

SARAH GILO

Sarah Grilo. Works (1967 – 2000) is the title of the second part of an exhibition that since July and with fourteen oil paintings and five works on paper, invites us to explore a career spanning six decades of one of the most unique and relevant artists to represent American painting in the second half of the 20th century. The exhibition starts in the sixties, transporting us back to a time when Grilo, having already made a name for herself in Latin American abstraction of the fifties, received a Guggenheim Fellowship and moved to New York, leaving behind her native Buenos Aires. In an interview in 1963, the artist herself recalled how this decision was key to forming a pictorial urge that would remain with her until her death in Madrid, in 2007:

“The city gave me a sense of security that sparked an intense desire in me to paint. Here I’ve found everything I need to paint. Things are constantly happening that I can incorporate into the field of abstraction; I need not look further than out my window or take a stroll through the streets with an alert gaze.”

These words reveal the urgency felt by the Buenos Aires-born artist to inject reality into her painting, and the certainty that she felt she was in the right place at the right time to take the leap. New York of the fifties had become the new hub of the international art scene, and its streets were a creative haven for a generation of artists beckoned to push the limits of art. In 1962, the same year that Grilo arrived in the city, Warhol created his first screen print; Oldenburg exhibited his *soft sculptures*; Kusama surprised everyone with her *accumulations*; and Judd blurred the notion of originality by creating objects that could be redone without losing their artistic condition.

Grilo would come to absorb the strategies and technical resources of the new avant-garde from a stance of independence and creative freedom. Her status as a female artist from abroad with limited command of the language fuelled in her the idea of translating and transposing reality to the picture plane through the discursive use of language. Soon her canvases began to fill up with words, signs and inscriptions that she found in adverts in Life Magazine, in headlines in newspapers such as the New York Times, and in the graffiti lining the walls of the city’s buildings. Words and numbers jumbled together and partially fragmented by glazes of paint turned each canvas into a collage of meaning and brand new connections that would create a talking point on the real effects of publicity and political discourse at the time, as can be seen in “America Has Changed” from 1967.

Grilo left New York in 1970 and headed for Europe, having amassed an extraordinary wealth of pictorial vocabulary. Each painting hides resources and solutions that add up to a creative and vital universe that does not conform to any particular evolutionary or chronological style parameters. They are works born from a deprived need for programmatic artifice, seducing the spectator from their own pictorial condition. Works like “Cartel” (*Poster*, 1975; “Soluciones para pensar” (*Solutions to think*), 1982; and “¿Comunican las palabras?” (*Do words communicate?*), 2000, immediately shine a light on the experience.

The work of Sarah Grilo (Buenos Aires, 1917 – Madrid, 2007) has been exhibited both individually and collectively in highly renowned institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), New York; the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Her work has been displayed at international art events such as the São Paulo Art Biennial in 1953 and 1955, and can be found in collections at MoMa in New York; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin; and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, among others.