Lee Lozano/MATRIX 135

"There can be no art revolution that is separate
designed to preside over a realm of its own, a realm where art and politics are separate as sky and sea, where art is heaven and politics is hell."

...
Lee Lozano/MATRIX 135

"Seek the extremes, that's where all the action is."

Lee Lozano (April 24, 1969)

Throughout the 1960s, artist Lee Lozano produced a diverse body of work that is as strikingly original as any made during that famously innovative decade. Lozano’s artistic production during those years is comprised of several related but distinct projects. As an accomplished painter, she produced a vast array of eccentric and deeply personal pieces, ranging from small figurative compositions to large-scale abstractions. Although she was widely recognized for these works, Lozano’s creative output was by no means limited to oil on canvas.

The drawings and studies for Lozano’s paintings co-exist in her working notebooks and diaries with a unique group of language-based works that document a variety of the artist’s everyday interactions and actual, lived experiences. Like Lozano’s later paintings, these “art-as-life” experiments belong to a larger movement known as Conceptual art, an art historical designation that encompasses a wide range of then unorthodox practices — principal among them the use of serial processes and the incorporation of language — that emphasize the artistic value of actions and ideas over the traditional material aspects of the art object. Indeed, Lozano was one of the earliest and most disciplined practitioners of Conceptual art in the United States.

By the end of the 1960s, Lee Lozano was duly regarded among the most important and influential artists of the decade. As the noted critic and art historian Lucy Lippard recently observed, “in terms of actual Conceptual art, the major female figure in New York in the 1960s was Lee Lozano.” Although she was a well-known and respected member of the New York art community throughout the 1960s, the artist has, in subsequent years, received very little recognition for her pioneering efforts. In fact, the majority of her work never has been exhibited publicly. This two-part MATRIX exhibition, which features Lozano’s Wave Series paintings (1967-1970) and a selection of largely unknown language-based Conceptual pieces drawn from the artist’s notebooks (1965-1970), marks the first museum presentation of Lozano’s work in over ten years.
Unlike the majority of her conceptually-driven colleagues, Lozano continued to paint throughout the 1960s. From 1961 to 1963, she produced a substantial number of expressionistic figurative paintings. Around 1964, however, her painting style changed dramatically with a series of cool, reductive, and, often, monumental images — first of machine-made objects and, later, of geometric forms such as arcs, cones, and circles. Lozano’s painting career culminated with a dramatic series of eleven abstract canvases that explore the notion of wave phenomena. At one point, Lozano considered the Wave Series to be a single work of art, and this MATRIX presentation marks the first installation of the entire set according to the artist’s original specifications.

The individual paintings are distinguished by the varying number of wave-like forms which occupy the central, vertical axis of each panel. Like much Minimal and Conceptual art of the period, Lozano’s Wave Series was generated through a logical, pre-set system. In this case, the artist used the uniform height (ninety-six inches) of each of the eleven canvases as a point of departure. The number of waveforms within each painting was determined by calculating the even factors of ninety-six (two, four, six, eight, twelve, sixteen, twenty-four, thirty-two, forty-eight, ninety-six etc.) and the length of each individual wave within a single composition was determined by dividing the height of the canvas by the total number of waves needed for the particular panel. In the 4-Wave painting, for example, each individual wave measures 24” (96/4=24), while in the 96-Wave painting each individual wave measures one inch (96/96=1).

The canvases are also distinguished by color. Lozano used only one or two different colors of Shiva® oil paint on each panel, limiting herself to muted shades of red, yellow, green, purple, brown, and gray. For the first six paintings in the series, she worked with two closely-valued colors on each canvas — one for the monochromatic field and another for the waveforms. After completing the first six canvases, however, Lozano seems to have lost interest in these painterly color juxtapositions and further restricted her palette to two closely-valued hues of the same color on each panel. Despite appearances to the contrary, Lozano rejected any notion of color theory. Describing her choices for the series as necessarily “arbitrary, inescapably arbitrary, and irrevocably arbitrary,” she insisted that she varied the colors of the paintings only “to avoid boredom” or “to learn more about color.” (March 29, 1969).

Indeed, process and technique were of significantly more interest to Lozano than color. After preparing the canvases with glue and two basecoats of lead-white paint, she applied the selected color with a three-inch-wide household paintbrush over the entire surface in a regimented horizontal motion. To create the longer waveforms for the first six panels, Lozano used the same brush to blend in a second color, raking the coarse
bristles over the surface from top to bottom with rhythmic, sweeping S-curves. As the series progresses and the number of waves in each composition increases, however, the waves get shorter and shallower. The dramatic, undulating lines of the early paintings eventually yield to more intricate “ripples” that define central, columnar forms. Although these later paintings are essentially monochromatic, the waveforms are articulated by the contrasting appearance of the heavily textured ridges left by Lozano’s pronounced horizontal and vertical brushstrokes.

Like much of her artistic activity, the Wave Series was the result of Lozano’s obsessive reliance upon a self-imposed set of pre-determined rules. Such a system would dictate not only how the paintings would look but also how and when they were made. Lozano stipulated, for example, that each Wave Series canvas would be completed in a single painting session. Importantly, the slow-drying Shiva® oils allowed her to paint for long periods of time and still maintain a wet, pliable surface. (The prolonged manipulation of thin coats of paint created what appear to be thickly layered surfaces.) Throughout the series, the duration of these painting sessions varied significantly. In fact, the artist was eager to assign a mathematical logic to the variances, observing near the end of the project that the length of each session was “inversely proportional to the length of the wave.” (c. November 1970). That is, the longer waves were easier to paint, while the shorter waves of the higher numbers required focused draftsmanship and long, grueling sessions. The 2-Wave painting, for instance, lasted only eight hours, while 96-Wave required three consecutive days of relatively uninterrupted labor. As she approached the end of the series, Lozano began to view these intensely focused sessions as performance-based endurance tests.

Based on her original concept for a series of paintings structured by the uniform, ninety-six inch height of the canvases, Lozano might have logically concluded the project after the 96-Wave. In order to end the series, however, she wanted to test the parameters of her system. Having used all of the constituent even factors of ninety-six, Lozano simply chose to double the original figure as the basis for the singular 192-Wave painting — a white canvas with a pencil-drawn waveform that approaches a straight line. “In physics,” Lozano noted, “all straight lines are really curved if you extend them far enough...Where else is there to go but all the way around?” For the artist, the 192-Wave marked more than simply the culmination of this consuming series. Indeed, after finishing the last of these eleven canvases she resolved never to paint again.
Lozano’s approach to this, her final series of paintings, was profoundly ambitious. Conceived as her magnum opus, she hoped the works would, when viewed as an entirety, function as more than mere paintings. They were, after all, designed not as individual objects but as components of a room-sized installation. More than anything else, the Wave Series was a grand experiment, an attempt to move beyond the formal specifics of painting to create a contemplative, interactive environment. “I can’t be interested in form for form’s sake,” Lozano wrote. “Form is seductive. Form can be perfect. But there’s no justification for form...unless it’s used to expose content which has meaning.” (July 19, 1971).

For Lozano, the production of meaning was rooted in the systematic observation, documentation, and analysis of the physical world. Her art aspired, then, to the qualities of science and mathematics. Discussing the Wave Series, Lozano recalled: “I was trying to combine science and art and existence...It was a science idea transferred to an art idea. What interested me, still interests me, what turns me on, excites me the most [is] astronomy, physics, cosmology.” The waveforms themselves were generated by means of several basic mathematical calculations. Additionally, the painted images are metaphors for scientific phenomena, references to a range of wave-related energies (including, in order of decreasing frequency, cosmic-ray photons, gamma rays, x-rays, ultraviolet radiation, visible light, infrared radiation, microwaves, and radio waves) described by the electromagnetic spectrum. With this metaphor as the foundation of her thinking, Lozano envisioned the completed installation as an extended meditation on the nature of light and energy.

As objects, the paintings were intended — from their conception to their execution and eventual display — as vehicles to capture and reflect light. Although the colors themselves may have been arbitrary choices, the specific properties of the ferrous oxide paints Lozano chose were of great importance. The artist was drawn to the muted earth tones of the Shiva® colors and to the reflective, metallic quality of those tones. Applying this paint directionally with a coarse, wide brush resulted in the textured ridges that mark the surface of each of the canvases. As one critic observed, “The finely ridged surfaces reflect and diffuse light in a complicated fashion...intensities
and hues shift and change as the viewer...changes position."

In order to maximize the potential for these paintings to respond to light, the artist spelled out very specific requirements for their exhibition. Rejecting the traditional presentation of paintings hung on white gallery walls, Lozano mused: “I would like to show the series leaned against black walls...with spots aimed at the canvases as the only light in the room.” (February 9, 1969). Unlike the reflective surfaces of white walls, black walls absorb the projected light and enhance the luminosity of the painted canvases. Leaning the objects at an angle instead of hanging them flat against a straight wall also intensifies the reflective properties of the painted surfaces. Furthermore, the leaning canvases allow for easier access to a contiguous view of the paintings from a side-long perspective. Viewed from this vantage point, the rich, tactile canvases take on an almost trompe l’oeil quality, as the flat surfaces of the later paintings begin to resemble a series of corrugated — almost sculptural — projections and recessions in threedimensional space.

Ultimately, Lozano viewed the Wave Series in a way that transcended their status as painted objects. For her, these paintings did more than represent waveforms; they actually created and transmitted their own energy. Fearing that the waves would be confined by the edges of the canvas, she refused to allow any protective stripping or framing along the top or bottom edges. “The idea was always that they were to be extended in any direction, that the energy left the canvas, beyond the edges.” The presence of the Wave Series, Lozano hoped, would be nothing short of magical. “I was never engaged by the idea that painting ought to be flat...and I never felt that the edges of the canvas were a boundary,” she wrote. “All my paintings are just details of a form that can be extended to infinity...”
Although widely disparate in form and content, much of Lee Lozano’s work can be understood as an investigation into the nature of systems, and, more broadly, into the ways in which systems determine actions. As indicated by the Wave Series, Lozano was interested in using art as a method of shaping particular experiences in controlled environments. Indeed, she structured many aspects of both her art and her life with a series of speculative propositions and self-imposed instructions. The second half of this MATRIX exhibition features a selection of the artist’s written documentation of these ideas for everyday interactions and includes more than twenty works on paper selected from an exceptional body of largely unknown material incorporated within Lozano’s working notebooks.

For Lozano, as it was for a handful of other pioneering Conceptual artists, ‘art’ could be created in conversation, in political action, or simply even in thought. As the artist herself said in 1968, “I have started to document everything because I cannot give up my love of ideas” (February 3, 1968). Ranging from whimsical fantasies to pragmatic guidelines for specific behavior, Lozano’s ideas always are stated simply and directly in terse, plain language. Conceived during the same period as the Wave Series, this work — like much of the art of the 1960s — attempted to blur the distinction between art and everyday life. Unlike most “instruction” or “command” pieces of the period, however, Lozano’s works are almost always directed at herself.11

Many of these diaristic pieces document intense “duration performances” involving the artist’s communication with and physical movement through the world. Together, they created an elaborate system of prescriptions and prohibitions, dictating the ways in which Lozano would and would not act in certain everyday situations. At various points in the late 1960s, these written works record ideas that would determine — with varying degrees of flexibility — the kinds of clothes she would wear, the types of food she would eat, the amount of drugs she would use, the people she would talk to, the frequency and nature of her masturbation, the amount of money she would invest, spend, or give away, and countless other aspects of her daily life.

Although these activities are recorded in the artist’s notebooks, Lozano was careful to
I will not call myself an
art worker but rather an
art dreamer

and I will participate only in
a total revolution that is
simultaneously personal
and public.

Lee Lozano. Statement for Art Worker’s Coalition (April 10, 1969)

PLEASE NOTE: Composer Alvin Lucier, John Spencer Camp Professor of Music at
Wesleyan University, will present a new work for voice and pure wave
oscillators created in response to Lozano’s Wave Series paintings and fea-
turing vocalist Joan La Barbara on Sunday, March 29, 1998 at 2:00 p.m.
A reception in honor of Mr. Lucier and Ms. La Barbara will follow the perfor-
mance. Please call 860.278.2670 x 3047 for information and reservations.

Andrea Miller-Keller, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art, will
present a gallery talk on the exhibition on Tuesday January 20, 1998.

James Rondeau, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, will present gallery
talks on the exhibition on Tuesday February 3 and Tuesday March 31, 1998.

All events are free with museum admission.
articulate the difference between the documentation of particular actions and those actions themselves. In the aptly titled Clarification Piece (July 28, 1969), Lozano wrote: "Make a clear distinction between a piece as an act or series of acts in time and the write-up of a piece which occurs only when there is occasion to show the write-up." An idea or an action was "written-up" as a way to share the content of her work, either publicly (in the context of an exhibition or publication) or privately (in her notebooks, diaries, or letters to friends). Lozano accorded the "write-ups" an ancillary artistic status as documentary material. "All write-ups of pieces are drawings," she allowed in a footnote to the Clarification Piece.

By Lozano's own design, this performance-based work existed outside of the usual art-world economy of discreet, salable objects. Instead, the artist's radical integration of her artistic practice and her everyday, lived experience represented an attempt to produce art within an alternative economy of distribution. As such, many of the works reveal Lozano's sophisticated, and often cynical, attitude toward success and survival in the competitive, market-driven art world. On various occasions, her proposals included making piles of printed matter relating to the art world in order to document the transient nature of individual artists' careers. Drawing for Lucy's Peace Show (February 26, 1969), pulling work out of an exhibition as an act of protest (Withdrawal Piece, February 1969), listening to the radio while attending a panel discussion on art (Transistor Radio Piece, March 31, 1969), and throwing all the latest issues of a noted art magazine into the air (Throwing Up Piece, May 8, 1969). While these quasi-comical proposals reflect Lozano's growing distaste for the institutional art world, her most pointed and concise repudiation of "the system" is articulated in General Strike Piece (begun February 8, 1969). Thinking of her own presence in symbolic terms, she stated her intent "to gradually avoid being present at official or public 'uptown' functions or gatherings related to the 'art world' in order to pursue investigation of total personal and public revolution."

One idea in particular proved to be central to Lozano's pursuit of an artistic revolution. The Dialogue Piece (begun April...
As always, the project commenced with a simple set of instructions: "Call or write [or] speak to people for the specific purpose of inviting them to your loft for a dialogue." Over the course of the next eight months, Lozano contacted different art world figures and asked them to participate in the project. In the beginning of the piece she recorded, in the form of a simple list, the name of the person she invited, the date of the invitation, and the person's response to the offer. Later, only the dates of actual dialogues and the person or persons involved were documented, along with occasional references to the content of the conversation or the nature of the interaction.

Although the documentation for Dialogue Piece ends on December 18, 1969, Lozano indicated from the outset that the piece would be "in process perpetually from the date of the first call." Acknowledging the limitless possibilities of the idea, she asked "what if I stopped doing different pieces and did the Dialogue Piece for the rest of my life as my work?" [It] comes the closest so far to an ideal I have of a kind of art...which is not for sale, which is democratic, which is not difficult to make, which can never be completely understood....In fact, this piece approaches having everything I enjoy or seek about art..." (n.d.) In working through the project, Lozano recognized the potential of extending her practice to its logical conclusion. If living and making art could be one and the same thing, the possibilities were indeed endless. Most importantly, she would no longer need to operate within the conventional art world.

As the 1960s drew to a close, Lozano's activity was marked by an increasing sense of isolation. In the artist's own words, her "dialogue was becoming increasingly interior." In General Strike Piece, she had described a "withdrawal from humans and the outside world" and had refused "to see [her] partner or anyone else." (April 3-5, 1969). Exactly a year later, Lozano elaborated on her feelings of growing detachment from the New York art world. "It was inevitable, since I work in..."
sets of course, that I do the *Dropout Piece*. It has been churning for a long-time but I think it’s about to blow. *Dropout Piece* is the hardest work I have ever done.” (April 5, 1970)

In the late summer of 1971, Lozano seized upon a single notion that would hasten the “dropout,” and, in the process, structure the course of her life for the next twenty-plus years. “Decide to boycott women,” she writes in the first week of August 1971. Lozano first conceived the piece as a short-term exercise. She started by throwing away an unanswered letter from a female colleague and refusing to greet a female acquaintance in a neighborhood store. By the second week of August, Lozano tells a female friend who phones that she is boycotting women as an experiment for a month or so. “After that,” she says “communication will be better than ever.” For reasons that are beyond the scope of art historical inquiry, Lozano has continued her boycott of women to this day.

In many ways, Lee Lozano’s art and life can be understood as a series of confrontations — with the canvas, with herself, with other artists, with the art world in general, with more than half of the world’s population. After leaving New York City in the early 1970s, Lozano eventually settled in Dallas, Texas. Since that time, her rejection of women has been one of the principal defining aspects of her life. Her determination to sustain this extreme position has, at times, made her life incredibly difficult. It often prohibits her from completing even some of the most basic tasks of daily living. Lozano’s decisions also have made it nearly impossible for her — and, in turn, her work — to circulate in the contemporary art world. Regardless of adversity, Lozano maintains her conviction, now as before, with tenacious will, unwavering commitment, and fierce integrity.

James Rondeau
Associate Curator of Contemporary Art
Unless otherwise noted, all Lozano quotations are from actual drawings for works of art or from unpublished materials found in the artist’s correspondence, working notebooks, and diaries. Wherever possible, exact dates are included within the body of the text. This material was made available by Rosen and van Liere Modern and Contemporary Art, NYC.


2 In 1980, the art critic Robert Hughes acknowledged the extreme radicality of Lozano’s work in the 1960s, but correctly reported that “What became of this [artist] the record does not show.”


4 See Eric Lawing, et al. Previous to this MATRIX installation, the eleven canvases of the Wave Series have been exhibited together on only one occasion. Immediately following their completion in 1970, the Wave Series was shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City from December 1970 to January 1971. In 1988, seven of the eleven canvases were exhibited at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery in Greensboro, North Carolina. Neither of these two installations was designed according to Lozano’s original instructions.

5 See Kashia Linville, p. 81.

6 Lozano, in Corinne Robins, p.68.

7 Lozano, in Poirier and Necol, p. 135.

8 See Dennis Adrian, p. 60.

9 Lozano, in Poirier and Necol, p. 135.

10 Lozano, in Robins, p.68.

11 There are rare examples of works designed to be carried out or completed by someone other than Lozano herself.

12 Throwing Up Piece (May 8, 1969), for example, seems to allow for anyone who sees the instruction to execute the work.

13 Under all circumstances, Lozano was most eager to keep the nature of these proposed interactions as flexible as possible, defining “dialogue” as “an exchange between people, the form of which need not be limited to verbal communication.” Indeed, several of the “Dialogues” are described as “nonverbal,” or, in an unmistakable reference to sexual activity, as “non-verbal.”

14 At one point, Lozano wondered if “the Dialogues are a saying good-bye?” (unpublished, c. July 3, 1969).
WORKS IN MATRIX

WAVE SERIES

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are 96" x 42", oil on cotton duck, 1967-1970, collection of the artist and courtesy of Rosen and Van Liere Modern and Contemporary Art, NYC.


WORKS ON PAPER

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are graphite and ink on paper, 8.5" x 11"., collection of the artist and courtesy of Rosen and Van Liere Modern and Contemporary Art, NYC. Where applicable, citations indicate position in Lozano's original notebooks and date.


ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Green Gallery, NYC, ‘64, ‘65; Van Bovenkamp Gallery, NYC Contemporary Erotica ‘64; Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT The New Art ‘64; Bianchini Gallery, NYC ‘66; The Lanniss Museum of Normal Art, NYC Normal Art ‘66; Allentown Art Museum, PA New Acquisitions 1963-1966: The James A. Michener Foundation Collection ‘66; Old Dominion College, Norfolk, VA Contemporary Paintings from the Michener Foundation Collection ‘67; The Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, OH Gordon, Lozano, Ryman and Stanley ‘68; Dwan Gallery, NYC Language III ‘69; Paula Cooper Gallery, NYC Number 7 ‘69; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 31st Biennial Exhibition ‘69; Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne, Germany ‘69; Suermontd Ludwig Museum, Aachen, Germany Heutige Kunst ‘69; Watson Gallery, Wheaton College, Norton, MA 8 Painters ‘69; University Art Museum, University of Texas at Austin Selected Paintings from the Michener Collection ‘70; Neue Galerie im Alten Kurhaus, Aachen, Germany Kliishe+Antikliische: Bildformen der Gegenwart ‘70; Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco, CA Some New York Painting ‘70; Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne, Germany Bilder, Skulpturen, Objekte, Zeichnungen ‘70; PS 1 Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY Abstract Art: 1960-1969 ‘83; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro Art on Paper: The 19th Weatherspoon Annual Exhibition ‘83; Grey Art Gallery, New York University, NYC 1969: A Year Revisited ‘94; Lawrence Markey Gallery, NYC Graphite Drawings ‘96.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ABOUT LEE LOZANO

Perreault, John. “Art &...,” The Village Voice vol.15 no.51 (December 17, 1970), p. 27.
Lippard, Lucy, ed. Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972... Praeger Publishers Inc. (NYC), 1973, p. 78+


Lee Lozano was born Lenore Knaster on November 5, 1930 in Newark, New Jersey. She received a B.A. from the University of Chicago in 1951. In 1956, she married architect Adrian Lozano and enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago. After receiving a B.F.A. from the Art Institute in 1960, Lozano spent several months traveling in Europe. Upon her return, she settled in New York City, where she lived until c.1972. Currently, the artist lives in Dallas, Texas.