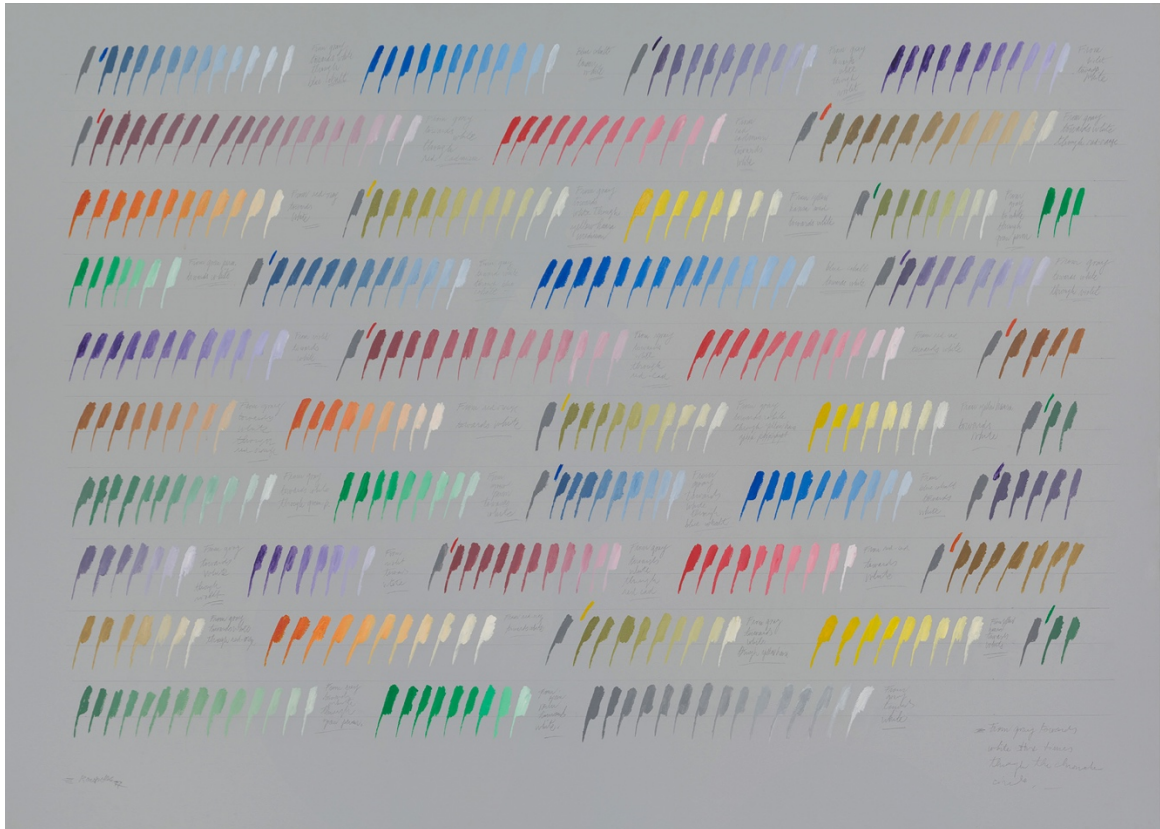


# Osvlado Romberg. Color Studies: From Analysis to Metaphor, 1970-2015

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*From gray towards white three times through the chromatic circle, 1977. Acrylic on canvas, 164 x 228 cm*

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**Osvlado Romberg. Color Studies: From Analysis to Metaphor, 1970-2015**

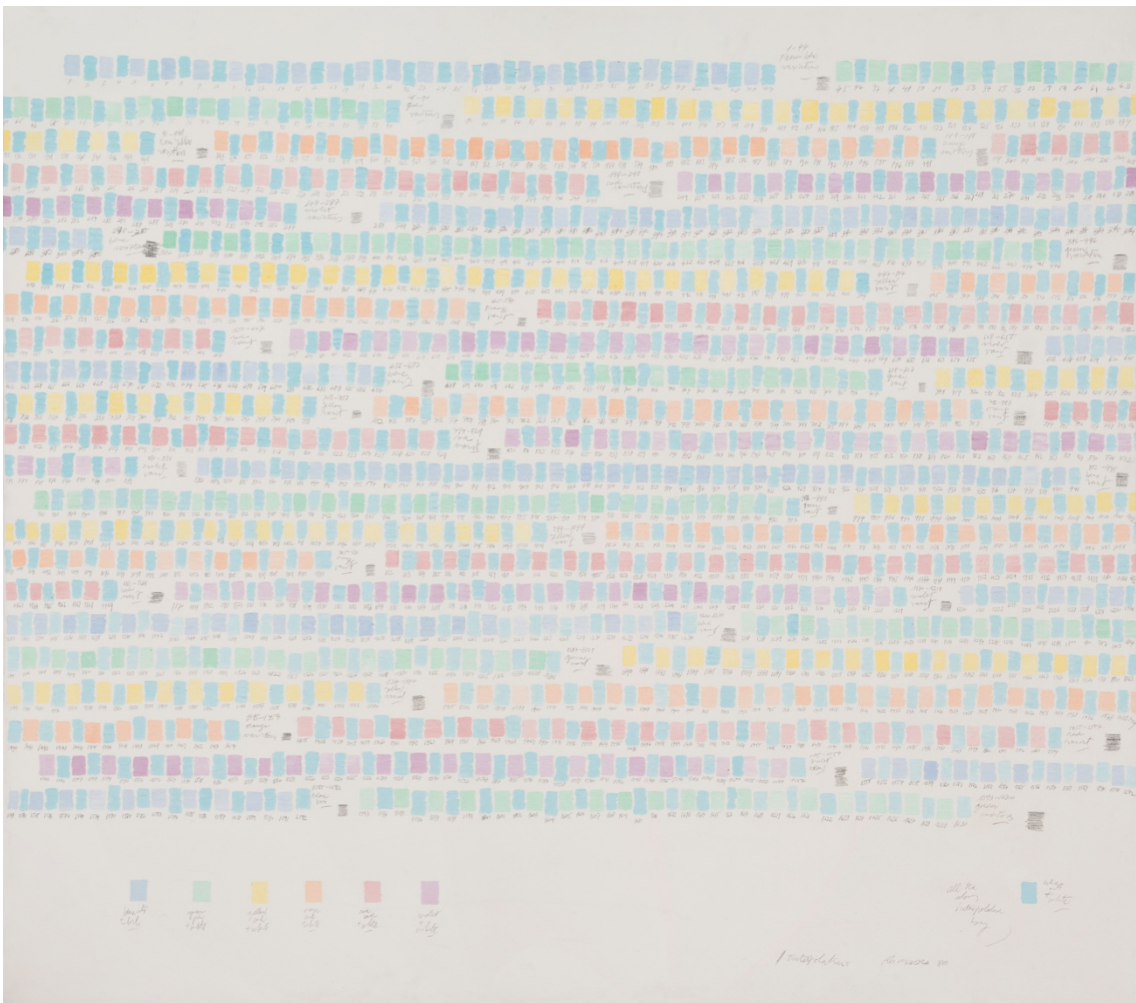
In 1935, Alfred Barr arrived in New York with Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918). The shipment of the small painting from the Russian revolutionary period to Germany and then to the United States was a landmark moment in avant-garde art. Susan Buck-Morss, in her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, argued that, in that journey, *White on White* lost its mystical power and became a prototype of the "pure" and "true" art that inspired many American artists. But this, a debatable proposition in relation to American art, is undoubtedly incompatible with Latin American art. The concrete artists of Latin America who discovered Malevich in the French magazine *Art de aujourd'hui* in the 1950s, established a Malevichian thread, which reverberates through Latin American art, reaching Helio Oiticica, as well as Mirtha Dermisache and Horacio Zabala, to mention only a few. Osvlado Romberg (born 1938), who has been working with color theory and meaning since the early 1970s, occupies a privileged position on this list. If the Malevichian lineage is applied to an artist such as Romberg, who stands out by his nomadism and transnationality, it is because Malevich's constellation belongs to a Latin American art of universal temperament and cosmopolitan practices. *White on White* represents the tension between universal languages and the strength of *hylé* (matter); its discovery by the Latin American concretists ushered in a new sense of the sublime that linked art practices with the indescribable quality of pleasure.



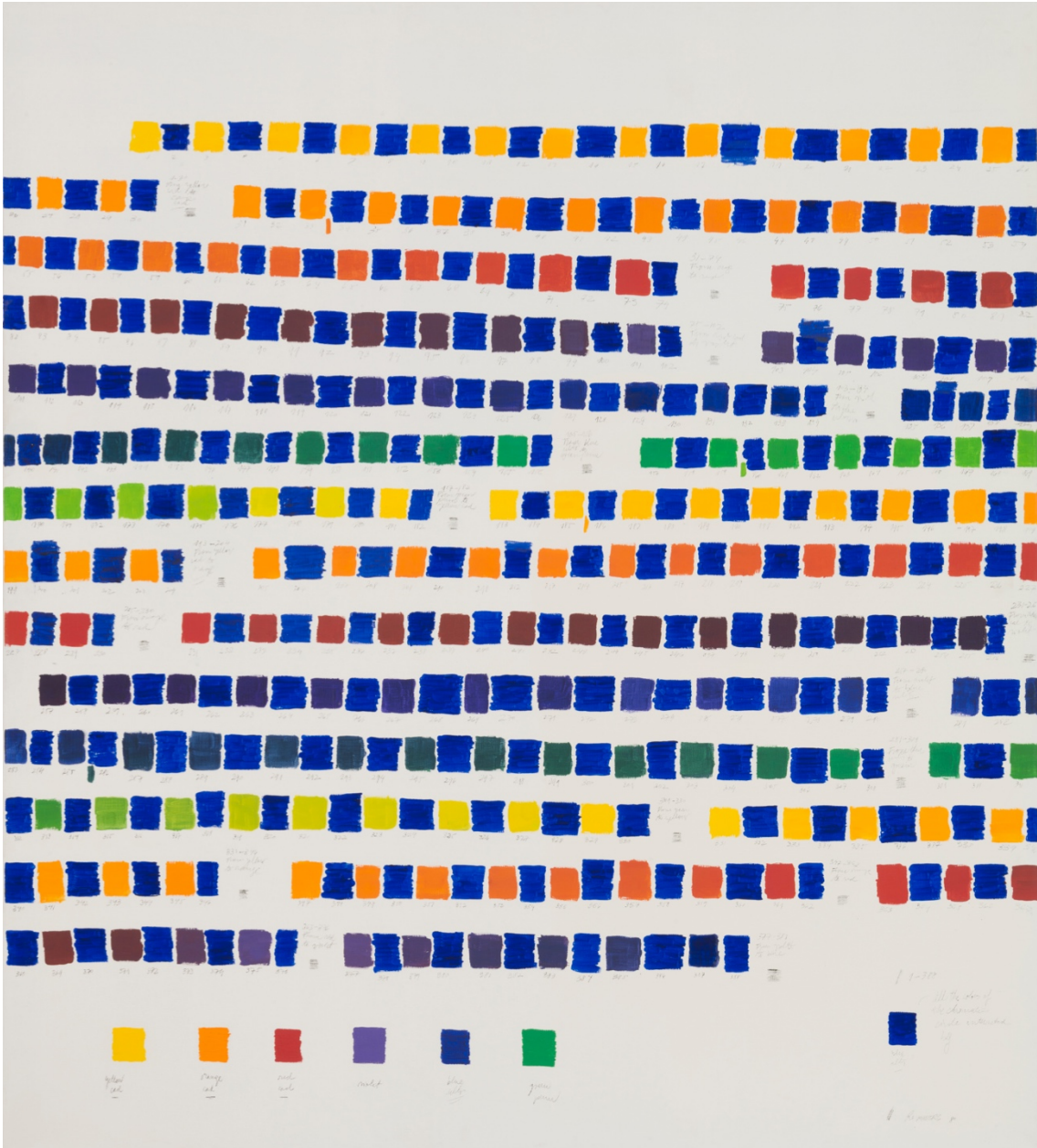
8 pictorial gestures with green, blue, yellow paint, 1974. Acrílico y lápiz sobre tela. 66 x 100 cm

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But what is Romberg's Malevich? Or, in other words, how does this artist process the *white* of a new sense of the sublime as it was understood in Latin America? In Romberg, the new sense of the sublime is pedagogical; it is organized according to what the artist himself called a "didactic space". Against expectations, the result of this formula is not a transparent relationship with the audience or a peaceful integration into a prestigious past, but rather a transgression through performance, invention and sensory energy. Although Romberg's works are created using a strict framework, they still provide room for his creative impulses. He is constantly teaching while showing us the mystery of myth, he keeps proposing grids and cognitive structures in order to ask us to offer our bodies and explore a sensitivity beyond reason. There are several references: from Joseph Kosuth's chairs (replaced by colors) to Goethe's theory of colors; not only because the German writer carried out a color study based on perception and the inclusion of psychology and sensitivity, but also precisely because his notion of *white* was not the absence of color, but an opaque sparkle of pure transparency. Rather than lack, *white* is expression and intensity. It is the power of the neutral.



*Interpolation*, 1980. Acrylic on canvas. 140 x 157,5 cm



*All the Colors of the Chromatic Wheel Interpolated by blue*, 1980. Acrylic on canvas. 200 x 180 cm

In Romberg, *white* does not have a descriptive value, not even a compositional one: it configures a language (hence the reference to Kosuth, which is clearest in his *Color Studies*) - an opaque language in that didactic space which works as an infinite alphabet full of nuances. Romberg resorts to the *gestalt* and the grid (common tools of high modernism), but he twists or contaminates them: he does dirty geometry; he makes up a Malevichian nightmare in which groups, straight lines and diagonals are not clear; he creates a figure behind a grid hidden by white lines, black squares and the uneven presence of the primary colors, red, blue and yellow. Being rational at the start (measurements and grids are his main tools), he is explosively sensitive in his intervention on the energies of the body, colors and shapes. An heir of structuralist

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approaches and passionate about taxonomies, Romberg made these knowledge frames deal with a body that responds to his requirements but at the same time exceeds them, as in the sculptures made with rods and sketches of black, white and yellow. In that excess, his strokes, his prints, his lessons, his landscapes and his colors are inscribed.

Gonzalo Aguilar

Gonzalo Aguilar is a researcher and instructor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the CONICET Institute.



Estudio de color para "La Ronda Nocturna" (Rembrandt), 1974. Collage, acrylic and pencil on paper. 77 x 49,5 cm

**Oswaldo Romberg** was born in 1938 in Buenos Aires. He studied architecture in the fifties and made several trips in the following years. In 1969, Romberg was called from Buenos Aires to update the Faculty of Fine Arts of Universidad Nacional de Tucumán's curriculum. He joined the faculty, bringing the lessons learnt from architect Gastón Breyer and influenced by architect Eduardo Sacriste (author of *Huellas de edificios* [*Building Footprints*]). Although Romberg began as an architect, he always acted from the edges: the architectural gesture never left him. However, in his practice of art, Romberg transgressed one of the prevailing myths in Western thought, rationalism, which was applied without changes to what was called "rationalist" architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Romberg undermines this dimension through body performance and heuristics (invention), because what is a landscape without a body experiencing it? What is a picture but the colors making it up and oscillating between local, historical and affective choices? And senses, to which field do they belong? What is that which exceeds what is rational but that which would also be wrongly called irrational? Colors, landscapes and bodies have their rational part (they can be measured and admit typological approaches), but also have emotional, sensory, mythical qualities. Or, to say à la Dominique Nahas, they have "somatic energy". As in the *Malevich 3D* sculpture, the measure is the human body, but the colors, landscapes and bodies know how to stand on their feet, they can face us and give us a message we will never stop trying to decode.

In the early 1970s, began using a grid to analyze the tone and saturation of various colors. His thorough taxonomies are vibrant, rainbow-like compositions whose optical effects exceed and deform the empirical structure of the grid with their uneven strokes of paint. Romberg's deconstruction of both individual hues and those of famous historical paintings investigate the political and social conventions of looking and seeing. The works on paper from this period are infused with Romberg's interest in art history, philosophy, linguistics, and informational systems.

Romberg has exhibited and curated shows internationally. He is currently Senior Curator at the Slought Foundation in Philadelphia and has guest curated exhibitions at Mana Miami, Habeeb Art and Visual Media Center, Beer Sheva; the Zaritsky Artists' House, Tel Aviv; and the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield. He has had individual exhibitions at institutions including the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2011); Z.K.M, Karlsruhe (2009); Centro Cultural Recoleta (2008); the Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires (2007); Kunst Museum, Bonn (2007); Museum of Modern Art, Saint Etienne (2005); and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (1999). He has participated in group shows at the Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (2011); White Box Gallery, New York (2000); the Kwangju Biennial (1997) and XLI Venice Biennial, Israel Pavilion (1995), among others. He lives and works between New York, Philadelphia, Tel Aviv and Ilha Grande, Brazil.