

Article

Olga Albizu's Lyrical Abstraction and the Borders of the Canvas

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Abstract: The abstractionist paintings of Puerto Rican artist Olga Albizu (1924–2005) gained prominence in the late 1950s when her work debuted in galleries across the Americas and entered the commercial music industry with RCA and Verve records. However, existing scholarship has failed to capture the complex relationship between Albizu's anti-commercial abstractionist aesthetic and its mass reproduction as cover art for vinyl records during the Cold War era. Returning to the canvas to explore the iconographic, formal, and aesthetic qualities of Albizu's work within its sociohistorical post-World War II context, this study reveals Albizu's devotion to formal borders, vivid color juxtapositions, and compositional tensions. I argue that Albizu's practice constitutes an ongoing concern with a Modernist dialectic and ideals about subjective transformation in a postmodern world of mass culture, a message she conveyed through the material and experiential borders of the canvas. As an avowed formalist and Modernist existing between the postcolonial and postmodern worlds of San Juan and New York City, her work merits formal scrutiny. This paper will add to the diverse histories of Abstract Expressionism and mid-century Modernisms across the Americas while shedding light on an important post-war historical moment and artistic impulse that held on to anti-commercial values in an all-encompassing consumerist world.

Keywords: Puerto Rican art; modernisms of the Americas; abstract expressionism; the Cold War; mass culture; postmodern; World War II

*My art is "a dialogue between myself and my work."*¹

—Olga Albizu, 1966

The year 1957 was big in the history of modernist art in Latin America, especially for an artist from the small Caribbean island and U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, Olga Albizu. Her work premiered in *The First Comprehensive Exhibition of Contemporary Puerto Rican Artists* of 1957 at the Riverside Museum in New York City. It was a landmark show in U.S. exhibition history and an inaugural moment in the international recognition of the arts of Puerto Rico and its diaspora (Benítez 1989, p. 89). *Puerto Rican Artists* was coordinated by the Organization of American States (OAS), which embarked on the first permanent collection of Latin American art during the same year, thereby serving a pivotal role in the institutional shaping of Latin American/Latino art mid-century. In the same year, the show of *Puerto Rican Artists* traveled from the OAS in DC (then the Pan American Union) to the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* in San Juan, Puerto Rico (Sanjurjo 1997, p. viii). Among the 120 works by 25 Puerto Rican artists, including oil paintings, watercolor, prints, and silkscreens, Olga Albizu's lyrical paintings helped to define her place as a forerunner of Abstract Expressionism in Puerto Rico and its diaspora (Ramos 2013, pp. 87–89; Barrios 1998; Rodríguez 1998).

In the same year, Albizu's lyrical form of Abstract Expressionism (AbEx) appeared at the exclusive Sixth Annual Stable Gallery exhibition alongside second-generation New York School peers such as Krasner, Mitchell, Bourgeois, Nevelson, DeKooning, Motherwell, Schnabel, and her teacher Hans Hoffman, among the 115 artists on view. Her commitment to lyrical abstraction also led to an unexpected commercial direction in 1957 when her artwork landed the cover of RCA's *Tchaikovsky* by the *Toronto Symphony Orchestra* (McEwen



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2015, p. 99). Her position amid the lyrical abstractionist of the OAS, her momentary rendezvous in a New York School Tenth Street gallery, and her mid-career commercial success all raise many questions about how Albizu's pioneering legacy has been represented in art historical and exhibitionary narratives.

One recent article, "Olga Albizu and the Borders of Abstraction" (2015) by art historian Abigail McEwen, offers an excellent cultural and biographical analyses of Albizu's mid-to-late century career. Her analysis contends that Albizu's practice exemplifies a "border practice" that overcame her disenfranchisement as a woman, Puerto Rican migrant, and abstractionist painter in 1950s New York City (McEwen 2015, p. 88). Likened to *The New Mestiza* consciousness theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa in 1987, McEwen suggests that Albizu moved back and forth across the psychological, symbolic, political, and physical borders of identity. That is, the internal and external borders of subjectivity, belonging, freedom, and trans-Atlantic migration. Through this willful movement across metaphorical and physical borders, McEwen's "border practice" theory shows how Albizu's abstractionist practice challenges the status quo of the New York School, U.S. exceptionalism, and the social protest art of Puerto Rico's *La Generación del 50* (McEwen 2015, pp. 88 and 98). In doing so, the border practice framing looks beyond the particulars of Albizu's canvas to Albizu's vocational and cultural identity to expose the underlying "coloniality of power"—the reifying structures and logic of hegemonic practice—at work in the artworlds of the time.²

While McEwen provides a sophisticated analysis of Albizu's challenge to these dominant schools and ideologies, the "border practice" framing still risks essentializing Albizu's work. That is, by privileging her ethnic/national and gender identities as the sources of value and meaning in her work, the border practice theory ventures too far towards cultural reductivism, making Albizu's work solely about cultural identity.³ Though the transnational connotation of a border art and practice generally seeks to disrupt homogenizing identity categories and territorial power, this conceptual approach is not without its own polemic. Guillermo Gómez-Peña's essay "Death on the Border: A Eulogy to Border Art" (1991) warned of the mainstream and corporate co-option that renders art exclusively about cultural differences, demographics, and consumption. He encouraged artists and intellectuals to travel with him beyond the border, beyond ethnic-specific and nationalist forms of art, to speak and act from the "new center" rather than the "old margins."⁴ While McEwen's study provides an important and in-depth view of what Albizu's work says about her positionalities within a predominantly white, male-centered New York City art world, it fails to ask what those social positions and challenges say about Albizu's artwork. For example, what can Albizu's background and relationship with the music recording industry say about the internationalism, creative affinities, and philosophy central to her art? Furthermore, how did her formal practice "dialogue" with those artistic alignments and values? As a mid-century modernist and declared formalist, Albizu's work requires a formal and aesthetic reading that can grapple with the continuity and contradiction of her persistent Modernist ethos within the Postmodern world of mass culture.

Building upon the cultural history laid out by McEwen's border theory, this study returns to the borders of the canvas to examine the material and aesthetic approaches represented in Albizu's artwork. Complimenting this aesthetic analysis is a sociohistorical examination of Albizu's formal and philosophical values within the society of the time, particularly in relation to the cultural and ideological meanings associated with modernist abstraction in Latin America and the U.S. While McEwen's analysis advances a cultural reading of Albizu's work that centers the extra-artistic borders of her practice, I contend that Albizu's work and practice cannot be fully appreciated without an analysis of the material borders of the canvas. To that end, this article argues that Olga Albizu's lyrical abstractionist paintings of the mid-century display an ongoing formal concern with a modernist dialectic that espoused ideals about subjective transformation in the post-war and Cold War era. This is demonstrated by Albizu's "push and pull" compositions of centralized foci in tension with the borders of the canvas, as well as by her transnational story, creative affinities, and record art career for classical and jazz albums.

1. A Transnational Story

Olga Albizu Rosaly (1924–2005) was an only child born and raised in Ponce, a major cultural center in central Puerto Rico, where she studied drawing with renowned realist painter Miguel Pou as a teenager. At home, Albizu's mother, a classical pianist, instilled a keen appreciation for instrumental music, sharing with young Olga her favorite Metropolitan Opera music hour on a weekly radio program. Later, she trained with Spanish abstractionist Esteban Vicente (1903–2001) at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR-RP), Rios Piedras. Her early music appreciation and her training with Pou (a realist) and Vicente (an abstractionist) served as a foundation for the way Albizu understood art formally, aesthetically, and culturally (Rodríguez 1998; McEwen 2015, pp. 87–89).

Albizu's alma mater UPR-RP represented the "internationalist" Academy, supporting and promoting a universalist vision of art and aesthetic experience as early as the 1930s. They opened their Humanities department to Spanish artists and intellectuals fleeing the civil war in fascist Spain into the 1940s, not unlike Albizu's abstractionist teacher Esteban Vicente.⁵ Many of these artists and intellectuals taught in the Fine Arts Department of UPR and at the affiliated Edna Coll Academy of Fine Arts, where many also exhibited works.⁶ UPR simultaneously began exchange programs during the 1930s and 1940s, encouraging students to travel abroad. As with the fellowship awarded to Albizu, José Torres Marinó, Julio Rosado Del Valle, and Jose Melendez Contreras traveled to the United States and Europe to study during the 1940s (Ibid.). These influences are seen in works such as Rosado Del Valle's *Vejigante*, 1955, and Melendez Contreras' *Bell Tower*, 1958. Though both are regional in subject matter, the former depicting an abstracted folkloric mask and the latter a Caribbean landscape, both works reveal a cubist interest in the flattening of the picture plane. UPR's internationalist approach, facilitating the movement of art and thought between Europe and the Americas, had a profound impact on Albizu and the emerging group of modernist artists from the Academy of UPR.

The international scene represented a small portion of the artistic landscape in Puerto Rico. The largely dominant "regionalists" had their start in postwar modernization campaigns in graphic and poster arts through the Departments of Health and Public Education, extended New Deal programs that began in the late 1940s under President Harry S. Truman. The Division of Community Education workshop, headed by Irene Delano, provided many of the art jobs during this decade in addition to lessons in silkscreen printing. There, a group of Division employees formed the Center for Puerto Rican Art (CAP) at the beginning of the decade and became the hub for the regionalist school known as the *Generación del 50* (Ibid., pp. 77–79). True to CAP's mission to make art for the people, artwork such as Rafael Tufino's *Cane Cutter*, 1951–52, and Lorenzo Homar's *Le Lo Lei*, 1953, depict the working-class struggle and the folkways of everyday Puerto Rican life. Despite the important role of New Deal era arts programs, many artists felt that the overriding nationalism of print culture and its commitment to regional subject matter elevated the graphic medium to a *cultura oficial*,⁷ deeming all other forms at best derivative and at worse a form of cultural imperialism.

The predominance of regionalist art was well underway by the time of Albizu's departure to the states in the late 1940s upon winning a *post-baccalaureate* fellowship award from UPR to study in New York. This also happened on the heels of the Ponce Massacre of 1937, the bloody aftermath of a UPR student-led march against the government, and police repression of pro-independence dissents across the island. In this anti-U.S. and pro-independence atmosphere, abstract art was politicized as an artistic form of the enemy and, thereby, a form of U.S. cultural imperialism. Against her family's wishes, she arrived to "The City" at the age of twenty-four, where she studied modernist painting techniques at the Hans Hoffman School of Fine Arts. With Hoffman, she learned the aesthetic strategies and philosophy that would become central to her work and practice, namely the expressionistic spatial theory of "push and pull" that stresses the use of contrastive planes of bold color that intersect, creating energy through the illusion of emerging and receding forms (flatness and depth) on the surface of the canvas (Seitz 1963a, p. 32; Seitz 1963b, pp. 11–56; Schreyach 2005, pp. 44–67). In general, Hofmann's pedagogy emphasized the union of "spirit and

form” that happens in the artist’s “spiritual translation” of subjective experience into objective reality as a painting. A Hofmann quote from 1948 conveys the bigger picture embodied in this subjective-universal translation of spirit: “We are connected with our own age if we recognize ourselves in relation to outside events; and we have grasped its spirit when we influence the future.” (Seitz 1963b, p. 8)⁸ She supplemented her Hoffman School education at the Arts Students League studying with Morris Kantor, Carl Holty and Vaclav Vitlail. Albizu’s training culminated in 1952 when she completed two years of study in Europe at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in France. In Europe, she encountered the work of Francisco de Goya and drew inspiration from his textured style of painting (Karlin et al. 1978). Albizu’s abstract style was a part of a larger trend known as lyrical abstraction, a personal and expressive style developed after the Second World War that was linked to the musical and spiritual qualities championed in the lineage established by Wassily Kandinsky and distinct from the more “cold” form of hard-edge geometric abstraction.⁹ While Albizu’s training in Puerto Rico, NYC, and Europe explains much about the freedom she sought to pursue her career outside of the strictures of state-sponsored representational realism, it also helps us understand her move towards international movements such as Modernism and her journey to her personal lyrical style (Benítez 1989, pp. 78–93).

The trauma of nuclear threat and hope for a new future established a postwar ethos of new beginnings for both regionalist-nationalist and internationalist schools in major regions across Latin America, particularly in the development of modernist styles. National modernization projects promised hope and progress through government and corporate programs that took hold across the American continent, including centers such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela. In addition to the changing landscape of government, business, and civil society, the upheaval of the Cuban Revolution during the fifties led many artists to seek expressive forms that could contend with both the modern transformation of society and the human subject. Presenting a paper at the 1959 International Association of Art Critics, Brazilian critic Mário Pedrosa describes the angst of this social change plainly: “Through the fate of our formation, we are condemned to modernity” (Pedrosa 1998). For modernist practitioners, this was reflected in the need for structured, rational organization (concreteness) that stood equally for the universal as for a drive towards the “concrete” seen in manufacturing sectors such as the steel and automobiles industries. It catalyzed the search for a “universal language” while empowering Latin America with the hope of joining the world stage (Ramírez 2017, p. 492). Foundational institutions such as the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires (1958–70), Ciudad Universitaria in Mexico City (1952–54), and Ciudad Universitaria in Caracas (1954), are symbolic of the utopian vision of that postwar decade.¹⁰ Around the time of Albizu’s debut at the OAS, Argentinian Kazuya Sakai established *Siete Pintores Abstractos* (1957) in Buenos Aires (Usabiaga 2019, p. 125). The same year, a show of the French and Spanish Informalism style, *tachista*, opened in Buenos Aires called *Que cosa es el coso* (*What is the thing?*). A large showing of informalists appeared at the 1957 Bienal de São Paulo, where the father of Peruvian abstraction, Fernando de Szyszlo, premiered his dark surrealist abstractions.¹¹ Also gaining momentum in 1957 Mexico was the *Generación de la Ruptura* (Breakaway Generation), a movement catalyzed by José Luis Cuevas’s “The Cactus Curtain” (1953) in their opposition to the hegemony of the Mexican School of muralism.¹² The impulse towards abstract and concrete forms in the late 1950s emerged transnationally following the Second World War in locations that had been in dialogue with Modernisms between Europe, Eastern Europe, Japan, and the Americas.

Following a decade of training in Puerto Rico, the United States, and Europe, Albizu began exhibiting yearly between New York and Puerto Rico into the 1970s; however, her career was not without complication. After the 1957 Stable Gallery Annual, Albizu never made headway into the New York School circuit of Tenth Street galleries.¹³ Her exclusion from the New York School sphere was undoubtedly affected by her status as a woman and Puerto Rican migrant in a predominantly white and male-dominated art world (McEwen 2015, pp. 88 and 98). The late 1950s was also a time when some members of the New

York School were becoming disenchanted with what they thought was the academicism of abstract expressionism and began turning towards more embodied and literal artistic forms such as Happenings, Minimalism, and Pop art (Fineberg 2000b, pp. 188–90). Another reason for this disenchantment within the movement was its cooptation by government and corporate forces during the decades of the Cold War, a period of geopolitical tensions between U.S. and Soviet superpowers that included proxy wars, an arms race, and an ideological struggle for global dominance.

Though the Cold War-era appropriation and commercialization of U.S. Abstract Expressionism has been well studied since the 1970s (Kozloff 1973, pp. 43–54; Eva Cockcroft 1974, pp. 39–41), this context is worth repeating because it bears the specific asymmetries of AbEx values and Cold War ideology central to modernist discourses across the Americas, including the work of Albizu. Against the heroic and democratic image of AbEx art represented in the literature of American Modernism (Sandler 1970), revisionist scholarship exposed how government and corporate interests used these paintings as a weapon of foreign policy and private enterprise as well as a tool for taste-making and class differentiation in the pages of magazines such as *Life* and *Harper's Bazaar* (Guilbaut 1983; Collins 1991, pp. 283–308). The scandal revealed how the Rockefeller-funded Museum of Modern Art and the CIA stepped in as foreign relations proxies to undertake projects of cultural imperialism (through international committees, exhibitions, and programs) amid the immobilization of a U.S. congress steeped in the anti-avant-garde and anti-communist stance of Cold War McCarthyism (Cockcroft 1974, pp. 39–41). Studies that followed examined the relationship between modernist ideals of subjectivity and freedom and the cold war's ideology of individualism and liberty, demonstrating how AbEx values could have lent themselves to cooptation by global Capitalists monetizing personal taste, progress, and independence (from the East) (Robson 1990, pp. 113–18; Neofetou 2022, p. 10). Art historian David Craven complicates the discussion of Cold War propaganda and the U.S. AbEx movement by introducing an art historical perspective from Latin America. He makes the counter-dependency argument that Modernism can no longer be read as a history between Paris and New York, namely because of Modernism's appropriation of native artistic practices from across the Americas (and the globe), as well as the essential influence of Mexican muralists.¹⁴ Latin American modernists, he asserts, have moved beyond monolithic and Manichean ideas of Abstract Expressionism in their understanding of its primitivist (nativist) legacy and in their "dialogical" approach to the contradictions posed by their collaboration with advanced western art forms and their fundamental anti-imperialism.¹⁵ This was the reality of the art world that Albizu lived through, and similar to her modernist colleagues, she chose to move beyond the deadlock politics of cultural imperialism. She did so by working within the system, using Abstract Expressionism's aesthetic-subjective transformation strategically within the international networks of mass culture to direct her artistic expression and values to more specific audiences.

2. Working "in the Belly of the Monster"

Despite not sharing in the gallery and market success of Tenth Street, Albizu attracted the attention of a MoMa-trained art specialist and Director of the Pan American Union's Visual Arts Section, José Gómez-Sicre. As the curator of milestone shows such as the *First Comprehensive Exhibition of Puerto Rican Artists* (1957), where Albizu's work made its international debut, the Cuban-born art critic and writer Gómez-Sicre would go on to play a significant role in the promotion of Latino and Latin American art during the 1950s and 1960s. He led hundreds of exhibitions of art from Latin America between 1941 and 1964 through the auspices of the Pan American Union (PAU). As a Cuban exile fleeing the Castro dictatorship, he held deep convictions against authoritarianism specifically the leftist regimes he witnessed and their cultural and nationalistic projects.¹⁶ He believed that art created in a "state of freedom" would serve as a testament to man's capability when free of religious doctrines and political ideology (Pini and Bernal 2020, p. 7). This "state of freedom" was reflected in Gómez-Sicre's canon of lyrical abstractionists, including artists

such as Julio Rosado del Valle (Puerto Rico), Luis Hernandez Cruz (Puerto Rico), Hugo Consuegra (Cuba), Alejandro Obregon (Colombia), Maria Luisa Pacheco (Bolivia), Tomie Ohtake (Japan/Brazil), Fernando de Szyszlo (Peru), as well as the expressive works of Albizu ([Sanjurjo 1997](#), pp. v–vii).

However, the PAU was not exclusively a cultural agency promoting artistic avant-gardism. Originally a trade and commerce organization founded in 1890, the PAU was a state agency that later merged with the Organization of American States, a Cold War inter-American “security pact” espousing anti-communism and economic liberalism ([Fox 2022](#), p. 265). Gómez-Sicre’s promotion of modernist styles (again, associated initially with anti-commercialism) at the PAU/OAS reflected the reality of the propagandism and commodification of Latin American art in global markets during and after the war. Against the communist threat from the East and its realist visual styles, the U.S. government promoted corporate-funded exhibitions and grants through the PAU/OAS in line with Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policies, encouraging inter-American goodwill and middle-class values (trade, industry, consumerism) in the Western hemisphere. At the helm of the Pan American Union’s Visual Arts Section, Gómez Sicre had to weigh the costs and benefits of complicity with the Cold War machine against his artistic and personal commitments to promoting the universal humanism of lyrical abstraction and, significantly, the “solidarity” of Latin America and its autonomy among the nations of the west.¹⁷

Gómez Sicre’s position in this alliance between art, the government, and big business, and related concerns about cultural imperialism, were raised by art historian Alejandro Anreus in 1991. Anreus responded specifically to Gómez Sicre’s series of Exxon Mobile *Esso Salons* in the 1960s, in which Albizu participated in 1965.¹⁸ Gómez Sicre’s response to this indictment suggested his deep reflection on the matter, saying he was working “in the belly of the monster.” His reply was a citation from the *Modernismo* intellectual and revolutionary leader of Cuba, José Martí, who lived in exile in New York, where he gained first-hand experience of imperial power and consumer society. From New York, he mobilized anti-imperialist and pro-independence movements, worked as a political correspondent for papers across the Americas, and maintained local projects with *Patria*, *La América*, and essays such as “Nuestra America” (1891).¹⁹ In this association with a revolutionary figure and *Modernismo* intellectual, Gómez Sicre acknowledged the reality of his participation in the system of multinational penetration into the Latin American art world. Consequently, he was also aligning himself with a legacy of exiled activists working towards forms of liberty from authoritarian rule within the financial centers of the imperial west. This points, again, to the contradiction between the explicitly subjective and anti-commercial modernist tradition and its instrumentalization as a mass-disseminated ideological tool for foreign policy, domestic development, and consumer markets. Against claims of western cultural imperialism in his collaborations with government and big business, Gómez Sicre was more invested in capitalizing on these networks to create a space dedicated to modernist styles emerging from Latin America, and he did so with the aim of Latin American autonomy.

In this light, Gómez Sicre’s work at the PAU/OAS exposes not only the ideological and geopolitical rifts mediated by Cold War politics but the forces working within and against their dominance. For example, we see the antagonism staged between the West-allied internationalists’ movements of Pan-American Modernism and the regional nationalisms of the East-allied Third World alignments of the global South ([Fox 2022](#), p. 274). However, further scrutiny of this opposition shows that between the poles of “pure aestheticism” championed by Greenberg in the democratic west and the nationalist traditions of muralism and print culture often associated with the social realism of the communist east, both have a long tradition of state and corporate sponsorship and co-optation ([Alvarez and Franco 2019](#), p. 5; [Goldman 1994](#); [Mosquera 1995](#); and [Herrera 2017](#)). Gómez Sicre’s PAU/OAS work also reminds us that there is a concurrent tradition of Latin American artists and intellectuals who navigated imperial geopolitics with a keen double-consciousness of both worlds. Accepting the restraints and advantages of his world, Gómez Sicre created spaces for artists unwelcomed in the main centers of the modernist art world and those excluded

by the regionalist/nationalist schools of Latin America (Fox 2022, p. 266; Alvarez and Franco 2019, p. 151). His fight was against the hegemony of both poles. Above all, he wanted to elevate the modernist artists of Latin America to the level of their U.S. and European peers. Still, his curatorial story reveals much about avant-garde collaboration with commerce in the history of the American hemisphere, and, similar to Craven, stakes out another vision for Modernist art from the perspective of Latin America.

3. Creative Affinities

In addition to Gómez-Sicre, Albizu's lyrical paintings drew the attention of music executives in the mid-fifties, which led to an interesting turn in her career. In 1955, she found a secretarial post at RCA Records, a choice that makes sense given her upbringing and appreciation for music. Only two years later, her gestural style of abstraction made a strong impression on an RCA executive and was selected for the cover of two albums in the 1950s (McEwen 2015, pp. 88–87). In the *Untitled* (1957) painting used for the record jacket of the *Toronto Symphony Orchestra Tchaikovsky* (1957), overlapping vertical and horizontal strokes in white, yellow, and peachy segments are activated by black strokes and white avenues of space, pushing the eye back momentarily and pulling it forward again.²⁰ Tension is pronounced in an uplifting color palette and grounding composition strongly suited to the highly emotional and romantic style of Tchaikovsky's *Andante—Allegro con anima*. Later, a yellow and orange composition in the same abstract impressionist style was chosen for the cover of *Boston Symphony Orchestra Blackwood/Haieff, No. 1 & 2* (1959).²¹ Throughout the Sixties, Albizu created her meditative lyrical paintings for the covers of over a dozen Latin jazz and *bossa nova* albums, revealing not only the fruits of her labor but her long-term engagement with musicians and the music industry.²²

Albizu's lyrical style began to surface earlier following her 1948 arrival and training in NYC and Europe. Her formal exploration is most evident in her black lines, stroke forms, and compositional foundation in nature. This is most notable in an earlier work completed at the Arts Students League, *Untitled (to Josefina Tiryakian)* (1950), in its use of vivid tonal families, spatial illusionism, and pictorial unity.²³ In time, her abstracted landscapes became increasingly monotone and flattened, as seen in *Untitled* (1952), a work in shades of blue and hints of green, structured by black lines that cut across horizontally and diagonally, suggesting the architectonic shapes and divisions of a landscape. A 1953 painting, *Untitled (Easter Sunday)*, ushers in a move towards an opulent materiality in service of color. The delineations of her black lines now work as large strokes, as forms, positioned horizontally among strokes of red, orange, and yellow against a white ground. The treatment of neatly painted square blocks recalls the influence of Nicolas de Staël's compositions of the 1950s, specifically his thick impasto and highly abstracted landscapes (Karlin et al. 1978). Albizu continues to develop the application of black gestural lines and strokes, establishing the black mark as a figure-ground mechanism for exploring the possible relations of compositional tension.

In the mid-1950s to the 1960s, Albizu's lyrical abstractions communicate an on-going preoccupation with the formal and poetic connections between inner and outer worlds. She creates heightened sensation expressed through fragmented palette knife strokes that converge and vibrate at the center of the picture plane and play against soft blended outer edges of the canvas. These formal strategies are not unlike those used by Joan Mitchell in *City Landscape* (1955) and Philip Guston in *Native's Return* (1957), all yielding a central focus and juxtaposition of colors as a primary mode for conveying emotion. While these artists share in their overall compositions, improvised application, varying stroke marks, and diverse color palette on a tonal ground (i.e., *City Landscape* and *Native's Return*), Albizu's calibrated mark-making and lush color palette creates a more lasting emotive impact. For example, her *Easter Sunday* (1953) uses thick, consistently rectilinear swatches of carefully laid paint arranged horizontally across the center of the canvas in a simple palette of vibrant reds and sunny mustards, with a central gray patch and rogue black mark, on an icy grey ground. Reading almost like a line of sheet music in its horizontal arrangement, each

form conveys the pace, strength, and movement of the artist. Overlapping shapes and borders add depth to the surface, reflecting light and texture that evoke outer feelings of cool serenity contiguous with internal feelings of warm hope.

This in-and-out tension is also present in the color field work of Helen Frankenthaler, whose *Mountains and Sea* (1952), for example, displays an “experience of lyric sensations” through push-pull movement. Specifically, Frankenthaler poured, sponged, and drew with paint to create swatches of soft color linked by blank passages of canvas and set against unpainted background to create related yet opposing vantage points (Hobbs 2016). Art historian Robert Hobbs argues that in distinction to the macho metaphors of Eighth Street Club members (masculine conquest and propagation), women practitioners of the time may be better read through the poetic trope of metonymy in their contextual approaches and emphasis on connections.²⁴ Rather than the metaphorical objectification enacted by *art as artist*, *art as nature*, or *art as life force*, art made by Mitchell, Krasner, and Frankenthaler (and Albizu) would be better read as metonymic strategies that explore the relations of aesthetic experience (seeing and feeling) via painterly figure-ground techniques that convey self and nature and draw from their underlying composition of internal and external attachments (Ibid., p. 65). This offers an alternative lens to read AbEx formal techniques and values while attending, partially, to the exclusionary male bias implicit in the art movement and scholarship of the time. Albizu’s devotion to the formal and aesthetic “dialogue” between subjective and objective human experience certainly align her with this empathetic desire to connect with the world. With evocations of early spring, *Easter Sunday*’s aesthetic impact has an enduring lyricism that bespeaks Albizu’s use of nature as a poetic trope deployed through abstraction’s fragmentation, illusory pictorial depth, and surface effects. Unlike her “one-image” (drips, zips, veils) male counterparts, Albizu offers her vision of modernist techniques through formal contiguity, connecting herself to her paint(ing) and connecting her work to the world of human feelings and desires (Ibid., p. 61). Moreover, her works from this period reveal how she balanced international avant-garde techniques with her formative study of saturated sunlight and bright colors in the Puerto Rican landscape, distinguishing her work formally from her fellow abstractionists.²⁵

In fact, this masterful facture and musical energy earned Albizu a Grammy nomination for a beautifully lyrical painting in warm reds, *Untitled* (1962), created for the album of *Jazz Samba* by Stan Getz and Larry Byrd²⁶ (McEwen 2015, p. 87). This rich coral-colored composition is painted with black and red strokes converging at the center. Similar to her other works of the 1960s, a concentration of palette knife strokes gravitates inward. Paint is applied thickly, conveying the decadent quality of impasto while creating depth and vibration through piles of brightly painted patches capturing the light on its layered and overlapping surface. Like the pulsating rhythm of a percussion instrument, the thick paint, sensuous color, and illusory heart form in the *Untitled* (1962) composition in coral captures the instrumental richness and lamenting mood of *Jazz Samba*’s awarding winning tracts *Desafinado* (*Out of Tune*) and *Samba Triste* (*Sad Samba*).

It is not surprising that these emotive lyrical abstractions were so favored for this popular middle-class music of 1950s Brazil and North America into the 1960s (Moreno 1982, pp. 133–34). The internationally acclaimed *Getz/Gilberto* (1964) collaboration featuring “The Girl From Ipanema” is an album that marks the becoming international of a musical style created between a U.S. innovator of cool jazz and one of the founders of the Brazilian “new style. *bossa nova* (Moreno 1982, p. 132). The *Jazz Samba* (1962) album likewise represents the creation of a Pan-American hybrid form that united the Samba of Rio de Janeiro and the cool jazz sounds of the North. Though the musical genre finds its rhythmic roots in the African-inspired popular music of Samba, the lyrical themes of *bossa nova* are anything but socially conscious. They depict nostalgic reflections of home, love, and nature, bearing the relative comfort of the minority middle-upper class in 1950s Brazil and the apolitical expression of its creators and consumer base (Ibid., pp. 134–35). Akin to the youth of *bossa nova*, who claimed a Brazilian/International artistic expression, Albizu was a part of this middle-class internationalism that was frowned upon by their parents’ conformist generation.

Though one could also read these international records and album covers as a symbol of the mass-produced commodity and middle-class consumer-subject relationship, there is something to be said of the sheer persistence of this work. The consistency of the work's compositional affect—the energy of overlapping palette knife forms and luminous color play—leaves a lasting impression that speaks to the post-war moment. In the modernist imperative of Albizu's work, to transform the deeply subjective experience into a painting that could impart universal human visual and emotional feeling, there is a desire to be alive in one's body in an alienating world. As the post-war generation witnessed the rapid rise of industrial automation, private development, and dictatorships across Latin America, Albizu and her peers found hope in an international movement of avant-gardes united around an alternative, dis-alienating form of awakening to the body. The aesthetic philosophy of Modernism provided the promise of a corporeal subjectivity, a human wholeness that could stand up to the desensitizing and conformist worlds of global capital and authoritarian repression (Neofetou 2022, p. 10; Craven 1991, p. 56).

This search for wholeness was genuine for Albizu, as it was for her middle-class peers in Rio de Janeiro. Her *Caricoa* counterparts found that High Modern musical forms provided “a viable alternative to more utilitarian careers” and a degree of autonomy in the early pre-mainstream days of jazz–samba hybrids such as *bossa nova* (Treece 1997, p. 11). Scholar of Brazilian music David Treece points out that prior to leftist nationalism and Marxism, French Existentialism made an indelible mark on young artists and intellectuals through writers such as Clarice Lispector, who wrote lyrically about issues of the self and subjectivity (Treece 1997, p. 7; Fitz 1985). *Bossa nova* would become one of Latin America's most lucrative exports, which is largely because it arose with Brazil's developmentalist and modernizing government during a period of opening to international markets. However, in the early days of *bossa nova*, there was an earnest attempt by artists to create alternative spaces of being for a heterogenous community. Treece explains that it is only in hindsight that *bossa nova* came to be a mode of highly commercialized music divorced from its early goals of “inner spiritual integrity” (Treece 1997, pp. 1–7).

The musical quality of Albizu's gestural abstractions—the works' formal and aesthetic impact—is exemplary in the painting created for the Grammy-winning Getz/Gilberto album, *Alla Africa (There Africa)* (1963)²⁷. In this composition, spaced strokes in warm citrus hues collide at sharp borders creating raised planar shapes. Pops of yellow and blood orange dialogue with dissonant black strokes, maintaining a playful push-pull that is more relaxed than the engulfing center of *Jazz Samba's* lamenting heart. The monotone and nasal vocals of *bossa nova* singers in the Getz/Gilberto album, with their “delicate and melancholic melody” and sequential semitone compositions, help to convey the passage of time. With *bossa nova's* equally paced rhythm, this temporality provokes an absorbed embodiment, a sway that is visualized in the inward and outward play of yellow and black swatches in *Alla Africa*. (Moreno 1982, pp. 133–34) With record sales at over 2 million, the Getz/Gilberto album art, *Alla Africa*, reached a large global public while elevating the sophistication of this “new style.”²⁸ Without understanding the association between Albizu's paintings and the jazz musicians she collaborated with, it is easy to miss Albizu's artistic affinity to musical composition and visual experience. One also misses the significance of her subjective-universal practice for the international high modernist community in the age of obsolescence and the Cold War.

The meaningful relationship between Albizu's art and the *bossa nova* records that came to represent middle-class Brazilian tastes of the 1950s is well represented in musical form and compositional technique.²⁹ Latin Americanist Albrecht Moreno explores the characteristic elements and syncopation of the new musical trend, saying:

In all of its musical components, *bossa nova* heralded a new and different era. Its innovative harmonic structure included dissonant tones and frequent key changes; its melodies and bass lines were enriched with chromatic notes; its rhythms were complicated, unexpected and yet typically Brazilian; the interpretations were soft and intimate, definitely in an antimacho style; the orchestras

were small, frequently just a guitar, constituting a “less is more” or “small is beautiful” simplicity; and the lyrics attempted a directness and a sincerity that, despite their inherent sentimentality, escaped the mawkishness that so frequently characterized the popular music of Latin America. (Ibid., pp. 134–35)

This analysis of *bossa nova*’s formal qualities underscores the necessity of formal and aesthetic analysis as a foundation for understanding Albizu’s painterly technique and aesthetic expressiveness. Her artwork, with its gestural, smooth strokes, opulent coloration, and penetrating foci, is quite literally a sequence of organized tones and midtones, equally spaced and vibrating within the confines of a harmonic structure. Moreover, it is primarily through the collaboration and commercial success with RCA and Verve Records during the late 1950s and 1960s that Albizu’s work continues to speak to us through its lyrical forms and post-war aesthetic values.

It is easy to see why this musically inclined art was chosen as the face of this “new style.” her name conspicuously displayed next to the founders of this international, Pan-American musical movement: Stan Getz, Joao Gilberto, and Antônio Carlos Jobim (Ibid). In a 1998 interview with *El Vocero* newspaper on the occasion of her retrospective, Albizu reflected on the deep influence of music on her introspective expression and lyrical style: “I think it [music] had an influence on what I painted. It was something that I felt from within. Since I was little, my mom played the piano and we also listened to the Metropolitan Opera on the radio every Saturday” (Rodríguez 1998). Meyer Schapiro eloquently described this subjective-universal feeling of inner experience shared with others in “Recent Abstract Painting” (1957), written in the year of Albizu’s career stardom:

This art is deeply rooted, I believe, in the self and its relation to the surrounding world. The pathos of the reduction or fragility of the self within a culture that becomes increasingly organized through industry, economy and the state intensifies the desire of the artist to create forms that will manifest his liberty in this striking way—a liberty that, in the best works, is associated with a sentiment of harmony and achieves stability, and even impersonality through the power of painting to universalize itself in the perfection of its form and to reach out into common life. It becomes then a possession of everyone and is related to everyday experience. (Schapiro 1978)

Schapiro’s insights about abstract painting help to link the seemingly oppositional drive of the subjective-universal expression in art: it starts with an expression of inner feeling created in the context of social change and the alienating forces of society, an inner freedom of human feelings made plain through forms and techniques rendered familiar (human) and embodied by the beholder. This is central to Albizu’s formal introspection, one that engages this subjective-universal feeling as a dialectical exploration of material (paint and canvas) and meaning (artistic philosophy) expressed through the borders of the canvas.

Albizu eventually settled in the Upper West Side in 1966, where she attended Lincoln Center concerts regularly, maintaining her life-long passion for music and its continued influence on her lyrical style (Karlin et al. 1978). Her commitment to the emotional potential of abstraction is seen into the seventies in the skillful handling of material achieved in *1-1421 Blue*, n.d., a work exhibited at a 1998 retrospective curated by Adlín Ríos Rigau at the Art Gallery of the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón (Santurce, Puerto Rico).³⁰ It is a medium size work measuring approximately 47 × 51 inches, painted predominantly in rich violet blues with swatches of red, mustard, and black on a square canvas. Red and mustard hues are placed carefully in three arrangements, forming two triangular paths that pop and recede, preoccupying the eye within the central picture plane. Within this compositional arrangement emerges two crude figures in motion, floating in space, impressions that encourage and frustrate figural representation while highlighting the play of color and the application of paint. Movement is conveyed by a series of short, thick, vertical strokes in various sizes, layered, juxtaposed, and methodically applied. The smooth strokes reveal

the deliberate application of a palette knife. The built-up surface is reminiscent of salt flats with its segmented shapes, contrastive channels, and tiered plateaus that produce depth and texture that is emphasized against the consistently smooth, almost somber, blue edges that encompass the central foci to the materiality of the indulgent strokes, while measured, recall decadent daubs of icing pressed into place. This is balanced by the simplified palette of tonal primary colors, accentuated by black swaths, and encircled by a sfumato treatment of blues darkening softly towards the outer edges of the canvas. Moving closer to center, softer pastel shades of blue assist the central pull of the composition and convey the feeling of an inner glow. *1-1421 Blue*, n.d. awakens human sensations through the complex tension created by the painting's materiality—its color, viscosity, and vibration of overlapping borders and painted forms—opening the viewer to an emotional dance of reticence and frolic.³¹

4. Conclusions

As witnesses of their time, Albizu's mid-century paintings open many avenues for research. An expanded look at the exhibitionary networks Albizu participated in would add much to the understanding of her unique lyrical style and transatlantic career. For example, further comparative studies between Albizu and her New York and PAU/OAS teachers and peers would provide a broader context for understanding the nuances of Albizu's artistic vocabulary and philosophy. Analysis of Albizu's unstudied album art should seek more details about her collaboration with musicians and its impact on her formal choices and artwork titles while extended cross-analysis of the artwork and album tracks will provide a richer aesthetic language for interpreting Albizu's compositions. Finally, as an artist that occupies a space among the second-generation of New York Abstract Expressionists and the Latin American lyrical abstractionist of the Pan American Union, it is necessary to explore Albizu's artistic legacy in Latin America and the United States. Albizu's paintings still speak to us today about the various artistic projects that took a stake in personal and social transformation, and the forces and methods to which art was deployed amid the tensions of the post-war and Cold War era. The study contributes to the literatures of modern and contemporary Puerto Rican, Latino, Latin American, and US art by centering understudied artwork of the mid-century that helps us reconsider the history of abstract expressionism and the movement's relationship with popular culture.

This formal and aesthetic exploration of Albizu's cover art and lyrical style of the mid-century helps us understand the deeply personal and spiritual experience of Albizu's work and the universal vision of her practice. Against the backdrop of the popular social realism and print culture of Puerto Rico and the post-AbEx moment in New York City, Albizu continued to work within the subjective experience and material borders of her lyrical abstractions. In advancing the emotional and musical qualities of Abstract Expressionism through a devout exploration of push-pull color and form, Albizu was searching for an embodied spirituality found in the dialectical union of form and meaning—a human experience and feeling she hoped to share with her viewers.

Through a close analysis of her artwork, we learn how her transnational cover art career, her creative affinities within the international Modernist art world, and her transnational training affirmed her lyrical artistic vision. Albizu advanced these ideals by working in the “belly of the monster”, not unlike Gómez Sicre and José Martí, to exploit the mass-circulated outlets of the corporate music industry to her own ends. Albizu's artistic position echoes Gómez Sicre's PAU/OAS work elevating Latin American Modernism to the status of cultural autonomy. Especially in the transgressive nature posed by Latin American Modernism as a counter-position within the New York-Moscow domination of Cold War rhetoric and political co-option. Albizu was no stranger, nor passive participant, to these larger geopolitical dynamics as a student educated by an exiled avant-gardist and one who bore witness to the hegemony of the government-sponsored graphic traditions of mid-century Puerto Rico. Her decision to move to New York was both resolutely anti-authoritarian and very much a choice to take her place in the international modernist

art community, attaining, in the process, vocational and artistic autonomy. Beyond these comparisons, this analysis reveals that Albizu determined and negotiated her own artistic position through her album art, creating an internationalist/cosmopolitan avant-garde aesthetic that also reflected her Latin American cultural identity and roots.

Her creative affinities within the modernist community of artists and musicians also reveal the ways her lyrical paintings stand out as masterpieces of color and energetic light, paintings made possible, in part, via international networks and markets. In her collaboration with high modernist musicians, Albizu was able to express and synthesize the early radical emotional and spiritual aspects of *bossa nova* music with an understanding of the universal spiritualism of modernist avant-garde traditions, particularly Kandinsky's musical legacy within Abstract Expressionism. In her international training, she absorbed the techniques that would best capture abstraction's meditation on subjective and universal qualities in order to find a space of retreat and meditation on life during the Cold War. Her existentialism found solace in abstraction's underlying structure—forms and affect expressed in the dialectical tensions created by depth and flatness through shapes, colors, and layering techniques—creating compositions that continue to evoke her subjective and human feelings today. That she adapted these international values, artistic affinities, and techniques to aspects of her existentialism can only be fully appreciated with an analysis of the material forms and borders of the canvas.

If the epigraphic text—“*My art is a dialogue between myself and my work*,”—discloses the dialectical relationship at the heart of Albizu's art—between her subjective expression and her universalist project—her philosophy on “eternal art” reaffirms the character of that project. In a 1969 interview for the *San Juan Star*, Albizu spoke directly to her beliefs and artistic values, asserting, “[t]o a certain extent, I believe in art for art's sake. I believe in eternal art and eternal values, in Botticelli and Kandinsky, in the will to live. I really don't think an artist at this moment in time has to give a political or social interpretation to his work.”³² That she so assertively states her belief in Botticelli and Kandinsky, in art's “eternal” values and the “will to live” says much about how she valued art and what she aspired to as an artist. Her homage to Botticelli, the High Renaissance and proto-mannerist master of emotional expression, compositional harmony, and luminous coloration, is clear. As is her connection to Kandinsky, the founder of music-inspired lyrical abstraction and the aesthetic theory of the artist's “inner necessity” as the expression of subjective feeling in art (Dabrowski 1995, p. 11; Fineberg 2000a, p. 57). Albizu situates her practice and values comfortably among western masters, like the masters of jazz, claiming their pictorial language and artistic heritage as her own and declaring in her lyrical abstractions the inherent value of art and the sensuous striving of human existence.³³

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Notes

¹ (Lewis 1966), C2. Quoted on the occasion of Albizu's 1966 Pan American Union solo exhibition.

² (McEwen 2015, pp. 101–3). This is defined by Walter Mignolo as the “logic of domination in the modern/colonial world” that remained in the US and in the Latin American post-independence era. The coloniality/modernity perspective works by revealing the underlying rationale of neocolonial hegemony. Walter Mignolo (2005, p. 6).

³ In her study on female modernists, Anne M. Wagner speaks to the risks posed to both artist and critic when works are completely reduced to a representation of their maker's social group, saying, “To see either [artist or critic] as the representative of a social identity risks asserting the transparency of the image to the social identity it represents.” Anne Middleton Wagner (1996), p. 26; Art historian Darby English makes a similar assessment in the case of ethnicity and race, exploring the art historical strategies

that emphasize biography and racial essence as the sources of value and meaning in modernist art at the margins. He cautions against the scholarly inclination to overcome the legacy of “race and representation theory” by promoting a ‘conceptual vision’ of racial humanity, which is communicated through the power of pure racial form. Darby English (2016), pp. 68–69.

By 1990, Gómez-Peña’s persona “warrior for gringostroika” was born in the ashes of his “border brujo” character, leaving the border behind to find “an-other America,” a “universal barrio.” Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1991, pp. 8–9).

See also Alejandro Sánchez Felipe (1895–1971), Eugenio Fernández Granell (1912–2001), Cristóbol Ruiz Pulido (1881–1962).

The Academy of Fine arts was affiliated through the founder, UPR Professor of Literature Edna Coll, in 1982. (Benítez 1989, p. 78).

Mary Coffey adapts Sociologist Roger Bartra’s “*cultura oficial*” to describe the “ensemble of habits and values that mark the behavior of the Mexican political and bureaucratic class,” including the literature and art that this class approved under the auspices of the government. Mary K. Coffey (2012, p. 24).

For the concept “subjective universality,” a personal experience that is common to all, see Immanuel Kant in *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Kant 2000) translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews.

This form of Abstract Expressionism is also known as gestural abstraction and is related to action painting and color field. In Europe, it is known variously as *Tachisme*, *Abstraction Lyrique*, and *Art Informel*. In Latin America, it is largely referred to as *Informalismo*. For a foundational text by Wassily Kandinsky, see “Concerning the Spiritual in Art” (1911).

Other utopic institutions include the capital of Brasília (1960) and the Bienal de São Paulo (1951). Mari Carmen Ramírez (2017, p. 492). Additionally, see (Zambrano and Ester 1997).

Only one year later, De Szyszlo puts on his *Salon de Arte Abstracto* (1958) in Lima, Peru. Informalism is the gestural abstraction practiced in Europe and Latin America and was concurrent with Geometric Abstraction and Kinetic art movements in Latin American art in the 1950s and into the 1960s. Ferreira Gullar (1959, p. 8). Alvarez, Calligraphic Abstraction and Postwar Brazilian Informalist Painting, 31–32; Michele Greet (2019, p. 139); Enrique García Gutiérrez (1998, p. 18).

José Luis Cuevas’s “The Cactus Curtain” is a moral tale about costs of muralism’s dominance and rigid orthodoxy and a call to freedom and international opening in art. José Luis Cuevas (1959, pp. 187–93); Teresa Del Conde (1999, p. 12); Manuel Felguérez (1988, p. 102).

“Olga Albizu” Artist Directory, Museo De Arte De Puerto Rico, Accessed 18 April 2019, <http://www.mapr.org/en/museum/proa/artist/albizu-olga>.

(Craven 1991, pp. 44–66). Craven also discusses the importance of spaces created for Black artists due to their early exclusion from the mainstream gallery scene, such as the Spiral Group and the Cinque Gallery in the 1960s. Deborah Cullen shows how many of the abstractionist of the 1950s, including Pollock, were trained in the internationalist leaning and highly experimental studios such as the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop, the Harlem Community Center, and the Robert Blackburn Studio. Deborah Cullen (2012, pp. 14–20). Additionally, see Deborah Cullen (2009) and Craven (1999).

This is especially true given the ongoing involvement and contributions of Latin American and the Caribbean artists to Modernism since the mid-19th. Michele Greet (2018); Natalia Majluf (1997, p. 878).

Gómez Sicre explicitly noted that he was also against “banana-republic right-wingers” and fascists. (Pini and Bernal 2020).

Despite the large number of shows devoted to modernist forms, modernist styles were not the dominant mode but existed alongside conceptual, performance, and other nonobjective art movements in art centers of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Ibid., pp. 266–68, 275.

Albizu’s work was included in the *Concurso Esso* exhibition held at the Pan American Union in 1965. Ramos, “Olga Albizu,” p. 89.

Alfred J. López (2014, pp. 108–226, 319–20). He also contributed his efforts towards Puerto Rico liberation in the pages of *Patria*.

An image of the record jacket featuring Albizu’s *Untitled* (1957) painting for RCA Record’s *Toronto Symphony Orchestra Tchaikovsky* (1957) can be viewed on the Discogs website: <https://www.discogs.com/master/992775-Tchaikovsky-Toronto-Symphony-Orchestra-Sir-Ernest-MacMillan-Symphony-No-5-In-E-Minor-Op64?image=5319120.SW1hZ2U6MTA4OTY0MzA%3D> (accessed on 20 October 2022).

An image of the record jacket featuring Albizu’s *Untitled* (1959) painting for RCA Record’s *Boston Symphony Orchestra Blackwood/Haieff, No. 1 & 2* (1959) can be viewed on the Discogs website: <https://www.discogs.com/master/650233-Boston-Symphony-Munch-Blackwood-Haieff-Symphony-No-1-Symphony-No-2?image=4447243.SW1hZ2U6ODg2NzI0Ng%3D%3D> (accessed on 20 September 2022).

In “Jazz and the New York Schoool,” Mona Hadler extends the discourse of Abstract Expressionism by highlighting understudied artists and the movemnt’s relationship to popular art forms. Artists cited from the 1940s and 1950s included Jimmy Ernst, Roberto Matta, Romare Bearden, Carl Holty, and Philip Guston, among others. Common among many of these artists was the understanding that jazz comprised both structure and improvisation. (Hadler 1995). Chad Mandeles observes the parallels of Abstract Expressionism and Jazz in his study on Jackson Pollock’s creative affinities to the music of performers such as John Coltrane and Jane Ira Bloom. For example, in both Coltrane’s “set-long improvisations” and the “all-over” improvisations of Pollock, paint and sound “function as carefully orchestrated but autonomous visual and aural elements. Importantly, each improvisatory method works with a preconceived composition. (Mandeles 1981). The connection between Jazz and album artwork, specifically the use of African motifs in the designs of Jazz album covers of the 1960s and 1970s, is the subject of study in

Carissa Kowalski Dougherty (2007). The exhibition catalogue for the show *Bridge between Islands* indicates that Albizu “supported” her jazz peers by “designing jacket covers for their albums,” showing her favor and participation with this musical form. Olga Albizu,” *Bridge between Islands*, 6.

“Olga Albizu,” *Bridge between Islands*, 5.

These metaphors are based on statements by artists such as Pollock’s “I am nature,” Neman’s “The first man was an artist,” and Rothko’s “Pictures as dramas . . . pictures as performers,” and DeKooning’s painting as a “style of living.” See Hobbs, “Krasner, Mitchell, and Frankenthaler,” 60.

The relationship between Albizu’s impeccable command of color and light and her roots in Puerto Rico was first made in the 1978 exhibition *Bridge Between Islands*. The catalogue notes that when the six artists were asked “ . . . what aspect of their work they could identify as Puerto Rican, all of them agreed that it is their use of color and light that is distinctly Latin.” “Olga Albizu,” *Bridge between Islands*, 3.

An image of Albizu’s cover art, *Untitled* (1962), for Verve Record’s *Jazz Samba* (1962) album jacket can be viewed on the Discogs website: <https://www.discogs.com/master/300215-Stan-Getz-And-Charlie-Byrd-Play-Desafinado-One-Note-Samba?image=2826148.SW1hZ2U6MTU2MTM5OTM%3D> (accessed on 1 May 2019).

An image of Albizu’s cover art, *Alla Africa* (1963), for Verve Record’s *Getz/Gilberto* (1963) album jacket can be viewed on the Discogs website: <https://www.discogs.com/master/85178-Stan-Getz-Joao-Gilberto-Getz-Gilberto/image/SW1hZ2U6NjExMjU0Mg==> (accessed on 1 May 2019).

Illan Stavans (2014, p. 296); Thomas Cole notes that Albizu’s art raised the sophistication of classical albums, which previously featured cherubs, and jazz albums that previously featured “cheesy photographs of sirens in cocktail dresses.” Thomas B. Cole (2015, pp. 10–11).

An article published by the PAU makes a connection between Albizu’s album covers and jazz music, noting that her rhythmic use of color is “highly suggestive of syncopation.” (Pan American Union 1966).

Enrique García Gutiérrez (1998, pp. 18–19); In the seventies, she produces works that emphasized a more tonal coloration and negative space with distinct figure-ground relationships emphasized through black lines and sharper borders, and an increased number of strokes that reach outward filling more of the picture’s surface. A 1970s work sold by Christie’s auction house reveals a lively assortment of strokes that appear more fleeting as if the central foci have taken flight outward in spite of their inner anchor, in contrast to the all-consuming, compact, and inward compositions maintained in the sixties, revealing a more intensely antagonistic push-pull. An image of Albizu’s painting *1-1421 Blue* (n.d.) can be viewed on the website of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas in the online article “Olga Albizu: Cohesión de diseño”: <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/866927#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-906%2C-113%2C3511%2C2444> (accessed on 1 May 2019).

Albizu’s work has been recently featured in solo shows at the Biaggi & Faure Fine Art Gallery (San Juan) in 2004 and 2005 and the Petrus Gallery (San Juan) in 1999. Recent group shows include *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art*- Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, D.C.) in 2014.

Recorded in 1969 in Robert Friedman (1969).

An exploration of Schopenhauer’s “will to live” and its influence on Kandinsky may open up an avenue for deeper analysis of Albizu’s quote, expanding the discussion on musicality and inward reflection in her art. See *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*), 1818.

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