

LEÓN FERRARI

[1920 - 2013, Argentina]

Born in 1920 in Buenos Aires, León Ferrari developed an artistic practice that encompassed the media of painting, collage, sculpture, poetry, and printmaking. Known internationally for his often-provocative social and political critiques, Ferrari made work that was highly critical of war, social inequality, discrimination (sexual, religious, and ideological), and abuse of power.

In the 1950s, Ferrari traveled repeatedly to Italy, where he began making sculpture. In the early 1960s, he began exploring the connections between word and line in *Cuadros escritos (Written Paintings)* and *Dibujos escritos (Written Drawings)*, and he continued these explorations throughout his career. These abstract “writings” on canvas and paper combine dry pastel, graphite, watercolor, and colored pencil to make lyrical, almost calligraphic imagery.

In 1965, an exhibition including Ferrari’s *La civilización occidental y cristiana (Western Christian Civilization)* was censored and then closed by the Catholic Church. His subsequent work would challenge the policies of the church and the role of religion in the history of art. In the late 1960s, Ferrari participated in the collective known as Tucumán Arde. The group intended to draw attention to the conditions of the Tucumán Province through an intervention into the circuits of mass communication, countering the official news media of the Argentine dictatorship. During this period of increasing political activism, Ferrari published what would become a famous manifesto and call-to-arms for artists, in which he wrote, “Art is not beauty or novelty, art is effectiveness and disruption....”

With the persecution, murder, and disappearances of family members and friends during the Guerra Sucia (Dirty War) in Argentina, Ferrari fled to São Paulo, where he remained from 1976 to 1991. During this political exile, Ferrari created metal sculptures, photocopies, postal art, heliography, and art books, and he continued his explorations in drawing. Upon his return to Buenos Aires in the early 1990s, Ferrari created a series of collages to illustrate the official report about the disappearance of Argentineans during the war; the report, created by the National Commission for the Disappearance of Persons, was titled “Never Again,” and it was published in 1984 and reissued with Ferrari’s collages in 1996. The imagery condemns the relationships between the repressive military regime and the religious establishment.

Ferrari’s works have been in numerous important exhibitions, including La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2007); *Retrospectiva León Ferrari, obras 1954-2004*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2004); *Politiscripts*, The Drawing Center, New York City, New York, USA (2004); *León Ferrari. Obras 1976-2008*, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (MACG), Mexico City, Mexico (2008); *Instrumentos para dibujar sonidos*, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina (2004); *León*

Ferrari, Brailles y relecturas de la Biblia, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina (2012); *The Kind Cruelty, 100 Years*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain (2020) and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2021) and Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2022); *A Arte de León Ferrari*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM), Brazil (1980); and *The Words of Others: León Ferrari and Rhetoric in Times of War*, REDCAT, Los Angeles, California, USA (2017) and Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Florida, USA (2018), among others.

Ferrari's works are represented in several major collections including the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA; Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA; Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, USA; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba; Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich, Switzerland; Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (MACG), Mexico City, Mexico; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Bahía Blanca (MAC), Argentina; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires (MACBA), Argentina; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina; Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Brazil; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico; Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende (MSSA), Santiago, Chile; Museo La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia; Museo Sívori, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM), Brazil; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Texas, USA; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City, New York, USA; and Tate Modern, London, England, UK.