eye wavers and the momentary symmetry of the configuration floats off in all directions. It turns out that many more discs are in the process of proliferating through both reflection and refraction and it is very unclear which may be in front but which may be behind you. At certain moments, the viewing body becomes little more than a transparent screen, quite as transparent as the glass. At others it seems another layer of opacity that blocks off what can be seen. Rather than looking at something – even at black discs cutting out sections of screens of light – we are watching the work making and unmaking itself.

The project of the exhibition began with *The Eye of Go*, through which it was possible to recover the extreme point of the abjection to which Orozco had pushed abstraction in his acetates in the early nineties. The addition of *Blind Signs* in turn allows us to rethink the significance of that moment yet again. It also shifts the terms with which to reflect on how circles work – expanded now to ask how intimacy might survive in a culture blinded not only by images but by the spectacular effects of light and glass.

There is the same kind of precarious relation between symmetry and asymmetry to be found between the new work and the older acetates. This is highlighted by the fact that they mirror each other at either ends of the gallery. It turns out to be harder than expected to keep in place the sense of before and after, not least because both the acetates, represented now in aluminum frames, and *Blind Signs* are in an important sense two halves of the same thought process.

Starting with the *The Eye of Go* opened the possibility of thinking outside the standard formal and hermetic vocabularies of abstraction. Its black and white silhouette makes it feels like the most schematic ur-image and at the same time its negation (as if it has temporally gone missing in a wink or a blink). *Blind Signs* goes further, splintering into thousands of tiny smaller eclipses. Still more emphatically now, it is not only the spatial or chromatic blanking out of the field of vision that is at stake but temporary suspensions in time. Think of the small black discs as temporal cut–outs; think of them as sticking points.

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**Gabriel Orozco: Thinking in Circles Part II**

Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 5th November–21 December 2013

Notes by Briony Fer, curator

Given the limited vocabularies available to describe abstraction, it is still, even today, not easy to be precise about an operation that fits the conventional attributes of neither a form nor a motif. Orozco himself has suggested that circles are *instruments*; that is to say, they cause something to happen. We could also think of them, in similar terms, as devices or protagonists that actively trigger a set of actions, and go on doing so, like a chain-reaction. So right from the start we can imagine not a single morphology but the possibility of continuous permutation – where circles can activate axial points and rotations and morph into one another and where they hold within themselves the potential to trigger their own polyvalence.

One of the paradoxes of Orozco’s paintings has always been that although they seem mechanical, painted by assistants according to a set procedure and computer-generated variations, they are also very clearly hand-made things. Their thingness is made even plainer by their insistent lack of frame. There is something almost archaic about the way they reiterate an obsolete language of utopian constructivism for which planets and constellations signified as well as promised the fruits of futurity. *The Eye of Go* (2005) is a template for, at the same time as an eclipse of that format and of the universals and absolutes that so often accompanied it in the discourses of the historical avant-gardes.

However, far from being severed from the history of twentieth century abstraction, Orozco’s painting demands to be re-thought and re-aligned in relation to it. I don’t mean as part of the fiction of continuous formal development but as a strategy of what we can call abjection: to bring down to earth or even violently *ground* the mythic purity of geometric abstraction. As a consequence, as much as the work answers to the conditions of art production that historically precede it, it also, as Jorge Luis Borges wrote in another context, makes its own precursors, and forces us to adjust some of the preconceptions we might have about where avant-garde histories start and end.

In retrospect, Orozco’s move to make paintings was already prescient in his work of the early nineties, especially in his *Light Signs*, that he made for the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea in 1995 when he had similar configurations of geometric forms in primary colors made by a local sign-maker. The quarter-circles that are its component parts are vinyl stick-ons attached to a commercial light-box. This asserts the fact that, rather than belonging to the cosmos, the work belongs in the street.

Exhibition first presented at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.

A fully illustrated catalogue by Briony Fer, published by The Fruitmarket Gallery, accompanies the exhibition.
There is another large group of drawings made around the same time which demonstrate this movement towards abjection even more clearly by showing how impure a configuration of circles might have become – as computer-generated templates printed onto newspaper or molecular-like clusters, all in black-and-white. Many of them relate to the works he was making over the summer of 1994, while he was preparing for his first one-man show at the Marian Goodman Gallery. In the event, he showed his seminal yogurt caps and not the group of acetates, seven of which were shown for the first time in the context of the present exhibition.

Orozco made the acetates in black and white and color and made plans for attaching them to the walls in a variety of different ways, including at right angles, like banners. He photographed them attached to brick walls, outside, like graffiti or mold or lichen. Planted in unlikely places, like a kind of geometric ambush on the unsuspected passer-by, makes them very much of the city. It is apt therefore that the acetates should, after twenty years delay, end up in the space that they were originally envisaged for.

The acetates don’t fit that easily with the picture of nineties art that has taken hold today or of Orozco’s role within it. Yet they show him trying to figure out some kind of relation between Duchamp and Mondrian and, even stranger perhaps, how such a relation still had something to say to artists like him, working antagonistically to a studio aesthetic and making sculpture, however unstable that term has become in relation to his three-dimensional works.

But I suppose the even more startling aspect still was that he found a way to turn what could have been a hermetic art historical problem outwards. The acetates are see through, mimicking windows, with hand-painted circles that ‘affix’ themselves within the field of vision, and as a consequence they let the world back in to art. Or rather they allow the world to imprint itself within the very same visual field that when talked of in the same breath as geometric abstraction is so often assumed to exclude it.

The acetates dramatize the fact that circles are not autonomous forms, even when they are painted in black acrylic on a flat surface. A transparent acetate surface across bio- and geo-political terrains. A gingko leaf, of the kind found on a New York city street, is as much a part of the city as it is part of nature. A river stone, molded by water currents, is not just a natural but also a building material in Mexico. Carved by a stone-cutter, these stones are like nature’s soccer balls. Over thousands of years they have been eroded by water, then ‘drawn’ by cutting into them and exciting sections out of them.

The most recent work in the exhibition is Blind Signs (2013), a glass labyrinth made partially in response to the acetates that Orozco had come to think about again when they resurfaced in the context of the conversations we had in preparation for the current exhibition. Of course, the work is also more than that; it prompts other connections with other works not included in this exhibition, but in the first instance the address to the group of acetates from the mid-nineties is both simple and striking.

Rather than degraded and ruined, like the black paint that peels away in some of the sections of the original acetates, Blind Signs is harder and less yielding: black discs on plate glass suggest both the corporate spaces of public buildings but also the intimate space of the shower. In one of the notebooks the artist kept as he was making the earlier acetates he made a small collage of a shower cubicule and speculated about making shower curtains covered in black circles. Discs were already suggesting bubbles and spheres full of air that were impermanent and would collapse into foam. In the recent work, the beveled sheets of plate glass and chrome fittings are based on shower fixtures.

But in its corporate look and precision finish, Blind Signs dramatizes that sense of extreme susceptibility to the conditions under which art exists. Like the Light Signs they are made using decals, and in this context of large panes of glass they connote the kinds of warning signs and safety stickers that are the familiar street furniture of an urban environment. Like logos and brands, decals can be stuck on anything from car bumpers to bus shelters to plate glass doors; dispersed and distributed across vast stretches of chrome and glass. Blind Signs might mimic aspects of these global image flows but also resists them; after all they are blacked out and unseeing; if in everyday life we might be saturated by accumulations of visual sign-noise, these are mute.

Viewed as an optical apparatus, there is no single viewfinder but multiple and only ever multiplying points of view that are perpetually in movement and unstable. The small black discs are blind spots or scotoma, small sections cut out of the field of vision. As you move through and around the piece, the discs are perpetually moving in and out of alignment. Stand still and peer; try to align yourself; fix the black discs as if trying to ‘aim’ your gaze. As you do so, partly perhaps due to the concentration involved, time seems to stand still too.

Yet almost as soon as this temporal blank occurs, and vision holds for a single precarious second, it falls away again. The body imperceptibly moves and with it the