



Teresa Burga

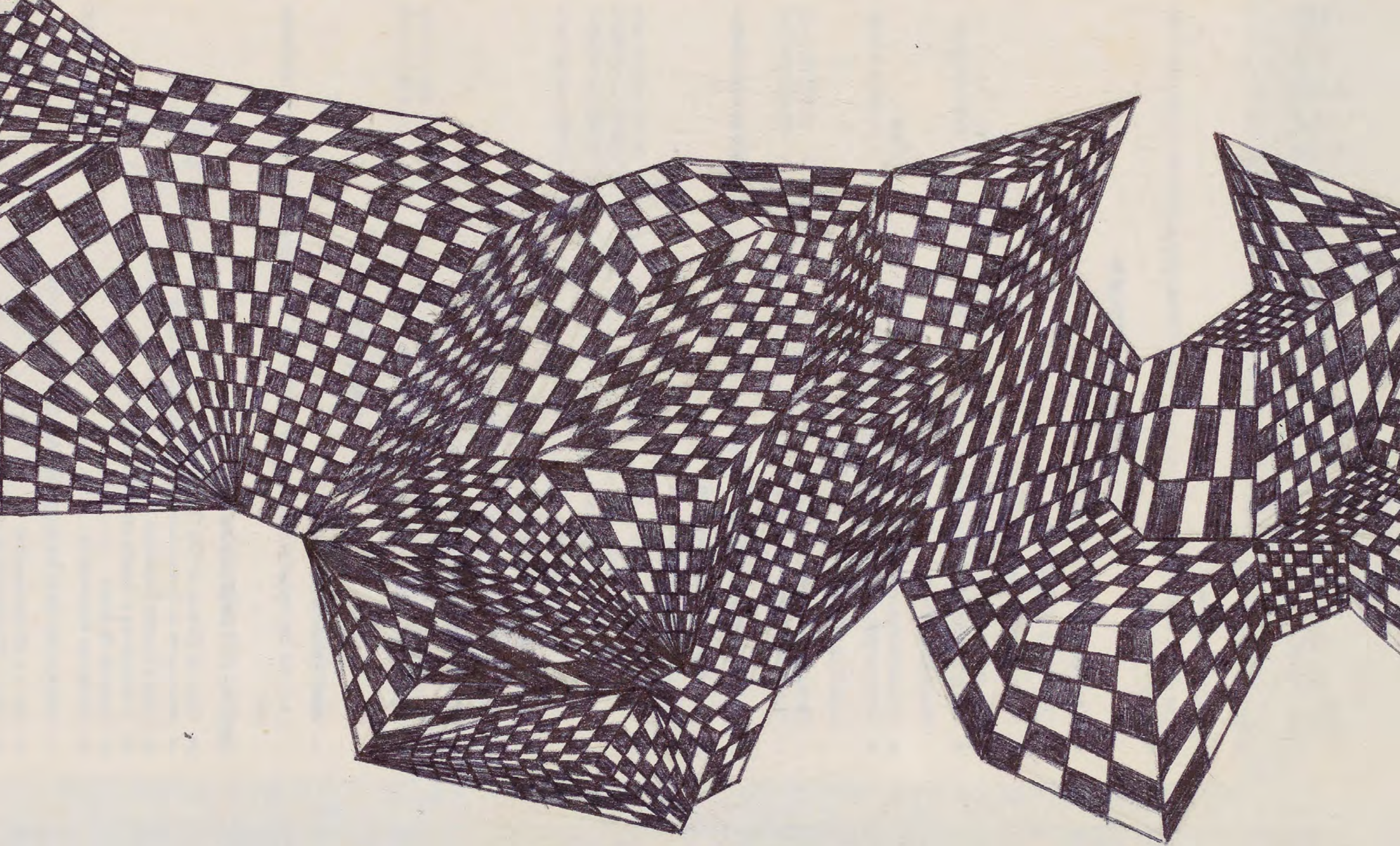
Teresa Burga

Alexander Gray Associates

**Teresa Burga**

September 5 – October 12, 2019

Alexander Gray Associates



## Artist or Computer?: Teresa Burga's Drawing Practice, 1972-2019

By Ashton Cooper

In its July 17, 1972 issue, the Lima, Peru-based newspaper *Correo* ran an interview headlined *Teresa Burga ¿Artista o Computadora?*<sup>1</sup> At the time, Burga had just debuted an ambitious solo show at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA) for which she had made a multi-part conceptual work titled *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe., 9.6.1972* (*Self-Portrait. Structure. Report., 9.6.1972*) (1972). The piece, which has come to be one of her most well known, was composed of charts, diagrams, and scientific calculations that documented the bodily statistics from a single trip Burga took to the doctor on June 9, 1972. Visitors to the exhibition could examine electrocardiograms of Burga's heartbeat, pencil sketches of her profile, photographs annotated with exact measurements of every feature of her face, and hand-drawn flowcharts breaking down the biochemical content of her blood. Facetious though this headline may have been, Burga's interviewer wasn't exactly wrong to ask, "artist or computer?" Her drawing was computer-like: calculational, data-driven, seemingly impersonal, and schematic. Shirking the revelatory expressiveness that a viewer might expect of a conventional self-portrait, Burga's method of drawing instead mimicked the computational methods of science.



*Autorretrato (left, right)*, 1972/2006, detail

Burga's approach to drawing, in *Autorretrato* and in her practice generally, undermines two major—and antithetical—cultural expectations of drawing. The first, as indicated by the skepticism of the aforementioned press, is the expectation that drawing act as a record of artistic subjectivity—a view that had arguably reached its zenith in the two preceding decades with the predominance of Abstract Expressionism. Like many artists working within a conceptualist ethos, Burga instead emphasized removing the artist's hand, making what she called "non-work."<sup>2</sup> The second expectation was that drawing be informational, a truthful record of the world. Across many bodies of work, Burga has used drawing to explore and undermine the way information is communicated—whether it be through charts, representational illustrations, or abstract fields. She has prodded viewers to think more about the ideological



*Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe., 9.6.1972*, installation view, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA) (1972)



Untitled, 1967

underpinnings of standard structures for conveying knowledge. For Burga, drawing is a central tool used as part of a conceptual practice devoted to revealing both the constructedness of knowledge-generating systems and how they shape individuals' understandings of their own subjectivities.

Burga's 1972 ICPNA show was the culmination of nearly 20 years of study and travel that began with an abandoned architecture program followed by a degree in painting from the School of Art at the Catholic University of Peru.<sup>3</sup> Following graduation, Burga undermined the academicized European-style oil painting she was taught in school by experimenting with Pop, Happenings, and Installations as part of the Lima-based artist group Arte Nuevo from 1966–67 ("I have loathed oil-paint all my life because it's sticky, it's dirty and it never dries because Lima is very humid," she said in a 2011 interview).<sup>4</sup> In 1968, Burga left Lima to earn her MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she studied with Christo, Frank Stella, and Claes Oldenburg, among others, and also further developed her interest in conceptual art.<sup>5</sup> In one sculpture from the period, *Obra que desaparece cuando el espectador trata de acercarse*



*Obra que desaparece cuando el espectador trata de acercarse* (Work That Disappears When the Spectator Tries to Approach it), 1970/2017

*trata de acercarse* (Work That Disappears When the Spectator Tries to Approach It) (1970), Burga programmed a grid of lights to progressively turn off as the viewer walked toward them.

By 1972, Burga had returned to Lima with a deepened devotion to conceptual practice. Like many of her conceptually-minded peers around the globe, she was making art that foregrounded the elimination of artwork-as-object and the removal of a commodifiable visuality linked to the artist's hand. In their influential 1968 essay *The Dematerialization of Art*, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler wrote: "During the 1960s, the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making characteristic of the last two decades have begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the conceptual artist's mandate was to create ideas. Though she had refined her interest in conceptual art in Chicago, Burga's practice wasn't simply an American import. In the context of Lima, Burga understood the Duchampian death of the author that underpinned much conceptual work as a direct affront to

the imperialist art education she had received at the Catholic University of Peru. Deskillling was a decolonial stance.



Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), detail

In addition to conceptualism, Burga's project was also congruous with another burgeoning strain of artistic practice: art informed by feminism. Though Burga has never explicitly aligned her work with feminism, *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe.* preceded iconic feminist works of the ensuing years. In a manner similar to Martha Rosler's *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1977), Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), and Sandra Llano-Mejía's *In pulso* (In pulse) (1978), Burga's projects often use statistics, data collection, and seriality to comment on the ways that systems form and regulate individuals. Even as Burga worked to eliminate an emphasis on the maker's

subjectivity in the final art object, she used the methods of conceptual art to contend with the formation of identity itself.

In Nizan Shaked's recent book *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art*, she traces a history of artists working between the 1960s and 1990s who used the lessons of Conceptual Art to deal with political and identity-related topics. Shaked shows how artists used conceptualist tactics to reveal the ways that subjectivity is enmeshed in social networks and signifiatory structures.<sup>7</sup> According to Shaked, such artwork "aimed to upset assumptions about forms, materials, conventions of representation, or the institutional framework of art, just as it examined the social function of identity formation and destabilized the notion of a coherent speaking subject. Thus the work was political not because of its subject matter, but also because it performed self-analysis of its own means of reference, reflecting upon the implications of visual and physical manifestations of meaning."<sup>8</sup> Following Shaked, the politicality of Burga's drawing practice comes from her interrogation of both the formation of subjectivity and the way drawing itself creates and communicates knowledge.

Burga was prolific in the years following the *Autorretrato* exhibition and continued to produce conceptual works that were quietly political, enough to escape the censure of General Juan Velasco's military regime (which had come to power while Burga was studying in Chicago). In 1974, she had a second solo show at the ICPNA. Titled *4 Mensajes* (Four Messages), the exhibition took four transmissions made by national TV

channels on December 27, 1973 and translated them into four distinct illegible fragments. The piece nods to Joseph Kosuth's iconic *One and Three Chairs* (1965) while also putting forward a sly commentary on the expropriation of telecommunications in Peru under Velasco's military coup.<sup>9</sup> *4 Mensajes* and *Autorretrato* are distinct among Burga's large body of conceptual projects because they were actually realized at the time that Burga conceived them. Drawn blueprints and instructions for many other ideas, installations, and sculptures remain in her archive.<sup>10</sup> Although



Teresa Burga, c.1972

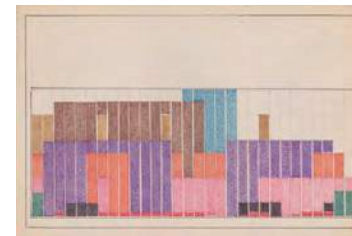
recent years have seen the materialization of support to produce several of Burga's historic projects, she makes no distinction between fabricated works and those that remain on paper. Burga is devoted to the sentiment, famously proposed by Sol LeWitt in his 1969 essay *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, that "ideas can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical."<sup>11</sup>

In one such until-recently unfabricated series, *Máquinas inútiles* (*Inutile Machines*) (1974), Burga drew blueprints for "inutile," or useless, machines, such as a vase incapable of holding water or a lamp with no socket for a bulb. While Burga's plans specify that the machines can be rendered in metal at six feet high, the drawings on their own function as an indictment of the authoritativeness of the schematic drawing. Burga nudges us to question: *What kind of stable knowledge do we expect to take from a blueprint? What if it instructs us to make a machine that is utterly inoperative?* With this 1974 series, she deconstructs the conventions of schematic drawing, the knowledge we expect to receive from it, and the utility we expect it to serve. Instead, Burga's drawings themselves are inutile, without utility at all. It is perhaps not coincidental that at the same time that Burga was sketching up her useless machines, she had just started a bureaucratic job in Lima's customs office where she was tasked with creating an information system—an early computer database—that organized customs-related legislation and made it accessible and searchable to government employees.<sup>12</sup>

In 1974, Burga also completed a series of drawings based on Jorge Luis Borges's 1929 poem *La noche que en el Sur lo velaron* (*Night Death Watch on the Southside*) in which she used rule-based procedures to translate Borges's words into colored grids and other schematics. Burga's *Borges* drawings call to mind the early conceptual work of Charles Gaines. Using



Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara, 1974



Borges, 1975, excerpt

drawing, both artists explored the ways that arbitrary systems construct and frame meaning. In 1981, Burga debuted the last major work she would show in public until 2010. Titled *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana* (*Profile of the Peruvian Woman*) (1980–81), the gargantuan project was undertaken with sociologist Marie-France Cathelat, three universities, and 25 assistants.<sup>13</sup> Burga and her team polled nearly 300 middle class women between the ages of 25–29 on questions relating to their lives and political views and turned their answers into epigrammatic sculptural objects that visualized the statistical results.

After *Profile of the Peruvian Woman*, Burga had an increasingly difficult time finding support to realize her projects though she continued to make work without producing it. Under both the government of General Velasco and following the reelection of President Belaúnde Terry in 1980, Burga was told that her work had "no Peruvian character."<sup>14</sup> She explains: "At that moment an important number of official nationalist cultural proposals consisted in promoting

representations of peasants and still-lives with fruits. I never saw that much fruit being drawn! All my friends painted fruits, they became true experts. What a shame!"<sup>15</sup>

While Burga continued to work at the customs office by day, late at night she made dozens of repetitive, abstract, and intricate drawings from the late 1970s through the early aughts. These *Insomnia Drawings* developed from a predetermined system loosely inspired by the automatic and chance-based experiments of surrealists like Dolfi Trost whose practice of "entopic graphomania" allowed the artist to abdicate creative decision making in favor of an algorithmic procedure. In the case of Burga's drawings, she would absentmindedly fill a page with looping lines and then painstakingly and repetitively tint sections of the rings with red, blue, and black ink—making sure that two sections of the same color were never side by side. In other *Insomnia Drawings*, Burga started with quadrangular lines, resulting in undulating gridded planes that snake under and around each other like warped chess boards and recall the Op Art drawings of Bridget Riley or Ernesto Briel.

Burga's drawings have a certain kinship with another series of *Insomnia Drawings* made by Louise Bourgeois in the mid-1990s, in which Bourgeois



Louise Bourgeois, *Insomnia Drawing No. 174, March 13, 1995, 1995*



*Insomnia Drawing (8), 1981*

sketched repetitive patterns of triangles, concentric circles, and interlocking lozenges in red and black ink. Bourgeois has spoken about her drawings as a method to excise “unconscious memories,” but Burga’s drawings don’t claim to be a window into her true self.<sup>16</sup> While viewers might be inclined to interpret Burga’s abstract doodling as the output of her unconscious, the artwork is emphatically made according to a set of pre-planned rules. By presenting something that appears to be an expressionistic drawing, but is actually made mechanically, Burga disallows the viewer from understanding the work as a reflection of a stable, identifiable maker or a transcendental truth. Rather, she asks viewers to reflect on the sites—in this case abstract drawings—through which specific kinds of meaning are communicated.

Burga’s most recent works are made using a method that she first developed in a series of untitled drawings from 1974, in which she selected an image from a newspaper at random then rendered it on paper accompanied by a series of timestamps that listed the exact days and times when she added to the composition. The new drawings depict vibrantly hued female figures in traditional garments against landscapes or patterned backgrounds, such as women

in traditional indigenous Peruvian attire in *Niñas Peruanas Cusqueñas* (2019) or Venetian Carnival costume in *Acqua Alta* (2019–present). While Burga’s drawings employ her familiar timestamps, they also take up a wholly unexpected subject matter—images of indigenous Peruvians. Although her earlier work explicitly avoided the depictions of national identity that were expected by the powers that be, her new pieces directly confront the representation of indigeneity. Typically, a drawing of a person in traditional dress might be accompanied by an explanatory caption to contextualize and categorize the depicted individual. In Burga’s rendering, the anthropological label is replaced by information about the act of making the image itself—drawing attention to the systems through which we gather knowledge. Unlike the 1974 drawings, Burga’s newest series supplement the initial found newspaper image with ones sourced from the internet. In doing so, Burga builds on the kind of data gathering processes that she employed in earlier projects, but this time on the scale of internet search engines and Big Data.

By behaving like a computer, by amassing and displaying information as a computer would do, Burga asks us to look at the computational schema itself. From *Autorretrato* to *Cusqueñas*, she has replicated everyday systems for communicating and classifying information about individuals so that viewers might see the framing devices that govern representations of selfhood. Using her conceptually-driven drawing practice, Burga continues to question the ways knowledge is communicated through the largest networks all the way down to the individual body. Burga insists that drawing can’t reveal unimpeachable truth or immutable meaning. It can, however, show us the systems that create and regulate truth—and in doing so allow us to imagine different structures for understanding ourselves and the world around us.

#### Notes

- 1 Elisa Arca Jarque and José-Carlos Mariátegui, “Uncovering information systems in the work of Teresa Burga.” Paper presented at Re:Trace 7th International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology, Danube University, November 2017, 7.
- 2 Teresa Burga and Miguel A. López, ““As Near as Possible to Chance”: A Dialogue Between Teresa Burga and Miguel A. López,” in *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures*, ed. Heike Munder (Zurich: JRP Editions, 2018), 53.
- 3 Jarque and Mariátegui, 2.
- 4 Burga and López, 54.
- 5 Burga and López, 59-60.
- 6 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 46.
- 7 Nizan Shaked, *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 2.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Burga and López, 55.
- 10 Dorota Biczal, “Cracking Open the Systems: Media, Materiality and Agency in Teresa Burga’s Self-Portrait. Structure. Report. 9.6.72,” *alternativas*, no. 3 (2014): 22.
- 11 Sol Lewitt, “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” *ArtLanguage* (May 1969), 11.
- 12 Jarque and Mariátegui, 16.
- 13 Burga and López, 61.
- 14 Burga and López, 56.
- 15 Burga and López, 56.
- 16 Marie-Laure Bernadec, “The Insomnia Drawings of Louise Bourgeois,” in *Louise Bourgeois: The Insomnia Drawings* (Zurich: Daros, 2000), 12.

Teresa Burga







Untitled (Narizones), 2019

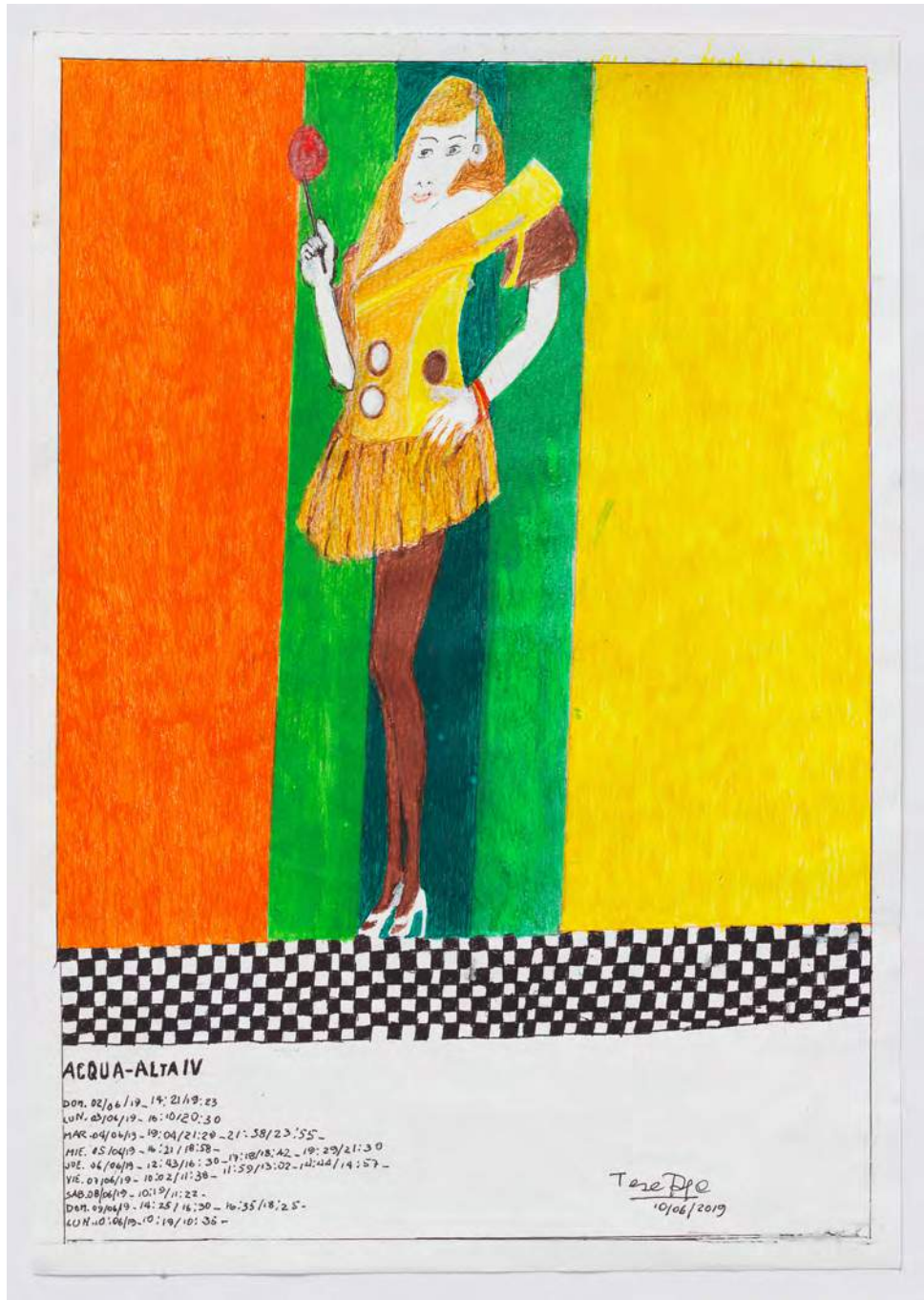


Left: *Untitled (Acqua Alta VI)*, 2019  
 Right: installation view





Untitled (Acqua Alta I), 2019



Untitled (Acqua Alta IV), 2019



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019



Untitled (Acqua Alta II), 2019

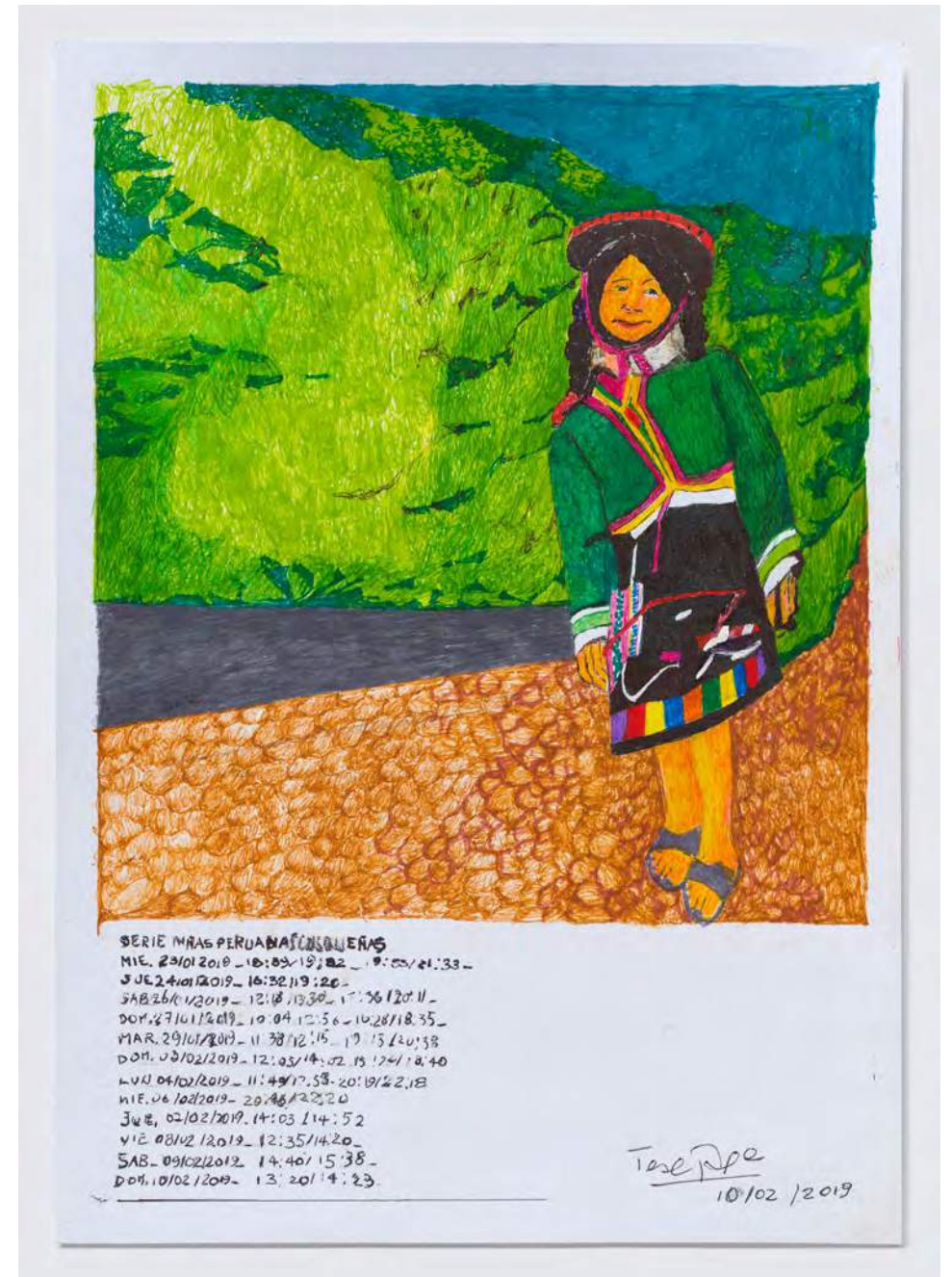


ACQUA - ALTA V

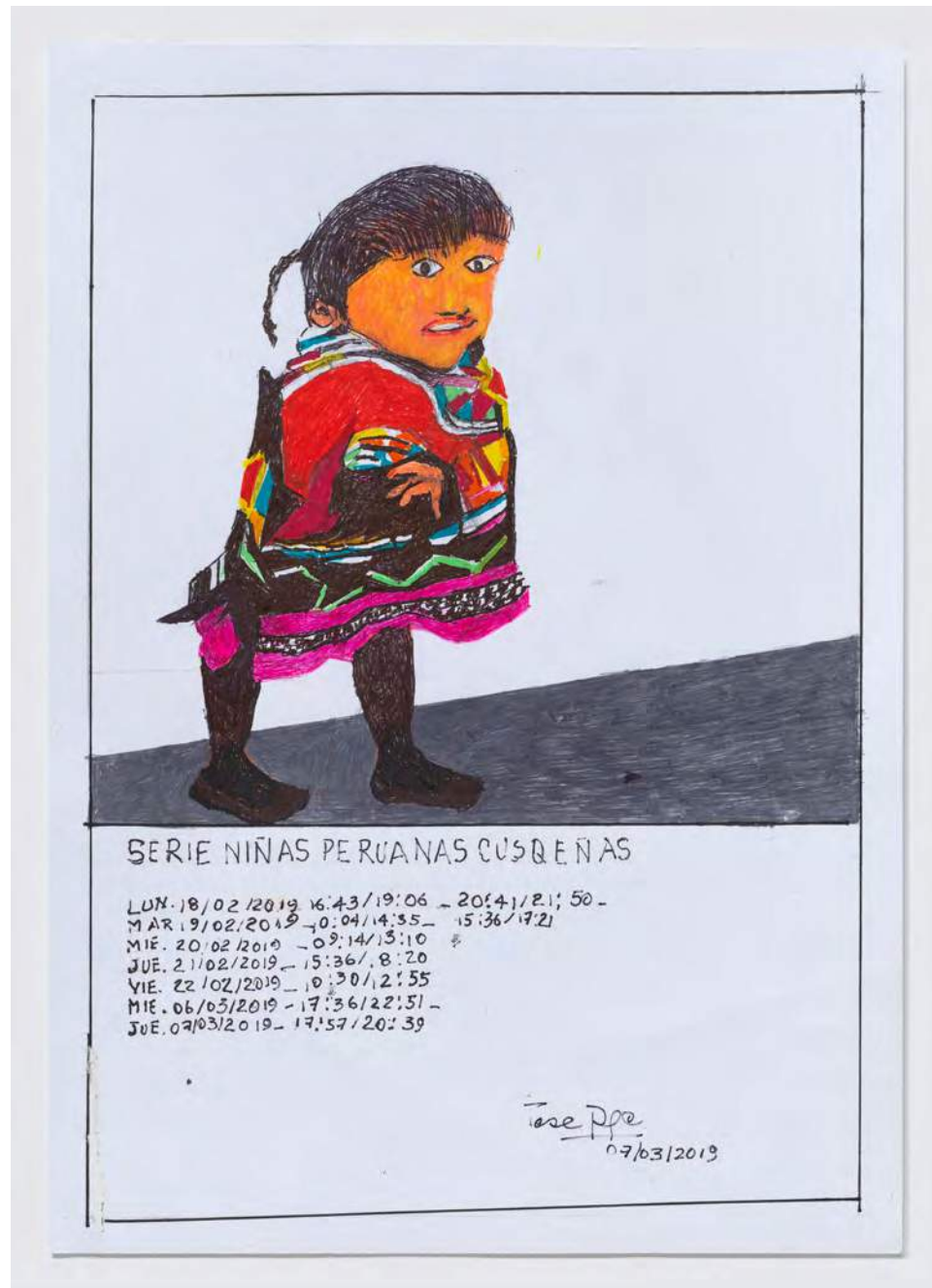
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MIE. 13/04/19 - 10:19/13:15 -  
SAB. 20/04/19 - 18:25/22:34 -  
VIE. 21/04/19 - 19:10/19:54, 11:08/12:57 - 19:05/19:23 - 20:05/22:19 -  
SAB. 22/04/19 - 10:44/13:42 -

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Untitled (Acqua Alta V), 2019



Left: installation view  
 Right: 10 / Febrero / 2019, 2019



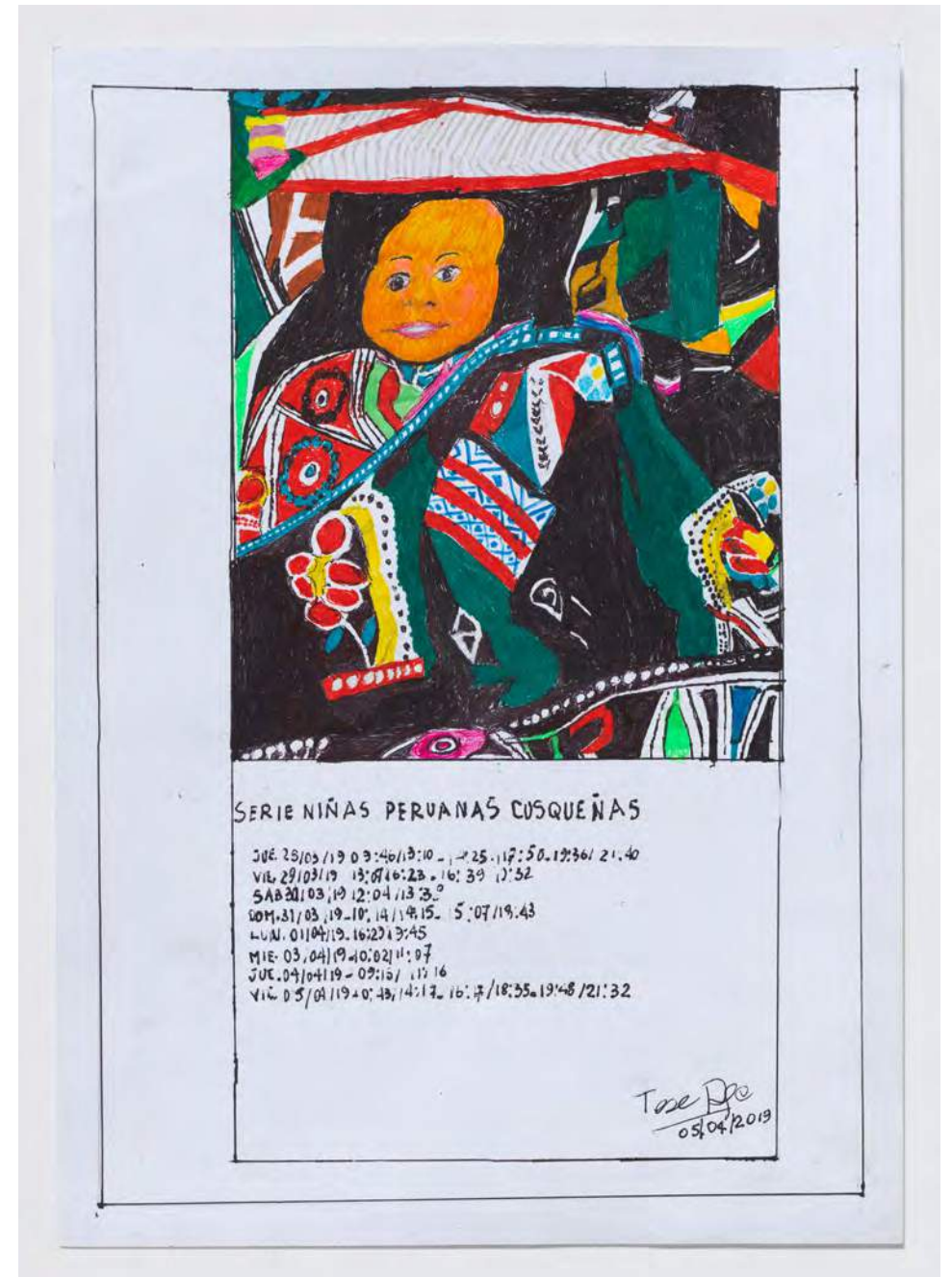
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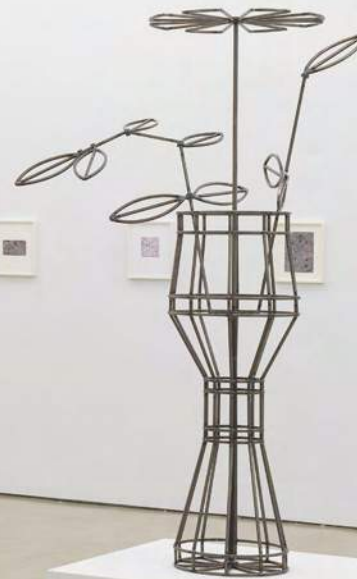
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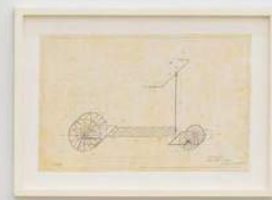


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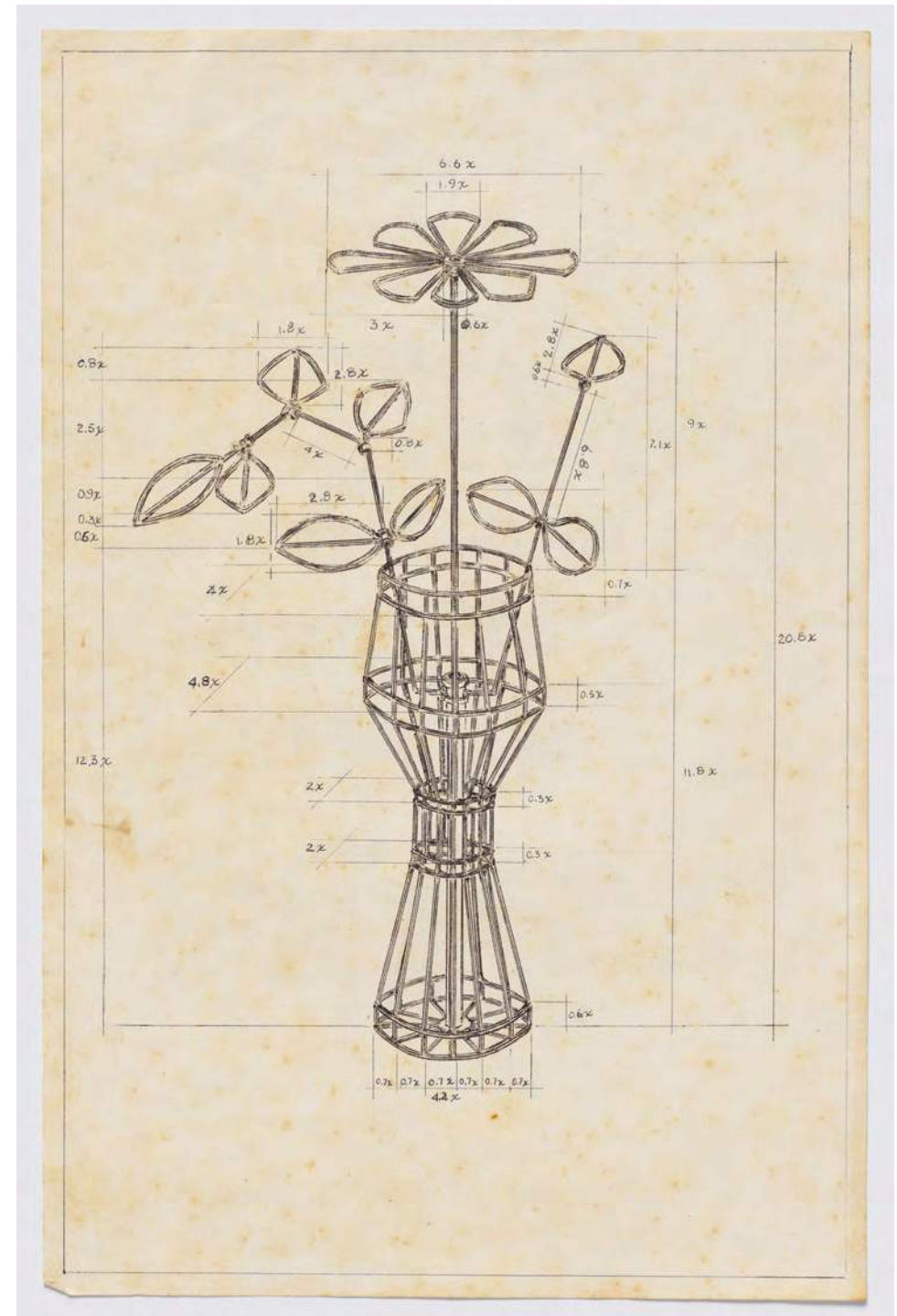


Teresa Burga

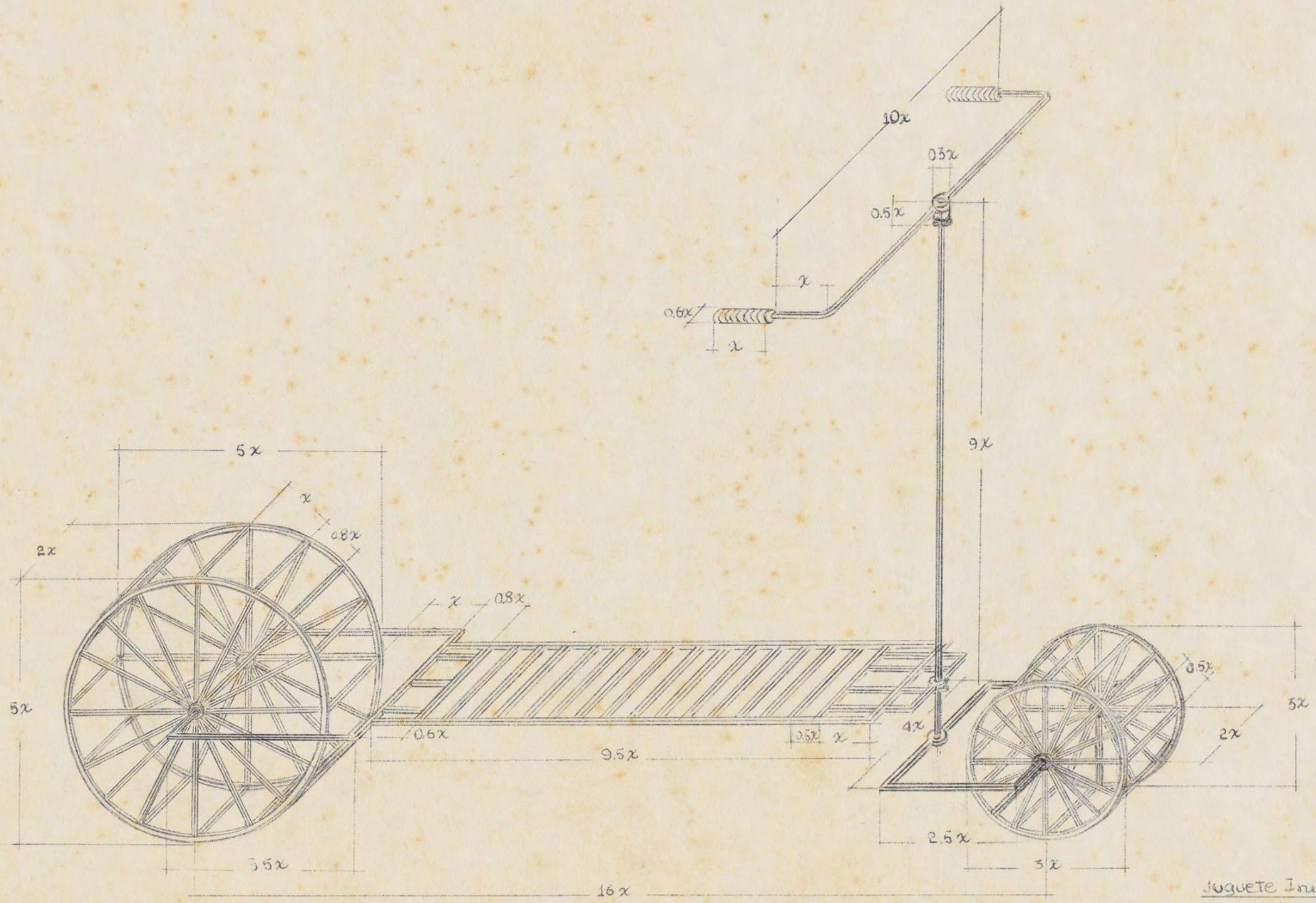




Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019

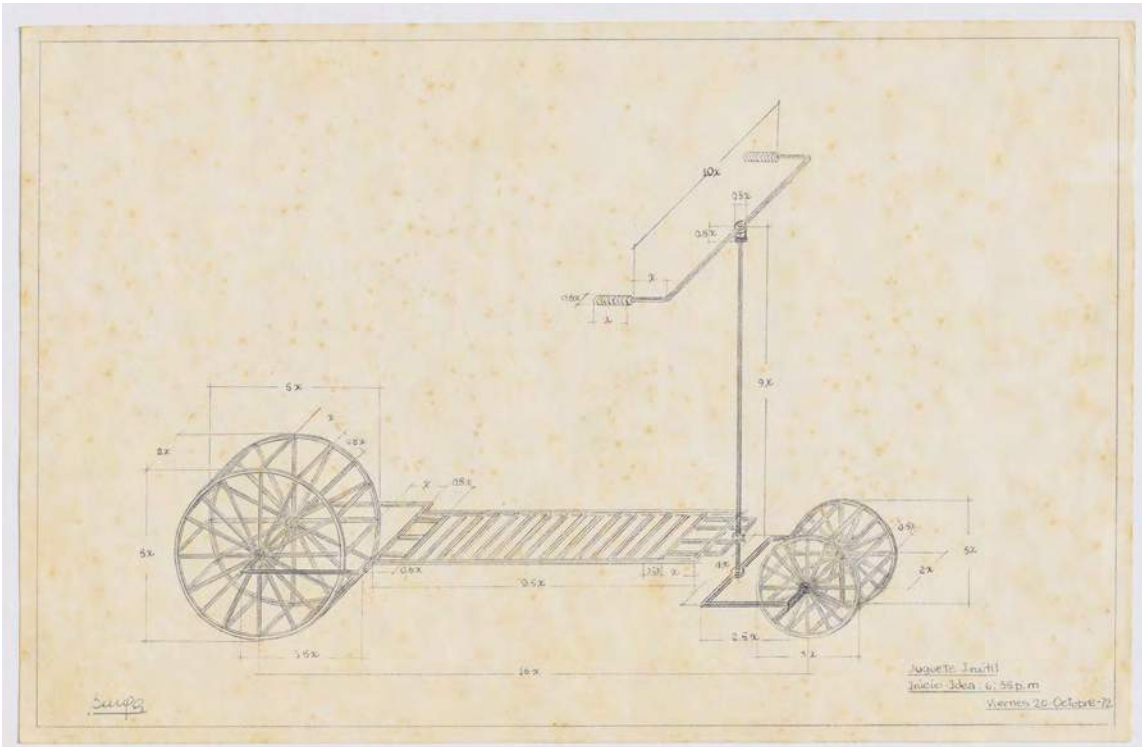


Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Florero, 1974

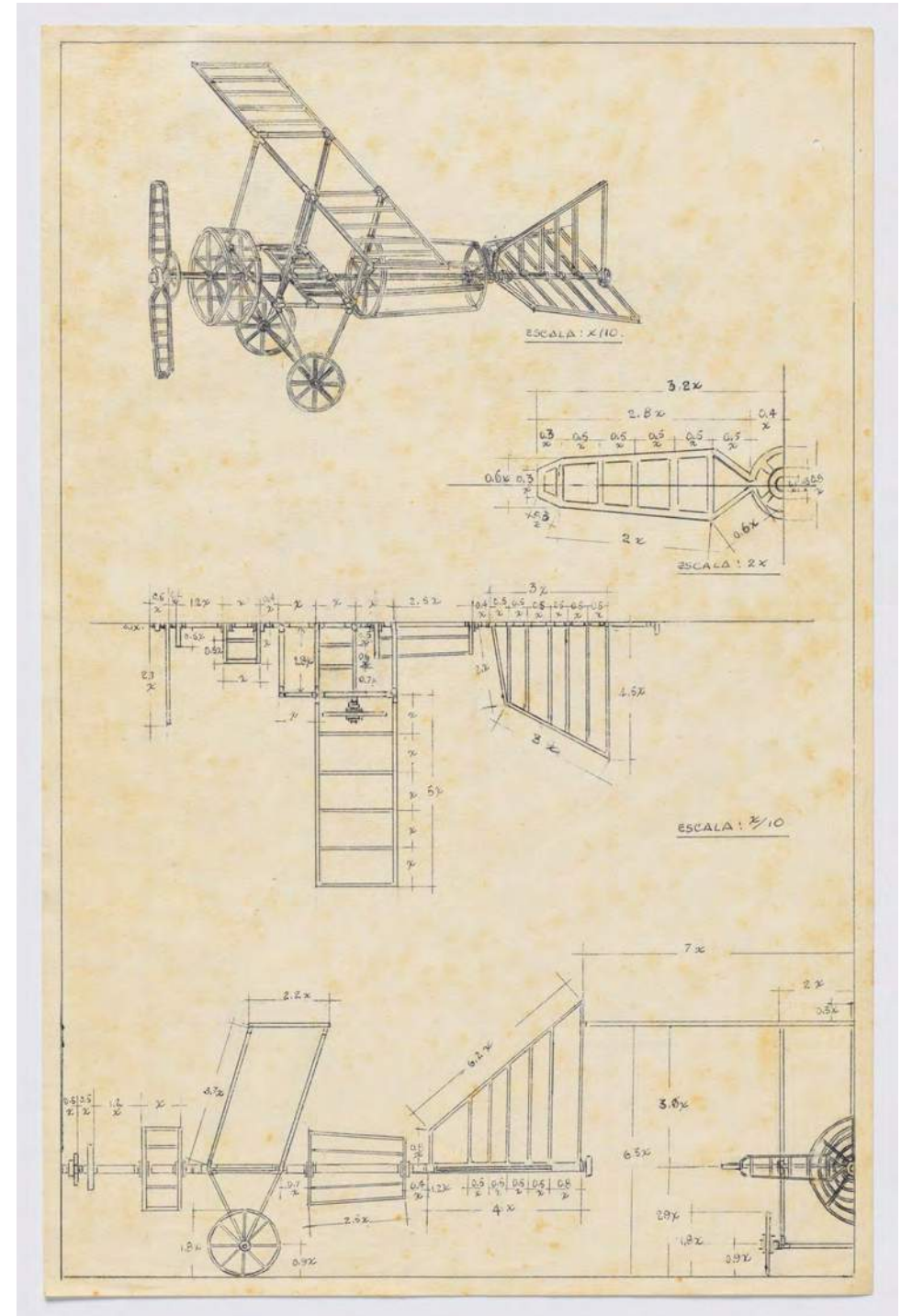


Juguete Inútil

Inicio - Idea: 6:5



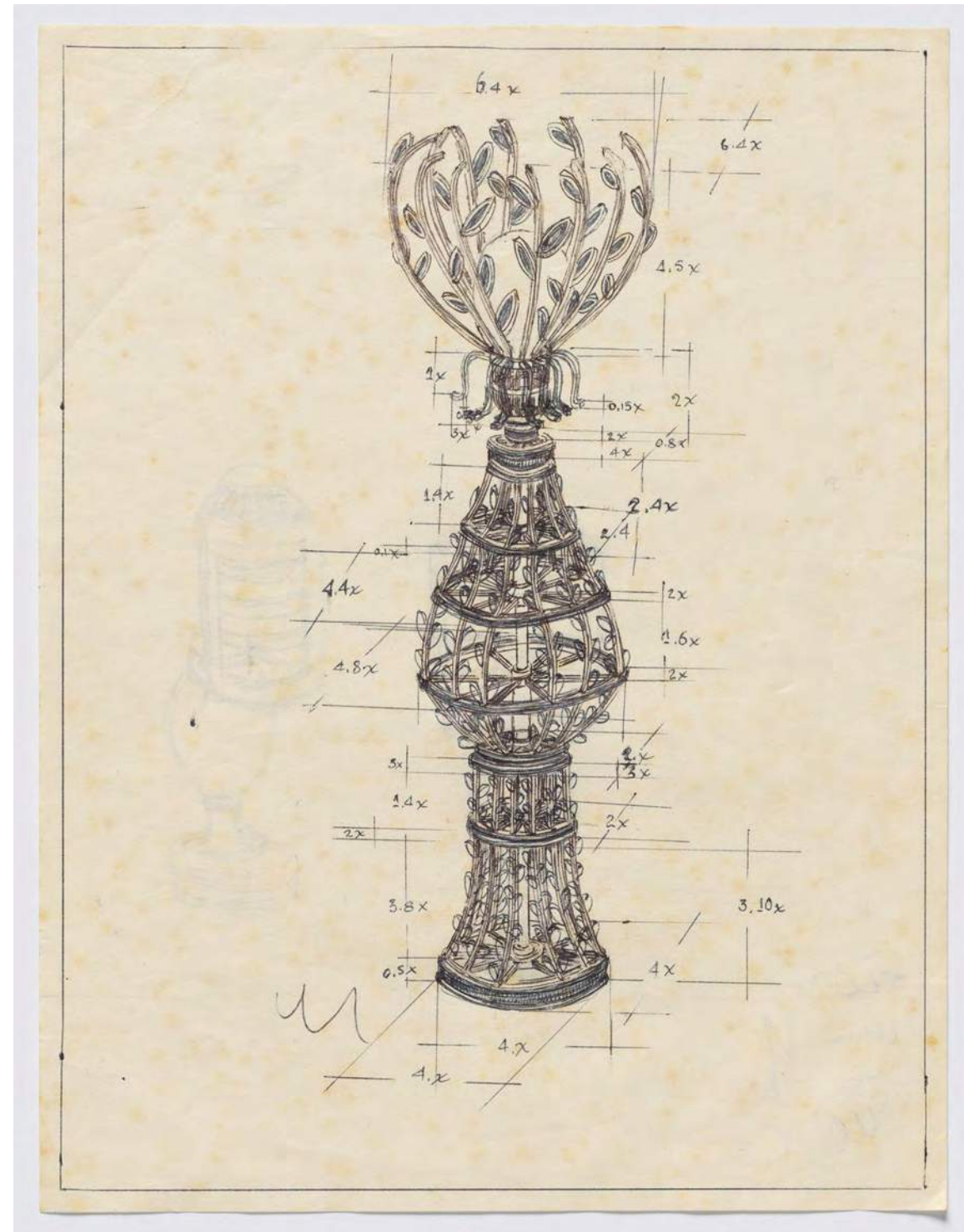
Juguete Inútil. Viernes (20 Octubre 1972), 1972



Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Manual de instalación de avioneta, 1974



Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara, 1974, verso



Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara, 1974, recto

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara, 1974/2019*





*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara, 1974/2019*  
Right: detail







Outdoor view, Germantown, New York, 2019

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Florero, 1974/2019*





*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Florero, 1974/2019*  
Right: detail

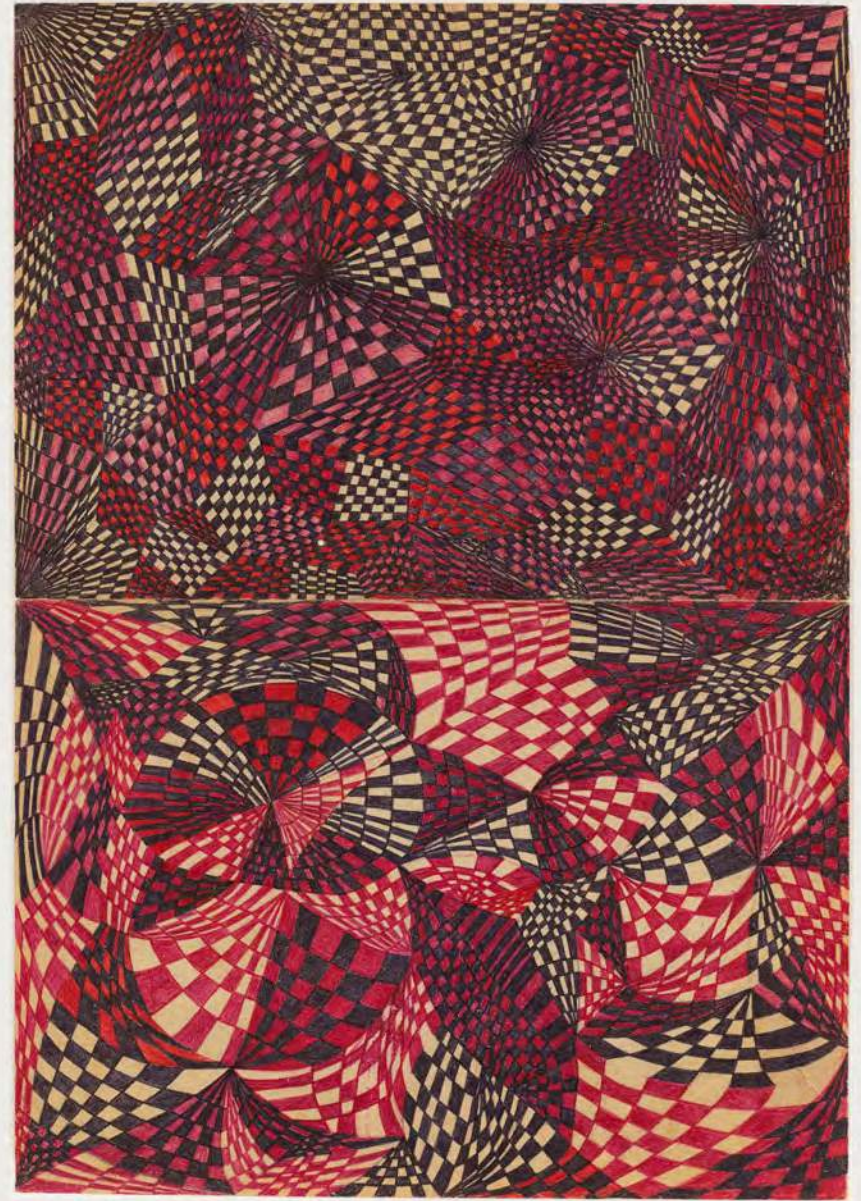




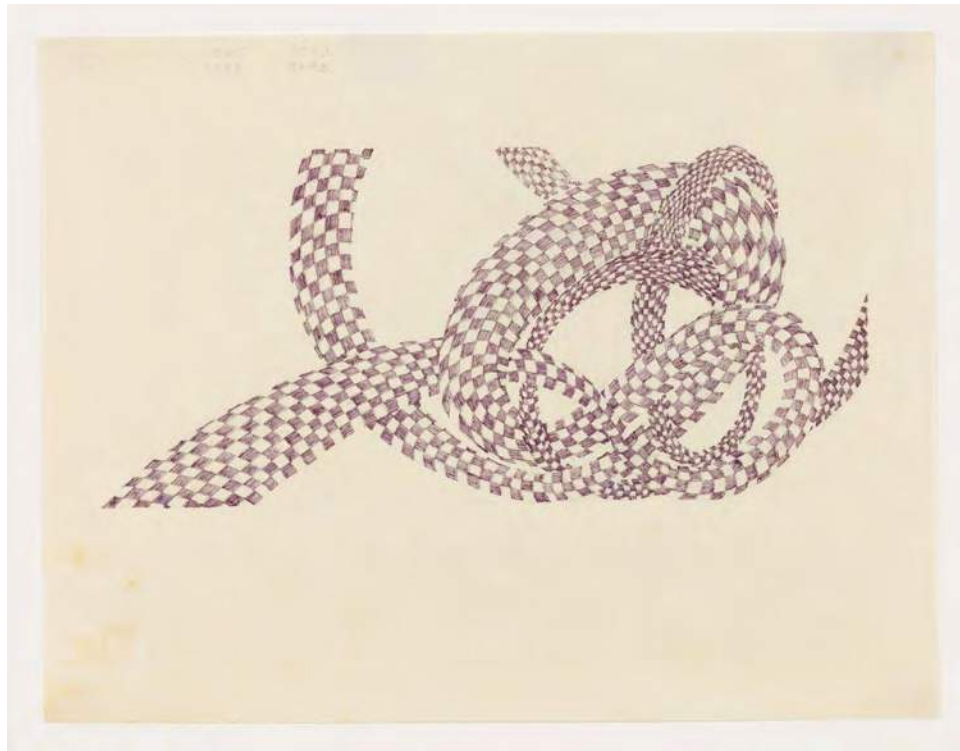
Outdoor view, Germantown, New York, 2019



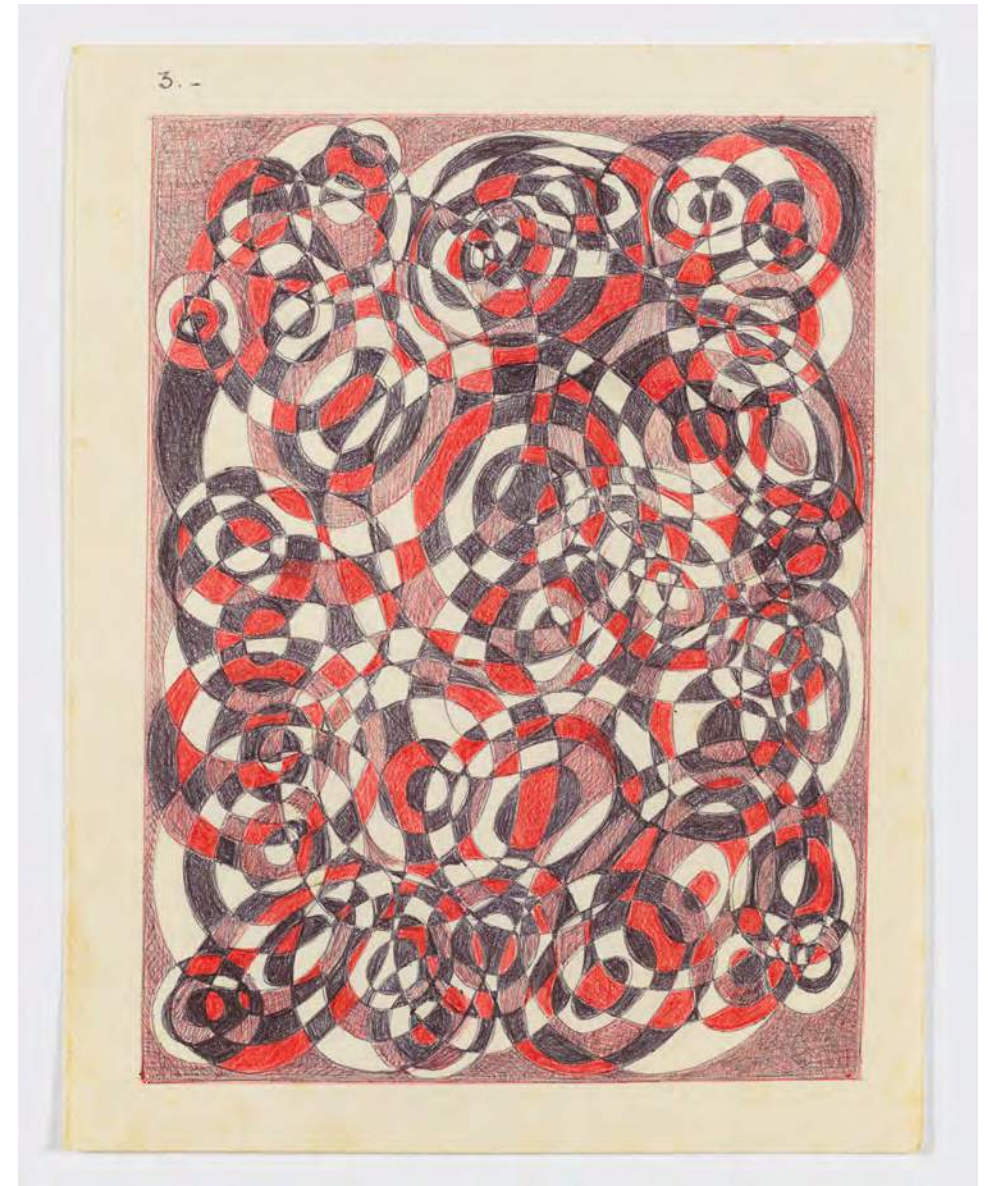
Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019



*Insomnia Drawing (8)*, 1981



*Insomnia Drawing (5), 1978*

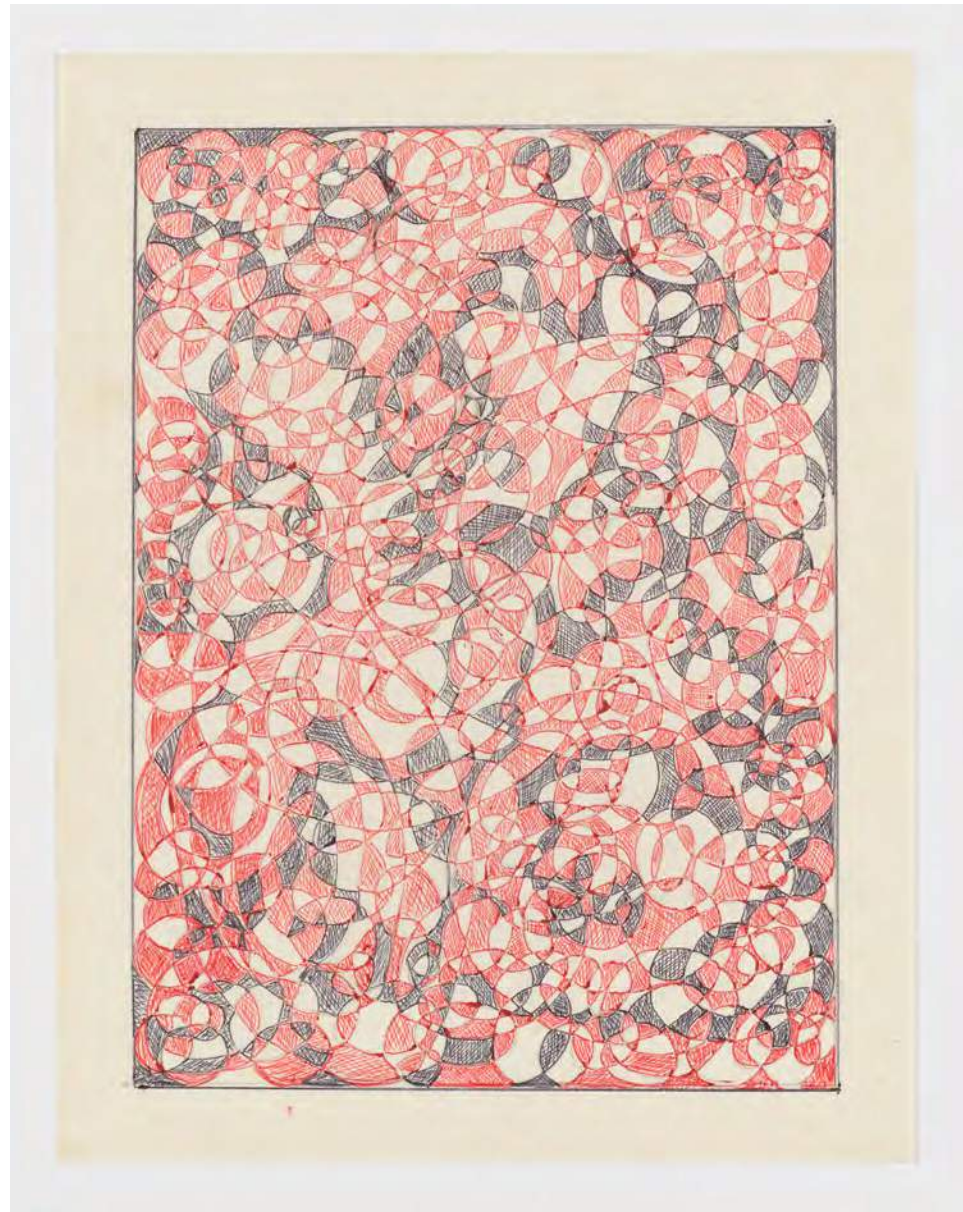


*Insomnia Drawing (23), 1990*

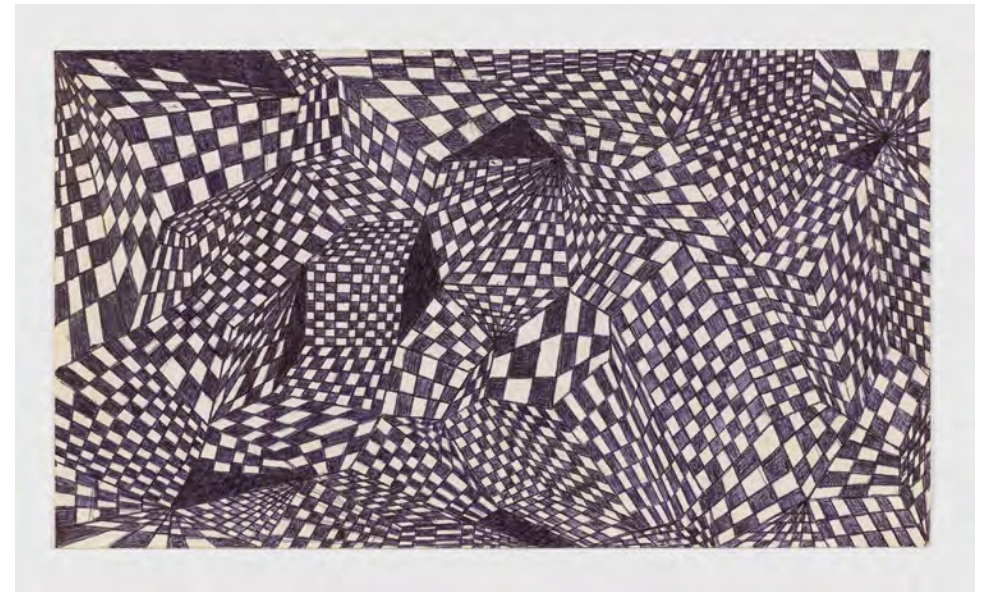


Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019

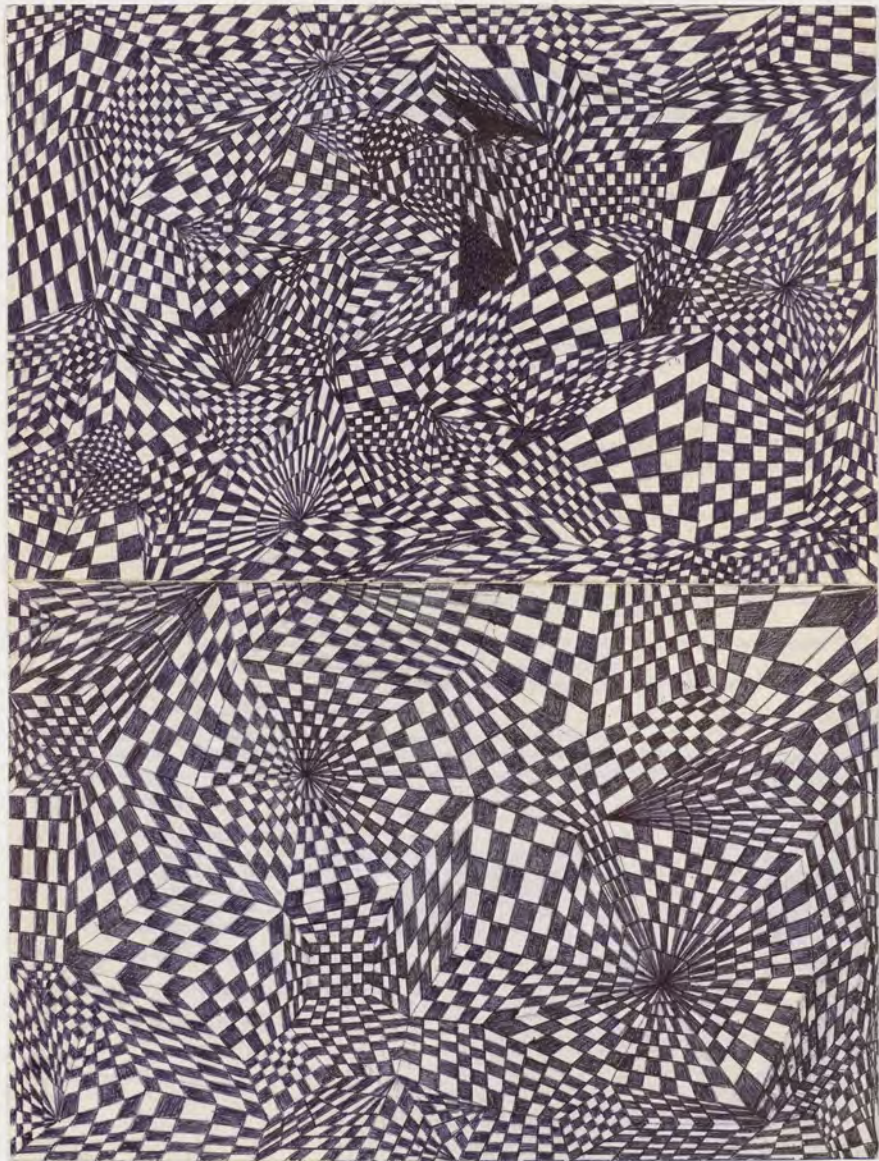




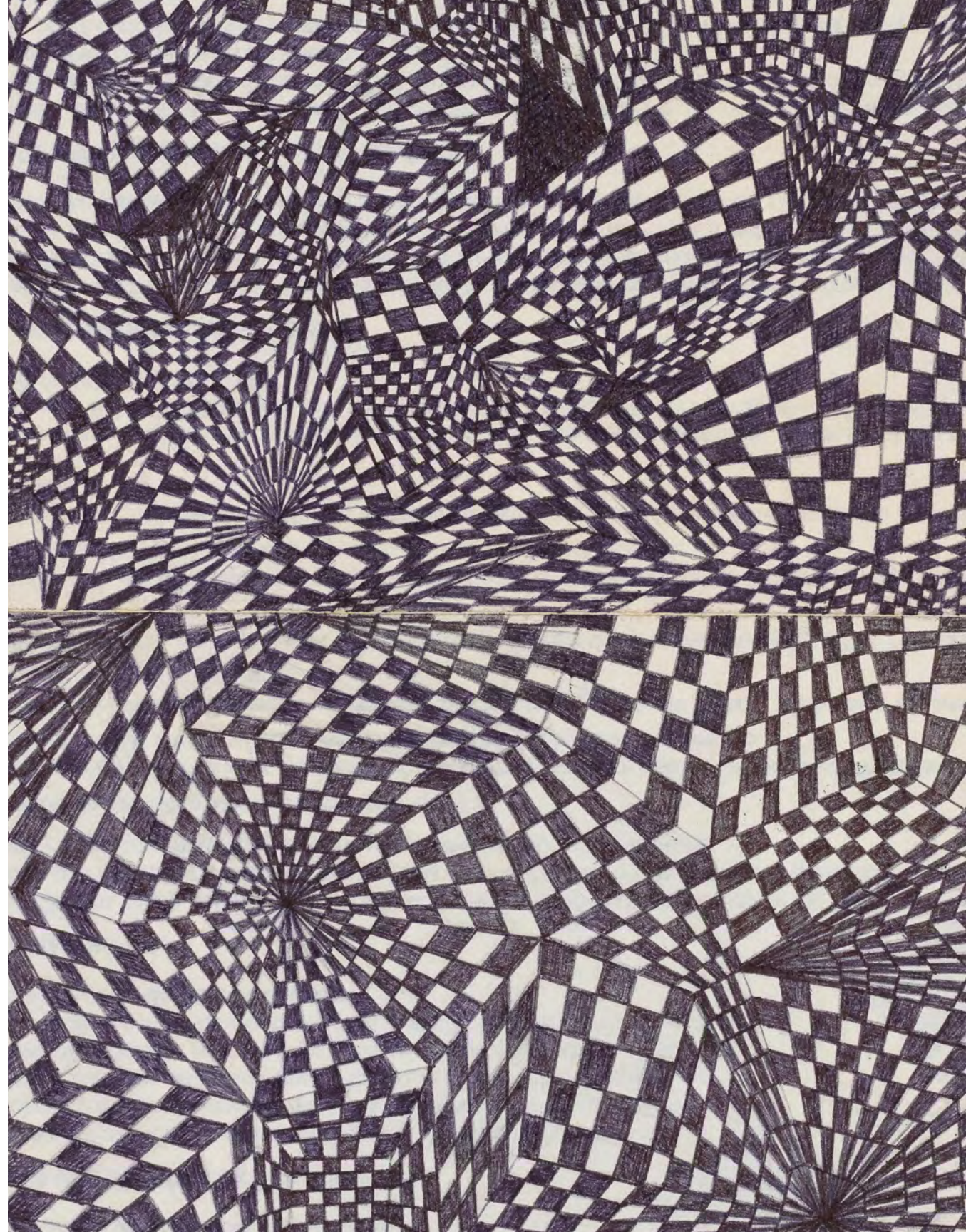
*Insomnia Drawing (14), 1990*

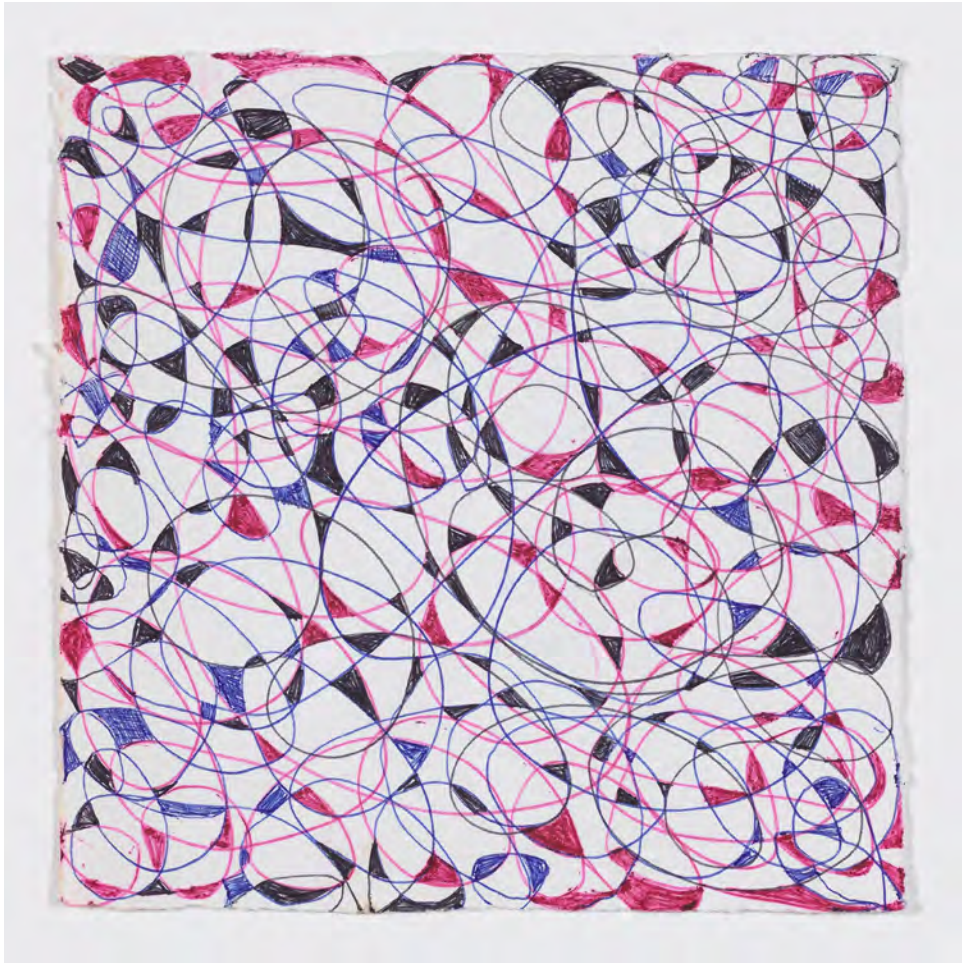


*Insomnia Drawing (9), 1981*



*Insomnia Drawing (13)*, 1989  
Right: detail





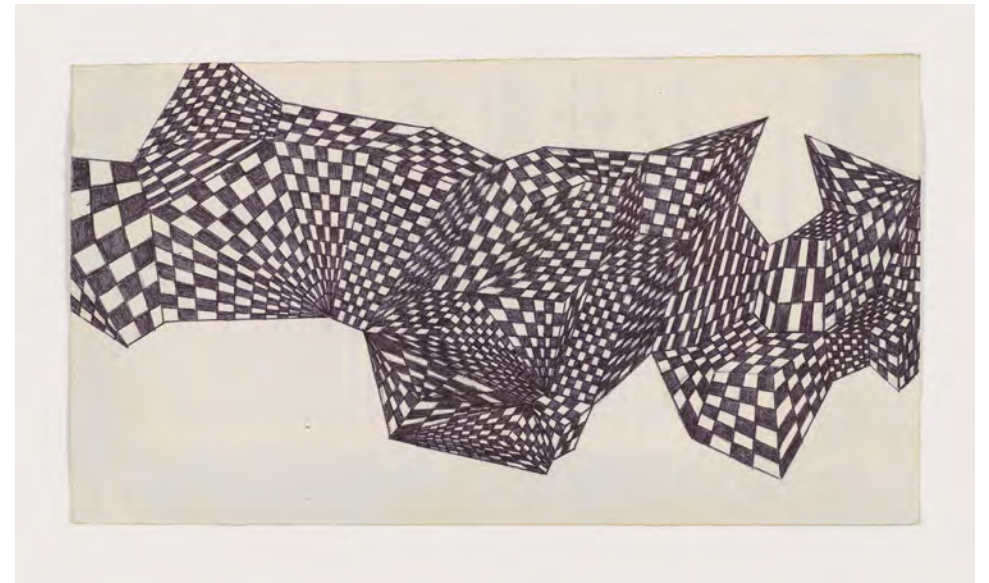
*Insomnia Drawing (42), 2001*



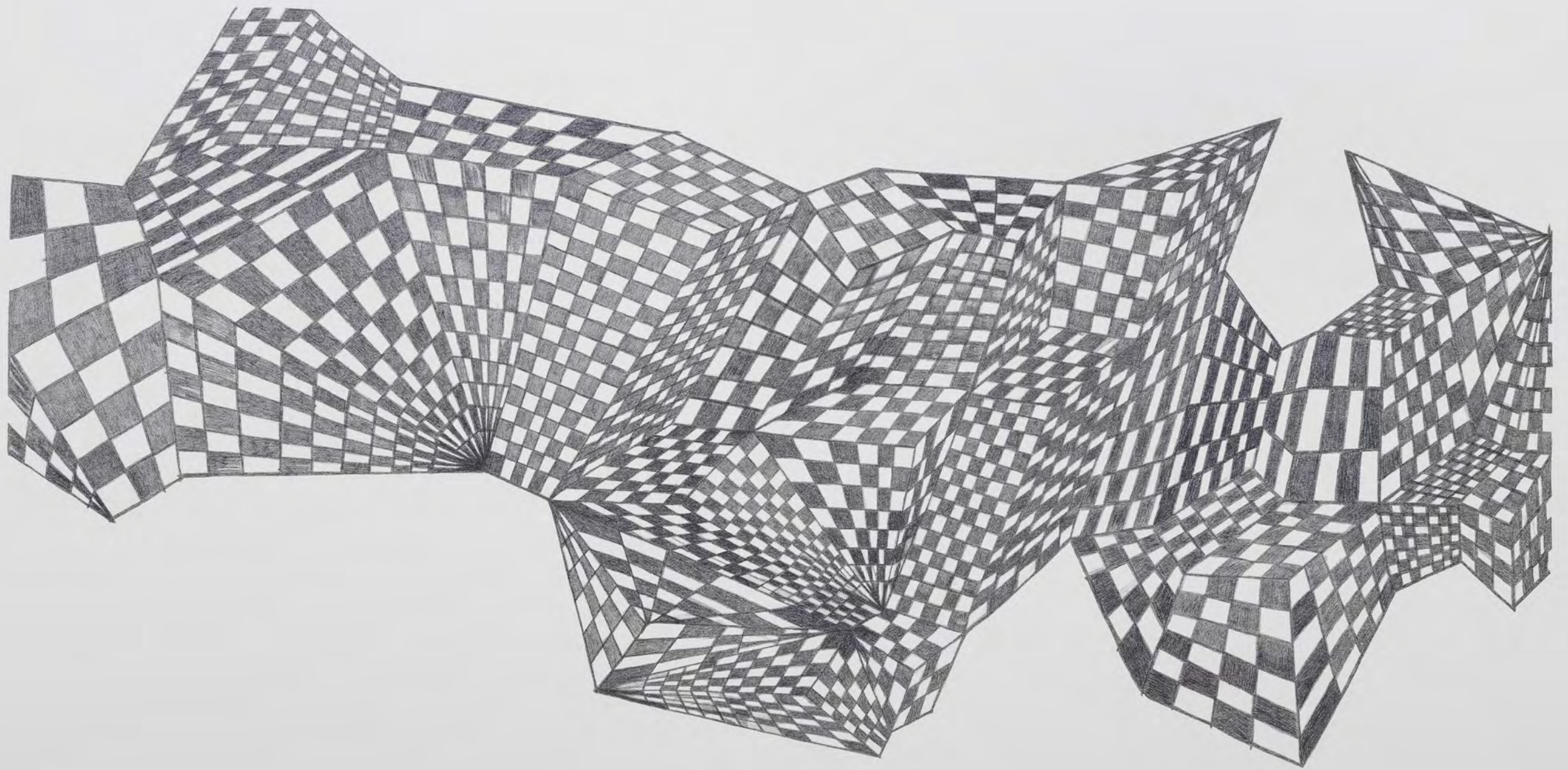
*Insomnia Drawing (41), 2001*



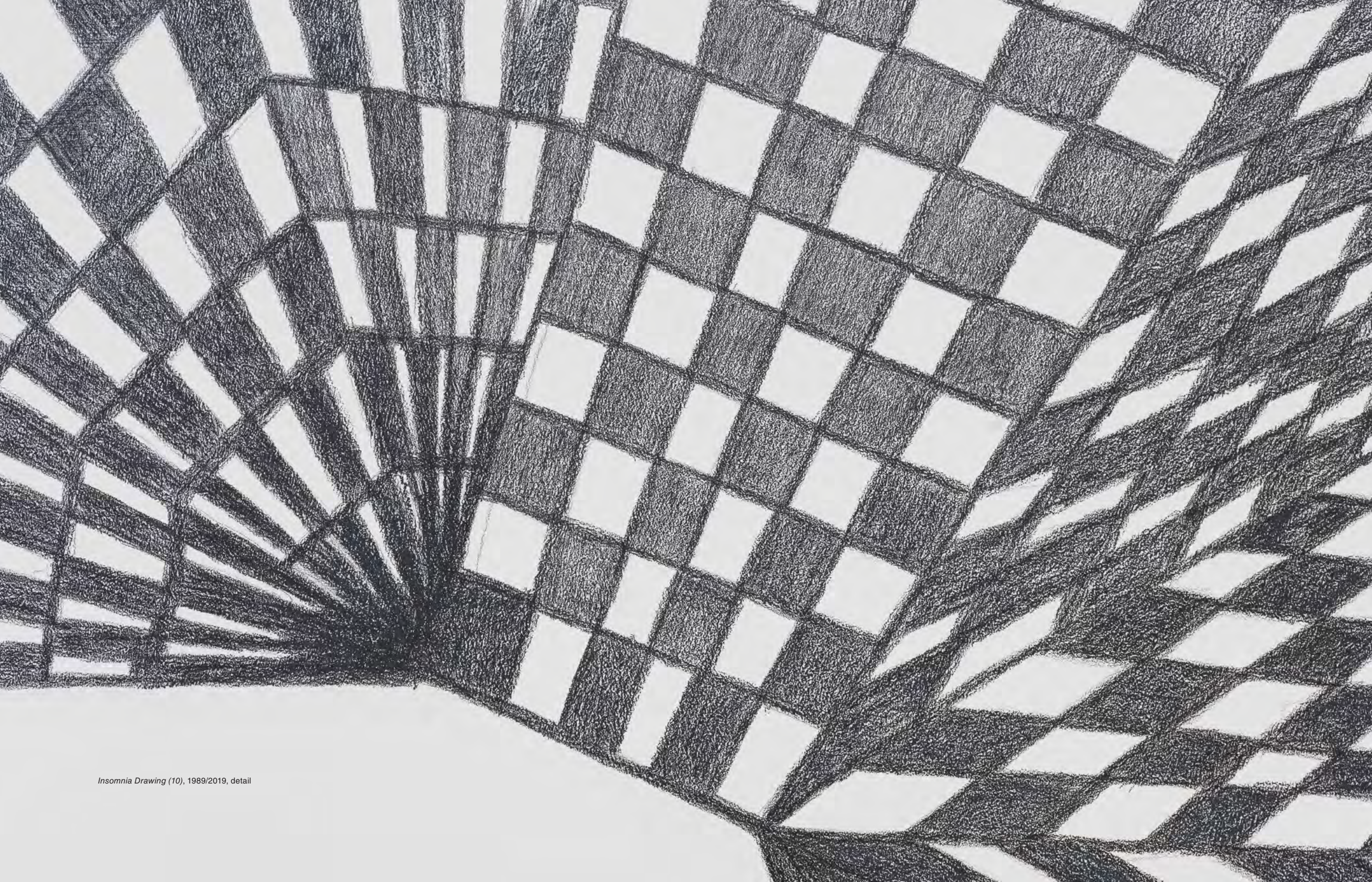
*Insomnia Drawing (44), 2001*



*Insomnia Drawing (10), 1989*



*Insomnia Drawing (10)*, 1989/2019, installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019



*Insomnia Drawing (10), 1989/2019, detail*



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2019





Teresa Burga in Lima, c.1979

**Teresa Burga: Selected Chronology**

- 1935 Born in Iquitos, Peru on September 14, 1935. Born to a military family (her father was an Official in the Peruvian Marine force).
  - 1937 Family moves to Lima.
  - 1943–50 Studies in El Colegio Italiano Antonio Raimondi, Lima, Peru.
  - 1951 Family returns to Iquitos. Burga’s father is enlisted by the military to manage the construction of the Santa Clotilde Naval Base off the Nanay River.
  - 1954 Returns to Lima with her family.
  - 1955 Enrolls in an Architecture program at La Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería (National University of Engineering)
  - 1957 Decides to abandon architecture, and enrolls in the School of Visual Arts of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.
- Al darme cuenta que mi vocación verdadera en las Artes Plásticas era la pintura me matriculé en la Escuela de Artes Plásticas de la Universidad Católica. Desde mi ingreso fui nombrada delegada de año a la mesa directiva de la Federación de Estudiantes, en el tercer año fui elegida presidente de los estudiantes, y en el cuarto año fui reelegida en el cargo y nombrada secretaria de mesa directiva de la Federación de Estudiantes.<sup>1</sup>*
- 1960 Travels to Paris with her family when her father was named a Naval Attaché of Peru to France.
  - 1961–62 Travels throughout Europe. Studies French at the Alliance Française in Paris. Takes drawing courses at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.
  - 1962 Returns to Peru with her family, and re-enrolls in La Escuela de Artes Plásticas (School of Visual Arts) to finish her degree.
  - 1965 Graduates from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru after defending her thesis.
  - 1965 First solo exhibition, *Lima imaginada*, held at Galería Cultura y Libertad, Lima, Peru. This presentation focused primarily on Burga’s linocut prints.
  - 1965 Solo exhibition, *Teresa Burga*, held at Galería Solisol, Lima, Peru. This presentation spotlighted Burga’s expressionist oil paintings.
  - 1965 Participates in group exhibitions at Museo de Arte de Lima, El Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas, and Galería Solisol.
  - 1966 Solo exhibition of drawings at Taller 406, Lima, Peru. Another solo exhibition of paintings and woodcut prints is held at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano de Lima (ICPNA) in Lima.



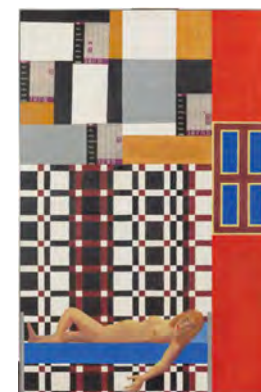
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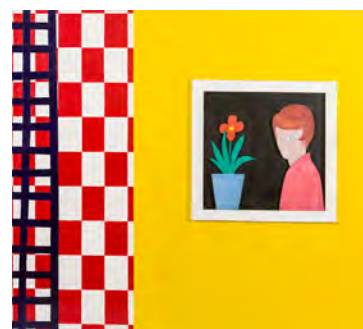
Fig 1 Teresa Burga, Lima, 1949  
Fig 2 Burga family, 1945

Fig 3 Teresa with her mother and sister, 1945  
Fig 4 Untitled, 1966  
Fig 5 *Composición*, date unknown

Fig 6 Teresa and family, October 31, 1959  
Fig 7 *Silencio (Silence)*, 1966



9



12



8



10



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11



14

Fig 8 Untitled, 1967

Fig 9 Untitled / Prismas (J), 1968/2013

Fig 10 Teresa Burga, May 1964

Fig 11 Arte Nuevo exhibition catalogue. Galería

Lirloy, Buenos Aires, Argentina. March–April, 1967.

Fig 12 La Ventana (Window), 1967

Fig 13 Arte Nuevo exhibition catalogue. Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru, 1966.

Fig 14 Imágenes III (Calculadora), 1967

*En esta época mi pintura era ya de tipo constructorista, con fuerte influencia Pop, y con utilización de collages.<sup>2</sup>*

- 1966 Along with fellow artists Gloria Gómez-Sánchez, Luis Arias Vera, Jaime Dávila, Víctor Delfín, Emilio Hernández Saavedra, José Tang, Armando Varela, and Luis Zevallos Hetzel, forms the group Arte Nuevo. Begins to experiment with Pop collages, cut-out posters, happenings, and environments.
- 1966 Solo exhibition held at Galería Siglo XX, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Burga is included in group exhibitions at various venues in Peru: *Obligado de Adán*, Museo de Arte de Lima, and El Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), among others.
- 1967 Presents an exhibition of sculptural objects at Galería Cultura y Libertad, Lima, Peru.
- 1968 Develops two series, *Cubos* and *Prismas*, consisting of selections of boldly painted geometric sculptures featuring Pop iconography. Solely dictating the sculptures' color palette, Burga intentionally designed the series to be open-ended, allowing future assistants to determine the forms' positioning, painting, and compositional arrangements.

*Many of my last works in Lima, before leaving [to Chicago], had been commissioned. I would still make some figures or graphic work, but most of the time my friends or anybody who wanted to participate would come and paint following my instructions. [...] As a premise, I was not going to add my subjectivity, nor do the work myself. [...] In the last sculptures I made in Lima, geometric Pop pieces with colorful representations, the figurines and colors were chosen randomly. If they came out nice, it was by pure chance.<sup>3</sup>*

- 1968 Receives a Fulbright Fellowship for study abroad. Pursues an MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and works alongside American artists like Christo, Frank Stella, and Claes Oldenburg.

*I submitted my application, and it eventually found its way into the hands of the people who selected the scholars in the United States. [...] I remember I presented a project stating my intent to do experimental art. Perhaps at that point I didn't know exactly what Conceptual Art and arte no-objetual meant, but that was what we were into in Lima then. [...] They sent me straight to the place where they were doing all that kind of art: the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was there where I found out about the great movement of Conceptual Art.<sup>4</sup>*

*In Chicago, our professors were the artists who were already beginning to appear in books. I remember I didn't say a word in my first class, and the professor said to me, "If you don't contradict me or say something to me, I'll throw you out of class." I felt like contradicting him so I raised my hand and said, "I don't agree with anything you have said." I seemed to have hit the nail on the head: I received a big applause*

of the audience, and they all became my friends. That reaction is not common here in Peru because, if a woman stands up and says something like that, all men in the class immediately become her enemies and think, “There is the know-it-all, who does she think she is?”<sup>5</sup>

- 1968 Military coup led by General Velasco. Velasco’s regime takes power in Peru.
- 1971 Returns to Peru following the completion of her studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1972 Conceived of and exhibits *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe*. 9.6.72, a collection of her own medical records, photographs, electrocardiograms, and other personal documents presented as a conceptual installation at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, Peru. Burga’s *Autorretrato* served as an illustration of the socio-political realities of Peru at the time: in particular, how standardized, regulated, and bureaucratic systems function as apparatuses for control and oppression—especially for women.

*Precisely because of the use of those medical elements and technical language, many thought that the project Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe. 9.6.72 was a joke and that it simply could not be considered art.*<sup>6</sup>

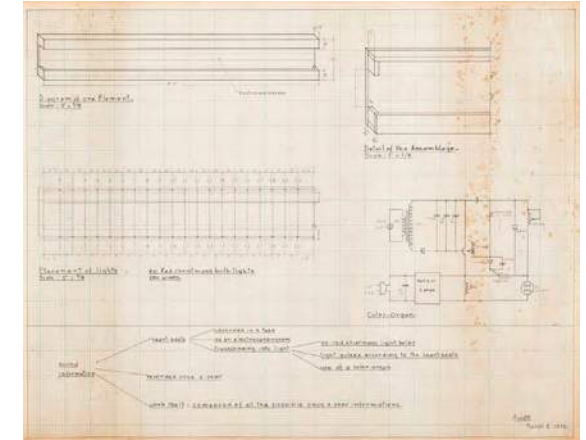
- 1974 Presents the multimedia project *4 Mensajes* at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, Peru. This seminal project consisted of appropriated television segments that were manipulated and distorted in different media to the point of abstraction.

*[The military regime] never had a problem with me because I never attacked them directly. In 1974, I did the multimedia project 4 Mensajes at the ICPNA. It consisted of a play on language and meaning which, in some way, touched upon the situation of telecommunications at a moment when television stations were being expropriated, without them realizing it; it was very difficult to become aware.*<sup>7</sup>

- 1975–2005 Works for Peru’s General Customs Office (Servicio de Administración Tributaria Nacional). During this time, Burga develops her *Insomnia Drawings* series, which she created during sleepless nights.
- 1978–79 Conceived the conceptual project *Paisaje urbano*, a site-specific intervention involving Lima’s central square, the Plaza de Armas. This project has never been realized.
- 1980 Former president Fernando Belaúnde is democratically elected, ending the military regime.
- 1980 Along with psychotherapist Marie-France Cathelat, co-founds the association Investigaciones Sociales y Artísticas (ISA) (Social and Artistic Research).



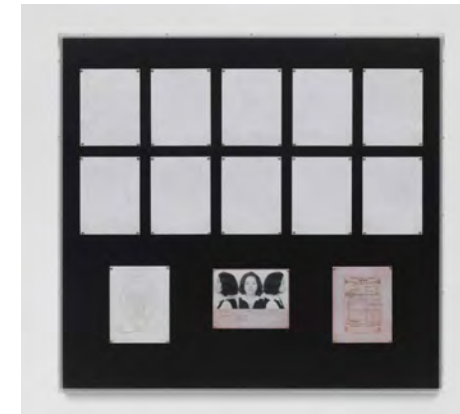
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Fig 15 *Collage a modo de boceto para Autorretrato*, 1972  
 Fig 16 *Insomnia Drawing (23)*, 1990  
 Fig 17 *Autorretrato (Invitation card)*, 1972

Fig 18 *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures*, exhibition view at Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, 2018  
 Fig 19 *Sin titulo (Heartbeat recording and light)*, 1970

Fig 20 *Untitled*, 1978  
 Fig 21 *Autorretrato*, installation view, Galeria ICPNA, Lima, Peru, 1972



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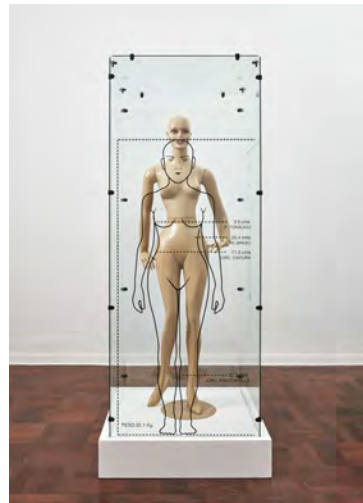
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Fig 22 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana — Propuesta II (Perfil Social)*, 1981/2017

Fig 23 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana — Propuesta II (Perfil Profesional)*, 1981/2017

Fig 24 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana*, 1980–81, book cover

Fig 25 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana (Uterus)*, 2017

Fig 26 *Teresa Burga: Die Chronologie der Teresa Burga*, installation view, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany, 2011

Fig 27 *Teresa Burga: Lips Painted Red*, installation view Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway, 2013

Fig 28 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana/Objeto. Estructura. Informe Antropométrico (Perfil Fisiológico)*, 1980

1980–81 Produces *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana* in collaboration with Marie-France Cathelat, an interdisciplinary research project in which Burga and Cathelat surveyed middle-class Peruvian women between the ages of 25 and 29. Their survey compiled detailed demographic data about various aspects of women's social and physical identities, including height, weight, religion, political affiliations, and other categories.

1981 The findings from *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana* are presented in an exhibition format at Banco Continental, Lima, Peru and at the *First Colloquium of Nonobject Art and Urban Art* in Medellín, Colombia. A book is published on the occasion of the work's presentation: *Perfil de la mujer peruana, 1980–1981* (Lima: Investigaciones Sociales Artísticas, 1981).

2007 After decades of neglect by the art world, two Peruvian curators, Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona, begin to unearth works from Burga's personal archive.

*The failure of her work to comply with the local tastes in art during her time and the silence that surrounded her work for years as a consequence of that mismatch are telling in that they suggest 'history' as artificially organized memory. The neglect of the production of so many women artists who, like Burga, have earned a certain degree of recognition very late in their lives is a constituent part of the construction of asymmetrical power relations in the social and cultural sphere.<sup>8</sup>*

2007 Never before exhibited early work by Burga is included in two group exhibitions in Lima: *La persistencia de lo efímero. Orígenes del no-objetualismo peruano: ambientaciones / happenings / arte conceptual (1965–1975)* at the Centro Cultural de España and *Arte Nuevo y el fulgor de la vanguardia. Arte, experimentación visual y transformación cultural* at Sala Luis Miró Quesada Garland and Sala Luis Porras Barrenechea.

2010 Burga's first solo exhibition in decades, *Teresa Burga. Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10*, is held at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, Peru.

2011 Burga's work is included in the 12th Istanbul Biennial (Untitled), curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffman.

2011 *Teresa Burga. Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10* travels to the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany, under the title *Die Chronologie der Teresa Burga: Berichte, Diagramme, Intervalle/29.9.11*.

2012 Begins to make drawings using felt-tip markers, in some cases, replicating children's drawings borrowed from friends and family.

2013 Burga is included in the 12th Kleinplastik Triennial in Fellbach, Germany.

- 2014 Included in the group exhibition *artevida: política y artevida: corpo* at Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- 2014 The conceptual installation *Estructuras de aire* (*Structures of Air*) (1978) is realized physically for the first time for the exhibition *Fleeting Imaginaries*, CIFO Art Space, Miami, FL.
- 2014 *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana* (1980–1981), curated by Tatiana Cuevas, is shown at the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City, Mexico.
- 2015 Included in the 56th Venice Biennale, *All The World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor.
- 2015 Solo exhibition *Teresa Burga. Estructuras de aire*, curated by Miguel A. López and Agustín Pérez Rubio, is held at Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina.
- 2015 Included in *The World Goes Pop*, group exhibition at Tate Modern, London.
- 2017 The Sculpture Center in New York, NY presents the solo exhibition *Mano Mal Dibujada*, curated by Ruba Katrib.
- 2017 Burga is represented in various group exhibitions, including *Memories of Underdevelopment*, Museo Jumex, Mexico City, Mexico and *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA.
- 2018 Group exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* travels to the Brooklyn Museum, New York and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil.
- 2018 The Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich, Switzerland and Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover, Germany present the solo exhibition *Aleatory Structures*.

#### Notes

- 1 Teresa Burga, *[Biografía]*, 1967 in *Teresa Burga: Structures of Air* (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2015), 8.
- 2 Teresa Burga, *[Biografía]*, 1967 in *Teresa Burga: Structures of Air* (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2015), 8.
- 3 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 57.
- 4 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 55.
- 5 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 60.
- 6 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 58.
- 7 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 55.
- 8 Miguel A. López, *Teresa Burga: Structures of Air* (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2015), 39.



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Fig 29 *Teresa Burga: Profile of the Peruvian Woman (1980-1981)*, installation view, Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City, Mexico, 2014

Fig 30 *Teresa Burga: Mano Mal Dibujada*, installation view, SculptureCenter, New York, 2017



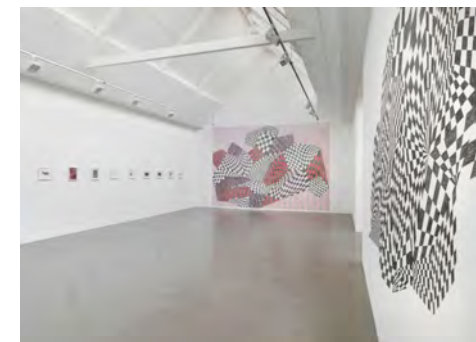
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Fig 31 *Teresa Burga: Aleatory Structures*, installation view at Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, 2018

Fig 32 *All the World's Futures*, installation view, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 2015

Fig 33 *Mano mal dibujada*, 2015

Fig 34 *Teresa Burga: Insomnia*, installation view, Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, 2018

Fig 35 *10 / Febrero / 2019*, 2019, from the series *Niñas Peruanas Cusqueñas*

Teresa Burga, 2019



## Teresa Burga

A pioneering figure in Latin American Conceptualism, since the 1960s Teresa Burga has made works that encompass drawing, painting, sculpture, and conceptual structures that support the display of analytical data and experimental methodologies.

Born in Iquitos, Peru in 1935, Teresa Burga studied at the School of Art Catholic University of Peru in Lima and contributed significantly to the Peruvian avant-garde art scene at the time. In 1966, along with other forward-thinking artists in Lima, Burga formed part of the Arte Nuevo group, a collective of artists interested in advancing genres of Pop, Minimalism, Op Art, and happenings in Peru. Notably, the group only included two women artists—Burga and Gloria Gómez-Sánchez—indicative of the social barriers for women in the country in that moment, a subject that would influence Burga’s practice for decades. Prompted by a Fulbright scholarship, in 1968 Burga traveled to the United States and for two years studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. During this time of formal experimentation, Burga made works that questioned traditional artistic authorship, instead prioritizing conceptual prompts. Meant to be produced and replicated by anyone via highly-detailed schematic diagrams, her boldly-saturated *Prismas* sculptures, for example, embody both Pop and commercial aesthetics with colorful geometric forms. In other works, like *Pictures with a Limited Time* (1970) and *Work That Disappears When the Spectator Tries to Approach It* (1970), Burga invented immersive situations where spectators must activate the environment through the use of their own bodies.

In 1971, Burga returned to an authoritarian Peru, under the military rule of Juan Velasco Alvarado and his reformist government. Facing a repressive regime which did not favor Conceptual art, Burga pursued a career in Peru’s General Customs Office, where she would remain an official for three decades, designing solutions to enhance administrative efficiency in digital information systems. Throughout this time, Burga continued to make work that reflected the socio-political realities of the country: in particular, how standardized, regulated, and bureaucratic systems function as apparatuses for control and oppression—most saliently for women. *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe, 9.6.1972* (1972), for example, consists of a thorough portrait of Burga’s own body illustrated through medical reports, an audio simulation of her heartbeat, photographs, and various diagrams outlining biological data. Following a similar conceptual vein, in 1980 Burga developed *Perfil de la muter Peruana (Profile of the Peruvian Woman)*, (1980–81), an ambitious large-scale research project and installation. For the project, in collaboration with sociologist Marie-France Cathelat, Burga interviewed 290 women in Lima and recorded statistical data about their height, weight, religious identities, and political affiliations, among other categories, and displayed the findings using conceptual visual representations like a mannequin, a jigsaw puzzle, and various drawings.

In recent drawing series, Burga affirms her commitment to the destabilization of ubiquitous and singular authorship by appropriating subject matter from newspaper clippings and children’s drawings. As she explains, “I want to escape from the artist’s taste and from subjective self-abstraction, because the worst thing an artist can do is to be self-complacent and please the public. I’ve always believed that.”

Teresa Burga’s work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including *Aleatory Structures* at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover, Germany (2019); and Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland (2018); *Teresa Burga: An Artist or a Computer?*, at the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent, Belgium (2018); *Mano Mal Dibujada*, Sculpture Center, New York, NY (2017); *Estructuras de aire*, MALBA, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2015); *Die Chronologie der Teresa Burga. Berichte, Diagramme, Intervalle. 29.9.11*, Württembergischen Kunstvereins Stuttgart, Germany (2011); *Teresa Burga. Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10.*, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, Peru (2010); and *Cuatro Mensajes*, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA), Lima, Peru (1974). She has also participated in many group shows, including *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2017), which traveled to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY (2018) and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil (2018); *Memories of Underdevelopment: Art and the Decolonial Turn in Latin America*, Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2018) and Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA (2018); *A Kingdom of Hours*, Gasworks, London, UK (2016); the 56th Venice Biennale, *All the World’s Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor (2015); *The New Contemporary*, Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2015); *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London, UK (2015); and the 12th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2011).

Burga’s work is featured in many private and public collections, including the Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland; Pinault Collection, Venice, Italy; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA), Antwerp, Belgium; Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), Lima, Peru; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Collection Hochschild, Lima, Peru; Sammlung Verbund Collection, Vienna, Austria; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna, Austria; among others.



### Exhibition Checklist

*Untitled (Acqua Alta VI)*, 2019  
Mixed media on paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*Untitled (Narizones)*, 2019  
Mixed media on collaged paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*Untitled (Acqua Alta II)*, 2019  
Mixed media on collaged paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*Serie Niñas Peruanas Cusqueñas. 23 / Marzo / 2019*, 2019  
Mixed media on paper  
8.31h x 11.69w in (21.1h x 29.7w cm)

*Serie Niñas Peruanas Cusqueñas. 11 / Marzo / 2019*, 2019  
Mixed media on paper  
8.31h x 11.69w in (21.1h x 29.7w cm)

*Serie Niñas Peruanas Cusqueñas. 10 / Febrero / 2019*, 2019  
Mixed media on paper  
11.69h x 8.31w in (29.7h x 21.1w cm)

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Manual de instalación de avioneta*, 1974  
Pen on paper  
13.03h x 8.58w in (33.1h x 21.8w cm)

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara*, 1974  
Pen on paper  
11.02h x 8.46w in (28h x 21.5w cm)

*Juguete Inútil. Viernes (20 Octubre 1972)*, 1972  
Pen on paper  
8.27h x 12.8w in (21h x 32.5w cm)

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Florero*, 1974  
Pen on paper  
12.95h x 8.46w in (32.9h x 21.5w cm)

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Florero*, 1974/2019  
Welded steel  
71.63h x 48.5w x 25.38d in (181.93h x 123.19w x 64.45d cm)  
Edition of 3 (1/3)

*Serie Máquinas Inútiles. Lámpara*, 1974/2019  
Welded steel  
72.25h x 21.13w x 22d in (183.51h x 53.66w x 55.88d cm)  
Edition of 3 (1/3)

*Insomnia Drawing (8)*, 1981  
Black and red pen on paper  
11.63h x 8.13w in (29.53h x 20.64w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (9)*, 1981  
Pen on paper  
3.5h x 6.13w in (8.89h x 15.56w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (42)*, 2001  
Black, red, and blue pen on paper  
4.38h x 4.38w in (11.11h x 11.11w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (13)*, 1989  
Pen on paper  
8.63h x 6.5w in (21.91h x 16.51w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (44)*, 2001  
Black, red, and blue pen on found paper  
5.75h x 8.13w in (14.61h x 20.64w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (23)*, 1990  
Black and red pen on paper  
8.38h x 6.5w in (21.27h x 16.51w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (10)*, 1989  
Pen on found paper  
3.5h x 6.63w in (8.89h x 16.83w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (14)*, 1990  
Black and red pen on paper  
8.38h x 6.5w in (21.27h x 16.51w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (5)*, 1978  
Felt-tip pen and pencil on paper  
8.38h x 11w in (21.27h x 27.94w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (41)*, 2001  
Black and red pen on paper  
4h x 5.25w in (10.16h x 13.34w cm)

*Insomnia Drawing (10)*, 1989/2019  
Graphite and colored pencil on wall  
Dimensions variable

## Other Illustrated Works

*Autorretrato (left, right), 1972/2006*, detail  
Wood, acrylic, scale paper, screw, offset screw,  
b/w photograph, plastic foil, tape  
26.5h x 39.64w x 3.03d in (67.5h x 100.7w x  
7.7d cm)  
Collection Sammlung Migros Museum für  
Gegenwartskunst

Untitled, 1967  
Acrylic, paper and canvas on plywood  
36.6h x 56.2w in (93h x 143w cm)  
Collection Art Institute of Chicago

*Work That Disappears When The Spectator  
Tries to Approach It, 1970/2017*  
Sensors, 400 light bulbs  
86.6h x 86.6w in (220h x 220w cm)

*Borges, 1974-2017*  
51 drawings, musical score and sound  
installation  
Dimensions variable

*Untitled (Acqua Alta I), 2019*  
Mixed media on collaged paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*Untitled (Acqua Alta IV), 2019*  
Mixed media on paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*Untitled (Acqua Alta V), 2019*  
Mixed media on collaged paper  
16.5h x 11.5w in (41.91h x 29.21w cm)

*07 / Marzo / 2019, 2019*  
Mixed media on paper  
11.69h x 8.31w in (29.7h x 21.1w cm)

*05 / Abril / 2019, 2019*  
Mixed media on paper  
11.69h x 8.31w in (29.7h x 21.1w cm)

Untitled, 1966  
Mixed media on plywood  
72.6h x 48.2w inches (184.5h x 122.5w cm)  
Collection Museo de Arte de Lima

*Composición*, undated (ca. 1960s)  
Collage  
12.9h x 15.9w in (33h x 40.5w cm)

*Silencio*, 1966  
Mixed Media, collage and acrylic on Masonite  
48.23h x 36w x 2.36d in (122.5h x 91.5w x  
6d cm)

*Sin Titulo/Untitled, 1967*  
Plywood, cotton, foam, wood, metal  
2 parts: 1 part 31.5h x 42.52w x 81.9d in (80h  
x 108w x 208d cm); 1 part 150.8h x 110.24w in  
(383h x 280w cm)  
Pinault collection

*Untitled / Prismas (J), 1968/2013*  
Set of 7 objects; painted plywood  
Dimensions variable

*La Ventana, 1967*  
Mixed media, collage and acrylic on Masonite  
55.2h x 60.43w x 2.36d in (140h x 153.5w x  
6d cm)

*Imágenes III (Calculadora), 1967*  
Linocut on paper  
33.66h x 24w x 1.18d in (85.5h x 61w x 3d cm)

*Collage as a sketch for Autorretrato. Estructura.  
Informe. 9.6.72, 1972*  
Ink and photograph on paper  
8.27h x 11.42w in (21h x 29w cm)

*Untitled (Heartbeat Recording And Light), 1970*  
Ballpoint pen on paper  
11.26h x 17w in (28.6h x 43.2w cm)

Untitled, 1978  
Ink on paper  
6.57h x 8.66w in (16.7h x 22w cm)  
Courtesy of Sammlung Verbund, Vienna

*Perfil del la Mujer Peruana – Propuesta II (Perfil  
Social), 1981/2017*  
Stainless steel, wood, acrylic in 2 parts  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Barbara Thumm,  
Berlin and Galería 80 m2, Lima

*Perfil de la Mujer Peruana – Propuesta II (Perfil  
Profesional), 1981/2017*  
Wood, knotted strings  
79.25h x 78.94w x 29.41d in (201.3h x 200.5w x  
74.7d cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Barbara Thumm,  
Berlin and Galería 80 m2, Lima

*Perfil de la Mujer Peruana – (Uterus), 2017*  
Ceramics  
11.81h x 25.59w x 5.12d in (30h x 65w x 13d cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Barbara Thumm,  
Berlin and Galería 80 m2, Lima

*Perfil de la Mujer Peruana/Objeto. Estructura.  
Informe Antropométrico (Perfil Fisiológico I),  
1980*  
Glass cube, mannequin  
74.8h x 39.37w x 39.37d in (190h x 100w x  
100d cm)  
Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Barbara Thumm,  
Berlin and Galería 80 m2, Lima

Untitled, 1967  
Acrylic, paper and canvas on plywood  
72.44h x 27.56w in (184h x 70w cm)  
Installation view, Sculpture Center,  
New York, 2017

*Mano mal dibujada # 1, 2012–2015*  
Steel and nail varnish  
approx. 16.54h x 14.17w x 3.35d in (42h x 36w  
x 8.5d cm)  
Edition of 2 + 1 AP

Published by Alexander Gray Associates on the occasion of the exhibition

**Teresa Burga**

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Cover image: *Insomnia Drawing (8)*, 1981, detail, black and red pen on paper, 11.63h x 8.13w in (29.53h x 20.64w cm)

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p. 10 (top): Louise Bourgeois, *The Insomnia Drawings*, 1994–1995 (detail), one of 220, mixed media, works on paper of varying dimensions. Photo: Christopher Burke. © The Easton Foundation / VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

pp. 6 (bottom), 87 (fig 34): Jens Ziehe

Chronology images: courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.

pp. 84 (fig 22, 28, 23), 87 (fig 31): Stefan Altenburger

p. 84 (fig 26): Hans D. Christ

p. 84 (fig 27): Anders Solberg

p. 87 (fig 29): Agustín Estrada

p. 87 (fig 30): Kyle Knodell

p. 87 (fig 32): Nici Wegener

p. 89: Ross Collab

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