

Ferrari

No. 67 Volume 6 Year 2007

# ArtNexus



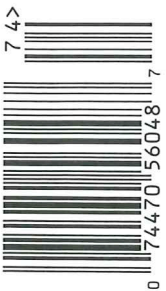
**LEÓN FERRARI**

**The 6<sup>th</sup> Mercosur Biennial • Albers - Moholy Nagy**

**Enrique Martínez Celaya • MDE07 • Regina Silveira**

**Cuenca Biennial • Diego Rivera • Fernell Franco**

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December 2007 - February 2008

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PRINTED BY: Panamericana Formas e Impresos S.A.

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Registro de Propiedad del Ministerio de Gobierno Resolución 002314  
ARTNEXUS ISSN 0121-5639

MADE IN COLOMBIA



León Ferrari. *Hell*, from the *Ideas for Hells*, 2000. Pan with saints.  
8 3/5 x 20 2/5 x 10 1/5 in. (22 x 52 x 26 cm.). Alicia and León Ferrari Collection.  
Courtesy: Pan American Art Projects.

When the Argentinean curator Victoria Noorthoorn, who took part in the presentation of León Ferrari (Buenos Aires, 1920) in the Venice Biennale, learned that the artist received the Golden Lion, she commented: "[...] this is not only a reward for his career achievements, the sustained experimental practice over the years and the confrontation of adverse circumstances, but also a prize for freedom of expression in our country." This statement is more than accurate: if anything has distinguished Ferrari throughout his long, prolific career, it is the permanent defense of his convictions, despite any trouble they might cause for him. Ferrari's position regarding "Western and Christian" religion, for instance, is a central theme in his work, and it has resulted in multiple acts of censorship against him. Let us just remember the banning in 1965 of *La civilización occidental y cristiana* during the Di Tella Award, under the excuse that it could hurt the religious sensibilities of workers in the Di Tella Institute. From his beginnings in the art world around 1955 to the present, using a uniquely personal artistic language, with controversial proposals, Ferrari experimented both in abstraction and figuration, deploying such varied techniques as sculpture, drawing, painting, photography, collage, and installation, as well as materials like wood, plaster, clay, and stainless steel wire, with which he created refined sculptures. All this activity in the art world is complemented by his texts, be it poetry, journalism, and essays on the role of art and of the artist.

Ivonne Pini

(See interview, Birbragher-Pini, page 90)





**LEÓN FERRARI**

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& WORKS 1962-2007**

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## CONVOCAATION

## 28th International Mini Print

Fort Studio Gallery, ADOGI  
Cadaqués, Spain

Fort Studio Gallery was founded in 1960 with the aim of contributing with the expansion of engraving art in all its specialties. Since 1981 it organizes every year the Cadaqués International Mini Print, in which 7215 artists from 130 countries have participated, whose small engravings have been exhibited in spaces around the entire world. In order to collaborate with Fort Studio Gallery the *Asociación Difusora de la Obra Gráfica Internacional -ADOGI*, which organizes jointly this edition of the contest, was created.

For the 28th edition of the Mini Print, each artist must participate with four works. The images cannot exceed 10 x 10 cms. They must be sent via certified mail before March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. A jury of 6 engraving professionals will deliver 6 awards, all of them in the same category, which will be reproduced in their original size and in full colour in the catalogue. Each awarded artist will be invited for an individual exhibit of their small format work on the summer of 2009.

Full contest requirements and additional information on:  
[www.miniprint.org](http://www.miniprint.org)

## PRIZES AND DISTINCTIONS

## ✦ Venice Biennial Awards

Venice, Italy

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Venice Biennial jury formed by: Ilaria Bonocossa, Abdellah Karroum, Ilona Blazwick, Manuel Borja-Villel and José Ignacio Roca, informed the artists awarded during the biennial.

Argentinian artist León Ferrari won the Golden Lion to the best work of the International Exhibit with *La civilización occidental y cristiana* (1965). Hungary received the Golden Lion to the best national pavilion, Jordan Emily Jacir was chosen as the best artist under 40, for a work focused on exile in general and in the Palestinian case in particular, the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement award was given to Malick Sidibé, from Mali.

## René de la Nuez

2007 National Fine Arts Prize  
Havana, Cuba

On September 14, René de la Nuez (1937) received the 2007 National Fine Arts Prize. He was chosen from six candidates selected by several Cuban institutions. The majority of members of a hefty jury headed by Pablo Oliva, last year's winner of the same prize, voted for de la Nuez.

Regarded as one of the most important cartoonists of the twentieth century in Cuba, René is the first artist who is outstanding mainly in the field of humorous cartoon drawing to receive this award.

Every year since 1994, the Cuban Cultural Ministry awards this National Prize, through its National Fine Arts Council to a living Cuban artist residing on the island for his lifetime body of work and his overall contribution to the country's art history. Solely that, in this particular instance, the award acknowledges a manifestation of the visual culture: graphic humor.

This recognition coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of de la Nuez's most significant cartoon character: *el Loquito* (*The Loony*). Although it had a short life span (1957–1959), it became a milestone of Cuban cartoon drawing. Other characters such as *El Barbudo* (*The Bearded One*), *Mogollón* (*Slacker*), and *Don Cizaño* (*Mr. Troublemaker*) demonstrate the artist's creative ability and his talent for developing multiple personalities.

This self-taught graphic satirist, who began publishing his cartoons in 1955, does not believe humor can be divided by color: rather than black or white, he believes in the existence of either good or bad humor. He has thrived in a diversity of graphic humor genres: political; editorial; local customs and manners, personal caricature...

With precise, concealed humor, elliptical and encoded visual language that invites the reader's complicity, de la Nuez has collaborated with several national and international newspapers and magazines. He was Director of the humorous weekly magazine *Pa'lante* and is the Cuban visual humorist with the most books published, with nearly twenty. One of these, *Garabatos*, received an honorable mention at the prestigious Latin-American competition at *Casa de las Américas*.

Nuez has earned several national and international humor awards, the most recent that he received this year at the *Bienal del Toboso* in Spain. He has been a member of jury panels in numerous competitions such as the International Humor Biennale held in San Antonio de los Baños, his hometown.

A graduate in journalism, René is also Honorary President of the Cathedra of Humor at The International Journalism Institute José Martí in Havana and Emeritus Professor at the Cathedra of Humor at The University of Alcalá de Henares in Spain.

He has also experimented with other artistic media, painting and collage, and has pursued national identity themes from folklore to poetry.

Israel Castellanos León

## Molaa Award

Art Contest 2007  
Long Beach, California

The Museum of Latin American Art (Molaa) announced the winners of the Second Juried Art Contest, who were selected on Sunday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007. A jury of four contemporary art experts selected the seven final contestants who were competing for US\$ 50,000 in prizes from auctioned works. Each art piece except the Honor Mention, is now included in Molaa's permanent collection.

The winners were: Mario Opazo (Colombia) with the digital video *Territorio Fugitivo*, Julio César Peña (Cuba) for *Apropiaciones indebidas*, Verónica Riedel (Guatemala) for the series *Travesías del rito: Clockwork Orange* and *Cadena de Montañas 1*; Ricardo Benaím (Venezuela) for *Billete de cinco condors/Banco Central del Cóndor*, Tristán Reyes Alvarado (Puerto Rico) for *Franchessa en el estudio, 2.1* and Tatiana Parceró (Argentina) for *Reinvención #25*. The Honor Mention was given to Oliver Krisch (Venezuela) for the digital photography *Reggaeton*.

## Praemium Imperiale 2007

The Japan Art Association  
Miami, FL

The Japan Art Association has appointed the architect firm that will design the new





## León Ferrari

Untitled, from the series *Re-reading of the Bible*, 1988. Collage, 8 x 10 1/2 in. (20.2 x 27 cm). Collection Alicia and León Ferrari.

### Interview by:

CELIA SREDNI DE BIRBRAGHER  
AND IVONNE PINI

**Celia Sredni de Birbragher:** How and when were you discovered?

**León Ferrari:** That was only a joke. The truth is that I started making art when I was very young—in 1940 at the age of twenty, when I was studying engineering. My father was a painter but he didn't think it advisable to study art, because of the difficulties entailed in supporting a family with that profession; it is not that he forbade it, but he directed me toward other professions. I made some things in clay, and finally in 1955 I started studying ceramics, as a hobby in Rome. I realized I really enjoyed it and devoted myself to it, but I also continued in engineering until 1976. My road with art was somewhat bumpy

because my first show in Argentina was in 1960, when I was doing abstract art (with other shows in 1961 and 1964) and that's when friends started to know me, the artists and the local scene.

I stopped doing abstract art in 1965, when I made the airplane that is now at the Pinacoteca. Between 1965 and 1972, I practically did nothing but stuff for political shows that were entirely outside the museum and gallery circuit. We exhibited at trade unions or artists' societies. In 1973, I left that entirely. My art production was somewhat staggered, but in 1976, in Brazil, I went back to abstract art and worked hard. I took a workshop and for the first time devoted myself to working as an artist full-time. At first I sold almost nothing, and although there were critics—especially Andrea Giunta, who began working with me and other timid friends years ago—it had no transcendence. I lived in São Paulo for almost fourteen

years, but this is the first time I am at the São Paulo Biennial.

**Ivonne Pini:** In Argentina in the 1960s, there was a movement called Nueva Figuración with Noé and other artists, some of them with a political bent in their work, concerned with finding new forms and languages. Another experience was Tucumán Arde. How did you experience this complex period, with a dictatorship and with art experiences that confronted the situation?

**L.F.:** Undoubtedly, Noé, de la Vega, Macció, and Deira all have works about torture, and they formed the Nueva Figuración group. Somewhat later, the Di Tella Institute gave them its support. From there, Romero Brest fostered formal freedom and new experiences. Despite having had great differences with Romero Brest, he was, in my view, very important in Argentina as a generator of new movements, of interest and emulation

among artists. Now, the emergence of Tucumán Arde is interesting, if you take into account that Romero Brest was against anything that had to do with politics. "Ideology is the anti-body of art," he used to say. But the people that later did Tucumán Arde came out of the Di Tella Institute. Some came out of there and abandoned the gallery circuit entirely; they sought a new form, in order to intervene in the political life of the country, to use art as a revolutionary weapon. There were two or three meetings and two shows: one at the CGT of the Argentines, in Rosario, and another one in Buenos Aires. But the funny thing is that the Tucumán Arde group, which wanted to escape the "-isms" and the history of art, faced art as a political weapon and dissolved after two or three months. Maintaining a group with such great differences was very difficult and the truth is that this movement that wanted to break free from the history

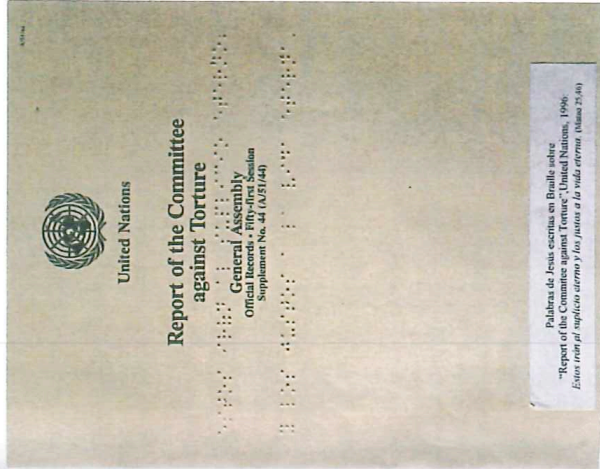
of art in order to do politics was unable to do politics and instead entered the history of art. Many people left this, many people went to fight with guerrillas: Rodolfo Walsh's daughter, Vicky Walsh, died there. I stopped making art for a time, but later, when I got to Brazil—where I went, also fleeing from repression—I took up art as a profession in order to make a living and for the first time I devoted myself to it in full. I went back to things I had not only left behind, but things I had denounced in my writings of 1968, all connected to abstract art; later I went back to it as a way of life. Sometimes people criticize me; they ask me why some of the things I do have such great charge and others don't. I do what occurs to me; it is like life, sometimes you go out for a drink, sometimes you go to the cemetery; these are different things. Many things happen in life: there is a pretty field of flowers, and all of a sudden there are scores of dead from a bomb dropped by the Ameri-

cans. So, this would be in brief my history in the last fifty years.

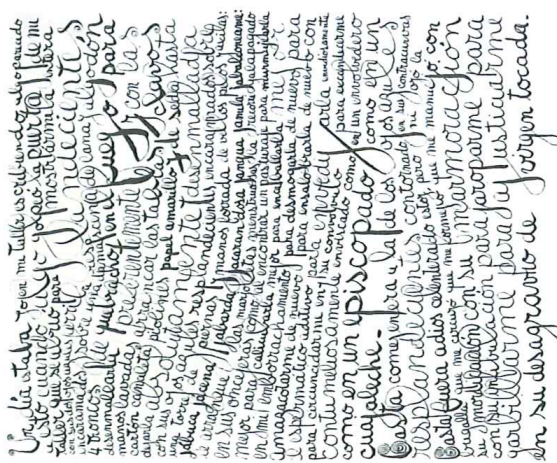
**C.S.B.:** In your work, there is a courage, a strength to say certain political, sexual, religious things without fear, openly. Why?

**L.F.:** I think that the axis of the West is religion's threat to those who are different: intolerance taken to the extreme. In other words, not only disliking what the other says but also punishing him with torture. Such intolerance is embedded in our culture. Atheist or not, we have it inside of ourselves, and it seems to me that anti-Semitism originates in the Bible and especially in the New Testament. Whether the story of the life of Jesus is true or not, whether it is distorted or not, what matters is the book, the existence of the book. Anti-Semitism is born of the book: Jesus's struggle against Jews who did not believe in his divinity, Peter's condemnation of the Jews for killing Christ. Also, anti-gay intolerance is in the Old Testament with the destruction of Sodom; later,

*They Shall Go*, 15/05/1997. Artist book 1/10. Words of Jesus written in braille on the Report of the Committee Against Torture, United Nations, New York: "They Shall Go to Eternal Torment and Those Who Ate Fair, to Eternal Life." (M 25-46), 10 1/2 x 8 1/2 in. (27.5 x 21.5 cm). Collection Alicia and León Ferrari.

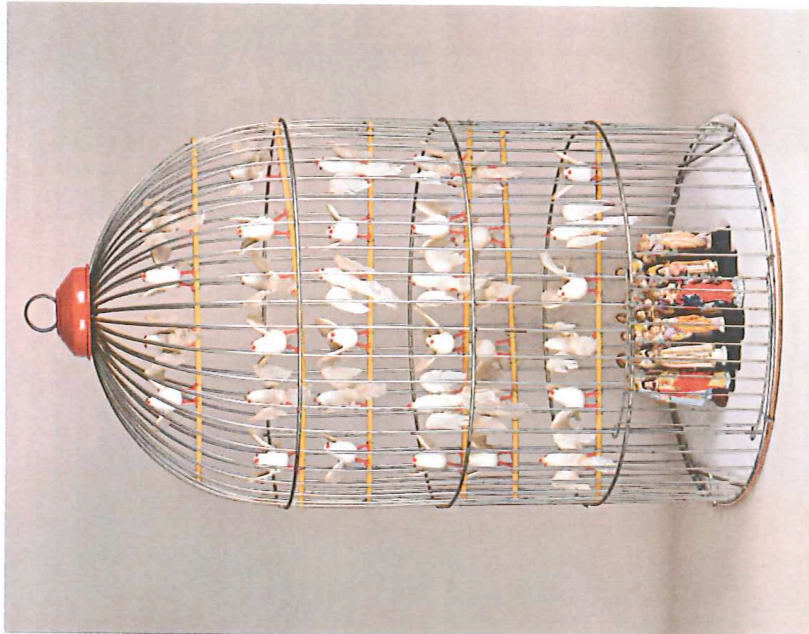


*The Story of My Death*, from the series *Manuscripts*, 1965. Chinese ink on paper, 13 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (35 x 27 cm). Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires.



Historia de mi muerte. León Ferrari, 1965





*Hell*, 2000. Bird cage with dove and sand saints. 32 1/2 x 18 1/2 in. (83 x 47 cm.). Alicia and León Ferrari. Collection.

Paul repeats the thing about punishment by death, discrimination against women, all that. Intolerance is one Biblical feature that has survived through the actions of the Church and the Western culture that supported it.

In the work of many of the artists we admire—artists who I also admire—the content is awful. Giotto, Michelangelo, Dante, Bach—all have terrible things. Art served as a P.R. tool for the Church in its effort to entrench itself, to maintain power, to communicate those ideas: kill the natives, kill the witches, kill so many people. I mean, this concern with what the West is—which I've been talking about for years, since 1965

nuts who prayed at the door of my show... whatever.

I wanted to initiate a debate, but I couldn't. I wrote several things responding to the issue of blasphemy, telling them that the only difference or the most important difference was that I am against torture and they are in favor of it. They were in favor in the Great Beyond. I think that religious people have two separate areas in the brain when it comes to reasoning about morality and the ethics of life in common. They condemn violations of human rights on Earth, and they threaten unbelievers with just such violations; it is a giant contradiction.

**I.P.:** But it is also very interesting that, when the event at La Recoleta happened, the effect they achieved was to incite many people to come see the show. There were lines of people, because it obviously arose curiosity. They even closed the show for one day.

**L.F.:** It had to be closed because it was the Day of the Immaculate Conception or something, and I said let's close it to avoid the appearance of provocation because, among other things, Luisa Carrió—a very political woman who wears a big cross on her chest—said that it was stupid for the government to give me a space next to the Church of the Pilar, and in the middle of Advent to boot. They might be right with their religion, but there are others who are not. So I responded in the newspaper, saying that Videla and others also had communion at this church; and also that every Sunday someone was attacked, be it those they call sinners, or gays, or the condom camp; and I said that you can read really terrible things in the Bible. Why is it possible to say those things in church without being bothered, while I can't come and say that I dislike torture? Some people supported me, many friends, and sometimes I even ran into people in the street who greet me and say "Thanks." Meanwhile those who are against me are nowhere to be seen. Once I met a young woman who did say something, but it wasn't important—it was at a wedding in Ushuaia, to the south,

and she came to greet me. It was a good thing both for the repercussions of the show and for the chance it gave me to express what I think, and also for this parallel show mounted by the Church, practically illustrating the point about intolerance.

**I.P.:** Publications like *León Ferrari: Prosa Política* include texts from various periods.<sup>2</sup>

**L.F.:** Yes, the first one is from 1965; it was a response to a critic, because at the Di Tella they didn't show the airplane, they took it down. There was a very strong critique in the newspaper *La Prensa*, saying that I was a subversive, a communist, and all that. So there is a first response letter to them in which I end by saying that maybe they could prove to me that what I did wasn't art, but that even so I wouldn't stop doing it, I would simply call it something else—I'd call it "evulsive critique" or

something like that. There are two texts from that period; the first one is this and talks about art. There is something there from Tucumán Arde about art of the signified is part of the work of art, as if it were another color. And then there is, above all, reflection about the Nazis, anti-Semitism, gay issues, the Conquest, witch hunts—a bit of a grab bag; these are loose things, some of which I published, some of which I didn't.

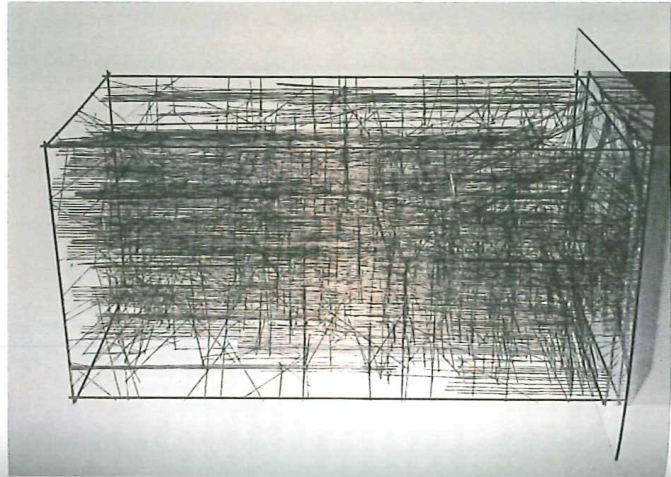
**I.P.:** I thought it was interesting because it establishes a dialog; however, there is no answer from the other side.

**L.F.:** I didn't get a response although responses were not a justification of Hell. It can't be justified. What some do is deny its existence, but then they are heretics. If you are Catholic and you deny the existence of Hell, it is like what Peter said, I think: whoever doesn't believe in Hell is anathema and

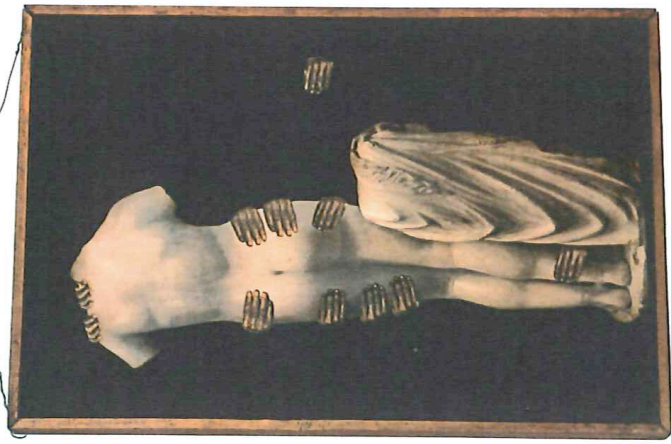
whoever doesn't believe the New Testament is anathema...

**C.S.B.:** Let's go back to the currents in your work. There is the protest part, the abstract part, and photography. Tell us about photography. Why do you use it?

**L.F.:** I used photography a lot in that period of the show at the Di Tella. Among the things that remained are photos from newspapers, photos of torture that appeared in newspapers and that I pasted as a background collage. Later I used photographs by Man Ray and by my father, with a different intent. In fact, the cover of the catalog that's coming out is a picture taken by my father of a female model he used in his painting, with a love poem by Borges in Braille. The poem was printed on the girl's image, so that one had to caress the photograph in order to read the poem. I used the photo-



*Membranas de meu pai*, 1977. Stainless steel sculpture and silver welding. 39 1/2 x 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 in. (100 x 50 x 50 cm.). Collection Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil.



*Tortured Venus*, 1964. Box with photo-collage. 20 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 2 in. (52 x 36 x 5 cm.). Collection Alicia and León Ferrari.



graphs in other places, like in the book *El mima más*, published in 1984 with all the denunciations. But later in the newspaper *Página 2* published it in booklets in 1992, now it has put out a second edition and I illustrated it with various collages that use many photographs of the repressors. I link the excesses, the violations of human rights by Catholics with violence, the deluge, and things like that.

My father actually used photography a lot; he painted churches and had people wear costumes. For example, I have a great picture of my parents dressed up as if for the Canaan Wedding; she was *criolla* and he was Italian, twenty years her senior, and they are there as if ready for a wedding. He

the name but I wrote in Braille: "Love your neighbor like you love yourself"; I titled it *Amate* and I sent it to a visual poetry show in Rosario. When it was censored, my friends took it and paraded it around the show on the opening day, and after two or three days it was on view again. Finally I said, "OK, I will donate one of the works." The director of the museum said "We will hang *Amate* up," and they have it there. I made another one, which is at the Pinacoteca.

**I.P.:** So, you studied engineering but not art, and the interest arose from your relationship with your father but you continued as an autodidact.

**L.F.:** I started working in clay before studying and learning ceramics techniques. But although I think studying is a good thing, I always say that not studying art has the advantage of not having to find a way: so maybe you end up inventing things, maybe you are freer, maybe your head is clearer, and in my case there are things I maintain, like drawing. But when you go to one of my shows, it looks like a collective, and it is precisely because I make a series and then I leave it and work on something else. For a long time I made welded-steel sculptures and then others with knots, like the one I'm working on now.

**C.S.B.:** You were telling us that now you have a larger workshop.

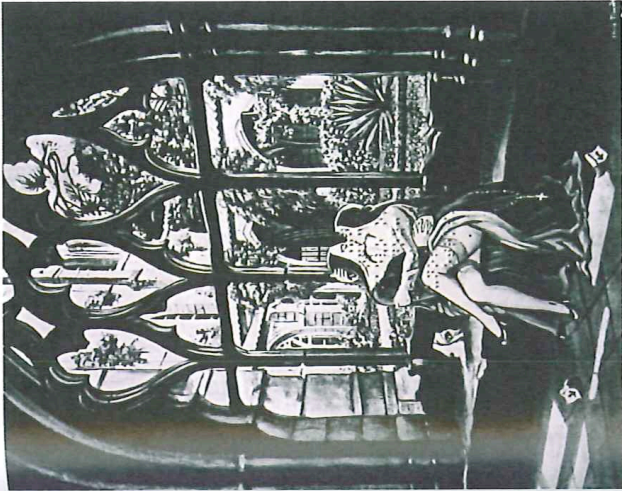
**L.F.:** I sold several works unexpectedly and was able to buy a larger space, and it turns out that when one has more space, there is a need to do more things. In a small workshop everything is full, even my head. Here, however, I have plenty of room: I have a patio and large doors. I used to have a workshop where everything was limited to 180-by-140-centimeter paintings, because nothing else would fit in the elevator to the fifth floor. Now my door is 240 centimeters.

**I.P.:** What show are you preparing? I am always working, and recently Ticio Escobar invited me to the Valencia Biennial. He made a good selection, especially works of this black polyurethane, a material that is used to fill gaps in plumbing. You pour it and things form by them-

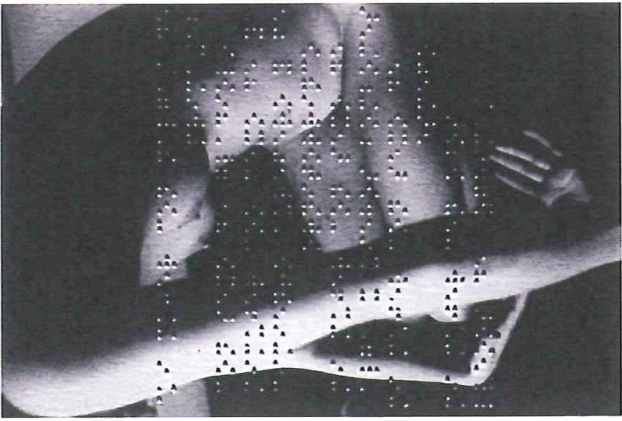
self; it seems like there is a sculpture inside, and it creates incredible shapes that you would never think up by yourself. This does it on its own. They look like turds, but I think they have great force.

**C.S.B.:** At the biennial there are works made with human bones or what resemble human bones.

**L.F.:** For a long time I looked at skeletons in medical supply stores, very well done skeletons, and one day I was walking by a place that sold such things and I bought a skeleton. I took it apart and made one of the works after breaking the bones, and later I made a bigger one with parts from almost eight skeletons. I was interested in bones as an aesthetic element because I approached a kind of forgetting what death means. It is like making a sculpture, although the material gives it a different charge, one that is tragic, strong, but I leave it to the viewer to deal with the meaning. Because



*Love Each Other*, 1997. Words of Jesus written in braille on a reproduction by Clowis Tivollice: "A New Commandment I Give to You: that You Love Each Other" (In. 13:34), from the series *Coloured Bible*. 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in. (36.3 x 28.5 cm.). File of L.F.



*Untitled*, 2004. Poem Free Union by Andre Breton, trans. Aldo Pellegrini, written in braille on a photograph by Ferdinando Scianna. 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (22 x 14.5 cm.). Collection Alicia and Leon Ferrari.

didn't see it, but one thing impressed me tremendously and it is that cat that eats a rat—what a terrible thing! With nothing but a TV and the cat...

**C.S.B.:** What do you think of a work like that?

**L.F.:** I thought it was good. I was impressed. This is the kind of thing one doesn't notice. And it made me think; I have two granddaughters who are vegetarians, and so I think, of course, what if we were all eating ourselves like that? Without analyzing the meaning of the work, I thought it was strong.

NOTES

1. He refers to *Civilización occidental*, 1965.
2. Leon Ferrari: *Prosa Política* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005).

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*Torturas*, 1982/2004. Collage from the newspaper *Página 12* of 13/6/2004 with Jacobo Meylan in Torment, engraving from the book *Political and Religious Hunts in Europe*. 14 1/2 x 11 in. (37 x 28 cm.). Collection Alicia and Leon Ferrari.

