



Ad Minoliti's Playful Geometric Abstractions Explore Nature's Queerness

By Josie Thaddeus-Johns – July 25, 2023



There's abstraction, and then there's figuration: so the traditional binary goes. But labels have a way of putting people in boxes. Throughout their career, Argentine artist Ad Minoliti has tried to break down such boundaries in their paintings, installations, and sculptures that draw on queer theory to create a new understanding of these terms.

"My work is basically a formula of putting geometry with something else in order to break traditional, geometric abstraction: to take the geometry out of the white cube," they said in a recent interview. As their work is increasingly honored with shows in those "white-cube" institutions (for example, Tate St. Ives and Baltic Gateshead's jointly commissioned show "Biosfera Peluche" in 2021–22), this approach becomes particularly notable. Selected by Artsy in 2018 as part of The Artsy Vanguard, and representing Argentina at the 2019 Venice Biennale, the artist's star has continued to rise.

Now, in a new series of works, on view as part of "Geometries of the Forest," on display through August 20th at Peres Projects in Seoul (their first show in Korea), this "tension between abstraction and figuration" that they refer to is reaching new audiences. Later this year, on October 28th, the same series will be transformed into an even more immersive installation for Minoliti's solo museum exhibition at Kunstpalais Erlangen in Germany.

PERES PROJECTS

It's a childlike, playful show, with black, gestural figures dotting the gallery's walls between Minoliti's bright, geometric paintings. Fungi, which Minoliti sees as representing something between animals and plants, were also a strong inspiration for the show. "We have flora and fauna...mushrooms are like a third field of living beings," they said. "I love this reference of breaking the binary, because nature is queer." Dainty, toadstool-like mushrooms can be seen throughout the show, for example.



Elsewhere, the gallery's walls feature an undeniably cute mouse, which could be taken from any children's book or cartoon. But in Minoliti's paintings, the references are more oblique. Here, characters are not overt representations, but rather can be seen through the eyes that interrupt the slices of pure color on their canvases. "I was already working with geometrical figures as monsters, goblins, fairies," said Minoliti. "It's a simple way to add animism."

This personification of the bold, sharp shapes in their canvases helps Minoliti dissolve that obstructive line between figuration and abstraction. Work titles also create a sense of characterization: *Frog* (2023), for example, is a meter-square painting predominated by the amphibian's dark green hue. "It's a little bit of a game—you see what you want to see," they said.

Across their oeuvre, the artist has a distinctive color palette, juxtaposing pastels with clear, bright primary shades. Often, colors are chosen for their political implications. The green, for instance, threaded through Minoliti's abstract canvases, refers to the shade used by the abortion rights movement in Argentina; black, baby blue, and pink are a reference to the Black trans flag. They also look at color trends in interior design when putting together a palette, often from decades past.

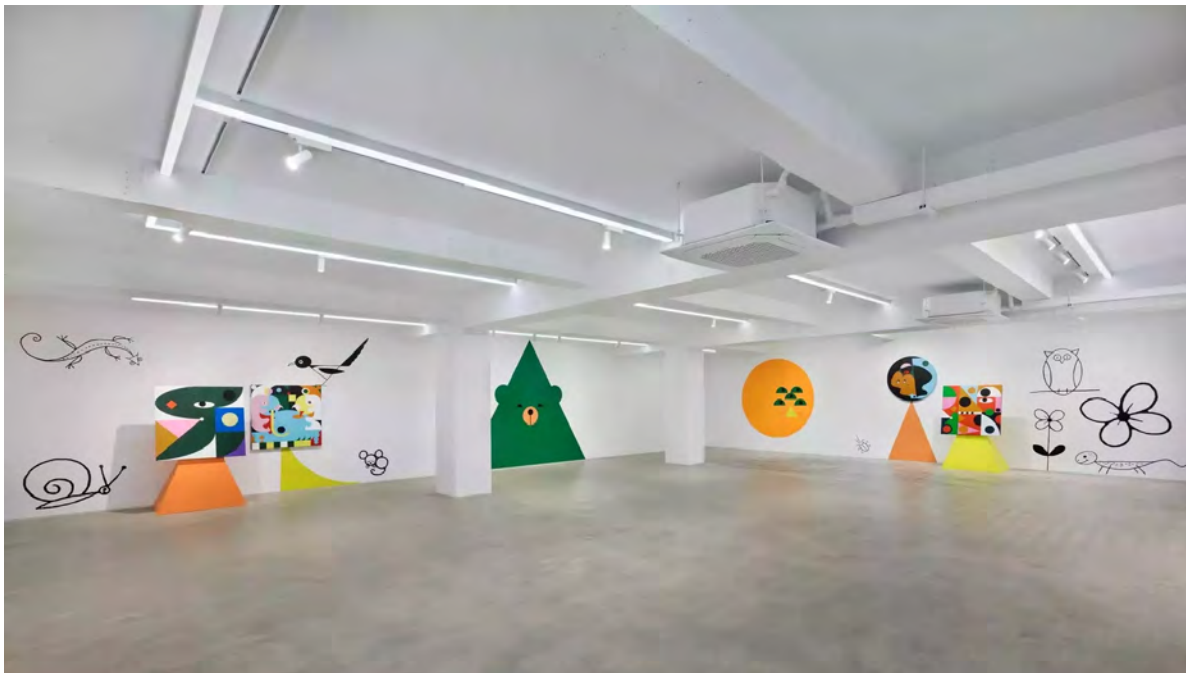
Queer and feminist theory has been another important touchpoint throughout their career. Minoliti is particularly interested in the theorist Donna Haraway, whose rejection of harsh boundaries chimes exactly with their point of view. And yet the artist isn't interested in weighing down the viewer in academic references, rather evoking such ideas in an accessible, almost naive style. Minoliti's work explicitly reaches out to the viewer in welcoming, bright colors and engaging figuration to make its point.

When creating such work, children's literature and cartoons are an important source for the artist. For this latest show, they mined inspiration from an Argentine how-to-draw book from the 1950s. While its content is outdated

PERES PROJECTS

(depicting, for example, racist stereotypes of Indigenous people), Minoliti was inspired by its simplified, geometrical way of thinking about the world—a visual language that is instantly accessible. “These were the pedagogical mechanisms used when I was a child,” they said.

But there is a hidden layer within the simple, playful way that children learn: Gender is embedded into almost everything. “Dolls; toys; coloring books, even” reflect “society’s expectations of gender,” they said. Minoliti’s work welcomes the viewer, expressing the fun and comfort of childhood, and avoiding tired, stereotyped gender roles.



Educational settings, they noted, tend to become less and less inclusive as we grow older: “When you start in kindergarten, you have this warm, welcoming, soft environment to learn, or you learn by playing,” they said. “What happens if we switch, so that you can go to a space where you have intrinsically academic content, in theory, but at the same time, you have the tenderness or the warm environment that you have in the kindergarten? Why not?”

Minoliti’s artworks, with their soft-play aesthetic, are a way for them to express themes that are often politicized, opaque, and difficult. As they put it: “Painting is like an open door to talk about something else.”