



Tapestry of Tessim and Peggy Zorach at 15 Willow Place, 1930s, by folk-art collector and textile artist Marguerite Zorach.

By turns introspective and expansive, Soto describes his childhood awe at the way heat rippled over the Venezuelan hinterland and how pictures in magazines taught him to apply Cubism and Klee to his early paintings of tropical vegetation. Good teachers at art school in Caracas helped him to think and see for himself. He eschewed Socialist Realism (“Stalin terrified me”) and, establishing himself in Paris, turned almost immediately to a pure, rigorous abstraction. At the age of 32, he showed his work alongside that of Calder and Duchamp in a landmark group exhibition at Denise René’s Paris gallery in 1955. Unlike those artists, he had no interest in representation. He focused on a geometric, vibrational style of painting and later sculpture that he described as “making Mondrian dynamic.”

Working in wood, wire, and oil paint, Soto sought “to put color in a state of motion, not as chromatic harmony, which is another academic vestige that I was running away from, just as I ran from composition and balance.” His explorations of space and color culminated in the enormous walk-through

thickets of hanging cords or metal rods known as “penetrables.” They reminded people of forests, yet the artist, never ceding an inch to representation, called them simply “an idea of space that can materialize in any situation and at any scale.” Soto died in 2005. This book sheds much light on his gifts—yet, like the Fundación Cisneros’s three previous book-length interviews with other artists, it also shows the need for more proper biographies of Latin American artists.

—Roger Atwood

King of Kinetics

Jesús Soto in Conversation with Ariel Jiménez

By Ariel Jiménez

Fundación Cisneros/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 198 pages, \$25

Jesús Soto gave this exhaustive and engrossing interview in 2001, when the kinetic abstraction that he had championed since the 1950s had fallen out of fashion a bit. The book that grew from that discussion with curator Ariel Jiménez has the tone of a valedictory, a summing up of a lifetime’s work that shows what kinetic artists were trying to accomplish and why their movement, of which Soto was a pioneer, is seeing a reappreciation by curators and collectors.



Jesús Soto’s Pre-penetrable, 1957. Soto described his kinetic works as “making Mondrian dynamic.”