THE BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

RECOVERING *Beauty*

THE 1990S IN BUENOS AIRES

RECOVERING
Beauty
THE 1990s IN BUENOS AIRES

The Blanton
Museum of Art

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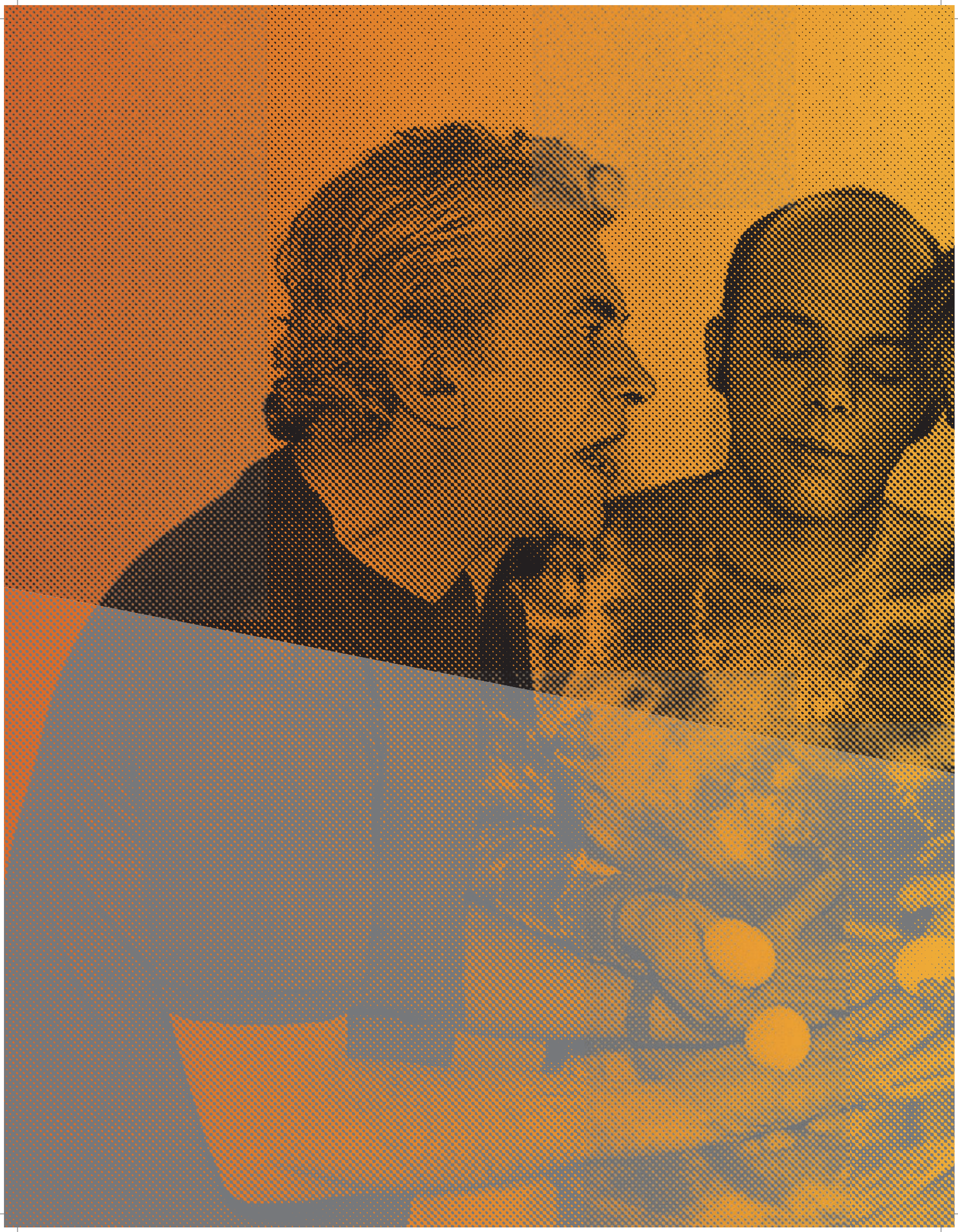


Foreword

Sir Isaac Newton's third law of motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. It is so in the physical world, and it has been accepted as such for more than three centuries, but that precept may also contain an important lesson for those of us who study and scrutinize how human culture and artistic creativity function.

Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires displays the combined efforts of thirteen artists who explored their newfound freedoms beginning six years after the displacement of their country's oppressive military dictatorship during the early 1980s. Working in an exhibition space called the Rojas Gallery, which was located within the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Jorge Gumier Maier, an artist, activist, and curator, identified a number of artists who possessed shared sensibilities and overlapping ideas about art. He articulated a program for the gallery, where he featured the work of those artists for a number of years. Now, some fifteen to twenty years later, a more cogent and discernible account of their collective responses is in order. For while these artists may not have constituted a "movement"—a term that art historians and critics often use in an attempt to identify, thereby reducing the complexities of art into overly simplified "styles"—there was indeed a unifying aspect to their work.

Are the efforts of a handful of artists living and working in Buenos Aires during the 1990s important enough to warrant a review of the eighty works of art (works that have made their way into various collections, including The Blanton's, which has fifteen) presented here? You would not be reading this if we believed otherwise. What makes them important? For one thing, the Rojas Gallery artists were an especially determined group, who were working in the aftermath of an era in which there were intensive limitations on public displays of private expression, limitations put into place and enforced by a government unwilling to tolerate divergent orientations. For this reason alone, it is indeed worthwhile to examine these works and the context in which they were made.

There is no need to argue for particular heroics on the part of this cluster of artists. Our exhibition is meant to offer a vehicle for reconsidering the specific works of art gathered here, and to shed some light on the historical moment during which they were produced. The creativity and unity of

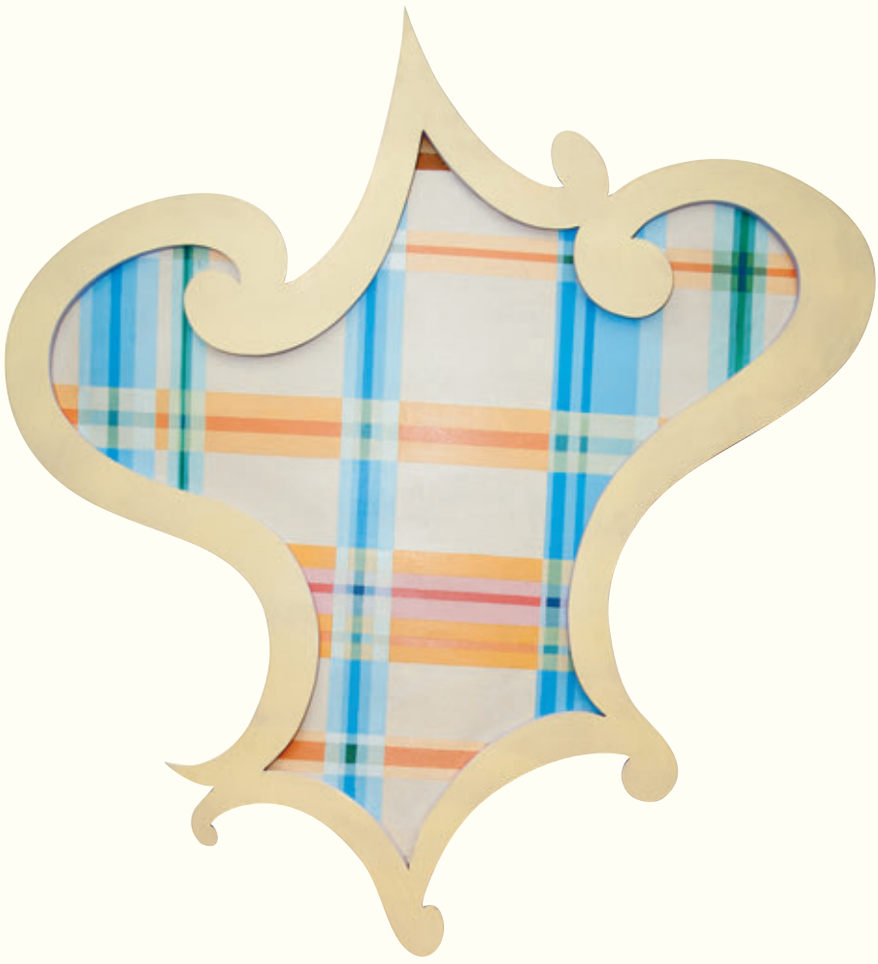


Figure 1 Jorge Gumier Maier, *Untitled*, n.d., Acrylic on wood, 149 × 160 cm (58¾ × 63 in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

these dozen or so kindred spirits was predicated on years of pent up and private frustrations and fears that were the result of violent and unimaginable actions against their peers and fellow citizens, many of whom the Argentine government "disappeared" without warning or public trials. The Rojas Gallery artists matured during a period when thousands of people whose beliefs and actions ran contrary to official doctrine were taken away and subjected to horrific crimes, including torture and murder, as part of a systematic campaign of intimidation that cast a pall of terror over one of the most sophisticated cities in the hemisphere. Among other things, their art can be understood as an attempt to heal some of the lasting wounds that resulted from those horrible fears.

Some art yields beauty that is primarily sensual, visually luxurious, and philosophically empirical based on a refined appreciation of line, form, color, composition, and other primarily aesthetic dimensions. The beauty that is presented as "recovered" herein is not primarily of that nature, nor is it ironic, as was so much of the art produced in the United States during the same decade. Instead, the art that comprises this exhibition is saturated with a double-edged dynamic and meaning, for beauty must be lost in order for it to be recovered. In Buenos Aires during the 1990s, as was the case in Argentina as a whole, the artistic freedom to create as one wished was among the many aspects of life that had been lost—in addition to the

Figure 2 Sebastián Gordin, *Biznikke*, 1995, Siliconed foam rubber, glass globe, and light, 36 × 45 × 27 cm (14 1/4 × 17 3/4 × 10 5/8 in.), Colección Gabriel Guilligan. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

thousands of lives that were also lost. For many of us, especially in the United States, it is very difficult to appreciate the absence of such freedoms and, as a consequence, we may well take them for granted. It is only when something of such importance is temporarily misplaced, lost, or forcibly taken away that we truly realize its value and how desperately we wish it restored.

So *Recovering Beauty* is a modest exhibition with a profound message. This assembly of artworks and its accompanying catalog feature a sensibility that was a direct response to what the preceding political forces had deemed unacceptable, intolerable, and even dangerous during an era when the most vital and dynamic Argentines—artists, intellectuals, and journalists—had become not only outsiders in their own homeland but, insofar as they were radically opposed to official rules, also outright enemies of the state. This was no intellectual debate, no colloquy on philosophical ideas, ideologies, or theories. It was quite literally a matter of life or death for anyone who chose to defy, ignore, or question the powerful regime.

Recovering Beauty is the result of a deeply considered curatorial process. Ursula Davila-Villa, The Blanton's associate curator for Latin American art, has been thorough in her approach to this subject. She has worked diligently with colleagues from the Department of Art and Art History at

Figure 3 Sebastián Gordín, *El libro de oro de Scoop* [*Scoop's Golden Book*], 1993, Enameled epoxy putty, wood, cardboard, and aluminum, 25 × 45 × 36 cm (9 3/4 × 17 3/4 × 14 1/4 in.), Private collection. Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

The University of Texas at Austin (UT); two talented graduate interns specializing in Latin American art, Doris Bravo and Abigail Winograd; UT alumna Sara Meadows, who conducted important archival research on the exhibition while studying abroad in Buenos Aires; and Natalia Pineau, doctoral candidate from the Universidad de Buenos Aires, whose research resulted in a thorough, illustrated chronology. Over a period of three years, they constituted a study group that considered various approaches to this complex topic. The outcome of their examination is an exhibition that is more than a historical narrative. It is a message. In art, society, and politics, as in the natural world, Newton's third law of motion applies: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The Rojas Gallery artists were not simply celebrating beauty as such; they were formulating aesthetic reactions against the residue of an oppressive military dictatorship.

So the notion of an older vocabulary of beauty, a seemingly naïve and fluid way of expressing the lyricism of life, even if alluded to or quoted by these artists, was never entirely embraced. Their art emphatically requires us to focus attention on their visual language as a compelling signifier of something "lost." It alludes to an innocence that can never be simply reacquired, for it has been replaced by a knowing toughness, an insistent acceptance that things can never be as they once were. All things change; some things evolve. These artists seem to assert that when and if the forces of inhumanity and cruelty return, there will *always* be a meaningful expression—a Newtonian equal and opposite reaction—to remind us that the need to live unencumbered by dreads of evil will inevitably be manifested in the human urge to create, freely and openly.

—Ned Rifkin, Director

Opposite page:
Figure 4 Fabio Kacero, *Untitled*, n.d., TKS, 125 × 60 × 7 cm (48 7/8 × 23 5/8 × 2 3/4 in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

Acknowledgments

The conception, development, and production of an exhibition and catalog are the result of both personal and collective efforts with one shared aspiration. *Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires* is the culmination of the work and enthusiasm of a number of people at the Blanton Museum of Art and in Buenos Aires to whom I am deeply grateful. First and foremost I would like to thank all the artists for creating inspiring works and enthusiastically supporting this exhibition. Without them and their creativity, this project would not have been possible.

At the Blanton I have been privileged to work with a talented and devoted staff, whose combined abilities make for a strong and passionate team. I would like to thank Ned Rifkin, director of the museum, and Annette Carlozzi, deputy director for art and programs, for their endless work on this publication as well as their continued support throughout the development of the exhibition. I would also like to thank Simone Wicha, deputy director for external affairs and operations, for her enthusiastic advocacy of this project from its genesis during our travels in Buenos Aires. Although each and every member of our staff has contributed to this undertaking, I am especially grateful to James Swan, installation manager; Colette Crossman, administrator for art and programs; Aimee Chang, manager of public programs; Stephanie Niemeyer, manager of docents and university programs; John Sager, technical assistant; Annie Arnold, administrative assistant for education; Jacqueline Abreo, administrative assistant for curatorial; and our entire development team, for their ongoing work on *Recovering Beauty*, their creativity in developing ideas in response to the core concepts of the project, and their continual commitment to excellence.

This project would not have been possible without Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, director of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, who during his tenure at The Blanton began acquiring the work of the artists represented here for the museum's permanent collection, and whose enthusiasm for and belief in this work was an inspiration to me. I am also deeply indebted to Gustavo Bruzonne, an Argentinean collector and early supporter of these artists, whose friendship along with his passion and affection for the Rojas Gallery group were a guiding star during the years of research and production of this project.

I will be forever grateful to all the people I met during my research trips to Buenos Aires. Their advice and friendship provided clarity and guidance. I especially would like to thank Jorge Gumier Maier and all the artists who generously shared with me their memories of their years at the Rojas Gallery. I am also grateful to Andrea Giunta, professor of art history at The University of Texas at Austin (UT), for her warm hospitality in Buenos Aires, her key and thoughtful advice, and her helpful bibliography. Art historian Laura Batkis was incredibly helpful during loan negotiations, and generously shared her remembrances of the Rojas Gallery group as well as artist Pablo Suárez. I am very grateful to Natalia Pineau for her arduous archival research in Buenos Aires and her contributions to this publication. Photographers Alberto Goldenstein and Daniel Kibliski warmly received this exhibition and generously shared photographic material. Artist Roberto Jacoby provided timely feedback and recommendations, and Ana Granel was a key collaborator in helping us secure important loans. Both Ruth Benzacar and Alberto Sendros Galleries were generous and helpful in many ways. Finally, I would like to thank the Rojas Gallery and the Universidad de Buenos Aires for their support and belief in this project.

The contributions to this catalog by Inés Katzenstein, director of the department of art at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, and doctoral students Doris Bravo and Abigail Winograd undoubtedly make this publication an important addition to the study of Latin American art history. I especially want to thank museum interns, Doris Bravo and Sara Meadows, for their invaluable help during the research and conception phases of this publication.

The museum's location at UT means that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to work closely with a number of scholars from diverse disciplines whose knowledge is important to the museum's research projects and programs. Therefore, I would like to thank Kathleen Higgins, professor of philosophy at UT, and Jonathan Brown, professor of history at UT, for

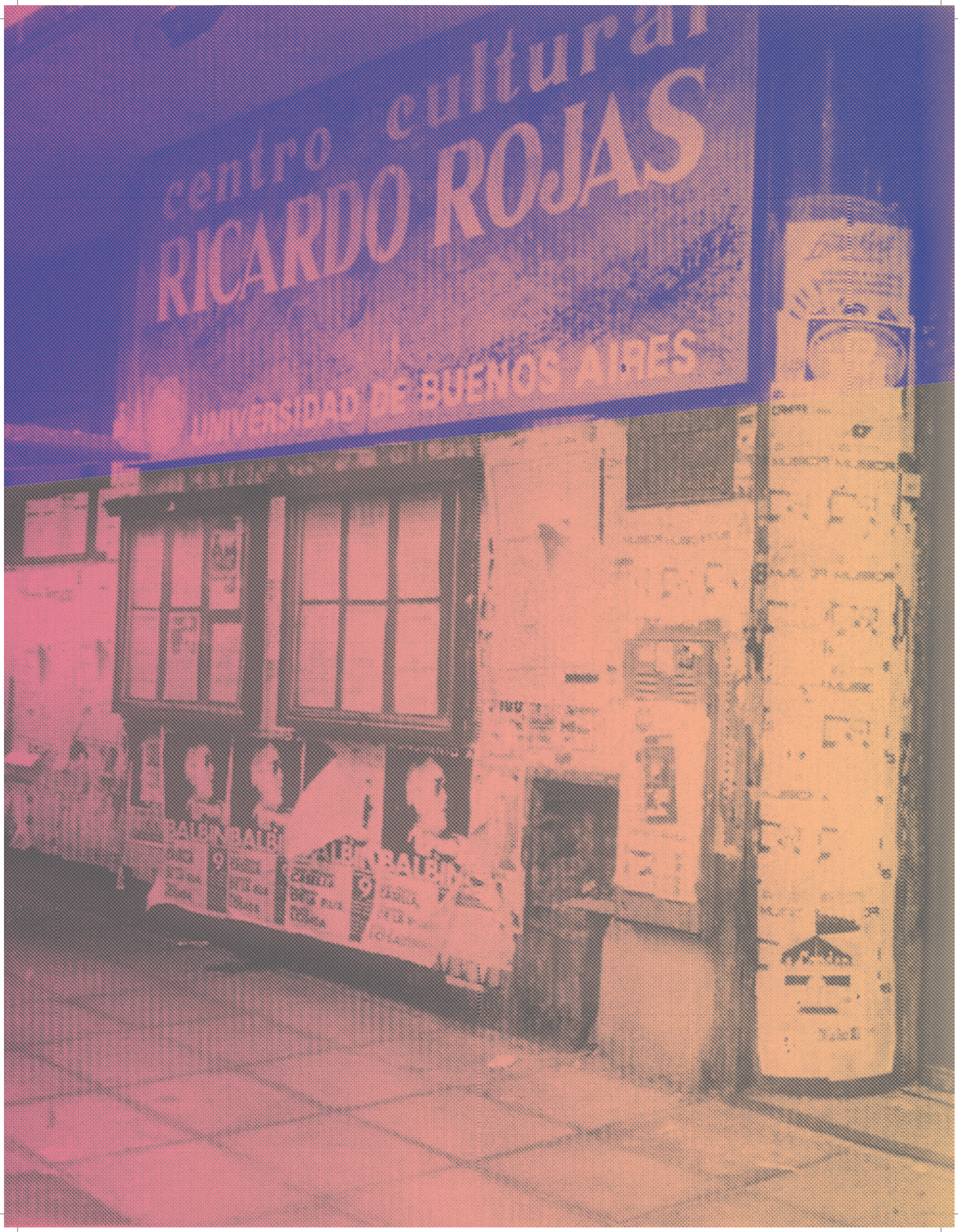
sharing their expertise in aesthetics and history respectively with the exhibition research team, as well as Jason Borge, associate professor of Latin American literature and film at UT, for his advice and collaboration with the museum's film program. I would like to extend my appreciation to Jacqueline Barnitz, professor emeritus at UT, as well as the art history and art education students who participated in the museum's seminar in preparation of the exhibition. Their stimulating contributions during our reading and discussion sessions were invaluable to the exhibition research team.

I am fortunate to know one of the most passionate groups of benefactors with whom I have ever had the pleasure of working. The museum's commitment to Latin American art would not be possible without the enthusiasm, support, and great generosity of donors such as Susan Garwood, Fran Magee, Don Mullins, and Ellen and Steve Susman. I would like to express gratitude to the underwriters of the exhibition, including Judy and Charles Tate, the Susan Vaughan Foundation, Sally and Robert Meadows, and the Houston Endowment Inc. in honor of Melissa Jones for the presentation of contemporary art at The Blanton. I am especially grateful to Judy and Charles Tate for their constant support and encouragement, and to Michael Chesser whose generous contribution made this publication possible.

Of course, *Recovering Beauty* comes to life in great part through the generosity of lenders to the show. Their trust and support was indeed of prime importance in building this exhibition, and I am truly humbled by their belief in the museum and our work.

Finally, I am privileged to count on the friendship and advice of Jim Lewis, Maria Nicanor, Luis Adrián Santiago-Vargas, and Erica Bohm, whose help was crucial during all stages of this project. To my family and Ivo, I will be forever grateful for the endless guidance, encouragement, and love.

—Ursula Davila-Villa


RICARDO ROJAS
UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES

Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires

[B]eauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins.

—Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)[1]

[B]eauty lies, perhaps, not in the eye of the beholder but in the hand of the creator.

—John Updike (1997)[2]

Modest actions can have great impacts. This was the case with the Rojas Gallery, which was founded in 1989 and occupied a small corridor on the first floor of the Centro Cultural Rojas at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. This unremarkable space, the art that was shown there, and the ideas that were exchanged as a result of its exhibitions, served as the catalysts for a group of young artists who wanted to create a different kind of art, one suited to a time of great social, political, and artistic transformation in Argentina. As is typical of these types of groups, the artists associated with the Rojas Gallery were a varied lot, and their work should be taken as the product of individuals, each with a distinct style. However, they shared two qualities: first, a need to express themselves via the formal qualities of ordinary objects, and second, an interest in embellishment or decoration as a form of beauty. Unlike their Argentine predecessors, they made no grand intellectual statements about social transformation, either in print or in the work itself; instead, the Rojas Gallery artists made art that was about visual enjoyment and delight. No more, no less.

Like Wilde's Lord Wotton, they believed that true beauty is both essential and beyond paraphrase, that it is enchanting, addictive, inherently frivolous, and, as such, incompatible with the intellect. Like John Updike, they were convinced that it is the artist, not the audience, who defines what is and is not beautiful, and that he or she does so through careful attention to craft. In short, beauty is something an artist builds, not something a viewer sees—or perhaps, the viewer sees it if, and only if, the artist creates it. Together, these two ideas epitomize the art, and determine the aesthetic debates, that arose in Buenos Aires during the 1990s. Some Argentines found the aesthetic implicit in the Rojas Gallery artists' work inspiring, and some found it superficial; but one way or another, almost everyone felt compelled to consider and discuss it.

Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires brings together the work of thirteen artists associated with the Rojas Gallery during the 1990s. It is the first time their work has been seen in North America. The purpose of the exhibition is twofold: to display the artists' shared desire to celebrate life through art, and to demonstrate the crucial role that the gallery played in transforming visual art in Buenos Aires. This transformation, effected by a small group of young artists motivated to develop an alternative aesthetic, was one that would transcend

1. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

2. John Updike, "Can Genitals Be Beautiful?," review of *Egon Schiele: The Leopold Collection, Vienna* by Magdalena Dabrowski and Rudolf Leopold, *New York Review of Books,* December 4, 1998, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1997/dec/04/can-genitals-be-beautiful/.

Argentina's political and artistic past, which had been circumscribed by a repressive military dictatorship.

Recovering Beauty does not attempt to survey or present an exhaustive review of Argentine art from the 1990s. Instead, it focuses on the work of a handful of artists—Fabián Burgos, Feliciano Centurión, Beto de Volder, Sebastián Gordín, Jorge Gumier Maier, Miguel Harte, Graciela Hasper, Fabio Kacero, Benito Laren, Alfredo Londaibere, Marcelo Pombo, Cristina Schiavi, and Omar Schiliro—and the Buenos Aires gallery where they showed their art.[3] But we believe that these artists, individually and as a group, are of special importance, and by exhibiting, documenting, and analyzing their work, we can highlight the more general issues that Argentine artists faced during a period when a neo-liberal government transformed the country, and a far more open society emerged at a time when the art world was becoming increasingly globalized.

In addition, we have chosen the city of Buenos Aires, and, even more specifically, the Rojas Gallery, not because they symbolize the Argentine art world as a whole, but precisely because they do not. For while all art can be seen in ever-broadening contexts—particularly during the 1990s, a decade when internationalism took hold, both in Argentina and around the world—the Rojas Gallery artists' response was, in large part, an attempt to resist such globalization, by focusing on local themes, materials, friendships, and influences. Still, as Ned Rifkin mentioned in his foreword to this catalog, every action has a reaction; and thus the Rojas artists' determined focus on the immediate environment inevitably, and in time, had an impact beyond its own community of artists. Hence, somewhat paradoxically, by narrowing the focus of the exhibition to a particular group of artists exhibiting at a specific space during a circumscribed moment in time, and by opening ourselves to the spirit and importance of the Rojas Gallery and the artists associated with it, we can gain a deeper understanding of how art functions and impacts the history of places such as Buenos Aires. Parallel to this contextual analysis, we can then come to discern and comprehend the many associations that exist between the art history of this South American city and many others around the world.

Indeed, by first taking stock of the country's political and cultural past, we can begin to grasp the great transformation that swept Argentine art during the 1990s. Throughout the twentieth century, artistic expression in Argentina has been bound to political circumstances—namely, the series of military regimes that controlled the country and kept it somewhat isolated throughout much of the twentieth century. During the 1940s, that isolation proved to be a boon; for while Europe endured World War II, Argentina flourished with growing urban centers, like Buenos Aires, that became cosmopolitan sites for artistic creation. The style known as Concrete art began around that time and was fostered in the pages of *Arturo,* a journal that proposed a new aesthetic embracing purity of form as a way of questioning the role of art in society.[4] Works like *Marco recortado no. 2* [*Irregular Frame No. 2*] by Juan Melé (fig. 45) and *Relief* by Raúl Lozza (fig. 26) were created under the precept that the appreciation and understating of geometric abstraction could be a common language, and thus create a sense of community.

3. Several other artists occasionally exhibited at the Rojas Gallery. Moreover, a number of artists, among them Nicolás Guagnini, Jorge Macchi, and Pablo Siquier, showed their work elsewhere, but were equally important to the developing art scene during the 1990s. For more information, see Natalia Pineau's chronology in this volume.

4. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "Buenos Aires: Breaking the Frame," in *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection,* ed. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (Austin, TX: The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 32.

5. After the military coup of 1962, Arturo Illia was elected president in 1963. In 1966 he was deposed in yet another military coup, giving rise to a dictatorship under General Juan Carlos Onganía. See Andrea Giunta, "Bodies of History: The Avant-Garde, Politics, and Violence in Contemporary Argentinean Art," in *Cantos Paralelos: La parodia plástica en el arte argentino contemporáneo/Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art,* ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez (Austin, TX: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin and Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Argentina, 1999).

Figure 5 Luis Felipe Noé, *Cerrado por brujeria* [*Closed by Sorcery*], 1963, Oil and collage on canvas, 199.6 × 249.7 cm (78 5/8 × 98 1/4 in.), Archer M. Huntington Museum Fund, P1973.11.3. Photograph by Rick Hall

In time, as it happens, art changed in Argentina, and during the 1960s the prevailing tendencies split into two styles: New-Figuration and Conceptual art. With the former, artists, including Luis Felipe Noé and Antonio Berni, made highly expressive works that incorporated different forms of collage into a dense materiality. It was an aesthetic aimed at representing the overwhelming chaos that beset urban centers during modern times. Through works like Noe's *Cerrado por brujeria* [*Closed by Sorcery*] (fig. 5) and Berni's *La familia de Juanito Laguna* [*The Family of Juanito Laguna*] (fig. 71), the New-Figuration artists expressed the anxiety that accompanied unfamiliar changes: the growing presence of mass media, increasing urban poverty, and the intensification of political oppression that resulted from the 1962 military coup against President Arturo Frondizi.[5]

On the second front, many local and international artists saw Buenos Aires as a thriving locus for Conceptualism, a movement that the Instituto Di Tella promoted in part.[6] In many ways, Argentine Conceptualism prefigured American and European movements that dematerialized art, with local artists producing work that incorporated performance, written language, and nonmaterial art, like Oscar Bony's *La familia obrera* [*Proletarian Family*] (fig. 6).[7] What is more, since the language and aesthetic of Conceptualism could easily cross borders—based on the idea that art should examine its own nature regardless of its context—its growth in Buenos Aires intensified. The spread of Conceptualism in this South American city drew several well-recognized international artists who wanted to be a part of the scene. Among these artists was Lawrence Weiner, who in 1971 visited Buenos Aires to produce and exhibit art at the now-defunct Centro de Arte y Comunicación.[8] Nevertheless, there was an important difference between the conceptual traditions of Europe and North America, and those of

6. The Instituto Di Tella was created on July 22, 1958. It became the most important site for the exhibition of political and Conceptual art during the 1960s. As more international artists came to Buenos Aires to participate in the developing conceptual scene, the institute led the internationalization of the city. The institute closed for a brief period during the 1970s, when the dictatorship imposed scrutiny and censorship on artistic endeavors.

7. In 1968 Oscar Bony hired Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a machinist by profession, along with his wife and ten-year-old son, to be displayed on a platform at the gallery of the Instituto Di Tella, while a recording of everyday household sounds played in the background. A label next to the platform, read: "Luis Rodríguez, a machinist by profession, is earning twice his normal salary for staying at the exhibit with his wife and child for the duration of the show." (Deborah Cullen, *Arte≠Vida, Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000* [New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008], 90). For further information on the history of Conceptualism in Latin America see Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007) and Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s,* ed. Philomena Mariani (New York: Queens Museum of Art: 1999).

Figure 6 Oscar Bony, *La familia obrera* [*Proletarian Family*], 1968, Documentation of performance of *Experiencias 68* at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires, 1968. Courtesy of Carola Bony

developing countries like Argentina, for the latter took on a certain militancy. *La familia obrera,* for example, was not merely an exercise in philosophy: it offered a critique of the powers then dominant by featuring an ordinary man, who represented the millions of working-class Argentines oppressed both by their economic status and by the military dictatorship.[9]

The brutality Argentine citizens had experienced in previous years intensified in 1976, when the military took control of the country through a coup-de-état and established one of the most repressive dictatorships in Argentine history—a period that became known as "The Dirty War." The military regime, led by General Jorge Rafael Videla, kidnapped, detained, tortured, and murdered many people, who, because they seemed to have simply disappeared, became known as *los desaparecidos* (see fig. 7). Freedom of speech was nonexistent, and a constant state of surveillance prevailed.

The violence exercised by the military was faced with resistance from the cultural community. Artists across disciplines united against the government, creating an anti-regime art that represented a public, collective response to the suppression of civil rights and the injustices that the mili-

8. After the Instituto di Tella closed, the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC) was inaugurated in 1969 and began exhibiting Conceptual and political art that was heavily coded to avoid government censorship.

9. Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007), 178.

Figure 7 Madres de la Plaza de Mayo [Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo] at a rally demanding a criminal investigation on human rights abuses committed by the military junta (1979–1983). Photograph by Ali Burafi

tary perpetrated against all citizens.[10] Under these conditions, the production of nonmaterial (Conceptual, performance, and mail) art, such as *La valijita del panadero* [*The Baker's Little Suitcase*] (1977) by Victor Grippo, called attention to the imminent psychological and physical violence that dominated Argentine life.[11]

Political circumstances changed again in 1982, when Argentina lost the Falklands War to the United Kingdom, a public and international humiliation that quickly led to the end of dictatorial rule.[12] A new era of civilian and democratic rule in Argentina began the following year with the election of President Raúl Alfonsín.[13] But the great social and political transformation of the country did not begin in earnest until 1989, with the election of Carlos Saúl Menem, who introduced a series of aggressive economic policies, including trade liberalization, privatization, and reduction of state-subsidized social services, decreased wages, and weakened labor rights.[14] These changes resulted in a temporary semblance of economic stability, which in turn unleashed a parade of extravagance that masked misspending and kleptocracy at the highest state levels.[15] Indeed, life in Argentina changed dramatically from ominous to flamboyant.

As the political climate turned toward democracy, the production and role of art was also transformed: the political enemy that had united artists in dissent was now gone. Yet the will to make activist art persisted, and the ways in which it might be enacted, in a far less oppressive society, was under debate precisely at the moment when the Rojas Gallery was inaugurated and young artists began exhibiting their work there.

The group associated with the exhibition space had their own method of addressing the debate, which consisted (mostly) of disregarding it. The artists associated with the Rojas Gallery believed in the traditional idea that art's primary role was to create pleasurable aesthetic encounters, rather than to communicate political statements in protest of a particular situation. This attitude, which some expressed as a recovery of beauty,[16]

10. See Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Parallelisms," in *Cantos Paralelos: La parodia plástica en el arte argentino contemporáneo / Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art,* ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez (Austin, TX: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin and Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Argentina, 1999), 19.

11. For a full description of this piece and its context see Giunta, "Bodies of History," 155.

12. The Falklands War [*Guerra de las Malvinas*] was fought between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands [*Islas Malvinas*]. The war began in 1982 with the Argentine invasion of the territory—which was, and continues to be, a British protectorate—and lasted 72 days, ending with the surrender of Argentine forces. The defeat hastened the fall of the military dictatorship.

13. During his tenure as president, Alfonsín attempted to prosecute human rights violators but met active resistance from the military. Efforts to bring perpetrators to justice gained momentum again in 1987, but suspicions of a possible military uprising defeated the attempts for justice. In 1989, in an effort to leave the trauma of "The Dirty War" behind, newly elected President Carlos Saúl Menem granted a general pardon to those implicated in human rights violations. On May 31, 2010, General Videla accepted responsibility for crimes against humanity that were committed under his rule at a tribunal court in Córdoba (Argentina). To this day, the perpetrators of these crimes have not been brought to justice and the families of the "disappeared" have not been compensated.

14. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 94.

Figure 8 Clockwise from top left corner: Miguel Harte, Marcelo Pombo, Jorge Gumier Maier, Laura Batkis, Alberto Goldenstein, and Patricia Rizzo, c. 1990s. Photograph by Alberto Goldenstein

can be seen in many ways as a simple expression of the joy the artists shared over of the arrival of democracy and freedom: that was all the politics they needed and wanted.

Why Beauty Mattered

The Rojas Gallery opened its doors in 1989 under the directorship of artist and curator Jorge Gumier Maier.[17] It operated under the auspices of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, an independent institution (not supported by the state) that was known for its dynamic underground theater scene.[18] Because the university was not affiliated with the government, Gumier Maier was able to run the gallery without any institutional opposition. This allowed him to exhibit work by artists who might otherwise have been neglected, either because they refused to make the kind of political art that had prevailed during earlier decades or to engage in any kind of discussion about theory and art. During the 1970s Gumier Maier himself had been a strong political activist. Later, in the 1980s, he became a fierce advocate in the fight for gay rights; and it was, perhaps, this history of engagement that led him to write a series of essays that served, not just as guiding principles for the Rojas Gallery, but as a collection of manifestos.[19]

Still, Gumier Maier's idea of political engagement was quite different from that embodied in recent Argentine protest art. He envisioned the gallery as a nurturing platform for the exhibition of works that, in his view, proposed new and original values very much in opposition to those set by recent Argentine art tendencies, as well as by the growing international trend of

15. The financial mismanagement that dominated Menem's presidency had a dramatic effect when in 2001 Argentina experienced a catastrophic financial crisis. In 1999 the country's economy began to contract. By 2001 the currency was overvalued, and unemployment spiraled out of control, giving rise to public protests. In December of 2001 violent clashes between the public and police led to thirty-five deaths and thousands were arrested. Jonathan C. Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 271–72. For information on the economic situation during the 1990s, see Pineau's chronology in this volume.

16. Inés Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," in *Pombo,* ed. María Gainza (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2006), 25.

17. Gumier Maier briefly stepped down as director in 1991, returning the following year as codirector with Magdalena Jitrik. He resigned as director in 1997.

18. During the 1980s Buenos Aires had a thriving street and underground theater scene. Among the performances presented by the Centro Cultural Rojas were: *Arturo* (1985), interpreted by the collective El Clú del Claun, and directed by Hernán Gené; and *Battambang* (1987), a piece directed by Adriana Barenstein based on texts by Marguerite Duras. Natalia Calzon Flores, *25 Años del Rojas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009), 17, 29.

Figure 9 Rojas Gallery building façade, 1993, Archivo fotográfico del Centro Cultural Rector Ricardo Rojas. UBA / Courtesy Rojas Gallery

neo-Conceptualism.[20] Thus, in an essay called "Avatars of Art" (1989), he proposed six tenets that would become the foundation of the Rojas Gallery's mission. At the same time, he attacked what he saw as the weaknesses of an art community that promoted an aesthetic based on previously articulated ideas or positions, one in which:

> *[t]he work, as such, aims to sustain itself through a proposal of some sort. Works are appreciated not on face value, but for whatever makes their proposal interesting. The work is only judged as a failed or successful illustration of an intention. Originalities are hatched under the shelter of this law.*[21]

Instead, he proposed an art based entirely on visual experience, one that had little use for ideas, one in which form was to supersede content.

In 1997, after resigning from his position as director at the Rojas Gallery, Gumier Maier organized the exhibition *El Tao del Arte* at the Centro Cultural Recoleta and published a catalog by the same name.[22] At the time, the show was seen as a summary and final statement of what he and the Rojas artists had proposed. In the catalog's essay, he wrote:

> *Our ideas and values turn aesthetic contemplation into a judgmental act through which beauty might be accused of being a frivolous, and even complicit enterprise . . . That art, as life, leads to nowhere is what makes our freedom meaningful and our salvation possible . . . If an artist would show us unrestrained beauty, [or] the drift of his emotion, we would say that he has surrendered to the exercise of irony. And maybe even cynicism . . . Why not think that those dislocated spaces are in fact the occasion for the sacred things that art promises us?"*[23]

19. Gumier Maier wrote three important essays about the Rojas Gallery project: 1. "Avatars of Art" (1989), published as the introductory essay to his project at the gallery. 2. "The Rojas" (1992), published as the prefatory essay to the exhibition catalog *5 Años del Rojas.* 3. "The Tao of Art" (1997), the prefatory essay to the exhibition *El Tao del Arte,* which was organized as a farewell show when he resigned from his post as director. English versions of these essays are included in this volume.

20. In the context of this publication, neo-Conceptualism is understood not as an artistic movement, but as a variety of artistic tendencies developed by artists across the globe. It emerged in the late 1980s through the 1990s, adopting Conceptual traditions from the 1960s and 1970s to create art that served as a form of critique.

21. Jorge Gumier Maier, "Avatars of Art," in *La Hoja del Rojas,* June 11, 1989. Translation by Kristina Cordero, 2010. Original: "La obra busca entonces sustentarse en una propuesta. No se aprecian las obras, a la vista, sino lo interesante de la propuesta. La obra solo se mide como ilustración foallida o certera de una intención. Al amparo de esta ley se traman las originalidades."

22. For a full list of participating artists, see Pineau's chronology in this volume.

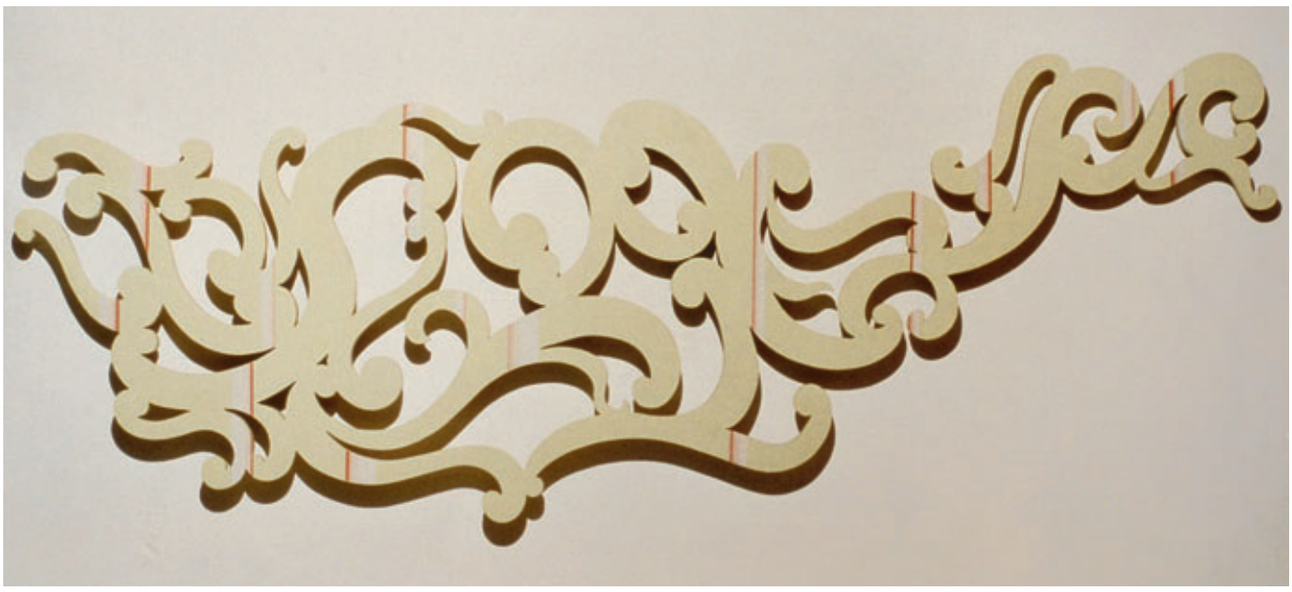


Figure 10 Jorge Gumier Maier, *Untitled*, 1998, Acrylic on wood, 86 × 222 cm (33 7/8 × 87 3/8 in.). Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

His words here invoke the lost joy of seeing art simply as a source of delight and pleasure, and suggest that such an experience can indeed elevate the spirit.

Of course, the artists that showed their work at the Rojas Gallery were not the first to call upon beauty for inspiration. Throughout history, beauty—and its manifold interpretations—have been embraced by many, if not most artists. But in the artistic milieu of 1990s Buenos Aires, the very idea that art could, first and foremost, create aesthetic pleasure, was considered naïve at best—a sign of weakness in the face of a harsh world—and at worst a kind of reactionary return to bourgeois values. In Susan Sontag's essay "An Argument about Beauty," she reflects on just this tendency to conceptualize beauty as a quasi-moral concept, linked to such oppositions as "inner" and "outer," "higher" and "lower," "frivolous" and "serious," and so on—as if it was an ethical attitude rather than a distinction pertaining to taste.[24] Yet, even if we take this to be true, we need not see the Rojas artists' return to beauty as a desire to bring back outdated and shopworn homilies. On the contrary, it was an attempt to move beyond the harshness of the dictatorship under whose strictures they were raised—and to move beyond, too, the dreariness of the work that such a world inspired—to express, instead, a simple joie de vivre that had only recently become possible. Hence, the decorative quality of much of their art—the lively palette employed in works like Gumier Maier's *Untitled* (fig. 10), or the playfulness of pieces like Sebastián Gordín's *El infierno de Dante* [*Dante's Inferno*] (fig. 11)—was recognized for what it was: a form of rebellion, an expression of independence, and a call to liberation.

It is worth noting that many people within the North American art world were grappling with the same subject during this time, engaging in a debate that found its most prominent expression in Dave Hickey's *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1993), a book in which he declared, "[t]he issue of the nineties will be beauty."[25] As the decade developed, museums plunged into the discussion with exhibitions like *Regarding*

23. Jorge Gumier Maier, *El Tao del Arte* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1997), 9, 13, 14. Translation by Kristina Cordero, 2010. Original: "Nuestras ideas y valores hacen de la contemplación estética un acto tribunalicio, y la belleza puede ser acusada de ejercicio frívolo, y hasta de complicidad. . . . Que el arte como la vida, no conduzca a ninguna parte es la razón de nuestra libertad, la posibilidad de nuestra salvación. . . Si algún artista nos expone a su belleza desatada, las migraciones de su emoción, diremos que se ha entragado al ejercicio de lo pensar irónico. Y hasta de lo cínico. . . ¿Por qué no pensar que esos espacios dislocados son la occasion para lo sagrado que el arte nos reserva?"

24. Susan Sontag, "An Argument about Beauty," in *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches,* ed. Paolo Dilonardo and Anne Jump (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 25.

Figure 11 Sebastián Gordín, *El infierno de Dante* [*Dante's Inferno*], 1993, Wood, acrylic, epoxy putty, wax pencils, and plastic, 18 × 18 × 7.5 cm (7 1/8 × 7 1/8 × 3 in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

Figure 12 Marcelo Pombo, *Skip Ultra Intelligent*, 1996, Stickers and acrylic on cardboard box, 15 × 19 × 9 cm (5 7/8 × 7 1/2 × 3 1/2 in.), Private collection. Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century, organized by Neal Benezra and Olga M. Viso at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1999. In that exhibition, ideas of beauty in twentieth-century art were traced through the work of Pablo Picasso, Yves Klein, Andy Warhol, Matthew Barney, Lorna Simpson, Yasumasa Morimura, and Jim Hodges, among others.

Indeed, the argument was more public in the United States than it was in Argentina. Nevertheless, around the same time, the artists associated with the Rojas Gallery began working and exhibiting in earnest. Employing distinctly personal languages, they made works that shared a clear emphasis on decorative materials, and an artisanal approach to craftsmanship that drew inspiration from the formal qualities of ordinary objects.

Some, like Hasper, Gumier Maier, Burgos, and Kacero, drew inspiration from the geometric abstraction of Concrete art. Deliberately ignoring the rigorous tenets established by the Concrete artists, they reinterpreted the earlier artists' style, creating playful nonrepresentational paintings and sculptures, such as Hasper's *Untitled* (1997; fig. 55) and Gumier Maier's *Untitled* (fig. 10). Drawing formal simplicity from works like *Ritmos Cromáticos III* [*Chromatic Rhythms III*] by Alfredo Hlito (fig. 54), Hasper used circles to render a whimsical abstract composition in pastel colors, while Gumier Maier created a curved frame reminiscent of Art Nouveau forms to contain a geometric composition of colorful straight lines.

Other artists—among them, Pombo, Gordín, Schiavi, Laren, Londaibere, and De Volder—drew references and materials from Pop art, including comic books, ordinary consumer products, and advertising. Works like *Skip Ultra Intelligent* by Pombo (fig. 12) and *Untitled* by Londaibere (1995; fig. 68) show the artists' use of, and in their specific case embellishment of, found objects. For example, in *Skip Ultra Intelligent,* Pombo decorated a cardboard

25. Dave Hickey, "Enter the Dragon, On the Vernacular of Beauty," in *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), 11.

detergent box with an intense red and blue graphic design and thick applications of small spots of white paint. The dense materiality of this work was typical of much of the art exhibited at the Rojas Gallery.

The focus on craftsmanship was another interest that the artists shared. For example, Schiliro made highly ornamental lamps from plastic objects and light fixtures, Centurión embroidered and painted blankets and pillows, and Harte created extremely detailed dioramas out of industrial materials like plastic and Matrilux paint.[26]

Reflections on mortality also characterize many of the works. Schiliro's *Untitled* (1993; fig. 13) preceded his death from complications related to AIDS by only a year; its bristling surfaces of colored glass and plastic beads can be understood as a celebration of life. Centurión, who also suffered from an AIDS-related illness, embroidered and painted cloth right up until his death: the delicacy and simplicity of works like *Me adapto a mi enfermedad* [*I Adapt to My Illness*] (fig. 35) reveal his urgent embrace of creative activity as a form of solace.

These similarities, in method, attitude, and circumstance, led the artists affiliated with the Rojas Gallery to become friends who admired each other's work and shared techniques, styles, and motivations in support of a common project. As the group coalesced into the gallery, its program embodied a new attitude that was developing among young artists in Buenos Aires, one that redefined the relationship between life, joy, and art.

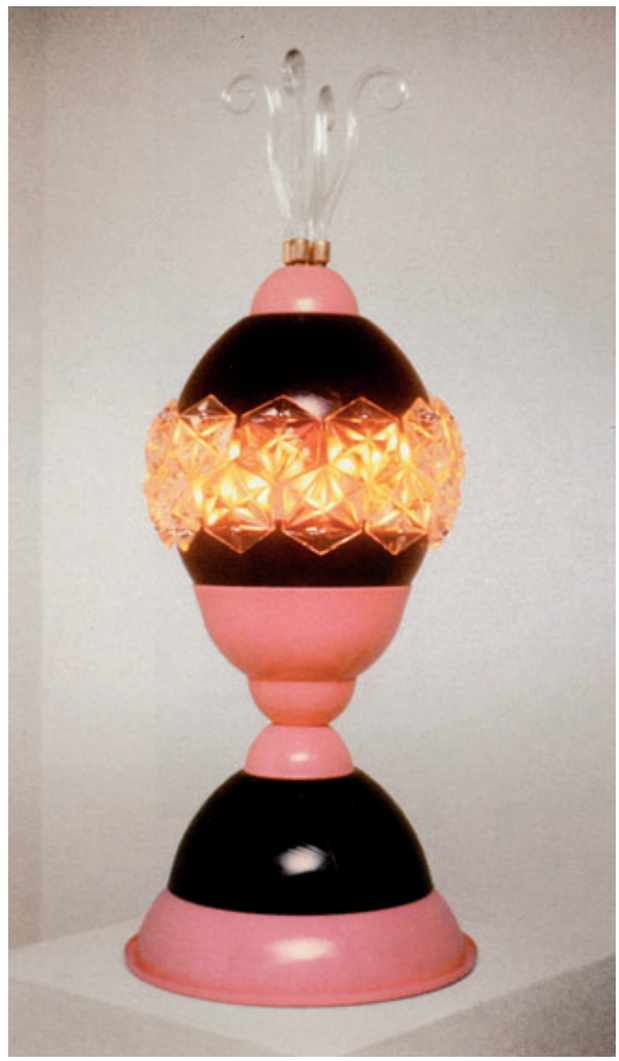


Figure 13 Omar Schiliro, *Untitled*, 1993, Plastic and glass elements with light, 98 × 38 × 38 cm (38 5/8 × 15 × 15 in.), Blanton Museum of Art, Fran Magee Fund, 2005.155. Photograph by Rick Hall

Insularity, A Double-Edged Sword

In time, the artists associated with the Rojas Gallery grew into a somewhat insular group set apart from their peers and, as a result, they became dependent upon one another both for inspiration and for an audience. This naturally had both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, they drew strength from one another—enough so that, in time, they established a new artistic style within Argentina, and, incidentally, nurtured the development of their country's newly forming openly gay community. On the other hand, their interdependence engendered a deeper sense of isolation, well beyond their regional environment. While many urban art centers became increasingly internationalized during the 1990s, with artists showing works and trading ideas without regard for borders, not so the Rojas Gallery artists, who remained determinedly local and secluded from both a larger potential audience and other opportunities to expand their aesthetic beyond Buenos Aires.

In Buenos Aires, this new Rojas Gallery aesthetic was received with great enthusiasm by some and was vehemently rejected by others. For the most part, the negative reactions were based on a misunderstanding of the spirit motivating the work. Some regarded its ornamentality, bright colors, and

26. Martilux is a kind of industrial paint that adds texture to surfaces. Made of synthetic resin and highly resistant pigments, it is commonly used on engines and safes.

Figure 14 From left to right: Pablo Suárez, Marcelo Pombo, and Miguel Harte, 1989. Photograph by Alberto Goldenstein

apolitical nature as "frivolous"[27] and little more than a kind of domestic, decorative activity lacking the seriousness expected from art. These dismissals stemmed from an encoded, and sometimes not so encoded, homophobia (and its usual concomitant misogyny), with some critics pejoratively referring to the art as "feminine," "gay," and "light."[28] The strong negative criticism, such as it was, effectively put an end to a richer and broader public discussion of what the Rojas artists had achieved and how they were contributing to the developing art scene in Buenos Aires.[29]

But as the Rojas Gallery grew, the space itself became an effective platform for open discussion and expression of issues surrounding gender and sexual preference.[30] As the art historian Andrea Giunta has noted, while the impetus for those qualities regarded by many as "light" were generally more personal than political, they became a crucial part of the struggle to define an openly gay identity in the context of Argentine conservatism.[31] Nor was that struggle trivial or futile: the recent legislation allowing gay marriage in Argentina, which was approved on July 15, 2010, would not have been possible without the groundwork laid by phenomena like the Rojas Gallery, at a time when political and social repression was gradually giving way to liberation and tolerance.[32]

The isolation and resulting interdependence and shared strength among the Rojas Gallery artists also helped them confront the AIDS pandemic that hit Argentina in the 1990s. In North America, the depredations of the disease could be addressed within the context of the fight for gay rights, which had begun during the late 1960s. In Argentina, a deeply Catholic country with a history of repressive and dictatorial rule, the same history occurred, but on a compressed timeline confined to a single decade, the 1990s. The dictators had vanished, an open reaffirmation of sexual expression arrived, and soon thereafter AIDS struck aggressively.

This experience, at once exhilarating and terrifying, found expression in many of the artworks exhibited at the Rojas Gallery. One of the most

27. See Rodrigo Alonso and Valeria González, *Ansia y Devoción: Imágenes del Presente* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Proa, 2003); Hernán Ameijeiras, "Un debate sobre las características del supuesto 'arte light,'" *La Maga,* June 9, 1993; and Pierre Restany, "Arte guarango para la Argentina de Menem," *Lápiz: Revista Internacional de Arte 13,* no. 116 (November 1995).

28. Argentine art critic Jorge López Anaya coined the term "*arte* light" in response to the 1992 exhibition *Algunos Artistas* at the Centro Cultural Recoleta that included works by Londaibere, Gumier Maier, Laren, and Schiliro. Inés Katzenstein further discusses the origins and interpretations of the term in Jorge López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra," *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), August 1, 1992.

29. Although several formal and informal debates on the art of the time took place in Buenos Aires during this decade, most discussions centered on the duality between "light" and "committed" art, not addressing the complex changes that were occurring on all fronts of the artistic landscape in the capital city. In recent years, local discussions about the period have shifted toward a more reflexive and positive discourse.

30. As a member of the gay community, Gumier Maier had been actively involved in the gay rights movement in Argentina throughout the 1980s. Given his position as director of the Rojas Gallery, his personal views were important in defining the relationship between gender and the gallery's program.

31. Andrea Giunta, "1 época 100 colectivos," *Página 12,* August 14, 2009. Translated from the Spanish by the author.

Figure 15 From left to right: Gustavo Bruzzone, Benito Laren, Sebastián Gordín, and Miguel Harte in front of *Plato volador* (1992) by Benito Laren. Courtesy Colección Bruzzone

notable examples is Fabio Kacero's *Omar Schiliro* (fig. 60), a small and poignant memorial that Kacero made after Schiliro's death. Kacero generally used graphic design techniques and industrial materials in his work (see fig. 4), but for this tribute he abandoned plastic in favor of rich, red velvet fabric and hand-sewn golden thread, to create a sympathetic homage to Schiliro's fascination with ornamentation. By foreswearing his usual technique and embracing those preferred by his lost friend, Kacero manifested the uniqueness of the Rojas Gallery, and its unusual capacity for nurturing strong bonds among artists and members of the art community during difficult times.

Thus, social isolation of the Rojas Gallery had significant advantages. However, its economic isolation did not benefit the artists nor the reception and documentation of their work. The group had flourished during a decade that saw the rise of international art fairs, the proliferation of biennials, increased inclusion of artists from different nationalities in international auctions, growing cultural tourism, and increased global communication through high-speed and borderless Internet. It was also a time when artists from previously ignored or isolated contexts—such as Guillermo Kuitca, Gabriel Orozco, and Ernesto Neto from Latin America, and Cai Guo-Qiang and Zhang Xiaogang from China—became well-known international figures. However striking such signals of cultural globalization may have been, it was still the exception rather than the rule, given that for most members of local art communities, including the artists associated with the Rojas Gallery, an international career and broad exposure would have been well out of reach, even if they had wanted it.[33]

While the Rojas Gallery artists' use of found materials culled from consumer culture echoed the methods of their contemporaries in other parts of the world, their unquestioning embrace of such a technique, and their focus on materials and products specific to Argentina, meant that

32. On July 15, 2010, the Argentine senate voted in favor of gay marriage. The bill, which had the support of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, also allows same-sex couples to adopt. Argentina was the first Latin American country to pass such legislation. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10630683.

33. It is important to mention that the local art market—and in the case of Marcelo Pombo, a modest market in North America—did welcome the work of these artists eventually. Currently, all the artists are represented by Buenos Aires–based galleries and, in some cases, by international galleries.

their work represented local values and concerns. This condition and the fact that the artists associated with the gallery were not part of the local or international mainstream intensified their insularity within the global art world.

Consider, for example, Benito Laren's *Buscando precios* [*Searching for Prices*] (fig. 63). The work was commissioned by a grocery store called El Tigre [The Tiger], which is located in San Nicolás, a small city some distance from Buenos Aires. It is made from holographic paper, acrylic paint, and a variety of glittering elements that are combined in a composition on glass. The central figure is a tiger surrounded by local products and flanked by two of the more prominent buildings in San Nicolás, the city hall and the main church. In all, *Buscando precios* is a visually powerful and intelligently integrated work that draws upon both local and international artistic traditions. Laren's large-scale representation of local consumer products and the bright and metallic colors are a naïf and powerful expression of Argentine and American Pop art references. Since its creation, *Buscando precios* has been exhibited in Argentina only at the grocery store El Tigre. In 1991 it was removed from the store (at the owner's request) and transported to the Argentine consulate in New York City, where it remained virtually out of view for more than fifteen years, until the Blanton Museum of Art acquired it for its collection in 2007.[34] The work's path exemplifies the limited possibilities for exposure available to the Rojas Gallery artists during a decade that, ironically, was characterized by a growing and expansive art world.

The Rojas Gallery Legacy

Twenty years after the Rojas Gallery's opening, its program during the 1990s became an inescapable point of reference for younger generations of Argentine artists. Some, like Fernanda Laguna, who became involved with the gallery toward the end of the 1990s, have extended its legacy by founding spaces like the influential Belleza y Felicidad (Beauty and Happiness). The gallery, which Laguna developed with the writer Cecilia Pavón, opened in Buenos Aires in 1999 and quickly developed into one of the most dynamic exhibition and literary venues in the city, supporting a new, emerging generation of artists and writers.[35]

Until it closed in 2007, Belleza y Felicidad was the Rojas Gallery's most prominent legacy; however, the Rojas Gallery's impact has been felt in numerous, less evident ways. To be sure, the artists associated with it had little interest in, or expectation of, becoming spokespersons for a "new" Argentine society, but that modesty may well be the source of their enduring influence, for by focusing on the more immediate pleasures of art, they created precisely what a more concerted program could not: the possibility of freedom, at a moment when Argentina was both ready for it and desperately in need of it.

Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires is meant to encourage North American audiences to understand and experience the conditions that characterized the late twentieth century in Argentina, as well as the aesthetic debate that arose in response to those conditions. Moreover,

34. Email conversation between Benito Laren and Andrea Giunta, January 16, 2007.

35. Belleza y Felicidad organized art openings, lectures, and literary events. It had a publishing house and a bookstore that included a selection of music for sale. The exhibition space challenged the idea of "white-cube" by rejecting a "clean" museum-like display, allowing artists to arrange art as they wished. The space also embraced gay culture, continuing the legacy of the Rojas Gallery. It currently exists only as a publishing house.

the work contained in the exhibition should remind us that the freedoms we assume and enjoy in this country are not always available everywhere. The story of the Rojas Gallery, and the experience granted by the art featured in *Recovering Beauty,* remind us that the presence of beauty and joy, pleasure and delight, are not always givens. Sometimes, as John Updike suggested, they have to be created.

—Ursula Davila-Villa

Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, Buenos Aires served as the backdrop for the genesis of certain ideas and art objects that would leave behind an unusual flurry of cultural and political aftereffects: aesthetic debates, stylistic influences, and most importantly, ideologies that, almost twenty years later, continue to resonate in the city's artistic milieu.

To understand this phenomenon, which revolved around the gallery of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, it is important to consider both the artworks of the artists who exhibited there and the ideas and beliefs upon which their art was founded—especially those of artist Jorge Gumier Maier, who also served as the curator and director of the Rojas Gallery. The factors that helped determine the artists' work were tremendously complex, as were the effects the work itself had; however, they served to unravel a generational schism, one that arose as a reaction to the emergence of a globalized, professionalized, and neo-Conceptual regime of art that had dominated the international art circuit during these years.[1]

Beyond the artworks themselves, which of course are essential and constitute the very heart of the exhibition *Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires*, there is the power of that art and the ideology it embodied, one that emerged with the force of a manifesto. Indeed, as the art historian Roberto Amigo has noted, Gumier Maier was one of the last artists for whom the idea of a manifesto still held sway.[2] He established the exhibition calendar for his space by summoning the capricious inspiration of his own personal taste and mixing artists of different styles and generations, but he also wrote texts (particularly "Avatars of Art" and "The Tao of Art"[3]) that expressed his sense of mission and defined his symbolic enemies, lending a cohesion and meaning to his curatorial efforts.

What were, then, his political ideas? Gumier Maier wanted to subvert the aesthetic that had dominated the 1980s (represented by neo-Expressionist gestural painting[4]) and to champion instead an art that was autonomous—art that did not pretend to make statements or effect political transformations. At the same time, he wanted that art to challenge the neo-Conceptual ideas and catchphrases that had begun to influence the local art scene, which was experiencing a process of artistic professionalism in response to the parameters that

This essay was originally written in Spanish and translated into English by Kristina Cordero, 2010.

1. It should soon become clear that this essay does not pretend, in any sense, to undertake an analysis of all the art created during the 1990s. The aim is to study the work and the ideas of a group of artists that became influential in the broader artistic scene in Buenos Aires during those years. Moreover, it should be noted that this text does not attempt to discuss all the artists who exhibited work at the Rojas Gallery, just those the author considers most representative.

2. Roberto Amigo, "80/90/80," *Ramona* 87 (December 2008): 13.

3. For more information, see the translations of these texts in this volume.

4. During the 1980s Argentine art saw a return to painting characterized as neo-Expressionism. Some of the artists who participated in this artistic movement were: Grupo Babel (Nora Dobarro, Juan Lecuona, Gustavo López Armentía, and others), Grupo Loc-son (Guillermo Conte, Rafael Bueno, and Máximo Okner), Alfredo Prior, and Guillermo Kuitca, among others. Though many of these artists were clearly influenced by the 1960s New-Figuration artists like Jorge de la Vega, Luis Felipe Noé, Ernesto Deira, and Romulo Macció–their art was informed by the complex political and social atmosphere of the 1980s, which witnessed the end of the military dictatorship, the Falklands War with the UK, and the transition into democracy. For further information, see Fundación PROA's exhibition *Escena de los 80* and MALBA's exhibition *60'/80' Arte Argentino*.

were developing in the expanding international art world. More than promoting a specific artistic style, then, Gumier Maier wanted to make people aware of the value of a certain kind of artist, one who seemed especially vulnerable and marginalized in those days. In many ways, he proposed a romantic idea: the artist as a true individual, unable to do anything else but make art, a natural creator, whose passions and obsessions were so singular and inborn that they were incapable of being professionalized vis-à-vis international standards. Gumier Maier believed those standards led to the destruction of artistic sensitivity, the component of creation that he held in highest regard.

It is possible, in light of his emphasis on those romantic ideals, to view Gumier Maier's position as a reactionary defense of aestheticism: the recovery of Beauty, and the autonomy of the work of art. The maxim coined by the artist Fabio Kacero—"beauty doesn't think"[5]—perfectly synthesizes the Rojas Gallery artists' attitude: to show works of art that were, first and foremost, about notions of beauty and, as Marcelo Pombo, one of the most emblematic artists of this time, called them: "brainless."[6]

But, of course, what began to emerge was not quite so simple. True, the notion of reinstating beauty as the defining characteristic of art was always of the utmost importance to Gumier Maier and his artistic circle, but this idea can also be understood as little more than a contrarian throwback. On the one hand, Gumier Maier's ideas spearheaded the launch of an entirely new generation by offering a space for new kinds of work that, in the prevailing ideology of the time, would have precluded them from being deemed worthy or valuable. On the other hand, and contrary to the dominant tendencies of the art world at the time, the work Gumier Maier showed at the Rojas Gallery was deliberately—even defiantly—local and utterly unconcerned with whatever might be in vogue on the international scene.

In time, the ideas that Gumier Maier explored in his texts, talks, and curatorial efforts helped the Rojas Gallery artists move from the margins to the center of the Argentine artistic scene, and in just a few years, they became an important force in that milieu. But it was not just the quality or the novelty of their work that made such an ascension possible. As Argentina's art world healed from the wounds inflicted by the repressive dictatorship,[7] and the country's economy began to fall in line with the new coordinates of globalization,[8] the work of the Rojas Gallery artists became especially resonant, relevant, and important.

Embattled Models

The Rojas Gallery was established in 1989. As an exhibition space it lacked a certain architectural independence. The space itself was little more than a broad hallway in the Universidad de Buenos Aires Cultural Center that connected the street entrance to the university's theater and the center's public bathrooms.[9] There was little to suggest that the exhibitions held there—of generally unknown artists, organized by an artist who could only be regarded as incidental to the prevailing artistic circuit of the late 1980s, in an exhibition space that was peripheral to

5. Fabio Kacero, "Introduction," in *Fabio Kacero* (Buenos Aires: Galería Ruth Benzacar, 2002). Original: "la belleza no piensa."

6. Inés Katzenstein, "Los secretos de Pombo," in *Marcelo Pombo* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2006), 16. Original: "descerebradas."

7. For further information on the dictatorship regime during the 1970s and early 1980s, see the introduction to this publication.

8. For further information on economic policies in Argentina during the 1990s, see Pineau's chronology in this volume.

9. The Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas was one of the nerve centers of the alternative theater scene during those years.

Figure 16 From left to right: Miguel Harte, Pablo Suárez, and Marcelo Pombo, 1992. Photograph by and courtesy of Ricardo Cárcova

Figure 17 Roberto Jacoby y Kiwi Sainz, 1993–2009, C-print, 50 × 50 cm (19 5/8 × 19 5/8 in.). Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Alberto Goldenstein

the contemporaneous "art map" of Buenos Aires—would become influential in such a short time. Nevertheless, a few important Argentine art world figures came to the exhibitions, including Pablo Suárez and Roberto Jacoby, two veteran artists who had come of age during the 1960s at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (figs. 16 and 17). They gradually began to approach the younger artists, and soon served as important mentors to the emerging generation.

During the first year of the gallery's existence, Gumier Maier, whose journalistic work on homosexuality had given him an ad hoc training in theory and activism, published an initial manifesto entitled "Avatars of Art,"[10] in which he extolled an "art without pretensions, one that aspires to impermanence, sacredness, silence."[11] He proposed a few positive but ambitious goals, but also chose to expose and attack qualities in the prevailing art of the time—qualities that he felt were negative and had to be overcome: on one hand, the "stomachism of gestural and materially oriented artists who prefer the ugly and sloppy,"[12] and on the other, Conceptual art—an "art of proposals," which was in opposition to what he called the "gruesome passion" of true artists. To complete his vision, he pitted the notion of art creation against the notion of professionalized production, and criticized overtly political artists as pompous pretenders.

Perhaps in cities or societies with more evolved structures of art criticism, this discourse would have been rejected as conservative. It did, in fact, have a few points in common with recalcitrant Argentine conservatism thinking, particularly in its phobia of what it believed to be the "Duchampian curse"[13] and its resistance to the integration of artists into an increasingly administrative, professional, and institutional art world. But the similarities are

10. All the quotes in this paragraph are statements made by Jorge Gumier Maier, "Avatares del Arte," La Hoja del Rojas, June 11, 1989.

11. Original: "Arte sin pretensiones, que aspirara a la fugacidad, a la sacralidad y al silencio."

12. Original: "Estomaguismo de los artistas gestuales y matéricos que prefieren lo feo y lo desprolijo." The artist Nicolás Guagnini wrote the following about the Argentine aesthetic of the 1980s: "The artists of the 1990s come from truly disparate educational backgrounds, sociocultural strata, ideas and degrees of political involvement [. . .] Nevertheless we all unilaterally reject the 1980s and paintings made with drippings. It would seem as if the pain and anger caused by the repression and lies had shifted or directed itself toward a distancing from this stylistic aesthetic, which our generation has reduced to the simplest and most damning of adjectives according to our ethical and aesthetic parameters: ugly." Nicolas Guagnini "Arte de los noventa y dictadura. El amor y el espanto," in *Oid el ruido de rotas cadenas, Arte y dictadura* (unpublished manuscript, author's copy).

13. "Duchampian curse" can be understood as the opinion expressed by many conservative critics and members of Argentine academia who viewed Marcel Duchamp's Conceptual legacy as a negative influence on the history of modern and contemporary art.

somewhat superficial and, as such, more misleading than telling. The artwork Gumier Maier valued—which he presented with tremendous grace, humility, and intelligence—offered a sophisticated and subtle proposal of regeneration, gaining momentum and lending force and a sudden relevance to his words.

The works in question focused on a wealth of formal elements rather than the known conceptual codes, and they were championed by artists who—in general—worked spontaneously and were neither educated nor trained within the traditional conventions of art. Their styles were varied, but their intentions were always personal, distinct, and somewhat arcane. Some of the artists were sympathetic to Pop art, others to geometric painting, but all revealed quite quickly their rejection of art theory, of explanation or conceptual elaboration. Instead, they emphasized the more direct pleasure derived from the materials with which they worked and the craft they used to build them. They struck a clear contrast with artists who fashioned their work on the basis of a proposition, a theory, or a specific set of premises—artists who were intellectuals or, worse yet, academics. In particular, their work was a challenge to the American-style professionalized artist, an archetype that was profoundly anathema to Gumier Maier, who found Argentine equivalents in those artists who were drawn to the boom in large-scale installation art and whose ideas jibed with neo-Conceptualism.[14]

Gumier Maier was interested in art as the source of an untranslatable emotion, of an exaltation of sensibility that could not be captured by intellectualization or paraphrase. Thus, for most of the Rojas Gallery artists, the propositional or political rhetoric of some artists who gravitated toward Conceptual strategies only served to hide how inarticulate neo-Conceptual art was. Years later, clearly influenced by these ideas, Fabio Kacero would write, "If the eye is spoken, the mouth's vapor will cloud it,"[15] signing his maxim with the name of Nebridio[16] in an ironic reference to the anachronism of his remark. Artist Nicolás Guagnini, a participant and observer during these years, had this to say about the matter:

> *The very fact of not structuring a discourse, or of not seeking refuge in theories, was perceived at the start of the decade as a positive condition for establishing a personal, and as such, original universe. The capacity to make art, to produce things, was not lost—it was flourishing. But the word existed in a kind of limbo between loss and prohibition. As in the periods of clandestine activity, each one emphatically affirmed his credos in the intensity of the secret meeting, the intimate group, before doing so in the risky public arena.*[17]

When the artists of the Rojas Gallery spoke about their work, they generally did so without reference to theories or to a description of content; instead, they told stories of their own lives, experiences, and pleasures—though not out of naïveté, false or real, for the majority of them were perceptive readers and lucid analysts.

In "The Tao of Art,"[18] a retroactive manifesto in which Gumier Maier said farewell as curator and director of the Rojas Gallery in 1997, he retrospectively defined his goals. At the same time, he questioned those who

14. In general, the Argentine neo-Conceptual artists of this period were not concerned with reclaiming the local Conceptual tradition of the 1960s, which at that time had been all but erased from the annals of local art history, but rather wanted to keep up with international trends.

15. Kacero, "Introduction." Original: "Si el ojo es hablado, el vapor de la boca lo empaña."

16. Nebridio is a fictional name that Kacero invented in imitation of Greek philosophers, who indeed wrote axioms.

17. Guagnini: "Arte de los noventa y dictadura. El amor y el espanto." Original: "El hecho mismo de no estructurar un discurso, o no refugiarse en teorías, era visto al comienzo de la década como una condición positiva para el establecimiento de un universo personal, y por lo tanto original. La capacidad de hacer arte, de producir cosas, no estaba perdida sino que florecía; pero la palabra habitaba un limbo entre la pérdida y la prohibición. Como en las épocas de la clandestinidad, cada uno afirmaba vehementemente sus credos en la intensidad de la reunión secreta, del grupo íntimo, antes que en la riesgosa arena pública."

18. All the quotes in this paragraph are from Jorge Gumier Maier, "El Tao del Arte" (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1997).

disparaged him for being insufficiently critical in his reasoning and justification for pursuing the Rojas project. He also defended his artists against the charge that described their work as trivial, or as a simple attempt to reject what he saw as a growing political or intellectual instrumentalization of art. On the contrary, Gumier Maier argued: "Beneath their pinkish camouflages, with the cunning of contrabandists, [the Rojas Gallery artists] were injecting their ferocious, critical, virile messages."[19] Then, he ironically denounced the kind of artist typically involved in neo-Conceptualism: "Not the least bit astonished, attentive and judicious, we listen on as so many artists manage to describe what they do with enviable economy and precision. Far from encountering anguish and desperation (or, in contrast, the bliss and calm of yesteryear), a stroll through the world of art nowadays frequently begins with the preamble of: 'the idea is. . .' No longer must we wander about in ignorance: this is 'work!'"[20]

Essential Elements of the "Light" Concept

In 1992, the art critic Jorge López Anaya defined the works being displayed at the Rojas Gallery as "*arte* light" and wrote several articles in the newspaper *La Nación* on the subject as he followed the exhibitions and work by this new generation.[21] While the characterization was not meant to be pejorative, it quickly became one of the focal points of the controversy that erupted around the new art, and it exploded publically the following year during a series of roundtables that were held at the Rojas Gallery, in which the artists of the previous generation inveighed against the new aesthetic.[22]

At the time, "light" was a trendy term that referred to the arrival in Argentina of a new culture of diets and body consciousness, the manifestation of an apparent vanity that was emblematic of the Carlos Saúl Menem's administration. Above all, it suggested the modernization of customs through the importation of hygienic habits and conventions, primarily for women. Translated into the realm of art, the idea of "light" insinuated a component of femininity and a levity that bordered on frivolity—qualities that the art by the Rojas Gallery artists indeed possessed—and not by accident. "Light" was the expression of a set of attitudes about gender that was unspoken but revealed through their art.[23]

The work of Omar Schiliro, for example, deliberately and emphatically cultivated decoration. His lamp designs, with their plates, bowls, and pails of color—the glass balls and appliqués, volutes, and tubes of lights with their curves and counter-curves—all conspired to create a kind of third-world Baroque style that fused pomposity and willful tastelessness (see fig. 18). In a different way, Marcelo Pombo also drew upon the styles and varied forms of decoration. While Schiliro appropriated certain kitsch conventions from the world of design, Pombo's decorative touches were determined not merely by the objects he made, but also by how he extensively embellished them. Pombo wanted to decorate in the most literal sense, the way an artisan might decorate a little box by painting it, or a pastry chef would adorn his cake with icing (see fig. 21). The objective, no matter how strange or impure the final design turned out, was to beautify, to bring

19. Original: "Bajo sus rosáceos camuflajes, con astucia contrabandistas, [los artistas del Rojas] estarían inoculando sus viriles mensajes, feroces, críticos."

20. Original: "Sin el menor asombro, juiciosos y atentos, escuchamos como muchos artistas logran dar cuenta de lo que hacen con precisión y economía envidiables. Lejos estamos de la angustia y desesperación (o la dicha y el remanso de otrora). Hoy, la visita al mundo del arte comienza a menudo con un preámbulo: 'la idea es. . .' Ya no mas deambular ignorante: 'trabajo!'"

21. Jorge López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra," *La Nación,* August 1, 1992. By this time, the Rojas Gallery had already received its "anointment" as a space that legitimized the new generation, and in fact the gallery organized an exhibition with some of its artists at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, entitled *El Rojas presenta: algunos artistas.*

22. Ten years later the controversy would be revived, with greater perspective, in the context of the event *Arte Rosa Light—Arte Rosa Luxemburgo,* which took place at the MALBA in Buenos Aires from July to August 2003. Roberto Jacoby, Magdalena Jitrik, Roberto Amigo, Ana Longoni, Jorge Gumier Maier, and Andrea Giunta participated on that occasion.

23. The rejection of contextualization and even interpretation would extend to gender politics. The aesthetic of the Rojas Gallery could have defended itself against the accusations of superficiality by alluding to gender identity, thus politicizing its practices and aesthetic choices. But this did not happen. The contradiction was established in the following manner: while indeed Gumier Maier promoted a gay aesthetic (little pearls, decorative ornaments, Baroque-esque volutes, and pastel tones that came together as signs of a generational but not identity-based aesthetic), at the same time he refused to accept any kind of identity-based reading of the works. During the 1980s, Gumier Maier wrote dozens of articles in which he explored and discussed the problem of *establishing a minority* and boxing gays into an identity that ultimately only served the interests of those in control of power. See "La mítica raza gay," *El porteño,* October 1984. On the other hand, he also wrote, "I am not the spokesperson (representative) of the complaints of sexual minorities—a racial notion according to Baigorria—because the existence of racial minorities is a fabrication of power." Jorge Gumier Maier, "Apocalipsis y mesianismo," *El porteño,* July 1985.

Figure 18 Omar Schiliro, *Untitled,* 1992, Plastic and glass elements with light, 113 × 110 × 23 cm (44½ × 43¼ × 9 in.), Colección Ignacio Liprandi. Photograph by Gustavo Lowry

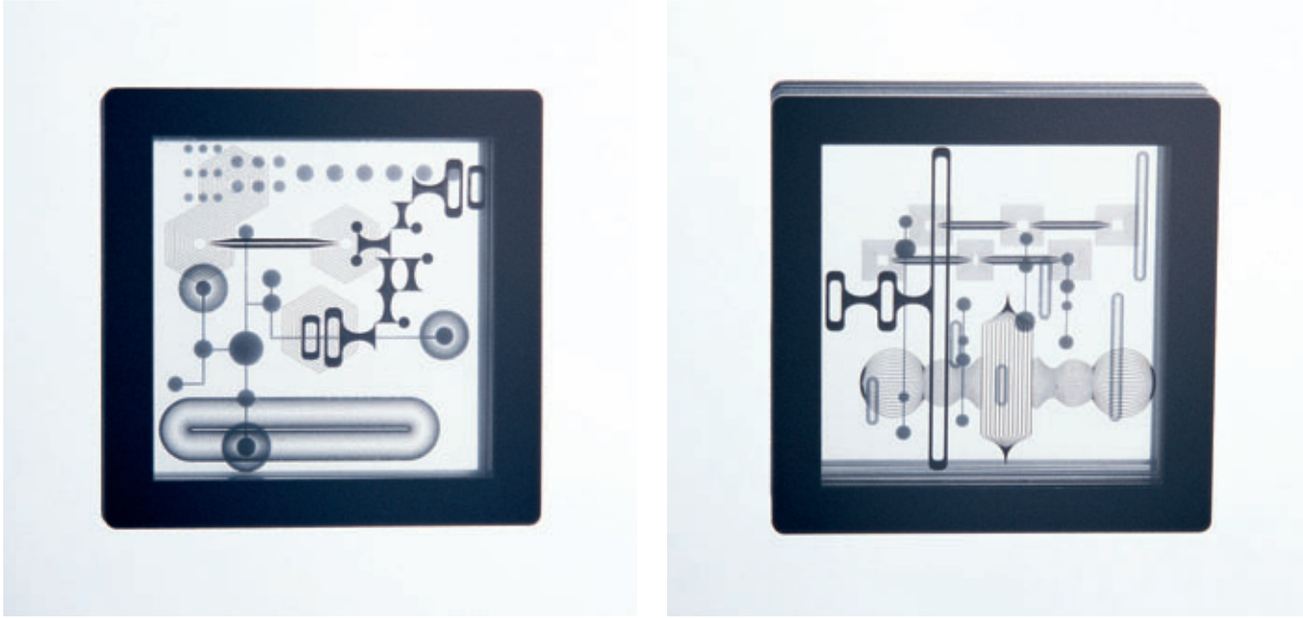


Figure 19 Fabio Kacero, *Untitled,* 1996-1998, Superimposed plastic transparency, each 7 × 7 cm (2¾ × 2¾ in.), Collection of the Artist. Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

Figure 20 Marcelo Pombo, *Cepita naranja* [*Orange Cepita*], 1996, Cardboard box, plastic, and acrylic, 21 × 12 × 8 cm (8 1/4 × 4 3/4 × 3 1/8 in.). Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

Figure 21 Portrait of Marcelo Pombo, 1995. Photograph by Gian Paolo Minelli. Courtesy of Marcelo Pombo

aesthetic life to an object of everyday use. Thus, for example, Pombo would take a classic tile from the streets of Buenos Aires and make it into a little geometric painting, or paint tears and glue small gift bows on a Tetrabrik fruit juice container (see fig. 20).

What is most notable in both Schiliro and Pombo is the spirit of the marginal artist who is disengaged from the history of art. Nevertheless, if we examine their works we may discover procedures that indeed fall within the parameters of modern art history. For example, Pombo's soap box *Skip Ultra Intelligent,* 1996 (fig. 12) can be seen as a variant of Pop art, and in particular of Warhol's emblematic *Brillo Soap Pads Box* (fig. 22). But Pombo reversed the Warholian strategy: simulating innocence, Pombo appropriates and alters ordinary objects from a local standpoint by adding stickers of little fish, dolphins, turtles, and starfishes, and painting halos of bubbles around some little turquoise stones stuck to the box's surface. On top of this, by choosing a box and describing it as "ultra intelligent," as the title indicates, he added a dig at the supposed intelligence of appropriationists and Conceptual artists.

Other pieces by Pombo, which use windows as their primary compositional device, reveal a different kind of purpose. One of these works, *Vitreaux de San Francisco Solano* [*Stained Glass from San Francisco Solano*] (fig. 23), consists of a black wood panel featuring a geometric composition of holes covered up with pieces of colored plastic, thereby recalling a stained-glass window. Once again he evoked the decorative tradition, though instead of crystals or glass he used plastic bags affixed with packing

Figure 22 Andy Warhol, *Brillo Soap Pads Box,* 1964, Silkscreen ink and house paint on plywood, 43.2 × 43.2 × 35. 5 cm (17 × 17 × 14 in.), © 2010 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Figure 23 Marcelo Pombo, *Vitreaux de San Francisco Solano* [*Stained Glass from San Francisco Solano*], 1991, Waste bags, packing tape, and enamel on wood, 100 × 180 cm (39 3/8 × 70 7/8 in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

tape, recalling the way in which windows are sometimes covered in the dwellings of the poor. This interest in uniting poverty and luxury is directly connected with Schiliro's objects and reappears transformed in another of Pombo's windows, *Navidad en San Francisco Solano* [*Christmas in San Francisco Solano*] (fig. 72). This composition includes cleaning product cartons, the edges of which are decorated with bits of plastic fringe and little white dots painted on the surface, representing the impossible arrival of snow in the poor neighborhood of San Francisco Solano in Buenos Aires where, as in all of South America, the Christmas season arrives in the summertime.

But the most emblematic example of the marginal-decorative artist within the Rojas Gallery circle is Benito Laren, both for his eccentric personality, as well as for his tiny works of art with no greater pretension than aspiring to be pretty little things that were created upon backdrops of colored mirrors and framed with cheap gold-plated frames (see fig. 24).

"Light," then, was a way of describing the whole universe of decorative intentions: Schiliro's appropriation of kitsch bourgeois designs, Pombo's happy affinity for the adornments typical of young girls or poor people, and even the infantile urge to play with brightly colored things (as in Laren's works, or the animals that the Paraguayan artist Feliciano Centurión painted on top of blankets). But the "lightness" of the strategies was directly linked to the economic conditions in which the works were made, as was revealed in their cheap and humble materials, the works' titles, and the artists' use of commercial products and repeated references to popular culture. What was unusual about this, at least within the history of Argentine art, was that the references to poverty, and to traditional notions of femininity and childhood, were neither patronizing nor meant to draw pity

Figure 24 Benito Laren, *Circulación monetaria* [*Currency Circulation*], 1992, Acrylic and holographic paper under glass and tire, 51 × 6 cm (20 1/8 × 2 3/8 in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Daniel Kiblisky

from the viewer; instead they were simply expressed, with unusual candor and unmistakable joy.

Gumier Maier's work embraced the decorative as well. Like Schiliro, he was infatuated with forms of kitsch (hence his extravagant arabesque frames), but he combined them with references to a kind of secondhand geometric art—that is, a vulgar geometric style that was more redolent of the decorative traditions from the 1950s and 1960s than it was with the various historical avant-garde geometric art movements.[24] In Gumier Maier's work, the references tend to evoke neighborhood beauty parlor designs rather than other works of art.[25]

This identification with minor artistic traditions is a central aspect of the group's work. It was a self-conscious rebellion against high culture, as well as a way of posing alternatives to the conventions of supposedly more serious painting (exemplified in Buenos Aires by the 2 × 2 meter pieces that the powerful and controversial curator Jorge Glusberg solicited from artists for submission to the many awards he oversaw). It also went contrary to the self-explanatory and theatrical formats of installation art—both of which could be seen, within the time and local context, as appealing to a stereotypically male artist, who expressed his interior life, showed off his intellectual power, and ruminated on the great themes of history.

Instead, some of the Rojas Gallery artists played with the valorization of the woman's domestic tasks and hobbies, shifting that labor and creation over into the "queer" realm (in this case, a number of gay men). It was a clear inversion of long-accepted values, and it opened a space for a surprising range of techniques, formats, materials, colors, and styles. Feliciano Centurión, who dedicated the last years of his life to embroidering images of flowers, eyes, and random words of corny poetry ("Sueña," "Reposa,"

24. For further information on the geometric art tradition of the 1940s and 1950s in Argentina, see the introduction to this publication.

25. There is an entire school of critical thought that views this little boom of geometry as a recuperation of the forgotten avant-gardes of the 1940s. This is especially evident, for example, in the writing of Carlos Basualdo's *Rational Twist* (New York: Apex Art, 1996), which was published in conjunction with the exhibition *The Rational Twist* at Apex Art. But Gumier Maier's own testimony refutes this hypothesis: "I come to these landmarks of contemporary art through the dissemination of kitsch [. . .] I was greatly influenced by modernism as it was applied to decoration. I have two essential references for this. One is the ladies' beauty parlor my aunt owned, which in those days was terribly modern. The entire aesthetic of the place: the chairs, the towels, the magazines, the hairdryers. The other aesthetic that left quite an impression on me was that of a pizzeria and ice cream shop owned by some uncles of mine, in Mar del Plata, where I spent the summers." Jorge López Anaya, "Gumier Maier y la estética de los 90," *La Nacion,* January 22, 1994.

Figure 25 Feliciano Centurión, *Luz divina del alma* [*Divine Light of the Soul*], ca. 1996, Hand-embroidered pillow, 22 × 31 cm (8¾ × 12¼ in.), Museum purchase with funds provided by Don Mullins, 2004.174. Photograph by Rick Hall

"Soledad," "Luz divina del alma" [see fig. 25]) on pillows and small pieces of fabric, is the clearest example of this revalorization, an embrace of everything previous generations of artists had not considered.

Finally, the notion of "light" also suggested a festive spirit, a will to live and to celebrate, an attitude that clashed with the idea of the artist as a tragic figure, who suffers without relief, whether because of the nature of his own precarious existence or because of the state of the world.

For some art historians, among them Roberto Amigo, the Argentine art immediately preceding that of the Rojas Gallery was divided into two branches: one that drew upon politics or advocacy, and another that after the dictatorship sought "the body as joy."[26] For him the Rojas aesthetic "is the conclusion of the 1980s: it brings to the material support the festive, bodily quality, and at the same time it grants plastic visuality to the gender politics that, in a previous decade, had opted for performance."[27] Whether one agrees with this hypothesis of continuity or not, it is nonetheless important to understand the celebratory aspect of much of the Rojas Gallery art. It is a paradoxical festivity, for it occurred during a time of economic hardship and mourning, and yet it resisted being interpreted simply as an alternative form of expression. It is impossible to overlook the direct connection between the artists of the Rojas Gallery and the emergence of the AIDS pandemic, which left its impact on the entire artistic community, most directly affecting such accomplished artists as Liliana Maresca, Omar Schiliro, Feliciano Centurión, and Alejandro Kuropatwa, all of whom died of AIDS-related illnesses. With this in mind, festivity cannot be seen as an attempt to exonerate some aspect of the past, as Amigo suggests, nor is it simple euphoria. Instead, it represents the emergence of small, intimate

26. Amigo, "80/90/80," 13. Original: "el cuerpo como alegría."

27. Ibid. Original: "[la estética Rojas] es la conclusión de los ochenta: traslada al soporte material el aspecto festivo corporal, a la vez que le otorga visualidad plástica a la política de género que había optado por la performance en la década anterior."

celebrations of the gift of life in the middle of a great deal of pain and loss. The art of the Rojas Gallery, as Pombo put it, was the occasion of a "semi-angelical passage toward the *light*."[28]

The Multiple After-effects of the Rojas Gallery

The Rojas Gallery artists were resistant to the convention of art as a communication tool and to practitioners of the idea of art as a game. They were enamored with the cosmetic exuberance of surfaces and created an alternative aesthetic in contrast to the new international establishment that had begun to dominate the artistic landscape.[29] But throughout this process, as art historian Valeria González points out, "the discourses of the founders hold their own among the others, defining as alienating all generic characterization of 1990s art as movement, style, historic generality, regional or epochal representation, etc., and once again underscoring its situational, contingent origins."[30] This situation was less a conscious strategy than it was an attitude of rebellion, which unavoidably became an intrinsic element of the Rojas Gallery's program. Yet, in retrospect, the lack of a clearly articulated program from the early beginnings of the gallery left the art exhibited in the space exposed and vulnerable to misunderstanding and incomprehension within its milieu.

Artistic phenomena of this sort—based on resistance yet refusing to define themselves as forces of resistance, defying what is deemed "correct" by the mainstream without encouraging or even allowing for debates that go beyond their own circle—are examples of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have defined as one of the principal obstacles to contrarian movements: as they see it, such ambivalence and deliberate lack of engagement tends to be seen as "old, outdated, and anachronistic" and its aims "impossible to communicate."[31]

Indeed, the art and ideas of the Rojas Gallery influenced the succeeding generation of artists and art criticism in two important ways. In part due to the artists' own resistance to formulating a discourse, as well as a lack of sophistication from local art critics—who were unable to interpret the artists' works beyond their declared intentions—some of the artists' successors dedicated themselves to work that was completely stripped of any political force. In some cases, the artists succumbed to a style characterized by an aimless and almost unbearable decorative saturation (the hateful cliché of an artist as embroiderer of colorful beads or sculptor of teddy bears), and generally, at least until the end of the 1990s, an increased tendency to avoid reflecting upon the effect of their work on the public sphere—a trend that slowly lost steam as the decade came to a close.

But the larger, longer, and more meaningful legacy of the Rojas artists stems from their desperate attempt to create art by searching for the kind of transcendence that immediate visual pleasure produced. In doing so they taught Argentine artists and art professionals to disavow the fatuous and all too often banal discourses of a false kind of Conceptualism, and encouraged us to train our gaze upon the difficult, but joyous, profusion of form.

—Inés Katzenstein

28. Katzenstein, "Los secretos de Pombo," 18. Original: "[t]ranse medio angelical hacia lo *light*."

29. To date, no study has been undertaken analyzing the possible relationship between this aesthetic and the ideas of the neo-Baroque writers (primarily Néstor Perlhonger) who were contemporaries of the Rojas Gallery artists. As Santiago García Navarro notes, the points of ideological concurrence are remarkable.

30. Valeria González, "El papel del Centro Cultural Rojas en la historia del arte argentino: polarizaciones y aperturas del campo discursive entre 1989 y 2009," in *Como el amor, Polarizaciones y aperturas del campo artístico en la Argentina 1989–2009* (Buenos Aires: Libros del Rojas, 2009), 21. Original: "Los discursos de los fundadores se sostendrían frente a los otros marcando como enajenación toda caracterización genérica del arte de los noventa como movimiento, estilo, generalogía histórica, representación regional o epocal, etc., y volviendo a destacar sus orígenes situacionales y contingentes."

31. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

FABIÁN BURGOS

Fabián Burgos' art focuses on the fusion of color and line, as if he were weaving threads of paint to create abstract compositions. Combining a methodical sensibility with a penchant for whimsy, his aesthetic balances seemingly unrelated elements into subtle and complex abstractions. For example, in *Untitled* (1998; fig. 31), Burgos painted small black shapes on a vivid lemon green background, creating an overall suggestion of cloudlike forms. His playful organization of these visual elements invites the viewer to transfer focus between the gestalt image and the field in which it exists. When the many black squares are seen as a larger single shape, they become the dominant element in the painting. When the individual squares are perceived as discreet and multiple shapes, the green interstitial spaces result in a commanding visual buzz. The transferring of perception from the whole to the part—and back again—creates a shifting and playful optical dynamic.

Burgos' understanding of space and line finds a somewhat different expression in *Untitled* (1995; fig. 30). Several painted lines originate at the lower edge of the composition and appear to move upward. A number of the lines seem to sprout until they reach the top of the canvas, while others undulate organically in different directions. The result is a complex web of interlacing lines that describes abstract shapes forming a thicket of layered grids. While Burgos provides a clear compositional element at the bottom of canvas, the entire work operates as an optical illusion in which the matrix of sinuous lines overshadows the grid that appears in the foreground. Burgos' approach to creating geometric forms by weaving lines recalls the earlier work of an influential Argentine artist, Raúl Lozza, who is known mostly for his Concrete art from the 1940s.[1] Lozza created preliminary sketches in which he crossed numerous diagonal lines to create sharp abstract forms for three-dimensional, nonrepresentational works like *Relief* (fig. 26). Once his grid was complete, he isolated specific geometric shapes within a web. These elements, known as *coplanals*, became central to his oeuvre.[2] In *Untitled* (1995; fig. 30), Burgos drew inspiration from Lozza's grid-like sketches, but whereas the coplanals are purified renditions of immutable shapes, Burgos' interlacing lines create a density out of his delineated organic forms.

1. In 1996, *Crimen & Ornamento*, an exhibition originally shown at the Centro Cultural Parque de España in the city of Rosario (September) and later at the Rojas Gallery (October) in 1994, was re-exhibited at Apex Art in New York City as *The Rational Twist*. Burgos, as well as several artists associated with the Rojas Gallery (Jorge Gumier Maier, Graciela Hasper, Fabio Kacero, and Omar Schiliro) and Raúl Lozza were featured in the show. Carlos Basualdo, curator of the exhibition, aimed to reconsider the place that Latin American Concrete art held in art history and wished to link contemporary Argentine artists to the tradition of Concrete art.

2. During the 1940s in Argentina the group Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención (AAC-I) developed the *coplanal*—a jagged, frameless form meant to reflect the essence of abstract art. The artists associated with the AAC-I "aspired to create a movement that would be collective, organized, and committed to a systematic analysis of issues in the visual arts." Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "Buenos Aires: Breaking the Frame," in *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*, ed. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (Austin, TX: The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 35.

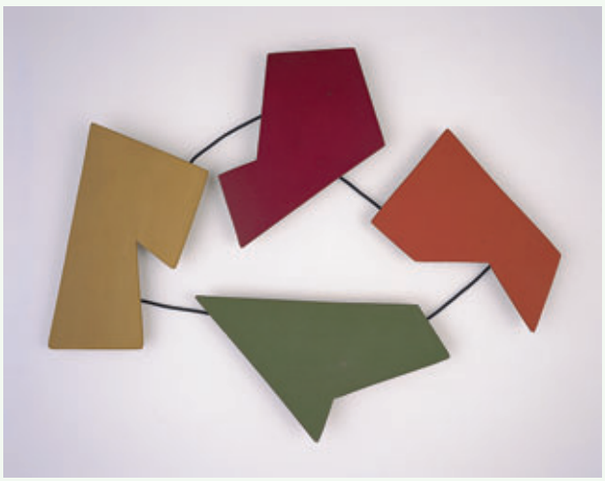


Figure 26 Raúl Lozza, *Relief*, 1945, Casein on wood and painted metal, 40.6 × 53.3 × 3.8 cm (16 × 21 × 1½ in.), Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 1998.52. Photograph by Mark Morosse. Courtesy of Elida Vda. de Lozza

Figure 27 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Lovers—Paris), 1993, Lightbulbs, porcelain light sockets, and extension cords, overall dimensions vary with installation. Two parts: 41 ft. in length with 20 ft. of extra cord each, © Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Another notable aspect of his work is the use of saturated rich colors in the backgrounds of his compositions, such as the lively lemon green of *Untitled* (1998; fig. 31), the thundercloud deep gray of *Untitled* (1995; fig. 29), and the thick olive gray of *Untitled* (1995; fig. 30). Burgos sometimes tempered the intensity of his monochromatic colors and the deployment of the lines and resulting forms seems to become the focus of the composition. In *Untitled* (1996; fig. 28), he took a subtler approach to color, painting a dark blue rectangular area on the right side of the canvas that vividly contrasts with the lighter blue of the background. Because these two blues are close in value, the distinction between them is not immediately discernible. By using two different but similar colors, Burgos created a nuanced yet more expressive change in mood. Moreover, his free-hand style of painting the darker blue rectangle discloses a modest human quality. The central ovoid motif that rests across the twice-blue background is an intricate web of painted threads that suggests a nest or a human brain, underscoring the organic quality of the work. Again, while at first glance the central threaded cluster also seems to be dark blue, a closer examination reveals that the color is a combination of black and navy. Indeed, while the form and color at first appear to be accidental, they are deliberate in their rejection of an industrial appearance. The cadence according to which the painted threads move around the composition demonstrates an affinity for the graceful and random arrangements of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' "Untitled" (Lovers—Paris), 1993 (fig. 27). In that work, white light strings of commercially available light are arranged in a circular pile on the ground.[3] Both artists' works present a body of lines and orbs—in the latter sculptural, in the former painted—that are "woven" into a jumble.

At first glance, Burgos' compositions recall the Concrete artists' pursuit of a nonrepresentational geometric form. However his palette of soft colors and the organic quality of his line suggest a more personally derived form of abstraction, one that perhaps was intended to mollify the starkness that characterized 1940s art. Though he apparently admired and was inspired by this historical art movement, his own sensibility was fundamentally different from that of the Concrete artists. Burgos was not interested in clearly defining his influences or his beliefs. He painted with a distinctly personal style that was playfully expressive without being representational.

—Doris Bravo

3. Gonzalez-Torres' "Untitled" (Lovers—Paris), 1993 is one of several works from this period composed of lightstrings. At every reiteration, the artist deliberately left the decision to arrange the lightstrings in a particular way to the exhibition's curator. In addition to the circular pile, Gonzalez-Torres' lightstrings have also been suspended from ceilings, with the ends arranged into a variety of shapes on the floor.

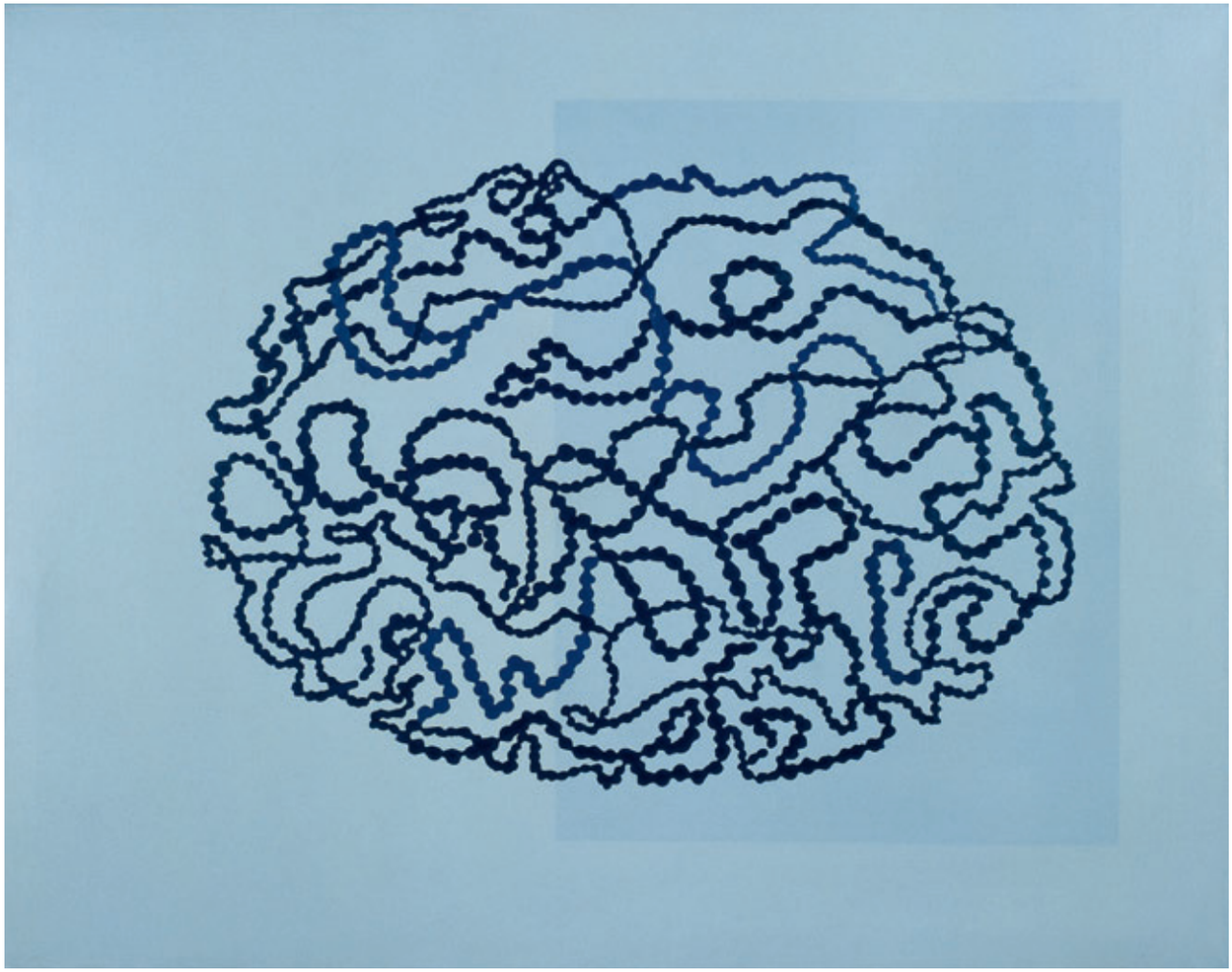
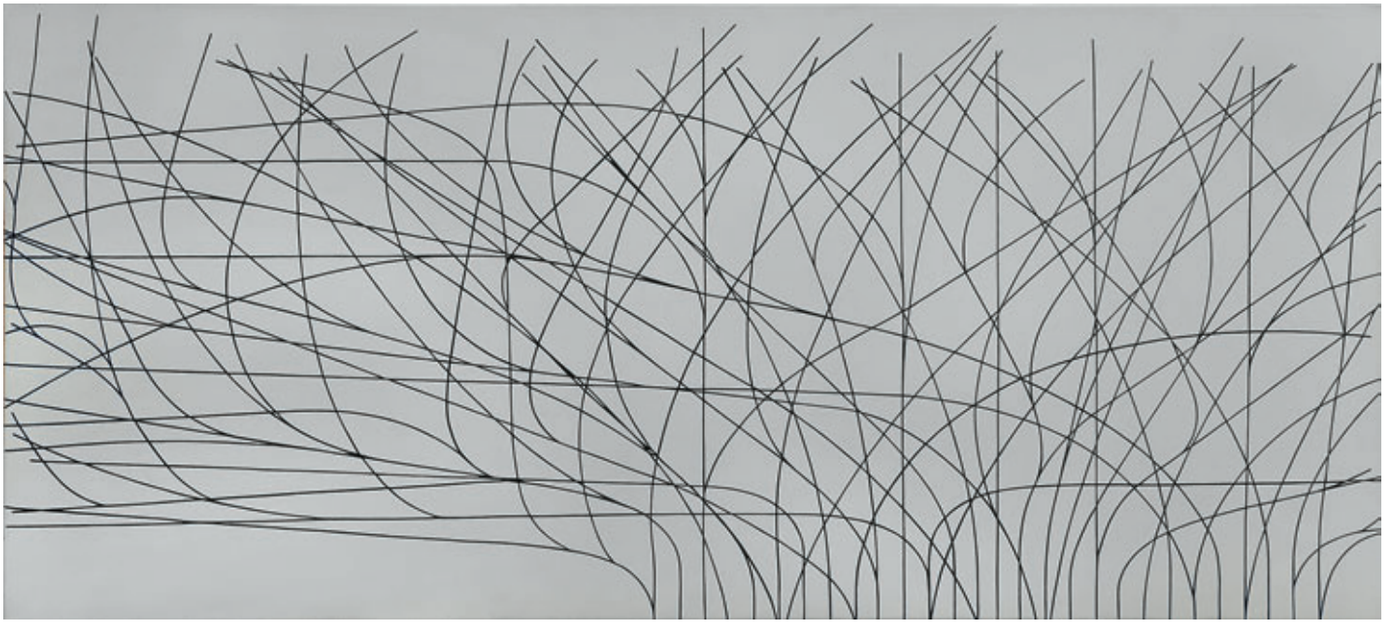


FIG 28 Untitled 1998 Oil and acrylic on canvas

FIG 29 Untitled 1995 Oil and acrylic on canvas

FIG 30 Untitled 1995 Oil and acrylic on canvas



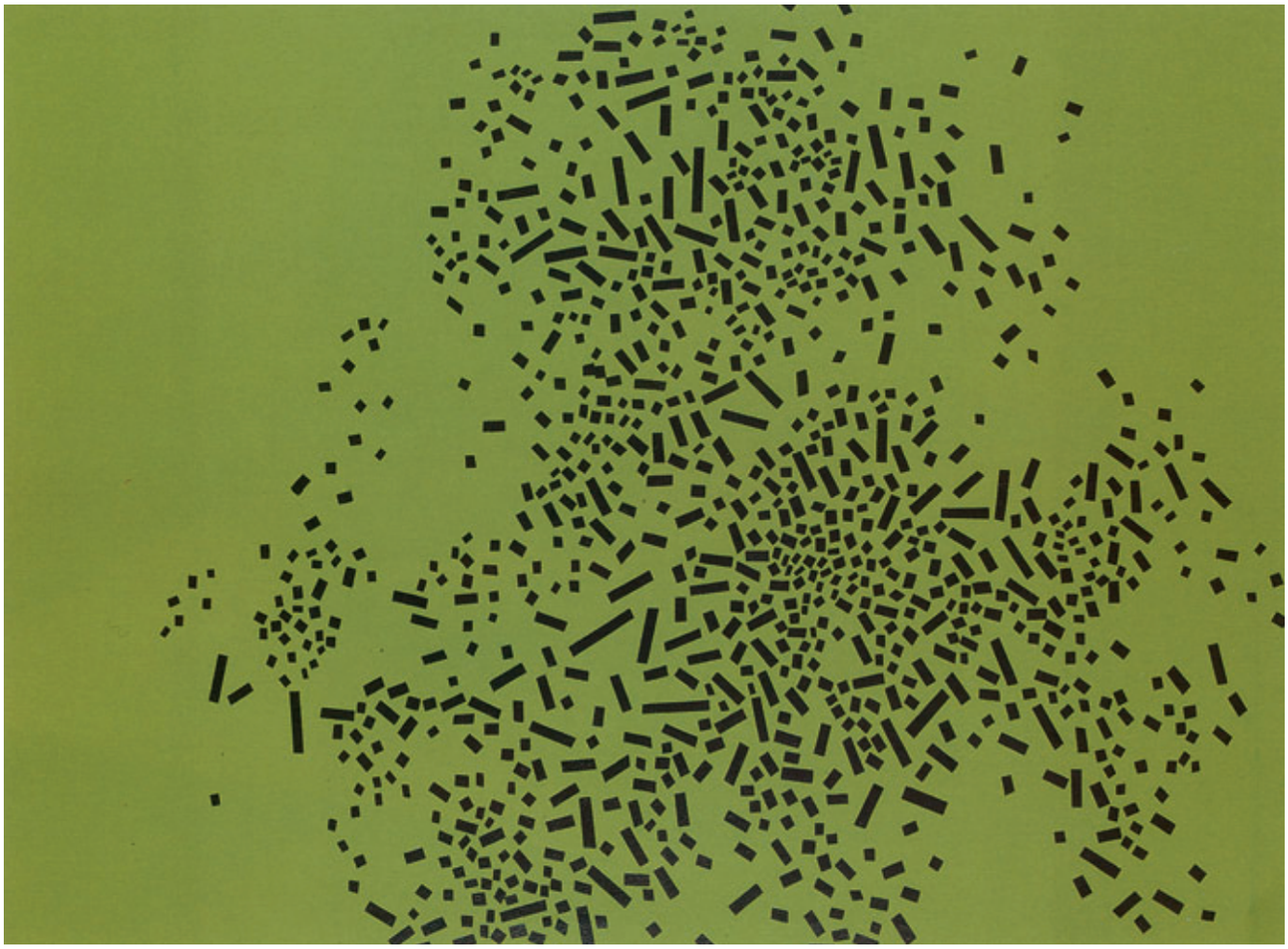
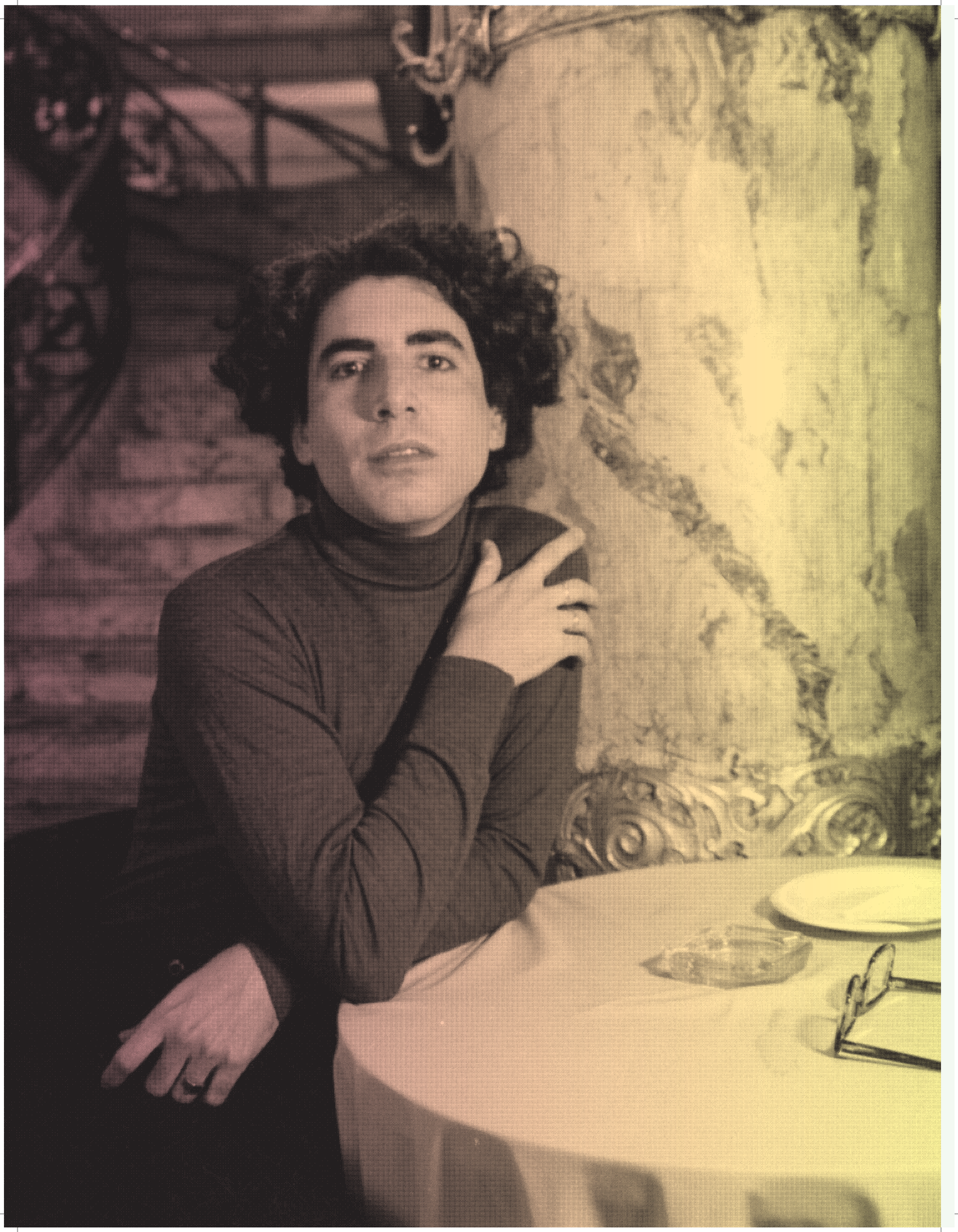


FIG 31 Untitled 1996 Oil and acrylic on canvas



FELICIANO CENTURIÓN

Feliciano Centurión was the only artist associated with the Rojas Gallery who was not a native Argentine. He was born in 1962 in San Ignacio de las Misiones, Paraguay, a country he left at the age of sixteen to attend the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de La Cárcova in Formosa, a small city close to the Argentina-Paraguay border, about 750 miles north of Buenos Aires. Beyond the opportunity to study art, the move provided a respite from the intolerable political situation in his home country, where General Alfredo Stroessner had established an especially brutal and corrupt military dictatorship in the mid-1940s. But the hope of political stability in his newly adopted country rapidly dissipated after his arrival in Argentina in 1974.[1] Centurión's life was difficult enough, but by the time he reached thirty he had contracted HIV, at a moment when the AIDS pandemic was spreading throughout Argentina.[2] He died in 1996 of complications from the disease.

Centurión's work was founded upon a love of textiles. He used textiles manufactured for the home, such as blankets and pillow covers, as an alternative to the more traditional canvas in his art. Through this choice of materials, Centurión emphasized the physical nature and inherent tactile sensuousness of his creative process. His painted and hand-embroidered blankets and pillow covers with decorative motifs (see figs. 25 and 35) made a direct connection between art and perhaps the most intimate of domestic spaces. Moreover, his embellishments disclose two important characteristics in his work: a penchant for adorning everyday objects and a desire to engage in the kind of labor-intensive work that few artists seemed to embrace with passion. Centurión's subtle handcrafting and fastidiously detailed construction suffuse his works with human presence and his own sense of artisanal fulfillment.

Centurión's blanket paintings are heavier than comparably sized works on canvas. Gravity causes them to gradually change each time they are installed on a wall. In this way, his work is related to Process art of the late 1960s and early 1970s—practiced by the American artists Robert Morris and Eva Hesse, among

1. In 1976 a military coup gave rise to a repressive dictatorship that would last until 1983. For further information on the political history of the 1970s and 1980s in Argentina, see the introduction to this publication.

2. In late 1987, six thousand cases of AIDS were reported in the country, and a mere six years later that number had ballooned to sixty thousand. The gay community represented three quarters of the reported cases.

Figure 32 Eva Hesse, *Expanded Expansion,* 1969, Fiberglass, polyester, resin, latex, and cheese cloth, 309.9 × 762 cm (10 ft 2 in × 25 ft) overall, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, Family of Eva Hesse, 1975. 75.2138. Photograph by David Heald. © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

others—which focused on the act of making art as much as the outcome, and incorporated the idea that a host of conditions, including time, temperature, exposure to light, and the inherent vice of certain materials, could determine whether art was in flux, not unlike human bodies and lives (see fig. 32). Centurión understood that the fabric he used was vulnerable, and he embraced the fact that his work was inherently fragile and mutable and would likely visibly change over time. By fully engaging these materials, he explicitly rejected the austerity found in some forms of modern art in favor of the imperfect, unstable, and enigmatic beauty inherent in most handcrafted objects.[3]

When in 1996 Centurión learned that he was infected with HIV, his work became a meditation on the imminent end of his life, for at that time the disease was, almost always, unavoidably terminal. He painted his most poignant and personal work, *Cordero sacrificado* [*Sacrificed Lamb*] (fig. 34), the very day he learned of his fatal diagnosis. Upon a pine-green blanket, he depicted a lamb with a bloody knife at its throat lying on a cinder-block gray mastaba. The image of the lamb, in addition to its symbolic registration in Christian iconography, is perhaps a clear parallel with his own heightened sense of mortality. The revealing subject matter and the continuing transformation of its material imbue the work with poignant, emotional intensity.

As his condition worsened, Centurión became progressively weaker and ultimately bedridden. Out of necessity, he began working on an increasingly smaller scale. During his final months, he produced profoundly intimate works in which he embroidered poetic phrases—*La muerte es parte intermitente de mis días* [*Death Is an Intermittent Part of My Days*], ca. 1996; *Luz divina del alma* [*Divine Light of the Soul*] (fig. 25); and *Me adapto a mi enfermedad* [*I Adapt to My Illness*] (fig. 35)—onto small handmade pillowcases and blankets. In effect, each piece became a tender self-portrait that lay bare his sorrow, revealing his hope and fear and expressing his intense vulnerability.

—Abigail Winograd

3. See Octavio Paz's essay "Use and Contemplation," in *In Praise of Hands: Contemporary Craft of the World* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society in association with the World Crafts Council, 1974).

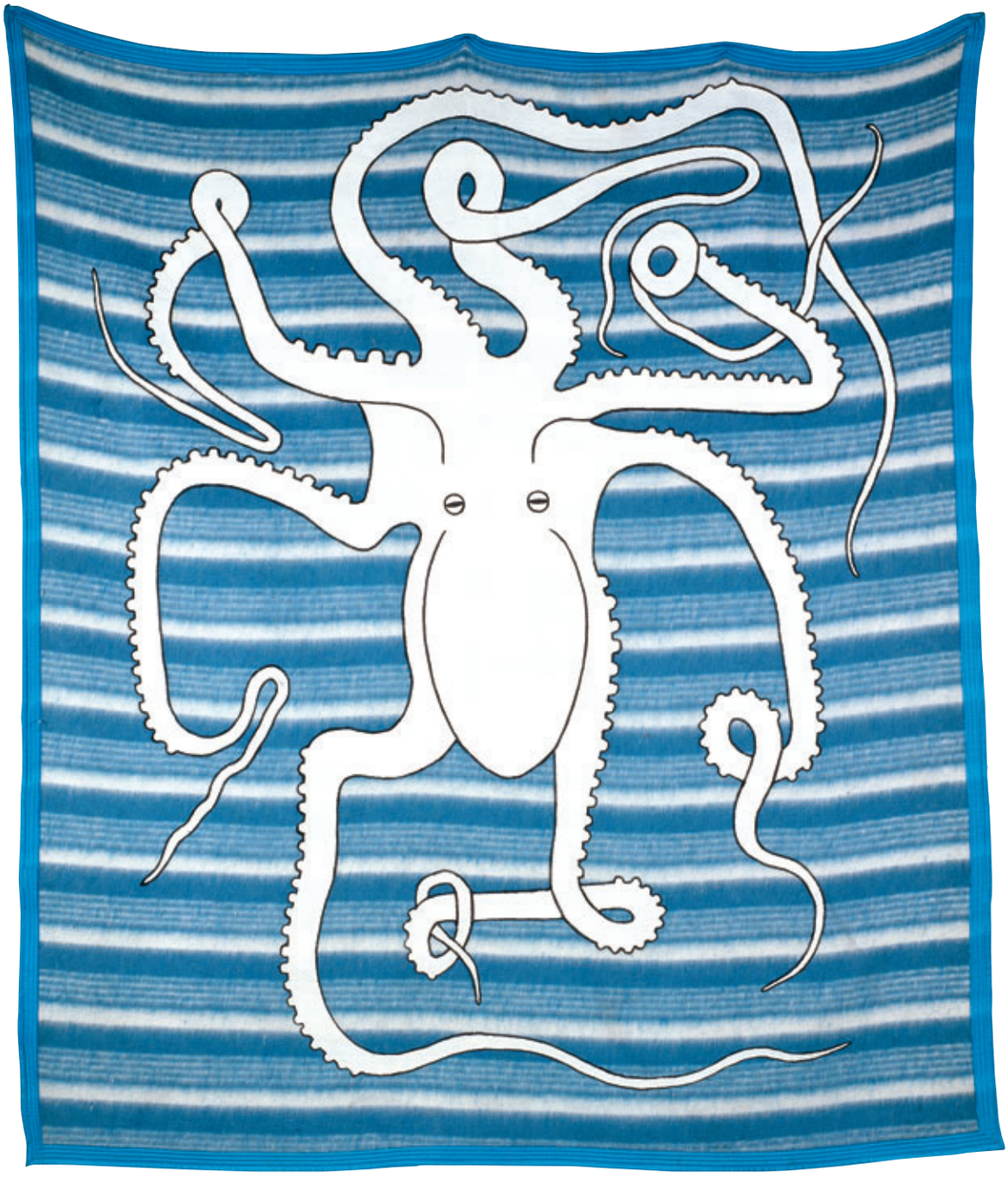


FIG 33 Pulpo blanco [White Octopus] CA. 1993 Acrylic on polyester blanket

FIG 34 Cordero sacrificado [Sacrificed Lamb] 1996 Acrylic on polyester blanket

FIG 35 Me adapto a mi enfermedad, parte de la serie Flores del mal de amor
[I Adapt to My Illness, part of the series Flowers of Lovesickness] 1996 Hand-embroidered blanket

BETO DE VOLDER

Beto de Volder's work is characterized by a bold use of line and color. He creates figurative compositions with well-defined contours as well as dynamic formal arrangements charged with the vivacity of a strong palette. Like some of his peers at the Rojas Gallery, his interest in geometry and color indicates an admiration for the Argentine Concrete art movement of the 1940s, especially the aesthetic of the Madí group.[1] His work carries the influence of a broad range of artists, from the abstraction of Uruguayan constructivist Carmelo Arden Quín, to the expressive compositions and satire of Argentine Pablo Suárez, and the wit of graffiti work of American Keith Haring.[2]

Like some of his contemporaries, de Volder studied at the fine arts school at the Escuela Manuel Belgrano in Buenos Aires. Between 1994 and 1996 he was awarded a scholarship to take part in the first edition of the Taller de Barracas, which was organized by the Fundación Antorchas in Buenos Aires. The workshop was an innovative platform that functioned as a kind of atelier and mentorship program and was led by three veteran Argentine artists: Luis Fernando Benedit, Pablo Suárez, and Ricardo Longhini.[3] During these years, de Volder would come to articulate a visual aesthetic that combined cartoon-style elements reminiscent of Haring's street art with the geometric precision characteristic in Concrete works like Juan Melé's *Marco recortado no. 2* [*Irregular Frame No.2*] (fig. 45). Two elements became the hallmarks of his 1990s production: humor and sexual motifs. Both his compositions and titles indicate his carefree approach to sexuality. For example, in his large-scale triptych *Orgía* [*Orgy*] *I, III, and IIII* (figs. 36, 37, and 38), as the title indicates, he depicts a scene dense with sexual excess. While it is easy to discern the act of penetration, the figures and characters performing the action are not lifelike representations. To the contrary, the play between rectangular and curvilinear volumes rendered in pinks and blues projects an innocent spirit. The triptych, along with *Mordisquito* [*The Bite*]—which depicts a hanging breast about to be bitten by a large open mouth—were included in the 1993 exhibition at the Rojas Gallery entitled *Romántico* [*Romantic*]. His choice of a sappy, almost naïve title contrasts with the irreverent depiction of body parts and genitalia performing sexual divertissements.

1. For more information on Concrete art, see the introduction to this publication. Madí art began as part of the Asociación de Arte Concreto (AAC). Madí artists quickly distanced themselves from the intellectual rigorousness of the original group to develop a different philosophy, one based on a more experimental approach to art that in their view would be truly avant-garde in terms of the transgression of a particular model of art production, not an aesthetic. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "Buenos Aires: Breaking the Frame," in *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection,* ed. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (Austin, TX: The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 36.

2. Carmelo Arden Quín (1913–2010) was an Uruguayan artist who move to Buenos Aires during the early 1940s and became one of the leading figures in the Concrete art movement. Pablo Suárez (1937–2006) was one of the most vocal and political artists in Buenos Aires during the 1960s. In later decades his work focused on realist painting and sculpture that, in part, addressed sexual identity (Katzenstein, "Pombo's secrets, Second Session," 19). Keith Haring (1958–1990) was an artist and social activist who became known for his graffiti and public works in New York City.

3. Luis Fernando Benedit (b. 1937) is an Argentine artist who, during the 1960s and 1970s, began working on the relationship between artificial and scientific mechanisms. Ricardo Longhini (b. 1949) is an Argentine artist who transforms found objects into collages that convey political denunciations.

De Volder's bold lines and repeated geometrical forms are clear references to Constructivism. However, his sense of irony and satire strongly depart from the rationality that distinguished his predecessors' work. In this regard, the influence of Haring's humorous and explicitly sexual compositions is clearly present. De Volder is not interested in conveying a specific message, as he once stated: "[My] work does not represent anything, it is only meant to be seen."[4] But, like Haring, his depictions of genitalia and distorted human bodies can be understood as the transformation of the body into a site for pleasure and transgression.[5] Regardless of his disinterest in conveying explicit ideas through his art, it is important to consider that he produced these paintings at a moment in which sexual conversation, orientation, and the AIDS pandemic became tangible in a recently democratized Argentina. Therefore, the humor that distinguishes his work is in effect an easily accessible tool that allows the articulation of difficult realities, such as AIDS and the death due to related illnesses of fellow Rojas artists.

In 1996 de Volder took a four-year break from his career as an artist to pursue a business profession. While his return to the visual arts led him to fully embrace abstraction as the purity of form, his figurative practice of the 1990s was marked by a sense of liberation and irreverence. Considering that his generation was brought up during the repressive years of the dictatorship (1979–1983),[6] his compositions can be understood as an attitude of rebellion. One of the works that epitomizes this demeanor is *Untitled* (fig. 39), a large square canvas depicting his country's blue-and-white flag with its golden sun at the center. Autocratic sovereign states have traditionally regarded national symbols as sacred, which was the case during the military rule in Argentina. De Volder's work takes on this iconic image and transforms it into the background for a nonsensical scene saturated with elements reminiscent of comic strips. These illustrations are not denunciations, but rather satirical references imbedded in Argentine culture. As in other works, violence, humor, and sex are present and intertwined. The most prominent visual reference to sarcastic aggression is the emblematic sun at the center of the flag. Rendered as a smiley face, the star is being stabbed by a disembodied arm suggesting a darkly humorous take on Argentina's rapidly changing social landscape.

De Volder's intent is not political, but rather it signifies his untroubled attitude towards everyday symbols and stories drawn from his own experience.[7] His work does not pretend to convey grand discourses or a complex synthesis of art history. Its freshness lies in his vivid conjunctions of violence and sex. He saw art as an expression of renovation, and as a way to challenge the seriousness that defined the political art of previous generations through wit and humor.

—Ursula Davila-Villa

4. Patricia Rizzo, ***La palabra es tenue,*** exhibition text, Galería Arguibel, Buenos Aires, 2002. Original: "[Mi] obra representu nada sólo se ve." (http://www.betodevolder.com/textos/07.html).

5. Elisabeth Sussman, ***Keith Haring*** (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997), 20.

6. For further information on Argentina's dictatorship period, see the introduction to this publication.

7. Interview between Beto de Volder and the author, Buenos Aires, June 24, 2010.

FIG 36 Orgía [Orgy] 1993 Acrylic on canvas

FIG 37 Orgía [Orgy] II 1993 Acrylic on

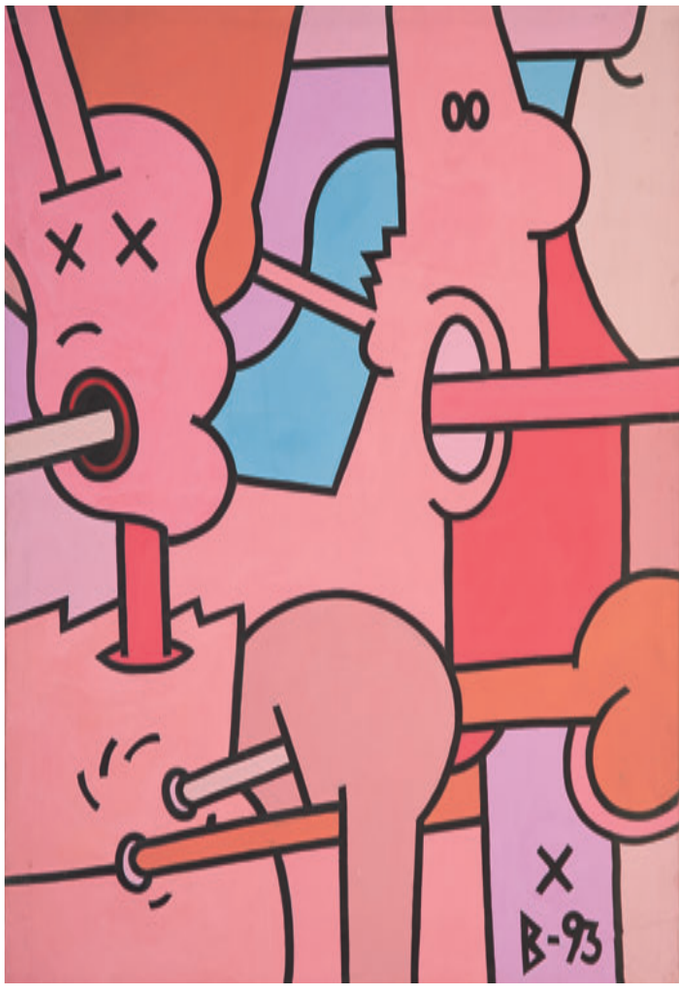


FIG 38 Orgía [Orgy] III 1993 Acrylic on canvas

FIG 39 Untitled 1994 Acrylic and markers on canvas

SEBASTIÁN GORDÍN

I do not want to invent anything new. I want to copy what is already there.
—Sebastián Gordín[1]

As this quote articulates and his body of work confirms, Sebastián Gordín is fascinated with the world as it is, and has a keen desire to reproduce it, down to the smallest detail. He draws inspiration from an abundant variety of sources—pulp magazines of the pre- and postwar periods, cinema, and toys—in order to convey the nuances he identifies within the familiar spaces of everyday life.

Gordín is a builder of miniature renditions of actual spaces. As a child, he spent many hours laboring over model airplanes and ships, a passion that evolved into the creation of diminutive structures like *Gordinoscopio* (fig. 102), a series of five boxes. About his work on a small scale, he said:

> *I use scale as language. It is difficult for me to transition from a small-scale to a large-scale language . . . Traditionally, people make models to scale in order to turn them into a larger size. I am the opposite: I want to make a model of all that exists.*[2]

His replicas are not at all preliminary models or studies for a full-scale project, but emphatically the artwork itself. Like dollhouses—which are designed for small children's interactions and are to be viewed both open (so that one can access the interior) and also closed (so that the only view in is through tiny windows)—Gordín's *Gordinoscopio* series of boxes are fastidiously detailed reproductions of rooms and buildings. For example, several within the *Gordinoscopio* series—among them *Gran Rex* [*Grand Rex*], 1996, and *Edificio administrativo de Johnson e hijo* [*Johnson and Son Administrative Building*], 1996—are scrupulously faithful miniaturized replicas of office-building interiors. They are filled with functional elements specific to work spaces—windows, desks, carpet,

1. Sebastián Gordín, "Una vez descongelado no volver a congelar: Sebastián Gordín, un iluminador que juega fútbol, al cine y a la muerte, diálogo con Kiwi Sainz, una de sus primeras fans," *Ramona* 2 (May–June 2000): 18. Original: "Yo no quiero inventar nada nuevo. Yo quiero copiar lo que ya está." All translations by the author.

2. Gordín, "Una vez descongelado no volver a congelar," 17. Original: "Uso la escala como un lenguaje. Y me resulta difícil traducirme de la lengua de escala menor a la lengua de escala mayor . . . Generalmente la gente piensa en hacer un modelo en escala para llevarlo luego a tamaño grande. Yo, al contrario: busco llevar a modelo todo lo que existe."

laminate flooring, and fluorescent light fixtures. But unlike dollhouses, Gordín's *Gordinoscopio* boxes are notable for the limitations they place on the viewer's visual access. Though the artist goes to great lengths to reproduce the scenes they depict in accurate detail, he intentionally thwarts any attempt to view the model in its entirety. The exteriors of these boxes are painted in opaque colors, effectively concealing the tiny worlds they contain. Indeed, at first glance they appear as Minimalist art objects perched on wooden stands. As the viewer approaches, a peephole becomes evident on the side of each box. Only through the hole can one scrutinize the interior space. Doing so creates a voyeuristic intimacy, while underscoring Gordín's physical and psychological control of the work, restricting viewing to a single perspective that yields an incomplete view of the work inside. Like Marcel Duchamp's final work *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* [*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*], 1946–1966, the peephole is the window, and it creates an unusual edge for the work, simultaneously a point of access and a boundary.

The deliberate control of the viewing experience may at first seem like self-sabotage; however, Gordín's desire to conceal certain elements of his works lies at the heart of his art. For while these elements are not easily visible, their uncertain presence plays a pivotal role. In a conversation with fellow Argentine artist Luis Fernando Benedit,[3] Gordín recalled Benedit's discussion of Franco Zeffirelli's stage direction for a production of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. The film director used "a large number of objects and details the viewer would never see. He said that, in the end, one senses those details."[4] In much the same way, Gordín fully furnishes complete sets. His dedication to replicating spaces as if recording or photographing them implies the construction of elements that will never be seen—reminding us that all elements of a real building are rarely ever seen directly. For example, in *Las últimas consideraciones* [*The Last Considerations*] (fig. 41), he crafted a soccer stadium model and provided it with visible features such as bleacher seats, a pitch, and lights. Knowing that the model is complete, regardless of whether the viewer can see it all, spurs the imagination, creating a sense of disquieting mystery that, somewhat paradoxically, is based on what one does not see.

By the same token, Gordín's carefully crafted mini-dioramas from everyday life are devoid of human figures, as if all the actors have just left the stage. Any narrative that one would impose upon the mise-en-scène is also thwarted by

3. Luis Fernando Benedit (b. 1937) is an influential Argentine visual artist and architect who began working in the late 1950s. Along with Pablo Suárez, he founded the Taller de Barracas [Barracas Workshop], one of the most important mentorship programs for emerging artists during the 1990s in Buenos Aires. The workshop was a two-year program that concluded with a 1994 exhibition at Ruth Benzacar Gallery.

4. In their recollection of this conversation, neither Gordín nor Benedit specify the place and date of the production of ***Don Giovanni.*** Alfredo Prior, "A Pleasant Conversation in the Museo de los Zombies: Interview," in ***Gordín***, ed. Lucrecia Palacios Hidalgo (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2008), 147.

this provoked absence, meaning that individual viewers have the option of animating it as they please. As Gordín once said: "My work is not narrative, as some say; it becomes a narrative once people see it. As with photography, it does not exist until it is developed and seen."[5]

Although Gordín's use of these empty models is a recurring aspect of the work he did in the 1990s, three related pieces exemplify another unique invocation of abbreviated narration without a particular story. Each work, done over a span of four years, contains the image of one figure carrying a second sleeping, wounded, or dead figure as in a pietà subject. This motif is first seen in the watercolor entitled *Lo encontraron con el pichicho en sus manos y sangre en la boca. ¿Cómo probar su inocencia?* [*They Found Him with the Doggy in His Hands and Blood in His Mouth. How Can His Innocence Be Proven?*] (fig. 42) wherein a snowman with a bloody frown carries a sleeping, sick, or dead dog. A year later, in *¿Cómo probar su inocencia?* [*How Can His Innocence Be Proven?*] (fig. 43), we see a similar frowning snowman, now as a sculptural figure, with his hands stretched out carrying a platypus. The last work from this series, *¿Quién mató a quién?* [*Who Killed Whom?*] (fig. 44), which was created two years later, is another three-dimensional work that presents a possible solution to the crime in the title. Each work displays a standing figure holding a lifeless character; however, there is an intimation that the story evolves throughout the three pieces, regardless of how one interprets the changes from a snowman to a penguin-platypus and the victim evolving from a dog, then a platypus, and finally appearing as a human being, more poignantly, a likeness of Gordín. In addition to their haunting qualities, these works reflect a more personal side of Gordín's work, especially in the last of the series, which is the only work to this day in which the artist's figure is depicted.

As Gordín presides over his collection of tiny dominions, he presents himself as an artisan as much as an artist. He has said that he would rather be likened to a construction worker—a builder of objects, models, and boxes—than an architect, adding, "I believe that most of the major shifts in my work have come from daily contact with materials."[6] It was this vital connection to materials that enabled Gordín to engage in an original type of craft, one that "showed something strange, weird, complex"[7] and reflected an encounter with the uncanny forms of life hidden within the world's ordinary spaces.

—Doris Bravo

5. Gordín, "Una vez descongelado no volver a congelar," 17. Original: "Mi obra no es narrativa, como dicen; se vuelve narrativa cuando la ven los otros. Igual que las fotos, que no existen hasta que las revelás y las ves."

6. Prior, "A Pleasant Conversation in the *Museo de los Zombies*: Interview," 150.

7. Ibid, 151.

FIG 40 Untitled 1992 Wooden box, 0.5 mini-ampere lightbulbs, epoxy putty, and acrylic

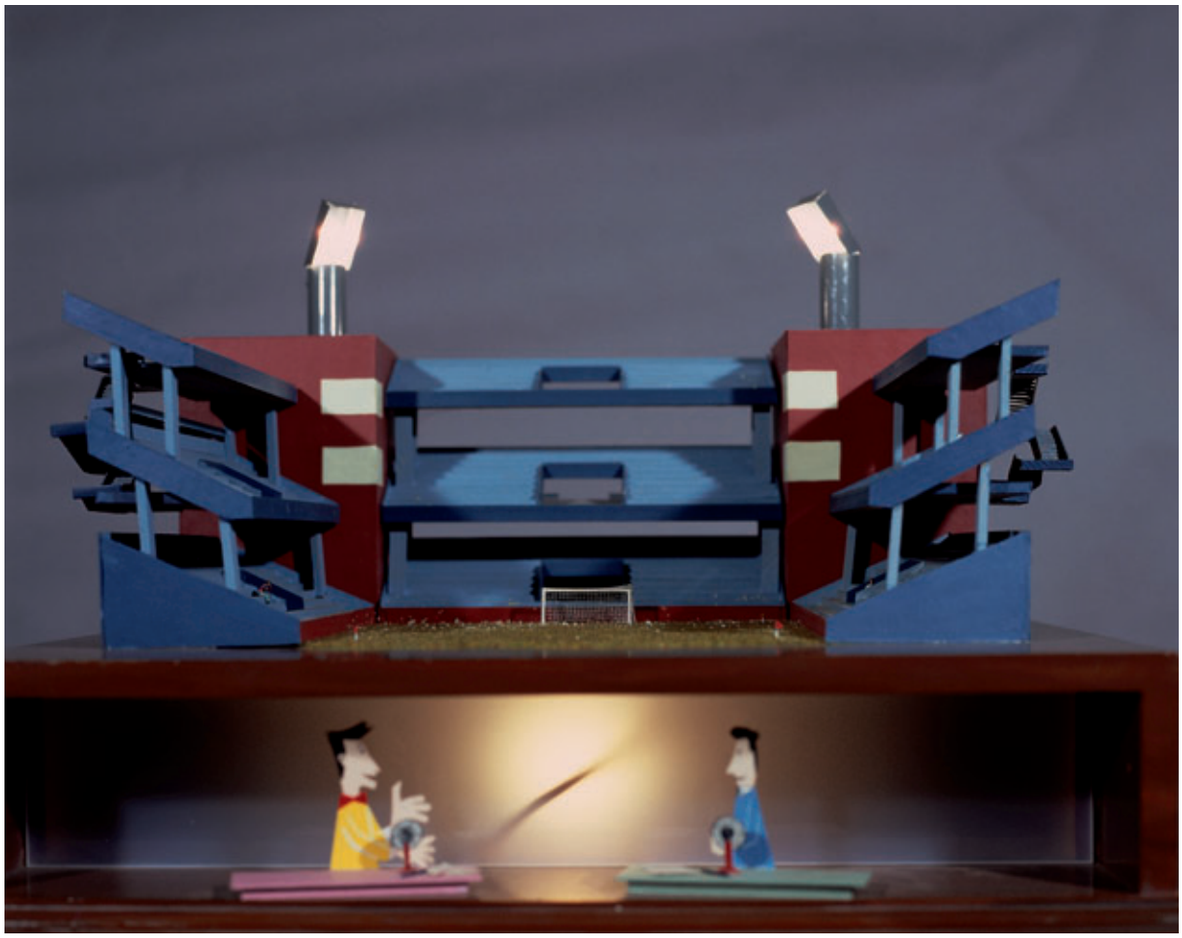


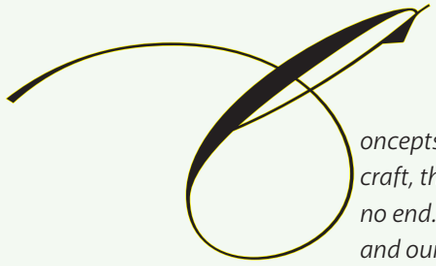
FIG 41 Las últimas consideraciones [The Last Considerations] 1993 Wood, aluminum, cardboard, and lights

FIG 42 Lo encontraron con el pichicho en sus manos y sangre en la boca. ¿Cómo probar su inocencia? [They Found Him with the Doggy in His Hands and Blood in His Mouth. How Can His Innocence Be Proven?] 1995 Watercolor and wax pencils on paper

FIG 43 ¿Cómo probar su inocencia? [How Can His Innocence Be Proven?] 1995 Silicone, foam rubber, epoxy, and lamp

FIG 44 ¿Quién mato a quién? [Who Killed Whom?] 1997 Polyester resin and enameled foam rubber

JORGE GUMIER MAIER



oncepts like "truth" and "reality" are anathema because all art is fiction . . . It is that craft, that impractical effort that sustains us. An infinite, radiant excess that knows no end. That art, as life, leads to nowhere is what makes our freedom meaningful and our salvation possible.

—Jorge Gumier Maier[1]

The above statement by Jorge Gumier Maier signals a shifting attitude about contemporary art in Argentina during the 1990s, a direction in almost complete opposition to the art of the preceding two decades. In part, Gumier Maier conceptualized this change in his triple role as artist, curator, and writer. He encouraged a group of artists to make work that departed from tradition, explored personal notions of beauty, and cultivated a more openhearted attitude. Gumier Maier's career paralleled a number of significant political events in Argentina from the 1970s through the 1990s; understanding his beliefs and his work in relation to those events provides a key to contextualizing the work of the Rojas Gallery artists.

Born in Buenos Aires in 1953, Gumier Maier dropped out of high school in his third year to study art at the Escuela de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano in 1968. He lasted only a year, but continued to make art under the most exigent circumstances. From the 1930s through the 1970s, Argentina had endured a series of political and economic crises that eventually led to the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1976,[2] marking the start of Argentina's so-called Dirty War.[3] Under pressure to conform with the new, ultra-conservative regime, Gumier Maier responded by becoming an art critic for the magazine *El expreso imaginario* [*The Imaginary Express*], founding a drawing and painting workshop for young artists, chronicling the burgeoning gay scene for the magazine *El Porteño,*[4] and becoming an activist for gay civil rights. In 1989, the Universidad de Buenos Aires inaugurated the Rojas Gallery in a corridor at the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, a space conceived by the university to exhibit the work of emerging visual artists.[5] Gumier Maier was appointed its founding director and in that capacity he defined an exhibition program that explored ornamentation and decoration through experimental works made from ordinary materials.

1. Jorge Gumier Maier, *El Tao del Arte* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1997), 13. Original: "Conceptos tales como 'verdad' o 'realidad' le son extraños porque todo arte es ficción . . . Es ese hacer, ese obrar insensato que nos sostiene. Un exceso sin término, infinito y fulgurante." For the full English translation, see the document section in this volume. Translation by Kristina Cordero, 2010.

2. Gumier Maier studied psychology in college, but left in 1976 because of the military coup-de-état. While at college, he was completely absorbed by politics and therefore did not paint again until 1978.

3. For more information about the political situation in Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s, see the introduction to this publication.

4. *Porteño* is a term that refers to Buenos Aires and/or its inhabitants.

5. During the 1980s, the artists associated with the Rojas Gallery exhibited at alternative spaces such as nightclubs and laundromats.

Those exhibitions heralded a significant change in Buenos Aires. Until the Rojas Gallery got under way, Argentine art had been dominated by overtly Conceptual and political art.[6] Gumier Maier's stated goal was to expand the field to include an aesthetic that was, by comparison, playful and sensual. Though he wrote various essays that could be read as manifestos over the years describing the kind of art he was trying to advance, his efforts received their most explicit expression only after he resigned the leadership of the gallery space in 1997. At that moment he organized the retrospective exhibition *El Tao del Arte* [*The Tao of Art*] at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, featuring the artists with whom he had worked during the previous decade.[7] In the exhibition catalog's main essay his intentions for the Rojas Gallery became clearly manifested, for Taoist philosophy—which had developed in the sixth century BCE as a reaction to Confucianism—rejected Confucianism's weighty morality, asceticism, and sense of duty in favor of a joyful and yielding approach to life.[8] Gumier Maier had wanted *El Tao del Arte*, as well as the style defined by the art and artists he selected, to be a meaningful response to an Argentine political and artistic past that, in his view, had been powerless to change society for the better.

Gumier Maier's own art was more formalist in its innovations than in its content per se, though it was not without ties to Argentine art history, recalling the 1940s geometric style that came to be known as Concrete art.[9] In an article published in the seminal Argentine art journal *Arturo* in 1944, the artist Rhod Rothfuss had suggested that abandoning the traditional rectangular frame would expand the definition of a work of art, as it did in works like Juan Melé's *Marco recortado No. 2* [*Irregular Frame No. 2*] (fig. 45).[10] Gumier Maier recapitulated Rothfuss' ideas decades later, using curvilinear frames that he built himself to mount canvases dominated by rectilinear designs. In time, his experiments with the size, shape, and qualities of his frames became so pronounced that his work began to feel both sculptural and painterly (see figs. 46 and 47).

This ambiguity between the two-dimensional qualities of painting and the three-dimensional concerns of sculpture was reinforced by Gumier Maier's interest in combining elements of nonrepresentational art with the more prosaic aspects of architectural construction and interior design. While the careful geometry of his compositions recalls the Concrete aesthetic, his preference for juxtaposing pastels with saturated hues evokes the palette used in mid-century home interiors and automobiles. The artist was drawn to the colors he experienced as a child in 1950s Mar del Plata, a tourist city south of Buenos Aires on the Atlantic coast where modernist architecture was set against a backdrop of beach and ocean. Among the materials that defined his youth were Formica

6. In order to subvert governmental control during the most repressive years between 1976 and 1983, Conceptual art became one of the most effective means of political activism and expression, enabling artists to surreptitiously condemn and expose the frequent injustices to which the population was subjected.

7. For a full list of participating artists, see Natalia Pineau's chronology.

8. Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "Daoism."

9. The Concrete art movement dominated Argentine and much of South American art during the first half of the twentieth century. Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención, founded by Carmelo Arden Quín, Gyula Kosice, Tomás Maldonado, and Edgar Bayley in Buenos Aires in 1944, proposed a radical new role for art, one that evoked everything from science fiction to Marxist theory to create an art that would transform society. These artists defined their work as concrete rather than abstract. Unlike abstract artists, constructivists viewed their work as free of metaphysical significance. For more information, see the exhibition catalog, *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*, ed. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (Austin, TX: The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007).

10. *Arturo* was published in 1944 by Arden Quín, Rothfuss, and Kosice in Buenos Aires and included essays, poetry, and reproductions of art. Unfortunately, only one issue of the journal was produced.

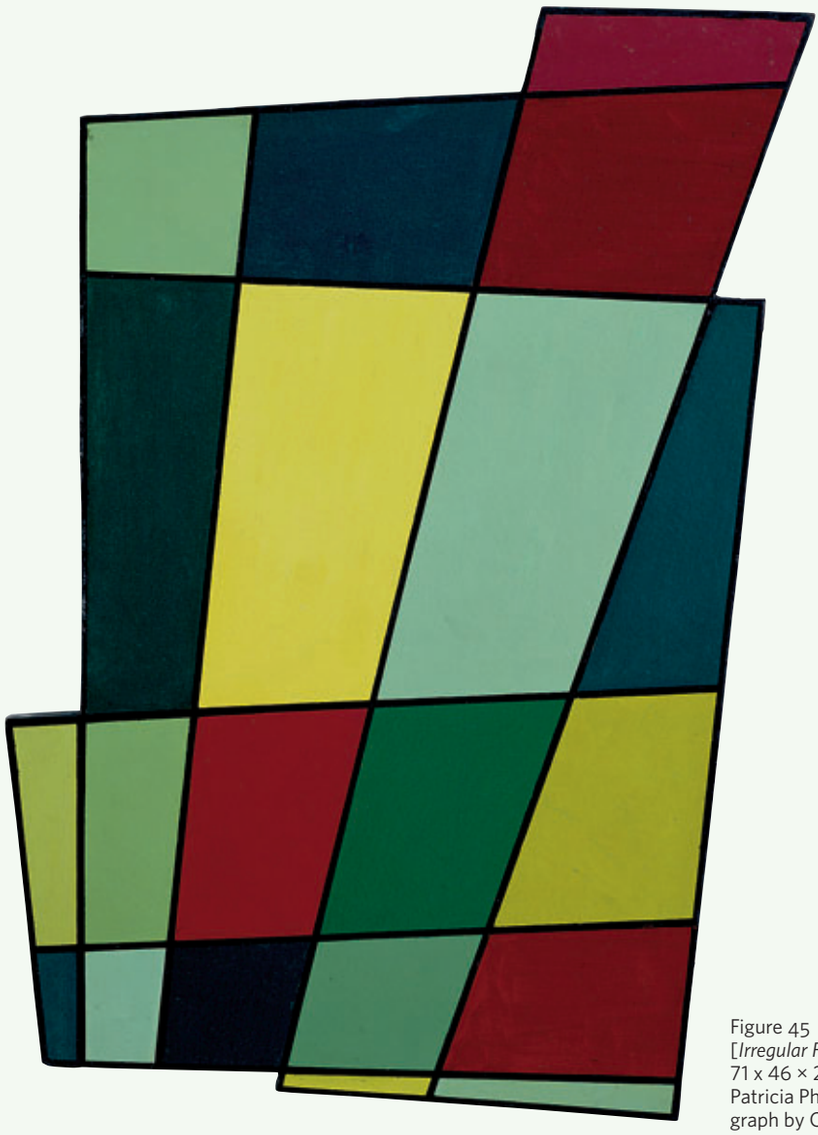


Figure 45 Juan Melé, *Marco recortado no. 2* [*Irregular Frame No.2*], 1946, Oil on Masonite, 71 x 46 × 2.5 cm (28 × 18⅛ × 1 in.), Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 1997.102. Photograph by Carlos Germán Rojas

countertops, plastic booth covers, and the tiled surfaces he saw in his uncle's pizzeria and ice cream parlor. Describing his aunt Esther's beauty parlor, he said, "I was fascinated by the blow-dryers, the small feet of the furniture, the curtains. It was amazing; it was the most modern [thing that] had arrived before television."[11] His art is a form of syncretism, a melding of traditions from the rarified to the vernacular.

Gumier Maier had a powerful influence on the visual arts in Buenos Aires, perhaps more so than any other figure of the time. As a painter, he set an example for his peers, helping to clear a path to new territories in Argentine art. As a curator, he discovered, encouraged, and exhibited a generation of fellow artists, a number of whom went on to have substantial careers (Marcelo Pombo, Miguel Harte, and Sebastián Gordín, among others). As a writer, he gave explicit voice to an aesthetic that otherwise might have been too unconventional and marginalized to garner the recognition it deserved. The attention came, the work prevailed, and decades later, Gumier Maier's influence continues to be felt.

—Doris Bravo and Abigail Winograd

11. Jorge Gumier Maier, "Jorge Gumier Maier," *El ojo del que mira, Artistas de los noventa*, ed. Victoria Verlichak (Buenos Aires: Fundación PROA, 1998), 26. Original: "Me fascinaba ver los secadores, las patitas de los muebles, las cortinas. Era bárbaro, era lo más moderno hasta que llegó la televisión." Translation by the authors.

FIG 46 Untitled N.D. Acrylic on carved plywood

FIG 47 Untitled 2000 Acrylic on carved wood

FIG 48 Untitled 2002 Acrylic on carved wood

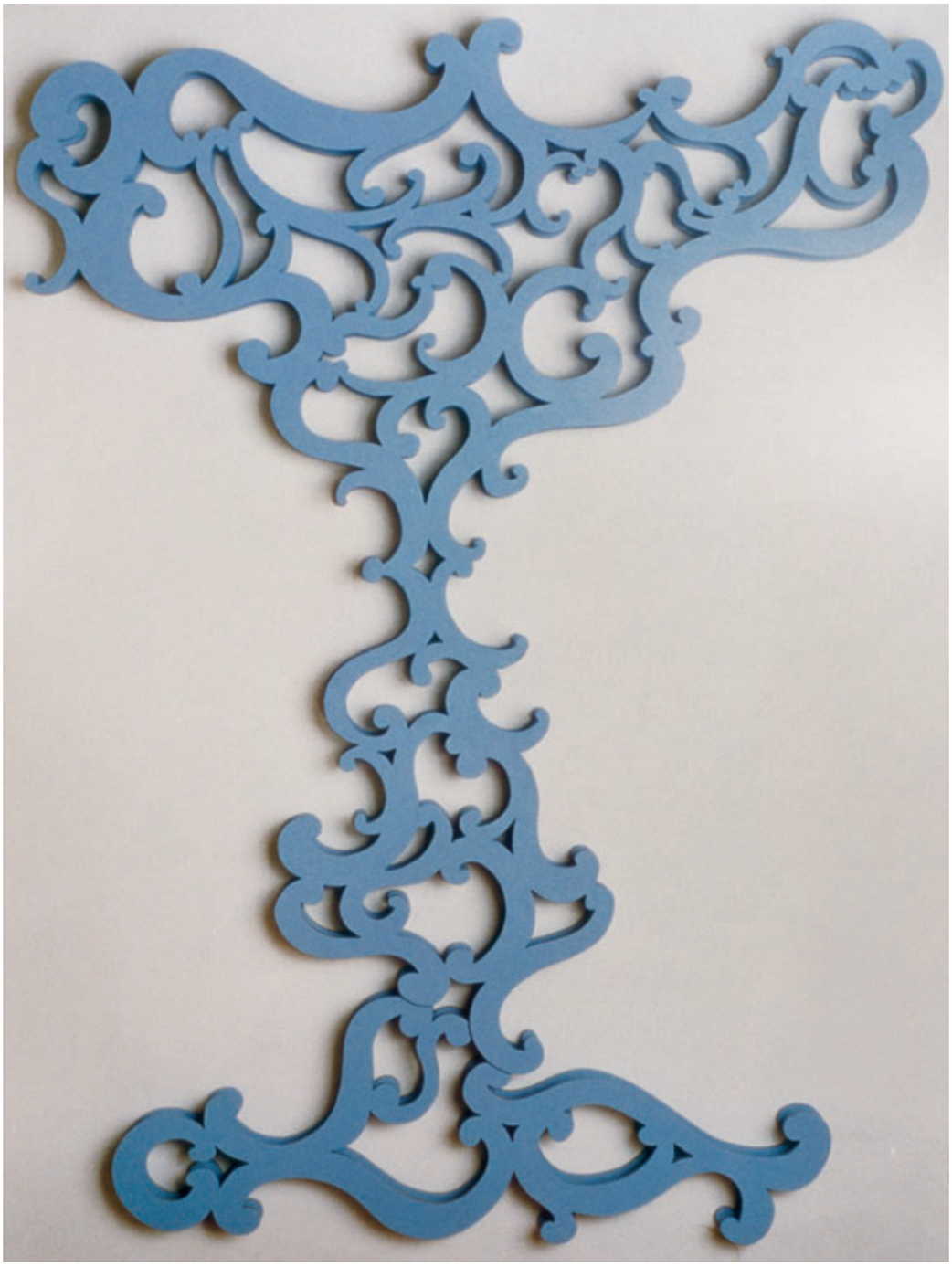


FIG 49 Untitled N.D. Acrylic on carved wood

MIGUEL HARTE

As a child, Miguel Harte was obsessed with order. He built meticulous scenes with small dolls, arranging toy cars in careful displays. As an adult he turned his love of methodical stagecraft into an art, making micro-environments that expand upon his childhood play. Harte made elaborate models, enclosed within spherical, cylindrical, or cubic structures inhabited by dried insects and both human and human/insect hybrid figurines. They are dense and elaborate dioramas, made from a variety of unusual materials: Martilux paint,[1] epoxy putty, polyester resin, liquid Vaseline, eggshells, and desiccated bugs. Uncanny and dramatic, the scenes are filled with bizarre characters.

Harte's sculptures also include elements of self-portraiture—not depictions of himself so much as self-caricatures, as if he wanted to represent himself while mounting an attack on vanity in general. For example, *El gordiplan hártico*, 1995,[2] is a large acrylic sphere with several peepholes and orifices. Inside, the artist placed groups of tiny, embryonic effigies with bulging eyes, fixed in fetal positions. Their form and prenatal position suggests the sphere as a womb, an image made even more poignant because some of the faces appear to have Harte's visage. Critic Julio Sánchez describes them as *Hartecitos*[3] ("little Hartes"), and, as with many of Harte's works, the scene presents a somewhat mystifying projection of the artist.

Harte's interest in art began with a series of art history magazines that his parents collected entitled *La Pinacoteca de los Genios* [*The Gallery of Genius*]. These volumes proved to be of lasting influence.[4] The title of *El jardín de las delicias* [*The Garden of Delights*] (fig. 53), comes directly from the great masterpiece by fifteenth-century Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch (1480–1505).[5] Like Bosch, Harte draws upon a Christian narrative of mankind's history and fate, with the insect-humans serving as Boschian metaphors for the decay of humanity.

Another example of Harte's use of grand historical contexts is *El jardín filosófico* [*The Philosophical Garden*] (fig. 50). In this sculpture, the lone figure and a

1. Martilux is a kind of industrial paint that adds texture to surfaces. It is made with synthetic resin and highly resistant pigments and is commonly used on engines and safes.

2. The title of this work is an intentional blending of Sebastián Gordín and Miguel Harte's names and thus the title is completely invented and nonsensical. Gordín also used Harte's name in titles, as evidenced in *Instituto oceanográfico Miguel Harte* [*Miguel Harte Oceanographic Institute*].

3. Julio Sánchez, "Miguel Harte," in *Críticos y Pintores* (Buenos Aires: Librería Clásica y Moderna, 1992). http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/cultura/arteargentino/03actualidades/harte/00_actualharte.php, 2.

4. The forty-nine volumes of *La Pinacoteca de los Genios* were produced by Editorial Codex in Argentina during the 1960s under the direction of Dr. Dino Fabbri. Published monthly, each magazine featured a single artist and contained a monograph, an art historical essay, and color reproductions of works by such canonical figures as Pablo Picasso, Albrecht Dürer, and Hieronymus Bosch. The collection was an important source of information for a number of artists from Harte's generation.

single standing tree are the only elements in a surreal and dreary landscape. Set on top of a board with gray Formica veneer, the scene is enclosed in a transparent acrylic pyramid and perched atop legs that take the form of exposed "subterranean" roots of the tree. The starkness of the roots, the drabness of the Formica, and the bleakness of the interior setting give the work a decidedly post-apocalyptic tone. At the center of the landscape, a human/insect hybrid figure bends over a small pond with a whirling vortex. The viewer is prevented from seeing the figure's face. By transforming this Narcissus-like figure into a human/ladybug amalgam, Harte suggests the miserable futility of self-regard in a world that is isolated, otherwise lifeless, and utterly bleak.

Harte's choice of material reflects his ambivalence about the human condition. *El jardín de las delicias* and *El jardín filosófico* are two of a number of his works from the 1990s that have inspired substantial critical debate and interpretation. Some critics have responded to Harte's use of Formica as a kitschy reference to middle-class aspirations while others believe that the artist used it for its "widely accepted connotations (practicality, hygiene, resistance, and comfort)."[6] While the material creates an illusion of rich marble surface in *El jardín de las delicias*, it significantly contributes to the pervasive darkness and mood of *El jardín filosófico*. In *Como una piedra que sueña* [*As a Dreaming Rock*] (fig. 52), the brown and dark green Formica that is applied to the cubic "pedestal" creates an atmospheric effect and seems to envelop the tiny bridge spanning the river. Harte's whimsical use of Formica establishes the dominant visual element of the work, thereby transcending the material's common domestic associations.

Harte's hybrid figures and their unsettling environments are grotesques. While his materials—especially Formica and Matrilux—are traditionally used to "beautify" surfaces, his use of them in his work engenders wonder, discomfort, and a darkness that fluctuates between the humorous and ominous. According to Jorge Glusberg, director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, Harte's work after 1992 is notable for how he "keeps avoiding temptations to seduce [the viewer] and increases the incentive for [their] complicity."[7] Intended to evoke far more than simple visual allure, Harte's art engages the viewer by employing everyday materials to appeal to our emotions while inviting us to his strange, new world.

—Doris Bravo

5. Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) was a North Netherlandish painter famous for his detailed and panoramic triptychs that often depict religious scenes. The precise meaning of many of his works continues to elude viewers and scholars.

6. Elena Oliveras, "Confrontaciones," in ***Harte, Pombo, Suárez III*** (Buenos Aires: Fundación Banco Patricios, 1992). http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/cultura/arteargentino/03actualidades/harte/00_actualharte.php, 1.

7. Jorge Glusberg, "Miguel Harte: Quince años de trayectoria," in Miguel Harte en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2003), 13. Original: ". . . Harte continua eludiendo las tentaciones de la seducción y acrecienta los incentivos de la complicidad."

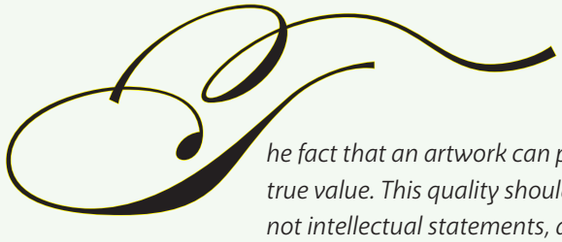
FIG 50 El jardín filosófico [The Philosophical Garden] 1998
Iron, acrylic, epoxy putty, Formica, expanded polyurethane, Vaseline, purpurin, and light

FIG 51 La intrusa [The Intruder] 1998
Steel, glass, epoxy putty, quartz geodes, putty, insects, and light

FIG 52 Como una piedra que sueña
[As a Dreaming Rock] 1997
Formica, epoxy putty, wood, polyester resin, and lacquer

FIG 53 Jardín de las delicias
[The Garden of Delights] 1993
Formica, Martilux, insects, snails, plastic plants, polyester resin, and light

GRACIELA HASPER



he fact that an artwork can provoke an emotional response should not diminish its true value. This quality should be [formally] expressed through constructive forms, not intellectual statements, and processed through [our personal] emotions. Possibly, this is where the relevance of the great constructive tradition lies. Few things are as evident and secretive as the emotional contents of an artwork. Even when emotions cease to be cryptic, their existence does not dissipate. Between discretion and firmness, they make themselves present in the liminal space of our perception.

—Graciela Hasper[1]

Graciela Hasper was born in Buenos Aires in 1966, and though she had received no formal art training, she first exhibited at the Rojas Gallery in 1992 at the age of twenty-eight. She was one of the few female artists of the group and was, in many ways, anomalous to their aesthetic. Her style was clean, simple, and sharp, and committed to conventional painting techniques. She used a traditional orthogonal, a striking contrast to the work of other artists associated with the space who are known for their curvilinear or otherwise unusual forms, ornamentation for its own sake, and an abundance of found or unconventional materials.

Hasper's nonrepresentational work often appears esoteric or even cryptic. She has a special admiration for the early Italian Renaissance painter Giotto and his famous fresco cycle in the Scrovegni Chapel in Florence. While it may at first appear curious, this appreciation is in large part because of the great scale of the commission and the ambition that it reveals.[2] In her estimation, the two years of constant effort required on the part of the artist to complete the cycle speaks of his remarkable dedication. Even more than Giotto's humanistic representations of the figures, for which the artist is best known, Hasper believes that his achievement was to foster a visual style embodying a reawakening of European culture from the confusion of the Middle Ages; she credits him with finding

1. *Graciela Hasper* (Buenos Aires: Galería Ruth Benzacar, 1999). Original: "Esa pura instancia afectiva de la obra no excluye la percepción del trabajo artístico como modélico, pero a condición de que ya no se trate de modelos a ser aprehendidos por medio del intelecto sino de afectos organizados bajo la forma de lo constructivo—y aquí quizás radique la posible vigencia de la gran tradición Constructiva en nuestros días. Pocas cosas son más evidentes y a la vez más secretas que los contenidos afectivos de una obra, y no obstante, no por dejar de ser crípticos dejan de existir, entre la discreción y la firmeza, haciéndose presente en los intersticios de nuestra percepción." Translation by the author.

2. *Graciela Hasper* (Buenos Aires: Galería Ruth Benzacar, 2006).

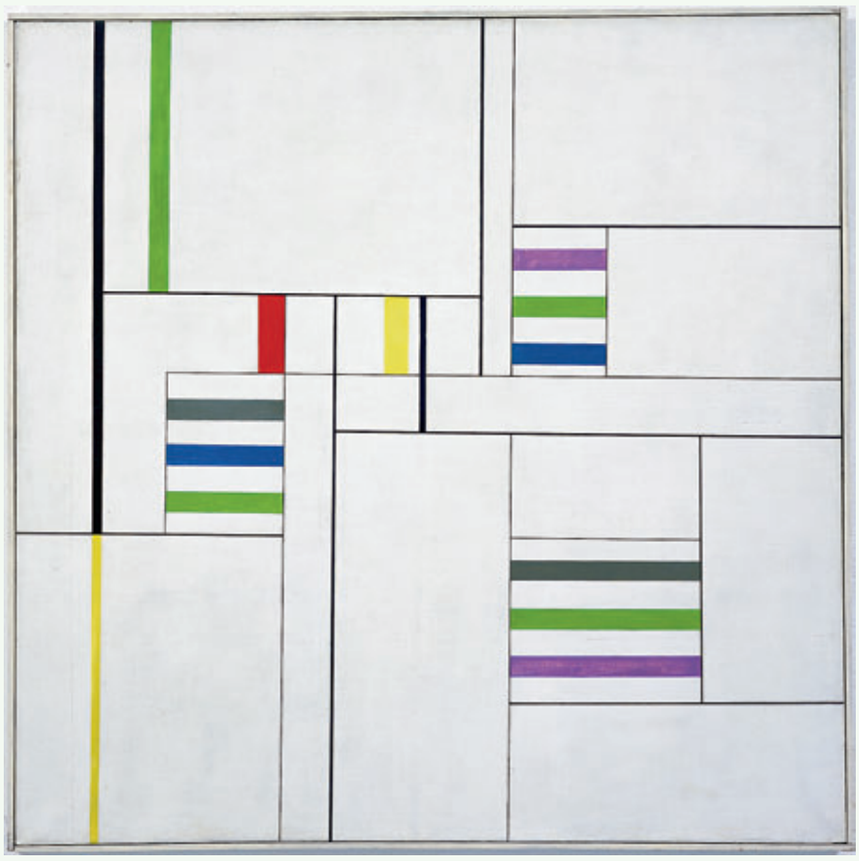


Figure 54 Alfredo Hlito, *Ritmos Cromáticos III* [*Chromatic Rhythms III*], 1949, oil on canvas, Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 1997.67. Photograph by Gregg Stanger. Courtesy of Sonia Henríquez Ureña Vda. deHlito

rational order in chaos via a coherent style of painting. She sees her own art as a contemporary parallel and creates works that function as a rational response to a rapidly changing and increasingly bewildering world.[3]

For Hasper, abstraction is the means by which chaos can be organized. It is an attitude that stems from the ideas of earlier, canonical modern artists like Piet Mondrian, Joaquín Torres-García, and Barnett Newman, all of whom used geometrical forms as a means of referring to rational order within an otherwise disorderly world.[4] It also harkens back to Concrete art, the dominant style during the 1940s in Argentina; for example, *Ritmos Chromaticos III* [*Chromatic Rhythms*] by Alfredo Hlito (fig. 54).[5] In fact, Hasper understands her own work as an extension of the tradition of geometric abstraction. *Untitled* (1998; fig. 56) uses repeated optical patterns of geometric forms in a variety of different colors, not to be whimsical, but rather to show how rational order can apparently supersede visual turmoil.

Hasper used color to create rational structures dominated by repeated geometrical forms. In effect, her colors invite the viewer to project their own associations onto the paintings. In doing so, she again distinguished herself from other artists exhibited at the Rojas Gallery, for example Feliciano Centurión and Miguel Harte, whose work was often autobiographical and narrative. Hasper had little interest in revealing either her personality or her background. Instead she chose to make her art distinct in style and devoid of any recognizable subject matter, thereby liberating viewers from arriving at specific meanings.

—Abigail Winograd

3. Although Hasper makes reference to "a world of confusion" in an abstract way, it is important to remember the oppressive political reality that artists of her generation faced during the 1970s and early 1980s. For further information on this matter, see the introduction to this publication.

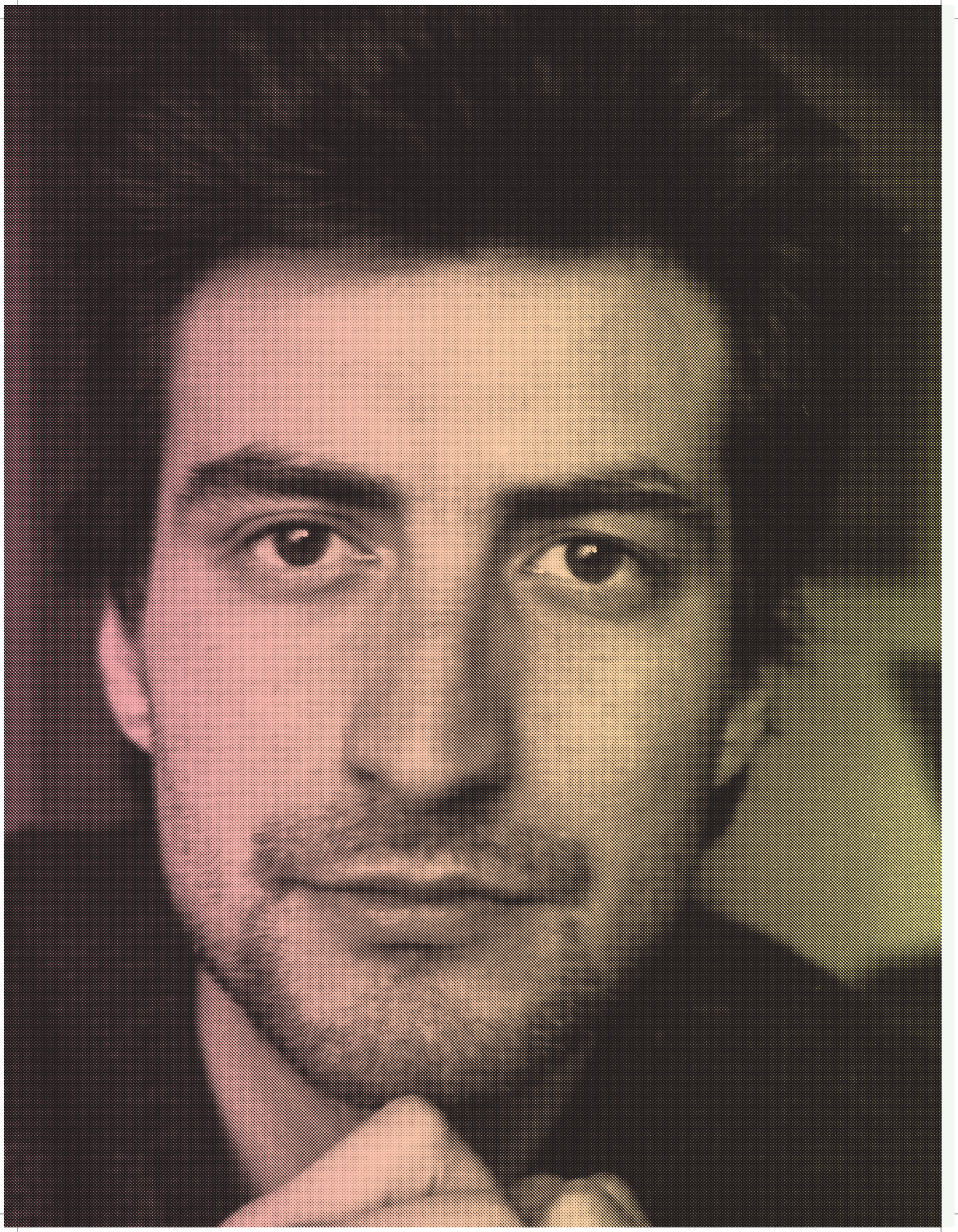
4. Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) was a Dutch artist and theorist associated with the De Stijl movement. His iconic works distilled painting to its most essential elements. Using primary colors and horizontal and vertical lines, he proposed a theoretical approach to art that would eventually lead to a society in which art was not independent from life. Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949) was a seminal figure of the European avant-garde and Latin American Modernism during the early twentieth century. Barnett Newman (1905–1970) was an American Abstract Expressionist. Newman's approach stressed the use of abstraction as the imposition of order on a chaotic universe through purity of form and color.

5. For more information on Concrete art, see the introduction to this publication.

FIG 55 Untitled 1997 Acrylic on canvas

FIG 56 Untitled 1998 Acrylic on canvas

FIG 57 Untitled 1999 Acrylic on canvas



FABIO KACERO

believe that most contemporary art begins with a simple question: What material can I use?

—Fabio Kacero[1]

In the mid-1980s, Fabio Kacero was studying drawing and painting at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón. When an upholstery shop opened near his home in the early 1990s, Kacero soon abandoned his practice of monochromatic painting and began to produce sculptures out of upholstery materials like foam rubber and cushion tufting. In his "furniture-canvases,"[2] such as the work *Untitled* (1994; fig. 58), Kacero used specially designed stickers that he affixed onto the surfaces of cushioned objects to integrate his own graphic design elements, and subsequently wrapped the entire object in transparent plastic. His goal was to elevate his sculptures to a pristine condition in order to:

> *[reach a] state in which objects are outside the stain of use, before they have been touched or before they have been opened. . . . The condition that divides two different ontological states: one, before use; and the other, after use. I wanted my objects to enter the pure category of the former.*[3]

The plastic wrappings of Kacero's "furniture-canvases" are meant to be seen not as temporary protection, but as a fundamental visual component of the object's appearance—as visually appealing skins that simultaneously protect and reveal the colored plastic surfaces underneath. Thus covered, the "furniture-canvases" are preserved in a state of "purity," as if they are brand-new objects or unopened products.

The use of graphic design stickers is recurrent in Kacero's tufted sculptures, and the source of much of his work's mystery. He designed and printed the elements himself while working in a design studio during the 1990s. By affixing

1. Fabio Kacero, "Fabio Kacero," in *El ojo del que mira, Artistas de los noventa*, ed. Victoria Verlichak (Buenos Aires: Fundación PROA, 1998), 151. Original: "Creo que mucho del arte contemporáneo comienza con una simple pregunta, ¿qué material puedo usar?" All translations by the author.

2. In *Kacero*, the Argentine art critic Rafael Cippolini referred to these works as "cuadro-muebles" [furniture-canvases]. "[Kacero constructed] rectangular objects stuffed with pressed Styrofoam, then wrapped them in transparent plastic with four quilted points. A furniture-canvas, that is, a canvas that wants to be tactile, comfortable." Rafael Cippolini, "Dispersiones diferidas," in *Kacero*, ed. María Gainza (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2007), 12; "Deferred Dispersions," 124.

3. Kacero, "Fabio Kacero," 150–51. Original: "Ese estado de los objetos fuera de la mancha del uso, antes de ser tocados o antes de ser abiertos. . . . Esa cosa que dividía lo que serían dos estados ontológicos diferentes: uno, antes del uso, y otro, después del uso. Yo quería que mis objetos entren en la categoría de la pureza de los primeros."

them to the sculptures, he presents us with objects that appear to be industrially made, but are in fact the result of an intricate manual process: each sticker is soaked in water, dried, and stretched to fit the wooden or Styrofoam surface. Only then did Kacero heat and fuse them to the surface of the sculpture. Their subject matter, which ranges from typography to abstract designs, has been a source of much curiosity for Kacero's followers and critics, many of whom have approached him with questions about their meaning. For some, the stickers suggest "fragments of [artists'] biographies pertaining to the periphery of the universal art canon . . . as well as captions . . . scientific diagrams, and [Kacero's] father's notes on homeopathy."[4] The artist, however, insists that the stickers remain hybrid, multivalent, and unfixed in meaning and purpose:

> *They do not pertain to the language of [art] historical abstraction, they relate more to design, they could be logos, but don't quite belong to that category. They could be writings, typographies, but are not these either . . . I like objects to remain in a state of suspension, of detachment, for them to have that quality of being untouched, brand new, unused objects.*[5]

Such ambiguity helps to serve Kacero's preference for multiple interpretations. According to the artist, "my work is not forceful, it does not impose itself. I have the impression that it does not offer a direction, it does not guide you through feelings, my history, [or] my past."[6] He cherishes the anonymity and industrial depersonalization that these materials bring to his work, and he believes they form the basis for the appeal of his art.

While Kacero generally tries to keep his personal views from appearing in his sculptures, one work in particular seems exceptional in this respect: *Omar Schiliro* (fig. 60,) is a small wooden stool with an upholstered velvet cushion. Though it is clear that Kacero found inspiration in furniture design, this piece is unique in its abandonment of industrial materials. An explanation for this shift is its origin:

4. Cippolini, "Deferred Dispersions," 125.

5. Kacero, "Fabio Kacero," 144. Original: "No pertenecen al lenguaje de la abstracción histórica, tienen que ver con el diseño, pueden ser logotipos, pero no alcanzan a serlo. Pueden ser escrituras, tipografías, pero tampoco. . . Me gusta que los objetos estén en un estado de suspensión, de asepsia, que tengan esas categorías de intocados, de objetos nuevos, sin usar."

6. Ibid. Original: ". . .mi obra no es fuerte y no se impone. Me da la impresión que no da una dirección, no te conduce por los sentimientos, por mi historia, mi pasado."

7. For further information, see the essay on Omar Schiliro in this publication.

he made it as a memorial for his fellow artist and dear friend, Omar Schiliro, who died from AIDS-related complications in 1994.[7]

Artists at the Rojas Gallery frequently produced homages for each other. For example, Miguel Harte and Sebastián Gordín often created works with titles containing references to each other's names, inside jokes that served as encoded commentaries. Unlike Harte and Gordín's large-scale homages, Kacero's memorial is small in size and modest in materials. It is not an elaborate puzzle but rather serves as a touching tribute to a deceased friend. In earlier works, Kacero had attached stickers onto his "furniture-canvases" with biographical information about artists he believed were under-recognized. His tombstone concept appears again in *Omar Schiliro*, but in this case the inscription—Omar Schiliro, 1962–1994—is hand-embroidered in gold thread. By honoring his friend as he had artists from the past (e.g., Claude Lorrain, Antonio Pisano, and Richard Dadd), Kacero aimed to ensure a poignant remembrance of Schiliro. By varying his typical use of industrial materials, he created a more intimate work. The small size, velvet surface, cursive gold lettering, and fringed base of the work suggest that Kacero intended a rare glimpse into his personal life, an invocation of longing, tenderness, and admiration and an apt tribute to Schiliro, who explicitly wanted to be remembered as beautiful after his death.

Kacero's endearing approach to *Omar Schiliro* is unique in his oeuvre. Generally his work reads as far more detached. By employing a combination of techniques that included upholstery, graphics, and industrial design, he hoped to enforce his anonymity while generating an elegant ambiguity and compelling enigma in most of the objects he made.

—Doris Bravo

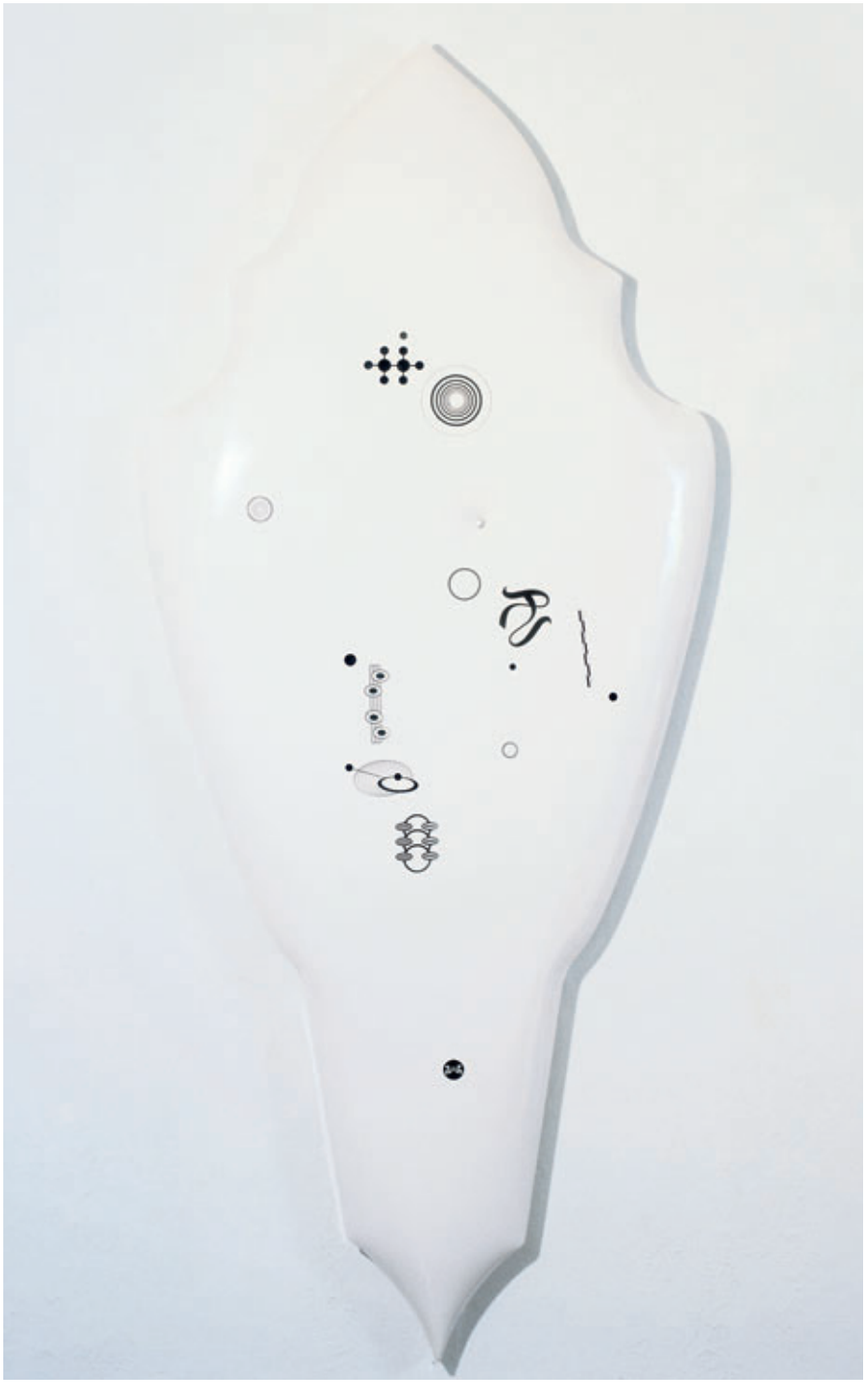


FIG 58 Untitled 1994
Wood, foam rubber, vinyl fabric, stickers, plastic, and PVC

FIG 59 Untitled 1996
Wood, Polifan, foam rubber, stickers, faux leather, and PVC

FIG 60 Omar Schiliro 1994 Wooden stool, foam rubber, decorative fringe, and embroidered velvet

FIG 61 Untitled N.D. Superimposed plastic transparency and light

BENITO LAREN

Benito Laren was a latecomer to the group of artists who exhibited at the Rojas Gallery. He was born in 1962 in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, a city in the industrial corridor of Argentina located almost 150 miles from Buenos Aires. He began his working life as a chemical engineer in a steel plant. It was not until 1985 that he reinvented himself as an artist, a profession he entered without formal training or even much in the way of experience.[1]

Laren's transformation was so extensive that he changed his name from Alberto Juan Baconski to "Benito Laren," a persona he created to become the embodiment of "artistic genius." From an early age he had been obsessed with the idea of fame and celebrity. His pseudonym allowed him to fantasize and pattern his life after two of the most recognizable figures in art history: Andy Warhol and Vincent van Gogh.[2] Those two artists' work and lives were extremely different, but Laren drew upon both. From Warhol he took the conventions and aesthetic of Pop (as well as a penchant for wearing wigs in public). From van Gogh he took a tragic model for his career—Laren's notoriety and celebrity would be achieved posthumously.

During the 1980s, Laren had submitted works to open calls for exhibitions and salons in the cities of Rosario and San Nicolás, but his work was consistently rejected. It was only in 1991, when the Rojas Gallery in Buenos Aires organized an exhibition of his work, that his art finally reached public view. The following year he was fired from his engineering job and used his severance package to pay for a trip to New York City, where he hoped to find the fame that had eluded him in Argentina despite the Rojas Gallery exhibition.[3] Yet success evaded him in New York as well. With the notable exception of *Buscando precios* [*Searching for Prices*] (fig. 63), a work he completed in Argentina and brought with him to New York, much of the art he made both prior to and during his stay in North America has been lost.[4]

Having no success at establishing himself as an international artist, Laren returned to Argentina in 1996 and moved in with his parents. He took a construction job to earn money and continued making art, exhibiting occasionally albeit with little notice. That same year, Gustavo Bruzzone and Miguel Harte—the first an active judge and art collector, the second a working artist—traveled

1. "Benito Laren: visión del arte," Bola de Nieve, http://www.boladenieve.org.ar/en/vision/203#r1.

2. Email conversation between Benito Laren and Andrea Giunta, January 16, 2007.

3. Ibid. The trip was partially financed by architect Osvaldo Giesso.

4. Email conversation between Laren and Giunta. Some of his production during those years was left (without a guardian) and lost in Argentina before Laren traveled to New York. He took other works with him, later leaving them as payment for rent at various apartments in which he lived. *Buscando precios* was the only work that Laren kept as his own, showing it at the Argentine consulate in 1997.

together to San Nicolás to visit Laren. There they discovered that he had begun storing his art in two separate boxes, one marked "to keep" and the other labeled "bad works." Bruzzone insisted that Laren give him the "bad works" (instead of throwing them away as he had planned), and invited him to Buenos Aires as his houseguest. Laren accepted both proposals and stayed at Bruzzone's house for a full eight years before finding his own home in the Argentine capital.[5]

Laren's work is witty, eccentric, grandiose, and often complex. *Buscando precios* was commissioned by a San Nicolás grocery store called *El Tigre* [The Tiger] in 1991. The painting hung there for a year before it was removed—at the request of the store's owner—and transported to New York City, where it ended up at the Argentine consulate in 1997.[6] Its original venue helps to explain the prominence of the tiger within the composition, but the method by which it was made was the artist's own creation. Laren employed a layering technique that utilized the glass surface within the frame as well as a canvas ground onto which he mounted special holographic paper—a kind of shimmering mylar—and applied acrylic paint. He then rendered the tiger alongside consumer goods available in the store, as well as the city hall and main church of San Nicolás. The tiger's stripes are also in acrylic paint on holographic paper but are fixed to the back of a glass pane. Together the layers achieve an effect of great depth, beyond what one-point perspective might otherwise create.

Stradivarius (fig. 64) also makes extensive use of holographic paper and bright, acrylic-based paints, all of which Laren combined inside a curvilinear frame. The

5. Email conversation between Gustavo Bruzzone and Ursula Davila-Villa, April 8, 2010.

6. Ibid. In 2007 it entered the collection of the Blanton Museum of Art as a gift from the artist.

eccentric frame is an allusion to Jorge Gumier Maier's work, a fellow artist and the director of the Rojas Gallery at the time of Laren's first exhibition. Gumier Maier was deeply influenced by the geometric abstract art that prevailed in Argentina during the 1940s and 1950s, an affinity he expressed by rejecting the use of a square frame, paralleling the practice of some Concrete artists. Laren also frequently constructed his own frames. However, unlike his colleague, he chose to carve them heavily and—in imitation of the grandeur and mystique of the weighty scrolled frames associated with more historic paintings—then painted them with painstaking detail using gold and silver. The association with the past was something he deliberately courted, for he hoped his work might someday be seen in the rarified company of the Old Masters.

In some ways, Laren played a curious role among the artists of the Rojas Gallery, perhaps akin to the role that Henri Rousseau played within the Parisian avant-garde during the early decades of the twentieth century. Rousseau—unlike Picasso and his counterparts—was self-taught, a naïf with an innocent belief in his own abilities and his place in history. Similarly, Laren emerged independently from his contemporaries and pursued his own path with unshakable faith in his own destiny. Whether his work will become as important as Rousseau's remains to be seen, but there is little doubt that he earned both the respect of his Argentine contemporaries and the admiration of a younger generation of artists.

—Abigail Winograd

FIG 62 A la hora señalada [High Noon] 1996 Acrylic and holographic paper under glass, and tire

FIG 63 Buscando precios [Searching for Prices] 1991 Holographic paper, mirror, and acrylic on glass

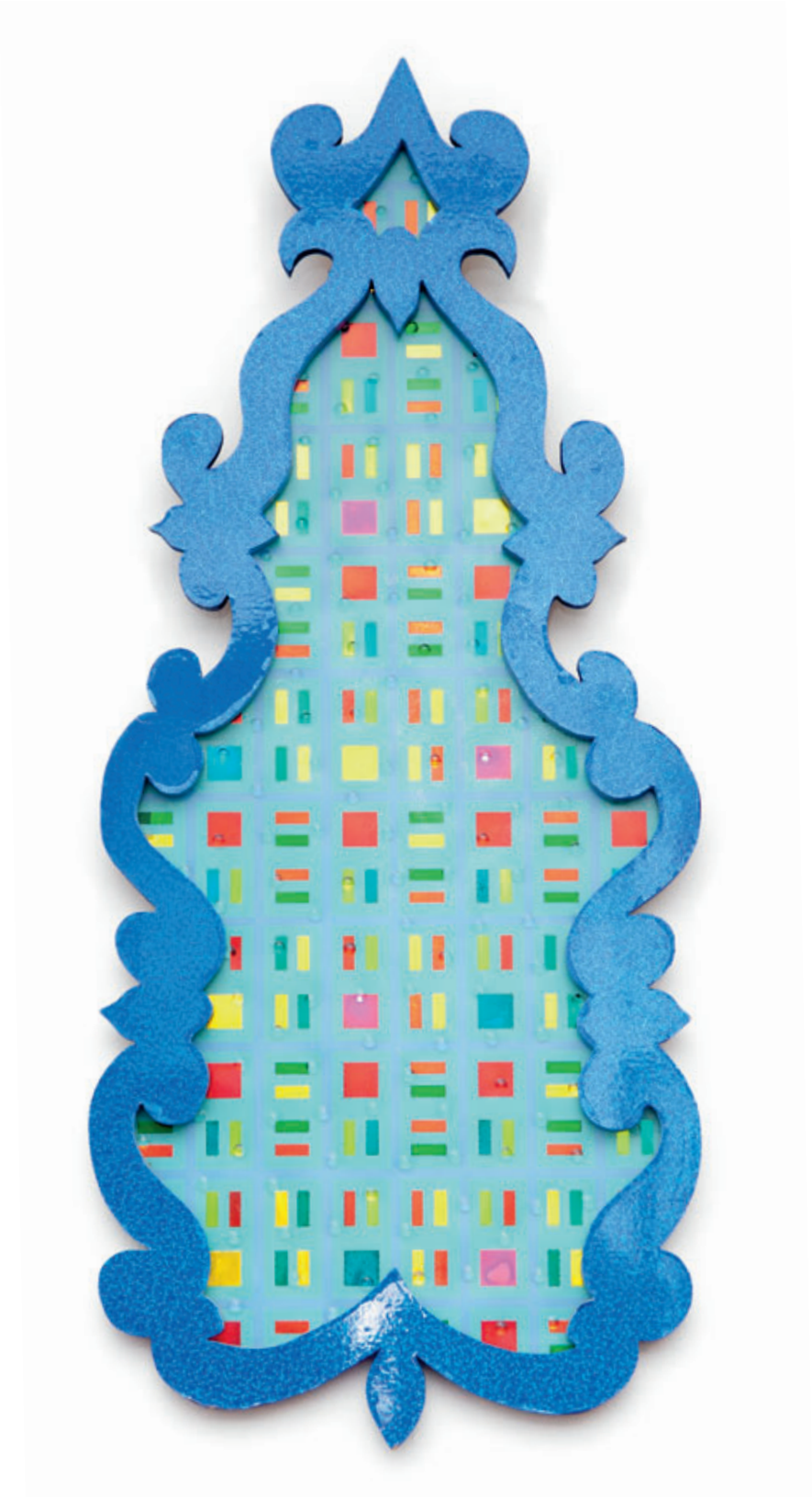


FIG 64 Stradivarius 1998 Acrylic, glass, and cut panel

FIG 65 Visita guiada [Guided Visit] 1996 Holographic paper, mirror, and acrylic on glass

ALFREDO LONDAIBERE

Beauty does not make itself present as something fixed, closed, or absolute; rather it renovates, is restorative and dynamic.

—Alfredo Londaibere[1]

Art and spiritualism have frequently been interconnected throughout history. For Alfredo Londaibere, a strong, personal notion of the divine stands at the core of his work. This sense of spirituality leads him to believe in the potential to gain personal enlightenment through artistic expression and in painting's potential to create beauty. As he once stated, "My path and aim is to merge tradition with personal expression, [to enable] a possibility to generate beauty and nurture the development of spirit."[2] Londaibere's words reflect the inspiration he finds in inner fulfillment, one of art's classical sources, and his belief in painting's ability to transcend tradition in order to respond to the constantly changing world.

Londaibere's work is infused with influences from European, American, and Argentine art history.[3] He sees himself as part of a distinctive Argentine artistic tradition and finds stylistic and intellectual inspiration in the work of such artists as Luis Felipe Noé, Marcia Schvartz, and Marcelo Pombo.[4] In particular, Noé's 1965 groundbreaking theoretical essay *Antiestética* [*Anti-aesthetic*][5] provided Londaibere with a strong theoretical framework regarding the organizing principles of painting. From Noe's work Londaibere derived an understanding for painting as a boundless medium to express a full range of ideas and emotions. Turning to North American and European art history, Londaibere was impacted by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Jean Dubuffet.[6] The work of these artists introduced the concept of painting as a language that could challenge traditional notions of beauty in order to represent inner emotion as a form of sensual pleasure and visual delight. Perhaps more than any other influences, most of Londaibere's assemblages from the 1990s bear the stamp of American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol.[7] Like Rauschenberg, Londaibere worked with found materials to create sculptural works in which ordinary objects derive new meanings from the fresh contexts in which the artist has placed them. And like Warhol, Londaibere is interested in the graphic qualities inherent in the labels of

1. Alfredo Londaibere, artist statement, http://www.londaibere.com/textos/textos03.html#artista. Original: "Lo bello no aparece como algo estable, cerrado, completo sino como lo reformulable, renovable, dinámico." All translations by the author.

2. Ibid. Original: "El vehículo y el objetivo es el hacer vinculado entre la tradición, la necesidad expresiva personal, la posibilidad de generar belleza y obtener desarrollo espiritual."

3. An important source of information for a number of artists from Londaibere's generation were the forty-nine volumes of ***La Pinacoteca de los Genios,*** a monthly magazine that featured a single artist and contained a monograph, an art historical essay, and color reproductions of works by canonical figures.

4. Luis Felipe Noé (b. 1933) is an influential Argentine artist who is known for his writings and work as part of the avant-garde New-Figuration movement (for more information, see the introduction). Marcia Schvartz (b. 1955) is an Argentine artist who is known for her figurative painting that focuses on feminist and social themes. For information on Marcelo Pombo, see the essay on his work in this publication.

5. In 1965, Noé published his groundbreaking theoretical study ***Antiestética,*** in which he proposed chaos as the organizing principle of life and art. See: Luis Felipe Noé, ***Antiestética*** (Buenos Aires, Arg.: Ediciones Van Riel, 1965), and Andrea Giunta, ***Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics*** (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007).

Figure 66 Andy Warhol, *Onion Soup,* from *Campbell's Soup I,* 1968, Five-color screenprint, Feldman & Schnellman 47, 18/250. Gift of Charles and Dorothy Clark, G1976.5.56 Photograph by Rick Hall. © 2010 The Andy Warhol Foundation/ARS, New York/ Trademarks, Campbell Soup Company. All rights reserved

consumer products. What distinguishes Londaibere's work from that of his North American predecessors is his impulse to embellish and decorate these graphics and ordinary products. Rather than simply representing a default to ornamentation, this inclination in his work allows him to transform commonplace objects into lyrical, beautiful sculpture.

Londaibere was raised in both cosmopolitan Buenos Aires and in the Argentine countryside; his experience with the latter nurtured an appreciation for nature and its potential to foster feelings of peace and tranquility.[8] The majority of his works from the 1990s reflect the dual experience of his childhood surroundings, making use of themes and materials from across urban and rural spheres. His principal theme never diverged from nature, nor did his aim vary from the goal of reaching spiritual realization through art. As he once said:

> *I create with aesthetic pleasure, with visual enjoyment, with the conviction that the process (of production and contemplation) is a form of harmony and spiritual fulfillment.*[9]

Londaibere's words articulate his belief in his own existence as intrinsic to the unity between nature and the human spirit. In an assemblage from 1991 (fig. 67), he renders a darkened landscape with bare trees set against a twilight sky, reflecting the tranquility of a countryside afternoon. The branches, painted in black, show glimmers of light through red tones, suggesting a setting sun. While the scene is both mysterious and peaceful, a paper cutout of a red cartoon telephone, smiling and affixed slightly off-center, infuses the composition with a playful and carefree mood. The contrast between the comical phone and the quiet, desolate landscape it is set against exemplifies Londaibere's desire to integrate the serenity and calm he found in the countryside with the vibrancy and energy he experienced in the city.

6. Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) was an American artist known for his late 1970s and 1980s graffiti work in New York City, as well as expressionist painting and collages. Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) was an expressionist French artist known for challenging traditional notions of beauty and for establishing an aesthetic he believed to be more authentic and humanistic.

7. Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) was a prominent American artist who became well known during the 1950s for his paintings and sculptures that featured non-traditional materials and objects in innovative ways. Andy Warhol (1928–1987) was an influential American artist, filmmaker, and a leading figure in the visual art movement known as Pop art.

8. Artist statement. In his online statement he expressed: "As a child, I lived year-round between the introspection of Buenos Aires, with its culture; and during summertime at the countryside where I recuperated a sensation of merging with the landscape, wild, and natural."

9. Alfredo Londaibere, *Szene Buenos Aires* (Freiburg, Germany: Galería Ruta Correa, 1999). Republished at http://www.macromuseo.org.ar/coleccion/artista/l/londaibere_alfredo.html. Original: "Hago con goce estético, con disfrute de lo visual con la convicción que ese proceso (del hacer y la contemplación) implica armonización y desarrollo espiritual."

Londaibere's compositions are generally distinguished by their lighthearted themes, lively colors, and use of ordinary materials. Like fellow Rojas artists, he thought objects of common circulation in Argentina were beautiful and fascinating. In his case, rather than embellishing disposed containers (like Marcelo Pombo), Londaibere incorporated graphic elements from items such as soda cans into larger compositions. His assemblages from 1994 (figs. 69 and 70) are emblematic of this tendency. In these pieces he depicts a marsh setting with blue flowers whose petals are made from flattened Quilmes beer cans.[10] While the theme is nature, the presence of a distinguishable commercial product calls to mind the beer manufacturer's marketing advertisements, which are pervasive in Buenos Aires. Londaibere's assemblage from 1995 (fig. 68) again presents the artist's use of commercial products as decoration. Here he constructs a composition featuring tree branches with birds' nests sitting at the tips of the limbs. While the bright yellow sky and tree are depicted in a cartoonlike style, a distinctive set of flattened red Coca-Cola cans forms the nests. To add to the sculptural quality of this work, Londaibere affixed robin's egg blue marbles for the eggs.

The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer once wrote: "The experience of beauty, in particular beauty in art, is to elicit [the existence] of a complete possible order."[11] In this light, Londaibere's desire to represent the fullness of life as experienced through nature, beauty, and spirituality embodies what Gadamer defines as the "experience of beauty." By turning to childhood memories of natural and urban settings and finding beauty in ordinary materials, Londaibere aimed to share with others art's power to enhance the spirit through visual delight.

—Ursula Davila-Villa

10. Quilmes is the most consumed beer brand in Argentina; the can's sky-blue and white colors reference Argentina's flag.

11. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *La Actualidad De Lo Bello* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Paidós, 1977), 40. Original: "[La] experiencia de lo bello y, en particular, de lo bello en el arte, es la evocación de un orden íntegro posible[.]"

FIG 67 Untitled 1991 Acrylic and paper cut-out on canvas

FIG 68 Untitled 1995 Enamel-collage on wood

FIG 69 Untitled 1994 Enamel-collage on wood

FIG 70 Untitled 1994 Enamel-collage on wood

MARCELO POMBO

Marcelo Pombo was the first artist associated with the Rojas Gallery to achieve international recognition. He was born in 1959 and recalls his childhood, which was entirely circumscribed by political oppression, as a period of melancholy and darkness.[1] At the start of the Falklands War in 1982,[2] he left Argentina to live in Brazil. After his arrival in the capital, São Paulo, the collector and Surrealist Brazilian poet Péricles Prade invited him to live at his house as a guest. Prade commissioned Pombo to illustrate his writing and also introduced him to the literary work of Jorge Luis Borges. Reading Borges transformed Pombo's understanding of the relation between art and life. The writer's work, which combined elements of fantasy and intellectual gamesmanship with reality, showed Pombo that art need not reflect life.[3]

The 1980s were important years for Pombo. Upon returning to Argentina in 1984, he first made contact with Jorge Gumier Maier, who at the time was writing a column about gay culture in Buenos Aires for the magazine *El Porteño*. Gumier Maier was also an active member of the gay rights organization Grupo de Acción Gay (Gay Action Group, GAG).[4] Pombo had always felt like an outsider because of his homosexuality. His relationship with Gumier Maier and GAG provided him with a sense of community and social acceptance. It would also lead to his association with the Rojas Gallery and his first solo exhibition at the space in 1989.[5]

During the late 1980s, Pombo began working as an art instructor for mentally impaired children living in underprivileged neighborhoods, an occupation that inspired him both emotionally and artistically. He felt a kinship with the children, and he was touched by their open acceptance of him. Moreover, he was moved by—and related to—the poverty of the neighborhoods in which he worked. At the time he was struggling to make a living and was unable to afford materials for making his art. He began collecting items leftover from the day's classes to use in his own work. Many of his pieces from this period are constructed of found materials, invoking his difficult financial situation and the utter austerity of the communities in which he lived and worked. Examples include

1. Inés Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," in *Pombo*, ed. María Gainza (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2006), 131. For more information on the political landscape of Buenos Aires during Pombo's childhood and teenage years and those of his generation, see the introduction to this publication.

2. The Falklands War (*Guerra de las Malvinas*) was fought between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands (*Islas Malvinas*) in 1982. It lasted eventy-two days, ending with Argentina's surrender.

3. Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," 127, 129.

4. Gay rights movements did not fully emerge in Latin America until the mid-1980s. GAG fought for legal acknowledgment and government representation of homosexuals. The organization also actively published literature to raise awareness in Argentina about the gay community.

5. Elena Oliveras, "Marcelo Pombo: The Sublime and the Banal," *ArtNexus* 62 (October–December 2006): 66.

Figure 71 Antonio Berni, *La familia de Juanito Laguna* [*The Family of Juanito Laguna*], 1960, Collage on wood

Vitreaux de San Francisco Solano [*Stained Glass from San Francisco Solano*] (fig. 23) and *Navidad en San Francisco Solano* [*Christmas in San Francisco Solano*] (fig. 72).

Pombo was not the first artist to address issues of deep poverty in Argentina. Antonio Berni had ruminated on the predicaments of the urban poor years earlier.[6] During the 1960s, Berni invented a character named "Juanito Laguna" (see fig. 71), a boy who represented children living in the slums of Buenos Aires. Berni had used found objects (as Pombo did in his work years later) to depict the boy's life in his work. However, the two artists' works are quite different in that Berni used figuration to critique poverty, whereas Pombo focused on the beauty found in an otherwise harsh and downtrodden environment to reject the idea that poverty is entirely ugly and that the language of beauty belongs solely to the rich.[7] Furthermore, Pombo saw aesthetic pleasures as providing a refuge from the daily struggles of the poor.[8]

Like the other artists associated with the Rojas Gallery, Pombo integrated objects and products from daily life into his visual vocabulary. In *Navidad en San Francisco Solano* and *Cepita naranja* [*Orange Cepita*] (fig. 20), empty detergent and orange juice cardboard boxes serve as the foundations—a reliance on ordinary materials that echoes the work of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, two artists with whom Pombo became familiar early in his career.[9] To the "ready-made" (found objects) and the critical strategies of Pop artists, he added his uncanny flair for embellishment. Earlier artists like Warhol had shown that a reproduction of a manufactured object, for example, Brillo boxes (see fig. 22), could be elevated to the status of works of art. Pombo added the idea that similar objects could be made even *more* beautiful through ornamentation,[10] a flourish that he carried out by decorating in ways that mitigated the functionality of the objects with a touch of whimsy and frivolity. In response to the rise of

6. Antonio Berni (1905–1981), one of Argentina's most popular and prolific artists, had a career that spanned sixty years and incorporated Surrealism, social realism, and Pop art to address class issues.

7. Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," 138–39.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid, 129.

post-Duchampian movements like neo-Conceptualism, Pombo felt strongly that art should be about formal qualities rather than ideas.[11]

During the 1990s, Pombo remained committed to this ornamental aesthetic, an approach most visible in works like *El niño mariposa* [*The Butterfly Boy*] (fig. 73) and *Cae la noche sobre el río* [*Night Falls on the River*] (fig. 74). During this period Pombo's work began to be described—usually disparagingly—as "*arte* light,"[12] as were the works of other artists associated with the Rojas Gallery. When asked about the term in an interview, he responded in a positive way:

> *We didn't have any vocation for being underground [. . .] I think that many of us had a desire to gain access to a better life, a better world, and to try to do work that would reflect that. This is definitely what light is: aspiring to something better.*[13]

As the years passed, Pombo stopped working with found objects. Instead he began to focus on an obsessive painting technique. As in *Cae la noche sobre el río*, the artist built up the surface of his canvases with boldly colored dreamscapes of concentric circles of enamel paint dots carefully applied on top of each other. The effect is a kind of postmodern version of late-nineteenth-century French neo-Impressionist works, such as those by Georges Seurat.

While his subject matter often drew from his personal past as it related to the history of Argentina's onerous and lingering political wounds of the previous decades, he also had a deep desire to overcome his resulting childhood alienation.[14] He created a unique style that was both expressive and eccentric. Pombo embraced beauty in the form of ornamentation, decoration, and embellishment, in the belief that those principles more accurately reflected the true role of his art: to generate powerful and intimate aesthetic encounters in the service of visual delight.

—Abigail Winograd

10. Marcelo E. Pacheco, "Marcelo Pombo's Beauties," in ***Pombo***, ed. María Gainza (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2006), 144–47.

11. Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," 135.

12. For more information on the term "***arte*** light," see Inés Katzenstein's essays in this volume.

13. Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," 135–36.

14. In the essay "Pombo's Secrets," Pombo explained to Katzenstein how his sense of alienation was in part the result of his sexual orientation: "When I began to work at special schools I began to fall in love with that world. I felt I could identify with the mentally handicapped because the truth was that I didn't feel like a brave gay who could face things well." (Ibid., 131).

FIG 72 Navidad en San Francisco Solano [Christmas in San Francisco Solano] 1991 Cardboard, nylon, and synthetic enamel on wood

FIG 73 El niño mariposa [The Butterfly Boy] 1996 Enamel on wood

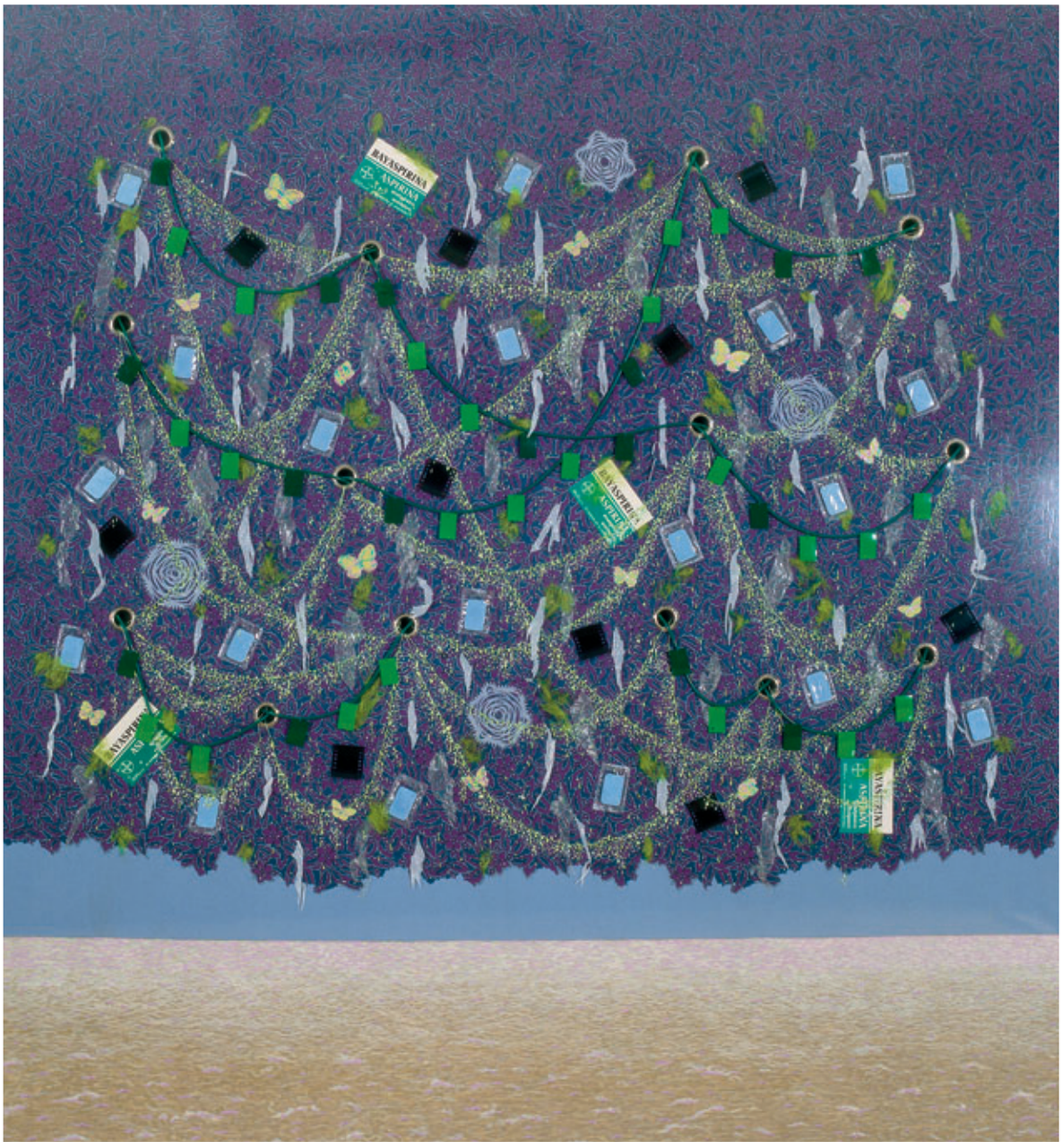


FIG 74 Cae la noche sobre el río [Night Falls on the River] 1996
Appliqués, nylon, and acrylic on stamped canvas

CRISTINA SCHIAVI

Cristina Schiavi was born in 1954 in Buenos Aires. Trained as an architect, she worked actively for the leftist opposition during the period leading up to the 1976 coup-de-état that established a military dictatorship in Argentina. She never received formal artistic training, but she attended sporadic art classes and worked as an assistant for various artists in Buenos Aires. In the 1970s and 1980s, while Schiavi was a practicing interior designer, she was drawn to making sculpture. Her attention to formal issues—color, construction, ambient space, and furnishings—reflects both her architectural training and her professional experience.

Like many of her contemporaries, Schiavi's work stems from a fascination with the textural qualities of materials. Jorge Gumier Maier and Benito Laren built their own frames, Sebastian Gordín and Omar Schiliro handcrafted heavily detailed and ornamental objects, and Schiavi created installations from a variety of materials assembled to house various sculptural objects. Like many of her peers, Schiavi also made art that relied upon readily available consumer products. During the 1990s, her sculptures used inexpensively made plasticized dolls. For example, *Te invito* [*I Invite You*] (fig. 76) is composed of the kind of small, cheaply made stuffed animals that one might win at an amusement park or buy from a vending machine. Such dolls, bearing labels with short messages like "I love you" or "I miss you," were especially popular in Buenos Aires during the 1980s. Schiavi was fascinated with them precisely for their flaws: their coarse texture, gloomy appearance, and poor construction.[1] The dolls' synthetic fur was quick to collect dirt and became difficult to clean. Their unclosing plastic eyes were glued to the surface in a haphazard manner. In *Te invito*, Schiavi utilizes a multilevel, enameled white stand to arrange the dolls in four tiers. In the original installation, Schiavi positioned the stand on top of a table covered in blue fabric that she had placed in a room decorated with balloons and streamers designed to evoke a child's birthday party. Though the environment was clearly not an invocation of a festive celebration of happy childhood memories, it played against those memories to yield a somewhat morose sensation, with its sagging streamers and mostly deflated balloons languishing on the floor, the shabby and vapidly smiling dolls occupying the center, like an abject birthday cake.[2]

1. Email conversation between Cristina Schiavi and Ursula Davila-Villa, June 1, 2010.

2. Cristina Schiavi, interview with Ursula Davila-Villa, June 28, 2010.

In *Te quiero* [*I Love You*] (fig. 75), Schiavi arranged a collection of plush red dolls in six horizontal rows atop a leather-lined piece of furniture. The dolls seem to stare at the viewer with their huge, lidless eyes, smiling and bearing their little love-message labels. The monochromatic red gives the assemblage a unified yet monolithic physical presence. The dolls form an overwhelming chorus of cloyingly "affectionate" messages for the viewer, an effect augmented by the presence of a mechanical parrot that repeats the same unrelenting declaration of love.[3] The sculpture overtly undermines the purported messages of the dolls—they are neither "loving" nor are they "cute." The large scale of Schiavi's work reveals a nostalgia for the locally produced goods that were popular in the pre-global culture of 1980s Argentina.

After decades of deprivation, the neoliberal reforms undertaken during Carlos Saúl Menem's administration opened the country to a flood of new products and services, and a new form (and volume) of consumerism appeared almost immediately. To Menem, this transformation was a way of shepherding the country into the twenty-first century; however, it was also a quick and somewhat facile way of keeping his constituents, who had recently experienced an impenetrable and draconian government, "happily" distracted. By drawing attention to the glut of cheaply produced and readily available products like the ones she used in her work, Schiavi documented some of the societal shifts and dramatic cultural changes that were taking place in Argentina.

Schiavi had been ruminating on the meaning of Menem's reforms almost from the very start. In fact, she may have been the only Rojas Gallery artist to openly address the new, more materialistic life of post-dictatorial Argentina, even if her true message remains unambiguous. Her installations questioned the real impact of the consumer culture by highlighting the ways in which it transformed the country's values, undermining notions of material quality while providing a free forum for a caustic critique of packaged sentimentality. The locally made dolls she convened predated the economic changes of the 1990s. The artist's selection of these items disclosed a market-driven nostalgia for an older Argentina, at a time before global commerce pushed local production aside.

Much of Schiavi's work follows *Te invito* in its engagement with the past, especially through the objects and spaces inhabited or experienced by children. Her choice of these elements and ideas was perhaps autobiographical, but it also reflected a growing uneasiness about a more general loss of innocence that she believed accompanied the country's precipitous dash toward economic progress. Political art was not new to Argentina; in fact, it had been prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike her predecessors, Schiavi eschewed making didactic political statements, yet she deeply embedded her personal interpretations, questions, and expressions throughout the body of her work. Neither rejecting Argentina's material culture, nor embracing it fully, she presented it as possessing its own kind of vernacular beauty.

—Abigail Winograd

3. In its original format, *Te quiero* was also conceived as an installation that occupied not just one but three rooms.

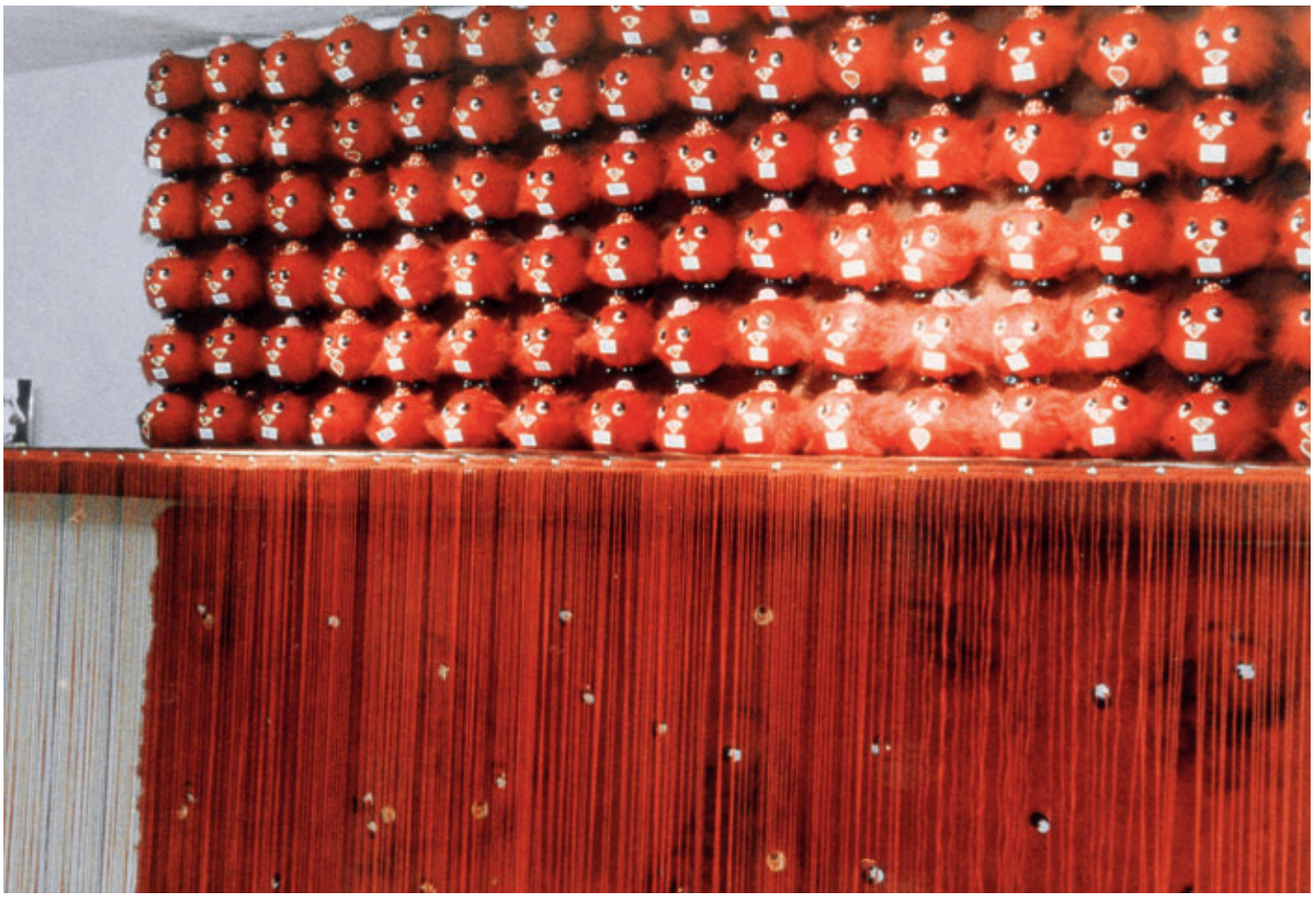
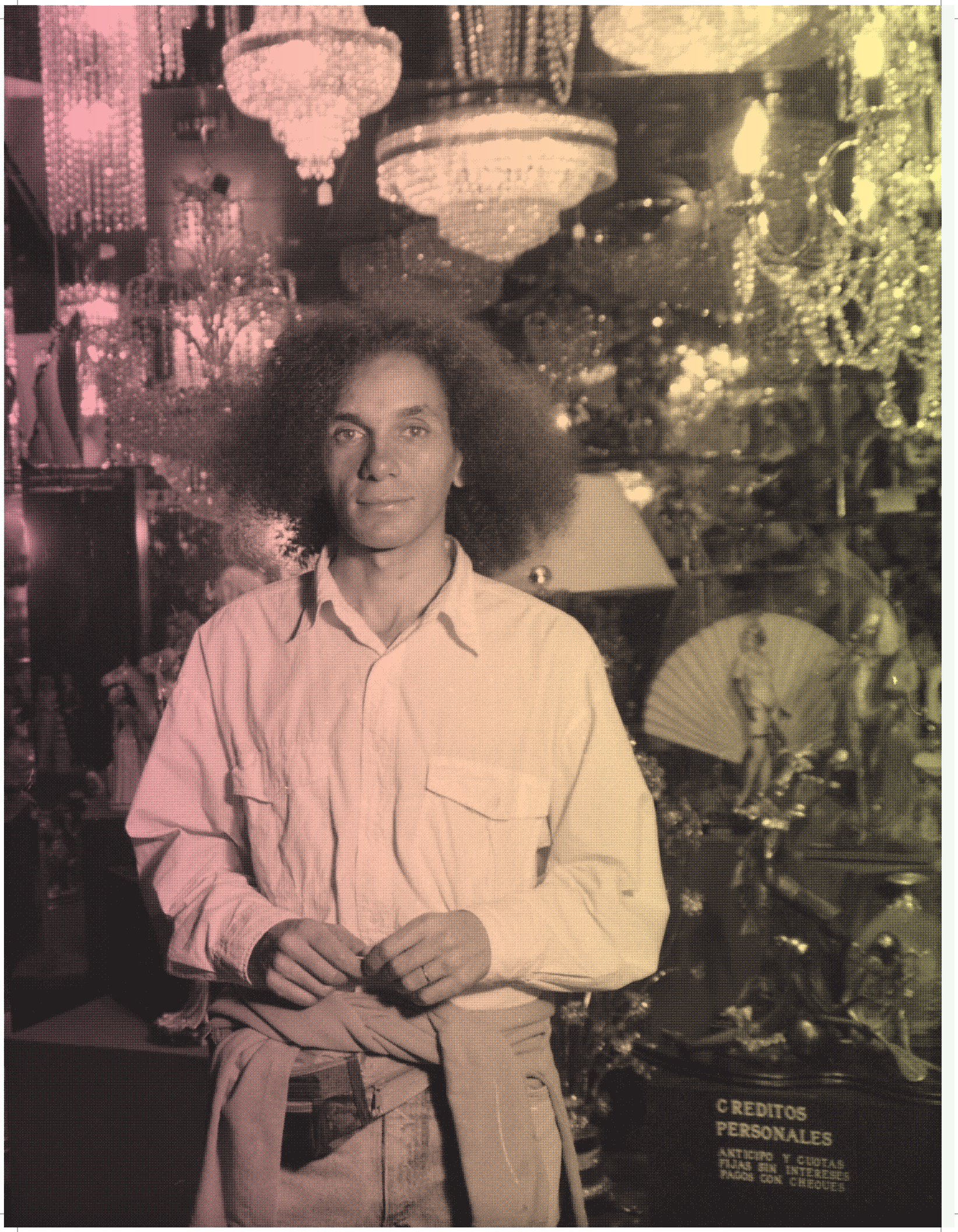


FIG 75 Te quiero [I Love You] 1993 Mixed media (diverse plastic and synthetic materials)

FIG 76 Te invito [I Invite You] 1992 Mixed media (diverse plastic and synthetic materials

FIG 77 Cinta rosa [Pink Ribbon] 1997 Zinc and enamel


CREDITOS
PERSONALES
ANTICIPO Y CUOTAS
FIJAS SIN INTERESES
PAGOS CON CHEQUES

OMAR SCHILIRO

Omar Schiliro was born in Buenos Aires in 1962 and died there in 1994. He began his professional career as a jewelry designer, an activity he pursued until he was diagnosed with AIDS in 1992. This turning point led him to begin making his art. According to Marcelo Pombo, his dear friend and artistic peer, Schiliro turned to art as a kind of therapy, a way of coming to terms with the implications of his condition.[1] His work consisted of sculptural objects built out of inexpensive, mass-produced items he could find in a supermarket or an outdoor bazaar. He transformed the found objects into larger-than-life replicas of luxury goods, rendering them in gaudy colors and lavish decorative detailing.

Relying on the skills he had gained during his years as a jewelry designer, Schiliro combined elements of popular culture and kitsch to create objects that engage the senses. He transformed ordinary items purchased at flea markets into sculptural, childlike fantasies of excess and luxury, enabling a kind of metamorphosis of the quotidian into the extraordinary. It was Schiliro's work, perhaps more than that of any other artist associated with the Rojas Gallery, that inspired the art critic Jorge López Anaya to dub the group's production "*arte* light."[2] Although not initially intended to be pejorative, López Anaya's remark noted a relative lack of intellectual substance in the works, describing them as "coffee without caffeine."[3] He went on to describe the decorative aesthetic of the art associated with the Rojas Gallery more generally as a possible response to larger societal shifts toward free market capitalism in Argentina.[4] Yet, Schiliro was deliberate and unapologetic in his embrace of ornamentation as a tool for artistic creation. Moreover and perhaps because he was a jewelry designer, many of his sculptures are functional as well as decorative. For example, a number of his works, among them *Batato te entiendo* [*Batato I Understand You*] (fig. 78), incorporate lighting elements that allow them to function as lamps.

Indeed, Schiliro's work exudes joy through bright colors and playful forms. Jorge Gumier Maier—Schiliro's longtime partner and the director of the Rojas Gallery—described these qualities as an outpouring of anguish over the

1. The AIDS pandemic swept through Argentina and the rest of Latin America during the 1990s, devastating the gay community in Buenos Aires and elsewhere. Inés Katzenstein, "Pombo's Secrets," in *Pombo*, ed. María Gainza (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2006), 129.

2. Jorge López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra," *Diario La Nación*, August 1, 1992.

3. After López Anaya suggested the term "*arte* light," it soon turned into a negative label. For further information on the term, see Inés Katzenstein's essay in this volume.

4. López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra."

ramifications of his fatal diagnosis. In discussing Schiliro's work, Gumier Maier wrote of the artist's desire to create work that transforms reality into fantasy, and vice-versa:

> *Without academic studies, he worked to create a parallel universe. Small paradises; the Ital park,*[5] *the bazaars, the film* Barbarella *or* The Thief of Baghdad, *the famous corner with all the lights at Suipacha and Córdoba were, for him, the fragments [and] beginnings of a brand-new world of dreams, filled with games, fantasies, sparkles, nonexistent poverty, and everything.*[6]

These references to films, multicolored lights, and the amusement park point to whimsical associations from Schiliro's childhood memories. The carousel, a popular feature of the Ital Park, seems to have been a particularly powerful influence on the artist. His work's circular stylistic gestures and multicolored lights call to mind the motion and visual sensations created by a merry-go-round, and the scale, profusion of color, and bejeweled surfaces that characterize Schiliro's work are redolent of carnivals.

To the artist, the creation of a sensorial superabundance was an act of catharsis, an attempt to grapple with mortality in the face of his own impending death. The works testify to his belief in the power of beauty, conceived primarily as decoration and ornamentation, to provide solace. Moreover, he believed that such an approach conveyed an almost spiritual aspect. In the year before he died, he gave an interview to the Argentine magazine *Espacio del arte* in which he argued that unlike Conceptual art, which promised philosophical solutions, beauty in the form of decoration contained no hidden agendas and was therefore "untainted" and "pure."[7]

Like other artists from the Rojas Gallery group, Schiliro thought that aesthetic pleasure had a healing power. In his specific case, this power offered only a respite from the specter of death, not simply a refuge from the ravages of poverty. "I work with inner beauty,"[8] he once said, "which is what stems from within." He continued:

> *In other words, what seems superficial and plastic is something from within, even though it might seem frivolous and shallow. I work from those events that have happened to me [personally], and to me with others, and I highlight [these events] through beauty. And I want [the work] to be read through pleasure, joy, [and] beauty. We all know a general code for beauty. I want to communicate it well, [but] with a twist.*

Given Schiliro's knowledge that his own death was imminent, such a statement linking apparently frivolous or superficial beauty with inner beauty takes on a special profundity.

—Abigail Winograd

5. Ital Park, which was home to roller coasters, Ferris wheels, and other assorted amusement park attractions, opened in 1960 and closed in 1989. It was extremely popular among Buenos Aires residents.

6. Jorge Gumier Maier, quoted at http://www.kulturburg.com.ar/sembrar_la_memoria/schiliro.htm. Original: "Sin estudios académicos, trabajaba creando un universo paralelo. Los pequeños paraísos; el Ital park, los bazares, películas como ***Barbarella*** o ***El ladrón de Bagdad,*** la famosa esquina de las luces de Suipacha y Córdoba, eran para él los fragmentos, indicios, de un mundo soñado repleto de juegos, fantasias y brillos, donde no había pobreza, donde era 'todo a estrenar.'" All translations by the author.

7. Silvana Curti, "Jorge Gumier Maier y Omar Schiliro," ***Espacio del arte*** 1, no. 2 (1993): 18–21.

8. Ibid. Original: "Trabajo con la belleza interna, que es lo que sale de adentro hacia fuera. O sea, que lo que parece superficial y de plástico, es algo interior, aunque parezca frívolo y superficial. Trabajo desde cosas que me pasan a mí y a mí con la gente, y lo acentúo con la belleza. Y quiero que se lea con placer, con gusto, con belleza. Lo que todos conocemos, es un código general que marca la belleza. Lo quiero transmitir bien, con un bucle."

FIG 78 Batato te entiendo [Batato I Understand You] 1993 Plastic and glass elements with light

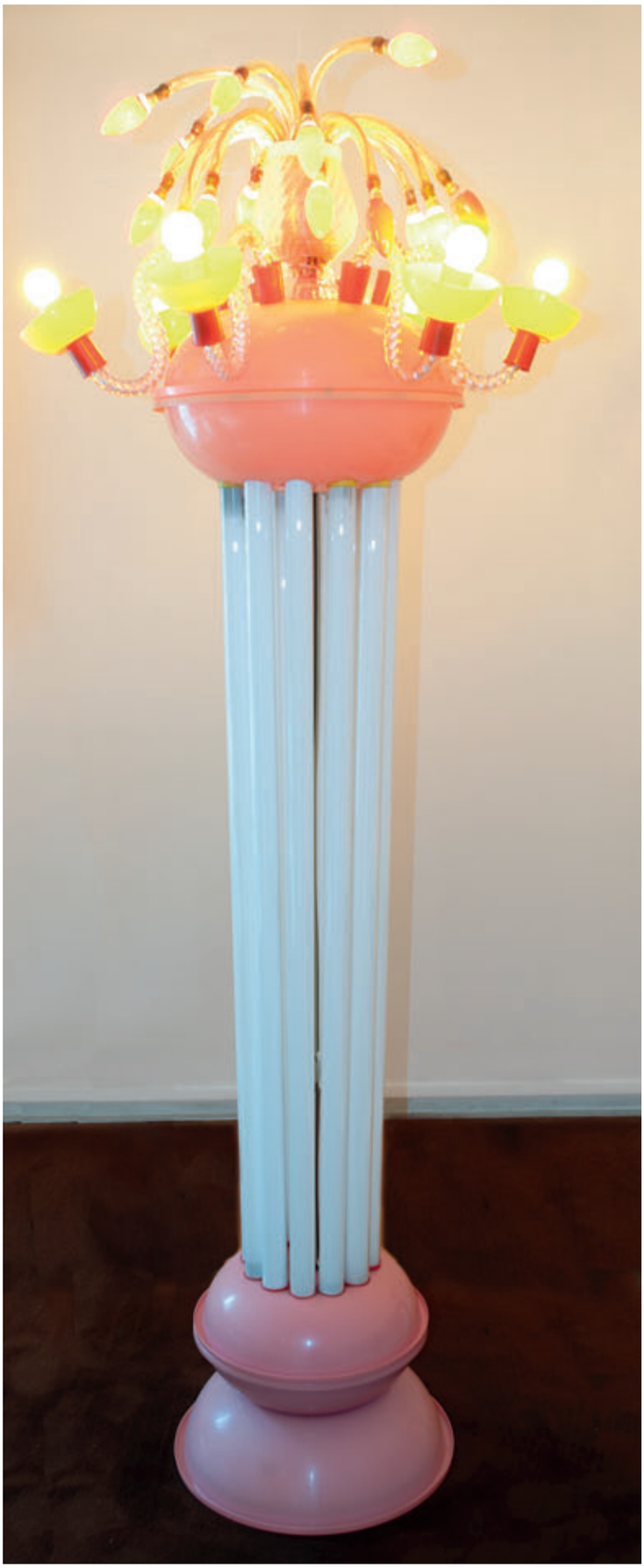


FIG 79 Untitled 1991 Plastic and glass elements with light

FIG 80 Untitled 1991 Plastic and glass elements with light

The 1990s in Buenos Aires

THE ROJAS GALLERY

In *La Hoja del Rojas,* the monthly newsletter of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Jorge Gumier Maier publishes the inaugural text of the Rojas Gallery, "Avatares del arte"[1] (June).

The gallery opens with Liliana Maresca's exhibition, *Lo que el viento se llevó,* and a performance by Batato Barea (July 13).

For this year's exhibitions, Gumier Maier culls a group of young artists, the majority of whom had been exhibiting their work at underground bars and nightclubs and/or at the Centro Cultural Ciudad de Buenos Aires: Alfredo Londaitzbehere [Londaibere], *Mapas y pinturas* (July 31–August 22); Emiliano Miliyo and ESP [Esteban Pagés], *Artes 13* (August 23–September 15); Marcelo Pombo, *Producción 88–89* (October 3–18); Máximo Lutz and Carlos Subosky (October 19–November 5); Diego Fontanet, Gastón Vandam, Sergio Vila, and Miguel Harte, *Arrojados al vacío* (November 6–21); and Sebastián Gordín (November 23–December 7).

Following Pablo Suárez's proposal to exhibit with Pombo and Harte, the gallery inaugurates the exhibition *Harte-Pombo-Suárez [I].* During the time the exhibition is open to the public, some pieces are damaged and the show closes earlier than planned (December 12–30).

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

The Primera Bienal de Arte Joven is held at the Centro Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (now called the Centro Cultural Recoleta, CCR) at the Palais de Glace and surrounding gardens. Under the stewardship of Osvaldo Giesso, the center earned a reputation for itself as a space for the underground cultural scene (March).

At the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana (ICI), presently the Centro Cultural de España en Buenos Aires (CCEBA), Sergio Avello, Ernesto Ballesteros, Juan Paparella, and Pablo Siquier exhibit their work in the show *Inocentes distractores.* Under the curatorial leadership of Laura Buccellato, the ICI earned a reputation as one of the spaces that gave visibility to the work of young artists (March 6–30).

Guillermo Kuitca is invited to participate in the Bienal de São Paulo and his international career begins to take off at the start of the 1990s (September–November).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The guerrilla movement known as *Todos por la patria* (All for the Homeland) fails at its attempt to assault the military barracks in the locality of La Tablada, in greater Buenos Aires (January 23).

The economic crisis that began in late 1988 grows worse, and in February the peso falls and capital leaves the country at an astonishing rate (February).

With hyperinflation and people pillaging supermarkets in different parts of the country, the Peronist candidate Carlos Saúl Menem secures victory in the presidential elections on May 14 with his promises of a *salariazo*[2] and a "productive revolution." Raúl Alfonsín, the exiting president, agrees to relinquish his position earlier than required by law (May).

Menem is sworn in as president on July 9, in the first constitutional presidential succession since 1928.

Néstor Mario Rapanelli, a board member of the Bunge & Born, a transnational company based in Argentina, is named Economic Minister. Economic Emergency and State Reform laws are passed, initiating a process of economic expansion in which the role of the state becomes less prominent (July).

Rapanelli's policies fail to stabilize the economic situation and, toward the end of 1989, the country is hit by a second wave of hyperinflation and another series of looting incidents.

Left: Figure 81
Jorge Gumier Maier
Essay "Avatars of Art" as published in *La Hoja del Rojas* [*The Rojas Page*] by the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (year 2, no.11, June 1989)

Right: Figure 82
Marcelo Pombo and Susana de Michelis at the opening of *Pombo-Harte-Suárez I* at the Rojas Gallery, December 1989. Courtesy of Marcelo Pombo

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Gumier Maier ceases to be the director of the gallery but continues to work on programming exhibitions.

Exhibitions include Agustín Inchausti (July 2–16); Alberto [Beto] de Volder (September 17–26); and Magdalena Jitrik (December), among others.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

The new home of the Fundación Banco Patricios (located in downtown, close to the Calle Corrientes, a district known for its bookstores, movie houses, and theaters) opens with a focus on contemporary art and the work of young artists.

At the CCR, Harte, Pombo and Suárez open the second iteration of the trio's group shows that began at the Rojas Gallery, *Harte-Pombo-Suárez II* (August–September); the third is held in 1992 at the Fundación Banco Patricios; and the fourth (and last) show takes place in 2001 at Galería Ruth Bencazar (see fig. 107).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The new Economic Minister, Erman González, implements the "Plan Bonex," forcing depositors to trade the money in their bank accounts for treasury bonds. The recession reduces inflation.

More members are added to the Supreme Court, offering judicial security to the economic and political reforms being undertaken.

The government institutes a U.S.–aligned foreign policy, which Argentine foreign relations minister Guido Di Tella refers to as "carnal relations." The Argentine navy participates in the efforts to block the activities of Iraq in the Persian Gulf.

State companies are privatized, among them the communications company Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (ENTel), Aerolínas Argentinas, and petrochemical enterprises.

The last *carapintada*[3] military uprising fails, and its leaders are sentenced to life imprisonment (December 3).

Menem pardons General Jorge Rafael Videla, president of Argentina during the dictatorship period that lasted from 1976–1981,[4] as well as the rest of the commanders of the Military Junta who had been declared guilty of crimes against humanity (December 29).

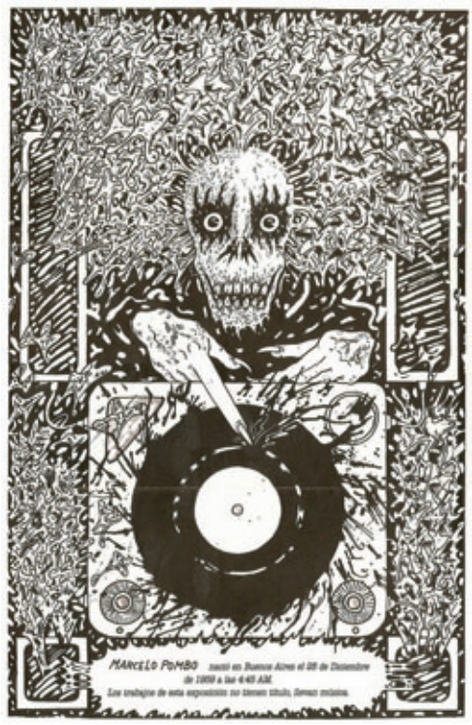


Figure 83
Poster of *Marcelo Pombo*: *Producción 88*–89 exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1989. Courtesy of Marcelo Pombo

Figure 84
From left to right: Carlos Menem; Felipe González, then president of Spain; Giulio Andreotti, the first minister of Italy; and Dan Quayle, then vice president of the US at the Palacio de los Olivos, official residency of the Argentine President, 1990. EFE News Services

Figure 85
General Jorge Rafael Videla during a military ceremony two weeks after the coup-de-état of 1979.
EFE News Services

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Gumier Maier returns to the gallery, this time as co-director with Magdalena Jitrik.

The Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas launches workshops for drawing, sculpture and objects, photographic vision, photographic images, and alternative design, taught by Marcia Schvartz, Maresca, Alicia Segal, Alberto Goldenstein, and Gumier Maier, respectively (May).

Exhibitions include Benito Laren (April 15–30); Londaibere, *Pinturas* (June 5–23); Nuna Magiante (July); Enrique Mármora (July 26–August 8); Ana López, Eloisa Da Silva and Feliciano Centurión, *Preludio* (August 9–25); Ariadna Pastorini (September 10–25); Goldenstein, *Tutti-Fruti*, photography exhibition (October 15–November 3); and Vila (December 1–11), among others.

Toward the end of the year, two group shows are held: *Bienvenida primavera* (September 27–October 13) and *Summertime* (December 12–February 28, 1992), which feature artists of several generations and cover a variety of aesthetic approaches.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

The first version of the Beca Kuitca (1991–93) is held. A non-official educational endeavor run by artist Kuitca and developed with the support of the Fundación Antorchas, the Beca Kuitca is a program aimed at young artists and organized around the concept of an "art workshop," which is a novelty in Argentina.

The first Feria de Galerías de Arte de Buenos Aires, or arteBA, organized by the Fundación arteBA, is held at the CCR (November).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Domingo Cavallo is named Economic Minister and establishes the "Convertibility Plan," which legally establishes parity between the peso and the U.S. dollar. The economy is stabilized and reactivated (February).

The country witnesses a flurry of serious corruption cases, among them "Swiftgate," in which a brother-in-law of the President attempts to extort money from a U.S. firm, prompting the intervention of the U.S. embassy.

Clockwise, from top:
Figure 86
Ariadna Pastorini, 1990–1995. Photograph by Alberto Goldenstein

Figure 87
Poster for *Summertime* group exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1991

Figure 88
Poster for *Bienvenida primavera* group exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1991

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Gallery exhibitions include Londaibere (April); Elisabet Sánchez (May 8–24); Martín Di Girolamo (June); Alejandro Kuropatwa, *La marcha de Kuropatwa,* photography exhibition (June 12–July 8); Centurión (July 10–30); Diana Aisenberg (July 31–August 20); Avello and others, *Sergio Avello y sus amigos* (August 21–September 10); Graciela Hasper (September 11–October 1); and Benito Laren (October), among others.

As the result of a review written by the critic Jorge López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra,"[5] about the exhibition of the work of Gumier Maier, Londaibere, Laren, and Omar Schiliro at Espacio Giesso, the term "*arte* light" emerges as a description of the artists connected to the Rojas Gallery (July 22–August 2).

El Rojas presenta: Algunos artistas, exhibition of the gallery's three-year history curated by Gumier Maier and Jitrik, opens at the Centro Cultural Recoleta (CCR). Participating artists include Centurión, Di Girolamo, Gordín, Gumier Maier, Harte, Jitrik, Laren, Londaibere, Magiante, Mármora, Pastorini, Pombo, Sánchez, Schiliro, and Vila. In the early phases of planning Esteban Pagés and Miliyo were part of this show but ultimately did not participate (August 26–September 6).

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

At the traditional Centro Casal de Catalunya, the artists Joan Prim and Fontanet inaugurate the Salas de Exposición del Centro Cultural Casal de Catalunya, an exhibition space for contemporary art (July).

Gordín creates a performance-installation, *El pintor Gordín* [*Gordín the Painter*], on the street in front of the ICI. The work manifests the artist's intention to exhibit at the entrance to those institutions he finds impenetrable, such as the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Galería Ruth Benzacar, or the Guggenheim Museum in New York (August).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

A bomb explodes at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires (March).

Argentina allies itself with the Brady Plan, an initiative aimed at consolidating and restructuring the foreign debt of Latin American countries, through which creditors transform their credit into bonds that may be freely traded and purchased anonymously.

State-owned companies and industries are privatized, including the oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), steelworks, electric power plants, and gas and electricity companies. The earnings are absorbed by the fiscal deficit.

Clockwise, from top:
Figure 89
Installation view of *Graciela Hasper* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1992. Courtesy of Graciela Hasper

Figure 90
Poster for *Algunos Artistas* exhibition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, 1992

Figure 91
Installation view of *Algunos Artistas* exhibition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, 1992. Courtesy of Magdalena Jitrik

THE ROJAS GALLERY

The conference series entitled *¿Al margen de toda duda?* is organized by artists Duilio Pierri, Felipe Pino, and Schvartz. Of the eight round-tables that comprise this event, one is focused on a discussion of the term "*arte* light" as compared to art that is deemed "engaged" or "political" (May 14–June 2).

Gallery exhibitions include de Volder, *Romántico* (April 16–May 4); Goldenstein, *El mundo del arte,* photographic portraits of artists (May 7–27); Cristina Schiavi, *De todo corazón* (June 18–30); Fabián Alegre, Gregorio Basualdo, Gabriela Faure, and Román Vitali, *Rosa de lejos* (September); Inchausti, *El camino del corazón* (October); and Mármora (October 15–November 4), among others.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

At Espacio Giesso Daniel Ontiveros presents the installation, *La fiesta argentina,* which takes on a variety of issues relating to Argentine history and to the controversy surrounding the question of "*arte* light" versus "political" or "engaged" art (September).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The peso-dollar parity prompts an avalanche of imported goods, triggering the collapse of a number of domestic industries and causing the trade deficit to rise.

The unemployment rate reaches 10%, causing an increase in informal employment.

Menem and Alfonsín sign the Pacto de Olivos, to reform the constitution (December 13).

Figure 92
Sebastián Gordín (right) during *El pintor Gordín*, a performance/exhibition at the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana (now the Centro Cultural de España en Buenos Aires) in collaboration with Roberto Jacoby, 1992. Courtesy of Sebastián Gordín

Figure 93
Exhibition catalogue for *Romantico: Beto de Volder Pinturas* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1993. Courtesy of Beto de Volder

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Jitrik resigns as co-director of the gallery.

A number of individual shows are held, including those of Luis Lindner, *Armas largas II* (April 8–May 3); Kuropatwa, *¿Dónde está Joan Collins?,* photography exhibition (May 6–June 3); Fernanda Laguna (June); Fabián Burgos (July); Centurión, *Estrellar* (August) and Pastorini, *Descanso desbordado* (September–October).

The exhibition *Crimen es ornamento* [*Crime is Ornament*], curated by Carlos Basualdo and featuring Burgos, Guagnini, Gumier Maier, Kacero, and Siquier, is held at the Centro Cultural Parque de España in the city of Rosario (September). A different version of the show by the name of *Crimen & Ornamento* [*Crime & Ornament*] —with work by Burgos, Nicolás Guagnini, Gumier Maier, Hasper, Kacero, Schiliro, and Siquier—opens at the Rojas Galley (October).

The book *5 años en el Rojas,* with texts by Gumier Maier, is published by the Universidad de Buenos Aires (October 26).

The artist Schiliro dies from complications related to AIDS.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

The Taller de Barracas, a workshop financed by the Fundación Antorchas as a scholarship program for young artists to develop sculptures, installations, and objects, is launched with Luis F. Benedit, Suárez, and Ricardo Longhini as its educational stewards. The workshop is operated according to the organizational principles of a mentorship program.

90-60-90, a multidisciplinary event that establishes parallels between works from the 1960s and the 1990s, opens at the Fundación Banco Patricios with the participation of 31 visual artists. In response to Elena Oliveras's curatorial proposal, Rosana Fuertes presents the piece *Los 60 no son los 90* (March 23–April 30).

The CCR presents *a e i o u,* a show that exhibits a broad range of Argentine sculpture, objects and installations through the work of 75 artists of different generations (August).

Nine days before Maresca dies from complications related to AIDS, *Frenesí,* a retrospective of her work curated by Gumier Maier, opens at the CCR (November 4–27).

Jorge Glusberg is named director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes; its collec-

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentine Workers' Center), which is not affiliated with Peronism, brings together most of the state and educational unions, along with the Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentine Workers' Movement), a collection of dissident Peronist unions. They lead the Marcha Federal, a federal protest march at the Plaza de Mayo (June 6).

A bomb explodes in the building that houses the Asociación de Mutuales Israelitas Argentinas (AMIA, Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association; July 18).

In the transition from a state retirement system to one of private capitalization, the country receives less money through tax collection and the deficit increases.

The new constitution is approved. Among other changes, the president may now be re-elected for one term; a system of a second-round election or *ballotage* is introduced; the City of Buenos Aires is granted autonomy; the provinces are granted ownership of their natural resources; and the Pact of San José, Costa Rica, is incorporated into the country's human rights laws (August 22).

Left: Figure 94
Rosana Fuertes, *Los 60 no son los 90* [*The 60s Are Not the 90s*], 1994, Acrylic on cardboard (original installation included fifty pieces), Each piece: 18 × 22 cm (7⅛ × 8¾ in.), Colección Bruzzone. Photograph by Ivo Kocherscheidt

Right: Figure 95
Car bomb explodes next to the Asociación de Mutuales Israelitas Argentinas (AMIA, Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association), July 18, 1994. Photograph by Ali Burafi

Figure 96
Installation view for *Crimen & Ornamento* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, September 1994. Courtesy of Graciela Hasper

Figure 97
Brochure for *Crimen es Ornamento* exhibition at the Centro Cultural Parque de España, 1994

Figure 98
Pablo Suárez at right. Taller de Barracas Workshop, 1994. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzone

Figure 99
Beto de Volder at the Taller de Barracas, 1994. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzone

Figure 100
Luis Fernando Benedit at the Taller de Barracas, 1994. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzone

THE ROJAS GALLERY

The Rojas Photo Gallery opens, with Goldenstein as its director (May).

Maricas [*Faggots*], a group exhibition curated by Bill Arning, opens featuring the work of 37 gay artists living in the United States (May).

Gumier Maier holds the seminar *Los '90: El tao del arte.*

The gallery holds individual shows of works by Kuropatwa, *Mi amor,* photography exhibition (June); Marcelo Zanelli, *Flores* (July); Magiante (August); Jane Brodie, *Las cosas de Jane* (September); Laguna (October); and Hasper, *Es roja* (November).

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

tion is one of the most important in Argentina (October).

The Fundación Federico Jorge Klemm is established, to offer a permanent exhibition space for Klemm's considerable collection of international art, hold exhibitions of the work of young artists and, starting in 1997, sponsor an annual painting award, among other activities.

The Centro Cultural Borges, located in the building that houses Galerías Pacífico, opens with the exhibition *Art from Argentina 1920–1994,* curated by David Elliott and displayed in 1994 at Modern Art Oxford (previously known as the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford) (October).

Pierre Restany publishes the article "Arte guarango para la Argentina de Menem: arte argentino de los 90" [Tacky art for Menem's Argentina: Argentine Art of the 90s],[6] which links the Menemist culture to the vital spirit of the young artists working in Buenos Aires.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

As the result of the "tequila effect,"[7] capital leaves the country at lightning speed; the federal reserve shrinks by 27%; the banking industry becomes concentrated and internationalized; the government takes out US$7 billion in credit from the International Monetary Fund; the GDP drops by 4%; public expenditures are cut; and unemployment rises by 18%.

Given the economic uncertainty, during the election campaign Menem capitalizes on the stability achieved during the early years of the convertibility plan and easily wins the presidency again (May 14).

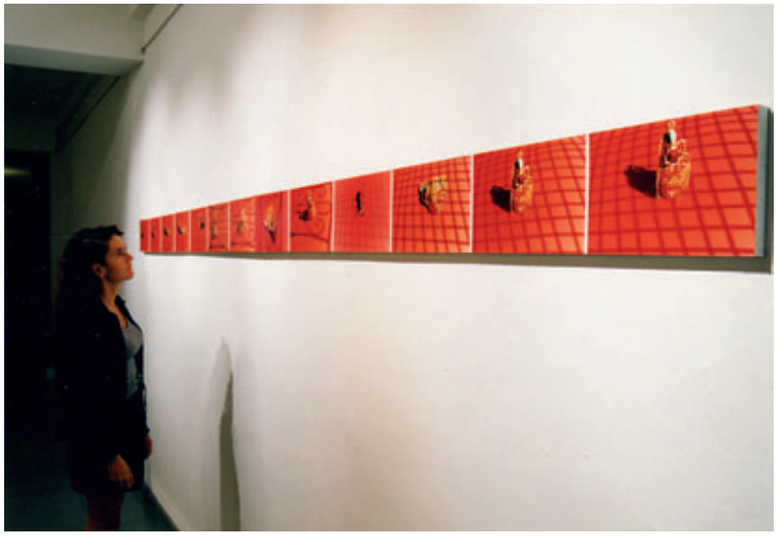


Figure 101
Installation view of *Es Roja* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1995. Courtesy of Graciela Hasper

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Exhibitions include José Garófalo, *Violencia light* (April); Schiavi (May); Ziliante Mussetti (1921–1992), *Naif painting* (August); Elba Bairon (September); Vitali (October) and Gordín, *Gordinoscopio* (November), among others.

The artist Centurión dies from complications related to AIDS (November 7).

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

At the Galería Ruth Benzacar Kuropatwa exhibits *Cóctel,* a photography series focused on the collection of drugs used to fight AIDS, from which the artist himself suffers (October 10–November 2).

The Fundación Proa, with the support of the Techint corporate group, opens in the neighborhood of La Boca in November, with Adriana Rosenberg as its director. She establishes a calendar of shows that includes the work of a number of important, internationally known contemporary artists, including Andrés Serrano (1997), Anselm Kiefer (1998), and Dan Flavin (1998).

In the residential neighborhood known as Palermo Viejo, a number of small art galleries begin to set up shop including spaces, such as Gara, selling a combination of clothes, design objects, and decorative pieces.

Graciela Sacco represents Argentina at the Bienal de São Paulo with the installations *El incendio y las vísperas, Bocanada,* and *Esperando a los bárbaros.*

The CCR serves as the site for the exhibition *Juego de damas,* in which the work of various generations of women artists is explored (October 30–November 17).

Based on the exhibitions *Crimen es Ornamento* and *Crimen & Ornamento,* Carlos Basualdo organizes the show *The Rational Twist* at Apex Art in New York, including the same roster of artists as *Crimen & Ornamento,* with one addition, Raúl Lozza, one of the seminal figures of Argentine Concrete art (February 1-March 2).

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The trend toward economic recovery and high interest rates once again lures capital into the country, and while the GDP rebounds, unemployment remains stuck at 15%.

The parliament's treatment of the postal service's privatization pits Economic Minister Cavallo against Senator Eduardo Menem, the president's brother. While Cavallo defends the interests of the U.S. company Federal Express, Menem is linked to Alfredo Yabrán, a businessman who has attempted to concentrate his control over the postal, airport, and identity-document issuing businesses.

President Menem replaces Cavallo with Roque Fernández, a neo-liberal economist who institutes drastic fiscal adjustments by raising the price of fuel, increasing the Value Added Tax to 21%, reducing the number of public jobs, and implementing budget cuts. The remaining privatizations of state-owned enterprises—the postal service, the airports, and the Mortgage Bank—are pushed through.

The country's three main labor organizations—Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT, General Labor Confederation), Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos (MTA, Argentine Workers' Movement), and Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA, Argentine Workers' Center)—come together to protest the Flexibility of Labor law and the country's economic policies. For three consecutive days a general strike is held, paralyzing the country (August–December).

The City of Buenos Aires elects Fernando de la Rúa, the candidate representing the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR, Radical Civic Union) party, in the elections for its first autonomous government (June 30).

Figure 102
Installation view of a visitor viewing *Piscina de la calle Pontoise* [*Pontoise Street Pool*] (1996) at *Gordinoscopio* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1996. Courtesy of Sebastián Gordín

Figure 103
Installation view of *Juego de damas* [*Ladies' Game*] exhibition at Centro Cultural Recoleta, 1996. Courtesy of Graciela Hasper

Figure 104
Installation view of *The Rational Twist* exhibition at Apex Art, New York, 1996. Courtesy of Graciela Hasper

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Gumier Maier resigns as director of the gallery and Londaibere takes over his position.

El Tao del Arte, a retrospective of the Rojas Gallery curated by Gumier Maier, opens at the CCR. The exhibition includes work by Avello, Bairon, Brodie, Burgos, Centurión, Goldenstein, Gordín, Harte, Hasper, Inchausti, Kacero, Kuropatwa, Laguna, Laren, Lindner, Londaibere, Maresca, Mussetti, Pastorini, Pombo, Schiavi, Schiliro, Siquier, and Zanelli (May 13–June 8).

Exhibitions include Florencia Böhtlingk (August 13–September 6); Alicia Herrero, *Mi botín* (October 8–November 8); and Gabriel González Suárez (May), among others.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

A solo exhibition of Siquier's work opens at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Photojournalist José Luis Cabezas is brutally murdered. The crime is linked to members of Yabrán's security detail and high-level police officials (January 25).

Three traditional oil cities affected by the privatization of YPF—Cutral-Có and Plaza Huincul in the province of Neuquén and Tartagal in Salta—are rocked by a wave of violent popular protests. Groups of unemployed people, known as *piqueteros,* begin to organize, blocking traffic on secondary routes with barricades as a form of protest.

Teachers stage a hunger strike under the "Carpa Blanca"[8] [white tent] set up in the Plaza del Congreso, demanding a salary increase and a new education law (April).

The center-left Alianza made up of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR, Radical Civic Union) and the Frente País Solidario (FREPASO, Front for a Country in Solidarity) emerges as the victor in this year's congressional elections.

Thailand devalues its currency, triggering a global crisis that will have significant consequences for Argentina in 1998 (July).

Figure 105
Installation view of Cristina Schiavi's *Cinta rosa* [*Pink Ribbon*] (1997) and Graciela Hasper *Untitled* (1996) at *Tao del Arte* exhibition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, 1997. Photography by Gustavo Lowry

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Individual shows include Pombo (April 15–May 10); Schvartz (May 13–June 7); Lindner, *Argentina '78* (June 10–July 5); Laren (July 15–August 9); Pastorini, *Flotación* (August 12–September 5); and Guagnini (November–December), among others.

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

Sonia Becce begins her tenure as curator of the art gallery of the Alliance Française, with a lineup of shows devoted to contemporary art.

The contemporary art gallery Blanca opens its doors, with Florencia Braga Menéndez as its director.

Under the curatorship of Patricia Rizzo, the Fundación Proa presents the reconstruction of *Experiencia '68,* a 1968 exhibition originally held at the Instituto Di Tella, a focal point for avant-garde art in Buenos Aires in the 1960s. On that occasion the participating artists destroyed the works of art in the show responding to police censorship of one of the works (May–July).

Jorge Macchi and Gustavo Romano present the video installations *Evidencias circunstanciales* at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (September 10–October 4).

The artist collectives known as GAC (Grupo de Arte Callejero, Street Art Group), and Etcétera participate with posters and performances in the *escraches*[9] organized by the HIJOS collective,[10] which pressed for public repudiation of those who had participated in State-sanctioned terrorism between 1976 and 1983 and had been pardoned or never brought before a court of law.

The Fundación Banco Patricios closes its doors.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Argentina is severely affected by the increase in interest on the country's debt, the scarcity of credit, the fall of the commodities market, and the internal recession. The GDP drops by 4% and the automotive industry slashes its production by 50%. Foreign debt, which was US$60 billion in 1992, balloons to US$160 billion.

THE ROJAS GALLERY

Exhibitions include Vitali (April 7–30); Juan Tessi, Gabriel Rodríguez, Pablo Sara, and Chino Soria (May 5–30); Gustavo Marrone, *Creadores* (June 2–26); Angélica Vaca Narvaja, Fabiana Imola, Laguna, and Jorge Manghi (June 30–July 25); Mario Bortolini (October 20–November 14); and Jitrik, *Desobediencia* (November 17–December 12).

Colección Bruzzone, an exhibition of the works acquired over the course of the decade by Argentine collector Gustavo Bruzzone, opens (September 22–October 16).

ART IN BUENOS AIRES

In the residential neighborhoods of Almagro and Abasto, two galleries open: in Almagro, Belleza y Felicidad is an art space and gallery run by artist Laguna and writer Cecilia Pavón, and in Abasto, the art space called Duplus is launched by artists Lucio Dorr and Santiago García Aramburu.

Suárez wins the Premio Constantini award for *Exclusión,* a work that alludes to the overwhelming number of Argentines who are excluded from the social structures set in place by the government and civil society.

The exhibition *Arte de acción, 1960–1990,* curated by Rodrigo Alonso, opens at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires. The show traces the history of performance, happenings, urban interventions, and other art actions in Argentina (May 13–July 11).

The Fondo Nacional de las Artes publishes the book, *Artistas argentinos de los '90,* with texts by Benedit, Gumier Maier, and Marcelo Pacheco.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Alianza team of De la Rúa and Carlos "Chacho" Álvarez meets with victory in the October presidential elections.

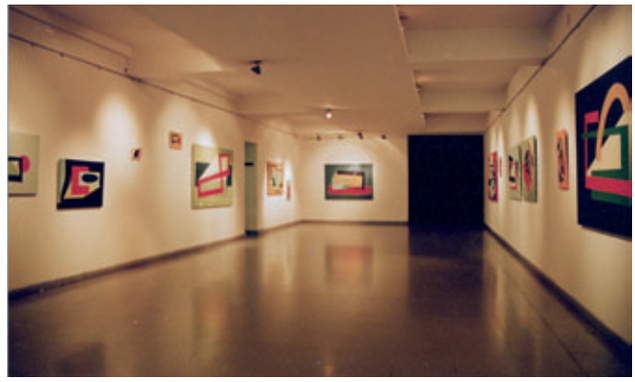


Figure 106
Installation view of *Desobediencia* exhibition at the Rojas Gallery, 1999. Courtesy of Magdalena Jitrik

Figure 107
From left to right: Pablo Suárez, Orly Benzacar, Marcelo Pombo, and Miguel Harte at the opening of the *Harte-Pombo-Suárez IV* exhibition at Galería Ruth Benzacar, 2001. Courtesy of Galería Ruth Benzacar

Top left: Figure 108
Gustavo Bruzzone during the installation of the exhibition *Colección Gustavo Bruzzone,* 1999. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzonek

Top right: Figure 109
Installation process of *Colección Gustavo Bruzzone* exhibition at the Rojas gallery, 1999. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzone

Bottom right: Figure 110
Installation process of *Colección Gustavo Bruzzone* exhibition at the Rojas gallery, 1999. Courtesy of Colección Bruzzone

NOTES

This chronology was originally written in Spanish and translated into English by Kristina Cordero, 2010.

1. Jorge Gumier Maier, "Avatares del Arte," *La Hoja del Rojas,* June 11, 1989.

2. With this term, derived from ***salario,*** the Spanish word for "salary," Menem indicated that he would undertake a massive raise in salary for members of the working class.

3. The term ***carapintada*** was coined by the press to identify factions of the army that, during Holy Week in April 1987, under the administration of Raúl Alfonsín, formally protested the trials of intermediate-level military officers accused of human rights violations during the military dictatorship. Despite the existence of the Law of Due Obedience, which put an official end to the investigation of those crimes, the aforementioned factions intensified their demands, calling for modifications to the command structure of the Army. They staged uprisings on two more occasions, in 1988 and again in 1990, during the Menem administration.

4. General Videla led the 1976 coup-de-état and was the first of the four generals who, as mandated by the Military Juntas, successively served as president until 1983, when democracy was restored in Argentina.

5. Jorge López Anaya, "El absurdo y la ficción en una notable muestra," *La Nación,* August 1, 1992. For further information regarding the term "*arte* light," see Katzenstein's essay in this publication.

6. Pierre Restany, "Arte guarango para la Argentina de Menem: arte argentino de los 90," ***Lápiz:*** *Revista Internacional de Arte* 13, no. 116 (November 1995): pages unknown.

7. "Tequila effect" was the term coined to describe the international economic consequences brought about by the 1994 economic crisis in Mexico.

8. The protest's eponymous "white tent" is a direct reference to the white tent beneath which the teachers carried out their demonstration, which came to an end in 1999.

9. A word derived from the Buenos Aires slang known as ***lunfardo, escrach*** is a popular form of denouncing people accused of violations of human rights or corruption. It is carried out through sit-ins, graffiti, singing, and chanting in front of the homes of the people in question or in public spaces. Academia Argentina de Letras, Diccionario del habla de los argentinos (Buenos Aires: Emece, 2008).

10. HIJOS, an acronym for Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (Children for Identity and Justice and Against the Forgotten and the Silence), is a human rights organization that came of age between 1994 and 1995, and is comprised of the children of those people who disappeared during the last military dictatorship (1976–1983).

Documents of the Rojas Gallery

The Rojas Page: Avatars of Art

by Jorge Gumier Maier

Year II, No 11 June 1989
Centro Cultural Rocardo Rojas
Corrientes 2038/(1045) Capital Federal
Dirección de Cultura
Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria
Universidad de Buenos Aires

1.
In the rich, vibrant landscape of the world, painting has been misread. Like a worn-out phoenix, it has to be propped up in every scene, in every appearance. But it is actually thanks to this negativity, to its insistent whimsy that it is able, on occasion, to recover its sacred breath.

2.
All contemporary art, aside from *art brut,* would be conceptual (as Dubuffet wanted). In this sterile, mistaken practice ("I like painting. Even doors." —R. Rauschenberg), which oscillates between inherited practices and the persistent ennui of repeating things that already exist, a work of art, in the face of such neglect, becomes an object of self-validation, a document of its belonging, an apologia of its inconsequence, parodical nature or reproductory vocation. This, on one hand, partly explains the oversized dimensions of contemporary art that serve as compensations of a sort and, on the other hand, that brand of simplicity that is so in vogue at the moment, a kind of omni-comprehensive minimalism: there is a minimalism of expressionism, a minimalism of neo-expressionism, a minimalism of informalism, another one for the revival of the 1950s, a minimal psychodelia, *e cosí via*. . .

3.
The work, as such, aims to sustain itself through a proposal of some sort. Works are appreciated not on face value, but for whatever makes their proposal interesting. The work is only judged as a failed or successful illustration of an intention. Originalities are hatched under the shelter of this law.
The important thing is the way in which meaning is produced in a given work.

4.
A displacement of the artistic imagination.
The obfuscation of art at its edges, the blurriness of its marks. Ubiquity and dispersion. . . A practice that is understood to be (creative) work, more a saturation of ideas than an obsessive passion, closer to craft than to creation, closer to ingenuity than subjectivized expression. Obfuscation that brings art to the precipice of the spectacle. By now it is almost a cliché to say that in the field of visual work the best things at the recent Bienal de Arte Joven [Young Art Biennial] were the fashion shows. More exuberant, democratic and crazy, last year heralded the Certamen con el Arte en el Cuerpo [The Contest of Art and Body], an idea and a production conceived by Roberto Jacoby at the Palladium disco. If art had been desacralized, then these operations reaffirmed a pagan hedonism. Privilege seems to recline at the side of the engenderer. The creator himself, by now far from the storms and squalls of another era, is more than ever an engenderer of his talent and his work.

5.
Stomachism is garnering quite a following. This is happening among those who, amid the anxiety, yearn for the solid, peace-inducing dogma of an efficacious kind of art, a kind of painting that socks us in the stomach when we lay eyes on it. They tend to depict or evoke social and marginal scenes, which lead them to be graphic and material. They are messy, rebellious and they dare to deal in ugliness. In these efforts, everything is aimed at some kind of high impact. Some do so with discarded materials, garbage, rags, a whole slew of neo-noble materials (long live the lowly!).

All documents translated from Spanish into English by Kristina Cordero, 2010.

Also, painting termed visceral shares and supports the old notion that it is reasonable and acceptable to disturb and modify the other, and on top of it they pretend to achieve this with the vision of a few paintings.
They believe, for example, that when something like *La Tablada* occurs, they can't just continue to paint what they always paint, that they ought to respond to that kind of event with their art, as if anyone cared.
For this class of people, the other class of people are either fast asleep or complete idiots, and the idea is to shake them enough so that they might wake up to the life and consciousness that they enjoy.

6.
Art, the sacred, eludes pretensions, lacks transience, and settles in where it is not named.

Jorge Gumier Maier is a visual artist, art critic, and coordinator of the visual art department at the Rojas Gallery. Photo: Julieta Steimberg, Con el arte en el cuerpo, Palladium, October 1988 (see fig. 81).

The Rojas

by Jorge Gumier Maier

Prefatory essay of the book *5 años en el Rojas* published by the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1994.

There was once a wide hallway that led to the men's and women's bathrooms, and also to the ample entrance of a theater. The first stretch of this hallway was occupied by the lively tables of a bar frequented by students. The walls of the complex were divided into three broad horizontal strips that extended from ceiling to floor, in carmine red, white, and dark gray.

One fine day, the corroded skeletons of chairs and umbrellas of an abandoned weekend resort in the Paraná Delta—almost a negative replica of the bar that preceded it in the hallway—seemed only to add to the semantic confusion of the place. This was the state of things when the gallery of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas was inaugurated with an installation by Liliana Maresca entitled *Lo que el viento se llevó* [*Gone With the Wind*] and a performance by Batato Barea. The date was July 13, 1989.

Leopoldo Sosa Pujato, Director of the Centro Cultural at the time, had decided to devote some space to exhibitions. On the suggestion of the head of the literature department, Daniel Molina, I was called in to take charge of the gallery, with total freedom and absolutely no budget. It is not at all common to ask an artist to assume the role of curator, but there was no time for bewilderment. A group of very young artists had been showing their works primarily in bar and discos, and could not dare to dream of aspiring to more comfortable exhibition spaces because their work did not jibe with the hegemonic canons of the art of the 1980s.

From a distance, both the derivations of the trans-avant-garde/neoexpressionist boom, as well as the furor surrounding those works created with certain discarded materials (including the short-lived utopia of an art form of pre-Columbian roots), share the same conceit and purpose. A key term in the discourses of the day was "proposals." Works were understood—that is, conceived—as propositions. According to formal logic, these works were relegated to the status of mere illustrations of intentions. The much-promoted freedom and uninhibited spirit of a great deal of 1980s art was often nothing but a disciplined observance of what was decreed

expressive. Drips, "bad drawing," "bad painting," dirty or dissonant colors, and a whole host of other deliberate accidents constituted the affirmation that this was a dense, rich body of work of deep sensibilities (geometry, for example, was only accepted if lines were uneven and colors not uniform). I think we can agree that this was a rather frivolous vision of art, a repertoire of easily digested narrative clichés disguised as spontaneous and successful at convincing its conservative public—which, by this point, included artists—with the illusion that something important had been communicated to them.

From the very inception of the Rojas, Roberto Jacoby—an artist of both the 1960s and the present—enthusiastically encouraged people to visit the shows held there, but he did not seem to achieve this goal until a number of years later. We were something like a little club: some of the exhibitors were already friends, while others got to know each other there. Shortly after the gallery opened Pablo Suárez—an enthusiast both then and now—met Marcelo Pombo at his solo exhibition and asked him to pick a date to show his work along with him and Miguel Harte, who had exhibited his work at the Rojas not long before. This was how 1989, less than five months into the life of the gallery, culminated with the consolidation of this group of artists, who would come to have such a decisive effect on some of the new paths embarked upon in the field of visual arts.

But it was hard to get the specialized critics to come to a place that was so far beyond the usual art circles, and so lacking in prestige and promotion at the time. Fabián Lebenglik was the sole exception to this rule, for he was the first person to write, in the pages of the newspaper *Página /12,* about many of the shows at the Rojas. He had the privilege of seeing Benito Laren's marvelous—and only—individual exhibition. Magdalena Jitrik, herself a visual artist, had recently joined forces with the gallery and she was the person who discovered this singular work from among the piles of pored-over artist portfolios. Her work would be critical to giving the Rojas the identity and relevance it soon achieved. Established artists such as Margarita Paksa, Juan José Cambre, and Alejandro Kuropatwa asked to show their work at the gallery and so with Jitrik we decided to put together something of a celebration: *Bienvenida Primavera* [*Welcome Spring*]. We brought together these more renowned friends with a group of younger artists who were just getting started. It was at this show that an emblematic artist of the 1990s, Omar Schiliro, appeared on the scene with his very first piece, created just days after learning he was ill with AIDS.

Two months later, in the very same spirit, came *Summertime*. This time around a very young Sebastián Gordín was making his return to the realm of art after holding his first individual show at the Rojas in 1989 and then declaring his retirement. On this occasion he exhibited the origins of what would be the charming, refined scenarios for which he would later be known. To the right was a piece by Juan Pablo Renzo.

Despite all this the larger art world continued to ignore us. If Mohammed won't go to the mountain, we resolved, then let's just move the mountain. And so, in 1992, at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, a far more popular and larger venue, *Algunos Artistas* [*Some Artists*] was inaugurated with a large number of works by fifteen different artists, "some of whom took their first—or second—steps at the Rojas and have been associated with its name ever since," as stated on the humble sheet that served as the exhibition catalog. Fabián Lebenglik, in this same document, expressed his belief that, "In fast-paced times, wagers should be made over brief periods. The gallery of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas is a mental place that exhibits art that is in tune with the times (. . .). To assess the impact of the space, clearly one must consider the

complicities, the paths that have been embarked upon by the artists who got their start there, as well as the rejection and even the scotoma of those who have missed it. According to the dictionary, a scotoma is "an injury to the eye that consists of a dark, sparkling stain that blocks part of the visual field." To this he added, "For many people, this is precisely what the Rojas is: a dark, sparkling stain. But for me it is a thermometer for [measuring] painting made today." There is also a common belief, of widespread adherence in our local milieu, that in order to be recognized here an artist must first achieve success abroad. As fate would have it, *Algunos Artistas* coincided with a new session of the Jornadas de la Crítica, an occasion for which the Argentine Art Critics' Association organized a host of shows in galleries and other spaces, to which foreign critics were invited. On his page in the *Buenos Aires Herald*, Ed Shaw remarked: "The juices were flowing upwards with unexpected strength at the Centro Cultural Recoleta [. . .] at a moment when most of our local curators are searching outside of themselves for inspiration—most particularly looking toward distant places like Germany, Italy or the United States—the Rojas 15 are exciting because much of the work is drawn from the artists' own interior microcosmos [. . .] In essence, these are the first steps of the incipient art of the 90s, disconnected from the song and dance of the critics [. . .]. The Centro Cultural Recoleta has given the Rojas artists the chance to make themselves known publicly and to exhibit a selection of their work in a more recognized venue, conveniently timed to coincide with the art critics' week. Some critics, internationally known as heavyweights in the field, have deemed this parallel talent explosion to be the freshest expression of art they have ever seen in Buenos Aires. (Upon return to their respective countries, the aforementioned critics left record of this reaction in publications such as *Sculpture, Art Forum* in New York, and *Poliéster* in Mexico.)"

This signified a more public and widespread recognition of the work of the Rojas, and at the same time a whole spate of legends was spawned about the gallery and its purposes. A number of the artists that got their start at this exhibition went on to exhibit their work at the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana (ICI), while others found their way to Galería Ruth Benzacar, where they presently comprise the best and largest group in her stable of young artists. But the Rojas must not be considered a kindergarten for new creators, nor are its tremendous efforts aimed at establishing trends, as might be inferred by comments such as "so-and-so is more Rojas than so-and-so" or that a certain piece of art is "very Rojas."

The variety and complexity of what has been exhibited over these past five years has been unsettling and disturbing to the need that many people have to establish labels. It just so happens that—as a brief perusal of this catalogue reveals—there is no such thing as the so-called Rojas style. It isn't about a movement, nor are the similarities between artists so remarkable. It is about change, in the aesthetic and artistic collective vision: the scene has been inhabited by other values. Beyond their rhetoric which actually comes as something of a relief, these works force us, when we approach them, to divest ourselves of the ideas that have come to inform the way we think of art.

For the critic and curator Carlos Basualdo, "the Rojas never seems to have wanted to situate itself within the context of 'international' art, like other venues that tended to reproduce the artistic output found in central art spaces. It seeks, instead, to find its place in the realm of art that—and this is very much within quotation marks—we might term 'proletarian.'" (And this does not constitute a matter of principles, or a programmatic desideratum, simply the record of the gallery's incubation and production).

Perhaps, more than ever, this is the place and time to speak of a marginal art form—precisely not because it uses certain themes, or because of some kind of fidelity to certain aesthetic qualities associated with those themes, but because it emerges at the fringes of the consecrated space dedicated to art, at the fringes of an established set of ideas.

We are talking about a dislocated territory. Most of these young people have not gone through the path of art schools or private workshops—and of the few that have, this is thankfully not very noticeable. The average amount of information they work with is dubious. These are people who have not set out to be artists, things just turned out that way for them.

Benito Laren can scarcely identify a dozen names beyond those of Warhol and Dalí. A mild-mannered, solitary chemist from a city in the provinces, in the evenings after work he would apply all his knowledge to experiments with different kinds of paint on glass. Finally he made it to Buenos Aires, the end of a long pilgrimage undertaken in the hopes of exhibiting his tiny, charming works.

Omar Schiliro was a bijoutière, a lover of things that sparkled. When he became sick, instead of opening the door to a testimony of pain, he chose to create a fantasy world with his luminous works of art, in which Egyptian amphoras in a Hollywood set, a lotus associated with spiritual practices, and the childhood memory of amusement parks dialogue freely with one another, boldly reclaiming the concept of beauty. A kaleidoscopic gluttony that celebrates the daydream quality of art.

For each and every one of them, art is a "journey." Tender fundamentalists of themselves, these works emerge not from some kind of jockeying with respect to the current art scene, but from their own dogged persistence. Their subjective, obsessive and on occasion delirious assertions of identity preclude a proliferation of followers. Nor do they aspire to a genealogy that might legitimize them because they are uninterested in the history of art. For them, any artistic product, no matter what its place or time of origin, enters their game through the realm of taste, where a diversity of elements circulate with equal authority, from supermarket packaging to 1950s era science magazine diagrams, to the work of some or other fashion designer, or elements from the applied arts. . .

Words like *kitsch* and *light* have been tossed around, with varying intentions, in reference to the works produced by the artists that have passed through the Rojas, as a way of approaching the art of the '90s.

I think that, among other things, this change in the collective image of the visual arts is forcing us to redefine the meaning of *kitsch* in our time. On the other hand, any work with *kitsch* implies an intellectual operation, a comment, a conspiratorial nod among those in the know—whether they are populists, elitists, or otherwise. Strange matters for these creators.

As far as the term "light" is concerned, perhaps it might be more useful to replace it with the word "bright"—that is, brilliant, wide-awake. If some tortured soul might need a certification of the widespread notion of "intensity," he might uncover it in the relation these artists establish with their materials, their procedures.

Owing partly to the fact that the art market is not able to absorb their works in any sustained manner, they take comfort in creating pieces that are whimsical. Often they require far more than a month of work, as well as the investment of a sum of money that will never be earned back. They are passions.

Generic names run the risk of promoting shuttered interpretations, reducing the singularity of their individual meanings to a single explanation that misses their real

significance. For this reason it would make sense to stop talking already about what they have in common and begin to see them one by one, as individual pieces.

This catalog does not aim to present them exhaustively or exclusively as individuals, nor does it attempt to arrive at static conclusions about art in this first half of the 1990s. All it aims to do is document, briefly, the story of the Rojas Gallery. Included here are those artists who participated in the retrospective exhibit *Algunos Artistas,* along with some other artists who are newer to the space. After the remodeling of the Centro Cultural, the gallery looks different than it did in its early days. But it continues with the same enthusiasm, and the same purpose of moving forward without too many plans, with its eyes fixed on the eyes of the artists.

These five years would not have been possible without the framework of total independence and trust established from the very start by the authorities of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas and the Universidad de Buenos Aires. To them, and to all the artists and critics who have lent their support—a scant few are mentioned here—I would like to express my deepest gratitude.

The Tao of Art

by Jorge Gumier Maier

Prefatory essay to the exhibition *El Tao del Arte* organized at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in 1997.

In 1989, the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas at the Universidad de Buenos Aires remodeled its ground floor level, and as a result decided to create a space dedicated to the visual arts. The very identity of the institution, for which Leopoldo Sosa Pujato had been the director since 1986 and where Batato Barea executed his marvelous theatrical pieces, seemed destined for adventure. The freedom I enjoyed to assume the direction of a space that had no history and no marks of any kind, with a location and certain qualities that situated it quite radically at the fringes of the art circuit, allowed me to turn this unexpected task into a felicitous game. I was being given the chance, a recurring gift of sorts, to exhibit those things that I had found so fascinating at the homes of friends and acquaintances, or that had amazed Pablo Suárez, Roberto Jacoby, and me when we had encountered them poorly displayed at some bar or disco.

The enthusiasm of these two artists, who came of age in the 1960s, was a decisive factor in the unexpected impact that would soon be made by this very modest exhibition space—nothing more than a hallway. This was what prompted me and my co-curator, Magdalena Jitrik, in 1992, to think about bringing a selection of those artists who had taken "their first or second steps" at the Rojas Gallery to a broader public. In the catalog, Fabián Lebenglik spoke of scotoma, an opacity in the eye that prevents us from seeing things directly in front of us, as a way of talking about the art world's very marginal or dismissive treatment of the gallery. We said little in the accompanying text, preferring instead to focus on the singularity of these artists and their very persistent efforts, the way in which poetic visions emerged where we least expected them. Perhaps we left everything encrypted in the plain, austere title with which we chose to present the exhibit, as a kind of ground zero of curatorial work: *El Rojas Presenta: Algunos Artistas* [*The Rojas Presents: Some Artists*]. Such an ambiguous name hardly seemed reflective of an intention to launch an artistic movement, nor did it suggest that it was some kind of inventory of emerging art. We had simply decided to celebrate the fascinating worlds of "some artists." Thanks to this very varied and highly irregular landscape, the gallery found itself subjected to a battery

of interrogations: What was the focal point we had chosen for the exhibition? What was the strategy being formulated at the Rojas? Some public institution even asked us for our "working model" in the hopes of reproducing what we had done in other art spaces.

The domestic model, that private pleasure exhibited in public, found itself forced to respond. Today Okakura Kakuzo might be able to rescue me on this point: "It is too bad that, nowadays, much of the apparent enthusiasm for art is not based on genuine feelings. In our democratic age, people demand what is generally thought to be the best, without paying attention to their own feelings." One paragraph earlier the same writer contemplated the collection of objects pertaining to Rikiu, the first of the tea-masters, because "he dared to love only those objects that he personally felt drawn to."[1]

However, attributing everything to taste could seem deceptive: some consistency ought to reside within and be brought to light. The enzymes of knowledge dove into their digestive ecstasies and reveled in their nutrients. They spoke of the emergence of a group of artists who were happy to prance around in the underworld of kitsch and whose genius had led them to undertake everything with levity. Some people declared that this blustering had turned them into *guarangos*: people who liked making art that jibed with the values of the Menemist culture. What Pierre Restany (who coined the term) failed to consider was that people began creating these works around 1985 and 1986, some five years before everyone started clipping their sideburns like the Argentine president. Shortly before the *Algunos Artistas* exhibit, Jorge Lopez Anaya coined the term "light" as a concise designation of the output of a group of these artists. "Light," however, quickly became a pejorative, accusatory term. Regarding the problematic nuance of "light"/"not light" (which might be translated as "light" versus "heavy" or "weighted"), a redeeming initiative was launched, preaching the nobility of the functions of art. Our ideas and values turn aesthetic contemplation into a judgmental act through which beauty might be accused of being a frivolous, and even complicit, enterprise. There is an anecdote which, because of its ephemeral nature, might be considered incidental but I venture to mention it in the hope that it might serve to clarify the debate regarding the art of the 1990s. The astute addition of the term "pink" to the Anglo-Saxon monosyllable made the landscape more complex and complete.

Pink is the color of daydreams. Chocolate candy pink, even though the chocolates are brown. Little sweets for children. And for the woman—whether she is the woman of our dreams, or the secretary on her birthday—gets herself a box of those chocolates and a bouquet of roses. Such a trivial thing, and yet it makes so many people so happy! Sentimental and intimate, sheltered from the temperatures of the world, pink has been all but prohibited from appearing on flags and emblems. Stranger to contingencies, silly and vulgar, it knows no modesty. Thrilled to inhabit its own tiny domain, it aspires to no dimension other than that of the perfumed moment, that brief intoxication.

This is why, as a result, pink has become the faggot color *par excellence.* Over the past centuries, amid the consolidation of the nations of the West, the figure of the sodomite has been associated with the traitor. Weak, cowardly, without substance, the faggot is someone who eludes his supposed obligations, who shrugs off what he has been destined for. A missed opportunity. Frequently the faggot is referred to as "a waste."

No small number of people came out in defense—the military/bacteriological metaphors justify any crusade—of the disdained waste, finding it to be tremendously useful. Apologists and detractors alike rose to the stage, brandishing the same

1. Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010).

arguments, reciting the same creed. He who attempted to turn art into a predictable object, precise in its objectives. Everything revolved around whether these artists offered a rendering of their context, "questioned" reality or, on the contrary, lacked a critical gaze, eluding the commitment ascribed to the artist in the face of the vicissitudes of the species.

Turning a deaf ear to them, ignoring their silences, some people maintained that these "light" artists were, in fact, not at all light. They were redeemed by a refined strategy. Beneath their pinkish camouflages, with the cunning of a contrabandist, they were injecting their ferocious, critical, virile messages.

On guard against the necessary unnecessariness of the artistic endeavor, the assumption that all art possessed content became a guarantee of meaning. What was so scary about the idea that things might just be? ("Art, the sacred, eludes pretensions, suffers from its fleeting nature, and finds its place precisely where it is not named.")[2] All throughout history things that were just anything came to dominate the realm of art: they received their taxonomical baptism and now they sit resplendent on the shelves of knowledge. *Honoris causa* for the stone-age drawings and the digitalized image, art brut, and the embroideries of the other genre. Given the ambiguity of its limits, and the exhausting renewal of its consensus, it comes as an unfathomable relief to simply bundle everything up in the chariot of history. In this way, art is preserved as a precious document of an era. But to revel in this foolish evidence would be to trivialize it. What makes art different from eating habits, clothing, or the history of hygiene as a means of helping us understand the spirit of the time in which it was created? Superlative and enlightening prism, symptomatic and prophetic artifact, art must be communicable if it wants to establish its noble nature, its content, its good intentions. Thanks to the demand for knowledge about art, promotional strategies have become part of the genesis of countless aesthetic propositions.

Not the least bit awestruck, but rather attentive and judicious, we listen on as numerous artists manage to describe what they do with enviable economy and precision. Far from encountering anguish and desperation (or, in contrast, the bliss and calm of yesteryear), a stroll through the world of art nowadays frequently begins with an introduction of "the idea is. . ." No longer are we wandering around in ignorance: this is "work!" (Rimbaud said that the poet did not work.) Words are not innocent. Let us linger a bit more on this rather striking lexicon, on this abundance of "reflections" and "hypotheses" of all sorts. Today's artists "discuss concepts," "confront concepts," "propose," "infer," "investigate," "assert," "note". . . What is the reason for this need to reduce the artistic endeavor to an activity that is sensible, intelligent, alert? Might we not be confusing things, taking art to be an endeavor for studying and understanding the modern world? Everything seems clear and unmysterious—to see this all you have to do is visit one of the mega-shows in which the chosen group of artists "illustrates," "interprets," or "translates" the curator's facile hypotheses. How gratifying it is to visit galleries and finally understand what art means! How "comforting" it is to know that we are part of such lofty matters, to conform to our beliefs! Ilya Prigogine (Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1977) believes, on the other hand, that we have in fact reached "the end of certainties." The advancement of particle physics and the cosmology of black holes have led us to a new paradigm in the sciences, in the possibilities of knowing. From the most rigid and "scientific" of our disciplines of knowledge, the way in which people have come to perceive the world and life in general has started to come apart.

Fritjof Capra, in his charming book *The Tao of Physics,* states that "the things we see or hear are never the phenomena in and of themselves [. . .] the more we penetrate

2. Jorge Gumier Maier, "Avatares del Arte," *La Hoja del Rojas,* June 11, 1989.

nature and the deeper we go, the more we find ourselves forced to give up the images and concepts of our language."[3] And in response to the anxieties unleashed by these changes, we find the tonic of rationalist furor. The order of discourse reduces singularities to the level of genres. "The majority of the phenomena of the universe are less attributable to stable models than to instability [. . .] humanistic disciplines, unlike the 'new science,' don't seem to realize that."[4]

In ancient Greece, along with Kronos, there was another god who was ultimately eclipsed. Unlike Kronos, with his linear, balanced gait, Kairos was concerned with the suspension of time—that place where one surrendered, where one got lost ("the world moves with no sense of time").[5] It is in this suspension, this time without limits in which beauty visits us ("this existence is a great void and that is its beauty").[6]

The movement of art is flight. Concepts like "truth" and "reality" are anathema because all art is fiction. Newly-conceived narratives of the fables that resound in our being ("the arts speak of the obstinacy of the impenetrable, of the utterly alien quality of everything we bump into in the labyrinth of intimacy").[7] It is that craft, that impractical effort that sustains us. An infinite, radiant excess that knows no end.

That art, as life, leads to nowhere is what makes our freedom meaningful and our salvation possible. ("You don't happen to have some kind of logic that explains what you are doing here, do you?").[8] With the phosphorescence of abduction we are emptied of all understanding. As in the hypnotic murmur of a koan, the logic of thought is suspended. Our reasons find themselves seized (". . .at the still point, there the dance is.")[9]

But what happens when academic-journalistic hyperbole comes across these works that lie beyond its identificatory comfort zone, those things that blossomed, ignorant and deaf to its demands and bribes. If some artist were to show us his unfettered beauty, the migrations of his emotion, we would say that he has surrendered to the exercise of irony. And maybe even cynicism. How can we think that they might find those things beautiful? The presumption of a pleasure to which we cannot gain access irritates and bothers us. As in the case of children or the feminine spirit, like those crazed lives or those close to their end, instability, the whimsy of the self, becomes something highly unreliable and unworthy, something that cannot be introduced into a coherent sentence. They do not know what they say (and it is that "beauty is not known"). Why not think that those dislocated spaces are in fact the occasion for the sacred things that art promises us?

Clearly, the artists in this exhibition do not make Taoist paintings. Nor do many of them show a particular interest in Oriental mysticism. They know nothing of the mysteries of the void that give life to the universe, or of the methods for manifesting hypotheses of any kind.

Though all of these artists have passed through the Rojas, this is also not, strictly speaking, a retrospective of the history of this gallery. Tao is the way. It is also the method. It is relative as absolute. This is the vortex of that domestic curatorial model, that excuse of the poor, impulsive collector—my Tao, a path I drifted down, carried aloft by the siren songs of these artists.

3. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley, CA: Shambhala, 1975).

4. Omar Calabrese, *Neobaroque* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

5. Ilya Prigogine, *From Being to Becoming: Time and Complexity in the Physical Sciences* (San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1980).

6. Osho, *Tao. The Three Treasures* (New York: Osho International Foundation, 1983).

7. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

8. Osho, *Tao. The Three Treasures*.

9. T.S. Eliot. *Four Quartets* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

Exhibition Checklist

Fabián Burgos
Untitled, 1995
Oil and acrylic on canvas
101.6 × 224.8 cm (40 × 88½ in.)
Colección Delmiro Méndez e Hijo, S.A. (fig. 30, p. 48)

Fabián Burgos
Untitled, 1996
Oil and acrylic on canvas
91 × 140 cm (35¾ × 55⅛ in.)
Colección Delmiro Méndez e Hijo, S.A. (fig. 28, p. 47)

Feliciano Centurión
Pulpo blanco [*White Octopus*], ca. 1993
Acrylic on polyester blanket
241.3 × 213.4 cm (95 × 84 in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.176 (fig. 33, p. 53)

Feliciano Centurión
Cordero sacrificado [*Sacrificed Lamb*], 1996
Acrylic on polyester blanket
236.2 × 130.8 cm (93 × 51½ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.173 (fig. 34, p. 54)

Feliciano Centurión
Me adapto a mi enfermedad, parte de la series *Flores del mal de amor* [*I Adapt to My Illness*, part of the series *Flowers of Lovesickness*], 1996
Hand-embroidered blanket
54 × 36.5 cm (21¼ × 14¾ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.175 (fig. 35, p. 55)

Feliciano Centurión
Luz divina del alma [*Divine Light of the Soul*], ca. 1996
Hand-embroidered pillow
22 × 31 cm (8¾ × 12¼ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.174 (fig. 25, p. 42)

Feliciano Centurión
Soy el alma que no muere [*I Am the Soul that Does Not Die*], ca. 1996
Hand-embroidered blanket
49 × 51.5 cm (19¼ × 20¼ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.179

Feliciano Centurión
Sueña [*Dream*], ca. 1996
Hand-embroidered pillow
22 × 31 cm (8¾ × 12¼ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Donald R. Mullins, Jr., 2004.180

Feliciano Centurión
La muerte es parte intermitente de mis días [*Death Is an Intermittent Part of My Days*], 1996
Hand-embroidered blanket
50 × 70 cm (19⅝ × 27½ in.)
Collection Donald R. Mullins, Jr.

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, n.d.
Acrylic on polyester blanket
232 × 193 cm (91¼ × 76 in.)
Collection Don R. Mullins, Jr.

Beto de Volder
Mordisquito [*The Bite*], 1993
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 130 cm (78¾ × 51¼ in.)
Colección Bruzzone

Beto de Volder
Orgia [*Orgy*], 1993
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 150 cm (78¾ × 59⅛ in.)
Collection of the artist
(fig. 36, p. 59)

Beto de Volder
Orgia II [*Orgy II*], 1993
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 150 cm (78¾ × 59⅛ in.)
Collection of the artist
(fig. 37, p. 60)

Beto de Volder
Orgia III [*Orgy III*], 1993
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 150 cm (78¾ × 59⅛ in.)
Collection of the artist
(fig. 38, p. 60)

Sebastián Gordín
Que cosa tan horrible y espantosa [*What a Horrible and Creepy Thing*], 1992
Plastic, epoxy putty, and acrylic on a wooden box
17 × 17 × 4 cm
(6¾ × 6¾ × 1⅝ in.)
Colección Orly Benzacar

Sebastián Gordín
Untitled, 1992
Wooden box, 0.5 mini-ampere light bulbs, epoxy putty, and acrylic
9 × 14 × 12 cm
(3½ × 5½ × 4¾ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 40, p. 66)

Sebastián Gordín
El libro de oro de Scoop [*Scoop's Golden Book*], 1993
Enameled epoxy putty, wood, cardboard, and aluminum
25 × 45 × 36 cm
(9¾ × 17¾ × 14¼ in.)
Private collection
(fig. 3, p. 10)

Sebastián Gordín
El infierno de Dante [*Dante's Inferno*], 1993
Wood, acrylic, epoxy putty, wax pencils, and plastic
18 × 18 × 7.5 cm (7⅛ × 7⅛ × 3 in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 11, p. 26)

Sebastián Gordín
Las últimas consideraciones [*The Last Considerations*], 1993
Wood, aluminum, cardboard, and lights
48 × 50 × 50 cm
(18⅞ × 19¾ × 19¾ in.)
Colección Silvia y Hugo Sigman
(fig. 41, p. 67)

Sebastián Gordín
Lo encontraron con el pichicho en sus manos y sangre en la boca. ¿Cómo probar su inocencia? [*They Found Him with the Doggy in His Hands and Blood in His Mouth. How Can His Innocence Be Proven?*], 1995
Watercolor and wax pencils on paper
16 × 24 cm (6¼ × 9⅜ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 42, p. 68)

Sebastián Gordín
Biznikke, 1995
Siliconed foam rubber, glass globe, and light
36 × 45 × 27 cm
(14¼ × 17¾ × 10⅝ in.)
Colección Gabriel Guilligan
(fig. 2, p. 9)

Sebastián Gordín
Estación central de Rotterdam [*Rotterdam Central Station*], 1996
Wood, metal, plastic, glass panes, and lights
Box: 45 × 60 × 100 cm
(17¾ × 23⅝ × 39⅜ in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Fundación Arte BA, Buenos Aires, and contributions from the Blanton Latin American Circle, 2006.326

Sebastián Gordín
Piscina de la calle Pontoise [*Pontoise Street Pool*], 1996
Wood, metal, plastic, glass panes, and lights
Box: 45 × 60 × 100 cm
(17¾ × 23⅝ × 39⅜ in.)
Colección Subastas Roldán

Sebastián Gordín
Edificio administrativo de Johnson e hijo [*Johnson and Son Administrative Building*], 1996–2010
Wood, metal, plastic, glass panes, and lights
Box: 45 × 60 × 100 cm
(17¾ × 23⅝ × 39⅜ in.)
Collection of the artist

Sebastián Gordín
Sala de fiestas Lyon [*Lyon Party Room*], 1996
Wood, plastic, glass panes, and lights
Box: 45 × 60 × 100 cm
(17¾ × 23⅝ × 39⅜ in.)
Collection of the artist

Jorge Gumier Maier
Untitled, 1993
Acrylic on carved plywood
184 × 73 cm (72⅜ × 28¾ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 46, p. 74)

Jorge Gumier Maier
Untitled, 1999
Acrylic on wood
70 × 70 × 2 cm
(27½ × 27½ × ¾ in.)
Private collection

Jorge Gumier Maier
Untitled, 2000
Acrylic on carved wood
Larger panel: 192 × 95.5 cm.
(75 9/16 × 37⅝ in.)
Smaller panel: 150 × 90 cm.
(59 1/16 × 35 7/16 in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by the generosity of the Blanton Latin American Circle, 2005.173.1/2-2/2
(fig. 47, p. 75)

Jorge Gumier Maier
Untitled, n.d.
Acrylic on wood
149 × 160 cm (58¾ × 63 in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 1, p. 8)

Miguel Harte
Huevojos [*Eggs/Eyes*], 1990
Eggshells and glass eyes on wood
94 × 51 × 16 cm (37 × 20 × 6¼ in.)
Colección Andreussi Guzmán

Miguel Harte
Jardín de las delicias [*The Garden of Delights*], 1993
Formica, Martilux, insects, snails, plastic plants, polyester resin, and lights
120 × 110 × 30 cm
(47¼ × 43¼ × 11¾ in.)
Colección Delmiro Mendez e Hijo, S.A. (fig. 53, p. 83)

Miguel Harte
El gordiplan hártico [*The Gordiplan Hártico*], 1995
Acrylic hemisphere, textured paint, glass, liquid Vaseline, silicone sealer, insect, cold air fan, and light
39.4 × 78.7 cm (15½ × 31 in.)
Museum purchase with funds provided by Michael Chesser, 2008.59

Miguel Harte
Como una piedra que sueña [*As a Dreaming Rock*], 1997
Formica, epoxy putty, wood, polyester resin, and lacquer
30 × 30 × 28 cm
(11¾ × 11¾ × 11 in.)
Colección Juan y Patricia Vergez
(fig. 52, p. 83)

Miguel Harte
La intrusa [*The Intruder*], 1998
Iron, glass, epoxy putty, quartz geodes, putty, insects, and light
294.6 × 208.3 × 322.6 cm
(116 × 82 × 127 in.)
Blanton Museum of Art, Susman Collection, 2007.84
(fig. 51, p. 82)

Miguel Harte
El jardín filosófico [*The Philosophical Garden*], 1998
Iron, acrylic, epoxy putty, Formica, expanded polyurethane, Vaseline, purpurin, and light
110 × 110 × 170 cm
(43¼ × 43¼ × 66⅞ in.)
Colección Zelmira Peralta Ramos
(fig. 50, p. 81)

Miguel Harte
Sin título (Homenaje a Fontana) [*Untitled (Homage to Fontana)*], 1998
Polyester painting on embroidery frame, polyester resin inclusions
100 × 220 cm (39⅜ × 86⅝ in.)
Colección Alejandro Bengolea

Graciela Hasper
Untitled, 1994
Acrylic on canvas
145 × 86 cm (57⅛ × 33⅞ in.)
Colección Bruzzone

Graciela Hasper
Untitled, 1996
Acrylic on canvas
144 × 145 cm (56¾ × 57⅛ in.)
Private collection

Graciela Hasper
Untitled, 1996
Acrylic on canvas
145 × 145 cm (57⅛ × 57⅛ in.)
Collection of the artist

Graciela Hasper
Untitled, 1999
Acrylic on canvas
175 × 175 cm (68⅞ × 68⅞ in.)
Colección Magdalena Cordero
(fig. 57, p. 89)

Fabio Kacero
Omar Schiliro, 1994
Wooden stool, foam rubber, decorative fringe, and embroidered velvet
15 × 32 × 20 cm
(5⅞ × 12⅝ × 7⅞ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 60, p. 96)

Fabio Kacero
Untitled, 1996
Wood, Polifan, foam rubber, stickers, faux leather, and PVC
5 circles: 50-60-50-70-80-100 cm diameter (19¾–23⅝–19¾–27⅝–31½ in.)
Colección Mauro y Luz Herlitzka
(fig. 59, p. 95)

Fabio Kacero
Untitled, 1999
Wood, Polifan, foam rubber, plastic material, stickers on P.V.C.
200 × 95 cm
(78¾ × 38⅜ inches)
Colección Lucio Oscar Méndez

Fabio Kacero
Untitled, n.d.
Superimposed plastic transparencies and light
Entire piece: 10 × 115 cm
(3⅞ × 45¼ in.)
Colección Delmiro Mendez e Hijo, S.A. (fig. 61, p. 97)

Fabio Kacero
Untitled (three boxes), 1996–1998
Superimposed plastic transparencies
Each box: 7 × 7 cm
(2¾ × 2¾ in.)
Collection of the artist
(fig. 19, p. 38)

Benito Laren
Buscando Precios [*Searching for Prices*], 1991
Holographic paper, mirror, and acrylic on glass
83.2 × 178.3 cm (32¾ × 70¼ in.)
Blanton Museum of Art, gift of the artist, 2007.15
(fig. 63, p. 103)

Benito Laren
Circulación monetaria [*Currency Circulation*], 1992
Acrylic and holographic paper under glass and tire
51 × 6 cm (20⅛ × 2⅜ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 24, p. 41)

Benito Laren
Plato volador [*Flying Saucer*], 1992
Acrylic and holographic paper under glass
40 × 50 cm (15¾ × 19¾ in.)
Colección Bruzzone

Benito Laren
A la hora señalada [*High Noon*], 1996
Acrylic and holographic paper under glass and tire
51 × 6 cm (20⅛ × 2⅜ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 62, p. 102)

Benito Laren
El día de la independencia de los elipses [*Independence Day for the Elipses*], 1998
Acrylic and holographic paper under glass
45 × 50 cm (17¾ × 19¾ in.)
Colección Bruzzone

Benito Laren
Stradivarius, 1998
Acrylic, glass, and cut panel
60 × 26 cm (23⅝ × 10¼ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 64, p. 104)

Alfredo Londaibere
Untitled, 1991
Acrylic on canvas
48 × 72 cm (18⅞ × 28¼ in.)
Colección Subastas Roldán

Alfredo Londaibere
Untitled, 1994
Enamel-collage on wood
70 × 92 cm (27⅝ × 75⅝ in.)
Colección Gabriel Guilligan
(fig. 70, p. 113)

Alfredo Londaibere
Untitled, 1994
Enamel-collage on wood
57 × 72 cm (22⅜ × 28¼ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 69, p. 112)

Alfredo Londaibere
Untitled, 1994
Acrylic and enameled inclusions on wood and metal
50 × 35 × 5 cm
(19¾ × 13¾ × 2 in.)
Colección Proyecto A

Alfredo Londaibere
Untitled, 1995
Enamel-collage on wood
35 × 50 × 5 cm
(13¾ × 19¾ × 2 in.)
Colección Patricia Rizzo
(fig. 68, p. 111)

Marcelo Pombo
Untitled, 1990
Cardboard and enamel on wood veneered in Formica
55.6 × 47 × 4.1 cm
(21½ × 18½ × 1⅝ in.)
Collection of the artist

Marcelo Pombo
Navidad en San Francisco Solano [*Christmas in San Francisco Solano*], 1991
Cardboard, nylon, and synthetic enamel on wood
80 × 120 cm (31½ × 47¼ in.)
Colección Mauro y Luz Herlitzka
(fig. 72, p.118)

Marcelo Pombo
Vitreaux de San Francisco Solano [*Stained Glass from San Francisco Solano*], 1991
Waste bags, packing tape, and enamel on wood
100 × 180 cm (39⅜ × 70⅞ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 23, p. 40)

Marcelo Pombo
Guirnalda con frutos podridos [*Garland with Rotted Fruit*], 1993
Appliqués and enamel on wood
100 × 150 cm (39⅜ × 59⅛ in.)
Colección Carlos R. Luis

Marcelo Pombo
Skip Ultra Intelligent, 1996
Stickers and acrylic on cardboard box
15 × 19 × 9 cm
(5⅞ × 7½ × 3½ in.)
Private collection
(fig. 12, p. 26)

Marcelo Pombo
El niño mariposa [*The Butterfly Boy*], 1996
Enamel on wood
95 × 100 cm (37⅜ × 43¼ in.)
Colección Gabriel Guilligan
(fig. 73, p. 118)

Marcelo Pombo
Cae la noche sobre el río [Night Falls on the River], 1996
Appliqués, nylon, and acrylic on stamped canvas
132 × 124 cm (52 × 48¾ in.)
Colección Mauro y Luz Herlitzka
(fig. 74, p. 119)

Marcelo Pombo
Casper, 1998
Mixed media on canvas
110 × 220 cm (43¼ × 86⅝ in.)
Blanton Museum of Art, gift of Michael Chesser, 2010

Cristina Schiavi
Te Invito [*I Invite You*], 1993
Mixed media (diverse plastic and synthetic materials)
70 × 42 cm (27⅝ × 16½ in.)
Colección Bruzzone
(fig. 76, p. 124)

Cristina Schiavi
Cinta rosa [*Pink Ribbon*], 1997
Zinc and enamel
147 × 118 × 36 cm
(57⅞ × 46½ × 14¼ in.)
Collection of the artist
(fig. 77, p. 125)

Omar Schiliro
Untitled, n.d.
Plastic and glass elements with light
65 × 43 cm (25⅝ × 16⅞ in.)
Colección Ignacio Liprandi

Omar Schiliro
Untitled, 1992
Plastic and glass elements with light
190 × 80 cm (74¾ × 31½ in.)
Colección Gabriel Guilligan
(fig. 79, p. 130)

Omar Schiliro
Batato te entiendo [*Batato I Understand You*], 1993
Plastic and glass elements with light
190 × 60 cm (74¾ × 23⅝ in.)
Private collection
(fig. 78, p. 129)

Omar Schiliro
Untitled, 1993
Plastic and glass elements with light
98 × 38 × 38 cm
(38⅝ × 15 × 15 in.)
Blanton Museum of Art, Fran Magee Fund, 2005.155
(fig. 13, p. 27)

Omar Schiliro
Untitled, 1992
Plastic and glass elements
113 × 110 × 23 cm
(59⅜ × 74¾ × 9⅛ in.)
Colección Ignacio Liprandi
(fig. 18, p. 38)

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About the Artists

Fabián Burgos (b. 1962, Buenos Aires) He began studying art with Luis Felipe Noé. His first solo exhibition was at the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana in 1993. His solo exhibitions have been at: the Galería Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Galería Annina Nosei, and Galería Dabbah Torrejón (Buenos Aires). He has been included in group exhibitions such as: *Crimen y Ornamento*, Centro Cultural Rojas (Buenos Aires, 1994); *Kacero, Burgos, Ballesteros*, Ruth Benzacar Galería de Arte (Buenos Aires, 1996); *Vértigo*, Fundación Proa (Buenos Aires, 1997); *El Tao del arte*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (Buenos Aires, 1997); and participated in international exhibitions in Brazil, Mexico, the United States, and France. His work is included in several private collections in Argentina.

Feliciano Centurión (b. 1962, Asunción, Paraguay; died 1996 in Buenos Aires) He was trained in the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón and the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Córcova in Buenos Aires. He was included in solo and group exhibitions in Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Cuba. He received numerous awards, among them: Fundación Mundo Nuevo, given by the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, and Premio Martel de Pintura awarded to him in 1990 and 1992 at the Centro de Artes Visuales, in Asunción, Paraguay. His work is included in several private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Beto de Volder (b. 1962, Buenos Aires) He studied at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano, between 1986 and 1989, and at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in 1989. He participated in numerous individual and group exhibitions in Argentina, the United States, Uruguay, France, Chile, and Peru. He was awarded the first prize in painting at the Bienal de Arte Joven in 1993. In 1994 he was awarded a scholarship by the Fundación Antorchas to work in the Taller de Barracas for two years under the mentorship of Luis Fernando Benedit and Pablo Suárez. His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Sebastián Gordín (b. 1969, Buenos Aires) He completed a B.F.A. in 1989 at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano. His first exhibition was held at the Galería Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (Buenos Aires). In 1996 he presented the *Gordinoscopio* and *teatrinos* at this space. In 1999 he had his first solo show at Galería Ruth Benzacar (Buenos Aires). He has been included in several national and international group shows. He was awarded the Premio Braque in 1994, received a grant from Fundación Antorchas in 1997, and a scholarship from the Fondo Nacional de las Artes in 1998, and the first prize at the Bienal de Arte de Bahía Blanca in 2001. His work is included in several private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Jorge Gumier Maier (b. 1953, Buenos Aires) He directed the Galería Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas at the Universidad de Buenos Aires from 1989 until 1997. He has led seminars and workshops at the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Universidad Nacional del Sur in Bahía Blanca, and Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Mendoza. He has been an active artist in Argentina since the 1970s, participating in a number of solo and group exhibitions. His work has been included in group shows in Argentina, Brazil, Germany, and the United States. In 2001 he received the award Trayectoria del Fondo Nacional de las Artes, and in 2002 the Premio Konex. His work is included in several private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Miguel Harte (b. 1961 Buenos Aires) He was trained and influenced by artists Pablo Suárez, Antonio Heredia, Emilio Renart, Victor Grippo, and Roberto Jacoby. He has been active since the 1980s, working and showing in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. His exhibitions include: *Harte-Suárez-Pombo*, Rojas Gallery (1989); *Miguel Harte*, Galería Ruth Benzacar (1998 and 2008); *Miguel Harte Dibujos*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (2003). He was awarded, among others: a grant from the Fundación Antorchas and a scholarship from the Fundación Nacional de Arte (1996); and the prizes Leonardo (1999), Konex (2002), Klemm (2008), Fortabat Sculpture Prize. In recent years he has held individual exhibitions at the Galería Fernando Pradilla of Madrid, and the Casa Rivadavia, in Cádiz, Spain. His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Graciela Hasper (b. 1966, Buenos Aires) Since 1989 she has held various solo exhibitions at the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Galería Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (Buenos Aires), and Gallery Annina Nosei (New York). Her work has been included in several group exhibitions, among them: *Le Réel Comme Matériau*, Centro 19 (France); *From Confrontation to Intimacy: 1960/2007*, Americas Society (New York, 2007); *Lo(s) Cinético(s)*, Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid, 2007) and Instituto Tomie Othake (São Paolo, 2007). She received the Fundación Antorchas scholarship for the Kuitca workshop in 1991, and a Fulbright scholarship for a residency in Apex Art (New York) in 2000. She co-founded the Residencia Internacional de Artistas in 2006, and the Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas in 2009 (Buenos Aires). Her work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Fabio Kacero (b. 1961, Buenos Aires) He studied art at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón and at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Among his solo exhibitions are: Kravets-Wehby Gallery (New York, 1998); Museo de Bellas Artes de Bahía Blanca (Argentina, 2004); *La muestra del año*, Ruth Benzacar Galería de Arte (2006). His work has been included in several group shows: *Heard Not Seen*, Orchard Gallery (New York, 2006) *Beginning With A Bang! From Confrontation to Intimacy*: *An Exhibition of Argentine Contemporary Artists 1960–2007*, Americas Society (New York, 2007); and *Archaeology of Longing*, Kadist Art Foundation (Paris, 2008). He has received the following prizes and distinctions from: the Asociación Argentina de Críticos de Arte (Buenos Aires, 1991); Fundación Konex (Buenos Aires, 2002); among others. His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Benito Laren (b. 1962, San Nicolás, Argentina) He was trained as chemist, and is a self-taught artist. He employs a painting technique of paint over glass that consists of enamel, metallic paper, and glosses. He also works within the video and film industry. His work has been in several group and individual exhibitions in Argentina and abroad. A book on Laren's visual and literary work, entitled *Larenland*, was published in 2010. His work is included in several private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Alfredo Londaibere (b. 1955, Buenos Aires) He trained with artists Araceli Vásquez Málaga and Oscar Smöge, and studied at the Asociación Estímulo de Bellas Artes. He assisted the artists Marcia Schvartz and Juan José Cambre during the mural project for Banco Tornquist (1993–1995), and was also Pablo Suárez's assistant. His work has been included in publications such as: *El Tao del Arte*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (1997); *Artistas Argentinos de los '90*, Fondo Nacional de las Artes (1999); *Últimas tendencias*, the Museum of Modern Art de Buenos Aires; *Como el Amor*, M. Jacoby V. Gonzalez CCEBA-Libro del Rojas. He received the Fundación Antorchas scholarship for the Kuitca workshop (1991–1993). His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Marcelo Pombo (b. 1959, Buenos Aires) During the 1990s his work alternated between painting and object making, utilizing ornamental materials associated with decoration. His work has been featured at: Galería Ruth Benzacar (Buenos Aires), Christopher Grimes Gallery (Santa Monica, CA), the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin, TX), and Blaffer Gallery (Houston, TX), among others. His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

Cristina Schiavi (b. 1954, Buenos Aires) Among her solo exhibitions are *Te Invito*, Galería Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (1993); *La Toma*, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2003); *Cristina Schiavi*, Galería Braga Menéndez (2005). Her work has been included in several group shows in Rosario, Bahía Blanca, La Habana (Cuba), Asunción 1(Paraguay), Frankfurt (Germany), Mallorca (Spain), and Taiwan. She has received the following awards: the Primer Premio Bienal de Bahía Blanca, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Bahía Blanca (1999); el Primer Premio Prodaltec de Arte Digital (2000); la Beca Artes Plásticas del Fondo Nacional de las Artes (2001); Fundación Konex (2002); Premio Fundación Antorchas (2004); the Premio Samuel Paz (2006); El Basilisco (Esteban Álvarez, Tamara Stuby and Cristina Schiavi); Asociación Argentina de Críticos de Arte. Her work is included in private and public collections in Argentina.

Omar Schiliro (b. 1962, Buenos Aires; died, Buenos Aires 1994) He was a jewelry designer and self-taught artist who began working in this field in 1992. His work has been included in group exhibitions: *La Conquista. 500 años. 40 artistas*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (1991); *El Rojas presenta: algunos artistas*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (1992); *Gumier Maier, Laren, Londaibere, Schiliro*, Espacio Giesso (1992); *Ilusiones de artista*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (1993); *Del borde*, Fundación Banco Patricios (1993); *90-60-90, Crimen y ornamento*, Centro Cultural Rojas (1994); *1999. Fin de siglo*, Fundación Banco Patricios (1995); *El Tao del arte*, Centro Cultural Recoleta (1997); *Ultimas tendencias*, MAMBA (2002); (and New York) *The Rational Twist*, Apex Art (1996). His work is included in private and public collections in Argentina and abroad.

About the Authors

Doris Bravo is a doctoral student in Art History at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). She completed her B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature and Latin American Studies in 2003 and earned an M.A. in the Social Sciences in 2004 at the University of Chicago. In 2010 she completed her M.A. in Art History at UT. Her research projects include post-1970s Latin American art, and the artistic scenes of 1980s Santiago and Buenos Aires.

Ursula Davila-Villa received an M.A. in Museum Studies from New York University in 2005, and a B.A. in Architecture and Urbanism from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Mexico), Université Laval (Québec), and UT Utrech (Netherlands) in 2001. She joined the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin in 2005 and is currently serving as Associate Curator, Latin American Art. She was co-editor of *The New York Graphic Workshop: 1965–1970* published by the Blanton Museum of Art (2008). She has lectured and published internationally on contemporary art and museum studies.

Inés Katzenstein received her M.A. from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York in 2001. She is currently Director of the Department of Art at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires. Her curatorial projects include: "Liliana Porter: Fotografía y ficción" (Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2003), and "David Lamelas, Extranjero, Foreigner, Ètranger, Aüslander" (Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico, 2005), among others. She was curator of the project "Guillermo Kuitca, If I was Winter Itself," presented at the Argentine pavilion at the 52nd edition of the Venice Biennial, and was co-curator of Zona Franca at the Mercosul Biennial in 2007. From 2004 to 2008 she was the head curator at Malba-Fundacion Constantini, Museum of Latin American Art in Buenos Aires. She edited the book *Listen, Here, Now!! Argentine Art of the Sixties: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2004).

Natalia Pineau is a doctoral student currently working on her thesis, *Poéticas de los noventa. Debates estéticos en el campo del arte argentino (1989–1999)* under the support of a scholarship awarded by the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), where she received a B.F.A. in Art History in 2005. She currently teaches art history at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the UBA. She has written and presented her research at academic conferences and scientific meetings both nationally and internationally.

Abigail Winograd is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) specializing in modern and contemporary art. She received an M.A. in Art History from Northwestern University in 2007, a second M.A. in Art History from UT (2009), and a B.A. in Art History and History from the University of Wisconsin (2004). Her most recent research project is "The Trauma of Dislocation and the Development of Abstraction in Latin America: Renegotiations of Space, Experience, and Self in the work of Gego and Mira Schendel." She has been a Graduate Research Assistant at the Blanton Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago.

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