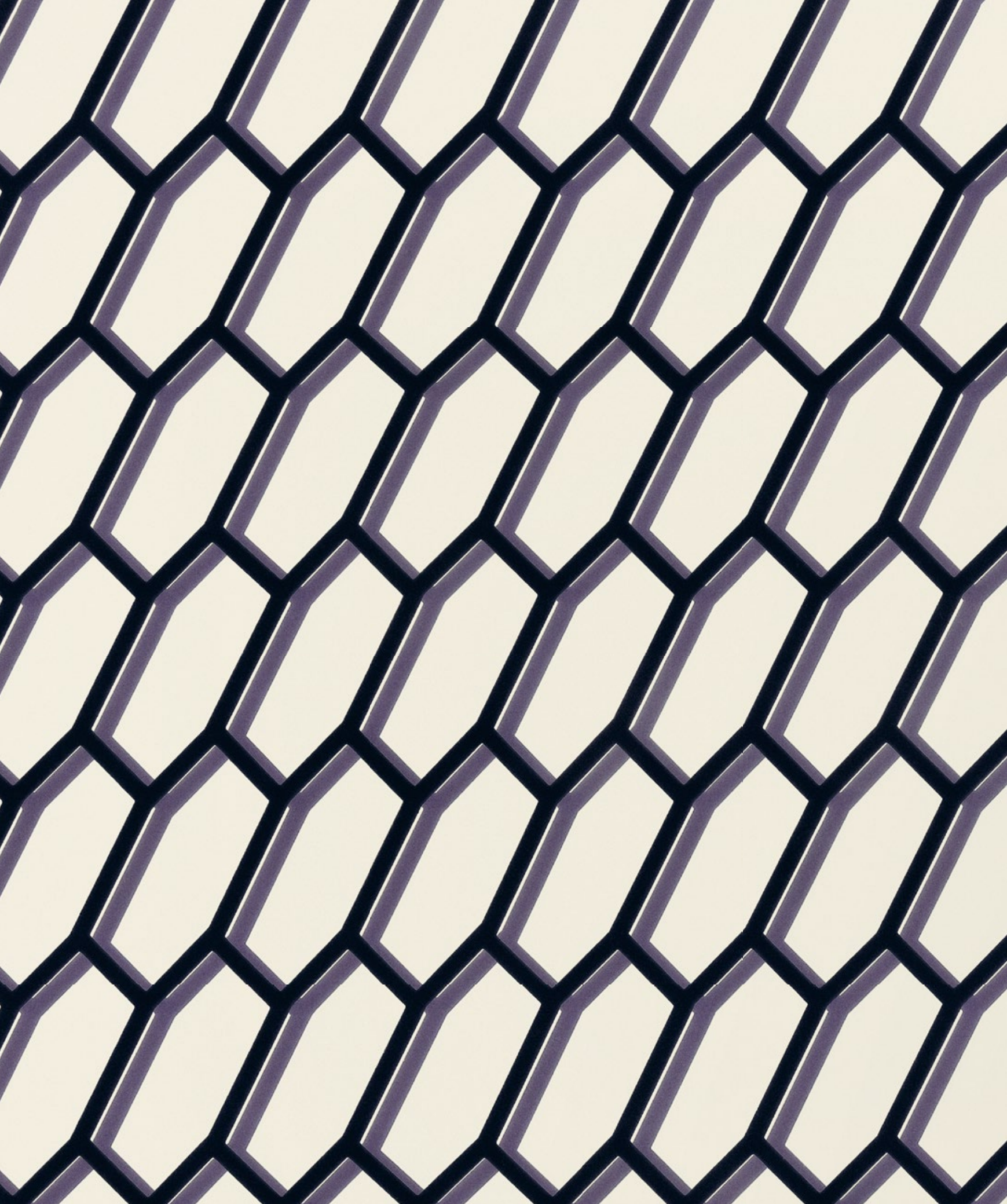
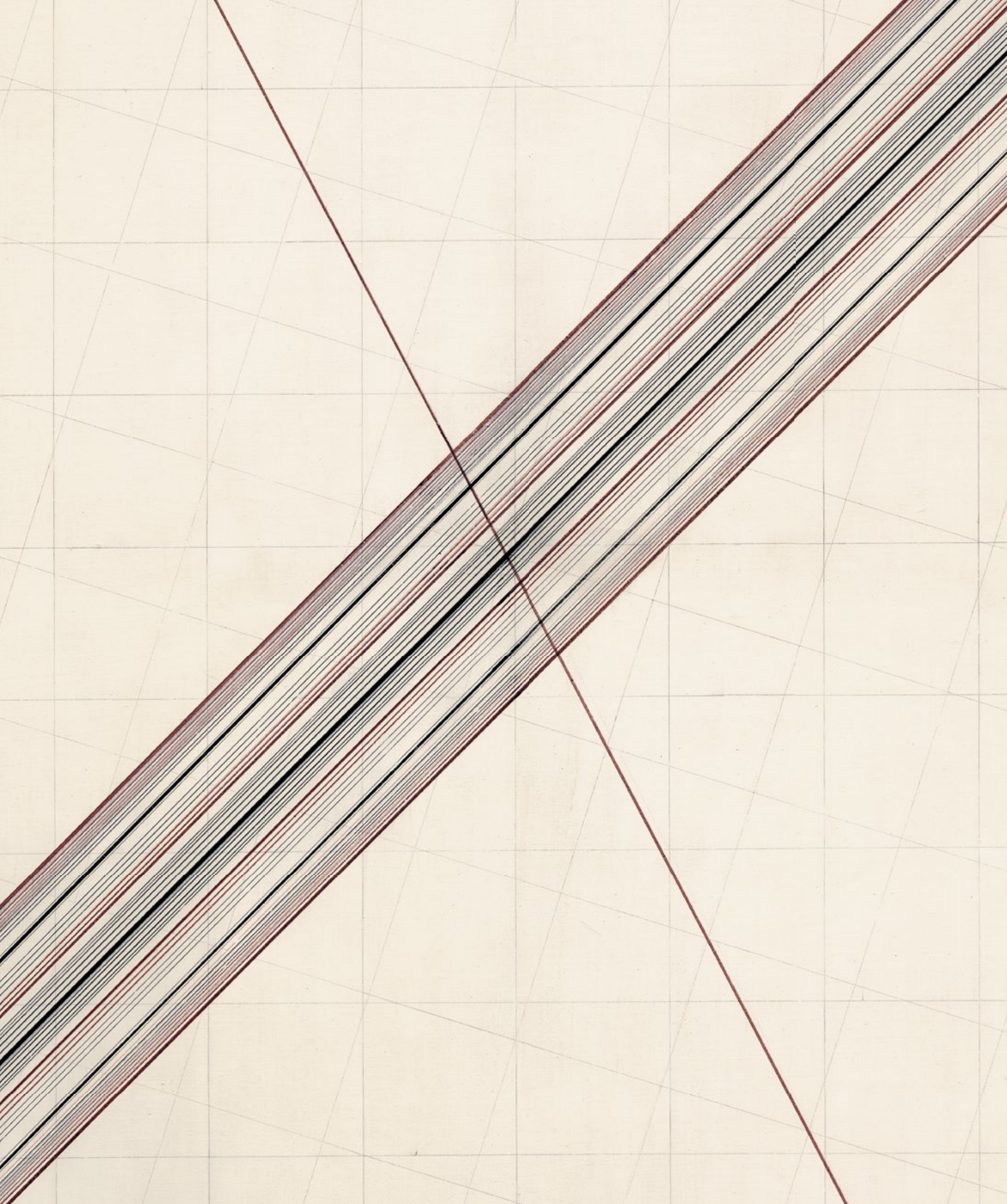
Soledad Sevilla

Rhythms, Grids, Variables



Soledad Sevilla
Rhythms, Grids, Variables

MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA
GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE CULTURA



Soledad Sevilla: Rhythms, Grids, Variables is the title of the exhibition the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía has dedicated to Soledad Sevilla (Valencia, 1944), the winner of the 2020 Velázquez Prize for the Plastic Arts and one of the most firmly established creative voices in contemporary Spain.

The retrospective draws us into an oeuvre that spans six decades, highlighting the connections between her different phases as an artist.

A poetic element has consistently played a key role in the work of Soledad Sevilla. Hers is a poetics of subtlety, shot through with the work of other artists, ranging from great masters of baroque painting like Velázquez and Rubens to twentieth-century artists like Mark Rothko, Agnes Martin, or her friend Eusebio Sempere. This comprehensive review of Sevilla's creative journey invites us to plunge into the most audacious and experimental facets of an oeuvre that employs abstraction to give visual form to a unique conception of everyday reality.

Geometry and the repetition of visual patterns form the foundation of an artistic language increasingly centered on the use of reticular grids and the search for a certain vibratory effect. Sevilla's residence in Boston in the early 1980s marked a watershed in her career. It was then she designed her first installation projects, which foreshadow the emotional dimension of her later work.

In her most recent work, an architectural sensitivity is combined with a beautiful approach to nature and a reflection on time that leads into minutely precise and hypnotic series, shown to the public for the first time in this retrospective.

The exhibition is complemented by this catalogue, with essays by Paula Barreiro, Yolanda Romero, Antonio Cayuelas, and Isabel Tejeda, the show's curator, that explore different aspects of the artist and her work. We also extend our gratitude for these valuable contributions to the team at the Museo Reina Sofía in collaboration with that of the Comunidad de Madrid, for enabling such a complete, rigorous survey of the magnificent oeuvre of Soledad Sevilla.

Ernest Urtasun Domènech
Minister of Culture

Soledad Sevilla: Rhythms, Grids, Variables, the exhibition devoted to the artist Soledad Sevilla, brings us closer to the universe of one of the most interesting figures in the history of recent art. We are speaking of one of the leading representatives of geometric abstraction in Spain and one of the most internationally reputed Spanish artists. From geometry to light, her work, always highly personal, seeks poetry in a beauty that has conceptual roots.

Curated by Isabel Tejeda, the show surveys Sevilla's artistic universe from the 1960s onward, with works linked to the Universidad de Madrid's celebrated Centro de Cálculo (Computing Center), to her most recent production, where she pays tribute to her friend and fellow artist Eusebio Sempere.

The 1960s saw essential changes brought about by, among other things, new technologies. To process those changes, centers devoted to investigating the dialogue between technology, art, and science took on great importance. In Spain, it was in this context that the Universidad de Madrid's Centro de Cálculo was founded. In Soledad Sevilla's case, it proved fundamental. Thanks to the use of the computer, she fashioned the voice that would henceforth accompany her. Not content with this, she took this voice to the United States in a process of spatial and aesthetic investigation that continues today.

This exhibition reflects the interest of the Comunidad de Madrid in disseminating and celebrating the work of great contemporary artists.

We wish to thank the artist for her investigative work, her tireless labor, and her unflagging commitment to painting, and also the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía for its dedicated, rigorous efforts to ensure visibility for the most suggestive and personal artists of our time.

Isabel Díaz Ayuso
President of the Comunidad de Madrid

The exhibition *Soledad Sevilla: Rhythms, Grids, Variables* presents a chronological survey of the career of Soledad Sevilla, a prolific and heterodox artist whose work is sustained by a concept of art uniting judgment and emotion, reason and sensibility. The show highlights how Sevilla's work, which springs from a lyrical understanding of formal experimentation, is deeply concerned with beauty and intuition, and how it vindicates the ability of aesthetic creation to confront us with "liminality and the inapprehensible," to shake us and transport us to a "threshold" where time remains suspended for an instant and our relationship with reality is transformed.

Through a selection of over a hundred works, the exhibition shows the coherence and circularity of the artist's evolution, something she herself points to when she states she has been painting the same picture all her life. This assertion requires qualification, as the curator of the exhibition, Isabel Tejeda, points out, since her work should be viewed as a continual to-ing and fro-ing, a tireless reflection on the same questions in a "Heraclitean" sense, that is, as if returning to a permanently flowing river. This idea is explored in Yolanda Romero's essay, which suggests that Sevilla's career can be read as a "vast universe governed by the principle of change, where one event already includes the beginning of the next" in a constant mutation that has allowed her to "transit freely from the geometric to the expressive, from the permanent to the ephemeral, from light to darkness, and from reason to emotion," remaining on the margins of dominant, sometimes stagnant, trends.

Soledad Sevilla began her career in the mid-1960s, a time when the Spanish art scene was opening up to geometry. As Paula Barreiro explains in her essay, the artist then started to define her artistic language, concentrating on "rational experimentation with form by means of geometric abstraction." Her involvement with the Universidad de Madrid's Centro de Cálculo (Computing Center) allowed her to pursue research on the principles of combinatorics, seriality, and the module, fundamental for her later work.

Although she always kept up ties with the heterogeneous group of geometric artists, Sevilla soon set aside the use of the computer as an artistic tool because it did not allow her to develop the type of investigation of geometry that interested her. From the end of the 1970s, this investigation led her, in Barreiro's words, to the "breaking of the bounds of the plane by the line and its interaction with space." In this respect, her residency in Boston between 1980 and 1982 proved a crucial experience, as it was there that she conceived her first projects that hinged on spatial intervention and contained performative connotations. Those projects anticipated her later incursion into the installation format, such as *MIT Line* and, especially, *Seven Days of Solitude*, where she first introduced the processual, memory, and the cultural specificity of place to her work.

In Boston, she also produced pictorial series such as *Keiko* and *Belmont*, in which she imbued her pictures with an atmospheric and vibratory quality that was to be one of the principal hallmarks of her mature work. They are the direct precedent of two of her most emblematic projects of the mid-1980s: *Meninas*, in which

she focuses her investigation on how space is configured through an immaterial element like light, and *Alhambras*, articulated, as the artist herself explains, around three themes born of her "contemplating the world of the Alhambra: the magic of portals, the magic of reflections, and the magic of shadows."

These two series put the seal on the growing importance that Sevilla had started to attach in her work to poetics and the installation. Indeed, this exhibition includes a re-creation of *El tiempo vuela* (*Time Flies*), in which a thousand paper butterflies revolve unceasingly in a suggestive metaphor for the inexorable passage of time and the fleetingness of life, and *Donde estaba la línea* (*Where the Line Was*), conceived by the artist specifically for this show. In it Sevilla carries out an intervention in the Museum's Sabatini Building with cotton threads, a material she has used in earlier installations like *Fons et Origo* and *Toda la torre* (*All the Tower*), whose choice, as Isabel Tejeda emphasizes, is informed by an "underlying gender reading."

Soledad Sevilla's installations have sometimes constituted the starting point for a new pictorial cycle, as is the case of *En ruinas* (*In Ruins*), which originated in *Mayo 1904–1922*, produced at the Vélez Blanco Castle, in Almería. This fully abstract series reflects the influence of Mark Rothko on her oeuvre and anticipates the interest in landscape and nature that was to mark her work from the late 1990s onward. Such interest also surfaces in works like *Apamea* and *Insomnios* (*Insomnias*), as well as in more recent projects such as the sculptures *Arquitecturas agrícolas* (*Agricultural Architectures*) or the series *Nuevas lejanías* (*New Distances*) and *Luces de invierno* (*Winter Lights*), where she paints the diffuse landscapes seen through the transparent plastic sheeting of the tobacco drying sheds on the fertile plains of Granada.

Along this path of to-ing and fro-ing, Soledad Sevilla's current production reviews some of the artistic concerns of the beginning of her career. This process of revisiting has led to a reencounter with Eusebio Sempere, an artist she has always greatly admired and with whom she maintained a close friendship ever since first meeting him in 1967. She pays homage to Sempere in this exhibition with a small gouache by the artist belonging to her personal collection, which has given rise to her most recent series, *Horizontes* (*Horizons*), *Horizontes blancos* (*White Horizons*), and *Esperando a Sempere* (*Waiting for Sempere*), revealed to the public for the first time in this exhibition.

The exhaustive survey of Soledad Sevilla's career offered by this retrospective shows how the artist has constructed a hybrid oeuvre punctuated by continuous transformations but at the same time characterized by an unequivocal internal unity. The exhibition furthermore demonstrates that in her quest to generate "an experience of the liminal" and incorporate a poetic drive in her practice without renouncing experimental rigor, Sevilla has traced a path of her own, making her a fundamental figure in the Spanish artistic landscape of recent decades.

Manuel Segade
Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

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Mediating between Emotion and Judgment: Soledad Sevilla

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Kevin Power, "Una conversación con Soledad Sevilla," in *Memoria. Soledad Sevilla 1975–1995*, by Rosa Queralt and Mar Villaespesa (dir.), exh. cat. (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1995), 101.

2
Soledad Sevilla, "Proceso," in *Soledad Sevilla* (Zaragoza: Sala Cai-Luzán, 1991), n.p.

3
Dan Cameron, "Soledad Sevilla. Entrevista," in *Imágenes líricas. New Spanish Visions*, ed. Lucinda Barnes and Constance Glenn (Long Beach: California State University, 1990), 84–93.

4
Soledad Sevilla, "Luces de invierno," in *Soledad Sevilla. Luces de invierno*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Galería Marlborough, 2018), 7.

5
See Paula Barreiro, *Arte normativo español. Procesos y principios para la creación de un movimiento* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas [CSIC], 2005).

6
Soledad Sevilla's relationship with what surrounds us is sophisticated and difficult to describe. I think that the notion of *vislumbrar* or "glimpsing," defined in the *Dictionary* of the Real Academia Española as "knowing something immaterial imperfectly or conjecturing it on the basis of slight indications; seeing an object tenuously or confusedly owing to distance or lack of light," approaches the idea translated by her painting.

I never embark on an analysis of my work a priori. [. . .] I never plan my works in a theoretical way, there's always something more visceral involved. It's an image that shakes you up at a certain moment, a sensation. Afterward, when it's done, is when I analyze it and find certain reasons.[1]

There's a world where reason emerges from experience, and another different one where one acts in such a way that recognition lies above understanding. You can't look for the logic of that world. It doesn't have any. In it, foreknowledge, improvisation, magic, and wisdom seem to impose themselves on method. Only in such conditions do objects cease to be mute and awaken the creative necessity in me.[2]

In actual fact, it isn't aesthetics that attracts me but beauty . . . What I want is to put myself in front of things so as to analyze what there is behind them. Smoke is a consequence of fire, and so what interests me is the fire. What draws me to things is their essence, why they are generated, why they occur. That is what I want to transmit, not external facts or images but presences. To find and delimit the inner space of things.[3]

It has constantly been written about me that I paint light, but I've always rejected that. Light isn't there to be seen but to allow us to see.[4]

—Soledad Sevilla

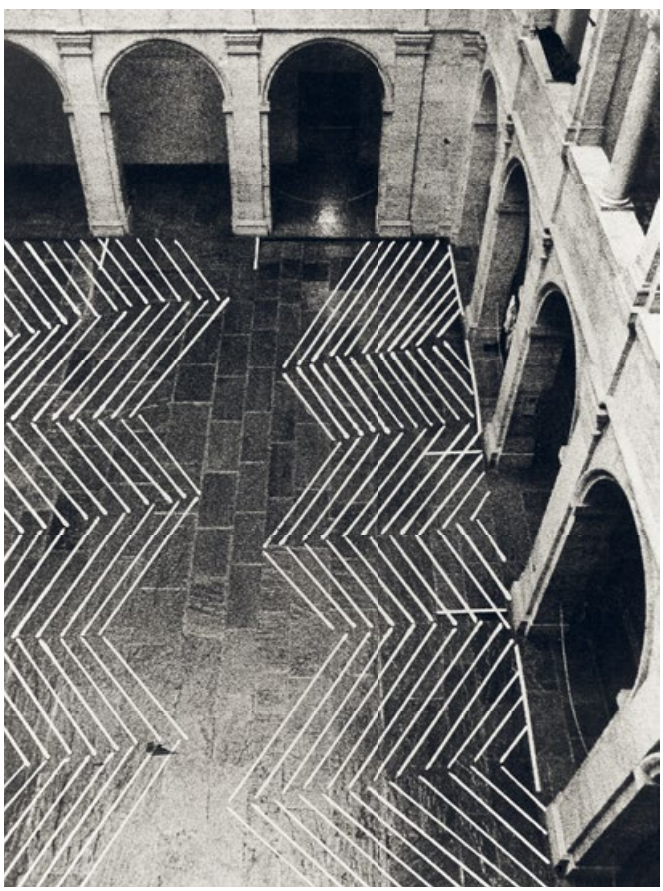
In 1960, the First Joint Exhibition of Spanish Normative Art at the Ateneo de Valencia represented an attempt, albeit a short-lived one, to espouse the development of a school of geometric artists in Spain.[5] At the end of the decade, the normatives were to return with renewed impetus and, above all, a greater sense of purpose in a second group, one of whose participants was Soledad Sevilla. Born, in fact, in Valencia, in 1944, this artist has threaded together her work with painting, installations, and interventions, disciplines of space and time that entail memory.

Although a fully geometric artist from the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Soledad Sevilla followed a path of her own after 1980, one that fed off contemporary creative and visual options that were nonetheless seen as antagonistic or divergent. Some of her works intersected with conceptual art—I am thinking of *Seven Days of Solitude* [p. 120], a project carried out during her stay in Boston (1980–1982), or *Rutas del desasosiego* (*Routes of Disquiet*, 2017), invested in poetics of walking aligned with those of Hamish Fulton or Francesco Careri—and she also plunged unreservedly into lyrical abstraction at the start of the 1990s.

Although the narrative resources of painting were rejected as a matter of principle in her artistic milieu of the 1960s and 1970s, we are able to glimpse the contingent in part of her work.[6] This occurs in *Alhambras* [pp. 84-95], in her vegetational works like *Díptico de Valencia* (*Valencia Diptych*, 1996) [pp. 100-101], *Hotel Triunfo* (1998) [pp. 102-103], *Apamea* (1999) [pp. 104-105], or *Malezas* (*Undergrowth*, 2003), and in *Nuevas lejanías* (*New Distances*, 2016), landscapes that creep in

7
"In the *Alhambras*, I fought tooth and nail to eliminate the formal aspects of the monument, but I failed. There are the arches, the columns, the gates." Soledad Sevilla, telephone interview, March 13, 2024.

8
Ángel Crespo, *Arte Objetivo* (Madrid: Dirección General de BBAA, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1967), n.p.



Seven Days of Solitude, 1982

behind the humble semitransparent veil of the greenhouse plastics of southwestern Iberia.[7] The object, taken as a presence rather than in a literal sense, is also an ally in installations and interventions like *El poder de la tarde* (*The Power of the Evening*, 1984) [p. 131], *Leche y sangre* (*Milk and Blood*, 1986), *Nos fuimos a Cayambe* (*We Went to Cayambe*, 1991), *Mayo 1904–1992* (1992), *El tiempo vuela* (*Time Flies*, 1998) [pp. 106-109], and *Te llamaré hoja* (*I Shall Call You Leaf*, 2005). The fact is that in the 1980s, Soledad Sevilla abandoned canonical geometric abstraction, the "art opposed to intuition and to a subjectivity that might be objectivized,"[8] refuting the assumption that the emotions were the preserve of the informalists with her visibly poetic quality. Her work thus exceeds categorizations governed by urgency or written and theorized with a broad brush: the artist is heterodox, she has moved against the tide, and she is always open to new explorations. She understands art as a quest that unites judgment and emotion, reason and sensibility, and she allows herself to be borne along by intuition—a faculty that paradoxically can only be pursued from intuition itself. Afterward, as she told Kevin Power in the quotation that opens this essay, she began a process of reflection that is systematized by language. In this way, without renouncing past work, Soledad Sevilla has produced an oeuvre throughout the course of her career in accordance with her creative spirit at each moment, reconciling her personal life and her physical needs.

It seems pertinent to point out that abstraction, whether geometric or informalist, was not considered during her formative years to be a suitable formula of expression for women artists, who were

9
Maria Lluïsa Faxedas has analyzed the antagonism between abstraction and women in the discourses of Kandinsky and Mondrian: "the utopian and universal ideal of a pure abstraction could have made it easier for women to access artistic practice, avoiding the confrontation with figurative representation that can be more easily connoted as gender; but in fact the same theory characterized this supposed universalism as masculine. Aspiring to universality implied reducing the 'feminine,' in all its dimensions, to its minimum expression." "¿Contra sí mismas? Mujeres artistas en los orígenes desde la abstracción," *Barcelona Research Art Creation* 1, no. 1 (June 2013): 36.

10
I have analyzed the case of the Spanish informalists in Isabel Tejeda, "Juana Francés. Silencio," in *Juana Francés*, by María Jesús Folch (dir.), exh. cat. (Valencia: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern [IVAM]: 2024), 60–75.

11
The artist, who suffers from insomnia, says she has solved many problems of both art and life while dozing fitfully in the blackness of the night. She believes that "the night is more intelligent." Soledad Sevilla, conversation, February 5, 2024.

12
Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 112.

13
Agnes Martin, "What Is Real?," in *Agnes Martin, Writings. Schriften*, ed. Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz (Winterthur: Cantz-Verlag, 1991), 93.

14
Byung-Chul Han, *Die Errettung des Schönen* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlage, 2015).

restricted to the imitative possibilities of narrative languages because girls were thought not to be very fruitful when embarking on the creative paths of avant-garde artistic autonomy.[9] If, for Spanish women of her generation, pursuing a figurative career meant following a hostile path, the road thus became even steeper and darker when they chose to enter the terrain of the "self" or of rational intellect, and to employ languages that betrayed the illusionist precepts of representation and perspective, the basis of European painting since the fifteenth century. The fact is that abstraction was linked to a higher universal identified with masculinity.[10] Opting for normative art meant a challenge for a woman artist who rejected the tradition that reigned almost inescapably at Spanish fine arts schools, believing that science and art come from the same place and are alternative ways of trying to understand what we are and what the world we live in is like. Paradoxically, Sevilla was to be helped along this stony path by disciplined academic training. She first studied at a private painting school in Valencia run by a husband and wife, the Portoléses, both artists, and afterward she went on to public higher education at the Sant Jordi Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona. Method and discipline germinated in her in such a way during her geometric phase that when she allowed herself to be inundated by the shaking of intuition, her firm roots allowed her to conciliate emotion and reflection. From the start, Soledad Sevilla has been a disciplined, demanding, and obstinate artist. And an intuitive one.

Her work translates the upheaval that bursts in upon the sensitive, making the visual vibrate. This is the bridge the artist uses to shake the viewer physically in an experience of the liminal that ultimately unleashes intimate emotions that are difficult to share, since they are released differently in each individual, and she does this with the spiritual and human dimension, free of dogmas, that was advocated by Kandinsky. Her painting presents itself as a paradoxical deep surface located on the threshold. It is not in one place or another but between night and day, in the *eureka* of the fitful sleeper that slips out rapidly in the early hours, as materialized in her *Insomnios* (*Insomnias*) [pp. 139-149].[11] A place of *otherness* that suspends time for an instant. Mark Rothko called it "revelation,"[12] Agnes Martin "silver thread,"[13] and Soledad Sevilla "sacudidas" or "shakes." I have a notion they are talking about similar sensations. These "shakes" are tied in her production to an aesthetic category despised by a segment of twentieth-century art: the beautiful, materialized in the sensitive. It is no coincidence that the artist should have felt captivated in recent years by the theory of the Korean German philosopher Byung-Chul Han, which maintains that we are confronted by a crisis in beauty's capacity to cause commotion—that which nests in the sensitive—as it has been replaced by the absolutization of the healthy and the polished generated in the virtual space by the perverse logic of the *like*.[14] Soledad Sevilla's painting is rooted in an analog tradition and finds—and entraps—a universal that is particularized to defend a formula for relating to the sensitive, to space and time, and which breaks down the apparent barriers of the epidermis, the fine line that connects rather than separating our interior from the exterior. She finds this in what

15
Soledad Sevilla, interview March 7, 2024.

16
I worked with the idea of the *limen* in the painting of Soledad Sevilla in *Soledad Sevilla. Umbrales*, exh. cat. (Murcia: Galería Art Nueve, 2005).

17
Yolanda Romero, "Una conversación con Soledad Sevilla," in *Soledad Sevilla*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Galería Soledad Lorenzo, 2001), 11.

18
Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion, oder der Eremit in Griechenland* (Tübingen: n.p., 1797), 12.

19
I am grateful to Antonio García Álvarez for our conversations on the inapprehensible and the threshold. The fact we reached no point of verbal agreement while knowing full well we were talking about the same thing reaffirms my confidence in the concept of intuition in Bergson.

20
Intuition is "that kind of intellectual sympathy whereby we are transported to the interior of an object in order to coincide with what is unique and therefore inexpressible about it." Henri Bergson, "Introduction à la métaphysique," in *La pensée et le mouvant: Essais et conférences* (Quebec: Université du Québec à Chicoutimi - Bibliothèque Paul-Émile-Boulet, 2003), 100.

21
Daniel Giralt-Miracle connects Yturralde's work with the liminality I propose in this essay for Sevilla, although the visual results of the two are very different. See Daniel Giralt-Miracle, "Yturralde en busca de un ontoespacio," in *Yturralde*, exh. cat. (Valencia: IVAM, 1999), 11–17.

Mark Rothko,
Red on Maroon, 1959

is set into commotion by the beautiful, in the belief in beauty as a potential transformer of our relation with reality. "Beauty is not in fashion, but I've never been in the trendy group," says the artist.[15]
Soledad Sevilla expresses liminal experiences in the face of the disquieting, the mysterious, and the impossible, sensations that arouse an emotion that enmeshes reason because it is difficult to define, disentangle, and explain with words or concepts. An instant that brings us close to a revealed truth, to the threshold, to the knowledge of something indescribable that slips swiftly through our fingers, caught and lost again in a second.[16] She has related it on occasions to another aesthetic category, that of the sublime.[17] Only poetic discourse is able to caress it, an inapprehensibility that has been analyzed from Kant to Romantic philosophy and poetry: "Man is a god when he dreams, a beggar when he thinks, and when inspiration is gone, he is left standing there like a worthless son whose father has driven out of the house," says Hölderlin.[18] This line of thought returns with Henri Bergson's argument that there is knowledge that reason cannot attain, yet which poetic intuition can brush up against.[19] For Bergson, indeed, intuition can only be expressed in images, never in concepts.[20]
The result of a process that starts from the sketch on paper, the artist's final works are of a very large size. This makes the viewer feel enveloped by the painting, causing the body as well as the gaze to participate performatively in the work whose space it shares.[21] Sevilla has defended the importance of the large format in her work on countless occasions. Although the dimensions of her work call

22
Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 74.

23
Soledad Sevilla met Sempere in the Grupo 15, a graphic art workshop managed by María Corral, when she arrived in Madrid as a recently married woman of twenty-three. "I was struck by the way María Corral introduced us. She told Eusebio she was going to introduce him to an artist he was going to be very interested to meet. I thought at that moment that it was me who would be interested in meeting Sempere. From then on we became very good friends, and he often came to dinner at my home on Calle Ángel Muñoz, where my children, Adrián and Gala, spent their first years and grew up. Moreover, our relations grew closer at the Centro de Cálculo (Computing Center)." Soledad Sevilla, interview, January 27, 2024.

24
"I met Yturralde at the Escuela de San Carlos in Valencia. He was walking through the courtyard of the school with Fuster, dragging his feet. There I started to have dealings with him and to love him. With him, I took part in Antes del Arte and in a project at the Galería Eurocasa that was directed by Tola de Orueta. We saw each other in Madrid at the Centro de Cálculo. And so on until today. But it was a difficult time when it came to producing art. I had two children—my husband had none, of course—and I had to do the shopping, cook, teach at a high school, and paint. I don't have very good memories of that period. I was rushing about all day. And few colleagues appreciated me. Most of them saw me as a housewife and mother. And if you're not appreciated, of course, you don't appreciate yourself." Sevilla, interview, January 27, 2024.

25
The Centro de Cálculo at the Universidad de Madrid (now the Universidad Complutense) was crucial for Soledad Sevilla. Besides the works she was able to produce within the framework of its workshops, laboratories, and exhibitions, she had the stimulus of meeting other artists of her generation, and some who were rather older, who took their personal and creative experiences to the university setting. Paula Barreiro analyzes the artist's production in the national and international artistic context of the 1960s and 1970s in the essay she has written for this catalogue.

for a suspension of the instant, they are never so overwhelming that they prevent the viewer from apprehending what surrounds the subject. They are human. In this respect, she follows Rothko:

> I paint very large pictures [. . .] precisely because I want to be intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something you command.[22]

Soledad Sevilla shares this productive drift from the sensitive and emotional with an artist from an earlier generation, Eusebio Sempere.[23] Her affinity with him is appreciable throughout her career, from the beginnings, in three undisplayed 1967 gouaches, to her most recent work, like the series painted from the summer of 2022 onward inspired by and as a tribute to her friend. Like Sempere—but also like Rothko, with another language and poetic discourse—Sevilla finds in light and line the friction that nestles in the limits of color. She also has notable points in common, notwithstanding evident differences, with the work of José María Yturralde, intimately bound to geometric art in the 1960s and 1970s.[24] With Sempere and Yturralde, as Paula Barreiro relates in her study, Sevilla took part in Antes del Arte and, from 1969 on, in the sessions at the Centro de Cálculo (Computing Center), philo-scientific and philo-technological artistic programs that were the nemesis of the unfettered self-expression that drove informalism.[25] In her personal

Agnes Martin,
Untitled #5, 1998

development, however, Sevilla gradually dissolved geometry in light and emptiness, a path also explored in different ways by Yturralde. She opened this door with *Belmont* [pp. 74, 75] and continued with her installations and paintings of the 1980s and 1990s. From 1990 onward, Yturralde painted atmospheric, silent, and somewhat mystical pictures that appear to filter the viewer's gaze through a veil. Emotion and geometry also intersect in the work of Canadian painter Agnes Martin (*Tremolo*, 1962), to whom Soledad Sevilla dedicated a number of pieces in 2023 in a circuit that led her from Sempere to Martin and back to Sempere again. For these painters, it is crucial both to know the work of their colleagues and to allow themselves to be traversed by the real.

The production of these artists has been visited in one way or another by the grid. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Rosalind Krauss theorized that the grid "announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."[26] Overcoming the Horatian *Ut pictura poesis*, painting thus vindicated itself as an autonomous language beyond representation. In Soledad Sevilla, the grid leads to the veil, a procedure she uses paradoxically. Although her first steps were based on the language of the avant-gardes, her creative process shifted her toward referents outside painting, though she was always to return to it.

The module, the line, and the grid, elements from geometry, enabled her to take the first steps toward causing painting, and its viewers, to vibrate and boldly expressing the emotions aroused by light and darkness, two of the opposites she has most frequently explored (since without silence, there is no tolling of the bell). Sixty years later, these questions continue to engage the artist.

Her first approach to liminality and the inapprehensible is found in the possibilities offered by light in filtering through the translucent surface of colored methacrylate [pp. 28, 29]. With the reliefs of modules, which coincided with the sessions at the Centro de Cálculo, Sevilla made her first and still somewhat timid incursion into three-dimensionality. Francisco Sobrino, Eusebio Sempere, and José Luis Alexanco also experimented with this industrial material under the influence of minimalism, as did pop artists like Ángela García Codoñer and Darío Villalba.[27] Methacrylate implied distance and depersonalization, aspects of a discourse that the objective and geometric artists shared with pop through its neutralizing of subjectivity. The IBM computer enumerated the permutational possibilities of a repeated module that interacted with others of the same kind: it superimposed, translated, inverted, and set them in opposition to one another. Soledad Sevilla was not naive about the results offered by this enormous contraption, which she has ironically described as "a very stupid paintbrush."[28] Since those first experiments, indeed, she has been a staunch defender of manual creative processes.

In these methacrylate works, curiously seldom studied, one already finds the germ of the grid, the veil, and the transparency, which she took to their limit by installing them in devices that allowed them to be presented freestanding. Her work of the 1960s and 1970s contains the potential of symmetry, superimposition, displacement, vibration, use of light, and idea of infinity that understands

26
Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 9.

27
Methacrylate had been used since the 1930s in the three-dimensional work of certain artists of the historic avant-garde, such as László Moholy-Nagy.

28
Soledad Sevilla, interview, Madrid, October 29, 2011. I conducted this interview within the framework of the 2011–2012 Research Residence at the Museo Reina Sofía.

29
These methacrylate pieces, of which good selections are held by both the Museo Reina Sofía and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, are paralleled by numerous gouaches, graphic works, and even a pair of silkscreen fabrics that Sevilla made for her friend María Mercedes Esteve, a print designer for a textile firm. It was her only incursion into design, a common practice among the geometric abstract artists both of her own generation and, above all, of the previous one of the early 1960s.

the set as a whole on the basis of a repeated unit. Nevertheless, in transferring these reflections to gouache, she was returned to the foreground, to the flatness (the concept coined by Clement Greenberg) of modernism. The choice of materials implies language, for materials also speak. This was an initial round trip that was to accompany her throughout her life: translating three-dimensional works to two-dimensionality and vice versa. Sometimes the two dimensions give her illuminating clues for taking a new pictorial step: particularly lucid is the step from her *Alhambras* to *Fons et Origo* (1987) or *Toda la torre* (*All the Tower*, 1990). On other occasions, the reverse happens. After *Mayo 1904–1992* [p. 97], her 1992 project at the Vélez-Blanco Castle, she replaces the line with the atmosphere of loose brushwork.

The methacrylate modules generated some almost inapprehensible lines at their intersections that nuanced the light and became even more tenuous in subsequent pieces, helping her to simplify and "minimalize" her reflections on the plane.[29] She purges, cleans, and relinquishes color by working in transparent methacrylate, and carries out trials with parchment paper, acetates, and metallized paper (the idea of the mirror returns here once more), which she superimposes with the aid of electrographic printing.

She also empties out the module and thickens the line that outlined it, erases the different transparencies and opacities, and moreover signals the superimposition, the displacement, or the inverted use of the same mesh that, like an echo, is presented in different colors, appearing like a shadow that generates depth and denies Greenbergian flatness without having to resort to representation. The artist perceives that painting in its specificity is not only two-dimensional but can also permit three-dimensionality to be intuited. With *Mondrian* (1973) [p. 40], one of the few pictures of those years to bear a title, she betrays the Dutch artist's militant flatness, a spatial concept that was to retain her attention for a time and that she transferred in 1975 to three canvases of nearly two and a half meters each [pp. 41, 43]. The modules, in the form of a pentagon or hexagon, are superimposed until these geometrical figures become unrecognizable.

In 1977, she produced a long series of drawings in which the grid organizes the two-dimensional space. On the grid, or through it, the line is developed ad infinitum. The idea of the line that generates webs leads the artist in her permutational development to experiment with the possibilities of symmetry, of the negative, and of its intersection, to the point where the grid is so tangled that it is no longer recognizable. The squared pattern immediately surpasses the phase of the material support to become form in itself (the limit of the stretcher is only physical, not conceptual), which she transfers to the large format in some light, white works of 1978 and 1979 that were exhibited in Alicante in 1979 [pp. 52-55]. They are the basis for her report "Perceptive Analysis and Development of a Biomorphic Network Composed of Two Squares: Fibonacci Proportions," with which she obtained a grant from the Fundación Juan March [pp. 60, 61]. She closed the series with a 1980 painting that enlarges the linear module until it occupies the whole surface of the canvas [p. 59]. The web or grid, which at first

30
Soledad Sevilla, interview, January 27, 2024.

31
Sevilla, interview, January 27, 2024.

32
In February 2024, Soledad Sevilla visited the anthological exhibition on Rothko at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, a trip that affected her both emotionally and artistically.

33
The artist visited this show with Yturralde and their respective partners; it so happened that Rothko had committed suicide that very day.

34
Soledad Sevilla, "Permutaciones y variaciones de una trama. Análisis perceptivo," copy of the statement sent to the US-Spanish Joint Committee, 1979. Archivo Soledad Sevilla, Otura, Granada.

35
For example, Denise René did not agree to support a possible exhibition of geometric artists in Spain because the limits with the informalist languages were not clearly defined among the potential participants. See Paula Barreiro López, "Sempere, electricista y carpintero. Un artista en red por los territorios de la abstracción del Estado español," in *Eusebio Sempere*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía, 2018), 129.

organized the space upon which to develop the form, passes into the foreground to be analyzed as form in itself.

With this project, Sevilla competed for a research scholarship from the US-Spanish Joint Committee to study at Harvard University, where she lived from 1980 to 1982 with her partner at that time, the architect José Miguel de Prada Poole, and her two children, Gala and Adrián, in a small house on Trapelo Road in the Belmont neighborhood of Boston. There are matters normally regarded as secondary that come to the fore in the case of women artists, and those related to their private lives and the upbringing of children materialize in conditions of production that have to be read in terms of gender. "We were grant holders, and everything was very tight."[30] Soledad Sevilla had no studio, so continuing with the large formats she had worked on in Spain was impracticable. She worked with a roll of brown Kraft paper on her bedroom table, actually a door laid across two sawhorses. "I would stretch out the paper and roll it up again when the drawings were done. Most of the drawings were lost because of the untidiness that came from living in another country, in a house that wasn't mine, and having no studio, but also because I didn't attach value to my work. My mother, who was an iconoclast, had thrown out nearly all the work I'd done at school. From her I learned a certain detachment from things."[31] Her experience with continuous rolls of printer paper influenced her habit of drawing along the length of the paper, which was comfortable and easy to store. It also opened the door for the public to follow her production process, as legible as a musical score . . . or as East Asian calligraphy [pp. 64-65].

During the 1980s, her knowledge of the paintings of Rothko, which she frequently went to see in museums during her stay in the United States, played an important role in her work.[32] Her first contact with the work of the US artist of Latvian origin took place in 1970 at the anthological exhibition held parallel to the Biennale at the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna Ca' Pesaro in Venice.[33] The question is why a geometric painter should have been drawn to an abstract expressionist. On the one hand, in the statement for her scholarship application she already references the fusion between the sensual and the rational that was to traverse her work years later:

> With the reiterative use of the line, I try to create a magic, mobile, and enveloping atmosphere, full of light and shade, which will largely be a fictional space, since the geometric abstraction in which I am submerged has a markedly paradoxical character, as while on the one hand it asserts itself as a whole of mental creation, on the other it represents an abandonment to a sumptuary goal, subjected to purely sensual values.[34]

In addition, however, I think it is important to understand how the political specificity of Spain under a dictatorship had marked the artistic scene of the 1960s and 1970s. While the geometric artists of neighboring countries presented an alternative for putting an end to informalism, Spain faced other urgent questions, and in this respect experienced a *décalage*.[35] The use of abstract languages went further than formal or visual investigation, becoming a banner of modernity that challenged the Francoist regime's conservative

36
Art remained a bastion of nonconformity. Spanish artists, both men and women, who followed tendencies that were irreconcilable elsewhere enjoyed excellent relationships in Spain (they exhibited together internationally thanks to actions led and controlled by the Francoist regime) or even lived together (let us recall the colony of artists that resulted in the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca). Francoism purloined the ideological dissidence that emanated from these avant-garde practices, appropriating them and partially annulling them through a policy of international exhibitions that turned Spanish informalism into a kind of "Spain brand."

37
"All things done with straight lines are not dead," Rothko asserted. See "Notes from an Interview by William Seitz, January 22, 1952," in Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 75.

38
Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 44.

39
See Soledad Sevilla, "¿Qué espero de un cuadro?," in *Enfoques 2007. Soledad Sevilla* (Madrid: Fundación Amigos del Museo del Prado, 2007).

40
Soledad Sevilla, "La creación se estimula con la mirada," in *Soledad Sevilla. Obra reciente* (Madrid: Galería Soledad Lorenzo, 2008), 5.

41
See the work *Mirror Way* by Mary Miss at http://marymiss.com/projects/mirror-way/.

42
The application is dated June 1982. Letter reproduced in Marina Mayoral and Santiago B. Olmo, *Soledad Sevilla. Instalaciones* (Granada: Diputación provincial de Granada, 1996), 25. In a telephone conversation on September 15, 2017, the artist confirmed that the work was first conceived in 1980.

43
She was referring to the colored sand drawings of the Navajo people of the southwestern United States.

obsession with the past, particularly in its first two decades.[36] With the so-called return to painting of the late 1970s, moreover, any linguistic resource was admissible in the production of visual discourse. The walls had been torn down.

Added to this substratum was Sevilla's fascination with the mystery of beauty, and her dialogue with Rothko, also a pivotal artist, therefore seems natural. Rothko had transferred his investigations of light and color fields to a use of space that envelops the viewer until it generates sensations of emotional suspension. The gesture, the great ally of his generation, thus becomes an instrument that can be relinquished as it is unnecessary.[37] Rothko thought the emotions his works unleashed in viewers were a translation of those he had felt himself when painting them, or when listening to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In a discourse with Heideggerian echoes, he believed that in this way he was "enlarging the extent of this reality."[38] Soledad Sevilla's "shakes" are brought on in a similar fashion: while walking through the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra at dusk, while visiting the Museo del Prado (Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, Rubens's *Apostles*, Guido Reni's *Atalanta and Hippomenes*, and many other paintings), or while contemplating the vegetation hanging from a stone wall, some ruins in Syria, a tuna net on the sands of Huelva, the landscape seen through agricultural plastic sheets, or the timber of an old tobacco-drying shed on the plain of the Vega de Granada.[39] "The sources are not sought out, they nearly always present themselves imperatively."[40] Sevilla tries to jettison the apprehensible to capture all that surrounds her, the air . . . or what retains it, the memory. Aspects that are translated into images.

She took the step toward occupying space in order to achieve a more complete multisensorial experience in the 1980s. Sevilla was impressed by *Mirror Way* (1980), the intervention by Mary Miss in the neoclassical cloister of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University. *Mirror Way* consisted of a wooden structure with steps and seating with which the artist invited visitors to climb the three floors of the covered courtyard. However, it turned out to be an impossible space, as the steps ended in closed walls that prevented climbers from continuing. The highest parts of the structure were inaccessible.[41]

Miss's intervention encouraged Sevilla to present *Seven Days of Solitude* (1980–1982) for the same cloister. This work, whose title played with the English translation of her first name, was her first project with performative connotations and her step forward toward an expanded painting.[42] Sevilla wanted to draw diagonal chalk lines on the ground so that the public who attended concerts there on Sundays would inadvertently rub them out with the disorderly movement of their feet, erasing their rigorous geometry. I find it suggestive that such a scrupulous geometrician as she was should have demanded the destruction of her lines by chance gesture. I almost interpret it as a therapeutic and liberating change of course. Moreover, it was the first time she worked with the cultural specificity of place or memory, subjects she developed in depth during the 1980s and 1990s. In the letter she sent to Seymour Slive, then the director of the museum, she compares her lines to "the sand painting of your Indians."[43] The museum rejected the proposal, which the artist presented again years later in Málaga

44
Power, "Una conversación," 96.

45
María Jesús Folch and Isabel Tejeda, "Dictadura y transición," in María Jesús Folch and Isabel Tejeda (dir.), *A Contratiempo. Medio siglo de artistas valencianas (1929–1980)* (Valencia: IVAM, 2018), 81–210.

46
Rosa Queralt and Mar Villaespesa, "Memoria. Soledad Sevilla 1975–1995," in *Memoria. Soledad Sevilla. 1975–1995*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1995), 27.

MIT Line, 1980

in another format (without the erasure of the lines) under the title *Estratos* (*Strata*, 1985). Once again, the project went unrealized.
On the building fronts and lawns of the university campus, she spread out the long geometrical patterns she had drawn in her bedroom. Some of the papers were twelve meters long. *MIT Line* (1980) was not her first installation, as Kevin Power claimed,[44] pushing Soledad Sevilla's three-dimensional production back by a few years (as I argued in 2018).[45] It is true that those long rolls of paper, exhibited on only a few occasions, demand that the public provide physical and temporal "accompaniment" for Sevilla's intellectual and productive process in the development of the line, but she unrolled them in Boston with no public or artistic intention in mind: at home, quite simply, she could not see the result at its full length. This performativity of the audience is found, on the other hand, in *Seven Days of Solitude*, her incursion into conceptual art, process, and participation. As Mar Villaespesa suggested, the artist moved away from the orthodox artistic presuppositions she had started out from a decade earlier.[46] After this fruitless attempt, she returned to painting. For a time.
In 1982, while still in Boston, her series *Keiko* [pp. 62, 63] and *Stella* were followed by the luminous and evanescent works on paper of *Belmont*, the name of the district where she lived. She drew the three series with school wax crayons, producing light and slightly powdery lines that could not be blended like pastel. The hardness of the material permitted the individualization of an extremely fine line whose proximity to others called forth that sense of vibration so characteristic of Soledad Sevilla's painting. From geometric abstraction, she

47
Yolanda Romero, "Notas a las variaciones de Soledad Sevilla," in Juan Bosco Díaz-Urmeneta Muñoz, Esperanza Guillén, and Yolanda Romero, exh. cat., *Soledad Sevilla. Variaciones de una línea, 1966–1986* (Granada: Centro José Guerrero, 2015), 15–19.

48
At Harvard, she attended courses taught by Oleg Grabar, a historian of the art and architecture of the Islamic world, who placed special emphasis on the analysis of the Alhambra.

49
Soledad Sevilla, interview, October 29, 2011.

50
José María Iglesias, "*Las Meninas*, de Soledad Sevilla," in *Soledad Sevilla. Meninas* (Granada: Centro Cultural Manuel de Falla, 1985), 4.

51
Literature, both prose and poetry, has been a source of images for Soledad Sevilla. This includes the Nasrid poems, Federico García Lorca—*Con una vara de mimbre* (1998) takes its title from the line "con una vara de mimbre, va a Sevilla a ver los toros" (with a willow switch, he goes to Seville to see the bullfight) from *Romancero gitano* (1928)—and Fernando Pessoa—*Los días con Pessoa* (2021) is based on *O livro do desassossego* (1982), a text she considers fundamental for self-knowledge.

moved on to a use of the line and the grid that generates atmospheres and space where the physical and the metaphysical appear to fuse. The geometry is gradually dissolved in color and light, producing a grid that makes the interior impracticable. The gaze bounces off and is retained at the threshold without managing to penetrate to the other side. There seems to be a glimpse of a bridge, but it is instantly dissolved in that liminal surface of the painting.

As Yolanda Romero has shown, those wax crayons were the prelude to the atmospheric results of her *Meninas* (1981–1983) [pp. 76-83];[47] to what to my mind is her most hallowed series, the *Alhambras* (1984–1986) [pp. 84-95];[48] and to the *Muletas* (*Capes*, 1989–1990). This signified a return to her cultural origins, which she interpreted years later as a reaction to the artistic formats then in fashion in the United States, such as video. In these works, memory comes into play. It was not to be the last time.

> I was doing some courses at Harvard University on the conservation and restoration of artworks, and there was a team that gave a lecture on a study they had carried out on *Las Meninas* in the Prado. They projected the X-rays and made it clear that the conservation at the museum was disastrous: they kept the windows open next to a work that was a collection highlight. Thrilled, I saw things in the X-rays that Velázquez had done and erased afterward. I then decided I would do the series of *Las Meninas*, because I wasn't conceptually interested in the art that was being produced there. I saw myself as so far removed from it all that what I did was to retrieve or acquire an understanding of my roots, which were these, for better or worse.[49]

In *Meninas*, she started from the structure and the atmosphere with which Velázquez imbu ed his painting of the same name. She turned the immaterial into something physical, and the intangible and sensitive into form and image. The atmosphere is understood as an impression, a liminality that becomes unstable, fluid, and inapprehensible in the superimposition of the webs. The pieces are crossed by force lines that structure the space and are riddled with planes of grids that meet at certain points, becoming slightly caught up with each other and giving rise to a shimmering effect at the edges because, as José María Iglesias would say, the sides of these webs have an unwoven appearance.[50] Through its superimpositions, the grid serving as a base constructs a place in itself, enlarging reality. Flatness, central to modernism and to all kinds of abstraction in the 1940s and 1950s, ceases to be relevant for Soledad Sevilla. After this series, geometrical theory and canons carry less and less weight. Only painting matters to her.

In her *Alhambras*, she painted the air that surrounds the architecture with intersecting grids that generate depth through their reiteration. The paradox is that she approached a certain figuration in her painting of emptiness, although her interest is by no means rhetorical but pictorial. We thus appreciate the darkness of a gate or the verticality of the columns transmuted into a line in the Golden Room, the Comares Hall, or the Court of the Lions. Also, for the first time, she uses poems to title her works, in this case those inscribed in the plasterwork of the Nasrid monument.[51]

52
Mariano Navarro, "Desde mi burladero. Entrevista a Soledad Sevilla," in *Soledad Sevilla* (Madrid: Galería Soledad Lorenzo, 1991), 9.

53
Soledad Sevilla, untitled, in *Soledad Sevilla 2000–2005* (Barcelona: CEGE, 2005), 9.

54
The title comes from a poem by Eugénio de Andrade in *As palavras interditas* (1951).

55
Textile production, traditionally a female occupation, was obligatory training for young Spanish women during Franco's regime under the supervision of the Sección Femenina of the Falange. Women artists born in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s had mixed feelings about textiles. In some cases, they rejected them outright, not so much because of the technique itself as because of the way it was instrumentalized by the Francoist regime and as a reaction to the pejorative attitude toward everything classed as feminine.

> At heart, the subject gives me the tension I need to remain at a halfway point, and moreover in an ambiguous position, between an abstraction that disdains its own system and a figuration that flees from the direct image and even from the metaphorical reference.[52]

The display of these two series takes on the characteristics of an installation. In the exhibition, an attempt has been made to bring together her most outstanding pieces (excluding her secondary works and sketches), which are hung very low and close together in the case of *Meninas*, and in pairs—night versus day—in that of *Alhambras*. There is a linguistic question that must be stressed: Soledad Sevilla works in series because she considers that the problem is not resolved in a single image. She needs several images that accompany one another and maintain a dialogue. This theatricalization of the way her works are displayed proves fundamental for mural paintings that the viewer has to move along, like *Apamea* (1999) and *Insomnio de paz y de conflicto* (*Insomnia of Peace and of Conflict*, 2002) [pp. 145-149].

Painting understood from the viewpoint of the installation facilitates the leap toward three-dimensionality, another way of translating the poetic "shakes" of fleeting sensitive experiences with a refined sense of drama: the sensation she felt in a park in Seville, for example, was the origin of *El poder de la tarde* (1984) [p. 131]. Years later, the artist expressed the emotion felt in the presence of rain, water, the fluttering of a butterfly, or the breeze blowing against a thick wall of vegetation. Underlying all these examples is a fascination with the perishable and the transitory, that which neither pauses nor can be caught: "The ephemeral as object of artistic reflection . . . Increasingly, nothing exists if it does not have the confirmation of existence bestowed upon it by the image."[53]

Two years later, Sevilla produced *Leche y sangre*, an installation she had first conceived in 1981. She covered the perimeter of the same gallery with red carnations in parallel vertical rows as a poetic denunciation of artistic fashions. This work set the pattern for her installations of threads, which began with *Fons et Origo* (devised concomitantly with the *Alhambras*). In this piece, the mesh is reflected in a pool of water, generating a circular space that contains within it the surrounding world. A rhythmically falling drop makes the reflection tremble, so that the gaze rebounds and is unable to progress further. This echo culminated in the direct use of the mirror to spark the idea of infinity and experience at the limits in *Casa para la conciencia* (*House for Conscience*, 2000). For the Museo Reina Sofía, running parallel to her *Horizontes* series, she has created a new installation of threads, *Donde estaba la línea* (*Where the Line Was*, 2024) [pp. 180-183],[54] woven with horizontal skeins of colored thread lit by the large neoclassical windows of the Sabatini Building. Behind the choice of material for these installations is an underlying gender reading. The cotton threads with which Soledad Sevilla constructed her great wefts were bought in notions stores, not in shops selling fine arts materials. It is not a matter of chance that textiles have been culturally linked in our recent past to the manual production of objects by women.[55] Such a use of materials is close to the differential context in which we have been culturally formed, and it

The Power of the Evening, 1984

56
Soledad Sevilla, telephone interview, March 29, 2024.

provides a notable and economical formula for passing from the grid to the contingent space. I link this weaving of the air with the work of the Catalan artist Aurèlia Muñoz (*Estel ancorat*, 1974) or the Brazilian Lygia Pape (*Ttéia*, 1991), who, like Sevilla, use copper wire in some of their pieces.

In 1992, she implemented *Mayo 1904–1992* at the Vélez Blanco Castle within the framework of Mar Villaespesa's Plus Ultra project. This is Soledad Sevilla's most "minimalizing" piece as it restricts itself to the use of light as a metaphor for memory. She created an intervention in the courtyard of the castle, whose Renaissance cloister was traumatically ripped out in 1904 and sold off piece by piece—it is currently exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. *Mayo 1904–1992* retrieves the image of the castle by projecting it at nightfall upon a bare ruin whose wounds, with no empathy whatsoever, have been left open (the artist worked years later on the disinherited beauty of dereliction, as in *El Rompido* and *Arquitecturas agrícolas* [*Agricultural Architectures*] [pp. 150-151], which Antonio Cayuelas analyzes in this publication). The image faded away at dawn. Night and day are presented in Almería as a continuum, and the work is the passage of time itself. History and the contingent time of the viewer are fused in a progression from the death of the day that flows toward darkness. The threshold materializes, but once more, lacking limits, it is inapprehensible. With its slow appearance, the phantom of the cloister forms a metaphor for a fitful sleep in which the body succumbs but reality is still guarded and cared for. The fitful sleeper is both there and not there, feeding off productive moments punctuated by illuminations that are not altogether conscious.

At the same time, Sevilla made a series of paintings that meant another change of course in her career. In them, the line is replaced by an atmospheric painting, a transition seen most clearly in *Atropellar la razón* (*Riding Roughshod over Reason*, 1991) [p. 133]. Once more, personal factors are fundamental for explaining her production processes and the language of her work:

> There are two changes in my work—I don't know if they're changes of direction, but they are changes of language—caused by health problems. I stopped doing grids because in the large pictures, every line required three passes on the verticals running from top to bottom, as they were more than two meters high (I used a skirting board to do them because I didn't have such a long ruler). I developed a pain in my knees, and I looked for a language that would adjust to my body, not the other way around. This coincides with my first atmospheric pictures. When I was at work on the *Vélez Blanco* series, I had a colostomy. In the studio, I had to remain seated and was unable to perform energetic gestures, so I tried out oil because it worked more slowly, whereas acrylic dried too fast. I thought that if I couldn't move, the picture had to move instead. In this way, I developed this minute brushwork that by accumulation made the unit disappear in a whole.[56]

En ruinas II (*In Ruins II*, 1993) [pp. 98-99] once more necessitated the adjustment of her artistic language to her restricted mobility in the studio. She returned to the line, but this time in the form of gesture, tiny brushstrokes like organic fillers that became a repeated and characteristic

Bulls series
Riding Roughshod over Reason, 1991

57
Romero, "Una conversación," 12.

linguistic element in her series created during the late 1990s—*Soñé con una planta* (*I Dreamed of a Plant*, 1997), *Veinte años más tarde* (*Twenty Years Later*, 1999), and *Apamea* (1999). At the same time, she used a brushstroke in the form of a leaf in her *Insomnios* (2002–2003), nocturnal walls of vegetation in whites, blacks, reds, and grays, colors she uses with a sense that is not naturalistic but metaphysical and transcendent. With these two gestures, she distributed the material over the canvas with spaces that range from being covered by the material to the underlying support being empty. In the zones full of material, in the foreground, the block of leaves forms a single unit and once more marks the threshold, the transition from light to darkness, since it is paradoxically at night that everything is seen more clearly. In the *Insomnios* on paper, gaps appear that open onto an emptiness that is really nothingness—specifically, the background that is left untouched.

> [I]n that series I work indistinctly with those two different gestures. If I had been younger, I would no doubt have eliminated one and kept the other for reasons of coherence, of style, of all those values that seemed important to me. However, now I keep both ways of proceeding because I think: "Well, with one brushstroke I'll express some things, and with the other I'll express others."[57]

That need to be situated on the limit makes it possible to be, to reinvent oneself ceaselessly, to extend reality. First the module, then the line, now the brushstroke . . . although they are visually different, they partake in the same poetics and use identical resources: the

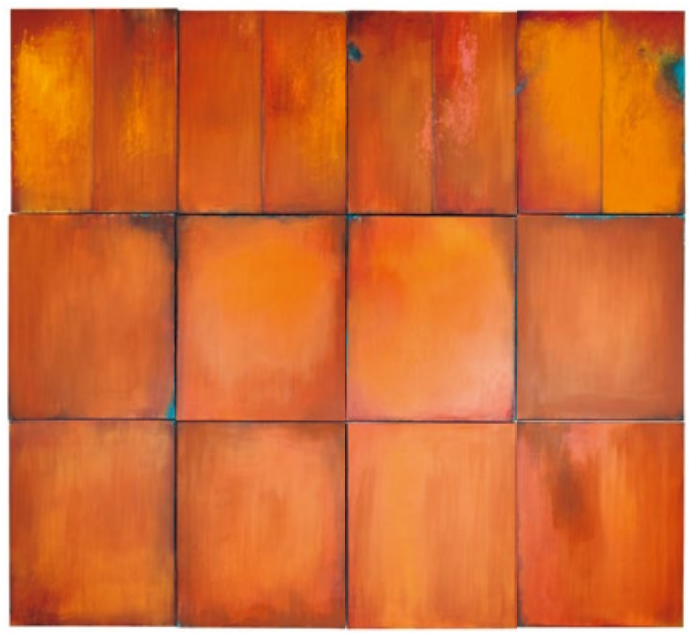
Malevich in El Rompido, 2004

58
The artist has always lived in cities: Valencia, Barcelona, Madrid, Boston, and Granada. An important change is that her current studio, where she spends most of her time, is in a rural area near Granada, on the outskirts of the municipality of Otura. Antonio Cayuelas, the architect of her studio, gives an account of the importance this space holds for the artist in his essay in this publication.

59
Soledad Sevilla, untitled, in *Rutas del desasosiego. Soledad Sevilla*, (Lisbon: Passevitte, 2017), n.p.

painting dies materially at the limits fixed by the stretcher, but that element reiterated as a unit continues potentially in successive layers that, when superimposed, point to the idea of the infinite.
In the years that followed, Soledad Sevilla, who until recently was fundamentally an urbanite, located the origin of her drives in landscape and vegetation: *El Rompido* (2000), *Malezas* (2003), *Malevich en el Rompido* (*Malevich in El Rompido*, 2004) [p. 134], *Te llamaré hoja* (2005), *Sonata* (2010) [p. 135].[58] These images materialize her new "shakes" with the metaphorical possibilities of art. *El tiempo vuela* (1998) is a *vanitas* in which the second hand constantly moves the butterfly over a line of verse by Antonio Machado: "y es hoy aquel mañana de ayer" (and today is that tomorrow of yesterday); it returns it again and again to the same position in a notional approach to circular time. It is not the first work with indirect references to the finality of death: they were also found in *Leche y sangre*. These pieces on landscape interlock with Sevilla's exploration of the great artistic masters, particularly Rubens and his *Apostles—Apóstoles mayores* (*Major Apostles*, 2007), *Apóstoles menores* (*Minor Apostles*, 2006–2007)—and Fernando Pessoa—*Rutas del desasosiego* (2017)—with whom walking through Lisbon becomes the experience that generates her sculptures.

> The path is suppressed once it is walked, but highlighting its absence will make it more present than ever. From the idea to the experience, from reflection to reflex, from mental superimposition to physical superimposition, from presence to absence, from the exterior to the



Sonata, 2010

60
Sevilla, "Luces de invierno," 7.

61
Sevilla, "Luces de invierno," 4.

62
Walter Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1950).

63
Paul Valéry, "Le cimetière marin" (1920), in *Œuvres de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Éditions de la N.R.F., 1933), 157–63.

> interior, all are transitions or opposites that touch . . .[59]

In *Nuevas lejanías* (2016) and *Luces de invierno* (*Winter Lights*, 2018), she worked once more with the veil. She painted the diffuse landscapes that are seen through the protective plastic sheets of the tobacco-drying sheds on the plain of the Vega de Granada. Like a poor version of lattice shutters, these sheets filter the light, sway in the wind, and reveal the other side when the light shines through them, nearly always at dawn, with the uncertainty proper to them, as María Zambrano would have said. Once again, she changes her brushstroke. She makes small freehand parallel lines that create spatial blocks and color fields. These are not descriptive pieces but works that capture the ephemeral instant. Behind these synthetic fabrics, the artist projects herself on the landscape, referring to the works as *contrapaisajes* or "counterlandscapes."[60]

> I have called these works "winter lights," not so much as an allusion to the atmosphere of that time of year but because they are a reflection on myself and the feelings and sensations aroused in my experience of the time that has passed. As Faulkner explains about the light in August that provides the title for his book, I observe, faced now with my personal winter, that nothing has changed: I wanted the same reasons, the mystery, the doubts, and the need to transform the everyday to have the echo of lasting moments, as if they did not originate in a particular time but came from *the remote times of antiquity*. Works of art are the traces of a life, says Siri Hustvedt.[61]

This time, she takes a look back and revisits the artistic concerns of her beginnings in her latest work, *Esperando a Sempere (Waiting for Sempere)*, *Horizontes* (*Horizons*), and *Horizontes blancos* (*White Horizons*, 2022–2024), series accompanied by pieces that cite other artists like Agnes Martin and Gego.

Nevertheless, time also paints. Although Sevilla affirms that she has always painted the same picture, she was not the same artist at twenty-three or twenty-four as she is at eighty. With perseverance and curiosity, she questions Walter Benjamin's assertion that the same thing cannot be learned twice.[62] She rethinks herself and refeels herself without grief or nostalgia (owing to the spirit of the Spanish language, paradoxically, the concept of "feeling anew" is expressed through a term, *resentir*, with negative connotations linked to suffering, pain, displeasure, or revulsion), understanding time from a Heraclitean perspective: paradoxically, we are and are not the same. She thus returns to the epidermis of the canvas, to the line situated in the foreground, and to the work with the emptiness of the material support of her first geometric pieces. "La mer, la mer . . . toujours recommencée!" cries out Paul Valéry.[63]

In the midst of this process of revisitation, Soledad Sevilla encountered Sempere. These last series are born of a small gouache by the painter belonging to the artist's personal collection and included in this exhibition as a tribute to its referent. In summer of 2023, Sevilla dismantled her studio in Madrid to move to the one the architect Antonio Cayuelas had designed for her in Otura. Having sent everything to Andalusia, all that remained with her in those last days of the blazing Madrid July was a table, a chair, a notebook, some col-

64
While she did freehand trials in her 1977 papers of the processes she would develop in her solo exhibition in Alicante, meaning they should be understood as sketches, in *Horizontes blancos* the vibration she draws in her artist's book is purposely transferred to the canvas. Something similar occurs with Sempere's line gouaches of the 1950s, pieces the artist did not decide to show until twenty years later. See Carmen Fernández Aparicio and Belén Díaz de Rábago, "Eusebio Sempere: movilidad, luz, poesía del espacio y del tiempo," in *Eusebio Sempere*, 31.

65
Eugène Delacroix, *El puente de la visión. Antología de los Diarios*, ed. Guillermo Solana, trans. María Dolores Díaz Vaillagou (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1987).

ored crayons, a pencil . . . and a small gouache by Sempere [p. 169]. When I visited her in August in Granada, her notebook contained the germs of the series *Esperando a Sempere* [pp. 171-178], *Agnes Martin*, *Horizontes* [pp. 160-165], and *Horizontes blancos* [pp. 166, 167].

In the first sketches that she showed me, she had ruled planes of thin pencil lines, very close together, with which she covered the paper from one end to the other. Afterward she made cutouts and employed a collage method to generate planes of vertical and horizontal lines that cut each other off upon intersecting [pp. 11-15]. Occasionally, she introduced yellow lines. The final series of pictures, 244 centimeters high, was made with a parallel straightedge. To create the picture, she would walk along it drawing the thousands of lines that made it up one by one. As before, when she was unable to reach, it was the picture, hung in different positions on the studio wall, that, out of necessity, was moved toward the painter's body. From this series came the idea of ending this retrospective with a large mural of lines establishing a dialogue with the artist's early works, especially the pieces from the 1970s and the wax crayon drawings from Boston. This project has been adapted to the final location of the exhibition.

In 2024, she has finished *Horizontes blancos*. These follow the *Horizontes*, magnificent pictures that explore the kinetic possibilities of color on the basis of horizontal lines, sometimes metallized, which she paints on a black background with Posca markers, an acrylic with water-based ink. With *Horizontes blancos*, in a "minimalizing" fashion, she returns to pieces with white backgrounds and gray or blue lines. She marks the space with a few lines drawn with the parallel straightedge, sometimes crisscrossing and sometimes oblique, tracing a path that is well known and therefore safe to follow. The rest is indicated in pencil before she then goes over it freehand with the marker, with any chance trembling voluntarily retained. Like some of her 1977 sketches, the drawing transmits vibration by creating a sensation of a sensitive moiré open to small errors, impressions on the canvas of strength or weakness at the moment of execution, *pentimenti*, uncertainties, and even excess ink, which is not hidden but made to visibilize the hand at the instant of production.[64] In this "refeeling," the artist emphasizes her authorship and recalls her heterodoxy with regard to the theoretical discourse defended by the other geometric artists of her generation. I understand this as a practice that vindicates an enjoyment of painting in itself.

Soledad Sevilla, an artist who militated in geometric abstraction, in the concrete art that emerged at a moment of strong political significance in Spain, went from an objective reading to a subjective one related to the most profound intimacy. This is the key to an oeuvre that overflowed the limits of its immediate context in the 1960s and 1970s, but which also meant an alternative to the formulations of the triumphant new figuration of the following decade. It has shown poetic freedom in returning to aesthetic categories that have accompanied the history of art since the sixteenth century: the beautiful, the sublime, the inexpressible trepidation of emotion. In the interstices, in the encounter between two elements of the composition, between two colors in two lines, is where vibration is found, that *punctum*, which functions as a bridge for vision, the mysterious hinge between the painting and

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