

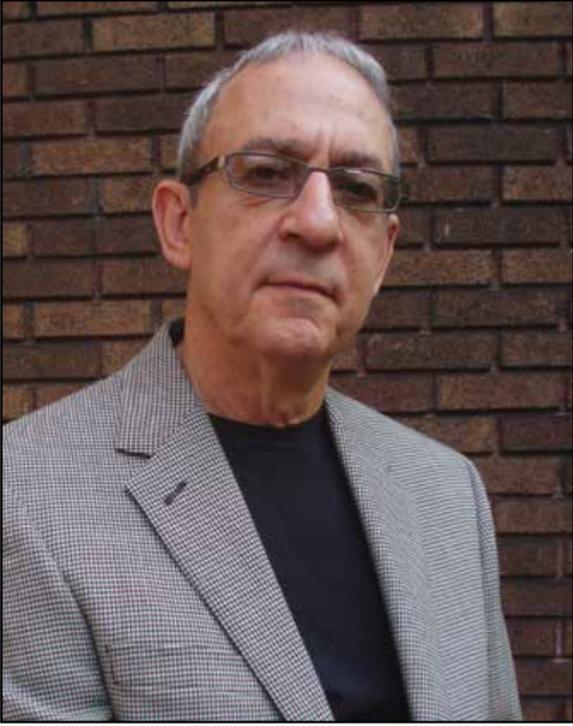
Painting BORGES

art interpreting literature

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THE EXHIBITION/PINTANDO A BORGES: LA EXHIBICIÓN

Jorge J. E. Gracia



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The visual interpretation of literature is nothing new. A great part of the history of western art has been concerned with rendering stories, myths, and adventures first recorded in literary genres into visual media. The subject matter of a substantial portion of Greek and Roman art is divine mythology, and in the Renaissance, as many works of art deal with classical topics as with Christian ones. Michelangelo's rendition of the creation in the Sistine Chapel is one of the most dramatic and well known of these. The image of God giving life to Adam, the creation of Eve, the temptation by the serpent, and the subsequent expulsion from Paradise effectively express the Genesis narrative. The artistic interpretation of literature is so common that it is hard to walk into an art museum and not be confronted with works whose subject matter does not have a literary origin. How many artistic depictions of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* have been produced?

In spite of this abundance, the investigation of the artistic interpretation of literature in general is relatively infrequent. Most critics restrict themselves to particular interpretations of literary works, ignoring the broader questions that such interpretations involve, such as: how artistic interpretations of literature differ from other kinds of interpretations, their character, and whether it makes sense to call them interpretations when the media of visual art and of literature are so different. To investigate these and many other questions that surface in this is well beyond the boundaries of this exhibition, but I hope the works of art exhibited here serve to raise some of these questions in the audience.

Numerous examples of the hermeneutic phenomenon that concerns us are found in the history of art and could have served our purpose. Why not use Michelangelo, Leonardo, or Goya? One reason is that the variety of literary works these artists interpreted is too large, creating unnecessary complications and distractions. Moreover, the use of religious stories and myths, so common in the history of art, add difficulties that further complicate matters. It is one thing to interpret a literary text that has no religious overtones, and another to interpret one that believers consider a divine revelation. Then there is the exhaustive and numerous discussions of these works by critics throughout history. To pick a work such as Michelangelo's pictorial interpretation of Genesis in the Sistine Chapel would have forced us to deal with many issues that are only marginally related to the core topic of interest here. Not to mention that only reproductions of the pertinent works could have been used.

In short, simplification was needed, and this was achieved in two ways. First, by picking only one literary author and, second, by using recent artists, whose work is not burdened with history and criticism. Because interpretation is a matter of perspective, it was also necessary to use artists whose work manifests different points of view. I searched for artists at different career stages, young and old, women and men, belonging to different social classes, with different ideologies and interests, and even having different ethnic origins, some who live exclusively from their art and some who have to do other things to survive, artists who began to create when they were children and artists who started their careers at a mature age, painters, engravers, and multifaceted and monofaceted artists. In short, I looked for variety as far as possible, although the nature of our topic, and its philosophical bent, favored those whose work is figurative and sensitive to conceptual content.

The choice of author was not difficult. Jorge Luis Borges is one of the most prominent literary figures whose work is also profoundly philosophical. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that he is a philosopher, and that his work should be considered part of philosophy. The philosophical interest in Borges should not be surprising insofar as his stories are filled with conceptual puzzles that prompt the reader to face the most fundamental questions concerning human existence.

Once I chose Borges, the field of artists narrowed to those who had already produced interpretations of his stories, whose creations had been directly influenced by Borges, or who were fascinated by some aspects of Borges' work even if they were not enthusiastic about his style or perspective. Borges is perhaps the most outstanding contemporary literary figure Argentina has produced and so it is understandable that among Argentinean artists his

work has had a most evident impact. This is particularly true of artists who are porteños, born and raised in Buenos Aires, for Borges is quintessentially a porteño.

It was not difficult to find the artists. But a variety of perspectives also required the inclusion of non-Argentinean artists. I found the key in José Franco, a Cuban artist who resides in Buenos Aires and had produced works based on Borges' stories. The idea of including him appeared appropriate in that it would reveal how an "adopted Argentinean" would approach Borges. In turn, this led us to other Cubans. Finally, in order to maintain unity and focus, and to avoid difficulties with space and transportation, I restricted the art work to paintings, drawings, etchings, and mixed media, all on a flat format, and so had to leave out pertinent works by such prominent artists as León Ferrari, and artists who, although influenced by Borges such as Guillermo Kuitca, had not directly worked on Borges' narratives.

In consultation with the artists, I chose twelve stories by Borges, which I organized according to three topics: identity and memory, freedom and destiny, and faith and divinity. Two visual interpretations by different artists are given of each story, which add up to twenty four works of art by sixteen artists. Some works had been produced before this project was undertaken and some were produced for this project. Some artists had produced works before, but did not produce any works for this project (Etienne Gontard, Mirta Kupferminc, Nicolás Menza, and Estela Pereda), some had produced works before but also produced works for this project (Ricardo Celma, Miguel Cámpora, Héctor Destéfani, Claudio D'Leo, Carlos Estévez, José Franco and Mauricio Nizzero), and some produced works for this project but had not produced works before (Alejandro Boim, Laura Delgado, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Paul Sierra, and Alberto Rey). In addition to the twenty works that constitute the core of the exhibition, I added eight others by some of the same artists that had pictures in the core.

The first exhibition of the art was accompanied by a symposium, "Interpreting Borges: Art, Literature, and Philosophy," that took place between June 22 and 25, 2010. It gathered a group of international philosophers, literature scholars, and some of the artists whose work is being exhibited, to explore the artistic interpretation of literature in the context of Borges's work. Some of the papers appeared in the journal *CR: The New Centennial Review*. From Buenos Aires, the exhibition is traveling to various venues in the United States. My book, *Painting Borges: Philosophy Interpreting Art Interpreting Literature* (2012) functions as catalogue of the exhibition.

TOPIC I: IDENTITY AND MEMORY

1. Story "The Other"

A. Laura Delgado, *La otra – éramos demasiado parecidos y demasiado distintos* (The Female Other – We Were too Similar and too Different),

B. Mauricio Nizzero, *El otro* (The Other),

The action of the story takes place in February, 1969, in Cambridge, north of Boston. Borges is sitting on a bench by the Charles River when suddenly, under the impression that he had lived the experience before, he hears – for he is nearly blind – that someone has sat at the other end of the bench. The person in question turns out to be a much younger version of himself and Borges engages him in conversation. His former self thinks they are sitting in Geneva, on a bench by the Rhone, and not by the Charles River in Cambridge. Both cannot be right. Either Borges is right or his younger self is right, in which case either Borges is dreaming his other self or his other self is dreaming Borges; one of the two is a dream of the other.

Neither thesis is easy to prove, although the older Borges tries hard to prove that he is the real one to the younger. The older Borges seems to have forgotten some things the younger knows, such as that once in his youth he had met an elderly gentleman who in 1918 told him he was Borges.

And the younger seems to be very different in some ways from the older; he has ideals about the brotherhood of mankind, while the older Borges is rather cynical. The knowledge the older Borges has of certain facts known only to himself cannot prove that the younger is his dream, because it would be natural for the younger to know these facts if he were the dream of the older Borges.

The older Borges proposes a strategy to solve the puzzle. He asks the younger to give him a coin and he hands him a dollar bill. In looking at the dollar bill, the younger is shocked by its date, 1964, which presumably indicates that the older Borges is real and they are not sitting by the Rhone in 1918. But we are told that this does not work, because the older Borges was informed months later that dollar bills do not have dates. Further confirmation eludes us in that the younger Borges destroys the dollar bill and the older Borges never keeps the coin he had asked from the younger.

The Other, continued on page 2



A. Laura Delgado, *La otra – éramos demasiado parecidos y demasiado distintos* (The Female Other – We Were too Similar and too Different)

TOPIC I: IDENTITY AND MEMORY

The Other, continued from page 1

One solution to the puzzle is that the older Borges is dreaming the younger dreaming himself. After all, the older Borges states at the beginning that at the outset of the encounter he had a sense of having lived the moment before. However, this solution is disputed at the end of the story, when the older Borges tells us that the encounter was real and he was wide awake, having had a good night's sleep, when he spoke to the younger Borges. The younger, however, spoke to him in a dream, a reason why the older Borges could not remember his encounter with his older self when he was young.



B. Mauricio Nizzero, *El otro* (The Other)

2. Story “Funes, The Memorius”

A. Laura Delgado, *Funes, vaciadero de basura II* (Funes, The Garbage Heap II)

B. Mauricio Nizzero, *Funes, el memorioso* (Funes, the Memorious)

The story begins and ends with the recollection by the narrator of Funes, “his taciturn face, Indian features, and extraordinary remoteness,” in the third and last time

could always tell the correct time and remember the names of everyone he met. Later he learned of an accidental fall from a horse that had crippled Funes and changed his life –

learn Latin just with a book and a dictionary sounded like a joke to Borges, but he did comply with the request to disabuse Funes.



A. Laura Delgado, *Funes, vaciadero de basura II* (Funes, The Garbage Heap II)

Borges met him. Then the narrator goes back to an earlier time to describe Funes as an Uruguayan tough in contrast with the highbrow, dandy, city slicker Borges in Funes's eyes. A brief detour gives us to understand that Funes had become a glorified figure in Uruguay, “a precursor of the race of supermen,” according to a well-known writer, and the author has been asked to write his recollection of him for a volume in his honor.

Borges the narrator encountered Funes first as a boy who

he remained “hopelessly crippled” and never moved from his cot, where he laid with his eyes fixed on a fig tree or a spider web. Borges saw him twice through an iron-barred window, once with the eyes closed, and another time absorbed in the contemplation of an artemisia, both times immobile. Then he received a flowery letter, in perfect calligraphy, from Funes, requesting to borrow one of the books Borges was using to learn Latin, and a dictionary, for a short time. The presumption that one could quickly

Shortly after, Borges received bad news about his father's health and, while packing for the trip, realized he was missing the books he had lent Funes. He walked over to his house to recover them, and when Funes's mother opened the door, Borges heard him reciting parts of the chapter on memory in Pliny's *Naturalis historia*. Funes welcomed him and told him his remarkable story through a dialogue that Borges found exhausting and terrifying.

When Funes woke up from the unconscious state caused by the accident, he discovered an extraordinarily rich world, very different from the one he had known. Before, he had been, as he thought the rest of mankind still was, “blind, deaf, befuddled, and virtually devoid of memory.” After his accident, “perception and memory were perfect.” The result was not only that he could memorize entire works in different languages of which he had no prior knowledge, but that he could recall every thing he had experienced. Indeed, he did not remember just a dog he had perceived, but every single perception of the dog he had at every instant: “the ‘dog’ of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile” and “the ‘dog’ of three-fifteen, seen frontally.” This prompted Funes to try to develop a language of numbers that would identify each number with a proper name, and to catalogue every experience he had ever had. Realizing that the tasks would be interminable, and perhaps useless, he eventually gave up.

The dizzying world in which he lived made sleep difficult for Funes and, Borges suspects, also thinking, for “[t]o think is to ignore (or forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract.” In Funes's world, nothing could be forgotten. Borges closes the story with a description of Funes, laying on his cot, “monumental as bronze – older than Egypt, older than the prophesies and the pyramids,” and with a fear that Borges's presence would add to Funes's predicament.



B. Mauricio Nizzero, *Funes, el memorioso* (Funes, the Memorious)

pg. 2

3. Story "The South"

- A. Alejandro Boim, *El sur* (The South)
- B. Miguel Cámpora, *La duda* (The Doubt)

pg. 3

The story concerns Juan Dahlmann, who works as a librarian in a municipal library. His ancestry is mixed. One grandfather came from Germany and the other had died fighting against the Indians. In the pull between these lineages, Borges tells us that he "chooses the romantic ancestor, or that of a romantic death." His criollismo is supported with memories and heirlooms, and he dreams of returning to a large country house in the South of Buenos Aires he had inherited and managed to keep over the years. Then he has an accident. He hits his head very badly and develops septicemia. After days of suffering, he is taken to a sanatorium where he undergoes a painful operation. He awakes sick, feeling as if at the bottom of a well, and hates himself, and his self-identity, weakness, and humiliation.

Ostensibly, he recovers and, after being discharged, undertakes his long-desired return to the house of his childhood memories. The trip to the train station mirrors the trip to the sanatorium, and in the station he encounters a large cat he remembers. Petting the magical cat feels illusory, an encounter between two senses of time. Once in the train he enjoys the passing landscape, and the pleasure of the food served in the shining metal bowls he recalls from his childhood, the trip seems like one into the past. Indeed, he feels as if he were two men: one imprisoned in the sanatorium, and another gliding along through his native land. He dozes off, and when he awakens the car of the train where he travels appears different from the one he took in Buenos Aires.

Eventually he arrives at a station where the conductor informs him that he must get off, even though it is not the one Dahlmann intended. He walks to a country store to take a calash to his final destination, but decides to eat there before he leaves. Dahlmann thinks he recognizes the owner, but then realizes it is because he looks like one of the employees at the sanatorium. Three rough-looking young men are sitting at one of the tables, and a small, dark, dried up, old man, living in a sort of eternity, lays motionless on the floor. Dahlmann minds his own business, but clearly stands out as an incongruity in the rough countryside. He notices that someone has thrown a ball of bread at him, and pays not attention to it, but another is thrown. The owner, who strangely addresses him by his name, tells him to ignore it and this makes

Dahlmann realize that the provocation now has been identified publicly as directed at him and he cannot let it go. He faces the young men and one insults him and pulls a knife. Dahlmann is not armed, but the old man throws him a knife, and "[i]t was as if the South itself had decided that Dahlmann should keep the challenge." He instinctively



A. Alejandro Boim, *El sur* (The South)

picks up the knife and understands that this commits him to a fight in which he will die. He thinks: "They'd never have allowed this sort of thing to happen in the sanatorium." As he goes out, without hope or fear, he feels that in contrast with dying in the sanatorium, this death here would be a liberation, a joy, and a fiesta.



B. Miguel Cámpora, *La duda* (The Doubt)

4. Story “The Interloper”

- A. Estela Pereda, “*Si la querés, usála*” (If You Want Her, Use Her)
- B. Etienne Gontard, *La intrusa* (The Interloper)

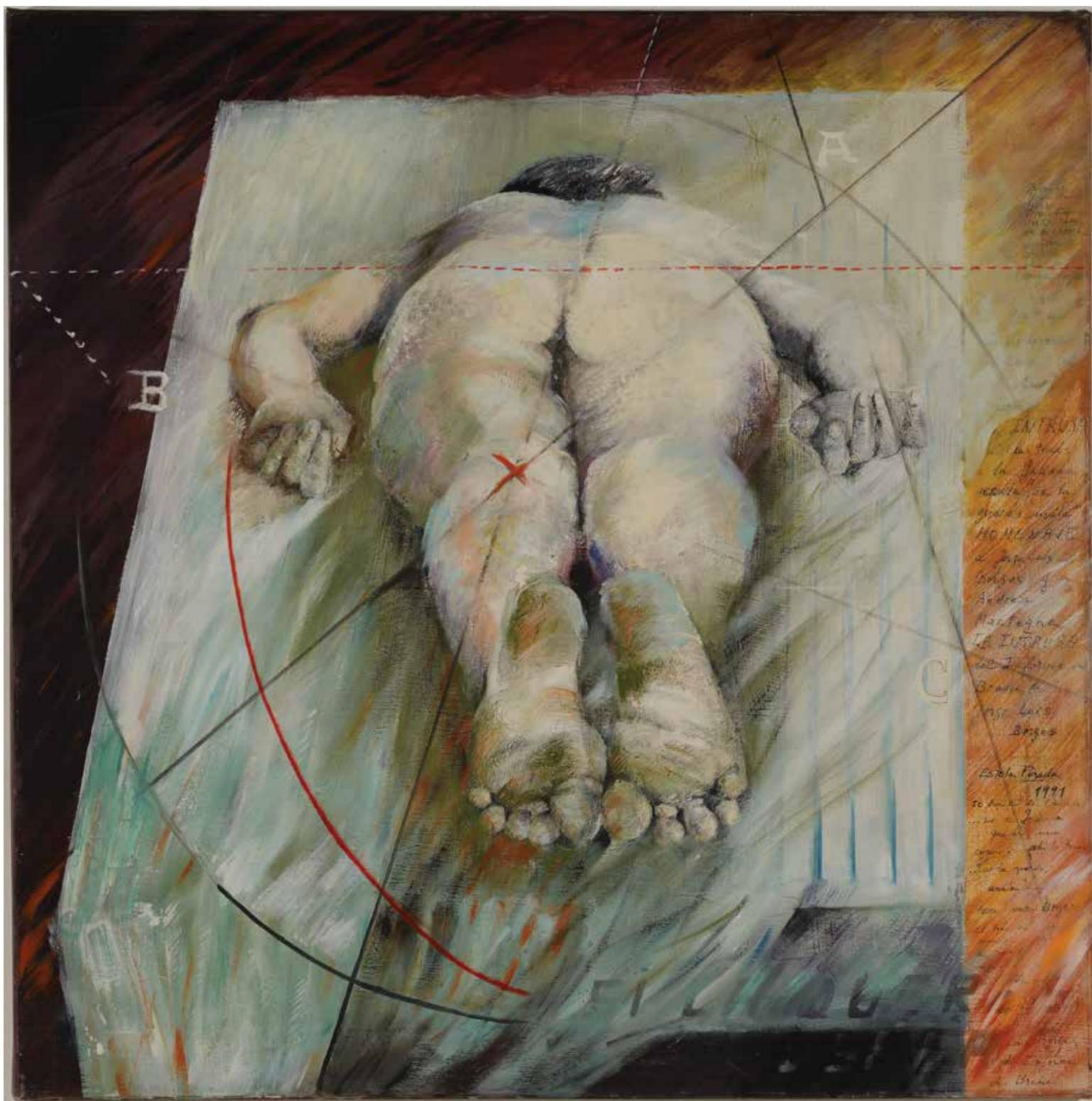
pg. 4

Two brothers live together in harmony and peace in the outskirts of Buenos Aires in the 1890s. They are tall, redheads, and rough, reflecting their mixed ancestry and culture. They stand out from the rest of the population and stick to each other in a very close relationship that perhaps goes beyond brotherly love. One day, the oldest, Cristián, brings home not-a-bad-looking woman, Juliana Burgos. She becomes their servant and he displays her at local parties, “lavishing ghastly trinkets upon her.” Eduardo, the youngest, lives with them, but then he takes a trip and when he returns he brings back with him a girl that he throws out shortly after. It is obvious that he is in love with Cristián’s woman, although he does not want to acknowledge it. But Cristián realizes it and offers her to him: “I’m going off to that bust over at Fariás place. There is Juliana – if you want her, use her.”

This opens up a new *modus vivendi* in which the brothers share Juliana, but the arrangement does not last. They never mention her, but often find excuses to argue with each other because both want her. Eventually they talk about the situation among themselves – Juliana is not given a say, she is a mere object whose fate is to be decided by them. And so they choose to take her to a bordello where they sell her to the madam. Still, even out of the house, she comes between them; they are unable to get her out of their minds and reestablish their original way of life. They begin to visit the whorehouse separately to see her until one day, per chance, Cristián meets Eduardo there and they bring Juliana back to their place. But this does not resolve the conflict, for Juliana has come between them, souring their original relationship. So Cristián kills Juliana, leaving her body on a field. When he gets back to the house he asks his brother to accompany him to take some skins “over to the Nigger’s place.” On the way there, he throws out his cigar, saying to Eduardo “Let’s go to work, brother. The buzzards’ll come in to clean up after us. I killed ‘er today. We’ll leave ‘er here, her and her fancy clothes. She won’t cause any more hurt.” Deeply moved, they embrace, closer than ever, having now another source of unity: the sacrificed woman and the obligation to forget her.



B. Etienne Gontard, *La intrusa* (The Interloper)



A. Estela Pereda, “*Si la querés, usála*” (If You Want Her, Use Her)

TOPIC II: FREEDOM AND DESTINY

1. Story “The Garden of Forking Paths”

A. Nicolás Menza, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (The Garden of Forking Paths)

B. Carlos Estévez, *Los jardines que se bifurcan* (Forking Gardens)

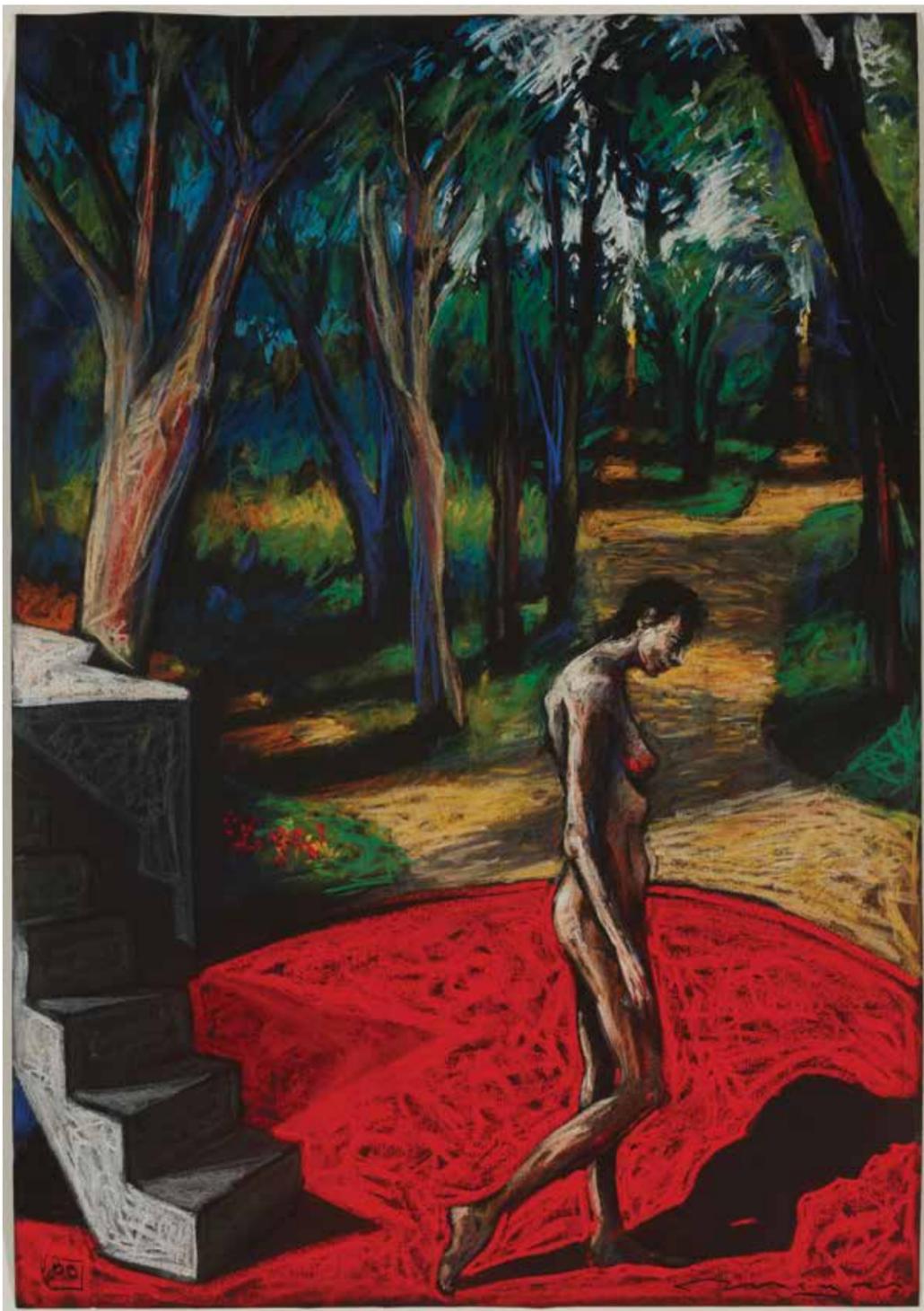
The story begins with a narrative missing the two first pages and it is self reported in the History of the European War. It is signed by Dr. Yu Tsun, a former professor of English in the Hochschule at Tsingtao. The events take place in England. Col. Richard Madden, a determined Irishman, has discovered that Tsun, a consular official and a spy for the Third Reich, and Runeberg, his associate, have uncovered the location of the new British artillery park on the Ancre and are looking for a way to convey this information to “the Leader,” so the German air force can bomb it. Tsun has found out that Runeberg has either been arrested or killed and he must finish the task by himself. But how is he to convey the name of the town to the Leader? His aim is not the glory of Germany, a nation he considers barbaric. He is merely trying to demonstrate to the Leader – a despicable man whom he hates because he thinks Tsun’s race inferior – that a yellow man can save his armies.

The solution becomes clear to Tsun, although it is not revealed to the reader until the very end of the narrative. He must kill a man with the name of the town where the British artillery park is located, so that when this is published, the Germans will know where to attack. The name of the city is Albert, so Tsun looks up the address of a person with that name in the telephone book. After he finds it, he searches in his pockets for the gun with one bullet that he will need in order to accomplish his task. Albert lives in Ashgrove, so Tsun takes a train there, although he carefully buys a ticket to a different town to cover his tracks. As the train pulls out, he sees Madden at the end of the platform, but he has gained an advantage. He arrives at his destination and is given directions to Albert’s house: “The house is far away, but you’ll not get lost if you follow that road there to the left, and turn left at every corner.” This is the way, Tsun recalls, to find the center of a certain kind of maze.

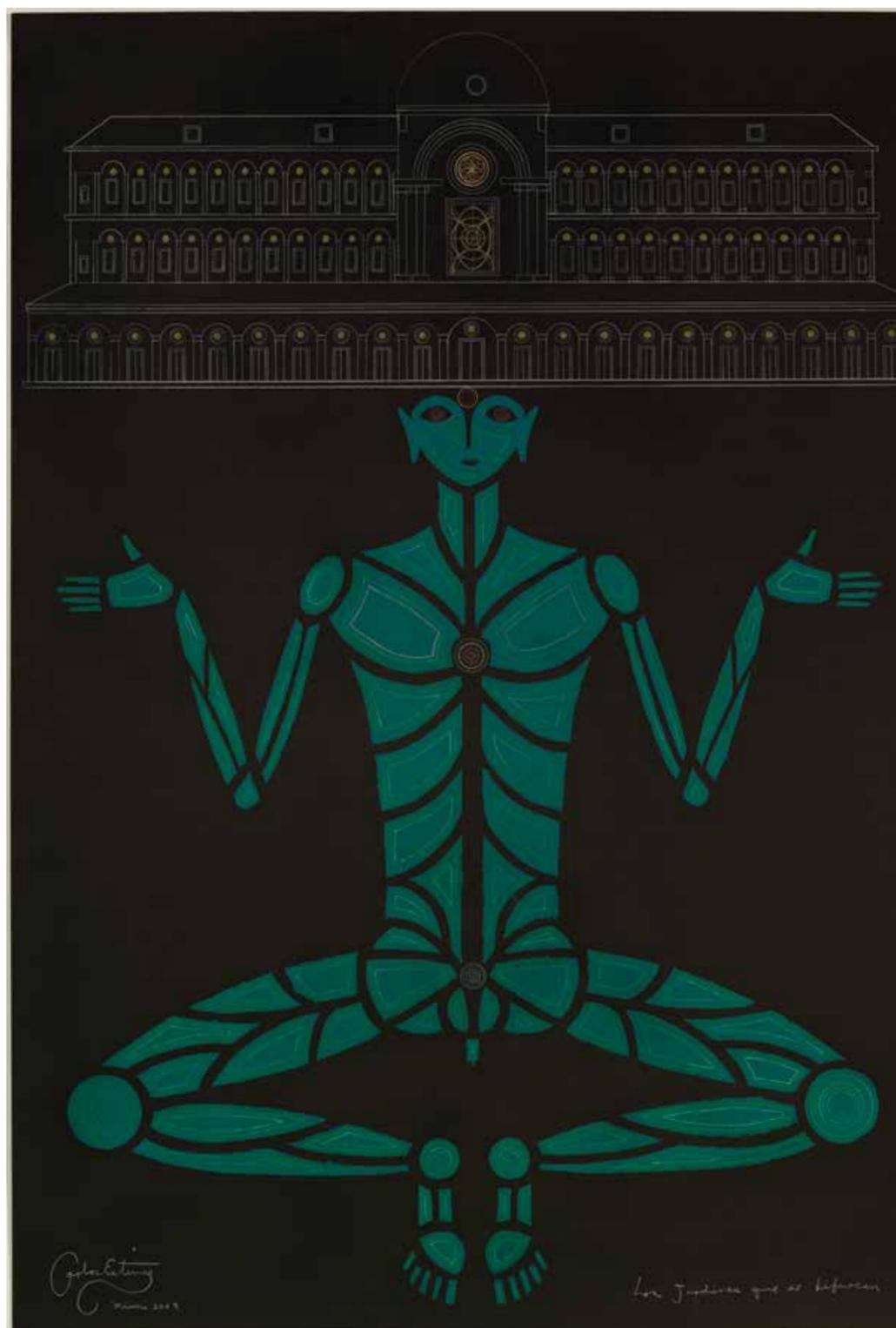
The connection with mazes brings him to the memory of his grandfather, Ts’ui Pen, governor of Yunan province, who gave up his temporal power in order to write a novel and construct a labyrinth. At this point begins the second tale within the tale. For Pen, after spending thirteen years in his tasks, had died presumably without completing them, since no one has been able to find the labyrinth and the manuscript of the novel he left looks like a jumble of chaotic writings.

As Tsun approaches Albert’s house, he is surprised to hear Chinese music coming from a gazebo. Albert opens the gate and greets him in Chinese. He asks Tsun if he wishes to see the garden of forking paths, which turns out to be Pen’s garden. Tsun is intrigued and decides that he has some time before he kills Albert, who proceeds to tell him that he had solved the mystery surrounding Pen’s labyrinth. No one had found the labyrinth because everyone thought that the novel he had retired to write, and the labyrinth he intended to build, were two different things. In fact they are one and the same; the novel, just like a labyrinth, is full of contradictions. Albert found the key to the puzzle in a letter from Pen in which he had written: “I leave to several futures (not all) my garden of forking paths.” Albert figured out that “The Garden of Forking Paths is a huge riddle, a parable whose subject is time.” This is why the term ‘time’ never appears in the novel, which is an image of Pen’s conception of the universe. In it, all possibilities are revealed. “Time forks, perpetually, into countless futures.” For Pen, time is “a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times.” That is why in one chapter of the novel the protagonist dies, and in a subsequent one he is alive. The possibilities are infinite, forking into different paths that open up endlessly.

At this point Tsun sees Madden approaching, and so he acts. He asks Albert to show him again the letter where he had found the key to the puzzle, and when Albert turns to get it, he shoots him. Tsun is arrested and sentenced to hang, but he succeeds in the task he had set for himself. The Leader understands the clue and the city of Albert is bombarded. The story ends with Tsun’s expression of contrition and weariness.



A. Nicolás Menza, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (The Garden of Forking Paths)



B. Carlos Estévez, *Los jardines que se bifurcan* (Forking Gardens)

TOPIC II: FREEDOM AND DESTINY

2. Story “The Circular Ruins”

A. Mirta Kupferminc, *Con el fuego* (With the Fire)

B. Nicolás Menza, *Ruinas circulares II* (Circular Ruins II)

C. Héctor Destéfani, *Ruinas circulares II* (Circular Ruins II)

A sorcerer, gray, taciturn, and ignorant of his name or of any details of his prior life, arrives by canoe at, and drags himself to, a “circular enclosure, crowned by the stone figure of a horse or a tiger, which had once been the color of fire and was now the color of ashes,” a former temple destroyed by fire. His immediate obligation is to sleep, but his supernatural goal is to dream a man.

He dreams that he is at the center of the circular amphitheater at the center of the ruined temple. He is surrounded by taciturn students from different centuries and locations, to whom he lectures on anatomy, cosmography, and magic, hoping to find one he can insert in reality. Some students are passive observers, but his expectations are encouraged by those who raise objections. From them, he chooses one who resembles himself, and makes amazing progress. But disaster strikes and he is unable to continue dreaming in spite of his efforts. The lucidity of insomnia appalls him and he realizes the extraordinary difficulty of bringing order into the chaotic stuff of dreams.

Once the sorcerer gives up on his premeditated effort, he immediately begins to sleep again, although he is no longer focused on his dreams. During full moon, he purifies himself, bows to the astral gods, and utters a powerful name. He falls sleep and almost immediately dreams a warm, active, and secret heart. Slowly, the dream progresses to the whole body, but the youth is still lifeless. Frustrated, the sorcerer prays to the god, who now appears to him simultaneously as horse, tiger, bull, rose, and tempest. The god reveals that his name is Fire and that he will bring to life the sorcerer’s human creation in such a way that everyone but the god and the sorcerer will think the dreamed man is real. But he orders the dreamer to send the youth away to the circular ruins down the river once he has been properly instructed, so that “a voice might glorify the god in that deserted place.” The sorcerer obeys the god’s instruction, although it pains him to think of his eventual separation from his creation. Once the son is ready, he erases his memory, so that he does not know that he is a mere simulacrum of the sorcerer’s dreams, and then sends him away, accomplishing the goal he had set out for himself.

After a few years, the sorcerer hears of a magical man that can walk through fire without being burned in a temple in the north. He knows it is his son, and fears that he might find out he is a projection of the sorcerer’s dreams. But his meditations end suddenly, when a Holocaust that had been predicted consumes the ruined temple. When the Fire does not burn him, he realizes, with relief, humiliation, and terror, that he too, is another man’s dream.

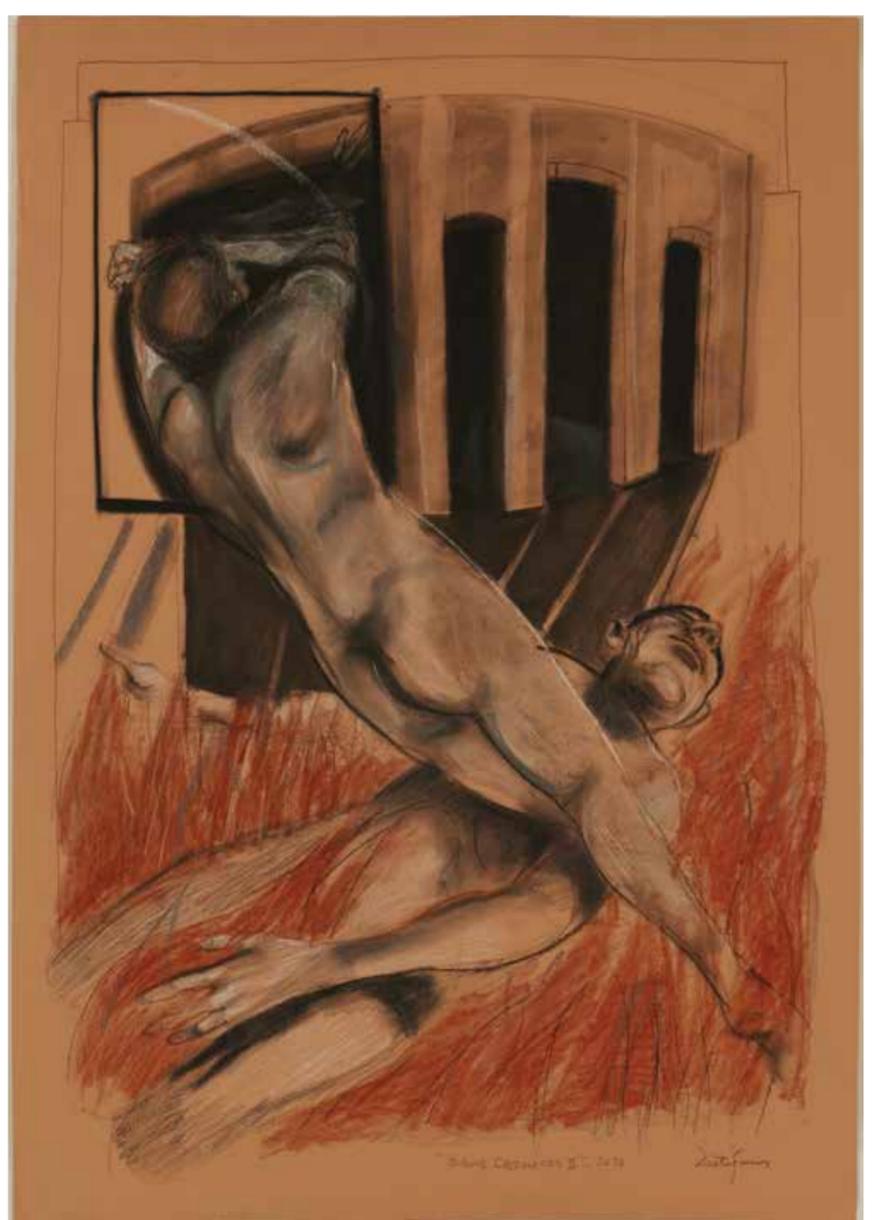


A. Mirta Kupferminc, *Con el fuego* (With the Fire)

pg. 6



B. Nicolás Menza, *Ruinas circulares II* (Circular Ruins II)



C. Héctor Destéfani, *Ruinas circulares II* (Circular Ruins II)

TOPIC II: FREEDOM AND DESTINY

3. Story "The House of Asterion"

A. Luis Cruz Azaceta, *La casa de Asterión* (The House of Asterion)

B. Paul Sierra, *Asterión*

The story consists of a monologue by Asterion in which he disputes claims that he is arrogant, misanthropic, and mad. Although he never leaves his house, he is not a prisoner, for no doors are locked and anyone can enter it. He does not leave it because of the terrible dread his presence inspires outside it. The house and he are unique, a reason why he cannot mix with ordinary people. He spends his time in multiple distractions and games, of which his favorite is imagining that "another" visits him. He shows the visitor the interminable labyrinth the house is, and laughs with him about the mistakes he makes trying to find his way around it. The house is as big as the world, and is in fact the world. Indeed, it is possible that Asterion created it, along with the stars and the sun, and has forgotten about it.

Every nine years nine men come into the house to be freed from evil, and Asterion is overjoyed to meet them, but one by one they fall without him ever touching them. He leaves their bodies where they fall to help himself distinguish the interminable number of similar galleries and guide his wanderings. One of these men predicted the arrival of his redeemer, whom Asterion hopes will take him to a place with fewer galleries and doors. Will the redeemer be a man, a bull, or someone like Asterion? The story ends with a line from Theseus, the slayer of the Minotaur: "Would you believe it, Ariadne? The Minotaur scarcely defended himself."



A. Luis Cruz Azaceta, *La casa de Asterión* (The House of Asterion)



B. Paul Sierra, *Asterión*

TOPIC II: FREEDOM AND DESTINY

4. Story “The Immortal”

A. Claudio D’Leo, *El inmortal* (The Immortal)

B. Carlos Estévez, *El inmortal* (The Immortal)w

In London, a prince buys a copy of Pope’s Iliad from Joseph Cartaphilus, an antique bookseller from Smyrna. In the last volume, she finds a manuscript divided into five chapters in which the Roman tribune, Marcus Flaminus Rufus, tells how he threw himself into the quest for the secret City of the Immortals. He first hears about the City from a rider who, bloody and exhausted, dies at his feet asking for the river that purifies all men of death, on the far shores of which the City is located. Ignoring the advice of philosophers who claim that immortality merely multiplies a man’s deaths, Marcus throws himself in the pursuit of the City and its river to quench his thirst for immortality, accompanied by two hundred soldiers. After many disastrous adventures, the soldiers are about to mutiny and kill him, but he manages to escape. He is wounded by a Cretan arrow and finds himself alone, at which moment he sees pyramids and towers in the distance. This is the City of the Immortals, but exhausted, he falls asleep. When he wakes up, his hands are tied behind his back and

he is lying on an oblong niche scraped on the slope of a mountain. Around him he sees little gray men belonging to the bestial lineage of the Troglodytes, emerging from similar niches. They do not speak. Marcus throws himself down the mountain toward a polluted stream, and is eventually able to free himself. The Troglodytes pay no attention to him or his pleadings.

Consumed by the goal of his quest, Marcus can hardly sleep, and it appears as if the Troglodytes, divining his purpose, do not either. He crosses the stream on his way to the City and is followed by a few of the little men, although eventually only one remains. The City is built on an impregnable plateau, but Marcus finds a way in through a cave that leads to a maze through which Marcus eventually emerges in a plaza. The City turns out to be an irrational jumble of buildings with no purpose. Its chaos horrifies him and he finds his way out. There he encounters the Troglodyte that had followed him, clumsily drawing

symbols on the sand and erasing them. Suspecting some capacity in the man, Marcus tries to teach him but it is all in vain. He names him Argos, after the moribund old dog of the Odyssey. One day there is rain, and this seems to waken the village, and Argos speaks. He is Homer.

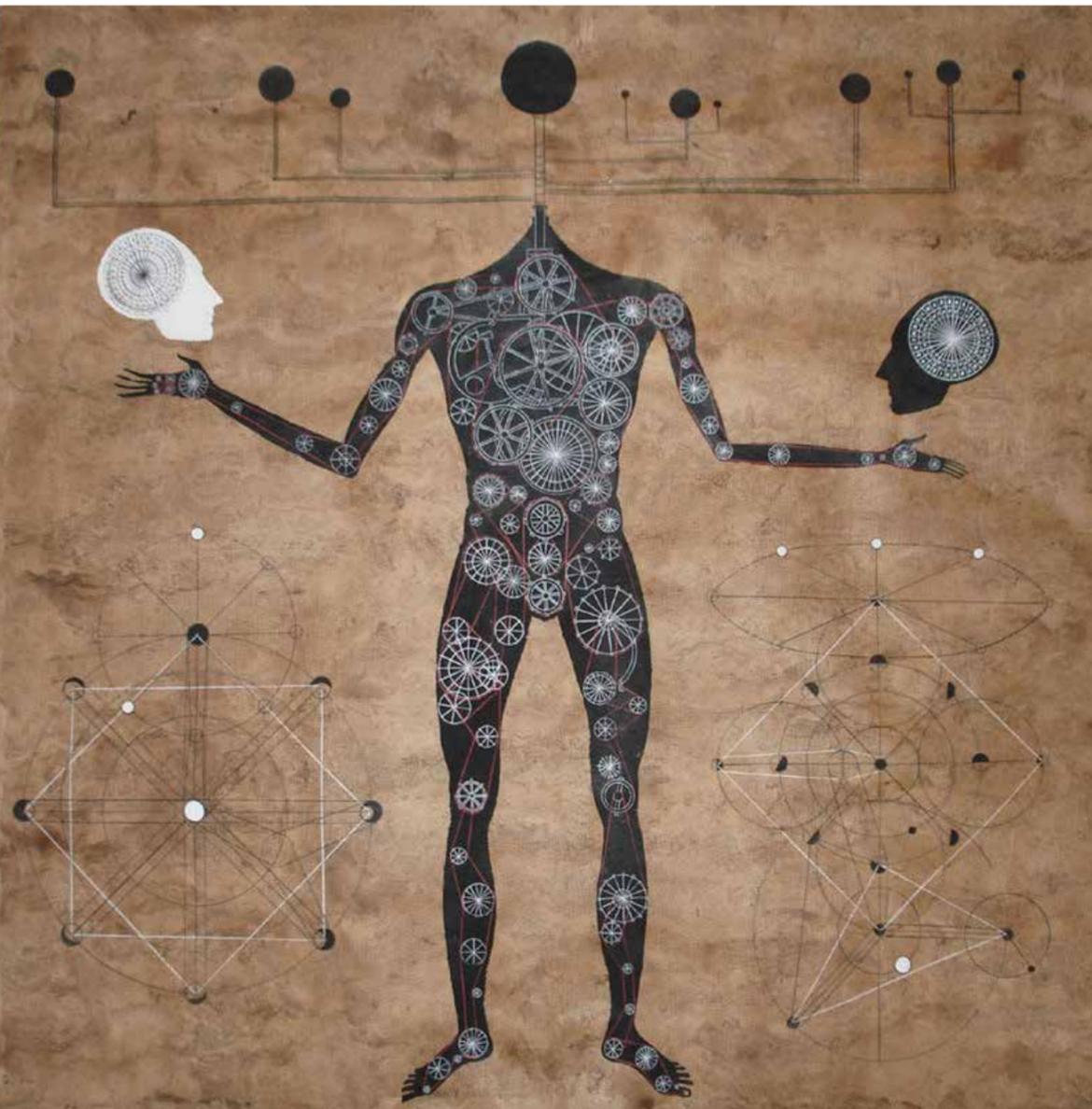
Marcus now achieves an epiphany, he understands. The Troglodytes are the Immortals. They had destroyed their City nine hundred years before, and built a new one in its place “as a temple to the irrational gods that rule the world and to those gods about whom we know nothing save that they do not resemble man.” At that point, thinking that all effort is vain, they decided to live in thought, devoting themselves to speculation. After centuries of living, they reached “a perfection of tolerance,” for they realized that in the long run all things happen to everyone. We are all things, god, hero, philosopher, demon, and world. Nothing happens only once, and nothing is ever lost, and this presumably is immortality.

Homer and Marcus part in Tangier, and Marcus goes on his way to be many things in many places. The account appears fantastic because, Marcus explains, it is the story of two men while presumably there is only one. But now Marcus is close to his end, when he will be all men, and none. No images from memory are left, only words.

The story ends with a postscript that refers to a publication entitled, *A Coat of Many Colors*, in which the author claims that the tale of the rare-book dealer Joseph Cartaphilus is apocryphal because of the texts from other sources it integrates. But the narrator of Borges’s story disagrees, for as he notes, “there are no longer any images from memory – there are only words.”



A. Claudio D’Leo, *El inmortal* (The Immortal)



B. Carlos Estévez, *El inmortal* (The Immortal)

pg. 8

TOPIC III: FAITH AND DIVINITY

1. Story “The Rose of Paracelsus”

- A. Carlos Estévez, *La rosa de Paracelso* (The Rose of Paracelsus)
- B. Alberto Rey, *Doubting of St Thomas* (La duda de sto. Tomás)

pg. 9

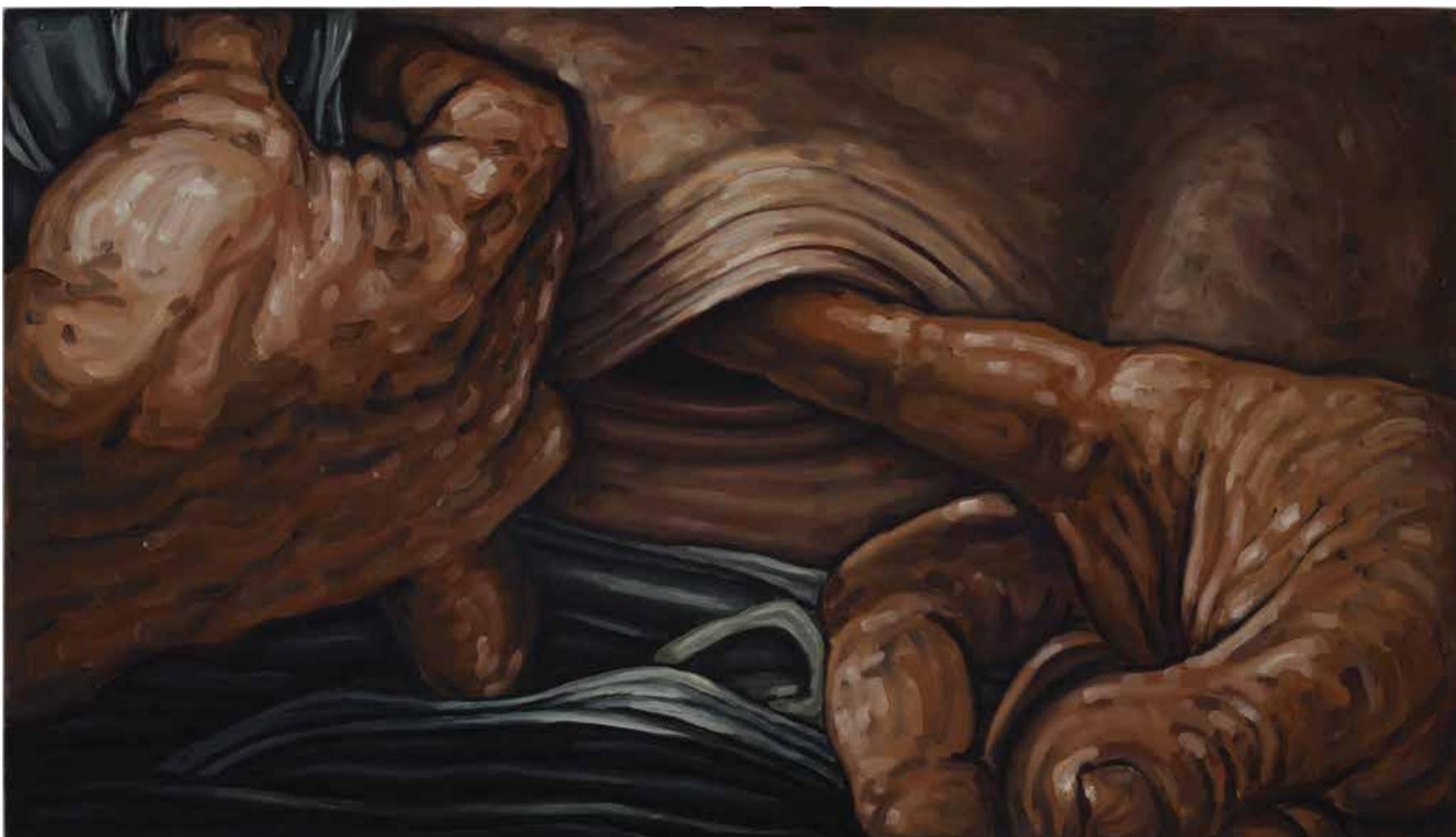
In his laboratory, Paracelsus prays to his indeterminate God, any god, to send him a disciple. He forgets his prayer, but a stranger comes to see him who aspires to be his disciple, and offers him all his worldly goods in the form of a bag full of gold, if Paracelsus should let him do it. The famous alchemist and physician (1493-1541) was reputed to be able to produce the stone that turns all elements into gold, so he has no use for gold and tells the student that if this is what he is interested in, he can never become his disciple. The student replies that the gold is only a token of his good will. He wants Paracelsus to teach him the Art, the path that leads to the Stone. Paracelsus answers that the path is the Stone and so is the point of departure. “Every step you take is the goal you seek.” Making sense of these words is the beginning of understanding, although Paracelsus’s enemies say there is no Path.

Still, the student wants a proof before he begins the journey – which indicates that he has not understood what the teacher has said, confirming Paracelsus’s first impression of him. When the student arrived, he held a rose on his left hand, a fact that had troubled Paracelsus. The sage was famous for burning a rose and making it reappear again through his Art, so the student asks him for this proof. But Paracelsus accuses him of credulity, whereas he requires faith. The disciple disputes this conclusion: he demands proof precisely because he is not credulous. But Paracelsus points out that his credulity lies in his belief that Paracelsus can destroy the rose, for nothing can ever be annihilated. The rose can be burned only in appearance; in itself it is eternal, that is why it would take only a word from Paracelsus to make it appear again. The word in question is found in the science of the Kabbalah.

The student insists, but Paracelsus replies that if he were to do what the student wants, the student would not believe it. The miracle would not produce faith. After Paracelsus shows signs of impatience, the student forces the situation by throwing the rose to the flames, which turns it into ashes. An unmoved Paracelsus notes that many think he is a fraud; now the rose is destroyed and will be no more. The student feels ashamed for having revealed Paracelsus as a fake. He apologizes and promises to come back after he is ready. They part courteously, knowing that they will not see each other again. Once the student leaves, Paracelsus pours some ashes from one hand into the other, whispers a single word, and the rose appears.



A. Carlos Estévez, *La rosa de Paracelso* (The Rose of Paracelsus)



B. Alberto Rey, *Doubting of St Thomas* (La duda de sto. Tomás)

TOPIC III: FAITH AND DIVINITY

2. Story “The Writing of the God”

A. Mirta Kupferminc, *La escritura del dios* (The Writing of the God)

The story is narrated by the protagonist, a Maya or Aztec priest – interpreters disagree – who is incarcerated in a jail in the form of an almost perfect hemisphere. A wall divides the prison into two halves. On one side, Tzinacán, the priest of the Pyramid that the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado burned, is imprisoned. On the other, the prisoner is a jaguar. A long barred window at the floor level makes possible for the priest to see the jaguar once a day, when a jailer lowers water and meat from an opening at the top of the ceiling. The priest spends his time waiting for the destiny that the gods have prescribed, and remembers the pains he suffered at the hands of his torturers. To pass the time, he tries to recall everything he knew, and once stumbles upon the story that on the first day of creation, foreseeing many disasters and calamities, the god had written a magical phrase capable of warding off those evils, for the sake of his elect. Tzinacán, as the god’s last priest, feels that he is destined to find the secret text. But where could it be written to be able to endure, be accessible, and yet hidden? After many hypotheses, he remembers that one of the god’s names is jaguar, and this leads him to think that the god has entrusted his message to the skin of the animal. This seems to be confirmed by the jaguar’s proximity to him in the prison.

The priest spends his time trying to decipher the many marks on the jaguar’s skin, the black shapes, the circles, the stripes, the rings, and the red borders. But all in vain. “What sort of sentence,” he asks himself, “would be constructed by an absolute mind?” The idea of a sentence makes no sense to him, and he speculates that it must be a word pregnant with “absolute plenitude,” the word could not be less than the universe as a whole.

An infinity of grains of sand appears in his dreams and he feels confused and lost, until the hard fact of his circumstances hits him and brings him back to reality. He is a prisoner, and he accepts it. This is the moment of enlightenment: he experiences unity with the deity and the universe, which to him appear to be the same. He has a vision of a wheel of enormous height, made of water and fire, and infinite, although he could see its boundaries. It is composed of everything that has been, is, or shall be, containing all causes and effects. In it, the priest sees everything and understands everything, including the writing on the jaguar’s skin.

The writing is a formula of fourteen random words – a number Borges often uses to refer to an infinity and was the sacred number of the jaguar divinity – and forty syllables, a number also pregnant with symbolism. To speak the formula would make him omnipotent, but he will never speak it, as he has forgotten who he is. He is no one, because he has glimpsed the universe and its designs. Now he lies in darkness, allowing the days to forget him.



“La escritura del Dios” 2/10.

Mirta Kupferminc 2004

A. Mirta Kupferminc, *La escritura del dios* (The Writing of the God)

TOPIC III: FAITH AND DIVINITY

3. Story "The Secret Miracle"

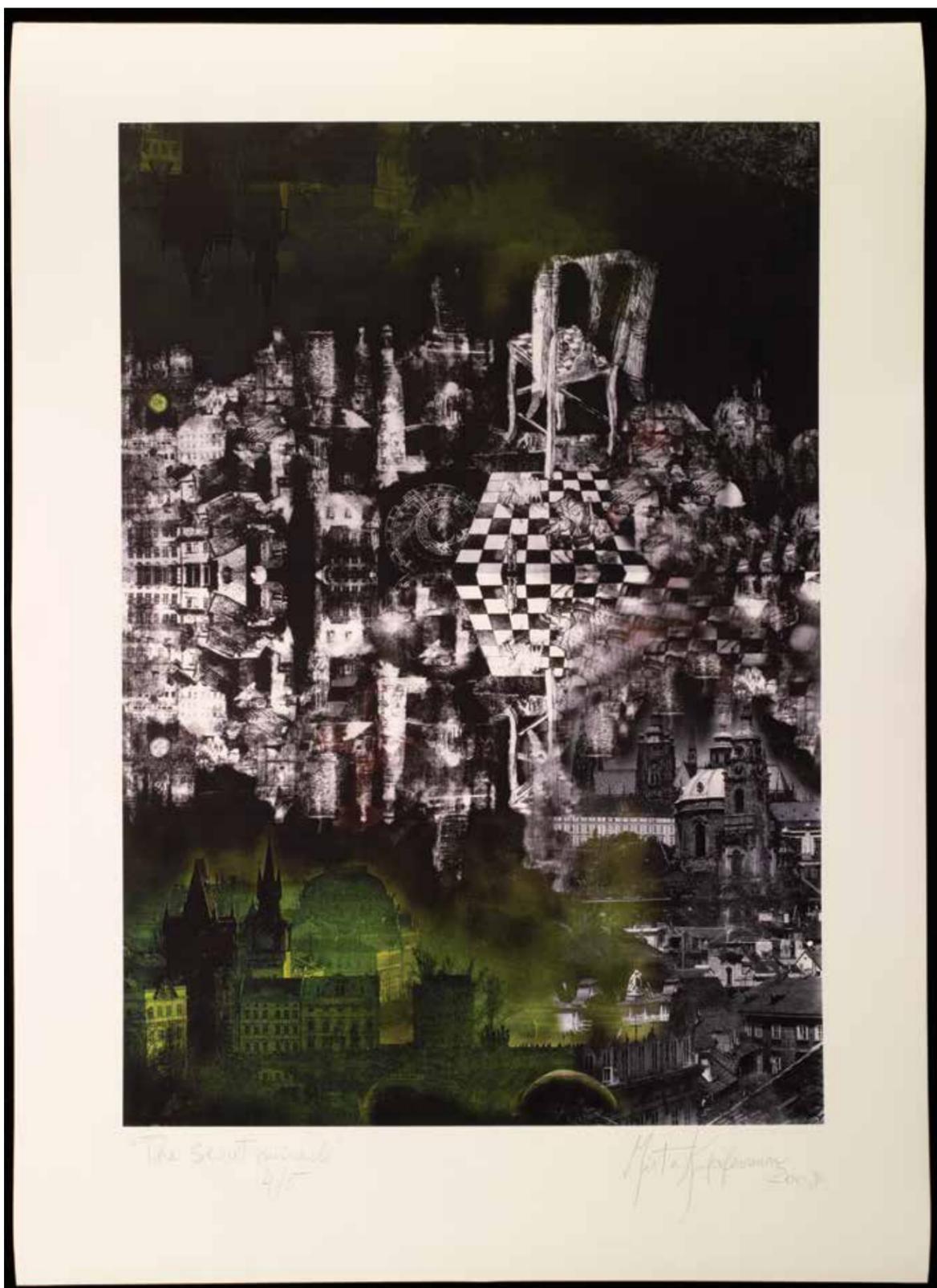
- A. Mirta Kupferminc, *El milagro secreto* (The Secret Miracle)
- B. Carlos Estévez, *Agujero en el tiempo* (Hole in Time)

pg. 11

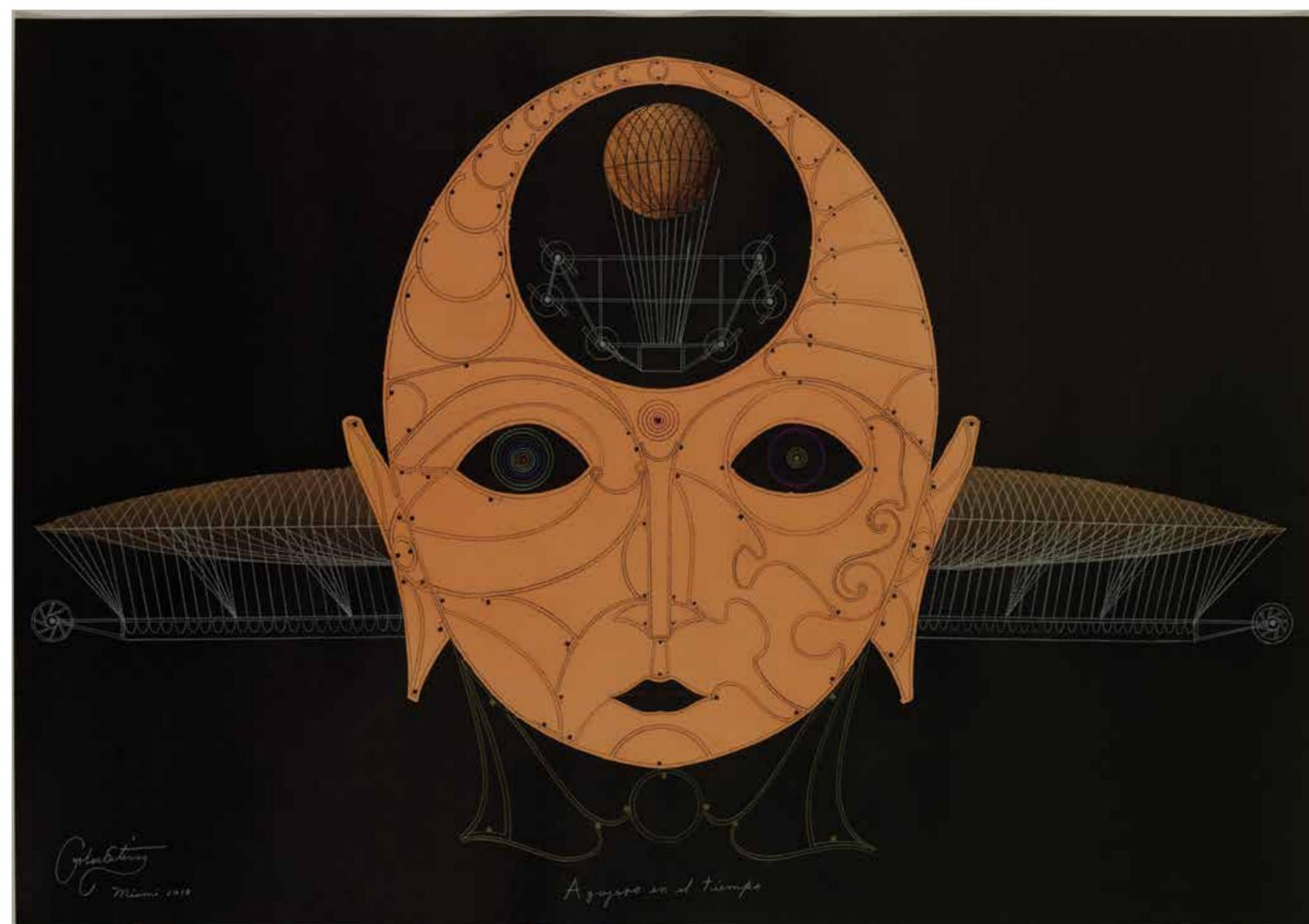
The story takes place in Prague during the occupation of the city by the forces of the Third Reich. It begins on March 14, 1939, the day before the invasion occurs. The protagonist is Jaromir Hladik, a Jewish playwright author of various works including an incomplete drama entitled *The Enemies*. Jaromir is dreaming of a long game of chess whose players are two illustrious families, and he wakes up at the moment in which the armored cars roll into Prague. On March 19, an informer accuses him and he is arrested. He cannot deny that he comes from Jewish blood and has written on Jewish subjects. He is summarily condemned to be executed by firing squad on March 29. This terrifies him and he relives the moment of his death repeatedly, some times hoping that this could prevent it, and at other times thinking that his imaginings could be prophetic.

As the day of his execution approaches, he impatiently begins to yearn for the shots that will kill him. But on March 28, his thought runs back to his play, *The Enemies*. As a writer he measures others by their work, and he regrets that he has not left any book that lives up to his expectations. This leads him to think that perhaps he could redeem himself by finishing *The Enemies*, but he does not have the time. The incomplete play has a convoluted plot which ends where it began, suggesting that the play has not taken place.

In a moment of hope, he asks God to give him one year to complete the play. That night, he dreams that he is at the Clementine Library in Prague and hears a voice that tells him: "The time for your labor has been granted." In the morning he is taken to the front of the firing squad. A heavy drop of rain grazes his temple and rolls down his cheek. The sergeant gives the order to fire, and the universe stops. Everything is frozen, including Jaromir, with the exception of his thoughts. He wonders whether he is dead or mad, or whether time has stopped. But this last possibility could not be, since he is still able to think. In time he realizes that his prayer has been answered favorably. A miracle, secret in that it is known only to him, has occurred. He works from memory and completes the play by the time, March 29 at 9:02 am, at which he dies. He hears himself cry, shakes his head, and the bullets kill him.



A. Mirta Kupferminc, *El milagro secreto* (The Secret Miracle)



B. Carlos Estévez, *Agujero en el tiempo* (Hole in Time)

TOPIC III: FAITH AND DIVINITY

4. “The Gospel According to Mark”

- A. Ricardo Celma, *El evangelio según Borges* (The Gospel According to Borges)
- B. Héctor Destéfánis, *La decisión de los Guthre* (The Guthres’ Decision)
- C. Mauricio Nizzero, *El Evangelio según Marcos* (The Gospel According to Mark)

The protagonist of the story is Baltasar Espinosa, whose last name means thorny and was also the name of a most celebrated Jewish philosopher in the seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza. Baltasar’s father is a freethinker and his mother a devout Catholic. He is characterized by a typical gift of oratory and “an almost unlimited goodness.” He is, like Christ, thirty-three years old when the events narrated in the story happen, and also like Christ, he had accomplished nothing of note to that point.

He accepts an invitation from a cousin to spend the summer in a ranch in the pampas. The bailiff is named Gutre, which we are told later is a corruption of Guthrie, signaling a long forgotten family origin in Inverness. He lives with his son, who is particularly uncouth, and a girl of uncertain paternity. Their dwelling is not far from the main house.

Baltasar’s cousin has to leave for Buenos Aires, but Baltasar remains in the ranch. A heat wave breaks in a colossal storm that isolates the ranch. The roof of the Gutres’ place is threatened by a leak and Baltasar allows them to move into a room in the main house, close to the tool shed. This brings him and them together. They have common meals and Baltasar tries to engage them in

conversation, but with limited success. To pass the time, he attempts to read them passages from a famous book about gauchos in the pampas, a copy of which he finds in the small book collection of the ranch – the Gutres can neither read nor write. But the bailiff, experienced in cattle ranching, finds the romanticized narrative inauthentic. Baltasar lets his beard grow and speculates about what his city friends will think when he returns to Buenos Aires. One day, exploring the house, he finds an old Bible, in English, with the Guthrie family history. The present Guthries had emigrated to the New World in the early nineteenth century, but had intermarried with Indians and had now forgotten both their origins and language. To try his hand at translating and see if he could get them interested, he reads the Gutres some passages from the Gospel According to Mark, and is surprised to find that they are fascinated by it. From then on, the Gutres anxiously look forward to the reading after dinner.

After Baltasar successfully treats the wound of a little lamb that was the girl’s pet with standard medications, the Gutres show him extraordinary gratitude. They pamper him, follow him around the house, and obey his orders immediately. One day he catches them discussing him in

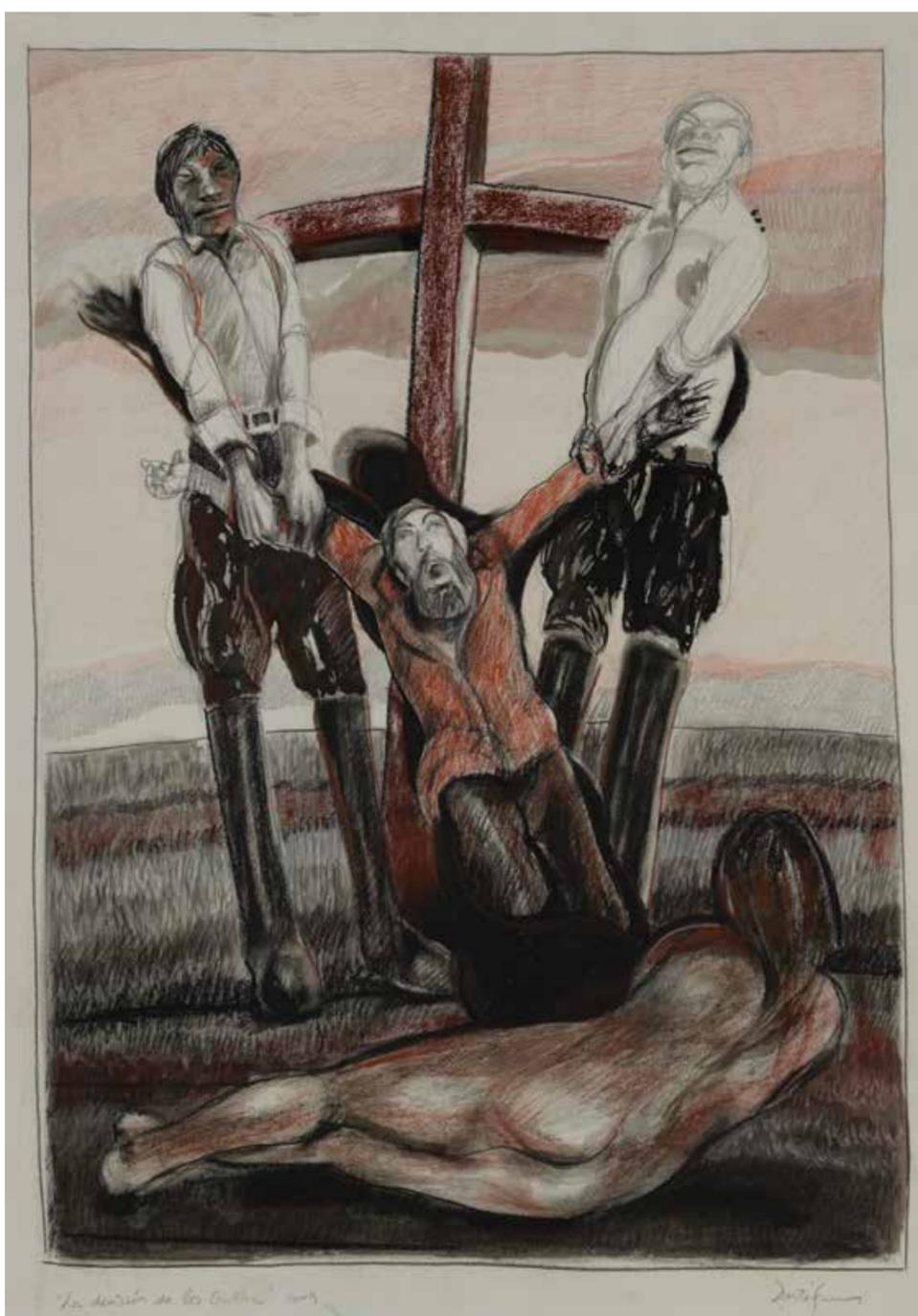
respectful words. After finishing The Gospel According to Mark, Baltasar tries to read them a different Gospel, but the bailiff asks him to read Mark again, so that they can understand it better.

One night Baltasar dreams of the Flood and wakes up at the sound of the hammering of the building of the Ark, but imagines it is thunder. The second storm takes place on Tuesday and, on Thursday, the girl comes into his room, naked and barefoot. She is a virgin.

The next day begins as usual, but the bailiff asks Baltasar whether Christ had undergone his death to save all mankind, including those who nailed him to the cross. Baltasar answers affirmatively, although he is not quite sure of the details of the Christian doctrine. Then they ask him to read the last chapters of the Gospel after lunch. Baltasar takes a siesta which is interrupted by insistent hammering. Toward evening, the Gutres kneel on the floor in front of him and ask his blessing. Then they curse him, spit on him, and the men drive him to the back of the house, while the girl cries. When they open the door to the shed, Baltasar sees the sky and hears the cry of a goldfinch. They had taken the roof of the shed off and built “the Cross.”



A. Ricardo Celma, *El evangelio según Borges* (The Gospel According to Borges)



B. Héctor Destéfánis, *La decisión de los Guthre* (The Guthres’ Decision)



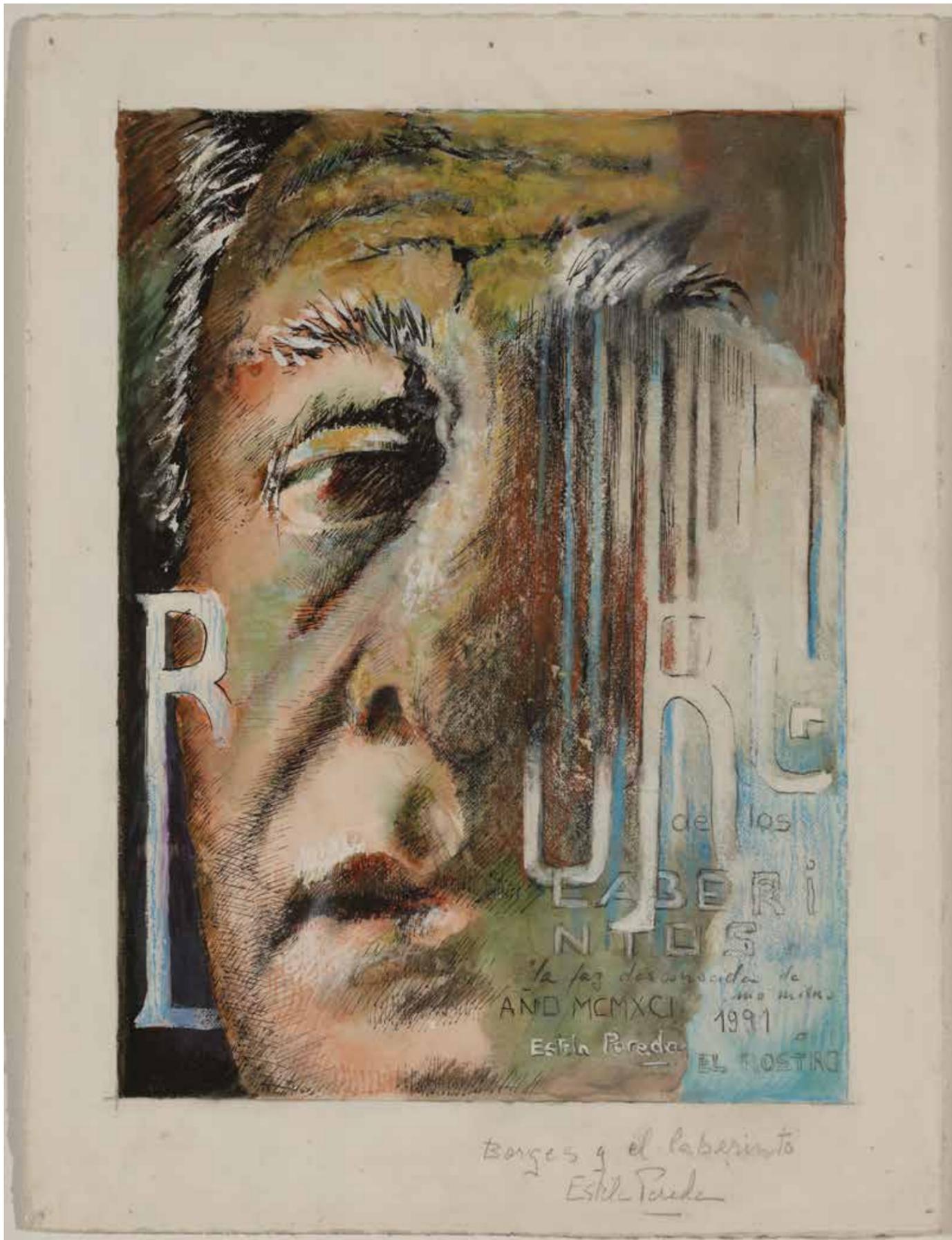
C. Mauricio Nizzero, *El Evangelio según Marcos* (The Gospel According to Mark)

OTHER TOPICS

5. Borges and Labyrinths

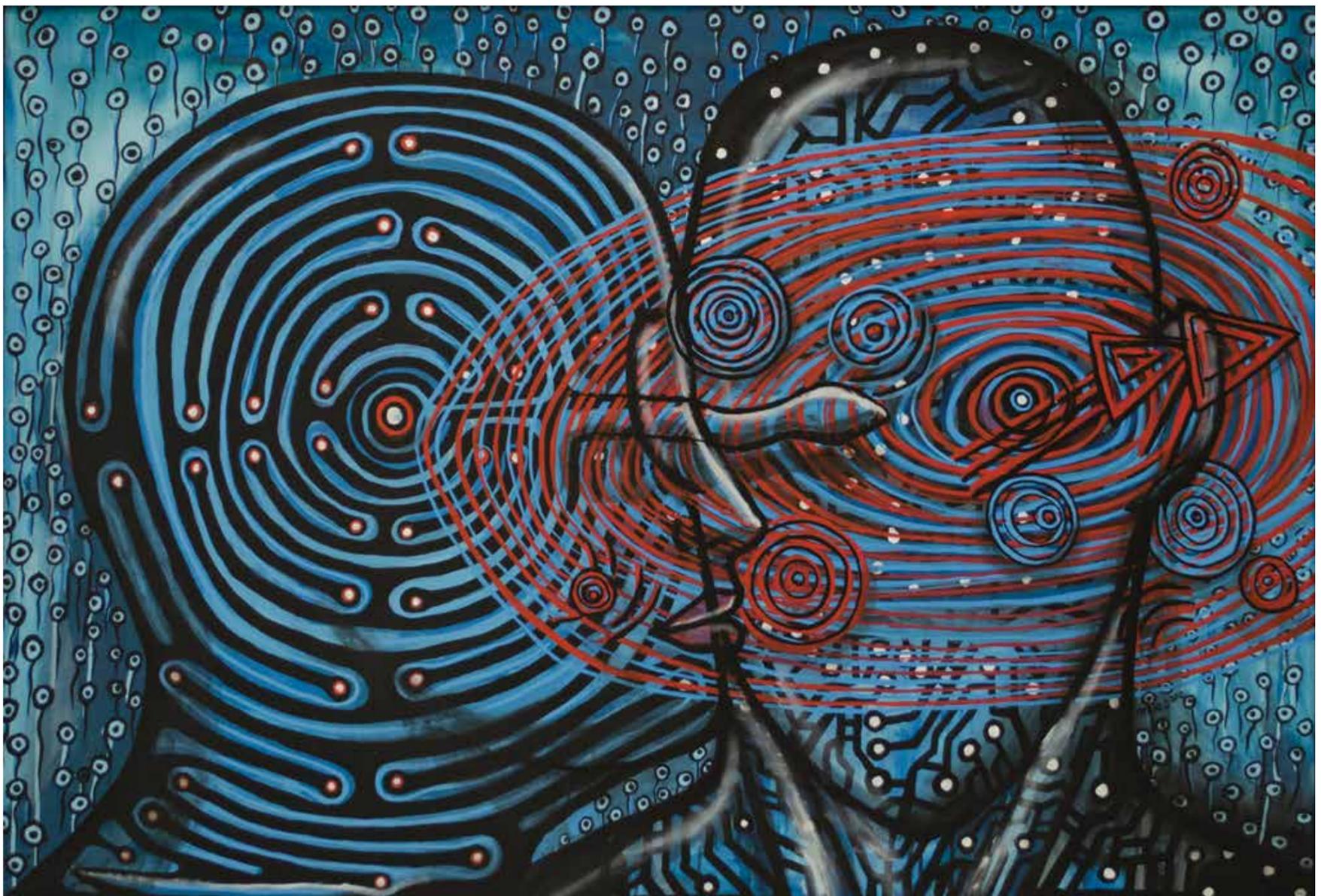
A. Estela Pereda, *Borges y el laberinto* (Borges and the Labyrinth)

B. José Franco, *El laberinto, o nadie entiende a las mujeres* (The Labyrinth, or No One Understands Women)



pg. 13

A. Estela Pereda, *Borges y el laberinto* (Borges and the Labyrinth)



B. José Franco, *El laberinto, o nadie entiende a las mujeres* (The Labyrinth, or No One Understands Women)

Luis Cruz Azaceta (b. 1942)

Azaceta was born in Havana, Cuba. He came to the United States in the early sixties, in the first exodus resulting from Castro's Revolution. He settled in New York City, where he attended The School of Visual Arts, and currently resides in New Orleans. His work has received wide recognition; it is present in important museum collections and has been exhibited in North and South America and in Europe. Among the many honors Azaceta has received are Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. The work has a strong character that occasionally borders on the shocking. A cartoon-like quality often reveals ties to popular culture and the long tradition of drawing and satire characteristic of much Cuban art, but Azaceta adds an element of suffering and pain that deepens the impact of the art, making it transcend particular cultures and circumstances. A good portion of the work explores the phenomenon of exile, emigration, and cultural dislocation, effectively employing the context of the rafts (*ba/sas*) used by the Cubans who, in desperation, have risked their lives to cross the channel that separates the island from the United States. More recently, Azaceta has been exploring labyrinths and journeys by concentrating on venues of travel such as airports and terminals, using them as symbols of the human existential predicament. The interpretation of Borges's story he created for the present project fits within this framework, both in that it deals with the Minotaur, a monster who is trapped in the labyrinth in which he resides, and continues a stylistic journey that has led Azaceta to greater simplicity and sharp drawing techniques in which solid colors are juxtaposed to create an engaging image.

Alejandro Boim (b. 1964)

Boim was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He studied art in Argentina and France and currently resides in Buenos Aires and Montreal. His work is always motivated by a curiosity which has led him to incorporate into it elements from the work of other artists he likes. The pieces tend to have dark tones, following his interest in Caravaggio and Rembrandt. Among other artists from whose work he has profited are Klimt, Alonso, and the members of the naturalist movement in France. The medium is primarily painting and the work figurative and realist – he regards it as *avant garde* in that it is a reaction against the overwhelming dominance of abstraction in the twentieth century. Boim has never been interested in the movement of “art for art's sake” – his art always responds to a personal interest. Unlike many other artists, he does not create series; each piece is unique and a reaction to what has gone on before – it is, as he puts it, “a way to fight boredom.” He has already created a substantial body of work that has received considerable recognition through various prizes and expositions in South America, Canada, and Europe. He is a recipient of the Gran Premio Nacional de Dibujo de Argentina (2008). Boim is not a devotee of Borges, but he likes some of his stories, such as “The South,” the object of his interpretation here.

Miguel Cámpora (b. 1961)

Cámpora was born in San Nicolás, Argentina. His work has been exhibited in South America, Europe, and the United States. He is particularly interested in topics that have to do with Argentinean society and its proverbial origin, the countryside, what Argentineans call “*el campo*.” Issues of fairness, exploitation, poverty, and displacement can be found in most of his pieces, joined to questions of social and national identity. What does it mean to be Argentinean? Where does he fit in this complicated society? Depictions of the countryside south of Buenos Aires take a good portion of the work. We see people and animals in vast expanses of land, migrating, moving, finding new places to survive and make their own. The human figures are rough, weathered, ravaged by the enormity of the land and its merciless oppression and beauty. The faces are grim, sad, resigned. Some colors are vivid, like the yellows of the pampa, but the greys and greens are subdued and mixed, adding a mood of sadness and struggle. Cámpora had not worked on particular works of Borges before he undertook to contribute to this project, although he had always had an interest in him, particularly in the stories that, like “The South,” have to do with the Argentinean countryside.

Ricardo Celma (b. 1975)

Celma was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His work consists primarily in painting, but also sculpture and drawing. He sees himself as a careful observer, and his art reflects this attitude. At first one's reaction is to classify the work as a kind of super realism, but upon closer scrutiny there is a major difference between this movement and Celma's work. Celma does not see his art as competing with photography and his topics are not the standard ones in super realism. He prefers a characterization that brings his work closer to the literary revolutoesses of contemporary art. art. They have taken the place of God and the Church in art, becoming the authorities who determine value and destiny. This imposes limitations on the artists who are forced to comply with their whims in order to survive. From the beginning of his

career he felt a special attraction for late Gothic and Flemish painting and for the ornamental Baroque in the works of Ribera and Rembrandt, and later for the descriptions of pain that flourished in the nineteenth century and the Baroque. He tried abstraction for a while, but eventually rejected it, because he needs to tell stories that have a rational denouement. He feels himself to be a kind of writer in that his work consists of narratives of moments he considers sacred. In these narratives woman has a special place and is almost always included in his work. He is fascinated by the psychology of women, the mystery of what they think, of their motives and intentions. This leads to portraits that are engaging, but thoughtful and mysterious, simultaneously revealing and concealing. His work has drawn attention in North and South America, Europe, and the Far East, and has been recognized with a variety of prizes, including the Primer Premio, Salón de Pintura, Sociedad Argentina de Letras, Artes y Ciencias (SALAC). Borges has always been a writer of interest for Celma for obvious reasons: the complexity and depth of Borges's work has attracted and challenged him. “The Gospel According to Mark” is not the first of Borges's works that has given rise to a pictorial interpretation by Celma, but it is the one used here.

Laura Delgado (b. 1975)

Delgado was born in 1978 in Buenos Aires. She began as a psychologist, but her interest in art led her to pursue an artistic career. Her initial work in art was academic, and was greatly influenced by mannerism, but eventually she turned toward a realist expressionism, in which she uses color as a symbol, and works with a loose stroke of the brush. She looks back to the Renaissance, and then to the work of El Greco, Goya, Alonso, and Nicolás. She does not see art as fundamentally demonstrative, but rather as suggestive. Some subjects that attract her in particular are children, animals, and everyday objects, which she organizes so that they speak to us of identity, memory, and the self. Delgado is a prolific artist whose work has already caught the attention of the art-loving public in South America and has been recognized with various prizes, including the Segundo Premio, 14 Salón Mercosur Internacional “Diógenes Taborda,” Museo ITIMuseum. Unlike many of the artists represented here, her initial reaction upon reading Borges when she was younger was rejection; she felt repelled by what she perceived as his pedantry and artificiality. Indeed, one of the stories that she found most objectionable is “The Other” (of which she has produced three different interpretations), because she thought the story had nothing to do with “the other,” but was exclusively about Borges. After some years away from Borges, she came back to him and developed a new appreciation for his work, a fact that paved the way for her participation in this project. Indeed, apart from three interpretations of “The Other,” she created two of “Funes, the Memorious.” Two of these pieces are used here.

Héctor Destéfanis (b. 1960)

Destéfanis was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is Profesor Titular in the Instituto Universitario Nacional de Artes and he is in charge of the Extensión Cultural of the Museo de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori. His work has traveled to various countries in South America and to the United States and Europe. He has been recognized with several prizes, including the Segundo Premio de Dibujo, Salón Manuel Belgrano awarded by the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. Destéfanis describes himself as a painter and drawer rather than an artist. A look at his creations shows a strong influence of drawing, even in paintings. His art is motivated by a sense that Argentinean artists have forgotten about themselves qua Argentineans, when in fact the key to the creation of universal art is precisely to begin with the particular. He begins to work, then, with what impresses and surprises him first in his surroundings, and generally ends where he began. The result is an abstraction from what he sees, and the creation of a new reality which is the product of emotion, the stuff out of which art is made, according to him. He creates surrealist spaces in which figures, colors, tones, and values enter in dialogue and carry a psychological burden, such as the loneliness of death. He begins a painting by applying color, because this is most obvious to the senses, and then gradually generates a figure. This leaves the work with large areas where certain colors predominate, breaking up the surface into separate spaces that interact in various ways. The artists who have influenced him the most were his teacher, Roberto Duarte, and classics such as Goya. Given Destéfanis's surrealist leanings and metaphysical preoccupations, it is not surprising that he has taken an interest in Borges, interpreting his work pictorially on a number of occasions. For this project he produced an interpretation of “The Gospel According to Mark,” which is included here, and two renditions of “The Circular Ruins.”

Claudio D'Leo (b. 1959)

D'Leo was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is an architect by training, but devotes himself to art. He teaches art in the Universidad del Museo Social Argentino and is Dean of the Faculty of Arts in Universidad del Museo Social

Argentino. His work has been exhibited in various venues in South America and the United States, and has received recognition through various prizes, such as the Premio Alianza Francesa, Centro Alfredo Fortabat. D'Leo's paintings have a strong social dimension, in which art is used to expose abuse and violence and the evils of an unconcerned society. For example, he created a series of oils on homeless people in Buenos Aires, and has often used his art to criticize structures of power in Argentina. Apart from his work at the university, he also offers workshops at a center closely oriented to the community. Some of his art has a sense of coming from the underground and being in opposition to anything associated with the establishment. Although he abandoned architecture for art, his art has not abandoned architecture. There is a strong structural aspect to it that is clearly visible. This is one of the reasons why his creations also appear to have been strongly influenced by Cubism and other currents in art that take a more scientific approach. The main explicit influence on his work is that of the Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamin, whose style, technique, and motifs are clearly echoed in the work of D'Leo. The influence of Caravaggio and his frames of penumbras are clearly visible in it. D'Leo has worked on Borges a number of times. Recently his interests have shifted to subjects that deal with the human condition, such as the work represented here, which concerns “The Immortal.”

Carlos Estévez (b. 1969)

Estévez was born in Havana, Cuba, but resides in Miami. His work has been exhibited in many countries from North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. Among his many prizes is the Gran Premio, Primer Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo in Havana. He has been very prolific, having produced hundreds of works. The range of the art extends from sculptures and installations to oil and acrylic paintings on canvas and paper, drawings on paper, assemblages, collages, and combinations of these. Estévez works with traditional materials, but has also incorporated non-traditional elements in the art. He regularly collects objects of various kinds, particularly artifacts such as bottles and gadgets he finds in rummage sales and flea markets, which he later integrates into his works. Estévez's art is easily recognizable. Its originality is a most prominent characteristic. One author that comes to mind as a background influence is Leonardo da Vinci. We find the same interest in machines, wheels, and contraptions. Estévez has also a fascination with anatomy, although for him this tends to concentrate on bugs, birds, fish, butterflies, lizards, and other animals. His humans are frequently puppets, mechanical devices with minds and emotions. Other common images found in the work are buildings and balloons. The mind behind the art seems to be as fascinated with new discoveries and the mechanics of the world as that of Renaissance and Enlightenment scientists and explorers. Estévez's art is a laboratory of sorts, an observation platform. Given his metaphysical interests, it is not surprising that he has been interested in Borges. Four of his works are included in this exhibition.

José Franco (1958)

Franco was born in Havana, Cuba, but he now resides in Buenos Aires. His work is represented in the collections of important museums in Europe, and North and South America, and has been exhibited in many countries in North and South America, Europe, and the Middle East. Among the many recognitions he has received is a Guggenheim Fellowship. His early work incorporated nature, particularly animals, and eventually abstraction. Magritte, Duchamp and Warhol have had a great influence on Cuban art, and Franco is no exception. Later Franco's art took the turn that he has followed ever since: the interest in animals and nature, using the black line of the draftsman typical of much Cuban art. The work has a surrealist sense mixed with an emphasis on vegetation that reminds one of Rousseau. Franco's interest in Borges goes back to Cuba, where the writer was popular in spite of his politics. In an art exhibition in Panama, seeing some of Franco's work on animal skins, someone mentioned Borges's story “The Writing of the God” and this prompted him to read more. He realized that Borges had been fascinated with tigers from childhood – indeed, one of the few surviving childhood drawings from Borges is of a tiger. When Franco arrived in Argentina, he began to paint on literary subjects and organized an exhibition in 1996, with a slightly modified title of Borges's story, whose lead work had the same title. For this project he has produced a painting with the same title as the first and inspired by it.

Etienne Gontard (b. 1934)

Gontard was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He wanted to paint from childhood, but instead of following this inclination, he studied business and practiced that profession until 1986, from which time he devoted himself entirely to art. After his first solo exhibition in 1976, it became clear that he had become serious about art. He explored the various currents of contemporary art, cubism, expressionism, conceptualism, and dabbled in photography, but he never incorporated in his work the insights of Magritte's surrealism, which was popular at the time. His work may be described

as having an expressionist root with a post conceptual character. He has kept an interest in nature, particularly the Argentinean landscape and animals, but the work is not that of a naturalist; he always alters what is presented to him into an image of what he sees. He has had exhibitions in North and South America, and in Europe. In 1983 he joined the Grupo Intercambio, and he set up his studio, where he also taught, in Palermo, and later in Olivos. His pictorial interest in Borges goes back to 1991, when he participated in an exhibition devoted to the writer, for which Gontard created two works, “La intrusa” (included here) and a pencil portrait of Borges that was stolen. The part of Borges’s work that interests Gontard has to do with the description of human beings and their complex emotional interrelations.

Mirta Kupferminc (b. 1955)

Kupferminc was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She was trained in engraving, but has done extensive work in sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, videos, and installations. Kupferminc is very active world-wide, and her art is known in many countries in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, and Africa. She has not developed a particular style, but rather uses a variety of approaches to reach ends that are aesthetically informed but have a contextual focus. Most of her work integrates different media and techniques, making it difficult to classify, since it does not easily fit into any single one of the established categories. Nonetheless, there are clear recurring motifs in it, and some of her pieces remind us of aspects of surrealism. Two of the most commonly used motifs are a chair and the figure of the poet. Both appear tri-dimensionally and on flat art. The first has evolved in many different ways, developing wings, optical illusions, and various colors, and appearing in different contexts. The image of the poet is used in various ways to recall learning, patience, and creativity. It was originally done in clay, a reference to the story of Genesis, but later it began to appear painted in other contexts. Both, the chair and the poet, are motifs connected to an important element that informs a great part of Kupferminc’s art, the exploration of her Jewish background. This is carried out through allusions to Jewish culture and roots, and it is one of the points of contact of her work with Borges, who was fascinated by Jewish history and the Jewish experience. She is one of the living Argentinean artists who has more frequently, intently, and consistently related her work to Borges’s stories.

Nicolás Menza (b. 1960)

Menza was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has had a very large number of exhibitions in many countries in North and South America, and Europe. Among his many awards is the Primer Premio de Dibujo, Salón Municipal Manuel Belgrano (Buenos Aires Government), Museo Eduardo Sívori. His work displays extraordinary variety: boxes, sculpture, installations, painting, and drawing. Although he is probably best known for his oils, temperas, and pastels, he finds in drawing the advantage that it is a more narrative medium in which color is suppressed in order to decrease psychological sensuality. His use of color is one of the most obvious and impressive features of his art – his creations are filled with brilliant, almost electric colors, big splashes of them, with areas of impasto, arranged in architectural designs that remind us of the Italian metaphysics of De Chirico and Morandi, artists to whom Menza acknowledges a debt. The style is recognizable, but it is not easy to describe or characterize. In part this is because Menza’s work is a very personal expression that seeks to be unique. Some of his art borders on the grotesque, the metaphysical, the latent – an implicit expression of what is hidden – and is complex and challenging. One can see a surrealist quality, as well as elements of expressionism and symbolism in the work, but none of them owns it; the work transcends schools and fads. Among recurrent themes are women, clowns, children, still-lives, the painter and his materials, toys, scenes from Buenos Aires such as the typical cafes, and of course Borges’s work. The last one has been a constant source of inspiration for Menza. He began to read him early on and has continued exploring his labyrinths ever since. He has created many works related to Borges, including portraits of the writer, but more important for us here, interpretations of his stories and poems. The key to this fascination is the structure of the thought. Menza finds an affinity between Borges’s *modus operandi* and his own, the way they approach the world, a certain metaphysical pattern of understanding that is common and bridges the gap between literature and art. Here I include his interpretations of three stories: “Circular Ruins II,” “The Garden of Forking Paths,” and “The Secret Miracle.”

Mauricio Nizzero (b. 1958)

Mauricio Nizzero was born in Buenos Aires. He graduated from Escuela de Bellas Artes, and currently teaches metal design in the Escuelas Técnicas Raggio, where he is one of the directors. He is prolific and has produced many public works. His art has been exhibited in Argentina and Uruguay and has received various awards, including the Premio Bial de Pintura de Quilmes. His art consists to a great extent in drawings, although he also paints, but even his paintings have a strong drawing flavor. He began drawing when he was

a child. He had an aunt who was an artist in Chile. When she visited at Christmas time when he was six, he had gifts for everybody but for her, so he made a drawing of a package and gave it to her and this event marked an important moment in his life. He has always felt the need to say something through the metaphors of drawings. He went to a technical secondary school where he spent many hours drawing with an emphasis on the ornamental, and working with metals. In the Escuela de Bellas Artes, he began sculpting and then followed with color and tri-dimensional space. He has often painted street murals. For him teaching is important because it gives him the possibility of an encounter with the visual arts and literature. He has a loose style that avoids what he considers unnecessary details in order to concentrate on an important element he wishes to express. He focuses on first impressions – the sensation of the moment and the before and after – in order to capture the human comedy and conduct, that is, the crucial instant viewed through the filter he, as artist, imposes on the occasion. His interest in Borges goes back some years, and although he had not produced interpretations of his works before, it has now surfaced in various creations. In the process of interpretation he applies the filter he uses in his art, looking at the work of literature through a funnel that enhances what impresses him as the key aspect. He likes Borges because of the emphasis on memory, which he considers essential for inspiration and the creative process. Memory is convenient in that it is selective and glides over unessential details. In connection with this project, Nizzero produced a number of works, two of which are included here. They deal with the stories “The Other” and “Funes, the Memorious.”

Estela Pereda (b. 1931)

Estela Pereda is the second most senior artist whose work is included here. She was born in Buenos Aires and has had a long and distinguished career. Her art has been exhibited in many countries, including Argentina, Canada, Ecuador, France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and has received many awards, such as the Medalla de Oro de la Asociación de Críticos and the selection for the mural and prize “Nunca Más,” for the Facultad de Engineering of the University of Buenos Aires. Pereda grew up in a family with a strong artistic presence. Both her mother and grandmother were artists, and now her daughter also has followed suit. Her mother was a well-known writer and her grandmother created tapestries that she integrated into other works as well. The grandmother’s family had an Italian origin with a strong tradition of creating objects; they were artisans and artists and Pereda’s mother frequently took her to workshops, when she was thirteen or fourteen. When the time came to choose a career, although she wanted to go to the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, she did not have the courage to do it and chose instead something practical that could help her earn a living. She enrolled in the career of public translation, in the Faculty of Law, but never finished. She married young and moved to the country, and only slowly got back into art, in 1962. Her training took place in the workshops of Mariette Lydis, Bernard Bouts, Vicente Puig, Héctor Basaldúa and Araceli Vásquez Málaga, and she was part of the Grupo Intercambio. She studied the masters from the Renaissance, whose influence is still evident in her work, as is the case with Mantegna on the piece included here, which is an interpretation of Borges’s “The Interloper.” The move to the country awakened in her an appreciation for *mestizo* art. She had the opportunity of visiting the Christian chapels of northern Argentina and Chile, where the native peoples had left a record of their reading of the Christian stories and created an idiosyncratic art. Pereda was inspired by this and began to re-read these works, incorporating in her art elements from the land and its fruits. Yet, in her own words, she tried “to avoid becoming a folklorist,” turning instead into what she calls “an Americanist” whose aim is to uncover and rediscover the riches of America. *Mestizo* art, with its musical angels and armed archangels, prompted her to introduce many changes in her work, but she never developed a set style. She has always liked to experiment and change. Her art varies in the use of media, which goes from oil and acrylic to drawing, sculpture, carving, weaving and sawing, the use of paper and collage, tempera, and the incorporation of various ready-made objects she finds. Among the topics that have particularly interested her is the place of women in society in general, and specially in Argentina. This is where the work I use here fits, and the explanation for her interest in Borges. Another of her pieces on Borges, a portrait, juxtaposes part of the image of the writer and a labyrinth.

Alberto Rey (b. 1960)

Alberto Rey was born in Havana, Cuba. His family emigrated to the United States when he was three years old. He is currently State University of New York Distinguished Professor at the State College at Fredonia. He holds a BFA from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a MFA from State University of New York at Buffalo with additional post-graduate work at Harvard University. He has received many awards, including the State University of New York Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activities. His art is in the permanent collections of several important museums

in the United States, and has been exhibited in Mexico, Spain, United States, and the Vatican. Originally an abstract painter, Rey eventually turned to realism as he began to explore his Cuban identity. During the 1990’s he focused on depicting Cuban landscapes recovered from old black-and-white photographs, exploring Cuban and American locales, representing Cuban cultural objects, such as bars of guava and bottles of rum, painting portraits of Cubans and Cuban Americans, and integrating religious images in his art. All of these pieces combine to raise issues having to do with identity, which are affected by religion, places, pop culture, and people. By this time, Rey had developed a painting technique over plaster in turn placed over canvas with a wood backing. This was an attempt to recover a fee for the work of old masters. The return to the history of art has always been important to him, as we see in his interpretation of Borges’s “The Rose of Paracelsus” for which he uses as point of departure a detail of a work by Caravaggio. This piece also points to his continuing interest in questions concerned with religious faith. The exploration of places and his interest in fishing led Rey to look into his natural surroundings in a series of works dealing with New York State fish and flora, particularly around the place where he currently resides, as well as in Cuba. These are large canvasses of live and dead fish, underwater videos, and combinations of some of these in a large installation.

Paul Sierra (b. 1944)

Paul Sierra was born in Havana, Cuba, and emigrated to the United States in 1961. He resides in Chicago, and studied art in the School of the Art Institute in that city. He is a senior artist with a large number of exhibitions and a substantial body of work, and has lived from his art for many years. His creations have been exhibited in France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, United States, and Uruguay, and are included in important collections in the United States and Europe. Among the many awards he has received are two Cintas Fellowships. Sierra started drawing and doing watercolors when he was a small child. He had an uncle who was a Sunday painter, and let him use his paints. He fell in love with painting then and eventually enrolled in The School of the Art Institute in Chicago. He had his first solo show in his early twenties but did not sell anything. He quit school and went into advertising to subsidize his painting which he did after hours and on weekends. Eventually he was making more money from painting than from the advertizing business, so he quit advertizing and has been exclusively devoted to painting ever since. He is one of those artists who early on are able to support themselves with their art, even though he did not compromise his work and did not paint to suit clients. His pieces are strong and vigorous, the colors vivid, the brush stroke powerful, and the topics often disturbing: a man falling from a burning skyscraper, a lonely figure in a landscape, swimmers going against the current, crashed automobiles, and a dead Minotaur. But much of it can be strangely beautiful, lush landscapes, birds, butterflies in starry nights, and golden fish swimming in creeks in the forest. In the landscapes he often places an animal or a statue, that stands alone, and he never uses more than one figure. Loneliness and uniqueness are recurrent themes, but also the idea of paradise. Obviously there are influences, one can detect those of Rousseau, Gauguin, Goya, and De Kooning. In contrast with many Cuban painters living outside Cuba who work on Cuban themes, Sierra has never done so. His art is universal and finds inspiration in literature and the work of the masters. The Chicago Art Institute has been a great resource for him, and it is no surprise that he would be interested in Borges. Nor is it surprising that for his story he chose “The House of Asterion,” a work about a monster who suffers loneliness and isolation, and ends up welcoming death.

CREDITS AND LABELS

Labels

Luis Cruz Azaceta

La casa de Asterión (The House of Asterion), 2009, 29.5" x 29.5", markers on paper (page 7)

Alejandro Boim

El sur (The South), 2009, 24" x 24", oil on canvas (page 3)

Miguel Cámpora

La duda (The Doubt), 2009, 31.5" x 39.5", acrylic on canvas (page 3)

Ricardo Celma

El evangelio según Borges (The Gospel According to Borges), 2009, 59" x 29.5", oil on canvas (page 12)

Laura Delgado

Funes, vaciadero de basura II (Funes, The Garbage Heap II), 2009, 27.5" x 39.5", mixed media on canvas (page 2)

Laura Delgado

La otra – éramos demasiado parecidos y demasiado distintos (The Female Other – We Were too Similar and too Different), 2009, 39.5" x 27.5", mixed media on canvas (page 1)

Héctor Destéfanis

La decisión de los Guthre (The Guthres' Decision), 2009, 39.5" x 27.5", mixed media on paper (page 12)

Héctor Destéfanis

Ruinas circulares II (Circular Ruins II), 2009, 39.5" x 27.5", mixed media on paper (page 6)

Claudio D'Leo

El inmortal (The Immortal), 2009, 39.5" x 39.5", oil on canvas (page 8)

Carlos Estévez

Los jardines que se bifurcan (Forking Gardens), 2009, 39.5" x 27.5", pencil and gouache on paper (page 5)

Carlos Estévez

La rosa de Paracelso (The Rose of Paracelsus), 2009, 39.5" x 27.5", pencil and gouache on paper (page 9)

Carlos Estévez

El inmortal (The Immortal), 2006, 46" x 46", tempera and pencil on amate paper (page 8)

Carlos Estévez

Agujero en el tiempo (Hole in Time), 2011, 27.5" x 39.5", pencil and gouache on paper (page 11)

José Franco

El laberinto, o nadie entiende a las mujeres (The Labyrinth, or No One Understands Women), 2010, 37.5" x 53.75", acrylic on canvas (page 13)

Etienne Gontard

La intrusa (The Interloper), 1991, 39.5" x 39.5", acrylic on canvas (page 4)

Mirta Kupferminc

El milagro secreto (The Secret Miracle), 4/5, 2008, 39.5" x 27.5", digital print (page 11)

Mirta Kupferminc

Con el fuego (With the Fire) 2/5, 2008, 39.5" x 27.5", digital print (page 6)

Mirta Kupferminc

La escritura del dios (The Writing of the God), 2/5, 2 plates, 2004, 22.5" x 27.5", etching (page 10)

Nicolás Menza

Ruinas circulares II (Circular Ruins II), 2010, 39.5" x 27.5", pastel on paper (page 6)

Nicolás Menza

El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan (The Garden of Forking Paths), 2000, 39.5" x 27.5", pastel on paper (page 5)

Mauricio Nizzero

El Evangelio según Marcos (The Gospel According to Mark) 31.5" x 19.75" (page 12)

Mauricio Nizzero

El otro (The Other), 2009, 19.75" x 31.5", ink and coffee on paper (page 2)

Mauricio Nizzero

Funes, el memorioso (Funes, the Memorious), 2009, 19.75" x 31.5", ink and coffee on paper (page 2)

Estela Pereda

"Si la querés, usála" (If You Want Her, Use Her), sketch, 1991, 39.5" x 39.5", pencil, ink, tempera, and water color on paper (page 4)

Estela Pereda

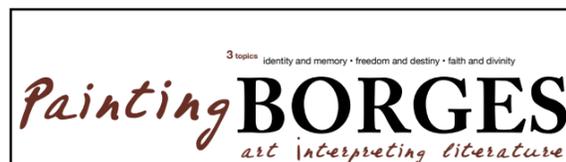
Borges y el laberinto (Borges and the Labyrinth), 1991, 8.25" x 8", pencil, ink, tempera, and water color on paper (page 13)

Alberto Rey

Doubting of St Thomas (La duda de sto. Tomás), 2009, 19" x 33", oils on plaster on canvas over wood (page 9)

Paul Sierra

Asterión, 2009, 34" x 26", oil on canvas (page 7)



Painting Borges:

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