

## ELENA ASINS

(Madrid, 1940 - Navarra, 2015)

*A painting is simply a fact, an action or an intervention, in which all the internal elements are intertwined in a determined way. This connection or relation is precisely what I have been denominating, for years, structure.*<sup>1</sup>

Considered one of the pioneers of cybernetic art in Spain, Asins developed her own graphic systems to produce shapes. These systems were based in numeric series, grammatical structures and musical developments. Interested in the core fundamentals of semiotics, she studied with Max Bense at the Universität Stuttgart in Germany and later on with Noam Chomsky at the University of Columbia, New York. In 2011 she was awarded with the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas (National Prize of Fine Arts).



Elena Asins during the exhibition *Fragmentos de la Memoria*  
© Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid. June 2011 – February 2012.

Asins' artistic investigation was determined by her early experience, in 1968, at the Centro de Cálculo, Madrid, where she took part of the seminar *Generación Automática de Formas Plásticas*. In this context, she started to explore the mathematical basis of art and the possibilities of working with new technologies. The origin of Cybernetic art in Spain took place in this seminar. During these years Asins was part of other experimental circles such as the "Cooperativa de Producción Artística y Artesana", a project initiated by Ignacio Gomez de Lianño, and surrounded herself by colleagues who were open to explore the crossovers between different disciplines: Fine Arts, mathematics, poetry, linguistics, philosophy, music or architecture.<sup>2</sup>

Asins' work was strongly influenced by these currents, and, specifically, by Optical art, monochromatic paintings and the Suprematism of Malevich. The artist progressively incorporated new materials such as thread, nylon or folded paper. These early advances in her artistic approach were strongly reinforced during her time at the University of Stuttgart, in 1970, where she met Max Bense and got familiar with his theory of "aesthetics of information". From this moment on, Asins worked intensively in the exploration and implementation of structures. But it was not until the eighties, during her time at the University of Columbia, New York, that she produced her first works with a computer. Asins was invited as a Visiting Scholar to the Department of Computer Science and conducted her research on the digital application of fine arts.

<sup>1</sup> Asins, E., Elena Asins, *Menhires [Cat exp]*. Sala Luzán, Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, oct 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Castañón Alés, E., "Los Orígenes del Arte Cibernético en España". *El seminario de Generación Automática de Formas Plásticas del Centro de Cálculo de la Universidad de Madrid (1968-1973)*. Málaga Univeristy, Spain, 2000.

# GALERÍA ELVIRA GONZÁLEZ

Hermanos Álvarez Quintero, 1  
28004 Madrid

T +34 91 319 59 00

[galeriaelvira.com](http://galeriaelvira.com)

Since then, the use of the electronic calculator was key to the conceptualization and production of her work. The research residency at Columbia University gave rise to a series of works in which she explored the structure of the drawing through progressive and generative forms, starting from the concept of scale. Between 1987 and 1990 Asins lived and worked in Hamburg. In this city she continued her investigation, focusing on generating shapes through the computer and printing them on continuous paper. Conceptually, these works were inspired by religious and philosophical ideas, which ranged from the Old and New Testament to Wittgenstein.

During the nineties Asins continued to work with computers and decided to reactivate mathematical formulas she had already explored in the past, reaching the creation of a whole new system. It was in this moment when she denominated those atoms, or minimal elements of the work, in memory of J. S. Bach,<sup>3</sup> Canons. In 1990 Asins returned to Spain after ten years living abroad and focused intensely on her investigations around the Canons 22. Music and rhythm were a source of inspiration for Asins, constantly present in her career. In the aforementioned Canons series, Asins visually parted from a melody, developing imitations and obsessively repeating the elements with slight variations.

Elena Asins moved to Azpiroz, Navarra, during the mid-nineties. From here, the artist continued her research on the elimination of materiality and designed sculptures and reliefs in different scales and materials, such as methacrylate, painted wood or alabaster. In her last stage she began to experiment with video in order to display space and time on a screen. Likewise, she became increasingly interested in conceptual art and made works based on pure space, produced by high precision digital prints.

Elena Asins received numerous grants during her career, including Fundacion March', Madrid, "Beca para España", (grant for Spain) in 1978, the Spanish Ministry of Culture's grant in 1980, and the Juan March Foundation's Grant for the U.S. In 1985 she was invited by Columbia University, New York, as Visiting Professor, and in 1988 she received the First Prize *Zeitschrift für Kunst und Medien*, Karlsruhe, Germany.

In 2011 Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, dedicated a large retrospective to Elena Asins. Her work is included in museums and private and public Collections such as Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Museo de Arte Abstracto de Cuenca, Museo de Bellas Artes de Alava, Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Museu d'Art Contemporani Vicente Aguilera Cerní de Vilafamés, Fundación Banesto, Unión FENOSA Collection, MACA (Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Alicante), or Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao.

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<sup>3</sup> How does a Canon work?

The Canon is a piece or section of a musical composition of a compensatory nature based on the imitation between two or more voices separated by a time interval. A vocal or instrumental part plays a melody and, a few bars later, a second voice repeats that same melody exactly or modifying its tonality or other aspects. More voices can participate in this process. The first voice is called dux, proposal or antecedent, and each of the following voices eats, response or consequent.



@galeriaelvira.com



@galeriaelvira.com



@GalElviraGonzal