

Approaching Abstraction: The Art of Casa Wabi

Running alongside the Bosco Sodi exhibition at Blain|Southern is *Approaching Abstraction*. Curated by Alberto Rios and Bosco Sodi, this show presents works by nine Mexican artists, most of whom have undertaken residencies at Casa Wabi, the home of Fundación Casa Wabi. Set up by Sodi in 2014, this foundation promotes collaboration and social commitment through art, and takes its name from the Japanese philosophy of wabi sabi which advocates acceptance of the imperfect and the ephemeral. As Sodi's works in the main exhibition demonstrate, the art inspired by wabi sabi recognises that beauty can arise by chance and from the random variations of nature.

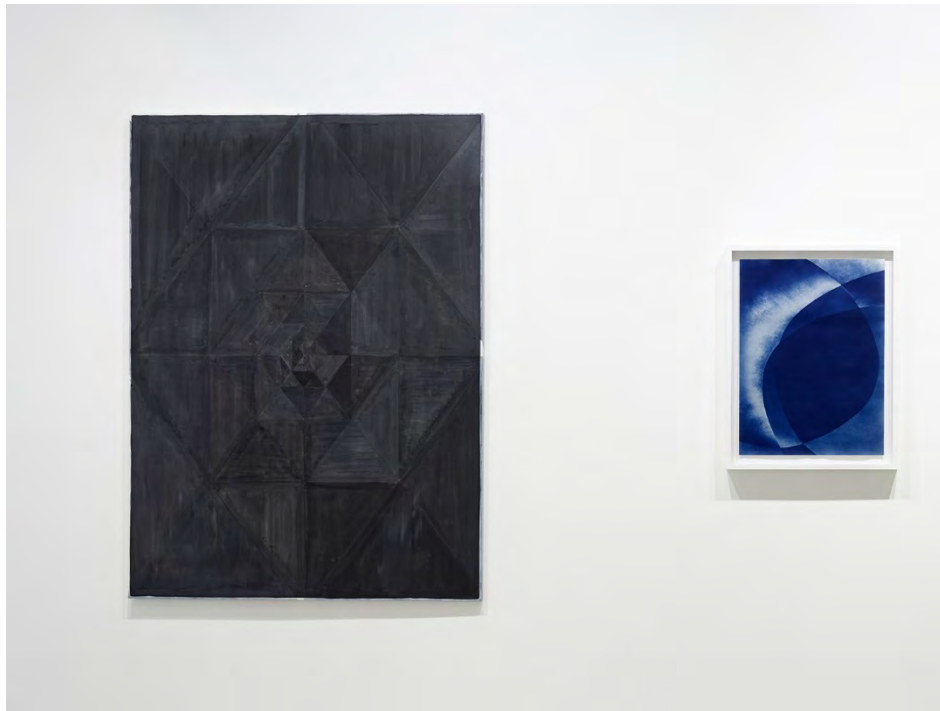
To put this philosophy into practice, Sodi worked with Japanese architect Tadao Ando to build Casa Wabi on the remote Oaxacan coast in Mexico. This campus provides an environment where the artists in residence can collaborate, and exchange ideas and skills both within the group and with the local community. Comprising six main buildings, the site is laid out like a giant compass, orientated by a long concrete wall running parallel to the sea. The main building that forms the centre of the cross formation is bisected by this concrete wall giving space for a reception area to the north and living areas to the south. The east-west axis is formed by a gallery and studios for Sodi and the resident artists.



Studio House, Casa Wabi, Oaxaca, Mexico Photo: Edmund Sumner

The location of Casa Wabi was specially chosen to draw on the beauty of nature and to provide an idyllic place to work, interact and reflect away from modern life. To present the art inspired by this environment, Sodi has worked with Alberto Ríos, the Foundation's former chief curator, to showcase pieces by nine young artists that unite around core themes but which utilise a variety of different mediums.

Brought together under the theme of architecture and landscape, Isauro Huizar, Fabiola Menchelli and Daniela Libertad have all been influenced directly by Casa Wabi. The surrounding landscape was Libertad's inspiration for the pencil drawing *Paisaje 21 (Landscape 21, 2018)* which explores how the intangible and mystical connect to everyday life. The works of Huizar and Menchelli were inspired by Casa Wabi's buildings. Huizar's black acrylic relief piece, *Quiscalus* (2018), named after a songbird native to the area, reflects the cruciform plan of Casa Wabi and the geometric patterns formed by the buildings, while Menchelli has taken the inspiration for her untitled work from the site's observatory. Built as a concrete ellipse containing a wooden bench where residents can gaze at the sky, the parabola created by the intersection between the lip of the observatory and the Mexican sky is perfectly caught by the Prussian blue of this cyanotype print.



Approaching Abstraction, 2019, (Isauro Huizar, *Quiscalus* 2018; Fabiola Menchelli, *Untitled* 2017) Courtesy the artists and Blain|Southern, Photo Peter Mallet

Galia Eibenschutz and Tania Candiani explore the theme of time. The drawings of performance artist Eibenschutz combine dance and draftsmanship. Using white pastel on black canvas backboards,

Eibenschutz seeks to document her sequence of movements within a single performance. Entitled *Instante 1 to 3 (Instant 1 to 3, 2017)* and on view as a triptych, these three works capture the unique juncture in space and time occupied by Eibenschutz's body as she dances. *Sobra el tiempo (On time, 2008-2015)* by Candiani takes the form of 240 ticking alarm clocks arranged on wooden shelves. Although identical, each clock keeps a different time, suggesting as individuals, we experience time as a construct in uniquely different ways.



Approaching Abstraction, 2019, (Galia Eibenschutz, Instante 1 to 3 2017) Courtesy the artists and Blain|Southern, Photo Peter Mallet

The remaining works in the show address social and historical themes. The collages *Imported 1* and *2 (2018)* by Benjamín Torres comment on the implications of globalisation for Mexico and depict two Heineken adverts almost obliterated by paint, a reference to the sale of the Mexican beer company Corona to the Dutch brewing conglomerate Heineken International. Another collage, *Hombre Murciélago (Bat-man 2018)* by Francisco Muñoz, critiques the ideological construction of national identity in Mexico by highlighting the tension between the archetypal beauty of pre-Columbian paintings and murals, and the crudeness of modern-day mass media.



Approaching Abstraction, 2019, (Benjamín Torres *Imported* 2018; Cristóbal Gracia *Erizo Acapulqueño* 2017)
Courtesy the artists and Blain|Southern, Photo Peter Mallet

The construction and (mis-)appropriation of Mexico's history is also the basis for the sculptural practices of Tomás Díaz Cedeño and Cristóbal Gracia. *Camina* (*Walk* 2018) by Cedeño makes a direct reference to a vocabulary rooted in daily Mexican life, replicating marginalised systems of belief and the ritualistic processes that surround them. In *Erizo Acapulqueño* (*Acapulco's Sea Urchin* 2017), Gracia draws on the legacy of Mexico's modernist era that was centred around Acapulco from the 1950's to the 1970's to provide a counterpoint to post-colonialist Hollywood visions of Mexican exoticism.

Approaching Abstraction: Curated by Alberto Rios and Bosco Sodi is on at Blain|Southern, 4 Hanover Square, London W1S 1BP until 23rd March 2019 (free entry)

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