

**Gabriel Orozco in  
conversation with  
Benjamin H. D.  
Buchloh, 2004**

**Gabriel Orozco and  
Benjamin H. D.  
Buchloh (2009)**

about some project or to sketch what I see. I draw in order to think about that drawing. Normally, they are letter size, and I do them at any desk. I don't care much about the margins or the composition. They help me to create the space that has to do with the time of being there, doing that, on this field of action, on that playing field.

Just as my work is developed from possible centers that are the beginnings from which the structure of each work grows, my work also consists of finding new centers as new starting points for possible growth. I believe this is how artistic ideas, and the history of art, develops. We tend to believe that there is a genealogy, a history, as in families, in which ideas are handed down from generation to generation. But this is not how it is. Most of the time, art happens where it is least expected; suddenly there emerges a new name, a new recognizable artistic sign, a new star. And that new star, like every new star in the universe, exercises gravity. And that new center of gravity in the universe, which is growing in multiple directions, may in turn generate a constellation around it. The same thing happens in art. It grows as the universe grows, and an understanding of that is very rewarding for an individual who wishes to originate things and to be at the beginning of every work, before every possible star. That is the way new ideas arise; that is how new signs appear in different centers, in every country and everywhere in the world.

#### Notes

1. Orozco is referring to the exhibition catalog *Gabriel Orozco* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Mexico City: Museo Internacional Rufino Tamayo, 2000). —Ed.
2. The word "sheen" has been used to translate "el brillo" throughout the text. —Tr.

#### Gabriel Orozco in Conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (2004)

**BENJAMIN BUCHLOH:** Modernism has been a history of restraints, prohibitions, eliminations, exclusions, and subtractions, at least in those instances we take seriously. It's almost a rule in twentieth-century art that whenever you can define an epistemological shift within artistic production and within the theorization of what visual experience is, you engage in a systematic abolition of always previously available models of production of seeing, of thinking. When I look at your work I have the feeling that the restraints have come off a little bit, there's a certain plenitude of yielding that suddenly makes a multiplicity of positions available to all of us, positions that we had thought to be no longer accessible. I'm arguing of course from the position of conceptual art, which is my historical moment, as many people know, and the moment of conceptual art has been very important for you as well, so we both share this historical background even though we have differences in generation. So how do you explain the wealth, the generosity of your plenitude of yielding materials, positions, and practices after all of those have been denied, prohibited, devalorized? All of a sudden you make sculpture; in the 1960s and '70s nobody thought sculpture would ever be possible. All of a sudden you make photographs that have a certain narrative aspect, even though high conceptual photography eliminated the narrative completely. All of a sudden, now you even make paintings—and we will get to this at a later point—and you occupy a whole range of production positions that had seemingly been shot down for good. Is it because you're an outsider in terms of the Western canon? Is it because you're a young artist in front of the generation of the '60s and '70s artists, and you oppose yourself to

them and say "your prohibitions are unacceptable to me, I will show you that I can open up all of those positions from my perspective, from where I come from, from what I do"? Or is it simply a generational chasm?

**GABRIEL OROZCO:** Being an outsider would not be the answer because I've grown up in the Western culture. The education and information that I have as a Mexican is very much the same that a European kid would have. Of course there are differences, but I think those differences are of the same kind as those you find when comparing a Spanish boy with a British boy growing up. So I think the outsider explanation is not the answer.

I grew up in the art world and studied at the art academy in Mexico, learning what any student around the world would learn, including these prohibitions and what has been done in art history. But the most important step for an artist, at least for me, is to reestablish or to develop contacts, or bridges, in our relationship with reality—the real, whatever it is. That thing that is outside of us, that thing we need to know, that we want to explore in order to understand the world, ourselves, and the time we're living in.

I think one of the reasons that at some point some art methods are prohibited or becomes obsolete, is because in fact the art loses contact with reality, stops talking about real issues, and becomes a bubble on its own, something alienated, something that is just a mere game. It's interesting to observe how this has happened with any technique. But I would say that the problem is not so much a technical problem; it is not because you're doing terracottas, or paintings, or photographs. I think to focus on this would be misleading. In the case of my photography, for example, after I develop actions in the street, I need to take a picture, because it's the only way that I can keep or transport this action and show it to other people. I use it as a kind of bridge of communication.

**BUCHLOH:** Which is a very conceptualist strategy.

**OROZCO:** It is. But with the difference that I don't have texts with my images, and I don't totally trust the archival systematic documentation of events and objects. I like to document a specific phenomenon in which I intervened or that I witnessed. But there is not so much of a conceptual explanation or cataloguing of the events, I leave it quite open. I think it's visual the way it is transmitted. As I have mentioned on other occasions, I like the idea of the photograph as a shoe box in which you keep and transport objects or memorable events in your life.

**BUCHLOH:** The shoe box is an archive too, right?

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**OROZCO:** It is not exactly an archive. It is a real object and a container. Sometimes I show it empty. The first time was in 1993 at the Venice Biennale. I had many of what I called my "exploring objects" in this shoe box in my apartment. After a few years I took the objects, put them on a table, and thought, "This is interesting all together," but then I looked at the shoe box and thought, "But this is better!" Then I decided to show the empty shoe box in the exhibition. I am not so much concerned with the archive as with how to get in touch with reality, to explore my landscape and my life. Those are the motivations for my traveling, or walking around the streets. That is the motivation for using different media, and it is through them that I have contact with the real. IS THIS THE EVERYDAY

**BUCHLOH:** Of course, it would be much easier for me to agree with that, and grant you the freedom of the individual, extraordinary artist, which would pretty much take care of the conversation, but I can't do that. [Laughs.]

So I do have to insist on playing the historian. There is a tradition and a trajectory of sculpture in the '60s that ranges from minimalism to postminimalism in the American context and, in the European context from Joseph Beuys to *arte povera*. That's the background of your history as a sculptor. Again I might be wrong, but for me you're primarily a sculptor, whatever this definition means or doesn't mean anymore.

Obviously the *arte povera* tradition and the postminimal tradition from Bruce Nauman to Eva Hesse to Richard Serra have been of crucial importance for you. You have looked at their work again and again, you've learned from their work, and you separate yourself from their work. So when you insist now on saying that artists lose the relationship to the real, and that you want to find the way back into your reality, how would you differentiate your reality from theirs? How would you differentiate your approach to sculpture from the development, let's say, of the work of the '60s, which started out with a very comparable insistence on reintroducing the somatic, the bodily experience, into the sculptural structure, which was very much opposed to the techno-scientist model that minimalism used?

In many ways your work is very close to that of Eva Hesse, which I think you admire very much; in many ways, you're close to some of the work by Nauman, least of all probably to Serra. But to use the body as an imprint, to use the body as a matrix for formal morphological production—as you have often done up to now—is a very common strategy in

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postminimal sculpture, in Nauman in particular. How would you define your reality as different from theirs?

**OROZCO:** When I work with objects, I focus very much on the object itself. I am not thinking about contemporary sculpture or traditions, or how to break with this or that. I am focusing on the material I have in front of me. When I did the inflated rubber ball (*Recaptured Nature*), for example, one of the things I was interested in was how to transform this object into something else, while also coming back to the reason for this material object to be. This rubber ball comes from an inner tube of a truck; I cut it, opened it, made two tops, and sealed it again, and it became this irregular sphere shape. So I'm using the material in the way it was made for: that is, to be inflated. So in every work, the first concern for me is a connection with what the material is, and that starts a process of analysis and posterior synthesis in which I arrive to a situation with the same object, without losing the essential characteristics, if we can say that, of the object and material itself.

Then of course, you can make connections with an artist who has used rubber, such as Serra. But I think his works are completely different. If I present a shoe box you can also connect it with Donald Judd if you want or with another minimalist, as a kind of joke about it. But also, and most of all, it is what it is. Of course you can say it's a readymade, but the fact is that it's not in a base, or that it's not even claiming to be a joke about art. It's really just a shoe box on the floor, which many people didn't even see it when it was shown, and which was kicked around. I have to insist on that point. When I did *My Hands Are My Heart* in clay, I was working with another artist in a brick factory in Mexico, and at some point this was a gesture that was kind of spontaneous, using this clay, which is made for bricks, it's solid. And then the title came afterwards, so it was not so much as if I'd been thinking, "I'm going to make a heart and it's about the body." It was a very immediate relation with that moment. After that piece I didn't work in terracotta for seven years, so it was very much something specific to that moment. I'm sure this is not answering your question, but I think that is very much the reason why I start many processes of working with different techniques and materials.

**BUCHLOH:** Since you mentioned the terracotta pieces, I was hoping to talk about them since three crucial new terracotta pieces are in this exhibition at the Serpentine. I consider them to be the most stunning of the entire show. They are very good examples both of the peculiar choice

of process and materials, because, I am sure somebody in the audience might correct me, but I don't remember any artist using terracotta other than Lucio Fontana. That's the last artist whose terracotta work I know. We know that Fontana was important for you, but of course what he was doing was something very different. Again, you have a very peculiar hybridism between an artisanal process, a highly artisanal material, and an extremely strange morphology that is not artisanal at all. You explained it to me and, I am sure, it will be wonderful for the audience to know how they were made. They were very much the result of a chance operation, at least partially.

Also the pottery pieces (*Cazuelas*), which look like mortars to me (fig. 31). They look even more artisanal since they look like pottery that is unfinished, or mortars that are almost finished, and then they all have been destroyed or affected by pure chance intervention on your side, throwing clay balls into the wheel while the pottery was made. There again, you have this strange synthesis of a very traditional material, a very traditional process, and a very strong foregrounding of the process, which is coming out the 1960s postminimal process-oriented artistic production. At the same time, there's a very strange combination with the foregrounding



31 *Cazuelas*, 2002.  
Fired clay.  
Dimensions variable.

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of chance operations, of utterly random or aleatory interventions. In the terracotta *Double Tail*, as you explained, you inscribe the shape of two wooden spheres at the end of this rolled structure, and it produces this utterly uncanny bodily quality, resulting in one of the most haunting works of sculpture that I have seen in a very long time (fig. 32). How does this relate to the body?

**OROZCO:** The body is important in all my work. But I don't think the representation of the body is enough. That means, the body's imprint or the body as a reference, or the space that the body occupies or generates, is not enough. Because this can easily become very anecdotal. I tried in the terracotta pieces. The movement of the making is very close to making bread, for example, when you start molding the mass on the table. The action of the body pressing this matter, it is a very primitive, essential movement onto the mass of the material. We have the body pressure on the mass and then the pressure of the wooden ball for the imprints of the



32 *Double Tail*, 2002.  
Fired clay.  
5.1 x 27.8 x 8.3 inches.  
Image courtesy: Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris.

spherical object. In these objects we have the pressure of an organic body and the pressure of the geometric spherical body into the rolled mass of clay.

Those two are the parameters that I like to include in every work: the organic, that is, the specific body doing something, and the geometric, the platonic or the abstract, mechanical and instrumental repetitive action on the same object. The confrontation of the two, the body and the mechanical, is very important. Even the cutting of the car (*La DS*) was a very bodily-like experience. At the final result you don't see the representation of the body making of the car, but it was not necessary because the car was already made for the body. We did this bodily-cutting exercise and then put it back, reduced, and it looked technical again. Part of the body of the car is missing, but it's still there, in our bodily-cultural memory of the object; it is now reduced but you can perceive that something strange had happened, even though it is still an industrial object. That is the balance I like to play with. What I'm trying to say is that, on one hand, minimalism and the nonpresence of the body in minimalist sculpture was not enough for me. . . . But on the other hand, if it's just the imprint or representation of the body and that's it, it's also boring. I think you need geometry and mechanism. Because our bodies are surrounded by geometry and structures that are part of them. They are not just organic.

**BUCHLOH:** Would you be happy if historians and critics adopted the reading that you just delivered and that seems perfectly complete, without wanting to touch it at all? Especially with the terracotta pieces in mind? Do you consider it impossible to go beyond that, in terms of asking the question of what type of body is articulated there? I mean, is this a utopian body? A fragmented body? A traumatized body? Would you allow those questions? Or do you think those have surpassed the pieces already? Because they're not happy pieces, they're not promising bodily plenitude at all; they're pieces of an extreme tension and fragmentation, and they complicate the conception of the body. It's not the body that is relieved or released in that context. The *Double Tail* looks like an amputated body part for example, at least it's one way of looking at it. There's no way to see this as a sign or a promise of bodily plenitude and happiness. It is a very fragmented structure, and it is very intensely present at the same time. It is very different in that sense from Bruce Nauman's cast *From Hand to Mouth*, for example, where we don't have that traumatic dimension at all. So what you have just said, that the pure cast of the body is

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not enough for you, could we not say that it is because you want to complicate the representation, or the articulation, or the indexical record of the body?

**OROZCO:** The terracottas look like body parts; they also look like shit or leftovers. They could almost look alive, but, of course, they look dead, too. Then there is one circular shape, which looks more like an industrial object, somehow. These bodies are representative but they're not representing. Those are the two parameters that I'm interested in: you are in fact representing something, a possible metaphor. Yet it's just a stone, or a shoe box, or clay.

This aspect can be connected with the finger-ruler drawings series, in which my finger obstructs the ruler in doing the perfect straight lines. This is a common accident, when the body is in connection with geometric mechanical instruments: you have this perfect ruler to make a perfect line, you have the hand, you try to make the line and suddenly the finger is in there and then you have this accident. So what I did is to make this accident a constant in the drawing. As a result, we have the trace of the seriality of these lines constantly interrupted by this finger-crossing. It is an organic and mechanical movement. That's why I installed them in this exhibition close to the terracottas. The mechanical drawing, the technical drawing, is not enough to express what it means to make a drawing. On the other hand, the pure organic drawing is not enough either. I prefer to combine these two extremes in any action. In drawing or sculpture this has many levels of interpretation.

**BUCHLOH:** Two artists keep coming to mind when one looks at your work. I mentioned one of them already, Eva Hesse, and the other is Piero Manzoni. I think both artists share with you, or you share with them, an extreme sense of the precariousness of bodily experience. That the body is actually something that is threatened, rather than fully available, fully present, fully redeemable. The choice of materials, in the *Lintels* piece, for example, which is such an extraordinary piece as well, points even more to the sense of the precariousness of bodily experience under the present circumstances. Because what is the lint? I feel obliged to ask, how do you relate it to Duchamp's *Dust Breeding*? That is the first work in the twentieth century where dust becomes a central matter. Now, this lint in its extreme fragility, in its extreme ephemerality, in its extreme kind of almost nonmaterial condition, is a sculpture, strangely enough. What type of bodily presence is articulated in that type of material, in that type of

process of looking at that, which is both waste and a bodily expression of industrial nature?

**OROZCO:** The lint was taken from drying machines in a laundromat in New York. The lint is a combination of skin, hair, and fabric. It gets accumulated in the machines. You get these very flat "skins" industrially produced. When I discovered this and started thinking about the best way to express what it is in there, I was playing in many directions. But in the end I said, "well, this is basically a kind of cloth, it's a pattern, a chaotic pattern, but it's a pattern." So I decided to hang them like drying clothes, the way we do after washing our clothes. It's kind of obvious, but it took me some time to figure out the best way to express the qualities of that specific material.

Coming back to the essence of the particular object . . . it doesn't matter if another artist has used this lint or dust. What I was trying to express was that material, and a possible connection with other of my works related to light and dust. It is installed in a mechanical way. These straight lines are holding there. And you can also think of drying meat. But lint is banal, I don't think there is so much drama in it: it's just a simple industrial leftover that can be dramatic if we look at industrial leftovers as dramatic things. But the way these things are produced is not dramatic, it's mechanical. That, I believe, can be one of the strengths of the piece.

Talking about Duchamp's influence and about the dust in Duchamp, I always like the fact that, when he was doing *The Large Glass*, one of the things that intrigued him the most was to make this image in which you don't have a background, because it is in a glass that you can see through. More like a window. He was trying to make a mechanical representation of sex, life, and death. Then he left his studio and when he came back a few years later, there was all this dust over the object, making the glass opaque and looking like a landscape, a kind of field of dust, and then Man Ray took the photo of it.

When I started to work with dust, I was not so much thinking of Duchamp's work. I started to make the *Yielding Stone* when in 1992 I was playing with plasticine for another project. After a few manipulations the plasticine was totally gray, dusty, and amorphous. I accepted it somehow and it was liberating. After that I decided to make a ball of my own weight and roll it in the streets, to shape it and to see how it would absorb all the imprints. In that moment I started to work with dust, I started to accept dust. Dust, the worst enemy of painting.

**BUCHLOH:** Yes, it's a negative pigment.

**OROZCO:** It's a negative pigment and it's a totalitarian surface. Everything that gets dusty becomes just surface. A dusty window becomes a wall, a painting with dust tends to become a flat object again. Painting tries to create an illusion, the illusion of volume, perspective, or light. It promises a kind of enlightenment through color. But dust is the contrary force.

Dust means also that things are static. When there is no movement dust accumulates, which is gravity and cosmos being sedentary. To be alive is to undust things; to see light, you have to clean. These are two parameters I like to play with. I am interested in the confrontation of color and dust. We can see that confrontation in many public sculptures, how the maintenance of the illusion of shine gets covered by the dust that comes back again and again. In their usual state, all public sculptures look somehow abandoned to dust. In painting we can see how Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel was cleaned, for example, and it became a different painting: after being covered by years of smoke and dust, suddenly it was a very bright and light image. Our perception, or the memory of our perception, of that painting as we imagine it was shocked.

**BUCHLOH:** One inevitable topic that I really think we want to address is the group of brand new paintings that are shown at the Serpentine for the first time, which give me great trouble since I don't deal with painting now, as you know. But first let's get into the circularity and the sphere, which are such utterly central elements in your work. What would we call them: icons? epistemes? structures? forms? morphologies? instruments?

**OROZCO:** Instruments.

**BUCHLOH:** In your work throughout (drawing, sculpture, painting), circles come out from the very beginning. It's the most important, or one of the most important, model of process and production in your work, and once you start thinking about it—I'm sure many people have—you recognize that, of course, the sphere has a long genealogy, but it's an obscure genealogy. The genealogy of the twentieth century in terms of abstraction is rectangularity, scientific rationality, optical construction of perspective in space. Or its contradiction and its abolition, through the means of geometry, with the square, the utterly nondirectional pictorial space. Suddenly, the sphere and the circle enter into the fray. Of course they have been present throughout the twentieth century. If one starts looking for it, one can recognize that they have actually been present from the very beginning,

in Malevich's work, in Delaunay's work, and then in Duchamp's work—most importantly—and so on. And they played a great role in Eva Hesse's and Jasper Johns's work. The sphere and the circle are really basically counterforces to the domination of rational Cartesian space throughout the twentieth century. But they have never quite reached the visibility or the comprehension that they deserve.

My question is: are we dealing in your work with an effort to dismantle and deconstruct the still governing principles of Cartesian rationality and spatial construction that rules up to minimalism? Are you introducing a dynamic model of spatial experience that is utterly different from the post-Albertian space that has ruled in painting up to the beginning of the twentieth century? Or is it once again the somatic dimension, since the body has orifices and circles but not squares and rectangles? Is the emphasis on the circle also yet another device of underlining, emphasizing the bodily experience of the making? Or the way our experience of the structure is determined by the body (visually and phenomenologically)?

**OROZCO:** All that. There was something I never liked about this Cartesian geometry in painting, this rigor, these straight lines. Even though I loved Mondrian, there was something that was a bit too religious in terms of geometry. The circle for me is an instrument very useful in terms of movement, in relation to gravity and erosion. It's the tendency of objects when they're in movement and are eroded by friction.

**BUCHLOH:** It has nothing to do with the ludic? Given that you are a soccer player, I thought that might be a dimension to consider as well, no?

**OROZCO:** Not really. That is one part, but generally we need circular objects when we move. Some of my work is a reflection on the circularity of objects in the everyday life, which in my opinion was not so much explored. We have the tables of Daniel Spoerri, for example, and we can see these circular elements (plates, bowls, cups, etc.) and claim that is the cosmos represented there. I think it's what he intended it to be. And I think he is right: the cosmos is there. The table is important—the horizontal surface in which to make an action happen. I try to generate or construct platforms for different actions. My drawings, as much as objects like the boxes with plasticine (*Game Boxes*) are platforms for movement.

The circle for me is an instrument. It is not something spiritual; it is not a statement. It's just something that in my opinion represents better

*It's a way of being?*



→ and do you want to work like the winner so?

how the universe works. It started to come and come in many different ways in my work. And in doing these paintings I wanted to confirm that it was possible to generate a structure complex enough using this geometric system, without the help of a collage background, or a photograph added, like I did before, but just in terms of pure colors and geometry. I don't use a black line to divide the different fields of color. We have this division of colors that is growing, rotating, and jumping (like the knight in chess), and there are rules in the "game" of making the painting. At some point I even thought about calling these paintings *Board Games*. I decided to do them to see how much they could express geometry but also organicity. Also, how much they can communicate or represent gravity, because that is another point I am trying to make here.

**BUCHLOH:** How do they talk about gravity—how can a painting ever talk about gravity?

**OROZCO:** Dust, actually.

**BUCHLOH:** Traditionally, painting was simulating the absence of gravity; that's what the '60s was battling with, to really bring gravity into the foreground of experience by no longer concealing it. But now you're saying painting is gravity, so that's a bit of a provocative statement.

**OROZCO:** When I started to deal with painting problems, I had to forget that I do photography. I had to forget I do drawings, I had to deal with this flat surface and these four colors. In painting you confront various problems, you have balance, weight, and compositional problems in how to structure the plane. What I decided was first to start from the center of the plane, which I think is not very common. I started from the minimal point of the center, developing the structure toward the frame as the limit.

**BUCHLOH:** Like a Jasper Johns target?

**OROZCO:** I think the target is a complete visual idea that is immediately conceived as a whole. It is not something that Johns started from the center developing into an unknown shape; it's more like a logo or a flag. It's a complete image that you conceive in the brain and reproduce in the canvas. He was not starting from nothing, growing into an unknown kind of form, which I think is how organic creatures grow: they start from a center and there is no certainty about what kind of shape will be there at the end, and also how much they can keep growing.

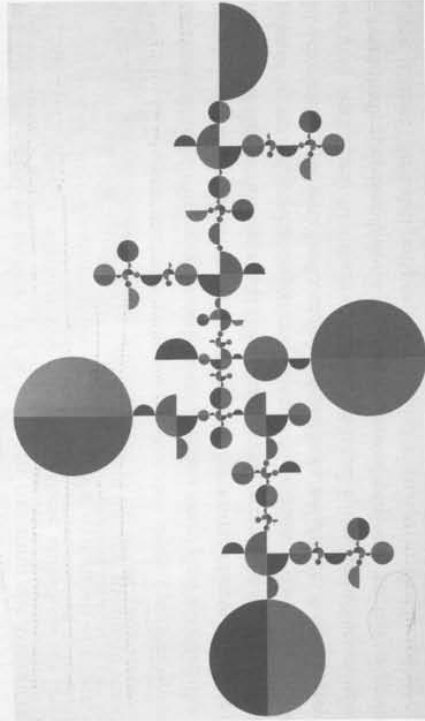
→ Then it's more like

**BUCHLOH:** Just like a crystal.

**OROZCO:** I think more in terms of trees. One painting is called *Samurai Tree*. I love the idea of how trees grow from a center. How they grow underground and on the ground from a center and a horizon and they start to develop all the branches. A tree is a metaphor for me. But it doesn't mean you see the representation of a tree. That would be very Mondrianesque. Mondrian's vision of a tree is from the point of view of someone standing on the ground looking at a landscape. Vertical and horizontal lines make the structure and representation of the branches. But if you look at a tree from above, you see the center from which the branches start to spread in multiple directions. In my understanding of how things work, it's not just one point of view toward the horizon, because we are also looking down, looking up. We have a peripheral view.

**BUCHLOH:** That is articulated in the paintings?

**OROZCO:** One is called *Spinning and Rotating* (fig. 33). There is a center point and when you have a center point you start to think in axes of possible directions. I am using just horizontal and verticals—I don't want to deal with diagonals for the moment—and they start to grow in different directions and the circles in different sizes. The center point is the one that is holding what I call the spinning movement of the painting,



33 *Spinning and Rotating*, 2004.  
Synthetic and polymer paint on canvas.  
76 3/4 x 44 7/8 inches.



are you a philosopher?  
are you a teacher?

that is the centrifugal point of the field. But then, because there's a play with different sizes, there is a "play with scale" problem, and the spectator has to play with the distance approaching the painting. Minimalist abstract painting is an image that you see in one block, normally from one distance. You don't need to get closer to see the painting better. There is nothing much else to see in the details. In general, it is a one scale kind of thing. There's a problem with scale that I'm trying to deal with here, which means a problem of depth, not in terms of perspective but in terms of scale. The sequence of colors is distributed on the basis of the knight's move in chess, "jumping" two blocks and one, which I take as a representation of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional field. In most board games you have diagonals or straight lines, and the way the pieces move is two-dimensional. But the knight in chess jumps, which insinuates or proposes a three-dimensional possibility; that's why I found this piece fascinating in chess. It is the only piece of the game whose movement is conceived to represent three-dimensionality. I am trying to apply that in the paintings, as much as I did in the *Atomists* series and in other drawings. I believe this system is representing the rotation of a body, in its growing or shrinking and in moving and rotating.

**BUCHLOH:** Why, then, execute such an extraordinary process with a very limiting and ultimately static structure? One of the key problems that the futurists failed to resolve, and it has been haunting the twentieth century ever since, is whether you can follow these ambitions for representation of the dynamism of the universe, or the dynamism of experience, or the flow of experience, with a relatively limited means of static representation.

**OROZCO:** One of the biggest needs in twentieth-century art was the illusion of movement and to try to represent the visual effects of movement and three-dimensionality. You have many examples of the worst failures in op art, trying to generate this kind of look—"Wow, it looks like three-dimensional," or Vasarely's kind of volume illusion. I mean, they are very nice tries, they were quite fantastic and I like them very much, since childhood. But I don't think it's a visual problem to try to generate a three-dimensional proposition, and it is not in the visual perception that we find the way to express how things work to become a three-dimensional organism or object. It's not visual: it has to be intellectual, it has to be an idea. It is more like a formula to be thought. You

way of being?

can look at the paintings as diagrams and think in terms of molecules, or atoms, or a DNA chain, but at the same time they're not claiming to be scientific, of course. They're also ludic, they look childish and I think that is good also.

**BUCHLOH:** You said something today, which I thought was quite striking. When I was listing all the models of abstraction that we know in the twentieth century—there are quite a few and I don't want to repeat that now—you said: "No, it has nothing to do with any of those," and then you said, "It's much more like a tantric model, because Tantra constructs abstraction as an instrument." It was a totally striking statement because I never thought that any abstraction of the twentieth century from Mondrian to Ellsworth Kelly would define itself as an instrument. An instrument of permission, an instrument of perception, perhaps, an instrument of transforming, of structuring, and of defining experience? In what way would you define it from the tantric point of view of abstraction? *is OROZCO'S THIS GUY'S BACKBONE?*

**OROZCO:** At some point I discovered Tantra and I was struck by the geometry and the body presence in this art. It's quite amazing, how the two together, the organic, the body, the sexual, is combined with the geometric and the mathematical. One possible way to see some of my work is related to this. And these paintings are also the idea of an instrument of knowledge, or an instrument of comprehension and enlightenment. Not religious, but an instrument of awareness—in the sense that when you look at it, you are aware of how it works. I think art can be an instrument of awareness in general. After you see a work of art, you are more aware of something about the world, you look at the world with more clarity in some aspects; I think that is the point of art in many ways.

Even though I was curious to explore the possibilities of abstraction, I don't quite think in terms of abstraction in art. I think in terms of fields connected through this structure, of making a geometric field such as, when you look at it, you become aware of something that is obviously very abstract. But it's also something that sounds or can be logical in relation with an organism, or in relation with how things grow or happen, in relation with abstract thinking itself, in relation with instruments, in relation with mechanics, in relation with our body. Then there is gravity, those axes moving back and forward with no background, or a white background, and with that you have a kind of representation of a sculpture, but it's flat. Somehow it can represent the body too. But I don't

see Sullivan G.

think you can even call them abstract, because abstraction was negating all these representations. On the other hand, if they're instruments you can say they're technical, because I think they have to be a little bit technical to be instruments.

**BUCHLOH:** But they do look like diagrams.

**OROZCO:** But also they imply organicity. They imply a growing organism, they imply nature. But not the representation of nature from a window. A Mondrian painting is like a window, and I'm not into that. Because I'm a sculptor, I'm into gravity and I perceive the world in volumes, even though I use photography, drawing, or painting. I don't think in terms of window-like representation.

### Spirograph: The Circular Ruins of Drawing (2004)

Briony Fer

As soon as you tire of squares draw circles.

—*John Ruskin*

Circling, shattering: these are ways to disappear into space without ever reaching the limits of the sphere.

—*Gabriel Orozco*

Drawings can be made or they can be found. They can be kept or they can be discarded. They are found in a photograph Orozco took of spirograph drawings on sheets of white paper laid out on a pavement in Delhi. The street context shows drawing at its most disposable, but retrieved by the photo and kept in the sort of limbo that seems to interest Orozco most—not entirely permanent but not entirely thrown away either. Spirographs for sale on a street. This isn't where we would expect to find drawing and yet here it is, as he might casually have come across it, at his feet, as he passed. These aren't his drawings, but drawing as happened upon. It invites us to think of drawing as a kind of transaction, connected to the way things circulate in the world, as well as something made in a fairly mechanical physical action. We probably all know how spirographs work, making intricate patterns by rotating a point in clear plastic circular stencils. The elaborately looped rings and wheels are made by rotating a smaller circle inside a larger one. There is something about the elements of a spirograph that resonates in Orozco's work. For a start, the rotating movement is always identical but, depending on the size of the inner