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Modernism Contested: Gego's Grids and the Aesthetics of Temporality

Victoria L. Fedrigotti
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Modernism Contested: 
Gego’s Grids and the Aesthetics of Temporality

By

Victoria L. Fedrigotti

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of the requirements for the degree of
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# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ........................................................................................................ III

**List of Illustrations** ........................................................................................................ V

**Epigraph** ........................................................................................................................ IX

**Introduction** ..................................................................................................................... 1

  **The Artist, Her Historiography, and Her Oeuvre** ......................................................... 3

  **The Modernist Grid and Modernism’s Chronological Schema** ............................... 13

**Chapter I**
**Gego’s Oeuvre Through The Lens of Its Relationship to the Grid** ......................... 19

**Chapter II**
**Reticulárea, the Collapse of the Grid, and Gego’s Artistic Genealogies:**  
**A appropriations and deconstructions** ........................................................................ 29

**Chapter III**
**The Aesthetics of Temporality** ..................................................................................... 44

**Conclusion** ..................................................................................................................... 58

**Bibliography** .................................................................................................................. 60

**Illustrations** ................................................................................................................... 64
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

All works are by Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt) unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 1. *Reticulárea (ambientación)* (*Reticulárea, environmental work*), 1969, mixed media, 17’ 8” by 11’ 5”, Museo de Bellas Artes (Museum of Fine Arts), Caracas.

Figure 2. *Reticulárea, environmental work*, 1969, mixed media, dimensions variable, Center for Inter-American Relations Art Gallery (now: Americas Society), New York, 1969.

Figure 3. *Reticulárea, environmental work*, 1969, mixed media, dimensions variable, Galería de Arte Nacional (National Art Gallery), Caracas, 1997.

Figure 4. Pietro Perugino, *Christ Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to Saint Peter*, ca. 1481-1483, fresco, 130 by 220 in. (330 x 550 cm), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

Figure 5. *Sin título* (*Untitled*), 1953, xylograph on paper, 4 1/2 by 6 1/8 in. (11.6 x 16.1 cm)

Figure 6. *Tres mujeres en banco* (*Three Women on a Bench*), 1954, watercolor on cardboard, 10 7/8 by 13 3/4 in. (27.6 x 34.8 cm)

Figure 7. *Sin título* (*Untitled*), 1959, ink on paper, 11 by 8 1/2 in. (27.9 x 21.5 cm)

Figure 8. *Ocho Cuadrados* (*Eight Squares*), 1961, painted iron, 66 by 25 by 15 ¾, in. (170 x 64 x 40 cm)

Figure 9. *Movimiento dinámico* (*Dynamic Movement*), 1960, etching on paper, sheet: 15 by 11 1/4 in., image: 10 by 8 3/4 in. (sheet: 38 x 28.5 cm), (image: 25.2 x 22.3 cm)

Figure 10. *Sin título* (*Untitled*), 1966, lithograph on paper, 18 5/8 by 10 7/16 in. (47.3 x 26.5 cm)

Figure 11. *Carta* (*Letter*), 1973, etching and lithograph on paper, sheet: 30 by 22 in., image: 13 3/4 by 11 5/16 in. (sheet: 76 x 56 cm) (image: 35 x 28.7 cm)

Figure 12. *Conjunto de Líneas paralelas* (*Ensemble of Parallel Lines*), 1969-1970, stainless steel on acrylic base, dimensions variable

Figure 13. *Chorro N° 7* (*Stream N° 7*), 1971, iron and aluminum rods, 69 by 16 1/2 by 10 1/2 in. (175 x 42 x 27 cm)

Figure 14. *Boceto para Reticulárea* (*model for Reticulárea*), ca. 1980, stainless steel and galvanized iron wires, 13 by 9 1/2 by 4 1/2 in. (33 x 24 x 11.4 cm)
Figure 15. *Reticulárea Cuadrada N° 2 (Square Reticulárea N° 2)*, 1971, steel wire and plastic, 50 by 42 by 6 3/4 in. (127 x 107 x 17 cm)

Figure 16. *Reticulárea Cuadrada N° 5 (Square Reticulárea N° 5)*, 1971, stainless steel wire and metal rods, 38 1/4 by 38 1/4 by 25 5/8 in. (97 x 97 x 85 cm)

Figure 17. *Tronco No. 4 (Trunk No. 4)*, 1976, stainless steel and lead, 84 5/8 by 22 1/16 by 22 13/16 in. (215 x 56 x 58 cm)

Figure 18. *Esfera No. 2 (Sphere No. 2)*, 1976, stainless steel rods, 40 1/2 in. (103 cm)

Figure 19. *Dibujo sin papel (Drawing Without Paper)*, 1985, metal, wire and thread, 36 by 34 by 2 in. (91.4 x 86.4 x 5 cm)

Figure 20. *Dibujo sin papel (Drawing Without Paper)*, 1985, galvanized iron mesh, 24 3/4 by 20 7/8 by 2 3/4 in. (63 x 53 x 7 cm)

Figure 21. *Bichito 88/42 (Little Beast 88/42)*, 1988, mixed media, 2 1/8 by 3 3/4 in. (5.5 x 9.5 cm)

Figure 22. *Bichito 89/29 (Little Beast 89/29)*, 1989, mixed media, 3 1/8 by 4 3/4 in. (8 x 12 cm)

Figure 23. *Tejedura 91/3 (Weaving 91/3)*, 1991, construction paper and metallic ribbon, 11 5/8 by 11 in. (29.6 x 28 cm)

Figure 24. *Tejedura 91/16 (Weaving 91/16)*, 1991, printed paper, 8 1/4 by 6 1/8 in. (21 x 15.5 cm)

Figure 25. *Esfera (Sphere)*, 1959, painted welded brass and steel, diameter: 22 in. (55.7 cm)

Figure 26. Alejandro Otero, *Coloritmo 39 (Colorrhythm 39)*, 1959, ducotone on wood, 78 3/4 by 20 7/8 in. (200 x 53 cm)

Figure 27. *Cuatro planos rojos (Four Red Planes)*, 1967, soldered and painted iron, 32 7/8 by 33 7/16 by 31 7/8 in. (83.5 x 85 x 81 cm)

Figure 28. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Fisicromía No. 42 (Physichromie No. 42)*, 1961, hardboard and cardboard, 12 1/4 by 12 1/4 in. (31 by 31 cm)

Figure 29. Jesús Rafael Soto, *Vibración (Vibration)*, 1965, metal and oil on wood, 62 1/4 by 42 1/4 by 5 7/8 in. (158.1 x 107.3 x 14.9 cm)
Figure 30. *Esfera en cubo (Sphere within a Cube)*, 1967, welded and painted iron rods, 39 3/4 by 70 7/8 by 40 1/2 in. (101 x 180 x 103 cm)

Figure 31. Alejandro Otero, *Abra Solar* 1976, iron and aluminum, Plaza Venezuela, Caracas.

Figure 32. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Doble Fisicromía (Double Physichromie)*, 1982, anodized aluminum, Plaza Venezuela, Caracas.

Figure 33. Jesús Rafael Soto, *Penetrable Pampatar (Pampatar Penetrable)*, 1971 (no longer in existence) white nylon tubing, variable sizes.

Figure 34. *Dibujo sin papel 83/17 (Drawing Without Paper 83/17)*, 1983, iron, 13 1/8 by 14 by 6 1/8 in. (33.4 x 35.8 x 15.5 cm)

Figure 35. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1954, tempera and ink on cardboard, 11 11/16 by 16 5/16 in. (29.7 x 41.5 cm)

Figure 36. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1954, watercolor and ink on cardboard, 11 3/4 by 16 5/16 in. (29.8 x 41.5 cm)

Figure 37. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1973-1988, etching on paper, 25 13/16 by 19 3/4 in. (65.6 x 50.1 cm)

Figure 38. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1961, cardboard box and string, 19 7/16 by 7 1/4 in. (24 x 18.4 x 1.8 cm)

Figure 39. *Cuerdas (Ropes)*, 1972, ropes of nylon, aluminum, and copper, 55 3/5 by 65 1/2 ft. (17 x 20 m), Parque Central (Central Park), Caracas.

Figure 40. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1962, ink on paper, 8 5/16 by 10 11/16 in. (21.1 x 27.2 cm)

Figure 41. Façade of INCE Mural (Instituto Nacional de Educación y Capacitación, or, National Institute of Education and Training), 1969, aluminum tubes, INCE Building, Caracas.

Figure 42. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1963, cardboard, wire, and glue, 11 1/16 by 8 9/16 in. (28.1 x 21.8 cm)

Figure 43. *Dibujo sin papel 85/2 (Drawing Without Paper 85/2)*, 1985, copper wires covered with plastic, 15 1/8 by 19 11/16 by 2 1/8 in. (38.5 x 50 x 5.5 cm)

Figure 44. *Bichito 88/42 (Little Beast 88/42)*, 1988, mixed media, 2 1/8 by 3 3/4 in. (5.5 x 9.5 cm)
Figure 45. *Bichito 91/12 (Little Beast 91/12)*, 1991, aluminum, paper, iron, wire, and ribbon, 57 7/8 by 2 3/4 by 2 3/4 in. (147 x 7 x 7 cm)

Figure 46. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1970, ink on paper, 24 3/4 by 19 3/16 in. (62.9 by 48.7 cm)

Figure 47. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1981, serigraph on paper, 18 5/16 by 16 1/4 in. (46.5 x 41.2 cm)

Figure 48. *Tejedura 88/24 (Weaving 88/24)*, 1988, cardboard, acetate and ink, 6 1/2 by 3 1/4 by 7/8 in. (16.6 x 8.3 x 2.2 cm)

Figure 49. *Tejedura 88/20 (Tejedura 88/20)*, 1988, paper and plasticized ribbon, 5 13/16 by 12 3/16 in. (14.8 x 12.8 cm)

Figure 50. *Tejedura 90/20 (Weaving 90/20)*, 1990, paper and cardboard, 8 1/2 by 8 in. (21.7 x 20.3 cm)

Figure 51. *Tejedura 90/52 (Tejedura 90/52)*, 1990, printed paper and cardboard, 7 7/8 by 7 5/16 in. (20 x 18.6 cm)

Figure 52. Image of bottle of “Dinastia” rum.

Figure 53. *Tejedura 91/37 (Weaving 91/37)*, 1991, paper and construction paper, 8 by 11 1/8 in. (21 by 28.3 cm)

Figure 54. *Tejedura 91/32 (Weaving 91/32)*, 1991, paper, 22 by 28 in. (55.9 x 71.1 cm)

Figure 55. *Solgio*, 1951, graphite on cardboard, 8 5/16 by 11 1/8 in. (21.1 x 28.2 cm)
Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.

INTRODUCTION

Venezuelan artist Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt, 1912-1994) is hailed by scholars as being one of Latin America’s most innovative artists, yet at the same time she is considered one whose work has come to reside in an interstitial space in between the modernist tradition and contemporary practices that unravel this very tie to art historical modernism.¹ In the words of Iris Peruga, Gego’s oeuvre is considered both “a challenge to the traditions of 20th century art as well as an idiosyncratic extension of this tradition’s paradigms.”²

Taking Peruga’s claim as a critical point of departure, this thesis explores Gego’s dialogue with modernism, one in which I see the artist contesting its primary tenets. To this end, I examine two principal aspects of her practice. The first, is the artist’s contradictory relationship to modernism’s grand orthogonal matrix—the grid—most visible in the collapse of this form from within her monumental Reticulárea (ambientación) (Reticulárea, environmental work) of 1969, a large-scale installation work comprised of various types of amalgamated metals which bend and fold in space, forming clusters, nets, and meshes (Figs. 1-3). The second, is Gego’s precarious relationship to her own art historical genealogy of three central modernist movements: Constructivism, Geometric Abstraction, and Kineticism. Gego subtly synthesized and

¹ The term “interstitial” was first used to describe Gego’s work by Julieta Gonzalez in her essay entitled, “Gego: Caracas 2000,” in Gego 1957-1988: Thinking the Line (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 83.
appropriated certain formal properties from this modernist lineage, only to subsequently abandon and deconstruct them from within *Reticulárea’s* collapsed space.

By coupling an in-depth formal analysis of key works within Gego’s oeuvre as seen through the lens of their relationship to the grid with first-hand statements made by the artist on the formulation of her practice, I demonstrate the two acutely nonlinear trajectories traversed by both her relationship to the modernist grid as well as her relationship to her modernist genealogy. These nonlinear developments, I argue, shed light on the anti-conventional brand of temporal aesthetics that Gego’s work brings forth: an aestheticized conception of time marked by deconstructions, displacements, and discontinuities; subversions, inversions, and—most curious of all—return.

I contend that Gego makes manifest a form of temporality marked by a certain precariousness—an aesthetic conception of time that resists, upsets, diffracts, and subverts a traditionally modernist assumption of a stable, linear progression through the passage of time. Her brand of an aesthetic of temporality rests in the interstitial space between a traditionally modernist art historical lineage rooted in a genealogical past, and a highly subjective form of contemporaneity rooted and grounded in the subjective present.
THE ARTIST, HER HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND HER OEUVRE

Gego was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1912. She graduated with a degree in architecture and engineering in 1938 from the Technische Hochsule Stuttgart (Stuttgart Technical School), where she received a foundational education in Russian and Bauhaus Constructivism, studying under Paul Bonatz. In the late 1930s, Gego’s family came under Nazi persecution, and was forced to leave the country under threat of deportation and death. In 1939, at the age of twenty-seven, Gego emigrated to Venezuela, the country where she would spend the remainder of her life.

The name “Gego,” abbreviated from Gertrud Louise Goldschmidt, is derived from the first two letters of the artist’s first name and the last two letters of her last name. Throughout her life, Gego never confessed the story behind this name’s origin; it was only revealed in the years following her death. The name stemmed from a word game Gego used to play with her sister, Hanna, in their childhood, in which the two sisters abbreviated each other’s names as nicknames. In this way, the name that for so many years was imagined to be a deliberate and consciously concocted artistic pseudonym, was in fact born from something as simply innocent as a game played in childhood. Nonetheless, as elusive as these four short letters stand, this creative act of abbreviating her name reveals a gesture of opting to live outside the realm of convention and delineated norms—elements that are highly reflective of her aesthetic as well.

3 The Technische Hochsule Stuttgart (Stuttgart Technical School) is today known as the Universität Stuttgart (Stuttgart University).
In the historiography of literature on Gego, the vast majority of sources center on her use of the line as the principal aspect of her practice. This approach is present in the earliest sources on Gego, Mari Carmen Ramírez and Theresa Papnikolas’ *Questioning the Line: Gego in Context* (2003) and Nadja Rottner and Peter Weibel’s *Gego 1957-1988: Thinking the Line* (2006), up to the latest sources published on the artist, Eva-Marina Froitzheim, Brigitte Kölle, Lisa Le Feuvre, and Petra Roettig’s *Gego: Line as Object* (2013) and the latest exhibition, held at the Dominique Lévy Gallery in New York City from September 10th to October 24th, 2015.5

In two early sources—*Questioning the Line* and *Gego: Obra completa, 1995-1990* (both from 2003)—the scholars’ principal investigations center on the primacy of the line as a formal property in Gego’s practice.6 In *Questioning the Line*, Ramírez states that “at the core of Gego’s unique approach to art-making [lies] an original conception of the function of the line.”7 In *Obra completa*, Peruga writes that “Gego created artwork founded on the use of a single, primary and basic element: [the] line.”8 In the same source, Josefina Nuñez makes the claim that “Gego’s line…is the point where Gego’s

7 Ramírez, “Reading Gego Between the Line,” in *Questioning the Line*, 23.
uniqueness, singularity and absolute naturalness are most strongly revealed.”9 Both of these early sources thus establish the line as the core of the artist’s practice.

Subsequent studies retain this focus on the line, and speak to the continuity of Gego’s commitment to this formal element throughout the trajectory of her career. In the latest source to date on the artist, Line as Object, scholar Brigitte Kölle makes the claim that the line was the single formal element that would “occup[y] the artist throughout her lifetime,” adding that the line was “[the] major element that would characterize [Gego’s] work as nothing else would.”10 Even the recent Dominque Lévy Gallery exhibition, “Gego: Autobiography of a Line,” has a title that fuses the artist’s self, her practice, and the line. This gesture stands testament to the inextricable conflation between Gego and the line that is consistently upheld in the scholarship on the artist.

Certainly Gego’s relationship to the line is one that is fundamental to her practice, and her exploration of it in its many variances has led to a nuanced understanding of her oeuvre’s works in both two and three dimensions. Nonetheless, despite the weight given to Gego’s relationship to the line, it is my view that this approach is deficient, not only because it presents a reductive view of Gego’s body of work, but also because it limits the understanding of what is a highly variable and richly creative practice. Instead, through this thesis, I add to the current scholarship by proposing an alternative approach to the artist’s oeuvre, one carried out through an examination of the artist’s curious and multi-faceted relationship to the grid. It is my view that engaging with Gego’s relationship to the grid—modernism’s grand orthogonal matrix, and the heralded form of

modernist abstraction—extracts Gego’s oeuvre from a solitary practice, and posits her within the larger framework of modernist art history, as much as her practice reveals itself to contest modernism at the same time. Considering Gego as an artist who works with and within the grid’s form recasts her as part of a larger, global, art historical framework, and removes her from the feminine, solitary and even isolated practice of inscription of simply working with the autobiographical line.

Through an analysis of Gego’s relationship to the modernist grid, I will position her within a modernist art historical framework. This approach counters the present scholarship’s more passive treatment of her relationship to modernism. Luis Pérez-Oramas, for example, has referred to Gego as being positioned “in the sidelines of…moderni[sm],” and as having “manipulate[ed]…moderni[sm] in a minor key.” Instead, this study aims to place the artist in a position of greater agency, taking her off the sidelines and positioning her at the center of a dialogue with modernist art history, a dialogue in which she challenges not only her modernist genealogy and the modernist grid, but also the modernist notion of temporality as well.

To date, there is yet to be a scholarly study that focuses either singly or comprehensively on the artist’s relationship to the grid. The grid has indeed been mentioned in the literature on Gego; however, discussions on this topic remain insufficient for two principal reasons. The first deficiency pertains to language, that is, the words scholars have used to describe Gego’s use of the grid have created a repetitive

discourse that is employed in only a very general sense. Dating from the earlier sources on Gego, the word choices that are consistently repeated are those of her “distorting” and “breaking” the grid’s form. These two words have been repeated throughout the literature. For instance, in her 2003 essay in *Questioning the Line*, Ramírez writes, in a very general sense, that Gego’s “later work ‘distorts’ the grid.”12 Peruga tentatively approaches Gego’s relationship to the grid stating that, in her later works, “Gego (almost) breaks with the grid.”13 In both instances, the authors’ passivity of discourse is remarkable; both Ramírez’s syntactical use of quotes around the word “distorts” and Peruga’s use of parentheses around the word “almost,” evince a tentative engagement with Gego’s relationship to the grid.

The second deficiency in the scholarship on Gego’s use of the grid is the lack of any systematic examination of her relationship to this orthogonal form throughout the trajectory of her oeuvre. Instead, this examination is limited to only three of the artist’s series: her *Reticuláreas* from 1969-1982, as well as her *Reticuláreas cuadradas*, or *Square Reticuláreas* created throughout the 1970s; her *Dibujos sin papel* (*Drawings Without Paper*), dating from 1976 and onwards; and her *Tejeduras* (*Weavings*) produced from 1988 until her death in 1994.

The more recent literature on Gego’s relationship to the grid, while still brief and limited in scope, does in fact tackle the issue more directly and through more explicit and activated language. In his examination of *Reticulárea*, Yve-Alain Bois, for instance,

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12 Ramírez, “Reading Gego Between the Line,” in *Questioning the Line*, 29.
references the ways in which Gego “deconstruct[s] the grid.”  

14 Julieta González, in turn, writes that “Reticulárea stages an implosion of the grid.”  

15 Regarding Gego’s Dibujos sin papel, Juan Ledezma mentions Gego’s “derangement of the grid’s orthogonal pattern.”  

16 Lastly, discussions of the Tejeduras chiefly reference the orthogonal in reference to Gego’s approach to weaving.  

Nonetheless, this examination of Gego’s relationship to the grid is mainly relegated to only these three series—out of a total of nine—a disservice to the artist’s practice, for her engagement with the grid throughout her oeuvre is as equally valuable as that of her engagement with the line. A detailed and systematic formal analysis of Gego’s employment of the grid throughout the entire trajectory of her career sheds light on the rich subtleties and variances that exist in the artist’s engagement with this modernist form. Furthermore, undertaking this analysis in a serial manner, that is, following Gego’s engagement with the grid through the nine series in her work, correlates with Gego’s own very well-known practice of documenting her oeuvre by series.  

The course of Gego’s body of work is somewhat elusive and difficult to categorize in any systematic manner. The words scholars have used to describe the artist’s body of works have ranged from “anti-conventional,” to “independent of fashions

14 Yve-Alain Bois, “From the Spider’s Web,” in Defying Structures, 48.  
and styles,” to “varied, heterogeneous and in a way, random.” As Ramírez writes, “as elusive as [Gego’s] oeuvre is, it is so difficult to apprehend and impossible to pigeonhole in specific genres, trends, or movements.” João Fernandes and Manuel J. Borja-Villel add that Gego’s work, “is one that defies aesthetic and ideological unidimensionality.” In an interview with Maria Fernanda Palacios in 1972, Gego herself admitted: “I can no longer define my own work. Perhaps in the future, other people will be able to place it, but I have neither definition nor concept for what I am doing.”

The non-programmatic, non-defined, and variegated nature of Gego’s work has led scholars to attempt to impose a systematic trajectory onto her oeuvre. Following a brief overview of the three most prominent ways that Gego’s oeuvre has been categorized, I aim to underscore the existing deficiencies of these methods. I then propose an alternative model of approaching Gego’s oeuvre, which I hope will add to the current scholarship in four distinct ways: first, by analyzing the artist’s trajectory in a manner that honors her own commitment to the non-chronological nature of seriality; second, by focusing on Gego’s relationship to the grid, one riddled with artistic gestures that reverse and contest any notion of linear temporality; third, by using the grid to understand her position within the larger framework of modernist art history, revealing her own unique contestation of modernism; and lastly, by bringing to light an engagement with

temporality that challenges the Greenbergian, modernist, linear and teleological version of temporality.

Peruga, one of the earliest of Gego scholars to attempt to categorize the artist’s work, openly admits to the deficiencies of her attempt from the outset: “as difficult as it is to classify Gego’s work…our classification of these works—necessary only to provide this text with a structure—will therefore be extremely broad and flexible, relying mainly on dates of production… consequently, the categories we propose are utterly provisional.”\(^{22}\) Her scanty categorization divides Gego’s oeuvre into four very general and very broad “phases:” the first dates from 1957 to 1971 and is categorized by Gego’s use of parallel lines; the second dates from 1969 to 1971 and is marked by Gego’s use of nets and meshes; the third dates from 1976 until the end of her life, and is comprised of small hanging pieces made of wire; and the fourth dates from 1988 until the end of her life, and is characterized by Gego’s woven works on paper.\(^{23}\) What is lost by this form of categorization is the tremendous amount of variety, subtlety, and nuances in Gego’s oeuvre, which are all subsumed under four very broad and general stages.

A second categorization of the trajectory of Gego’s oeuvre appears in *Gego: Thinking the Line* (2006). In this text, the scholar Hanni Ossott takes a slightly more explicit approach, yet still creates vast and exclusionary, broad categories. The different categories appear to be based on geometric frameworks and internal ordering principles. The phases, marked by what Ossott refers to as “structural systems,” are delineated as follows: first, works with parallel lines, dating from 1957 to 1972; second, works with

\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*, 380-381.
vertical lines, dating from 1970 to 1971; third, works based on the triangle, dating from 1968 to 1976; and fourth, works based on the square, dating from 1971 to 1976. One of the most alarming qualities of this form of categorization, is that it completely excludes the work the artist made from 1976 and onwards.

Three years after her first attempt at organizing Gego’s oeuvre, Peruga revised her approach in *Defying Structures* (2006). In this schema, the stages in Gego’s practice revolve around her various employments of the line. The four stages delineated here are revised chronologically even further once again: the first, from 1957 to 1971, based on Gego’s use of parallel lines; the second, from 1969 to 1976, based on her use of vertical lines; the third, from 1976 to the end of Gego’s life, based on works lacking any “defined system of linear configuration;” and lastly, her fourth stage, based on her return to working on paper with the line. While this categorization is somewhat more all-inclusive of the artist’s oeuvre, it nevertheless continues to retain the same generality and lack of consideration for the subtleties and nuances that the artist’s practice indisputably evinces.

I suggest an alternative categorization of the artist’s oeuvre, one that views Gego’s work through its relationship to the grid. This alternative vantage creates an atemporal organization that, rather than proposing stages or strict chronologies, approaches Gego’s practice in a serial manner, one much more in line with the artist’s own practice. Gego is known to have been a meticulous recorder of her works, employing

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26 Ibid.
a very personal form of documentation based strictly on the element of seriality in her
oeuvre which is comprised of nine different series. These series, while sequential but also
concurrent and overlapping, were all executed over the course of a span of twenty five
years dating from 1969 to the end of her life in 1994, and are relegated only to her
sculptural and installation work and her Tejeduras. Each of these nine series will be
examined systematically in the section that follows.

In the overwhelming majority of Gego’s oeuvre, the titles of her works consist of
three parts: the title of the series to which it pertained (i.e. whether it be a Dibujo sin
papel, or a Tejedura, etc.), followed by the year in which it was created, followed by the
numerical order of which that work consisted of from within that annual series. For
example, a work entitled Dibujo sin papel 83/17 is the seventeenth Dibujo sin papel
created in the year 1983.

By examining Gego’s oeuvre’s serially through the lens of the artist’s relationship
to the grid, I aim to convey the formal subtleties and nuances that emerge from her
practice. Formal analysis of works from each series reveals the manner in which the grid
takes on different formal properties throughout Gego’s oeuvre. It becomes clear that
Gego engaged with and employed the grid through an acutely varied and creative artistic
practice. In Gego’s oeuvre, the grid ranges from being geometricized in two dimensions,
to expanding toward a spatial format; from being contained vertically, spherically and via
the square to collapsing, breaking, and rupturing; and from being abandoned and
discarded to being returned to late in life.

This non-chronological and atemporal trajectory, I argue, is also highly significant
because it counters the view expressed by several scholars on the “linearity” of Gego’s
practice. Peruga has claimed that “Gego’s work offers continuity without breaks; it flows steadily…it develops and flows…without ruptures.” While Guy Brett has stated: “Gego’s work developed according to [a linear practice]…if I can put that schematically.” Presenting Gego’s oeuvre as “linear” risks being too reductive, as well as dismissive of the rich artistic gestures that Gego employed: those of synthesizing, discarding, and returning to certain formal properties from within her practice. Instead, by examining the artist’s atemporal and non-chronological relationship to the grid, I demonstrate how Gego’s work reveals the inadequacies of the classic, modernist, Greenbergian teleological view of art history progressing through time in a linear fashion where the grid remains as a constant and stable structure throughout. In this manner, I aim to shed light on the aesthetic of temporality that emerges from within Gego’s oeuvre: one marked by formal adoptions, rejections, challenges, and re-appropriations.

THE MODERNIST GRID AND MODERNISM’S CHRONOLOGICAL SCHEMA

According to the Oxford American Dictionary, the grid is: “a framework of spaced parallel bars.” Scholar Hannah Higgins has referred to the grid as an emblem of modern Western visual culture, despite the fact that it hails from a non-Western origin long predating modernism. The form of the grid dates back to ca. 9,000 BCE, right before the closure of the Ice Age, when in the current Middle East (in modern day Jordan), humans from Neolithic Jericho first created bricks of sun-dried mud, now

27 Iris Peruga, “From Matter to Space: The Game of Creation or Creation as Game?” in Questioning the Line, 47.
considered the first grid module. More relevant to Gego’s aesthetic, the net—the other most ancient grid module—was first created in Stone Age Finland.

Yet it was during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the Italian Renaissance artists began employing the grid as a formal device within the visual arts. Pietro Perugino’s *Christ Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to Saint Peter* (1481-1483) is a classic example of a work from this period employing orthogonality as a visual arrangement of space and of gridded perspective (Fig. 4). In the words of Peruga, “grids…in so many ways [were] the fundamental expression of rational thought in Western art.”\(^\text{30}\) Indeed it was during the Renaissance’s rise of humanism that the aim for the pictorial construction of clear and rational space lent to the employment of the rigid linearity and orthogonality of the grid. As a formal property, the grid enabled artists such as Perugino to depict an organized rendition of spatiality as well as a rational form of perspective.

In 1954 the American art critic and art historian, Clement Greenberg, made the proclamation that the primary feature of modern painting was its adherence to flatness, a statement that established the grid as the authorial formal property of modern abstraction, and of modernism in general. Greenberg’s model was one based on the primacy of medium and formalism, and he hailed the American Abstract Expressionist painters for their self-referential and self-reflexive acts of referring back to their medium of two-dimensional painting. Greenberg hailed this medium as moving increasingly toward flatness and abstraction, and further away from the illusion of depth found in the

Renaissance artist’s employment of a gridded pictorial perspective. In “Modernist Painting” Greenberg claimed:

It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that… [proved] more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art…. it was the only condition painting shared with no other art… [and thus] Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.

Rosalind Krauss took Greenberg’s tenets a step further in relation to the modernist grid, determining it as the ultimate, flattened, formal device of modernist art. In her 1979 essay, “Grids,” Krauss wrote: “the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered.” She proclaimed that the grid is “the structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts,” and continued, stating that the grid is “an emblem of modernity by being just that: the form that is ubiquitous in the art of our century, while appearing nowhere, nowhere at all, in the art of the last one.”

Greenberg and Krauss’s views long dictated the mainstream narrative of modern art as they established the foundation for artists, scholars, and critics to understand the grid as “an ideal matrix, an organizing principle, and a regulating device,” to use the words employed by Pérez-Oramas in *Inverted Utopias.* Pérez-Oramas’s definition

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provides a basis for my understanding of the grid in this thesis, as I will treat it as the fundamental visual language for modernist abstraction. In yet another primary essay, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” Krauss makes the claim that the twentieth century modern artists’ discovery of the grid represented a sort of a new birth. She wrote that: “[in] the absolute stasis of the grid...in this new-found quiet, what many artists thought they could hear was the beginning, the origins of Art....And the grid facilitated this sense of being born into the newly evacuated space of an aesthetic purity and freedom....The grid-scored surface is the image of an absolute beginning.”36 Krauss continued:

   It is because of this sense of a beginning, a fresh start, a ground zero, that artist after artist has taken up the grid as the medium within which to work, always taking it up as though he were just discovering it, as though the origin he had found by peeling back layer after layer of representation to come at last to this schematized reduction, this graph-paper ground, were his origin, and his finding it an act of originality.37

I challenge Krauss’s claims of originality in the following analysis of Gego’s oeuvre through the lens of its relationship to the grid. I demonstrate that it is not through Gego’s “discovery” of the grid (as Krauss would argue), but rather, through her problematization of it, that her innovative contributions can most be mined. Gego’s engagement with the grid flirts along the lines of a fascination, contradiction, and ambivalence as she both employs and rejects this modernist form through the many formal variances and oscillations in the nine series of her practice.

   Higgins has stated that: “the gridiron...organiz[es] space...[it] warps, bends, fragments itself in ether, pulls material from other gridirons, and, perhaps, more

37 Ibid., 158.
importantly, is made and unmade at will by its many users.”38 Higgins continues: “once
the grid is invented, it may bend, crumble, or shatter, but its organizing principle never
disappears…the persistence of grids demonstrates that once it is invented, it never
disappears.”39 This definition of and employment of the grid’s formal properties most
accurately describes Gego’s relationship to it; for while Gego did at points reject,
abandon, and deconstruct the grid, she also returned to its form and re-introduced it into
her practice late in life. In this way, Gego’s oeuvre in fact does demonstrate Higgins’s
claim that the grid “never disappears.”

Krauss has written that: “it is safe to say that no form within the whole of modern
aesthetic production has sustained itself so relentlessly while at the same time being so
impervious to change…development is precisely what the grid resists.”40 Krauss’s view
of the stasis of the grid in relation to formal development is precisely what this thesis
counters. I contend that it is through Gego’s non-static relationship to the grid, given its
numerous variations and permutations in her practice (such as her appropriating,
rejecting, re-inviting, abandoning, and then returning to it late in life), that a particular
aesthetic of temporality makes itself manifest. This temporal aesthetic, I argue, counters,
in Ramírez’s words, “the conventional historicist model that has, until now, dominated
the narratives of art history and curatorship…view[ing] history as a series of events that
succeed each other in time and space as if in an assembly line.”41

39 Ibid., 6.
41 Ramírez, “Reading Gego Between the Line,” in Questioning, 33.
In the analysis that follows, I elucidate the trajectory of Gego’s engagement with, rejection of, and later return to the grid. I first establish her strict employment of and incorporation of the grid in her sculptural and installation works. Next, I demonstrate her outright rejection of its orthogonal structure from within Reticulárea’s nets and meshes which lack any trace of parallel or perpendicular lines. Lastly, I examine Gego’s return to the grid intermittently throughout her career, particularly late in life. Far from its complete abandonment, and far from it being a “new beginning,” as Krauss would argue, Gego’s engagement with the grid challenges any suggestion of temporal linearity, and instead brings forth a visual and spatial aestheticization of time that resists a modernist linear conception of the trajectory of history and genealogy.
Gego’s oeuvre through the lens of its relationship to the grid

Gego spent her first years in Venezuela, from 1953 to 1955, living in the remote and largely inaccessible coastal town of Tarma. It was during those years that Gego first began her artistic work, producing abstract expressionist–style watercolors, monotypes, and drawings. These expressionistic works, mainly landscapes, highlight the artist’s sensitivity to color and form, as well as the lack of attention that Gego paid to the grid at this time. Two early works on paper, *Sin título* (*Untitled*), a xylograph from 1953 and the 1954 watercolor, *Tres mujeres en banco* (*Three Women on a Bench*) are but two examples of the artist’s experimentation with figuration through geometric forms and highlight Gego’s delineation of geometry through the use of vibrant and contrasting chromatic shapes (Figs. 5-6). In *Sin título*, this sensitivity to color takes on an almost haptic quality, while in the figurative watercolor, geometry and color seem to both be operating along the thin line between abstraction and figuration, yet not nearly enough to adhere to the grid’s linear orthogonal form. These two very early works from Gego’s time in Tarma stand as early examples of formal experiments from which Gego’s later works were to depart radically. More importantly, these two landscapes also mark the complete absence of any experimentation with the grid on Gego’s part at this time.

In 1956, shortly following the artist’s experimentation with color and figuration, after having moved to Caracas, Gego began to explore abstraction in her work more committedly, while also experimenting with three-dimensional space. Most importantly, during this time an exploration with the grid as a foundation for abstraction began to
permeate the artist’s practice. Gego’s *Sin título*, an ink on paper from 1959, is a clear example of an early work that demonstrates Gego’s interest in orthogonality, as perpendicular and parallel lines overlap to create grid-like forms (Fig. 7). This work is an early testament to the committed interest in the grid that would evolve over the course of Gego’s practice. In *Ocho cuadros* (*Eight Squares*) from 1961, Gego translated this early interest in orthogonality into three dimensions (Fig. 8). This work contains a highly geometricized formal structure comprised of a layered stacking of eight iron panels, each panel comprised of gridded lines that overlap at twisted angles. The very use of the term “square” in its title testifies to Gego’s commitment to geometric form, and to her deliberate inclusion of grid-like matrices at this early stage in her practice.

Initially, Gego’s first engagement with the grid played out through her exploration of the line, the formal element that did in fact play a foundational role in her practice along with her exploration of the grid’s form. Throughout her career, Gego indeed constantly explored the many variances of the line. For example, as Ossott has noted:

Gego manages to expose something that the line generally keeps hidden: its personality. A tone, a density, is forged for the modulation of this energy—thanks to the variable thickness of the lines, and to their accumulative energy or their transparency—and in this manner a character is added to the purity of the line.42

In other words, Gego tapped into formal properties of the line in a way that took it beyond being a structural element in her work; rather, by expanding the line into both two and three-dimensional space, she gave the line an animation, a character, and an almost personified role in her work.

At a lecture that Gego gave at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in 1966, the artist stated: “Thirty years ago, I was trained as an architect, committed to draw lines with a definite meaning, lines that determine forms or spaces as symbols of limits, never with a life of their own.” She noted the difference of an artist’s use of the line, adding:

Many years later I discovered the charm of the line in and of itself—the line in space as well as the line drawn on a surface, and the nothing between the lines and the sparkling when they cross, when they are interrupted, when they are of different colors or of different types. I discovered that sometimes the in-between the lines is as important as the line by itself.

The artist’s words make clear that the line played a key role in her work. Rather than a stagnant structure, the line was a formal element that Gego studied in all its variances. In the Tamarind lecture, Gego also explained: “there is no danger for me to get stuck, because with each line I draw, hundreds more wait to be drawn.” In other words, the line represented infinite possibilities for the artist. For example, *Movimiento dinámico* (*Dynamic Movement*) (1960) shows an acute awareness of movement through the use of the line, as these both swirl and sway on paper, while the lines in *Sin título* (1966) appear to be charged with an almost electric encounter between red and pink, and the negative space in between the lines seems to take on a charge of its own (Figs. 9-10). These examples are but two of works that display the range of Gego’s employment of the line’s form.

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A decade later, Gego’s exploration of the grid began to permeate her works on paper more explicitly, and her examination of the line proper as a structural support for the grid was brought to bear in her developing interest in orthogonal forms. By 1973, as seen in *Carta (Letter)* Gego’s use of the grid is embedded in the paper itself, through her exploration of the line and geometric forms on graph paper proper, itself a form of gridded backdrop (Fig. 11).

It was at this point, during the early 1970s, that Gego began to introduce her methodology of documenting and categorizing the various series in her oeuvre. The first series she categorized is *Líneas (Lines)*, which she executed from 1969 to 1970 (Fig. 12). In these early sculptural and installation pieces, Gego eliminates her use of the grid that she had employed earlier in three-dimensional format (as in *Ocho cuadrados*). Lacking any form of crossover between horizontality and verticality, instead, these works’ organizing principles consist only of acutely linear parallel lines as structural frameworks.

The second series in Gego’s sculptural and installation practice is *Chorros* or *Streams*, dating from 1971 to 1976. In this series, there continues to not even be a hint of the grid’s orthogonal form, as Gego further experiments with parallel lines, specifically vertical lines, as in her *Lineas* series. In this second series however, the lines are no longer straight as in her earlier series. Instead, Gego begins to haphazardly bend and twist the lines. In *Chorro No. 7*, 1971, Gego constructed the work’s structural format with suspended clusters of aluminum rods that hang from the ceiling and then trickle downwards in a disrupted manner, much like a vertical stream spilling perpendicularly towards the ground (Fig. 13). These installation works are devoid of any internal ordering
principle and completely lack any grid-like structural form, a testament to her rejection of the grid’s form at this stage in her practice.

Reticulárea (ambientación), created from 1969-1982, stands as a work apart from the categorized series, however, given Gego’s work on various versions, it arguably comprises the third series in Gego’s practice (See Figs. 1-3) Reticulárea consists of thirty-six individual pieces that Gego executed by coiling the tips of wires and hooking them together. Overall, the work was installed in over ten different locations between 1969 and 1982, before settling in its permanent home at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas. Reticulárea consists of nets and meshes that abandon any notion of either formal linearity or centrality, in lieu of experimenting with the element of space. This work is based on the module of the triangle and is comprised of a number of intricate parts that Gego attached to one another by hand. A small triangular boceto, or model, is an example of one of the intricate unites comprising the larger, monumental installation (Fig. 14). In Reticulárea, Gego continues to reject a stable grid—and any trace of parallel or perpendicular lines—as this organizing matrix of modernist art is replaced by the work’s spatially conceived, haphazard nets and meshes that lack any trace of orthogonality whatsoever. In this monumental work, Gego discards her prior commitment to the line, and instead replaces it with gaping webs and fractured clusters.

Along with the environmental Reticuláreas, Gego created her fourth series entitled Reticuláreas cuadradas (Square Reticuláreas) in the early to mid-1970s. Reticulárea cuadrada No. 2 and Reticulárea cuadrada No. 5—both from 1971—exemplify this series’ non-environmental pieces that hang as smaller, individual works as opposed to being spatial constructions (Figs. 15-16). In this series Gego shifts formal
paradigms from a triangular format to a square-based structural framework. These works are comprised of loosely organized lines that Gego splintered off into diffracted spatial points. In an aesthetic reversal, at this time Gego returns to her earlier treatment of the grid from the 1950s and early 1960s, and reintroduces its form; however, in this instance, she at the same time stretches, breaks, and distorts the grid, rendering its construct malleable.

In Reticulárea cuadrada No. 2, Gego warped the grid throughout the work’s steel and wire structure by folding and bending it through space, pushing and pulling against the flat grid of Krauss’s and Greenberg’s modernism. In Reticulárea cuadrada No. 5—from the same year—Gego has piled up and plied the grid even further, as it both juts out as well as recedes into space at the same time. In this way, Gego once again challenges the modernist grid’s flatness through the malleable three-dimensionality of the gridded works in this series.

The next two series in Gego’s work—her fifth and sixth—are entitled Troncos (Trunks) and Esferas (Spheres), which she made during the mid to late 1970s. In these series, Gego makes a much more explicit, multi-faceted, and committed return to the use of geometry as a formal language than in her Reticuláreas cuadradas, once again subverting and disrupting the reading of a formal linear trajectory into her practice. In these two series, Gego infused the works with geometric forms: those of pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, and decagonal shapes. The Trunks are largely cylindrical standing forms that are vertically structured; the Spheres are hanging pieces. As seen in Tronco No. 4 and Esfera No. 2 (both from 1976), the artist makes a much more explicit return to the grid than in her previous series by not rupturing, stretching, breaking, or distorting its
orthogonality (Figs. 17-18). At the same time, however, the grid’s form is made only slightly palpable as it flickers in and out of transparency through the works’ delicate and subtle stainless steel structural frameworks.

The seventh series, *Dibujos sin papel* (*Drawings Without Paper*) dates from 1976 and onwards and consists of much smaller works made of wire and everyday elements, such as thread and scraps of metal. With her *Dibujos*, Gego made a radical departure from the relationship she held to the grid in her two earlier series. While in her *Troncos* and *Esferas* Gego reintroduced the regularity of the grid’s form back into her practice, in her *Dibujos* series, Gego actively broke, ruptured, distorted, and disfigured the grid’s form. This series thus evinces another gesture of temporal reversal, as Gego turned back time by revisiting and reengaging her treatment of the grid as during her *Reticuláreas cuadradas* series from the early 1970s, where only traces of the grid’s form remain.

Two *Dibujos sin papel*, both from 1985, demonstrate the ways in which the artist appears to have done something similar, yet completely opposite, in the same localized area: the two works’ right quadrants. In one of these, made of metal, wire, and thread, Gego has severed the grid in the right quadrant, slicing through its orthogonal form, and leaving a broken rupture (Fig. 19). While in the other, made of galvanized mesh, Gego has raised the right quadrant in a gesture of malleable curvature so that this ruptured area bends and curves toward the viewer (Fig. 20). These two creative acts offer additional demonstrations of the ways in which Gego disrupted, distorted, and defaced the grid at this time.

Gego’s eighth series, and the last of her three-dimensional series, is comprised by her *Bichitos* or *Little Beasts*, dating from 1987 and onwards. These works are small-
scaled, three-dimensional pieces made of waste materials. Both *Bichito 88/42* and *Bichito 89/29*, suggest yet another reversal in time (Figs. 21-22). They refer back to the *Líneas* and *Chorros* series of the early 1970s in which the grid was completely absent in favor of a concentration on vertical, straight and twisting perpendicular lines. With the *Bichitos*, it is through the twisting and twirling of materials that Gego removes any suggestion of the grid. Comprised of curled up remnants of mixed media lacking any trace of orthogonality whatsoever, this series is very similar to her earlier two series from nearly two decades prior; however, one can argue that the lines Gego employed in her earlier two series are completely mangled in her *Bichitos* series.

The ninth and final series, *Tejeduras* (*Weavings*), dates from very late in Gego’s life. Begun in 1988, this series is marked by another complete reversal in the artist’s relationship to the grid, as Gego carried out her most committed return to its orthogonal form. In these works, the grid exists in its entire, unbroken, and unfractured orthogonality, countering the complete abandonment seen in the *Bichitos*. This gesture is yet another artistic reversal that defies any existing linear development in her relationship to the grid. In these works, Gego’s re-incorporation of the gridded matrix is heavily pierced with elements of the subjective; she employed as mediums pieces of paper taken from her daily life—such as magazine illustrations, her cigarette packs, even her own earlier engravings. Gego cut them into strips of variable thickness and then wove them into a form of gridded fabric, one in which Gego re-invites the strictly parallel and perpendicular lines, not seen in her work since the 1960s.

For example, *Tejedura 91/3* from 1991 contains construction paper and metallic ribbons from cigarette packs (Fig. 23). An avid smoker, Gego imbued the materiality of
her cigarette packs into the works themselves, as traces of her personal, daily life. She rendered an equally personal aesthetic in *Tejedura 91/16* (*Weaving 91/16*), an explosively chromatic gridded work also from 1991, containing a similar element of the subjective by constructing this work out of an earlier piece of hers which she cut up and wove into a new work (Fig. 24). Here, Gego returned to her original relationship to the grid (as seen in *Sin título* from 1959 and *Ocho cuadrados* from 1961) by employing its form in its entirety, a gesture that interrupts and dizzies any potential for temporal linearity, and instead, suggests a reversal and return, and therefore a sense of atemporality (See Figs. 7-8).

Most specifically, by problematizing, subverting, and challenging the modernist grid’s structure—in both two and three dimensional works—Gego plays out a gesture of many in which she manages to taunt, subvert, and defy any potential for linearity over the course of her oeuvre’s relationship to the grid. This contestation of a linear form of temporality is seen in both works hailing from her nine sculptural and installation series, as well as in those pre-dating and standing outside of the artist’s categorized series. Gego engaged with the grid equally in her early works on paper and early three-dimensional works, abandoned and erased the grid’s form in her *Líneas* and *Chorros*, collapsed it in *Reticulárea (ambientación)*, stretched and warped it in her *Reticuláreas cuadradas*, returned to it once again in her *Troncos* and *Esferas*, ruptured and diffracted it in her *Dibujos sin papel*, completely abandoned it once again in her *Bichitos*, and then finally reversed to incorporate the grid in its full, unbroken form in her *Tejeduras* series.

Through these marked formal gestures, Gego made artistic choices that defy the notion of a linear chronological progression regarding her oeuvre’s relationship to the
grid. Instead, she challenges the teleological development presumed by modernist art
history’s conception of the grid’s stability. In this manner, Gego aestheticizes a construct
of temporality marked by formal deconstructions, subversions, inversions, and returns.
CHAPTER II

RETIČULÁREA, THE COLLAPSE OF THE GRID, AND GEGO’S ARTISTIC GENEALOGIES: APPROPRIATIONS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS

Very many trains of thought contributing to the dream converge. This is where we find ourselves in the middle of a thought-factory where, as in the weaver’s masterpieces, one thrust of his foot, and a thousand threads invisibly shift, and hither the shuttles dart—just once he treads and a thousand strands all twine together.

~ Anna Freud quotes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part 1

The element of transgressing modernism’s formal matrix reveals a dialogue with modernist traditions, specifically with art historical movements from which Gego’s work departed: Constructivism, Geometric Abstraction, and Kineticism. Gego balanced both a precarious alliance with them and a strict deviation from them. This relationship is most exemplified through the marked and specific formal acts that play out in Reticulárea, a work that is emblematic of Gego’s collapse of the modernist grid.

Reticulárea received its title from the art critic Roberto Guevara, who in a review of the work in El Nacional on June 10, 1969, claimed the work to be an “area of reticules.” ‘Reticula’ (reticule) means a fabric shaped like a net, thus “Reticulárea.” connotes an area of multiple nets. In Reticulárea, Gego carried out an exercise in the randomized and the improvised, creating a piece that can constantly be modified, given that its installation in the venues where it was displayed was never the same. Gego initially installed Reticulárea in 1969 at the Museo de Bellas Artes (Museum of Fine Arts) in Caracas (See Fig. 1). Subsequent to that, Reticulárea was displayed in over ten venues worldwide, each time in a new configuration adapted to each new space, with differing and variable dimensions. These venues included the Center for Inter-American
Relations in New York (now the Americas Society), also in 1969 (See Fig. 2). In 1980, the work was moved permanently to the Galería de Arte Nacional (National Art Gallery) in Caracas (See Fig. 3).46

The *Reticuláreas* consist of a system of nets and meshes of varied scale and regularity that are based on the pattern of the triangle. These nets and meshes are constructed in different layered tiers that hang from the ceiling vertically and horizontally, and randomly spill to the floor in a haphazard array. The work’s diverse parts are linked throughout space by hooks and rings made of wires, while the meshes and nets are made of stainless steel and other metals differing in size, density, and scale. Folding and bending throughout space, the work’s diverse parts take the form of both clusters as well as gaping spider web-like forms.

Scholars have endeavored to describe the work in countless ways, pointing to its amorphous nature, and difficulty in capturing its baffling and unique formal structure in its entirety. Monica Amor, for example, has written that the spaces within *Reticulárea* “at times, create three-dimensional clusters of metal that have been described as clouds, nests, columns, or beehives, even though they defy description.”47 In turn, Bruno Bosteels has noted:

Opening up in every direction, the work is at once fragile and massive, humble and awe-inspiring….If the work is expressive, it is hard or even impossible to say what is expressed in it. There seems to be no content,

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except the bare contingency of form, brought to a point of indiscernibility from pure formless matter.48

The words of Lourdes Blanco perhaps capture it best stating that *Reticulárea* “still baffles like the distant stars, glimmering and elusive.”49

From within *Reticulárea*’s spacious form, Gego erased any trace of a parallel line, and shattered any hint of either a linear or rigidly geometricized grid-like structure. Instead, she replaced them with gaping webs, nets, and meshes that hang malleably and pliably from the ceiling, seeming to collapse around the room. The work has been described by Pérez-Oramas as “a proliferation of links that cancel out their own centrality by constantly seeking the margins...creating an arrangement that drops off the register of what is legible...transcending any kind of programmatic regulation.”50 In this way, it is as if the contained, orthogonal, rigid structure of the grid, is replaced by a work not only lacking any trace of either parallel or perpendicular lines, but also one which has swallowed any formal cardinality as well. Within *Reticulárea*, as the viewer walks through its hanging structure, one’s vision can rest on either one line or one nodal point, as the gaze shifts from inside and outside its variously webbed planes. In this way, the work challenges the viewer’s perception in a manner that renders its optics both fractured and spaciously tessellated at the same time.

Gego’s challenge to modernism’s primary orthogonal structure from within *Reticulárea* and other works, and her rejection of any sense of a teleological progression

49 Blanco, *Thinking the Line*, 217.
to purity and flatness in her oeuvre were not the only ways in which she defied the formal
tenets of art historical modernism. Instead, her precarious relationship to her modernist
genealogy stands as a critical extension of this very problematization as well. Gego’s
practice departed from a genealogical platform comprised of three key modernist
movements that established and engaged the grid: Constructivism, Geometric
Abstraction, and Kineticism. Gego appropriated and synthesized certain elements from
these movements in her early work. Yet while Gego’s oeuvre originated from within this
art historical lineage, the artist established both a delicate alliance with, as well as a strict
deviation from, these historical frameworks.

The precariousness of Gego’s relationship with these historical movements
unfolds from within the nets and meshes of *Reticulárea* once again, as the artist
synthesized certain aesthetic principles from her genealogy in this work, only to subtly
deconstruct and abandon them. In analyzing the acts of both appropriation and
deconstruction as these acts unfold from within *Reticulárea*, I support this section
through conflating a formal reading of the work with an analysis of the inherent and most
salient characteristics of these movements themselves.

*Reticulárea* embodies Gego’s contestation of the version of temporality upheld by
the Greenbergian, historicist, and linear paradigm of modernist temporality. In
“Modernist Painting,” Greenberg made the claim that modern art is “firmly attached to
tradition… [and that it] takes its place in the intelligible continuity of…tradition.”

51 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting (1960),” in *Sharecom*, accessed November 4,
Greenberg continued, stating: “nothing could be further from… [modernist art] than the idea of a rupture of continuity,” and that modernism “is…continuity, and unthinkable without it…Modernist art continues the past without gap or break.”

I demonstrate that Gego disrupts this very notion of “continuity of tradition” and “linearity” as proposed by Greenberg, by analyzing her relationship to her own modernist genealogy. Rather than the straightforward continuity defined by Greenberg, Gego’s relationship to her art historical lineage is marked by disruptions, deconstructions, and subversions. From within *Reticulárea*, Gego contests the tenets of art historical modernism through her very relationship to tradition, the past, and her art historical genealogy. This operation presents the alternative aesthetic of temporality marked by appropriations and deconstructions that defines her oeuvre.

The first movement that Gego appropriated and synthesized, only to undo, was Constructivism, the foundation of her architecture and engineering studies with Bonatz at the Technische Hochsule Stuttgart. Once she moved to fine arts, Gego initially imbedded constructivist principles into her early works, which demonstrated an adherence to rationality, functionality, Cartesian spatial relations, and an industrial aesthetic. *Eight Squares* exemplifies this aesthetic, evincing Gego’s commitment to rigid linearity conflated with a rational and geometric aesthetic, as discussed earlier (See Fig. 8). At this point in her practice, the grid’s orthogonal form appears in its entirety and rests at the crux of her works’ structural frameworks.

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Within *Reticulárea*, however, the very qualities that the artist initially appropriated are the same ones she proceeded to subvert and throw into question. As Monica Amor writes: “[once] inspired by constructivist…systematic structures…Gego’s work ultimately undermined their rational and functional matrix by destabilizing them from within.”53 This formal undermining of the grid matrix is evidenced by two gestures: the first, by Gego’s marked reconceptualization of spatial relations, and secondly, by her replacing a commitment to an industrial aesthetic with an unquestionably hand-made aesthetic.

Gego’s contestation of Constructivist spatial relations results from *Reticulárea*’s very malleability. In this work, Gego challenges the notion of spatial relations associated with modernist sculpture and inverts these formal parameters. As Peruga has noted, Constructivist spatial aesthetics conceive of space as “differentiated… identifiable… delimited, specific, [and] Cartesian.”54 The perception of spatial relations within the webbed windows of *Reticulárea*, however, varies constantly depending on the vantage point and ocular processes of the spectator. From within this work, one’s vision can rest on either one strand or one nodal point, as the gaze shifts from inside and outside its various planes. As such, the piece exists as a form of visual contestation toward any possibility of its perceptual dissection or understanding, as Gego shatters the rigid constructivist principles of logic and clarity that she once adhered to in her earlier sculptural work.

54 Peruga, *Defying Structures*, 16.
Furthermore, in presenting its own version of fractured optics, the visual decoding of space from within Reticulárea varies constantly based on the multiplicity of vantage points. As Ossott writes: “the spectator, instead of being welcomed by visual, sensorial effects, must strive to reconstruct [the work], study it to identify its composition, mentally take it apart…reorganize it, and only then will it appear as it truly is.”55 Peruga has been so forward as to make the claim that “challenging the authoritarianism of modernity and its conventions… [Gego’s] mature work does not conform to the parameters of modern western sculpture: on the contrary, it undermines its principles, in this case particularly spatial autonomy.”56 In Reticulárea Gego produced a form of spatiality that is forever changing, and a far cry from the delineated, rigid, and organized spatial aesthetic of her initial influence from constructivist art.

Gego also contested Constructivism’s industrial aesthetic principles. Prior to Reticulárea, she had been executing her works out of industrial materials, among them sheet metal and steel bars. In Reticulárea, the artist also employed stainless steel, titanium, wire, and aluminum. Yet while Gego continued her tradition of fabricating out of industrial materials, she crafted these materials by hand, bending and coiling the work’s various parts, creating an artisanal, handmade aesthetic that counters the more industrialized canonized principles of constructivist art.

Gego demonstrated a similar relationship of engagement and subversion with Geometric Abstraction. In the late 1950s, Gego was introduced to the members of the

56 Peruga, Defying Structures, 20.
Sardio literary group and to other artists practicing geometric abstraction in Venezuela. These artists maintained a committed exploration of the formal possibilities of geometry, and employed abstract geometric forms as structural frameworks in their work. It was also during this time, in 1959, that Gego became appointed as faculty at the Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo (College of Architecture and Urban Planning), and the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas (School of Fine Arts of Caracas), which further involved her in the field of geometry.

At this time, Gego experimented with the geometric volumes, shapes, and topological mathematics fundamental to Geometric Abstraction. Following this movement’s formal properties, Gego infused her art with cubes, spheres, and other shapes of curved volumes. *Esfera* (*Sphere*) of 1959 epitomizes the unquestionably geometricized works that the artist created during this time (Fig. 25). In this work, Gego clearly implemented the type of geometric structural framework so integral to Geometric Abstraction, through the conflation of its rigid linearity with the curvature of its spherical form.

In *Reticulàrea*, as Kaira Marie Cabañas writes, Gego abandoned “her previous rational application of geometry (of using geometry to *a priori* determine a work’s execution) toward a principle of a work based on undoing.”57 For while geometry as a visual language had once supplied Gego with a formal, structural framework, in *Reticulàrea* the artist proceeded to shatter her ties to her lineage by employing a haphazard organizing principle in contrast to the rigid aesthetic of Geometric Abstraction.

Abstraction. Furthermore, as Julieta Gonzalez writes, Gego’s most notable abandonment of geometric principles in *Reticulárea* was achieved via her “elimination of a center, [and] accentuation of the nonhierarchical and the nonsignifying.”

While Gego had initially employed abstraction’s affinity for rigidly linear structural frameworks in her works, in *Reticulárea*, Gego countered the movement’s emphasis on rigidity and precision by incorporating an organizing principle that celebrated chance, the randomized, the improvised, and the haphazard. *Reticulárea* exists as an amalgamation of metallic mediums all of varying and differing scales and densities, which randomly intermix, bend, and fold throughout the work’s many webbed planes. Furthermore, the work’s numerous installations also defy the idea of permanence through time. Gego incorporated randomization as a compositional element into her practice, a formal quality and framework that opposes the rigidity, clarity, and precision of Geometric Abstraction.

The most influential movement on Gego’s career came from the works of her chief counterparts: the male triumvirate of Venezuelan Kineticism: Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, and Alejandro Otero. In the 1950s, these artists carried out a sustained investigation of employing geometry as a visual and formal language. They created artworks that celebrated optical processes, having at their center the construct of the perception of movement and color. Soto, Otero, and Cruz-Diez spearheaded the movement of Venezuelan *Cinetismo* (Kineticism), which dominated the country’s cultural scene during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Their influential works explored the formal

58 Gonzalez, *Thinking the Line*, 87.
59 Ibid.
rigidity and orthogonal linearity of the grid. These three artists represent the historically modernist lineage from which Gego’s practice departed. During the 1950s, as Venezuela underwent a period of modernization, the kinetic aesthetic of pristine linearity and rigid angularity was highly attractive and sought after through nationalized commissions. After the fall of the dictatorship of Marcos A. Pérez Jiménez in 1958, when Venezuela became a fully democratic country in 1960, Cinetismo became the officially supported art movement of the democratic governments of the 1960s and 70s. This political appropriation was a result of the government conflating the “clean” aesthetic of Cinetismo with the rational, industrial, and technological advancements of the time. As a result, Cinetismo proper reached its zenith in Caracas as the Venezuelan government adopted the aesthetic as a form of nationalized artistic movement.

During these decades, Soto, Otero, and Cruz-Diez retained a strong adherence to the employment of the grid’s form, and their acutely gridded works during this time are echoed in Gego’s early sculptural and installation work. During the 1950s and 60s Gego’s work shared affinities with Cinetismo; it was a time when she demonstrated an interest in the movement’s formal doctrines of acute geometrization, consistent linearity, and a highly self-conscious attention paid to kinetic perceptual and optical processes. During this time, Gego’s small sculptural and installation work stood outside the problematic treatment of the grid that her later works evince (i.e., their being stretched, ruptured, broken, or collapsed).

Otero’s initial kinetic investigations can be seen in his series of Coloritmos (Colorhythms), which he executed from 1955 to 1960. His Coloritmo 39 from 1959, for instance, demonstrates a clear investigation of color, perception, geometry and
movement, through wavering parallel and perpendicular lines that dance across the 
work’s Duco surface (Fig. 26). Gego’s *Cuatro planos rojos* (*Four Red Planes*) (1967), is 
but one of a number of sculptural works that the artist executed during the 1950s and 60s 
that similarly plays with chromatism as a formal property; in this case, its bright red 
structure (Fig. 27). While Oteros’s work overlays rigid geometric lines over patches of 
color, Gego’s work adheres to the rigid orthogonality of the grid. In their engagement 
with linearity, both works testify to a shared investigation of color in relation to optics 
and virtual movement.

Cruz-Diez, pushed the exploration with color the farthest, in relation to 
*Cinetismo*’s interest in optics and movement. The *Fisicromías*, or *Physichromies* series, 
begun in 1959, exemplifies his investigation of color and phenomenology. *Fisicromía 
No. 42* from 1961, evinces the artist’s use of vertical lines made from sliced and spaced 
strips of color, as a work that is rendered animated by the optical perception of its viewer 
as she moves in front of it (Fig. 28). Cruz-Diez’s work shares not only the play with 
color, line, and optics in Gego’s *Cuatro planos rojos*, but also, through hints of both the 
square and sphere, the kineticists’ interest in geometry as well.

Gego also shared formal affinities with Soto’s work during the 1950s and 60s—in 
particular, an adherence to geometry, linearity, optics, and the grid’s structure. In Soto’s 
*Vibración* (*Vibration*) from 1965, a work of metal on wood, the repetition and seriality of 
monochromatic square patterns converge in the viewer’s eye as if animated through their 
perceptual dissection against a backdrop of painted vertical lines of black and white (Fig. 
29). This optical, almost dizzying effect can be seen in one of Gego’s works from 1967, 
*Esfera en cubo* (*Sphere within a Cube*) (Fig. 30). Gego’s work shares the exploration of
vibratory movement through the conflation of lines that overlap in delineating the shapes of both a square and a sphere, creating a similarly unsteady, vibrating optical effect. These comparisons testify to Gego’s attention to and engagement with her kineticist colleagues’ formal properties at this stage in her practice.

While activating it and exploring the potential of the grid, this seminal trio also celebrated it; their gridded structures are echoed in Gego’s early sculptural and installation work from the 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless, while Gego’s chief counterparts did employ the grid’s structure, they also challenged its formal properties in their own ways in both their installations and monumental public works. Nevertheless, these artists did not come close to the precariousness of Gego’s relationship to the grid; meaning, they did not actively rupture, distort, or disfigure its form to the degree that Gego did in her Reticulárea.

Three examples of these artists’ local, public works demonstrate both an adherence to and challenge to the grid in their own individualized manners. In Abra Solar (1976), constructed from iron and aluminum and installed in Caracas’s Plaza Venezuela, Otero achieved this dynamic through the interaction between the aluminum stacked cubes and the play of sunlight (Fig. 31). This effect brings the work’s parts in and out of view in line with the kineticist interest in virtual movement and perceptual optics. Cruz-Diez’s 1982 Doble Fisicromía (Double Physichromie), also installed in the Plaza Venezuela, plays with the artist’s interest in color and phenomenology through adhering to the kineticist principles of linearity and precision (Fig. 32). Via the serial repetition of vertical bands of color, the work evinces the formal properties of an adherence to geometric linearity, optics, perception, and virtual movement. However, rather than
employ the full orthogonality of the grid, the work mainly encompasses the sphere as its structural framework.

Perhaps the most well-known of these three artists’ public works, are Soto’s *Penetrables* created since the 1970s—large, environmental works constructed from suspended vertical rods of metal or nylon designed to be “walked through” by the viewer. Soto’s *Penetrable de Pampatar (Pampatar Penetrable)* from 1971 (no longer in existence) is a classic example (Fig. 33). In this work, rigid linearity and the precision of the grid was designed to be combined with the fruitful dynamic of the movement of the spectator, exemplifying the kineticist interest in perception and spatial relations.

While Gego’s work initially incorporated such kinetic principles with an affinity for rigidly structural, geometric, and linear frameworks, by the late 1960s and 70s, the artist went on to incorporate elements in *Reticulárea* that both unraveled as well as ran counter to the movement’s formal doctrines. These three artists—while to a degree challenging the grid in their own subtle ways—nonetheless maintained a loyalty to its form in contrast to Gego’s complete abandonment, collapse, and shattering of the grid in *Reticulárea’s* haphazard nets and meshes. Gego thus proceeded to deconstruct her originally modernist genealogy of Venezuelan Kineticism, as she subverted the formal tenets of this aesthetic through her abandonment of the primacy of optical processes and virtual movement, and her rendering of spatial relations palpable. The latter was achieved by working with the installation and structural framework of the piece, just as much as with the vacuums of negative space permeating it throughout.

Gego’s first act of deconstruction was to abandon the primacy of optical processes celebrated by her counterparts’ emphasis on movement. *Reticulárea* exists as a wholly
static work completely devoid of any form of activated motion, its construct exuding an air of fixed immobility, and it hangs in complete stasis. As Pérez-Oramas has written, from within *Reticulárea*, “nothing moves…the webs themselves, hang…precariously in their state of weightlessness…[nothing] pass[es]…[but rather] stops in those links, knots, and vectors, in that woven suspension of the world’s cardinal experience, devoid of both center and of meaning.”60

Gego also deconstructed the tenets of *Cinetismo* regarding the dimension of space. As *Reticulárea*’s structural framework moves beyond that of a hanging, individual piece (such as Gego’s earlier works were) to a static and monumental environmental piece comprised of vacuous gaps of metal, the work exists as both a fixed and static arena, its very spatiality rendered acutely more palpable than any form of optical kinesis. *Reticulárea*’s investigation of spatial relations in lieu of an exploration of movement, underscores Mari Carmen Ramírez’s view that “Gego’s art stresses… [the] contemplation of the infinite possibilities of making visible the multiple layers of space.”61 And in essence, *Reticulárea*’s relationship to space is rendered palpable, through the vacuous gaps within the work’s webs. For it is the work’s emptiness, its gaps and vacuums, that bring forth negative space as a formal property, rather than adhering to the repetitive and rigid geometric linearity of her Venezuelan counterparts’ containment and geometrization of space.

While Gego’s early work from the 1950s and 60s initially departed from a platform of kinetic principles—which investigated optics, movement, geometry, linearity,

60 Pérez-Oramas, *Geometric Abstraction*, 41.
rigidity, precision, and perception—the artist in the end incorporated elements in her
*Reticulárea*—through its abandonment of optical illusion, kinesis, and its rendering of
spatial relations palpable—that countered the inherent principles of *Cinetismo*,
exemplifying her departure from her modernist lineage.
CHAPTER III

THE AESTHETICS OF TEMPORALITY

By initially appropriating and synthesizing modernist principles in her early work, and then, in *Reticulárea*, proceeding to deconstruct markedly and even abandon the aesthetic properties of her formation and contemporaries, Gego contested her own place in a rigid artistic genealogy presupposed by modernist art history. *Reticulárea* challenges the notion that the past holds a continuous, linear, and ordered weight on the present, as Greenberg would argue. Furthermore, Gego’s employment of the grid’s form throughout her practice exposes the very instability of this modernist structure. As seen in both Gego’s relationship to the modernist grid, as well as her deviations from her modernist genealogy, the multiple variances and oscillations in her practice traverse non-linear paths. Gego’s work makes manifest an aesthetic of temporality marked by subversions, inversions, and returns; a form of temporality that diffracts any formal linearity that could be presumed to accompany the passage of time.

In his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, T.S. Eliot wrote on the relationship between the historical and the contemporary: “the historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.”62 Eliot adds that:

> No artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead artists…the

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necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created, is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it…the existing order is complete before the new work arrives.63

Eliot continues, making the claim that “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its success, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged.”64

It is clear from the trajectory of Gego’s oeuvre, that the artist did not blindly follow the dictates of the movements that preceded her. Almost three decades after Eliot’s writings, at a time when her artwork was attracting great critical acclaim, Gego—much in line with Eliot’s views—stated about her practice in the 1960s and 70s:

If people ask about outside influences…I prefer to leave the answer to historians and scholars. Each life is governed by origins and beginnings, by encounters and adjustments, leading to the present….The past of all human beings is rooted inside every one of us, and if I have ended up with a certain combination of abilities to do what I do, it has been as the result of a multidimensional chess game.65

This quote is relevant for its visual and formal associations and because it evinces a particular notion of temporality. First, Gego’s statement elicits the formal properties of a chess game, a chessboard, and by extension, the modernist form at the center of this study: the grid. Second, the game of chess operates via anything but a standard form of linearity—how the pieces advance through time, how the game progresses, is in fact, as Gego stated, in a “poly-lineal,” multidimensional manner. Her own practice runs a

63 Ibid., 4-5.
64 Ibid.
65 Gego, Sabiduras, 35, 39.
similar course in its non-linear engagement with the grid and in its non-linear relationship to the movements that preceded her.

Gego’s attitude regarding the weight of the past on the present mirrors that of Eliot’s, as both claims acknowledge the thin and delicate balance that exists between these two distinct temporal poles. Gego displayed an awareness that a subtle interwoven conflation of both the historical and the contemporary takes place in the creation of a work of art. What this thesis aims to shed light upon, however, is the space between the modern and the contemporary, the present and the past, the very gaps in the folds of time, that exist in her oeuvre. For it is in this interstitial space that Gego formulates her own temporal aesthetic—one through which I see her playing out this multidimensional chess game with both the present and the past. Through her engagement with, rejection of, and return to, her use of the grid, Gego challenges, disrupts, and subverts a linear version of time, and brings forth an aesthetics of temporality that contests the very tenets of Greenbergian modernist art history’s supposition of a teleological trajectory of temporality.

The literature on temporality is vast, but is informed by three major theorists: Aristotle (385 BCE–322 BCE), Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), and Albert Einstein (1879–1955). Aristotle delineated time as a construct comprised of separate, distinct cycles, such as, “the rising and setting sun, the turning of wheels, and the birth, growth, and decay of human life.” Furthermore, his conception entails that time be observable

and experiential, requiring an observing self that could provide a validated measurement of its occurrence.

Following Aristotle’s notion, Newton conceived of “Absolute Time.” He introduced the notion of concrete measurements of time, beyond Aristotle’s loose conception of cyclical natural models such as the waxing and waning of the moon, or the rising and setting of the sun. Newton codified a theory that conceived of time as consisting of lengths and breadths, completely autonomous from a validating, experiential bystander that Aristotle had conceived of for his premise. According to Newton, time could be understood as an infinite line, independent from the relative space and placement of objects or individuals in the external world.

Einstein expanded on this idea with his theory of “spacetime.” In 1919, Einstein brought forth his theory of relativity that challenged the Newtonian concept of time, arguing for a notion that countered the idea that time was an isolated linear coordinate that ran through space. Instead, Einstein argued that: “it is neither the point in space, nor the instant in time, at which something happens that has a physical reality, but only the event itself.”67 This theory can be brought back to Gego’s Reticulárea of which various versions were created. Einstein’s theory of “spacetime” then, lends to the reading of each “version” of Reticulárea as being a singular event in itself, and a singular work in itself, outside the measurement of a linear conception of temporality, but rather an event in time

and space singular to each version of each separate entity of the work, challenging any notion of an over-arching temporal historicity.

Contemporary scholars continue to engage these important thinkers. Ronald Schleifer, for example, has taken a stance on the side of a postmodernist revision of Enlightenment rationality. He critiques the Newtonian, Enlightenment conception of time as unfoundedly abstract, and instead celebrates the post-Enlightenment revision arguing toward a plethora of multiple temporalities occurring at once. While various postmodern theorists such as David Harvey, Andreas Huyssen, and Charles Jencks, among others, claim that this rupture and revision occurred after the Second World War, in Schleifer’s view, it occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. 68

More to the point of Gego’s relationship to time, and her defiance of a modernist conception of temporal linearity, Schleifer’s arguments are much in line with her view as revealed in her statements regarding her own practice. In other words, Schleifer criticizes the modern period as overtly abstract and teleological, and instead, favors postmodernism for its validation of multiple temporalities. Schleifer offers an alternate view of both the traditionally conceived notion of historical causality as well as to the concept of a linear arrangement of time by arguing in favor of the primacy of a number of temporal trajectories unfolding at once, a form of temporality evident in the manner in which Gego’s series appear both concurrent and overlapping at the same time.

Schleifer’s arguments are much in line with Gego’s ideas and her artistic practice, a practice marked by deliberate conflations of styles and pointed returns to early formal experimentations. The first grouping of works referred to here as “returns to early traces,” reveal the subtle hints of earlier works to which later works return. This exploration of shared issues applies to both different media and different series (many times these cross-over). These works reveal a form of temporality marked by formal precursors that later works revisit, bridging the gap in time between the past and the present. The second grouping of works demonstrates a process of “conflation.” These works appear as hybrids and dualities of formal properties from different series hailing from different chronological time periods, defying Gego’s strict adherence to seriality. Lastly, the third grouping of works referred to here as pertaining to a “temporality of the self,” are works that are marked by reversals and returns while at the same time, being very much grounded in the present moment, all the while being enacted through an acutely subjective aesthetic. Gego brings forth this subjective and personal aesthetics through various formal acts: by inserting materials from her older work into later work, and by imbuing these with materials from her present, everyday life. The formal operations in these three categories of Gego’s practice suggest the consistent contestation of a linear conception of temporality.

Despite Gego’s extremely meticulous recording and strict categorization of her work, it is notable how in many instances, a number of later works return to include subtle formal traces from earlier works that predate them—most especially, as these cross-over into different mediums and series. An example of one such “return to an early trace” is Dibujo sin papel 83/17 from 1983 (Fig. 34). In this work made of iron, Gego has
fractured its structure as its lower right quadrant splinters off, bends, hooks, and breaks. Taking a closer look back some almost thirty years prior, one can already see traces of this very same work emerging in two untitled works on paper from 1954: one, a tempera and ink on cardboard and the other a watercolor and ink on cardboard (Figs. 35-36). In *Dibujo sin papel* 83/17 it is as if the subtle brushstrokes from this pair of two-dimensional works reemerge nearly fifty years later, but this time in an iron framework. The same bending, fracturing, and splintering of lines reappear in the later work—a re-exploration of formal predecessors that traverses an adherence to strict media or seriality, as Gego loops back to early formal properties late in life.

Another example of this formal revisiting taking place in the space between Gego’s works on paper and her sculptural/installation work, can be found in *Sin título* from 1973-1988 (Fig. 37). An etching on paper, this work evinces traces of formal experimentation in two dimensions with qualities that Gego would later expand upon in *Dibujos sin papel*. While different media, and a good decade prior to the later series, the lines on this work on paper appear to bend and fold through space, once again warping and disfiguring the grid through a gaping hole in a similar manner to that which Gego would recall in the three-dimensional form in her *Dibujos*. In this way, the later series revisits this earlier one, despite the difference in media, and despite their chronological distance. In a way, time appears to almost be neutralized between the two, despite the many years that came between them, again challenging any conception of a linear form of temporality demarcated by distinct seriality. Instead, this work presents a version of time in which the future returns to the past—much like T.S. Eliot evokes in his poem,
“Burnt Norton” from his *Four Quartets*, which serves as the epigraph to this study, and suggests that the present is never able to be fully divorced from the past.

Temporal overlapping also occurred in Gego’s own public works. In *Cuerdas* (*Ropes*), a public work from 1972 located in Caracas’ Parque Central (Central Park) clear traces of *Sin título*, a cardboard box and string work from 1961, can easily be seen (Figs. 38-39). The playful dance of strings and chords in *Cuerdas* hearkens back to the strings of loud, neon orange and bright fuchsia of their antecessor. In collapsing the gaps of time by moving from a chromatic experimentation with vertical and cris-crossed lines, toward a monochromatic, large format of the same experimentation with linear ropes, Gego challenges the notion of a strict, linear formal development.

Another example where early traces from small scale works reappear in later works, seemingly bridging the years of time, is in a public work from 1969 installed in Caracas’ INCE (Instituto Nacional de Educación y Capacitación, (National Institute of Education and Training) building from 1969, which echoes an untitled ink on paper from 1962 (Figs. 40-41). Both examples manifest formal gestures interrupting geometry, dizzying linearity, and displacing the grid’s form, through an overlapping and even layering of parallel and perpendicular lines.

In essence, all of these examples present a version of temporality that collapses the periods of time existing between the earlier and the later versions of similar works. Gego may have seen the earlier works as experimental objects to be revisited later in time. Nonetheless, these formal similarities bridge those gaps in time, and rid this measurement of the years through their revisiting and re-inviting of earlier formal traces back into later works.
In the “Conflations,” traces of the principal formal properties of two or more of Gego’s series are clearly combined into one work, much as in a hybrid aesthetic. Examples hail from differing decades of the artist’s practice, highlighting the consistency of this understudied aspect of her practice that is highly evocative of a challenge to the notion of seriality and chronology that is so embedded in her historiography.

*Sin título* from 1963, a work of cardboard, wire, and glue, predates the *Dibujo sin papel* series begun in 1976 and the *Tejeduras* series begun in 1988 (Fig. 42). In a challenge to any rigid sense of seriality, through both its rustic wovenness and its play with wire in three dimensions, this work stands as a clear conflation of both series. As the work flirts with the grid’s form, while at the same time, juts out into three-dimensionality, it stands as a curious conflation of the most salient formal properties of both series.

Gego also conflated the *Dibujos* with her *Bichitos (Little Beasts)* series. *Dibujo sin papel* 85/2 consists of electrified copper wires that twist and bend, wrap around, and jut out towards the viewer; characteristics that echo those from her *Bichitos* series (Fig. 43). Gego did not create this series until several years after her *Dibujos*; however, her *Bichito 88/42*, for example, contains the same tangled, almost life-like wiring present in the *Dibujos* (Fig. 44).

Lastly, the gesture of conflation appears in *Bichito 91/12* from 1991, in which the artist melded formal properties of this series with those from her *Troncos* and *Chorros* series of the 1970s (Fig. 45). Consisting of the plastic wrappings and ribbons from her cigarette packs, the work has a sheer verticality that calls to mind her earlier two series. These exercises in linearity and gravitational verticality highlight formal properties that
the artist seems to both revisit and conflate by transferring these elements onto a work from a different series, while also going beyond the earlier two series’ traditional characteristics.

Conflations also occur in works on paper related to Gego’s *Reticulárea (ambientación)*. The dates of the three examples discussed here underscore that the act of conflation was a continuous gesture that Gego enacted. The works stand as testament to the idea that the folding and bending of time became essential to Gego’s formulation of her *Reticulárea*, as she continued to explore its formal characteristics in certain works on paper over a span of a nearly three decade trajectory. This continuous re-invitation of certain formal properties over time counters the suggestion of a linear conception of temporality and formal progression. Instead, a conception of temporality marked by returns and re-incorporations emerges, in which the artist both loops back and closes the gaps in the passage of time.

The first of these examples of a work on paper conflating the formal properties of *Reticulárea* is *Sin título*, an ink on paper from 1970, created only a year after Gego installed her first version of *Reticulárea* (Fig. 46). Here, elements from Gego’s monumental work re-appear in two-dimensional form in a work of ink on paper. Through the use of subtle lines bending and folding, collapsing and stretching the grid, the work suggests the visual experience of a visitor walking through the various webbed planes of the original installation, calling to mind Pérez-Oramas’s film documenting the experience of a viewer walking through *Reticulárea*, in his clip entitled *Anudamientos (Knottings)*.69

Another example in which Gego looped back in time through her formal appropriation of her earlier work, is the 1981 serigraph *Sin título* (Fig. 47). Here, Gego conflates elements not only from *Reticulárea*, but also from *Dibujos sin papel* and *Tejeduras*. The work’s vibrant chromatic palette of both pale and screeching pink combined with deep reds, also contains splintered white lines that warp the grid’s orthogonal form while still adhering to it, in the same manner that the *Dibujos* and *Tejeduras* did. At the same time, the white lines appear to bend and fold just as in *Reticulárea*. In this way, all three of these different series manifest themselves at once in one singular work. Despite its two-dimensionality, the serigraph appears as a cross-section of these series, bridging the gaps of time through conflating formal appropriations.

One final example of Gego recalling the formal properties of her *Reticulárea* and conflating them with a work dating nearly two decades later is *Tejedura 88/24* from 1988 (Fig. 48). Made of cardboard, acetate, and ink, this three-dimensional work emerges as a hybrid of a *Tejedura* and a rough sketch of a *Reticulárea*. Gego subtly includes the weaving gesture so particular to her *Tejeduras* series along the upper and lower borders of the work. However, she also splinters and diffracts the lines that comprise its interior area in a gesture that suggests the *Reticulárea’s* rejection of the grid from within its variously webbed planes.

Through its subjective aesthetics, Gego’s *Tejeduras* series suggests a form of “temporality of the self,” where, once again, the artist deliberately rejects the notion of linear chronological progression. Gego developed this series late in life, in 1988. It is the least studied of her series; however, it is my view that it is in fact one of the richest for
two reasons. First, in this series, Gego reinfused her work with the grid’s orthogonal form, re-inviting it into her practice in a reversal of time. Second, it is the most subjective of all the series in the artist’s work, and by extension, the one most stamped by the indexicality of the present. In addition, the sole craft of weaving is one that imbues a work with an acutely hand-made aesthetic, making the artist’s hand haptically palpable. In this series above all others, Gego incorporated highly personal and individual material elements from her everyday life, imbuing the works with a sort of aesthetics of the self, an indexical gesture that grounds these works in a subjectively present moment in time. In the *Tejeduras*, Gego thus reverses time while at same time grounding these works in the subjective present.

Two examples of this subjective aesthetic relate to the very well-known fact that Gego was an extremely avid smoker, and that she infused her works with the cigarette wrappings and the plastic ribbons from her cigarette packs—stamping these works with materials hailing from the present moment. In the first example, *Tejedura 88/20* from 1988, the artist wove the cigarette packs’ plasticized golden ribbon with azure strips of paper of equal measure into a gridded fabric (Fig. 49). In the second example, *Tejedura 90/20* from 1990, Gego imbedded the actual cardboard cigarette pack of her favorite brand of cigarettes (Dunhill) with a magazine ad for the brand (Fig. 50). The crimson and golden hues of the glossy magazine ad are woven together with the actual materiality of an actual Dunhill cigarette pack, speaking to the contemporaneity of the work.

An equally self-referential gesture, and reference to the present, is seen in a work from the same year, *Tejedura 90/52*, which relates to Gego’s love of her favorite alcoholic beverage: rum. Here, Gego wove the work with strips of paper from a
contemporary magazine ad for a bottle of the Venezuelan rum brand, “Dinastia.” (Fig. 51). Gego has woven the actual slogan of the “Dinastia” brand through the lower left quadrant of the work, turning its orientation upside down (Fig. 52). Coincidentally in line with the theme of temporality at the crux of this study, the slogan states: “porque el tiempo todo lo suaviza” (“because time softens everything”). At this point late in her career, Gego tellingly chose to comment on the nature of time, particularly referencing the ameliorating aspect of its passage.

Perhaps Gego’s most subjective gesture was her re-use of her older artwork, which she wove into her Tejeduras, as in Tejedura 91/37 from 1991, a work in which Gego conflated a contemporary magazine illustration and an original work on paper of her own (Fig. 53). In doing so, Gego infused the present with the past, closing the gap between the years through the subtle act of weaving the two temporal strands together. This form of subjective recycling demonstrates both a reversal in time to her earlier works, as well as a conflation of multiple temporalities. Once again, Gego challenges the possibility of any form of temporal linearity in her oeuvre, denying a sense of progression and conflating the gaps in the passage of time. As such, the works create a sense of multi-temporality while demonstrating that the present can never fully be aesthetically divorced from the past in her oeuvre.

Lastly, the heretofore unpublished Tejedura 91/32 of 1991 can be considered the most acute example of the relationship between Gego and temporality for a number of reasons (Fig. 54). Firstly, in this highly subjective and personal work, Gego wove together strips of paper from a page from an almanac from Hamburg, returning to her natural German heritage in a gesture that may evince a nostalgia or yearning for her past
and homeland. In all of Gego’s oeuvre, only one other work, *Solgio* from 1951, depicted the landscape of her European heritage on graphite and cardboard (Fig. 55). That this *Tejedura* should demarcate a return once again to her roots, late in life, in 1991, three years prior to the artist’s death, is a notable gesture of a reversal of time and return. At the same time, the artist once again re-invited the orthogonality of the grid into her practice.

Secondly, Gego’s chosen medium, an almanac, contains associations to chronology and temporality, and to the recording and measurement of time. That this almanac hailed from Hamburg makes it all the more remarkable, as if the artist were coming full circle back to her German roots (perhaps a nostalgic gesture of hers at this late stage in her life), in a reversal of time, with the very materiality of an object employed for the measurement of time. Arguably, in this work, above all others, Gego evinced an awareness of temporality as a construct in her work. This fractured and woven page of a German almanac stands as a testament to the novel brand of aesthetics of temporality that Gego brings forth in her oeuvre: a formal portrayal of time that conflates, disrupts, returns, and collapses any form of temporal linearity.
CONCLUSION

Creía en infinitas series de tiempos, en una red creciente y vertiginosa de tiempos divergentes, convergentes y paralelos. Ese trama de tiempos que se aproximan, se bifurcan, se cortan o que secularmente se ignoran, abarca todas las posibilidades.
~ Jorge Luis Borges “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan,” 1941

Through this thesis, I have shed light on the precarious balance between the acts of appropriation and deconstruction, abandonment and return, which characterize Gego’s oeuvre. Furthermore, I have framed this practice in between the two temporal poles of a modernist art historical lineage from which Gego originally departed, and a highly subjective and contemporary practice very much rooted in the present, which the artist enacted in the later stages of her life. First, by tracing the trajectory of Gego’s relationship to the grid—her first incorporating, then collapsing, and much later in life, re-inviting it back into her practice—I have mapped out this path as one that resists the conventional conception of time as linear. Second, through carrying out an examination of the creative choices Gego made within Reticulárea, I revealed the formal elements mined from her modernist lineage which she chose to embark upon, and those that she chose to discard. Through underscoring Gego’s precarious alliance with, as well as deviation from, a modernist art historical framework, I have conveyed that the genealogical trajectory of her practice—marked by its many deconstructions, inversions, and subversions—diffractions any formal linearity that could be presumed to accompany the

passage of time. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that Gego’s oeuvre contests the teleological linear development presumed by Greenbergian modernist art history. Lastly, through an in-depth formal analysis of a number of mainly unpublished works by Gego, I have brought forth the artistic choices that Gego made in her practice that challenge the notion of a linear conception of time, and amplify an understanding of her oeuvre. In these works, Gego enacted formal decisions reflecting collapse, interruption, and return; artistic choices that defy the notion of a linear chronological progression. In this manner, Gego thus branded a novel approach to the construct of time, bringing forth an aesthetic of temporality that subtly weaves together the two strands of both the present and the past.
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ILLUSTRATIONS

Note: all works by Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt) unless otherwise specified.

Fig. 1. *Reticulárea (ambientación)* (*Reticulárea, environmental work*), 1969
mixed media, 17’ 8” by 11’ 5” by 16’ 4” (5.4 x 3.5 x 5 m)
Museo de Bellas Artes (Museum of Fine Arts), Caracas
Image Source: Eva-Marina Froitzheim, Brigitte Kölle, Lisa Le Feuvre, and Petra Roettig.
Fig. 2. *Reticulárea, environmental work*, 1969, mixed media, dimensions variable
Center for Inter-American Relations Art Gallery (now: Americas Society)
New York, 1969
(Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2003), Fig. E, p. 150.
Fig. 3. *Reticulárea, environmental work*, 1969, mixed media, dimensions variable
Galería de Arte Nacional (National Art Gallery), Caracas, 1997
Fig. 4. Pietro Perugino, *Christ Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to Saint Peter* ca. 1481-1483, fresco, 130 by 220 in. (330 x 550 cm), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City
Image Source: Hunter College Image Kiosk
**Fig. 5.** Sin título (*Untitled*), 1953, xylograph on paper, 4 1/2 by 6 1/8 in. (11.6 x 16.1 cm)
Image Source: Iris Peruga and Marta Liaño. *Gego: 1955-1990, A Selection* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes and Gego Foundation, 2000), Fig. 110, p. 28.

**Fig. 6.** Tres mujeres en banco (*Three Women on a Bench*), 1954 watercolor on cardboard, 10 7/8 by 13 3/4 in. (27.6 x 34.8 cm)
**Fig. 7.** *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1959, ink on paper, 11 by 8 1/2 in. (27.9 x 21.5 cm)  
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**Fig. 8.** *Ocho cuadrados (Eight Squares)*, 1961, painted iron  
66 by 25 by 15 ¾, in. (170 x 64 x 40 cm)  
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**Fig. 9.** *Movimiento dinámico (Dynamic Movement)*, 1960, etching on paper
(sheet: 38 x 28.5 cm), (image: 25.2 x 22.3 cm)

**Fig. 10.** *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1966, lithograph on paper
18 5/8 by 10 7/16 in. (47.3 x 26.5 cm)
Image Source: Anne Louyot. *Gego, Poétique de la ligne.* Collection Mercantil, Caracas, Venezuela (Paris: Maison de l'Amérique latine, 2014), Fig. 35, p. 56.
**Fig. 11.** *Carta (Letter)*, 1973, etching and lithograph on paper
(sheet: 76 by 56 cm) (image: 35 by 28.7 cm)

**Fig. 12.** *Conjunto de Líneas paralelas (Ensemble of Parallel Lines)*, 1969-1970
stainless steel on acrylic base, dimensions variable
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Accessed November 4, 2015
Fig. 13. *Chorro Nº 7 (Stream Nº 7)*, 1971, iron and aluminum rods 69 by 16 1/2 by 10 1/2 in. (175 x 42 x 27 cm)  

Fig. 14. *Boceto para Reticulárea (model for Reticulárea)*, ca. 1980 stainless steel and galvanized iron wires 13 by 9 1/2 by 4 1/2 in. (33 x 24 x 11.4 cm)  
Fig. 15. *Reticulárea Cuadrada N° 2 (Square Reticulárea N° 2)*, 1971
steel wire and plastic, 50 by 42 by 6 3/4 in. (127 x 107 x 17 cm)

Fig. 16. *Reticulárea Cuadrada N° 5 (Square Reticulárea N° 5)*, 1971
stainless steel wire and metal rods, 38 1/4 by 38 1/4 by 25 5/8 in. (97 x 97 x 85 cm)
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*Gego in Context* (Houston: International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of
Fine Arts Houston, 2003), Fig. 7, p. 56.
Fig. 17. *Tronco No. 4 (Trunk No. 4)*, 1976, stainless steel and lead
84 5/8 by 22 1/16 by 22 13/16 in. (215 x 56 x 58 cm)
Image Source: Artstor Image Database

Fig. 18. *Esfera No. 2 (Sphere No. 2)*, 1976, stainless steel rods, 40 1/2 in. (103 cm)
Image Source: Gego Foundation Online Image Archive
© Anne and Thierry Benedetti and Archivo Colección Banco Mercantil
Accessed February 4, 2015
Fig. 19. *Dibujo sin papel* (Drawing Without Paper), 1985
metal, wire and thread, 36 by 34 by 2 in. (91.1 x 86.4 x 5 cm)

Fig. 20. *Dibujo sin papel* (Drawing Without Paper), 1985
galvanized iron mesh, 24 3/4 by 20 7/8 by 2 3/4 in. (63 x 53 x 7 cm)
Image Source: Mari Carmen Ramirez, and Theresa Papnikolas. *Questioning the Line: Gego in Context* (Houston: International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2003), Fig. 13, p. 66.
Fig. 21. *Bichito 88/42 (Little Beast 88/42)*, 1988, mixed media
2 1/8 by 3 3/4 in. (5.5 x 9.5 cm)
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Fig. 22. *Bichito 89/29 (Little Beast 89/29)*, 1989, mixed media
3 1/8 by 4 3/4 in. (8 x 12 cm)
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Fig. 23. *Tejedura 91/3 (Weaving 91/3)*, 1991, construction paper and metallic ribbon 11 5/8 by 11 in. (29.6 x 28 cm)
Image Source: Félix Suazo. *Gego: Tejeduras, Bichitos y Libros* (Caracas: Fundación Telefónica, Fundación Gego, and Periférico Caracas, 2013), Fig. 9, p. 14.

Fig. 24. *Tejedura 91/16 (Weaving 91/16)*, 1991, printed paper 8 1/4 by 6 1/8 in. (21 x 15.5 cm)
Fig. 25. *Esfera (Sphere)*, 1959, painted welded brass and steel, diameter: 22 in. (55.7 cm)
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Fig. 26. Alejandro Otero, *Coloritmo 39 (Colorhythm 39)*, 1959, ducotone on wood
78 3/4 by 20 7/8 in. (200 x 53 cm)
Fig. 27. *Cuatro planos rojos (Four Red Planes)*, 1967, soldered and painted iron 32 7/8 by 33 7/16 by 31 7/8 in. (83.5 x 85 x 81 cm)

Fig. 28. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Fisicromía No. 42 (Physichromie No. 42)*, 1961 hardboard and cardboard, 12 1/4 by 12 1/4 in. (31 by 31 cm)
Fig. 29. Jesús Rafael Soto, *Vibración (Vibration)*, 1965, metal and oil on wood
62 1/4 by 42 1/4 by 5 7/8 in. (158.1 x 107.3 x 14.9 cm)
Image Source: Guggenheim Museum Online Collection
http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/3974
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Fig. 30. *Esfera en cubo (Sphere within a Cube)*, 1967
welded and painted iron rods, 39 3/4 by 70 7/8 by 40 1/2 in. (101 x 180 x 103 cm)
Fig. 31. Alejandro Otero, *Abra Solar* 1976, iron and aluminum
Plaza Venezuela, Caracas.
Image Source: © Victoria Fedrigotti

Fig. 32. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Doble Fisicromía (Double Physichromie)*, 1982
anodized aluminum, Plaza Venezuela, Caracas
Image Source: © Victoria Fedrigotti
Fig. 33. Jesús Rafael Soto, *Penetrable de Pampatar (Pampatar Penetrable)*, 1971 (no longer in existence)
white nylon tubing, variable sizes
Image Source: Jacqueline Barnitz. *Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), Fig. 8.19, p. 158.
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Fig. 35. *Sin título* (*Untitled*), 1954, tempera and ink on cardboard
11 11/16 by 16 5/16 in. (29.7 x 41.5 cm)
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Fig. 36. *Sin título* (*Untitled*), 1954, watercolor and ink on cardboard
11 3/4 by 16 5/16 in. (29.8 x 41.5 cm)
(Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2003), Fig. V, p. 26.
Fig. 37. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1973-1988, etching on paper
25 13/16 by 19 3/4 in. (65.6 x 50.1 cm)
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Fig. 38. Cuerdas (Ropes), 1972, ropes of nylon, aluminum, and copper
55 3/5 by 65 1/2 ft. (17 x 20 m), Parque Central (Central Park), Caracas

Fig. 39. Sin título (Untitled), 1961, cardboard box and string,
19 7/16 by 7 1/4 in. (24 x 18.4 x 1.8 cm)
**Fig. 40.** *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1962, ink on paper, 8 5/16 by 10 11/16 in. (21.1 x 27.2 cm)
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**Fig. 41.** Façade of INCE Mural (Instituto Nacional de Educación y Capacitación, or, National Institute of Education and Training), 1969, aluminum tubes
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Fig. 42. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1963, cardboard, wire, and glue
11 1/16 by 8 9/16 in. (28.1 x 21.8 cm)
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Fig. 43. *Dibujo sin papel 85/2 (Drawing Without Paper 85/2)*, 1985
copper wires covered with plastic, 15 1/8 by 19 11/16 by 2 1/8 in. (38.5 x 50 x 5.5 cm)
Image Source: Josefina Manrique. *Gego/Procedencia y encuentro* (Caracas: Sala Mendoza and Gego Foundation, 2012), Fig. 91, p. 35.
**Fig. 44.** *Bichito 88/42 (Little Beast 88/42)*, 1988, mixed media
2 1/8 by 3 3/4 in. (5.5 x 9.5 cm)
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**Fig. 45.** *Bichito 91/12 (Little Beast 91/12)*, 1991
aluminum, paper, iron, wire, and ribbon, 57 7/8 by 2 3/4 by 2 3/4 in. (147 x 7 x 7 cm)
Image Source: Félix Suazo. *Gego: Tejeduras, Bichitos y Libros* (Caracas: Fundación Telefónica, Fundación Gego, and Periférico Caracas, 2013), Fig. 37, p. 34.
Fig. 46. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1970, ink on paper, 24 3/4 by 19 3/16 in. (62.9 by 48.7 cm)
Image Source: Josefina Manrique. *Gego/Procedencia y encuentro* (Caracas: Sala Mendoza and Gego Foundation, 2012), Fig. 61, p. 30.
Fig. 47. *Sin título (Untitled)*, 1981, serigraph on paper
18 5/16 by 16 1/4 in. (46.5 x 41.2 cm)
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Fig. 48. *Tejedura 88/24 (Weaving 88/24)*, 1988, cardboard, acetate and ink
6 1/2 by 3 1/4 by 7/8 in. (16.6 x 8.3 x 2.2 cm)
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Fig. 49. *Tejedura 88/20 (Tejedura 88/20)*, 1988, paper and plasticized ribbon
5 13/16 by 12 3/16 in. (14.8 x 12.8 cm)
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Fig. 50. *Tejedura 90/20 (Weaving 90/20)*, 1990, paper and cardboard
8 1/2 by 8 in. (21.7 x 20.3 cm)
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Fig. 51. Tejedura 90/52 (Tejedura 90/52), 1990, printed paper and cardboard 7 7/8 by 7 5/16 in. (20 x 18.6 cm)  
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Fig. 52. Image of bottle of “Dinastia” rum.  
Image Source: Accessed October 6, 2015  
Fig. 53. Tejedura 91/37 (Weaving 91/37), 1991, paper and construction paper
8 by 11 1/8 in. (21 by 28.3 cm)
Fig. 54. *Tejedura 91/32 (Weaving 91/32)*, 1991, paper, 22 by 28 in. (55.9 x 71.1 cm)

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Fig. 55. *Solgio*, 1951, graphite on cardboard, 8 5/16 by 11 1/8 in. (21.1 x 28.2 cm)
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