

LEÓN FERRARI

[1920 – 2013, Argentina]

"Art is not beauty or novelty, art is effectiveness and disruption...."

Born in 1920 in Buenos Aires, León Ferrari's artistic practice 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. About these works, Ferrari writes, "I draw silent handwritten words, which tell things, with lines that recall voices. And I write drawings that recite memories that words cannot say."

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.

León Ferrari's works are represented in several major collections including Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, USA; Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, New York, USA; Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba; Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich, Switzerland; Giesso Collection, Argentina; Helft Collection, Argentina; Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Bahía Blanca, Argentina; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Argentina; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina; Museo de Arte Moderno de Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico; Museo La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia; Museo Salvador Allende, Santiago, Chile; Museo Sívori, Museo de Arte Moderno, Argentina; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Houston, Texas, USA; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, New York, USA; and Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom.