

FELICIANO CENTURIÓN: I AM AWAKE

19 SEPTEMBER - 13 DECEMBER 2019



Cecilia Brunson Projects (CBP) is pleased to announce 'I am Awake', the first London exhibition of the celebrated Paraguayan artist Feliciano Centurión.

Centurión, who died aged 34 in 1996 from AIDS complications, was a central figure of the Arte Light movement in the late 80s, which was tied to the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Centre in Buenos Aires. These artists were known for their flamboyant, irreverent works that embodied progressive attitudes to sexuality and lifestyles, emerging in tandem with the fall of right-wing dictatorships across Latin America.

'I am Awake' is comprised of a series of works from the artist's estate, some of which are being shown publicly for the first time since his death. Taken mostly from the period following Centurión's HIV diagnosis in 1992, the exhibition features his characteristic embroidered *frazadas* (blankets), along with plastic dinosaurs bedecked with crochet outfits, and painted paper plates.



Ave del Paraiso Florecido
[Bird of Paradise in Bloom]
c. 1995
Embroidery on blanket
57 x 42 cm
[Frame: 85 x 71 cm]





Eres Una Flor Única
[You Are a Unique Flower]
1994
Acrylic with inclusion on
blanket
207 x 150 cm
[Frame: 217 x 163 cm]



In the War of the Triple Alliance, when Paraguay fought the triple alliance of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay in South America's bloodiest war, 90% of Paraguay's male population was killed. As a result, women created the new Paraguayan nation. Raised by his mother and grandmother who taught him the traditionally female activity of lacemaking, embroidery and crochet – exemplified in *Eres Una Flor Única* [You Are a Unique Flower] – Centurión sews beautifully intricate pieces of embroidered text, lace, and patches onto intimate household textiles. As he later said: “It’s a feminine world that I come from, so crochet, weaving threads, and craft are all part of my work.”

Eres Una Flor Única was made in 1994, two years after Centurión’s diagnosis with AIDS. According to confidantes such as fellow artist Ana López, his diagnosis came with an overwhelming sense of ‘vertigo’ - the feeling that the virus was tugging at his whole consciousness, not just his health. Centurión weaved phrases like *Eres Una Flor Única* into his works in order to help him express his emotions and process his day-to-day fear.

Eres Una Flor Única
1994
(Detail)



Untitled
1993
Acrylic on blanket with
crochet inclusion
54 x 42 cm
[Frame: 82.5 x 72.5 cm]





Estoy Vivo [I am alive]
1996
Embroidery with inclusion on blanket
44 x 52 cm
[Frame: 74.5 x 81.5 cm]



Estoy Vivo [I am Alive] was completed in the final year of Centurión's life, and is a key work in understanding how his artistic practice used humour to control, confront, and lighten these heavy fears. He uses the motif of clover, traditionally an omen for faith, hope, love and luck, to ironically juxtapose his impending fate. This work is a prime example of Centurion's poetic and humorous artistic game.

This piece is also a crucial part of Centurion's artistic legacy. One of his final acts as an artist was to organise all of his small blankets in a box. He titled every blanket, ordered them in a way that made sense to him, closed the box, and said to his partner: "This is my most precious box of works, ordered in importance. When I am gone, open it when the time is right." *Estoy Vivo* was the top blanket in this box.

Estoy Vivo and this story was the starting point and foundation for this exhibition.



Vestiditos [Dresses]
1994
Collage on blanket
45 x 46 cm
[Frame: 73.5 x 75 cm]



Casa del Pájaro [Bird House]
c. 1994
Acrylic on blanket with toy birds
126 x 231 cm



*Casa del Pájaro [Bird
House]
c. 1994
(Detail)*



Caíman [Cayman]
c. 1990
Acrylic on blanket
42 x 53 cm
[Frame: 71 x 82 cm]



Flamencos [Flamingos]
c. 1990
Acrylic on blanket
42 x 53 cm
[Frame: 71 x 82 cm]





Ilumino con Amor [I Shine
with Love]
c.1990
Embroidery on blanket,
with crochet and acrylic
paint
36 x 37 cm
[Frame: 64 x 66 cm]



Paraguay
1994
Embroidery on blanket
50 x 52 cm



Cielito Argentino [Little Argentinean Sky]
1993
Acrylic with inclusion on blanket
54 x 39 cm



Flor [Flower]

1990s

Embroidery on blanket, with crochet
and acrylic paint

33 x 30 cm



Dos Sombreros [Two Hats]
c.1990
Embroidered miniature hats on blanket
43 x 28 cm



Centurión writes in his manifesto: 'The blanket is a familiar object, an everyday item for warmth, cover and protection. A cosy haven of emotional and physical support.' In using blankets as canvas, Centurión emphasizes the urgent need to convey feelings of healing, love and warmth - feelings particularly necessary against the backdrop of far-right politics that many of his generation across South America had suffered under.

In *Dos Sombreros* [Two Hats] Centurión uses the blanket and two hats to turn the work into what looks like a picnic scene framed from above. Through simple and innocent means, Centurión beautifully captures an idyllic and intimate moment between two people.

Dos Sombreros [Two
Hats]
c.1990
(Detail)





Untitled
1990s
Acrylic Paint on Paper Plate
27 cm diameter
[Framed 44 cm diameter]



Untitled
1990s
(Detail)

Arriving in the Buenos Aires from Paraguay in 1974, Centurión and the 'arte light' group reformulated and redefined cultural, social, and political values.

Perceived as outsiders that distanced themselves from the growing intellectualisation of Argentinean artistic practice, Centurión and the 'arte light' group turned to humble materials in an effort to embrace experimentation and infuse their work with a playful and free-spirited aesthetic.

These paper plates are nostalgic portrayals of the natural world Centurión left behind in Paraguay. Creating a tension between art and reality, similar to Andy Warhol's *Endangered Species* from 1983, these plates remind the viewer of the pop sensibility of the 1980s.

Centurión produced twelve of these paper plates and this is the first time they have been shown publicly.



Untitled
1990s
Acrylic Paint on Paper Plate
27 cm diameter
[Framed 44 cm diameter]



Untitled
1990s
Acrylic Paint on Paper Plate
27 cm diameter
[Framed 44 cm diameter]



Untitled
1990s
Acrylic Paint on Paper Plate
27 cm diameter
[Framed 44 cm diameter]





Familia de Dinosaurios
[Dinosaur Family]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
15 x 10 x 5 cm



Familia de Caballos
[Horse Family]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
30 x 15 x 5 cm



Tortuga [Turtle]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
20 x 15 x 7 cm



Familia de Dinosaurios
[Dinosaur Family]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
25 x 20 x 10 cm



Familia de Dinosaurios
[Dinosaur Family]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
15 x 10 x 5 cm



Familia de Dinosaurios
[Dinosaur Family]
c.1990
Plastic toy animal with
crochet wrap
25 x 10 x 5 cm





Germinar [Germinate]
c.1990
Embroidered cloth patch on
blanket
27 x 32 cm



Mexicano [Mexican]
c.1990
Embroidered cloth on
blanket
47 x 35 cm



Feliciano Centurión

Key Exhibitions

33rd Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, *'Affective Affinities'* (2018)

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, *'Recovering Beauty: The 1990s in Buenos Aires'* (2011)

Museo de Arte Latino Americano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina, *'Escuelismo. Arte argentino de los 90'* (2009)

Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Buenos Aires, *'El Rojas: 20 Años de Artes Visuales'* (2009)

5th Biennial of Havana, Cuba (1994)

Key Collections

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

The Blanton Museum of Art, Austin

Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid

Latin American Art Museum (MALBA), Buenos Aires

The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA), Buenos Aires

The Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat Art Collection, Buenos Aires



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