

**Marcela Jardón: Paintings “The Depth of Subjectivity”** by Andrea García Casal  
(translated by Kymm Coveney)

“No forms. ‘The finest has no shape.’ [...] No colors. ‘Color blinds.’ [...] No light. No bright or direct light in or over the painting. [...] No space. Space should be empty, should not project, [...] No time. [...] ‘A work of art is always present.’ [...] No size or scale.”

Selection of fragments from *Twelve Rules for a New Academy*. Ad Reinhardt, 1957.

The truth is that by laying out his *Twelve Rules for a New Academy* (1957), the painter Ad Reinhardt gives us a sense of how difficult it is to find plastic artists who adhere to his rigid postulates. His highly refined technique of post-painterly abstraction gives rise to a very clear interpretation of painting as something autonomous, independent of all but itself. Independent even of its creator, who must paint with utter impartiality since there can be no trace of subjectivity in the artwork. For Reinhardt, the only objective path is to scrupulously work technique and medium under his precepts, which include the absence of form, color, luminosity, and space.

Within the context of her own painting, [Marcela Jardón](#) (Buenos Aires, 1964) is obviously not a fan of the peculiar rigor demanded by Reinhardt in his treatise. This is also the case due to Reinhardt’s having set his hardline theoretical corpus against the famous abstract expressionism of artists like Jackson Pollock, because he was absolutely opposed to that art movement.

Jardón is not living in an era of disputed abstract styles, nor does she feel indebted to them in any way. However, in reviewing each of the post-painterly artist’s rules, certain fragments spark interest in a discussion of the kind of art that Jardón has been making in recent years.

First of all, our featured artist does fall into the realm of abstraction as regards her art. This is worth mentioning because she is a multifaceted artist who primarily cultivates painting, photography, object art, installation art and audiovisual media, yet does so always with an eye for abstraction. Here the term abstract art is understood to be closely tied to conceptual art. Jardón is concerned primarily with ideas, regardless of how this later takes shape in her art. It therefore follows that she can combine objects, photographs and paintings and regard them all as abstract. Ultimately, she uses different forms of artistic expression to channel her thought processes, but the focus of this article is the paintings on which she has been fervently working over the past few

years. Also worth mentioning in this regard is the notion of *disegno*, as perfected by the art historian Giorgio Vasari. This Renaissance author argued that *disegno* is synonymous with properly channeled ideas as well as with draftsmanship — and drawing can be done only after lengthy deliberation. *Disegno* is the origin of all visual art. This is a good point to consider, given that Jardón eschews drawing as the basis for her paintings, and yet she has been working on series such as *Ejercicios para una comprensión del espacio-tiempo* [*Exercises in Understanding Spacetime*] in which she reasons out the primacy of drawing to translate the idea of space. In other words, she feels that it moves from the negative sphere of nonexistence-abstraction to the positive sphere of existence-concretion. This is useful in understanding her pictorial work, which also considers the idea as being directed towards the concretion of a subjective artistic reality.

The artist was introduced to Reinhardt's painting at *Ad Reinhardt: "El arte es el arte y todo lo demás es todo lo demás"* [*Art Is Art and Everything Else is Everything Else*], an exhibit held in Spain in 2021 that captivated her, even though she had not yet studied Reinhardt's theory.

Nevertheless, Jardón's painting could never adhere to the punctilious postulates he advanced, because her art stirs up emotions and feelings. Yet there is no lack of meaning, precisely because —as mentioned earlier— she does lay out her thought process, so her art is immersed in subjectivity. Which makes sense at least. Presenting objective artwork in Reinhardt's cold fashion means imposing a personal point of view, according to the Argentine artist's vision. And this is true. There is nothing objective in favoring the perspective one person has regarding art —or other disciplines— over the rest.

Art is a pathway to expression and recreation. Our featured artist knows it is important for the viewing public to feel aesthetic pleasure, but she also wants them to feel moved. There are no figures in her artwork; there are no forms, as Reinhardt said. But all other points tend to vary. For example, lately she has been working on a series of black paintings that are fascinating to analyze, and they connect with the idea of color being the thing that blinds, and not light. These paintings are done in very dark, monochromatic tonalities —black, neutral, with occasional exceptions when she adds dark blue— now and then interrupted by fields of gray or white. In fact, these tones are constructed by using a wash of black paint and sgraffito, as well as by leaving areas of white canvas unpainted. At any rate, her paintings are muted and smooth. Visible reality —as regards representation—is rejected at the highest level through the use of a single color that in no way constructs space.

As mentioned earlier, when Jardón starts on a piece, she is not particularly invested in the type of support or technique she's using or how it looks in the end. She begins with

sheer conceptualization, and from there makes concrete choices of the media she needs to bring her idea —as it pulses through her mind— to fruition. She is particular with the details, and has continued to experiment over the years. Our featured artist's task of thinking out what she wants to transmit through her art is complicated and rigorous —in this sense, she ascribes to Reinhardt's severity. She is not concerned with teasing out an intense emotion and pasting it onto the piece, as if it were some spontaneous emptying of the id. In this way she distances herself from gesture and speed —from a visual arts point of view— preferring to think through her painting and externalize her subjectivity rather than blast out explosions of creativity.

When she works on her black paintings, she takes care to give them a velvety texture— to increase the haptic effect. Refinement is evident in how the paintings are texturized but, at the same time, this tactility can generate a certain visual unease. Visually her paintings feel like velvet. They give off not a sense of smoothness but the exact opposite: what Reinhardt so detested. A viewer's gaze sinks into a murky sea, incapable of fixing onto a hypothetical, well-defined horizon. Yet, again, there is coherence between idea and object: what is on display is the concept of sadness, war, death. This is a point of inflection in Jardón's career. Color is symbolic, but also negative in that it respects our western tradition. Even so, it also alludes to a problem affecting the entire world: the armed conflict in Ukraine; Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "No time. [...] 'A work of art is always present.'" In a way, this quote rings true here. Although a particular era —a current event— is evoked, it is also true that armed conflicts have a degree of timelessness because they never end. There are always several circumstances regarding the cause of every war, but the general idea remains that armed conflict is warranted in order to achieve results. Whether it's 1337 or 2023, there seems to be no great variation in the stakes involved: one nation subjugated by another based on culture, exploitation of other cultures' material wealth, etc. In this sense, Jardón has predecessors as unmistakable as Francisco de Goya and the Black Paintings that were torn from the walls of his Quinta del Sordo home, marking not only the end of his career, but the end of his life as well. Paintings which in many cases are thought to be linked to heartache, not just because of the subject matter, but especially due to the grimness of the images depicted.

Jardón doesn't find it relevant to consider how far away a war is; it is an event that affects the entire planet and for which we need to offer condolences even to ourselves. Her chromatics and textures showcase her inner empathy and pain through color and a layered effect. Here she begins to use tempera to achieve a velvety texture, a look that is muted while suggesting an ecological objective.

Indeed, our artist uses organic tempera paint not only to enrich her artistic career in terms of technique, but also to minimize the use of acrylics. Acrylic paint uses synthetic polymers, and so has an artificial, industrial origin. It is also a constant reminder to the artist that we live in an era of massive use of plastics, which usually come from petroleum products, therefore also alluding to global warming and the depletion of our natural resources.

Encouraged in the use of tempera for her black paintings, she continues to investigate how its effectiveness can be applied to more colorful paintings, such as those in her *Floating Landscapes (Interdimensional Maps)* series. She feels passionate about seeing the contrast between the intense, saturated colors of acrylics and the tenuous, grainy qualities of tempera. This series is dedicated to landscapes — a recurring theme in the artist's career. Yet she doesn't see the genre of landscapes in the way tradition indicates. Jardón doesn't resort to imitation or to recreating any previously seen landscape. Her landscapes are not related to her own experience, so she feels no need to have seen any "in real life" to paint them in her own way. Her opinion is that experience is not limited to the individual but is collective when referring to human beings. This means that, roughly speaking, certain experiences —as repeated by many people throughout time and in different geographical areas— can become engraved in an underlying genetic memory. This allows us to extract the essence of what a certain landscape might mean, regardless of its content as mountain or snowscape, desert or seascape.

It goes without saying that the landscapes in this series are abstract compositions in the usual colors, unlike the hard monochromes of her black paintings, which are a true allegory to the sorrow caused by warmongering. These paintings may or may not make use of the psychology of color, yet they tend to be structurally composed of two large fields of color in graduated tones. This lets the application of colors generate depth, in opposition to Reinhardt's "no space." The sense of depth produced by the horizontally divided fields of color, and by glazing, should not, however, be understood as a quest to convey a linear perspective. This is not a matter of subtle illusionism. It is a matter of focusing on a landscape that is imaginary, one that our own optics cannot fully capture. Ultimately, Jardón's landscape painting is an incarnation of what her mind, consciously or unconsciously and roughly speaking, understands nature to be, of whatever she is feeling and whatever aesthetic value she gives it, while her technique acts as a pathway taking her to the finished painting. Doubtlessly formless and everlasting, yet having color, light, and space.