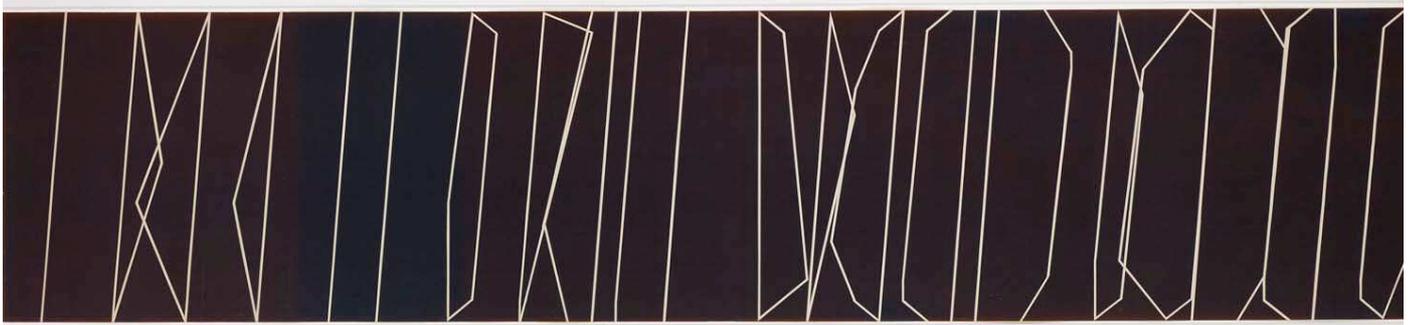


Elena Asins Fragments of Memory



Serie Blanco y Negro, 1975

DATES:	14 June – 31 October 2011
PLACE:	Sabatini Building. 3rd Floor
ORGANISED BY:	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
CURATED BY:	Manuel J. Borja-Villel
ASSISTANT CURATORS:	Belén Díaz de Rábago Carmen Fernández Aparicio
PROJECT ADVISOR:	Ángel Llorente Hernández
COORDINATED BY:	Belén Díaz de Rábago

Museo Reina Sofia dedicates to Elena Asins (Madrid 1940) the most comprehensive exhibition of her work to this day. The public will see works from the sixties until more recent pieces. Asins gathers 20th century Avant-garde's constructive tradition and combines it with computation and the theory of information in the sixties, going through optical art and minimalism. This procedure, which involves a constant use of calculus theory and algorithms, makes Asins one of the pioneers of computer-based art in Spain, besides being one of the rare representatives of that tendency in conceptual art very little explored in Spanish conceptualism: the one defending the idea as the motor of artistic execution itself, opposite to other more political or sociological practices.

Research and analysis of the plastic language as system and as process is one of the main lines of work in her career, which she has maintained until present days and shows in the pieces displayed in the exhibition.

With a particular emphasis in the first twenty years of her trajectory, learning period and consolidation of the poetics, the artist points out that the exhibition is not either "anthological or retrospective", but it intends to show the vitality of her work to this day, trying to explain and underlining her complexity and variety of practice. In fact, Asins has never compelled to formalism or held back disciplines: she has always been open to an enormously wide range of formats (concrete poetry, book, sculpture, installation or video) and interests (music, architecture, urbanism, etcetera).

The selection now presented respects in its essence the chronological development of Asins' work, highlighting especially dense moments. On display are many works that were never exhibited to the public before. Furthermore, the visitor will see the significant number of the artist's pieces that Museo Reina Sofía holds in its collection, purchased in recent years.

The exhibition starts in 1968, an important year in Asins' trajectory. On one hand, the Universidad Complutense de Madrid held the first seminars in Automatic Generation of Plastic Forms in its Calculus Centre. This was the first experience in Spain that incorporated cybernetics in artistic processes. In it, Asins participates along other artists such as José Luis Alexanco, Barbadillo, Luis Lugán, Eduardo Sanz, Soledad Sevilla, Eusebio Sempere and José

María López Yturralde. On the other hand, also in 1968, Asins holds her first two solo exhibitions, in Galería Edurne in Madrid and Cercle Artístic Sant Lluç in Barcelona.

Already at an early stage, Elena Asins abandons her initial figurative efforts to focus in space and geometry investigation, getting to work in abstraction. Until 1968, the artist is part of experimentalist circles, such as Cooperativa de Producción Artística y Artesana (Cooperative of Arts and Crafts Production), initiated by Ignacio Gómez de Liaño with Herminio Molero, Manuel Quejido, Francisco Salazar and others, an open room to debate and contamination of many disciplines that cohabitate plastic arts with poetry and linguistics, philosophy, music or architecture. Elena Asins begins exploring many options that go from optical art to monochrome painting—in line with Malevich's suprematism—, weighing up and incorporating supports such as nylon thread or simple fold paper figures. She also uses standard labelling and typing procedures, Letraset, dymo tapes or compositions made with typing machines, and also pieces closer to concrete poetry. By this time Asins works with the second generation of Spanish post-war geometric artists and orients towards investigation and analysis of the plastic language as a system and a process.

In the exhibition there is a group of optical-kinetic works in which one observes the relationship with Eusebio Sempere's work and also other artists that had been working in that same line, although a specific preoccupation for the sign and a language is also apparent, due to a fascination for semiotics that belonged to the new generation.

Asins applies the idea of the fusion of art and technology to her systematic study of "structure of the plastic field". Starting in the 70s, she starts to elaborate the notion of structure in the works that coexist with artists from the previous generation, like Pablo Palazuelo, when at the same time develops extraordinarily broadside compositions—offset paper rolls—that show an interest in temporary dimension.

In the mid-seventies she devotes her practice to a more methodic study of structures. In the show we find an important group of work belonging to the *Strukturen* series, that the artist numbers using musical nomenclature. These pieces are held in different supports. Asins unfolds in them a great variety in terms of composition. The plastic elements put constantly in

the game field variables of space, time and rhythm. In these works, Asins unfold combinations and variations where she begins to play with the idea of the negative and the estimation of the void: in effect, lines and plans maintain structural relationships between them instead of drawing forms.

The *Cuartetos prusianos* ("Prussian Quartets"), made between 1979 and 1981, explicitly inspired in the string quartets composed by Mozart for Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia, intensify the depuration of plastic elements, now strictly lineal, and an extreme concentration of the spatial sequence, movement and rhythm notions, alluding sensations of music and dance. The exhibition shows the complete *Combinaciones* ("Combinations", 1980) series, formed by 33 pieces and belonging to the Museo Reina Sofía's Collection.

In 1980 the artist travelled to New York and, as a consequence of it, her work shows a concern for tridimensionality when it comes to approaching issues like architecture and urbanism, as in the works *Project for an Architecture* (1981), prelude to the extensive *Scale* series of pieces.

Paradigma for Scale, belonging to the Museum's Collection, was made in 1982. It is composed of 272 pencil, ink and enamel drawings on vegetal paper, and is shown for the first time in its entirety. We can see the development of the structure studies on the plan through progressive and generative forms, in this case starting with the concept of scale.

The artist will focus intensely in computer-generated forms during her stay in Hamburg between 1987 and 1990. The computer-made drawings on continuous stationery assisted by printer clearly show the affiliation neatly conceptual of the work. In those days she makes a series of directly computer-made continuous stationery books, scarcely known until now, and inspired in religious and philosophical motifs that go from the Old and New Testament until Wittgenstein, such as *The Enigma* trilogy, *Ludwig Wittgenstein-Zettel*, *Caligraphy* or *Metanoia*. This line of work composed of computer-assisted drawings, with a strong spiritual content, will continue in the nineties with the digital prints *I Ching* (1994), based on the Chinese "book of mutations".

During the last decade of the 20th century, and already on the 21st, Elena Asins faces new challenges: **sculpture**, **installation** or **video**, media with which she is still working to this date.

In the last few years her production has continued in a line that, quite pertinently put as ascetic, aims to unite the rigor of her investigations with a more transcendent intention.

Videos allow her to use the moving image to continue her exploration on the distribution and organisation of space and time, central aspects in her work. The *Dolmen* and *Menhir* series, made in the nineties, include graphic work, engravings and sculptures: “I would like to make clear that it is not about reproducing here what a menhir, as a megalithic monument, is; but to find the archetype that succeeds in showing the deepest wishes in human life” she explains. In them she makes variations on basic figures, such as the rectangle or the parallelepiped, wrecked in one of their corners, in which the idea of the void as a possibility is once more protagonist. The *Agujero negro* (“Black hole”) installation will be on display in the exhibition.

The artist

Elena Asins, artist, writer, lecturer and art critic, was born in Madrid in 1940. As from 1953 she attended painting lessons at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios (School of Arts and Crafts) in Madrid, and after that the Círculo de Bellas Artes (Circle of Fine Arts) and Escuela de Cerámica (Ceramics School) in the same city. She studied at the École de Beaux Arts in Paris, at the Stuttgart University (Semiotics with professor Max Bense), at the Complutense University of Madrid (Calculus Centre), at The New School for Social Research (New York) and Columbia University (Department of Computer Science: Computer Art), where she was invited as *Visiting Scholar* to research on digital application in plastic arts (computer art).

She has made more than 40 solo exhibitions in several countries, as well as published essays on aesthetics and experimental poetry in specialised publications of art and art theory in Spain, France, Germany and the States. Her work can be found in many museums and in private and public collections.

Catalogue



The catalogue of the show gathers an extensive compilation of texts written by the artist, in an effort to make visible her wide theoretical work as a singular voice inside Spanish theory and critics. Besides, texts by Manuel Borja-Villel, Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, Ángel Llorente, Carmen Pardo, Pierre Binétruy and Anjel Lertxundi are included. The publication is completed with the reproduction of exhibited works and an extensive bibliography.

The catalogue, and also the exhibition, intends to systematise, document and show a work whose public trajectory and presentation in exhibitions throughout time have got around important aspects of her artistic contribution.

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