The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920–1970

Essays by Luis R. Cancel, Jacinto Quirarte, Marimar Benítez, Nelly Perazzo, Lowery S. Sims, Eva Cockcroft, Félix Angel, and Carla Stellweg

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“Magnet—New York”: Conceptual, Performance, Environmental, and Installation Art by Latin American Artists in New York

by Carla Stellweg

In 1964 John Canaday wrote in *The New York Times*: “It is not exactly an invasion but there is at least a strong Latin American infiltration into the international strongholds so largely cornered by New York galleries. The exhibition currently at the Bonino Gallery arranged by the Inter-American Foundation for the Arts might have been called *Target: New York*, in which case the comment would be in order that a sound hit, although not a bull's-eye, has been scored. But the exhibition is more tactfully called *Magnet: New York* since all twenty-eight artists represented have been lured from their homelands to reside in this wonderful and terrible city.”[1] In the next paragraph he addressed the artists not as residents but as “visitors” who are welcome, clearly illustrating the ambivalent attitudes of U.S. critics in the evaluation of Latin American artists: should these artists be viewed as part of the establishment or should they be seen as outsiders and “in transit” visitors?

These artists, being internationalists themselves, were already outsiders in their own countries. Prior to coming to the United States, they had made it their business to be very up-to-date and had thereby broken with the ethnocentrism that continued to prevail in their homelands. The art history and traditions they wanted to be a part of were far beyond their places of birth and natural roots. They brought with them to the United States this condition of artistic exile and searching, and it granted them the possibility to continue confronting conventional mediums and to acquire their own place among the innovative modes prevalent in New York during the 1960s.

To the degree that they were all faced with the same rules, Latin American or Caribbean artists who came to New York to develop careers within what from today's vantage point are movements called Conceptual Art, Performance, Environmental Art, and Installation Art, were little different from those who came from Europe, Japan, or elsewhere. The motives and means by which each artist made the move to New York varied, just as each work of art revealed individual responses to given circumstances. This dynamic ameliorates the idea of a Latin American Conceptual group or movement per se. While the artists' backgrounds have few aspects in common, in general they do share a solid university training, and they all rejected the strictly academic approaches to artmaking prevalent in Latin American art schools. In addition, their intellectual information extended beyond the boundaries of Latin American or Caribbean cultures. Most were bilingual or trilingual, and they incorporated several intellectual discourses into their work. By contrast, the New York art establishment applied measures of appreciation to artists who came from a world they knew little or nothing about. Major art institutions in the United States had exhibited pre-Columbian art and examples of the Mexican muralists, but by and large Latin American art was *terra incognita*. On an academic level there were very few Latin American scholars and hardly any courses available for Americans who wished to study Latin American art. Latin American culture was the domain of the departments of Romance languages, and even there it is noteworthy that the Latin American literary boom had not yet begun. Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in Spanish in 1967, was not available in English until 1970.

Contrary to the sparse knowledge of things Latin American in the United States, Latin American intellectuals had access to plenty of information about cultural and artistic developments in the United States. North American films, books,

magazines, and a series of traveling exhibitions organized by the United States Information Agency promoted U.S. culture. A Latin American intellectual's familiarity with U.S. culture served as an incentive to explore new artistic horizons. By the 1960s it became a real possibility for artists to leave their homelands in pursuit of the international scene that New York promised. A long list of art organizations actively promoted the international standards of New York in Latin America and served as springboards to get to the United States. Under the directorship of Jorge Romero Brest, the Torcuato di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires invited many critics and curators from the United States and Europe to view and select local artists for shows and grants. There was also El Eco, an experimental space created in 1953 by Mathias Goeritz in Mexico City. Under Goeritz's umbrella of "Emotional Architecture," artists of all disciplines were invited to break with functional and formal precedents. Music, film, dance, poetry, and performance were created by such international artists as Luis Buñuel, Henry Moore, and Walter Nicks, as well as by Rufino Tamayo and Carlos Mérida. The protests of the prevailing Social Realist Mexican School, headed by Diego Rivera, doomed El Eco's future, but the experiment inspired many Latin American artists to seek out arenas beyond their national borders.

Under the sophisticated guidance of Francisco Matarazzo, the São Paulo Bienal became one of the most effective platforms for younger Latin American artists looking for new options and hoping to communicate with experimental ideas from abroad. There they were given firsthand experience of the work of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, and the experiments of young Minimalists, including Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre, in addition to Conceptual works by Joseph Kosuth, Bruce Nauman, and others, and special exhibitions of major international figures such as Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, and Joseph Beuys.

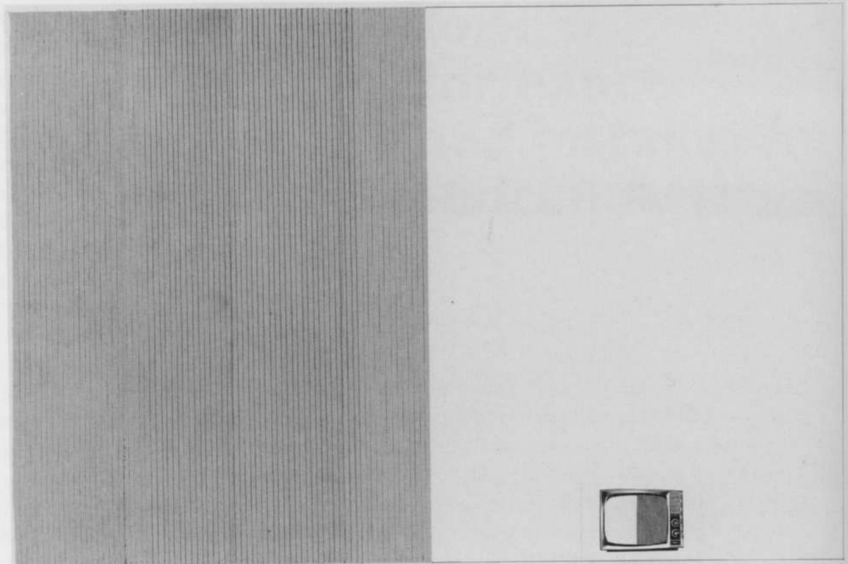
In the early 1960s John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress and human rights concerns produced the idea of a United States, concerned and liberal, in favor of Latin American civil rights. But it was also the time of the nuclear missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. It can be assumed that a Latin American artist coming to the United States carried with him a complicated baggage of information and started with at least an ambivalent perspective.

In 1977, thinking back on the days before he left for New York City with a Guggenheim grant in 1961, the Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer wrote:

It was a time that Montevideo was infested with fascist groups who would kidnap leftists, preferably Jewish, and tattoo swastikas into their skin with razor blades. Well-intentioned friends gave me some weapons to defend myself with; since I didn't know how to use them, it only increased the weight of my carrying case. New York seemed fascinating: the center of the empire. The measuring stick for success was set by the empire and not in the colonies. Even refusal or rebellion are determined and qualified by the central office of the empire.[2]

Some U.S. critics supported these assumptions of cultural imperialism. In April 1967 Sam Hunter wrote: "In Buenos Aires, a thriving and sophisticated art center, the avant-garde di Tella Institute and its gifted impresario, Romero Brest, have been decisive in promoting an awareness of rapidly accelerating artistic changes during the sixties. The criteria of global art, based in fact on the going styles of New York, have been established as the framework for local expressions." He further observed: "It is in abstraction that the South Americans excel and make their most significant contribution."[3] Lawrence Alloway had an equally paternalistic, if less generous, point of view. In a text about the 1965 international scene in Latin America he referred to the abstract art he had seen: "The thick surface of 'matter painting' as practiced in Spain by Antoní Tapiés and others, is repeated in numerous turgid, sandy, and sluggish slabs in Latin America. In a new way, matter painting is the new form of colonialism, the analogue in mud of the Baroque architecture of Hispanic domination."[4]

Despite their aesthetic disagreements, both critics found that whatever was being produced in Latin America corresponded to a dominated and colonial expression of the



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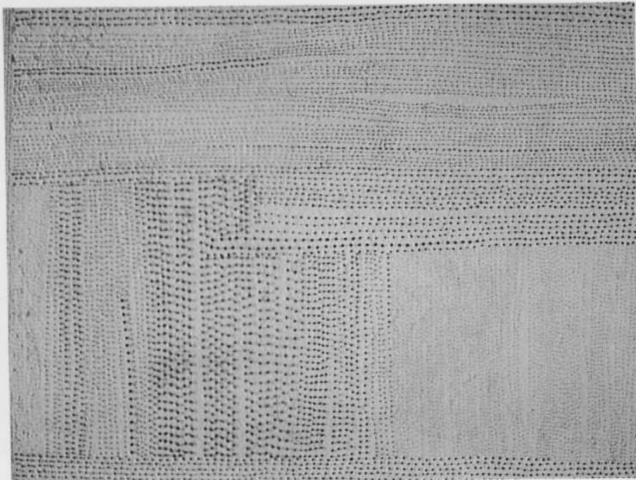

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Jaime Davidovich
205. *Adhesive Video-Tape Project.* 1970
Adhesive tape, ink, and photo on paper, 30 x 40"
Collection the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

Mathias Goeritz
206. *Message XIX.* 1959
Wood, plaster, nails, and paint, 39¾ x 48 x 2⅝"
Collection Atlantic Richfield Company, California
Photo: courtesy Atlantic Richfield Company

Mathias Goeritz
207. *Red Realizations.* 1959–61
Painted wood
Photo: courtesy Art in Public Places, Dade County, Florida

international artistic movements. However, the Latin Americans who were Conceptual artists constituted a very sophisticated group, ready to take on the empire. Back home they were already in the forefront of art, and they were ready to show that they lived in a contemporary world. Their deliberately hostile attitude to convention enabled them, once in New York, to advance their ideas.

Mathias Goeritz was the first important representative of Latin America's commitment to the new international styles. To those Latin Americans who followed in his footsteps, he was an artist who had moved beyond his regional boundaries and made an international impression. Born in Danzig in 1919, Goeritz studied in Berlin and obtained a doctorate in philosophy by the outbreak of World War II. In the 1930s he traveled extensively throughout Europe, meeting Käthe Kollwitz, Karl Schmidt-Rotluff, László Moholy-Nagy, and various members of the Bauhaus, Dada, and Surrealist groups.[5] In 1939 he fled Germany for North Africa, then moved to Spain, where he founded the Altamira School, a loose-knit artists' and critics' organization that produced manifestos, a magazine, and exhibitions promoting the ideas of the avant-garde in the wake of the war's destruction. The group's romantic and hopeful purpose, stated by Goeritz in a manifesto, was to bring about "the spiritual metamorphosis of mankind. A new brotherhood of men will be born, one for whom life and art will not be contradictory."[6] The Dau Al Set group in Barcelona as well as the Grupo Pórtico from Zaragoza also adhered to these principles, so Goeritz began collaborating with their members, including Joan Miró, Antonio Saura, Manuel Millares, Modest Cuixart, and other prominent Spanish artists and critics.

In 1948 Goeritz left Spain for Mexico, where he was invited to teach at the new architecture school of the University of Guadalajara. The chance to leave Europe for the New World seemed an appropriate challenge to the pioneering spirit Goeritz had already developed by then. He has remained in Mexico ever since.

Many of Goeritz's friends and colleagues left Europe for the United States, and invariably they invited him to visit New York. Herbert Bayer and Moholy-Nagy continued to communicate with Goeritz from the United States. Goeritz's first major exhibition in New York was in 1960 at the Carstairs Gallery. The proposals and drawings he showed there, although apparently Minimalist in style, were an example of his theory of Emotional Architecture.

While in New York, in an extended Conceptual gesture, Goeritz decided to launch a protest during the performance of Jean Tinguely's self-destructive sculpture *Homage to New York* at The Museum of Modern Art. This was the first time that a Latin American artist confronted the international avant-garde of New York. Outside the museum Goeritz handed out a leaflet that called for a halt to Tinguely's type of art: "PLEASE STOP the aesthetic so-called profound jokes! STOP boring us with another sample of egocentric folk art! All this is becoming pure vanity!" it exclaimed. The leaflet emphatically begged for the return of spiritual and emotional qualities in art, ending with: "Be consequent, honor the tradition of Hugo Ball! Go forward and be decisive, the most difficult step of Huelsenbeck's NEW MAN: from Dada—to faith!"[7]

Seven years older than Tinguely, Goeritz had experienced the mechanized self-destruction of Europe. Thereafter he believed in art that promoted and elicited belief, if only the belief in believing. He advocated emotionally charged art that went beyond rationalizations, that eliminated the contradictions between life and art, whereas Tinguely's proposition suggested life is in perpetual change, its permanence untrue. When Goeritz wrote "it is not true that what we need is to accept instability. That is again the easy way. We need static values,"[8] he emphasized his hope for a meaningful and greater art, one that would address the spiritual needs of man.[9] These inclinations in Goeritz's work were not seen by several critics, including Gregory Battcock, who simply noted: "In 1960 the Mexican sculptor-architect Mathias Goeritz exhibited at the Carstairs Gallery in New York City proposals and drawings for huge structures of a grand architectural scale—works that apparently approximated the flat and sculptural style that has come to be known as Minimal Art."[10]

Goeritz never presumed to be an early Minimal artist; his work was conceptually connected to deeper emotional expressions. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, in referring to Goeritz's vision as it was exemplified in the *Five Towers*, built in 1957 at the entrance to Ciudad Satélite in Mexico City, spoke of the "Obelisks of Luxor, the spires of a cathedral, the

towers of a Lombard stronghold, the forest of chimneys in a great production center, or the skyscrapers that announce America to the seafarer. No one lives in these towers and no one can climb up inside them. They are wasteful, prideful, beautifully durable exclamation marks of human ambition."[11]

Parallel to creating the El Eco and the *Five Towers*, Mathias Goeritz produced a series entitled Messages with subtitles from the names of books of the Bible. Although these works looked abstract, they were almost like small chapels, explicitly designed to evoke spiritual sensations in the spectator. Each and every installation of his work, whether outdoors or indoors, was meant to convey his conviction that art was not just to be viewed but to be experienced in a profound manner, as though in communion with values higher than materialism (plates 206 and 207). It is on this level that his work influenced artists from all over the world, particularly those who had begun to question the meaning of dematerialized art. Luis Camnitzer recalls today: "Goeritz was a very influential figure that we had all heard of and admired. Aside from his work, he was an inspiration in terms of the attitudes towards artmaking."[12] And Liliana Porter remembers, "Mathias Goeritz had been my teacher in Mexico City and his teachings had already made an impact on me before coming to New York."[13]

Much younger than Mathias Goeritz, these artists tended to work toward building a sense of community among Latin Americans in New York, whereas Goeritz had caught the attention of the art world by his isolated actions. Porter remarked: "With Camnitzer and the Argentine Installation artist Luis Felipe Noé, we went to exhibitions and visited the museums together, and we learned a lot from the interchange. Noé was waiting for an exhibition at the Bonino Gallery, and at that point it was extremely important that you showed your ideas first, before anyone else beat you to it."[14] (Although Noé stopped producing art for several years, in order to write a book, Porter considers today that "he also was a key figure in our development."[15])

Jaime Davidovich, from Argentina, found the cultural climate in his country stifling, reiterative, and "derivative of the main abstract art theories from Europe and the United States."[16] Already teaching in Buenos Aires at the age of twenty-three, he first saw the work of modern artists he had studied and read about during a visit to the São Paulo Bienal. He decided that the prospect of becoming part of yet "another Argentinian young, or not-so-young, art movement based on European or North American abstract art models, wasn't for me."[17] A grant awarded to him by Romero Brest of the Torcuato di Tella Institute enabled him to leave Argentina for the United States for a year. He then decided to stay beyond that first year, learn English, and adjust to the new environment. Davidovich spent much of his time in New York viewing the original art he had not seen while studying in Argentina: "I was actually amazed when I first saw a Mondrian painting at the Modern, that one could see the brush strokes. I had always thought the paintings were flat, without any texture or any surface qualities. It was surprising to have a tactile contact with the original pieces of art."[18]

Davidovich brought with him the notion to break and challenge the boundaries of conventional painting. In Argentina he had created paintings that were conceptually related to the idea of vacuums and emptiness, symbolic not only of the Pampas landscape but also of the Argentine cultural and political void. He named these works *Pizarrones Negros* (Blackboards) and exhibited them next to works by Alberto Greco and Zulema Damianovich, Argentine artists who at the time exchanged ideas with several of the future Conceptual artists from Latin America.

It was not until several years later, when Davidovich moved to Ohio, that he began to take his works off the stretchers and to tape the canvases directly to the wall of a given space, assimilating and extending artworks into the environment (plate 205). The critic John Matturri wrote: "From the tape mountings emerged Davidovich's interest in the use of adhesive tape as a media in its own right."[19] Referring back to this period in Davidovich's career, Roger A. Welchans described the presentation of the *Carroll Wall Project* at John Carroll University in Cleveland: "Davidovich, a native of Argentina, has shed the 'furniture' of painting— the frames, stretchers, and supports—and moved the remaining aesthetic elements, the textures and compositional concerns, out into the environment."[20] Reviewing a show of six "New York" artists, Michael

Sundell wrote: "Jaime Davidovich, Athena Tacha, Craig Lucas, Karen Eubel, Joe Breidel, and John Pearson vary considerably in maturity, talent, and preoccupation. But all the work is generally in the new international style of the late 1960s—the style which the finicky or precise subdivide with labels like 'conceptual,' 'process,' 'systemic,' and 'arte povera.' Thus all six move in that mainstream of contemporary art which usually flows so thinly through the Western Reserve."[21]

Even though Davidovich did not yet form part of the "mainstream," his work at that time already pointed to his later visibility within New York's parameters of highly regarded Conceptual Art. He was also invited to Canada to participate in a symposium, "Education through the Arts," organized by Herbert Read, with whom he had corresponded from Argentina. At the symposium he was introduced to video and television and has since made these media an integral part of his work, culminating in the first Soho cable program, "Artists Television Network," in the early 1970s. His early underground video work gained the respect of all major artists working with that medium. With the technology available to him in the United States, Davidovich was able to develop a body of work that confronted mass culture, examined popular heroes, and documented the creative thoughts of other artists, such as Laurie Anderson. He thereby became one of the active participants in the New York avant-garde.

Another Argentine artist, Marta Minujín, went to Paris in 1962 on a French government award, which enabled her to continue in directions she had tentatively tested in Buenos Aires. She associated with the Nouveau Réaliste French artists, who manipulated found objects so as to bring a "new reality" to their audience. Minujín won the Torcuato di Tella Institute's First National Prize on her return to Argentina in 1964. Two years later, armed with a Guggenheim Foundation grant, she arrived in New York. Minujín's first exhibit to gain attention in New York had been an environmental happening, staged in Buenos Aires at the di Tella Institute in 1966. Before her arrival in New York, Barnard L. Collier had reviewed the happening in *The New York Times*: "A vocal and vivacious group of young Argentine artists is led, it seems, by a slim 24-year-old girl named Marta Minujín, who is supposed to go to New York on a Guggenheim Fellowship and who has set up sixty television sets with a chair before each. For nearly two and a half hours Miss Minujín, in a silvery jumpsuit, and her companions did various things before closed-circuit television cameras while the people grew restless."[22] Of this work, which explored new ideas of self-interaction, the video artist and critic Douglas Davis said: "The Argentine intermedia artist Marta Minujín invited sixty well-known celebrities to a theater, filmed them, and asked them to return one week later, where they were barraged with playback information about themselves on sixty television sets and sixty radios. Miss Minujín called the event *Simultaneity in Simultaneity*."[23]

Evidence that Minujín's cultural antennae were sharply tuned could be seen in all her technological communication experiments. Upon her arrival in New York, she installed an environment, complete with sensory experiences—smells, sights, and sounds. It was called *El Batacazo* (The Long Shot). Of this work, Grace Glueck wrote in *The New York Times*: "*El Batacazo* is meant to be toured by a gallery visitor alone, while viewers watch him through transparent panels. He climbs a slippery staircase that leads him past the rabbits (twitchy but caged) and brooks no turning back. Then, to reach an upper platform, he plows through the rugby players. From there he toboggans down a slide to land on the face of the amorous nude. And then the final angst: an odyssey through a tunnel of flies (active, but entrapped in plastic panels)."[24] Marta Minujín, very impressed by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, particularly those expressed in *Understanding the Media*, was generally regarded to be doing a Latin version of Pop art or a "hot" Pop art.

Jacqueline Barnitz associated Minujín's work also with the New Realism: "It is no accident that the Latin Americans refer to their new realism as the art of things (like the French *art des objets*) rather than Pop art. Pop art speaks of 'things,' the things that surround us, whereas the 'art of things' paradoxically speaks of people. It employs objects in order to create an image of man. In this sense it is not very different from Goya's commentary on war and reason, or from the Mexican muralists' social criticism. But in keeping with an age of industry and mass production, contemporary artists have

recourse to more strident means in order to be heard."[25] And heard she was, in more than one way. Marta Minujín, perhaps keener than many other Latin American artists to grasp the trend, the latest ideas, the generally fashionable, caught on to the celebrity aspect of the art world. Moving around New York on roller skates, she was highly visible, both socially and intellectually. *Newsweek*, reporting on *El Batacazo*, even lauded Minujín's environmental work:

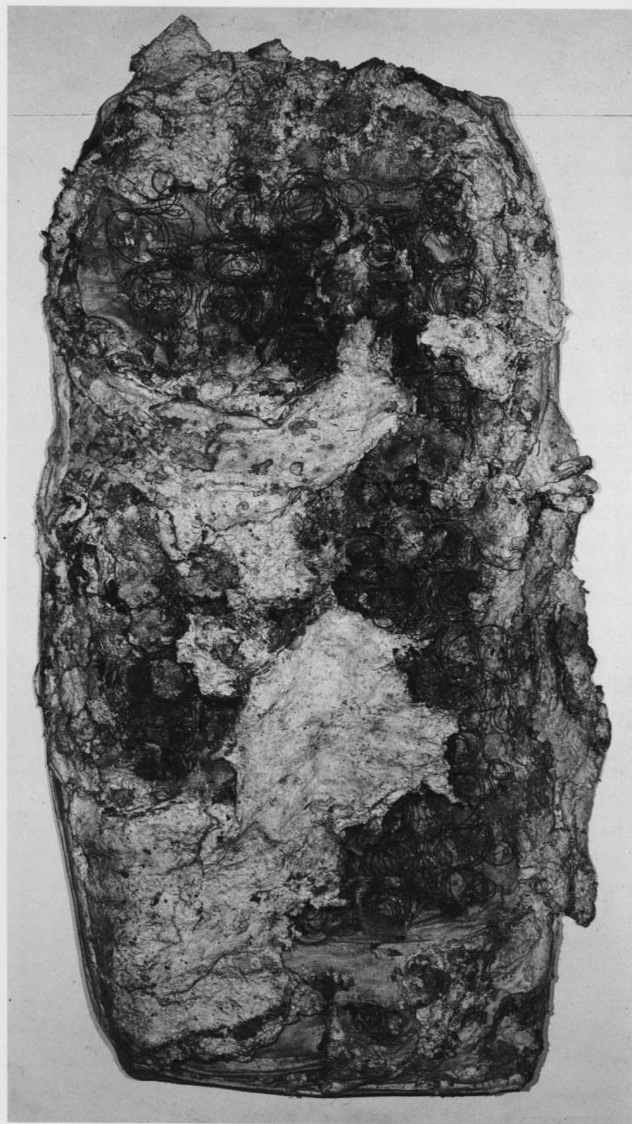
The precise blend of disturbance and delight in a happening is hard to achieve, but last week New York's Bianchini Gallery presented a near bull's-eye. Painting and sculpture are through, proclaims Marta Minujín, the red-haired, kitten-eyed, 29-year-old Argentine sprite who conjured this elegant and exuberant labyrinth.[26]

In 1969 several aspects of Minujín's social awareness and multimedia, McLuhanesque concerns were combined in an Environmental work entitled *Minucode*, of which John Perreault noted: "Marta—blond, Argentine, outgoing, and familiar to everyone on the 'art scene'—is presenting her latest Conceptual, multimedia complexity: *Minucode*. Will this be followed by *Minutype, Minumobiles, Minuplanes, Minumix*?"[27]

Part of the fascination with the new technological materials were the attempts to make them an extension of the central nervous system, as suggested by Marshall McLuhan. Marta Minujín revealed this best in her *Minuphone* of 1967. The *Minuphone* looked like an ordinary phone booth of the 1960s, except that it did not behave like one. When a number was dialed, a series of events occurred: the walls changed colors, smoke enveloped the user, lights flickered, a television set showed the user the expressions on his face, sirens went off, and wind came blasting from behind the screen. In *Look* magazine, William Zinsser wrote: "Well, if it is a function of art to tell us something about our lives—to reveal truth, if necessary, by exaggerating it—I had three minutes' worth of art from Miss Minujín. By assaulting my various senses, by turning me on with a series of processes that were far more psychedelic than rational, she made me see the telephone booth for what it is: an intimate part of my daily environment."[28] Minujín had hopes that the *Minuphone* would be mass-produced and installed all across the United States.

Although her media-oriented ideas were already crystallizing in Argentina, her reaction to the U.S. technological society, to the possibility of global communication, allowed her to become very quickly an American technological creation. By choosing the most debated issues of the times and presenting these in media spectacles, Marta Minujín became, more than any other Latin American artist, a media celebrity not unlike Andy Warhol. She adapted to United States culture and became an outright proponent of the American dream (plates 209 and 210).

Like Marta Minujín, Rafael Montañez-Ortiz was also extremely effective in his employment of the media. In addition, both artists had unique interpretations of Dada's dictums. Among the Latin Americans, it seems that the work of these two best addressed the disruption of established order and the utilization of shock. Rafael Montañez-Ortiz (Ralph Ortiz), born in New York City of Puerto Rican, Mexican, and American Indian ancestors, was to be the first truly *Hispanic* artist to acquire a significant reputation. He considers himself first an American, regardless of whether he chooses to work with Latin American subject matter or not. In 1963 he independently developed the mattress and piano-destruction pieces that made him a principal exponent of the Destruction in Art movement. The same year, he was included in an exhibition of contemporary sculptors with Mark Di Suvero, Rosalyn Drexler, and others. One reviewer stated: "Ralph Ortiz's smashed and gutted open-out couches and chairs were notable." Another commented: "Ralph Ortiz slices davenports and lays out the halves side by side, showing the stuffing, springs and supporting tape. He composes the sections somewhat, by placing one end at the top of one half and the other end at the bottom of the second half."[29] However, Ortiz was really showing decomposition rather than trying to "compose" what had been destroyed. It is no surprise that his work caught the attention of Richard Huelsenbeck, one of the founders of Dada, who wrote: "When I think about Ralph Ortiz it comes to mind that he does not do entire things. He is fascinated by things that are not or are not yet. When Ralph Ortiz wants to show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Rafael Montañez-Ortiz
208. *Archaeological Find 3.* 1961
Burnt mattress, 74⅞ x 41 x 4¼"
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Constance Kane
Photo: courtesy The Museum of Modern Art

Marta Minujín
209. *Installation of "The Long Shot."* 1966, Buenos Aires and New York
Photo: courtesy the artist

Marta Minujín
210. *Minucode.* 1969
Photo: courtesy the artist

us a mattress he does not show a mattress but an object that is torn by undefinable forces as they work in time."[30]

Ortiz is primarily interested in using art as a strategy to provoke deep emotional and radical changes (plate 208). He once took a used mattress, carried it to the ocean at Coney Island, quickly set it afire with lighter fluid, soaked it in the sea, and for a week, while it dried in the sun, he tore the material every day or spilled acid on it. Crowds gathered to watch and cops asked what he was doing. Ortiz explained it was an art project. Through this type of "disassembly," Ortiz attracted the attention of the art world and effected the inclusion of his work in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art and The Museum of Modern Art. James Thrall Soby, then chairman of the acquisition committee of The Museum of Modern Art, justified purchasing the mattress: "A rather difficult object to live with, it is indeed a powerful and horrifying image; but at the same time an object capable of moving the viewer after he has recovered from the first shock of revulsion, and I think our visitors will find it so."[31]

By 1965 Ortiz began formalizing the performance aspects of his destructive events. Contrary to our acceptance of physical decay or planned obsolescence in everyday life, when these concepts are incorporated into art, the result almost always provokes controversy. In his manifesto for the Destruction in Art Symposium in London, in 1966, Ortiz noted: "Our tragic dilemma is that because of our limited psychological evolution we have, unwittingly, instituted our biological and physical limitations. We have instituted for the ultimate destruction of our species."[32] Edward Lucie-Smith, then art critic for the London *Times*, declared: "Surrounded by a world in which violence reigns, I find it hard to assume that in the sphere of art, sweet reason must nevertheless continue to prevail. If people complain that breaking up a chair in the name of art shows a certain lack of dignity, I am inclined to wonder what's so dignified about a race riot."[33]

In another work of 1966 Ortiz confronted the ideas of regression and evolution: "Every performance piece had its own narrative, a Dada-Surrealist narrative, sounds that related to communication preceding language, the irrational preverbal sounds."[34] Expanding on the issue of art and psychology, he wrote to Kristine Kiles in 1982: "It is because the dream is our primal authenticating link to the magic of our mind, body, and spirit, to all our processes of imagination that I perceive it to be the key to all our processes of art. Any and all research that illumines behavior illumines art."[35] Art also illuminated behavior. In his book *Primal Scream*, behavioralist Arthur Janov acknowledged that the invention of the process he used with his patients originated from Ortiz's *Self-Destruction* performance. He credited the artwork with inspiring his use of a popular and accepted therapeutic treatment.[36]

Ortiz received a doctorate from Columbia University's Teachers College. Aside from agitating during the 1960s for the improvement of the New York Puerto Rican cultural conditions, he has not been disposed to teach about or romanticize his Latin heritage: "Ethnocentric concerns continue to blend high art into the limitations of folk culture. I am committed to viewing my profession from a perspective that will permit me a historically relevant contribution. I don't deny folk art's integrity or its place in art history. I never wanted to be folk Hispanic or a folksy anybody but have looked beyond my limitations, whether imposed on me or by me. This is why education is meaningful so that art at the larger world level of problem solving becomes like any other profession. Nuclear physics also evolve beyond naive and primitive notions. This led me to investigate the area of destruction in art, the unmaking of made things. My art from the late 1950s and 1960s is not just the result of exploring my own roots but rather based on questioning diverse historical and aesthetic contexts."[37] From 1968 till the end of the decade Ortiz continued to be a leading exponent of Destruction in Art principles and was a prominent and visible presence in the media. Next to artists such as Yoko Ono, John Hendricks, Wolf Vostell, Les Levine, and others, he actively staged Performance rituals at various locations throughout the United States, was on radio programs, and even had an appearance on the Johnny Carson show.

In terms of Latin American art, Ortiz's experiments remain among the most influential examples that art can make an impact beyond conventional, commercial standards—that it can affect people's lives. In contrast to Ortiz's experiments, in which

the individual learned through the processes of the irrational and emotional, was the work that brought Julio Le Parc to the forefront in New York. He studied prevailing mass culture and the electronic communication that our society seems to have successfully promoted. Like most Kinetic artists, he followed much of the earlier movements that addressed the democratization of the arts, such as Futurism, the Bauhaus, or De Stijl. Le Parc's first show in New York was in 1962, when he exhibited as a member of the collective Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel–GRAV. This group was formed in 1960, in Paris, and its founding act was signed by the artists Demarco, García Miranda, García Rossi, Le Parc, Molnar, Morellet, Moyano, Servanes, Sobrino, Stein, and Yvaral. In its founding charter GRAV stated its purpose was to emphasize team effort, its members were to exhibit anonymously in joint exhibitions, and spectators were to be inspired to participate in the art. The members stated that they would leave their individual activities and by means of organized investigation into one another's work establish a solid theoretical and practical aesthetic from this collective experience. In 1964–65, after holding a Labyrinth (exhibition) in Europe, GRAV and Le Parc created two Labyrinths at The Contemporaries gallery in New York (plate 213). Reflecting on the group's work, Douglas Davis wrote: "No one became more skilled at *l'instabilité* than Le Parc, who emerged as GRAV's central force. His kinetic-light murals and small constructions used bland and repetitive forms, allowing the play of light and shade across their surfaces to create a continually shifting impression upon the eye."[38] In Kinetic art, *l'instabilité* refers to the disappearance of permanent forms, putting the spectator in front of all sorts of projections, constantly moving and blinking lights, and shadows that slide across mirrored surfaces in order to induce multiple sensorial responses. In *Kunst Licht Kunst*, a key exhibition of Kinetic art held in Amsterdam, GRAV issued a statement: "It is not the purpose of the group to create a super-spectacle, but by producing an unexpected situation, to influence directly the public's behavior and to substitute for the work of art and the spectacle an evolving situation that calls for the active participation of the spectator."[39]

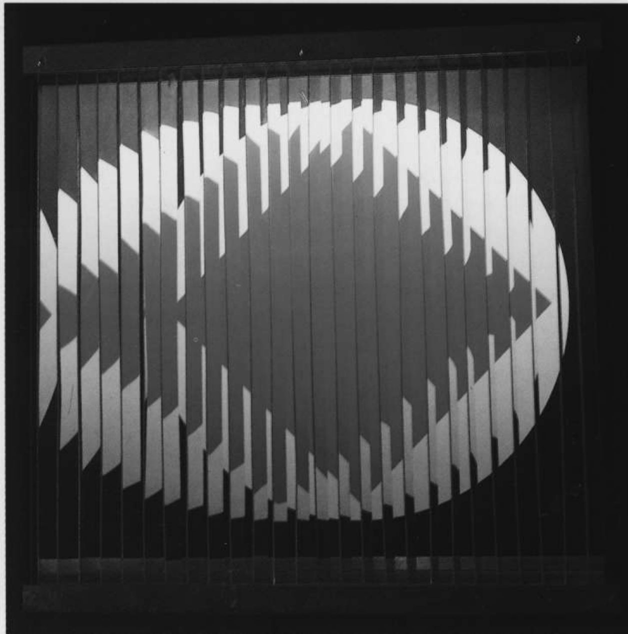
László Moholy-Nagy had written in the 1920s that light would bring forth a new form of visual art. After he came to the United States in 1937, he became the promulgator for future generations of Kinetic artists, including Le Parc. Having been born to a working-class family in Argentina, Le Parc shared the goals outlined by Moholy-Nagy and his fellow Bauhaus associates of creating art directed at the masses. His ideology is present throughout the collective writings of GRAV, including the manifesto published with the second Labyrinth in New York: "A spectator conscious of his power and tired of so many errors and mystifications will be able to make his revolution in art and follow the signs: Handle and Cooperate."[40]

Today, Le Parc states: "In New York GRAV helped to point to the existence of a new tendency in direct opposition to Pop art, which was emerging in those years. This was achieved in a failed, coopted exhibition, *The Responsive Eye*, at MOMA. We were in touch with Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, and Donald Judd, who then acted as a critic. New York City was less exclusive. Now I believe that our presence was erased, to the extent of denying its existence. An art, or artists' relationship toward today's pretended superiority of North American art cannot be but one of opposition."[41]

However, objections were voiced publicly about Kinetic art's failure to produce the real participation of the spectator, who instead was generally assaulted by technological devices. In addition there was the problem of the cooption of its ideas by facile commercial ventures. *Newsweek*, reporting on *The Responsive Eye* show, alluded to this drawback as well: "Perhaps, since such art is meant to be impersonal and neutral, its real future is functional. At the Newark Museum, some of the liveliest Op pieces currently on view are most functional indeed, warm comforting quilts in splendid, radiant colors and intricate geometric patterns, made by little old New England ladies a full century ago."[42]

Despite these objections, Julio Le Parc continued working toward a community-oriented art that would transcend the proverbial individualism allotted to high art practitioners in our society. "Creativity, like anything else in society, should be concerning everyone and not be relegated to a small group, whether in its creative aspects, its value system aspects or its social inclusion," he stated recently.[43]

211



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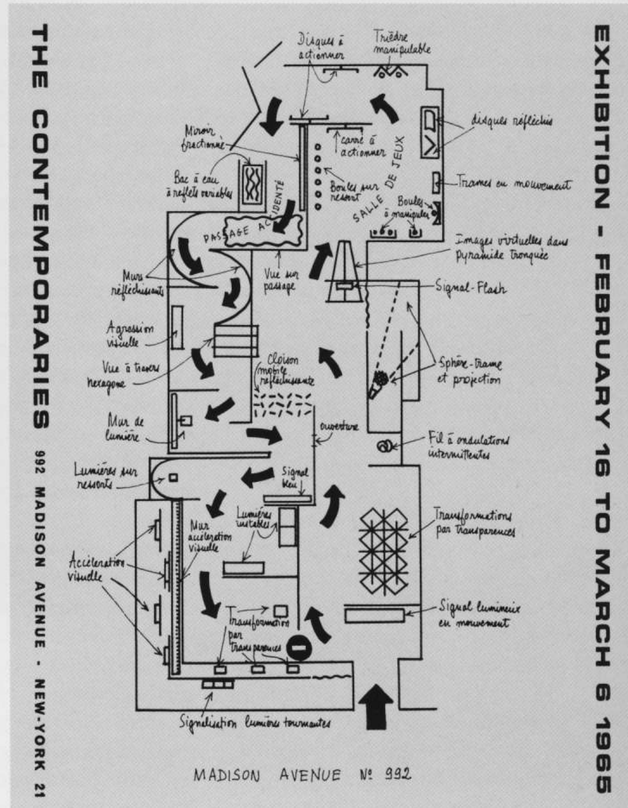


213

Julio Le Parc
211. *Installation Views.* March 11–April 1, 1967, Howard Wise Gallery, New York
Photo: courtesy the artist

Julio Le Parc
212. *Virtual Forms for Displacement of the Spectator with Changeable Themes.* 1966
Wood, metal, and light, 51 x 40 x 20"
Collection the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel de Paris (Garcia Rossi, Le Parc, Morellet, Sobrino, Stein, Yvaral)
213. *Exhibition Brochure for Labyrinthe 3, New York.* February 16–March 6, 1965, The Contemporaries, New York
Collection Julio Le Parc, Paris
Photo: Tony Velez

Le Parc's attitude regarding the purpose of art stems from a long Latin American tradition that began with tentative examples after the Latin American independence movements and culminated in the Mexican Revolution and its subsequent popular muralist movement. Moreover, during the 1960s, most Latin American artists were informed about how the Cuban Revolution dealt with the issue of the artist's freedom and his commitment to the society he lived in. Inspired by the social pronouncements of early twentieth-century artists, such as those of the Constructivists, many Latin American artists were influenced to incorporate social objectives into their art. Therefore, aside from Le Parc's prominence within the international Kinetic movement, his example as an artist with a social conscience continued to exercise influence over future generations of Latin American artists who considered art a vehicle for social change (plates 211 and 212).

Whereas the Latin American Environmental artists in Europe were aiming to control technology, New York artists, including those who came from Latin America, did not concern themselves with control. Some even considered it anathema, and in general their use of machines and technology was more experimental. They followed in the footsteps of the happenings, in which artists were willing to grant part of the creative process to other elements.[44]

Even though many Latin American artists were drawn to Paris, where their Latin American colleagues, such as Le Parc and Soto, had gained a strong reputation, Enrique Castro-Cid chose to go to New York in 1962. Born and raised in Santiago, Chile, he left his country at the age of nineteen and first went to Mexico, motivated by a desire to find new sources with which to challenge the European-oriented education he received in Chile. Today he recalls that he thought the French art scene seemed devoid of the energy he sensed existed in New York. Shortly after his arrival he was introduced to John Chamberlain and Willem de Kooning. He remembers that "with this group of artists I went abruptly from a kind of Chilean *joie de vivre* into a New York artistic violence," experiencing culture shock on all levels. "From the weak and boring French philosophical rhetoric, I began to focus on ideas coming out of Wittgenstein or D'Arcy Thompson, specifically geometry and mathematics."[45]

His first robots, shown at the Richard Feigen Gallery in 1965, were a response to the technology he confronted in the United States: "The early robots are interesting for their painful sterility: no longer the clanking metallic beasts of the 1920s, these are more akin to humans divested of their corporeal form, mere brains placed in bell jars with appropriate electrodes inserted, sending commands to mechanical limbs," wrote the art historian Jack Burnham.[46]

His next exhibition at the Richard Feigen Gallery was in 1966. Entitled *Compressed Air Sculptures*, it included whimsical and magical mechanical sculptures and was reviewed in *Time* magazine by Peter Sims: "Castro-Cid made toylike, motor-driven robots. They jousted like a 21st-century Punch-and-Judy show, chasing tiny balls with spinning hoops in an electronic version of Alexander Calder's 1926 *Circus*. His latest works avoid the clanking humdrum of much Kinetic art. Magically, when someone approaches his *Sensitive Sphere*, a multicolored ball bounces into the air. In a variation, an 8mm film is projected onto an airborne ball, playfully contorting and distorting the tiny images of human figures. Another work presents the appearance of a bouncing ball inside a shaped screen by means of rear-view projection."[47] Of these robots (plate 214), Burnam wrote: "Castro-Cid's energies have gravitated toward a mode of sculpture which could be termed 'cybernetic games.' They simulate the precise, instantaneous technology of a computer system in which playfulness is merely an aspect of some greater hidden function." Touching on the deeper, ethical approach to the use of technology already present in the work of Castro-Cid, he added: "In terms of their psychic complexity these works appear to be trivial, but as a means of introducing ideas for reshaping the world, they transcend the single-purpose machines of Kinetic art and move beyond the limitations of scientific Constructivism."[48]

Castro-Cid's environmental installations developed as visualizations of the concepts set forth by Norbert Wiener in *The Human Use of Human Beings—Cybernetics and Society*. Wiener's ideas influenced many artists working with technology at that time. Alongside Nam June Paik, Castro-Cid was a leading exponent of machine-

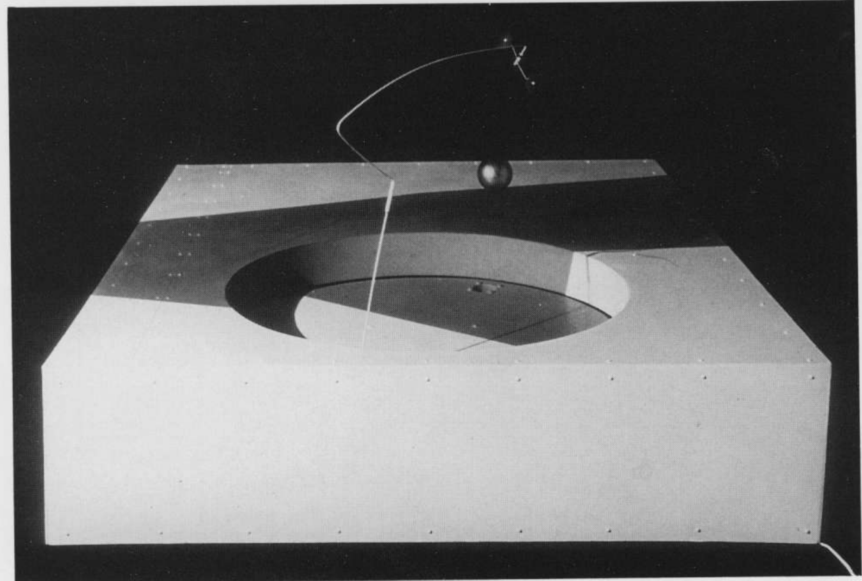
operated works invested with human qualities. At the forefront of the avant-garde, he received acclaim from art historians and the general press alike.

Another artist from Chile, Juan Downey, traveled first to Barcelona and Paris before going to New York in 1965. In Paris, Downey had studied printmaking in the atelier of the American Stanley Hayter. "There wasn't any specific reason for leaving Chile other than that I knew that to make art I had to move to a cultural center, one where art is marketed. When I came to New York, I found a city full of fantasy where everyone was ready to play, which is something I did not experience in Paris," he recalls today.[49] Downey had read the Futurists and was greatly impressed by Marinetti's claim that museums would become obsolete, superseded by forms of technological beauty. "In Paris I was painting machines, with a consciousness of trying to represent movement and energy. Then when I got here in 1965, I immediately understood that that kind of representation wasn't necessary. That I could directly manipulate electricity and use light."[50] After creating a series of light sculptures, Downey very quickly moved on to create interactive environments, and by 1966 he exhibited an electronic sculpture installation at the Judson Memorial Church Gallery. Douglas Davis commmented on the exhibition: "At the opening of Juan Downey's show at the Judson Gallery in New York the crowds were so large that none of the machines, which in each case depend upon an interval of passivity, functioned. Neither did the system, which reduced itself to a hum in the presence of the crowded bodies. This failure made him very happy."[51] Earlier that year, Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg, founders of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), a movement that brought artists into contact with technology, organized "Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering," also at the Judson Memorial Church Gallery in New York. During these evenings Robert Whitman, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, John Cage, and other artists presented large, technologically oriented works. The Judson show was therefore a timely opportunity for Downey, instantly putting him in touch with some of New York's most prominent artists. The interchange between these artists continued to be mutually influential in the following years.

Anti-art, a term invented by Marcel Duchamp, was—besides all its connotations—foremost defined as art that opposed using art as a commodity, the object cultus. As such, a majority of Conceptual, Performance, Environmental and Installation artists created anti-art and regarded Marcel Duchamp as their prophet. Juan Downey, however, was closer to the sensibility of Francis Picabia. Shortly after his first visit to New York in 1913, to visit the Armory Show, Picabia switched his aesthetic allegiance from Cubism to machine-oriented Dadaism. His wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, remarked: "Picabia found in anti-painting a formula of black humor which gave him free reign to express his rancor against men and events, an inexhaustible vein of plastic and poetic sarcasm."[52] Downey has said that Picabia influenced him in "an anarchic sense, in the way that he constantly subverted his own career."

Downey's early electronic sculpture environments also were part of his flirtation with Dada. *Nostalgic Item*, an electronic sculpture Downey exhibited in 1967 at the Martha Jackson Gallery, contained two slide projectors and tape recorders with prerecorded lists of famous classical paintings and photographs of his family. The projectors were activated by the viewer through an electronic eye, while the exterior finish was soft and furry. "This work was about memory and about the things that I loved enormously," recounts Downey today.[53]

In 1968 Downey had an exhibition of his electronic sculptures at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in which he showed a variety of pieces that again addressed issues of audience participation through interactivity. The works were created with the collaboration of an engineer, Fred Pitts. In spite of this they did not have an engineered or manufactured look; they had instead the quality of found objects seen in early 1920s machine art. One of the most enigmatic pieces was appropriately named *Invisible Energy*. The notion that whatever is imagined by the mind does not stay still and does not present itself as a single static image only is clearly evident in this work. It is also the only work in the Corcoran exhibition that could not be operated by the viewer. Its actions were controlled by arbitrary radiowaves it picked up from a ten-mile radius (police broadcasts, ham radios, taxicabs), which activated two semicircular, moon-shaped wedges into a rocking motion. The intention behind Downey's



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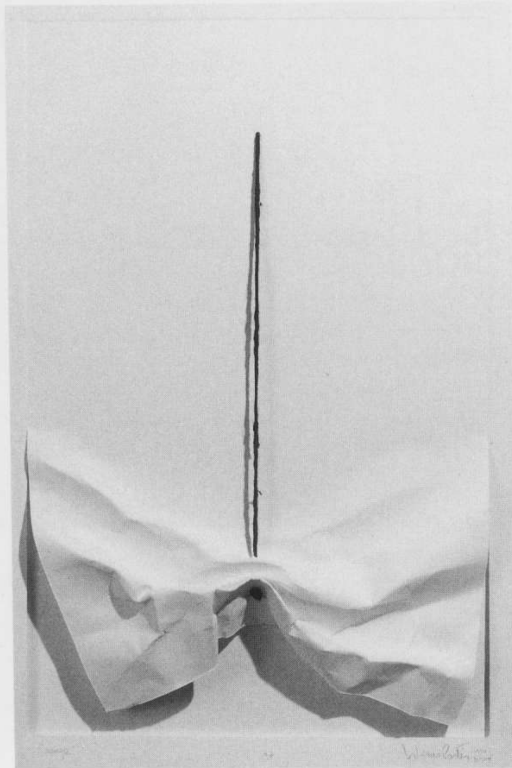


215

Enrique Castro-Cid
214. *Set No. 1.* 1965
Motorized wood construction, 60 x 72 x 12"
Collection the artist
Photo: Nelson Morris, *Time* magazine

Liliana Porter
215. *Untitled.* 1970
Wrinkled paper, string, and embossing on paper, 20 x 13"
Collection the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

216

Luis Camnitzer
216. *Leftovers.* 1970
Paint, gauze, plastic, and cardboard (80 boxes),
80 x 127 x 8″
Yeshiva University Museum, New York
Photo: Tony Velez

environments was to comment on mass communication by actively engaging viewers. In the accompanying text to the show, James Harithas wrote about a novel the artist created for the exhibition: "This novel by Juan Downey illustrates in another medium the artist's concept of audience participation. It consists of several dialogues, each of which Downey, as one of the participants, keeps alive by a preconceived pattern of yes-no answers. The sparse nature of these replies places the whole burden of communication on the other participant."[54] This exercise in the various levels and forms of communication between people—the subjectivity of information as it is perceived and transformed—was manifested throughout Downey's work. In his 1970 exhibition at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, he was asked to do a performance piece. Instead, he decided to create what he called a "Pollution Robot"—a large, eight-foot-tall box that concealed him from the gallery's visitors. In this container on wheels, he was able to move around, pursue the audience (spotted through a two-way mirror), and blow hot air on them. They, in turn, could ask questions, answered by Downey in an automated robotic manner. "Perception is a two-way phenomenon," he said. "The mirror is ultimately an invitation to everyone to see themselves."[55] As Anne Hoy has observed: "Videotape's capabilities in surveillance, feedback, and delay also intrigued him. He first used the medium in installations with voice-activated components, and in 1968 created a high-tech electronic environment, complete with walkie-talkies and AV equipment for viewers, at an event called 'Communication' at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C."[56]

By the end of the 1960s, however, the Vietnam War had spiraled into grotesque proportions, opening up a debate on the benefits of technology. Technology was associated with large corporations that were implicated with the military-industrial complex. These considerations were part of the reexamination of the relationship of art and technology that influenced artists like Juan Downey. He moved on to do several ecology-oriented pieces and then switched to television. Television was to become the tool with which he could treat issues of communication even more effectively.

Thinking of himself as an outsider, Juan Downey nevertheless considers New York to be his city, "a city of outsiders, a sort of hospital with an open-door situation like nowhere else in the world." He concluded that "my art is about nomadism, about leaving, going away, and taking off."[57] Like other Conceptual artists, Downey felt New York was indeed the place to come to and where his work would be free to develop into any direction his mind chose. Downey's later work exemplifies this freedom and has inspired numerous other New York arrivals from Latin America.

Luis Camnitzer, who grew up in Uruguay as the child of immigrant parents, also faced the problems of being an outsider from a very early age. In architecture and art school in Montevideo he studied his own process of assimilation and became active in the student movement. "We abolished the 'national artist' diploma and created popular fairs, moved into the poor neighborhoods and our school became like a community. The courses we designed went beyond the Bauhaus, Montessori, or any other dream about what a school could be."[58]

When he arrived in New York in 1962 he was an outsider used to examining cultural mechanisms. He continued to question the complexities of the structures behind artmaking and those that operated its distribution and effectiveness. Camnitzer shared his apartment with Luis Felipe Noé, who was concerned with "assuming chaos" and was already an active anti-art practitioner:

New York helped to accelerate the process, and I started to make a work in which I opposed fragments, playing with the stretchers. These, starting from the wall, extended in various directions and continued onto the floor; parts were empty stretcher bars, parts were just canvas without stretchers, with cut-out shapes. Soon, after having gone back to Buenos Aires and then returned to New York, I came to realize that my proposal of assuming opposites was really an expression of me against myself, which was at that time considered to be taboo. One was supposed to prescind the "self."[59]

This tendency to replace the "artist" with the "art worker" had its impact on Luis Camnitzer as well:

One thing was that esthetics was a by-product, the packaging, but not a departure point for art. I tried to ignore composition as such, to limit myself to certain propositions that could "flexibilize" the viewer in such a way that the artist was an intermediary between reality and the consumer was eliminated—to reverse the consumer into creator, which I guess was a common idea at that time. So I began to use language to describe certain visual situations. It was also part of my rejection of expensive materials that added to a "poor esthetic," one that was less authoritarian.[60]

This is a mirror. You are a written sentence was one of his first strictly language works. Messages made of self-adhesive tape were placed directly on the walls as well as on small metal boxes shown at the Marian Goodman Gallery (Multiples, Inc.), in New York in 1966. These self-adhesive stickers were then sent into the world by mail. Mail art was another vehicle with which to confront the status of art as private property. Although most technologically based art also emphasized art's social responsibility, it usually required an intense assault on the viewer's senses. By contrast, Camnitzer's work had more of an affinity with the social projections of the European Arte Povera group. His was generally an art about content and context rather than about its means and ways of representation.

In 1968 Camnitzer decided to make *Living-Comedor*, a type of family room in Latin America, by employing the words that described the space and what was in it directly on a floor and four walls. The installation was created in a museum in Caracas, and the public maneuvered carefully around the "table" while walking on the "rug": "I discovered that when logic is taken to the extreme it leads to something quite magical. To inhabit an architectural drawing resulted in something more moving than to inhabit the architecture itself."[61]

Sections of the *Living-Comedor* were installed at the I.C.A. in Philadelphia in 1969 and at the Dwan Gallery in New York in 1970. This work revealed with precision the patterns of behavior that guide the viewer, something the philosophical questions of much Conceptual Art of the 1960s constantly confronted. Allowing for the viewer's freedom and letting the words generate a response were premises of Camnitzer's experimental art: "A newspaper headline is the perfect example of the viewer becoming the producer of the results. He creates his own images and does not consume those of the person who did the headline."[62] Language and linguistics were also vehicles with which to bridge the gap between art and didactics. Teaching, or the means with which a person acquires knowledge, are central issues in Camnitzer's career. He has not only taught and written extensively on education but also on the mechanisms of culture. Thinking that the Tupamaros, the Uruguayan guerrilla fighters of the 1960s, could be utilized in his art, he began incorporating oppression into his subject matter. He set up an installation in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago with a floor plan of a massacre that had occurred in Puerto Montt in 1969. At the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York in 1970 he created an inventory of the armaments used for repression in Latin America, to which he added a wall of boxes wrapped in bloodstained gauze. Each box was stenciled with the word "leftover" and had a Roman numeral on it to indicate the identity of the victims. The look of the installation emphasized the artist's intentions. As Camnitzer himself has insisted: "Technical virtuosity is about convincing the viewer that the work is the perfect incarnation of the intention, even when it is really only an approximation shaped by an accumulation of mistakes that are more or less wisely administered" (plate 216).[63]

His participation in the New York Graphic Workshop is another expression of the socially oriented artmaking concerns he has maintained. But today he views printmaking not as an alternative to the private appropriation of art but more as a medium that promotes the possibility for an anonymous group of stockholders to acquire a piece of his work. By contrast with other North American and European Conceptual artists, such as Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris, Hans Haacke, and Joseph Beuys, Camnitzer did not pursue a career through the gallery and dealer system. His influence was then and now through organizing group endeavors, curating marginal, noncommercial exhibitions, and publishing in a variety of magazines in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Together with José Guillermo Castillo and Liliana

Porter, he was the cofounder of the New York Graphic Workshop, which was to become a springboard for many socially oriented art activities in the following years.

Liliana Porter, born in Argentina, began art school at the age of twelve and went to Mexico City when she was sixteen. There she studied with Mathias Goeritz and the Colombian printmaker Guillermo Silva Santamaría at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. At the age of seventeen she exhibited at the Mexican avant-garde Galería Proteo. In 1964, on her way to Paris, she stopped over in New York and, after visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, decided to stay in America. Then she continued her studies at Pratt Institute and shortly thereafter was invited to participate in group shows like *Magnet: New York*, at the Bonino Gallery. This first exhibition gained her a mention by John Canaday in *The New York Times*.[64]

Used to working within the limited facilities of Latin America, Porter thrived in New York, where she was introduced to a vast amount of technical equipment. Porter has remarked of those days: "It was like being a kid walking into F.A.O. Schwartz."[65] These possibilities made her create an enormous amount of work, and this intense activity was coupled with exhibitions, including one at the Van Bovenkamp Gallery in 1964, that led to the creation of the New York Graphic Workshop. There she found a platform from which to rethink the graphic medium on artistic and social levels. The teamwork that developed between Porter, Camnitzer, and Castillo enriched her work enormously: "We gave a lot of consideration to the political and moral aspects of artmaking, and through prints there was this idea we were working toward mass culture. Painting was reactionary. While this seemed intellectually coherent, my interest was always more toward the poetics of printmaking."[66] Her work took on Minimalist forms when she saw that incredibly complicated printing techniques could be replaced with more simple approaches to content and means: "I thought there would be more impact and magic in showing the absence of whatever I chose to work with rather than its presence, or the presence of many things. Somehow this was the beginning, and I started to make shadows of the subjects I was focusing on."[67] These shadows, such as the shadow of a glass and an olive, eventually were shown together at an exhibition at the Torcuato di Tella Institute in 1969. Shadows of a typical opening crowd, painted directly on the museum's walls, interacted with the real crowd. Porter explained: "People do not relate to a shadow as though it is an object but read it as the absence of a person, which is a mystical experience."[68] In 1967 the New York Graphic Workshop published a series Porter created using the motif of a man's silhouette under the general heading of *Retratos de Nadie* (Portraits of Nobody).

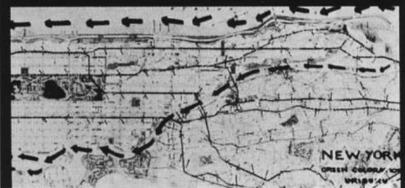
In 1968 she executed a book entitled *Wrinkle*, with ten photo-etchings showing a page getting progressively more wrinkled. At this time she also explored new media: "embroidered prints," silk screen, plastic prints, Xerox, and offset. By 1970 she reached an almost total reduction of subject matter, just printing the relief of a printing plate with the bottom part of the paper slightly wrinkled (plate 215). In this work it is evident that the notion of fusing reality with illusion had acquired a very personal and unique format. Gregory Battcock observed: "What Porter does is construct an event that is only partially real. Certain factors that distinguish the real from the illusive are offered in illusory form; therein lies the paradox. For example, a piece of string is attached to a screw that, alas, is not real but is a silk-screened photograph. Or, we find a nail protruding from a tear in the canvas surface. The tear is quite real, the nail is not. One is not quite sure sometimes, what is real and what is not, and therein lies Porter's proposition."[69]

Together with José Guillermo Castillo and Luis Camnitzer, Porter participated in a series of events that addressed the political issues of the times. When she exhibited in a group show at New York University's Loeb Center, Luis Camnitzer, acting as curator, wrote: "Porter and Castillo are both members of the New York Graphic Workshop, which believes in the production of FANDSOS, that is, Free Assemblable Non-functional Disposable Serial Objects. Essentially the ethical concern of mass-produced art is to eliminate the high cost and pompous ritual that separate art from the public."[70] Of that period Porter remembers: "Luis seemed more religiously political than José Guillermo, who approached mass production from design; as for myself, I saw it as a mystical thing, the idea that something is born, happens, and then dies. Which is

217

Rafael Ferrer
217. *Untitled.* 1970 (reconstructed 1988)
Water, glass, tarpaulins, neon, drums, and monitors,
Courtesy the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

219



218

Nicolas Uriburu
218. *International Coloration (The East River, New York).* 1970
Colored photograph and map documentation
Collection the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

Eduardo Costa
219. *Fashion Fiction No. 1.* 1966
(Reproduced in *Vogue*, February 1968)
Photo: Richard Avedon. Copyright 1968 Richard Avedon, Inc.
All rights reserved

why I chose to do *To be wrinkled and thrown away* for the *Information* show at MOMA in 1970."[71]

In 1970 the New York Graphic Workshop disbanded: José Guillermo Castillo returned to Venezuela, and Porter and Camnitzer became increasingly more active in political art. The Center for Inter-American Relations in New York became a target of artists' hostility since it had several board members that most Latin American artists in New York seemed to distrust.[72] Several boycotts were organized by large numbers of Latin American artists and their American colleagues. These first actions inspired the artists to organize. In a letter sent by Luis Camnitzer to John Perreault at *The Village Voice*, the group specified their objectives: "To create a center for Latin American cultural dissemination on a nonofficial level; to report on repression of culture in Latin American countries; to take actions against institutions that misrepresent or ineptly represent Latin American culture; to create special services for Latin American artists."[73]

First grouped under the name Museo Latinoamericano, the artists began to disagree and soon divided, so that a new group developed which called itself Museo para la Independencia Cultural Latinoamericana. This latter group then produced the *Counter Biennial*, an artist's book against participation at the São Paulo Bienal (because it was supported by the Brazilian dictatorship). In this publication artists from Latin America, including Julio Le Parc, Mathias Goeritz, José Luis Cuevas, Luis Felipe Noé, and Gordon Matta-Clark, utilized one page each for their contribution, which could be either visual, literary, or both. In addition to a call to abstain from participating in these type of international art shows in Latin America, the book also promoted a consciousness about the military repressions in South America. An attempt was made to distribute the book commercially; however, it really circulated by word of mouth and in an underground fashion. Soon thereafter it became clear that aside from basic political disagreements, a lot of artists were in no position to protest and confront the establishment, either because their immigration documents were insufficient or because of financial and personal pressures. Nevertheless, for over a year the group called attention not just to Latin American artists but to Latin America in general. They distributed information to the press, university teachers, and the general public. For everyone involved it was to be an eye-opening education on the lack of information and communication about Latin America and an introduction to the distinct components within Latin America. By the group's zenith, Rafael Ferrer, Leandro Katz, Eduardo Costa, Helio Oiticica, Rubens Gerchman, and Lygia Clark had already become known in New York.

Rafael Ferrer occupies a special place within the anti-art and Conceptual movements. Due to his early involvement with Surrealism through his teacher E. F. Granell in Puerto Rico in the 1950s, he approached artmaking organically, much in the way that the Latin American and Hispanic world treated Surrealism (as opposed to the objective analytical process North American Conceptual artists favored). In 1968 Ferrer deposited autumn leaves in the elevator of the building where the Fischbach and Tibor de Nagy galleries were located, then dropped twenty-one bushels of leaves in front of Leo Castelli's East Seventy-seventh Street gallery, after which he drove on to Castelli's Upper West Side warehouse. There he filled three landings of the staircase with more leaves.

Marcia Tucker, a curator of the Whitney Biennial in 1969, remembered:

My first contact with Ferrer's work was extraordinarily disconcerting. At the opening of Castelli's uptown warehouse in 1968, the entire hallway and staircase were densely covered with autumn leaves, pungent, musty, crackling underfoot. No one knew how they got there, why they were there, whether the leaves were "art" or not. The only certainty was that they were not there by accident or design of nature—at least not in December, in New York, indoors. They remained a mystery. In 1969 Ferrer appeared with some photographs. It was only then that I discovered who had been responsible for the leaves.[74]

Ferrer remembers mostly that in New York, "I could do anything I wanted," an idea he proceeded to put into practice.[75] For the Whitney Biennial Ferrer installed

two and a half tons of ice blocks on the ramp of the museum and inside he deposited a huge haystack, kept in place by steel bars. He smeared grease on the walls and the ceiling so that more hay was stuck to those surfaces. Ferrer commented: "Life can't be resolved in terms of clean spaces, light, cubes and control; life is messy and full of problems that can't be resolved. Life is open."[76]

Many critics hinted at the use of time in these early works. For the Western world time implies a cycle, with its implicit meaning of order. But in Latin America time is perceived as a simultaneous function of life and death, where one can only act in the small instances in between. In an interview with Stephen Prokopoff, Ferrer stated: "I really have never been interested in pursuing an attachment to something as a way of sustaining a style. Grease is a terrific material and it revealed all kinds of unsuspected things to me, but they were related to particular places, to limitations of time and space. For those reasons my use of it was strategic rather than stylistic."[77] In keeping with his idea, he also employed peat moss, corrugated metal, sheets of glass, tents, branches, even neon, constantly challenging himself to create layers of meanings regardless of the medium.

Much of the critical response to his early work was haunted by the critics' current partiality to Minimalist or cool approaches to art. Peter Schjeldahl observed: "We are faced here with an art movement that is destined to rise and fall leaving less *objets d'art* of a familiar order in its wake than even Dada."[78] Hilton Kramer wrote:

You may also need a pair of boots. For to get to the main section of the exhibition which is housed on the Whitney's fourth floor, you are obliged to traverse an improvised moat of melting ice and heaps of dead leaves at the very entrance of the building; this free memento of a messy December thaw, the work of Rafael Ferrer—is not surprisingly called "Ice." It is that kind of show. Materials you see. Procedures. And no illusion.[79]

No one grasped the underlying meaning of working with materials that exist as physical and visual examples of two extremes. Ice and grease are chaotic, formless, and liquid when warm, but ordered, defined, and contained when cold. To traverse this image is naturally upsetting, something Ferrer's paradoxical work of those times strived for (plate 217).[80]

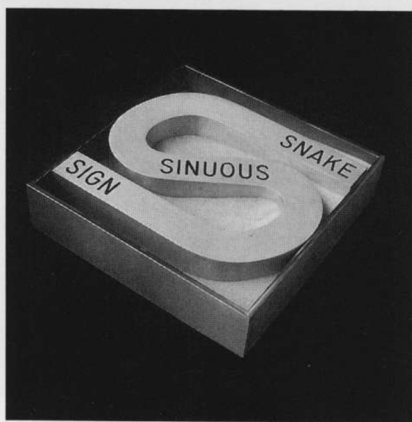
Rafael Ferrer, along with Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Robert Morris, and Walter de Maria, stands out as an influential artist who changed the face of the 1960s art scene. With these pioneers of the so-called Anti-Form movement, Ferrer was testing the conventional notions of sculpture to their limits.[81]

The Argentine Leandro Katz was active as a poet, editor, founder of small presses, and organizer of poetry performances in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico. In 1966 he came to New York. He recounts today: "There was no particular intention when I left Argentina. It wasn't like going into voluntary exile even though it turned out to be very much like that. It had to do with the desire to meet some of the artists I had already translated, like Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg. Once in New York I became involved with the St. Marks Church group."[82]

Just as the Conceptual artists turned to language, many poets and writers had begun to use language for its visual qualities, crossing over into Performance works and artist's books, which were generally visualizations of poetic conceptions. Many exhibitions, largely under the umbrella of Concrete Poetry, gave examples of the idea that the word is a picture, in fact a topography, a vast visual landscape. In 1968 Leandro Katz realized that he too had moved away from syntactical uses of language into a more Conceptual way of writing:

I wanted to become more visual. Whether that came from migrating to a new language, the dichotomy of the language in which you thought and the new language, or whether it came as a result of a personal wish to move into further means of expression, is not so important. What was important was that I started to do scrolls and began also to explore film.[83]

Katz had read some of the early texts by Roland Barthes relating language to an



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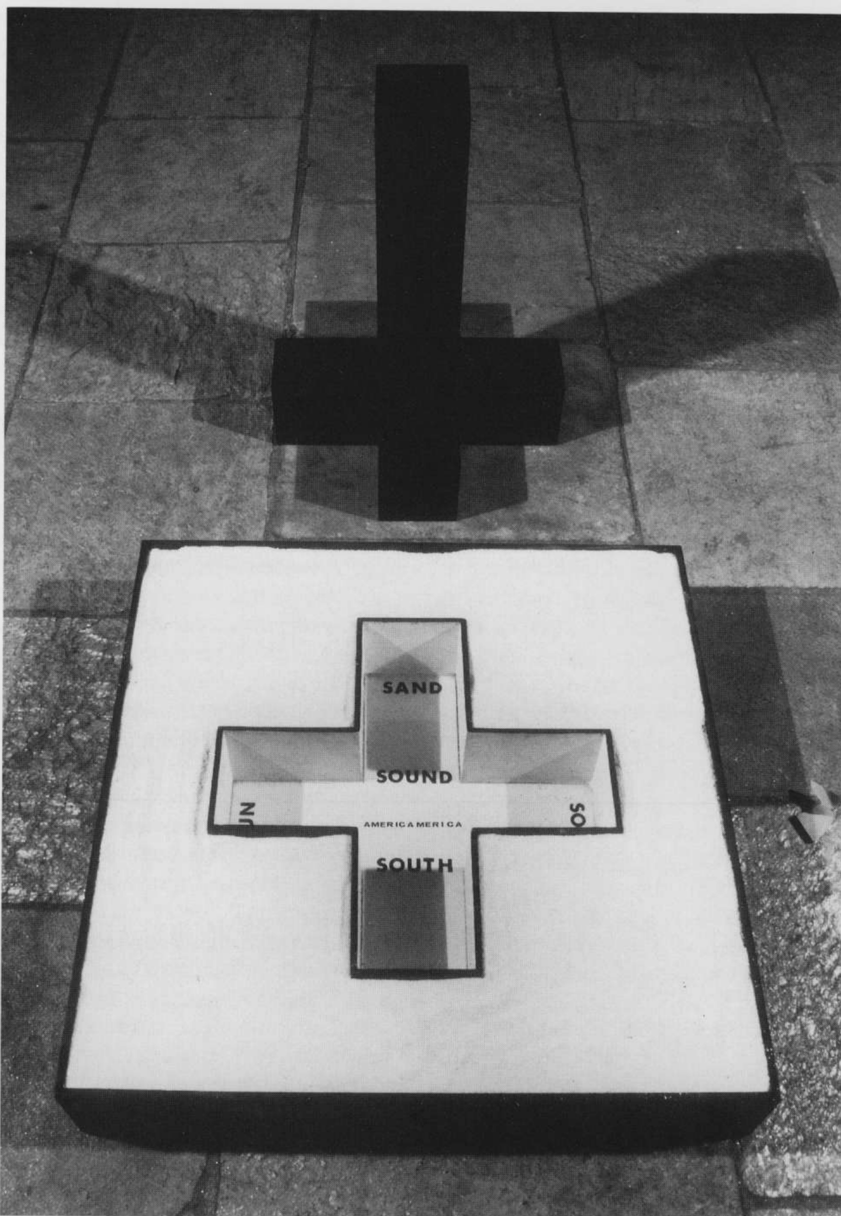


221

Rubens Gerchman
221. *Americamerica (Homage to R.O. de Andrade).* 1969
Stainless steel and sand, 39⅜ x 39⅜ x 27½"
Museu de Arte de São Paulo
Photo: courtesy the artist

Rubens Gerchman
220. *Snake, Sinuous, Sign.* 1969
Stainless steel and sand, 70 x 70 x 12"
Collection Fundaçao José e Paulina Nemirovsky
Photo: courtesy the artist

Leandro Katz
222. *Word Column.* 1970
Paper, typewriter, and table
Collection the artist
Photo: courtesy the artist

222

architectural formation of the mind and named his scrolls of accumulated writing Word Columns (plate 222). On these, a subconscious flow of words were typed, and no attempt was made to rationalize or create an order. Soon it became clear that the project was infinite, and Katz decided to give the work some parameters by choosing the arbitrary number of twenty-one columns. In a sense this numerical choice suggested endless columns: two plus one being three, it evoked the triangle, a symbol for infinity. After that he began to see the columns as Conceptual sculptures, imaginary monuments that could be placed in different sites all over the world. As he reflected: "I would choose the name of a town in Bolivia, name the scroll after that town and place it somewhere in Canada, like in a mining wasteland town called Cobalt. After that I took photographs and sent out postcards of the *Column* all over the world."[84] Many Conceptual artists were at that time putting themselves through rigorous exercises, reducing the aesthetic choices to a minimum. Leandro Katz shared this approach with other artists, including Hanne Darboven and On Kawara. While the work had a meditative and spiritual quality, it also made a pronounced and culturally relevant comment, which is a goal Katz has continuously pursued in his work.[85] As with many Latin American artists, Katz has consistently examined his roots, showing Latin American cultural forms in an ample visual language that combines contemporary modes, such as photography, with archaeological motifs in a unique format. Aside from Katz's artistic contributions, his role as a curator and publisher, as well as a teacher, has made him a prominent figure in the intellectual and cultural community of New York.[86]

Eduardo Costa, who was also from Argentina, was another artist-writer who moved from text to visuals. For Costa, language was first sounds and forms, before it could be put to some rational use. When he developed this idea into an artwork, *Tape Poems*, he found a collaborator in John Perreault, a poet-critic who participated in much of the anti-art of those times. The idea of *Tape Poems* was to recuperate the richness of oral language, the tone of voice, and its clues to the age, sex, and social status of those speaking. These elements, according to Costa, get lost in the written language. Five hundred copies of *Tape Poems*, created specifically for tape, were published with an introduction that stated, among other things, "Tape recordings have become snapshots. But there is a difference between photo documentation and sound documentation. In a photograph the materiality is not the same as the materiality of the object represented. For instance, a photo of a person is not flesh but paper. But when we play a tape we have sound as in the original phonic language."[87]

In 1968, shortly after arriving in New York, Costa gained attention with his unusual concept of art jewelry, or "wearable" art. He molded and casted gold ears, gold strands of hair, gold fingers, and gold breasts to people, as anatomical extensions of their bodies (plate 219). At the height of the miniskirt and the radical statements of the sexual revolution, his innovation was immediately embraced by the art-oriented fashion world. *Vogue* "dressed" Marisa Berenson in Costa's creation, adding additional status to the concept. Lawrence Alloway commented: "Costa's jewels are a commentary on anatomy. He treats adornment as a kind of fiction."[88]

In 1969, incorporating fashion into the visual arts, Costa, together with John Perreault and Hannah Weiner, organized the *Fashion Show Poetry Event* at the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York. Alan D'Archangelo, Les Levine, Claes Oldenburg, and Enrique Castro-Cid, among others, exhibited a wide variety of "wearable art." The media instantly applauded these "wearable" fictions. As one reviewer commented: "*The Fashion Show Poetry Event* could have been just another disintegration into more irrelevancy. But get this—it wasn't. It went slamming across all right, only to prove once again that the artists and poets are already into fashion's creative lunar orbit while most pro designers are still grounded."[89] Although Costa's gold ears and breasts could have been mass-produced, they remained art objects, collected by museums and individuals.

Expanding on the idea of "useful" art, Leandro Katz pointed out that the relationship a Latin American artist has toward the object is very different from that cultivated in the United States, where it is formulated by the materialistic aspects of a society obsessed with consumption. Since Latin America's history is unresolved and

not yet stabilized, the artist approaches the object with a sense of trying to define an identity: the object is thus converted into a subject. Costa's "wearable and useful" art definitely emphasized this distinction between object and subject.[90]

Vito Acconci, Anne Waldman, Scott Burton, Bernadette Mayer, Marjorie Strider, and many others took part in a saturation of innovations on the edges of "art." Eduardo Costa led the way with his "useful" art of translating street signs from English to Spanish and vice versa. These Streetworks were to be an integral part of what Lucy Lippard designated "dematerialized art." This art intended to undermine New York's capacity to market any kind of innovation that was simply a formal innovation rather than an ideological one. In general, however, most activities surrounding the "dematerialization" of art insisted on works that liberated the spectator's own creative processes.

Rubens Gerchman, a Brazilian artist, also incorporated text and writing into a series of works that confronted issues of importance to Brazil's "black" society. Some critics regarded Gerchman as a Pop artist. To decide for himself whether he fit into that category, Gerchman moved to New York in 1968, where he found his work had few connections with Pop art but did have affinities with certain popular expressions, such as the murals of Chicano and Puerto Rican artists. In New York, he developed themes he had already explored in Brazil. For the *Fashion Show Poetry Event*, he created portable shelters for people to inhabit; he also developed large sculptural words. His explorations into language as a source of imagery were influenced by the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Gerchman later created "pocket stuff," small boxes that created simple written messages and were intended to be mass-produced. Gerchman returned to Brazil in 1973, having been an important contact for newly arrived Latin American artists in New York. However, by contrast with Gerchman, most Latin American Conceptual artists favored anti-art methods or uncritical forms of mass communication (plates 220 and 221).

Antonio Dias, who was from Brazil but went into exile in Europe in 1966, made Conceptual works about dematerialization. Having communicated from Europe with Luis Camnitzer, Liliana Porter, and several other Latin American artists in New York, he went to New York in 1970. That same year he was included in group shows at the Kiko Gallery in Houston, the Felix Landau Gallery in Los Angeles, and the Bonino Gallery in New York. Edward Fry, then organizing the *Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition*, selected several of his 1960s works—those that best represented Dias's Conceptual approach. Mentioning the culturally oppressive climate of Brazil, Fry stated: "Antonio Dias, who works in Milan, has in recent works demonstrated his awareness of the necessity for a post-formalistic aesthetic in painting and has emerged as an important investigator of the linguistic structure underlying visual imagery."[91] *Newsweek* selected Dias, Joseph Kosuth, and Jiro Takamatsu as "radical exponents of the communication of ideas rather than physical suggestions."[92] Later Dias lived in New York with the help of a Guggenheim Foundation award, and he has always kept in close touch with his New York colleagues. But he qualifies his presence here as being "a discreet one." Keeping in touch with artists and critics, however, was enough for his inclusion in major contemporary shows, including the *Guggenheim International Exhibition*.[93]

Nicolás Uriburu left Argentina for Paris on a French government grant in 1965. For the Venice Biennale in 1968, at the height of the student protests, he colored the Grand Canal in fluorescent green. His gesture suggested a desire to reconstruct the universe according to a scheme based on emotion and harmony rather than urbanistic theory. "Venice is an eternal city, and they say no one can change it, but you can change Venice in a day, without damage, or cost, by art. I used about sixty pounds of nontoxic dye," the artist commented.[94]

By 1969 artists everywhere had moved outdoors, making natural energy a substance of art. Ecology became a household word. Global communication was imminent. Christo, Richard Long, Robert Smithson, and Joseph Beuys were shaping what was called Earth Art and Land Art. Important exhibitions revealed the aesthetic shift both in Europe and the United States. Uriburu's goals were more humanistic than intellectual. Coming from South America, a continent known for its great rivers, he

wanted "to raise an alarm against pollution!"[95] His first U.S. series, begun in New York in 1970, was appropriately entitled "Antagonism Between Nature and Civilization" and was shown at the Bonino Gallery in New York. The real piece was created outdoors, on the East River in New York (plate 218). Uriburu, dressed in a chartreuse green shirt, had invited about fifty people to the Heliport base from which he took off on a tugboat, with half a dozen barrels of dye to be poured into the river. *The New York Times* reported: "The rusty powder foamed white, then turned green. Streaks of green quickly twisted into serpentine lines, then spread out into a system of three large blobs. The blobs coalesced into roundish shapes, roughly 175 feet by 50 feet."[96] John Perreault reported: "A helicopter hovered above filming everything and followed the green stain for a while as it made its way out to sea. On shore we were given a handbill titled 'Green New York—Intercontinental Project of Waters Environment.' In the next two months Uriburu will also color the Seine, the canals of Venice, and the Riachuelo River in Argentina. I myself enjoyed the spectacle and the ambiance of the whole thing and thought the stain as it swirled down the river surprisingly beautiful. It was the best watercolor I've seen in a long time."[97] Uriburu's concern for the abuse of nature has persisted over the years. He has made works in Europe and South America and sometimes collaborated with other artists, including Joseph Beuys, with whom he planted trees at Documenta in Kassel.

By 1969 Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, both from Brazil, were also known in New York. John Perreault wrote: "Lygia Clark . . . a very important artist, virtually unknown in this country . . . has been a pioneer in manipulatory sculpture and in 'Poor Art.' She is now almost totally concerned with touch . . . Helio Oiticica, who is temporarily in England, makes clothing and capes with inside pockets that contain various powders for you to touch while you are walking around. He has also done various street festival art works. Brazil is a dictatorship so neither artist can get any support from the government."[98]

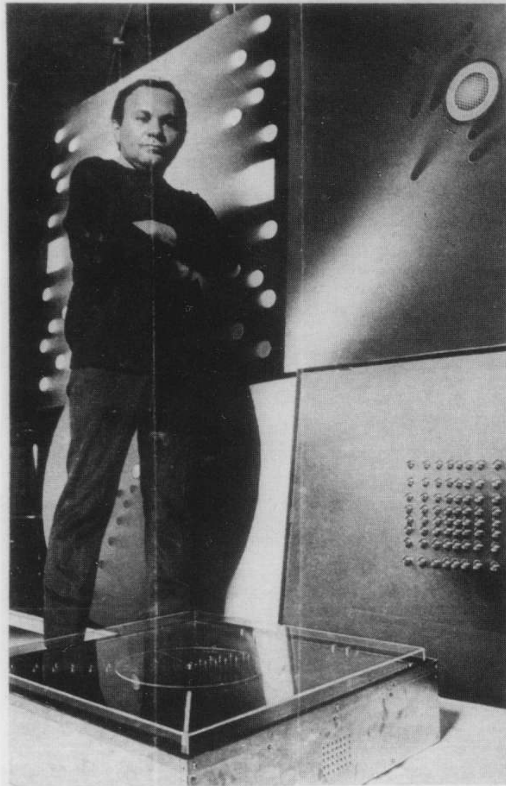
Dore Ashton, who met Oiticica in Brazil through the art historian Mario Pedroza, recalls: "He took me dancing to the *favelas* where he was well known. He used to design carnival costumes for the denizens of these poorest neighborhoods, and they respected him. When he came to New York, he took a very small and uncomfortable loft near my home . . . and it was an extraordinary 'happening' in itself. Or perhaps a 'site-specific' sculpture. The only thing that might be compared to that loft was Schwitters's Merzbau. Helio divided the space in horizontal planes. All around the walls and hanging from the ceiling were boxes, sometimes those plastic milk containers, and in them little organizations of odd matters. You had to make your way through this animated maze, and the feeling of no up and no down was intense. Helio was a *perpetuum mobile* of invention."[99]

Regarding his presence in New York, the writer and critic Ted Castle said: "I saw him as being a classical exile. He absolutely adored Brazil but not being able to operate there, because of the regime, he left. He was always planning for his return. Perhaps this accounts for him not having done much publicly in New York. His element was largely language. He loved to write in Portuguese, and he was a brilliant thinker. As anti-artist, affected by Baudelaire, he was a proposer of creative activities, making his work his life, like the *Babylonests* he created where he lived."[100]

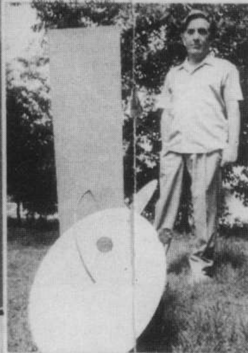
After being involved in the Brazilian Neo-Concrete movement, Oiticica independently began to work on what can be called today forerunners of the Anti-Form sculptural breakthroughs in America. His *Nucleos* was a type of "Mondrian dissolved into space, recycled by the tropics," as the Brazilian art historian Federico Morais put it. He developed his Environmental works into a more intensely sensorial series called *Penetrables,* which were labyrinths with myriad colors and materials that the viewer could inhabit and interact with. In 1963 the boxlike structures entitled *Bólides* came into being. These were incandescent containers one could touch, smell, feel, and become one with. In 1969, Guy Brett, the British art historian and curator of Oiticica's Whitechapel Gallery exhibition in London, observed that with these works, "Instead of merely looking at color, you plunge your hands into it, you weigh it, you put it around your body and clothe yourself in it."[101] In 1964 Oiticica had begun to visit the Mangueira, a shantytown, and after what the Brazilian art historian and curator Mario

ARTES PLASTICAS

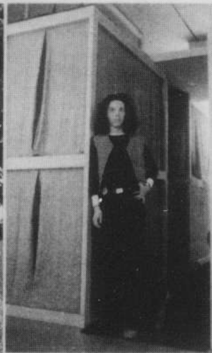
Nossos homens em Nova Iorque



IVA DE FREITAS



AMILCAR DE CASTRO



HELIO OITICICA

ROBERTO DE LAMONICA

Êles criam obras diferentes, vivem longe uns dos outros, pouco ou nunca se vêem, mas têm um ponto comum: são artistas brasileiros vivendo em Nova Iorque. No Brasil, ganharam prêmios, foram exaltados, imitados. Na América, estão lutando sòzinhos para conseguirem o mesmo. Dos cinco, quatro já estão em Nova Iorque há mais de um ano e o outro foi provisòriamente, mas pretende voltar depois. Como a América reagiu aos seus trabalhos? É fácil para um artista brasileiro triunfar no colosso nova-iorquino? Apesar da vida espartana e sem badalações que levam por lá, Rubem Gerchman, Hélio Oiticica, Amílcar de Castro, Roberto De Lamônica e Ivã de Freitas querem continuar a aventura. Reclamam a falta de oportunidades, mas garantem que é uma experiência fascinante, porque Nova Iorque, para êles, é todo um mundo artístico revelado de repente. Não querem perdê-lo.

Estes cinco artistas brasileiros de vanguarda testam o mercado de trabalho de Nova Iorque, considerada hoje a capital da arte mundial. "O problema é arranjar uma boa galeria" (Amilcar). "Poucos topam investir na gente" (Rubem). "Que os jovens se desinibam e venham também fazer uma experiência" (De Lamônica).

Reportagem de LUCAS MENDES ● Fotos de GERALD DAVIS
(Sucursal de Nova Iorque — Via VARIG)

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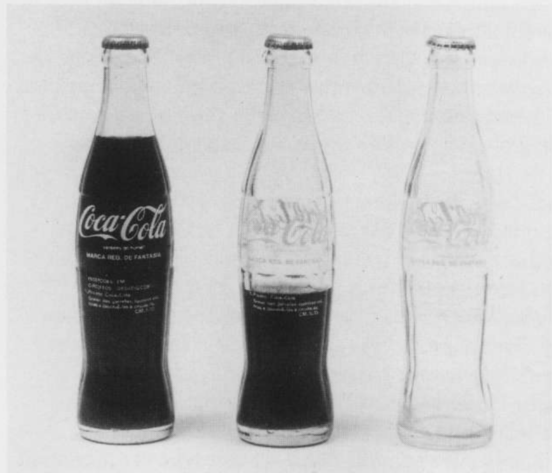

224

225

Cildo Meireles

224. *Insertions in Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project.* 1970
Coca-Cola bottles and adhesive stickers
Collection the artist
Photo: Pedro Oswaldo Cruz

223. *(left to right) Iva de Freitas, Amilcar de Castro, Helio Oiticica, Rubens Gerchman, and Roberto de Lamonica.*
Photograph reproduced in "Our Men in New York," *Manchete* magazine, Brazil, 1970
Photo: courtesy Rubens Gerchman

Helio Oiticica

225. *Installation of "Nests."* 1970. *Information,* July 2–September 20, 1970, The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Photo: courtesy Projecto HO, Rio de Janeiro

Pedroza called "his painful initiation," he created the *Parangolés.*[102] These capes, tents, and banners or flags—no precise translation or explanation exists—were a unique and metaphorical means for transgression. The user became the work; inside this second skin he shared the collective myth of the samba. Oiticica's influence extended beyond his exhibitions, leaving a lasting impression on artists and critics in South America, Europe, and New York. In addition, a sequel of younger Brazilian artists that later ventured to New York also learned by his example (plate 225).

One of these artists was Cildo Meireles, who met Kynaston McShine during his visit to Brazil in 1969 and was invited to participate in the *Information* show at The Museum of Modern Art. He created a work entitled *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* (plate 224). This work, composed of two projects, inverted the idea of the "ready-made" by creating an art that acted in concert with the industrial complex and utilized its support system. *Coca-Cola* consisted of returning empty bottles to circulation after information and critical opinions had been attached to the bottles by way of silk-screen stickers. The texts were invisible when the bottles were empty, but as they were refilled in the factory, the information became legible. Meireles hoped the consumer of Coca-Cola would become part of an "ideological" circuit. By "circuit" he meant the cyclical repetition of information transmitted through various vehicles. The work also resembled the age-old practice of bottles being thrown into the ocean with messages to be picked up by someone at the other end of the world.

Of the artists discussed above, Luis Camnitzer, José Guillermo Castillo, Liliana Porter, Rafael Ferrer, Marta Minujin, and Helio Oiticica were included in the *Information* show. Remarkably, of the ninety-six participating artists, twenty-one were from Latin America (and many of the twenty-one were not U.S. residents). In the catalog, too, a significant number of images came from Latin American sources: the film section, for example, included work by David Lamelas, Paulo Roberto Matina, Jorge Sirito de Vives, Alfonso Sanchez, Rafael Colón-Morales, Alfonso Pagan-Cruz, Luis Vale, and Edgar Sanchez. The *Information* show was also an exceptional event in itself. The museum became a transmitter of raw materials, presenting art to the public without a critical guide. The variety of media and the unabashedly messy quality of many of the presentations made viewing the exhibition a new experience, similar to a festive event or a Latin American fiesta. The exhibition was intended to be a demonstration of the unrestricted motivations that propelled artists in the 1960s. Freedom, as presented by the borderless transmission of information (an idea influenced by Marshall McLuhan's concept of a global village), was particularly meaningful for Latin American artists in the United States. These artists made global communication and nomadic information the centerpieces of their work.