

MUSEO TAMAYO

Manuel Felguérez
(Zacatecas, Mexico, 1928)
Tension towards three, 1973

Hello! My name is Esteban King. I'm a curator and an investigator of modern and contemporary art, and in this audio I'll talk about one of the pieces included in the commemorative exhibition of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Museo Tamayo.

Manuel Felguérez, born in the state of Zacatecas in 1928, and died in Mexico City in 2020, was an artist who belonged to the Half-Century Generation and the movement known as La Ruptura, which opened new routes for art and culture in Mexico in the middle of the last century.

Due to the fact that he studied abroad for several years and was a tireless traveler, the artist was able to learn first-hand about the avant-garde movements of Europe, the United States and Latin America, which allowed him to enter the field of plastic creation through different paths. Throughout his life, he carried out everything from meticulous work with spatulas and different materials attached to the canvas, which allowed him to create carefully planned textures and tactile sensations, to compositions based on free strokes, gestural processes and paint drips, or else, in mathematical calculations and computational processes.

In addition to his pictorial work, Felguérez made numerous sculptures, works of public art, assemblages and large-format murals. As if that were not enough, during the 1950s and 1960s he also collaborated on the set design for different theatrical productions, films and performance pieces which had an experimental nature.

From the end of the 1950s and for much of the 1960s, the painter produced works close to the international artistic movements known as abstract expressionism and informalism, which started from the premise that it is possible to materialize, through movements of the body, strokes and gestures on the canvas, the subjectivity and the inner world of the artist. Numerous pieces associated with these movements are also part of the Museo Tamayo's collection.

After ten years of making works from this perspective, Felguérez searched for other forms of composition that did not depend on spontaneous emotion or expressiveness, but were rather based on combinatorial possibilities conceived beforehand. Thus, at the beginning of the seventies, he began a series of investigations focused on exploring a system based on the combination of certain basic elements (such as the triangle, the square, the circle and their derivations) to build, according to his own words, a "plastic alphabet". To achieve this, he thoroughly analyzed the production he had made throughout the previous decade and synthesized the elements that made it up; in his own words, he "geometrized" his time in informalism, with which he discovered the components that structured his own creative practice. In this way, he developed a kind of language, with its own operating rules, which he included under the name "The multiple space".

The piece "Tension towards three", from 1973, can be understood as part of the investigations of this project. The work of art, made with acrylic lacquer on silk, and measuring 124 x 150 cm, consists of a series of colored planes and geometric figures that propiciate a volumetric effect, that is, they generate in the viewer the sensation of observing a three-dimensional space, as if it were a part of an architectural work or a sculptural piece. The central motif is made up of three whitish ovals, which lie on the vertical face of a kind of "step" created by the optical play of the piece. The title, in fact, seems to allude precisely to the force generated by these circular elements in relation to the entire composition, as well as to the appearance of three dimensions in the flat space of the painting.

The colors that make it up, in turn, range from white to deep black, going through grey, brown and purple, as well as two red lines whose intensity stands out among all the other elements. Just as in other creations from the same period, in this work there is an effort to explore space and the way in which different colored surfaces made with the basic elements of geometry interact. This is evident in the titles of other pieces in this same series, such as "Game of planes" or "Transformed motifs", both from the same year as "Tension towards three".

For its part, the acrylic lacquer with which it was made favors the appearance of well-defined solid surfaces, uniform and without textures. This type of painting moves away from the traditional tools and procedures of this discipline —such as the brush or spatula— and is much closer to the industrial field, since it is a type of common application in the automotive universe. The interest in machines and the universe of materials and industrial processes is one of the characteristics that runs through practically all of this artist's work, and is present both in this pictorial series and in the iron and waste murals he made during the sixties, as well as in a large number of public works —as is the case of the metal latticework that surrounds the National Museum of Anthropology.

Tension towards three is a work that accounts for Manuel Felguérez's efforts to find other forms of creation, which do not necessarily have to do with the rather problematic notions of "inspiration" or "genius", but rather are the result of a meticulous study of his own creative practice and the paths that foster analysis and reflection in the field of art.

Thank you for listening to this audio. If you are interested in learning more about other pieces in the Museo Tamayo collection, visit the Commented Collection section on the museum's website.

Text by Lorenza Herrasti