

MARTÍN RAMÍREZ

Amidst political and religious upheaval, Martín Ramírez left his native Jalisco, Mexico for America in 1925 seeking work to support his family and struggling ranch. He labored as an impoverished immigrant until he was picked up by police in California in 1931, reportedly in a disoriented state. By 1932, Ramírez was declared schizophrenic (with varying diagnoses of catatonic, manic-depressive and paranoid amending that) and committed first at Stockton State Hospital and eventually at DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn. During this internment and until his death in 1963, Ramírez's fantastic drawings, formerly only found in the margins of his letters home, ranged up in scale.

Some of Martín Ramírez's large paneled pieces stretched to nineteen feet. These drawings were all completed from within the walls of hospitals, on the floor underneath a table, and often on paper the artist carefully pieced together himself. With rhythmic repetition of line and gentle shading, Ramírez created imaginary landscapes populated by the real images of his past: the caballeros, Madonnas and animals of his Mexican heritage and the trains that carried him to permanent exile in America. His technical skill, stylistic evolution, and thematic coherence led Roberta Smith of the New York Times to call Ramírez "...simply one of the greatest artists of the 20th century."

Martín Ramírez's talents were recognized in small exhibitions as early as the 1950s and most recently by the American Folk Art Museum, which showed approximately 100 of his drawings in an exhibition of 2007 titled, Martín Ramírez. During that exhibition, a curator was contacted by a relative of Dr. Max Dunievitz, former medical director of DeWitt State Hospital. The Dunievitz family possessed dozens of Ramírez's drawings that had been stored in their garage for over two decades. Subsequently verified, this group of 140 previously unknown works, and the estate of Martín Ramírez will be represented exclusively by the Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York. The newly discovered cache of work from the last three years of Ramírez's life will be the subject of a second exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum in October of this year.

from Ricco Maresca