

ARRANGING COLOR

by Etien Martínez Román

Pattern in color or Wood for the change: form that is composed while changing.

Roger Toledo is, in my opinion, one of the finest young Cuban artists. With a coherent work without being homogeneous; where it is easy to distinguish motives that evolve both in the way they're represented and in the matters solved from them. We discover in his body of work, an abstraction with the explicit influence of Malevich and Rothko, which imposes the expressive range in the line, the texture and the lighting.

Toledo's working method is the realization of a substantial spirit that he has always displayed with his works. Methodical to the extreme, away from platitudes, he allows an unusual study of each piece and an even more surprising convergence with the intuitive order it incorporates. The act of translating color reaches its peak with the series Days at the museum, in which much is gained with this chromatic perspective of the Cuban art history. With this series, he escalates his role of "interpreter" already developed in previous series in which he is able to extract from a painting the colors that best typify it.

He also knows how to insert himself into collective spaces and hence his success in participating in many group exhibitions with other artists, at the renowned Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, an institution focused on promoting young Cuban art. His years as a professor of Painting and Art Criticism at the University of the Arts in Havana have helped him to incorporate the dialogue as a fundamental part of his creative process, act that I have happily participated in on several occasions.

An explicit continuity in Roger's work occurs in the progression of formal and conceptual solutions. A very distinguishable style that surpasses the differences in formats shows a work without banalities or easy escapes. He develops a rigorous work that cautiously explores the abstraction before incorporating into a figurative representation everything that has been discovered with the pure elements.

The most important proposal in his work is the color pattern. Its lay-out becomes explicit and Roger suggests that the squares he uses to segment the space are only a selection for the spatial order that could have been alternated if triangles or hexagons had been arranged, should another regular shape to divide the space be required. This is organized and the image is conceived from the color. The light and the figure must submit to the color. The axis of all the attention from the painting lays on the color. The color should also create a center pointing to the other elements that surround it.

Roger's work begins with wooden installations where, from abstraction, he configures the space compelling the viewer to a frontal perception in order to understand the piece. They establish the artist's first interest: the segmentation of space and its subordination to the image. They also provide another piece of information about an important feature of his work method: the preference for an analytical system in his artistic work. The origin of this procedure comes from his early interest in mathematics, also approached in his explorations of perspective. However, Roger does not apply the unoriginal tendency to blend science and art; he rather uses science systems to structure a visual piece that stands out in its creative environment.

The mix of painting with wood installations will also evolve from the assembly of stretchers where canvases with flat colors and sophisticated frames that contain paintings determined by the visual structure imposed by the wood are put together. Resulting from a thorough investigation of the meaning of the frame in the history of the visual arts, these pieces are one of the most difficult challenges for Roger, since a frame-canvas coherence where both play an essential role in the finished piece must be achieved. Due to the complex elaboration of these frames, the paintings must be excellent pieces in order to not be overshadowed by the frames limiting them.

Roger always navigates different media and formats. His switch from abstraction to more figurative trends serves to consolidate him as an artist who does not limit his work just to the idea he aims at representing. Two important stages of these changes are the summer residencies in Yaddo and Studio 1606, in the United States, where Roger explored a subject that he immediately captured: the landscape. With his experiences in these places he conceived a series, the most recent one, where he gathers and analyzes his greatest interests, pattern and color, through the Cuban landscape.