

Alicia Herrero: Una teoría visual de la distribución [A Visual Theory of Distribution]

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Mise à nu, 2017. Steel, aluminum and glass. 277,5 x 178 x 8 cm

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Alicia Herrero: The Mystery of Measurements and Excesses [desbordes]

For some time now measurement has been an object of political dispute. What is more, over the past few years, that dispute has intensified and become omnipresent: How do we measure poverty, inequality, growth, investments or consumption? We confront these questions every day, and the media and management often seem concerned with nothing else. Measurement, which undoubtedly is at the origin of politics and economics, is also at the origin of art. It has been so ever since antiquity, from the Pythagoreans to the Renaissance (Leonardo wrote in his *Treatise on Painting* that, once a young artist has studied perspective, he must learn "the measures of all things"), and up to certain 20th-century artists of the avant-garde such as Kurt Schwitters or Marcel Duchamp, who made measurement a field for strategic experiment. To make *3 stoppages étalon* (which one can translate either as 3 standard stoppers or 3 standard stoppages), Duchamp slung three threads each one meter in length onto the floor and, with the shape they took on, traced outlines he then transferred onto wavy wooden slats in what he termed a "reduced meter." The resulting figures were later to be the threads connecting the suitors with the machine in the lower part of *The Large Glass*. In this work and others (I can think of the *Unfortunate Readymade* he did in Buenos Aires, or in his participation in Maya Deren's film *The Witch's Cradle*), Duchamp not only relates measuring with the artisanal construction of an object but also with desire. He assails desire, which is precisely what can't be measured, with an odd mix of joking and inquiry.



Global Tax-Evasion, 2017. From the series *Mobiliario*. Acrylic and iron. 47 x 85 x 5 cm

This whole mass of issues and aesthetic, economic and political problems is the starting point for Alicia Herrero's *Una teoría visual de la distribución* [A Visual Theory of Distribution]. Between Duchamp and her work lies an art movement impossible to ignore: conceptualism. Herrero, like other present-day artists, envisions going beyond conceptualism through work with a sensitive dimension. And the terrain she has chosen on which to perform this transcendence is, precisely, the stripping bare of measurement and its mysteries. The show is divided into "Instrumental," which works out its monetary calculations in chromatic and poetic terms, and "Mobiliario" [Furniture], which turns topics of economic analysis into objects that take up room in this space. Statistics, coordinates, accounting forms, pie charts and bar codes are used to link the art of economics with the art economy. The choice couldn't be more on the mark, since measurement involves numbering (abstract, mental, quantitative, allegedly predictable) and materiality (perceptible, physical, leaning toward the random) without apparent overlap. Herrero collapses this difference and ventures, in her words, into the "visual and constructive condition of the statistical universe" with strategies focusing on visual concepts that are no longer entirely conceptual or strictly visual. Coloring, combination of patterns or standards (to use Duchamp's term), materials in daily use (acrylics, woods, plastic fabrics, acetates, aluminums) and research interact with an aesthetic power that takes us to the verge of delirium, to a point where all measuring teeters, yet can still be sensed in the incommensurable. How are we to think of the mystery that connects monetary and artistic measurement? Herrero moves toward that mystery without reducing it to didactic or argumentative dimensions: her task is not explanation but rather setting things down onto the ambiguous turf of the perceivable. The delirium is not the work in itself, but rather the effect it produces in combining numbers with perceptible expressions, measurements and overflows, colors and numbers, as occurs in the capitalist art market.

One of the basic strategies for exploring these relations is chromatic assignment, which is not pursued according to symbolic values: with her concrete, i.e. pre-conceptual, art outlook, Herrero works with vibrations, combinations and pure colors. What are we to see in a piece of furniture: contrasts or the references to gauges of inequality or to evasions? That blue, is it pictorially motivated or part of some arbitrarily assigned code? Does a rising line mean higher earnings? What's gauged in *Mise à nu*, Herrero's rereading of Duchamp's *The Large Glass*: the desire of the suitors, the numerical skeleton of the work, the interpretive distortions it's been subjected to, its relation to the market and its limit (since it has no price), representation of distribution and concentration of wealth? Other measurements, overlapping Duchamp's original, profane *The Large Glass* and break if not shatter it all over again.



1870/2100 Global Distribution, 2017. From the series *Mobiliario*. Wood, iron and paint. 45 x 85 x 5 cm

In quite distinct art media, Herrero has worked on issues related to the art economy and its major auctions: she's done portraits at Sotheby's. In *A Visual Theory of Distribution* she aims at the center of all measurement: the pattern, which is to say, the need to have some model enabling comparison and a putting into relation. These patterns [*patrones*: in Spanish, also meaning "bosses," "masters"] (a justly ambivalent word) come from statistics (for instance, from pie charts), but Herrero uses them as if they were forms with some aesthetic power to them: a sine function chart may be transformed into a pseudo- function piece of furniture and at the same time suggest the rendering of a seascape; global inequality can turn into a pie chart as beautiful as it is sinister. What, then, is a pattern or an algorithm? A struggle with and within the outlook, the experience, the value we give things.

The sensitive intellectual research Alicia Herrero conducts adds to the chromatic operation and aesthetic use of the patterns. The result is stunning: it's neither a thesis in art theory nor a class in contemporary economics. *A Visual Theory of Distribution* opens itself up to the mystery of art, of economics and measurement, and wisely enough, doesn't dispel it. It simply makes it more intense and powerful.

Gonzalo Aguilar

Gonzalo Aguilar is a researcher and instructor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the CONICET Institute.



Untitled, 2016. From the series *Instrumental*. Acrylic, paint, plastic, aluminum, wood and paper on MDF. 70 x 50 cm

Alicia Herrero is a graduate of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón (the current UNA). Among the numerous exhibitions her work has appeared in are the first *BienalSur* (Buenos Aires, 2017); *It's the Political Economy, Stupid*, at DAAP Galleries, University of Cincinnati (2016), Galerija Nova (Zagreb, 2014), Gallery 400 - University of Illinois at Chicago (2013), Center of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki (Greece, 2012), Austrian Cultural Forum New York (2012); *Algunos Artistas /90-Hoy* [Some Artists/ the '90s till Today], Fundación Proa (Buenos Aires, 2013); Henrique Faria Buenos Aires (2013/2012); Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2012), and the *VIII Bienal do Mercosul* (Porto Alegre, 2011). Her recent prizes and fellowships are: travel grant, Colección Oxenford (Buenos Aires, 2017); PAOS residency, Museo José Clemente Orozco (Guadalajara, 2016); creative fellowship, Fondo Nacional de las Artes (Buenos Aires, 2016); residency, DordtYart (Dordrecht, Holland, 2015); first prize, Salón Nacional de Artes Visuales – Nuevos Soportes e Instalaciones [New Media and Installations] (Buenos Aires, 2014); national fellowship for group projects, Fondo Nacional de las Artes (Buenos Aires, 2012); residency, Capacete (Rio de Janeiro, 2011). Among the collections her work is found in are: Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Rosario; Centro Arte Contemporáneo Mendes (Rio de Janeiro).