

Biography

Agustín Fernández was born in Havana, Cuba on April 16, 1928 and died in New York City on June 2, 2006. From his career beginnings in Havana through the many years that he spent outside Cuba, which were formative for the independent and international context that would mark his work, Agustín Fernández dedicated himself to the production of paintings, drawings, and graphics. Fernández also created assemblages, sculptures and artist's books.

Fernández is recognized as an outstanding artist of his generation. His work has been extensively and internationally exhibited and has received copious critical acclaim. It is included in numerous and prestigious public collections and found a popular audience when one of his paintings was featured in the 1980 Brian de Palma film, *Dressed to Kill*.

Today, his work is most recognizable for its ambiguous and precariously balanced forms, erotic overtones, surreal juxtapositions, and metallic palette. Inspired by the demands of survival in an urban environment and the mundane objects that clutter its alleys and streets, Fernández is a collector on a quest for the substance of creativity, complete with the armor of protection necessary to maneuver through time and place that becomes such an important source of his imagery. Paintings and objects are related and complementary and further complicate the identification of organic versus inorganic forms; human and machine; real and imagined; obsessive and cerebral. Throughout his long and prolific years as an artist, Agustín Fernández was respected as a dedicated professional able to distinguish himself with a unique style and masterful techniques.

Fernández began his studies in Havana, Cuba, at the Escuela Elemental de Artes Aplicadas Anexa a San Alejandro (1944-1946) and the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro (1946-1950). In 1948, he journeyed to New York for a summer course with George Grosz and Yasuo Kuniyoshi at the Art Students League before returning to Havana, where he studied Philosophy and Languages at the Universidad de La Habana (1948-1951). He later traveled to Madrid, Spain, where he audited courses at the Academia de San Fernando de Madrid (1953). In 1959, Fernández was granted a scholarship to study painting in Europe by the Ministry of Education, General Cultural Division, Havana. From that point onward he remained abroad, residing in Paris, France from 1959-1968; in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 1968-1972; and New York City from 1972 until his death.

By the time Fernández arrived in Europe at the age of thirty-one, in addition to a solo exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, he had also had eleven one-man shows that presented his work to audiences in Havana, New York, Madrid, Caracas, and Washington D.C. During the next four decades Fernández went on to have more than 30 solo exhibitions in important galleries, museums, and art fairs around the world. In 1992 The Art Museum, Florida International University organized a major retrospective of his work.

In the course of his career Fernández also participated in over 100 group shows throughout Europe, the United States and Latin America. The first of his more than 30 collective museum exhibitions was in 1958 at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (where he showed again in 1966 and 1967) and the following year he was part of show held at The Art Institute of Chicago. He also took part in the traveling exhibition and major resource publication, *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*, which was originated by The Bronx Museum of Art in New York and traveled to El Paso Museum of Art in El Paso, Texas, The San Diego Museum of Arts in California, El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña in San Juan and The Center for the Arts in Vero Beach, Florida.

Fernández was also part of numerous important gallery projects including *Tanguy Dali Bellmer Fernández Roy* at Galerie André Francois Petit in Paris (1966) and *Latin America: New Paintings and Sculpture* (Juan Downey, Agustín Fernández, Gego, Gabriel Morera) at Center for Inter-American Relations in New York (1969). More recently, his work was included in the exhibitions, *The Coincident Eye: Hans Bellmer, Agustín Fernández, Robert Mapplethorpe*, (1997) and *In Context: Hans Bellmer, Victor Brauner, Joseph Cornell, Agustín Fernández, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Carlos Merida* (1998), both by 123 Watts Gallery in New York as well as *Cundo Bermudez, Agustín Fernández, Emilio Sanchez* at ACA Galleries, New York (2004).

Fernández was the recipient of numerous honors. He was awarded a Cintas Foundation Fellowship in 1978. The artist was selected to create a permanent public ceramic mural at the Colegio de Arquitectos in Havana (1957). He was selected to participate in the VIII Salón Nacional de Pintura y Escultura, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (1956); the Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo, (1957-Honorable Mention, 1959); Salon Comparaison, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (1961, 1964, 1965), and the Salon de Mai, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris and Tokyo (12 times between 1960 and 1993) and the Bienal de San Juan del Grabado Latinoamericano, El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña in San Juan, Puerto Rico (First, 1970; Third, 1974-Honorable Mention).