

## THE JEWELLERY OF JESÚS RAFAEL SOTO (1923 – 2005)

Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto was born in Caracas in 1923. By the end of his life he had established himself as one of the most influential Latin American artists of the 20th century. At the heart of a vibrant Parisian artistic and intellectual scene in the 1950s, for many, Soto and his group revolutionised the relationship between artwork and viewer.



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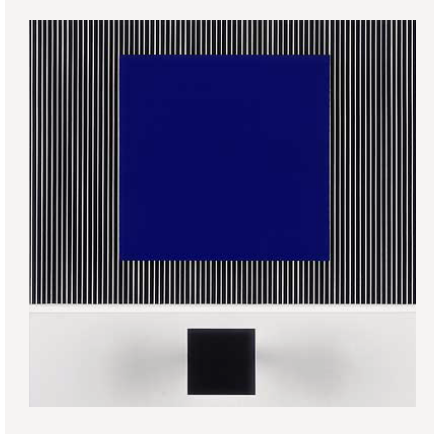
In the early years of his career, Soto was influenced by the work of Piet Mondrian, Malevich and Cezanne. Not long after his arrival in Paris in 1950, however, he departed from conventional painting and sculpture, to become one of the founding fathers of 'Kinetic Art'. Alongside Jean Tinguely and Victor Vasarely, Soto strove to place movement at the center of his art. Later a member of the famous 'Zero Group', Soto worked, debated and exhibited with artists including Lucio Fontana, Enrico Castellani, Heinz Mack, Jean Tinguely, and Günther Uecker.

Soto used thin oscillating metal rods to manipulate space and form in his work. Placing these against a plain or monochrome background he used the rod's 'vibrations' to incorporate movement. Crucially, more simply than optical illusion, these works would move in response to the world around them.

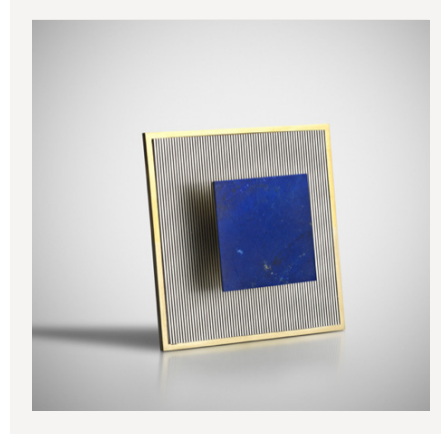
*"My work is in motion, and that makes all the difference. [...] What interests me is the transformation of matter. Taking an element, a line, a bit of wood or metal, and transforming it into pure light...transforming it into vibrations. Making a solid material into something ethereal: this is my present concern. So there is not only the question of movement, but also the question of the transformation of elements."*

(Soto, conversation with Carlos Diaz Sosa, "La Gran Pintura es Cosa de Progreso Histórico", El Nacional, Caracas, August 1, 1966)

In 1966 at the XXXIII Venice Biennale, Soto shrouded the walls of the Venezuela Pavilion with a suspended curtain of fine wire rods. Two years later, Soto's earring design (Fig 2.), like *mur panoramique*, used tightly packed suspended metal rods. Both works chart the artist's progression towards his iconic, immersive 'Penetrable' sculptures composed of suspended wires. The ultimate exploration of movement, displacement and instability, the viewer is required to walk through the vine-like sculpture.



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Soto's brooch/pendant design (Fig. 4), also of 1968, uses thin metallic lines silkscreened onto aluminium to similarly give an impression of movement. The striation of the metal tricks the eye: the background is illusive, at once plain, textured and monochrome. When on the neck, or pinned to the shoulder the effect is twofold. Cleverly designed with its purpose in mind, the work's illusion is bought to life by the movement of the wearer.

Both 1968 jewellery designs were realised by artist's jeweller GEM Montebello.

- 1 PENETRABLE INSTALLATION, Stedelijk Museum, 1968 Amsterdam, photo Aspetersen.
- 2 White and yellow gold earrings, 1968, 18ct white and yellow gold, 9.1 x 6.9 x 0.3cm, edition of 25.
- 3 OUTREMER ET NOIR, 1997, 53 x 52 x 17cm, photo Beatrice Hatala.
- 4 SQUARE BROOCH / NECKLACE, conceived 1968, cast 2012, aluminium background silk screen printing in white and black stripes, frame of 18ct white and yellow gold with lapis lazuli central square, 8 x 12 x 0.7cm, edition of 25.

Soto's jewellery is currently on display at  
 LOUISA GUINNESS GALLERY, <sup>c/o</sup> BEN BROWN FINE ARTS,  
 21 Cork Street, London W1S 3LZ, t: 0207 494 4664  
 We are open from 10am — 6pm and would be delighted  
 to show you round the collection

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