

Masterpieces from Jean Cherqui Collection

Abstraction from Río de la Plata

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Press release



José Gurvich
Constructive fish n° 83,
1950-1952
Oil on wood
47 x 31 cm
Courtesy of Jean Cherqui
Collection

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Opening on January 9, 6 pm

This exhibition seeks to pay tribute to the passionate collector, two years after his passing, by presenting a selection of historical works that highlight the commitment and friendship Jean Cherqui maintained with numerous artists from the Río de la Plata region.

In this sense, the curatorial project focuses on presenting works created between the 1940s and 1960s, related to the avant-garde movements of geometric abstraction, such as MADI Art and Concrete Art, by Joaquín Torres García and the Escuela del Sur, along with some precursors of Kinetic Optical Art.

The exhibition begins chronologically with a work by the master Joaquín Torres García, along with works by two of his most prominent disciples, José Gurvich and Manuel Pailos. A selection of works by the precursors of MADI Art—Carmelo Arden Quin, Gyula Košice, Volf Roitman, and Martín Blaszczo—follows, along with works by key figures of Río de la Plata concrete art: José Pedro Costigliolo, María Freire, Alfredo Hlito, and Ennio Lommi. The exhibition concludes with works by the pioneer of Optical Art, Martha Boto, and the creator of Generative Art, Miguel Ángel Vidal, with a piece from his early Concrete Art period.

Dr. Jean Cherqui was an inventive and creative entrepreneur who introduced generic medications to France and a passionate art collector who amassed a collection of approximately 5,000 works of modern and contemporary art in his laboratory in Aubervilliers.

As a brief introduction, it can be mentioned that after selling some pharmacies he owned, Cherqui left his homeland, Algeria (during the complex process of independence), at the end of the 1960s to settle in France. In 1971, he acquired a small pharmaceutical laboratory, which gradually grew, eventually occupying a large space in Aubervilliers, where the headquarters of the Jean Cherqui Foundation is currently located.

During the 1980s, the dynamic businessman recognized the importance of generic medications and began manufacturing them, gradually introducing them into the French market. While improving and innovating in the production of these drugs, he discovered the world of contemporary art, particularly artists associated with geometric abstraction in its many forms: MADI Art, Concrete Art, and Kinetic Optical Art.

This discovery quickly turned into a passion, and Cherqui undoubtedly identified with these artists, who were enthusiastic about science and reason, working like scientific inventors and promoting audience participation with their works, many of whom were also immigrants.

Thus, the laboratory's headquarters shifted from a pharmaceutical production space to store Cherqui's vast collection of works by artists from Latin America, Europe, and Asia. This passion never left him and was passed down to his grandson Matthias Chetrit, the current director of the foundation based in Aubervilliers.

– Manuel Neves

Artists (in alphabetical order)

Carmelo Arden Quin (Rivera, Uruguay 1913 - 2010 Savigny-sur-Orge, France)

Visual artist, poet, and performance artist, he was part of the editorial committee of the *Arturo* magazine (1944) and organized the two exhibitions of the Arte Concreto Invención Movement in 1945. From this first group, two artistic movements emerged: the Asociación Arte Concreto Invención (AACI) and the MADI Movement, of which Arden Quin was the founder. Their first exhibitions took place in Buenos Aires at the French Institute of Higher Studies in August 1946, at the Altamira Academy in October, at the Bohemien Club in November, and at the AIAPE in Montevideo in December. In 1949, he emigrated to France, where he actively participated in the *Salón de Realités Nouvelles* and created the *Atelier au Centre de Recherches et d'Études MADI*, bringing together Latin American and European artists.

In 1955, he co-founded the Asociación Arte Nuevo in Buenos Aires. Over five decades (1958–2010), he tirelessly promoted the work of MADI artists through more than 120 exhibitions and poetic events.

Martín Blaszkó (1920 Berlin, Germany - 2011 Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Visual artist, painter, and sculptor, he participated in the 1945 exhibitions of the *Arte Internacional MADI*.

Concrete Invención Movement, which led to the creation of two groups: the Asociación Arte Concreto Invención (AACI) and the MADI Movement. He was an active member of MADI and a close friend of Carmelo Arden Quin, taking part in all the activities of the *Movimiento Arte Concreto Invención (AACI)* and the *MADI Movement*. He was an active member of MADI and a close friend of Carmelo Arden Quin, taking part in all the activities of the *Movimiento Internacional MADI*.

Martha Boto (1925 Buenos Aires, Argentina - 2004 Paris, France)

Pioneer of optical and kinetic art, she graduated as a drawing teacher from the *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes* and later studied at the *Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova*, graduating in 1950. She participated in the activities of the *Arte Nuevo* group in 1956 and co-founded the *Grupo de Artistas Argentinos No Figurativos*. In the late 1950s, she began experimenting with plexiglass and moved to Paris, where she participated in the *I Bienal de París* and exhibited regularly at the *Denise René Gallery*. In 1963, she integrated electricity into her work and created her first cinematic

pieces. During the 1970s, she returned to experimenting with painting.

José Pedro Costigliolo (1902 Montevideo - 1985 Montevideo, Uruguay)

Visual artist and graphic designer, he was a precursor of geometric abstraction in Latin America. He studied at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in Montevideo between 1921 and 1925 and participated in the *Planismo* movement in Uruguayan painting. In 1927, he left the visual arts and built a notable career as a graphic designer in both Uruguay and Argentina.

In 1946, encouraged by Emilio Pettoruti, he returned to painting, producing works influenced by Cubism, which quickly evolved into abstraction. In 1952, he co-founded the *Arte No Figurativo* group with María Freire and Antonio Llorens, promoting concrete art in Uruguay.

Joaquín Torres García (1874 Montevideo - 1949 Montevideo, Uruguay)

Visual artist, writer, theorist, lecturer, and teacher, he was a fundamental figure in both European and American avant-garde movements. His theoretical work is as important as his paintings, and he published numerous books outlining his philosophy of Universal Constructivism.

As a brief overview, we can note that his family decided to move to Catalonia in 1891, where he studied at various painting academies. At the beginning of the 20th century, he became part of the *Noucentisme* movement, which had as its crowning project the monumental murals created in the Sant Jordi Hall of the *Palau de la Generalitat de Catalunya*.

At the end of the decade, after facing multiple issues with the *Generalitat*, he decided to leave Spain and embark on a journey that would take him to New York, the Tuscan region of Italy, the south of France, and Paris, where he connected with artists from the avant-garde movement related to geometric abstraction.

In 1929, Torres García founded the *Cercle et Carré* association in Paris with Piet Mondrian and Michel Seuphor, publishing a magazine and organizing several events. He returned to Montevideo in 1934 after more than 40 years of absence, where he promoted his theory and created the *Taller Torres García*, training over 100 students.

After his solo exhibitions at the *Jeanne Bucher* and *Percier Galleries* in Paris, he decided to move to Madrid, where he would live for several years. In 1934, he returned to his hometown, Montevideo, after more than 40 years of absence.

Once settled, he began to promote his theory of *Universalismo Constructivo* through lectures, radio broadcasts, articles, books, and numerous solo exhibitions in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, as well as group exhibitions with the *Constructive Art Association*, which he founded. In the 1940s, he established the *Taller Torres García*, where over 100 students would be trained.

After his death, the workshop remained active for over a decade, and his work began to be recognized as fundamental in the history of Western modern art, with his influence spreading across the continent, including to the United States.

José Gurvich (1927 Jeiznas, Lithuania - 1974 New York, USA)

Uruguayan artist of Lithuanian origin, painter, muralist, sculptor, and ceramist, he was one of Joaquín Torres García's most notable disciples. He produced extremely original works in mural, sculpture, and ceramic projects. He lived in Israel and New York, exhibiting throughout the Americas and Europe.

Manuel Pailos (1914 Galicia, Spain - 2004 Montevideo, Uruguay)

Uruguayan artist of Spanish origin, painter, muralist, sculptor, and ceramist, he was an important figure in the *Taller Torres García* and one of Torres García's most prominent disciples.

Unlike many of his colleagues from the *Taller Torres García*, he did not emigrate to the United States or Europe but maintained an active international presence.

María Freire (1917 Montevideo - 2015 Montevideo, Uruguay)

Visual artist (painter, sculptor) and renowned art critic, she was a pioneer of abstract sculpture in Latin America. She briefly joined the MADI Movement and co-founded the Arte No Figurativo group, promoting concrete art in Uruguay.

Alfredo Hlito (1923 Buenos Aires - 1993 Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Visual artist and theorist, he participated in the 1945 exhibitions of the Arte Concreto Invención Movement and later joined the AACI. His work evolved from concrete art to an extremely personal symbolic painting influenced by Joaquín Torres García.

Ennio Iommi (1926 Rosario, Argentina - 2013 San Justo, Argentina)

Noted sculptor and teacher, a precursor of abstract sculpture in Latin America. He was active in the Arte Concreto Invención exhibitions and became a key figure in the MADI Movement. His work is in public spaces in Buenos Aires, Havana, Cannes, and Brasília.

Gyula Košice (Fernando Fallik) (1924 Košice, Slovakia - 2016 Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Visual artist, poet, editor, and journalist, a pioneer in the use of neon gas lighting and water in sculpture production worldwide.

He was part of the editorial committee of the Arturo magazine (1944) and organized the two exhibitions of the Concrete Art Movement in 1945.

From this first group, two movements emerged: the Asociación Arte Concreto Invención (AACI) and the MADI Movement, which held its first exhibitions at the French Institute of Higher Studies in Buenos Aires in August 1946, at the Altamira Academy in October, at the Bohemian Club in November, and in December at the AIAPE in Montevideo.

He created the magazine Arte Madi Universal, where he introduced the Madimensor movement, hydro-kinetic art, and the utopian project of the Hydrospatial City. He created monumental sculptures in Argentina, Uruguay, Israel, and Korea.

Volf Roitman (1930 Montevideo, Uruguay - 2010 Tampa, USA)

Painter, sculptor, and architect, he emigrated to France in the late 1940s, where he met Carmelo Arden Quin, establishing a lifelong friendship.

He actively participated in the *Salón de Réalités Nouvelles* in Paris and was part of the *Centre de Recherches et d'Études MADI*, created by Arden Quin.

His involvement in the International MADI Movement spanned more than five decades, with over 100 exhibitions and poetic events.

At the initiative of collectors Bill and Dorothy Masterson, he promoted and designed the Museum of Geometry and MADI Art in Dallas.

Miguel Ángel Vidal (1928 Buenos Aires - 2009 Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Visual artist and prominent teacher, he was a disciple of Lino Enea Spilimbergo and Eugenio Daneri at the National School of Fine Arts Prilidiano Pueyrredón (now IUNA Visual Arts), where he graduated in 1952.

Between 1989 and 1991, he was the director of this institution and a painting professor at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova.

He co-founded the “*Arte Generativo*” movement with Eduardo Mac Entyre, which developed a unique variation within optical art.