

Feliciano Centurión

Frieze Masters

13 - 17 October 2021



Feliciano Centurión Frieze Masters

13 - 17 October 2021

Cecilia Brunson Projects and Galeria Millan, official representatives of the Estate of Feliciano Centurión, present a selection of masterpieces covering his intense but tragically brief career. Born in the interior of Paraguay, Centurión moved to Buenos Aires in the 1980s, and was a key player in the artistic renovation of the Argentine art scene following the return to democracy after the Falklands/Malvinas War. This new generation of artists, centered around the legendary Centro Cultural Rojas, rejected the coded conceptualism of the 1980s to embrace a flamboyant, Baroque and kitsch aesthetic, through which they could express ideas of queerness, otherness, and an irreverent sense of joy. As elsewhere in the world, this moment of jubilation was cut short by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and Centurión was one of several members of the group who passed away tragically young. The last phase of his career addressed his imminent death in heartbreaking declarations of love and faith in his signature technique of hand-embroidery on found fabrics (pillowcases, tablecloths, etc). Many of these textile works incorporate the indigenous Guaraní tradition of Nandutí lace.



Flores Negras [Black flowers], 1992

Acrylic paint with Nanduti lace on blanket
230 x 134 cms
90 1/2 x 52 3/4 inches

Flores Negras [Black flowers], 1992

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Description

Made in the year of Centurión's diagnosis with HIV, this is the largest work in the selection. Between 1992 and 1996, as the artist's health and energy progressively diminished, so did the scale of his work. This blanket, at over two metres tall, represents a fulcrum between his earlier work which was brighter, bolder and larger and his latter work which focused more on smaller embroideries.

'Flores Negras' consists of thick and twisting stems painted over a vivid red blanket, and decorated further with intricate Ñandutí flowers. Ñandutí, which takes its name from the Guaraní word for 'spider's web', is an indigenous Paraguayan form of lacework. This work demonstrates the artist's connection to his heritage. He regularly depicted the flora and fauna of Paraguay in his works and similarly often incorporated Ñandutí. Having moved to Buenos Aires, Centurión found comfort in these sentimental reminders of his home country.

Paraguay has a particularly strong connection to its indigenous heritage. The region of Centurión's birth, Misiones, takes its name from the missions established by colonising Jesuits from 1609 onwards. Unlike other colonising forces on the continent, the Jesuits aimed to preserve the indigenous culture and language; partly as a result of this, Guaraní is one of the few officially recognised indigenous languages in Latin America, it is spoken by a majority of the population.



Mi casa es mi templo [My house is my temple],
1996

Embroidery with inclusion on fabric
53 x 63 cms
20 7/8 x 24 3/4 inches

Mi casa es mi templo [My house is my temple], 1996

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Exhibitions

Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo, Americas Society, New York (February 14–May 16, 2020)

Affective Affinities, 33rd Biennial of São Paulo, Brazil (7th September - 9th December, 2018)

Publications

Iglesias Lukin, Aimé, and Karen Marta. Eds. *Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo*. p. 88, illustrated. New York: Americas Society, 2020

Iglesias Lukin, Aimé, and Karen Marta. Eds. *Feliciano Centurión*. p. 128-29, illustrated. New York: Americas Society, 2020

Pérez-Barreiro, Gabriel, and Fabiana Werneck, eds., *33rd Bienal de São Paulo: Affective Affinities*: Livro Registro, 162–63, illustrated. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2018.

Description

‘Mi casa es mi templo’ is a readymade, white apron with four bunches of colourful, embroidered flowers decorating the bottom. In the centre of the apron we see the titular phrase embroidered in red, cursive, lower-case letters. Feliciano Centurión understood the history of the gendered associations of textile production and he chose to embrace the domestic connotations of the practice. This work directly interacts with these assumptions surrounding domesticity and femininity. The textile works made by Centurión towards the end of his life reveal a nexus at which an affront to conservative art histories and gender-normative behaviours mingles with a practice that is also assumed for its therapeutic effect, practical convenience and tactile potential. The phrase at the heart of this work has religious connotations, it elevates and consecrates the domestic sphere. The home represented, for the artist, a sanctuary - a place of safety and rest. Furthermore, for Centurión, the notion of finding comfort at home relates to his illness with AIDS and his identity as a Paraguayan immigrant living in Argentina; it relates to the inevitable search for physical belonging and refuge.

mi casa
es mi templo





Untitled (Angel), c. 1993

Acrylic paint and embroidery on silk cushion
27 cms in diameter
10 5/8 inches in diameter

Untitled (Angel), c. 1993

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Exhibitions

The 5th Havana Biennial, Cuba (May, 1994)

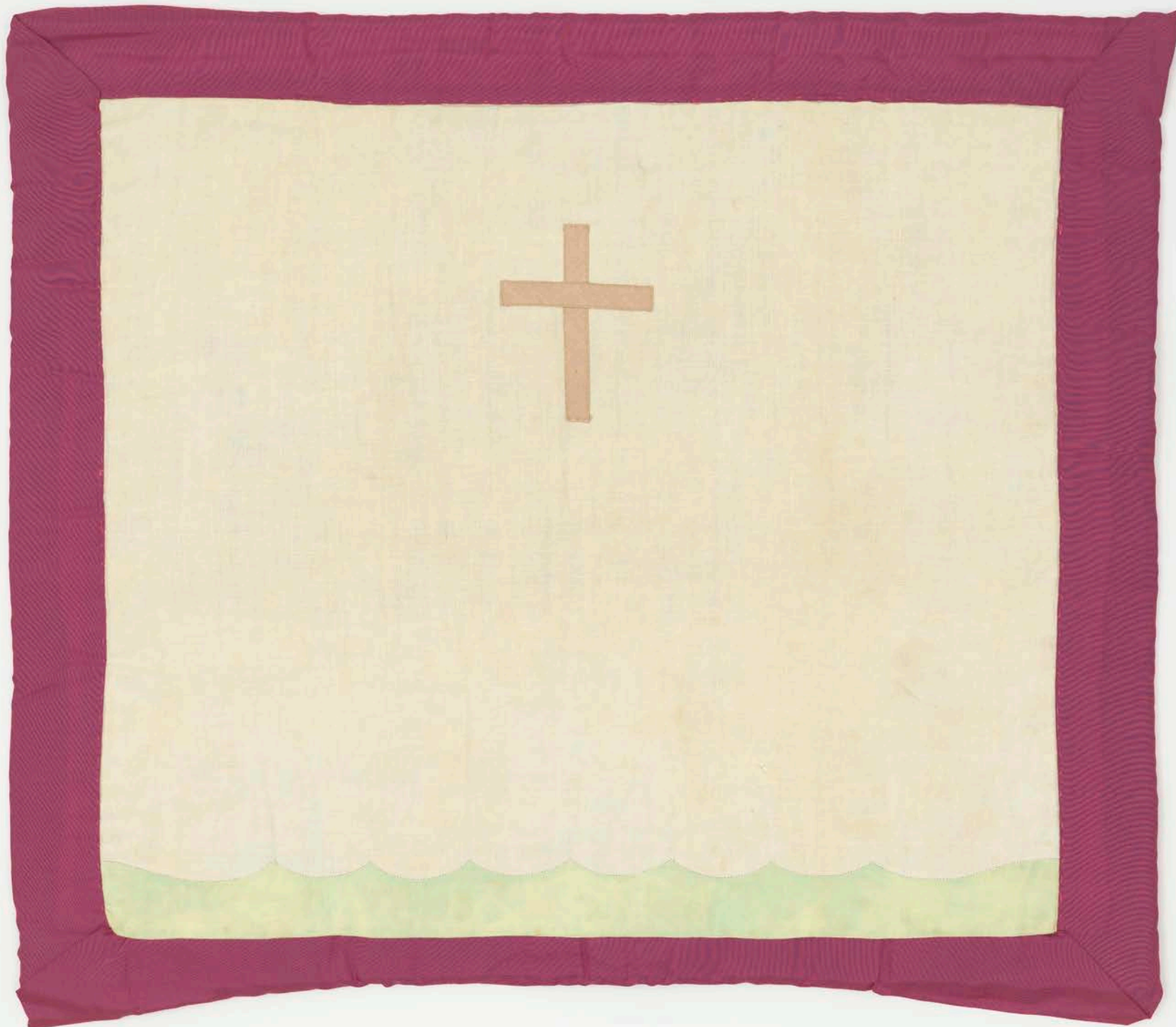
Description

This work was selected for the 5th Havana Bienal in 1994 (directed by Lillian Llanes) which would have been hugely significant for Centurión at the time. The Havana Bienal had already established a reputation for its championing of artists from the Global South and in particular Latin America and the Caribbean.

In his work, Centurión often welcomed a clash between kitsch, quaint designs and his own highly personal, visual and textual additions. Unlike the cheap, plain woolen blankets that the artist often used, this cushion appears more decadent, it has a deep purple silk trim and an ornate, almost baroque, floral design. Centurión chose to decorate this cushion further with the embroidered figure of an angel, another nod towards his beliefs and an engagement with religious imagery.

With its embroidered additions, this work occupies a middle ground between artwork and functional object. After its selection for the Havana Bienal, it was transported into the public sphere, destined to be put on display for infinite future audiences. This juxtaposition - of public and private, of the home and the gallery - reminds the viewer that the artist's work carries a self-revealing quality. It demonstrates his emotional willingness to bare all and to share even the most intimate parts of his life.





*Untitled (Cross with lilac
border), c. 1996*

Embroidered mixed media
on blanket
51 x 59 cms
20 1/8 x 23 1/4 inches

Untitled (Cross with lilac border), c. 1996

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Description

In the last years of the artist's life, religious text and imagery featured prominently in his work. This blanket uses very muted colours, and minimal decoration or detailing; at its centre is a simple crucifix, made from two strips of fabric, and along the bottom of the composition is a line of light green water or gently-cresting waves. Water is highly symbolic in both Christian and spiritual traditions, often representative of healing, purification or sanctification.

The Catholic Church has had a sustained impact on sexual and gender politics in Latin America for hundreds of years. In the context of the AIDS epidemic, it is necessary to mention the Church's historical, doctrinal opposition to sexual education, contraception and homosexuality. There is, nevertheless, a potency in Centurión's embrace of faith in spite of the anti-progressive teachings espoused by some members, it represented a conscious decision to extract its positive elements and to seek solace towards the end of his life.



El cielo es mi protección [Heaven is my protection], 1995

Embroidery with inclusion on
blanket
45 x 46 cms
17 3/4 x 18 1/8 inches

El cielo es mi protección [Heaven is my protection], 1995

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Exhibitions

Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo, Americas Society, New York (February 14–May 16, 2020)

Affective Affinities, 33rd Biennial of São Paulo, Brazil (7th September - 9th December, 2018)

Publications

Iglesias Lukin, Aimé, and Karen Marta. Eds. *Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo*. p. 68, illustrated. New York: Americas Society, 2020

Iglesias Lukin, Aimé, and Karen Marta. Eds. *Feliciano Centurión*. p. 140, illustrated. New York: Americas Society, 2020

Description

This is an example of one of Centurión's characteristic embroidered blankets (or frazadas). This grey blanket has a yellow border and at its centre, a square piece of fabric onto which the artist has embroidered the titular phrase. This work was selected for the 33rd São Paulo Bienal in 2019 which was curated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro. This was the artist's first inclusion in Latin America's longest-standing Bienal.

'El cielo es mi protección' is a demonstration of the attitude with which Centurión approached his illness with HIV/AIDS, and an example of his calm acceptance of his mortality. His sister, Gloria, once described how her brother lived a very healthy lifestyle and practiced yoga; furthermore, she said that he did not take any medication following his diagnosis with HIV in 1992. Perhaps this was a conscious decision to avoid early HIV medications such as AZT and Zidovudine, which were both controversial and led to severe side-effects for some patients. In this way, Centurión adopted a more palliative approach to his illness, searching not for a miracle cure but rather for moments of joy that he found while exploring beauty, love and his faith. He wanted to seize agency over his illness, and his perception of it.



Flores del mal [Flowers of illness],
c. 1995

Embroidered pillow bag
38 x 37 cms
15 x 14 5/8 inches

Flores del mal [Flowers of illness], c. 1995

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Description

This work takes its title from 'Les Fleurs du mal', a volume of poetry by Charles Baudelaire. Written in the 19th century, it was deemed to be a controversial body of work and various poems were censored or banned on the basis of their immorality. 'Flores del mal' is made up of a deep brown pillow bag with the titular phrase embroidered in red and floral decoration along the bottom. According to Centurión's sister, it was important for him to make sure that a work such as this one should be stuffed with pillows when on display, in order to ensure a fullness, plumpness and softness.

This work is demonstrative of the artist's optimism and positivity in the face of serious illness. Centurión's artistic endeavours were rooted in a desire to find and create beauty in the everyday, this is connected to the Guaraní ideal of 'tekoporã', a search for a good and beautiful life. Centurión, in his work, sought out simplicity and harmony through the use of colour, texture, emotions, and affective text.





Serie la mirada [from the Gazing series] (Eye with ñanduti),
c. 1994

Ñanduti and acrylic on blanket
48 x 49 cms
18 7/8 x 19 1/4 inches

Serie la mirada [from the Gazing series] (Eye with ñanduti), c. 1994

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Description

Centurión often included painted or embroidered eyes in his work, and this interest in the eye is connected to his spiritualism. At the centre of this work is a single eye, painted in bright acrylic, which could be interpreted as a depiction of the third-eye with the associations of enhanced perception and access to higher realms of consciousness. Additionally, this work relates to the ancient notion that the eyes are the light of the soul.

This blanket also features elements of Ñandutí lacework. Ñandutí takes its name from the Guaraní word for 'spider's web' and is an indigenous Paraguayan form of lacework. This work demonstrates Centurión's strong connection to the cultural heritage of his home.



*Untitled (Cross with lilac border),
c. 1995*

Embroidered mixed media on blanket
51 × 59 cm
20 1/8 × 23 1/4 inches

Untitled (Cross inlaid with stones), c. 1995

Provenance

Artist's Family Estate

Description

Textile production has traditionally been conceived of as feminine and deemed to be craft not art. Centurión acknowledged this fact and his work subsequently arrived at a critical crossroads, questioning hegemonic notions of taste, quality and masculine behaviour.

‘Untitled (Cross inlaid with stones)’ demonstrates the more intricate side of the artists engagement with craft-based practices. Other than its bright purple border, the only decoration on this dark blanket is a delicately cut piece of fabric onto which the artist has attached a varied selection of small stones. The meticulous, diligent work required for such detail on a small scale demonstrates the shift in Centurión’s practice as his illness progressed. Although his engagement with textile work served as an affront to conservative art histories and gender-normative behaviours, it was also a practice that he assumed for its therapeutic effect, practical convenience and tactile potential.



Feliciano Centurión

Born in San Ignacio de las Misiones, Paraguay, in 1962
Lived and worked in Buenos Aires, Argentina since 1974
Died Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1996

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2022 *Feliciano Centurión*, Galeria Millan, São Paulo SP, Brazil
- 2020 *Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo*, Americas Society, New York, United States
- 2019 *Feliciano Centurión: I am Awake*, Cecilia Brunson Projects, London. United Kingdom
- 2018 *Solo artist presentation*, 33rd Bienal de São Paulo: Affective Affinities. São Paulo, Brazil

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022 *Theme: AIDS (1993)*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo
- 2021 *Bodies of Water: The 13th Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai, China. Nov 10, 2020–July 18, 2021
- 2011 *Recovering Beauty. The 1990s in Buenos Aires*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas
- 2007 *Arte contemporáneo*. MALBA—Fundación Costantini, Malba, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1994 The 5th Havana Biennial, Cuba

Selected Collections

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin
Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA)
Museo Castagnino + Macro, Rosario, Argentina





Feliciano Centurión
Flores Negras [Black flowers], 1992
 Acrylic paint with Ñanduti lace on
 blanket
 230 x 134 cms
 90 1/2 x 52 3/4 inches



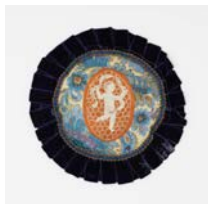
Feliciano Centurión
*El cielo es mi protección [Heaven is my
 protection]*, 1995
 Embroidery with inclusion on blanket
 45 x 46 cms
 17 3/4 x 18 1/8 inches



Feliciano Centurión
*Mi casa es mi templo [My house is my
 temple]*, 1996
 Embroidery with inclusion on fabric
 53 x 63 cms
 20 7/8 x 24 3/4 inches



Feliciano Centurión
Flores del mal [Flowers of illness],
 c. 1995
 Embroidered pillow bag
 38 x 37 cms
 15 x 14 5/8 inches



Feliciano Centurión
Untitled (Angel), c. 1993
 Acrylic paint and embroidery on silk
 cushion
 27 cms in diameter
 10 5/8 inches in diameter



Feliciano Centurión
*Serie la mirada [from the Gazing se-
 ries] (Eye with ñanduti)*, c. 1994
 Ñandutí and acrylic on blanket
 48 x 49 cms
 18 7/8 x 19 1/4 inches



Feliciano Centurión
Untitled (Cross with lilac border), c.
 1996
 Embroidered mixed media on blanket
 51 x 59 cms
 20 1/8 x 23 1/4 inches



Feliciano Centurión
Untitled (Cross with lilac border),
 c. 1995
 Embroidered mixed media on blanket
 51 x 59 cm
 20 1/8 x 23 1/4 inches

Subject to availability.

Taxes Where Applicable.

fred@ceciliabrunsonprojects.com

galeria@galeriamillan.com.br

Photography by Eva Herzog