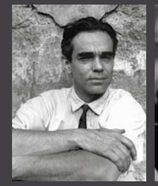

León Ferrari and Mira Schendel are among the most significant Latin American artists of the twentieth century. Living respectively in Argentina and Brazil, both began to make art in the 1950s and hit their stride in the early 1960s, maturing during a period when not only artists but philosophers and indeed a broad range of intellectuals were developing a fascination with language. Interested equally in speech and the written word, Ferrari and Schendel made language their subject matter. In this they may seem to resemble the Conceptual artists, their contemporaries in North America and Europe, but their work differs fundamentally from the generally accepted canon of Conceptual art in using language not as a transparent vehicle of ideas but as a material, an almost physical medium to shape and mold.

Ferrari was born in Argentina in 1920. He has worked in a wide range of art forms and mediums, from sculpture, painting, drawing, and assemblage to film, collage, mail art, poetry, and sound. While living temporarily in Italy in the 1950s, he made ceramic sculptures stylistically connected to the European abstraction of the time. On returning to Argentina, he produced sculptural works of metal wires and rods before beginning a series of works on paper, developing a practice in which organic, gestural forms can appear both as abstractions and as explorations of the codes of writing, whether legible or indecipherable. Deeply concerned with the ethical role of the artist, Ferrari later fused his avant-garde formal interests with a more political, confrontational kind of art. Still fully active in Argentina's contemporary-art scene, he lives in Buenos Aires and won the Leone d'oro at the Venice Biennale of 2007.

Born in Zurich in 1919, Schendel moved with her family to Italy while still an infant. In 1936 she entered a Milan university to study philosophy, but three years later, facing the threat of anti-Semitic persecution, she fled into exile, and once the war was over she left Europe for Brazil. It was there that she began to make art, producing first ceramics, then painting, and, beginning in the 1960s, a volume of work based on the use of Japanese paper but involving uncategorizable, often self-invented methods. Like Ferrari, Schendel was highly sensitive to the ethics of artmaking, and approached art as the most radical possible expression of the human condition. She continued to experiment with forms and materials until her death, in São Paulo in 1988.

Written and conceived by Luis Pérez-Oramas, The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at The Museum of Modern Art, *León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets* presents new insights into these artists' visual deconstructions of language and examines the connections and collisions among visual art, the word, and the social world.

ISBN: 978-0-87070-750-6

pérez-oramas

leon ferrari and mira schendel

tangled alphabets

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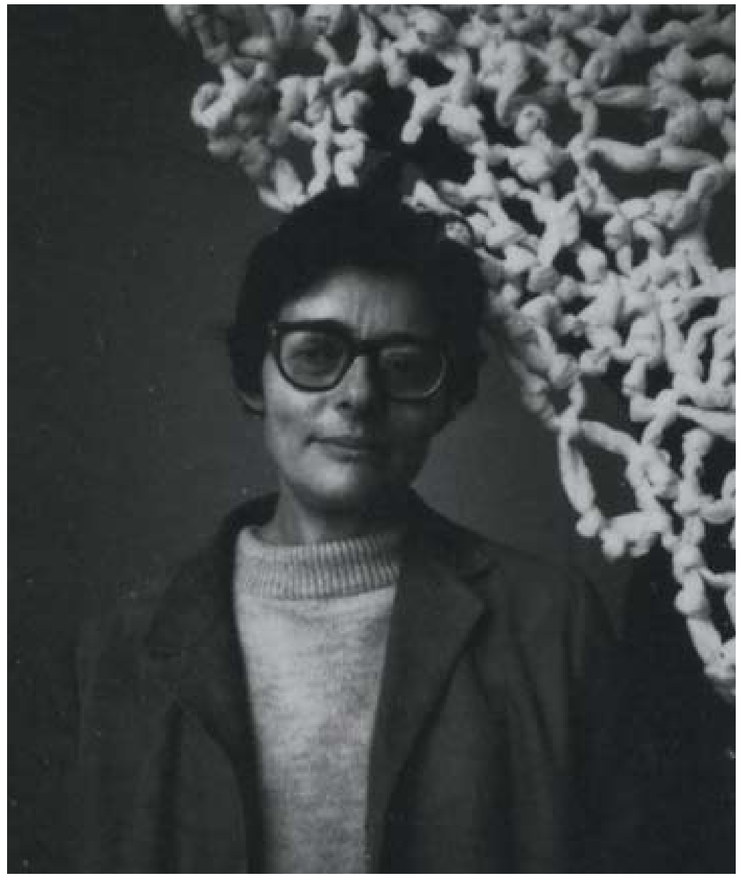
león ferrari and mira schendel



luis pérez-oramas

león ferrari and mira schendel tangled alphabets

with essays by andrea giunta
and rodrigo naves

The Museum of Modern Art
New York

COSACNAIFY

Published on the occasion of the exhibition **Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel**, organized by Luis Pérez-Oramas, The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, The Museum of Modern Art, April 5 through June 15, 2009

The exhibition is made possible by Agnes Gund, The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and Estrellita B. Brodsky.

Generous support is provided by Beatriz and Andrés von Buch, The Bruce T. Halle Family Foundation, and Fundación Cisneros/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros with additional funding from Clarissa Alcock Bronfman, Andrea and José Olympio da Veiga Pereira, Leopoldo Rodés and Ainhoa Grandes, Mrs. Yvonne Dadoo de Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. Guillermo Cisneros, TEN Arquitectos/Enrique Norten, and Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Griffin, Eva Luisa Griffin, and Tomás Orinoco Griffin.

This publication has been prepared with the assistance and support of Mr. Charles Cosac and Mr. Michael Naify.

Cosac Naify Publishing House acknowledge the cooperation received from Mrs. Ada Schendel, Mr. André Millan, and Mr. Carlos Jereissati Filho, to whom they wish to express their gratitude.

Produced by the Department of Publications
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Edited by David Frankel
Designed by Amanda Washburn
Production by Christina Grillo
Printed and bound by Conti Tipocolor, s.p.a., Florence, Italy

This book is typeset in Chalet and Century Schoolbook.
The paper is 170 gsm Luxosamt Offset

Published by The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 Street, New York, New York 10019 (www.moma.org) and Cosac Naify, rua General Jardim, 770, São Paulo, Brazil, 01223-010 (www.cosacnaify.com.br)

Luis Pérez-Oramas's essay was translated from the Spanish by Kristina Cordero. Andrea Giunta's essay was translated from the Spanish by Elise Nussbaum. Rodrigo Naves's essay was translated from the Portuguese by Michael Reade. Mira Schendel's writings in that essay were translated from the Portuguese by Clifford E. Landers.

Distributed in the United States and Canada by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd floor, New York, New York 10013 (www.artbook.com)
Distributed outside the United States and Canada (except Brazil) by Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181 High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX United Kingdom (www.thamesandhudson.com)
Distributed in Brazil by Cosac Naify

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009922634
ISBN: 978-0-87070-750-6

Front cover
Left: León Ferrari. *Torre de Babel* (Tower of Babel; detail). 1964
Stainless steel, bronze, and copper, 6' 6 3/4" x 31 1/2" (200 x 80 cm)
Lent by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery 2008. See plate 72
Right: Mira Schendel. Untitled (detail) from the series *Objetos gráficos* (Graphic objects). 1973
Transfer type on thin Japanese paper between transparent acrylic sheets, 22 x 22 x 3/8" (55.9 x 55.9 x 1 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. See plate 93

Back cover
León Ferrari, late 1960s; and Mira Schendel, São Paulo, 1980s

Frontispiece
León Ferrari, Galeria Levi, Milan, 1962; and Mira Schendel with a *Droguinha*, São Paulo, 1980s

Printed in Italy

Contents

Foreword

The Museum of Modern Art has a history of conceiving comparative retrospectives, exhibitions exploring parallels and divergences among two or more artists. Following one of the original legacies of modernity, the understanding that symbolic forms only produce meaning through their differences, we have embraced this curatorial model from our opening in 1929, with a show of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, and Gauguin, to the recent *Matisse Picasso* of 2004. *Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel* extends this curatorial and philosophical tradition.

Tangled Alphabets focuses on two outstanding artists whose work is too little known in North America and Europe. The first U.S. retrospective to pair León Ferrari, from Argentina, and the late Mira Schendel, who was based in Brazil, it provides a consistent analogical survey of their contribution to contemporary art and, we feel, a groundbreaking moment of awakening to the quality and significance of their work. The Museum's commitment to Latin American art of course goes back many years, and today more than ever we are committed to bringing attention to overlooked chapters of modern art history and to shaping curatorial initiatives through an awareness of the complexity of our present world.

Art is a history of diaspora, of the relocation, assimilation, and transformation of forms, ideas, practices, and intellectual movements. Ferrari, the Argentine son of an Italian immigrant, and Schendel, a Swiss/Italian who emigrated to Brazil, have tirelessly addressed visual art as capable of positing the most radical and demanding existential questions. At a time when a good deal of Western art was linguistically based, they addressed language as if there were no difference between signs, codes, words, and any other visual form. Instead of using language as a substitute for the art object, they produced art objects that made language a visual subject. Both artists knew hardship and tragedy; Schendel, who came from a Jewish family, became a refugee fleeing the Nazis during World War II, and Ferrari had agonizing experience of the Argentine junta's "dirty war" of the 1970s and '80s, to the point where he was forced into exile. Both made art a form of survival, conceiving original techniques for producing it and opening up new repertories for abstraction and language-based work. Their contribution has been transformative in their own countries, but in exhibiting their work together in New York and in Europe, we bring to bear on them an international perspective that transcends a purely national understanding and will no doubt crucially inflect our understanding of Western modern art.

We are enormously grateful to Ferrari and to the Schendel estate, as well as to the collectors and institutions lending works for the exhibition. A project this complex demands the collaboration of a great number of people and we are grateful to the writers, curators, and other members of the Argentine and Brazilian art worlds who have contributed to the exhibition's materialization. The excellence and creativity of the Museum's own staff is crucial to the success of all our projects, and Luis Pérez-Oramas, The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art, and Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Drawings, have worked tirelessly on every detail of this exhibition from inception to realization. We are deeply grateful to Agnes Gund, The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, Estrellita Brodsky, Beatriz and Andrés von Buch, The Bruce T. Halle Family Foundation, Clarissa Alcock Bronfman, Andrea and José Olympio da Veiga Pereira, Leopoldo Rodés and Ainhoa Grandes, Mrs. Yvonne Dadoo de Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. Guillermo Cisneros, TEN Arquitectos/Enrique Norten, and Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Griffin, Eva Luisa Griffin, and Tomás Orinoco Griffin for their enthusiasm and support for this exhibition and its catalogue. We warmly thank Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and the Fundación Cisneros for important funding of the exhibition, and Patty for her tireless efforts to raise awareness and support not only for this presentation but for all Latin American art. The Brazilian publishers Cosac Naify were extremely generous and helpful with the production of the catalogue, and this assistance is greatly appreciated.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art

acknowledgments

I remember an early afternoon in the late 1990s in São Paulo, when I first saw a retrospective of works by Mira Schendel. I had barely seen this magnificent, compelling art before, and I felt privileged to share my astonishment with Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and Paulo Herkenhoff. I could not have asked for a higher blessing than being there with Patty, who really brought me to Latin American art and introduced me to friends and guides like Paulo. I am and will forever be grateful to them both.

As fortune had it, that first encounter led me to friendships that paved my path toward the work of Schendel and León Ferrari. These *amis de grande profondeur* are many, and no words can express my gratitude to them. I would first like to thank Glenn D. Lowry, Director of the Museum, whose continuing enthusiasm for both artists has been the touchstone of this project; Gary Garrels, former Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings, who inspired me to think of Schendel and Ferrari as acquisition and exhibition priorities here; John Elderfield, former Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, for whose wise and inspirational advice I will always be grateful; Jay Levenson, Director of the Museum's International Program, with whom I first visited Ferrari's Buenos Aires studio along with Victoria Noorthoorn, who pointed out the almost total absence of Ferrari's work in the Museum's collection at the time; Kathy Halbreich, the Museum's Associate Director and an ardently supportive advocate of the global cause behind this exhibition; and Guy Brett, whose brilliant insights have been instrumental in the constitution of my own view of Schendel's art and whose patience and understanding were critical in accomplishing major acquisitions of her works at the Museum.

The conception, production, and realization of a project like this one are a labor of many, and the professional collegiality and human generosity of the numerous contributors to the creation of this publication and the exhibition it accompanies have been an immense privilege. I am forever indebted to Ada Schendel, Schendel's daughter, and to León and Alicia Ferrari, all major lenders to the exhibition. Both Ada and León have been generous in sharing their time and their memories with me, and have been invaluable to the entire process of this exhibition from the start. I have shared many moments with Ada's family, including her father and aunt, Knut and Erika Schendel, and her children João, Nina, and Max Schendel. Max also contributed to the book as one of our main photographers in Brazil. I thank Claudia Vendramini Reis and André Millan, dear friends and esteemed colleagues. André, an exceptional gallerist, gave us an incredible amount of help; he was a constant guide and advisor, and I am deeply grateful for his dedication to this wonderful project. We could not have succeeded without his devoted partners and staff—Socorro de Andrade Lima, Sophia Whately, Adriana M. de Brito, and Amanda Rodrigues Alves—who gave us unconditional support. I was also privileged to share many hours of work and talk with León in his Buenos Aires studio. The exhibition could not have taken place without the tireless help and devotion that his family, assistants, and friends demonstrated along the way, in particular Julieta Zamorano, Marcela Roberts, Andrea Wain, and Juan José Firpo (Yaya). I am also grateful to León's family in São Paulo, including Pablo Ferrari, Anna Ferrari, and Patricia Rousseaux, for receiving us in their homes.

There are a number of studies of Schendel, including Sonia Salzstein's exhibition catalogue *No vazio do mundo*, which remains a major reference. Geraldo Souza Dias's research on the artist is the most comprehensive to date; I was fortunate to have access to both his doctoral dissertation and his forthcoming book, *Mira Schendel. Do espiritual à corporeidade*, which will be published later this year by Cosac Naify and will certainly prove a fundamental scholarly tool. My knowledge of Schendel, and this exhibition and catalogue, are permanently indebted to Souza Dias. The Brazilian historian and art critic Rodrigo Naves provided vital input on Schendel's life and work, and collaborated further by writing an essay for this catalogue. I am grateful to Rodrigo for introducing me to Paulo Celso and his son, Fernando Vilela, both of whom shared intimate information about Schendel's friendships with Dominican friars in São Paulo in the early 1970s.

Many members of the Brazilian art world have come to our rescue with priceless advice for which I am forever thankful: the collectors Gilberto Chateaubriand and Adolpho Leirner, good friends of the Museum; Ricard Akagawa; Aracy Amaral; Marcelo Araújo, Director, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo; Raquel Arnaud and Yannick Carvalho; Hector Babenco; Julie Belfer and Felipe Chaimovich, Museu de Arte Moderno de São Paulo; Jones Bergamin; Peter and Flavio Cohn; Israel Furmanovich; Esther and Edward Galvão; Carmela Gross; Afonso Hennel and Cristina Sá; Antonio Hermann; Ana Maria Hoffman and Paulo Roberto Barbosa, Museo de Arte Contemporâneo, Universidade de São Paulo; Paulo and Marta Kuczynski; Eduardo Leme; Francisco Leite; James Lisboa; Heitor Martins and Fernanda Feitosa; Marli Matsumoto; Andrea and José Olympio Pereira; Cesare Rivetti; Paulo and Helene Mendes da Rocha; Nara and Daniel Roesler; Clara Sancovsky; Jayme Vargas da Silva; Susana and Ricardo Steinbruch; Eduardo and Alberto Tassinari; and Martin Wurzmann. Special gratitude goes to the publisher Charles Cosac and to the team of professionals working with him at the publishing company Cosac Naify, particularly Augusto Massi and Cassiano Machado. Their generosity, as well as that of Charles Cosac and Michael Naify, has made a transformative difference in this book.

In the Argentine art world too we have met a seemingly unlimited welcome. I would first like to thank Eduardo Costantini, President of the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), for his ongoing support. Marcelo Pacheco, Chief Curator of MALBA, embraced the idea of this parallel retrospective of Ferrari and Schendel early on, and his friendly advice, intellectual input, and concrete help have been invaluable. I am also grateful to his assistant, Victoria Giraudo, and to Cintia Mezza, Registrar, who were always ready to answer our questions. Many Argentine intellectuals, critics, and artists have shared with me their knowledge of Ferrari's work and life. Andrea Giunta, an exceptional art historian and one of the most devoted and trustworthy sources of intelligence on Ferrari's work, contributed an essay to this book. Luis Felipe Noé, a major artist and an intimate friend of Ferrari's, generously shared time, memories, and information. Collectors, gallerists, and art lovers such as Orly Benzacar, Ruben Cherñajovsky, Debbie Frydman and Mariela Rossi, Mauro and Luz Herlitzka, Ignacio Liprandi, Luisa Pedrousa and Gianni Campochiari, Perla Rotzait, and the staff of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and of the Museu Sívori were invaluable guides. Photographers in both Argentina and Brazil did an amazing job of capturing the artists' works: Vera Albuquerque, David Clarke, Romulo and Nicole Fialdini, and Adrían Rocha Novoa. The observations of friends such as Luis Camnitzer, Nicolas Guagnini, Jorge Macchi, Gabriela Rangel, Eduardo Stúpia, and Beto de Volder were instrumental as I was building my personal cartography of both artists' work.

In the United States and abroad, we have depended on the assistance of a wonderful group of collectors and gallerists: Anton and Victoria Apostolatos, Francisco and Pia Arevalo, Pablo and María Cristina Henning, Ernesto and Cecilia Poma, and Cecilia de Torres. I have been privileged in the friendship and intellectual support of Edward Sullivan, Dean of Humanities at New York University, whose unparalleled generosity and enthusiasm have given me strength. Mari Carmen Ramírez, Worham Curator of Latin American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has shared insights and knowledge on both artists. Erika Franek, Registrar at the same museum, and Catherine Clement, Registrar at Tate Modern, London, have been instrumental in expediting key loans. I am grateful to the staff of the Fundación Cisneros, including Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, Director; Guillermo Ovalle, Collection Manager; and Ileen Kohn, Projects Manager, all of whom have given us incredible assistance and support. Amelia Sosa-Zimerman, Senior Associate, Programs and Communications, at the Fundación Cisneros has given us unconditional assistance, particularly in the fundraising aspect of the project. Museum Trustees such as Kathy Fuld, Mimi Haas, Henry and Marie-Josée Kravis, and Emily Pulitzer have long supported the work of both Schendel and Ferrari. I am especially grateful to the sponsors of this exhibition: Agnes Gund, MoMA's International Council, Daniel and Estrellita B. Brodsky, and Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and the Fundación Cisneros, tireless allies in MoMA's Latin American initiatives, who have continuously supported all of our endeavors involving Latin American art; Beatriz and Andrés von Buch; Bruce and Diane Halle, exceptional collectors of Latin American art; and Clarissa Alcock Bronfman, Andrea and José Olympio da Veiga Pereira, Leopoldo Rodés and Ainhoa Grandes, Mrs. Yvonne Dadoo de Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. Guillermo Cisneros, TEN Arquitectos/Enrique Norten, and Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Griffin, Eva Luisa Griffin, and Tomás Orinoco Griffin.

A challenging curatorial and intellectual project like this one can only be achieved within the framework of a unique, supportive,

demanding institution, and what has made *Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel* possible is The Museum of Modern Art. This institution comprises a multitude of bodies and souls, who have given us much more than could properly be asked of them in the fulfillment of their everyday work as staff members here. I would like to thank Jennifer Russell, Senior Deputy Director for Exhibitions, Collections, and Programs, who, working with Maria DeMarco Beardsley and Jennifer Manno, has supported this exhibition in the most exemplary way. The high standards of this team are an endless lesson in discipline and intellectual efficiency for any curator in the field. Peter Reed, Senior Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, has been an advisor from the moment of the show's inception to the realization of the exhibition and its catalogue. Ramona Bannayan, Director, Collection Management and Exhibition Registration, and Sacha Eaton, Senior Registrar Assistant, have excelled in executing the shipping of the works for the exhibition in a safe and caring way. Michael Margitich, Senior Deputy Director for External Affairs, and Todd Bishop, Director of Exhibition Funding, have achieved funding for the project during the most difficult of economic times. Jay Levenson's advice, support, and intelligence have accompanied me in all my projects at MoMA, and Carol Coffin, who serves as Executive Director of the Museum's International Council, was instrumental in getting its support. Wendy Woon, Deputy Director for Education, Pablo Helguera, Director of Adult and Academic Education, and Laura Beiles, Associate Educator, have worked closely to organize an exciting series of educational programs. Allegra Burnette, Creative Director, Digital Media, and her team of designers have worked tirelessly on the exhibition's website. Kim Mitchell, Deputy Director for Communications, Margaret Doyle, Assistant Director, and Meg Blackburn, Senior Publicist, have taken special care in fostering the best communication strategy and reaching the Latin American press both in the United States and abroad.

Any curatorial project involves ongoing intellectual research, and here the outstanding resources of the Museum's Library are key. My special gratitude goes to Milan Hughston, Chief of Library and Museum Archives, and to Jenny Tobias, Sheelagh Bevan, and Alexa Goldstein for their tireless support and attention. Our Collections and Exhibitions Management System team of Ian Eckert, Jeri Moxley, Kristen Shirts, and, in the past, Eliza Sparacino and Susanna Ivy worked closely with us in maintaining our checklist and responding to our endless queries. The outstanding staff of the Museum's Department of Imaging Services, including Robert Kastler, John Wronn, and Thomas Griesel, elegantly photographed many of the works for this book. The Department of Graphic Design, and particularly Bonnie Ralston, Inva Cota, and Claire Corey, have given the exhibition a brilliant design that echoes the originality of the artists' own production. The Exhibition Design and Production team under the leadership of Jerry Neuner counts among the most understanding and imaginative professionals I have had the privilege to work with; Lana Hum, Production Manager, has excelled as an unparalleled exhibition designer. I am in debt to Peter Perez, who has reached artistic heights of taste, execution, and understanding of the works when it came to providing them with frames. Rob Jung and his team of preparators have given us crucial hands and minds, eyes and arms, for the installation of the works in the exhibition. The most outstanding group of conservators ever imagined, under the direction of Jim Coddington, has cared for every work in the show. Karl Buchberg, Senior Conservator, in particular provided masterful knowledge of paper conservation, and Anny Aviram, Lynda Zycherman, and Roger Griffith oversaw the paintings and sculptures and provided conservation for key works in the exhibition.

A quiet but essential protagonist in the complexities of a curatorial project is the Publications Department, whose staff produces the exhibition's lasting memorial, its catalogue. I have been fortunate in an extraordinary team: Christopher Hudson, Publisher, handled intercontinental negotiations to give the show a well-funded catalogue that will be internationally distributed and translated into Portuguese and Spanish; David Frankel, a gifted editor and challenging reader, has surpassed the most exigent heights of intellectual competence and knowledge, and it has truly been a privilege to work with him; Kara Kirk, Associate Publisher, Christina Grillo, Associate Production Manager, and Marc Sapir, Production Director, have contributed hugely to the production, organizational, and financial details of creating the book; and Amanda Washburn, an amazing designer, has surpassed her own outstanding skills in its beautiful and elegant design. She was always open to our ideas and has materialized them beautifully. Outside the Museum, Kristina Cordero, Clifford Landers, Elise Nussbaum, Michael Reade, and Marguerite Shore, provided translations from Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. Without them there would be nothing to read.

I have benefited from the interest and understanding of my colleagues in other curatorial departments and have enjoyed their advice and feedback: Ann Temkin, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator, and Lilian Tone, Assistant Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture; and Deborah Wye, The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Chief Curator, and Christophe Cherix, Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. Last but not least, the entire Department of Drawings has supported, accompanied, discussed, and enhanced this project in a myriad of ways: Connie Butler, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator, who exemplifies the best intellectual and human form of leadership; Jodi Hauptman, Curator, who as Interim Chief Curator provided me with invaluable insights and brilliant advice during the inception of this project; Kathy Curry, Assistant Curator, whose experience is a treasure for any exhibition project; and John Prochilo, whose management skills and intellectual intuitions have tirelessly guided and protected me. I am also thankful to Christian Rattemeyer, Associate Curator; Curatorial Assistants Esther Adler, Maura Lynch, and Samantha Friedman; Preparators David Moreno, Mary Saunders, and Eleanor White; Research Assistant Carrie Elliot; and Ji Hae Kim, Assistant to the Chief Curator. The exhibition has also relied on the tireless help of an amazing team of interns, who dedicated endless hours to research for the exhibition and its book: Gabriela Baez Bastarrachea, Luis Gordo Pelaez, Carmen Hermo, Maya Jimenes, Heather Reyes, Jessica Ventura, and Ed Ubell. Above all, this project came to fruition with the assistance and collaboration of Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, Curatorial Assistant, whose outstanding professional and human qualities have been absolutely fundamental to making this project and catalogue possible. Geaninne has been a real intellectual partner along this lifetime process, from its inception to its materialization, and there are simply no words eloquent enough to express to her my fondest gratitude and intellectual debt.

Friendship is key in the life of ideas, and I have counted on the constant support and advice of my friends Juan Iribarren and Michel Weemans, and of my dearest partner, Samuel Guillen.

Luis Pérez-Oramas
The Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art

luis pérez-oramas

león ferrari and mira schendel: tangled alphabets

Man,
because he lives,
clashes with the living.
To live
is to wend among the living.
Whatever lives
inflicts life
on silence, on sleep, on the body
that dreamed of cutting itself
clothes out of clouds.
Whatever lives clashes,
has teeth, edges, is thick.
Whatever lives is thick
like a dog, a man,
like the river.

—João Cabral de Melo Neto, *O cão sem plumas*
(The dog without feathers)

O the frenzied alphabet

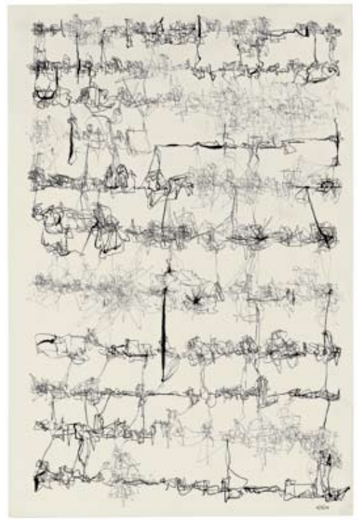
—César Moro, *Prestigio del Amor*, 2002

The Tumult of Language Among the *Objetos gráficos* (Graphic objects) shown by the late Mira Schendel at the 1969 Venice Biennale, one piece stands out for its sobriety, rigor, nakedness, and transparency (plate 90). That work contains not scattered letters, like most of the rest of the *Objetos*—variously inscribed sheets of Japanese paper, sandwiched in transparent acrylic—but whole fragments of text. Some of these passages quote the conversation and lecture notes of the artist's friend Max Bense, the philosopher and linguist. Others include references to samba, and to the general spirit that made the name of that Brazilian dance into a verb (*sambar*, to dance samba) that for Schendel described an entire existential endeavor; lyrics by the popular songwriter Chico Buarque de Hollanda; and extracts from the verses of the great Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto, taken from his book *O cão sem plumas* (The dog without feathers), better known as the *Discurso do Capibaribe* (Capibaribe discourse): "Whatever lives is thick/like a dog, a man,/like the river./Thick/like everything real." The *Objetos gráficos*, as their title suggests, explore the thickness of language, the objectlike density of its graphic root, the existential bulk of words, traces, marks, whether written or drawn by brush. Opaque bodies, obstacles, suspended in our presence as fields of both seeing and reading, these works are bodies to be deciphered with the body (fig. 1). One might even say that Schendel's entire oeuvre is about the body, the single link through which we understand the world, and about the body of art that may emerge from this ceaseless effort to understand. In that light it is significant that in one of these works, as if in a modern palimpsest, Schendel inscribed the poetic key to the corporeal dimension of her work, and perhaps to the *Objetos gráficos* as a whole, in the form of poems and quotations. And she did so in the most transparent and bare, the least dense and thick, of all of the *Objetos gráficos*.

Both art and language have the potential for opposite dimensions: opacity, or density and thickness, and transparency, or immediacy and clarity. Perhaps between these poles we may frame an approach to the work of Schendel and of León Ferrari. The two artists were born on different continents—Ferrari in Argentina, Schendel in Switzerland, though she spent her later life in Brazil—but they are contemporaries, born in 1920 and 1919 respectively (Ferrari is still working, Schendel died in 1988), and both have found their principal visual source in language as both writing and gesture, that is, as both verbally intelligible and purely visible matter. Even at its most silent, intimate moments, their art is imbued with the protean tumult of language's countless faces and incarnations, from voluntary silence to aphasia, passing along the way through whisper, prayer, accusation, sermon, dialogue, quotation, stutter, shout, onomatopoeia, collage, argument, alphabet, and poetry. Both artists knew poets well—Haroldo de Campos in the case of Schendel, Rafael Alberti in that of Ferrari—and both at one time or another were poets themselves.

To understand the meaning of an art infused with language, to understand what such infusion can mean and how it can help us to talk about that art's specificity, we should remember something obvious but often overlooked: Schendel and Ferrari emerged during a time

1. **Mira Schendel**
Installation view, Venice Biennial, 1968.
Mira Schendel Estate



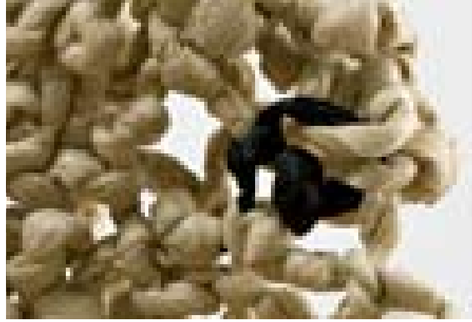
2. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1962
Ink on paper, 18 1/4 x 12 1/4" (46.4 x 31.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

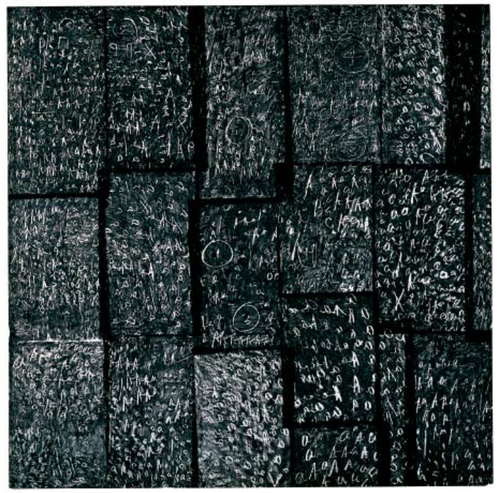
3. **León Ferrari**
Carta a un general (Letter to a general). April 13, 1963
Ink on paper, 18 7/8 x 12 3/16" (48 x 31 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

marked by the use of linguistic models to understand the world, a time when many intellectuals—anthropologists, filmmakers, philosophers, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists—made language a paradigm for thought and for the world itself. These thinkers were reacting against the tendency during the early part of the twentieth century to take the organism, the machine, natural selection, and other such models as organizing systems through which to explain reality.[1] It is important, then, to understand what in the realm of facts the language in Schendel's and Ferrari's works refers to, or uses as a backdrop or frame, a context or pretext—what provokes that language, what guides it, where it is directed. And: what distinguishes the art of Schendel and Ferrari from so much other work of the same era that was based on and revolved around language.

The early 1960s were crucial years in the development of Schendel's and Ferrari's work—that is, in its materialization of new and different forms—and 1964 in particular seems to have brought both artists to turning points. That was the year of Ferrari's *Cuadro escrito* (Written painting; plate 41), which followed a period of intense focus on drawing that led him from abstraction (fig. 2) to deformed, illegible writing (fig. 3), and then to the sophisticated but no less hermetic calligraphy of his written drawings (plate 58). That same year, Schendel embarked on a phase of her practice exclusively dedicated to works on paper—specifically, rectangular sheets of the Japanese paper often called rice paper. To make her drawings of this period—around two thousand of them—she used a self-invented technique, her own in both the application of the ink and the actual physical gesture.[2] The period ended in the second half of the 1960s with the creation of her most emblematic objects: the *Droguinhas* (Little nothings, c. 1965–68; fig. 4), *Trenzinho* (Little train, 1965; plate 77), and the *Objetos gráficos* (fig. 5).

In North America and Europe, these years also saw the emergence of an art form that used no single medium, or at least that could not be understood from the perspective of the qualities of a single medium or material. Instead, as Sol LeWitt wrote, this was an art form in which "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work."[3] From the start, the critical writing on this work—Conceptual art—developed what would prove to be one of its essential myths, the





4. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled (detail; see plate 73) from the series
Droguinhas (Little nothings). c. 1965–68
Japanese paper, dimensions variable, c. 35 1/2" (90 cm)
fully extended
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Scott Burton Fund

5. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). 1967
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper between
transparent acrylic sheets, 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm)
Collection Diane and Bruce Halle

dematerialization of the art object assumed to be implicit in it.[4] Not only did Conceptual art aspire to be an art form without genre, it also was, or tried to be, an artistic option opposed to the formalisms of the late modern period and most of all to painting, as an art of subjective expression, a materialization of the spirit.

In that crucial year of 1964, not only did Ferrari and Schendel start to derive work from language, or more specifically from its constant *dérive*, or drift, they also reacted against painting—Schendel by abandoning that art form for works on paper, and Ferrari, although he had not painted since his earliest days as an artist and would not again until the 1980s, still rejecting it, subtly but clearly, in *Cuadro escrito*. In describing what Ferrari would have painted had God blessed him with painterly talent, the text of this written drawing illustrates an impossible, nonexistent painting, a nonpainting, an imaginary painting, the utopian painting created by the erotic yearnings of God.[5] Ferrari's and Schendel's distance from painting, however, which in Schendel's case was temporary, makes neither of them a Conceptual artist. On the contrary: since language as a material presence, a body of signs and traces, brushstrokes and gestures, far more than as a vehicle of concepts or ideas, prevails in their work, we cannot claim that "the idea or concept is the most important aspect" of it. In fact execution is key here, making each work an unrepeatable operation—the polar opposite of LeWitt's sense of execution as a "perfunctory affair."[6]

The works of Ferrari and Schendel describe an ingrown, interconnected language, a written materiality, language as a trembling of the hand, a shudder of the body—language that itself has shuddered, a language that voices an idiosyncratic, irreplaceable subject. Of course their art involves ideas and concepts, indeed, often, ideas and concepts in their barest state, an obstinately repetitive plundering of barely legible names, words, fictions, definitions, locutions. But these things are depicted in a physical circumstance, where the materiality of signs and symbols resonates like a dissonant, distorting echo of the ideal and perhaps fictional purity of the mind and of ideas. Perhaps this, in one sense at least, is what the tumult of language means to these two artists: that words are opaque and out in the world.

Clearly the key to LeWitt's famous declaration lies in the mean-

ing ascribed to the word “aspect”: while language as an ideal vector of meaning is a central “aspect” of the Conceptualists’ art, Ferrari and Schendel are concerned with the “aspect” of language in the sense of its visual appearance. This distinction is crucial if we are to understand their specific contribution, and to defend them from the stereotypic, homogenizing tendency of the label “Conceptual,” with its baggage of aesthetic and artistic myths: dematerialization, ideality, and so on.[7] It is also crucial in approaching a complex moment in which the legacies of the historical Western avant-gardes began to multiply in a more global geography, the classic modern styles to break apart and evolve in a variety of relocalized or, rather, repoliticized forms. The shift contributed to the rise of practices in which objective content, a discursive dimension (by which I mean the use of linguistic enunciation as content in visual art, a strategy in various work of the postwar era, both within and beyond the Conceptual canon), the power to say things (not just show them), would reach new relevance.

Between 1945 and 1965, “modernity”—the large and complex repertory of artistic practices that accompanied modernization—gave way to “modernism,” an artistic ideology that contributed to the summing up of modernity and modern art in their most characteristic and hegemonic versions. Existing modern works became the object of multiple reappropriations, and began to be used to legitimize the practice of late modern artists. The spectacular public reception of these latter artists’ works, instrumentalized by the European and American culture industries during the second half of the twentieth century, was key in order for modernity to become an ideology, a canon, a universal formal model.[8] At the same time, for various reasons—World War II; the end of many traditional institutions of colonialism; the emergence of new nations; diasporas of entire communities, along with their artists and intellectuals; the Cold War; the industrialization of tourism; the advent of new information technologies, and so on—the idea and promise of a single form of modernity happily fell apart, making way for the rise of alternative local versions of what it meant to be “modern.”

In many of these versions of the modern, the idea of the autonomy of the artwork did not exist, or took very different form from its expression in canonical modernism. In Brazil, from Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, and Amilcar de Castro to Antonio Manuel, Cildo Meireles, and Waltercio Caldas, the fundamental premises of Concrete art tended to relativize the art object, underscoring its perceptual pliability and conceiving it as a transitional form somewhere between the field of art and the field of political or everyday experience. We may also recall the distinctly literary tendency in the art of Argentina and Uruguay, where artists from Joaquín Torres-García (fig. 6) and Alejandro Xul Solar (fig. 7) to Alberto Greco, Alejandro Puente (fig. 8), Leandro Katz, Roberto Jacoby, and Ferrari himself favored narrative and discursive, illustrative and textual methods, working especially on relationships between the image and alphabetic or verbal codes.

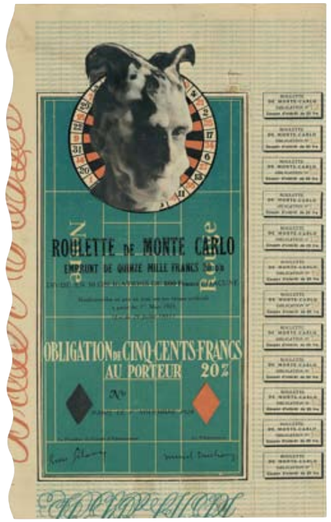
The ideologues of modernism, by ignoring basic historical facts, had ascribed to canonical modern art the idea of the primacy of the purely visual, and this and related notions—the identification of the artwork with the specificity of its medium, for example—had become the connecting threads of modernist aesthetics.[9] As nongeneric practices began to emerge, as more and more artists embraced hybrid media, and as the presence of discursive intentions became more common, varied, and widespread in visual art, this ideology fell to pieces. By the late 1960s, the possibility of identifying an artwork with a specific statement rather than with a specific medium, and tautological, allegorical, narrative, or literally textual modalities—“something alien to the late modernist tradition of painting, namely the specific operation of language,” as Alexander Alberro has put it[10]—had once again become general currency in Western art.[11]

It is important to say, however, that canonical Conceptual art was not alone responsible for the shift. The work of Ferrari and Schendel, unclassifiable within the usual parameters of critical discourse on the art of the postwar period, shows this conclusively. In and beyond the West, and in and beyond recent decades, certain art practices have

6. **Joaquín Torres-García**
Composition. 1932
Oil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 19 3/4" (71.8 x 50.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Dr. Román Fresnedo Siri

7. **Alejandro Xul Solar**
Pan Game and Marionette I Ching. c. 1945
Painted wood and metal, 54 pieces,
overall dimensions variable
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of
Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, through the Latin American
and Caribbean Fund, in honor of Agnes Gund

8. **Alejandro Puente**
Todo vale. Colores primarios y secundarios llevados al blanco (Everything goes. Primary and secondary colors brought up to white). 1968–70
Cloth, iron, and pigments. Pencil, felt-tip pen, cut-and-pasted printed paper, transfer type, watercolor, felt samples, and staples on seven sheets of paper, 29 1/2 x 68 7/8" (74.9 x 174.9 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Latin American and Caribbean Fund with additional funding provided by Beatriz and Andres von Buch on behalf of Fundación arteBA



proven themselves indifferent to the famous distinction between the arts of time and the arts of space that Lessing established in the eighteenth century, and that would serve as the theoretical basis for modern aesthetic formalism.[12] Centering on linguistic codes and texts, on narratives and narrative images, these practices have produced a sophistic visual art, an art based on the potential of language not for clarity but for ambiguity.[13] From William Blake and Francisco de Goya to Théophile Bra, Marcel Duchamp (fig. 9), Francis Picabia, Marcel Broodthaers (fig. 10), Félix Bruly Bouabré, and Ferrari and Schendel, images are manifested through texts and texts through images—in fact images *are* texts, texts *are* images.[14] In this sense it is insufficient to say that Ferrari and Schendel practiced an alternative Conceptual art. Rather, Conceptual art is just one manifestation of a various, often contradictory phenomenon: a reinvention of visual art through operations involving language, and occurring during a specific period in Western intellectual and social history that was dominated by the paradigm of language as the operator for understanding human reality, as asserted in the writing of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Umberto Eco, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, and others.

To avoid convoluted, generalization-driven interpretations that would lump this huge variety of practices within the framework of either alignment with or reaction against the hegemonic form of American and European Conceptual art, we may consult Fredric Jameson's distinction between "classical moderns" (a "rather unsatisfactory designation," he admits), who embraced artistic practices with neither names nor theories, and "late modernists," who were aware that they were working within a canon.[15] "Conceptual art," following Jameson's distinction, is a constellation of artistic practices; "Conceptualism" reflects their stylistic canonization and (belated) conversion into ideology. By highlighting the differences between Ferrari and Schendel, on the one hand, and those artists who tend to align themselves with the canonical forms of "Conceptualism," on the other, we argue against the strategic or tactical use of the term "Conceptualism" as a canonical method of including, legitimizing, and homogenizing highly diverse practices beyond North America and Europe.[16]

Ferrari and Schendel are visual artists who never abandon the word. On the contrary: even in their most silent, empty images, they make the word the center of their work, protesting what Roland Barthes called the "segregative law" that in the West separates the poet from the novelist, the graphic artist from the painter.[17] More specifically, what is still clearer in their work than language, even when the text is impossible to identify, is writing—writing in Barthes's sense of *scription*, the "muscular act of writing, of drawing letters,"[18] in other words the *epoché* or suspension of writing as trace, its radical material reduction, and the revelation of its capacity to function as a visual representation of enunciation.[19] The work's guiding spirit, then, more than language, is the word itself—the word as a limitless substitute for the human voice. Ferrari and Schendel don't give us the neutral, subjectless sentences that anyone might say, impersonally, as if language were an ideal form of transparency. Instead we get opaque texts, wounded, fragmented, obsessive signs, abandoned, delirious, solitary letters. In the end it is not language that shines through but writing—whether abstract or textual, alphabetic or architectural, deformed or infinitesimal, nominal or transitive—and, above all, its body: the graphic gesture.

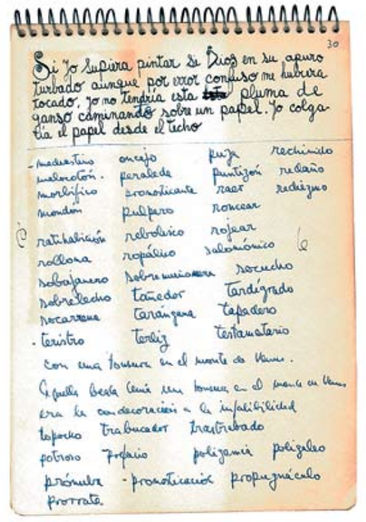
The Silence of Things All this, in the work of both artists, begins in the same way that we may imagine language itself beginning: through silence, the silence of objects, and the effort to capture silence with a name.

Ferrari got a late start as an artist, sometime after he had turned thirty and after he had graduated as an engineer from the Universidad de Buenos Aires. In 1946 he married Alicia Barros, who gave birth to the couple's first daughter, Marialí, in 1948. Until then Ferrari had been working as an engineer for his father, the architect and painter Augusto Ferrari, who specialized in the construction and decoration of churches. It seems to me that Ferrari's art may have been decisively affected by two traumatic family events, which would prove crucial to his life and perhaps to some of his most significant decisions in terms of art.

In 1952, Marialí Ferrari contracted tuberculous meningitis. Through the treatment, with streptomycin, she lost her hearing and with it her ability to speak. It was as a result of this tragic loss, this absence of language, that Ferrari began to collect words. "We were desperate, bewildered," Alicia Ferrari would write;

> *Our daughter was deaf, she had entered a different world that we had to share and know in order to help her . . . we gathered 100 perfectly pronounced words, which we jotted down one after the other without really knowing what we were doing. This list of words, which became the basis of her reeducation, included proper nouns. . . and the common names of all sorts of everyday things.*[20]

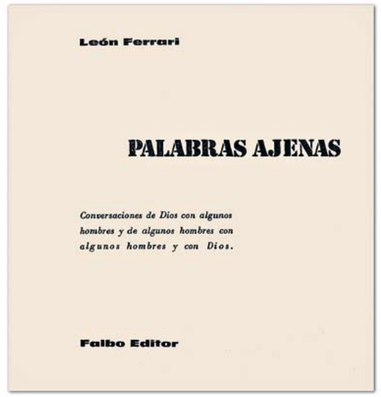
What relationship can we draw between this list of words composed by Alicia and León, as loving parents trying to help their daughter reenter the world, and the obsessive, curious collecting of strange and unintelligible words that Ferrari would undertake years later for the baroque, satirical texts of some of his written drawings? He must have scoured the dictionary for these rare, surprising, foreign-sounding words: *agerasia* (youthfulness in age), *butuco* (squat), *cañucela* (reed), *desavahar* (to expose to air), *encambijar* (to conduct water by aqueduct), *menuceles* (trifles), *oploteca* (museum of ancient weapons), *perulero* (narrow-rimmed vase), *arrizafa* (royal garden; fig. 11).



9. **Marcel Duchamp**
Monte Carlo Bond (No. 12). 1924
Cut-and-pasted gelatin silver prints on lithograph with letterpress, 12 ¼ x 7 ½" (31.2 x 19.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist

10. **Marcel Broodthaers**
Pour un art de l'écriture et pour une écriture de l'art (On the Art of Writing and on the Writing of Art). 1968
Oil and photograph on linen mounted on composition board, in two parts, 40 5/8" x 7' 3 3/8" (103.2 x 221.9 cm).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Raymond J. Learsy and Gabriella De Ferrari

11. **León Ferrari**
Page from Notebook 3, November 15, 1964
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



12. **León Ferrari**
Palabras ajenas (Words of others). 1967. Cover
Buenos Aires: Falbo Editor
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

13. **León Ferrari**
Palabras ajenas (Words of others). 1967. Title page
Buenos Aires: Falbo Editor
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

Palabras ajenas ("Words of others," but also "Strange words"), not just words out in the world, seem from this point on to have guided Ferrari's work—whether the words robbed from the ears of a little girl who had lost her hearing, or the most unfamiliar words in the dictionary. Later, during the political furor of the 1960s, Ferrari would write a book called *Palabras ajenas*—a kind of protest play, the impossible script for a polyphonic performance among different kinds of power (figs. 12, 13.).[21] Later still, in 1976, it was at the hands of Argentine state power—which Ferrari had always opposed in written pictures and angry words and works—that his son Ariel was silenced in turn, and permanently, like many other young Argentines sacrificed at the dawn of their future promise.

If the first traumatic event, involving his daughter, led Ferrari to words, the second, involving his son, brought home on him the gravitas of his political responsibility, the need to align his work with a constant protest against the hell of history, political power, religion, and that other source of muteness, that other unbearable silence: the silence of a God—for Ferrari, an invention of human masochism—indifferent to human tragedy.

In 1952, when Marialí Ferrari lost the gift of language, words began to abound in her father's life. Yet years would pass before they would take center stage in his work. Seeking better medical care for Marialí, and still living as an engineer, Ferrari moved his family to Italy, and it was there, in Rome, that he first began to work as an artist, specifically a ceramist (fig. 14). From his conversation one deduces that his experience in Italy, from 1952 to 1955, was also his first experience with politics—that this was how the Catholic-born Ferrari became, like so many postwar Italians, vaguely Communist, if never a Party activist.

Ferrari's three-dimensional works from these years, almost all now lost, echo a certain vein of Italian modernity traceable back to Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana (fig. 15), Fausto Melotti (fig. 16), and maybe Piero Manzoni. Mute in relation to his later art, they involve no graphic writing—only the texture of the surface and the shaping of the clay into organic curves (fig. 17). The objects sit ambiguously between abstraction and use. A photograph from 1955 (fig. 1, p. 46) shows Ferrari in his Trastevere studio, surrounded by sculptures, vessels, and mobiles with, often, two striking features: a swollen center, perhaps a reference to pregnancy, and the presence of clay rings and ribbons, oval openings like those in certain bones, some of them acting as handles from which the objects hang. There is little continuity between these ceramics and most of Ferrari's later art, except perhaps for the love of curving lines, and of organic, corporeal shapes, that is visible in his calligraphy. The clay mobiles suspended from the ceiling, however, may relate more specifically to Ferrari's recent hanging sculptures in polyurethane and plastic, which include bones and similar round swellings (plate 144). It is almost as though, having begun in the abstraction of language implicit in silent objects, the work had concluded symmetrically, after long labor amid the sound of voices and the murmur of writing, in the muteness of bodies and their bones.

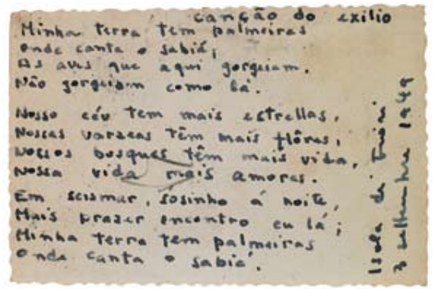
In 1948 Schendel emigrated to Brazil, leaving behind her in Europe her Catholic youth and her ambition as a poet—along with scenes of war and destruction, death-filled refugee camps, the silent fate of

14. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. c. 1955
Ceramic
Location unknown

15. **Lucio Fontana**
Crucifixion. 1948
Ceramic, 19 1/8 x 12 3/8 x 9 1/8" (48.6 x 31.4 x 23.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

16. **Fausto Melotti**
Bowl. 1953
Majolica, 2 1/4" x 5 1/2" diam. (5.7 cm x 14 cm diam.)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Phyllis B. Lambert Fund

17. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. c. 1955
Ceramic
Location unknown


Canção do exilio

Minha terra tem palmeiras
onde canta o sabiá;
As aves que aqui gorgeiam,
Não gorgeiam como lá.

Nosso céu tem mais estrellas,
Nossas varzeas têm mais flôres,
Nossos bosques têm mais vida,
Nossa vida mais amores.

Em scismar, sosinho á noite,
Mais prazer encontro eu lá;
Minha terra tem palmeiras
onde canta o sabiá.

Ilha da Flores
Porto Alegre
1949

the stateless. As soon as she settled in Brazil, in the town of Porto Alegre, Schendel took on the voice of her fellow refugees and émigrés in an open letter to a newspaper, a powerful attack on the bureaucratic mediocrity of institutions and the state. She seems always to have been generously rebellious, and her constant protests against the state of things clearly manifest her search for self among others, her need for the world.

Schendel's parents, Karl Dub and Ada Saveria Büttner, had divorced when the child was an infant. In 1937, Ada had taken a second husband, Count Tommaso Gnoli, the director first of the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan, later of the Biblioteca Estense Universitaria in Modena. Schendel, then, spent her young adulthood in an august context of humanistic and Catholic culture, among prelates, poets, theologians, and philosophers. At the beginning of World War II, when Mussolini's anti-Semitic laws prevented her from finishing her studies in philosophy, she embarked on her long exile. She first intended to go to Sofia, Bulgaria, but was stopped in Vienna by the German invasion of Hungary. She settled instead in Sarajevo, where she met the man who would become her first husband, Josip Hargesheimer. Here, while living among Croatian refugees, Schendel would recall seeing a girl of six or seven playing with a rabbit until she finally killed it: "just as they did with the Jewish children," she wrote in a diary. "As long as life is considered the supreme good, this scandal will subsist."[22]

Schendel would rarely mention the grim experience of war, whether in writing or conversation. Nor would she describe it through any direct symbolism in her work, perhaps because it was so extreme and impossible to communicate. In her polemic in defense of European émigrés in Brazil, Schendel wrote of freeing herself from the "sectarian spirit that identifies us so strongly with the desire to monopolize the greatest pain."[23] A related agnostic impulse seems to have led her to try to understand the meaning of her own religion, Catholicism, through the work of reform-minded, antiestablishment writers such as Leon Bloy, Emanuel Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin, and Ferdinando Tartaglia, with whom she often corresponded before emigrating.

Schendel wrote the texts of her last poems on the backs of photographs of herself and Hargesheimer in their first home in Porto Alegre, a house with a lush garden (figs. 18, 19). "Unfortunately speech is not my means of expression," she wrote to a friend during these years.[24] She dealt with her abandonment of writing by becoming an artist, beginning, strangely enough, with surely the most manual art form: ceramics. Like Ferrari in Italy, Schendel in Brazil devoted herself to kneading and shaping clay, making works that we now can only imagine, for none survive.

Soon, however, in 1950, Schendel decided that painting was "a question of life or death."[25] Perhaps she transferred to her early paintings the rugged texture of her ceramics, the impenetrable silence of the cups, vessels, and bottles that she had sculpted with her hands (plate 3). In any event critics felt in these pieces a somewhat melancholic, perhaps even metaphysical quality, recalling a pair of artists who almost certainly influenced Schendel in the Brazil of the 1950s: Giorgio Morandi (fig. 8, p. 66) and Milton Dacosta.[26] Her still lifes and abstractions already reveal a dissatisfaction with the limits of the picture plane. In one, a white oval, an egg, is an uncanny presence among bottles and glasses depicted as emphatically flat silhouettes (plate 6), while in another, thick, rough-textured paint is the backdrop for prominent geometric forms that stand out three-dimensionally (plate 1). On one level this latter work is a game of tonal values focused on the edges of these nameless presences (which makes it the most Morandi-like of Schendel's paintings, even while it is iconographically unlike him).[27] On another, it is about penetrating the density, the thickness, of paint and watching forms emerge from it, less compositional impositions than organic outgrowths.

This literal emergence of form would become essential to Schendel's art, and we will be looking at it later with respect to the technique she developed for drawing on Japanese paper. For now, it is enough to say that after she stopped writing poetry, painting emerged in her work not, as one might guess, as an exercise pitting art against writing, but definitively as an object. In the manual tradition of both her and Ferrari's ceramics, and in the earthy, tactile texture of Schendel's paintings before 1963, we see a plasticity that may be read as a metonym for the body, and, in the case of Ferrari's pregnant figures, for his own generative potential (plate 2). In giving up poetry for object-making, Schendel gave up written language—silent, but pregnant with latent speech—for the inescapable, fated muteness of the physical gesture; and the muteness of the gesture (and gesture physically shapes writing) became for her the place of language's silence, of the voice deferred, buried, contained in and by the hands that write or knead clay. "Writing," said Barthes, "in short is nothing more than a kind of fissure. It is a question of dividing, of plowing, of discontinuing a flat element, sheet, skin, clay tablet, wall. . . . the hand, the eye, guide the writing, not the reason of language."[28]

Written Pictures: The Visible as Verb Ferrari and Schendel established the basic repertoires of their respective bodies of work in the 1960s. Ferrari had gone through a period of experiment in which he continued to produce sculpture, briefly explored wood carving, and made some of his first works in wire, including *Gagarín* (Gagarin, c. 1961; plate 26). This spherical piece, which allegorizes the widespread early enthusiasm for the world's venture into space, manifests a theme of Ferrari's that would evolve in a number of directions: spheres, rockets, missiles, and even atomic explosions, in the recent mushroom-shaped sculptures in polyurethane.[29]

"It would be so wonderful," Ferrari wrote in 1962–63, "to make a kind of *mappa mundi*, a globe of some imaginary planet, 'the planet where I don't live,' a totally drawn sphere. . . . It could be made of solid iron, welded and painted."[30] "A totally drawn sphere": beyond the role of *Gagarín* as allegory, portrait, or sculpture, Ferrari's notes show that he saw the work graphically, as a kind of three-dimensional drawing. He wrote these notes at the same time that he was working on his first great drawing, the 1962 *Sin titulo (Sermón de la sangre)* (Untitled [Sermon of the blood]; plate 12), based on a poem by Alberti.

"[Rafael] read some poems," Ferrari wrote in his notebook, "and then I left him. I started to work on the poem '*Sermón de la sangre*' with the idea of doing something very complex (either in black or colored ink), whether directly on paper or on a piece of cellophane covered with alizarin red, for blood."[31] The notebook mentions four or five versions of the drawing and reveals a meticulous, painstaking process. Ferrari wanted absolute control in the work's execution: "Copying these drawings is difficult," he wrote, and he experimented laboriously, with an alchemy of inks, to get the color of a "blood that is a bit dead, like dry, opaque blood."

Aerial and corporeal at the same time, the result is surely one of the most spectacular drawings of Ferrari's career, and silently echoes Alberti's poetry:

> *I know, I consent: it is time—time to strike through the voice that transfixes all things, from the ice on the wheat to the beak of the bird that renounces the earth and waits for a day when the sky will be quartz and all grind to a halt for a moment, at last . . . while something that shames me and heaves me aloft, undermines me and drowns me, still drains me, abandons me and puts all to flight again for which I know no name but: my blood.*[32]

The composition comprises two planes of lines that join in a complex labyrinth of tangles and crisscrosses. These planes correspond to two colors, black and red, which seem in turn to refer to two levels of the body—outside, the grain of skin and hair, and inside, the circulation of blood—which, however, are inverted, the network of blood vessels appearing on top of the field of hair. The voice of blood becomes an eloquent vision, and while the work contains no literal writing, there is indeed a poem, a text, underlying its complex process.

The bodily dimension of Ferrari's drawing may be traceable to his early days as an artist. In 1962, while he was living for a period in Milan, the collector and author Arturo Schwarz invited him to contribute to a portfolio of prints by artists of the international avant-garde, leading to a drypoint etching that would prove the starting point for his drawings. His drawing practice, then, began with incision, the most radical form of drawing and perhaps also an originary form of writing: Saint Luke, the patron saint of artists, combined the practices of writing (revelation), drawing (portraiture), and incision (surgery). No less an artist than Giotto, according to Vasari, began his life as an artist by scratching an image into a rock with a sharp stone.[33] Ferrari, in his notebook, described his early *Músicas* [Musics] series (plate 17), begun in 1962, as "evolving toward drawn bas-relief."[34]

18. Mira Schendel and an unidentified friend, Ilha das Flores, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 1949

19. **Mira Schendel**
"Canção do exilio" (Song of exile). September 3, 1949.
Verso of fig. 18

At the same time, it is worth remembering that Ferrari's first abstract drawings had a pretext in text (in the Alberti poem, for example), while the *Músicas*, by invoking musical scores, aspired to be seen as textual events. These works would lead Ferrari toward the abstract drawings of the *Escrituras deformadas* (Deformed writings) series and to the *Cartas a un general* series of 1963 (Letters to a general; plate 37), which in turn would close in 1964 with the inception of the great repertory of written drawings that begins with *Cuadro escrito*. As such, Ferrari's drawing practice was and is an inscribed body of work (fig. 20), the result of a corporeal practice of inscription, or of Barthes's *scription*—"This gesture by which a hand picks up a tool (point, reed, pen), presses it to a surface, advances it heavily or caressingly, and traces regular, recurrent, rhythmic forms."[35]

It is interesting to note that this progression began with abstraction and ended with writing. Ferrari has said that it was as if he had inverted a modern order, as in the work of Antonin Artaud and Henri Michaux, in which writing is abstracted into a calligraphy that is illegible, indecipherable.[36] In fact he may have repeated the ontogeny of writing, if we agree with the theories of the philosopher André Leroi-Gourhan or the linguist Jacques Van Ginneken, as summarized by Barthes: "Writing," he says, "would have to have come before oral language," given that its origins must lie between the age of purely gestural communication and the age of communication through clicklike phonemes, like the sounds that newborns make with their mouths—but before the rise of an articulated language. According to Leroi-Gourhan, Barthes writes, graphics would have come before writing: "Writing, outside its semantic constituent, is lines and marks engraved on bone or stone, little equidistant incisions. In no way figurative, these traces have no precise meaning; they seem to be rhythmic manifestations, perhaps incantatory in nature. In other words, writing begins not in imitation of the real but in abstraction."[37]

If Ferrari's abstract drawings are purely aesthetically a high point of his work, his written drawings begin to serve as a platform for objective content, for a discourse on art; on the world, with all its contradictions and nonsense; and, usually sarcastically and critically, on the powers of church and state. None of these early works are violent, or show the kind of anger and protest that would appear in his art later on, as a natural reaction to the tragedies of Argentine history, which would scar his own family directly. The period begins with works like *Sin titulo (Sermón de la sangre)*, an abstraction based on an existing piece of writing, and can be seen as ending with *La civilización occidental y cristiana* (Western Christian civilization; fig. 21), a sculpture fusing a crucifixion with an American bomber. Exhibited at Buenos Aires's Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in 1965, the work was ultimately censored, after which Ferrari abandoned artmaking for a time. During this brief period between 1962 and 1965, Ferrari established the foundations of his entire future repertory, in abstract drawings such as the *Músicas*, the *Escrituras deformadas*, the *Cartas a un general*, the wire sculptures, the boxes, and the written drawings such as *Cuadro escrito*.

Between 1957 and 1963, Schendel too stopped artmaking to concentrate on raising her daughter, Ada, her child with her second husband, Knut Schendel. (The couple had lived together since 1952 and would marry in 1960.) Knut (fig. 22), a German who had emigrated to Brazil in 1936, sensing the horror then brewing in Europe, would become a crucial figure in Schendel's life; although after she married him she only signed her work with her first name, Mira, some of the abstract calligraphy in her drawings on Japanese paper resembles his signature, as though she were rewarding his name with a gesture, making it a feature of her work (plate 25).

Knut ran the São Paulo bookstore Canuto, a significant importer of technical literature during the years of Brazil's modernization (fig. 23). His business presumably gave Schendel access to books and paper. In 1963, she began to paint again, making abstract, materially oriented canvases. Soon, however, she chose instead to work on sheets of Japanese paper, all (with rare exceptions) in the same vertical rectangular format, twice as high as wide—the sum of two squares. In her last paintings of this period, Schendel combined numbers and letters with a series of basic forms—lines, rectangles, shapes contained within shapes, openings, and ovals, all of which would reappear in her drawings. One of these works, *Sem titulo (Achilles)* (Untitled [Achilles], fig. 24)—perhaps her first "written painting"—depicts a kind of threshold, a "doorway," as Geraldo Souza Dias has described it.[38] Above it is written a full English sentence: "Froude and myself at the time, we borrowed from M. Bunsen a Homer and Froude chose the words in which ACHILLES returning to the battle says you shall know the difference now that I am back again."

Several features of this work deserve attention: the presence of text in a good-sized painting (thirty-seven by fifty-two inches); the use of capital letters, apparently stenciled, rather than calligraphy; the way the text dominates the upper part of the picture, superimposed over the black arch and over the somber colors of the visual field; the hermetic character of the sentence, despite its reference to Achilles, whose name stands out in white, the only brightness in an otherwise dark composition; and the philological and aesthetic moment in Schendel's development that the painting marks.

The sentence is a quotation, never correctly identified before, from the writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman, and specifically from his preface to the *Lyra Apostolica* of 1836, a collection of religious poems by writers such as John Keble, Richard Hurrell Froude, Newman himself, and others, all figures in the Oxford Movement, a nineteenth-century English expression of Roman Catholicism and European romanticism.[39] Visiting Rome in the winter of 1832, Keble, Froude, and Newman had met the German theologian and diplomat Christian Charles Josias, Baron von Bunsen, and, as Newman wrote, had borrowed from him a copy of Homer. In the *Iliad*, on returning to battle after the death of Patroclus, Achilles promises, "You shall know the difference, now that I am back again." In quoting this line in the preface to the *Lyra Apostolica*, in the sentence in turn quoted in Schendel's painting, Newman was describing his and his friends' frame of mind at the book's inception.

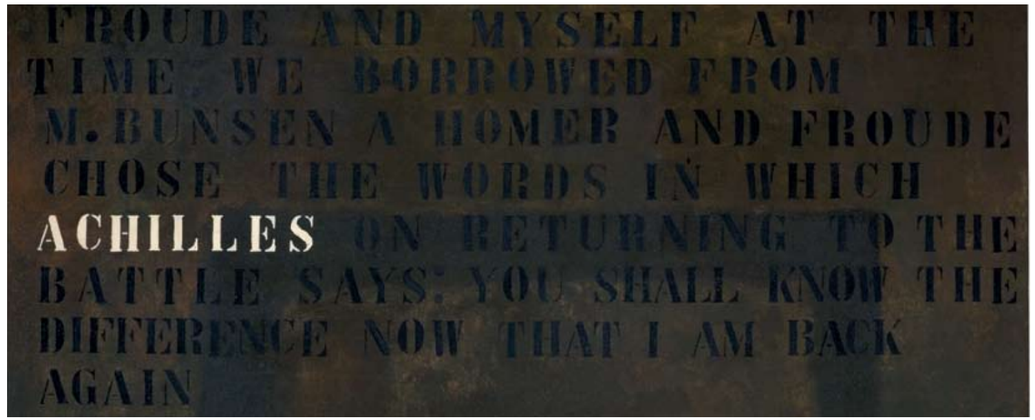
On returning to London after touring the Mediterranean with his friends, Keble gave his "National Apostasy" sermon protesting the decline of the Church of England. This speech would become the foundational document of the Oxford Movement, which attempted to reestablish a more primitive connection with the Church, a kind

20. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1964
Ink on paper, 9 7/16 x 6" (24 x 15.3 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

21. **León Ferrari**
La civilización occidental y cristiana
(Western Christian civilization). 1965
Installation view of **León Ferrari**
Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2004
Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2004

22. Knut Schendel, Berlin, 1932

23. Knut Schendel's Canuto bookstore, São Paulo



of primordial, almost preecclesiastical Christianity. It should hardly surprise us that Schendel was reading Newman at a time when she was deeply involved in issues of Catholic reform.[40] Nor should it seem odd that her interest in different forms of early Christianity, both pre- and even antiecclesiastical, would lead her to profound differences, both personal and theological, with the Church. Schendel also knew that the reformist principles embedded in the Oxford Movement had contributed to the ideas of the Second Vatican Council, conducted during precisely this period, from 1962 to 1965. Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Montini, had personally helped Schendel during her years as a refugee in Europe. This same Pope would publicly declare that Vatican II had been "Newman's hour."[41]

Achilles's words in the *Iliad* herald a furious battle—an energy emulated by the Oxford men in their critique of England's government and Church, and by Schendel on resuming work as an artist in 1963. The quotation, though, is eccentric, obscure. Isolated from its literary and theological context, surrendered to painting, it is almost a textual readymade. But Schendel was announcing her return to painting, to the struggles of art and of the self, with the weapons she would be using to make her symbolic gestures: lines, words, impeccable surfaces, empty fields.

Schendel's religious feelings should not be underestimated; her work returns obsessively to eschatological issues, the difficulties of faith, and the contradictions within the Catholic Church of the time. The unfathomably immense expanse of the paper on which she inscribed her enormous production of *Monotipias* (Monotypes)—this was the battlefield on which her spiritual ideas materialized, as fragments, floating words, terse symbols, hermetic paraphrases, nominal sentences. Schendel was not afraid of religious struggle, a struggle of the Church, with the Church, against the Church that she knew all too well. Newman's great themes—faith's independence from reason, humanity's radical secularism, ecumenism, the embrace of poverty, social action—were important to her during these years, years in which she subtly but laboriously and completely revised her ideas about ecclesiastical, artistic, and political institutional structures.

The period that began in 1963 with the quotation of Newman perhaps ended in 1969 with a quotation from the Book of Kings, used in a spectacular installation on the voice of God as absolute, indecipherable silence. *Ondas paradas de probabilidade—Antigo Testamento, Livro dos Reis, I, 19* (Still waves of probability—Old Testament, I Kings 19; fig. 25) was Schendel's contribution to the 1969 Bienal de São Paulo, which activists against Brazil's military dictatorship were boycotting; the work, then, was politically as well as theologically radical, defying not only the state but its opponents. *Ondas paradas de probabilidade* juxtaposed the archaic voice of the Bible with modern transparency, but before she could make it Schendel had had to follow a tortuous path, through the *Monotipias*, the *Droguinhas*,[42] and *Trenzinho*.

Rodrigo Naves has repeatedly argued that the *Monotipias*—the drawings on which Schendel labored intensely from 1964 until the end of the decade—should not be called by that name, since no reproduction process was used to make them, not even the limited form of reproduction involved in printing monotypes.[43] Naves stresses the poetry of the technique that she invented to produce this large series of works; the fragility and light weight of the Japanese paper become essential rather than incidental, medium rather than support. Since a more conventional inscription of the kind Schendel was making could have scratched or torn the paper, she instead devised a method of coating a pane of inked glass with a layer of talc, to shield the paper she next laid on it from the ink. Then she would press on the paper with her fingernail or some other firm tool. Where she applied pressure, the paper absorbed the ink. This method let her balance the difficult equation between spontaneity and intention, both of which come through in these drawings: "She would meditate or do nothing for a period and then dash off drawings one after another rapidly, scratching on the paper laid over an inked glass, renewing it and doing another."[44]

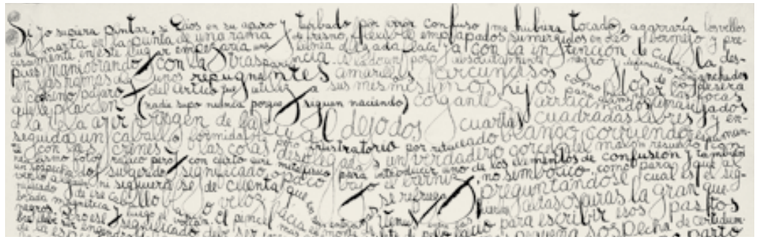
In the *Monotipias*, the drawing in fact *shines through*. Its body precisely inhabits the paper's transparency; its traits lie in the trace, the physical gesture, the muscular weight that produced it, as well as in the paper's intensified presence. It is as if the darkness of the drawn line grew integrally from the paper's white clarity without compromising either value. For Naves, the poetic meaning of this technique of Schendel's lies in her ability to make the drawing seem to emerge from within the support, rather than being imposed upon it from outside.[45] Through this key observation we recognize the equivalence of her gesture here to that of those modern artists who tried to reduce the practice of painting to its minimal conditions of possibility, for example to its flatness. Schendel's project, however, is something other than formalist, something other than an attempt to identify the drawing with its medium, or to reduce it to the materiality of its support; the number and variety of the *Monotipias* show that she conceived them as figural or figurative fields, fields in which the most radical abstraction and the most minimal gesture have symbolic or allegorical weight. Writing breaks down into fragments, furious gestures, or is transformed into song, recitation, prayer. Here it is as clear as a monogram (plate 30), there it decomposes, its signs divided, its physical matter torn. The writing in one of the most interesting monotype drawings—interesting in part because Schendel changed format, making the drawing horizontal and slightly larger than the rest—describes how the paper was accidentally ripped, and this tear becomes the work's symbolic center, its symbol (plate 27). This risk of accident, of the torn image, the fractured object, embodies the poetry of the *Monotipias*.

These drawings should be read through the logic not of the sign but of the symptom, not of the imprint but of the emergence, the spontaneous stain or mark. The strokes, forms, signs, and gestures in the *Monotipias* suggest tangible traces rising to the surface of an absorbent substance, a lucent yet material support. As such, they depart from the mythic role of the sign as an expression of the artist's will, transferring to the paper the organic quality that Walter Benjamin reserved for the "mark" as opposed to the "absolute sign": "Whereas the absolute sign does not for the most part appear on living beings but can be impressed or appear on lifeless buildings, trees, and so on, the mark appears principally on living beings (Christ's stigmata, blushes, perhaps leprosy and birthmarks)."[46] This distinction, informed by Judaic theology, between imaginary absolutes of sign and mark is important in thinking about Schendel, particularly in understanding her marks as links to notions of sin (Benjamin's "blushes") and innocence (his "stigmata"). It becomes crucial, though, when we recall that for Benjamin the mark works a kind of "temporal magic," fusing the past (of guilt) and the future (of atonement). He continues, "The medium of the mark is not confined to this temporal meaning; as we are distressed to see in the case of blushing, it also tends to dissolve the personality into certain of its basic components."[47]

A symptom is an involuntary, purely organic warning of a physical state. What does it mean for a text to take that form? The signs and

24. **Mira Schendel**
Sem título (Achilles) (Untitled [Achilles], detail; see plate 42). 1960s
Oil on canvas, 36 $^{9}/_{8}$ x 51 $^{15}/_{16}$ x 1 $^{3}/_{8}$ (93 x 132 x 3.4 cm)
Private collection, São Paulo

25. **Mira Schendel**
Ondas paradas de probabilidade.
(Still waves of probability). 1969
Installation view, Bienal de São Paulo, 1994



writings in the *Monotipias* are indexical: rather than naming things, they point them out. They present—rather than just represent—the organic personality that has produced them or, rather, that has allowed them to be produced, but that also dissolves them in their primitive discontinuity, their material stutter, their suspension and fragmentation. The logic of a drawing that emerges from the interiority of the paper is not strictly artistic and certainly not formalist, at least in Schendel's case. It responds to a metaphysical reason that Schendel expressed years later when she described the *Monotipias* as "the result of a hitherto frustrated attempt to capture discourse at its moment of origin," for which she had sat down to "wait for the letters to form, to take shape on the page and connect to one another in a text predating the literal and logical."[48]

With the possible exceptions of *Sem titulo (Achilles)* and the monotype drawing *A Trama* (A fabric net; plate 27), whose inscription refers self-reflexively to drawing, none of Schendel's work has the meticulously descriptive character of Ferrari's. Yet his written drawings too are imbued with theology, and with the presence of God, if in a negative sense—negative in that Ferrari is radically opposed to religion.

Cuadro escrito (fig. 26), the first and most important of these works, begins with the remark, "If I knew how to paint, *if God*, in His haste and bewildered by mistaken confusion, had touched me. . . . " *Cuadro escrito* is an argument against God, against painting, against the deification of painting. This complex work takes a stand against the Western tradition that made painting the summit of the plastic arts—a humanistic tradition that began in the Renaissance by establishing an equivalence between pictorial practice and the arts of poetry, rhetoric, and geometry.[49] By showing poetic stories in a space ruled by perspective—in other words, by geometry—painting was freed of its stigma as a manual, only pseudo-intellectual craft. Over three centuries would pass before Lessing's distinction between the arts of time (such as poetry) and of space (such as painting and sculpture) undid this equivalence. It was ultimately Lessing's argument that established the basis for the modern understanding of painting as nonverbal, anti-literary, spiritual—a dominant aesthetic model in modernist ideology as conventionally understood.[50]

Insofar as *Cuadro escrito* resembles the discursive practices of some Conceptual art, in which a text replaces the object it describes, it has been called a Latin American precedent for such works.[51] This may be so, but it is superficial; *Cuadro escrito* is far more complex than is suggested by this simple alignment with Conceptual art, to which Ferrari usually says he felt entirely indifferent at the time. The implicit links between Conceptual art and a humanistic archaeology of the visual arts as understood before Lessing have yet to be fully explored. It seems clear, though, that by rejecting the primacy of the art object in favor of the operations of language, and particularly of administrative language,[52] Conceptual artists gave up the spatial dimension of visual art; they gave up structural extension in favor of intention, and also of cognitive intentionality.[53]

In this sense it can be argued that by opposing the modernist ideology of art's identification with its medium—an identification implicit in the primacy of painting—Conceptual art engineered a return of sorts to the humanistic origins of Western art. If Renaissance painters devised mimetic structures that functioned like, for example, the periodic sentence prized by rhetoricians, the verbal and visual equivalences of the Conceptual artists resembled tautological sentences, restoring early humanism's favoring of verbal structures in visual art.[54] Of course there is more in Conceptual art; some artists—possibly Lawrence Weiner (fig. 27), certainly Joseph Kosuth (fig. 28)—have a "philosophical" impulse, a drive to make their work mimic the clarity and formality of analytical, mathematical, or logical intellectual operations. This may imply, incidentally, a second, more consistent confluence between the accepted canon of Conceptual art and the pictorial theory of the Renaissance, when the representation of history demanded the neutralization of the subject who observed it—a form of desubjectivization. This was achieved through the establishment of the Renaissance model of perspective, in which vision is monofocal and the observing subject agrees to make his or her body equivalent to a point—in other words, to reduce his or her subjective density to the smallest coordinate of Euclidean geometry. Conceptual art also diminished the density of the subject, through neutral, objective language operations: sentences that establish strictly logical and nominal equivalences between language and impersonal representations,

26. **León Ferrari**
Cuadro escrito. (Written painting, detail, see plate 41).
December 17, 1964
Ink on paper, 26 x 18 7/8" (66 x 48 cm)
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires

27. **Lawrence Weiner**
With a Relation to the Various Matters with Various Things. 1973
Lithograph, 16 3/16 x 12 1/4" (41.1 x 31.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Art & Project/Depot VBVR

imperturbably objective sentences that could have been produced by anyone or no one. The "I" in these sentences, if there is one, is negligible, functional, dispensable. Like the paintings of the Renaissance—the originary paintings of humanist history—these language operations aspire to be neutral, universal statements.

Cuadro escrito is anything but a universal statement. Its "I" is not a nominal transparency but a being in existential distress, and it begins with a recognition of limitations, of impotence. In this sense that opening sentence could not be more diametrically opposed to canonical Conceptualism, which tends to describe the concise execution, complete or potential, of a singular operation. Ferrari begins instead by saying what he would do if God had touched him—in other words by saying what he cannot do.

As sarcastic and intricate as Ferrari's text may be, it is existentially consistent: anything a man is unable to do, from creating a painting to any other frustrated potential, is attributable to the fault of the divine. Here Ferrari initiates his inversion of Western theology: the mistake is divine, not human, and in place of a call for humans to atone there is a condemnation of the cultural abuses and phantasmagoria surrounding religion, like the idea of hell or the prudish sexual attitudes of the Catholic Church. More than anything, though, *Cuadro escrito* initiates an aesthetic of confusion—confusion about any kind of assertion, confusion about the truth—that would become essential to Ferrari and would appear in a variety of ways, including an abundant repertoire of visual and textual camouflage. Buried and invisible within *Cuadro escrito*, that potential painting that Ferrari would have painted if he could, is "the hidden heart of the entire WORK: forty square centimeters deliberately concealed in the work's various measures so that no one perceives its inaudible language."[55] The reference to Balzac's celebrated *Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* is clear,[56] but one might also think of the painting described here as an anticipation of Ferrari's camouflage paintings and assemblages of the 1990s (fig. 29), his clearest inversions of the traditional pictorial strategies of Christianity. In these later

28. **Joseph Kosuth**
One and Three Chairs. 1965
Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and photographic enlargement of a dictionary definition of "chair." Chair: 32 3/8 x 14 7/8 x 20 7/8"
(82 x 37.8 x 53 cm), photographic panel: 36 x 24 1/8"
(91.5 x 61.1 cm), text panel: 24 x 24 1/8" (61 x 61.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund

29. **León Ferrari**
Mimetismo (Mimicry). c. 1995
Painted plaster on printed fabric,
6' 7/16" x 55 1/8" x 5 1/8" (184 x 140 x 14 cm)
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires

works, by covering the Christ figure in camouflage, Ferrari inverts a celebrated remark by Erasmus, in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1504), according to which the Devil moves in disguise.[57]

In this light *Cuadro escrito* is essentially a manifesto, though a manifesto that speaks for just one person, rather than for a movement or collective aesthetic, and that is also a work of art. And what is it a manifesto of? As we have seen, the text uses baroque, jumbled sentences to describe a potential, impossible painting. It is impossible in part because it is an erotic object, an object of desire, so that its impossibility as a painting mixes with the impossibility of desire's fulfillment. This fictional status, this nonexistence or falsehood, recalls age-old Western ideas about art: in making his painting something it is not, Ferrari could have been unwittingly following Cennino Cennini's fifteenth-century formulation of the task of the painter as making visible what had not seemed to exist.[58] This is the claim of the text of *Cuadro escrito*: that what Ferrari would have painted, had he been able to, would have been "true and as such nonexistent," as he wrote in his notebook.

I would argue, then, that *Cuadro escrito* is the manifesto of an unusual return to the origins of the Western visual tradition, where the contradictions of text and image—as well as their fatal attractions, their mutual desire for each other—are always simultaneously present. One might argue that the Western representational tradition (that is, the visual tradition founded in the Renaissance) began in writing, for beyond the ruins and remnants of ancient painting, beyond the surviving fragments unraveled by time—bits of murals, pieces of floor, imagined copies of ancient masterpieces—what we are most of all left with is written sources, including a foundational book by an uncertain author: the *Imagines* attributed to Philostratus, and written around the third century A.D. Throughout the history of visual art in Europe, Philostratus's book served as a guide, and all of the pictures he described were reattempted many times, as if painting had set out to reinvent its birth. Yet the book of course contained no real images, just verbal descriptions of them—and hermeneutic analysis has established the fictiveness of these descriptions, which are all in the end verbal fantasies.[59] It is a paradox that this collection of fantasies facilitated the development of the ontological distinction between the image as a physical object and the image's ideal quality or force—between the painting and the image that is painted, or, to use Philostratus's terms, between *pinakes* and *graphè*. In his preface Philostratus applies the first term to "paintings set into the walls"—presumably murals and in any case objects or things, parts of the physical solidity of the world. *Graphè*, meanwhile, he uses to refer to a representation, a mental, intentional construct, emancipated from the world. One agent of this crucial, often unnoticed distinction, then, is the description, the *ekphrasis*—the genre of writing established in Philostratus's book.[60]

This distinction has many consequences, but perhaps the most far-reaching is the feeling that every embodied image is a thing before it is a representation, and that every representation exists in the universe of cognitive intentions—that is, it is a mental image, a weightless, deobjectified entity. This means that every image administers its own conversion into a description, an *ekphrasis*. Residing in that conversion is the possibility of the image's intellectual circulation and interpretation. All images have this capability of existing somewhere other than the world, being something other than a thing among things. In order for the image to circulate through its description, it has to stop being an image-as-thing and become an image-as-verb, the mentalization of an image. And it was the *Imagines* that put this issue in play, for Philostratus, to write the book, invented the fiction of an image, or actually a series of images, that had never been things. His images exist only within and through language, as if they constituted a distinct world of language that language itself had engendered—as if language could produce images and not the other way around.

Ferrari made *Cuadro escrito* during one of painting's recurring twilights, one of the many endings in its convoluted history of influences, appropriations, and interpretations. The object quality of the work lies in the calligraphic materiality of its writing, the textual quality with which it describes the impossibility of painting, an impossibility phrased as both personal and radical. In place of the impossible painting Ferrari exhibits his Churrigueresque description, his *ekphrasis* of a supposed image. Let us be clear: the announcement of the end of painting is an age-old constant. For Pliny, completing his *Naturalis Historia* around 77 A.D., painting was a "now expiring" art. It was threatened in Byzantium, in the Koran, during the Reformation, and more recently in the Constructivist-era writing of N. M. Tarabukin, in the ironic voice of Duchamp on viewing an airplane propeller, in Robert Rauschenberg's 1961 telegram to the art dealer Iris Clert ("This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so"), in the critic Gregory Battcock's 1969 essay "Painting Is Obsolete," and in many more such examples.[61]

Years of an unprecedented reawakening of painting, the 1960s also insisted, like never before, on painting's end, the last picture. With admirable modesty, indifferent to the antipictorial Conceptualist heat of the day, Ferrari simply said that God had not touched him—that the day it was his turn, God's "hand was enjoying itself making the mounds, valleys, buttocks of Alafia and was so enthralled with Alafia that He did not want to remove His hand even though it was my turn; He refused to take His hand away and He refused to touch me." Ferrari says that he cannot paint because of an ontological irony. It is worth emphasizing, as a special quality of *Cuadro escrito*, his radical idiosyncrasy, his inability to serve as a universal model; "Only in me, León Ferrari, is painting impossible," his text implies. Yet by creating this work renouncing painting, Ferrari also unwittingly made not the last painting—as so many times in art history—but the first one. This is not the cave-dwelling figure whom Maurice Merleau-Ponty imagined going to the farthest reach of painting's future,[62] but rather the repetition, at the end of that future, of Philostratus's founding gesture: a written picture, a supposed image.

Cuadro escrito, however, should also be added to the class of "last paintings," the interminable archive of painting's end. Here that final work is once again reduced, as in Philostratus, to the description and idea uttered by a whispering personal voice. According to *Cuadro escrito*, though, this obsolescence of painting, besides being personal, is also metaphysical; that is the irony of Ferrari's text. An artist has missed his encounter with God. The end of painting is announced less as an ending than as a nonbeginning, as something that never took place in someone. Ferrari's written picture contains a double image: the image of painting's impossibility and the image of an impossible painting. This radical gesture transcends metaphysical impossibility by casting representation as the imitation of a divine gesture: I, as God, despite God, make myself visible through the word.

Babel and the Sophistic Image Recent scholarship on Philostratus has called the mental, conceptual image that we have seen originate in his writing a "sophistic image."[63] One of those scholars, Françoise Graziani, reminds us that the rhetoricians of the Second Sophistic—that is, Philostratus's predecessors and contemporaries of the second century A.D.—sought "mastery through the ambiguities of language."[64] Philostratus similarly sees painting as mastering ambiguity—or, as he says in his prologue, "Not to love painting is to scorn the truth."[65] That truth, however, is something different from the intellect's adequacy to reality. Rather, it speaks in a "low voice," figuratively, as a sophism: it is "a *logos* whose function is not to distinguish but to confuse things, that seeks not to circumscribe what it names with univocal definitions but rather to formulate the relationships between things and ideas, which can only be expressed through ambiguity."[66]

The final sentences of *Cuadro escrito* are explicit about Ferrari's sophism: had it been possible, had God touched him, he would have created a painting that set out "to attain the obvious confusion of the truth." It was in this sense that Schendel, too, suspended the image, in favor of what remains of language when it is treated like a corporeal body: a calligraphic gesture that both connects and disconnects, a binding of language, a prelinguistic, constellated configuration of weightless, arbitrary alphabets and palimpsests, of unclaimed words and letters that have fallen out of orbit.[67] The work of Ferrari and Schendel, and particularly of Schendel, shows an empty, mute substratum that the signs that remain in it may once again inhabit with their full power: paper, its expanses and deserts.

This is how we may appreciate Schendel's two greatest bodies of paper works, the *Droguinhas* and *Trenzinho*. The former—a repertory of strings and ties, of links connecting only to each other—finds complexity in the insignificant, and is an abyssal archaeology intimately concerned with writing, its mythic origins and essential rejections. *Trenzinho*, on the other hand, exposes its immaculate body of paper like stolen goods, a tabula rasa that once would have harbored the marks of writing but now, instead, presents its own nudity, its own void, in the form of veils and shrouds.

In his essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida writes that

regression in dreams represents a "path back into the landscape of writing. But not a writing which simply transcribes, a stony echo of muted words, but a lithography before words: metaphonetic, nonlinguistic, alogical."[68] One might say that Schendel's *Monotipias* represent exactly this "lithography before words." If so, one of their poetic keys may be found in her incised paintings of the early 1960s (plate 11), in which we can imagine echoed the same originary motion of drawing or impressing that we have discussed in relation to Ferrari—a motion that the invented technique of the *Monotipias* transfers to the fragile surface of Japanese paper. The marks in these works—scrawls, lines, points, constellations of vowels, thresholds, arrows, ellipses, words—are almost a magical image, an *acheiropoietos*: an accumulation that emerges from the depths of the paper and soaks through its thickness, like Christ's blood or sweat on the Shroud of Turin.

Sometime in 1965, Schendel called her young daughter, Ada, and some local children into her studio and asked them, under her instruction, to crumple and twist pieces of Japanese paper into ropes, which they then knotted and reknotted to make the three-dimensional doodles that are the *Droguinhas* (plates 67, 69, 71, 73, 74). According to Pascal Quignard, in an essay on the second-century Roman grammarian and rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *logos*, language, is a kind of *legein*, a knot, tie, or link.[69] In Homer, too, the word or sign, and the song or voice, are related to the knot. Quignard elsewhere cites the scene in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus has his men plug their ears to protect them from the song of the sirens, which he himself risks hearing as long as he is lashed to the mast with ropes at three places: his hands, feet, and chest.[70] Not only is the word Homer uses for "chest" *kithara*, a kind of lyre, Quignard points out, but the Greek word for the way the ropes around him are tightened is the root of our "harmony." It is also notable that when Odysseus is untied from the mast, the word used for "untie," or "loosen," is *analusis*. Quignard comments, "As it turns out, the word *analysis* appears for the first time in a Greek text."[71]

I have elsewhere used this ancient story to discuss the work of Gego,[72] like Schendel a European immigrant to Latin America (in her case Venezuela), and an artist using ties and knots during the same period. Embroidery seems to have been in the mind of both artists; Schendel actually titled some of her early works *Bordados*, or "embroideries," and Gego returned constantly, in sculpture and in drawing, to fabrics, nets, and weaves. Her work, though, is conjugated in terms of deferral—of the center, of completion, of the border or edge. For Schendel, on the other hand, the knot is literal, static, solid: it is the word as a tie, a link, and it is also, in the *Droguinhas*, simply a knot formation, a knot knotted only with itself, connecting to nothing (fig. 30). In this sense the *Droguinhas* not only materialize language but suspend it, producing silence—not the silence that precedes words and voices but the silence they leave in their absence, once they have already lived.

The idea that language is a transparent, utterly reliable tool of analysis, let alone of psychoanalysis, depends on innocent optimism. The *Droguinhas*, to the contrary, suggest that some knots can never be untied, that there is and always will be a definitive, primordial confusion impossible to reduce to transparency. In Brazilian argot, a *droguinha* is an insignificant little thing, a trifle, but a better word than "insignificant" in this case would be "senseless," the senselessness of some soft yet impenetrable matter—for the shapes of the *Droguinhas* resemble nothing identifiable, nothing that makes sense. It is interesting to note that *droguinha*, this affectionate name for something that merits no name, is the diminutive of the Portuguese *droga*, drug. This in turns leads us back to the *pharmakon* (drug) of the Greek Sophists—the seductive, persuasive, potentially misleading power of language, to which Plato opposed *logos*. In the *Phaedrus* Plato is ambivalent about the word *pharmakon*, which posits writing as a drug, a remedy or medicine for the memory; in fact the god of writing is also the god of medicine. But Plato is suspicious of writing, which he never presents as entirely benign, associating it with magic and intoxication. "Writing—or, if you will, the *pharmakon*," in Derrida's reading, "can only displace or even aggravate the ill. Such will be, in its logical outlines, the objection . . . to writing: under pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it diminishes it. Writing does not answer the needs of memory, it aims to the side, does not reinforce the *mnème* (memory), but only *hypomnèsis* (remembrance)."[73] As such, writing is the weapon of the sophist.

30. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Droguinhas** (Little nothings). 1960s
Japanese paper, dimensions variable, c. 13 3/4" (35 cm) fully extended
Private collection

For Derrida, *pharmakon* is a "a *substance*, with all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic depths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy—if we didn't have eventually to come to recognize it as antisubstance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it."[74] The inevitable ambiguity of language resides in its materialization, its material resonance, phoneme or sign, hieroglyph or trace. To claim mastery through this ambiguity is to claim mastery through the writing of it, those piles of words, or, if you will, through writing *as* piles of words. The *Droguinhas*, thick knots of a uniform material capable of carrying signs and symbols, are a perfect image of that pile, that thickness—a sophistic, literal, unexpected image.

The opposite of the knotting of language in the *Droguinhas*—writing in ties, voices in folds—would be *Trenzinho* (fig. 31). From a dangling cord—the string of a *kithara*, perhaps—hang transparent veils of paper, repeated and impeccable, like shrouds expecting an image or sign, tongues of silence. *Trenzinho* too embodies the silent matter of language, but this time not as suspension or desertion but as an awaiting, an absolute availability. In this sense it is optimistic, yet also terrifying. Schendel never based work on personal pain; she detested the narcissism of suffering. But she lived through some of history's darkest moments—persecution, refugee camps, the flight from the death camps—as if they were altogether typical.

From its title *Trenzinho* sounds innocuous enough: a little train—like a toy, or a well-known section of one of Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas brasileiras*. But the train's destination is unknown, like that of the trains that passed through a burning Europe, their freight the living dead. One cannot help but connect *Trenzinho* to the issue, at the time quite potent, of whether art or poetry is possible after the Holocaust. If silence could be elevated to the sublime, *Trenzinho* would manifest it.

No one has more powerfully broken that silence, more precisely named it in the full dimension of its tragedy, than Paul Celan: "Whichever word you speak—/you owe/to destruction."[75] In 1961, after a visit to Tübingen, where Friedrich Hölderlin endured his mental deterioration into silence, the great Romanian poet wrote a celebrated poem in which he used the eloquence of poetry to defy the muteness to which, according to Theodor Adorno, the Nazis had condemned it:

Came, if there
came a man,
came a man to the world, today, with
the patriarchs'
light-beard: he could,
if he spoke of this
time, he
could
only babble and babble,
ever- ever-
moremore.
("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")[76]

With its veils, empty spaces, and transparencies that turn opaque, like the density of silence, *Trenzinho* is one of the few works of visual art that come close to Celan's poem. Like "pallaksch," the nonsense word that Hölderlin repeated in his confinement at Tübingen—a word both resonant and mute, that is to say meaningless—*Trenzinho* comprises latent nonwords; remember that in the *Monotipias*, made on the same Japanese paper, the words and brushstrokes emerged from the semi-transparent thickness of the paper itself, as we may imagine a veronica, the *vera ikon* or face of Christ, emerging from a shroud. In this sense *Trenzinho* seems like a work of anticipation, the endless anticipation of a voice.

31. **Mira Schendel**
Trenzinho (Little train, detail; see plate 77). 1965.
Japanese paper and nylon, dimensions variable
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Richard Zeisler
Bequest, gift of John Hay Whitney, and Marguerite K. Stone
Bequest (all by exchange) and gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
and Mimi Haas through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund

32. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos** (Graphic objects). 1967
Oil transfer drawing and transfer type on thin Japanese
paper between transparent acrylic sheets,
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm).
Private collection

For Schendel, the only way to make transparency visible was to work with its residual opacity. In 1969, the same year she first exhibited her *Objetos gráficos* (fig. 32), at the São Paulo and Venice biennials, she wrote a note in a photograph album of a trip she had recently taken to Nordkapp, Norway, the northernmost point in Europe, where she had seen the midnight sun: "São Paulo Biennial, September 1969: this is an attempt to show that the 'other side' of transparency is in its front and that the 'other world' is this one."[77] By now, "this world" was really where Schendel was anchored. She had given up most of her previously passionate Catholicism and was agnostic, believing only in present substance—the body of art, the body of the world, her own body, the confused body of language. The "'other side' of transparency" suggests a transparency that is, above all else, a body, another form of materiality. It is something we can circumscribe, delimit, turn, caress, see from all angles—and in a horizontal hierarchy of the senses, all those perspectives, all those points of view, are equal. There is no longer a preferred direction from which to interpret the world and its discourses. The only transparency we have to embrace is dark, opaque, and confused—like the pool embraced by Narcissus in Leon Battista Alberti's metaphor of the invention of painting, a story that, for Graziani, constitutes a visual sophism.[78]

The *Objetos gráficos*, those composites of inscribed paper and clear acrylic, are metaphors for—or perhaps accurate images of—this dark, confused transparency, in which language becomes "cosmic word dust."[79] Here Schendel was pursuing "the idea of doing away with back and front, before and after, a certain idea of more or less arguable simultaneity, the problem of temporality, etc., spatiotemporality, etc."[80] Yet not only do these objects contain constellations of letters, signs, and liberated, deconstructed words, they are also theoretical objects opening up a variety of often contradictory possibilities. Their texts are legible but unintelligible—in other words, purely visual, and as such untranslatable. The works are also windows, as transparent and perfectly squared off as any Alberti would have imagined at the moment of perspective's first emergence, but their transparency—their plastic skin—leads to no view through, no vision of anything beyond themselves. They lead, at most, to the "'other side of transparency," which suddenly rushes forward, as Schendel says. Pictures yet not planes, they hang like objects, exposed bodies around which we can walk, viewing their sides, seeing and feeling their thickness. They are written sculptures as well as pictures, then, and also palimpsests, which, however, require no work to expose, for they already reveal, in one sublime yet laborious instant, the thickness of the time, the writing, the traces and strokes, that constitute them.

In November of 1976, to protect his family from the violent junta that had seized power in Argentina that spring, Ferrari had to flee his native country for São Paulo, where he would stay for the next fifteen years, joining the same artistic milieu as Schendel. (In fact the two artists once exhibited together, in a late-1970s show of art made by Xerox machine.) In Brazil, curiously, Ferrari soon resumed making the kind of metal sculpture he had produced in the early 1960s. Some of these new works, based mainly on square plans and rectangular, elongated volumes, were monumental in scale, made sounds, and were designed to be played in performance (fig. 33); they developed through a logic of accumulation, repetition, and juxtaposition, manifesting density through strips of iron rather than signs or letters. Despite their abstraction, for Ferrari these sculptures were representations, tools for visualizing impossible dwellings, cages, enclosures, labyrinths. Their

33. Ferrari in performance, **14 Noites de Performance**
(14 nights of performance), SESC Fábrica da Pompéia,
São Paulo, 1981

connection to the Letraset drawings (1979–80; plate 110) and, particularly, to the *Heliografías* (Heliographs, 1982–83; plates 97–99) is clear: the sculptures are models of absurdity, figures for how very crazy the world was and is. In this sense they may be seen as three-dimensional equivalents of the written pictures that Ferrari began late in 1979, this time as paintings on wood and, later, on high-impact acrylic laminate—the same support that had lent both transparency and stiffness to Schendel's *Objetos gráficos*.

In that Ferrari's works on acrylic are connected to the idea of the palimpsest, their tangled, bewildering superimpositions of signs and writings also bear a conceptual resemblance to the *Objetos gráficos* (e.g. plate 86). If we can say that the principles of Ferrari's written drawings extend to Schendel's *Monotipias*, as though his *Cuadro escrito* could have been their theoretical model, we may likewise say that the works he began in the early 1980s are *Objetos gráficos* in every sense, as though her works in turn could have been models for them. Indeed all of these bodies of work materialize the idea of "babelism," a kind of scrambled opacity, which Ferrari identified in the early 1960s and which really sums up his entire poetic oeuvre: "To create something of three dimensions that is enclosed within a simple shape, like a cylinder or prism," he wrote in late 1963,

> *as one creates a drawing on a rectangular piece of paper. The edges are unimportant but must be simple, straight, so that you can put all sorts of things inside them, from all sorts of schools—as long as they are jumbled, and if any of these things has a shape of its own, it should be made more complicated by putting something on top, so that in the end nothing except the simple outside surface is easily understood. Just like the thoughts and sensations (opinions, passions, hatred, joys, fears) . . . that go in there, intricately united, forming this skeleton, this humus, that hides beneath the skin. [The idea is] to make objects that reveal and then hide things about themselves, in any material as long as it reveals something of what it hides, as mixed up as the truth and as the contradiction of this very intention. Or to do something your whole life, as meticulous as life itself, and add things little by little every day, without making models or drafts, just add things, like a prism that grows slowly on every side, and not take anything out, even if you are horrified by what you did two years or twenty years earlier. This way you have put together the sensibilities of an entire life, the great discoveries as well as the inevitable disappointments. The best thing would be to do this in a jail, but with a window to see the faces in the café across the street. Do nothing more than that. And die satisfied with this tangible confusion, which your children can carry on. Or else do it in a big group, whether locked up or outside in a plaza, so that it is eternally unfinished, like the cathedrals, like Rome.*[81]

Like *Torre de Babel* (Tower of Babel, 1964; plate 72)—and like Schendel's *Objetos gráficos*—Ferrari's sculptures and towers of the late 1970s correspond perfectly to a babelist aesthetic. Even when, on finishing *Torre de Babel*, he confessed that "babelism cannot be done alone, because the confusion comes out orderly," he was thinking of something deeper than the idea—which he more than once tried—of bringing a group of artists together to create a kind of monumental *cadavre exquis*.[82] Babelism requires not mere collective authorship but real confusion: "To create something un-unified, with different sensibilities—it can't be done in a short time, because sensibility ('the truth') is just one thing (in that period of time), which means that you have to wait a good while for that sensibility to change so that you can continue with a new one (with the risk of no longer liking the babelism and abandoning the entire endeavor), or do it with a number of people."[83] The kind of babelism described here explains a fair amount of Ferrari's aesthetic evolution, the inventions that he drops and then picks up again later, at other times, with other sensibilities, so that the multiplicity that constitutes us as people is manifest as visible sediments. Returning to a body of work one seems to have finished with, but treating it as something new—this habit, also practiced by Schendel, casts babelism as a poetic vision not of repetition but of the superimposition of diverse, mutable, diachronic, progressive sensibilities and elements, like strata that foreclose the possibility of attaining the desired result. To Babel as the collective noise of all the languages of the world—the confusion of the truth, the possibility of ambiguity in language—the artists add postponement, errata, cancellation, erasure, duration, time.

The Wounded Voice In 1976, when Alicia and León Ferrari were forced to take their family into exile in Brazil, their son Ariel stayed behind. The following year, his pregnant girlfriend returned from São Paulo to look for him. Neither the young couple nor the child survived Argentina's "dirty war," a crime run from the corridors of power and with the complicity, and worse, of the spurious authorities and institutions of the nation. Many years later it was revealed that Ariel had been murdered by the naval officer Alfredo Astiz, an infamous abductor and torturer in Jorge Rafael Videla's regime.

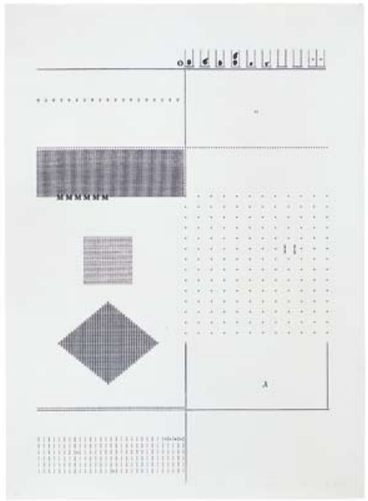
It is impossible to know another person's pain. Not even Ferrari's angriest work can come close to bringing home to us such a loss. Ferrari, like Schendel, refuses to fetishize pain or to exploit sorrow, but where she withdrew into herself, searching her own reserves of light, he instead has examined external miseries, denouncing political violence and the distant authors of crime: army officers, prelates, politicians. Some of those closest to him believe that Ariel's death pushed him toward gravitas, where previously he had been sarcastic and ironic about the totems of our supposed human order: God, pontiffs, heroes, heads of state, courts, the global bureaucracy, indifferent nations and silent governments.[84]

In a deeper sense, Ferrari came to see that the Argentine repression was not a political accident but a deliberate project of the state, and one in which the Catholic church was complicit. Toward the end of his exile, as he immersed himself in readings on and of the Bible and the Church fathers while also researching newspaper archives on mass crime and genocide in different places and times, what began to take shape was an ordinary father's legitimate judgment on the repression's perpetrators, whose freedom at that point depended on charity—a despicable amnesty entailing opportunistic deals, weak concessions, and the sublimation of the truth. This mediocre justice was meted out by public authorities convinced that they were saving democracy. Ferrari's beliefs (or disbeliefs) came to include a view of the sacred Judeo-Christian texts as perverse advocates of exclusion, torture, and crime.

By the early 1990s his art was outspokenly denouncing Christianity, its representatives and accomplices, and ultimately God as the architects of crimes against humanity.

Seeing works of art incorporate Christian messages, Ferrari tore reproductions of them apart to be rearranged in collages (fig. 34). These powerful works drive toward clarity rather than confusion, which is rare for him, yet like all the deepest, most human voices, their voice is a wounded one that exposes its powerlessness. To become complete, to touch us, it must use the mute devices of signing and pointing. So angels use trumpets and spears to indicate piles of corpses (plates 124, 126), and the cynical front pages of *L'Osservatore Romano*, the

34. **León Ferrari**
Torturas (Tortures). August 1, 2004
Cut-and-pasted printed paper (from the newspaper **Página/12**, June 13, 2004) on printed paper (**Jacobo Molay en el tormento** [Jacobo Molay tortured], from Alfonso Torres de Castilla, **Historia de las Persecuciones políticas y religiosas en Europa** [Religious and political persecutions in Europe, 1864]), 14 9/16 x 11" (37 x 28 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



35. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Datiloscritos** (Typed writings). 1974
Typewriting and ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 14 3/16" (50 x 36 cm)
Private collection

36. Schendel's studio, São Paulo, early 1960s

Vatican newspaper, are juxtaposed against both dark worldly events and the eternal tortures announced in the Bible (plate 129). Meanwhile the angry divinities can do nothing to slow human sexuality, a never-ending orgy, so that figures from art-historical Annunciations instead come to adore the phallus, symbol of reproduction (plate 128). In some works these images are overprinted with texts in Braille (plates 134, 135), the language of the blind, inviting us to touch them, to wear them out from touching them. In the end, this tactile gaze is posited as the only, last device for understanding the labyrinth of human existence.

During Ferrari's exile in São Paulo, Schendel was seeking relief from her own pain in the same city. Some of her densest works—for some viewers, the works of hers that most clearly manifest the impotence of language and voice—come from the late 1970s: collages using Letraset letters that fuse to become strange signs (plate 140). In other drawings of the period Schendel offers a personal version of mathematical theory, equations suggesting babelian orgies, voices upon voices, impenetrable mountains of words. The *Datiloscritos* (Typed writings; fig. 35) involve obsessively repeated letters and signs in the style of concrete poetry, particularly that of the British Benedictine monk Dom Sylvester Houédard, whom Schendel got to know in the late 1960s. Yet as writings Schendel's *Datiloscritos* are illegible. These are not poems but abstract drawings featuring careful geometric shapes. Repetition, we know, was for the Minimalists the quintessential anticompositional device; here, though, repetitive operations become thoughtful, delicate forms of composition.

The *Datiloscritos* are also tactile works, a kind of blind writing. Schendel made them when she had insomnia—she would call friends in the middle of the night, waking both them and her neighbors (fig.. 36). Where Ferrari's Braille works evoke the eloquence of the blind, a language that we physically caress like a body, Schendel's *Datiloscritos* suggest the repetitive mechanical noise of a typewriter, percussive, inarticulate, yet tactile and incisive at the same time. The bodies of work relate, however, in that both involve a desire to say what the voice or word can say no longer. In working with Braille, Ferrari brought the intellectual project of *Cuadro escrito* to a culmination, producing a non-existent image entirely through language, though a language as mute as an image. And he made this creation invoke a sensual gesture of physical touch, denouncing language's limitations. The *Datiloscritos*, images made up of language, are similarly tactile in that their surfaces are marked by the physical impression of the typewriter keys striking the paper, inverting the raised dots of Braille. In both cases signs become things, and things—shapes, figures, supports—become signs. In both cases the world falls silent, and makes us fall silent as well. In the face of the world's horrors and tragedies, and of certain kinds of anguish or solitude, pointing may be the only remaining option.

A wounded voice needs a body—by definition mute—to achieve its object. A wounded voice is a whisper that is aware of its powerlessness. In 1969, when Schendel showed in the Bienal de São Paulo, many artists had condemned it for accepting sponsorship from Brazil's authoritarian regime. Whatever her reasons—perhaps she felt she had already seen the worst—we may imagine that she took the long view and decided that the possibility of a voice, the possibility of saying something, was more important than choosing silence as a protest. The piece she showed at the Bienal, a crucial work, happened to be about the voice—the wounded voice, the whispering voice, of God.

In *Ondas paradas de probabilidade—Antigo Testamento, Livro dos Reis I, 19*, a mass of nylon threads hung from the ceiling of the gallery, shaping a geometric structure that was both opaque and transparent, like a rain shower. Light filtered through the nylon all the way to the floor, where the threads, longer than the height of the ceiling, doubled over like waves on the sand. The piece should of course be seen in the context of the constellation of "penetrables" made in Latin America between 1963 and 1969: Hélio Oiticica's *Núcleos* (Nuclei, 1960–63), *Gran Núcleo* (Great nucleus, 1966), *Tropicália* (1967), and *Edén* (Eden, 1969); Carlos Cruz-Diez's *Cámaras de cromosaturación*, installations of colored light begun in 1965; Jesús Soto's *Penetrables* of 1967 (formally similar to *Ondas paradas de probabilidade*); Lygia Clark's *A casa é o corpo* (The house is the body, 1968); Gego's *Reticulárea* (Reticularea, 1969), to say nothing of works by Cildo Meireles, Antonio Dias, and Eugenio Espinoza. To consider *Ondas paradas de probabilidade* only from the formal or phenomenological perspective of its spectacular penetrable structure, however, would be to simplify the work, which is above all a political and theological manifesto on God's silence, the inaudibility of his word. *Ondas paradas de probabilidade* was accompanied by a biblical text, taken from I Kings chapter 19:

> *And a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:*
>
> *And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*
>
> *And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?*"[85]

Perhaps Schendel—though certainly not Ferrari—would agree with Simone Weil's remark that "total obedience to time obliges God to bestow eternity."[86] In any event, in the landscape of modern art in the Americas, *Ondas paradas de probabilidade* is an exception: the work of a visual artist steeped in writing, an artist who agonizes over scripture, debating within it, with it, against it. An impossible transparency, manifestly opaque and stained—impure—is the only form Schendel seems to have found for depicting or suggesting the urgency of the issues carried here.

Formalists have had trouble with Schendel's celebrated drawing series *Homenagem a Deus—pai do ocidente* (Homage to God—father of the West, 1975; plate 122). In this, one of the most gestural of all Schendel's works, thick brushstrokes revealing the physical quality of picture-making share space with typewritten Old Testament quotations, barely visible from a distance. Interpretations of the work as a manifesto against phallocentric Western monotheism may be excessive in their ascription of a feminist message. Rather, *Homenagem a Deus* evokes a moment of closure in Schendel's religious art: after 1975, she would return to color and painting, to matter and to the void, where she, like the prophet Elijah, had always searched for a voice.

It is with the void that Schendel's career ends, in the surprising *Sarrafos* (Splints) series of the late 1980s (fig. 37). These white monochromes include attached black bars, like useless, incomplete frames, mute gestures that might redeem the silence of painting. If an empty, indifferent white painting is metaphorically mute, the surfaces of the *Sarrafos* are the height of silence. But they also include a "noise": a projecting black structure like Adam's extra rib, built not into the side of the painting but into the field. It is as though paintings, even the most silent ones, were destined to generate another body: "The other is born from my side, by a sort of propagation by cuttings or subdivision," writes Merleau-Ponty, "as the first other, says Genesis, was made from a part of Adam's body."[87] These elements interrupting the monochrome plane are like great shadows, or limbs that point to something. In this sense they may be to the silence of painting what the indexical is to language: mute mechanisms for showing that indicate just what they hide, like the pronouns of ordinary speech.

These simultaneous functions of indication and occultation are fundamental for both Ferrari and Schendel, who practice a kind of embodied, personalized language—a "language body," at once the language of the body and the body of language. Ferrari and Schendel might have been working against Merleau-Ponty's remark, "The wonderful thing about language is that it promotes its own oblivion."[88] In other words, the signs in this work do not lead us to forget their physical presence. On the contrary: they confront us with their opacity and density, forcing us to remember them. Like Artaud, in Derrida's reading of him, Schendel and Ferrari seem to struggle to restore letter to speech, speech to breath, breath to body, body to gesture, gesture to life.[89] All of their works—even those in which language leaves room for visible drawing or painting—feature a breach, like a voice, impossible to regulate, which disturbs the statement's stability with the peculiarity of an incarnating gesture. If the language operations of canonical Conceptual art are typically neutral, Ferrari and Schendel reveal the disruptiveness and density rather than the clarity and transparency of language, the point where language appears as enunciation, becoming the corporeal symptom of an accidental, untheorizable, singular, personal, subjective use. As such, their work has to do less with the operation of language and more with the act of language, with its radical effect on those who use it.

One could argue that the entire expressive tradition since the Renaissance may respond to this theoretical metaphor of the work of art as enunciation. Robert Klein, speaking of Giordano Bruno's *De vinculis in genere*, explains this eloquently:

> *Humanism had posed the problem of the relations between idea and form which expresses it in rhetoric, logic, poetry, and the visual arts; it endeavored to join the "what" to the "how," to find for formal beauty a justification more profound than the need for decoration. But, as far as it went, it never denied that in all these fields "what is expressed" must be present prior to its expression. That is why, speaking simplistically, humanism came to an end in the sciences just as the method of investigation became fruitful by itself, and in art just as the execution—the* maniera*—became an autonomous value. When artistic consciousness reached such a stage, around 1600, it found no art theory that could account for it. There was only the ancient natural magic—that is to say, a general aesthetic unaware of itself, which Bruno hastily developed in the magnificent essay he entitled* De vinculis in genere.[90]

Of course, all works of art within this historical and theoretical framework—even the most impersonal and neutral Conceptual puns—are equivalent to acts of enunciation, insofar as they demonstrate a personal use of language. The difference in the art of Ferrari and Schendel—and surely of other artists whom one might look at from this perspective—is that here the material made visible is precisely and primordially linguistic, and is manifest in the disruption that all enunciations, as personal and unrepeatable acts, effect on the body of discourse. Paradoxically, the height of this disruption is muteness, the form of silence that becomes visible when signs are illegible, when the hand that draws them trembles. It is in muteness, though, that we sense we might find language's origin, as in those lines of broken stones that lay out the plans of great but ruined buildings. And after all language's discursivity and excess, its high point may be the phrase that, instead of naming what needs to be named, requires a mute, indexical physical gesture: "That," "That thing there," "How beautiful," "Look," "*Hoc est corpus meum*" (This is my body).

The inexpressible, then, is less sublime than nameless, and as such is close to the "click," the first spoken phoneme of indexical demonstration. According to the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port-Royal*, of 1660, "As men have recognized that it is occasionally useless or in bad taste to speak of themselves . . . in order not to find themselves obliged to name that person to whom they are speaking . . . or . . . to repeat the names of other people and other things that are being spoken of, pronouns were invented . . . among them exist some that point, like a finger, to the thing that is being spoken of."[91] And so, inadvertently, toward the end of the century of Descartes, the grammarians of Port-Royal introduced the complex matter of the neutral index. As Louis Marin writes, it was a question of establishing the model of a linguistic sign in which a neutral pronoun heralded a great mystery, the transformation of one body into another: *Hoc est corpus meum*, the phrase signaling the transubstantiation of the Host in the Catholic mass. "The Eucharist," Marin adds,

> *situates itself, in theoretical meta-language, at the base of the text and the drawing in "language-objects," in the place where language, as the present-day spoken word, transforms and is transformed: it transforms the products of material consumption into products of spiritual consumption, but it too is transformed into the very subject of its enunciation, into consumable blood and body . . . and the problem, in every case, is that of recognizing how a body can be a sign and a real sign at that, and how, on the other hand, a sign can be a body and a true body.*[92]

We need not debate the Eucharistic transubstantiation here, even as it relates to the furious, magnificent works in which Ferrari denies it. But the issue of language continues to be that of how to embody it—how to make it a body, how to make a body from it, how to embody through it. With Ferrari and Schendel, this is a matter of written paintings, eloquent mutenesses that we read with the skin, arrows that point the way—this, here, the world, look. In the end, human language must contain a sacramental dimension that we hope can transform and be transforming through the radical particularity of its enunciation. Ferrari and Schendel seem to have understood the two minimal requirements for this: first, to push past language's neutrality, embodying language in the unrepeatable instance in which, along with what is being said, it says the "I"; and second, to face the inexpressible with the tools they have.[93]

Epilogue In 1964, Paulo Celso was ordained a Dominican friar.[94] When taking the habit, he adopted the name "Pablo," a kind of personal pun: Pablo (Paul) is still Paulo (also Paul) but refers not to Paulo Celso but to Paul of Tarsus. During his apostolate, Alain Badiou writes, Paul argued against both the written, interpretable "sign" required by the Jews and the thinkable, analyzable "wisdom" sought by the Greeks; when he spoke of "the foolishness of preaching" he had in mind what could not be accommodated, was disproportionate, to both of these totalities.[95] All that existed for Paul was the radical singularity of what happens, the happening, the event. And as Badiou says, "One of the phenomena by which one recognizes an event is that it is like a point of the real that puts language into deadlock."[96]

One day in 1964, Friar Pablo of Tarsus dropped in on Friar Chico, his prior at the Dominican convent in São Paulo. When Friar Chico opened the door, Friar Pablo saw in his room a written picture by Schendel, an image of waving drawn lines that ran from one end of the support to the other and contained a quotation from Homer: "They did not know the depth of the sea they were crossing." Friar Pablo expressed a desire to meet the artist. And so it happened that not long after his first encounter with a work by Schendel, Friar Chico told him that she was having a party. Friar Chico himself was unable to attend and Friar Pablo was to go in his place.

When Celso turned up at the party, no one greeted or recognized him. Trying to slip by unnoticed in the artsy crowd, he went to the kitchen, where help was needed, and began distributing canapés, carrying trays piled with hors d'oeuvres and wine among the guests. Suddenly a voice rang out, making everyone fall silent: "There is a

37. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Sarrafos** (Splints). 1987
Synthetic polymer paint on wood,
35 7/16" x 8' 7/8" x 4 5/16" (90 x 246 x 11 cm).
Museu de Arte Brasileira da FAAP, São Paulo

Dominican among us," announced Schendel. Celso stood frozen with his tray of wine glasses. Timidly he identified himself to the crowd, and to Schendel's deep gaze, fortified by thick lenses encased in black frames. "That's me," he murmured. In the same loud voice, Schendel inquired of Paulo: "What is a sacrament, to you?"

Celso said nothing. Instead, in silence, he took a wine glass and drank it down in a single gulp, a single gesture. Then he said, "This. This is a sacrament to me." Schendel may have burst out laughing; at any rate she seems to have said, before the party once again found noise and voice, "I know you." And they embraced.

Celso and Schendel were friends until the early 1970s, when life took them down different paths. The military regime's police raided the São Paulo Dominican monastery in search of leftist leaders; the monks were jailed and tortured, and eventually Celso left the order to start a family. Until then, though, the monk who sought redemption on earth instead of in heaven, and the artist who sought transcendence in the present moment instead of in art, shared many days and evenings, each a constant pressure for the conversion of the other.

The interesting thing about this encounter between artist and friar, though, is neither God nor theology, neither revolution nor conversion. It is ultimately "language in deadlock," and the "foolishness of preaching."

When Schendel brought her drawing quoting Homer to the monastery to give to Friar Chico, he surprised her with tragic news: a dear friend of hers, Carlos Millán, and all of his family but for one son, had just died when the car they were traveling in had plunged off a cliff into a river outside Rio de Janeiro. *They did not know the depth of the sea they were crossing . . . .* For Schendel the news was devastating. Not only was Millán one of her closest friends, but she seems to have felt a prophetic, ominous value in those words of Homer's, which she had written during an attack of insomnia at the same time that Millán and his family were sinking in the water. It was in the realm of the premonition of death, then, that Celso and Schendel first met.

Celso remembers that late one night, despite the agoraphobia from which she suffered, Schendel took him to a big empty field, where they smashed glass bottles by throwing rocks at them. According to Celso, she was hoping to find antimatter in matter that had exploded or broken. But the thing about the story that interests me is the gesture of throwing a rock so as to touch and actually break something with it. This is the kind of gesture that neither language, nor sign, nor wisdom, nor knowledge can ever manage, for none of them ever touches anything concretely, much less suddenly transforms it. To touch things—with language—seems to me one of the endeavors in the work of Ferrari and Schendel. It is not a question of simply naming or repeating; it is a question of using the word as a voice, a gesture, of inventing gestures as words, touching words as stigmata of silence, indexing with the mute body the thing that cannot be named.

When Schendel heckled Celso at the party, asking this Dominican friar the meaning of the word "sacrament," Friar Pablo of Tarsus responded with an indexical statement: drinking every drop of wine in his glass, he declared, "This. This is a sacrament." When the Port-Royal theorists set out to define the sign, they made use of Christian theology, specifically the indexical moment when the unspeakable becomes flesh: "This is my body," "This is my blood." All names, all signs, want to name the way an index points: by touching. In fact none ever do this. From here, perhaps, we may see "the foolishness of preaching" and the dream of a language that might dilute the disciplinary boundaries between the visible and the legible, becoming a material, dense, infinite, limitlessly malleable. Beyond a conceptualization of the enunciation, this would be the greatest contribution of Ferrari and Schendel: making us see the body of the voice in the mute body of language, in the indexical silence of signs that, while saying nothing, touch, so to speak, what they say.

When Celso visited Schendel, seeing a new artwork, he would often say "*Mira, que beleza!*" (Mira, how beautiful!). He adds that the name "Mira," in Portuguese as in Spanish, is a homonym of the word for "look," a word both imperative and indexical, inviting us to look at something that goes unnamed but that voice and body point out, and, as the Port-Royal logicians would remind us, also conceal: *Mira esto, mira aquello*. Look at this, look at that. The name "Schendel," on the other hand, in Celso's Dominican hermeneutics, conceals the word "Elohi," one of the biblical names for the unnamable God: Schen-d-el, El-o-hi Shem; *Mira-a-el*, look at him, *Mira a Elohi*, look at Elohi. Look, if you can, at what has no name. Perhaps the most radical form of touching what is named is to cover it with earthly matter until its pristine presence, the illusory form of its truth or threat, disappears—as Ferrari covers images by Michelangelo and Giotto, images claiming to name God, or the nameless figures of the Last Judgment, with base worldly stuff, the excrement of birds. Or as he molds shapes resembling human excrement and makes landscapes of them (plate 146). Or as he leaves our own bones exposed and mute (fig. 38), indecipherable signs of an unsuspected language yet to come.

38. **León Ferrari**
Atado con alambre (Tied with wire). 2006
Polyurethane bones and wire, 39 3/8 x 19 11/16 x 19 11/16"
(100 x 50 x 50 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

Endnotes

1. See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: at the University Press, 1972), pp. v–vii, 3–39, 101–216.
2. See Geraldo Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel* (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 2001), p. 14.
3. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 1967, reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 12.
4. See Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973, reprint ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997). See also Frances Colpitt, "The Formalist Connection and Originary Myths of Conceptual Art," in Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 2004), pp. 29–49.
5. The entire text of *Cuadro escrito* appears in English translation in Andrea Giunta, ed., *León Ferrari. Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2006* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify/Imprensa Oficial, 2006), pp. 434–35.
6. LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," p. 12.
7. See Colpitt, "The Formalist Connection and Originary Myths of Conceptual Art."
8. See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 161–79.
9. Recent studies have explored how some interpretations of foundational works of modern art, such as Georges Bataille's reading of Manet, seem to have ignored the deep connection between modern and historical painting. See, for example, John Elderfield, *Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), pp. 123–35.
10. Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 30.
11. Guided by Horace's motto *Ut pictura poesis* (As is painting, so is poetry), which originates, according to Plutarch, with Simonides, the Western visual arts won acknowledgment as a "liberal art" by linking their compositional devices to the rhetorical rules governing the art of oratory and speech in general. Thus "the humanistic model of artistic composition in general," Michael Baxandall argues, became the "period"—"the pattern of the grand neoclassical phrase." See Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 20–21, 100–101.
12. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, 1766, Eng. trans. Edward Allen McCormick (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).
13. See Françoise Graziani, "'La Vérité en image': L'Image sophistique," in Michel Costantini, Graziani, Stéphane Rolet, et al., *Le Défi de l'art. Philostrate, Callistrate et l'image sophistique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), pp. 138–51.
14. See, e.g., Bernard Blistène, *Poésure et peintrie. D'un art, l'autre* (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, Reunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993).
15. See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 198.
16. See Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980," and Héctor Olea, "León Ferrari from the Drawing of Texts to the Texture of Poetry," in Ramírez, Olea, et al., *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 420, 425.
17. See Roland Barthes, "L'Esprit de la lettre," in *L'Obvie et L'obtus. Essais critiques III* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982). Eng. trans. as "The Spirit of the Letter" in Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 102.
18. See Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture," *Oeuvres complètes. 1972–1976*, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 4:267.
19. The term *epoché*, or *epokhê*, was used by Stoic philosophers such as Sextus Empiricus to describe suspension or interruption. For Edmund Husserl it referred to the suspension of our prejudgments and beliefs about the objective world in order to grasp its real meaning—a suspension of the contingency of objects, their external reality, in favor of what they mean for us. See Rosa Mignosi, *Reawakening and Resistance: The Stoic Source of Husserlian Epochè*, in *Analecta Husserliana* 11 (1981):311–19, and Barbara Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 366–67. Emile Benveniste distinguishes between the "énoncé"—the object or message of a given text or utterance—and the "enunciation," that text's singular act of production. "Enunciation" concerns, then, the act of producing text rather than the text produced. For Benveniste, it is the singular act through which we take possession of our own linguistic capacity. It is the "individual conversion of language into discourse." See Benveniste, "L'Appareil formel de l'énonciation," *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 2:79ff. Barthes stresses the importance of this distinction to the understanding of subjectivity as intertwined with language; see his "Pourquoi j'aime Benveniste," *Oeuvres complètes*, 4:513.
20. Alicia Ferrari, "História de uma criança surda," in Giunta, "Cronología," in Giunta, ed., *León Ferrari Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2004* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2004), p. 73.
21. León Ferrari wrote *Palabras ajenas* at a time when he had abandoned his artistic practice. It takes the form of a play, featuring dialogues among figures emblematic of power and, in Ferrari's view, of injustice: Pope Paul VI, Hitler, and others. The book was published in 1967 as the script for a performance in which 120 actors reading quotations from newspapers and other sources would face 120 spectators, each group being equally distributed facing each other in two sets of 120 chairs. A version was performed in London in 1968.
22. See Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel*, p. 78.
23. Ibid., p. 28.
24. Ibid., p. 24.
25. Ibid., p. 30.
26. On Schendel's painting between 1962 and 1965 see Sonia Salzstein, "No vazio do mundo," in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo. Mira Schendel* (São Paulo: Editora Marca d'Agua, 1996), pp. 24–27. On relationships and influences among Italian and Brazilian painters see Alberto Tassinari, "Mais ou menos frutas," in ibid., p. 270; Rodrigo Naves, "Mira Schendel. El presente como utopía," in Naves, *Mira Schendel. Continuum amorfo* (Mexico City: Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, 2004), p. 13; and Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel: Do espiritual à corporeidade* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, forthcoming in 2009), p. 72.
27. The issue of the limits and edges of forms, as perceived through tone, recurs in modern Brazilian art right down to the present day, in the work of painters like Paulo Pasta and Paulo Monteiro. Naves has pointed out the tremendous influence here of Giorgio Morandi, which he believes was transmitted through artists such as Schendel and Amilcar de Castro. See his essay in the present volume, and his *A forma difícil. Ensalos sobre arte brasileira* (São Paulo: Atica, 2007), p. 252.
28. Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture," pp. 289–90.
29. Giunta has made acute connections between *Gagarín* and newspaper pictures of the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin, who in 1961 became the first man in space. In this light *Gagarín* becomes a kind of abstract portrait. Giunta, emails to the author, 2008. See also her essay in the present volume.
30. León Ferrari, Notebook 1, 1962–63. Collection of the artist.
31. Ibid.
32. Rafael Alberti, "Sermón de la sangre," in Alberti, *Sobre los ángeles* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1977), p. 111. This trans. from Alberti, *Selected Poems*, trans. Ben Belitt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 97. See G. W. Connell, "The End of a Quest: Alberti's Sermones y Moradas and Three Uncollected Poems," *Hispanic Review* 33, no. 3 (July 1965): 290–309.
33. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 1550 (reprint ed. New York: Penguin Classics, 1987), p. 57.
34. Ferrari, Notebook 1.
35. Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture," p. 267.
36. Ferrari, conversation with the author, São Paulo, May 2008.
37. Barthes, "Variations sur l'écriture," pp. 279–80.
38. Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel. Do Espiritual à Corporeidade*, p. 183.
39. Souza Dias attributes the quotation to James Anthony Froude, author of a study of Homer and the brother of Richard Hurrell Froude. Ibid., p. 184. See, however, *Lyra Apostolica*, 1836 (reprint ed. London: Rivingtons, 1879), p. xvi.
40. Participating in a congress for religious reform in 1948, Schendel met the theologian Ferdinando Tartaglia, with whom she would maintain a long correspondence. See Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel. Do espiritual à corporeidade*, p. 33.
41. Pope Paul VI, address to the Cardinal Newman Academic Symposium, Rome, 1975, online at www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1975/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19750407_symposium-newman_en.html. On the relationship between Schendel and Giovanni Battista Cardinal Montini, later Pope Paul VI, see Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel. Do Espiritual à Corporeidade*, p. 20.
42. Schendel began the *Droguinhas*, first titled *Droguinhas Fenomenológicas*, in 1965 and continued with them until at least 1968. She also produced a handful of them in the 1980s. The best source on the *Droguinhas* is Guy Brett, who exchanged a series of letters with the artist about them between November 1965 and April 1966. See Brett, *Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement* (London and New York: Studio Vista/Reinholdt, 1968), p. 8ff.
43. See, for example, Naves's essay in the present volume. The same essay includes a text by Schendel, a statement to the Fundaçao Armando Alvares Penteado, in which she explains the link in her mind between her drawings and the monotype form.
44. Guy Brett, email to the author, June 2008. See also Brett, "Mira Schendel. Ativamente o vazio," *Brasil Experimental. Arte/Vida: Proposições e paradoxos* (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Livraria, 2005), pp. 173–83.
45. See Naves, "Pelas costas," in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo*, p. 64.
46. Walter Benjamin, "Painting, or Signs and Marks," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1, *1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 84.
47. Ibid.
48. Schendel, typewritten ms., n.d., in Naves, *Mira Schendel, Continuum amorfo*, p. 19. Eng. trans. in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo*, p. 257, and in Naves's essay in the present volume.
49. See Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*.
50. See Lessing, *Laocoön*, and Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7, no. 4 (July/August 1940), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: at the University Press, 1986), 1:23–38.
51. See Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity."
52. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990):136–43.
53. The term "intentionality," in the sense of cognitive faculty (*res sub specie intellectualis*), has a medieval, Thomist genealogy but has been revisited and revised by such writers as Husserl and more recently John R. Searle. See Husserl, *Logical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1970), 2:552–96 (esp. pp. 554, 558); Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 6, 52ff (esp. pp. 81–85); and Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1983), pp. 4–26, 160–79.
54. See note 11 above and Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, pp. 130–131.
55. See the transcription of *Cuadro escrito* in Giunta, ed., *León Ferrari Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2006*, pp. 434–35.
56. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 133.
57. For this observation I must thank Michel Weemans, author of several works on Flemish painting in the age of Erasmus. See his *Paysages exégétiques et anthropomorphes de Henri Bles*, Ph.D. thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2004, and Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis christiani*, 1504, French trans. Festugière (Paris: Vrin, 1971), p. 89.
58. Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura*, 1437 (reprint ed. Milan: Biblioteca Longanesi, 1984), pp. 29–30.
59. See Nina V. Braginskaya and Dimitri N. Leonov, "La Composition des images de Philostrate l'ancien," in Costantini, Graziani, Rolet, et al., *Le Défi de l'art*, p. 25, and *Elder Philostratus: Imagines, Younger Philostratus: Imagines, Callistratus: Descriptions*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library/Harvard University Press, 1931), p. xxvi.
60. See Philostratus, *Imagines*, third century A.D., French trans. as *La Galerie de tableaux* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1991), pp. 10 and 121, note 7. See also *Elder Philostratus: Imagines*, p. 7, which translates the distinction as "panel-paintings" and "paintings."
61. See Gregory Battcock, "Painting Is Obsolete," 1969, in Alberro and Stimson, eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, p. 88.
62. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in James M. Edie, ed., *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 190.
63. See Graziani, "'La Verité en image,'" p. 137.
64. Ibid., p. 139.
65. *Philostrate, La Galerie de tableaux*, p. 9.
66. See Graziani, "'La Verité en image,'" pp. 140–42.
67. I have in mind here the poet Haroldo de Campos's description of Schendel's work as an "art of voids/where the utmost redundancy begins to generate original information/an art of words and quasi-words/where the graphic form veils and unveils, seals and unseals/sudden semantic values/an art of constellated alphabets/of beelike letters swarming and solitary." De Campos, in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo*, p. 260. Translated from the Portuguese by the author.
68. See Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: at the University Press, 1978), p. 207.
69. See Pascal Quignard, *Rhétorique spéculative* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), p. 12.
70. See Quignard, *La Haine de la musique* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1996), pp. 182–83.
71. Ibid., p. 193.
72. See Luis Peréz-Oramas: "Laocoonte, las redes y la indecisión de las cosas," in *Gego. Obra Completa. 1955–1990* (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2003), p. 296.
73. See Derrida, "La Pharmacie de Platon," in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972). Eng. trans. as "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: at the University Press, 1981), p. 102.
74. Ibid., p. 70.
75. Paul Celan: "Whichever stone you lift," 1955, in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 71.
76. Celan, "Tübingen, January," in ibid., p. 159.
77. Album, 1968. Mira Schendel Archive, São Paulo.
78. See Graziani, "'La Vérité en image,'" p. 151.
79. De Campos, in Salsztein, ed., *No vazio do mundo*, p. 260.
80. Schendel, quoted in Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel*, p. 15. See her text in the present volume, p. 62.
81. León Ferrari, November 28, 1963, Notebook 2.
82. Ibid., January 1, 1964.
83. Ibid.
84. I owe this observation to a conversation with the Argentine painter Luis Felipe Noé, a close friend of León Ferrari's. Buenos Aires, May 2008.
85. I Kings 19, 11–13.
86. Simone Weil, *La Connaissance surnaturelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 57.
87. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 86. Eng. trans. as *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 59.
88. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 401.
89. See Derrida, "La Parole soufflée," *Writing and Difference*, p. 179.
90. Robert Klein, "Form and Meaning," 1970, in *Form and Meaning : Essays on the Renaissance and Modern Art*, trans. Madeleine Jay and Leon Wieseltier (New York: The Viking Press, 1979), p. 60.
91. Antoine Arnauld and Lancelot Claude, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port-Royal*, 1660, quoted in Louis Marin, *La Critique du discours. Sur la logique de Port-Royal et les Pensées de Pascal* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), p. 177.
92. Ibid., p. 77.
93. On the inexpressible in Schendel's work see Paulo Herkenhoff, *Mira Schendel and the Shaping of the Inexpressible* (New York: The Drawing Center, 1995).
94. For the ideas and arguments in this section of the essay I am indebted to the generosity of Paulo Celso, formerly a Dominican friar and a close friend of Schendel's, with whom I talked in São Paulo on May 23, 2008. I am also grateful to Naves for directing me to Celso.
95. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Collège International de Philosophie, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 53. Eng. trans. as *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: at the University Press, 2003). For the quotations of Paul see 1 Corinthians 1:21–22.
96. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 49.

andrea giunta

león ferrari: a language rhapsody

1. León Ferrari in his studio, Vicolo di Santa María in Capella 12, Rome, 1955

Studio, Vicolo di Santa María in Capella 12, Rome, 1955. The photograph shows the thirty-five-year-old artist looking out from a dense luxuriance of his work (fig. 1). Hanging on the walls are twenty-six drawings of vessels, among them a picture by Picasso.[1] On shelves, on the floor, on turning disks, hanging from the ceiling, are over forty ceramics—volumetric prismatic forms, which fill the photograph and are sometimes taller than the artist himself. The ceramics are in different stages of completion: polished, enameled, painted in bands, bare. Every part of the workshop articulates excess and exuberance. Only the verticality and horizontality of some of the works offer calm; other pieces stack up like fragile perforated eggs about to roll over.

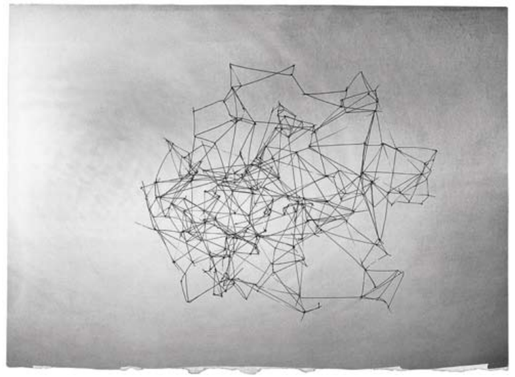
The photograph documents both the period when Ferrari became an artist and some of his work's characteristics to this day: the need to enlarge form, to fill space, to defy the limits of materials.[2] Accumulations, rhythms, and repetitions suggest a code, a language. Arrayed in rows, forms repeat abstractly, linked together in a simulation of writing, but Ferrari's code condenses their meanings so that they become more than words.[3] Indeed, his work constitutes a persistent, continuous investigation into the limits and powers of language.[4] An archive of different ways of saying new things, or of saying the same thing in new ways, it deals with the necessity and urgency of communicating, of making understandable what is not accepted, understood, or easy to express. It explores how to refer to a subtle perception, a loving feeling, or a polemical idea through volume, cadence, or apparent disorder.

Other meanings also emerge from the photograph. In the drawings on the wall to the right, each vessel holds a woman's body, a generic shape encasing a representation of reality. The drawings remind us of *Mujer* (Woman, c. 1960; plate 2), a ceramic in which feminine forms press outward from inside the piece, piercing it or creating reliefs on its exterior. An ambivalent abstraction is imposed on a curled-up body. Later, some of the wire sculptures of the 1970s would reiterate this tension between the apparent and the hidden, pure image and representational account, the poetic and the political. In this declassified zone, a zone of potential, mimesis acts on meaning and on form at the same time.[5]

In investigating the communicative power of repetition and formal excess, Ferrari invents languages and studies their mechanisms of power. The present essay will focus on these articulating nuances of Ferrari's work in the crucial era of the 1960s, when he began to elaborate ideas that he would explore throughout his later career. This is not to say, however, that we will be describing an evolution of themes and forms. Ferrari's art is not among those that begin as imperfect, then is purified and aestheticized; everything visible at the beginning remains present and active in his work today.

Ferrari has molded clay, shaped cement, carved wood, and knotted, soldered, and twisted wires, mixing their thicknesses, colors, and degrees of shine, making them a world. Creating sculptures-cum-musical instruments out of metal poles, he has performed on them in churches and public places. He has written on paper, on glass, on acrylic, on mannequins, and on photographs, and in ink, in Braille dots, even in bird excrement, which is splattered all over reproductions of the most auratic works in art history. He has accumulated bottles, fabrics, wire, condoms, artificial flowers, model airplanes, saint and Christ statuary, and plastic and plaster mice, cats, and monkeys, and has set them in imaginary dialogues, now funny and irreverent, now confrontational and watchful relationships of power. He has spilled polyurethane over knotted wire and encrusted dolls and toy trees in its creases. He has used repetition and seriality to design impossible architectures that do away with the idea of a center.[6] The coexistence of dissimilar devices and materials in Ferrari's work is initially disorienting; at the same time that they differ, his series cohere and repeat—instead of an evolution we find a doubling, whether refined or baroque, in response to an insistent need to communicate, to speak through forms and images. Between an exquisitely pure vessel and its urgent proliferation, as in the photograph, we see no progression.

This brief account will describe the magnetic unease that invades us when we are faced with this unclassifiable work. It will explore the trajectory from Ferrari's earliest work to his most recent, and will consider one of the enduring axes in his long career—over fifty years—of artmaking: an investigation of the general capacity of language, whether written or visual, to communicate, and of its



more specific capacity to make certain ideas understandable, even inevitable.

The 1960s were a time of intense change, of a configuration of new sensibilities. This was a crucial decade not just in Argentina but in the world, solidifying postwar transformations and establishing the first outlines of a new world order. In Argentina these shifts translated into a discourse of hope, optimism, and growth, accompanied, however, by a disenchantment with a kind of progress that fed misery and violence, expelling a large part of the population from the countryside into belts of concentrated poverty around the rich metropolis of Buenos Aires. This was the world that Antonio Berni described in his paintings and prints of the 1960s and '70s about a barrio boy he named Juanito Laguna, and that Ferrari examined in his works on the wars and miseries accompanying global progress.

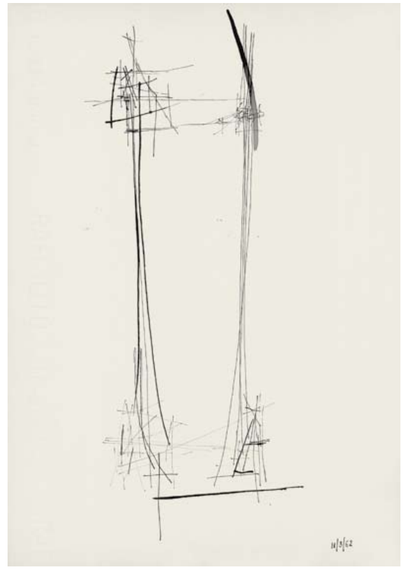
Arturo Frondizi, the progressive president of Argentina from 1958 to 1962, worked to maintain a democratic government and an economic plan in a context of confrontations among military groups that ultimately paralyzed civil society and took over the political system. The consolidation of an artistic avant-garde based around Buenos Aires's Instituto Torcuato Di Tella coincided with the emergence of a political avant-garde that would express itself in the *Cordobazo*, a popular uprising beginning in Córdoba in 1969, and in the formation of the Confederación General del Trabajo (General confederation of labor). In many respects these aesthetic and political avant-gardes overlapped, most notably in *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán is burning, 1968), a collective action in which artists protested an economic plan only masquerading as progress. *Tucumán Arde* marked the climax of an abandonment of art, as conventionally defined, by many artists.

Ferrari participated in this entire cycle, through his aesthetic experimentation and his political and institutional radicalization. Despite his insider position, however, he was also marginal: he participated in the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, and was friendly with key artists such as Pablo Suárez, Roberto Jacoby, Margarita Paksa, and Oscar Bony, but he also broke with the avant-garde. The institute had been founded to foster Argentina's cultural modernization—to advance the country's visual arts, music, theater, design, and media. Ferrari both contributed to and was nourished by these programs, but he also kept a critical distance from them: like other artists of his generation, his aim in smashing art open was to take it out of its exclusive orbit and return it to society as a whole. Ferrari separated his experiments with language and materials from the field of art as strictly understood, and tried instead to integrate them with life. He also developed an extreme form of institutional critique, subverting the institutional enthusiasm within Argentina's 1960s avant-garde. And his work confronted the global order, addressing the space race, the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965–66, and the escalating war in Vietnam. Ferrari analyzed both the problems and the potential of the avant-garde era, taking on both at their most radical extremes.

It was during the protean 1960s that Ferrari established the foundation of his work. Some of his many ideas during these years he set out in just one piece, or in notebook sketches that might remain as their only trace or might spark a series years or decades later. Others became key works, condensing much of his art to come: *Paloma* (Dove, 1961, of which only a photograph survives; fig. 2), *Gagarín* (c. 1961; plate 26), *Cuadro escrito* (Written painting, 1964; plate 41), *Cartas a un general* (Letters to a general, 1963; plate 26), *Torre de Babel* (Tower of Babel, 1964; plate 72), *La civilización occidental y cristiana* (Western Christian civilization, 1965; p. 24, fig. 21), the boxes of wire, the bottles of metals and rags, the *Manuscritos* (Manuscripts, 1964– ; plate 72), and the textual collage *Palabras ajenas* (Words of others, 1967).

After working in ceramic and cement between 1954 and 1961, and producing some carvings in wood, Ferrari began to use his skills from his original training as an engineer, and from studies of metals that he had conducted in 1955–57.[7] In a dialogue between scientific and artistic experiment, he twisted thin rods of stainless steel, bronze, copper, silver, palladium, tantalum, and gold. He welded them to silver, he knotted them (as in *Paloma*),[8] he mixed them in different thicknesses, and, as he had with his ceramics, he set them on pedestals or hung them from the ceiling. Bundles of lines, resembling prickly pears, plants, bugs, and stars or planets, floated in space.

2. **León Ferrari**
Paloma. (Dove). 1961
Wire, 11 13/16 x 15 3/4 x 7 7/8"
(30 x 40 x 20 cm)



3. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1962
Ink on paper, 13 3/8 x 9 7/16" (34 x 24 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

History is embedded in these metal works. The circular outlines of *Gagarín*, for example, may replicate the orbits of a rocket around Earth, or the appearance of the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin in a spacesuit. The work then captures a historical moment: the confrontation between two superpowers, mediated through the conquest of space—a chapter in the Cold War. Ferrari's delicate patterns of wires crossing in air are not just lines; they have titles like *Gagarín*, or *A un largo lagarto verde* (To a long green lizard), a quotation from the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, expressing the hope represented by that island in the story of postwar colonialism. The titles help us to reimagine the hidden contexts of the works' shapes, the cultural issues to which their swerving and turning lines refer. In 1961, for example, Ferrari met Rafael Alberti, the Madrilenian poet who had come to Buenos Aires in self-imposed exile after Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War. *Sin titulo (Sermón de la sangre)* (Untitled [Sermon of the Blood], 1962; plate 12), one of Ferrari's most exquisite abstract drawings, was inspired by Alberti's poem of the same title: between thin, tangled lines that cross the grisaille of a pen-on-paper rubbing, red marks are inserted like veins, or like ditches, in which flows the blood of life or death to which Alberti's poem refers. The drawing is an intermediate territory in which the poem reverberates.

Ferrari began to make autonomous drawings in March of 1962, at the suggestion of the poet and collector Arturo Schwarz, who visited his show that year at the Galleria Pater, Milan, and invited him to make a set of etchings. With the exception of one of the earliest, dated March 11, 1962 (fig. 3),[9] the drawings bear no relation to the sculptures, for which they are neither studies nor sketches. From the beginning they are tied to writing and to music, anticipating the musical instruments that Ferrari would produce in the 1980s. The drawings are usually based on the line of writing and the right angle. The line advances and retreats, narrows to near-invisibility, or forcefully emphasizes a mainly horizontal register.

Between 1962 and 1965, Ferrari experimented intensely with drawing and with wire. His line loosened up, gained color, broadened, lay on the surface of reliefs made from paper and glue. The curves and complexities of the drawn line reappear in the metal works, whose rods

undulate like lines on paper, disrupting orthogonality. In *Manos* (Hands, 1964; plate 70) a tangle of ink and wire lines is laid out in a box along with little photographs of hands cut from magazines. Metals broaden like belts or cut paper in the air, mix like inks on paper, entwine with fake flowers and cloth, and move inside a series of bottles.[10]

This urgent experimentalism was part of the rhythm of Buenos Aires's 1960s avant-garde, a laboratory for testing the materials and the limits of art. What shaped the city's avant-garde circles was a generational feeling of internal cohesion—the feeling of participating in a unified effort to create a local movement with international resonance, to escape the derivative, the imitative, taking references instead from one's contemporaries. Ferrari's work was central to this dynamic. Active in experiments with materials, he also participated in the politicization of the avant-garde and fulfilled this exceptional generation's mandate of ceaseless advance—even when, as a result, the artists saw that art as they had understood it was dissolving, and that form, dematerialized in aesthetic and political action, was losing its authority. The future tense had an absolute value, which art sought to bring into existence. In a notebook from 1964, Ferrari wrote of *Torre de Babel*—a colossal tangle of mismatched and distressed metals, and his last metal sculpture of the 1960s—that the work marked an ending: "Never again will I do something like this." Instead he imagined a future of collaborative projects carried out with other artists of the avant-garde.[11]

While Ferrari was making sculpture, he was also systematically exploring the limits of writing, the word, vocabulary, language. In disrupting language he was entering a field of floating meaning—of meaning that emerged from writing as visual form. The sense of a tension between meaning and form, between verbal description and visual representation, the visual contraction of written language—all this related to the feeling that both form and writing had to convey more. Where Ferrari's drawing had previously been abstract and joyful, a sense of connection with immediate realities was seeping in.

The 1960s hold a place in the Argentine imagination as a time of almost unprecedented democracy and freedom. There is a relation between this context and the avant-garde, understood as a kind of creative holiday in which artists transformed the art of Buenos Aires; nothing can deny the rejuvenating effervescence of the time, which produced many strategies that would later have names, legitimacy, and international currency. Bony's installation *La familia obrera* (Blue-collar family, 1968), for example, in which the artist had an actual working-class family sit on a pedestal, can be related not only to the conceptual devices that inspired Ferrari's *Cuadro escrito* but to the works of Santiago Sierra today, which similarly use living people.

At the same time that freedom of expression and the pace of development were increasing, however, they were enmeshed in an unstable political system. Conflicts among military factions, and censorship of magazines, films, and art, were an enduring threat to democracy.[12] The tension is clear in *Cartas a un general* (fig. 4), a group of drawings that builds on the experiments with line that Ferrari had begun the previous year, in 1962, but adds a new element: encrypted words. We do not know what text is hidden in these drawings, even when we can identify some of the words (such as "general"). Years later, Ferrari discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the letters:

> *It is difficult to write a "logical" letter to a general. A letter that says things, that isn't just insulting, that is "artistic." The incomprehensibility of these letters is more than a protection from censorship, it reflects an inability to write a letter like that of Rodolfo Walsh. That is a letter. What I did was an imitation of a letter, or a hidden letter, which might make one wonder, "Does this mean something or not?"* [13]

4. **León Ferrari**
Carta a un general (Letter to a general). 1963
Ink on paper, 9 7/16 x 5 9/16" (24 x 14.2 cm)
Private collection

Ferrari's letters are not so much brave confrontations with military power as ways of speaking despite difficulty. The title "*Carta a un General*" at the bottom, clearly and legibly written, shows their insubordinate meaning: although we cannot read what the letters say, they refer to a complex social and individual impossibility. What emerges from *Cartas a un general*, and from other works of the time, is a double, unstable inscription, on the one hand of abstraction and on the other of the narrative dimension of writing. On the one hand, we see that the drawing has content; we are prompted to look for the text of a letter that Ferrari would like to write but cannot. On the other, the authority of the written word—an authority derived from both religion (ultimately, that is, from dogma) and literature—is undermined.

Ferrari began the *Manuscritos* series of 1964 by choosing words from the dictionary—"strange" words that had fallen into disuse, words so rare as to seem new, words picked more for their sound than for their meaning. In the texts of the *Manuscritos*, these words follow the order of syntax but do not describe; instead, they evoke—and, in narratives such as *Barjuleta cabruñada* (Sharpened knapsack), *Cuando entré en la casa* (When I came home), and *Con un falconete* (With a musket), they abound in erotic relations. The Argentine Church polices sexuality closely, and Ferrari's masquerade illustrates its control over thought, speech, and the body. His writings, while hard to read, speak not of secrets but of that which must be said, recalling Michel Foucault's argument about the Victorian era, when the control and domestication of the body, rather than suppressing sex, led to extremely detailed speech on the forbidden: "The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech," wrote Foucault. "Nothing was meant to elude this dictum, even if the words it employed had to be carefully neutralized."[14] In shrinking writing to the point where we have to transcribe it in order to read it, this is just what Ferrari did also.

On November 15, 1964, Ferrari completed *El arca de Noé* (Noah's ark; also called *El árbol embarazador*, The impregnating tree; plate 43), a theme to which he would return in the collage series *Relecturas de la Biblia* (Rereadings of the Bible, 1983). The text in this drawing—written in a compact pattern that wraps like a sash around a collaged-in photograph, of the genitals of Michelangelo's David—proposes a version of the story of the Flood in which Noah and the animals fail to survive; everyone dies, in fact, except the women. Described as "the thousand wise sinners the revolutionaries the women who do not believe in God the marvelous atheists those who could govern their bodies with their own free will," the women inflate their breasts and buttocks and float to land. Meanwhile Satan, "that old inventor in exile," has cut off the choice parts of the men's bodies and grafted them onto an enormous tree, an "impregnating tree," on which the women throw themselves. From above, God observes this strange giant plant on which the women thrust themselves "in a cloud of sweat," but he cannot fight the life force. Women, whose forms shaped Ferrari's first ceramics, are now the revolutionary heroes who save humanity and fight God. The text follows the injunction of the eighteenth-century saint Alphonsus Liguori, who wrote, "Tell everything—not only consummated acts, but sensual touchings, all impure gazes."[15] Ferrari's interrogation of Western sexual morality also involves an irrepressible comic humor, like the Rabelaisian spirit theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin.[16] We see this again in *Relecturas de la biblia* (plates 123–26, 138, 139), in which Catholic angels, borrowed from Western art history, scrutinize the amorous interludes of Eastern erotic figures.

The *Manuscritos* series includes *Cuadro escrito*, a piece of writing—a conceptual operation—that describes the painting Ferrari would make "if I knew how to paint."[17] This is not, however, a cold list of portrait, landscape, or still life subjects to be described with the materials of painting ("marten hairs on the tip of a flexible stick of ash, drenched and submerged in crimson oil"); it is instead a motley gathering, featuring birds (the "*codesera*," a "filthy Arctic bird that feeds its young to the seals it likes"), a horse, chamomile blossoms, and a woman called Alafia, who lends the writer her hair-curlers to make a paintbrush.[18] As the artist who would produce this work, Ferrari imagines those who would study it in the future. He describes his feverish inspiration and his desire to create

> *something absolutely new unknown the hidden heart of the entire work: forty square centimeters deliberately concealed in the work's*

> *various measures so that no one perceives its inaudible language, reserving the satisfaction of it for a wise scholar after my death who will make everything clear and will anxiously seek out the bones in my coffin so as to make them into a kind of amulet to be exhibited in a museum before the prostrated parishioners praying for my soul which today is alive but hidden in Castelar.*[19]

Forty-two years later, in the *Atados con alambre* (Tied with wire) and *Poliuretanos* (Polyurethanes) series (plates 144, 146), Ferrari was mixing bones and polyurethane and hanging them from the ceiling of a museum.

Cuadro escrito describes a painting that itself tells a story. According to that story, the painting is not realized because the artist thinks it better described than painted, and also because it depends on the will of God, who, when the artist extends his hand, as if to ask for charity, will not touch him—not out of a refusal to do so, but because "His hand was enjoying itself making the mounds, valleys, buttocks of Alafia." Ferrari, then, describes a temptable God. Again, humor mixes with the essence and visual character of writing, in a text that looks like a pastel rubbing, a wordless pattern. *Historia de mi muerte* (Story of my death), from January 1965, and *Milagro en la OEA* (Miracle in the OAS [Organization of American States]; plate 53), from September 5, 1965, bring to a close a phase to which he would return ten years later, when he began to draw again.

The other crucial work of this crucial moment is *La civilización occidental y cristiana* (fig. 5), an assemblage of an altar-scale Christ figure crucified on a model of an American fighter jet. In 1965, Jorge Romero Brest, the director of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, invited Ferrari to exhibit there for the first time. Romero Brest probably imagined a show of wire sculpture or drawings, but Ferrari instead took the opportunity to show a strongly political work, with the politics international as much as local. The work also made use of materials external to art; unlike Ferrari's wires, or his lines on paper, these objects had clearly had a previous life. Rather than being integrated into a composition, becoming its material, the real world erupted with force.

La civilización occidental y cristiana took aim at the West's moral double standard, and at an issue then flooding the press: the escalating U.S. presence in Vietnam. Although addressed to this particular situation, the piece has since achieved a kind of universality, seeming relevant to other violent events; exhibited in Buenos Aires in September 2001, for example, it was thought to refer to that month's attacks on the World Trade Center, New York. The title, "Western Christian civilization," was a phrase used in the 1960s to rationalize American involvement in Southeast Asia, and also by the Argentine military to justify its overthrow of the country's democratic government in 1966.[20] For decades to come, violence and censorship would be forcibly installed in Argentine civil life and culture.

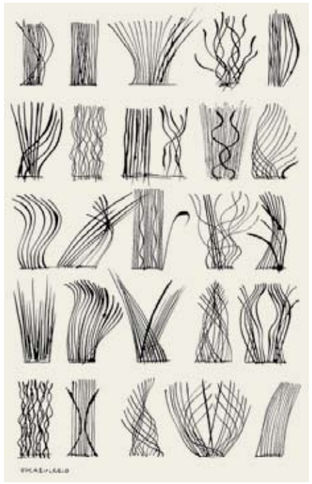
Before the opening of Ferrari's exhibition at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Romero Brest asked him to withdraw *La civilización occidental y cristiana* because it would offend the religious feelings of the staff. Instead Ferrari decided to show other works, smaller but on the same theme, as a way of denouncing this institution that claimed to promote the avant-garde. To one critic who questioned the work's value Ferrari resoundingly replied,

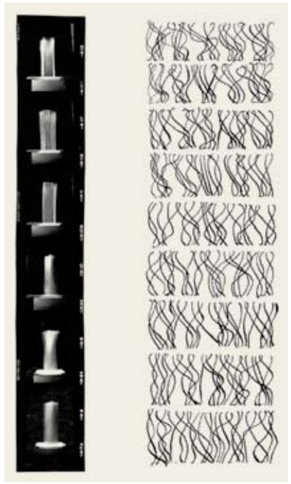
> *I do not know the artistic value of these pieces. The only thing I ask of art is that it help me, as clearly as possible, to devise visual and critical signs that will allow me to condemn Western barbarism in the most efficient way. It is possible that someone may show me that this is not art. I would have no problem, I would not change my course, I would only change its name: I would cross out art and call it politics, corrosive criticism, whatever.* [21]

After 1965, Ferrari abandoned traditional exhibitions for over ten years. He participated in political group shows,[22] wrote the book *Palabras ajenas*,[23] and worked in the group that developed the *Tucumán Arde* exhibition. Like a number of artists of his generation, Ferrari had essentially left art. The avant-garde, he felt, could no longer be established with traditional materials or in traditional institutions; it had to be created in the streets and united with life. It had to change the world—in other words, it had to fulfill its own highest aspirations.

In 1975, Ferrari began to draw again, and he has never stopped since. His curved, controlled line, now often combined in parallels,

5. **León Ferrari**
La civilización occidental y cristiana.
(Western Christian civilization). 1965
Plastic, oil, and plaster, 6' 6 3/4" x 47 1/4" x 23 5/8"
(200 x 120 x 60 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires





broadened and narrowed as if at the will of his pen. On March 24, 1976, another military junta staged a coup in Argentina. Between May 3 and November 7 of that year, Ferrari clipped news articles about bullet-riddled, burned, and bound corpses turning up in different parts of the city, the country, or on the Uruguayan coast.[24] He glued this horrible evidence onto sheets of legal paper, which he then juxtaposed with drawings in pen or pencil. Each drawing was done on the same day as the appearance of the news article. Amid daily violence, Ferrari cut, glued, and drew, setting horror beside lyricism. These series of collages and drawings is a startling demonstration of the particular condition of artistic creation.

On November 11, 1976, Ferrari and his family left Argentina for Brazil, beginning an exile that would last fifteen years.[25] At a small table in a hotel room on the beach in São Vicente, he once again set to work welding wire. Shortly afterward he moved to São Paulo, where he would make sculptures, etchings, drawings, collages of pictures and bird excrement, and berimbau (sound-making sculptures). In welded sculpture he achieved new heights between 1978 and 1979, producing not only *Planeta* (Planet; plate 94), a ball of wire so large that the front door of a gallery where it was to be shown had to be broken to get it inside, but a series based on the idea of the inverted pendulum, with groups of steel rods standing vertically in a base, and murmuring as they moved. From here Ferrari developed a new vocabulary that would generate the series *Códigos* (Codes, 1979; plates 113–15, 117, 118), *Xadrez* (Chess, 1974; plate 107), *Baños* (Bathtubs, c. 1981–84), *Plantas* (Plants, c. 1980–84) and the *Heliografias* (Heliographs, 1980–84; plates 97–99).

The *Códigos* is a series of twelve drawings in which lines abandon their earlier parallel order for a different, intense kind of dialogue, approaching, crossing, vibrating together. The drawings suggest both systems of writing—each work in the first group, in fact, is titled *Vocabulario* (Vocabulary; fig. 6)—and romantically intertwining relationships; later drawings are titled *Kama Sutra*. The second group begins with two drawings that establish equivalencies between short parallel lines and letters of the alphabet, Arabic numerals, even animals, with little images of a wooden horse, a fox, a porcupine, a bird, a squirrel, mixed in between the lines and letters. In fact these images and letters come from the Letraset system.

The *Códigos* deconstruct language, mixing its lines with signs that have a gamelike quality. We are reminded of Walter Benjamin's sense of the importance of games in the revision of history and in learning processes.[26] In that these images are historicized, evoking the formal order of the Gothic, it is as if they had an authority predating the linguistic lines' flow, which is itself unorthodox, moving around as if trying to escape from the picture (fig. 7). The *Códigos* recall those texts in which naturalists classify animals and plants—little world orders, in which are sketched, precisely to the last detail, images of the new, the unknown, the as yet unnamed. Before the computer came into common use, engineers, architects, and other practical scientists often used Letraset in their drawings. Ferrari, then, a trained engineer and the son of an architect, was incorporating in art a field of technical expertise and its visual devices, but associating that field with playfulness and the reorganization of meaning. Nature and life intermix with drawing; the letters fit like cocoons. In the lines between them slither a young woman and an undulating serpent (plate 118), a reference to the biblical tale. In the penultimate picture in the series, Ferrari links drawing to his musical instruments, including a photograph of the moving rods of the berimbau and, in parallel, a set of his undulating lines (fig. 8).[27]

6. **León Ferrari**
Vocabulario (Vocabulary) from the series **Códigos** (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink on paper, 12 3/16 x 8 7/16" (31 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

7. **León Ferrari**
Diccionario (Dictionary) from the series **Códigos** (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink and transfer type on paper, 12 3/16 x 8 7/16" (31 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

8. **León Ferrari**
Traduções (Translations) from the series **Códigos** (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Cut-and-pasted gelatin silver photographs and ink on paper, 12 3/16 x 8 7/16" (31 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

Ferrari made this series in exile, and at a time of bad news from home. Meanwhile, though, he was a full member of Brazil's experimental art world and was enjoying one of the most creative periods of his career. This was the period of his *Heliografias*, which he copied and sent, folded in envelopes, to friends in Buenos Aires and the rest of the world. In an alliance between mail art and mural art, these sheets unfolded into enormous maps, though maps drawn by crazed architects: panopticons of modern life, of cities traversed by highways, automobiles, and crowds—the electrifying city of São Paulo.

Together the *Heliografias* constitute a dazzling allegory of the tension between discipline and rule-breaking. Small printed figures—little men—appear in straight rows, looking at each other or superimposed within a frame; automobiles stand equidistantly, on highways that begin and end in the same place; lines arbitrarily divide space; doors and stairways offer no way out of a terrible trap. There is disobedience here as well as order, as when the white king sleeps with the black woman (*Adulterio* [Adultery], 1984) or when little men escape through a corridor opening onto the unknown area beyond the edge of the plane—beyond our gaze anything is possible. Within it, though, space is controlled. People talk to toilets, and beds are perverse in character: they fill space up to a certain point, but are so closely observed by Ferrari's repeated, anonymous characters that they hardly make us think of either lovemaking or rest. Embedded in the society that Ferrari reprograms is an exaggerated system of the observation and control of space. Endless walls, doors, beds, people, toilets, and vegetation seal off space and make it unusable.

No one would want to live here, but the pictures' humor creates a fissure that lets us enjoy looking at these uninhabitable environments. We can see the architecture of the *Heliografias* as an amplification of the oppressive social machine, but also as the disorder that precedes a new form of organization, as an intermediate space whose excessive overdetermination ends up as disorder, opening the possibility of a new game. The *Heliografias* suggest a zone tensed between the oppressive metropolis of the Argentine dictatorship and the liberty that Ferrari sensed in Brazil.[28] Being open to endless reproduction—Ferrari numbered his editions of these prints "x/∞"—they completely discard the aura of the unique art object. Their hypnotic power traps us in the internal events of the plane; in the texture of intermediate values achieved by their bluish color, etched with light; in the creases remaining from the maps' unfolding, and from marks left on them by their travels through the mail.

In 1982, in an interview in Mexico City, Ferrari said that he might have made these maps because he could find no way to represent the anguished reality of what was happening at home: "I feel the need to be able to express all the terrible things that were and are," but "I don't know anything in the expressive plane with the strength of the repression in Argentina."[29] A year later, Ferrari began his series on the Bible, hundred of collages linking Catholic saints to Eastern erotic figures and to contemporary events—works investigating the behavior of the God of the Bible and the consequences of the violence of Holy Scripture in Western history.

The issue was representing the unrepresentable, describing violence in visual terms. For this Ferrari returned to assemblage, or to its planar equivalent, collage—the road he had started on with *La civilización occidental y cristiana*, and which he had left hanging in 1965. Now he again took up images of war, of the violence preached in the Old and New Testaments. He also addressed the differences between Western sexuality and that of other cultures. Ferrari's collages reveal a battle between image and culture, the permitted and the forbidden, punishment and justice. How to empower pictures to condemn Western morality with the same force with which the West had preached it? Ferrari turned to auratic, high-culture images, such as Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. Above reproductions of them he set a cage of pigeons, whose excrement he allowed to fall onto them—birds, painter, and contemporary artist in an impromptu collaboration (fig. 9). At the same time that Ferrari brought out the impiety of these celebrated paintings, he used their force, their power, their place in the Western cultural tradition, to condemn its promises of terror and torment. An organic form of writing, the textured bird excrement expresses the desire for an end to the Bible's promises of tortures for sinners in the afterlife. In 1997 Ferrari wrote to the Pope, asking him to abolish Judgment Day; in 2000 he wrote again, requesting the abolition of Hell. Both letters were signed by hundreds of intellectuals, and both still await a response.

The doubled stakes of converting image into word and word into image are among Ferrari's most persistent concerns. Writing moves into collage, collage into Braille, writing intended to be touched. The script in Braille—biblical texts, and poems written by the blind Jorge Luis Borges to young women he could not see—is imprinted on photographs of beautiful women, representations of Hell, images of Nazism: poems to read with the hands (fig. 10). Where does Ferrari's work begin, in images or in writing? In drawings with lines, wires, branches, excrement, Braille? The latest chapter is in polyurethane on knotted wire—porous masses populated with little men, trees, eyes, and plastic mice (plate 146). This always protean body of work constitutes a thinking about the world through images, writing, and texture, all in a perpetual flow.

At a round table in Buenos Aires in July of 1994, Ferrari said that what he wanted to say had neither beginning nor end, and that he repeated it in a thousand different ways in order to be understood. Then he took out a watch with an alarm and explained that his talk would end in ten minutes—the time he had been assigned—without any formal conclusion; he would say what he wanted to say, repeating it in images and words, until he was understood—or, in other words, until the world changed. Each drawing, blueprint, or polyurethane work is an observatory for an insubordinate time.

9. **León Ferrari**
Juicio Final (Last Judgment). 1985
Printed paper (reproduction of Michelangelo's **Last Judgment**) with bird excrement,
20 7/8 x 13" (53 x 33 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

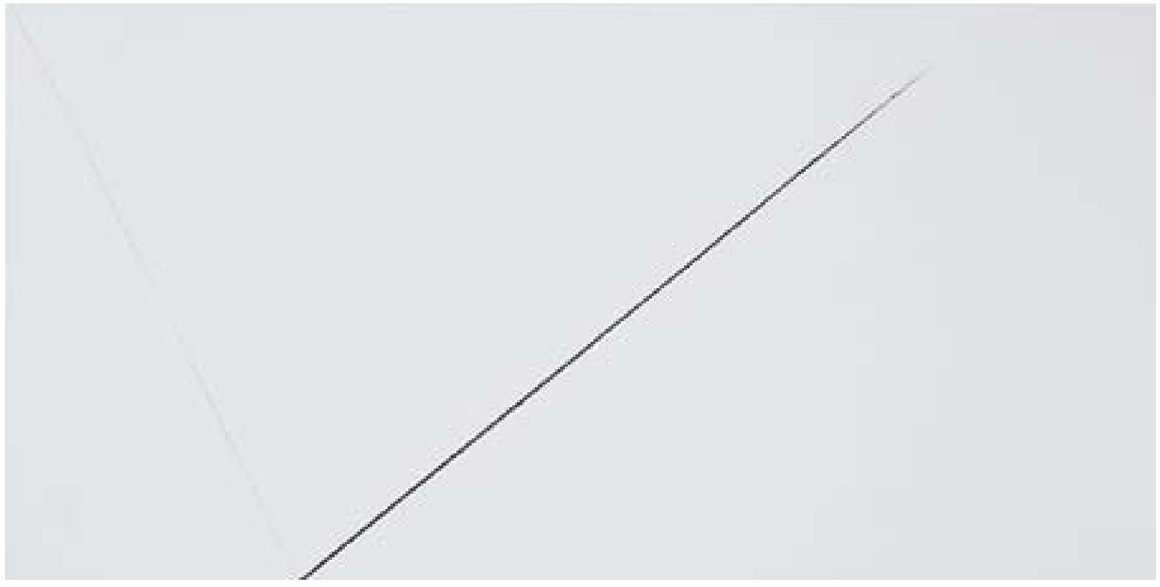
10. **León Ferrari**
El ciego (The blind man). 1997
Ink and Braille (surface embossing)
on paper, 14 5/8 x 9 3/4" (36.3 x 24.7 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

Endnotes

1. The drawing is *La Paix* (Peace), used in a poster to promote Picasso's 1953 show in Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna.
2. Having grown up in Buenos Aires, León Ferrari spent the years 1952–54 in Italy, having moved there with his wife, Alicia, and his daughter, Marialí. (He also returned there for a relatively brief period in 1955.) In 1954 he began to make ceramics with the Sicilian artisan Salvatore Meli. The rented Rome studio in the photograph was a former flowerpot factory, its walls blackened by the drying process for the clay. It had an oven large enough to fit sculptures over six feet tall.
3. For Noé Jitrik, Ferrari's main theme is the letter, the grapheme, the act of writing, all explored with ink, pen, and paintbrush. See Jitrik, "Vida, muerte y resurrección del signo," in *Escrituras 1962–1998*, exh. cat. (Buenos Aires: La Voz del Bajo, 1998).
4. Far from being limited to Ferrari's drawings in ink on paper, the concept of writing extends to his mannequins, his works in wire and in Braille dots, the "living" drawings he made with earthworms (seen in the video *Lombrices* [Worms] of 2004), and his first ceramic pieces. See *Escrito en el aire*, exh. cat. (Neuquén: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Neuquén, 2005).
5. Ferrari uses the term "mimetismo" to describe a series that he began in 1986 and continued into the 1990s, in which Christ is painted against a backdrop of camouflage or flowers. Camouflage, a tool of war, is also, as Jacques Lacan noted, a strategy of colonial discourse. Homi Bhabha writes, "The epic intention of the civilizing mission . . . often produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe-l'oeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition. . . . mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge." This device appears in Ferrari's earliest works, implacably unmasking the mechanisms of power. See Lacan, "The Line and the Light," quoted in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 85. The idea of a third zone is explored in my essay "Perturbadora belleza," in Andrea Giunta, ed., *León Ferrari Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2004* (Buenos Aires: CCR-MALBA, 2004), pp. 17–29.
6. See Roberto Jacoby, "Las herejías de León Ferrari," *Crisis* (Buenos Aires), January 1987, pp. 71–72.
7. Ferrari experimented with colors for ceramics and with chemical compounds of tungsten, tantalum, and niobium, used in metallurgy to harden metal. He started a family business to produce these compounds.
8. Knotted wire, like that in Gego's drawings without paper, was one of the many devices that Ferrari used in working with little metal rods. Forty years later he would return to this early solution in his experiments with polyurethane.
9. Ferrari's first dated drawing is from March 6, 1962.
10. In July of 1964, Ferrari wrote several ideas for bottles in his notebook. Apart from the large, untitled bottle of 1964, ten more survive from that year. As he has done many times with other subjects and motifs, Ferrari returned to bottles many years later, in 1992, in a series on the conquest of the Americas and in another on condoms, whose free distribution in AIDS-prevention campaigns was and is actively fought by the Catholic Church in Argentina.
11. Ferrari called this imaginary project "babelismo": "To make something without unity, with different sensibilities . . . or to do it among several people. To build a tower of Babel and add others' things to it: [Alberto] Heredia, Marta Minujín, [Luis] Wells, [Rubén] Santantonín, [Libero] Badii, [Julián] Althabe, [Osvaldo] Stimm, everything mixed together, everything Babelesque, or even better, to build it together, with everything on top of everything else, crossing out everything else." Ferrari, Notebook 2, January 1, 1964, pp. 15–16. Collection of the artist.
12. The word "libertad" (freedom) has complex meanings in Argentine culture. The military coup of 1955, for example, which ousted the democratically elected government of Juan Domingo Perón, was called the "Revolución Libertadora," and marked the concept of "freedom" with bullets. According to Jorge Romero Brest, who that year became the director of Buenos Aires's Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, those bullets actually pierced the museum's walls. Romero Brest, *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* no. 1 (June 1956): n.p. In several texts Ferrari has questioned the value of "freedom" used for political ends. See, e.g., the manuscript "Milagro en la OEA," May 9, 1965, collection Alicia and León Ferrari.
13. Ferrari, in *The Architecture of Madness*, a video made by Gabriela Salgado and Ricardo Pons in conjunction with Ferrari's exhibition of the same name, organized by Salgado, at the University of Essex in 2002. Rodolfo Walsh was an Argentine writer killed by a military death squad in 1977 after writing an open letter to the junta.
14. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 21.
15. A. de Liguori, *Préceptes sur le sixième commandement* (trans. 1835), p. 5, quoted in ibid.
16. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
17. The bibliography on this work is extensive. See, e.g., Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980," in Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, eds., *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), and Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).
18. Alafia reappears in a series of Ferrari's drawings from 2004.
19. Ferrari, *Cuadro escrito*, December 17, 1964. Castelar is the town in which Ferrari and his family were living at the time.
20. Juan Carlos Onganía, the leader of the 1966 coup and Argentina's subsequent military dictator, said that he was toppling a democratic government "in defense of Western Christian civilization."
21. Ferrari, "La respuesta del artista," *Propósitos* (Buenos Aires), October 7, 1965.
22. These exhibitions included *Homenaje al Viet-nam* (Homage to Vietnam, Galería Van Riel, Buenos Aires, 1966); *Homenaje a Latinoamérica* (Homage to Latin America, Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos, Buenos Aires, 1967); *Malvenido Rockefeller* (Rockefeller go home, Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos, Buenos Aires, 1969); Contrabienal MICLA [Movimiento de Independencia Cultural Latinoamericano] (Counterbiennial MICLA [Latin American Cultural Independence Movement], New York, 1971); a group show in Santiago, Chile, in solidarity with Salvador Allende (1972); and a group show in Havana, Cuba (1973).
23. *Palabras ajenas* is an imaginary conversation among God, Hitler, Jesus, and Goebbels, a literary collage of 120 characters that condenses the history of Western violence from the Old Testament to Nazi Germany and on to the present. See Ferrari, *Palabras ajenas* (Buenos Aires: Falbo, 1967).
24. Such was the state of terror and insecurity that Ferrari rented a small apartment to make this series, fearing that he would endanger his family by working on it at home. Interview with the author, July 10, 2008.
25. Ferrari did visit Buenos Aires while he was living in Brazil, first in 1982, for an exhibition in 1984, and on several other occasions. He returned there to live in 1991.
26. See Walter Benjamín, "Children's Literature," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, *1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
27. Ferrari defined his instruments, which he called berimbau or *percantas*, as instruments with which to draw sound. (The berimbau is an actual Brazilian folk instrument, which Ferrari's berimbau do not, however, resemble.) He constructed a series of these objects, of different sizes and shapes, and often performed on them.
28. Brazil, like Argentina, was ruled by a military dictatorship during these years, but for Argentines the nation and its music represented a site and a feeling of freedom. Brazil became a summer destination for the young and for intellectuals, to whom the music of Caetano Veloso, Chico Buarque, Maria Bethânia, Gilberto Gil, and Gal Costa offered a happiness and optimism that reality could not provide.
29. Ferrari, in an interview with Adriana Malvido, *unomásuno* (Mexico City), April 7, 1982.

rodrigo naves

mira schendel: the world as generosity



1. **Mira Schendel**
Monocromático (Monochromatic). 1986
Synthetic polymer paint and oilstick on wood, 35 7/16 x 70 7/8" (90 x 180 cm)
Location unknown

The wooden surfaces of one of Mira Schendel's last series, the *Monocromáticos* (Monochromatics) of 1986–87 (fig. 1), are coated with gently modulated plaster and painted in white or black tempera. The subtle relief of the surfaces throws soft shadows, optical lines that delicately differentiate themselves from other lines traced in oilstick. One of Schendel's assistants at the time, the artist Fernando Bento, remembers that to illustrate the relationship that she wanted between the surfaces and the two kinds of line that run across them, she would point to the white lines left in the sky by passing airplanes.[1]

For me this story constitutes a precise, lyrical revelation of the concept of form in Schendel's art, and of the associations she looked for among her work's various elements. The lines made when the hot air from an airplane's jets meets the cold air of the upper atmosphere are not a way of containing the blue of the sky, or of turning it into mere background, as the colored smoke used by aerobatic squadrons does. Rather, these tenuous lines help to *reveal* the sky, heightening the opposition between the regular trajectory of the airplane and undefined space. Both lines and sky are ambiguous—just vapor, layers of air—making it impossible to see them as static elements peacefully superimposed on each other.

The *Monocromáticos*, of course, differ physically from natural space and its phenomena, but, within limits, they try to make similar connections. The unlike quality of the two kinds of line raises doubts about the position of the surface, the depth of which cannot be accurately fixed unless one focuses on a single line. In doing so, however, one rejects the works' challenge. The directions of the lines—here more vertical, there more horizontal—create distinct experiences of spaces otherwise almost identical, because they act differently upon the fields on which they are drawn. The oilstick lines never touch the edges of the work, and one end is always sharper than the other, reflecting the gesture that created them; this captured movement further heightens the works' uncertainty.

Today, when the notion of form is often thought to get in the way of art's meaning and vitality, it is important to recall the generosity with which the great modern artists approached the world. Schendel's discreet interventions reflect an attempt to reveal the interdependence of phenomena, their reciprocity and equality of status. Only someone who has turned away from the world—away from, say, the blue sky—and who can only find meaning in realities that have lost their ambiguity and become purely instrumental, univocal in meaning, could see such subtle works as insignificant.

Nothing in Schendel's art attempts either to order reality violently or to impose meaning on it, actions that are two sides of the same coin. To the end, this woman—who came from Jewish parentage but survived the Europe of the 1930s and '40s, was several times forced to change countries and languages, had a difficult family life, and was recognized as an important artist only in her later years—examined the possibilities of our presence in the world, an investigation involving a recognition both of our limitations and of the achievements to which they might lead. The drawings on thin Japanese paper from the 1960s—over two thousand of them, usually called *Monotipias* (monotypes), in my view mistakenly—are among the works that most clearly reveal these concerns (fig. 2). To make them, Schendel would apply paint to a glass laminate, sprinkle a light layer of talcum powder over it to prevent the paper from picking it up immediately on contact, then lay the paper on the glass and draw on it, using her fingernails or some pointed instrument to press the paper into the paint. The technique itself expresses her desire not to act on the paper from outside it, on its surface; instead, the drawings seem to emerge from within the paper, to be indistinguishable from its porosity and texture, like something organic, a fungus perhaps. Rarely has an artist's touch been simultaneously so fragile and so intense.

Mira Schendel:

The [Monotipias] are the result of a hitherto frustrated attempt to capture discourse at its moment of origin. What concerns me is capturing the passage of immediate experience, in all its empirical force, into the symbol, with its memorability and relative immortality. I know that deep down it is a matter of the following problem. Immediate life, the kind I suffer and within which I act, is mine alone, incommunicable and therefore devoid of meaning or purpose. The realm of symbols, which seeks to capture that life (and which is also the realm of language), on the other hand, is antilife, in the sense of being intersubjective, shared, emptied of emotion and suffering. If I could bring these two realms together, I would have united the richness of experience with the relative permanence of the symbol. To put it another way, my work is an attempt to immortalize the fleeting and to give meaning to the ephemeral. To do this, obviously, I have to freeze the instant itself, in which the experience melts into the symbol—in this case, into the word.

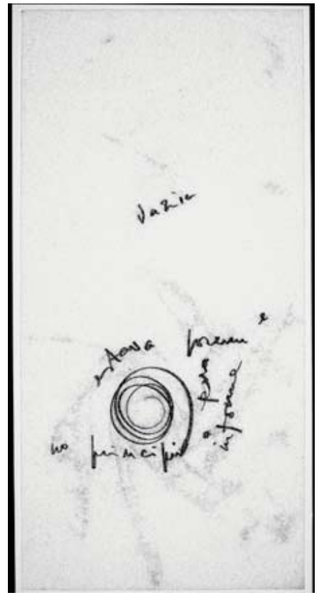
At first I thought that it would be enough for me to catch within myself experience's need to be articulated—enough, that is, to sit down and wait for the letters to form, to take shape on the page and connect to one another in a text predating the literal and logical. But from the outset I felt this could only work if the paper were transparent. Now I am better able to evaluate why I had this impression back then: the word, in taking form, must show the greatest possible number of its faces in order to be itself.

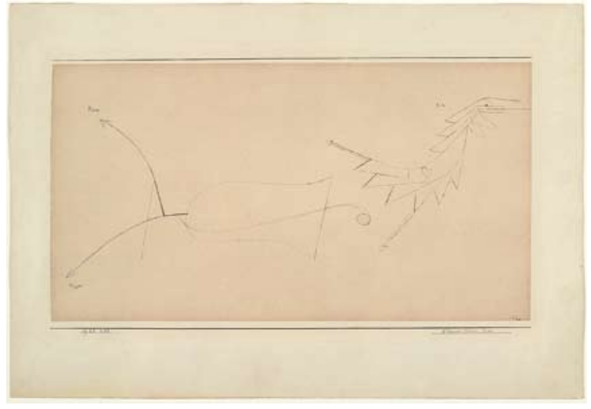
A second problem arose, however: a sequence of letters on paper simulates time without actually being able to represent it. They simulate the experience of time, but do not capture the unrecoverable experience that characterizes that time. The texts that I drew on paper can be read and reread, which isn't true of time. They make the fluidity of time fast without immortalizing it. So I abandoned the attempt.

I abandoned it because I discovered acrylic laminate, which offers the following possibilities: a) it shows the plane's other side, denying that the plane is flat; b) it shows the text's reverse, transforming text into antitext; c) it allows a circular reading, with the text as the unmovable center and the reader in motion, thus transferring time from the work to the reader, so that time springs from symbol into life; d) the transparency of acrylic is the false transparency of the explained meaning. It is not the clear, flat transparency of glass but the mysterious transparency of explication, of problems.

I'm not satisfied. I don't think acrylic is the philosopher's stone; I began, simultaneously, to experiment with film. But if the work shown has any value, it is this: to point to a station on one of the many possible roads leading to an articulation of the value and goal of life.

—n.d. [2]





The sense that these lines are part of the paper support, rather than being imposed on it, results from their accentuation of its presence and qualities—an unusual goal in the drawing tradition. A technique that minimizes and limits the artist's gesture has as compensation an unexpected heightening of its context. During this period Schendel was in practical terms working only for herself and a small group of friends;[3] the courage to create hundreds of these drawings to virtually no public response will undoubtedly stand as an example of modernist ethical behavior. (In 1989, after her death, the drawings were still being sold for $100 each.) But for Schendel, the quantity of these works served a structural function. Where Joseph Beuys's thousands of drawings witnessed the multiple states of consciousness subsumed in an art in progress, Schendel's drawings point almost in the opposite direction: for her, each work confirmed the richness of an idea of drawing in which the beauty of a line lies not within it but around it, in its activation of the place from which it has emerged. This was why she needed so many drawings.

In a certain way, Paul Klee, whose work Schendel knew well, was the modern artist whose concerns lay closest to her own (fig. 3).[4] Her work, like his, leans toward a modesty of dimensions, a discretion of presence, an economy of means, and a concern with wise relationships that bring divergent elements serenely together. But Schendel's work is more conflicted than Klee's precise yet lyrical associations of colors, lines, and surfaces. She seems always to have been driven to explore new arenas and situations, so that the elements of her work are always dealing with different conditions and are therefore differently experienced.

The lines of Schendel's drawings seem driven toward writing. The inscriptions through which she searches for meaning are highly precise; clearly these graphic signs are linked to letters and words, and the singular gesture of her individual hand on paper is linked to more general meanings. Schendel's path led naturally to the universality of language, as though expression and literary meaning had gradually converged.

As words gained autonomy in Schendel's work, however—as line lost its association with the movement of the hand and acquired the generality of concepts—she continued to place them in ambiguous situations. In the *Objetos gráficos* (Graphic objects), for example, from the later 1960s, graphic signs and letters traced on or applied to Japanese paper were pressed between sheets of acrylic laminate and displayed in space (fig. 4). The overlaps among these semitransparent elements reintroduced the thickness that the clarity of words had removed. Superimposition, transparency, and space were all parts of these works, and the galaxies and constellations of their arrangements reinstated the tension between gesture and meaning in a wider, perhaps even cosmic setting, transposing to a superhuman scale the interplay of chaos and meaning.

2. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Milan, São Paulo

3. **Paul Klee**
Glockentönin Bim (Lady Bell-Tone Bim). 1922
Ink on paper on board, 13 1/2 x 19 5/8" (34.3 x 49.8 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

Mira Schendel:

I'm not going to define "object" because I don't really know what it means—in other words, I wouldn't know how to theoretically distinguish an aesthetic object from a utilitarian one, because a utilitarian object can also be an aesthetic object. So I dodge the issue because I think talking about it is tough. I consider myself incompetent.

I'm just going to give an idea of how the objects I made came about—in a way, out of chance and curiosity. I was once given a large amount of delicate Japanese paper. I stored it, not knowing what to do with it. I had no plans. It was given to me. "Do you want it?" "Yes." Some time later, about a year, I started to work with that paper, but it tore, it couldn't stand water, couldn't stand anything. It was very delicate. Then I met a woman who did monotype and I thought that if I used the monotype technique, not with monotypes as an end but simply for the practical reason of not wanting to tear the paper every time I handled it, I could draw on it. I did several experiments and succeeded, which led to the whole series of drawings on that paper. . . . After that, in my wandering about the neighborhood here, on my afternoon walks—any small factory attracts me, whether it's metal, glass—any kind of material attracts me, manual labor attracts me, I'll put it that way, anything that people do with their hands—and I discovered a factory where they make lighting materials. . . . I went inside, asked permission, said I was an artist, my only way of being able to start working with [this material] was if they would let me look at the rejects. And they did. "Let the crazy old lady do whatever she wants. She's not bothering anybody." . . . Looking at all that, the idea came to me of mixing that very transparent paper with equally transparent acrylic laminate—white, obviously. That's where the large plates came from, the so-called Objetos gráficos *[Graphic objects], which were an attempt to bring about drawing through transparency—in other words, to avoid back and front. There was a problem, including a philosophical problem, behind all that. But the material gave me a possibility: with glass I wouldn't have been able to join the sheets, I would have had to frame them—and acrylic laminate really gave me a fantastic opportunity . . . to concretize an idea, the idea of doing away with back and front, before and after, a certain idea of more or less arguable simultaneity, the problem of temporality,etc., spatiotemporality, etc. . . . This is how the so-called* Objetos gráficos *came about. . . .*

—1977[5]

Schendel would rarely end her experiments until she was convinced that she had exhausted them. After revealing the material quality of Japanese paper so surprisingly in the *Monotipias*—in other words, after removing that material from the world of everyday stuff—she then began to use it as an autonomous medium in itself. The results were the *Droguinhas* (Little nothings; fig. 5), begun in the mid-1960s, and then *Trenzinho* (Little train; plate 77). For the *Droguinhas* Schendel twisted, rolled, and knotted Japanese paper, traditionally just a support, to make three-dimensional objects, strange in that they both communicate generously with the space around them and refuse to show themselves as a simple continuous movement, instead turning back on themselves, curling, complicating any easy trajectory from line to surface and from surface to volume—like the Möbius strip, so dear to the late Constructivists.

4. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos** (Graphic objects). 1967
Oil transfer drawing and transfer type on thin Japanese paper between painted transparent acrylic sheets with transfer type, 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm)
Collection Marta and Paula Kuczynski, São Paulo

5. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Droguinhas** (Little nothings). 1986
Japanese paper, variable dimensions, 17 11/16" (45 cm) fully extended
Collection Rodrigo Naves

Mira Schendel:

Before the acrylic phase, though, in the phase of that pile of very thin paper that I was given, there was another type of object with a different intention (a very dangerous word, but let's use it). I wanted, in a way, to concretize something different: the entire temporal problematic of transitoriness, shall we say. This was a transitory object; it could be made by anyone, twisting the paper into knots like that, and my daughter, who was around ten at the time, called it droguinha *[little nothing]. . . . It was really an attempt at an ephemeral form of art (which after all is no novelty, because dance is also an ephemeral art, like music, and so on). There were other efforts at ephemeral art in the so-called visual arts, the so-called plastic arts, let's use that term . . . I didn't invent it; it was a general problem that touched people, either it touched them or they touched it—it was in the air. We were living in a shared world, after all, and I feel that this was one of a few attempts at ephemeral art in the so-called plastic arts. Later there were other forms such as happenings, other things. But in the ephemeral object, an object exposed in a way to transitoriness, just as in life—I think that was a very interesting attempt, a very interesting experiment, which I never tried much to put into theory because . . . for me aesthetics is a bear, the whole problem of art is a terrible complexity, so as much as possible I avoid talking about it. But that was an experiment, the* Droguinha *. . . a transitory object, an ephemeral object, something exposed to the world, to the elements, to dust, like our own lives.*

Now I never addressed sculpture as sculpture, nor the object as object. . . . That work came about as part of the problem of transparency, not of the object. . . . it was the theme of transparency that led me to the object, that's what I mean. In my case it was really that. It was acrylic—not that I consider acrylic a pretty medium or a modern material, but that it's the only *material. The technology allows a certain handling that glass wouldn't, which affords me the possibility of broadening research in the field of transparency. To me this was really the form through which the object came into being. I never actually intended to address the object.*

—1977[6]

Except for the *Monocromáticos*, all the works discussed so far were made in the same decade (the 1960s) and in the same material (Japanese paper). While this selection is narrower than Schendel's ultimate range, it does show clearly how she advanced as much through the difficulties in her work as through its logical unfolding. This characteristic, synthesized in the *Droguinhas*, helps us to see how she both looked at Brazilian Constructivism and took a different path.

Beginning in World War II, when global conflict restricted international trade, Brazil underwent a period of rapid industrialization as it attempted to replace imports with homegrown production. This process advanced with the government of Juscelino Kubitschek, from 1956 to 1961, when investment in heavy industry—steel, automobiles, and others—allowed Brazil to produce goods it had previously imported. As a result, the country changed in nature: in 1940, 68.7 percent of the population was rural; by 1970, this number had dropped to 44.08 percent, with the majority of Brazilians now urban. It is within this context that we should see the emergence in Brazil of artistic trends identified with late European Constructivism, and above all with the ideas of Max Bill and the artists of the Ulm school, who thought that art should be clearly and demonstrably rational (fig. 6).[7] That influence appears as early as 1952, with the *Manifesto Ruptura*, the first manifesto of the Brazilian Constructivists, who called themselves *Concretistas*. The manifesto advocated an "artistic intuition based on clear and intelligent principles," described art as "a means of knowledge that can be deduced from concepts," and attacked "nonfigurative hedonism, a product of random aesthetics."[8]

In 1959, with the publication of the *Manifesto Neoconcreto*, a number of artists who had been part of the Concretist movement rejected its rationalist principles in favor of an art that gave more importance to the experiential, the sensual, and the subjective. Even while moving away from Bill's dogmatism, though, some of the Neoconcretist artists continued to be guided by the idea of an art based on logical, clearly defined principles. Lygia Clark, for example, one of the artists who benefited most from the rupture of Neoconcretism, would long explore the possibilities of the Möbius strip; from *Caminhando* (Walking, 1963; fig. 7) to *Abrigos poéticos* (Poetic shelters, 1964) and *Trepantes* (Creepers, 1964/1965), her forms are didactic in conception, made more relative only by their intense material presence. For Schendel, on the other hand, the meaning of an artwork came above all from its power to resist the kind of single, self-evident reading that requires reducing things—whether drawings, words, or bricks—to a well-functioning dynamic of clarity. At the same time, she had no interest in obscurantism, in the cult of art as the guardian of indecipherable mysteries. Such cumbersome concepts could never sustain her fragile, simple works.

The *Droguinhas* well demonstrate the kinds of relationships that Schendel sought between experience and meaning. She had already made writing a quasi-object in the *Monotipias*; she would later transpose it into space in the *Objetos gráficos*. Now, revealing the double meaning of the word "text" as both "writing" and "something woven,"

6. **Max Bill**
Unidade Tripartida (Tripartite unity). 1948/49
Stainless steel, 45 1/4 x 34 3/4 x 38 11/16" (115 x 88.3 x 98.2 cm)
Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

7. **Lygia Clark**
Caminhando (Walking). 1963. Performance

a "textile,"[9] the *Droguinhas* waver between threads of meaning and a more opaque material dimension implicit in the physical aspect of the work, its succession of knots and extensions. And they preserve a relationship of simultaneous openness and containment with the surrounding space.

Interpretations of Schendel's work often mention an almost paradoxical opposition,[10] an unresolved interplay between gentleness and force. This quality, I believe, results from her singular approach to reality: her materials attained intensity through very gentle interventions. The work's meaning depends on preserving this tension.

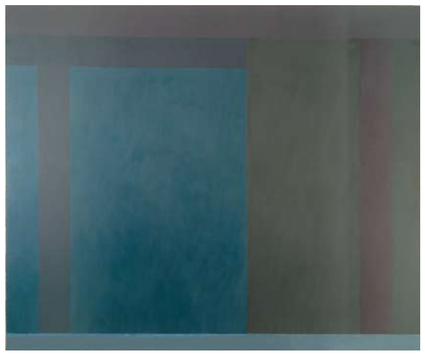
Schendel came to Brazil in August of 1949, at the age of thirty. Although her professional production began there, the foundations of her complex intellect and personality had been established before her arrival,[11] not only through her harsh experience in Europe during the war but through the cultural milieu in which she grew up. Many of the paintings she now began to make are characterized by their tonal proximity. This is true not only of her art of the 1950s and early 1960s but also of later works, such as the twelve "I Ching" temperas shown at the Bienal de São Paulo of 1981 and the tempera works using stenciled letters and numbers from the same year.

Discussion of the "nationality" of Schendel's work—of whether to call it "Brazilian"—can easily become circular, since "Brazilian" must be defined in advance, a denial of art's ability to break down set identities. The comparison of Schendel's first paintings with those of other Brazilian artists is nevertheless instructive, as is both her embrace of and her distance from Brazilian Constructivism.

Schendel knew the work of Giorgio Morandi while she was still in Italy (fig. 8). She also saw it in Brazil, especially in the São Paulo biennials.[12] I doubt that the artists of any other country, even perhaps Italy, were as deeply influenced by Morandi as those in Brazil. Few important Brazilian artists have failed to find something personal and relevant in his work, from Alfredo Volpi to Iberê Camargo, Milton Dacosta, Francisco Rebolo, Amílcar de Castro, Eduardo Sued, and even contemporary artists like Paulo Pasta (fig. 9). The roots of this interest are hard to identify, but one can make a connection between Morandi's tonal wisdom and certain defining aspects of Brazilian culture. From the absence of revolutionary upheavals to the search for fraternity, for warm, affectionate social interaction, many traits of Brazilian life reflect a faith in personal relationships as a defense against universalizing norms and impersonal institutions, which have contributed to a historical cementing of inequalities and privileges.[13] In many ways, Brazilian culture has tried to overcome the violence of its social life with a subtlety of sensibility that might serve as the basis for affectionate, enduring relationships, removed from the harshness of exchanges based on profit, individual advantage, or institutional rules. One need only think of one of our greatest writers, Guimarães Rosa, in whose work a discontinuous modern diction stands almost without rupture alongside a colloquial kind of speech that relies heavily on the informality of Brazil's rural dialects.

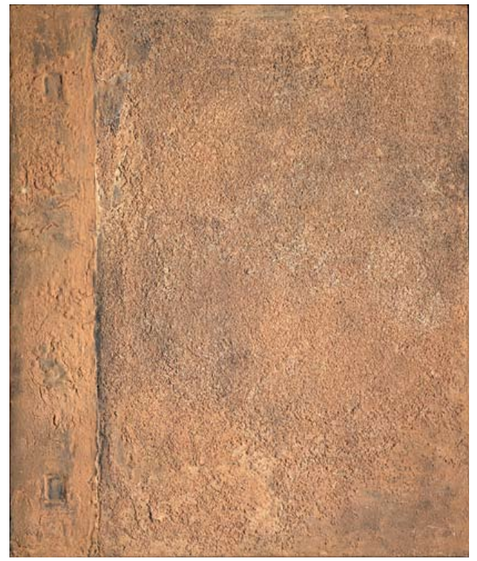
The magnitude, and the limits, of Morandi's legacy in Brazil are beyond the scope of this essay, but it is worth exploring why Schendel's work moved progressively away from an aesthetic that so interested her early on (fig. 10). Morandi's tonal paintings explore intimate sympathetic connections among disparate things, a central focus for Schendel. Even in her works of the 1950s and '60s, in which the contrasts are more pronounced (and which often recall the heterodox Constructivism of Milton Dacosta), she seems to have wanted to show that similar treatments of different colors, combined with an accentuated material facture, might approximate distinct qualities of light. Although she would return to even tonality after the 1960s, the unity it established, and the limits it imposed, also led her in other directions. To integrate a painting by the use of tonal proximity almost negated the reciprocal affirmation of elements that was ultimately revealed as one of her fundamental concerns. If the Constructivist tendencies of Brazilian art emphasized clear articulation of the elements of an artwork, even tonality tended to accentuate soft transitions among them. Schendel was interested in both, but since her aesthetic required relationships among elements in which each both reinforced and limited the others, she needed to move away from both.

I do not believe that Schendel would have produced this work in another country, particularly a developed country. The greater aesthetic density of an established art culture would have led her to less temperate solutions, especially after the 1970s, and the institutional



8. **Giorgio Morandi**
Still Life. 1949.
Oil on canvas, 14 1/4x 17 1/4" (36 x 43.7 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
James Thrall Soby Bequest

9. **Paulo Pasta**
Aquém. (On this side). 1963
Oil on canvas, 7' 10 1/2" x 9' x 10 1/8" (240 x 300 cm.)
Courtesy Galleria Millan, São Paulo



10. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. Mid-1960s
Tempera on burlap, 23 5/8 x 19 11/16" (60 x 50 cm)
Private collection, Brazil

framework of a more structured society might have identified her work, even if falsely, with an intimacy that was far from her concerns. While it is possible, for example, to find connections between Schendel and Agnes Martin—at least in the subtlety of their work—it is also necessary to identify their differences. Martin's subtlety arose from repeated gestures that hesitated to claim uniqueness (a characteristic recalling the Minimalists), while Schendel's came from a unique intervention that hesitated to affirm itself unilaterally.

I also think that easy connections between Schendel's work and Brazilian art history can lead to errors. An art history as sparse as Brazil's must calmly accept solitary paths, whose origins and itineraries are not easily identified: Camargo, Miguel Bakun, Oswaldo Goeldi, Alberto da Veiga Guignard, and so many others. Also, we have only recently been able to see the complete oeuvres of these various solitaries. Hurried conclusions might help in construing a more or less cohesive narrative of our history, but to the detriment of their real achievements and singularity.

Although Schendel revisited even tonality, continuing to search for a softer reciprocity among beings and things, I believe that other criteria guided her work from the second half of the 1960s on. The *Sarrafos* (Splints; plates 141, 142) of the late 1980s, which along with the *Monocromáticos* are among her last works, recall her drawings of the 1960s in their black lines on white, their ambiguities between plane and surface, and a certain difficulty in distinguishing their visual elements. Also like the *Monocromáticos*, they are relatively large scale. Here Schendel was bearing witness: those were turbulent years in Brazil—protests against the military dictatorship were accelerating, and a national space for public discourse was emerging. The possibility of people coming closer without violence demanded a more powerful configuration of individualities. In fact the *Sarrafos* are Schendel's most assertive works. If, on the one hand, they echo the subtlety of the 1960s work, on the other they establish more conflictual relationships, in which the presence of angles and contrasts points to new directions. "I am finally able to be aggressive," Schendel told the artist Iole de Freitas in the 1980s.[14]

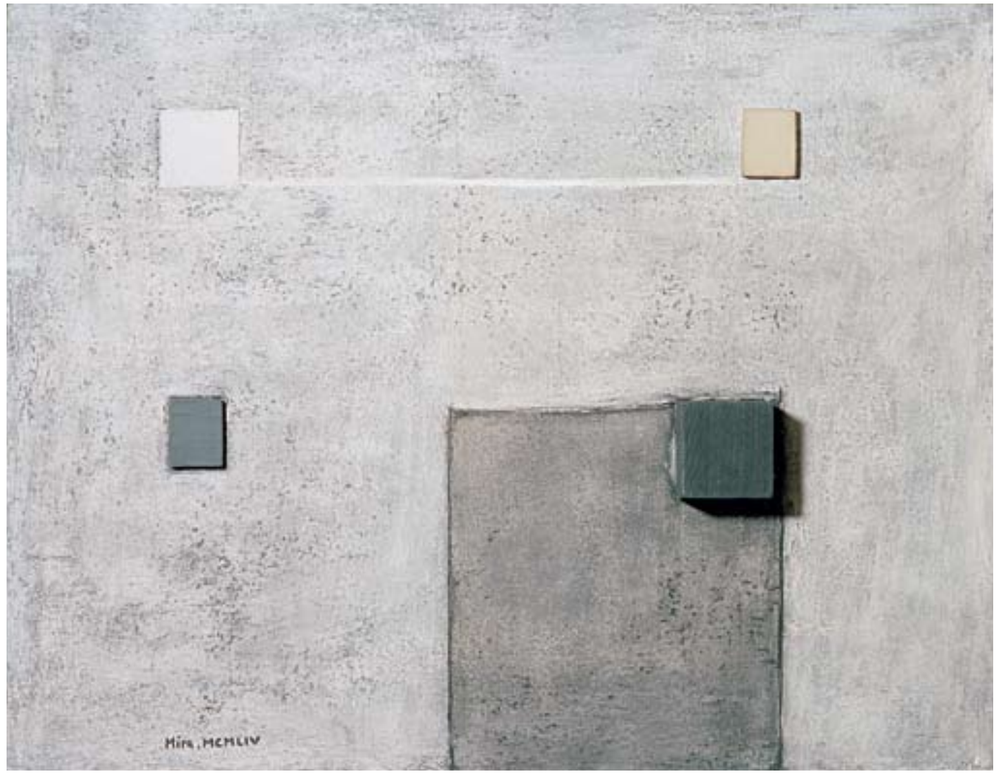
Schendel's difficulty in being "aggressive"—even the *Sarrafos* can only be considered so in the context of her own work—helps to explain her dilemmas and aspirations. Even in the first paintings in tempera and gold leaf, from the mid-1980s—just before the *Monocromáticos* and the *Sarrafos*—she was already searching for a more potent expressiveness, in both the work's format and the articulation of its elements. But the spaces of these paintings, ample in relation to her earlier work, raised uncomfortable issues: how to prevent these slightly larger dimensions from imposing themselves on the delicate relationships within them? The answers reveal some hesitation. The contrast between the sparkle and contained geometry of the gold-leaf areas and the opacity and indeterminacy of the monochromatic tempera surfaces establishes the unresolved interplay that had always interested her. For these tensions to be effective, though, the golden areas had to be discrete, which to some extent limited their aesthetic and visual power.

Apparently Schendel could only be aggressive once. A second time might compromise all she had believed in over the course of her career. Life allows detours for those who wish to live a just life; these trials may have an almost mythical, religious component, and highlight the rightness of the previous course. In 1987, after making the *Monocromáticos* and the *Sarrafos*, Schendel began to work with brick dust and glue on the *Tijolos* (Brick; plate 145), in a scale like that of her earlier work. Again she returned to light tonal passages and to areas of rough texture. If, in the *Sarrafos*, Schendel had been excessive, as if swept by temptation, these works are correspondingly contained, as if to atone for a lapse.

Although Schendel was an agnostic, she had a theologian's interest in religion. She studied the ideas of the German phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz as if she might find in them the solutions to her existential dilemmas. She was aware of the dissonance between art and life, between theory and praxis, but she never abandoned the attempt to glimpse, through the artist's experience, the contours of a less fractured life: an existence in which people and the world, nature and culture, like lines and surfaces, gained strength precisely from their ability to affirm what had seemed to be their opposite.

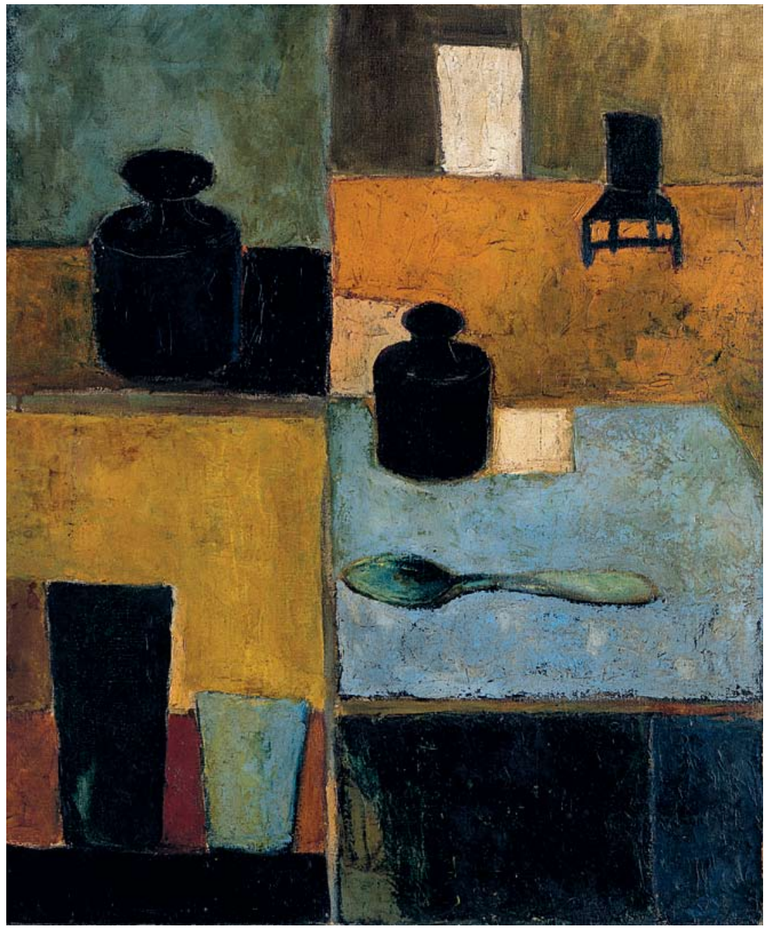
Endnotes

1. See *Raquel Arnaud e o olhar contemporâneo* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005), p. 54.
2. Mira Schendel, typed ms., unsigned and undated. Courtesy Arquivo Mira Schendel, São Paulo.
3. This circle included the physicist and critic Mário Schenberg, the psychoanalyst and critic Theon Spanudis, the philosopher and essayist Vilém Flusser, and the artist Amélia Toledo.
4. A number of writers have mentioned this connection. See, for example, Paulo Venancio Filho, "A transparência misteriosa da explicação," in Sonia Salzstein, *Mira Schendel. A forma volátil* (Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, and São Paulo: Marca d'Agua, 1997), p. 29, and Maria Eduarda Marques, *Mira Schendel* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, Coleção Espaços da Arte Brasileira, 2001), p. 29. On these aspects of Klee's work see Robert Kudielka's remarkable essay "Paul Klee and the 'Saga of Infantilism,'" in *Paul Klee. La infancia en la edad adulta* (Las Palmas de Gran Canária: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, 2007).
5. Schendel, statement to the Departamento de Pesquisa e Documentação de Arte Brasileira da Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (Department of research and documentation, Armando Alvares Penteado foundation), São Paulo, August 19, 1977. Courtesy Arquivo Mira Schendel, São Paulo.
6. Ibid.
7. Max Bill, born in Switzerland in 1908, had a deep influence on Brazilian art. His work *Unidade tripartida* (Tripartite unity, 1948) won the sculpture prize at the first Bienal de São Paulo, in 1951; he visited Brazil in 1953, when he argued harshly with modernist Brazilian architects, and in January of 1954, as a juror at the second Bienal de São Paulo. He also helped to bring word of Brazilian Constructivism to Europe, and in 1960 he wrote for the catalogue of the exhibition of São Paulo Concretists at the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.
8. The Grupo Ruptura (Rupture group) was led by Waldemar Cordeiro. The *Manifesto Ruptura* is republished in Ana Maria Belluzzo, Aracy A. Amaral, Pierre Restany, et al., *Waldemar Cordeiro, uma aventura da razão* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 1986), p. 59.
9. See Guy Brett, "Ativamente o vazio," in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo. Mira Schendel* (São Paulo: Marca d'Agua, 1996), p. 55. This book is a rich source of material on Schendel.
10. Brett, for example, remarks on the "fragility and energy" of the *Droguinhas*. Alberto Tassinari, discussing the *Mais ou menos frutas* (More or less fruit) series, mentions their "communication between intimacy and immensity." Ronaldo Brito sees the *Sarrafos* (Splints) as objects both "aesthetic and intense, almost anonymous but also unique." All in ibid., pp. 268, 270, and 274. For Salzstein, Schendel's work involves "sophisticated conceptual maneuvers" and "disconcerting adhesion to quotidian matters." See *Mira Schendel. A forma volátil*, p. 17. The Venezuelan critic Rina Carvajal writes that "in its apparent fragility, simplicity, and lightness, the work of Mira Schendel displays a powerful energy." In Carvajal, Suely Rolnik, Alma Ruiz, et al., *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, and Mira Schendel* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), p. 45.
11. See Geraldo Souza Dias, *Mira Schendel: Kunst zwischen Metaphysik und Leiblichkeit* (Glienicke and Berlin: Galda + Wilch Verlag, 2000). A synopsis appears in *Mira Schendel* (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 2001).
12. Giorgio Morandi won the prize for etching at the second Bienal de São Paulo, in 1953–54, which included twenty-three of his prints. At the fourth Bienal de São Paulo, in 1957, he won the grand prize.
13. The bibliography on this subject is both large and contradictory, but two studies are fundamental: Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), Eng. trans. most recently as *The Masters and the Slaves* (New York: Random House, 2000), and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's *Raízes do Brasil* (1936).
14. See Iole de Freitas, "Os Sarrafos," in Salzstein, ed., *No vazio do mundo*, p. 226. Beginning in the late 1970s, Schendel began to seek out younger artists, an indication of her continuous search for new challenges.



1. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1954
Tempera on wood, 20 1/8 x 26" (51.1 x 66 cm)
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
The Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art, museum purchase with funds provided by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund

2. **León Ferrari**
Mujer (Woman). c. 1960
Ceramic, 29 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 7 1/16" (75 x 35 x 18 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



3. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1953
Oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 21 1/8" (64.8 x 53.7 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

4. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1961
Ceramic, 6 11/16 x 2 5/8 x 2 1/8" (17 x 6.6 x 5.4 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

5. **León Ferrari**
Mujer preocupada (Worried woman). 1960/1961
Ceramic, 17 9/16 x 7 7/8 x 5 1/8" (44 x 20 x 13 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

6. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1954
Oil on canvas, 19 11/16 x 25 9/16" (50 x 65 cm)
Collection Andrea and José Olympio Pereira

7. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1960/1961
Ceramic,
8 11/16 x 1 15/16 x 1 15/16" (22 x 5 x 5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

8. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1960
Ceramic,
16 1/8 x 4 15/16 x 4 3/4" (41 x 12.5 x 12 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

9. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1964
Gouache on paper, 18 7/8 x 26" (48 x 66 cm)
Collection Socorro de Andrade Lima

10. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1963–64
Tempera on canvas,
29 1/2 x 29 1/2" (75 x 75 cm)
Private collection

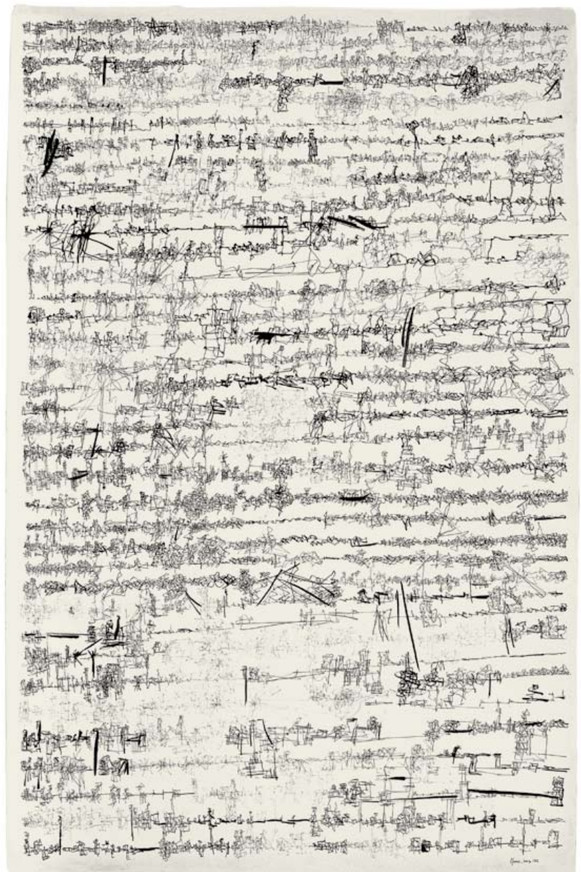
11. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1963
Incised tempera on wood,
47 5/8 x 23 5/8" (121 x 60 cm)
Collection Antonio Hermann D. M. De Azevedo

12. **León Ferrari**
Sin título (Sermón de la sangre)
(Untitled [Sermon of the blood]). 1962
Ink and colored ink on paper,
39 3/8 x 26 5/8" (100 x 67.6 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase

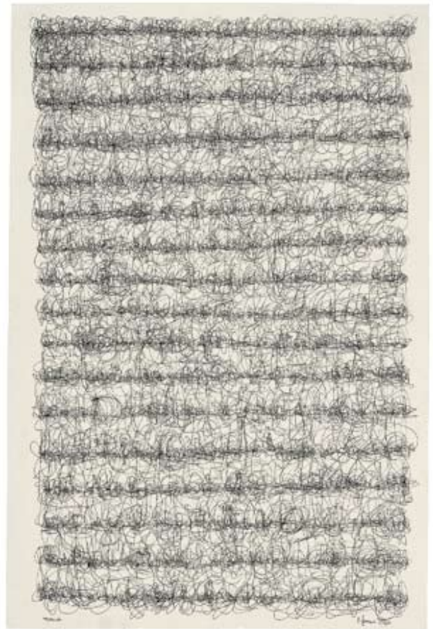
13. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. November 21, 1962
Ink and colored pencil on paper,
39 3/4 x 27 3/16" (101 x 69 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

14. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1960s
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 11/16 x 9" (47.5 x 22.9 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase

15. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1960s
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 11/16 x 9" (47.5 x 22.9 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase

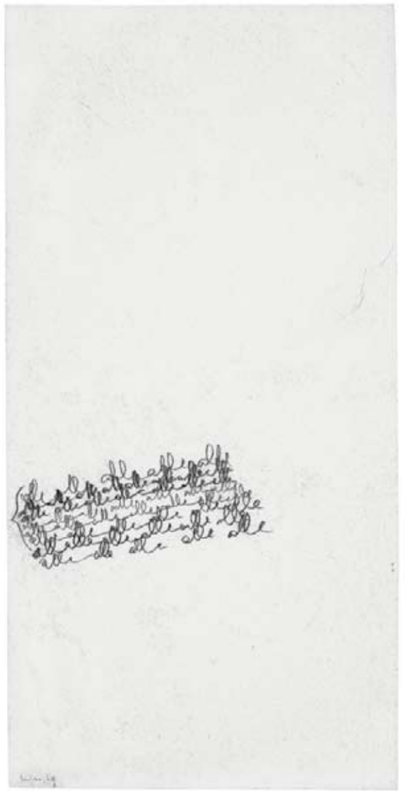


16. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. March 1962
Ink on paper, 41 5/16 x 27 1/16" (105 x 68.8 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

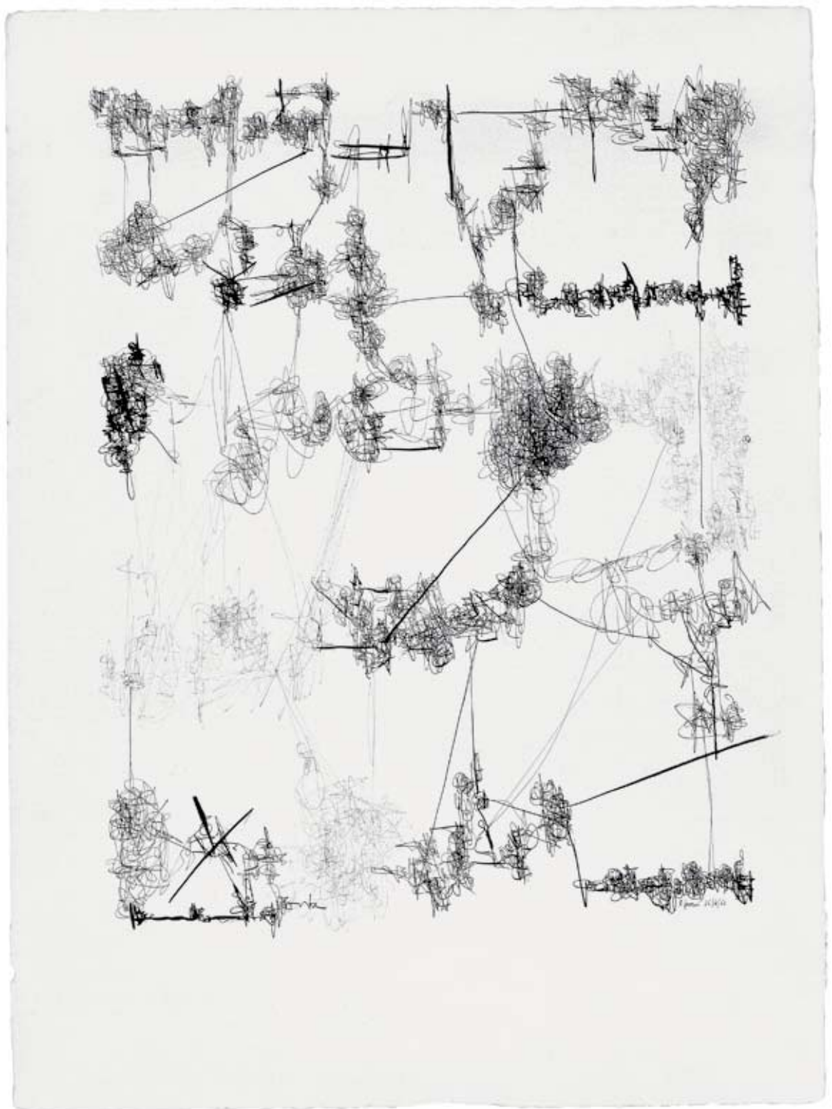


17. **León Ferrari**
Música (Music). May 2, 1962
Ink on paper, 17 11/16 x 12 3/16" (45 x 31 cm)
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires

18. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1964
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo



19. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

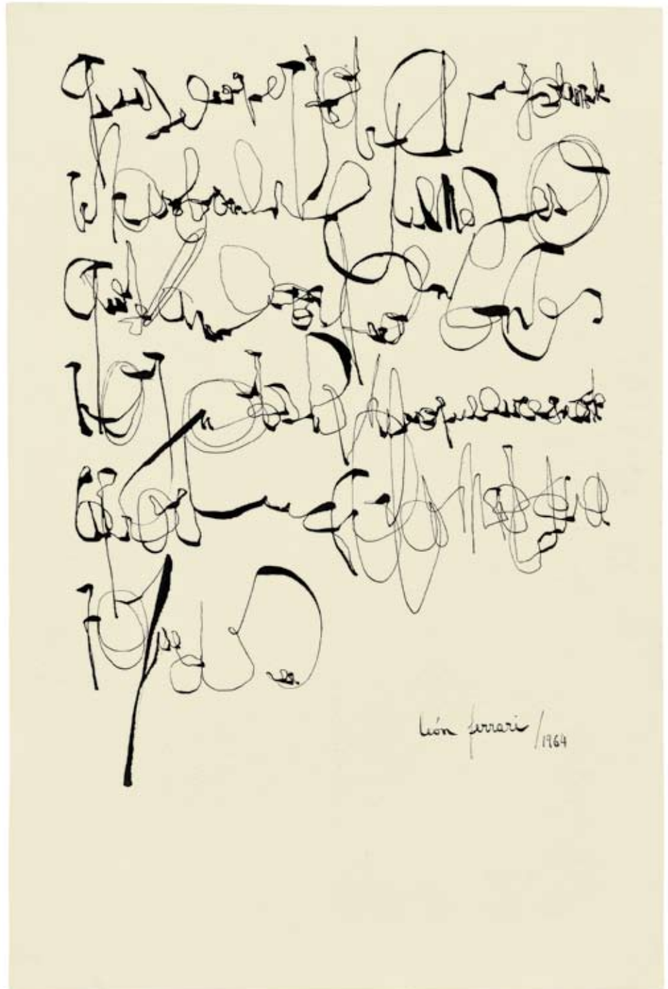


20. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. April 26, 1962
Ink on paper, 30 11/16 x 22 7/16" (78 x 57 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

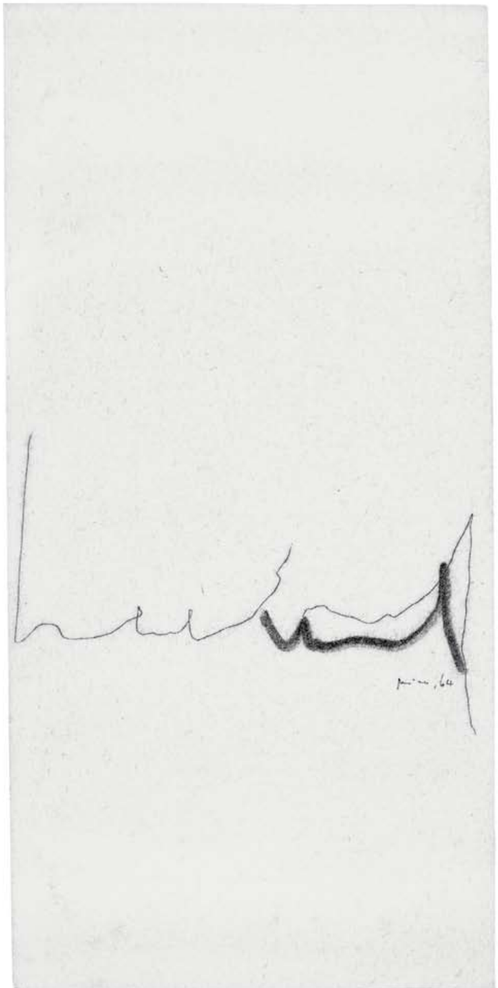
21. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Letras** (Letters). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

22. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Letras** (Letters). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

23. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Letras** (Letters). 1964
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

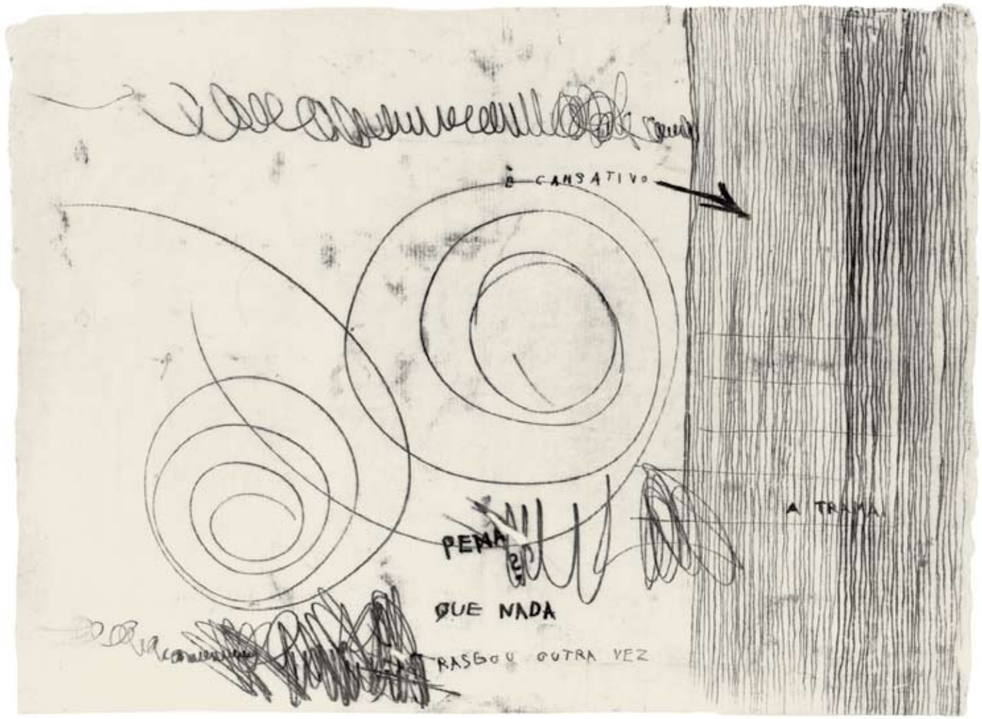


24. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1964
Ink on paper, 18 3/8 x 12 1/4" (47.3 x 31.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor
of Jennifer Russell

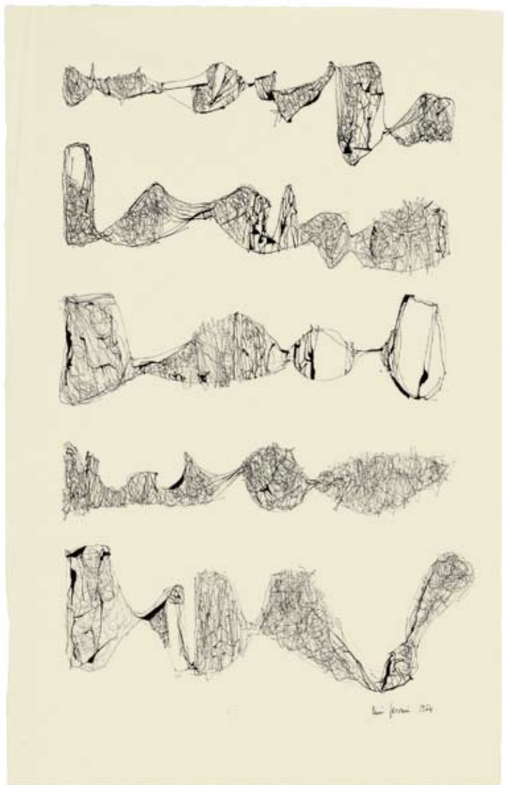


25. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1964
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

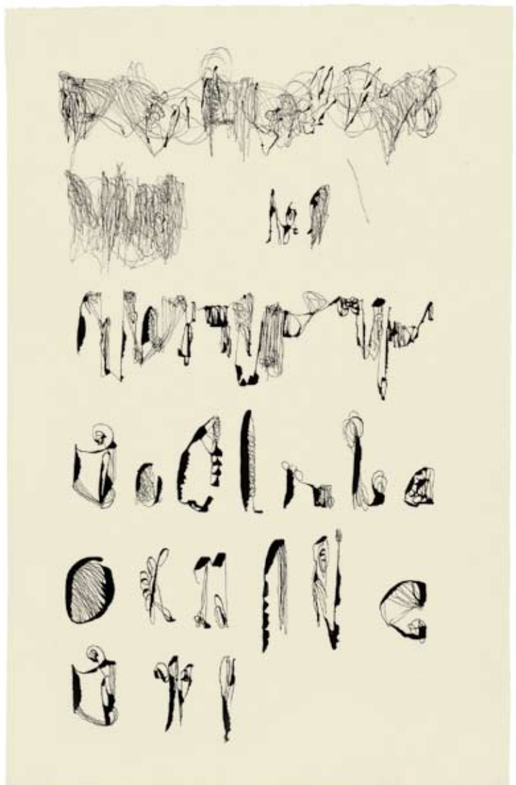
26. **León Ferrari**
Gagarín (Gagarin). c. 1961
Stainless steel, diam.: 20 ½" (52 cm)
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires



27. **Mira Schendel**
A trama (A fabric net). 1960s
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
17 ¾ x 24 ½" (45.1 x 62.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Ada Schendel and the Latin American
and Caribbean Fund

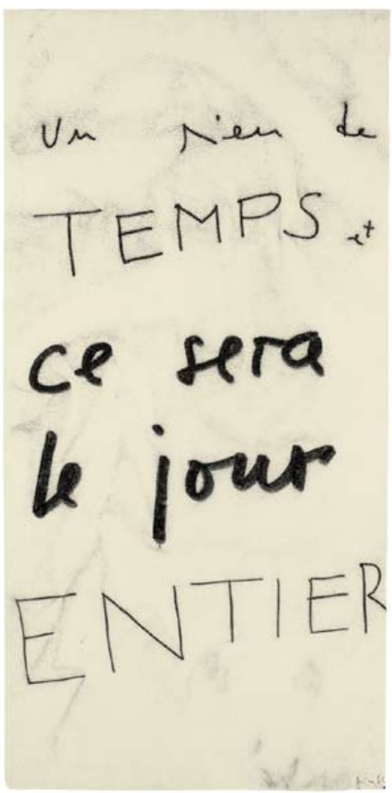


28. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1964
Ink on paper, 18 7/8 x 11 13/16" (48 x 30 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



29. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. c. 1964
Ink on paper, 18 7/8 x 12 3/16" (48 x 31 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

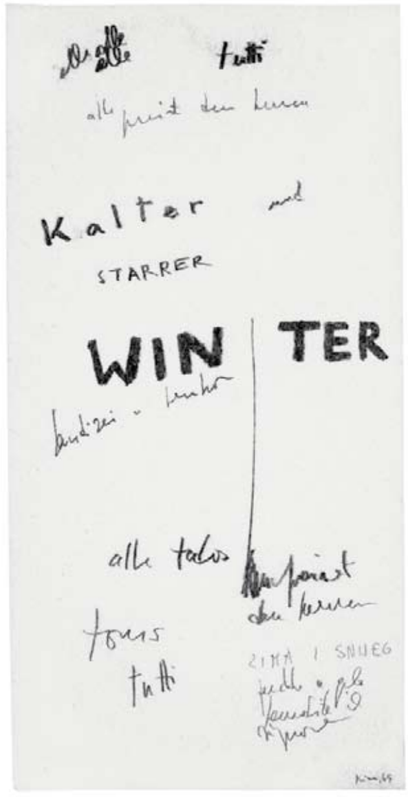
30. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1964
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (46 x 23 cm)
Collection Cesare Rivetti

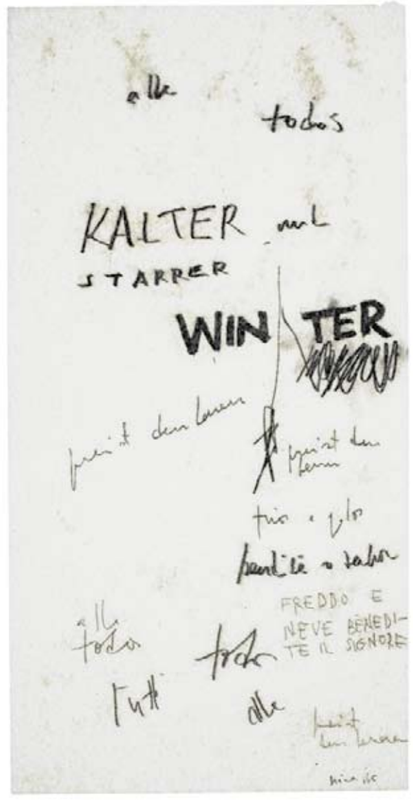


31. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/4" (46 x 23.5 cm)
Collection Adherbal Teixeira

32. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. October 24, 1962
Cut-and-pasted painted paper
on painted paper on wood,
18 7/8 x 11 13/16" (48 x 30 cm)
Collection Maria Cristina and Pablo Henning,
Houston

33. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. Mid-1960s
Tempera on burlap,
19 7/8 x 19 7/8" (50.5 x 50.5 cm)
Private collection





34. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1962
Ink on gessoed wood,
29 1/8 x 17 5/8" (74 x 44.8 cm)
GC Estudio de Arte, Buenos Aires

35. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

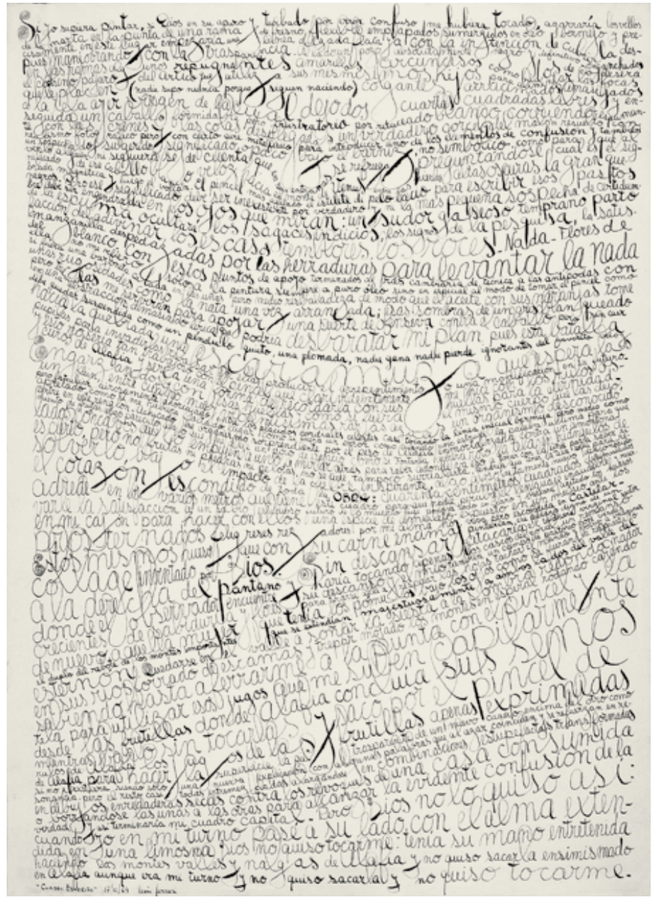
36. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

37. **León Ferrari**
Carta a un general (Letter to a general).
June 18, 1963
Ink on paper, 13 3/8 x 6 7/8" (34 x 17.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

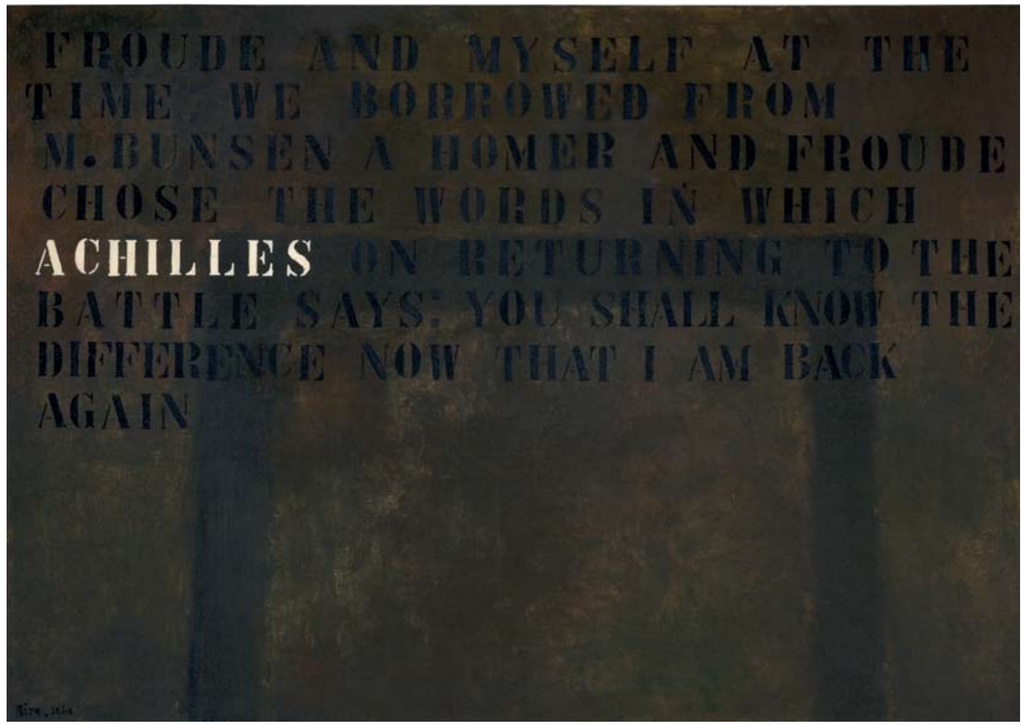
38. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

39. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

40. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo



41. **León Ferrari**
Cuadro escrito (Written painting).
December 17, 1964
Ink on paper, 26 x 18 7/8" (66 x 48 cm)
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires

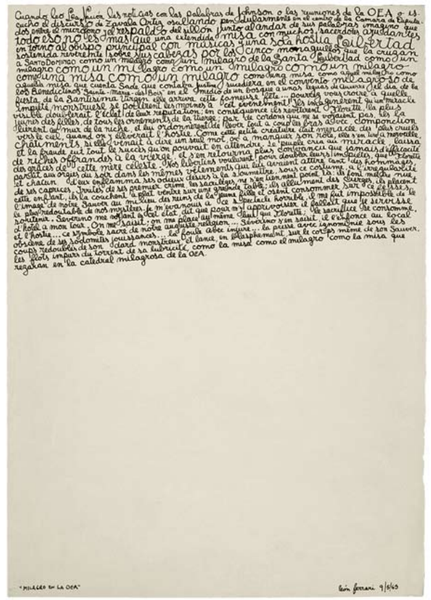


42. **Mira Schendel**
Sem título (Achilles) (Untitled [Achilles]). 1960s
Oil on canvas, 36 5/8 x 51 15/16 x 1 3/8"
(93 x 132 x 3.5 cm)
Private collection, São Paulo

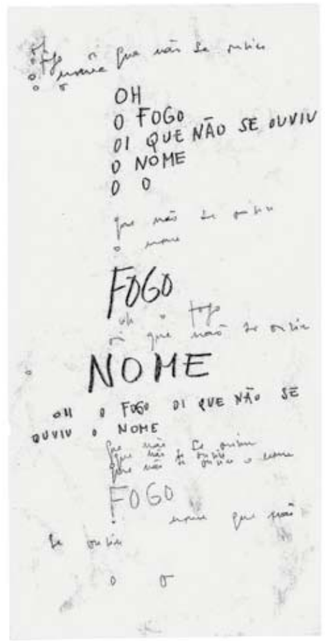
43. **León Ferrari**
El árbol embarazador
(The impregnating tree). 1964
Ink and cut-and-pasted printed paper
on paper, 16 9/16 x 12 5/8" (42 x 32 cm)
Collection Ignacio Liprandi, Buenos Aires

44–51. **Mira Schendel**
Eight untitled works from the series
Alleluia (Hallelujah). 1973
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
each: 18 1/2 x 9 1/4" (47 x 23.5 cm)
Private collection

52. **León Ferrari**
Quisiera hacer una estatua
(I would like to make a statue). c. 1964
Ink on paper, 39 1/4 x 27 7/8" (99.7 x 70.8 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of Connie Butler



53. **León Ferrari**
Milagro en la OEA (Miracle in the OAS)
from the series **Manuscritos** (Manuscripts).
May 9, 1965
Ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 13 3/4" (50 x 35 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



54. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

55. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

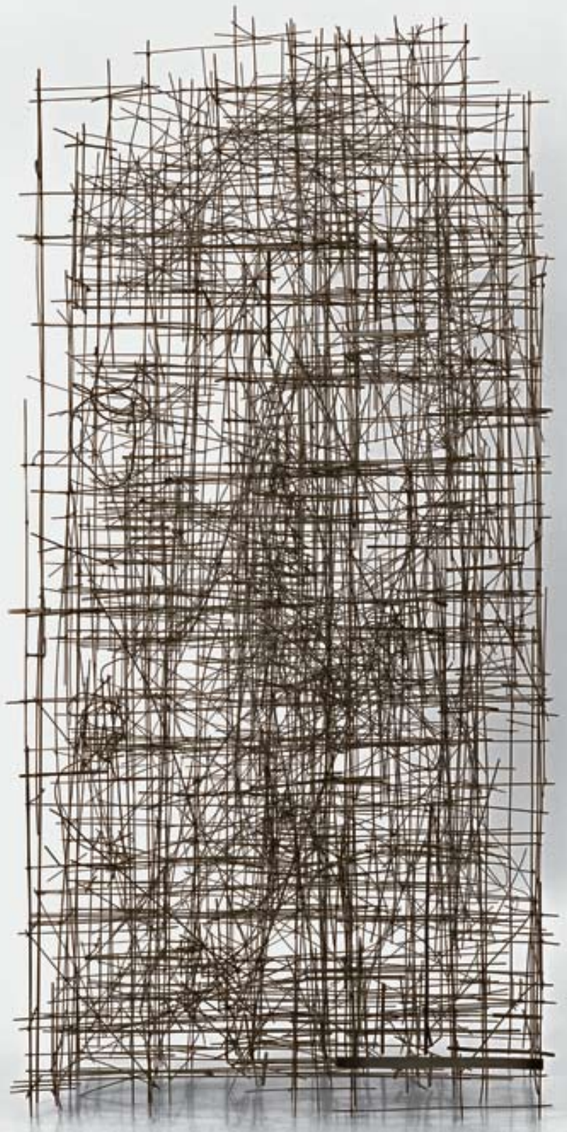
56. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Escritas** (Written). 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/2 x 9 1/16" (47 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

57. **León Ferrari**
El día que amanecí muerto
(The day that I dawned dead) from the series **Manuscritos** (Manuscripts). 1964
Ink and cut-and-pasted printed paper on paper, 11 15/16 x 9 1/16" (30 x 23 cm)
Collection Mauro and Luz Herlitzka

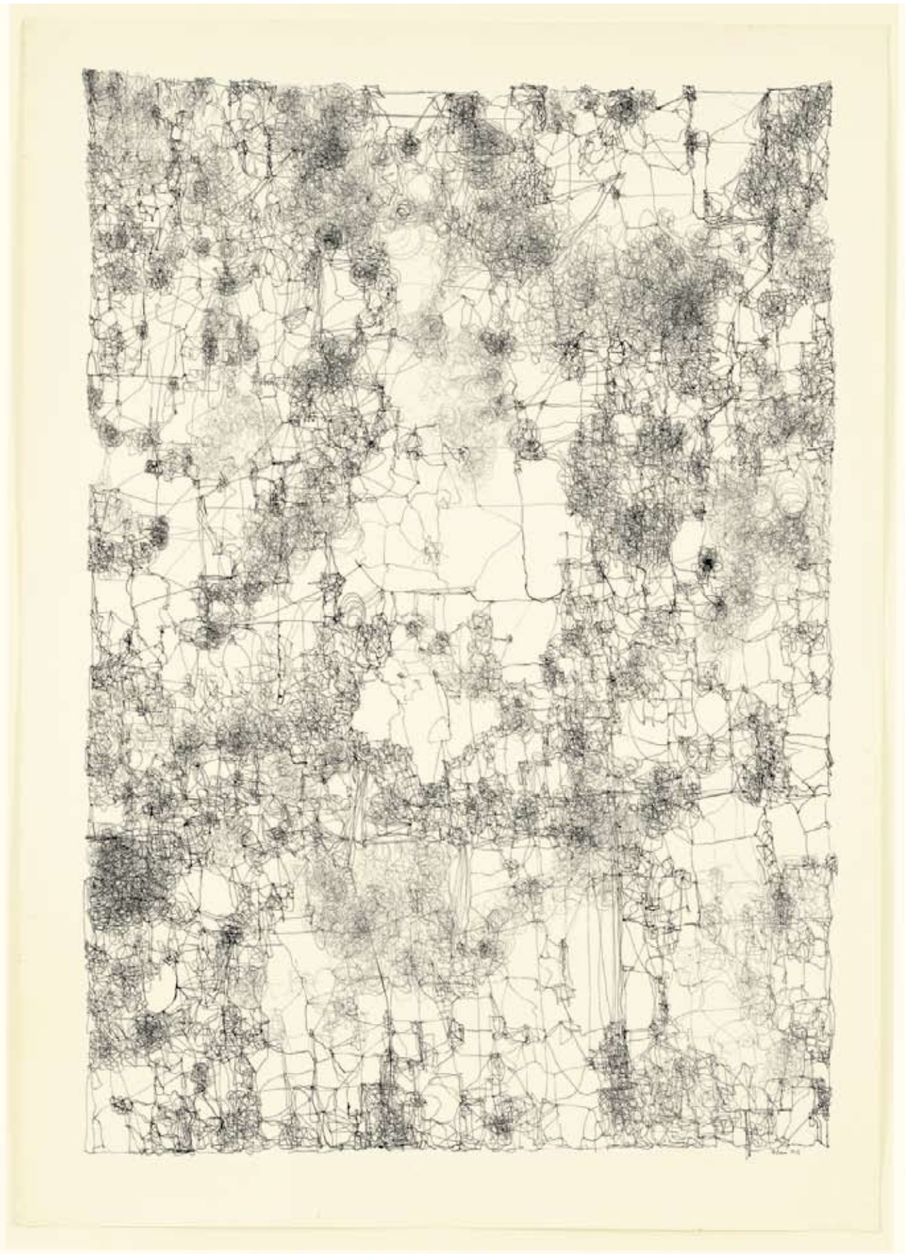
58. **León Ferrari**
La batalla estaba en su momentos definitorios (The battle was in its defining moments). 1964
Ink and cut-and-pasted printed paper on paper, 12 x 9 3/8" (30.5 x 23.8 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of Howard Gardner

59–63. **Mira Schendel**
Five untitled works from the series **Segno dei segni** (Sign of signs). 1964–65
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper, five sheets, each: 18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (46 x 23 cm), overall: c. 24 x 6' 1 5/8" (61 x 187 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Latin American and Caribbean Fund

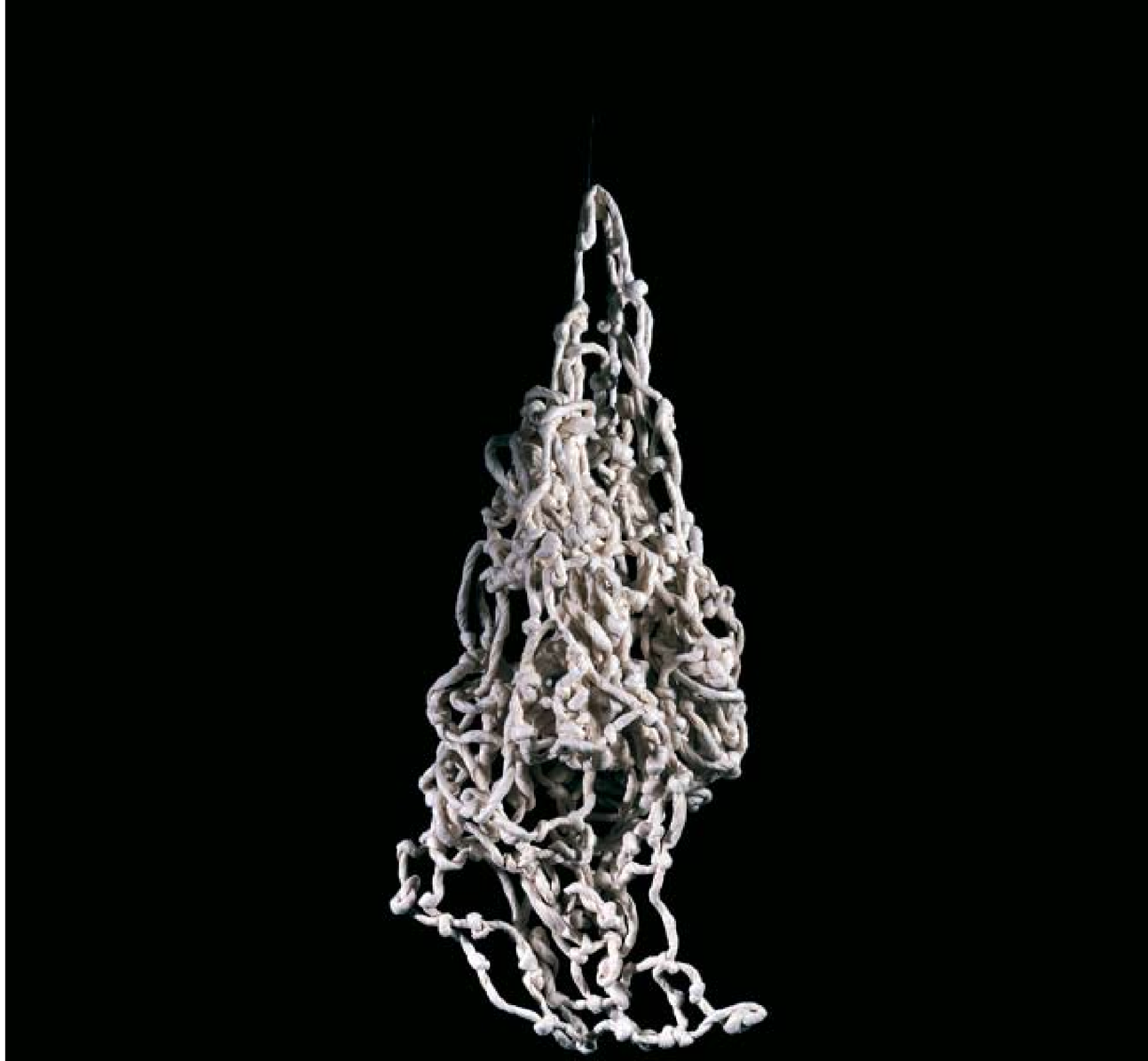
64. **León Ferrari**
Sin título (Castelar) (Untitled [Castelar]). 1962
Ink on paper, 40 3/16 x 27 9/16" (102 x 70 cm)
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum
purchase with funds provided by the Latin Maecenas



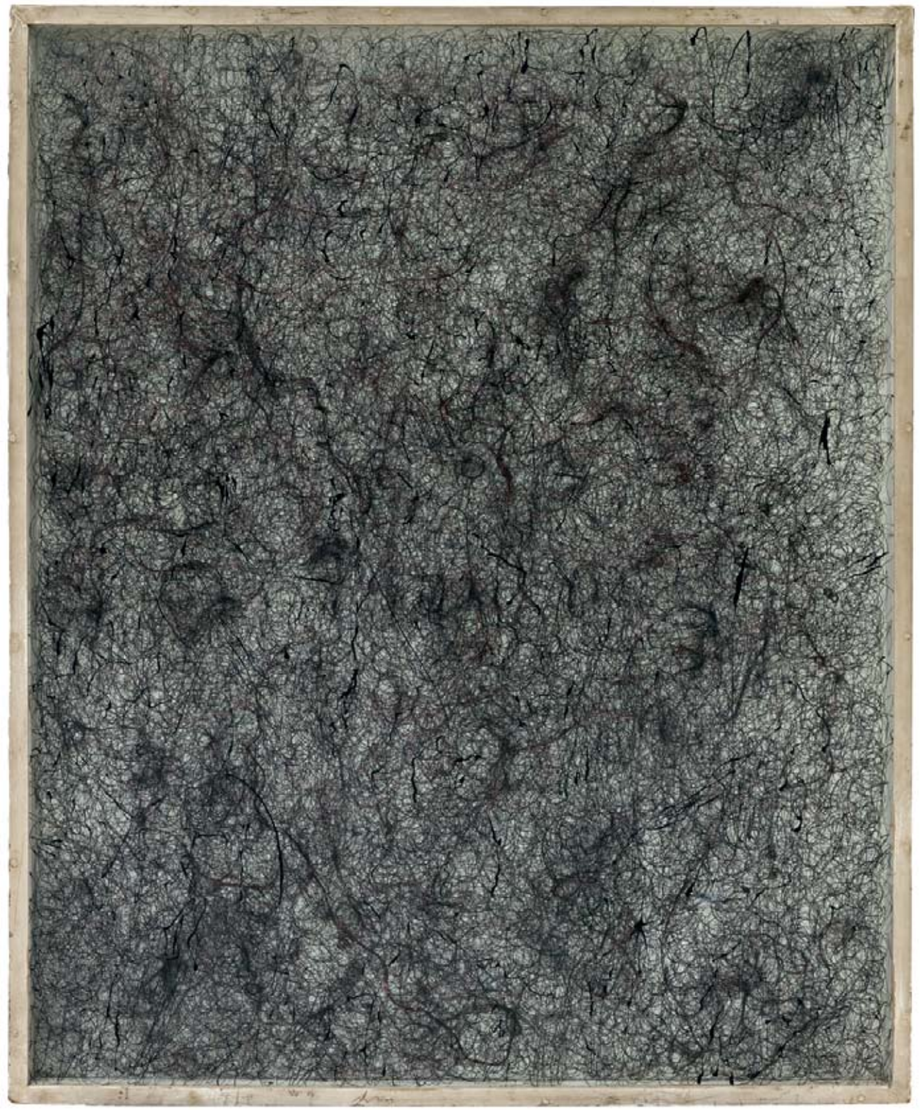
65. **León Ferrari**
Hombre (Maguete) (Man [maquette]). 1962
Stainless steel, 27 9/16 x 13 3/4 x 13 3/4"
(70 x 35 x 35 cm)
Collection Alicia y León Ferrari



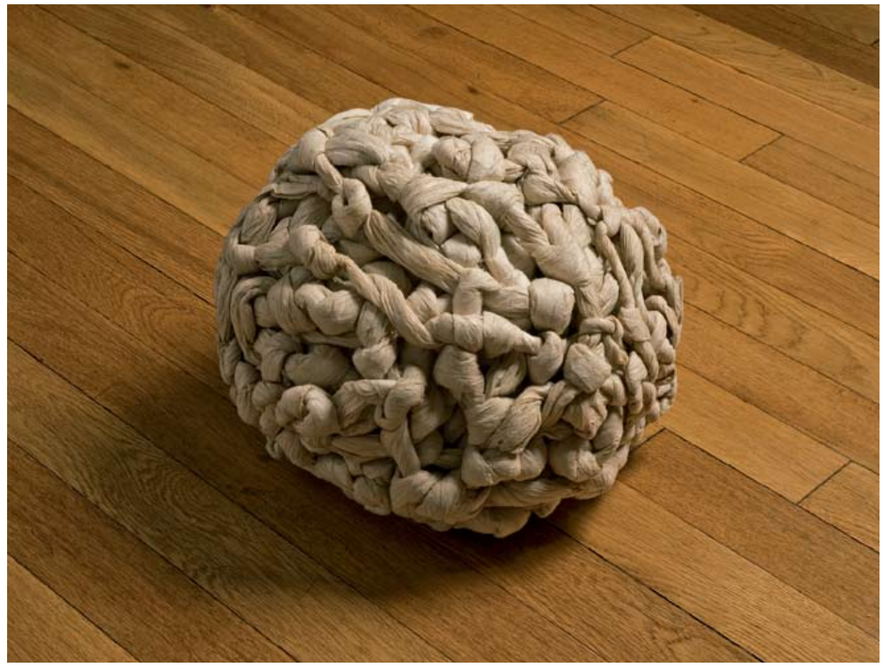
66. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1962
Ink on paper, 40 x 28 3/8" (101.6 x 72.7 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Purchase



67. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Droguinhas (Little nothings). c. 1966
Japanese paper, dimensions variable,
26" (66 cm) fully extended
Collection Diane and Bruce Halle



68. **León Ferrari**
Reflexiones (Reflections). 1963
Ink on gessoed wood, copper wire, and
ink on glass, in artist's painted wood frame,
34 1/8 x 28 x 2" (86.7 x 71.1 x 5.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Latin American and Caribbean Fund



69. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Droguinhas (Little nothings). 1965
Japanese paper, diam.: 7 7/8" (20 cm)
Private collection, London

70. **León Ferrari**
Manos (Hands). 1964
Ink on gessoed wool, stainless steel and copper wire with cut-out photographs, and ink on glass in artist's wood frame, 46 7/8 x 28 15/16 x 3 9/16" (119 x 73.5 x 9 cm)
MALBA-Fundación Costantini, Buenos Aires

71. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Droguinhas**
(Little nothings). 1966
Japanese paper, dimensions variable,
26 1/4" (66.6 cm) fully extended
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

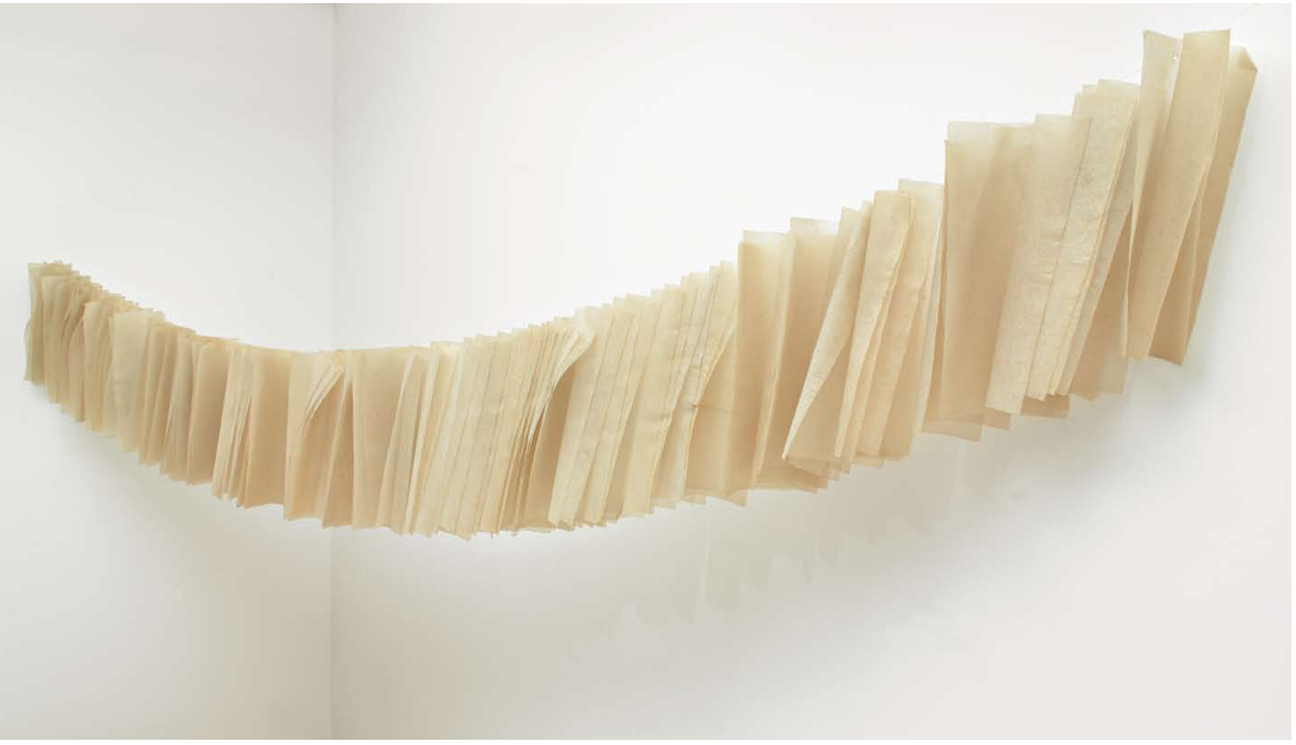
72. **León Ferrari**
Torre de Babel (Tower of Babel). 1964
Stainless steel, bronze, and copper,
6' 6 3/4" x 31 1/2" (200 x 80 cm)
Lent by the American Fund for the
Tate Gallery 2008

73. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Droguinhas**
(Little nothings). c. 1964–66
Japanese paper, dimensions variable,
35 1/2" (90 cm) fully extended
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Scott Burton Fund, 2005

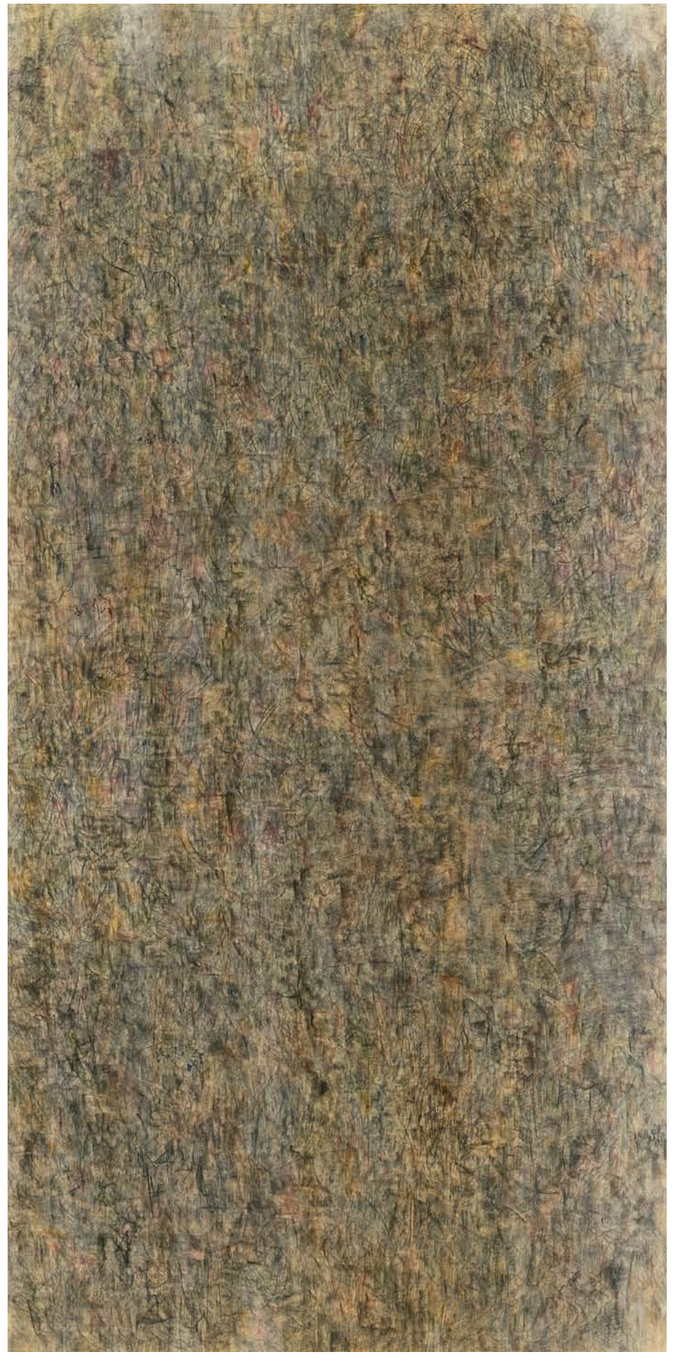
74. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Droguinhas (Little nothings). 1966
Japanese paper, dimensions variable
Collection Ada Schendel

75. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (46 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

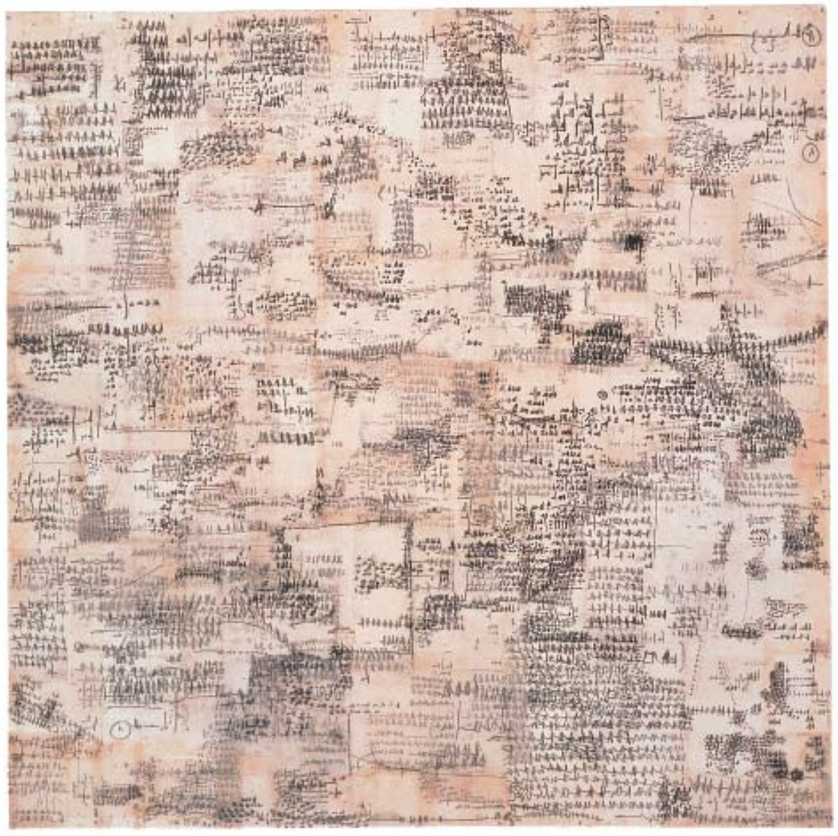
76. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1965
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper,
18 1/8 x 9 1/16" (46 x 23 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo



77. **Mira Schendel**
Trenzinho (Little train). 1965
Sheets of thin Japanese paper and nylon line, dimensions variable
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Richard Zeisler Bequest, gift of John Hay Whitney, and Marguerite K. Stone Bequest (all by exchange) and gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and Mimi Haas through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund

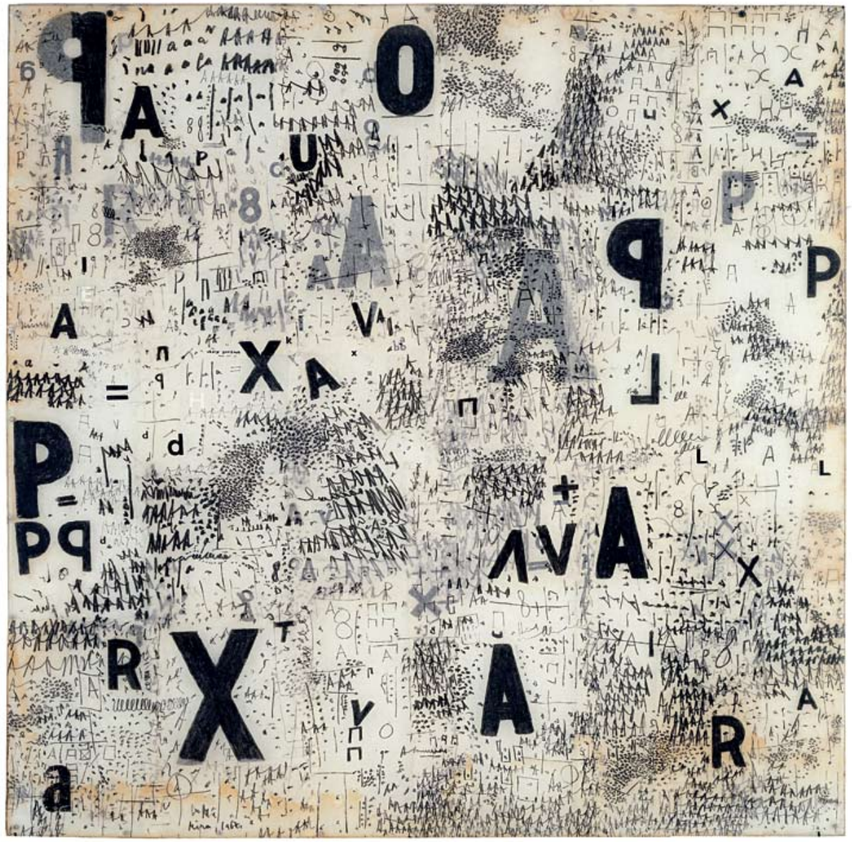


78. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1991
Oilstick on hardboard,
6' 6 3/4" x 37 3/8" (200 x 95 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Promised gift of Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis



79. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). c. 1969
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese
paper between transparent acrylic sheets,
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm)
Collection Diane and Bruce Halle

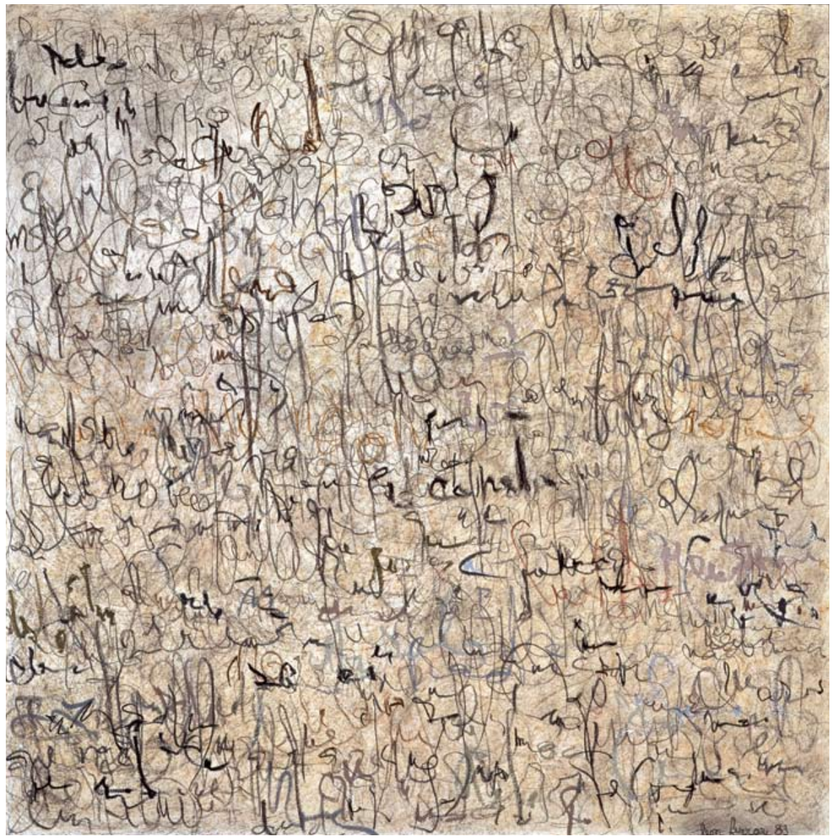
80. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1983
Oilstick and pastel on hardboard,
40 x 40" (101.6 x 101.6 cm)
Collection Ruben Cherñajovsky, Buenos Aires



81. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). 1967
Graphite, transfer type, and oil on paper
between transparent acrylic sheets
with transfer type, 39 5/16 x 39 5/16 x 3/8"
(99.8 x 99.8 x 1 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

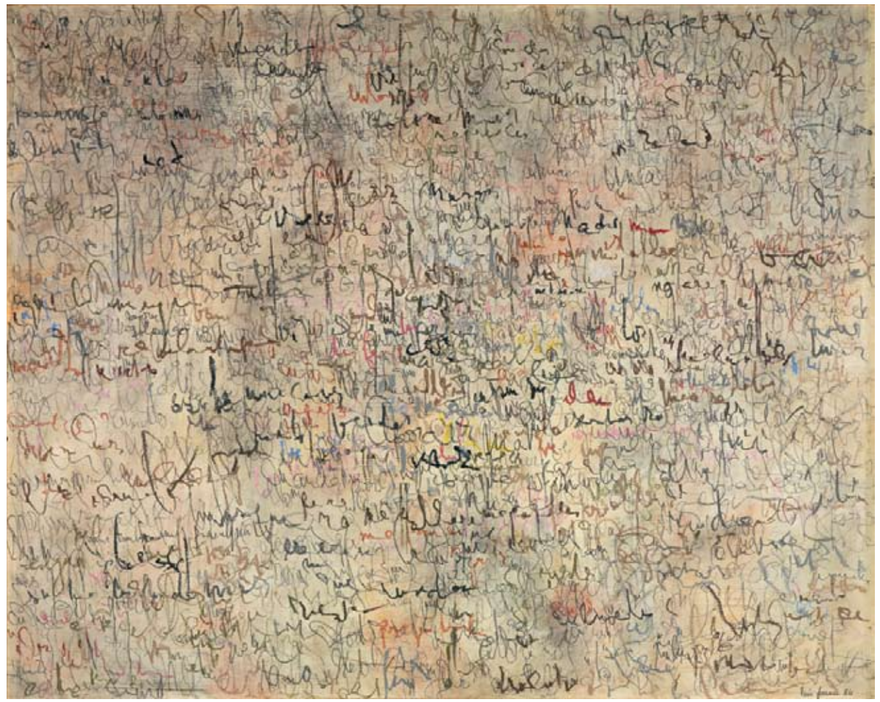
82. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1985
Oilstick and pastel on hardboard,
39 3/8 x 38 9/16" (100 x 98 cm)
Collection Patricia Rousseaux

83. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). Late 1960s
Oil transfer drawing and transfer type on thin
Japanese paper between transparent acrylic
sheets with transfer type,
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 5/16" (100 x 100 x 8 cm)
Private collection, São Paulo

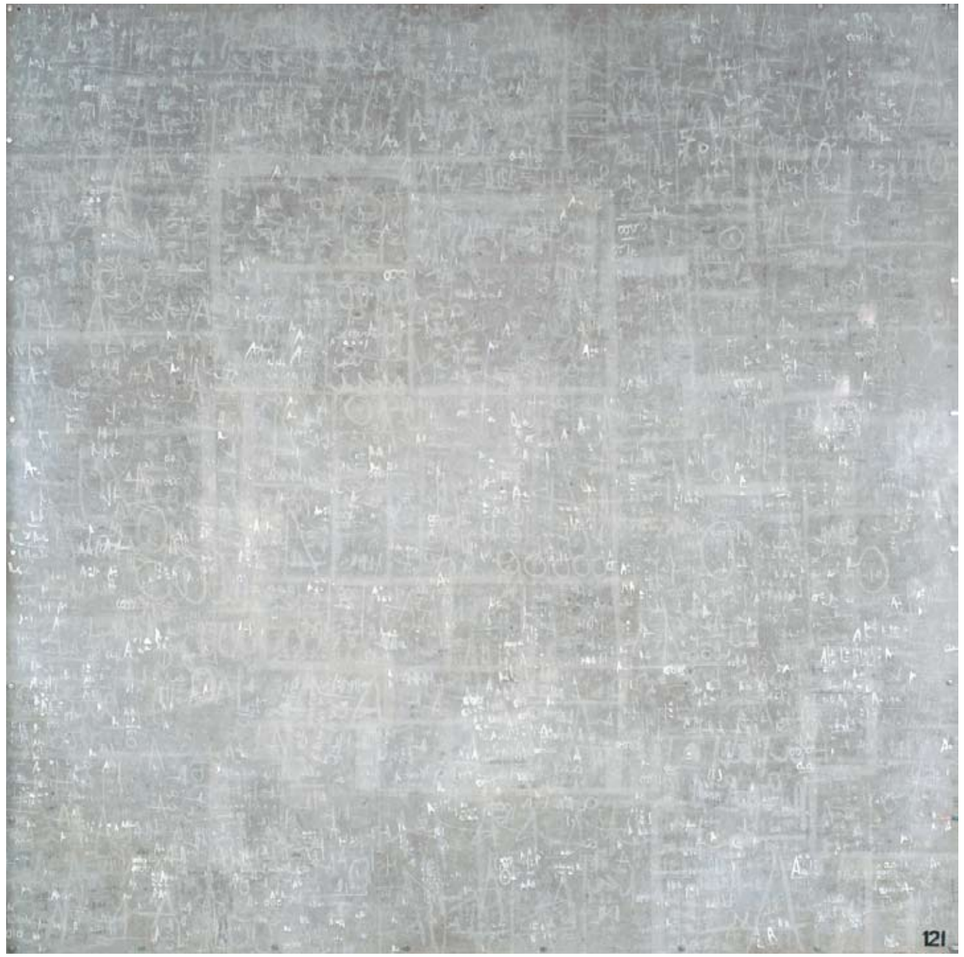


84. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1983
Oilstick and pastel on hardboard,
19 11/16 x 19 11/16" (50 x 50 cm)
Collection Patricia Rousseaux

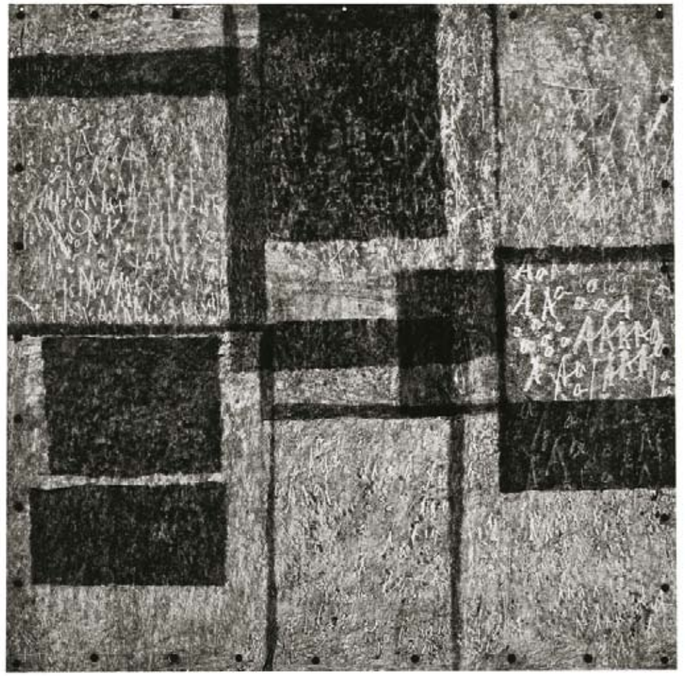
85. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). 1967–68
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper
between painted transparent acrylic sheets,
38 3/8 x 38 3/8 x 3/8" (97.5 x 97.5 x 1 cm)
Private collection



86. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1984
Oilstick and pastel on hardboard,
31 1/2 x 39 3/8" (80 x 100 cm)
Collection Cesare Rivetti

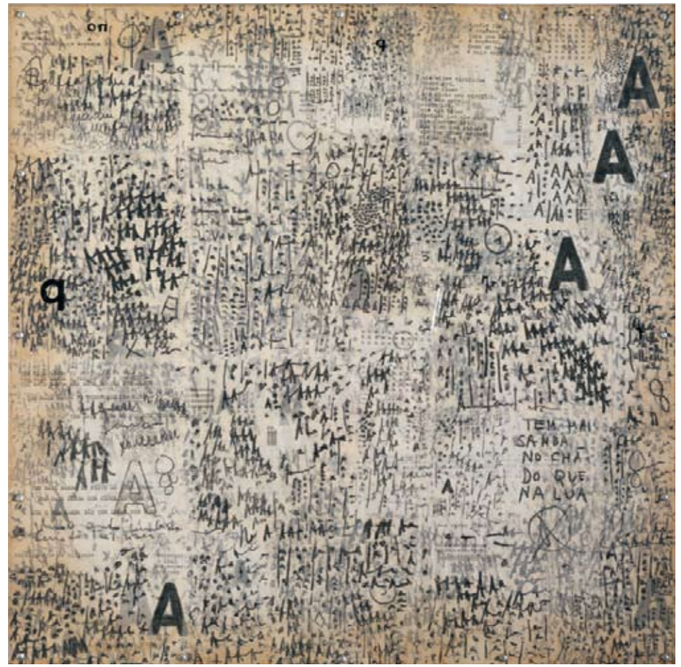


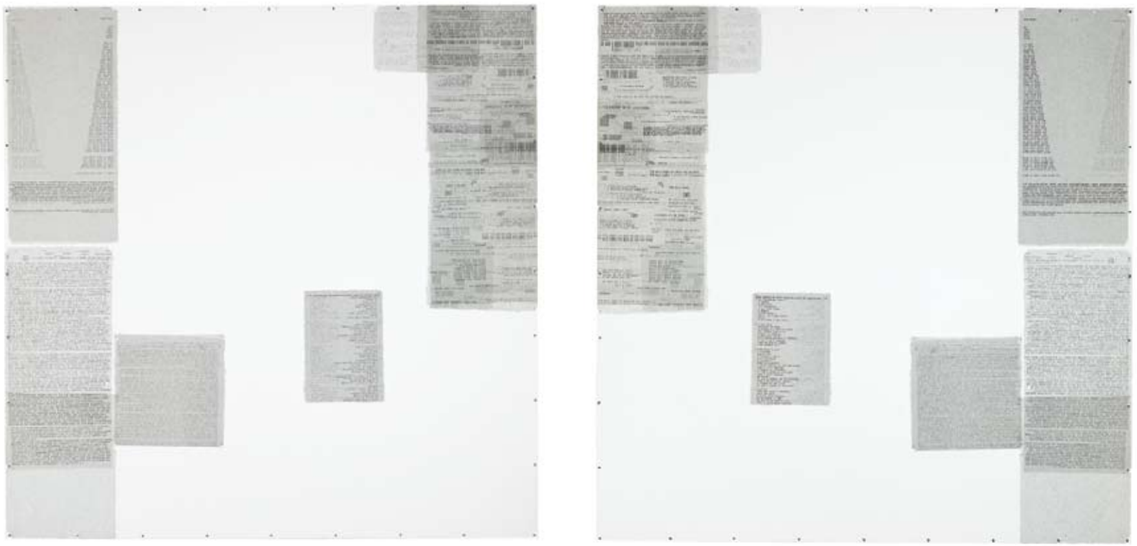
87. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). 1967–68
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese paper
between painted transparent acrylic sheets,
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm)
Collection Ernesto and Cecilia Poma



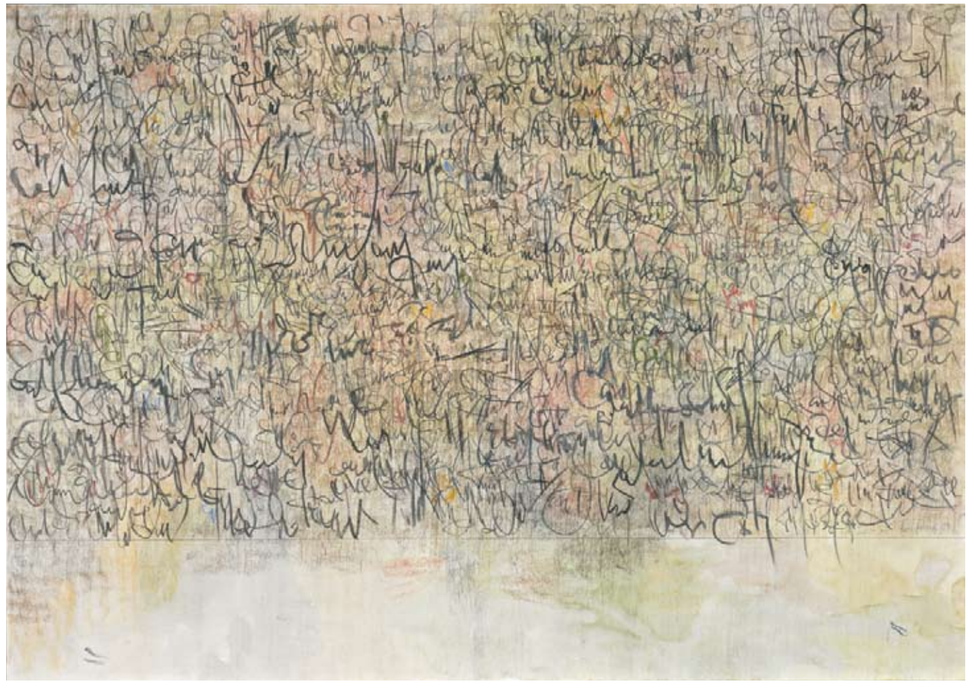
88. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). Late 1960s
Oil transfer drawing on thin Japanese
paper between transparent acrylic sheets,
19 11/16 x 19 11/16 x 3/8" (50 x 50 x 1 cm)
Collection Marta and Paulo Kuczynski,
São Paulo

89. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). Late 1960s
Oil transfer drawing and transfer type on
thin Japanese paper between transparent
acrylic sheets, 19 11/16 x 19 11/16 x 1/4"
(50 x 50 x .6 cm)
Private collection, São Paulo

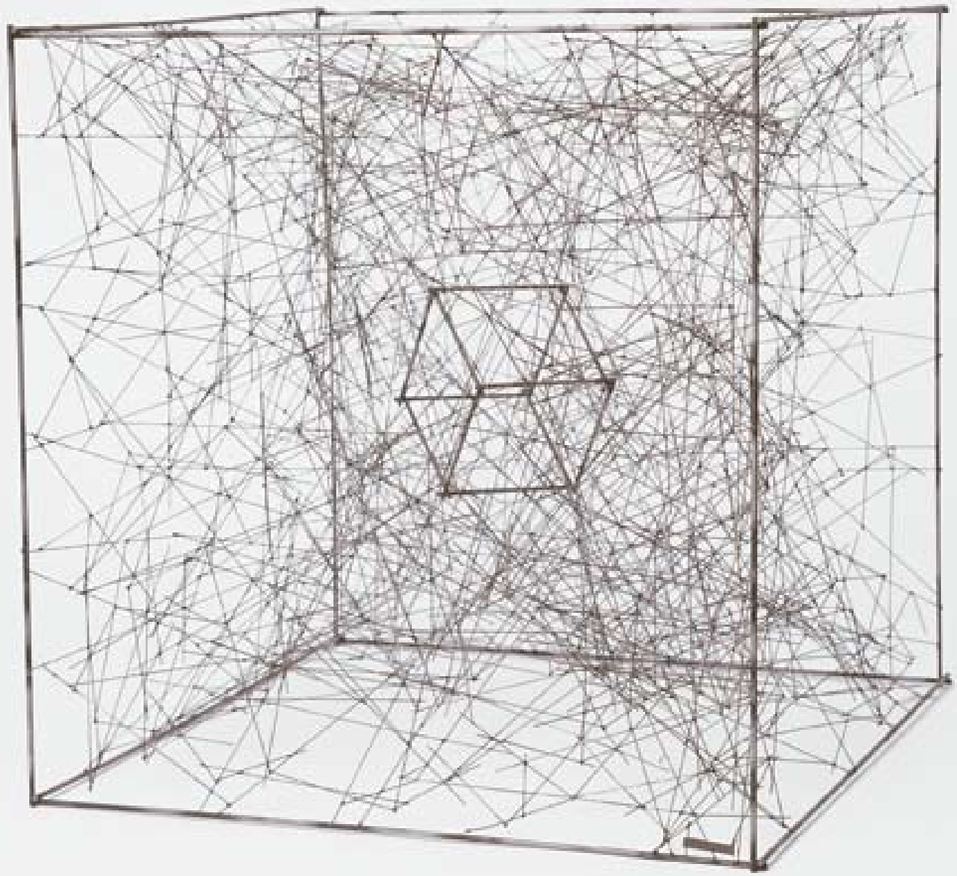




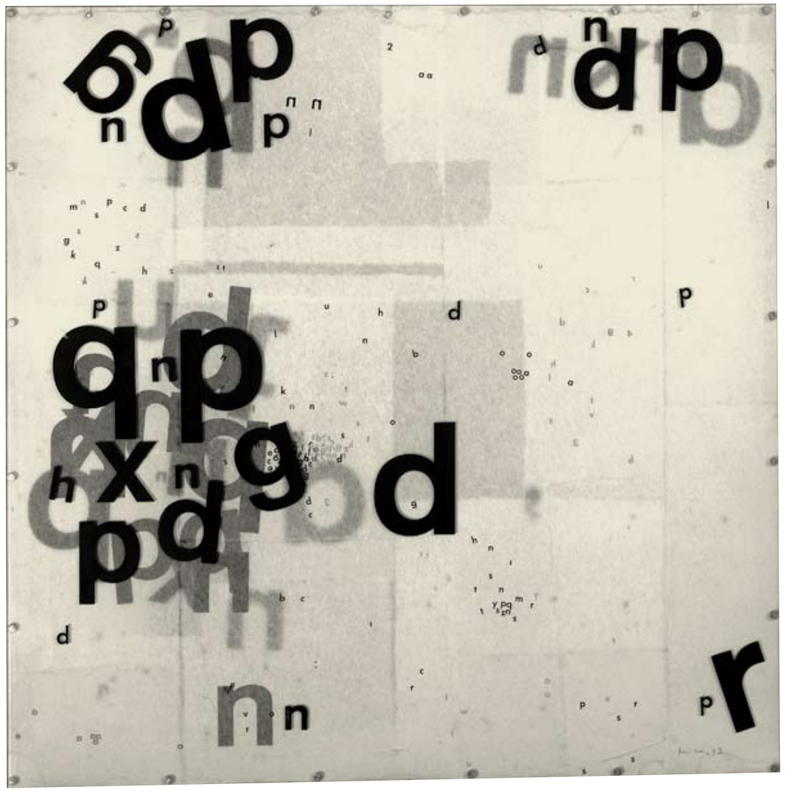
90. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos** (Graphic objects). 1967
Typewriting on paper between transparent acrylic sheets, 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/8" (100 x 100 x 1 cm).
Seen from both sides
Collection Ada Schendel



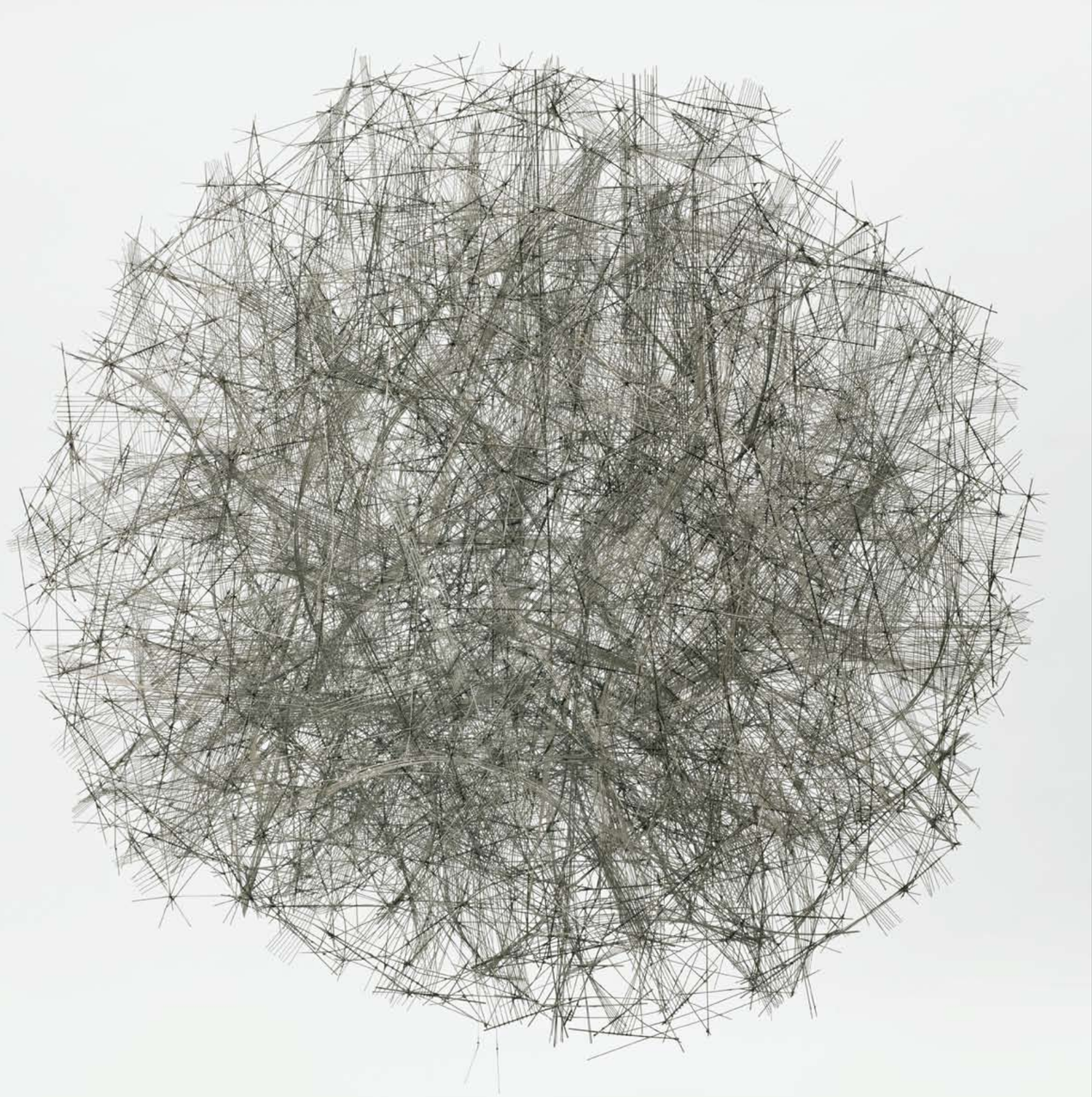
91. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1980s
Oilstick and pastel on hardboard,
28 3/4 x 44 1/2" (73 x 113 cm)
Collection Hector Babenco



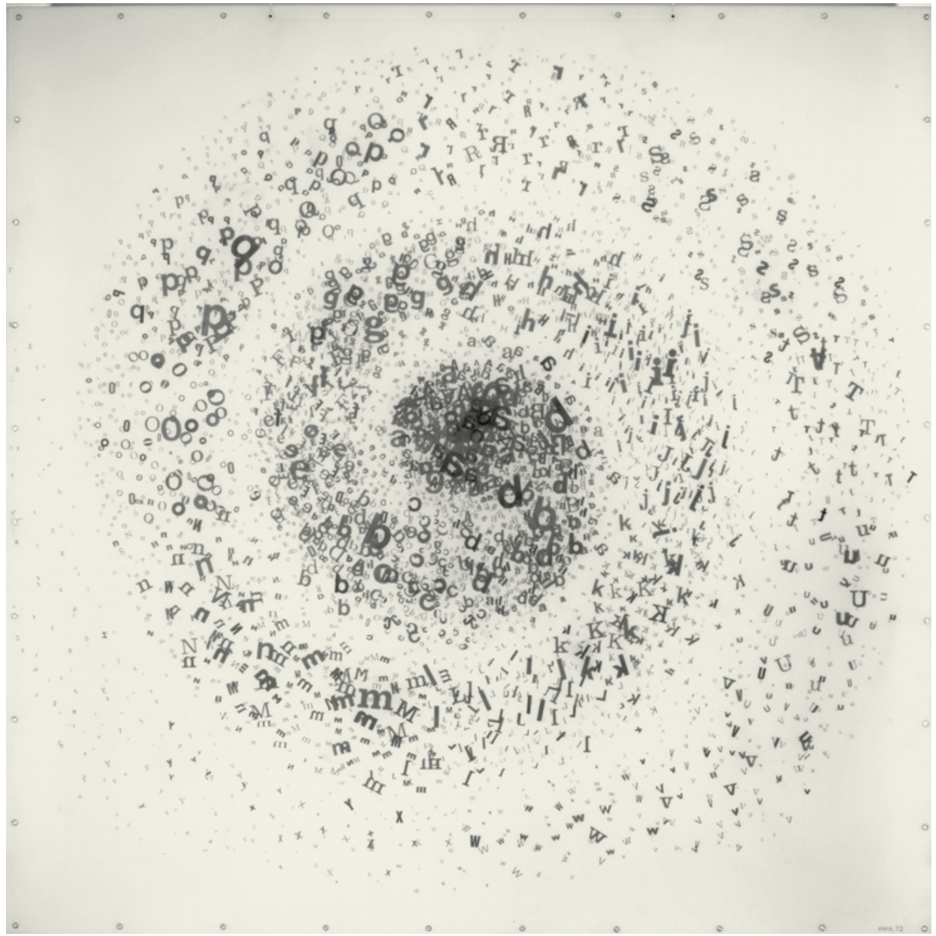
92. **León Ferrari**
La embarazada (The pregnant one). 1979
Stainless steel,
19 5/16 x 19 5/16 x 19 5/16" (49 x 49 x 49 cm)
Private collection



93. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Objetos gráficos (Graphic objects). 1973
Transfer type on thin Japanese paper between
transparent acrylic sheets, 22 x 22 x 3/8"
(55.9 x 55.9 x 1 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

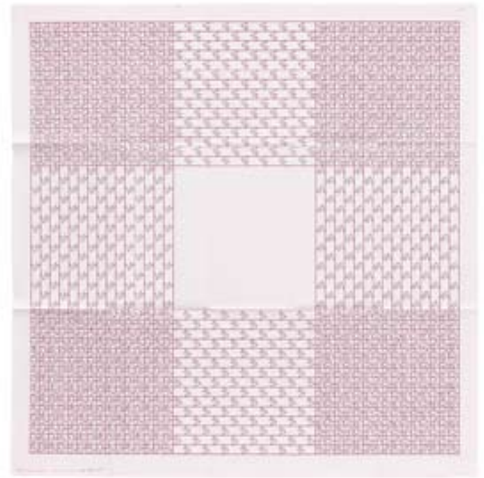


94. **León Ferrari**
Planeta (Planet). 1979
Stainless steel, diam.: 51" (129.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Fractional and promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
in honor of Mirriam Levenson through the Latin American
and Caribbean Fund



95. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos**
(Graphic objects). 1972
Transfer type on thin Japanese paper between
transparent acrylic sheets, 37 3/8 x 37 3/8 x 3/8"
(95 x 95 x 1 cm)
Collection Clara Sancovsky

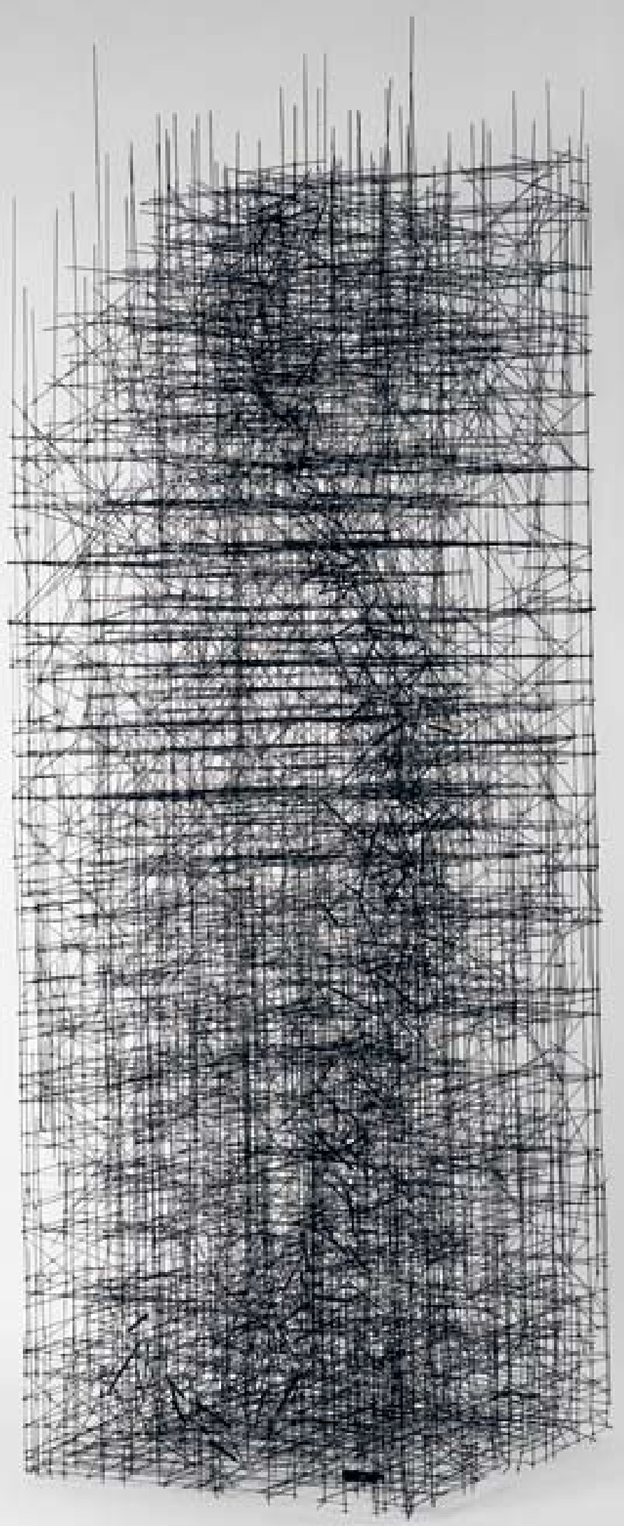
96. **León Ferrari**
Opus 113. 1980
Stainless steel, 7' 5 3/4" x 26 1/8" x 25 9/16"
(228 x 66.3 x 65 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



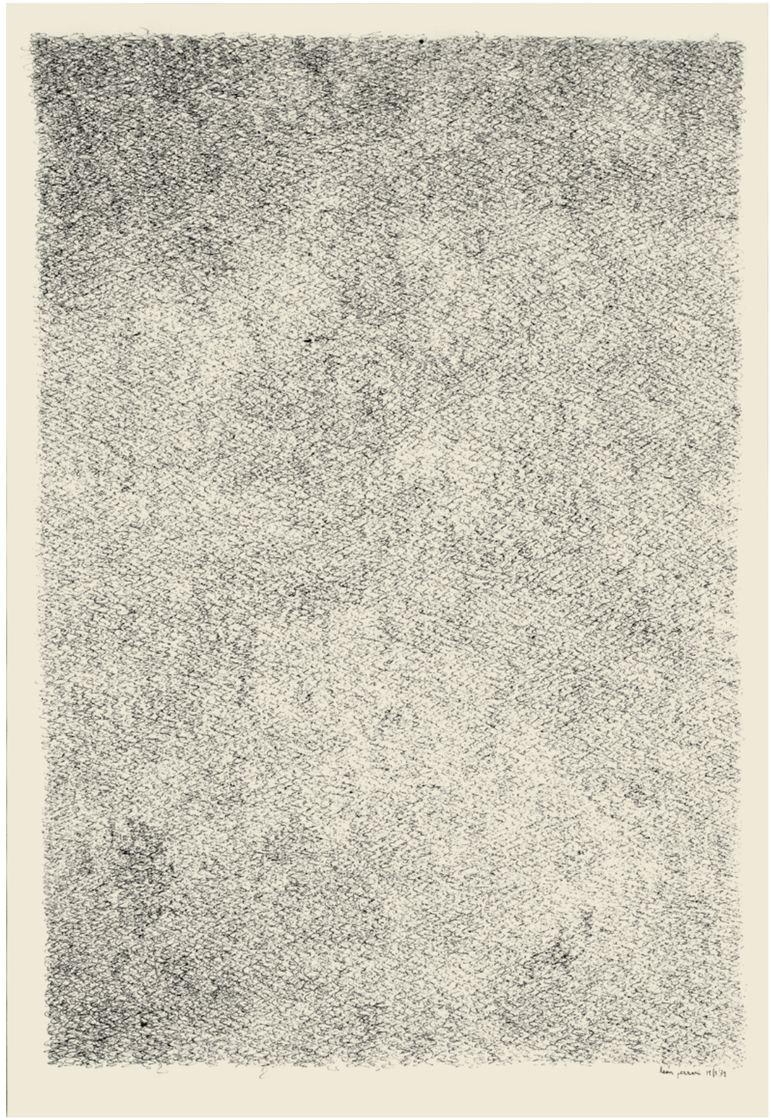
97. **León Ferrari**
Espectadores (Spectators) from the series
Heliografias (Heliographs). 1981 (signed 2007)
One from a series of twenty-seven diazotypes,
comp.: 36 x 36 5/8" (91.4 x 93 cm), sheet: 37 13/16 x
37 7/16" (96 x 95.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist

98. **León Ferrari**
Cuadrado (Square) from the series
Heliografias (Heliographs). 1982 (signed 2007)
One from a series of twenty-seven diazotypes,
comp.: 35 11/16 x 35 1/2" (90.7 x 90.2 cm),
sheet: 39 1/8 x 38 9/16" (99.3 x 98 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist

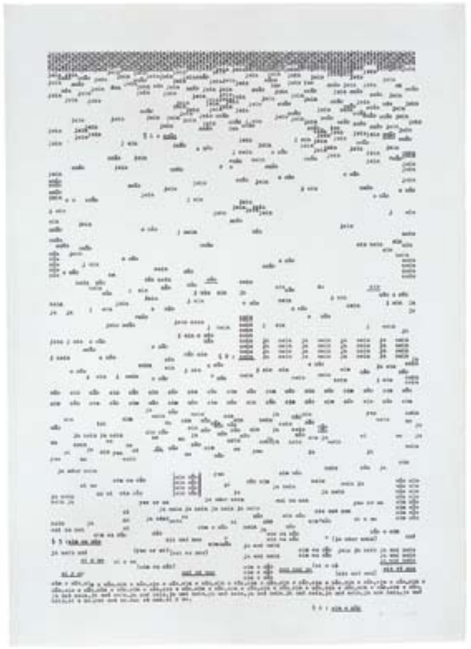
99. **León Ferrari**
Untitled from the series **Heliografias**
(Heliographs). 1982 (signed 2007)
One from a series of twenty-seven diazotypes,
comp. (irreg.): 37 15/16 x 38 1/16" (96 x 96.7 cm),
sheet: 40 15/16 x 41 1/8" (104 x 104.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist

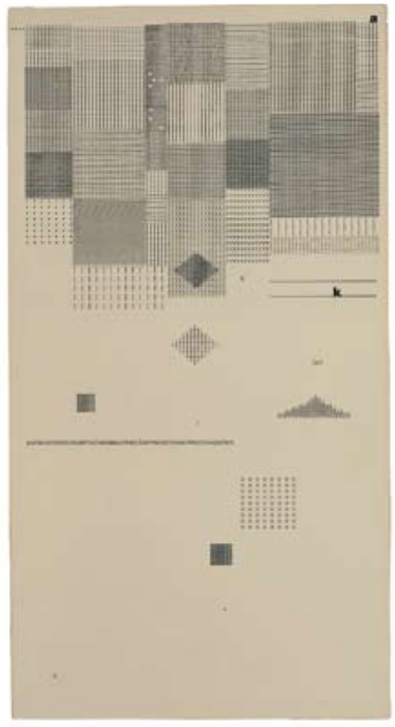


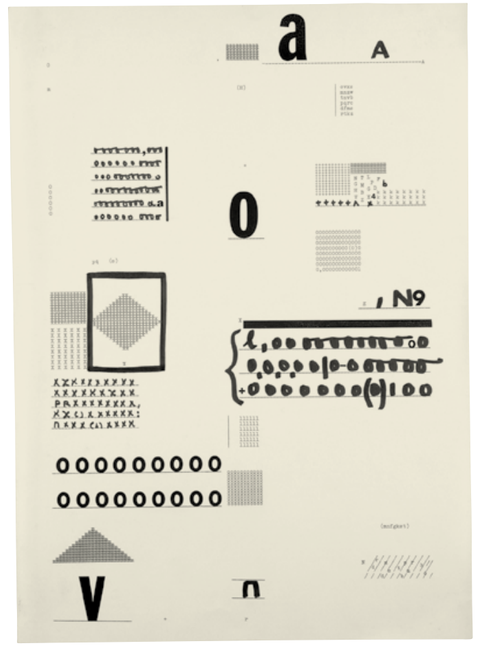
100. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. c. 1977–78
Stainless steel, 6' 6 3/4" x 27 9/16" x 27 9/16"
(200 x 70 x 70 cm)
Private collection

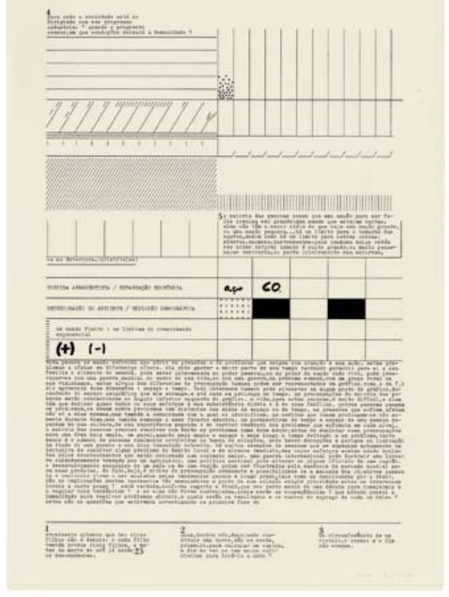


101. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1979
Ink on paper, 41 15/16 x 29 13/16" (106.5 x 75.8 cm)
Collection Cesare Rivetti









102. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Datiloscritos (Typed writings). 1970s
Typewriting on paper, 19 11/16 x 14 3/16"
(50 x 36 cm)
Private collection

103. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series
Datiloscritos (Typed writings). 1974
Typewriting, ink, and transfer type on paper,
19 3/4 x 14 1/4" (50.2 x 36.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Committee on Drawings Funds

104. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Datiloscritos**
(Typed writings). 1974
Typewriting and transfer type on paper,
20 1/16 x 14 3/8" (51 x 36.5 cm)
Private collection

105. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Datiloscritos** (Typed
writings). 1975
Typewriting and felt-tip pen on paper,
20 1/16 x 14 9/16" (51 x 37 cm)
Collection Estrellita and Daniel Brodsky

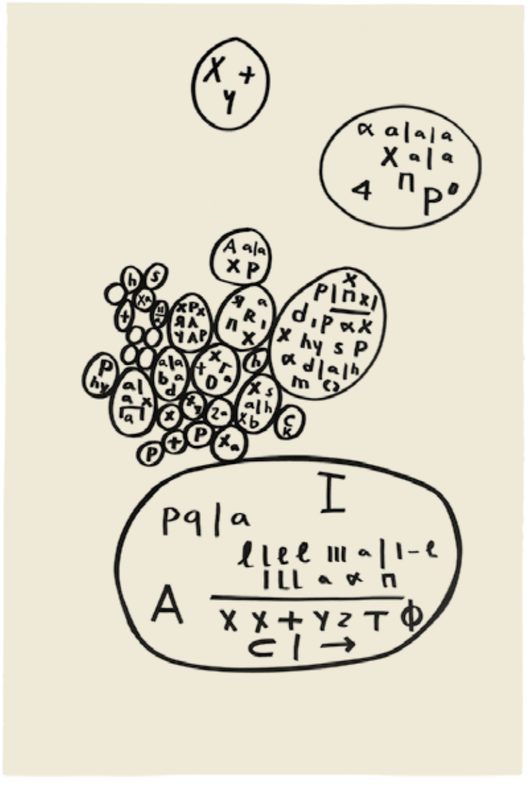
106. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Datiloscritos** (Typed
writings). c. 1970s
Typewriting and ink on paper, 19 3/4 x 14 1/4"
(50.2 x 36.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Committee on Drawings Funds

107. **León Ferrari**
P4CR from the series **Xadrez** (Chess)
and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Transfer type and cut-and-pasted printed
papers on paper, 12 7/8 x 8 7/16" (32.7 x 21.4 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

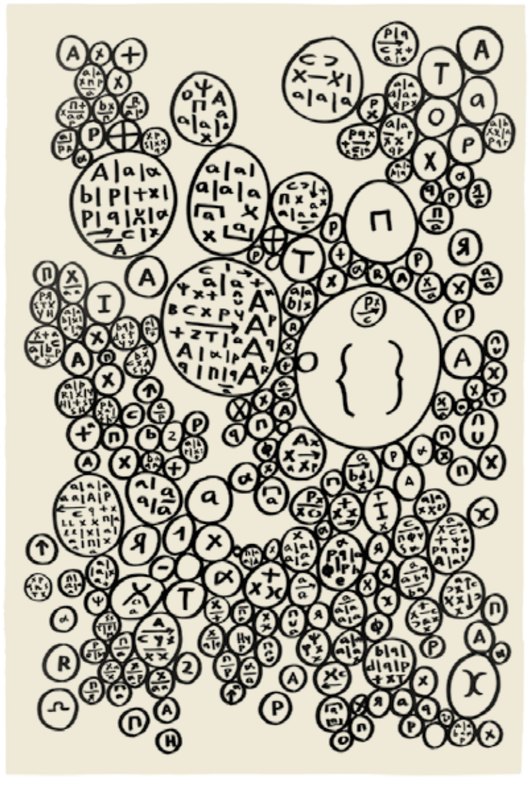
108. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Letras circunscritas** (Circumscribed letters). 1974
Felt-tip pen on paper, 19 13/16 x 14 5/16"
(50.3 x 36.4 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

109. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Letras circunscritas** (Circumscribed letters). 1974
Felt-tip pen on paper, 18 5/8 x 13" (47.3 x 33 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo

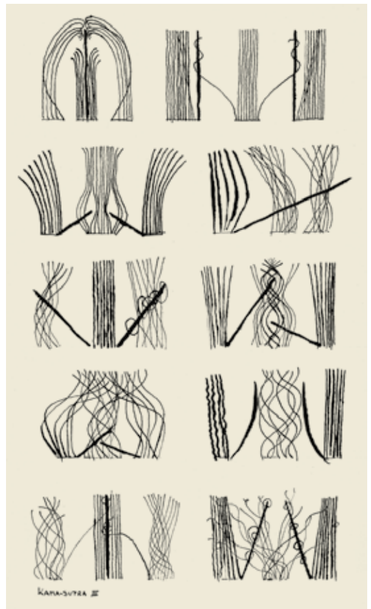
110. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. March 17, 1980
Ink, transfer type, and cut-and-pasted printed papers on paper, 12 7/8 x 8 7/16" (32.7 x 21.4 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

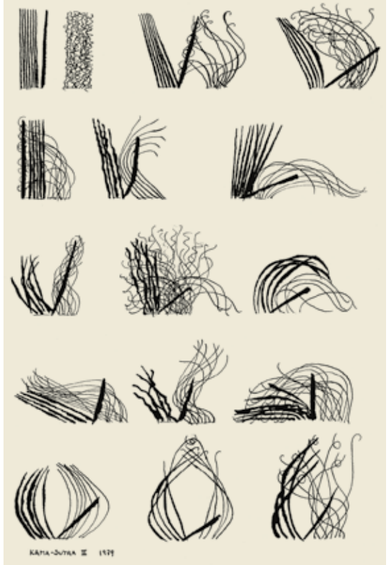


111. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1960s
Felt-tip pen on paper, 40 9/16 x 27 3/8"
(103 x 69.5 cm)
Collection Ivo Vel Kos



112. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1960
Felt-tip pen on paper, 40 3/4 x 27 9/16"
(103.5 x 70 cm)
Collection Adherbal Teixeira



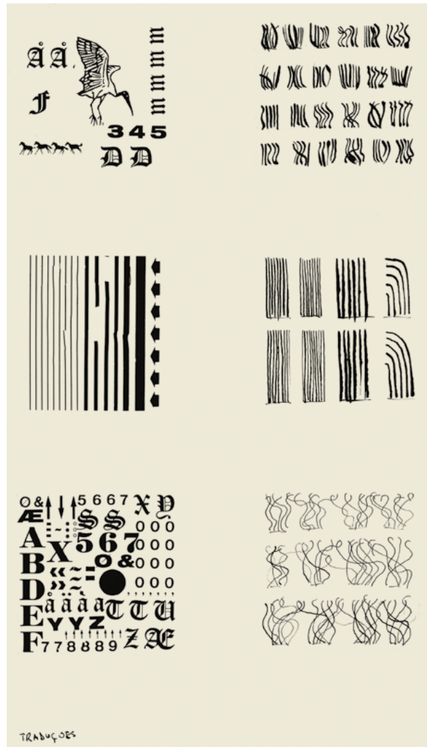


113. **León Ferrari**
Kama-Sutra I from the series
Códigos (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink on paper, 13 x 8 7/16" (33 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

114. **León Ferrari**
Kama-Sutra III from the series
Códigos (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink on paper, 13 x 8 7/16" (33 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

115. **León Ferrari**
Kama-Sutra II from the series
Códigos (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink on paper, 12 13/16 x 8 7/16" (32.5 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

116. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1971
Transfer type between transparent acrylic sheets, 3 9/16" (diam.) x 3/8" (9 x 1 cm). Seen from both sides
Collection Ada Schendel

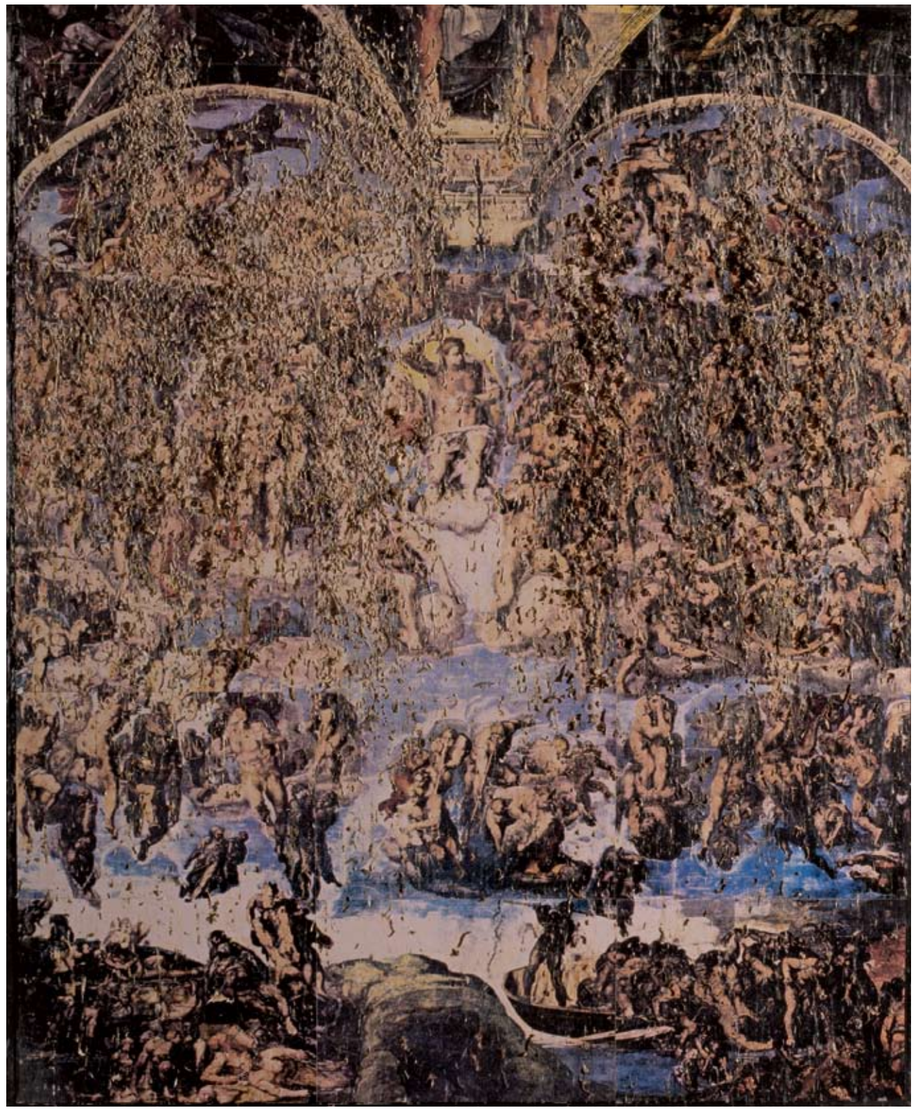


117. **León Ferrari**
Traduções (Translations) from the series **Códigos** (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink and transfer type on paper, 12 3/16 x 8 7/16" (31 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

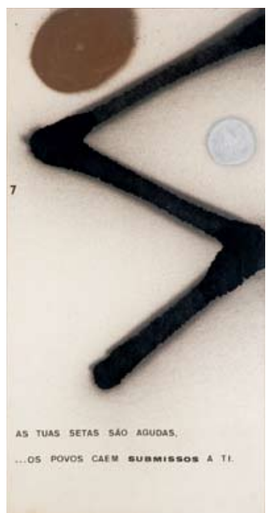
118. **León Ferrari**
Zoología (Zoology) from the series **Códigos** (Codes) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
Ink and transfer type on paper, 12 3/16 x 8 7/16" (31 x 21.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

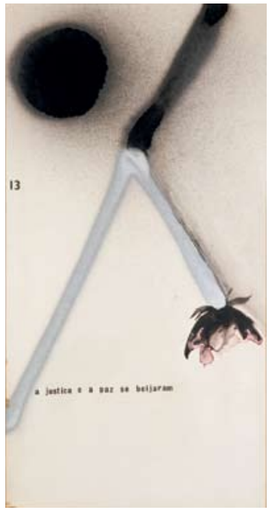
119. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled. 1972
Transfer type between brushed acrylic sheets, 10 5/8" (diam.) x 3/16" (27 x .5 cm)
Lent by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery 2007

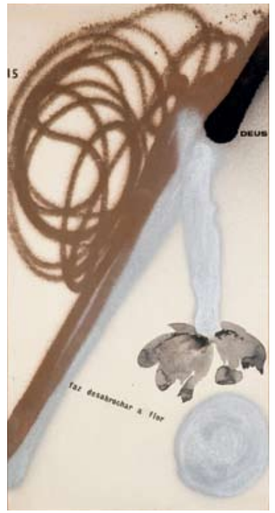
120. **Mira Schendel**
Ondas paradas de probabilidade
(Still waves of probability). 1969
Nylon thread and printed wall text, installation,
variable dimensions
Collection Ada Schendel



121. **León Ferrari**
Juicio Final (Last Judgment). 1994
Printed paper (reproduction of Michelangelo's **Last Judgment**) with bird excrement, 59 1/16 x 47 1/4 x 4 3/4"
(150 x 120 x 12 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires







122. **Mira Schendel**
Homenagem a Deus—pai do Ocidente
(Homage to God—father of the West). 1975
Transfer type, airbrush, and ink on paper, sixteen sheets, each: 19 15/16 x 16 1/2" (50.6 x 26.6 cm)
Private collection

123. **León Ferrari**
Untitled from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). November 1986
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper, 11 1/4 x 8 13/16" (28.5 x 22.4 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

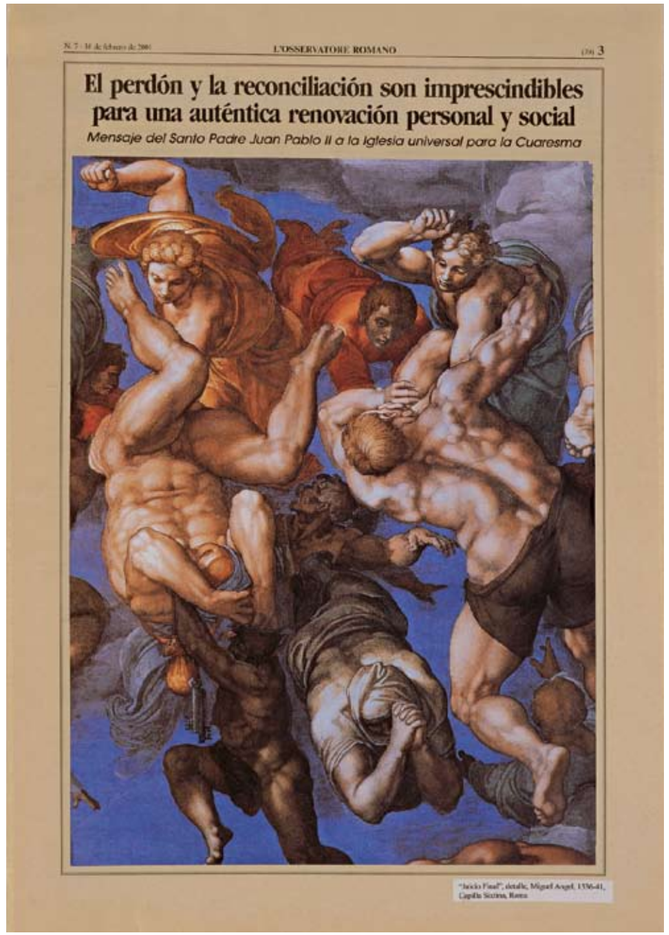
124. **León Ferrari**
Untitled from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). February 3, 1987
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper, 9 1/4 x 8 1/4" (23.5 x 21 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

125. **León Ferrari**
Helicóptero (Helicopter) from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). 1988
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper, 9 13/16 x 9 7/16" (25 x 24 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

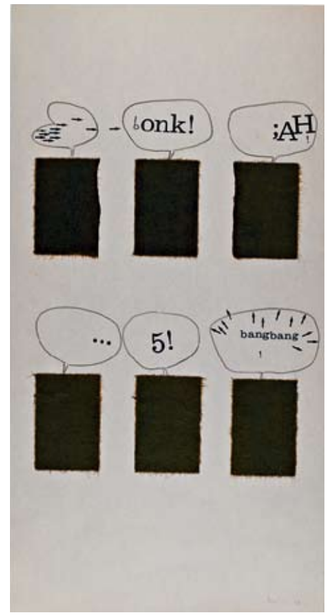
126. **León Ferrari**
Ángel apocalíptico (Apocalyptic angel) from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). 1988
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper, 13 3/4 x 9 7/16" (35 x 24 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

127. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. 1986
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper,
7 3/4 x 6 1/8" (19.7 x 15.5 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

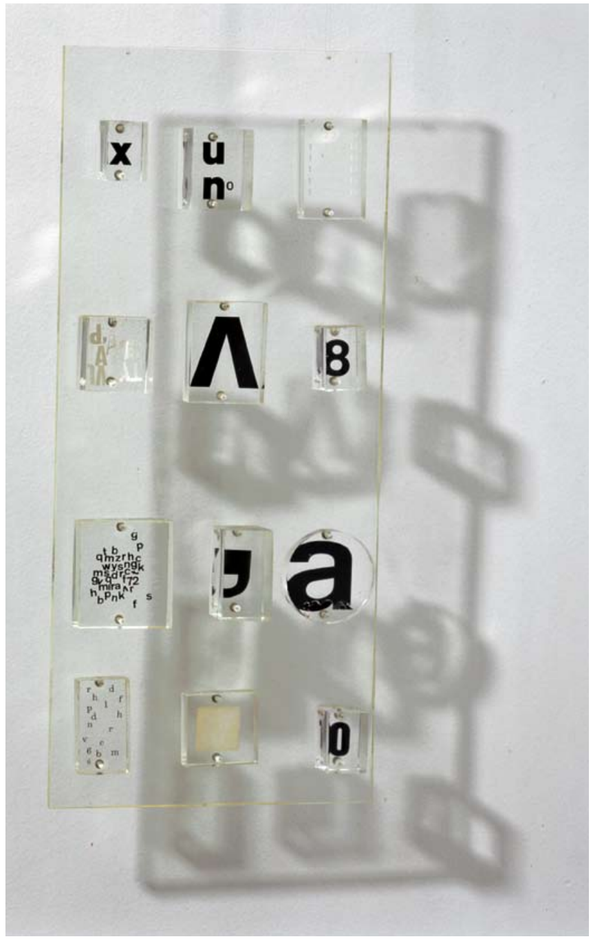
128. **León Ferrari**
Untitled. c. 1988
Cut-and-pasted printed papers on paper,
10 7/16 x 13 3/8" (26.5 x 34 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



129. **León Ferrari**
Renovación (Renewal) from the series **L'Osservatore Romano**. 2001
Cut-and-pasted printed paper (reproduction of a detail of Michelangelo's **Last Judgment**) on printed paper, 16 15/16 x 11 7/16"
(43 x 29 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires



130–33. **Mira Schendel**
Four untitled works from the series **Toquinhos** (Little things). 1977
Transfer type, dyed paper, and pencil on paper, each: 19 5/16 x 10 1/16"
(49 x 25.5 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo



134. **León Ferrari**
Unión libre (Free union). 2004
Braille (surface embossing) of the poem "Union libre" by André Breton, in Spanish trans. by Aldo Pellegrini, on a gelatin silver photograph by Cesar Augusto Ferrari, c. 1924, 11 5/8 x 8 1/4" (29.5 x 21 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

135. **León Ferrari**
Leda y el cisne (Leda and the swan). 1997
Braille (surface embossing) on printed paper (reproduction of Leonardo's **Leda and the Swan**), 15 3/8 x 9 9/16" (39 x 23 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

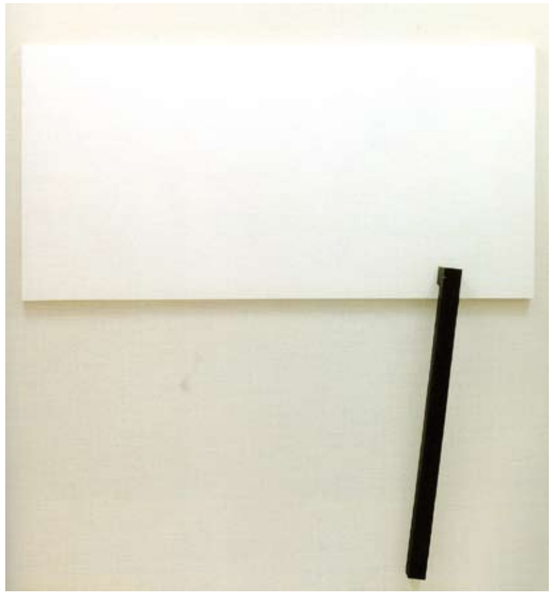
136. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Toquinhos** (Little things). 1970s
Transfer type on shaped acrylic on acrylic sheet, 18 15/16 x 8 1/16 x 1 3/8"
(46.5 x 20.5 x 3.5 cm)
Collection Esther Faingold

137. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Toquinhos** (Little things). 1973
Transfer type on shaped acrylic on acrylic sheet, 18 1/2 x 10 1/4 x 1 9/16" (47 x 26 x 4 cm)
Private collection, São Paulo

138 (top). **León Ferrari**
Untitled from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). 1986
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper, 10 5/8 x 14 3/8" (27 x 36 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

139 (bottom). **León Ferrari**
Untitled from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia** (Rereadings of the Bible). November 26, 1986
Cut-and-pasted printed paper on printed paper 10 5/8 x 8 1/4" (27 x 21 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

140. **Mira Schendel**
Three untitled works from the series **Desenhos lineares** (Linear drawings). 1973
Transfer type on thin Japanese paper, each: 18 1/2 x 9 1/4" (47 x 23.5 cm)
Courtesy Galeria Millan, São Paulo



141. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Sarrapos** (Splints). 1987
Synthetic polymer paint on wood,
6' 1 5/8" x 70 7/8" x 5 7/8" (187 x 180 x 15 cm)
Collection Dulce and João Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz

142. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Sarrapos** (Splints). 1987
Synthetic polymer paint on wood,
6' 5 15/16" x 70 7/8" x 3 5/8" (198 x 180 x 9.2 cm)
Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

143. **León Ferrari**
Ramas (Branches). 2007
Willow branches and wire,
7' 8 1/2" x 35 7/16" x 35 7/16" (235 x 90 x 90 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari. Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

144. **León Ferrari**
Huesos (Bones). 2006
Polyurethane bones and wire,
64 15/16 x 31 1/2 x 27 9/16" (165 x 80 x 70 cm)
Private collection, New York

145. **Mira Schendel**
Untitled from the series **Tijolos** (Bricks). 1988
Brick dust on hardboard, 39 3/8" x 6' 6 3/4"
(100 x 200 cm)
Museu de Arte Contemporânea da
Universidade de São Paulo

146. **León Ferrari**
Árboles (Trees). 2006
Polyurethane foam and synthetic polymer
trees, 72 13/16 x 31 1/2 x 27 9/16" (185 x 80 x 70 cm)
Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari.
Archivo y Colección, Buenos Aires

León Ferrari

Augusto and Susana Ferrari, 1918

1920
September 3: León Cesar Ferrari del Pardo born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the third of six children. His parents are Augusto C. Ferrari, an Italian artist and architect, and Susana Celia del Pardo.

1922
Augusto Ferrari is contracted to renovate the exterior and interior of the Iglesia de San Miguel Arcangel, Buenos Aires. He will paint until 1965, producing landscapes, nudes, portraits, self-portraits, and still lifes, in addition to photographing nudes.

1934–38
Attends high school at the Colegio Guadalupe, Buenos Aires. *Even though I went to mass while we were in the countryside, it wasn't a very pious atmosphere. It was even my luck to be sent to a high school run by priests. And there, yes, that was hell. Not because of any explicit torture, but for the notion of hell they stuffed into your head.*[1]

Mira Schendel

Schendel, Milan, mid-1920s

Ada Saveria Gnoli, Milan, late 1930s

Schendel, Milan, mid-1930s

1919
June 7: Mira Schendel born Myrrha Dagmar Dub in Zurich, Switzerland, the only daughter of Jewish parents Karl Leo Dub, a fabric merchant, and Ada Saveria Dub (nee Büttner), a milliner.

1920
March 17: Karl Dub moves to Berlin, followed by Ada shortly after. Ada soon returns, however, to be with her daughter, who has remained in Zurich with her maternal grandparents.

August 19: Ada returns to Berlin, again leaving Mira with her grandparents.

October 20: at her mother's request, Mira is baptized at the Kirche St. Peter und Paul, a Catholic church in Zurich.

1921
August 27: is taken to Berlin to be reunited with her parents.

1922
June: Ada moves to Mussoco, a suburb of Milan, after separating from Dub.

September: Ada divorces Dub after four years of marriage. Her parents join her in Italy. Dub, who is believed to have emigrated to South America, will lose contact with his daughter and ex-wife, but Mira remains in touch with his family and visits them occasionally.

Mid-1920s
From the time I was four or five years old I drew at a furious rate; it must have been with colored pencils and graph paper. I drew figures. . . . I read or I drew. I always had a drawing pad and a black pencil with me. I sketched and people watched me draw furiously.[1]

Early 1930s
Takes art courses. Little else is recorded, however, about her education during this period.

1936
Ada meets Count Tommaso Gnoli, director of the Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena, Italy, whom she will marry in the following year. Mira stops taking art classes and begins to study philosophy at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, which combines an academic education with a religious one.[2]

Ferrari

Ferrari and Alicia Matilde Barros Castro, Tigre, Buenos Aires, March 8, 1942

León Ferrari. **Alicia**. 1947. Oil on wood, 15 3/4 x 18 1/2" (40 x 47 cm). Collection Alicia and León Ferrari

1938–1947
Studies engineering at the Facultad de Sciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales, Universidad de Buenos Aires. While at the university he becomes interested in art and starts making ceramics. *Along with a fellow student we used to draw. I liked it but didn't think of dedicating myself to that alone.*[2]

1946
December 10: marries Alicia Matilde Barros Castro. Begins to paint still lifes and portraits using loose, broad brushstrokes and a dark color palette similar to his father's style.

1948
August 28: birth of María Alicia Ferrari, also known as Marialí, the first of three children.

1949
Death of Susana, Ferrari's mother.

November 9: birth of second child, Pablo Augusto Ferrari.

1950
The family moves to Castelar, Buenos Aires, where they will live until 1976. León sets up a laboratory to investigate the metallic element tungsten.

Ferrari and his son Ariel, Castelar, Buenos Aires, c. 1960

1951
June 7: birth of third child, Ariel Adrián Ferrari.

1952
Fall: Marialí contracts tuberculous meningitis. León and Alicia move with her to Florence, Italy, where she will remain in treatment at the Ospedale Pediatrico Meyer for nine months. Through the use of the antibiotic streptomycin to treat her bacterial infection, she loses her hearing and speech.

Ferrari in his studio, Rome, 1955

1953
Alicia and Marialí return to Buenos Aires. Ferrari moves to Rome, rents a studio in Trastevere, and begins making large ceramics, some designed to be hung. *One month before we were due back, I took some ceramic lessons at the studio of some Sicilian named [Salvatori] Meli, and there I fell in love with clay and ceramic forms.*[3] At Rome's Instituto Italo Argentino de Intercambio Cultural he meets Argentine exiles including filmmaker Fernando Birri.

1954
June: participates in a ceramics competition held by the Museo Nazionale delle Ceramiche di Faenza, his first group show.

León Ferrari. Ceramics. c. 1955

1955
February 15–28: *León Ferrari*, Galleria Cairola, Milan. His first solo exhibition, it contains fifty ceramics. Returning to Buenos Aires before the show opens, he will work as an engineer until 1958. *[My father] advised us not to study art . . . because he said that it was difficult to support a family as an artist.*[4] Studies tungsten, tantalum, and niobium, intending to create a small family business to produce compounds of these elements.

Left to right: Ferrari, Rafael Alberti, and Perla and Enrique Rotzait. Ezeiza airport, Buenos Aires, 1963

1958
Collaborates with Birri on the film *La primera fundación de Buenos Aires* (The first founding of Buenos Aires), based on a drawing by the Argentine cartoonist Oscar Conti. *In 1959 we went to the Cannes Festival, the film received three prizes in Argentina and that's where the adventure ended, and I began to do something else.*[5] Begins to concentrate on making sculpture.

Schendel

Schendel and Josip Hargesheimer, Sarajevo, 1942

1939
Benito Mussolini passes laws banning the enrollment of non-Italian Jews in institutions of higher education, forcing Schendel, classified as a Jew, to leave the Università Cattolica. On her mother's advice, she sets out for the home of her aunt, in Sofia, Bulgaria, to escape fascist persecution. Her trip is diverted to Vienna, where she joins a group of refugees who travel to Sarajevo.

1941
April 19: marries Josip Hargesheimer, a Catholic Croatian whom she meets in Sarajevo.

1944
On receiving a Croatian passport, returns to Italy to spend time with her mother and stepfather. The following year she and Hargesheimer will settle in Rome.

1948
Begins work at the International Refugee Organization (IRO), founded in 1946 to deal with the massive refugee problem created by World War II.[3] She will work here for a year. A displaced person herself, Schendel is engaged by the agency's mandate of assisting refugees either by helping them "to return to their countries of nationality and/or former habitual residence, or by finding new homes elsewhere."[4] Schendel and Hargesheimer soon begin planning to find a new home for themselves, considering moving to Argentina, Venezuela, Canada, and the United States before settling on the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Schendel, São Paulo, 1952

1949
July 27: the couple leave Italy, sailing from Naples on the ship *Protea*.

August 13: they arrive in Rio de Janeiro on route to Porto Alegre, where Schendel will register as Mirra Hargesheimer on August 31st.

Mira Schendel. Untitled. 1953
See page 72

1950
Schendel begins to paint. *After the war, I began painting; drawing came later. . . . Life was very hard; I didn't have money for paints, but I bought cheap paints and painted passionately. It was a matter of life and death.*[5] She takes drawing and sculpture classes at the city's school of fine arts while studying philosophy and theology independently.

October: first solo exhibition, at the Auditório do Correio do Povo, one of Porto Alegre's few art spaces. Shows six portraits, still lifes, and landscapes. The works recall the quiet aesthetic of the Italian modernist Giorgio Morandi.

1951
June 1–10: exhibits in the first Salão Universitário Baiano de Belas-Artes, Salvador, Brazil, and wins the salon's gold medal.

October 20–December 23: participates in the first Bienal de São Paulo with the painting *Paisagem* (Landscape). Other artists represented include Morandi, Lucio Fontana, and Max Bill. Of submitting her work she will say, *I had that courage. The courage of youth, of craziness. I was accepted.*[6]

Schendel, Porto Alegre, 1952

1952
After her exposure to contemporary art at the Bienal, Schendel begins to work more seriously and to exhibit more often. *From now on, the struggle will be decisive. Today, one must truly choose. Today, one must truly commit oneself. Thus, art also can be nothing less than a religious commitment.*[7]

Participates in the first Exposição de Arte Moderna, Santa Maria, Brazil, and wins a prize.

1953
January 31–February 8: participates in the first Festival de Arte e Música de Bento Gonçalves, Salão de Artes Plásticas, Bento Gonçalves, Brazil. Wins an honorable mention.

July: separates from Hargesheimer and moves to São Paulo. In a letter to relatives, she comments on Porto Alegre's remoteness from the world of artists: *On the one hand, this isolation is not all bad, that is, was not all bad. . . . I could work quietly, hearing no criticism, seeing nothing which would distract me. . . . I now need open competition. Having no serious contenders is not at all pleasant. It doesn't matter to me if I win awards (it was important last year); what is important to me is to carry out serious work.*[8]

Knut Schendel, Berlin, 1932

1954
Meets Knut Schendel, a German immigrant to Brazil who owns the well-known São Paulo bookstore Canuto and whom she will later marry.

October 12: *Mira: Exposição de pinturas*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. The paintings of this period, called *Fachadas* (Facades) and *Geladeiras* (Refrigerators), comprise irregular geometric shapes resembling abstract building facades, and are rendered in a predominantly dark, monochromatic palette.

Mira Schendel. Untitled. 1954
See page 70

1955
July 2–October 12: participates in the third Bienal de São Paulo, along with Brazilian contemporaries Lygia Clark, Milton Dacosta, Maria Leontina, Alfredo Volpi, and others.

During this period Schendel is getting to know a small intellectual circle, including the psychoanalyst, art critic, and poet Theon Spanudis, the theoretical physicist and art critic Mário Schenberg, the philosopher Vilém Flusser, and the Concrete poet Haroldo de Campos. De Campos will later remember Schenberg introducing him to Schendel: "When she was almost unknown, he called me to his home to show me samples of Mira's work and through him I came to know Mira personally. . . . Mário Schenberg, a really extraordinary figure in our culture, soon perceived the importance of her work."[9]

Ferrari

1960
November 7–19: *León Ferrari. Esculturas*, Galería Galatea, Buenos Aires. Exhibits sculptures in cement, plaster, and wood. Critics describe the work as "smooth" and "alive"; his "grand vessels, gourds and pregnant torsos have the softness and elasticity of bodies."[6] Meets the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, an exile in Argentina since 1939, and they collaborate on the book *Escrito en el aire* (Written in the air), to be published in 1964.

1961
October 4–18: *León Ferrari. Metal y madera*, Galería Van Riel, Buenos Aires. Exhibits sixteen carved-wood works and his first wire sculptures. Applauding his understanding of the materials he uses in his work, the press describes his sculptures as "luminous," "grandiose," and "monumental."[7]

December: begins a five-month stay in Milan.

Ferrari in Galeria Levi, Milan 1962

1962
February 21–March 10: participates in *Pittori, scultori argentine*, Teatro del Croso, Milan.

March 12: *León Ferrari*, Galleria Pater, Milan. His wire sculptures are described as "drawings in space that have almost more light than body, like an explosion of sparks."[8]

April: returns to Buenos Aires.

August 13–September 1: *León Ferrari. Alambres y dibujos*, Galería Antigona, Buenos Aires.

Fall: the collector and author Arturo Schwarz invites Ferrari to contribute to *Antología internazionale dell'incisione contemporanea*, an anthology of prints, published in Milan, by various artists including Jackson Pollock. *When someone makes sculptures and drawings it is assumed that the drawings are made first . . . I began the sculptures in 1960, and the drawings two years later in Italy, on account of an invitation received by Arturo.*[9]

November 17: begins work on an abstract drawing based on Alberti's poem "*Sermón de la sangre*" (Sermon of the blood). *I started to work on the poem . . . with the idea of making something very complex . . . with red, blood.*[10]

León Ferrari. **Carta a un general** (Letter to a general). June 18, 1963 See page 96

1963
April: begins the series *Carta a un general* (Letter to a general), works on paper in which serial, gestural lines and curvilinear abstract forms suggest deformed writing.

June 19: begins work on the sculpture *Torre de Babel* (Tower of Babel), which he will finish on January 24, 1964. This is his last sculpture of the 1960s: *It's too much . . . never again will I do something like this. I have to work on other things. Maybe the idea of making a Babel among several people.*[11]

November: participates in *La escultura en pequeño*, Galería Lirolay, Buenos Aires.

December 1963–February 1964: participates in *L'Art argentin actuel*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

Participates in *Schrift und Bild*, an exhibition including artists such as Paul Klee and Henri Michaux, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

León Ferrari. **Torre de Babel** (Tower of Babel). 1964 See page 114

1964
January: begins to develop the idea of "babelism," a notion touched on in *Torre de Babel*: *There could be one person who puts the tower together with things from others, or better yet, make it among all of us, crossing each other, covering each other . . . all of us together working . . . without looking at what the other is doing.*[12]

April 1–15: *León Ferrari: Escrituras, alambres y manos*, Galería Lirolay, Buenos Aires.

October 7: participates in *Feria de la Feria*, Galería Lirolay, Buenos Aires, where he exhibits seventeen *Botellas* (Bottles).

September 19: writes down his first ideas for *Cuadro escrito* (Written painting): *Make a drawing whose title . . . is an inextricable, ostensible and failed description of the painting that should be hanging there.*[13] Completed on December 17, the work comprises an elaborate, gestural, calligraphic text describing what Ferrari would paint if he only could.

November: begins series of written drawings, some of them openly criticizing Christianity, and containing collages of found images.

León Ferrari, **La civilizacion occidental y cristiana** (Western Christian civilization). 1965. See page 53

1965
September 1–23: participates in the Premio Nacional e Internacional Instituto Torcuato Di Tella. Having considered a number of possible submissions, most of them political in connotation, Ferrari finally settles on *La civilización occidental y cristiana* (Western Christian civilization), a Christ figure crucified to the belly of a U.S. fighter jet. The work is installed, but director Jorge Romero Brest asks Ferrari to remove it before the show opens on the grounds that it offends the staff. *Romero Brest invited me to the '65 Premio supposing (I believe) that I would send either a wire sculpture . . . or something similar. When I changed my mind about art, motivated by the bombings in Vietnam, I warned him that I would do something else.*[14] Ferrari receives a strong reaction from the press on the three works that remain, two of which refer to school bombings in Vietnam and include a skeletal representation of Christ.[15] Ferrari responds in an open letter: *Given the way in which the chronicler describes my works, I worry that someone could think I am a communist and add my name to the blacklists. . . . It therefore seems prudent to clarify that I am not a communist . . . and that I am profoundly worried by the U.S. war against Vietnam.*[16]

Mira Schendel and Ada Clara Schendel, São Paulo, 1957

1957
November 26: birth of Ada Clara Schendel, Schendel's only child. To look after her, Schendel stops making art, a suspension that will last until 1960.

1960
March 17: marries Knut Schendel. Meets the Brazilian artist Sérgio Camargo, who will later introduce her to the British critic and curator Guy Brett.

1962
June 30: participates in the Salão Paulista de Arte Moderna, São Paulo.

November 22: solo exhibition, Galeria Selearte, São Paulo, dedicated to her series *Bordados* (Embroideries). Among the first drawings she makes on Japanese paper, using Ecoline ink, these works feature repeated geometric motifs.

Mira Schendel. Untitled. 1963–64 See p. 77

1963
March 19: *Mira Schendel: Pinturas* opens at the Galeria de Arte São Luiz, São Paulo. The paintings of this period are in oil and tempera mixed with sand, polymer, plaster, and the red earth of the São Paulo region. Subdued colors saturate the compositions and the interlaid materials create vivid textural patterns, accentuated by minimal traces of lines and geometric shapes. The critic Mário Pedrosa writes, "Formerly, the line which divided the rectangle into multiple or successive, repetitive, regular shapes also divided it into figure and background. Its rectangular shapes stood out, here and there, so that the rest of the picture served as a backdrop. Form left off being form, living form, plastic form, in order to become composite form."[10]

September 28–December 22: participates in the Bienal de São Paulo.

Mira Schendel. Untitled. Mid-1960s See page 93

1964
February 26: opening of *Mira Schendel: Oleos e desenhos*, Galeria Astréia, São Paulo. Schenberg describes "difficult and austere canvases, of a strong ontological sense, in which the rigor of construction and the constraint of color and texture made us feel the *Parmenidian being*, unchanged and rigid in its own identity. In one or the other, the rigid and massive *Being* appeared threatened by a devouring *Nothingness*."[11]

March 14: *Mira: Pinturas* opens at the Galeria Aremar, Campinas, Brazil.

Mira Schendel. **A trama** (A fabric net). 1960s See page 89

Beginning this year and continuing until 1967, Schendel produces over 2,000 works on thin Japanese paper. The series will become known as *Monotipias*, or Monotypes; as the critic Rodrigo Naves has written, this is a misnomer, although the technique bears a relation to the monotype method. Schendel will cover a glass laminate with oil paint, sprinkle a layer of talcum powder over it, and lay the paper over the talc. She will then use her fingernails or some other sharp instrument to draw lines on the paper's surface, pressing the paper through the talc into the oil.[12] The end result is an imprint, a residue transferred from one surface to another, like the shadow of gestural lines, marks, and eventually letters, phrases, and symbols.

1965
July 22–September 22: participates in *Soundings Two*, Signals Gallery, London, on Brett's invitation. Cofounded by Paul Keeler and David Medalla in 1964, Signals Gallery is an avant-garde space that has already exhibited Brazilian art by Camargo, Clark, and Hélio Oiticica.

September 4–November 28: participates in the Bienal de São Paulo.

October 4: *Mira Schendel*, Petite Galerie, Rio de Janeiro.

Schendel with a Droguinha, São Paulo, 1980s

This year Schendel begins the three-dimensional series *Droguinhas* (Little nothings) and makes the installation *Trenzinho* (Little train), both using thin Japanese paper. In the *Droguinhas*, the paper is knotted, braided, and twisted into organic, tangible nets; in *Trenzinho*, sheets of thin, semitransparent paper hang from a nylon thread, gently intersecting the space with a ghostlike presence. Brett writes, "Schendel's *Droguinhas* do not describe any particular movement, but they are vital contributions to the language of movement, because their fragility and energy indicate space as an active thing, a field of possibility."[13]

1966
May: *Mira Schendel*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. Schendel's first major museum retrospective is accompanied by an exhibition catalogue in which a poem by Campos describes Schendel's work as "an art of voids/where the utmost redundancy begins to produce original information/an art of words and quasi-words/where the graphic form veils and unveils seals and unseals/sudden semantic values/an art of constellated alphabets/of beelike letters swarming and solitary/all-pha-bbb-ees."[14]

October 29–November 12: *Mira Schendel*, Signals Gallery, London—Schendel's first retrospective outside Brazil. *That was very strange, the low attendance [at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro] combined, somewhat, with the work itself. . . . I remember that in London, in '66, it was an ebullient, changing time; it was a very important moment. I remember the gallery. It was full. People were coming and going. People were all over the place. A totally different climate.*[15]

Signals gallery, London, 1966

Fall: *Desenhos de Mira Schendel*, Galerie Buchholz, Lisbon. Portuguese critic José Augusto França comments, "The consciousness of the relationships between line, form and space, which this experience accompanies, and which justifies it, place Mira Schendel's drawings in a modern category [in] which few artists would dare rate themselves."[16]

Ferrari

León Ferrari. **Palabras ajenas** (Words of others). Cover.
See page 20

1966
April 25–May 7: participates in *Homenaje al Viet-nam de los artistas plásticos*, Galería Van Riel, Buenos Aires.

Begins work on the book *Palabras ajenas* (Strange words of others), an imaginary dialogue among 120 characters—Adolf Hitler, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Pope Paul VI, God, and others.

1967
February–March: *Mira Schendel*, University of Stuttgart. In Stuttgart meets Max Bense, professor of philosophy and theory of knowledge at the university. Once in Europe, travels to Zurich and Milan for the first time since moving to Brazil, and meets the philosopher Umberto Eco.

September 22, 1967–January 8, 1968: participates in the Bienal de São Paulo with the *Objetos gráficos* (Graphic objects) series, in which sheets of Japanese paper, showing graphic letters, symbols, and pressed type, are mounted between sheets of transparent acrylic laminate. These works are suspended in space so that both sides can be seen simultaneously. *The idea came to me of mixing that very transparent paper with equally transparent acrylic laminate—white, obviously. That's where the large plates came from, the so-called* Objetos gráficos*, which were an attempt to bring about drawing through transparency—in other words, to avoid back and front. . . . acrylic laminate really gave me a fantastic opportunity . . . to concretize an idea, the idea of doing away with back and front, before and after, a certain idea of more or less arguable simultaneity, the problem of temporality, etc., spatiotemporality, etc. . . . This is how the so-called* Objetos gráficos *came about.*[17]

1968
August: presents his essay "*El arte de los significados*" (The art of meanings) in reaction to the censorship of the exhibition *Experiencias 1968* at the Instituto Di Tella in May.

October: presents *Palabras ajenas* theatrically at the Arts Laboratory, London, under the title *Listen, Here, Now: A news concert for four voices and a soft drum*.

November 25: participates in *Tucumán arde*, an exhibition at the Sede Central de la CGT de los Argentinos, Buenos Aires, denouncing the exploitation of sugarcane workers in the province of Tucumán.

1969
June 30: participates in *Malvenido Rockefeller*, Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos, Buenos Aires. Exhibits the national Argentine flag superimposed with a portrait of Che Guevara. The exhibition is organized on the occasion of a visit to Argentina by Nelson Rockefeller, which sets off many protests.

1970
Death of Augusto, León's father.

1971
September: contributes to the book *Contra-bienal* (Counter-biennial), published by the Movimiento de Independencia Cultural Latinoamericano (MICLA) to protest the Bienal de São Paulo.

November: participates in *Exposición en repudio al II Certamen Nacional de Experiencias Visuales*, Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos, Buenos Aires.

1972
August–September: participates in *Contra-Salón*, Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, Buenos Aires.

October: participates in *Salón Independiente*, Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos, Buenos Aires.

November: *Palabras ajenas* is produced at the Larrañaga Theater, Buenos Aires, directed by Pedro Asquini and titled *Operativo pacem in terris* (Operation peace on earth).

Mira Schendel. Untitled from the series **Objetos gráficos** (Graphic objects). 1967
See page 122

Schendel's installation at the Venice Biennale, 1968

Mira Schendel. **Ondas paradas de probabilidade**. (Still waves of probability). 1969 (this installation 1994). See page 27

September 30–October 31: participates in the Salão de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas José Pancetti, São Paulo.

1968
June 22–October 20: with Clark, Farnese de Andrade, and Ana Letycia Quadros, represents Brazil in the Venice Biennale. Flusser describes her *Monotipias* and *Objetos gráficos* as "arranged texts reminiscent of the Greek or Latin alphabets. . . . These symbols cluster occasionally in what appear to be words (of many existent or non-existent languages) . . . and recall, in this aspect, palimpsests."[18]

July–August: travels in Europe. In Bern, meets German philosopher Jean Gebser. Visits Bense in Stuttgart, then goes to Hamburg, Copenhagen, Oslo, and Nordkapp, Norway, the northernmost point in Europe.

1969
September 27–December 14: participates in the Bienal de São Paulo with the installation *Ondas paradas de probabilidade—Antigo Testamento, Livro dos Reis, I, 19* (Still waves of probability—Old Testament, I Kings 19), a mass of nylon threads hanging from the gallery ceiling to the floor and accompanied by a text from the Book of Kings. Six years after her death, it will be reinstalled at the Bienal de São Paulo of 1994 in her honor.

October 18–November 18: *Mira Schendel*, Gromholt Galleri, Oslo.

León Ferrari. Untitled. c. 1977–78
See page 138

Ferrari at the Espaço Alternativo exhibition, Galpão de São Paulo, 1979

León Ferrari. **P4CR** from the series **Xadrez** (Chess) and the book **Imagens** (Images). 1979
See page 142

1976
March: starts to collect newspaper clippings detailing the crimes of the military junta led by Jorge Rafael Videla. Ferrari will later present these clippings under the title *Nosotros no sabíamos* (We didn't know).

November 11: with his family, leaves Argentina for Brazil, to escape Videla's "Dirty War"—the abduction and murder of thousands of Argentines, as well as countless other human rights violations. Ariel alone stays behind; the family will never see him again. *He stopped writing at the end of February. . . . Only in September of 1978 did we receive the news that they had killed him. . . . We found out that [Alfredo] Astiz [an officer in the Argentine navy] went to his house looking for him, he left, a confrontation took place and they killed him.*[17]

1977
In São Paulo, Ferrari puts his political art aside and begins to make sculpture again. *The Brazilian people are sweet, free thinking and unprejudiced. This finally motivated me to decide to take on art as a profession*.[18] Meets Brazilian artists Regina Silveira, Carmela Gross, and others.

1978
September 5–October 1: *León Ferrari. Esculturas, gravuras e desenhos*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, his first solo exhibition in Brazil. In the catalogue, critic Aracy Amaral calls his wire sculptures "prismatic," "musical," "poetic," "linear galaxies."[19]

October: participates in *Panorama de arte atual Brasileira. Escultura/ Objeto*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

1979
May 10: participates in *Espaço alternativo*, Galpão de São Paulo. Exhibits *Planeta* (Planet), a large, spherical wire sculpture intended to hang from the ceiling. Begins the series *Codigos* (Codes), *Xadrez* (Chess), *Baños* (Bathrooms), and *Plantas* (Plants), drawings made with ink, pressure-sensitive transfer type, and collage. These series are later published in the books *Imagens* (Images) and *Hombres* (Men).

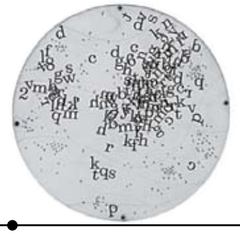
June: participates in a group exhibition at the Gabinete de Artes Gráficas, São Paulo, where he exhibits drawings and sculptures.

September 4–26: participates in *Escultura lúdica*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Exhibits *Berimbau*, a large sculpture of vertical rods of different diameters, which can be stroked to make musical notes. The work is named after an Afro-Brazilian folk instrument.

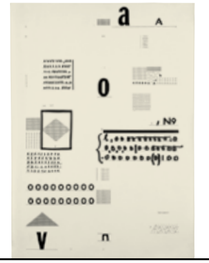
Wins the sculpture prize at the Salão de Arte de Riberão Preto.

November 19–December 16: participates in *Multimedia Internacional*, Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, São Paulo.

Mira Schendel. Untitled. 1972
See page 149



Mira Schendel. Untitled from the series **Datiloscritos**. 1975
See page 141



1971
March 31: wins the Gold Medal in the New Delhi International Triennial of Modern Art.

October 21–November 7: participates in *Amelia Toledo/Donato Ferrari/ Mira Schendel*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, exhibiting 150 *Cadernos* (Notebooks) from 1970–71. In these books she experiments with language and pursues serial explorations of circles, letters, arrows, and numbers.

1972
November 20–December 8: *Mira Schendel. Através: Acrílicos, Linhas, Transformáveis, Toquinhos, Bordados, Fórmicas, Espirais, Discos, Outros desenhos*, Galeria Ralph Camargo, São Paulo.

1973
January 12–February 5: *The Avant-garde Works by Mira Schendel*, Art Gallery of the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute, Washington, D.C. Schendel's first exhibition in the United States.

1974
July 4: participates in *Poesía Visual*, Museu Lasar Segall, São Paulo.

September 26–November 15: *Mira Schendel. Visuelle Konstruktionen und Transparente Texte*, Schmidtbank, Nuremberg, and at the Studiengalerie, University of Stuttgart, the following year.

October 26: participates in the Salão de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas José Pancetti, São Paulo.

1975
May 23–June 4: *Mira Schendel. Desenhos de 1974/75: Datiloscritos, Mandalas, Paisagens*, Gabinete de Artes Gráficas, São Paulo. The *Datiloscritos* (Typed writings) series are works on paper depicting abstract geometric shapes composed of typewritten letters, numbers, and symbols, occasionally accompanied by gestural, rhythmic abstract patterns.

July 15–August 10: *Mira Schendel*, Galeria Luiz Buarque de Hollanda & Paulo Bittencourt, Rio de Janeiro.

November 7–30: participates in the Salão de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas José Pancetti, São Paulo.

Creates *Homenagem a Deus—Pai do ocidente* (Homage to God—father of the West), a series of sixteen works on paper in which bold brushstrokes are accompanied by typed excerpts from the Book of Psalms.

Ferrari

León Ferrari. **Opus 113**. 1980
See page 136

Ferrari in performance, **14 Noites de PerFormance** (14 nights of performance), SESC Fábrica da Pompéia, São Paulo, 1981

Ferrari in his São Paulo studio, c. 1982

1980
May 6–June 1: *A arte de León Ferrari*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Exhibits over 100 drawings, lithographs, blueprints, watercolors, and books, and sixty stainless steel sculptures including *Planeta*. Ferrari describes his sculptures as *an explosion, a nest of lines, half hidden behind others or mixed with others behind them, which can be seen or not, depending on how the eye or the light switches*.[20]

July 25–August 13: participates in *Xerografia*, Pinacoteca do Estado, Casa das Artes Plásticas 'Miguel Benice A. Dutra' and Núcleo de Arte Contemporânea, São Paulo.

August 14–31: *León Ferrari: Esculturas, licopódios (xerografias), heliografias, desenhos, gravuras em metal e livros*, Museu Guido Viaro, Curitiba, Brazil.

Fall: participates in *Gerox*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, an exhibition that also includes Mira Schendel, among others. This is the only exhibition the two artists share until the exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 2009.

October 13–November 21: participates in *Exposició de tramesa postal/Mail art exhibition*, Espai del Centre de Documentacio d'Art Actual, Barcelona.

December 16–18: *León Ferrari: Percanta, esculturas sonoras, música não figurativa*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo.

1981
April 7–May 3: participates in *Heliografia*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo.

July 22: participates in *Mostra latinoamericana de arte*, Galeria Azulão, São Paulo.

October 27–November 4: participates in *Artes visuales e identidad en America Latina*, Foro de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City.

1982
León and Alicia return to Buenos Aires for the first time since 1976, to investigate the death of their son Ariel. As a protection, Ferrari has asked for and received Italian citizenship for himself and his family; now, having unsuccessfully petitioned the military government for a list of Italian citizens who have "disappeared," Ferrari asks the Italian ambassador, Sergio Kociancich, to request the list on behalf of the Italian government. The list will eventually be published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

April 7: *León Ferrari: Planos, heliografias y fotocopias* opens at Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City.

October: *León Ferrari: Prismas e retângulos*, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

July 12–25: participates in *14 Noites de Performance*, SESC Fabrica Pompeia, São Paulo.

1983
With Alicia, begins to travel regularly to Buenos Aires. Begins the series *Relecturas de la Biblia* (Rereadings of the Bible), collages combining Catholic and erotic Asian iconography and examining the violence in Christian scripture and its impact on Western society.

March: shows several works at the Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba. Gives his metal sculpture *La niña* (The girl) to Fidel Castro as a gift.

April 6–June 25: participates in *Multiples by Latin American Artists*, Franklin Furnace, New York.

October 14–December 20: participates in *Arte e videotexto*, Bienal de São Paulo.

Uma catedral ao vento dos direitos humanos, Ferrari's monument to Alceu Amoroso Lima, São Paulo, c. 1983. Left to right: Ferrari's grandchildren Anna, Julieta, Florencia, Paloma, and Maitén, with Alicia

November 24: *León Ferrari hoje: Quadros, desenhos, esculturas e instrumentos musicais*, Galeria Humberto Tecidos, São Paulo. The Associação Paulista dos Críticos de Arte gives the exhibition its prize for best show of the year.

December 10: Ferrari's monumental public sculpture *Uma catedral ao vento dos direitos humanos* (A cathedral for the wind of human rights), commissioned in honor of the philosopher, essayist, and art critic Alceu Amoroso Lima, is installed in São Paulo.

1984
April–May: participates in *Artistas en el papel* and *Libros de artistas*, Centro Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, his first group exhibitions in Buenos Aires since his departure from Argentina.

April 17–29: participates in *Sonicolor. Projeto Brasileiro-Argentino nas artes*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo.

May–June: participates in the Bienal de La Habana, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana.

León Ferrari. Untitled. 1984 See page XX

July 3–21: *León Ferrari: Ocho años en Brasil, 1976–1984*, Galería Arte Nuevo, Buenos Aires, his first solo exhibition in Buenos Aires since his departure from Argentina. A critic calls this "one of the most interesting theoretical-practical shows with an experimental artistic base that has taken place in 1984."[21]

1985
May 15: participates in *Cúpulas de Buenos Aires. Entre la realidad y la utopía*, Centro Cultural San Martín, Buenos Aires.

June 12–July 26: participates in *Caligrafias e escrituras*, Galeria Sergio Millet e Espaço Alternativo, Rio de Janeiro.

October 4: participates in *Releitura*, Bienal de São Paulo.

Schendel

1976–1977
Participates in various group exhibitions: *Brazilian Art: Figures and Movement*, Galeria Arte Global, São Paulo; American Biennial of Graphic Arts, Cali, Colombia; Art Fair 76, Bologna, Italy; *Panorama de Arte Atual Brasileira*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo; and *Recent Latin American Drawings 1969–1976: Lines of Vision*, International Exhibition Foundation, Washington, D.C.

1978
May 31–June 19: *Mira Schendel. Desenhos*, Gabinete de Artes Gráficas, São Paulo.

June 8–July 22: participates in *América Latina: Geometria sensível*, Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro. During the exhibition, a fire at the museum burns several of Schendel's works. *All of the works in the large exhibition burned. Including mine . . . a disaster. . . . It's a pity, but these things happen. Besides my five drawings which Light had bought, there were also twelve which I had sold to the museum collection. Seventeen in all. Perhaps I will make a donation later.*[19]

September 20–October 15: participates in the Venice Biennale among the eighty-one women artists included in the exhibition *Materializzazione del Linguaggio: La Donna fra Linguaggio e Immagine*, curated by Mirella Bentivoglio.

Participates in *Objeto na arte: Brasil anos 60*, at the Museu de Arte Brasileira da Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, São Paulo.

1979
Death of Schendel's mother, Ada Saveria Gnoli, in Brescia, Italy.

February: participates in *Coleção Theon Spanudis*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo. The show includes works by Dacosta, Volpi, Arnaldo Ferrari, José Antonio da Silva, and others.[20]

1980
April 25–July 30: participates in *Homenagem a Mário Pedrosa*, Galeria Jean Boghici, Rio de Janeiro.

May 21–31: *Mira Schendel. Desenhos*, Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, São Paulo.

Fall: participates in *Gerox*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, an exhibition that also includes León Ferrari, among others. This is the only exhibition the two artists share until the exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 2009. During this time Schendel also befriends the artist José Resende, the critics Naves and Ronaldo Brito, and the art dealer Paulo Figueiredo.

October 11: birth of Schendel's first grandson, Max Schendel.

Schendel, São Paulo, 1980s

1981
March–April: participates in *Arte transcendente*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, organized by Theon Spanudis.

May–July: participates in *Do moderno ao contemporâneo. Coleção Gilberto Chateaubriand*, Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro.

June 2–27: *Mira Schendel*, Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo.

October 16–December 20: participates in the Bienal de São Paulo with *I Ching*, a series of twelve paintings inspired by the ancient Chinese Book of Changes. The positive and negative spaces within these serial compositions deal with the idea of the dynamic balance of opposites.

1982
May 17: birth of second grandson, João Paulo Schendel.

June 5–28: *Mira Schendel*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo. Sheila Leirner writes, "In the last exhibition . . . her abstract works . . . revealed a rich mirror of an existential universe. Today, her works are bright like a jewel."[21]

August 9–23: *Mira Schendel*, Gravura Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro.

September–October: participates in *Women of the Americas: Emerging Perspectives*, Center of Inter-American Relations (now Americas Society), New York.

1983
April 19–May 7: *Mira Schendel: 65 Desenhos, 2 Droguinhas, 1 Trenzinho, 1 Quadro de 1964 e a Série Deus—Pai do Ocidente*, Galeria Thomas Cohn Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro.

June 14–July 30: *Mira Schendel*, Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo.

1984
May–June: participates in *Retrato e auto-retrato da arte Brasileira. Coleção Gilberto Chateaubriand*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and subsequently Barbican Art Gallery, London, that same year.

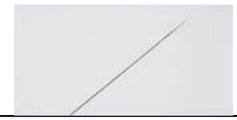
June: participates in *Le Petit Format*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo.

July 18: birth of third and last grandchild, Nina Schendel.

September 12–October 2: *Mira Schendel*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo.

November 1984–January 1985: participates in *Tradição e ruptura: síntese da arte e cultura Brasileira*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

Mira Schendel. **Monocromático** (Monochromatic). 1986. See page xx



1985
September 1985–October 1986: *Mira Schendel. Coleção Theon Spanudis*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

November 5–26: *Mira Schendel. Pinturas recentes*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo. Exhibits large monochromatic paintings incorporating spare gestural lines or simple geometric forms, some in gold leaf, placed off center in the compositions. Leirner writes, "The recent works by Mira Schendel . . . could exemplify with perfection the post-minimalism canon."[22]

León Ferrari. **Juicio Final**
(Last Judgment). 1985. See page 56

1985 (cont'd)
November: participates in *Panorama da arte atual Brasileira: Formas tridimensionais*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Exhibits two pigeons in a cage hung above a reproduction of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, on which their excrement falls. The work, he writes, criticizes the *Christian Multinational that promotes, sustains and uses these art works to advertise hell in its most political and evangelical campaign of fear.*[22]

1986
January: participates in *Uma virada no século*, Pinacoteca do Estado.

August 5: *León Ferrari*, Galeria Papier, São Paulo.

September: *A nova dimensão do objeto*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

November 26–December 31: participates in the Bienal de La Habana, Centro de Arte Contemporánea Wifredo Lam, Havana.

1987
January 25–February 22: participates in *A trama do gosto. Um outro olhar sobre o cotidiano*, Bienal de São Paulo.

October–November: participates in *Palavra imágica*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

November 13–December 18: *León Ferrari: Capilla hereje* (Heretic chapel), Franklin Furnace, New York. In *Capilla hereje*, the excrement of two caged pigeons falls through a cross-shaped opening onto paper; the resulting crosses of excrement are hung on the gallery walls. The installation also includes thirty photographic enlargements of collages from the *Relecturas de la Biblia* series. *It is a critique of Christianity, of Christian gods, of Christ as well as Jehovah. I try to point out these gods' characters—they are the fathers, the genes of repression and current excesses, of intolerance and of torture.*[23]

León Ferrari. **Ángel apocalíptico**
(Apocalyptic angel) from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia**
(Rereadings of the Bible). 1988
See page 155

León Ferrari. Untitled from the series **Relecturas de la Biblia**
(Rereading of the Bible). November 1986. See page 154

1988
June 3–26: *Relectura de la Biblia*, Galería Arte Nuevo, Buenos Aires. *It is part of my investigation of God's conduct. . . . everyone says that the Bible is a marvelous book. I believe that the Bible contains a complete justification of fascism.*[24]

September: participates in *Arte argentino en las decadas del 20, 40 y 60*, Museo Municipal de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori, Buenos Aires. Exhibits *La civilización occidental y cristiana*.

1988
June 4–30: participates in *The Debt*, Exit Art, New York, which includes works by Luis Camnitzer, Cildo Meireles, Marta Minujin, Juan Downey, and others. Ferrari exhibits two doves, their cage this time set up so that they defecate on U.S. dollar bills, which he intends to send to President Ronald Reagan to help pay Latin America's escalating debt.[25]

October 17–November 13: participates in *El pensamiento lineal*, Fundación San Telmo, Buenos Aires.

December 1–18: participates in *Cópias e pastiches*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

1989
May 18–August 6: Latin American scholar and curator Dawn Ades chooses fourteen collages from Ferrari's series *Relecturas de la Biblia* for the exhibition *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era 1820–1980*, The Hayward Gallery, London. One of these works is reproduced in the catalogue but none appear in the exhibition, an exclusion that Ferrari views as censorship.

October 7–29: *León Ferrari: Retrospectiva*, Museo Municipal de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori, Buenos Aires.

León Ferrari. **La Justicia** (Justice). 1991.
Installation view, Espacio Museo Sivori, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires

1991
Moves back to Buenos Aires, taking an apartment at 1032 Reconquista, later to be used as his office and storage space.

March 1: begins the *Errores* (Errors) series of works on paper, thick accumulations of gestural curvilinear lines superimposed in abstract, saturated, compact compositions. *It was, I think, about the pure line winding about freely, but without being so, it was free only to err, sinuous on the paper . . . that is one of the things that drawing can be, the sum of the infinite persevering errors that a pen commits as it caresses the paper.*[26]

May: participates in *Quinto centenario de la Inquisición*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

July 23–August 24: *Escrituras y esculturas de León Ferrari*, Galería Alvaro Castagnino, Buenos Aires.

November 21: participates in *A Vicente Marotta*, Museo Municipal de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori, Buenos Aires, with *La justicia* (Justice), in which a caged chicken defecates onto a scale, attracting public criticism and attention from the Sociedad Argentina Protectora de los Animales.

1992
May 21–June 12: participates in *One World Art*, Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg, with two bookshelves filled with bottles containing images protesting the conquest of the New World.

June 11–28: *León Ferrari: Sobre justicias y preservativos*, Espacio Giesso, Buenos Aires. *La justicia* reappears under a different title, *Autocensura* (Self-censorship), and with an embalmed chicken instead of a live one. The show also includes several versions of *Justicia final* (the work using Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*) and bottles of condoms, in a critique of the Church's opposition to their use and distribution during the AIDS epidemic.

July 26: participates in *Cuba. No al bloqueo. Exposición internacional de Arte Correl*, Espacio de Arte del Correo Viejo, Montevideo.

August 6–23: participates in *500 Años de represion. Muestra abierta internacional*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

October 19–November 20: participates in *Surrealismo. Nuevo Mundo*, Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires.

Léon Ferrari. **Juicio Final**
(Last Judgment). 1994. See page 151

1993
March: participates in *Erotizarte*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

March 18–21: participates in *Primera muestra del horror urbano*, Centro Municipal de Exposiciones, Buenos Aires.

April 23–May 9: participates in *Los Coleccionistas. El caos en el orden*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

May 26–June 6: participates in *Fotoespacio, pintores y escultores*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

September 16–30: participates in *Buenos Aires vista por sus artistas, sus arquitectos, sus escritores y sus psicoanalistas*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires.

October 4–20: participates in *Observaciones sobre la violencia*, Facultad de Filosofia y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Mira Schendel. **Obras recentes**. Installation view, Gabinete de Arte Raquel Arnaud, São Paulo, 1987

Schendel

1986
April 5: *Mira Schendel. Pinturas recentes*, Galeria Tina Presser, Porto Alegre.

August 14–September 14: *Mira Schendel. Pinturas recentes*, Galeria de Arte da Universidade Federal, Niteroi.

November 12–December 6: participates in *Caminhos do desenho Brasileiro*, Museu de Arte do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre.

1987
March–June: *Mira Schendel. Coleção Theon Spanudis*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

August 5–25: *Mira Schendel. Obras recentes*, Gabinete de Arte Raquel Arnaud, São Paulo. Exhibits *Sarrafos* (Splints), the last complete series she will make before her death: Black wooden bars protrude from twelve wooden panels painted with white tempera, making lines that erupt from the plane. *It sprang from the moment of lack of determination and disorder that Brazil lived through in March of this year, when apparently we were living in a tropical Weimar.*[23]

August 5–25: *Mira Schendel. Obras recentes*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo.

Figueiredo sets up a studio for Schendel in his gallery, where she begins the *Tijolos* (Bricks) series, paintings made with granulated brick dust. She will complete only three of these works.

September 15–October 9: *Mira Schendel*, Thomas Cohn Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro.

October 5: *Mira Schendel* opens at the Galeria Usina Arte Contemporânea, Vitória, Brazil.

Mira Schendel. Untitled from the series **Tijolos** (Bricks). 1988. See page 166

1988
February 26: participates in *Cem desenhos selecionados*, Paulo Figueiredo Galeria de Arte, São Paulo.

April 6–May 8: participates in *Modernidade: Arte Brasileira do Século XX*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

May: diagnosed with advanced lung cancer while traveling in Germany.

June: upon returning to Brazil, receives confirmation of lung cancer from her doctors.

July 21: is hospitalized at the Oswaldo Cruz Hospital, São Paulo.

July 24: death of Mira Schendel, at the age of sixty-nine. Brazilian curator and critic Paulo Herkenhoff remarks, "Mira took Brazilian art and transformed it into a philosophical matter. Through her notion of space, sign and material, she questioned the world like a philosopher."[24] Naves writes, "Just like the lines should appear in the weave of the paper in her drawings, as though they came from within, without the exterior quality of a superimposed line, life also for her—as I now understand it—never could be based only on a will to live that gave life to a feeble organism. I deeply hope that she becomes a star."[25]

León Ferrari. **Leda y el cisne** (Leda and the swan). 1997.
See page 160

León Ferrari. **Renovación** (Renewal) from the series **L'Osservatore Romano**. 2001
See page 158

León Ferrari. **Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2004**. Installation view, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2004

Ferrari

1994
May 6–June 30: participates in the Bienal de La Habana, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

May 28–June 9: *León Ferrari 60-70-80-90*, Espacio Rozarte, Rosario, Argentina.

September 20–October 16: *León Ferrari: Cristos y maniquíes*, Galería Filo, Buenos Aires. Shows a series of mannequins. *I dress the female mannequin with words or images that are at times like caresses and at others biblical threats of punishment.*[27]

November 23: participates in *La Justicia*, Galería del Sur de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de Mexico, Mexico City.

1995
Wins a Guggenheim Fellowship for the project *Sexo y violencia en iconografía cristiana* (Sex and violence in Christian iconography), which entails research into Christian iconography and its representation in his work.

March: participates in *Erotizarte II*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

March 15–April 20: participates in *Muestra internacional de libros de artista*, Galería Bookstore, Buenos Aires.

October 31–November 19: participates in *Arte al sur*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

November 6–25: participates in *El surrealismo en Buenos Aires*, Galería La Porte Ouverte, Buenos Aires.

1996
May 15–June 9: participates in *Las abuelas y los artistas*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

June 12: participates in *Eco: la ultima palabra*, Salas Nacionales de la Cultura Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires.

June 29–July 17: participates in *II Salón Nacional del Mar*, Centro Cultural Teatro Auditorium Mar del Plata.

November 4–9: participates in *Arte Con/ciencia*, Centro Cultural General San Martín, Buenos Aires.

November 20–December 20: participates in *Acerca del poder,* Galería de Arte de la Facultad de Psicologia de la Universidad de Buenos Aires.

1997
March 19: *León Ferrari: Tormentos y amores*, Galería Arcimboldo, Buenos Aires. Exhibits works in which Bible texts and poems by Jorge Luis Borges are printed in Braille on reproductions of erotic and religious images, including photographs by Man Ray, prints by Kitagawa Utamaro, and paintings by Giotto and Fra Angelico.

May 8–September 7: participates in *Re-Aligning Visions. Alternative Currents in South American Drawing*, El Museo del Barrio, New York.

May 15–24: *Nora Correas, León Ferrari*, VI Feria de Galerías de Arte Buenos Aires, ArteBA art fair, Buenos Aires.

August 10–September 11: wins the Gran Premio in the III Salon Nacional del Mar, Mar del Plata, Centro Cultural Teatro Auditorium, Buenos Aires.

August 12–September 24: participates in *Libros de artistas,* Museo Municipal de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori, Buenos Aires.

September 29–October 10: participates in *Che. Homenaje a 30 anos de su muerte*, CTA Congreso de la Cultura, El Trabajo y la Producción, Buenos Aires.

October 2–November 30: participates in the Bienal de Artes Visuales del Mercosur, Porto Alegre.

1998
Over the years, Ferrari has written a number of open letters to the press. These public statements now intensify through a series of newspaper articles on subjects ranging from the Church and anti-Semitism to atheism, paganism, poverty, abortion, and human rights. *The idea is to take advantage of freedom of opinion in order to express mine.*[28]

June: *León Ferrari: Escrituras, 1962–1998,* Galería Filo, Buenos Aires.

October 30–November 22: participates in the Bienal Internacional de Arte Experimental NO CON '98, Museo Municipal de Arte Moderno, Mendoza.

December 1998–March 1999: *León Ferrari. Nunca más y nosotros no sabíamos*, Centro de Documentación e Investigación de Culturas de Izquierda, Buenos Aires.

1999
January 2–March 7: participates in *Cantos Paralelos: Visual Parody in Contemporary Argentinean Art*, Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas. Ferrari's sculpture *La civilización occidental y cristiana* appears for the first time in the United States, along with Braille and bird-excrement works.

April 28–August 29: participates in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York.

August 13–22: participates in *Muestra coloquio de Buenos Aires. La desaparición: Memoria, Arte y Politica*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

October–November: *León Ferrari*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Bahía Blanca, Argentina.

November 10–28: participates in *Concurso Internacional J.L. Borges*, Salas Nacionales de la Cultura Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires.

December: participates in *Siglo XX argentino, arte y cultura*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

2000
May 9–June 2: *Infiernos e idolatries*, Centro Cultural de España, Buenos Aires. Ferrari shows his *Justicia final* series and a group of kitschy mass-produced objects—plastic saints and animals, dildos, frying pans, chessboards, cages, toasters—arranged in scenarios of torment from the Bible. *I reproduce Hell, but instead of doing so with regular people, I do it with the very saints who vouched for the idea of Hell.*[29] The public is outraged and the Spanish ambassador is urged to close the exhibition. It stays open, but two days before its scheduled close, a crowd gathers outside the Centro Cultural de España and throws garbage and tear gas into the galleries while reciting the rosary.

June 13–19: participates in *No a la tortura*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

August: wins the Premio Costantini 2000 for his work and artistic achievement, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires.

December 5: participates in *Dia del arte correo*, Palacio Central del Correo Argentino, Buenos Aires.

December 12, 2000–February 27, 2001: participates in *Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin lugar: 1918–1968*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

2001
April 16–May 19: *León Ferrari: L'Osservatore Romano*, Galería Sylvia Vesco, Buenos Aires. The show contains collages made from the Vatican's weekly newspaper, reproductions of images by Hieronymus Bosch and Albrecht Dürer, and photographs of Argentine military figures.

March 22: participates in *Pinturas por la vida*, Universidad Popular Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires.

May 31–June 1: participates in *La gran exposición de arte*, Fabrica Brukman, Buenos Aires.

June 21–July 1: participates in *No a la tortura. Equipo Argentino de trabajo e investigación psicosocial,* Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

July 26–August 12: participates in *Argentinos en la Bienal de La Habana*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

September 20: participates in *Arte en America Latina*, MALBA-Fundación Costantini, Buenos Aires. Exhibits *La civilización occidental y cristiana*, whose meaning now seems informed by the devastating attack on the World Trade Center, New York, the previous week.

October 3–31: participates in *Desapariciones. Encuentro internacional de arte correo,* Universidad Popular Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires.

2002
July 3–13: participates in *The Architecture of Madness*, University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom.

September 14–October 14: participates in *Pie de obra*, Festival Internacional de Poesía, Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes Juan B. Castagnino, Rosario.

September 20–October 27: participates in *Arte y politica en los '60*, Salas Nacionales de Exposiciones Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires.

2003
May 8–July 6: *León Ferrari: planos y papeles 1979–1986*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.

July 30–August 24: participates in *Manifestaciones sobre el malestar latinoamericano*, Centro Cultural Metropolitano, Quito, Ecuador.

September 25–October 19: participates in *Encuentro Internacional de Poesía Visual, Sonora y Experimental*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

October–December: *León Ferrari*, Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre.

2004
March 4–July 25: participates in *MoMA at El Museo: Latin American and Caribbean Art from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, El Museo del Barrio, New York. For one critic, Ferrari's work in drawing "raises issues of illusion, representation, and identity similar to those explored by contemporary figures like Thomas Demand and Cindy Sherman. It is a waterfall of lines, delicate and lyrical, a kind of Spanish moss hanging in and creating pictorial space."[30]

March 25–April 30: *León Ferrari: Escrituras*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires.

June 20–September 12: participates in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This exhibition is a reiteration of the exhibition *Heterotopías. Medio siglo sin lugar: 1918–1968*, at the Reina Sofia, Madrid, in 2000.

September 9–October 23: *León Ferrari: Politiscripts*, The Drawing Center, New York, curated by Luis Camnitzer. A critic writes in the *New York Times*, "Because even drawings that may be mere doodles are composed and executed with care, they all convey the impression of carrying coded and encrypted information known only to the artist. In short, they are like a taunting gesture of counter-censorship. Through its very opaqueness, abstraction, real or imagined, becomes a political tool."[31]

Ferrari at a rally, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, December 19, 2004

Léon Ferrari. **Huesos** (Bones). 2006
See page 165

New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930–2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions. Installation view, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2007

Ferrari in his Pichincha studio, Buenos Aires, 2008

2004 (cont'd)
October 28–November 13: *Planos y collages de León Ferrari 1980–1982*, Sicardi Gallery, Houston.

November 30, 2004–February 27, 2005: *León Ferrari. Retrospectiva. Obras 1954–2004*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, curated by Andrea Giunta. Conservative Catholic clergy demand that the show be canceled; Jorge Mario Cardinal Bergoglio, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, calls for "a day of repentance . . . where we ask God to pardon our sins and those of the city."[32] The exhibition closes on a judge's orders, but eighteen days later Centro Recoleta wins an appeal and it reopens. The city's secretary of culture, Gustavo López, remarks, "The exhibition may be provocative, but nobody is obliged to see it."[33] For Ferrari, the victory in the appeal is an unexpected achievement of the exhibition.[34]

December 10, 2004–May 2005: *León Ferrari: Artefactos para dibujar sonidos*, MALBA–Fundación Constantini, Buenos Aires.

2005
February 27: *León Ferrari. Obra reciente*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

March 12–April 23: participates in *Redefining Maps and Locations*, University of Essex, Colchester.

March 25–August 29: participates in *Drawing from the Modern, 1945–1975*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

September 13–October 17: participates in *Plumas y Brillos*, Galería Braga Menéndez, Buenos Aires.

September 2–October 2: participates in *Arte Memoria e identidad*, Municipalidad de Vicente López, Buenos Aires.

November 9–December 16: participates in *Pintura sin pintura*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires.

December 9, 2005–February 12, 2006: *Escrito en el aire*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Neuquén.

2006
Begins work on large sculptures made from a range of materials including polystyrene, prosthetic bones, and tree branches. *I was interested in bones as an aesthetic element because I approached a kind of forgetting what death means. It is like making a sculpture, although the material gives it a different charge, one that is tragic, strong, but I leave it to the viewer to deal with the meaning.*[35]

March 3–April 2: participates in *30 Años con memoria*, Municipalidad de Vicente López, Buenos Aires.

April 7–June 4: participates in *Daros Latin American Collection*, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

August 14–September 4: *León Ferrari en la FADU*, Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo, Buenos Aires.

October 7–November 26: *León Ferrari: Poéticas e políticas*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.

2007
June 10–November 21: participates in *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense*, Venice Biennale. Receives the Golden Lion award in recognition of his artistic oeuvre. The announcement reads, "At the Arsenale, Ferrari presented a body of work that offers examples of a long and substantial career and continuous critical stance in the context of often adverse political and social circumstances. The Jury decided to assign him this prize not only for his ethical and his political effort, but also for the contemporary aesthetic relevance of his work developed during the past sixty years."[36]

October 24–November 24: *León Ferrari*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires.

November 21, 2007–February 25, 2008: participates in *New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930–2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions*, curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2008
February 2–March 24: *León Ferrari. Heliografías*, Teatro Auditorium, Mar del Plata, Argentina.

April 22–June 7: *León Ferrari. Los músicos*, Galería Braga Menéndez, Buenos Aires.

May 6–June 29: *León Ferrari, Antologica*, Museo Castagnino + macro, Rosario.

May 17–October 13, 2008: participates in *Latin American and Caribbean Art: Selected Highlights from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, curated by Pérez-Oramas, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

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