



león ferrari

por um mundo sem Inferno

galeria

nara roesler

Galeria Nara Roesler | São Paulo is honored to present *León Ferrari, por um mundo sem Inferno [León Ferrari, for a world with no Hell]* solo show by , a name honored with the Golden Lion at the 2007 Venice Biennale and represented by Galeria Nara Roesler in Brazil and abroad.

Curated by Lisette Lagnado, this panoramic exhibition covers almost half a century of the multimedia artist's creative process, is the first large-scale solo exhibition inside a gallery, after his death in 2013.

The curator states: "A profound erudite on the canonical gospels, León Ferrari dedicated much of his time to defending his main thesis: the artistic heritage of Western culture is based on promises of penalties and torture, with Hell and Revelation as categorical imperatives of impious humankind". According to her, in the contemporary universe of artistic practices, encounters with such an expressive mass of engaged writings are rare.

Lagnado also emphasizes that the Argentine artist's public figure has become an inseparable part of his extensive and multifaceted production, which she defines as obsessive, controversial and good-humored.

"The proposition here is to recover this extensive iconography, without making a blank slate of its artistic or religious aura, but directing a scientific gaze that might extract a primitive meaning from the figures portrayed. It is not about establishing a confrontation with the spiritual dimension of religion, but understanding what is 'being given to see', the structure and morphology of each scene", the curator completes.

Aside from his solo exhibition at Galeria Nara Roesler | São Paulo and his figurehead status at the SP-Arte fair, the artist is the theme of a MAM-SP seminar, with the mediation of Lisette Lagnado and the participation of names such as Pablo León de la Barra from Guggenheim NY and Anna Ferrari from Fundação Augusto e León Ferrari and León Ferrari Arte e Acervo - FALFAA, among others.



Jeová: Não cubiçarás a mulher de teu proximo. (Deuterônimo 5,21)
Moisés com a Tábua da Lei, Bíblia Doré, 1865 + Gravura de Katsushika Hokusai
(1760-1849).

Relectura de la Biblia [Rereading of the Bible] series (1983):

"1983: Writings on Canvas, Urban Sculpture and Rereadings of the Bible – That same year Ferrari takes up religious themes once again, producing hundreds of collages in which Catholic iconography is linked with oriental erotic iconography and with contemporary images. With these collages, he begins what he presents as an investigation into the biblical gods' conduct and the consequences that the violence found in the Holy Scripture's pages have had on the history of the West."

Text: Andrea Giunta. "Chronology". In: León Ferrari: retrospectiva. Obras 1954-2006. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006, p. 410.

From the book Bible, 1989
collage on paper
16.1 x 12.4 x 00 in

Drawings and collages in Letraset - Códigos [Codes], Ajedrez [Chess], Baños [Bathrooms] and Plantas [Plants] series (1979)

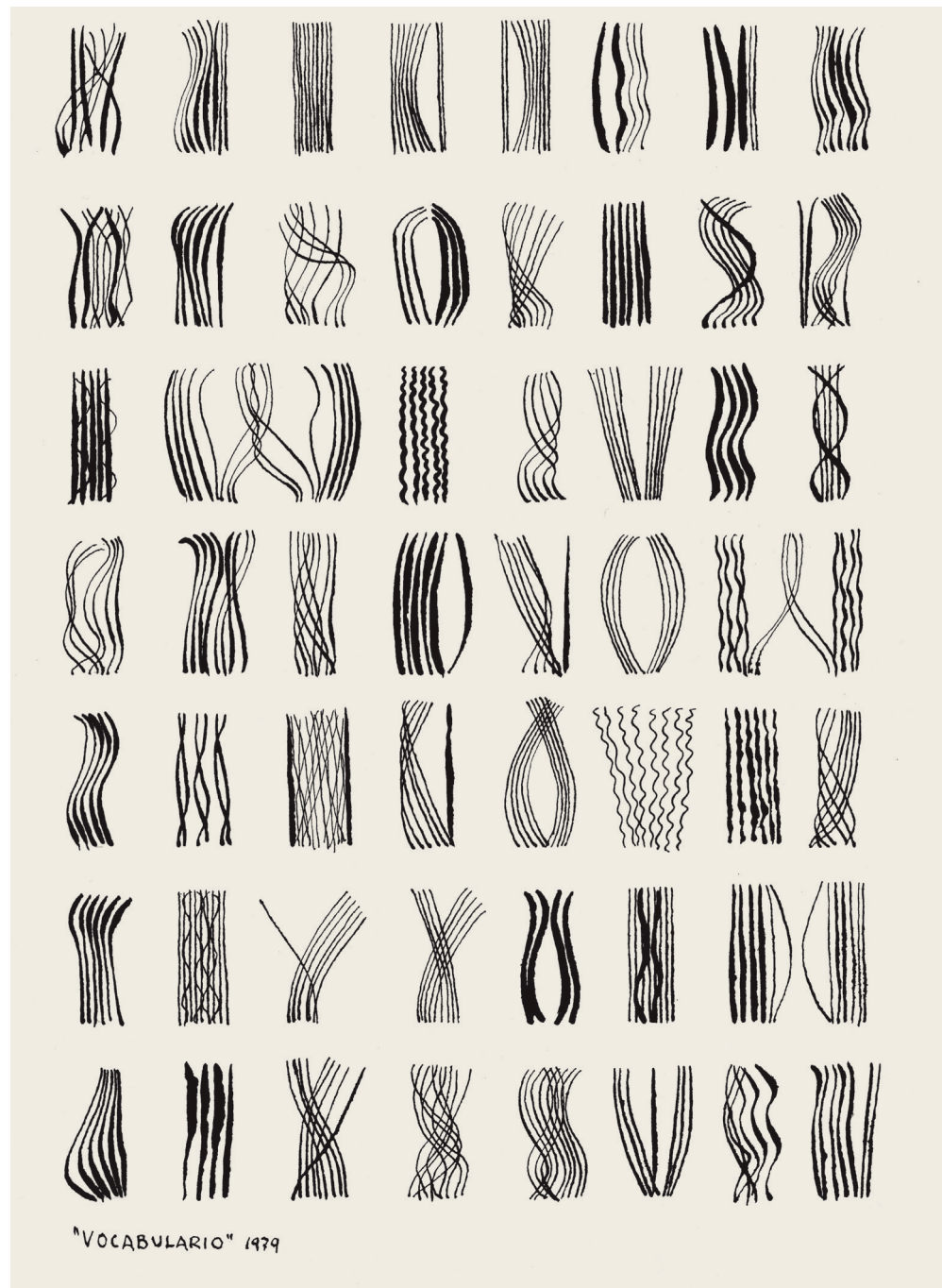
“[León Ferrari] begins to use inverted pendulums around 1978 in a series of sculptures that consist of groups of vertical bars (from 100 to 1000) unified at the bottom end in a single base. They emit murmurs when agitated by the wind or by hands. The drawings from the *Códigos [Codes]* series done in 1979 emerge from these bars’ movements.

1979: Letraset, Music, Flashartes – [...] León made several series of drawings and collages (that he called *Códigos [Codes]*, *Ajedrez [Chess]*, *Baños [Bathrooms]* and *Plantas [Plants]*, where he incorporated Letraset images. He published these series in the books *Hombres [Men]* (1984) and *Imagens [Images]* (1989). *Códigos*, in particular, proposed the creation of an alphabet or new vocabulary with which he reformulated the Kamasutra, for example, in images. At this point he also writes poetic texts (...) in which the description of visual language summons up images of extraordinary sensuality.”

Text: Andrea Giunta. “Chronology”. In: *León Ferrari: retrospectiva*. Obras 1954-2006. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006, p. 407.



Dictionary 1979
xerocopy on paper
12.6 x 8.5 in



Vocabulary, 1998
xerocopy on paper
11.8 x 8.3 in

Juicio Final [Final Judgment] series (1985):

"**1985: Animals and Excrement** – [...] *In the Panorama de formas tridimensionales [Panorama of Three-dimensional Forms]* exhibition organized by the MAM in São Paulo, he presented a piece with animals and excrement for the first time: a cage with pigeons defecating onto Michelangelo's Final Judgment from the Sistine Chapel, an image that was successively replaced with other final judgments painted by other artists—Giotto, Tintoretto and Rubens, among others—during the course of time the work remained mounted. These works form part of a series against Hell that he has continued to develop in recent shows (...)."

Text: Andrea Giunta. "Chronology". In: *León Ferrari: retrospectiva. Obras 1954-2006*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006, p. 411.

Leon Ferrari
Final Judgment 1994
excrement of pigeons on a plateau of
Michelangelo's Last Judgment
20.1 x 14 x 1 in





Brailles series (1997):

"1997: Brailles – Between March and April he presents *Tormentos-amores* [*Torments-Loves*], an exhibition held in the Arcimboldo gallery. The new approach consisted in a series of reproductions of photographs by Man Ray, prints by Utamaro, etchings by Doré, paintings by Giotto and Fra Angélico; all erotic or religious images over which Ferrari wrote texts from the Bible or by Borges in Braille. A sign reading 'Touching the works is not prohibited' invited the public to make direct contact with and participate in the pieces."

Text: Andrea Giunta. "Chronology". In: *León Ferrari: retrospectiva*. Obras 1954-2006. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006, p. 417.

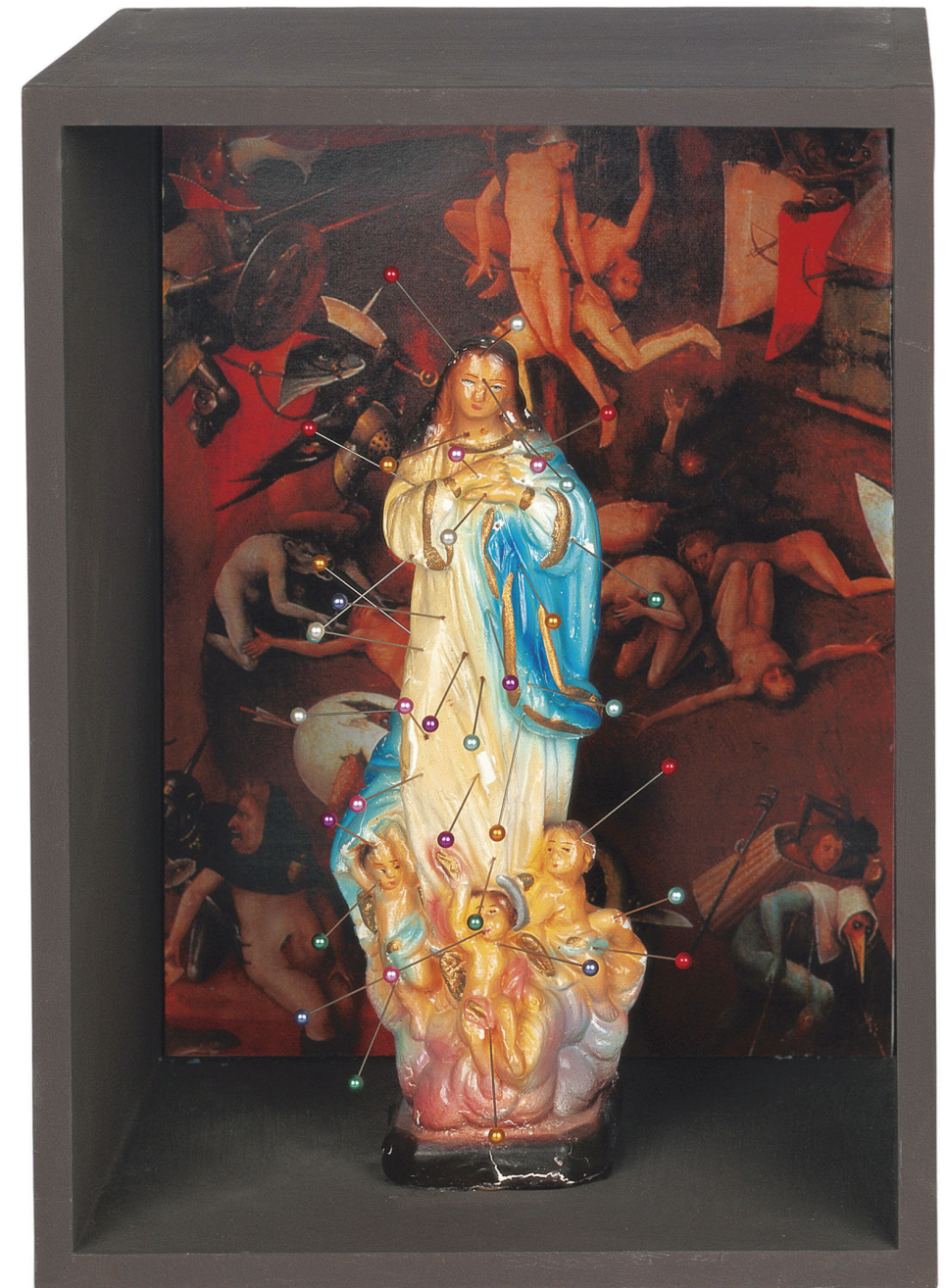
Tarde que socavó nuestro adiós, 2003
braille with poem by Borges on photography by Man Ray
34.6 x 21.9 x 00 in

Ideas para Infiernos [Ideas for Hells] series (2000):

"2000: Hells and Idolatries – In May León presents *Infiernos e idolatrias [Hells and Idolatries]* in the ICI, Centro Cultural de España en Buenos Aires. The exhibition brought together Final Judgments by famous artists (Hieronymus Bosch, Giotto, Michelangelo, Van Eyck, Bruegel and Doré) and a group of boxes, objects and sculptures in which other hells, similar to the others, were represented, but where the martyrs were plaster of Paris saints, virgins and sacred hearts. The show was rounded out by a series of cages and trees populated by artificial birds whose imulated defecating upon religious images or onto a portrait of Dante painted by Botticelli, along with some ten chessboards on which virtual battles between Christs, virgins, devils and wax penises were waged. Chess boards, cages, frying pans, toasters, blenders and hundreds of colored birds were used to submit the religious images to the same torment that the Bible promises after the Final Judgment. In place of real excrement that Ferrari had used in his collages, he now resorted to symbolic defecation from artificial birds. *I reproduce Hell, but instead of doing so with regular people, I do it with the very saints who vouched for the idea of Hell.* (LF, in Constantin, 2000.)

Text: Andrea Giunta. "Chronology". In: *León Ferrari: retrospectiva. Obras 1954-2006*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006, p. 418.

***Tortura*, 2000**
box - mixed media
11.6 x 8.5 in





Inferno, 2004
collage with object
83 x 47 cm

From the serie infernos, 2006
collage box
23.2 x 17.3 x 8.4 in



Espiraes [Spirals], Brillos [Shines] and Atados con Alambres [Ties with Wire] series (2004-06):

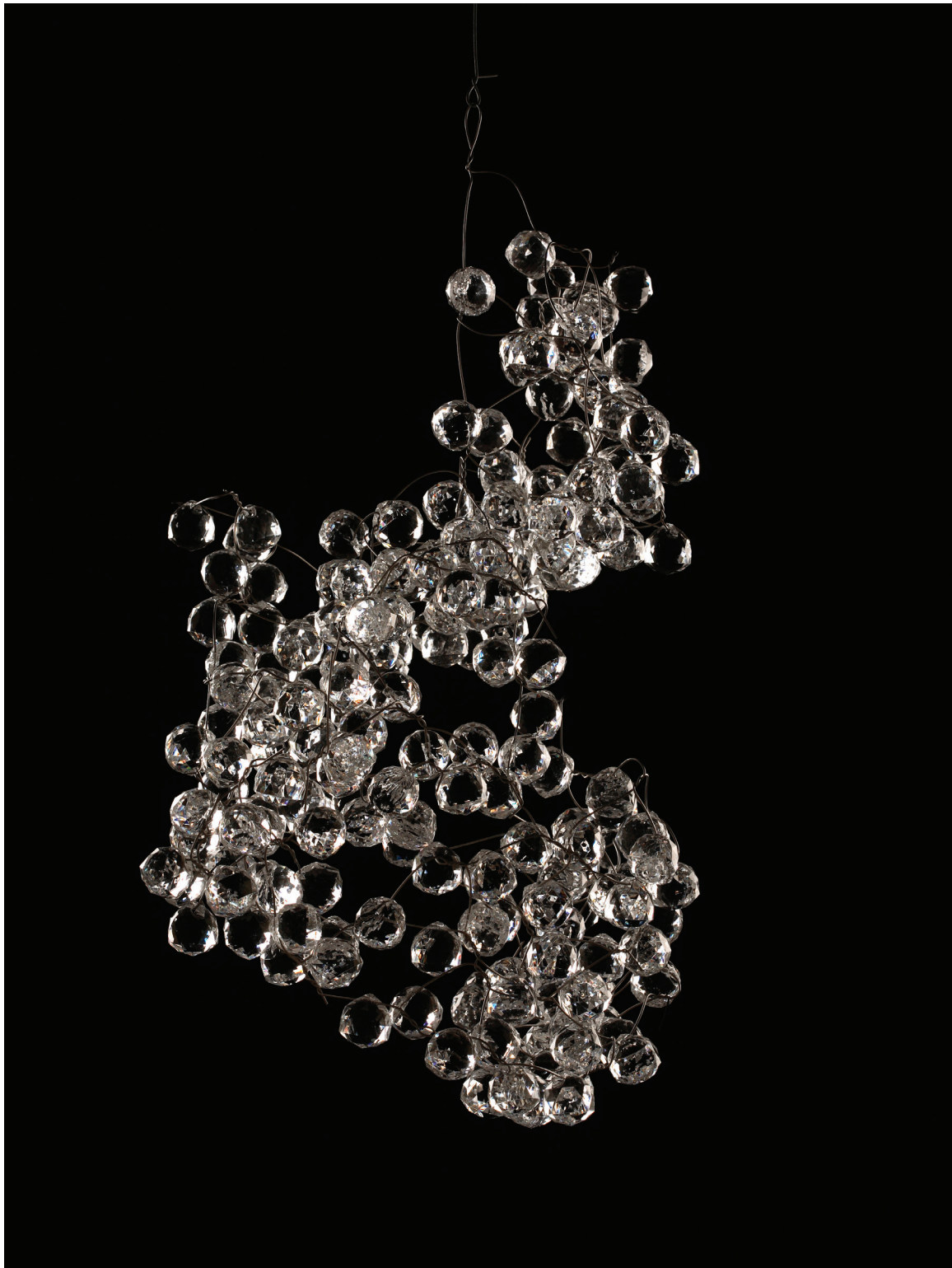
Between 2005 and 2006, León Ferrari developed three new series: *Espiraes [Spirals]*, *Brillos [Shines]* and *Atados con Alambres [Ties with Wire]*. In the first, rolled wires are organized in the form of aerial sculptures, large balls of coiled wires, which he also puts inside acrylic cylinders or boxes. In the series *Brillos*, he uses embossed painting of several colors, with glitter, with which he draws on paper or on successive glass or acrylic plates ordered in boxes. He draws with a spiral stroke, on both side of the glass, also covering the bottom of the box: the result is a porous and velvety vibration of glitter suspended in the distinct layers of the box space.

The *Atados con Alambres* series, which he begins in 2004, expands into multiple possibilities: wire nets covered with polyurethane foam painted in various colors, in which birds, parrots, flowers, rats, bombers and war tanks are added. This series is linked to poetic proposals, such as the beautiful set of branches of different trees (wooden rods, Weeping Willows trees), pierced and tied at its ends; and to the inescapable and connoted series of bones trapped in a bouquet, hanging from the ceiling or laying inside metal structures or acrylic cylinders.

Text: Andrea Giunta. "Chronology". In: *León Ferrari: retrospectiva*. Obras 1954-2006. São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2006

***Toothpicks*, 2016**
wood rods with wire
65 x 33.5 x 37.4 in





Untitled, 2008
hanging sculpture
22.8 x 13.8 x 13.8 in



Untitled, 2008
hanging sculpture
15 x 24.8 x 19.7 in



El infierno según San Alfonso, 2006
wooden box with glass painted with glitter
56.7 x 33.1 x 3.9 in

About León Ferrari

León Ferrari is one of the most renowned Latin American artists worldwide, acclaimed at the 2007 Venice Biennale, for which he received the Golden Lion Award in recognition of his artistic oeuvre that, until the end of his life, motivated him to challenge the world we live in.

In his artistic practice, he makes use of different languages, such as sculpture, drawing, writing, collage, assemblage, installation and video. This heterogeneous set of practices integrates themes that reveal both his researcher and activist character as the aesthetic investigation of language, the questioning of the Western world, power and normatization that dictates the values of Religion, Art, Justice and the State, the reverence for women and eroticism, and the depiction of violence. The repetition, the irony, and the literality are also resources of his poetics, recognized since his early works.

In the 1960s, the drawings and sculptures of Ferrari are permeated, in particular, by the ethical questioning of religion and the denunciation against Imperialism. In 1976, a military coup forced the artist and his family to leave Buenos Aires, moving to São Paulo, where they remained until the 1990s. During his stay in Brazil, Ferrari joined the local experimental circuit, involving with the process of language revitalization through the production of heliographies, photocopies, musical instruments, concerts and mail art. Upon returning to Argentina, the artist continued to produce politically engaged artworks, questioning the disappearances that occurred during the Military Dictatorship.

León Ferrari was born in 1920 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he lived until his death in 2013.

His works were exhibited at major international exhibitions, such as: The Words of Others: León Ferrari and Rhetoric in Times of War, Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Miami, USA, 2018, and Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT), Los Angeles, USA, 2017-18; La donación Ferrari, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2014; León Ferrari - Brailles y Relecturas de la Biblia, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2012; Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA, 2009; León Ferrari: Poéticas e Políticas, Pinacoteca do Estado do São Paulo, Brazil, 2006; León Ferrari: retrospectiva. Obras 1954-2004, Centro Cultural Recoleta (CCR), Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2004; and Politiscripts, The Drawing Center (TDC), New York, USA, 2004. He participated in Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense at the 52nd Venice Biennale (Italian Pavilion and Arsenal), in 2007, receiving the Golden Lion Award. His works are present in important institutional collections, such as: Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Miami, USA; Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), Chicago, USA; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, La Habana, Cuba; Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich, Switzerland; Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina; Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), Brazil; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), Brazil; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH), Houston, USA; The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; among others.

León Ferrari - The insubordination of the artistic gesture

Lisette Lagnado

Celebrated in Venice (2007) for the ensemble of his oeuvre, León Ferrari's name is inscribed in the artistic avant-garde of Latin American conceptualism. A multimedia artist, he was a sculptor, a draftsman, a painter ... and a heretic.

No discerning presentation may disregard his conflicting relationship with various authorities of the Catholic Church throughout its prolific trajectory. Meeting the expectations on every movement of rupture, the artist's public figure became inseparable from a production as extensive as it is multifaceted, obsessive, controversial and good-humored.

The current exhibition fulfills a panoramic ambition, gathering diverse artistic experiments by León Ferrari. It is his first large-scale solo exhibition in an art gallery after his death in 2013. This selection comprises the period between 1962 and 2009, including the years he spent in São Paulo (1976-1992), covering almost half a century of a creative and investigative process about the representation of power within society.

One soon realizes, however, that the "activism" key is too reductive to explain the monumentality of an oeuvre that contains an extraordinary collection of reproductions collected from the history of art. This abundance ended up revealing a so far disregarded feature, i.e., a rather iconophile than iconoclastic characteristic, as it appears at first sight.

The proposition here is to recover this extensive iconography, without making a blank slate of its artistic or religious aura, but directing a scientific gaze that might extract a primitive meaning from the figures portrayed. It is not about establishing a confrontation with the spiritual dimension of religion, but understanding what is "being given to be seen", the structure and morphology of each scene.

The artist meets Bataille's transgression when he points out how the aesthetic experience of the sublime reifies conceptions of guilt and punishment. Contemplating the works by Giotto, Botticelli, Michelangelo or Doré means admiring the cruelty of war, torture and martyrdom scenes, almost all of them a consequence of sexual practices deemed illicit in the Catholic religion.

From this perspective, León Ferrari's production asserts itself as an atlas of abstract and figurative images that still await interpretation. Collages from the Relectura de la Biblia [Rereading of the Bible, 1983] series, undoubtedly polyphonic, orchestrate a wealth of sources that range from philosophy to literature, juxtaposing excerpts of the Holy Scriptures on prints of Asian eroticism. Ferrari still resorts to the Braille alphabet system, adding fine irony: drawing the believer closer to the blind and breaking rules so that the word of God becomes a tactile experience, a contact with the skin.

In his aim to echo biblical scriptures, the artist understood the strategic need to feed all the existing communication channels of his time (before the Internet existed). Newspaper advertising was a key tool for reaching a public who would never visit art exhibitions, thus managing to appeal to the common citizen.

Those who were acquainted with Ferrari know how he had fun with the malaise caused by his numerous collages made from copies of emblematic works of art. Aside from a Duchampian (and infantile) gesture of appropriation, however, what matters is the debate of ideas.

"A visual artist who writes," Nestor García Canclini defined him very well, referring to two types of scripture one can find: the sacred and the profane, encompassing, the latter including political, poetic and erotic writings. Even the drawings with illegible handwriting that evoke variants of the Arabic alphabet must be seen, as the artist himself insists, as signs alluding to images.

León Ferrari drew unintelligible letters, elaborating a fantastic dialogue with the generals who rule totalitarian regimes. This production puts in the foreground a kind of abstract (almost automatic and psychotic) calligraphy that reverberates through all the means he experiments with, whether sculpture, collage or painting.

A profound erudite on the canonical gospels, he dedicated much of his time to gathering arguments to defend his main thesis: the artistic heritage of Western culture is based on promises of penalties and torture, with Hell and Revelation as categorical imperatives of impious humankind. In the contemporary universe of artistic practices, encounters with such an expressive mass of engaged writings are rare.

In short, it is a work that broadly fulfills the definitions of the avant-garde - originality and polemics.

The artist's recent death, at the age of 93 in Buenos Aires, has nevertheless raised a series of challenges for researchers and institutions. Along with the important task of cataloging the collection initiated by the family foundation where the artist kept his studio, perhaps the most difficult mission is yet to come: honoring a memory of struggle and insubordination, the backbone of ethics. While the main character left the scene, the questions he raised persist for the next generations, requiring a degree of commitment beyond the knowledge of the nature of art.

¹ The theme of Leon Ferrari's drawings deserved an exhibition organized in 2009 by the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MoMA) curated by Luiz Pérez-Oramas "Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel", which traveled the next year to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid) and the Iberê Camargo Foundation (Porto Alegre).

² Cf. <http://fundacionaugustoyleonferrari.org/about/>

