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## Cosmic Curves

### Important Abstract Artists from Latin America (Whose Work You May Not Know)



Kazuya Sakai, *Filles de Kilimanjaro III (Miles Davis)* (1976). Courtesy Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Archer M. Huntington Museum Fund, 1977. Photo credit: Rick Hall

By  Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro

curator of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo and director of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

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As Geometric Abstraction from Latin America has become part of the international mainstream, with artists like [Lygia Clark](#), [Hélio Oiticica](#) and [Jesús Soto](#) now household names, there are many other artists who worked in the region whose work is lesser-known. Here are just a few whose work you might not know, but should.

### **Kazuya Sakai (1927-2001)**

Sakai, who was of Japanese-Argentine descent, was a distinguished translator, professor and music critic, as well as an artist. The early paintings he made in his home town Buenos Aires were expressionist abstractions, inspired in part by Japanese calligraphy. In 1962 he moved to New York and then, from 1966 to 1977, he lived in Mexico, where he was the artistic director of the magazine *Plural*, which had been founded by the writer [Octavio Paz](#). In Mexico, Sakai's work changed as he painted parallel bands of saturated colors in vibrant compositions, often inspired by his jazz heroes such as Miles Davis. Sakai spent his last 25 years living on the outskirts of Dallas, Texas, where he continued to paint and translate Japanese texts.



Victor Magariños D., *Sin título* (late 1960s). Courtesy the estate of the artist

### **Victor Magariños D. (1924-1993)**

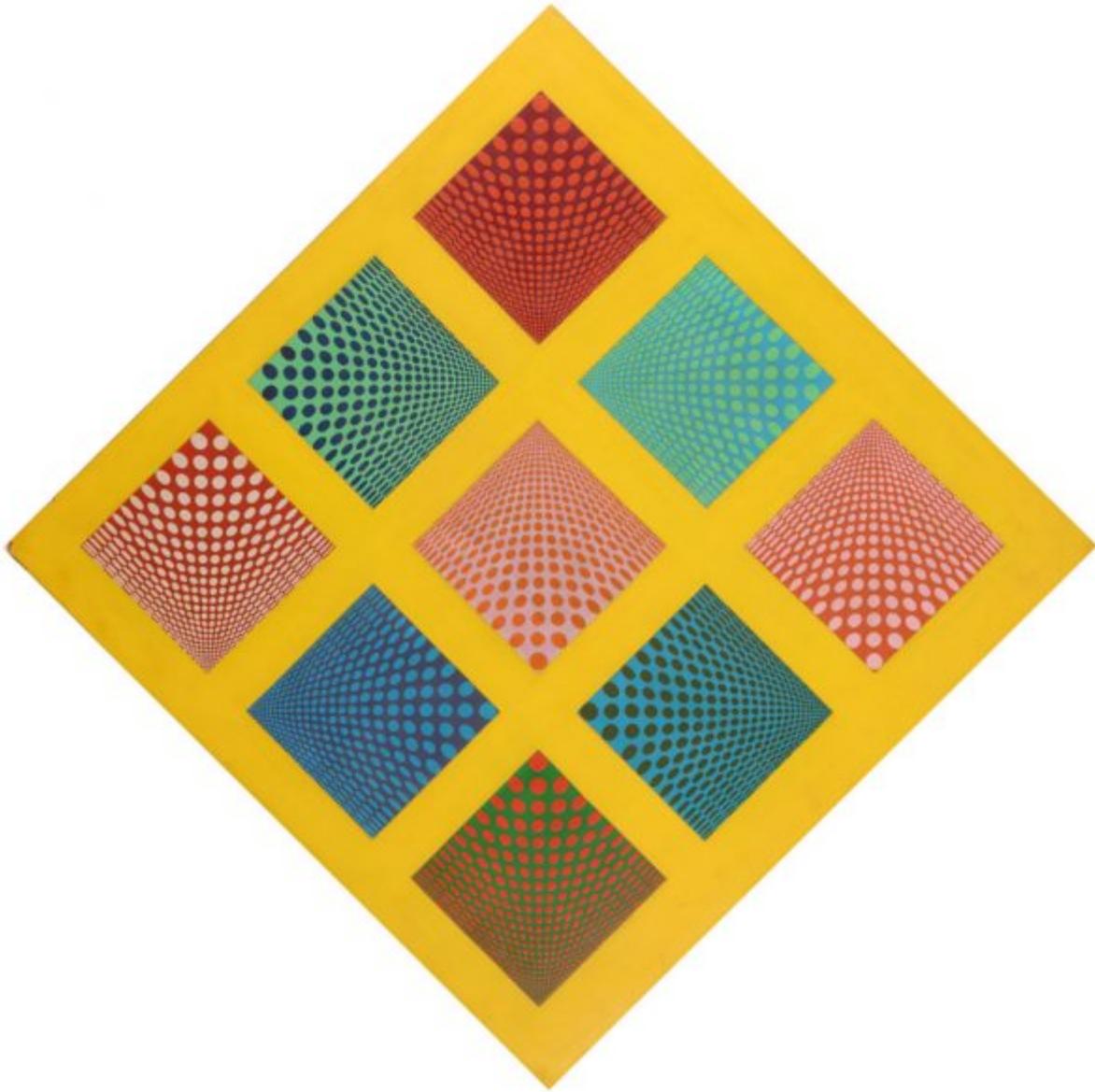
Magariños was a reclusive artist who lived in relative isolation in the coastal town of Pinamar, Argentina, from 1967 until his death in 1993. During the 1950s and 1960s he started producing geometric compositions but his interest in the work of the Belgian artist Georges Vantongerloo led him to a more cosmic conception of art as an expression of transcendental energy. Magariños was something of an artists' artist: hugely admired by many colleagues but loathe to participate in the commercial art world. As a result, his work has not circulated widely.



Rubén Núñez, *Composición* (1952). Colección Fundación Museos Nacionales, Galería de Arte Nacional

### **Rubén Núñez (1930-2012)**

Núñez was an early experimenter in abstraction in Caracas in the 1950s, joining the group “Los disidentes” (The dissidents) with Jesús Soto and [Alejandro Otero](#), among others. His work of the 1950s and 1960s explored geometric patterns and dynamic compositions, and in the 1970s he became an early pioneer of holography, in a movement he called “holocineticism”, an attempt to fuse holograms with kinetic art. He was also an accomplished industrial designer and glassworker, and perhaps his most famous creation was the bottle for a special edition of Pampero rum.



Carlos Silva, *Eutropos* (1966). Courtesy María Calcaterra, Moderno & Contemporáneo

### **Carlos Silva (1930-1987)**

Carlos Silva's works are complex and ambiguous constructions made up of accumulations of small hand-painted dots. The resulting undulating compositions recall the contemporary works of Bridget Riley or Victor Vasarely, yet Silva's work is barely known outside his native Argentina. Silva also used a unique color palette, with unexpected juxtapositions of pastel and primary colors, to create quite beautiful effects.



María Martorell, *Sin título (serie Lázaro) XVI* (1974). Courtesy Gabriela Martorell

### **María Martorell (1909-2010)**

Many of the most important abstract artists in Latin America were women (Clark, [Lygia Pape](#), [Lidy Prati](#), [Gego](#) and many others). María Martorell was born in Salta, a city in the Andean region of north-west Argentina, and remained

connected there throughout her long life. Her works are characterized by the use of undulating waves of color in earthy tones that recall the mineral-rich soil of her homeland.



Rubem Valentim, *Relêvlo Emblema* (1978). Private collection. Photo credit: Sotheby's Digital Images

## **Rubem Valentim (1922-1991)**

Valentim was born in Salvador, Bahia, in the north-east of Brazil. As a self-taught artist he engaged with the popular Afro-Brazilian traditions of Bahia while developing his own unique abstract language. The resulting compositions make equal reference to the contemporary geometric language that was gaining force in 1950s Brazil, and to more ancient languages that express religious and cosmic forces through abstract forms. He will be the subject of a major retrospective at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), scheduled to open in fall 2018.

\*Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro is the curator of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo, "Affective Affinities", opening September 2018