

EDUARDO TERRAZAS

Timothy Taylor, London

The précis of Eduardo Terrazas's long career in his 2012 monograph, *Possibilities of a Structure*, describes him simply as a 'creator'. That seems fair: now nearly 80, the Guadalajara-born Terrazas has been an architect (of houses, airport terminals, cultural centres), museographer, graphic designer, urban planner, commissioner for the World's Fair and, since his first solo exhibition in 1972, an artist whose work has ranged from installations of Mexican handicrafts to balloon-like plaza sculptures and spidery abstractions in acrylic and India ink, among other things. No single-room commercial gallery show could cover all of that activity – and Terrazas's first UK solo exhibition doesn't try. Instead, as if the artist were relatively monomaniacal, it assembles a dozen zesty geometric abstractions using wool yarn and wax, dual-dated to the early-to-mid 1970s and 2015, which suggests that they've been remade (as does their fresh appearance), and ten small, framed drawings. The result not only rotates Terrazas's most instantly accessible and likeable face towards a contemporary art audience, but also serves as an informal clinic in hybrid aesthetics and their useful relation to jaded palettes.

Most of what's here is culled from the series 'Possibilities of a Structure', which Terrazas primarily developed from 1970–80, though this sequence itself divides into sub-themes: 'Cosmos', 'Grid', 'Diagonals' and 'Nine Circles'. Examples of each are presented, rooted in a relentless logic of permutation. Take a square, fill it with a circle, place another square inside that, a small circle inside *that*, and run diagonals, verticals and horizontals from the corners and sides of the largest square. You now have a fairly rich set of divisions from which to begin editing and extrapolating. Erase some lines to create polygonal graphic segments, which can be tinted with whatever colour schemes you choose, as in the cool greyscale of *Possibilities of a Structure: Cosmos 1.1.11* (1974–2015). Or add nested rainbows of curves like vinyl grooves, as in *Possibilities of a Structure: Cosmos 1.1.13* (1976–2015). Or ditch the curves altogether and run ludic variations on the remaining grid, as in the pinging, pink-orange-blue-green maze of *Possibilities of a Structure: Grid 1.4.12* (1974–2015). Or, again, replace the large circles with a grid of smaller ones, as in *Possibilities of a Structure: Nine Circles 1.2.15* (2014–15).

The range of adjustments might not be infinite but it is clearly capacious, and in each case there's a patent push-pull between symmetry and asymmetry, repetition and deviation, clarity and commotion. There's also, of course, the impression of formal novelty. Unless you've seen Terrazas's work in the various biennials and museum and gallery shows in which it has been included since 2012, this may be your first experience of the textile technique he uses. Borrowed from indigenous Mexican folk art, (for several years from the early 1970s onward, Terrazas worked closely with Santos

Motoaapohua de la Torre de Santiago, a Huichol craftsman), this involves coating wooden panels with wax and then intricately overlaying them with wool. There's a consistent buzzy pleasure in how the designs' angles pull in different directions to those of the faultless ranks of fibre, a subtler patterning hiding behind the overt one. As you move closer, it's the small artisanal touches that pop out: a spiralling roll of wool nestled into a tight corner, or the way the soft yarn bends snugly around the panels' sides.

As he suggests in interviews, Terrazas's variegating activity is intended to reflect the natural universe's own branching fecundity and, at the subatomic level, its geometric basis. This attitude of wonder, nevertheless, doesn't feel like urgent content, and maybe didn't four decades ago either. It's also easy to assent to and hard to really grasp. The viewer is more likely to treat these works as comfort food – yes, they fit into evolving canons of global modernism and chime with later works such as Gabriel Orozco's own geometric abstractions (e.g. his 'Samurai Tree' series), so it's defensible that they're in a gallery like this. But it's somehow more interesting *not* to defend them: to enjoy their high-craft tastefulness as a kind of problem, to consider the possible differences between 'artist' and 'creator', to focus on how Terrazas's pieces resemble jazzed-up architectural plans or even macramé bedspreads, and to appreciate their general ontological indistinctness. These works are, right now, a bit rogue. They are of the past, while appearing (and apparently being) spanking new, to be parsed in the now. They speak a language we know and might perhaps find overfamiliar, doing so via unexpected textures that superficially rejuvenate that language. Yet Terrazas's art, here, still feels conservative – not only because it sustains, and gains energy from, a craft tradition but also because it is less ambitious, more interested in congenial design, than the modernist geometric abstraction from which it also follows on. If you find yourself liking the result, even guardedly, then you have some interesting questions to ask yourself. This in itself may be a good thing.

MARTIN HERBERT



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TIANZHUO CHEN

Long March Space, Beijing

It is tempting to view the work of Chinese artist Tianzhuo Chen as another illustration of the academic José Esteban Muñoz's contention that queerness is a futurity-bound phenomenon – a politics of 'not yet here' that lies always out of reach. Chen is quickly becoming known for his futuristic, hyper-queer characters that remix Japanese *anime* and science-fiction conventions with Leigh Bowery-esque costumes. However, as the artist's first solo exhibition at Long March Space revealed, Chen's queer futurity operates on another, perhaps more historical, plane: that of religion. More specifically, Chen's larger project involves constructing a new and fictitious religion that repurposes cultural symbology, collapses sexual norms and worships hedonism.

The exhibition – curiously, viewable by appointment only – inducted the visitor into Chen's invented religion. At the entrance lay a small sculpture entitled *Instrument 3* (2010), consisting of six grey eyeball-shaped objects book-ended by two small Egyptian scarabs. Gold decorative lines emanate from the sculpture on the plinth below, reminiscent of early Christian iconography. In the main gallery, two enormous concrete heads with long tongues rested peacefully like ancient Buddhist ruins (*Tainted Kiss*, 2014). Neon text attached to each forehead reads, respectively: 'Salvation' and 'Desperation'. Nearby, another neon text piece presented vertical flaming Chinese characters whose English translation read 'In Hell', while a sculpture of a divine heterosexual couple copulating sat majestically atop a plinth.

Chen describes his work as an attempt to transcend the self and create 'a state of madness'. This aim is certainly achieved in the exhibition's two videos, *ADAH A II* (2015) and *19:53* (2014). *ADAH A II* is almost 45 minutes long and presents documentation of the artist's recent performance at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris with artist and dancer Beio (also featured in *19:53*) and the artist collective House of Drama. His deranged aesthetic translates impressively to a theatrical context: one scene sees an androgynous performer in a ballooning bodysuit flailing on the floor singing lyrics such as: 'Pump the maddafakkin speakers; let my buttplug sing for kilometers. Fuck me hard fuck me now lick my stick; I suck on Hello Kitty's big big dick.' More seductive on screen was *19:53*, a short looped video that begins with a woman praying to an unspecified god while holding a wriggling bundle of tiny pink newborn mice in her hands. To an electro-pop soundtrack, the camera jumps between a series of performances on a pastel-coloured stage: a male couple in S&M regalia lick one another, as well as various reptiles; cheerleaders in anime masks and matching leotards bearing the word 'Dope' perform calisthenics; and a group of otherworldly hipsters thrash wildly in a dark, smoke-filled room. In between bursts of gaudy Technicolor graphics, the revellers appear to be guided by two solemn and pale-skinned deities with fluorescent face paint.

Chen's idolization of consumerism and celebrity is deliberately obscene. The flamboyant model in the photographic diptych, *Asian Boy* (2014), for example, wears a big-eyed anime balaclava sprouting long blonde pigtailed and has the phrase 'Asian Boy' scrawled across his naked stomach. Posing against a pastel pink backdrop, he is flanked by two poodles wearing tiny shoes and their own version of gold bling jewellery: soft doggy toys with one marijuana leaf symbol and one dollar sign. In the context of China's rapid industrialization and globalization, as contrasted against its hesitancy to accept LGBT identities, Chen's anxiety about the future of his generation is palpable.

LAURA CASTAGNINI

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Eduardo Terrazas
*Possibilities of a Structure:
Cosmos 1.1.11, 1974/2015,*
wool yarn on wooden board
covered with Campeche
wax, 1.2 x 1.2 m

2 & 3

Tianzhou Chen
19:53, 2014, film stills

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Helen Johnson
He head, she shed, 2015,
acrylic on canvas,
86 x 61cm

HELEN JOHNSON

Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Over the last decade, Helen Johnson has built a substantial body of large-scale, figure-based paintings and wall drawings featuring her friends and peers in gamine postures – reflecting, chatting or stretching – delicately rendered in flattened picture planes. The paintings have been winsome; figures cavort in domestic interiors amidst desk chairs or pot plants, the colours chalky and matte, with body parts dissolving into pale backgrounds like overexposed photographs.

'Café Fatigue' is a distinct departure from this bohemian Melbourne world. The paintings in this exhibition hurtle backwards through time and cross hemispheres to land in pre-World War I Europe. Figures here have been replaced by abstracted forms and interlocking compositions that recall early-20th-century experiments in deconstructing the picture plane wrought by the analytic cubists. The works pay more than a passing regard to the fragmented perspectives of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso but also their later experiments in synthetic cubism, where scraps of paper or wood stuck to the canvas turned paintings into reliefs. Although devoid of the rigour characteristic of this movement, Johnson's paintings share its objective of atomizing pictorial structure. Chromatically, her works are also of a piece with this period, in particular replicating the palette of the lesser-known French cubist, Albert Gleizes.

Johnson plays with patches and layers. In a key work, *It doesn't say this is a problem we have to solve, it says how do you respond* (2015), a large patch of canvas has been cut out to reveal another layer of yellow-stained cotton canvas beneath. The uppermost layer bristles with abutting tectonic and biomorphic forms, pacified by the delicate horizontal lines gouged across the wet paint, as if placing a layer of gauze between the painting and the viewer. *He head, she shed* (2015) fractures a view of a street scene; winding paths and the edges of buildings are abstracted beneath a kinked grid of painted lines, like a view through the leading of a stained glass window. Of course, the painting's degree of abstraction lends itself to other readings. The enmeshed forms might, contrarily, suggest the push and pull of a tussle or dispute; the work's title punning on the phrase 'he said, she said' – a case of your word against mine.

Johnson is an artist who has a self-declared affiliation with Kantian aesthetics, describing her artistic method as predicated on a 'pre-cognitive free play' of imagination. This describes both her way of coming to images and the encounter she offers to the viewer, wherein the formal language of her paintings prompts a kind of imaginative roaming. If Johnson finds abstracted forms coax a certain interpretative latitude, this also occurs through the artist's attraction to the materiality of paint. The works in 'Café Fatigue' are emphatically painterly; featuring textured mark-making,

extroverted brushwork and paint made gravelly via mixing with mineral extenders. Their very painterliness is foregrounded.

But there are slippages of history and sleights of hand here: although the works are painted in acrylic, they have the look and feel of oil paint. The resuscitated colour schemes of Parisian art c.1910, references to cubism and even the paintings' scale reveal a historicist imagination at work. While the catchphrase of modernism was the attempt to capture the transience of modern life, Johnson's paintings instead deploy a modernist vernacular to comment on historical form. Her paintings, however, are not merely nostalgic. Their titles anchor them in the present; their cryptic wit is pivotal to the opening out of imaginative spaces that she so appraises. *Corporate Personality Type Painting* (2015) is the only work where text outweighs the form – a cluster of speech bubbles parading contemporary corporate platitudes – and is the odd-man-out in the exhibition.

In Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27), the character Bergotte, after reading a critic's review of Johannes Vermeer's *View of Delft* (1660–61) hurries to the exhibition to see the painting first-hand. Noticing for the first time a patch of yellow wall – a small square strangely abstracted within the painting's realist depiction of the Dutch city – Bergotte is overcome. This yellow patch silently embodies the very qualities Bergotte wishes he had captured in his own writing and strikes him in some simultaneously knowing and unknowing manner. Johnson's paintings may not elicit the same drama of response (Bergotte dies) but their various parts and passages offer a related potential for ruminative absorption and tangential meanings.

SOPHIE KNEZIC

