

León Ferrari

b. 1920 Buenos Aires, Argentina - d. July 25th, 2013 Buenos Aires, Argentina

I draw silent handwritten words, which tell things, with lines that recall voices. And I write drawings that recite memories that words cannot say.

León Ferrari, to Christina Harrison, October 6, 1996; Huntington Art Gallery Archives, The University of Texas at Austin

I am very much interested in the attitude of the person who looks at a written drawing: he has within him traces of the millenary human history of looking at rationally comprehensible writing, of constructing meaning or piecing together an image as his eyes go over the lines of writing.

León Ferrari, "Questionnaire to Participating Artists," 1996; Huntington Art Gallery Archives, The University of Texas at Austin

1920-1954

León Ferrari was born in Buenos Aires on September 3; he was the third of six children. His father was the Italian architect, painter, and photographer Augusto C. Ferrari (1871-1970). Augusto Ferrari immigrated to Argentina in 1915; he had a successful career building and decorating churches in Cordoba and Buenos Aires. Leon's mother Susana Celia del Pardo (1891-1949) was a teacher. In 2003, León and his sister Susana sponsored an exhibition in Buenos Aires of their father's paintings, panoramas, church buildings and photography, accompanied by a catalogue.

León was sent to Catholic schools run by priests where he recalled *"the notion of hell was stuffed into your head [...] That image generated a terrible fear in the mind of the child. And fear winds up controlling your whole life."* (Juan Ignacio Boido, Rojo y Negro, Página /30, July 1999, revised in June 2004) "As a child, Ferrari resented daily exposure to Christian imagery and weekly coercive indoctrination. All these early experiences explain his lifelong attraction and repulsion by the Church as a source of faith and as an institution of power." (Héctor Olea in *Inverted Utopias*, MFAH, 2004)

He studied engineering at the Facultad de Ciencias Exactas, Física y Naturales of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and after graduating in 1947, he worked with his father on several construction projects in Córdoba.

In 1946 León married Alicia Barros Castro.

He painted and drew portraits of Alicia, but in spite of his father being an accomplished painter who studied in Turin at the Albertina Academy, León never had formal art training, which he considers an advantage. According to Ferrari, his father *"advised us not to study art, not to dedicate ourselves to art because it was difficult to support a family as an artist, despite his having done quite well."* (Luis Felipe Noé, *Visita a León Ferrari*, Centro Cultural Recoleta exhibition catalogue, Bs As 2004, p.349)

Moved to Rosario where he worked for Celulosa de Argentina, a paper manufacturer. In 1950 the family returned to Buenos Aires. They settled in Castelar, a suburb 20 km. from Buenos Aires, in a house built by his father where León set up his workshop in the garage.

Daughter Marialí was born in 1948, son Pablo in 1949, and Ariel in 1951.

1952

In the autumn Marialí contracted tubercular meningitis, Ferrari took her to Italy, where the Children's Hospital in Florence offered a successful treatment; his wife Alicia joined them a month later.

1953

They settled in Rome and lived for a year at the Italian Argentine Institute.

1954

Ferrari began to work with ceramics in the studio of a Sicilian ceramicist Salvatore Meli (1929-2011) and the sculptor Renato Marino Mazzacurati. Ferrari said “*I fell in love with clay and ceramic forms.*” Later he rented a studio in the Trastevere, which had a kiln that allowed him to make large ceramic pieces.



León Ferrari in his Rome studio 1955

In June he sent several pieces to the national ceramics competition at the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche di Faenza.

Ferrari participated in the X Milan Triennial, where he met Lucio Fontana, a juror.

1955

In February he exhibited fifty large hollow ceramic pieces that hung from the ceiling at the Cairola Gallery in Milan.

Ferrari returned to Buenos Aires, researched ceramic pigments, and then set up a small company to produce metal compounds, a business that he continued until 1976.

1958-1959

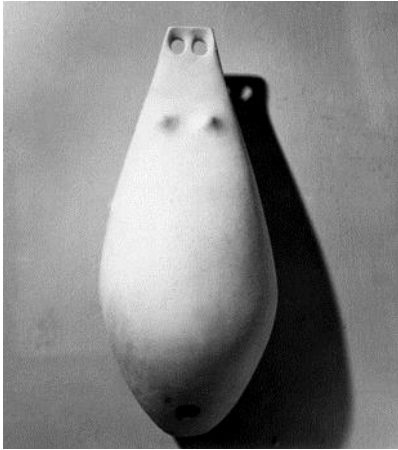
With Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri, Ferrari worked on the production of the film *La primera fundación de Buenos Aires* [The First Founding of Buenos Aires]. It was based on one of Oski's paintings, inspired by a 16th century German text by Enrico Schmidel (Oski/Oscar Conti, 1914-1979, Argentine cartoon and satirical historical artist). The film was presented at the Cannes film festival in 1959, and it received three awards in Argentina.

In 1959 Ferrari returned to making sculpture in cement, plaster and wood.

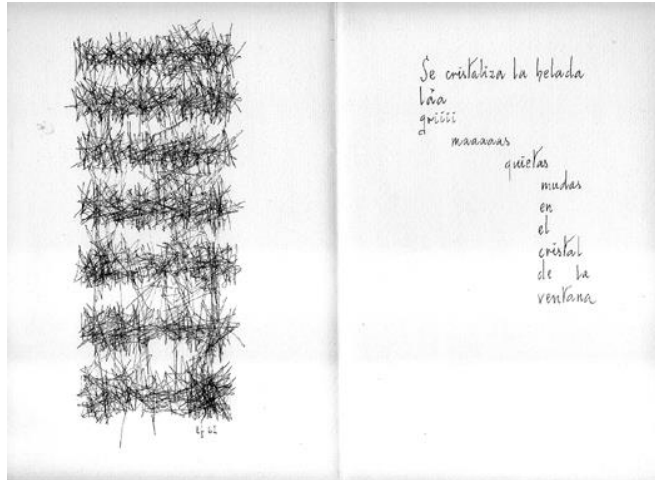
1960

In November he exhibited clay sculpture at the Galatea gallery in Buenos Aires.

Critic Hugo Parpagnoli described his clay works: "...they have the density and color of beautiful skin, smooth and matte. Even the more abstract pieces seem alive and undulating. The grand vessels, the gourds and the pregnant torsos all have the softness and elasticity of bodies, within the outlines of artificial objects. They are titled *Magdalen*, *Mujer rosada* [Pink Woman], *Mujer encinta* [Pregnant Woman] even when an anatomical description is remote or nonexistent." (Hugo Parpagnoli, La Prensa, Bs As, November 18, 1960)



Mujer [Woman], ca.1960 Ceramic,
29½ x 13½ x 7 inches

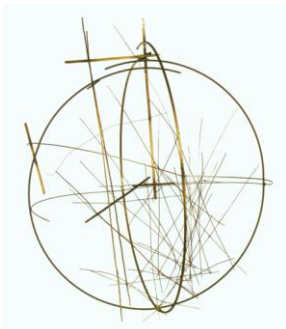


Escrito en el aire, 1964, page from the book of poems by Rafael Alberti & drawings by León Ferrari, published by Al Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, Milan

He met the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, an émigré after the defeat of the Republican Government who had arrived in Argentina in 1940. They collaborated in the production of a book of poems and drawings, *Escrito en el aire* [Written in the Air] published in Milan in 1964 by Vanni Scheiwiller, Al Insegna del Pesce d'Oro.

1961

In October Ferrari presented 16 carved wood pieces and his first wire sculptures at the Van Riel gallery. He also made *Gagarin*, a hanging stainless steel and bronze wire sculpture that now is in the Eduardo Costantini Collection.



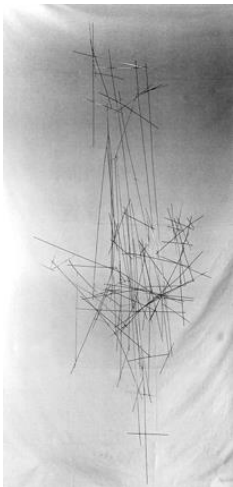
Gagarin, ca.1961 Stainless steel, 20½ inches diameter

"When somebody makes sculptures and drawings it is assumed that the drawings were made first, and then transferred to sculpture. On the contrary," Ferrari says, "I began to make wire sculptures, and the drawings were done two years later in Italy, when Arturo Schwarz invited me to participate in a collection of prints."

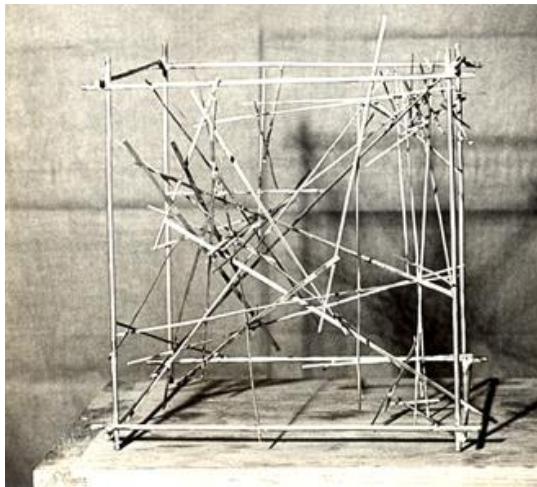
In December 1961 Ferrari traveled to Milan where he stayed four months.

1962

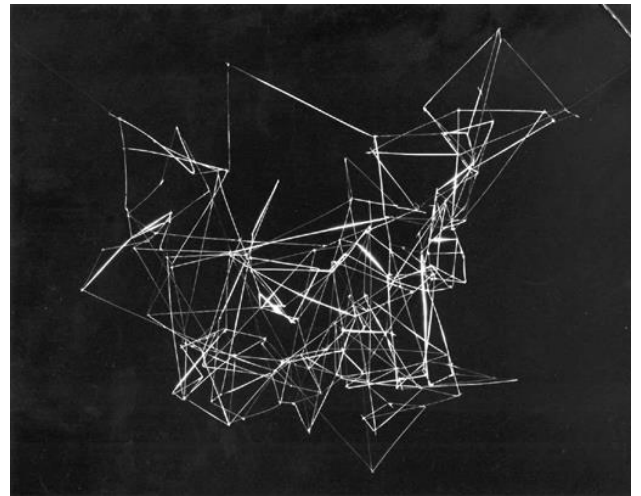
In March he exhibited the wood and metal pieces that he made in Milan at the Galería Pater. The wire sculptures were described in *Domus* magazine as "drawings in space that have almost more light than body, like an explosion of sparks." (*Domus*, 1962, Italy) The Italian collector Arturo Schwarz bought a sculpture and invited Ferrari to participate in the exhibition *L'Avanguardia Internazionale*.



Seated Woman, 1961,
Stainless steel wire,
47¼ inches



Cube, 1961 Stainless steel



Paloma [Dove], 1961 Stainless steel wire, 8 x 12 x 15¾ inches

It was then that he began his remarkable abstract drawings. "*This may well be the year's most interesting work, since I began drawing 'Music,'*" Ferrari wrote, evaluating his year's activity on December 31, 1962.

Lyle Rexer wrote: "The point of the '*Music*' pieces seems to be that while conventional notation contains the promise of sound, another kind of rendering might convey the experience of music, its rhythms and intensities, as heard. Ferrari doesn't estheticize the characters of a language, turning them into mysterious and beautiful symbols, as did Klee. Rather, he calls attention to ways in which musical notation and written language suggest, convey and withhold meaning." (Art in America, April 2005, exhibition at the Drawing Center in New York León Ferrari: *Politiscripts*)

Six of his remarkable drawings from 1962 and 1964 are in the MoMA collection.

During his stay in Milan he met the art critics Giulio Carlo Argan and Gillo Dorfles, and established a connection with the Levi Gallery.

He also went to Paris, visited Le Point Cardinal gallery, where he consigned a collection of drawings. In April Ferrari returned to Buenos Aires.

In September, he showed wire sculptures and drawings in the Galería Antígona in Buenos Aires.

The Buenos Aires Museo de Arte Moderno acquired Hombre [Man] 1962, a large wire sculpture (77 x 27½ x 27 in., 196 x 70 x 69 cm.).

His works on paper from this period, an extension of the *Written Drawings* series called *Escrituras dibujadas* [Drawn Writings], combined tightly handwritten text - often with biblical references - with drawn and collaged images. They erase the distinction between writing and drawing through the artist's distortion of traditional handwriting as he imbued it with new meaning. Made his first artist book.



Artist Book, 1962

1963

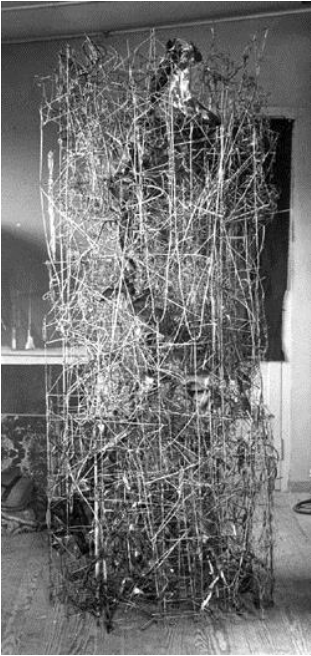
First works with political implications. From 1962, after the military ouster of President Arturo Frondizi until Juan Perón's return in 1973, the military ruled Argentina. In April Ferrari completed the first *Carta a un general* [Letter to a General]. These series of abstracted text-based drawings were a new form of political denunciation capable of evading censorship and reprisal from the repressive Military Junta. (A selection of these letters was exhibited in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, at the Queens Museum of the Arts in New York in 1999)

On the Letter to a General Ferrari commented: "It is difficult to write a 'logical' letter to a general. A letter that says something, that is not just an insult, but is 'artistic.' In the incomprehensible nature of these letters - more than a form of protection against censorship is a confession of my incapability to write a letter like Rodolfo Walsh's. Now that was a letter. What I wrote was an imitation of a letter, or a hidden letter, that could make you ask: does this mean something or it doesn't? (Rodolfo Walsh wrote "Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar" [Open letter from a writer to the Military Junta] on March 24, 1977 the first anniversary of the dictatorship. The following day Walsh was kidnapped and killed by the ESMA [Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada] task force.)



Letter to a General, 1963 Ink on paper, 23½ x 17¾ inches

Ferrari began work on *Torre de Babel* [Tower of Babel] a large-scale piece (86½ tall x 33½ inches in diameter, 220 x 85 cm.) made of variegated metal plates and twisted wires. With this sculpture, the idea of "Babelism" arose as a group art project, involving other Argentine artists. This was the last wire sculpture Ferrari made in the Sixties.



Tower of Babel, 1964
Stainless steel wire, 78¾ x 31½ inches

In September he traveled to São Paulo.

Ferrari made his first glass-fronted boxes that he filled with hair, wire, drawings, and photograph clippings. *Reflexiones*, now in the collection of MoMA New York, has an all-over written glass front and is filled with painted fine wire.

He participated in the exhibition *Art argentina actual* at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the works were selected by Argentine art critics: Jorge Romero Brest, Julio E. Payró and Héctor Basaldúa. Ferrari showed *Mujer* [Woman], a large wire sculpture (78¾ x 65½ x 65½ in., 200 x 165 x 165 cm.), and a carved plywood piece.



León Ferrari with *Mujer*, 1963

1964

In April Ferrari had a show at the Lirolay gallery titled *Escrituras, Alambres, y Manos* [Writings, Wires, and Hands].



Manos, 1964 Collage of photographs in a box, 14 x 21 x 1½ inches

He began a series of written drawings, of which *El árbol embarazador* [The Impregnating Tree] is the first to openly criticize Christianity. Ferrari explained: “*In the middle of a drawing-manuscript I placed an illustration of Michelangelo’s David’s penis. What I wrote in my text was a sort of rereading of the Flood ... The women saved themselves by inflating their breasts and buttocks in order to float. All the men died, but Satan rescued the penis from each one of them and grafted them onto a giant tree: the Impregnating Tree. The women climbed it: the sinners, in one great group fornication.*” (Alberto Collazo, *Vidella cumple con la Biblia*, “Fin de Siglo Nº 11,” Bs As, May 1988)



El árbol embarazador,
1964 Collage and ink, 16½ x 12½ inches

Two drawings: “*Musica*” and “*Letter to a General*” were included in the exhibition *Schrift und Bild*, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and at the Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden. The exhibition, an important survey of the uses of writing as an element in modern art, included works by Pollock, Klee, Michaux, Torres-García, Cy Twombly, Dubuffet, Miró, Tobey, Japanese calligraphy, etc. Ferrari’s “*Musica*” was reproduced on page 118 of the catalogue with Jackson Pollock’s “*Drawing*.”

In December Ferrari finished *Cuadro escrito* [Written Painting]. Ferrari explained that what motivated him to write it was “*that certain paintings are criticized for being too literal, a result of the criticized feature taken to an extreme. They are purely literary works; written visual art. But they can be considered as visual art because the image is preserved. It is transferred from hanging on the wall in front of the viewers’ eye, to behind his pupils, to his imagination, fired by the words that make up the image.*” (León Ferrari, *Ecología bíblica*, in “Eco: la última palabra,” Palais de Glace, 1996 exhibition catalogue)

According to Héctor Olea, the *Written Painting* is “a ground-breaking work that not only consolidated his [Ferrari’s] approach to visual art and poetry but also emerged as a paradigm of his innovative talent.”

Luis Camnitzer pointed out that it predates comparable projects by Joseph Kosuth. As Mari Carmen Ramírez explained, “León Ferrari’s suspension of the distinction between the acts of ‘seeing’ and ‘reading’ a work, as exemplified by this series, not only preceded the xerographic tautologies of Joseph Kosuth, but already differentiated both versions of language-based art.” (Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Cantos Paralelos*, Blanton Museum, Austin, 1999)

The critic Hugo Parpagnoli organized an exhibition for the Museo de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires titled *Objetos* [Objects]. Ferrari showed a dozen bottles in a crate stuffed with wire, fabric, paper cutouts, and with amorphous and at times unpleasant materials. (Andrea Giunta, *Disturbing Beauty*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2004)

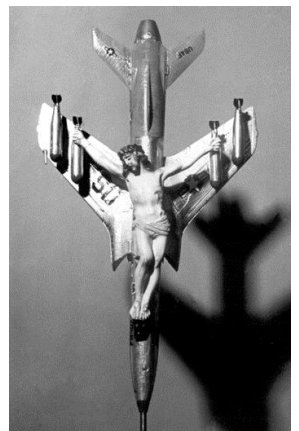
1965

Ferrari was invited by critic Romero Brest, director of the Centro de Artes Visuales of the Di Tella Institute, to participate in the prestigious Di Tella prize exhibition.

He sent three boxes and a montage two meters tall that combined a reproduction of an American fighter jet and a large store-bought Christ, titled *La Civilización occidental y cristiana* [Western Christian Civilization]. Brest asked Ferrari to withdraw the Christ and only the three boxes were exhibited: *Cristo murió* [Christ Died], *La civilización occidental y cristiana bombardea las escuelas de Long Dien, Cauxé, Linn Phung, Mc Cay, An Tanh, An Minh, An Hoa y Duc Hoa* [Western Christian Civilization Bombs Schools in Long Dien, Cauxé, Linn Phung, Mc Cay, An Tanh, An Minh, An Hoa and Duc Hoa], and *15 votos en la OEA* [15 votes in the OAS], all from 1965.

According to Ferrari: “Romero Brest invited me to the ‘65 Prize exhibition supposing (I believe) that I would send either a wire sculpture [...] or something similar. When I changed my mind about art, motivated by the bombings in Vietnam, I warned him that I would do something else. When he saw the airplane mounted, some two or three days prior to the opening, I noticed that he was worried; he called me to his office and said that he could not show the work because, among other reasons, it would hurt the religious feelings of the staff, or some of the staff. He suggested that I replace the plane with the model or with another piece, or leave only the three boxes that completed my participation [...] what was clear was that the plane would not be exhibited, that wasn’t negotiable [...] I found myself in a kind of dilemma: either take the route of the visual arts, that indicates or demanded withdrawing everything and denouncing the censorship, or the political route [that is to say] my initial purpose in showing something about Vietnam precisely there, in the place of those liberties that the US bombers were proclaiming. (Letter from the artist to Andrea Giunta, 7 August 1993, LF Archive)

The boxes provoked a strong reaction from Ernesto Ramallo, art critic at *La Prensa*: León Ferrari answered in a letter published in the magazine *Propósitos* (September 21, 1965). “I don’t know if my pieces have any formal value. The only thing I ask of art is to aid me in expressing myself as clearly as possible, to invent plastic and critical signs that with utmost efficacy will condemn the barbarian Western civilization. Maybe somebody will show me that this is not art; I would have no problem with that, I would not change, I would call it by a different name; I would cross out art and call it politics, acerbic critic, anything.” From that time onward, writing letters to the press allowed Ferrari to intervene and establish his position on issues connected to aesthetics or politics in public debates. (Published in León Ferrari, *Prosa Política, Siglo Veintiuno*, Buenos Aires, 2005, edited by Andrea Giunta)



La civilización occidental y cristiana, 1965 78¾ inches

Referring to this event, Julio Cortázar wrote Ferrari: “...at this point in my life, I can no longer be surprised, because it is enough to read Argentina’s newspapers to know that basically nothing has changed since I left the country, unless it be the name of the football players, congressmen or the price of men’s suits. This can be confirmed by looking simultaneously at a copy of *La Prensa* or *La Nación* from 1954; it gives the impression that, like a deck of cards, the only thing that changed is the order and the location of the cards. The old deck whose face cards are still called Fear, Stupidity and

Corruption is still being passed along from hand to hand; and almost all the cards are still marked. On the other hand, León, at least there are new people willing to take risks in Argentina. Your letter to *La Prensa* proves it, along with other testimonies that I receive from time to time. Not everything is that bad there, to the extent that for every E. Ramallo there is a León Ferrari.” (JC to LF, Saigon, 2 November 1965, LF Archive)

1966

Ferrari abandoned non-figurative art concentrating on political work presented in group exhibitions and events. He participated in the *Homenaje al Viet-Nam de los artistas plásticos* [Visual Artists' Homage to Viet-Nam] an exhibition at the Van Riel gallery.

After the Di Tella scandal, Ferrari began working on *Palabras ajenas* (Other People's Words), where he developed an imaginary dialogue between 170 characters, among them: Hitler, President Lyndon Johnson, Pope Paul VI, Goering, God, news agencies, etc. It is a literary collage that condenses the history of violence in the West from its origins up to the present day taken from published texts in newspapers, magazines and books. For Héctor Olea, in *Other People's Words*, Ferrari “excavated the most diverse strata of historic phraseology hinting that the artist is nothing but a mere manipulator of meaning conveyed through texts and images.”



Presentation of the book *Palabras ajenas* [Other People's Words],
Buenos Aires 1967

Ferrari conceived these texts as a book to be also presented theatrically. “*The piece will last for at least 10 hours, new pages will be published to complete this time, it will have neither beginning nor end, the spectator will arrive when it has already started and will leave when tired, and they will be charged by the hour.*”

Ferrari indicated that the text's objective was to show an idea about the contemporary world: “*...the encounter in the world between those who call themselves the West and the so-called Third World [...] What perhaps moved me to start this text was the daily publication of testimonies and photos of torture in the press. Not because of the torture in and of itself, but -above all- for the fact that the West shows itself, for the first time, coldly in action.* (LF in *La Opinión*, 30 November, 1972)

1967

At the end of the year *Palabras ajenas* (Other People's Words) was published by Falbo, in Buenos Aires.

In a letter that Julio Cortázar wrote León: “The evening before my trip I received *Palabras ajenas* by air mail, and that night I read the first thirty pages [...] they give a clear idea of the mechanism of your piece, and allow me to agree with you that merely reading it is cumbersome, as it lacks theatrical effects and I suppose, all the vigor that light and accents would give it. But it is a very good idea, and it seems to me that this kind of tremendous oratory (the word turns out to be ironic, but no other occurs to me) could have a very profound effect on any audience in the world.” (JC to LF, 2 July 1967, LF Archive)

In December, Ferrari sent a copy of *Palabras ajenas* to his friend, the Argentine conceptual artist Leopoldo Mahler, telling him that he was preparing a theatrical version. Mahler, who at that moment worked for the BBC in London, proposed mounting it for the stage.

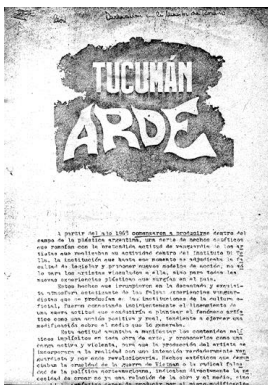
1968

In October the play was presented in London at the Arts Laboratory, with the title *Listen Here Now - A News Concert for Four Voices and a Soft Drum*. Read by professional radio announcers, who Mahler described as figures permeated by the “glorious reminiscences of war,” and as “instruments of information that the public listens to with unctious; they are conservative, expensive, have impeccable Oxford accents and high society prestige, lacking any idealism whatsoever.” It was staged by Pedro Asquini in Buenos Aires in 1973.

Earlier in May, an exhibition organized by the Di Tella Institute *Experiencias 1968*, touched off protests by artists who publicly confronting art-institutional censorship by the police, destroyed their own works in remonstrance.

Artists and intellectuals in Argentina organized meetings to discuss the place that art and culture had in society. At an August meeting in the city of Rosario, Ferrari presented the essay *El arte de los significados* (The Art of Meanings). He was increasingly preoccupied with the idea that avant-garde art has no ideology or meaning other than purely formal, and is for the social and cultural elite. In *El arte de los significados*, he proposed that meaningful contemporary art include political engagement, “Art will be neither beauty nor novelty; art will be efficacy and perturbation.”

Ferrari became a prominent member of a group of artists and activists who created “*Tucumán Arde*,” a groundbreaking exhibition denouncing the exploitation of the sugar cane workers in Tucumán province. These artists were preoccupied with the fundamental connection between the apparently disparate spheres of the experimental and the political. Héctor Olea wrote: “At stake was the nexus between art’s politics and the potential risk of sacrificing this quality in order to support formal experimentation. Among other things, this activist group proposed that committed art should resist becoming propaganda. The idea that art could be at once formally innovative and politically engaged annihilated all the common places about *political art* mired in the gross parameters of Social Realism or the ancillary policies of some party. For *Tucumán Arde*, ideology - defined as simply a systematic body of concepts- is immanent not only to political art but to art in general.”



Tucumán Arde, 1968 manifesto

1969

For *Malvenido Rockefeller* [Unwelcome Rockefeller], an exhibition of original posters by more than 60 artists repudiating Nelson Rockefeller's arrival in Argentina, Ferrari created a poster that featured an Argentinean flag with a superimposed image of Che Guevara and the legend: "*Rockefeller unwelcome to Guevara's country.*" Rockefeller's Latin American tour set off protests in the countries he visited.

1971

In protest of the repression in Brazil, Ferrari, and other Argentine artists joined in the publication of the book *Contra-bienal* [Counter-biennial] organized by Latin American artists living in New York, including among others, Luis Camnitzer, Luis Wells, Liliana Porter, Carla Stellweg and Teodoro Maus. They called that year's biennial, the "Dictator's Biennial."

In the II Certamen Nacional de Experiencias Visuales, linked to the Salón Nacional, Ferrari proposed to post *El calendario de la Casa Rosada* [The Pink House Calendar] a mural calendar with daily updates of the repression in Argentina posted on it - the jury rejected the project.

1972

In the winter, he participated in the *Contra-Salón* held at the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos to boycott the Salón Nacional. Ferrari presented a work dealing with the killing in cold blood of political prisoners at the federal penitentiary in Trelew, Patagonia. These incidents were documented in the book *La Pasión según Trelew*, by Tomás Eloy Martínez, originally published in 1973 it was suppressed by the dictatorship and reissued only in 1997.

In October at the *Salón Independiente* [Independent Salon], organized as a protest against increasing censorship and repression in Argentina, Ferrari presented a reproduction of an article published in *Le Monde* on September 19, about the shootings in Trelew, including declarations by survivors. He also showed a collage of newspaper clipping, texts and photographs in collaboration with Ricardo Carpani, Luis Felipe Noé, Oscar Smoje, Eduardo Rodríguez and Alicia Benítez. Hugo Monzón in *La Opinión*, 11 October, wrote: "that the epilogue to the history of this significant testimony the artists presented had yet to be written."

1973-1976

Ferrari traveled to Cuba, where he participated in a group show at the Casa de las Américas.

In 1975 he returned to drawing after almost a decade. During these years he participated in the *Foro por los Derechos Humanos* (Forum for Human Rights), and in the *Movimiento contra la Represión y la Tortura* (Movement against Repression and Torture).

1976

Ferrari began to clip and save newspaper articles reporting on the crimes of the military regime that took power after a coup d'état in March. Ferrari and his family were forced to leave Argentina on October 21st. His son Ariel decided to stay behind, and only in 1978 did the family learn that he had been killed. Ferrari then traveled to Sweden to report the murder to Amnesty International.

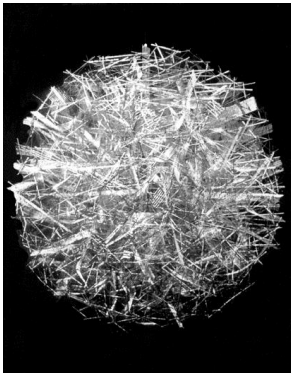
In Brazil, Ferrari mounted the clippings on boards to create 4 editions titled *Nosotros no sabíamos* [We Didn't Know]. The phrase, widely used by a sector of society in an attempt to justify its indifference toward the

repression carried out by the Argentine State during the years of the dictatorship, dismayed Ferrari. He confronted this excuse by showing that most of the abuses had been reported in the press.

1977-1979

The family settled in São Paulo, in a house at Rua Sampaio where he had his studio, Ferrari decided to dedicate himself full time to art and resumed making wire sculpture and drawing. He explored new mediums: photo copy, art by mail, heliography, artist books, and engraving.

In February at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, he showed drawings, prints, and sculptures including *Planeta*, newly made of steel and silver solder and 51 inches in diameter. In the catalogue introduction, Aracy Amaral refers to the wire sculpture as linear “galaxies, nuclei suspended in contained spaces, or models of imaginary buildings where light is recognized as having a central role in transfiguring the linear elements.” (Aracy Amaral “*León Ferrari na Pinacoteca*,” prologue to the exhibition catalogue *León Ferrari, Esculturas, Gravuras e Desenhos*, Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 1978)



Planeta, 1979 Stainless steel,
51 inches diameter

About the relation of his wire sculptures and his drawings, Ferrari explained that the relevance of the rectangular shape of the sheet of paper is often overlooked, “*Every single page man has written is homage to the rectangle.*” The rectangular drawing on a sheet of paper, he adds, can also be repeated in the air and “*when projected into space becomes a prism whose faces and edges are the anonymous frame, repeated, impersonal, transparent, envelope within which a line simply has to find its place.*” When made of metal rods these sculptures can be ‘played’ as musical instruments.



León Ferrari in his São Paulo studio, working on a wire sculpture, ca.1980

The motion of the wires in his sculpture either stirred by the wind or by hand, in their wave-like infinite configurations, inspired a series of drawings that depict the wires frozen in different movements, Ferrari titled them *Vocabularies*.

The sounds the sculptures made when stirred were recorded, amplified and then incorporated into a musical composition by Caito Marcondes Nassif for “Tarot,” a dance that the group Quebranto presented at the Pinacoteca. “As soon as I heard those first noises enriched by amplification, I began to investigate and record the sound of my sculptures, and to construct a new series of sculptures now conceived as having a musical function, I called them ‘Percanta,’ a word in Buenos Aires slang that means ‘girl, chick, young woman.’” (LF in Viana, 1980) Ferrari later found out that Harry Bertoia had done something very similar in New York, and he stopped making sculptures with the inverted pendulum principle. “But I continued using them as musical instruments.” (LF, communication with Andrea Giunta, 16 July 2004) He called these sculptures Berimbau, after the Afro-Brazilian single-string folk instrument.

Wrote *Flasharte I: Berimbau: artefacto para dibujar sonidos* [Flasharte I: Berimabau: Artifact for Drawing Sounds]. Flasharte was a form of postal art, Ferrari made three Flash Artes, 200 copies of each which he sent by mail.

He made a series of collages using Letraset images titled *Ajedrez* [Chess], *Baños* [Bathrooms], and *Plantas* [Plants]. They were published in *Hombres* (Ediciones Licopadio, Buenos Aires, 1984) and *Imagens* (Edições Exú, São Paulo, 1989)



Pages from *Hombres [Men]*, 1984 published by Ediciones Licopodio, São Paulo published by Ediciones Licopodio, São Paulo

Curator Salina Libman invited Ferrari to participate in the *Art lúdica* [Playful Art] show in the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, where he presented a 4-meter tall *Berimbau* sculpture made of 100 vertical rods of different diameters. The public was invited to participate stroking them to make “non figurative music,” as Ferrari called it.



Arte Ludica exhibition Museu de Arte de São Paulo 1979

At the Xerox exhibition in São Paulo, Ferrari met a group of artists who were exploring new techniques, among them Mira Schendel, Regina Silveira, Carmela Gross, Marcelo Nitsche, Nelson Leirner, and Julio Plaza. Because of their determination to remain open-minded and to be active despite the censorship imposed by the Brazilian military government, the group had an impact on Ferrari.

1980-1981

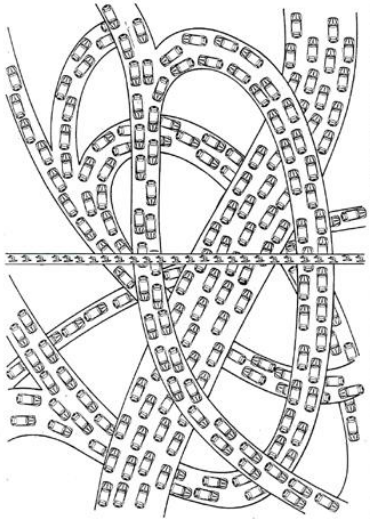
In May a retrospective exhibition, *A arte de León Ferrari*, at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, included works done between 1964 and 1980; drawings, lithographs, blueprints, photocopies, watercolors, books, and wire sculptures. He described his airy constructions as “...straight or curved wires crossing each other, holding each other, adding to one another, tangling with the others in a labyrinth connected to another and another, close to a vortex or to a far away edge with a sun, an explosion, a nest of lines half hidden behind others or mixed with others behind them, which can be seen or not, depending on how the light or the eye switch.” (LF, *Prisms and Rectangles*, ca.1979)

Ferrari was intrigued with techniques for reproduction that would make art work available at a low cost. Beginning in 1980, using Letraset symbols designed for architects of doors, toilets, beds, people, cars, etc., he made a series of 27 large-sized designs using a heliographic technique, like blueprints.

According to Ferrari they show the absurdity of contemporary life, in an interview with Vicente Zito Lema, he explained: “*The result looks like urbanization or plans, with a certain Surrealist humor, and in some way they can also be seen as architecture of madness. I am not guided by an aim to any specific meaning; whoever stands before these works is free to establish associations and to ascribe whatever meaning they consider right - personally, when I see these finished pieces my own interpretation, which neither limits nor excludes others, is that they express the absurdity of current society - that sort of daily madness that is necessary if everything is to look normal.*” (Vicente Zito Lema, *León Ferrari y los secretos del hombre y la sociedad*, “La Voz,” Bs As, July 26, 1984, p.381)

“Ferrari used the Letraset system to produce a series of drawings in which he appropriated a code of graphic conventions for architecture and its industrial design presentation. The Syntax of his blueprint series also appears in some of Mira Schendel’s works, in which she manipulates the graphic presence of ready-made letters of the same type. Ferrari draws architectural plans and peoples them with characters that function as indexes of scale. Ironically, the figures that are represented in motion end up in the opposite situation- in freeze-frame. They become prisoners of their own gestures, imprisoned by excess. Their breaking of the rules is cumulative, producing the effect of annulling the information, or of a radical change of meaning. As in one of Goya’s *Caprichos*, *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* [The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters], excessive rationalizing and order produce here an accumulation that annuls all the clarity of language creating a

'blind knowledge' of the project, to borrow Ivens Machado's expression. In the final analysis, León Ferrari's drawings address the malaise of modernity." (Paulo Herkenhoff, *Autonomous Doodles, Verbal Scrawls and Erasures on Drawing in South America*, in *Re-aligning Vision*, 1997)



Page from *Imagens [Images]*, 1980
a book of his works using Letraset symbols

Ferrari traveled to Cuba for the Solidarity Congress. He donated a sculpture to the Casa de las Américas.

1982

The Argentinean military government announced to the families of the disappeared that they would disclose what had happened to the missing, Ferrari and Alicia went to Buenos Aires, but the government failed to give them any information.

Participated in the *Artemicro* (microfiche with support), an event, organized by artist Regina Silveira in the Museu da Imagem e do Som in São Paulo [Museum of Image and Sound].

In the same museum, Ferrari along with ten other artists, experimented with *Arte pelo telefone* [Art by Telephone], an event that tested sending art through telephone lines to a TV monitor in the form of video text. The event was also presented in *Arte e Videotexto* at the 17th São Paulo Biennial in 1983.

In June he participated in *14 Nights of Performances* playing music with his *Percanta* sculptures in São Paulo.



León Ferrari playing a Percanta, São Paulo 1981



Image from "Art by Telephone," 1982



In October *Prismas e Retângulos* [Prisms and Rectangles] opened at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro; and at the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City, Ferrari showed 200 xerographs and blueprint heliographs in *Planos, Heliografías y Fotocopias* [Blueprints, Heliographies and Photocopies].

1983

León and Alicia begin to travel regularly to Argentina.

Culture Secretary Fábio Magalhães commissioned Ferrari for a sculpture in homage to the Brazilian essayist, philosopher, literary critic, and champion of intellectual freedom, Alceu Amoroso Lima, who had recently died. The sculpture was titled *Uma cathedral ao vento dos direitos humanos* [A Cathedral to the Wind of Human Rights]. It was inaugurated on December 10, Human Rights Day. It is 5.5 meters tall by 4 x 4 meters square and composed of 3-inch diameter rods attached to a base, painted in pastel tones with enough space between the rods for people to walk through it. The sculpture was later dismantled when a highway was built.



Cathedral to the Wind of Human Rights
Monument, in honor of Alceu Amoroso
Lima, São Paulo 1983

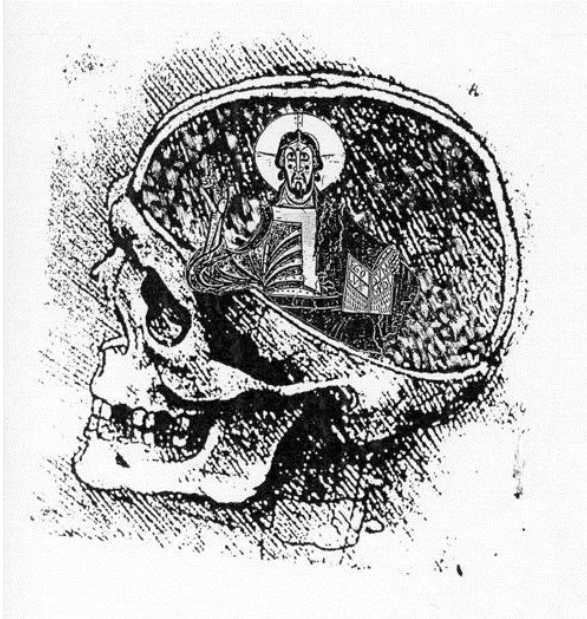
Ferrari resumed working with religious themes; he made collages mixing Catholic iconography with erotic oriental and contemporary images. For him, the origin of violence in Western civilization is in the Holy Scriptures. Ferrari is particularly fascinated with ecclesiastical subjects related to punishment, torment, lust and guilt and their relation to certain symbols and signs coming from such unrelated areas as Oriental erotic art, and images of well-known art works like Michelangelo's ceiling and mural in the Sistine Chapel.

1984

After eight years outside of Argentina, León participated in two group shows *Artistas en el papel* [the title of the exhibition is a pun: Artists on Paper - Artists in a Role] and *Libros de artistas* [Artists' Books], at the Centro Cultural Ciudad de Buenos Aires (now the Centro Cultural Recoleta). In July he presented *Ocho años en Brasil, 1976-1984* [Eight Years in Brazil, 1976-1984], at the Arte Nuevo gallery in Buenos Aires. The exhibition included drawings, heliographic plans and wire sculptures.

1985-1986

For the exhibition “*Cúpulas de Buenos Aires, entre la realidad y la utopía*” [Buenos Aires Cupolas, between Reality and Utopia], at the Centro Cultural San Martín coinciding with the Architecture Biennial, Ferrari published “*La Basílica*,” a book of collages and writings.



Page from *Parahereges*, published by Expressão, São Paulo 1986

He participated in *Panorama de formas tridimensionales* [Panorama of Three-dimensional Forms] at the MAM in São Paulo; where Ferrari presented for the first time a cage with pigeons whose droppings fell on an image of *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. He showed it again at the XVIII São Paulo Biennial. According to Luis Camnitzer, “...scatology in the visual arts returned with a bang in 1986. Argentinean artist León Ferrari exhibited a cage with two pigeons, whose excretions fell through a stencil of a cross onto a reproduction of Michelangelo’s Final Judgment.” (Art Nexus, 59, Nov 2005)

In his essay “*Multinationals*,” Ferrari wrote that he used paintings that are the pillars of Western culture covered with bird droppings - to criticize the “*Christian Multinational, that promotes, sustains, and uses these art works to advertise hell in its most political and evangelical campaign of fear.*” León Ferrari, *Multinationals*, 1986, “Prosa política, Siglo XXI,” Buenos Aires, 2005

In September 1986, Ferrari showed several “*Camouflages*,” in *A nova dimensão do objeto* [New Dimensions of the Object], an exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Contemporary Art. In one, he placed a crucified, camouflage-painted Christ on a background of the same pattern; another was camouflaged in floral wallpaper. He wrapped a Christ and a Sacred Heart with printed images of the Holocaust that he titled “*Anti-Semitism.*”

Published *Parahereges*, (Expressão, São Paulo). A book where he paired Dürer’s series of engravings: the *Apocalypse*, the *Passion*, and the *Life of Mary*, to erotic images and pagan iconography.

1987

In “*Palavra mágica*,” a show held at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Ferrari presented a series of photomontages titled “*Re-reading of the Bible*.” Fourteen panels from this series were selected for the *Art in Latin America* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London that traveled to the Moderna-Museet in Stockholm and the Palacio Velázquez in Madrid. However, although one photomontage is reproduced in the catalogue, none were exhibited in any of the venues because the organizers alleged that they were not properly mounted. Ferrari declared, “*This was particularly serious, because it is censorship and they tried to hide it by giving a false explanation.*” (Marta Góes, *Galeria londrina veta colagens com temas religiosos*, O Estado de São Paulo, August 30, 1989)

Invited by New York’s Franklin Furnace, Ferrari presented a shrine environment; an installation titled *Capilla Hereje* [Heretic Chapel], of thirty photographic enlargements of collages from “Re-reading the Bible,” and a cage with two pigeons placed over crosses that when covered by the bird’s droppings were hung on the wall. “Re-reading of the Bible” was translated to English from the Portuguese in a limited edition especially for the exhibition.

1988-1990

In June Ferrari participated in “*The Debt*,” at Exit Art in New York, an exhibition organized by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo, of North and South American artists: Luis Camnitzer, Cecilia Vicuña, Cildo Meireles, Marta Minujin, Juan Downey, John Fekner, and Marcos Margall among others. It was about Latin American and Third World debt, the rising debt of the United States and the relationship between them. The curators challenged artists to respond to a particular issue: the lending and borrowing of money between rich and poor countries.

In a Village Voice article “On the Money,” Elizabeth Hess wrote: “Argentinean artist León Ferrari has cynically placed two sweet white doves in a cage, whose droppings fall through a cross-shaped hole onto a pristine grid of dollar bills. Somebody will have to launder this money.” June 28, 1988. Ferrari intended to send the soiled bills to President Ronald Reagan to help repay the Latin American debt.



Cage with doves at Exit Art, New York 1988

In September 1988, the controversial *La Civilización occidental y cristiana* [Western Christian Civilization], a store-bought Christ attached to an American fighter jet that Ferrari made in 1965 was shown for the first time in

Buenos Aires at the Sívori Museum in an exhibition of Argentine Art from the 1920s to the 1960s. It had been seen only once before in the stage production of *Palabras ajenas* in 1972.

In October 1989, he had his first retrospective exhibition in Buenos Aires at the Sívori Museum.

In December, Ferrari participated in a group show at the bookstore Liberarte, protesting President Carlos Menem's pardon of the military authorities responsible for the deaths of political opponents during the dictatorship; the exhibition was titled "*No al indulto*" [No to the pardon].

1991

Ferrari dismantled the house and studio in São Paulo, settling in Buenos Aires.

In March he began *Los Errores* [the Errors] series, large ink drawings measuring two by one meters, on high-impact polystyrene, smaller papers, and pastels on polystyrene begun in Brazil. "In this series, Ferrari reduced drawing to its purest and most autonomous essence; he utilized the medium to record complex and abstract ideas while maintaining an absolute fidelity to aesthetic purity and technical innovation. They have been rarely exhibited and almost never sold." John Wineland, *Aligning Vision, Alternative Currents in South American Drawings*, Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin, 1997, p.146

Regarding the *Los errors* series, Ferrari explained: "*When I make these written drawings, I am concerned with them being new forms, but only in order to incite people's imagination. That is why I try not to explain them: explaining destroys the work because the person who created it has no idea of what relationship his work will establish with the viewer. Paintings and drawings that escape the control of the person who made them, going off with the first one who knows how to interpret them better than their progenitor, are adulterous.*" (LF, letter to Mari Carmen Ramirez, 6 May 1996, LF Archive)

1992

For "*One World Art*" in the Museum Für Völkerkunde, in Hamburg, Ferrari filled 100 bottles with texts, objects and images protesting the Conquest of the New World. Gerhard Hoffman made a video of this installation titled "*Justice.*"

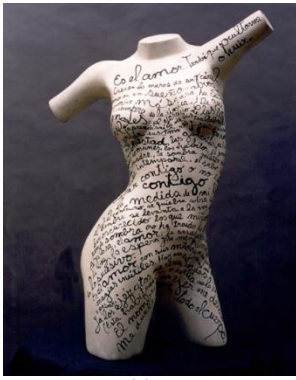
In "*New World Surrealism*" an exhibition at the Buenos Aires National Library, Ferrari presented "*Homage to the Condom.*" Bottles filled with condoms as a visual criticism of the position of the church that persists in prohibiting their use in the midst of the AIDS epidemic.

1993

Wrote '*Art and Power,*' which he read at an artist's meeting at the Centro Cultural Rojas, where he stated: "*We should replace that term [political art] but I have yet to think of an alternative.*"

1994

On using Plexiglas display mannequins which he showed at the *Cristos y maniqués*, [Christ and Mannequins] exhibition at the Filo Gallery in Buenos Aires, Ferrari said "*Writing on plexi manikins is a new way to say old things. I quote the Bible for example, the threats of punishment in the Deuteronomium (the Fifth Book of the Hebrew Bible), or the Song of Songs, poems by Borges or Breton, trying to reproduce in my handwriting the relation between the spoken word and the inflections of the voice. I dress the female manikin with words or images that are at times like caresses and at others biblical threats of punishment.*" (Fabián Lebenglik, *Un libro de artista en contra del olvido*, Página 12, BsAs, January 9, 1994)



Mannequin, 1994

1996

After democracy was restored in Argentina, a commission was created to investigate the disappearance of thousands of persons during the military regime. CONADEP [National Commission for the Disappearance of Persons] compiled a report urging legal action against those responsible. Titled “*Nunca Más*” [Never Again], it was published in 1984 and re-issued in 1996 by Página 12 in 30 inserts illustrated by Ferrari. His “*Nunca Más*” collages illustrate the connections between the repressive military power and the religious establishment.



Illustration for *Nunca Más* [Never Again], 1996

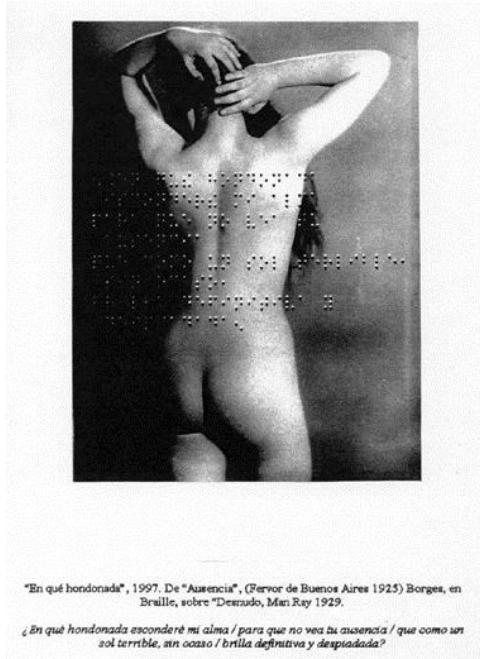
Ferrari returned to the idea he developed in *Cuadro Escrito* [The Written Painting] 1964, in the *Written Visual Art* series. Here his descriptions of sculptures, installations, and objects, were no longer handwritten but typed and then enlarged. It was Ferrari’s response to *Eco: the Last Word*, an exhibition dedicated to raising awareness for ecology. Ferrari wrote of *Written Visual Art* they are “*paintings, sculptures and installations using only words: the most renewable resource.*”

1997

Ferrari embossed in Braille several love poems by Borges on photographs by Man Ray, Tatiana Maiore, Ferdinando Sciana and by his father Augusto. He also embossed Biblical verses in Braille on religious images and on publications on human rights, abortion, homosexuality, etc. Ferrari showed them in “*Tormentos y*

amores" [Torments and Love], an exhibition at the Archimboldo gallery in March. Argentine critic Claudia Laudano wrote, "Ferrari's fantasies capture the field of vision, reclaiming it for the sense of touch. Like when Diderot demonstrated in his famous letter to what extent a blind person is capable of reconstructing and imagining space, this show invokes a re-evaluation of a dimension of the senses, intensifying the experience of sight in the touch." Claudia Laudano, *Cuerpos transferidos*, Artñif, Nº 97, Fall 1997.

"For the Braille Series I imagined Borges - blind and writing love poems to the girls in the photographs by Man Ray. As if Borges, in love, wrote them lovely poems. The point is: you have to caress the girl to read what the poet wrote." (LF, *Palabras del artista*, León Ferrari Escritos en el aire, 1961-2005, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Neuquén, p.29)



Braille embossed Man Ray photograph

Several drawings from the *Serie de errores* were included in "Re-Aligning Vision, Alternative Currents in South American Drawings" a traveling exhibition curated by Edith A. Gibson and Mari Carmen Ramírez at the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin (today The Blanton Museum of Art).

1998

In February the Blanton Museum of Art presented *Cantos Paralelos: Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art*, with works by Antonio Berni, Jorge de la Vega, Alberto Heredia, Pablo Suárez, Juan Carlos Distéfano, León Ferrari, Rubén Santantonin, Víctor Grippo and Luis F. Bénédict. The common bond these artists share is the use of parody to critique and challenge established aesthetic, political, and social values.

Cantos Paralelos spanned the years between 1960 and 1997, a tumultuous era in Argentina's history. During this time, the country experienced the rise and fall of economic expansion in the 1960s, the period of strict censorship and military repression that followed, and the restoration of democracy in the 1980s. The subject matter of these works often grapples with complex social and political issues such as violence and cultural and sexual stereotyping. *Cantos Paralelos* not only examined the work of these artists in relationship to Argentina's artistic traditions and recent history, but placed it within the broader context of 20th Century art, revealing affinities to parallel art movements in the United States and Europe.

2000

Ferrari presented *Infiernos e Idolatrías* [Hells and Idolatries] an exhibition at the ICI, the Spanish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires. Ferrari installed kitschy mass-produced objects made in China, and chessboards on which store bought plastic saints, devils and wax penises played imaginary games. It provoked demonstrations, and Catholic groups threw tear gas and garbage at the exhibition, although no works were destroyed.

Published *La bondadosa crueldad* [Kind Cruelty], a book of poems and collages dedicated to his late son Ariel. In the introduction Ferrari wrote “*in our culture, cruelty is so intimately fused to benevolence that it’s concealed by it.*”

Ferrari’s works were included in *Heterotopías - Medio siglo sin lugar, 1918-1968* [Heterotopías - Half-Century of No Place], a seminal survey of Latin American avant-garde work at the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea.

2001

Ferrari made boxes filled with artificial flowers, plastic cockroaches, butterflies, feathers and toy airplanes.

His 1965, *Christian and Western Civilization* was included in the inaugural exhibition of MALBA [Museo de arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires], Costantini Collection.

2002

The University of Essex Art Gallery presented “*León Ferrari, The Architecture of Madness,*” an exhibition of blueprint maps, curated by Gabriela Salgado. All the works in the exhibition were donated by the artist to the University of Essex, Collection of Latin American Art.

Ferrari worked on the *Electronicartes* series of collages, photographs or images which he digitally manipulated and sent by Internet. They were conceived as a response to the effect of corruption and socioeconomic disintegration in Argentina, and the United States military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. They are acid and humorous critiques of the international policies of President George W. Bush.

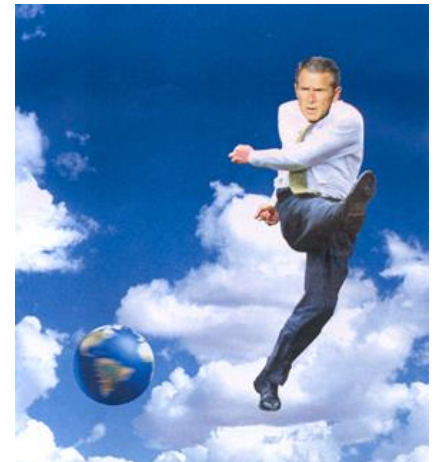


Image from the Electronicarte series, 2003

2004 - 2005

In *Inverted Utopias, Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, at The Houston Museum of Fine Arts, curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, several important works by Ferrari were presented: *Christian and Western Civilization* 1965, *The Written Painting* 1964, *Letter to a General* 1963, and the *Embossed Bible Series* 1997.

The Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires presented “*Dando Vuelta al Poder*” [Turning Power Around], curated by Victoria Noorthoom, with León Ferrari, Luis Camnitzer, François Bucher; three South American conceptual artists, focusing on the paradoxes of the great world powers. In *Art Nexus*, Victoria Verlichack wrote: “Ferrari presented an installation titled ‘El Diablo’ [The Devil], an implacably ironic and very serious scenario denouncing the explicit misogyny in many passages of the Bible. In his elaborate research, the artist discovered

a series of engravings and paintings by Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, the great masters of Western Art where Satan is represented as a female. ...Ferrari focused his criticism on the authoritarian cruelty of Western Civilization, calling attention to the fact that in this tradition, Woman/Eve was not only the first sinner, she was also the devil. As the Devil, women play a dual role: by becoming the axis of evil, and thus are deserving of multiple punishments. Ferrari denounces violence against women, even when it was preached by saints and prophets in Biblical texts. These texts were displayed on the Gallery walls.” (Art Nexus 54, October 2004)

In September, New York’s Drawing Center presented, “*León Ferrari: Politiscripts*.” An exhibition curated by Luis Camnitzer of subversive calligraphic drawings from the 1960s.

Holland Cotter in The New York Times wrote: “And because even drawings that may be mere doodles are composed and executed with care, they all convey the impression of carrying coded and encrypted information known only to the artist. In short, they are like a taunting gesture of counter-censorship. Through its very opaqueness, abstraction, real or imagined, becomes a political tool.”

“It is in such ways that artists in Latin America, Africa and Asia have created vital, distinctive modernisms even as Euro-American modernism ran out of steam, its radical potential unrealized. The modest show of Mr. Ferrari’s influential drawings hints at this dynamic; his collages and sculptures reveal more forcefully, as does his published writing, which can be sampled in ‘Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s, Writings of the Avant-Garde,’ a terrific anthology recently published by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The first three words of the title are borrowed from Mr. Ferrari. They capture his feisty spirit perfectly.” (New York Times, October 8, 2004)

In December 2004, Leon Ferrari’s *Retrospective Exhibition (1954-2004)*, at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, curated by Andrea Giunta, caused strong debate. Led by Catholic groups, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergolio (inaugurated as Pope Francis in March 2013), called it “a blasphemy.” Twenty days after the opening, the exhibition was closed by a judge’s decision, it was ordered to re-open eighteen days later by a justice’s order in defense of freedom of expression. The daily reports in the press captured the attention of the public, causing attendance to soar. The coverage focused on the political repercussions of judicial and religious censorship against an institution funded by the government of the City of Buenos Aires. The exhibition broke all attendance records, but at Ferrari’s request due to repeated bomb threats, it closed a month earlier than originally scheduled.

MALBA [Museo de arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires] simultaneously presented Ferrari’s *Instrumentos para dibujar sonidos* [Artifacts to draw sounds]. The instruments had been reconstructed for performances at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires.

Andrea Giunta, curator of the León Ferrari Retrospective at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, was invited by the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies to lecture about her curatorial project and the debate and controversy in articles and the media about it. The Ferrari retrospective exhibition has become paradigmatic for any discussion on the relationship between art and democracy. (*Conversation with Andrea Giunta: León Ferrari Retrospective, curatorial project and debates*, October 4, 2005, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, New York)

2005

A December exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Neuquén, Argentina, “*León Ferrari Escritos en el Aire, 1961-2005*,” had a catalogue with texts by Andrea Giunta, León Ferrari, Josefina Loudmer, Tununa Mercado, Roberto Jacoby, Miguel Briante, and Claudia Laudano.

2006

Curated by Gabriela Salgado, “*León Ferrari, A Relentless Critique of Power*,” was shown at the University Gallery, University of Essex. Ferrari gifted all the works in the exhibition to the university’s collection of Latin American Art.

In October and November Ferrari attended two important exhibitions of his work in Brazil; *Poéticas e Políticas*, featured 120 works, some from Brazilian collections, at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, and at the 27th São Paulo Biennial, a special room was dedicated to his work.

In his new studio in Buenos Aires, Ferrari continued experimenting with new materials for his hanging sculptures, including plastic human bones, tree branches, sprayed insulation foam, and large paper and canvas panels written with textile paint.



Plastic Bones and wire sculpture, 2006

2007

Ferrari's work was included in *Think With the Senses, Feel with Mind, Art in the Present Tense*, an exhibition at the 52nd Venice Biennale curated by Robert Storr at the Arsenale; and at Documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany, where his blueprint works were exhibited.

The International Jury at the Venice Biennial awarded León Ferrari a Golden Lion prize. "At the Arsenale, Ferrari presented a body of work that offers examples of a long and substantial career and continuous critical stance in the context of often adverse political and social circumstances. The Jury decided to assign him this prize not only for his ethical and his political effort but also for the contemporary aesthetic relevance of his work developed during the past 60 years." (Biennial Press Release, Oct.18)



León Ferrari receiving the Gold Lion Award at the Venice Biennale, October 17, 2007

León Ferrari's first New York Gallery exhibition in 20 years, *Serie de errores and works 1962-2007*, opened November 29 at Cecilia de Torres, Ltd., with accompanying catalogue.

2008

Ferrari's work was featured in numerous one person exhibitions throughout the year. Some of these include *Obras 1976 - 2008*, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, México DF; *Heliografías*, Teatro Auditorium, Mar del Plata, Argentina; *Los Músicos*, Galeria Braga Mendez Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires, Argentina; and *Antológica*, Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes Juan B. Castagnino, Rosario, Argentina. He also participated in *Latin American and Caribbean Art: Selected Highlights* from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, curated by Perez Oramas, New York State Museum, Albany, New York

2009

León Ferrari's work is shown in *Tangled Alphabets León Ferrari – Mira Schendel*, an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York curated by Luis Enrique Pérez-Oramas. There is an accompanying catalogue with essays by Andrea Guinta and Rodrigo Naves.

2010

Tangled Alphabets León Ferrari – Mira Schendel travels to Fundación Iberé, Camargo, Puerto Alegre, Brasil.

2011

Ferrari lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he continues working daily. The artist enjoys an active creative period and great personal success, including exhibitions at the New York gallery Haunch of Venison and at the Museo del Banco de la República de Bogotá, Colombia.

2012

The solo exhibition, *León Ferrari - Brailles y relecturas de la Biblia*, opens at MALBA [Museo de arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires]. This same year, Ferrari's work is included in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston show, *Constructed Dialogues: Concrete, Geometric and Kinetic Art from the Latin American Collection*.

2013 On July 25th, 2013, Ferrari dies in Buenos Aires at age 92. In honor of the artist, the Museum of Modern Art exhibits *Drawing Homage to León Ferrari* in early 2014.

Chronology compiled from the following sources:

León Ferrari Archives, Buenos Aires

Poéticas e Políticas, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2006

León Ferrari-A Relentless Critique of Power, text by Gabriela Salgado, University Gallery, University of Essex, 2006

León Ferrari, Escritos en el Aire, 1961-2005, Museo de Bellas Artes de Neuquén, 2005

León Ferrari, *Prosa Política, Siglo Veintiuno*, Editores, Argentina, 2005

Luis Camnitzer, *Flying in Weightlessness*, Art Nexus 58, November 2005

Andrea Giunta, *Chronology, Retrospectiva, Obras 1954-2004*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2004

Héctor Olea, *León Ferrari, From the Drawing of Texts to the Texture of Poetry, Inverted Utopias, Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, The Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 2004

Holland Cotter, The New York Times, October, 8, 2004

Victoria Verlichak, *Turning Power Around*, Art Nexus 54, October 2004

Loreley Gaffoglio, *La Iglesia advirtió que la muestra de Ferrari 'es una blasfemia,'* La Nación, Buenos Aires, 12/2/04

León Ferrari, The Architecture of Madness, text by Gabriela Salgado, University Gallery, University of Essex, 2002

Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Cantos Paralelos - Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art*, Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Austin Texas; Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Argentina, 1999

Re-Aligning Vision Alternative Currents in South American Drawing, Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, Austin, Texas, 1997

Claudia Laudano, *Cuerpos transferidos*, Artnif, Nº 97, Buenos Aires, Autumn 1997

Elizabeth Ness, *On the Money*, The Village Voice, June 28, 1988

Exit Art Archives, *The Debt*, press release, June 1988

"Heretic Chapel by León Ferrari," Franklin Furnace press release, November 1987, Franklin Furnace archives, MoMA, New York