

# LISSON GALLERY

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## Press Release

### Carmen Herrera

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27 Bell Street, London

“I like straight lines, I like angles, I like order. In this chaos that we live in, I like to put order. I guess that’s why I am a hard-edged painter, a geometric painter” – Carmen Herrera, *Artists in Exile*, 1994

Carmen Herrera’s sixth exhibition with Lisson Gallery, and her second with the gallery in London, features an entirely new body of work created within the last year. Featuring a large *Estructura*, along with a number of paintings and works on paper, the exhibition displays some of Herrera’s most ambitious work to date. Known for her geometric lyricism and vibrant abstractions, Herrera produces dynamic compositions that convey movement and rhythm through a careful balance of lines, forms and colours. Embracing an approach that is at once meditative and reflective, daring and bold, Herrera’s work evokes a simultaneous sense of instability and order, encompassing symmetry and asymmetry, shadow and light. Rather than tricks to fool the eye, her intent is to sharpen it.

Herrera’s dynamic use of colour and form is realised perhaps most effectively in her series of three-dimensional works, known as the *Estructuras* (Structures). The work presented at Lisson Gallery, titled *Pavanne*, is Herrera’s largest structure to date, originally conceived in 1967 as a monument in dedication to her younger brother, who was dying of cancer. Based on paintings “really crying out to become sculpture”, Herrera’s *Estructuras* represent a rare break in Herrera’s insistent planarity and rectangular container of her paintings. Moving from drawing, to painting, to sculpture, the physical manifestation of her forms brings to life the precision of Herrera’s sharp edges. As with many of her early *Blanco y Verde* paintings, Herrera envisioned her *Estructuras* in an environmental sense, using the surrounding walls as part of the composition. The irregular shapes, unable to fit perfectly together, create negative space to play with spatial awareness and balance. The first *Estructura* designed to go outside, the sculpture on view as part of the exhibition further extends the possibilities of the work, adding nature or different spatial dimensions into the mix.

The sculpture is accompanied by new eight new paintings, each composed of bands of colour that exist in unequal proportions and are suspended in tension with intersecting areas of black. Working predominately with acrylic, the geometrically-organised, dichromatic paintings contain a range of shapes in different sizes, almost mathematically arranged to create perfect compositional balance. While these works retain a certain luminosity, they are predominately dark, almost resisting colour, and indicate a steady move towards increasingly simplified pictorial elements and a progressively reduced colour palette. Notably uninterested in either the cultural or philosophical connotations of colour, Rob Storr, in his essay for the exhibition catalogue that accompanied Herrera’s inaugural exhibition of Lisson Gallery’s 24<sup>th</sup> Street location in New York in May 2016, states: “Indeed it strikes me as impossible to disregard the existential aura of these latest compositions.”

*Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight*, a major exhibition of Herrera’s work first staged by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in September 2016, is on view at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20) in Düsseldorf, Germany from 2 December 2017 until 8 April 2018. The show features more than fifty works, including paintings, works on paper and three-dimensional pieces, ranging from the late 1940s all the way through to 2017.

## About Carmen Herrera

Core to Carmen Herrera's painting is a drive for formal simplicity and a striking sense of colour: "My quest", she says, "is for the simplest of pictorial resolutions" (2012). A master of crisp lines and contrasting chromatic planes, Herrera creates symmetry, asymmetry and an infinite variety of movement, rhythm and spatial tension across the canvas with the most unobtrusive application of paint. As she moved towards pure, geometric abstraction in the post-war years in Paris, she exhibited alongside Theo van Doesburg, Max Bill and Piet Mondrian and a younger generation of Latin American artists, such as members of the Venezuelan Los Disidentes, Brazilian Concretists and the Argentinian Grupo Madi. Her work also chimes with her peers from the U.S. school such as Barnett Newman and Leon Polk Smith. Reflecting on this period, she says, "I began a lifelong process of purification, a process of taking away what isn't essential" (2005). While allied with Latin American non-representational concrete painting, Herrera's body of work has established, quietly but steadily, a cross-cultural dialogue within the international history of modernist abstraction.

Carmen Herrera was born in Havana, Cuba in 1915. She moved frequently between France and Cuba throughout the 1930s and 1940s; having started studying architecture at the Universidad de La Habana, Havana, Cuba (1938–39), she trained at the Art Students League, New York, NY, USA (1942–43), before exhibiting five times at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1949–53). She settled in New York in 1954, where she continues to live and work. Herrera's paintings were the subject of a large-scale survey at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, USA (September 2016 – January 2017), which travels to Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20) in Dusseldorf, Germany from 2 December 2017 until 8 April 2018. A selection of Herrera's recent paintings and *Estructuras* inaugurated Lisson Gallery New York's 24<sup>th</sup> Street exhibition space in May 2016. Herrera has also had solo exhibitions at Museum Pfalzgerie Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern, Germany (2010); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2009); and Museo del Barrio, New York City, USA (1998). She has been included in the group shows 'Post War: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965', Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2016); 'Order, Chaos and the Space Between', Phoenix Museum of Art, Arizona, USA (2013); and 'The Geometric Unconscious: A Century of Abstraction', Sheldon Museum of Art, Nebraska, USA (2012). She was awarded two fellowships from the Cintas Foundation, New York, USA (1966–68) and a grant by the Creative Artists Public Service, New York, USA (1977). Her work is in numerous public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA; the Tate Collection, London, UK; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC, USA; The Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC, USA; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL, USA; the Institute of Fine Arts Boston, MA, USA; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Pfalzgerie, Germany; and El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY, USA.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 56 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the public for the first time. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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