

MARTÍN RAMÍREZ: His Life in Pictures. Another Interpretation

9.9.17–12.31.17

Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation is the first monographic presentation in Southern California of the self-taught artist Martín Ramírez (1895–1963). The exhibition includes a range of works—from small-scale abstractions to monumental figures and landscapes—some of which are being presented to the public for the first time.

Born to a family of sharecroppers in Jalisco, Mexico, Ramírez migrated to the United States in the 1920s to seek work on the railroads. Following the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929, Ramírez found himself unemployed and homeless. In 1931, he was detained by police for vagrancy and interned in state psychiatric hospitals without due process until his death in 1963. In recent years, Ramírez's psychiatric diagnosis has been called into question, suggesting that the artist was the victim of discrimination and institutional bias. Even under these difficult circumstances, Ramírez produced a body of remarkable drawings that established his iconic visual language of rhythmic mark making and singular imagery. Moreover, his work highlights the many social concerns that endure as challenging topics of debate today—immigration, national borders, incarceration, and the rights of the mentally ill.

To create his drawings, Ramírez collaged found papers and excoriated his linework with pencils, crayons, burnt matches, and other makeshift implements. He populated his pictures with a constellation of figures—cowboys, religious icons, tunnels,

trains, and animals—creating spaces both real and imaginary. References to Catholic imagery and Jalisco's *ranchero* culture, that appear throughout the drawings, demonstrate the artist's enduring connection to Mexican cultural themes and rituals, while the occasional use of images from magazines, film, and television reflects his growing awareness of popular American culture. Ramírez's unique draftsmanship lends an optical rhythm and depth to his compositions, and his manipulations of found papers through piecing and layering expand his drawings into a sculptural dimension. Although Ramírez is often discussed in the context of "self-taught" or "folk" art, his compositions demonstrate a formal ingenuity that is both aligned with and independent of artistic conventions of his day.

This exhibition acknowledges the artist's history before his arrival in California as a necessary context for examining his work. By illustrating Ramírez's progression of motifs and improvisational techniques through drawings that seem to be from various periods, the show situates his visual style in the critical path of art made in California, where the crossover between Latin American art and American modernism found its fullest realization.

Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation is organized by Elia Longhiser, Executive Director, with Jamillah James, Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

This exhibition is presented by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles as part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA.



Lead Sponsors

The Broad Art Foundation, John and Louise Bryson, California Community Foundation, Megan and Peter Chernin, Robert Day, Cástulo de la Rocha and Zaida D. Escobar, Design Miami, Stephen English and Molly Minger, David and Marianna Fisher, Daniel Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser, The James Irvine Foundation, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board, Rob Lovelace and Alicia Miliani, Montage Beverly Hills, Ron and Jane Olson, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Anne and Jim Rothenberg, Elizabeth Segerstrom, Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc., South Coast Plaza, Terra Foundation for American Art, Maria Hummer-Tuttle and Robert Holmes Tuttle, Walter F. Ulloa and Alexandra Sevov, Dr. Richard and Rebecca Zaporta



Major exhibit loan support has been provided by



Additional exhibition support has been provided by The National Endowment for the Arts, Philip and Marci Herman Foundation, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Robert Lehman Foundation, Madeline and Bruce M. Roman, Wirth Foundation for American Art and Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation



















