

Gilda Picabea

HACHE

Loyola 32

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In this exhibition's two series, Gilda Picabea implicitly restages debates that arose in the 1940s in response to Argentina's Concretist painting, whose practitioners were dead set on banishing illusion and reference from their medium. Her pictures reactivate those efforts, injecting viewers with the feeling that we are "possessed by our ancestors, by those others who have looked and lent their bodies to the dialogues of painting," as María Amalia García writes in the show's catalogue. But Picabea moves beyond Concrete art, and even evokes forms of representation that may seem anathema to them.

The seventeen paintings in "Distant" (all works 2019) provide variations on a geometric theme: two rectangles against a gray ground. These dynamic canvases offer all the perceptive satisfactions that good painting can, and yet something seems off. This gray ground begins to look like the numeral 1, distorted differently in each work. And do these recurring rectangles actually depict the gallery's two parallel rooms? Rich abstraction, dumb repetition, a banal floor plan: Picabea's paintings are all these at once. How else might we see them? Or is this reading too much into mundane illustrations? The works' complexity comes from posing such questions and allowing them to remain unanswered.

"Un perfil dibujado en el espacio" (An Outline Drawn in Space), the other series, is rich with drama. These paintings' black-and-white stalactites, rendered to tease out bistable perception, induce a stark and mesmerizing vertigo that is at odds with the softer effects of "Distant." Here, too, Picabea encourages second-guessing. Is she transcending the figure-ground relationship, or playing cheap tricks? Do her jagged contours purposefully invoke sculptor Alicia Penalba's signature forms, or comic-book explosions? It's a sign of Picabea's strength as an artist that she dares viewers to think the worst even when she's bringing out painting's best.