

Laura Lima – *Playful Geometry*

Sammlung Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst

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Laura Lima's installation *Bar Restaurant* (2010) in dialogue with works by Valentin Carron, Sylvie Fleury, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, and Olivier Mosset from the collection of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

The exhibition *Playful Geometry* presents works from the collection based on a geometric core vocabulary in an engaging dialogue. Geometric form as the smallest common denominator underlies an associative and playful gathering of works from different periods that reflect a wide array of approaches to art-making. The ensemble sheds light on geometric abstraction with its diverse societal implications both from an art-historical vantage point and in a contemporary perspective.

The exhibition's centerpiece is the sprawling installation *Bar Restaurant* (2010), which the Brazilian artist **Laura Lima** (1971–, lives and works in Rio de Janeiro) created on the occasion of her solo exhibition at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in 2013. Lima's practice is informed by her fascination with the complexity of social relations and forms of human behavior. Many of her scenarios, in which the human body often figures as a central medium and animating force, are installations incorporating different artistic genres such as drawing, painting, or sculpture and activated by a performance component. Lima herself never appears in them, instead casting selected protagonists who put her dramaturgical instructions into practice.

At first glance, *Bar Restaurant* might almost be a faithful reproduction of a pub. All the chairs by the bistro tables are taken; the guests facing each other in pairs over cool beers, however, they are not humans but objects: stacks of paper and amorphous lumps of clay, an umbrella or colorful geometric bodies like cubes or spheres. A server waits on these peculiar customers. The protagonist weaves between the tables, assiduously refilling the glasses, which are emptied by some mysterious mechanism. There is something magical about the scene: though we do not actually see the objects seated at the tables consuming the liquid, the glasses emptying out as though of their own accord suggest that a mute drinking session is in progress; depending on their personalities, some guests hold their beers, while others down theirs in greedy gulps.

Curator:

Nadia Schneider Willen,
Collection Curator,
Migros Museum für
Gegenwartskunst

MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR
GEGENWARTSKUNST
LIMMATSTRASSE 270
CH-8005 ZÜRICH

T +41 44 277 20 50
F +41 44 277 62 86
INFO@MIGROMUSEUM.CH

MIGROMUSEUM.CH
MIGROS-KULTURPROZENT.CH

In its own way, each of the objects in *Bar Restaurant* gestures toward art, and for Lima, it embodies a particular art-historical reference: the red cube, for example, pays homage to the Brazilian painter Aluísio Carvão's (1920–2001) *Cubocor* (Color Cube, 1960), while the white umbrella quotes the famous painting *Hegel's Holiday* (1958) by the Surrealist painter René Magritte (BE, 1898–1967). The amorphous materials not yet touched by an artist's hand, have the potential to “become something”—a sculpture, perhaps. One of the guests is actually a work of art from our own collection: whenever *Bar Restaurant* goes on display, the green triangle from Blinky Palermo's (DE, 1943–1977) series *4 Prototypes* (1970) takes a seat at one of the tables.

Laura Lima's work, and especially her use of the vocabulary of geometric bodies, revisits the Brazilian Neo-Concrete Art movement (*Neoconcretismo*). In the late 1950s, artists started integrating time and the human body into their works, breathing new life into geometric art, where a spirit of sober-minded rationalism had prevailed. They assigned an active role to the spectators, who were expected to touch and manipulate the works. Art aimed to create spaces of experience in which people were able to feel part of a collective and organic living whole.

Despite the palpable affinities with *Neoconcretismo*, Lima's work eludes neatly defined categories. Back then, the audience was called upon to complete the works in the physical act of touching them; here, by contrast, we are invited neither to join the other guests sitting at the tables nor to interact with the objects: observers of a scene that is reminiscent of absurd theater, we remain on the margins, looking on with a chuckle or in wonder. The interaction with the guests/objects that transforms the setting of *Restaurant Bar* into an integral work has been delegated to the figure of the waiter/waitress, who tops up the beer glasses with such regularity that the drinkers can be expected to be drunk sooner or later.

The idea that the guests referencing significant works of art history enter a different state through their consumption of alcohol and—despite their seriousness and importance—begin to behave tipsy or drunk, is not only an entertaining vision. It speaks to an aspect that is perceptible in many of Lima's works: a displacement of the framework constraining ordinary conduct that may be connected to the concept of *carnivalization* (after the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, 1895–1975). What Lima has created in *Bar Restaurant* is a spatially and temporally delimited situation comparable to medieval carnival celebrations, where the rules that govern day-to-day life are suspended, where high and low, sacred and profane, living and dead mingle or even trade places. In fact, *Bar Restaurant* features more than one inversion of the “natural order”: in the suggestion that dead matter (cast as drinkers) is alive, in the dead-serious human waitstaff serving a posse of bibulous objects, in the venerable art-historical references slipping into the role of tipsy boozers. Lima establishes an experimental arrangement that probes the space between reality and illusion and offers a humorous challenge to the art-historical canon.

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Among them are iconic wall objects of American Minimal and Conceptual Art by **Donald Judd** (1928–1994) and **Sol LeWitt** (1928–2007), as well as large-format “shaped-canvas” paintings by **Robert Mangold** (1937–). Taking their cues from structural or conceptual principles and geometric forms, these artists set out in the mid-1960s to create works that were meant to represent no narrative content and refer to nothing beyond art itself. **Olivier Mosset** (CH, 1944–), who has dedicated his career to the study of abstract painting—its production and reception—and the histories of abstract art, is included with two paintings from his geometric period. **Valentin Carron’s** (CH, 1977–) early work is influenced by the appropriation of forms from a regional folk culture (in the Valais); in *Pavillon* (2002), he tries his hand at geometric form in three dimensions for a tongue-in-cheek interrogation of how everyday objects serve to anchor identities. **Sylvie Fleury** (CH, 1961–), who made a name for herself in part by critically recycling the works of male artists like Judd, Mondrian, or Vasarely, is represented by *She Devils on Wheels Hubcaps Collection* (1997): seventy wheel covers from so-called muscle cars (a special class of automobiles made in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s that had especially powerful engines) arranged on the wall in a rigid grid pattern. Appropriating strategies of Minimal Art, Fleury parodies intellectual hegemony of entirely male-dominated tendencies in art.



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