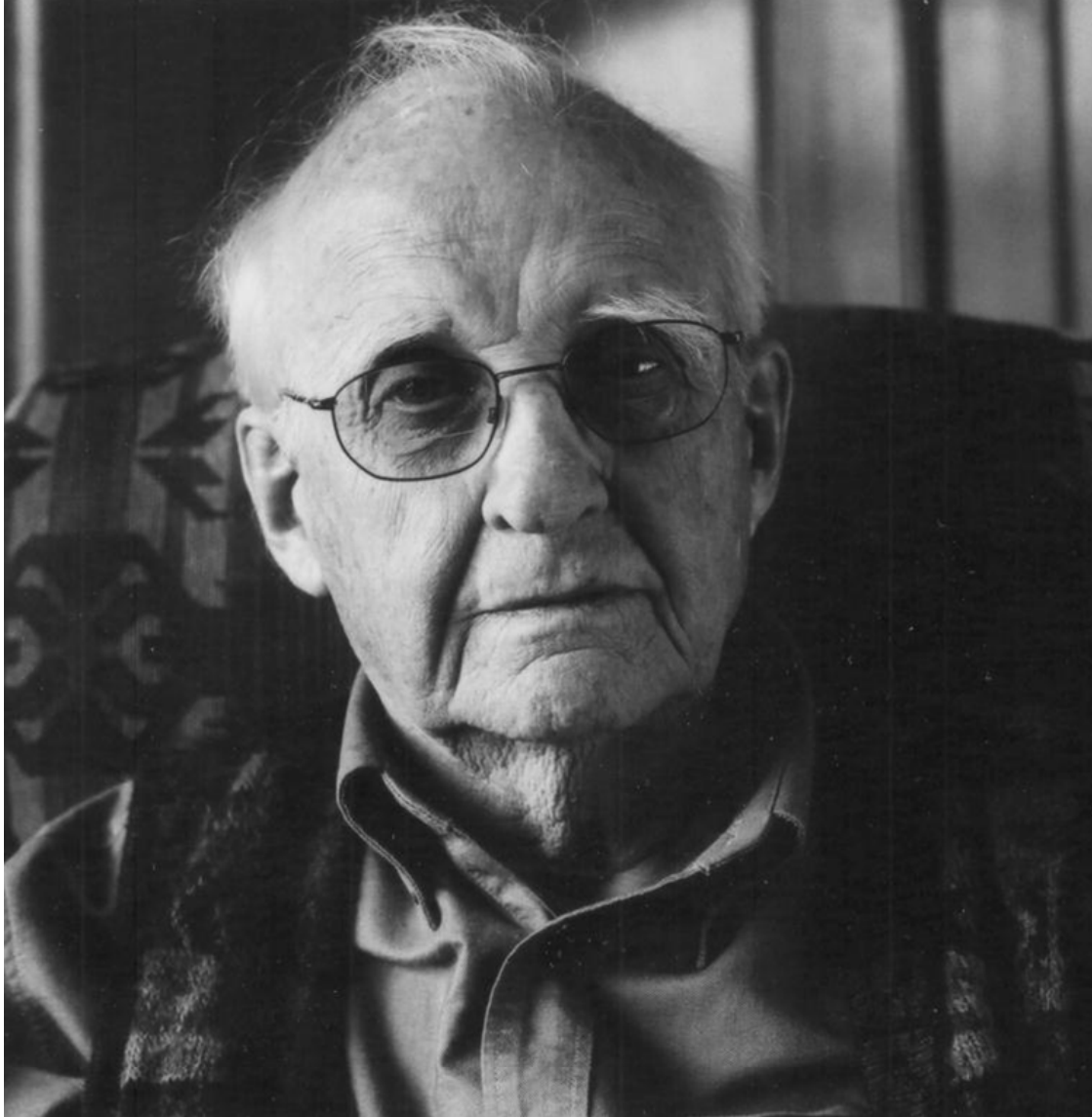


Juan Geuer
1917-2009



Though Juan Geuer was born in 1917 in the Dutch city of Soest, he has adopted several countries as his home and they have all marked his art, science and sensibilities toward human perceptions of space and time. Raised in the Netherlands and Germany, Geuer eventually moved to Bolivia with his family in 1939 to seek refuge from the war plaguing Europe. At a young age, Geuer was introduced to stained glass by his parents and thanks to them was also influenced by the *De Stijl Group*. During his time in the Bolivian jungle, he continued exploring design and nature using raw materials to make up for the lack of conventional supplies. In 1954, he immigrated to Canada and in 1962 began working at the Dominion Observatory, which later became the Earth Physics Branch of the Department of Natural Resources in Ottawa. Geuer was initially hired to work as a draftsman. As he progressed professionally, he began to construct models and displays to help scientists visualize geographical phenomena. Creating "scientific art" for a practical purpose has helped stimulate Geuer's artistic investigations since 1975.

Geuer's oeuvre has been recognized in major exhibitions in museums around the world, such as the Museum Boymans van Beuningen (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), the List Visual Art Centre at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, Massachusetts), the Ottawa Art Gallery (Ottawa, Canada) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada). He has also published in journals such as the *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences* and *Leonardo* and has guest-lectured at colleges and universities in Europe, New Zealand and North America.

In the sixties, Juan Geuer was an abstract painter. He exhibited frequently in rural Ontario, where he lived, and sold several paintings to private collections throughout North America and Europe. At the same time, Geuer worked as a self-trained draftsman at the Dominion Observatory, studying geophysical phenomena and translating them into diagrams and illustrations. After becoming intrigued by geographical anomalies presented in a project studied by his co-workers, Geuer decided to create a model by studying photographs of a meteor crater in Saskatchewan, Canada. His supervisor was so impressed by this visualization of data that he asked Geuer to co-author a paper in which they discussed the phenomenon.

Geuer's instinct to translate scientific data into visual, tactile models also led him to pursue a different vein of art production around that time. His sensibility to space and time and his relation to the scientific world, perhaps influenced by his observations of nature in the jungles of Bolivia, allowed him to create thoughtful and subtle installations that explored scientific principles intimately and sensually.

In 1973, Geuer invented the Terrascope, a scientific device that could physically visualize the movement of the Earth's tectonic plates. The device didn't differ greatly from the artistic work Geuer was doing at the time. During the mid-seventies, Geuer began to experiment with more technically minded art pieces and in 1979 exhibited *X-Ray* for the first time at the Kingston Artists' Association in Kingston, Ontario. This piece explored the enthusiasm for and destructive possibilities of the X-ray machine.

Geuer also started the Truth Seeker Company in 1973 to research the connections between art and science and what he considers the public's indifference toward creativity. He sees a large gap between the general public and the scientific community and strives to bridge it through art. Geuer's curiosity and his devotion to this communicative process incited him to create pieces

such as *The Truth About Cartesian Clarity* (Grid) (1972), *The Lord is Cunning* (1977), *Curve in Space and Time* (1977), et *Al Asnaam* (1979), an interactive seismometer.

Al Asnaam, also known as the "people participating seismometer," is one of Geuer's most exhibited works. It takes its name from an earthquake in Algeria that the artist registered on his "artistic instrument" during its early stages of testing. The work, which includes a laser, mirrors and a Plexiglas cylinder, records disturbances caused by a visitor's movement within the space and other minor seismic movement that the person may not detect.

Geuer attempts to become more sensitive to his own place in various environments, as is evident in his installations and art objects. He desires a relationship with his place in time and space and has the patience to examine this relationship and to see it from his body's perspective rather than his scientific mind's. Because of this, his artwork becomes more accessible to observers. Geuer notes that he "experimented with drawing attention to some particular phenomenon in such a manner that an intimate and personal contact is created between that phenomenon and the observer, without the intervention of preconceptions or metaphors".

In the eighties, Geuer's artistic output became more prolific and in 1980, he retired from the Earth Physics Branch. From then on, he committed himself to his Truth Seeker Company, producing works such as *Light Traps* (1985), *Holland's Grijs* (1985), *The Loom Drum* (1986-1992), *Siglo Veinte* (1987) and *Emanuel Kant's Failure* (1988). *Holland's Grijs* (Dutch Grey) in particular was a very simple but profound installation that Geuer created specifically for the retrospective exhibition at the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 1985. Gary Michael Dault writes:

"Here an ovoid Plexiglas dome resting on a reflecting glass sheet is installed somewhere within the Museum, a polarizing filter placed between the dome and a large window. Even when (especially when) it is overcast outside, the natural light entering the room is de-polarized by the dome but re-polarized by the glass sheet, resulting in the apparent entrapment, within the dome, of a myriad of dazzlingly coloured reflections: severe, lovely, and a genuinely felt response to (and gift in honour of) the Dutch fetishization of available light."

Geuer's sensitivity to nature and all its reflective possibilities is evident in this piece. This sensitivity continues throughout his work, from complex mirror-rigged devices to people participating seismometers. Geuer keeps visitors aware of their surroundings by magnifying the unnoticed and making it visible or perceivable.

In 1986, in co-operation with Canadian artist Michael Snow, Geuer produced a piece called *Geta* for the List Visual Arts Centre at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The piece played on reflection and the polarization of light. It was crafted to interact with Michael Snow's *De la* (1969-1971), which was placed near Geuer's installation. Snow's camera, which was programmed to swing by a gallery window, recorded the view of the outside but through the intermediary of Geuer's mirror device. The result was a playful and formal interaction between the two artists.

In 1989, Geuer submitted a proposal to the National Gallery of Canada for a permanent installation in the museum's rotunda. The gallery accepted the proposal and commissioned Geuer

to install the work in 1990. *Karonhia* (meaning sky in Mohawk) has become a signature experience at the gallery. It comprises four pairs of rectangular mirrors anchored to the walls of the building. The mirrors are placed so as to catch and reflect the light coming through the glass ceiling in the rotunda. The viewer can walk around and look at the four mirrors and the different reflections they cast from the four cardinal points in the sky. The gallery also purchased a subsequent work of Geuer's title *H2O* (1993).

Throughout the nineties and the year 2000, Geuer has been a constant fixture on the Canadian art scene. He has benefited from a host of exhibitions in Ontario and Quebec that have showcased his most recent works. In 1993, the Ottawa Art Gallery organized a solo show, *Investigating Chaos*, that spotlighted Geuer's most renowned works. In 1996, the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts in Montreal exhibited several recent works including *The Loom Drum* (1986-1992), *L'être et le néant* (1988) et *The Hellot Glasses* (1996). This last piece contains a series of 20 mirrors that play with the visitors' reflections. "In this forest of mirrors, Geuer essays an experiment in being self and being Other, a brilliant formulation of the empathetic proposition: put yourself in my shoes."

In the late nineties, Geuer began to experiment with video and is now exploring what he terms "aesthetic bonding." The artist is working on several video pieces that illustrate short sequences of processes such as churning water or the morphogenesis of cells and other primitive life forms. In the editing process, these patterns are placed in sequence and will be shown in forward and backward motions. Geuer selects patterns with scientific precision and according to easily observable categories, thus enabling the viewer to engage in a meaningful aesthetic experience. Working closely with new technologies, Geuer is attempting to bring his environmental sensibilities to the projected image.

Juan Geuer passed away suddenly May 2, 2009 in his 93rd year in Ottawa, Canada with his family at his side. We mark his passing with grief.

Written by
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