

Lee Lozano. *Pulling Out the Stops*



LEE LOZANO
Ream, 1964
Óleo sobre lienzo
198,1 x 243,8 cm

DATES:	May 30, 2017 – September 25, 2017
PLACE:	Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini building, 3 ^a floor
ORGANIZATION:	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
CURATORSHIP:	Manuel Borja-Villel and Teresa Velázquez
COORDINACIÓN:	Gemma Bayón

Lee Lozano: Pulling Out the Stops, the first retrospective in Spain dedicated to Lee Lozano (Newark, 1930–Dallas, 1999), traces the career of a controversial artist who questioned each and every socially imposed structure during the 1960s, shaking the ideological and formal presuppositions of art before retiring from the art world in 1972. In just twelve years, she produced a deeply provocative oeuvre impregnated with the ebullient spirit of activism that accompanied the flowering of the civil rights and anti-war movements. The social energies unleashed in the 1960s in various parts of the world aroused a contagious sense of liberation that has prevailed in our perception of a decade marked also by the global penetration of capitalism.

This exhibition seeks to situate Lozano's work on the political and aesthetic horizon of her contemporaries, with special emphasis on the artist's ability to understand and incorporate the casuistics that redefined the changing conditions of art and its progressive disintegration in life. In her determination to fuse art and life, Lozano was flung headlong into an irrevocable decision that pushed an oeuvre steeped in lived experience as far as it could go and set her apart from all she detested as an artist. Her complete renunciation, with no possibility of going back, put an end to a period of troubles but also eclipsed a legacy that remains challenging, even disturbing today.

After studying philosophy and science at the University of Chicago from 1948 to 1951, Lozano combined her interest in psychoanalysis with her artistic training, graduating from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1960. In 1961 she settled in New York, where she produced an extraordinary corpus of type of corporality that was erotic, aggressive, ironic, and perversely devouring. By crossing erogenous zones of the body with tools



LEE LOZANO
Sin título, ca. 1962
Óleo sobre lienzo
81 x 96 cm
The Estate of Lee Lozano. Cortesía de Hauser & Wirth
LOZAN30713

habitually associated with masculinity, like hammers and weapons, she engendered hybrids that twist and fold over on themselves. From the start, Lozano, imbued with the spirit of the counterculture, subverted the latent and profoundly patriarchal principles interwoven with the association of painting and virility. Several drawings produced in 1962 and 1963 show that she regarded every form of authority as an object of searing condemnation. Her deliberate irreverence and provocation led her to review each of the institutions that channel and administer social conduct: marriage, the monogamous

family, academe, religion, the sex work, conventions of beauty, and prevailing morality. Especially interesting is the drawing of a typewriter, *Untitled* (1962), whose keyboard sums up Lozano's poetics through expressive monosyllables and emoticons.

However, her work soon showed signs of gravity and restraint that indicated a departure from the carefree insolence of her beginnings. The year 1964 marked a

watershed in Lozano's production in terms both of format and imagery and of color, which veered toward a more austere palette. In a predominantly masculine medium like painting, the motifs that now centered Lozano's attention —screwdrivers, nuts, staplers, hammers, etc.— share a specific lexicon of productivity, aggressiveness, and manly vigor with industry, pointing to a shift in the artist's strategy and adoption of certain codes. Lozano was well aware of the difficulty of making a niche for herself in a hostile milieu. Those oversized details of industrial tools now invade the foregrounds and introduce a somewhat menacing tension that spills beyond the edges of the canvas. With their well-defined outlines and perturbing ambiguity, these objects still retain a distant sexual reference, but the coldness of the mechanical announces a shift toward abstraction and minimalism. Bearing in mind the friendship that then bound her to an artist as active as Carl Andre, it is unsurprising that Lozano's 1964 paintings should have accrued some of the embryonic minimalism of that artist, whose paintings are similar to Lozano's in both content and execution.

Abstraction makes its appearance in Lozano's work at the end of 1965. Geometric figures traverse canvases and panels from one edge to the other. Attention is focused on the encounter between the planes mapped by a dynamic pictorial space. The surface is hollowed out with colored glazes, producing a haptic sensation. A trail cuts through the depths of space like a soaring rocket, the flight of an arrow, the matrix of a circle, or the dissolution of light in solid



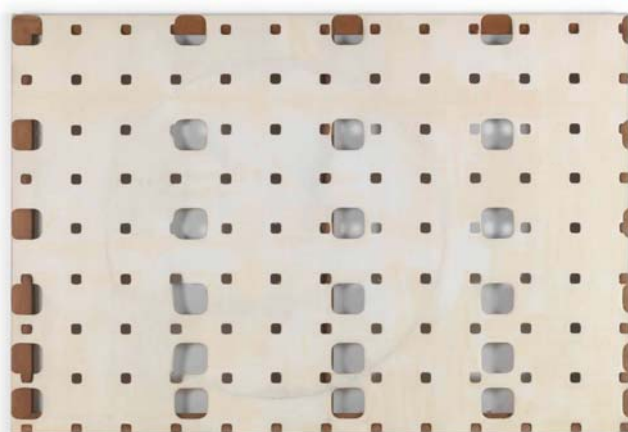
LEE LOZANO
Lean [Inclinar], 1966
Óleo sobre lienzo
3 paneles, 198,8 x 312,9 cm en total
The Estate of Lee Lozano. Cortesía de Hauser & Wirth
LOZAN30686

bodies. Her work now centers on spatiality in an attempt to capture the fourth dimension in what she called “energy paintings,” prompting the artist in 1969 and 1970 to conceptualize her pictorial practice. For Lozano, energy in painting emanates from the contradiction between its two-dimensionality and its objectuality in the transition of time and motion evoked in the mind.

In 1967 she began her first studies for the *Wave Series* (1969), a set of eleven paintings completed in 1969. The high point of her career was the presentation of this series at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970, a major achievement for a woman artist at that time and place. She had decided that the *Wave Series* would have its first showing in New York, and she persevered until she had secured her position in an especially competitive milieu, testing her power to consummate her own destiny. These paintings combined science, art, and existence in an investigation based on calculations and formulations related to the phenomenon of electromagnetic waves. Like her perforated paintings —for example, *Punch, Peek and Feel* (1967-1970), —

this is evidence of her interest in science through the methodical application of calculations and parameters.

While she was working on the first sketches for the *Wave Series*, Lozano began to record and document everyday activities. This was when she formed her friendship with Dan Graham, who was instrumental, together with her and other New York artists, in the shift toward the dematerialization of art. Her passage through conceptual and performative experimentation led to a series of works, the *Piecs*, that placed her at the vanguard of conceptual art.



LEE LOZANO
Sin título, 1970
Yeso y grafito sobre lienzo perforado
108,7 x 157,5 cm
Colección Hauser & Wirth, Suiza
LOZANO9653

Consisting of texts, these pieces are based on adherence to self-imposed instructions. They eventually lead to *Dropout Piece* (1970-1972), the last link forged between Lozano's life and art. After calling a halt to her career, she left the continuity of *Dialogue Piece* (1969) in suspense, making it the only work with a chance to occupy the rest of her life.

Lozano presented the full set of her *Pieces* in the exhibition *Lee Lozano: Infofiction*, organized by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in 1971. She reflected then on form and content. Form is a model, it is seductive and can be perfect, but it lacks justification unless it is used to exhibit a content that has sense. Content is fiction, it is confusing, it is infinite like the universe, it cannot be duplicated like form, and it only has sense at a particular moment of time.

Lozano's multifaceted oeuvre allows us to spin a narrative of continuities that articulates recurrent themes, moments of intensity, and contexts that shaped her creative identity. Without wishing to segment her short career into periods, or in accordance with the media combined by the artist in her practice, we can highlight three questions that run through her work, and on which her private notebooks, written from 1968 until their final correction in 1972, contribute important information. The first is polymorphous sexuality as the axis for a philosophy closely linked to emancipation, unsubmissiveness and ludic revolt. The second is an interest in science and phenomena related to energy, which the artist came to formalize in her own practice. The third is a sustained effort to fuse her art with her life. Matured through a categorical loss of belief, this path crystallized in a deliberate onward drive, pulling out all the stops to their ultimate limit of silence.



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