

ARTFORUM

Zilia Sánchez

ARTISTS SPACE EXHIBITIONS

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Zilia Sánchez composes her paintings in a syntax of soft swells and fleshed incurves. Born in pre-Castro Cuba, she moved to New York in 1964, where she remained for nearly a decade before settling in Puerto Rico. Contra the heterodox waxes and resins of 1966's "Eccentric Abstraction," canvas, pulled taut over frames affixed with objects such as rounded sticks, disks, and cylinders, became Sánchez's privileged medium. This revelatory survey, the artist's first in the United States, features twelve of such reliefs, worked and reworked over the course of over three decades. Also featured are two series of ink drawings and four issues of *Zona de Carga y Descarga* (Zone of Charging and Discharging), a literary journal produced by Puerto Rico's intellectual avant-garde and designed by Sánchez from 1972 to 1973. While post-Minimalist practice is often positioned as a strict reaction against male-centric Minimalism, the inclusion of *Zona* recontextualizes Sánchez's work in a semiotic frame, aligning it with contemporary developments in literary theory and their concern with the ways in which language—or, in Sánchez's case, canvas—signifies. Similar to how her peer Severo Sarduy stresses the sensual tactility of words, Sánchez denies the demotion of canvas to a passive, flattened backdrop, attending to its status as a site for inscription as much as to its expressive, sculptural potential.

Topología Erótica (Erotic Topology), 1978, is a cloven rectangle, its two halves joined along a horizontal split. Above the break, a blunt rod presses against the canvas at a downward skew; below, an immured circle bevels up, echoing the rod's slant. The word "topology" operates on mathematic and bodily registers, and Sánchez's diptych draws on both, recalling the slow build of a sine wave and the organic arc of an areola. On the surface, concentric ovals of pale peach, chalky blue, and white acrylic ring the two protrusions, forming a lopsided lemniscate. Across the room, a thin-edged disk bulges from the bottom center of *Mujer (de la serie el silencio de eros)* (Woman of the Series of the Silence of Eros), 1965, its contour at once vaguely labial and reminiscent of the burnished camber of a Brancusi bronze. In Sánchez's elegantly coherent oeuvre, works which span such large temporal gaps fit together seamlessly, each dilating the subtle, tensile eroticism of the others.



Zilia Sánchez, *Mujer (de la serie el silencio de eros)* (Woman [of the Series of the Silence of Eros]), 1965, acrylic on stretched canvas, 61 x 61 x 15".

— Courtney Fiske

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