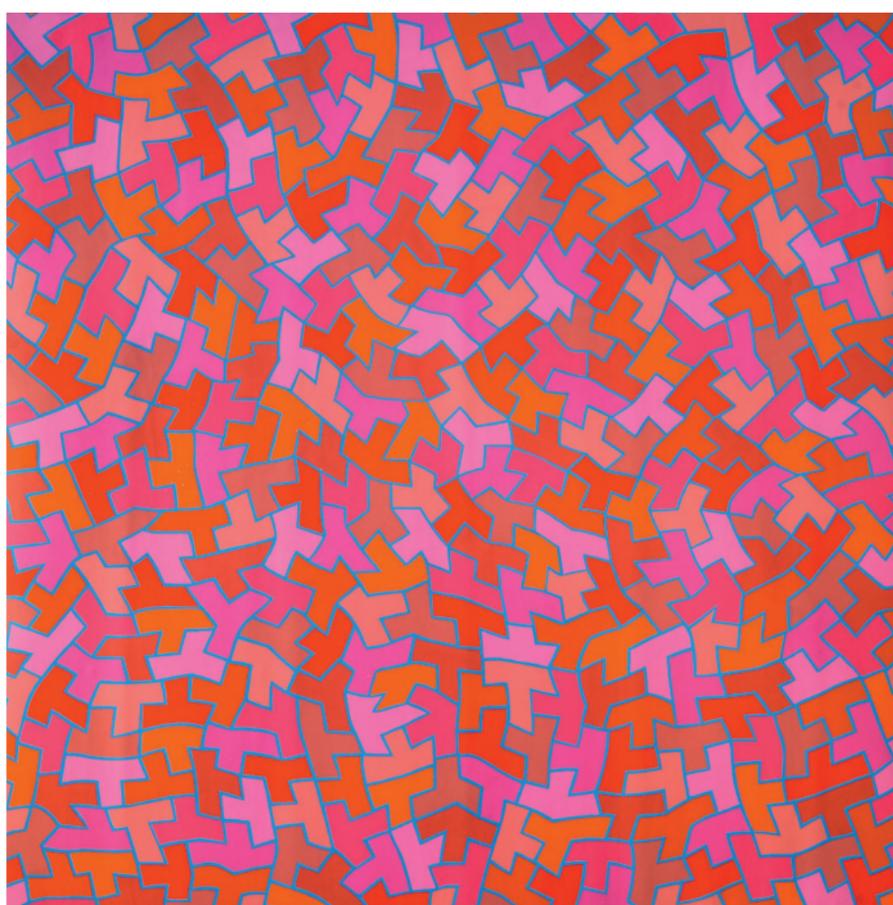


Rosemarie Castoro

Focus at Infinity

Exhibition from 9 November 2017 to 15 April 2018



Rosemarie Castoro, *Yellow Pink Brown Blue*, 1964. Courtesy of The Estate of Rosemarie Castoro and BROADWAY 1602, Harlem, New York

'I function as a human being in my art. My art is grounded on expressing my life... My panels are my containers.'

Rosemarie Castoro¹

'All of Rosemarie Castoro's art is about a fine bond between mind and body – gestural, but above all disciplined. Its major impetus is kinaesthetic.'

Lucy Lippard²

Rosemarie Castoro. Focus at Infinity, the first major institutional exhibition of Castoro's work, concentrates on the years 1964–79. Castoro (New York, 1939–2015) established her career in the context of Minimalism and Conceptualism in the U.S.A., circulating at the heart of the New York avant-garde. The exhibition shows her work in detail, revealing the diversity of her practice, which encompassed abstract painting, conceptual works, performative actions, poetry, sculpture, installation and land art. It explores the context of her work, her association with contemporaries across the arts, such as Carl Andre and Yvonne Rainer among others, her activism, including her role in the Art Workers' Coalition, and her relation to feminism.

Castoro began her career in graphic art, before becoming involved in dance, then turning to painting and later sculpture. The importance of dance as a constant is revealed through Castoro's journals containing performative photographs of her with her works. Likewise, the exhibition highlights her tendency to blend media: she called herself a 'paintersculptor'. Through Castoro's career, the exhibition addresses how key contributors to Minimalism have yet to be given due attention, particularly the women artists in a movement that is often identified as essentially masculine. As Lippard has written, Castoro was among those women artists who 'subverted minimalism on its own turf'.³

¹ All Rosemarie Castoro quotes are taken from her largely unpublished journals; those quoted were written between 1969 and 1978.

² Lucy Lippard: 'Rosemarie Castoro: Working Out', in *Artforum*, Summer 1975, p. 60.

³ Lucy Lippard: 'From Eccentric to Sensuous Abstraction: An Interview with Lucy Lippard', in Susan L. Stoops (ed.), *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s*. Waltham (MA): Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham (MA), 1996, p. 30.

'In 1964–65, Castoro was making all-over abstractions of gestural but tightly packed tilelike shapes which evolved into a basic "Y" unit, and then into strands or bands, like beams of light intersecting and interweaving in space.'

Lucy Lippard⁴

Born in Brooklyn, to an Italian-American family, Castoro lived and worked in New York her entire life. In the late 1950s, she began studying art at Pratt Institute and joined the New Dance Group, where she trained as a dancer and in choreography. While still a student, she met the experimental filmmaker Hollis Frampton and the artist Carl Andre, whom she married in 1963 (they divorced in 1970). Castoro began her career with graphic design, which accounts for the persistent importance of drawing in her work. Once she had graduated from Pratt, she found little opportunity to choreograph and painting offered the chance to develop her own ideas and an independent art practice. Her earliest mature works from 1964–65 were paintings executed on square format canvases first in painterly tessellated 'Y' shapes and later as geometrically rendered 'Y's against a monochrome ground, the minimal composition having the potential for infinite repetition (the first manifestation of a theme of infinity in Castoro's work). The paintings are characterised by bold 'literal' colour in diverse, opposing or close colour contrasts, her colourism attracting the praise of painter Frank Stella. Castoro developed a friendship with the painter Agnes Martin, whose influence might be detected in these early minimal paintings through their precise execution and visible pencil drawing.

As Castoro's painting developed, she fractured the 'Y' shapes into bars, distributing them as an all-over pattern: either in seemingly chaotic, chance compositions; in discrete though overlapping groupings; or else graphically regimented. While the 'Y' figure might be seen as standing in for the body, the anthropomorphic analogy can be continued in considering the bars as either bodies or demarcations of feet, as in *Gray Purple Feet* (1965). The relation of painting to dance is revealed through a consideration of bodies within space and their graphic rendition in minimal dance notation.

⁴Lippard (1975), op. cit, p. 60.

'Rosemarie Castoro's paintings, which at first seem to be color fields broken by odd random shapes of another color, gradually reveal the source of their cohesion in an underlying structure. It is from within this structure, rational and plotted, that an immense variety of related shapes have been retrieved and it is the rationality of these shapes which leaves her free to explore the sensuous possibilities of color.'

E. C. Goossen⁵

From 1966, Castoro's painting began to emphasise the seemingly random and irregular geometric forms created from the superimpositions or 'interferences' of one 'bar' over another. These works explore subtle and intermediate colour tonalities and close contrasts that, with their formal organisation, heighten the optical qualities of the works. Such work was included in the 1966 group exhibition *Distillation* curated by E. C. Goossen at the Stable and Tibor de Nagy Galleries, New York, one of two exhibitions curated by Goossen that helped to define Minimalism as a movement.

Two series of paintings of the later 1960s indicate Castoro's increasing use of systems and her move towards Conceptual art. Near-monochrome abstractions, the *Inventory* paintings emulate her drawing practice by employing diagonal lines to record the measurements of space or an encounter with an artist friend, as in *Portrait of Sol Lewitt with Donor and Friends - Oct 3, 1968*. Another complementary series are her prismacolor works executed in pen through which Castoro built up surfaces of densely repeated lines. The importance of line, implicit in the visible under-drawing of her earlier works, comes to the fore in these paintings.

⁵E. C. Goossen: 'Distillation: a joint showing', in *Artforum*, Vol. 5 No. 3, November 1966, pp. 31-33.

'I sometimes watch myself in time by recording my activities with a stopwatch.'

Rosemarie Castoro

For a little more than two years, Castoro departed from painting and produced conceptual art in a diverse range of other media, including performance art actions enacted in both street and studio, concrete poetry and installation art. These works reveal the intersection of a concern with time and space in her work. This period also saw her involvement in activism through the Art Workers' Coalition, which met in her studio at 151 Spring Street. Her most overtly political work, the concrete poem *A Day in the Life of a Conscientious Objector* (1968–69) was shown as a slide and audio installation at Dwan Gallery in 1969 and indicated her tendency towards intermedia. Castoro wrote a poem each day for one hour, beginning an hour later each day, over a period of 24 days. The work is a complex reaction to a fraught moment in the history of the U.S.A. Despite this political engagement, Castoro rejected becoming closely involved in feminism, which she saw as restrictive and a form of 'segregation'. She also created a series of 'stopwatch' works recording her everyday routines and the duration of each task, exhibiting an obsessive attention to time.

In 1969–70, Castoro participated in three exhibitions curated by Lucy Lippard and a series of single-day events of street-based actions collectively titled *Street Works*, organised by John Perreault and Marjorie Strider, which occurred on select days from March to December 1969. *Ariadne's Trail* made for *Street Works I* in March saw Castoro ride her cycle with a can of paint attached dribbling a trail through the city's streets. *Atoll*, for *Street Works II*, involved Castoro laying tape on the sidewalks around a city block to carve a conceptual hole out of the centre of Manhattan. For *Street Works V* in December, she unravelled a roll of aluminium in Soho for a performance she titled *Gates of Troy*. In 1969, she split the Paula Cooper Gallery conceptually through a line of tape, a type of work she named a 'cracking', as her contribution to a show curated by Lippard. *Seattle Cracking* revisited this on a larger scale for Lippard's 'numbers' exhibition *577,087* at the Seattle Art Museum. For *955,000* in Vancouver in 1970, Castoro constructed *Room Revelation*, a square room in which the viewer's presence triggered a light bulb to slowly illuminate.

**'Do all my problems center around space?
At one time – time was my problem. Now,
space. I want to carve space. I am carving
space.'**

Rosemarie Castoro

In 1970, Castoro developed freestanding panels that occupied the space of the spectator. The surfaces were created from gesso applied with a broom and then covered in graphite hatching so that the works combine painting, sculpture and drawing. Castoro's statement 'my panels are my containers' makes clear their relation to the body. These works are further reinforced as settings for the body by the numerous photographs she took and pasted into her journals, which show Castoro adopting dance-like poses within them or performing with ropes suspended in front of them. Castoro wrote in one of her journals: 'I am in dirt continually... My studio is covered with graphite... My ocean is made of graphite in front of which I tumble, chase, flop over. Paintings are the place where you watch yourself. Paintings are reflections. They are the manifestations of sexuality.'

The freestanding panels attain an almost architectural scale and character, which, while maintaining an origin in painting, moves her work closer to that of Minimalist sculpture. They were shown in 1971 in Castoro's first solo gallery exhibition. A year later, she exhibited a second series along with reliefs of isolated brushstrokes.

'I used to tumble around on ropes and suspend myself in mid air. My work is adapting itself to all those things.'

Rosemarie Castoro

The final room of the exhibition evokes Castoro's loft studio by emulating the white cube effect she created, and by assembling her small-scale 'studio-works' and maquettes. In the 1970s, she created post-Minimalist sculptures from epoxy with dark, painterly surfaces, often suspended from the ceiling, including the large installation *Land of Lads* (1975). The white background threw such works into sharp relief and revealed their continuing relation to drawing by highlighting their organic line.

From the mid-1970s, Castoro began making works from wood: first as ephemeral landscape interventions, such as *Georgia Branch Dance* (1974), which she described as a 'sculptural drawing' even though it references dance, and later as gallery works, including *Beaver's Trap* (1977-78), a play on the artist's name meaning 'beaver' in Italian. She also made robust installations for urban settings such as *Trap-a-Zoid* (1978). These works address perception through perspective and heightened recession, a recurrence of the theme of infinity in Castoro's work. Towards the end of the decade, she began an extended series of sculptures called *Flashers*, implying bodily exposure.

Throughout her later career Castoro maintained her engagement with various art forms, including dance. She also continued her activism, helping to found the HIV Arts Network (HAN). She passed away in 2015.

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Curator

Tanya Barson

Publication

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Let's Talk About...

Rosemarie Castoro

By Tanya Barson and Mariana Cánepa
Saturdays 11 November and 9 December, 6.30 pm
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Lecture-performance Yvonne Rainer: The Concept of Dust

By Yvonne Rainer
Tuesday 19 December, 7 pm
Meier Auditorium. 5 €
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Dance The Concept of Dust: Continuous Project - Altered Annually (2014)

Choreography and performers: Yvonne Rainer *et al.*
Wednesday 20 December, 8 pm. CCCB Theatre.
15 €. Combined admission to lecture and performance: 17 €. Tickets available at www.macba.cat.

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