

Reviews

Translations of Abstraction: Felipe Mujica at Beam, Nottingham

Bridging Modernism, Textiles, and Global Histories in
'The Spirit of Science Fiction', an exhibition in
Nottingham

By Jelena Sofronijevic February 10, 2025

Textiles Art History

Felipe Mujica's artworks are multilingual in their expressions of modernism. Eight years in 1970s London simply punctuated his strong upbringing in [Santiago de Chile](#), where he was born and came of age. Work has since travelled the artist to the capital cities of [London](#) and New York, but South America remains central to his practice. 'That's where I did my first bad behaviour,' says Mujica, and encountered artistic influences in translation and different contexts.

Mujica's practice indeed 'resonates with' abstract artists who practised before him in Europe, like Josef Albers in Germany and El Lissitzky in Russia, encountered through his education. In the 1990s, the artist attended Eduardo Vilches' colour seminar at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile art school, which transformed his relationship with design.

The line, however, has always been foundational to his practice. As a child, the artist filled sheets of paper with renderings of futuristic homes and cars—architectures drawn from Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, more so than concrete art and constructivism. (These overlapping interests in colour and sci-fi, shared with many other artists like [Tanoa Sasraku](#), demand a closer look; the former remains more often related to spirituality and religion.)

These personal and creative relationships with Western/Europe underpin the artist's current exhibition in Nottingham, his first solo exhibition in the UK. In Beam's gallery space at Primary, the geometric graphic prints wrap around several of his *Curtains* (*Cortinas*). He first produced the works in collaboration with different women working in Chile. The artist perceives

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these too as architectures, domestic interventions in the conventional exhibition space.



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Textiles would not come into Mujica's practice until much later in his career. Deemed a 'lower form' - in the Bauhaus, as in South America - architecture and design were more acceptable and accessible pursuits. His interest in craft encouraged self-education in the plurality of textile practices across South America, especially indigenous weaving and embroidery traditions in Mexico and São Paulo, Brazil. Contrary to prejudices - most recently expressed in the 'critical' reception of Brasil! Brasil! at the Royal Academy in London - these references are more evident in the monochrome work which opens the exhibition, made for an exhibition in Germany, rather than the colourful prints which characterise the rest of the display.



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As a result, these large-scale textiles articulate both transcontinental connections and, more interestingly, ones much closer to the artist's home. They may speak languages shared across South and Central America, suppressed by external forces - colonial and hegemonic, political and cultural - to undermine solidarity and resistance. Hanging so light, even floating, in space, Mujica's textiles have the potential to be laden heavy with such interpretations. The artist describes them as 'surfaces open to receive history,' as pages blank for projection - more explicitly realised in a concurrent exhibition at Primary, in a hybrid digital film-fabric installation by [Osheen Siva](#).

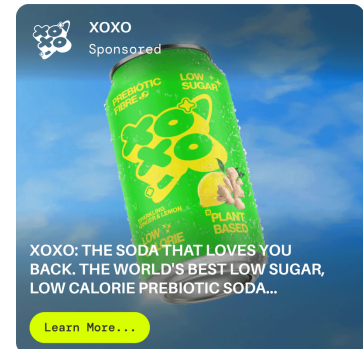
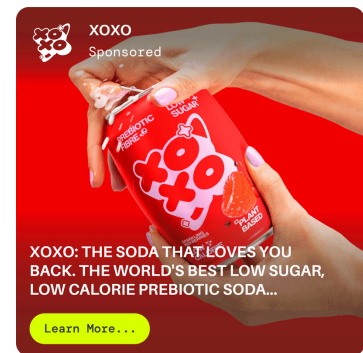
Nottingham's curators locate the artist - and their city - 'in the history of global modernism', referencing Latin American practitioners who worked with the Midland Group in the 20th century. As relevant, though, is the link to the region's late lace industry, interwoven with histories of unionisation and working-class protest. In this respect, Mujica's practice more strongly relates to the 'all-over' fabrics of Hamid Zénati - recently installed at [Nottingham Contemporary](#) and so contextualised in a tour by the city's stalwart curator, Tom Godfrey - than the neighbouring institution's current exhibitions of [Daniel Lind-Ramos](#) and [Allan Weber](#).

Mujica, though, does not consider his works as banners or flags, directly 'political' forms. His practice seems more concerned with preserving domestic knowledge than experimenting with or expanding forms. This practical intent should not escape his curators' attention, nor should the primary works' resemblance to IKEA's HILDEGUN tea towels - for it won't escape that of the town's contemporary student population, nor those who believe [the Swedish brand to be a bastion of Bauhaus principles in the 21st century](#).

This particular body of work is the product of extensive archive research elsewhere in the Midlands, at the Birmingham Industrial Museum, and Ghent in Belgium, another of Europe's cotton capitals with strong connections to Manchester. Such collections call for fresh perspectives - as seen by the work of [Karanjit Panesar](#) in Leeds and Bradford - and often can contribute to new artistic production in Birmingham with their still-functioning cotton looms. Mujica challenged the museum's 'very didactic' interpretation and focus on textile history with more collaborative production, working with 60 people over two months to produce the works here. Art fashioned a 'social club' - not unlike the one fostered by [Jakkai Siributr at the Whitworth in Manchester](#) - a local community that could persist beyond the making itself.

Whilst Western/European abstraction often ends 'rigidly' with the work itself, Mujica's work only begins with its display. This assertion by exhibition co-curator Stefan Benchoam, an artist and co-founder of Proyecto Ultravioleta in Guatemala, speaks to the importance of public participation and co-creation. However, [recent exhibitions of Hélio Oiticica's wearable Parangolés \(1964\)](#) have exposed continued conventions and codes of behaviour in Western/European institutions. Here, publics are encouraged to move the curtains by hand. Elsewhere, the artist has offered sticks and poles, tools also employed by [Lubaina Himid in Sharjah in 2023](#).

Mujica wishes his works to live - and to age and fade, in their installation in front of the great windows of Primary. This is another subtle challenge to the conventions of museums and conservation, the pretence that anything can or should last forever. Eschewing one curator's assertion of Nottingham as the 'periphery' to the cultural 'centre' of London -



a poor relation to South American and Western/European histories of modernism

- Mujica's textiles should be seen as prisms, letting the light beam through onto existing connections.

Felipe Mujica: The Spirit of Science Fiction is on view at Beam in Nottingham from 6 February 2025.



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