



león ferrari

for a world with no Hell

galeria

nara roesler





**Galeria Nara Roesler | New York** is pleased to present *León Ferrari, For a World with No Hell*, featuring 22 collages that delve into love, language, religion, and power—recurrent themes in the artist's oeuvre. The exhibition follows the announcement of the gallery's representation of the artist's estate earlier this year.

Curated by Lisette Lagnado, curator of the 26th Bienal de São Paulo (2006), *For a World with No Hell* is the second of two exhibitions of Ferrari's work organized by Galeria Nara Roesler in 2018, with the first on view in São Paulo through May. Specially conceived for the gallery's intimate setting, the exhibition in New York will be open to the public from April 27 to June 16, 2018.

"The current selection sought to highlight one of the fundamental elements in an artistic life that spanned nearly 60 years: the erotic pleasure," says Lagnado. "The show is structured around the collage *La Venus tocada* [The Touched Venus], in which a naked and armless sculpture is caressed by 11 human hands. The odd number suggests the intrusion of the artist's hand into the picture, while the depiction of the back-facing figure adds a valuable androgynous component to the definition of beauty."

The other collages included in the exhibition were produced between 1986 and 1988, and between 1996 and 1998. While these are thematically concerned with love, the curator notes, "his conception, far from platonic, challenges discrimination against homosexuality and the misogyny of the holy scriptures, which are punctuated by punishments and hells." The artist questions the contradiction between the use of sexual and violent imagery in religious iconography, and the censure of sexual imagery in relation to pleasure. Throughout his career, Ferrari produced pieces that challenged commandments, as well as political and scientific doctrines. Therefore, the relationship between Art and Power defines Ferrari's body of work, which vehemently denounces violence.

In curating the exhibition, Lagnado selected artworks that employ oriental iconography and braille as a means to expand the visual repertoire beyond a Greco-Roman aesthetic and embrace a sensorial energy. The importance of braille is tied to the investigation of language, which is central to Ferrari's practice.

***The Touched Venus***  
box with collage  
21.1 x 14.2 x 2 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.

## On the concept of truth in Leon Ferrari Lisette Lagnado

In 2009, the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MoMA) organized the exhibition “Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel” (Luiz Pérez-Oramas curator), which traveled to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain) and the Iberê Camargo Foundation (Porto Alegre, Brazil), gathering a wide range of works by both artists. The MoMA exhibition sought to emphasize the ways of inserting verbal language into the field of visuality.

Almost ten years later, this time at Galeria Nara Roesler, which represents the artist’s estate, the city of New York welcomes a precise selection of León Ferrari’s production, whose name is inscribed in the artistic avant-garde of Latin American experimentalism and conceptualism . It is now about looking at only twenty collages and asking: what are these alphabets for? And what do the images associated with them say?

Between poetic fragments and divine verdicts, the curator surmises hypotheses about “the Alpha and the Omega” (the beginning and the end) of León Ferrari (Buenos Aires, 1920-2013), who upheld the import of truth carried by the Word, come hell or high water. The Hebrew word for truth is *emet*, whose first and last letters are also the first and last of the Hebrew alphabet, just as the Greek Alpha and Omega.

Especially conceived for the gallery’s intimate venue, the current selection sought to highlight one of the fundamentals of an artistic life spanning almost sixty years: erotic pleasure. The show is structured from the 1964 collage *La Venus tocada* [Venus touched], in which the completely naked armless sculpture is fondled by eleven human hands. This odd number suggests the intrusion of the artist’s hand into the picture, while the body’s representation turning its back adds a valuable androgynous component to the definition of beauty.

The other collages chosen to dialogue with Ferrari’s *Venus* are from 1986-88 and 1996-98, juxtaposing the need to bring a repertoire beyond the Greco-Roman model and a language able to refer to sensorial energy: Eastern iconography and Braille , the dot writing system for the blind. Both are emblematic of the artist’s persistence in the love theme over decades. Yet his conception, far from being platonic, confronts the discrimination of homosexuality and the misogyny of the Holy Scriptures, interspersed with penalties and hells.

The fusion of mysticism and blindness simultaneously applies to texts and images, considering that the text is an image. Ferrari himself already stated that the graphism on his paintings derives from an abstract blur. Indeed, his 1962 hard-ground etchings and China ink drawings were still untitled or designated as “music”, as if they were scores - a sphere of action to which he will radically dedicate himself through the conception of instruments for concerts and public performances. In the next year, the artist started the series called “Letters to a General”,

with no mention of a specific sender. These writings thickened into texts at the edge between readability and invention, and began to require a complex engine for their interpretation.

León Ferrari created meshes of lines to question canonical excerpts, a process that arises from distorted handwritings to the point of misreading or inspiring imaginary codes, proposing an inaccessible language. Its indecipherable character is an allusion to both the failure of the rationalist project and the secret vocabulary used under military regimes to evade police controls. This idea unfolded into sculptures of stainless steel, bronze and copper, referring to the notion of “babelism”, the anarchic confusion between different languages.

Doubt constitutes an indispensable tool in Ferrari’s thought structure. In many cases, it yielded corrosive works, defying commandments and political and scientific doctrines. It is known that the artist was a founding member of CIHABAPAI (Club of the wicked, heretics, apostates, blasphemers, atheists, pagans, agnostics and infidels), which in 1997 asked the Pope for the annulment of the Last Judgment and immortality and in 2001 for the revocation and demolition of Hell.

As the artist explains, biblical scriptures are at the root of this conditioning. While scenes of sex and violence are permitted in religious works decorating various Italian chapels without any prior notice on their content, images that expose the pleasure of sex are liable to be censored.

Thus, the relations between Art and Power define the main axes of his work and construct a vehement denunciation of violence. The 1965 Vietnam War underpins the first explicit reference of the artist’s path, permeated by his tireless political struggle to defend freedom. León Ferrari left Argentina with his family in 1976 because of the military coup and moved to São Paulo, only to return for good in 1992.

In that sense, fulfilling the expectations for every breakup movement, the artist’s public figure became inseparable from a production as extensive as it is multifaceted, obsessive, controversial and good-humored. Aside from questioning the incoherence of the texts that distinguish Western civilization, the artist transferred the method of doubt to the universe of pictures that belong in the World Heritage for their artistic quality, because the scenes painted by Giotto, Tintoretto, Titian, Doré or Rubens recount biblical stories whose cult value, as pointed out by Walter Benjamin, has been replaced by their exhibition value.

### **about Lisette Lagnado**

Lisette Lagnado (1961, Kinshasa, Congo) is an art critic and independent curator. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and a Master's degree in Communication and Semiotics from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo-PUC/SP. Lagnado completed her Ph.D. at The University of São Paulo – USP with a thesis on Hélio Oiticica's Environmental Program. In 1993, she founded the Leonilson Project, where she organized the artist's first retrospective after his death from AIDS. Lagnado has authored books including *Leonilson. There are so Many Truths* (São Paulo:Project Leonilson/Sesi/DBA, 1995) and *Laura Lima. On\_Off* (Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó, 2014) and several essays and articles published in Brazil and abroad. In 2006, she was the chief curator of the 27th Bienal de São Paulo ("Como Viver Junto"). Other curatorial highlights include "Drift Drift. Experiences, Crossing and Morphologies" (2010), in the National Museum of Reina Sofía Art Center (MNCARS) in Madrid; and the 33rd Panorama of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (2013). From 2014 to 2017 Lagnado was the director of the School of Visual Arts at Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro, where she also served as Curator of Teaching and Public Programs.

