Elena Asins (Madrid, 1940 – Azpíroz, Navarra, 2015) was an artist committed to fully conceptual abstraction, underpinned in mathematical structures, the line, and the element of time as rhythm and cadence. In 1988 she wrote: “What I set out to do is try NOT TO SEE in order to see profoundly, in a symbolic transfiguration, in the scarce visuality of a world that the senses find hard to grasp”. In recent years Asins defined the ensemble of her work as a cryptogram the viewer must decipher, whilst certain critics have related it to the formal development of musical notation or dance. Following the retrospective exhibition entitled Fragments of Memory, held in the Museo Reina Sofía in 2011, a homage is once again paid to this artist, who very generously bequeathed her entire body of work to the Museo.

From 1967 onwards, Asins, who had previously founded the Castilla 63 group, became part of the multidisciplinary group Cooperativa de Producción Artística y Artesana (the Cooperative of Artistic and Artisan Production), together with Julio Plaza, Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, Lugán and Julián Gil, participating in meetings to apply new technology in art via the Computing Centre at the Complutense University of Madrid. Shortly afterwards, and up until 1971, the interest she took in familiarising herself with international experiences lead her to Stuttgart, where she came into contact with Max Bense, one of the founders of semiotics. Between 1981 and 1987 she worked in New York, where the linguist Noam Chomsky introduced her to the Department of Computer Science at Columbia University. She later moved to Hamburg, where she resided between 1987 and 1991, and was able to carry out a more profound analysis of plastic languages such as system and process, cementing her work with computers, a practice that would subsequently define the rest of her output.

In this room a selection of works are grouped together to show the key points in her artistic career and the diverse research-based formats in her artistic practice. The oldest pieces date back to 1968 when she exhibited at the Galería Edurne in Madrid and the Cercle Artistic de Sant Lluc in Barcelona. They are abstract drawings based on the concept of variation, which, as Gómez de Liaño pointed out, flowed into concrete poetry or the poetry of signs, according to the artist’s own definition. They comprise a succession of ink drawings and collages in Letraset, wave paper and folded paper, which, according to her definition, respond to the concepts of “pure arrangements, progressions and seriations”.

From the mid 1970s, Asins worked with supreme cohesion, independence and depth to study “the structure of the plastic field” in a series of works that illustrate her capacity to attain rhythm and beauty through the cadences of a line drawn in ink. Noteworthy are the series of drawings devoted to Mozart’s Prussian Quartets (K. 575, 589 and 590), which she realised, in diverse formats, between 1979 and 1981. This type of work, in which she managed to evoke the flexible tempo and rhythm of the music, belongs to the series of 33 drawings comprising Combinaciones (Combinations) from 1980.

Asins recalled on numerous occasions how her work with computers, which she started in the early 1960s in the Computing Centre at the Complutense University of Madrid, helped her to clean her thinking, with the stint at Columbia University also crucial as she focused with precision on the use of this tool. It was at this time that one of the series she would work on for a number of years materialised, a series she called Scale; Asins studied the structure of the plane by way of progressive and generative forms from the concept of scale. She produced digital computer-generated drawings and printouts in paper notebooks, acetate and strips of listing paper. In parallel, she developed this concept in series of ink drawings on paper, for instance the monu-
mental Scale (1982–1983), from the Museo’s Collection, and cardboard reliefs-collages such as Untitled (Sketch for Scale), on display in this room.

During the time she spent in Hamburg, between the end of 1987 and 1991, Asins continued to work with computer-generated forms, and worthy of mention are the works made up of progressive drawings on sheets of listing paper, alternating with biblically or philosophically themed texts she used to form unique “books”. Upon her return to Spain, first in Madrid and then, from 1996, in the small Navarra town of Azpíroz, she persisted with this intense and ongoing process of creation through computer-aided drawings, for instance in the series I Ching, Canon, Menhir and Dolmen. Furthermore, her forms evolved in a three-dimensional format with the production of sculpture installations and film projects, and a vast range of videos developed on a computer, defined by the artist as “digital images with temporary intervention”.

In January 2014 she finished version 63 of her last major work, the digital film Antigone, which was shown at the Juana de Aizpuru gallery in Madrid alongside a large-scale sculpture. A Sophocles text and some of the words Antigone uttered to her sister, Ismene, such as: “One world approved your wisdom, another approved mine”, and “You chose to live. I chose to die”, inspired the work Elena Asins continued to produce until the end of her life and also mark the conclusion of this homage.

**Bibliography**


Borja Villel, Manuel; Asins, Elena, et altr.: Elena Asins. Fragmentos de la memoria. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2011 [cat. exp.]

**Links**

http://www.elenaasins.es/