



EMBAJADA

Nora Maité Nieves

Margaux Ogden

Sarah Zapata

*Fragments, Stripes, and Repetition*

Foreword by Michelle Grabner

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EMBAJADA is pleased to present *Fragments, Stripes, and Repetition*, an exhibition featuring new and recent works by Nora Maité Nieves, Margaux Ogden, and Sarah Zapata. Together, the artists expand the language of abstraction through distinct approaches that explore form, material, and process. An accompanying essay, *Forms as Counter-Arrangements*, by artist and curator Michelle Grabner, offers thoughtful reflections on their practices and the dialogues they create.

*Forms as Counter-Arrangements: Nora Maité Nieves, Margaux Ogden, and Sarah Zapata*

Caroline Levine's text *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015) intervenes decisively in debates about the relationship between aesthetic practice and political life. For Levine, forms are not confined to the realm of art; they are generalizable "patterns of organizing" that circulate across media, institutions, and social practices. Symmetry, rhythm, hierarchy, and network, for instance, do not belong exclusively to visual or literary traditions but operate equally in legal discourse, architecture, bureaucracy, and protest movements. The critical force of Levine's thesis lies in her insistence that forms are *portable* and *iterable*: they can travel across domains, accumulate meanings, and collide with one another to produce unpredictable social effects. To analyze the work of contemporary artists Nora Maité Nieves, Margaux Ogden, and Sarah Zapata through this conceptual frame is to recognize their practices as deeply enmeshed in the contested terrain of form and abstraction. And where aesthetic choices of color and materiality stage, expose, and reconfigure the political arrangements of identity and culture.

Nieves's deployment of symmetry and twinning operates in tension with the rhetoric of equivalence that symmetry often underwrites. Symmetry is historically bound to ideals of balance, fairness, and equality, from classical architecture to modernist design. Yet Nieves frequently destabilizes symmetry, allowing mirrored elements to slip, double imperfectly, or misalign. This deviation from strict equivalence generates a poetics of asymmetrical relation, resonating with diasporic experience and the fractured promises of multicultural "inclusion." Nieves dramatizes the *collision of forms*: the symmetrical arrangement that aspires to equity intersects with the social hierarchies of race, migration, and colonial legacies, producing an unstable field where balance is always provisional and contested. Bold saturated color, ornamentation, and architectural references also permeate the work, straining Modernism's abstract vocabularies with the aesthetic motifs of hyper-localities including neighborhoods, territories, and communities.

Ogden's pictorial practice foregrounds rhythm, repetition, mirroring and overlapping as both aesthetic strategies and critical interventions. In Ogden's paintings, the temporal form of rhythm oscillates between predictability and generative collectivity. For example, the idea of regularity contrasts sharply with syncopated or improvisatory rhythms and the intentional and incidental mark-making that comprise her compositions. This purposeful ambivalence: the works' iterative marks and patterns conjure the discipline of repetition yet simultaneously generate ruptures and dissonances that refuse closure. The result is a



struggle over temporal organization itself. Destabilizing figure-ground relations, refusing perspectival hierarchy and offering instead a field in which forms jostle, dance, mirror, mimic, collide, and reconfigure—Ogden's abstractions model a visual analogue to the social and relational.

Zapata's abstract fiber-based sculptures and installations intervene most forcefully in the sphere of radical disproportion. The work's immoderate tactile qualities reinforce this fervent and seizing condition. If hierarchy is among the most entrenched organizational forms of political power, it is never absolute and always subject to pressures from countervailing forms. Zapata's work explores a reordering of hierarchy by mobilizing disproportion—between the domestic scale of weaving and the architectural scale of installation, between the intimacy of textile labor and the monumentality of sculptural presence. More simply, Zapata's formal strategy is to unsettle entrenched cultural hierarchies. By re-scaling the so-called "minor" or feminized practice of craft into immersive environments, Zapata collapses distinctions between private and public, low and high, queer and straight, decorative and monumental. In doing so, she reconfigures the hierarchies of value that structure both art history and social life.

Taken together, the practices of Nieves, Ogden, and Zapata underscore the political consequences of activating form's abstract and material arrangements. Each of their frictional practices in symmetry, rhythm, and hierarchy are never purely aesthetic; they are constitutive of institutions, labor regimes, and ideological systems. By manipulating these forms through strategies of overlap, twinning, and disproportion, these artists reveal not only how power arranges itself but also how alternative arrangements might be imagined.

—Michelle Grabner

Nora Maité Nieves (b. 1980 San Juan, Puerto Rico) received her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), 2010, and her BFA from La Escuela de Artes Plásticas, in San Juan, 2004. She has participated in a number of residencies, most recently at Ox-Bow, Saugatuck, MI (2021). Maite Nieves's first museum solo exhibition was held at the Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, FL (2024). She has exhibited in international exhibitions including a solo at Jason Haam, Seoul (2022) and group shows at the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan (2021), EMBAJADA, San Juan (2021), PROXYCO Gallery, NY (2021), 1969 Gallery, NY (2021), among many others. Maite Nieves is in the permanent collections of the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan and the Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, FL.

Margaux Ogden (b. 1983 Boston, MA) received her BA from Bard College (2005) and in 2012 her MFA in Painting from Boston University (2012). Solo exhibitions of her work have been held with White Cube online (2024), Tif Sigfrids, Athens, GA (2024); Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, CA (2023); Deanna Evans Projects, New York, NY (2023), Rental Gallery, East Hampton, NY (2018) and Embajada, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2016), among others. In 2021 she was Abbey Fellow at the British School at Rome, and in 2018 she was a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant Recipient.

Sarah Zapata (b. 1988 Corpus Christi, TX) received a BFA in Studio Art – Fibers from the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas in 2011. Zapata's work has been widely exhibited in solo and group shows at institutions including ASU Art Museum (AZ), New Museum (NY), El Museo del Barrio (NY), Museum of Art and Design (NY), Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (NY), Boston University (MA), LAXART (CA), and Ogden Museum of Southern Art (LA). Zapata has also completed recent residencies at MASS MoCA (MA), A-Z West (CA), and Wave Hill (NY), and is the recent recipient of an NFA Project Grant from the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures. Zapata was an artist-in-residence at the Museum of Arts and Design in 2016.