



ÑANDE RÓGA:
THE FELICIANO CENTURIÓN
ARCHIVAL COLLECTION





INTRODUCTION

Ñande róga means “our home” in Guaraní, which has been the primary language spoken in Paraguay since before the Spanish colonial conquest. There are two ways of addressing the first-person plural in Guaraní: the word *ñande* refers to an inclusive “we,” where everyone participates, while *ore* implies that some member of a social group has been left out. This difference, which is absent in Spanish and English, reveals an insightful understanding of community and belonging.

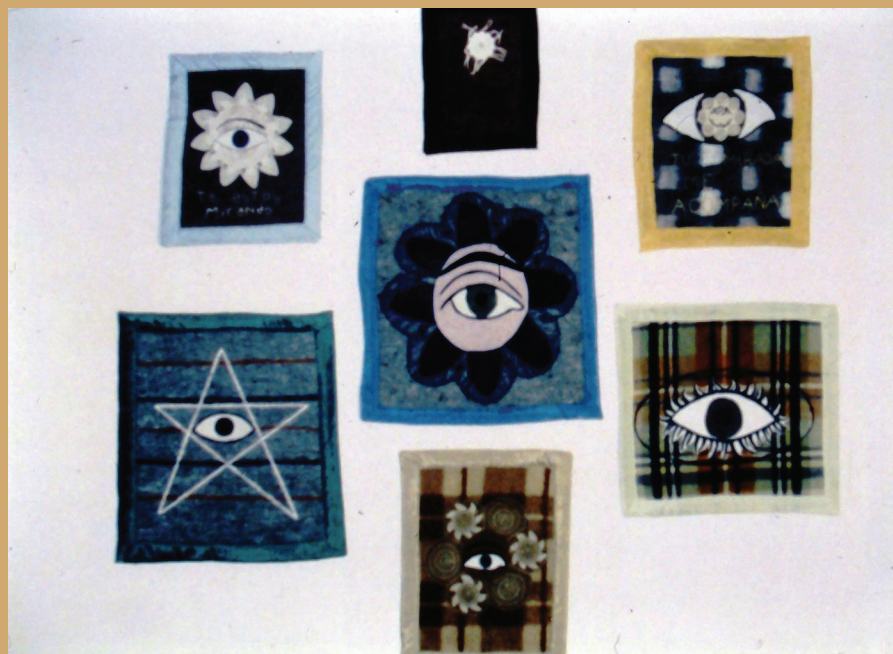
Inspired by this notion of collectivity, *Ñande Róga: The Feliciano Centurión Archival Collection* reflects on the work of Paraguayan artist Feliciano Centurión (1962–1996). His practice was profoundly influenced by the countryside of Paraguay, the underground cultural scene of Buenos Aires in the 1990s, and the LGBT liberation movements of postdictatorship Argentina. Resulting from the resonances of these various communities and his deep interest in Paraguayan crafts such as *ñandutí* textiles, his works are evocative of domesticity, care, healing, and spirituality.

This exhibition brings together drawings, textiles, and sculptural works by Centurión with archival materials, many of which have never been previously published or shown publicly. These items offer insight into Centurión’s studio practice and his relationships with other artists and thinkers working in Buenos Aires and Asunción in the 1990s. For Centurión—a gay man living through the most tumultuous years of the AIDS crisis in Latin America—the bonds of friendship he made during this period were a powerful grounding force in both his work and his life. It is clear from the works and archival ephemera presented in *Ñande Róga* that Centurión’s work existed within the inclusive “we.”

This linguistic nuance fueled the development of an installation design loosely composed of concentric circles. For this presentation, Centurión’s drawings, textiles, and sculptures are surrounded by a perimeter of slides, press clippings, documentary photographs, and notes from the artist’s archival collection in the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) Library and Archives, in effect staging the social and cultural contexts that shaped his work. Displayed together, these materials offer new perspectives on the lives and practices of Centurión and his peers.

Responding to the exhibition’s format and its emphasis on community, this booklet includes descriptions of the featured works, written by the curators, alongside excerpts of quotes by Centurión and a reflection by his friend and fellow artist Mónica Giron. Viewed in conjunction with the images and archival scans reproduced in these pages, these texts seek to shed light on the layers of influence that yielded Centurión’s resonant practice.

Ñande Róga: The Feliciano Centurión Archival Collection is curated by Eduardo Andres Alfonso, Angelica Arbelaez, María Carri, Rachel Eboh, Laura Hakel, Kyle Herrington, and Guy Weltchek, with guidance from Karin Schneider and ISLAA. It was originally presented at the Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, in December 2021. It results from a fall 2021 graduate seminar, led by Karin Schneider, at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, which was supported by ISLAA as part of its Research Seminar Initiative. This iteration of the exhibition is organized by Olivia Casa, exhibition and curatorial manager at ISLAA.



Top: Feliciano Centurión, Ana López on the blanket used for *Surubí* by Feliciano Centurión, ca. 1994

Bottom: Unknown photographer, *La mirada* (The Gaze) by Feliciano Centurión, 1995



Feliciano Centurión

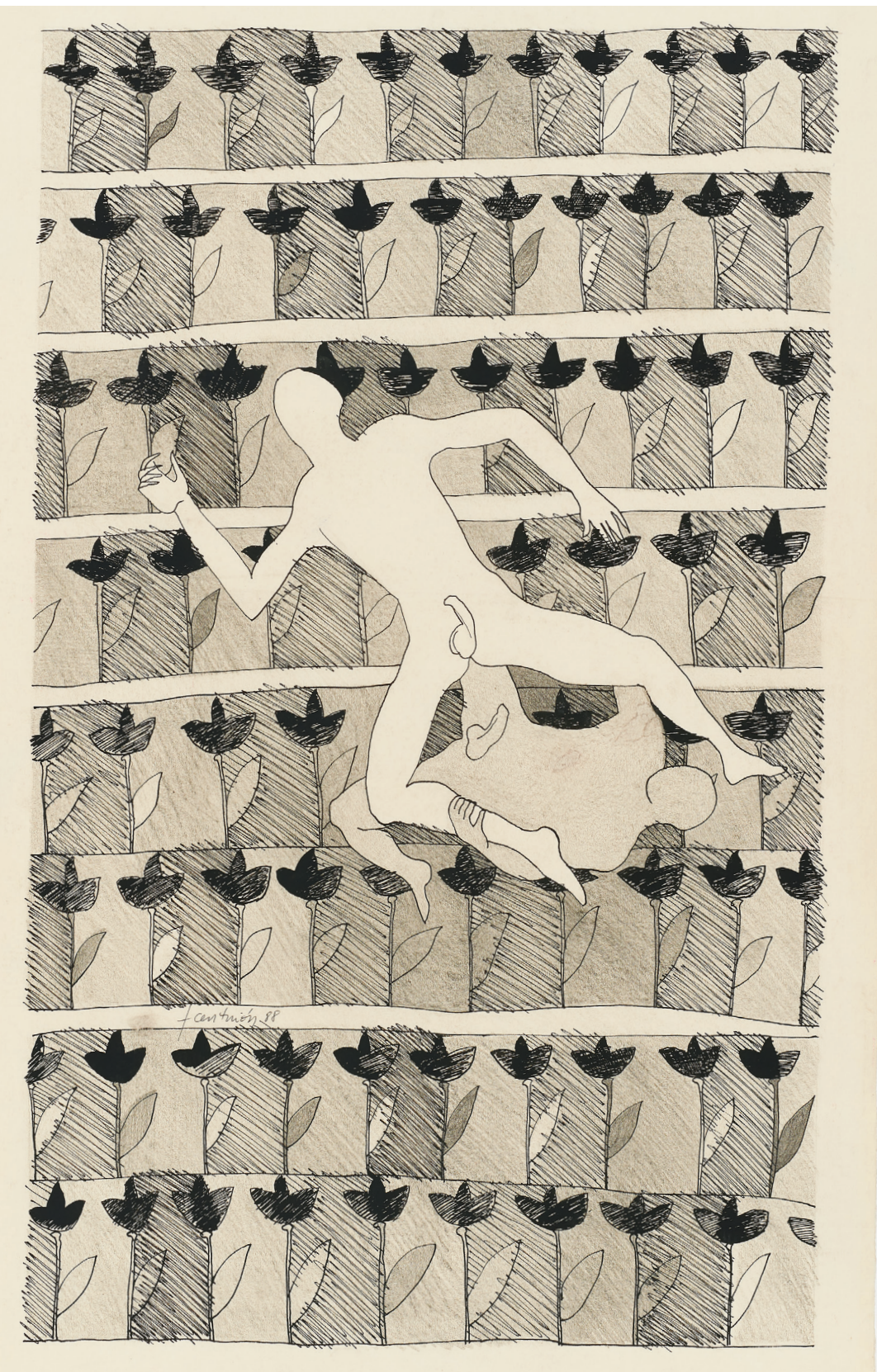
Untitled, n.d.

Graphite on paper

15 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (40.3 × 33.8 cm)

Centurión was born and raised in Paraguay and relocated to Argentina in 1974. He attended the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón in Buenos Aires, where he graduated with a concentration in drawing. Although he often opted for an abstracted representation of the human body in his work, we can see evidence of his training in figure drawing here.

The two intertwined figures in this work—one horse, one human body—are seen locked in an embrace or amid transformation from one form to the other. The lines that delineate the figures are ambiguous, erasing the boundary between the animal and the human while affirming the connection between individuals and the environment that surrounds them.



Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, 1988

Ink on paper

27½ × 19¾ in. (69.9 × 49.8 cm)

In this drawing, two male forms confront the viewer, punctuating the focal point of the piece and provoking a sense of voyeurism and awareness. Limbs extend poetically from the top figure, while the firm grasp and active position of the bottom silhouette suggest two lovers in the midst of a sexual encounter. The sequence of recurring geometric flowers, which are achromatic, reveal Centurión's interest in pattern and repetition.

The playful, decorative background motif complicates the viewer's sense of visual space and balances the atmospheric perspective of the nude figures. The drawing's allusions to sexual freedom exist alongside notions of tenderness and femininity, while hinting at Centurión's later explorations of care, safety, and protection.

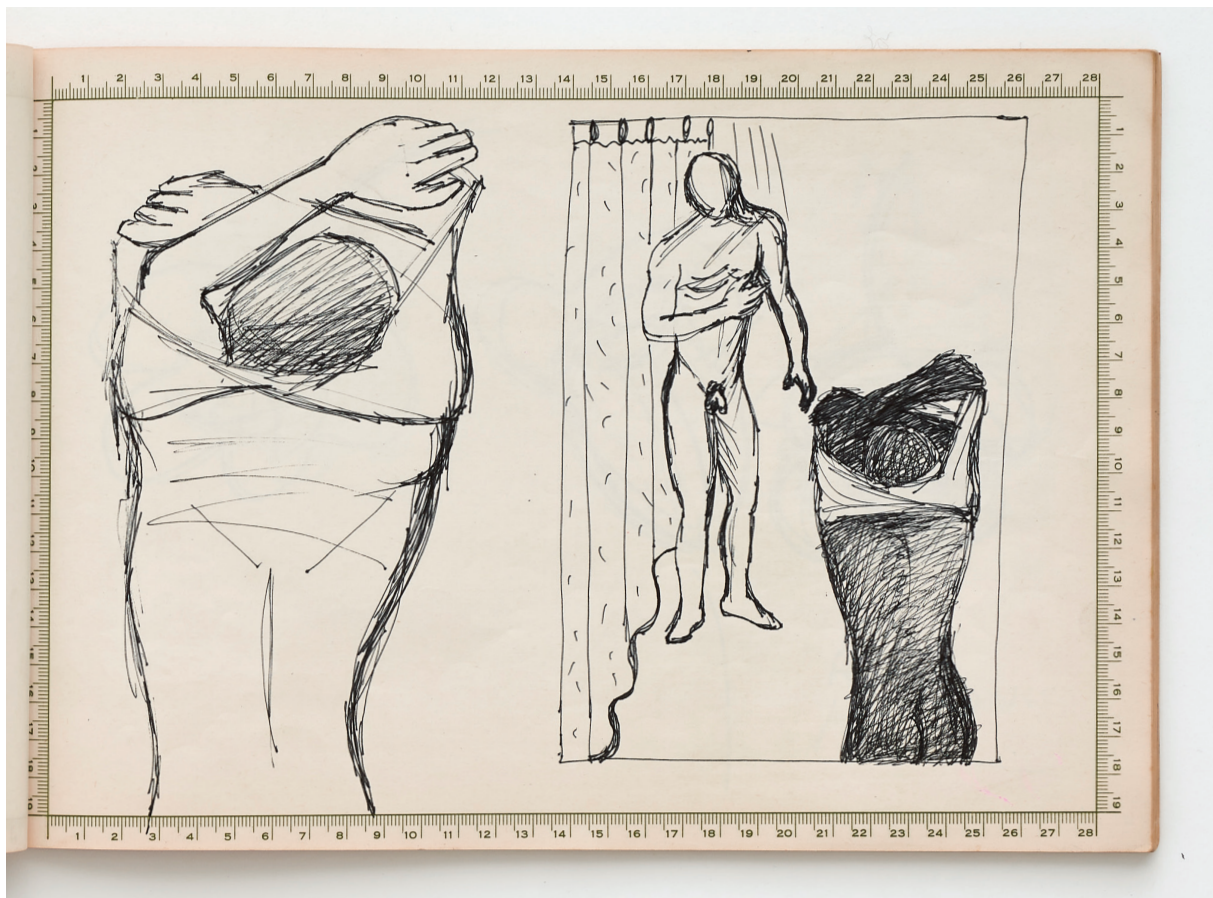
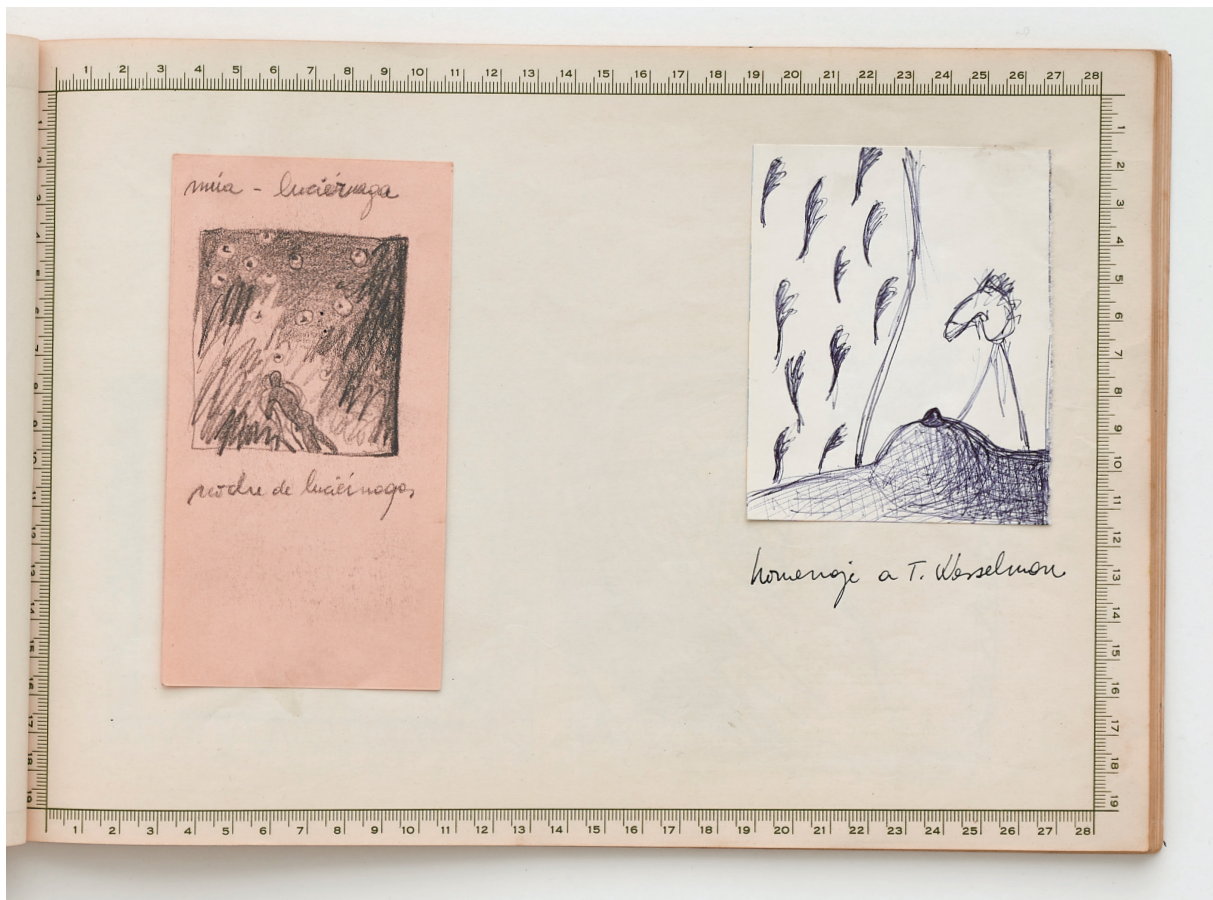
Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, n.d.

Facsimile of sketchbook

8 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (21.3 × 30.8 cm)

The forty-eight drawings in this sketchbook were made while Centurión was enrolled in a painting class taught by Juan Pablo Renzi at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova in Buenos Aires. The eclectic narratives—ranging from domestic scenes to homoerotic tangos to Greek myths—are marked by a tension between voluminous figures and abstract, patterned, and increasingly flat backgrounds. Starting off with the sort of decorative floral motifs found on bedspreads and wallpapers, the patterns begin to fill the entirety of the later pages. Two sketches contain references to the painters Francis Bacon and Tom Wesselmann, demonstrating Centurión's acute awareness of international contemporary art and his research into artists with compelling formal resolutions to the tension between figure and ground.





Feliciano Centurión
Ilumino con amor (I Light Up with Love), ca. 1990

Embroidery on textile with acrylic

14½ × 14½ in. (36.8 × 36.8 cm)

Centurión's engagements with local Paraguayan craft traditions including *ñandutí*, knitting, and crocheting were influenced by the expertise of his mother, Yolanda Andrea Acosta, and his grandmother Rogelia Acosta Mena. As his sister María Yolanda recalls, "Our grandmother crocheted very quickly, without even looking." *Ñandutí*, which translates as "spiderweb" in Guaraní, is a delicate style of lace popular in Paraguay that Centurión incorporated in many of his intimate textile-based pieces. The confluence of these forms of handicraft and objects of domestic comfort points to the importance of home, family, and Guaraní culture to his artistic development.

In *Ilumino con amor*, Centurión explores the relationship between materials by juxtaposing mass-produced industrial blankets, which he would buy in local markets or receive from friends, with the intimacy of needlework, a domestic activity that was ubiquitous during his childhood. The work embraces the beauty in the everyday and celebrates the artistic potential of craft techniques associated with domestic labor. The embroidered text, which became an emblematic aphorism in Centurión's practice during the final years of his life, evokes a sense of warmth and transcendence.



Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, 1994

Embroidery on textile with acrylic

21¼ × 21½ in. (55.2 × 54.6 cm)

Centurión was diagnosed with HIV in 1992 and passed away due to AIDS-related illness four years later, at the age of thirty-four. He was prolific in the final years of his life, producing works in smaller proportions that featured natural motifs and brief diaristic phrases waxing, by turns, personal, spiritual, and poetic in their tone and content. Upon stitching forms and figures onto found blankets, or *frazadas*, in his celebrated large-scale work from the early 1990s, he turned increasingly to the more diminutive scale of handkerchiefs and dishcloths starting around 1994.

In contrast to the gossamer ornamentation of *ñandutí*, this work highlights Centurión's use of densely knitted patterns as another form of embroidery. The floral motif, with its reference to domestic decoration, also hints at the interconnectedness between nature and the human world. Here, two flowers are attached at the stem as though sustaining each other, offering a symbol of mutual support.

plástica

Existen muchas maneras de conocer el trabajo de un artista. Recurrimos, en primer lugar, al estudio que sobre ellas hace Fabián Lebenglik en el catálogo de una de las exposiciones realizadas por Centurión en nuestro país, haciendo que el escrito responda a nuestras preguntas.

- ¿Qué pasó con el artista, en el momento en que abandonó la tela como receptáculo de su creatividad?

- Las búsquedas de Centurión, desde que abandonó la tela, se dirigieron hacia nuevas superficies para la pintura, en relación directa con la intimidad: Sábanas, gobelinos, lonetas, cortinas. Hasta que, en 1990 - cuando consolidó su imagen - encuentra en las frazadas el material perfecto para pintar sus soñados paisajes y geografías.

- ¿Qué clase de frazadas? ¿Tienen ellas que ser lisas o estampadas?

- Comenzó con las frazadas lisas, fue probando texturas y luego pasó a las estampadas, aprovechando el diseño que venía de fábrica.

Las que utiliza, en su mayoría son de "baja calidad". A partir de esta estética también "baja", que los diseñadores hacen pensando en el gusto de la gente y en el propio, el artista invirtió el sentido de los estampados y convirtió el gusto masivo de esas frazadas de "medio pelo" en obras únicas.

- ¿Tiene algún significado para él trabajar con frazadas?

- Por el tipo de operación plástica que practica Feliciano Centurión, pintando su obra sobre un material en relación tan íntima con el cuerpo, podría decirse que él exhibe y se exhibe al mismo tiempo. Se trata de una doble transformación de las frazadas.

- ¿De dónde las compra? ¿De una fábrica o de las tiendas abiertas en zonas comerciales?

- Para conseguirlas recorre el Once, un barrio de comerciantes judíos y coreanos donde sacian sus apetitos de consumo las cla-



Feliciano Centurión y su pintura sobre frazadas

El es paraguayo, oriundo de San Ignacio, tiene 31 años y hace 19 que está radicado en la Argentina. Ha realizado varias exposiciones colectivas e individuales, y tiene ganados premios como el Martel de Pintura en el Centro de Artes Visuales, el Fundación Nuevo Mundo de Porto Alegre, el Fortabat del Centro Cultural Recoleta de Buenos Aires y otros.



ses medias y populares de Buenos Aires y sus alrededores. En esa zona de la ciudad, las modas "altas" son copiadas y adaptadas al supuesto mal gusto del consumo masivo, para aquellos que no pueden acceder a la llamada "alta costura" y a las marcas internacionales.

- Frazadas... ¿De un mundo de sueños a los sueños de un artista?

- Con el aprovechamiento de los estampados - según Feliciano, ahora los fabricantes hacen frazadas para él - el artista pasó con facilidad de la vigilia al otro mundo, al de la pintura, al tiempo que responde con lucidez a los tiempos duros que corren".

"UNA BUSQUEDA"

Conversamos con Feliciano Centurión en "La Pequeña Galería", días antes de su retorno a Buenos Aires. "En realidad yo empecé a trabajar con una pintura más "tradicional", sobre tela, con óleo, y después, tenía un cierto interés por la decoración, por superficies decorativas, por fondos decorativos. Entonces ahí empecé a trabajar sobre sábanas, telas estampadas, trabajé lonetas rayadas, las carpas, utilizando ya eso como diseño, como fondo, y también gobelinos, las telas de tapicería, hasta que llegó un momento en que me dije: Tengo ganas de hacer algo diferente. Y bueno, surgieron las frazadas".

El artista comentó las particularidades de trabajar con un material tan absorbente como las frazadas, y señaló que actualmente se encuentra aplicando un sistema que disminuye esta absorción: "Estoy perfeccionando mi técnica, conociendo el material con el que trabajo", dijo.

Señaló asimismo que en Buenos Aires lo conocen como el "pintor de frazadas", y que le parece agradable esa identificación que se le hace con el material que utiliza en sus pinturas. Comentó finalmente, que tiene en carpeta exposiciones que realizará en breve, y también un viaje a Cuba, donde participará de una muestra internacional.

The toys and their outfits came to me by chance. I go back to my childhood and knit them wool dresses, jackets, crochet garments. I reveal the humor and underscore the kitsch quality of the object. Wrapped in tenderness, they arouse sympathy. They make up a sort of domestic Jurassic Park. Dinosaurs, horses, elephants, all together with no categories, are a metaphor for how little care and love there is for nature. Condemned to a shelf, they saturate "reality" in acts of love.

-Feliciano Centurión, unpublished artist statement, September 1996



Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, from the series Familia (Family), ca. 1990
Three plastic toy animals with crochet wraps
Various dimensions

Centurión began working with readily available, inexpensive materials such as blankets and plastic toy animals found in Buenos Aires's garment district, Once, around 1990. Here, a small toy deer, a dinosaur, and a zebra, part of the larger series *Familia*, are wrapped in playful hand-crocheted sweaters and blankets. By variously protecting their innocence or disarming their ferocity, the crocheted clothing bestows each animal with individuality.

The *Familia* series affirms the rich nexus of influence and inspiration within Centurión's artistic community, his chosen family. For example, one can see a reinforcing dialogue between *Familia* and the series *Ajuar para un conquistador* (Trousseau for a Conqueror, 1993) by Centurión's friend and fellow artist Mónica Giron. For this series, Giron knitted whimsical outfits, complete with stockings and scarves, intended to adorn the endangered birds of Patagonia.



I try to be in both places, to fight for a place for myself [in Paraguay] by submitting work to top-notch juried shows and other shows, like the one at Fábrica I am currently working on. But I also fight to earn a place for myself in Buenos Aires—where I currently live. It is a very closed and elitist milieu. In Buenos Aires, they know me as the Paraguayan, and that is often the reason I am marginalized.

—Feliciano Centurión, quoted in Francisco Britos C., “Abriendo caminos en el exterior,” *Última hora*, May 4, 1990



Top: Unknown photographer,
Tigres (Tigers) by Feliciano Centurión, 1992

Bottom: Mónica Giron, *Pasión de multitudes* (The Passion of Crowds) by Rosana Fuertes, Havana Biennial, 1994

Mónica Giron
Slideshow of photographs, ca. 1992–96
30 digitized slides

Unknown photographers
Slideshow of photographs, ca. 1992–96
50 digitized slides

The slides presented in this exhibition are housed in Centurión's archival collection in the ISLAA Library and Archives and consist of two sets of photographs. The first is a series of photographs taken by the artist Mónica Giron sometime between 1992 and 1996, in which she documents her own work as well as that of other artists in her community. The second set comprises personal archival images of Centurión's work and exhibitions, including the 1993 group show *Del borde* at the Fundación Banco Patricios and the 1994 solo show *Estrellar* at the influential Galería del Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas in Buenos Aires. Giron lent her slides to Centurión when he traveled home to Paraguay in 1996, so that he could use them to showcase the Argentine art scene to colleagues abroad.

Together, the Giron and Centurión slides stand as testimony to their important collaborative relationship. Not only were the two young artists professionalizing and documenting their work, but they also produced an invaluable document of contemporary art in Buenos Aires that circulated throughout the region. Alongside the photographs, letters, and ephemera in Centurión's archival collection, they attest to the communal networks of camaraderie that brought together Centurión's peers and collaborators—including Diana Aisenberg, Ana López, Cristina Schiavi, and Giron—in Buenos Aires.

Examples of these slides appear on the front and back endpapers and on page 18. Other materials from the Feliciano Centurión archival collection appear on the cover and page 14.

RECOLLECTION

Mónica Giron

In 1982, I acquired a Nikon camera, with a 5mm lens, in order to learn how to take and develop black-and-white photographs in the darkroom while at art school in Geneva, Switzerland.

The slides in this presentation were all made with that camera, and were taken sometime between 1992 and 1996. By then, I had started traveling to Bariloche, my hometown in Patagonia, still a very small village and removed from contemporary art scenes, to give art classes at Ruth Viegenger's art studio—an artist friend who I grew up with and who lived there.

After 1991—having quit a very demanding job at an antiques dealer—I started touring around the city and enjoying the contemporary art shows in Buenos Aires.

I was also getting a little bit of attention after two large solo shows (1988 and 1991), and because of that I was filing and keeping track of my own work with, among other media, 35mm slides in 5-by-5-centimeter frames. These were meant to be projected while I gave lectures on my work or sent by mail to different curators and institutions upon request. These slides were all carefully labeled.

Because I did not have a slide carousel, I would frame them and, only then, look at the lot in a little slide viewer, one by one, in order to organize and select them before traveling for a class or sending them by mail. By 1991, I was working with the gallerist Isaac Lisenberg, who was showing and selling some of my work, and so buying film and developing and framing slides was possible for me.

In order to prepare classes on contemporary art, I documented images in books and in shows that I thought might be of interest to the eyes and hearts of potential art students far from Buenos Aires, whether in Argentina or abroad.

Teaching in Bariloche, Posadas, Brazil, and Ecuador, in those first years and all throughout the 1990s, enabled me to reconsider the scene in Buenos Aires and the mainstream, so to speak. After 1996, most of the material started becoming digital and the slideshows were created with PowerPoint.

Many of the slides came from the art books on my bookshelves—books and art catalogues and magazines that I had brought in the 1980s while traveling in South and Central America, North America, and Europe. Also, I photographed art that I thought would or could interest or move the audience, from the Buenos Aires scene, as well as biennials and different group shows I had the ability to personally attend during those years.

My friend Feliciano Centurión gave me as a gift two lovely, beautiful, large handcrafted Paraguayan traveling briefcases or suitcases. They were decorated with flowers and leaves, with the design embossed in the leather. The first one was given to a curator who came to my studio and loved it.¹ So Feliciano brought another one from Paraguay. I had very few things in the studio I had moved into by the end of 1995, so it was very easy to see. It stood out like a very special artifact and could catch the eye of people interested in the field of beautiful, special, handcrafted regional and hybrid (culturally speaking) items.

These 160 slides were taken sometime in 1996. They were not labeled, so they depend on my recognition and memory to be identified. They might have been accompanied by handwritten sheets of paper, likely in A4 size, that listed the artists and maybe the techniques or dates or materials and sizes. These lists would be reconfigured according to each class I was lecturing in.

One of the last times I saw Feliciano, I lent him the whole lot of slides, and he put them into the big Paraguayan briefcase. Not only because the plastic sheets that hold the slides did not fit in a smaller bag but also because it was so beautiful and related to our interest in artworks, and because he was going to give a contemporary art class, possibly in Formosa, Argentina, or Asunción, Paraguay. I can vaguely remember my conversation with Feliciano about the fact that he would take this briefcase of great quality and beautiful design, and that it was extremely special.

As I mentioned, the first suitcase left my home studio with a curator. We enjoyed the fact that the first one had gone to a curator—it was as if our interest in peripheral or particular, local culture could find welcoming eyes in other, more central or mainstream art scenes.

I gave Feliciano all the slides I had for teaching. I believe no slides of my own work were in the batch. When Feliciano died, I did not find the courage to reclaim the briefcase or the slides. So I simply let go of them. I recently learned that some of these slides have appeared in ISLAA's archives but that the briefcase is missing.

1. The young curator could have been Carlos Basualdo or perhaps Jesús Fuenmayor. This part of my memory remains blurry.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, n.d.
Facsimile of sketchbook
8 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (21.3 × 30.8 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, n.d.
Graphite on paper
15 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (40.3 × 33.8 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, 1988
Ink on paper
27 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (69.9 × 49.8 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Ilumino con amor (I Light Up with Love), ca. 1990
Embroidery on textile with thread and acrylic
14 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (36.8 × 36.8 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, from the series *Familia* (Family), ca. 1990
Plastic toy animal with crochet wrap
11 × 4 × 10 in. (27.9 × 10.2 × 25.4 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, from the series *Familia* (Family), ca. 1990
Plastic toy animal with crochet wrap
10 × 5 × 11 in. (25.4 × 12.7 × 27.9 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, from the series *Familia* (Family), ca. 1990
Plastic toy animal with crochet wrap
11 × 5 × 13 in. (27.9 × 12.7 × 33 cm)

Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, 1994
Embroidery on textile with acrylic
21 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (55.2 × 54.6 cm)

Mónica Giron
Slideshow of photographs, ca. 1992–96
30 digitized slides

Unknown photographers
Slideshow of photographs, ca. 1992–96
50 digitized slides

Materials from the Feliciano Centurión archival collection, 1980s–90s
49 facsimiles of exhibition ephemera, newspaper clippings, photographs, and texts
Various dimensions

All works from the collection of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) and archival materials from the ISLAA Library and Archives

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Feliciano Centurión (1962–1996) was a Paraguayan artist, best known for his textile-based pieces, whose body of work explores topics including domesticity, queerness, and politics. In an embrace of craft and kitsch aesthetics, he incorporated a variety of media, from canvas and paper to blankets and found cloths. Centurión was born in the jungle-enclosed city of San Ignacio, Paraguay, and relocated to Formosa, Argentina, in 1974 to escape growing political unrest in his home country. He was raised by his mother and grandmother, who nurtured his early interest in craft and taught him techniques such as sewing, crocheting, weaving, and *ñandutí*, a traditional Paraguayan Guaraní style of lace-weaving. Centurión settled in Buenos Aires in the early 1980s to attend the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón and later the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova. Following his training in drawing, he began producing paintings on canvas characterized by bold colors and brash brushstrokes. Around 1990, Centurión turned to embroidering and painting on large, inexpensive, mass-produced *frazadas*, or blankets, often adorning them with colorful cutout representations of animals. In subsequent years, he took up smaller-format textiles, embroidering natural motifs and poetic phrases that reflected on his everyday life onto patterned handkerchiefs, dishtowels, and other textiles. Centurión participated in thirty-one solo exhibitions in Argentina and Paraguay between 1990 and his untimely death due to AIDS-related illness in 1996. Recently, his work was the subject of a presentation in the 33rd São Paulo Biennial, *Affective Affinities* (2018); the retrospective *Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo* at Americas Society, New York (2020); and the solo show *Feliciano Centurión: Telas y Textos* at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (2023). His work was also featured in the 13th Shanghai Biennale, *Bodies of Water* (2021), and the group exhibition *Eros Rising: Visions of the Erotic in Latin American Art* at the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), New York (2022).



Unknown photographer, Feliciano Centurión with his work *Margaritas* in *Feliciano Centurión: Estrellar* at the Galería del Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Buenos Aires, 1994

