

Martín Ramírez

Mexican, 20th century.

Born 1895, Jalisco, Mexico; died 1963, Auburn, California.

Born in Tepatilan, Jalisco, Mexico in 1895, Martín Ramírez was a rancher and a family man, until poverty and political violence drove him to California in search of migrant work in 1925. Like many Mexican immigrants, he suffered great hardship, but his story is anything but typical. In 1931 Ramírez was diagnosed with catatonic schizophrenia and committed to state hospitals, first in Stockton, and then at the DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn. He began to draw in the 1930s, using unlikely materials culled from hospital supplies. Erroneously labeled a chronic mute, Ramírez flourished as an artist until his death in 1963, producing an impressive body of over 300 large-scale, mixed-media drawings. This oeuvre would have been lost if not for the advocacy Dr. Tarmo Pasto, a Sacramento psychiatrist who met the artist after his move to DeWitt. Pasto offered him encouragement, some supplies, and later archived and exhibited his work.

Ramírez's creative ingenuity was staggering. Patching together long, rectangular sheets of thin operating-table paper with mashed potatoes and spit, he drew with pencil, crayon, charcoal made from burned matchsticks. He made paint by chewing on colored newsprint, then spitting it into homemade bowls of hardened oatmeal. His isolated figures and scenes are often dramatically framed by his signature proscenium device: lively gauchos from the Mexico of his youth, stately Madonnas, trains disappearing into underworld tunnels, animals, a lone figure seated in contemplation, possibly a self-portrait. Onto more complex works, he layered collaged images from print sources.

Recently discovered drawings made in the final years of his life reveal a bolder use of color, and riskier, more abstract compositions driven by his confident, undulating line.

Resonating with visual and symbolic elements from the artist's indigenous Mexican roots, his Catholic sensibility, his travels, and his pure love of line, color and form, Ramírez's achievement is far greater than the sum of these distinct parts.

- Jenifer P. Borum

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017

Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

2010

Martín Ramírez: Reframing Confinement, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

2009

Martín Ramírez: The Last Works, The American Folk Art Museum, New York

2007

Martín Ramírez, The American Folk Art Museum, New York

1989

Martín Ramírez: Pintor Mexicano, Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019

Memory Palaces: Inside the Collection of Audrey B. Heckler, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY

2018

Outliers and American Vanguard Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

2013

Great and Mighty Things: Outsider Art from the Sheldon and Jill Bonovitz Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

2012

Accidental Genius: Art From the Anthony Petullo Collection, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee

2006

Inner Worlds Outside, traveling exhibition, Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación "La Caixa," Madrid; WhiteChapel Gallery, London; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

2005

Dubuffet & Art Brut, traveling exhibition, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf; Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne; Musée d'art moderne Lille Métropole, Villeneuve d'Ascq

1992

Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

1985

The Heart of Creation: The Art of Martín Ramírez, Goldie Paley Gallery, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

The American Folk Art Museum, New York

The Anthony Petullo Collection, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee

Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA

Guggenheim Museum, New York

Museum of Modern Art, New York

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

Longhauser, Elsa, *Martín Ramírez: His Life In Pictures*, exhibition catalogue, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2017

Rousseau, Valérie and 29 additional scholars, *The Hidden Art: Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Self-Taught Artists from the Audrey B. Heckler Collection*, Skira/Rizzoli, 2017

Stone, Lisa, ed., *Accidental Genius: Art From the Anthony Petullo Collection*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, 2012.

Ramírez, Martín, *Martín Ramírez: Reframing Confinement*, exhibition catalogue, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2010.

Anderson, Brooke D., Martín Ramírez, Richard Rodriguez, and Wayne Thiebaud, *Martín Ramírez: The Last Works*, Ricco/Maresca Gallery, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2008.

Anderson, Brooke D., Victor M. Espinosa, and Martín Ramírez, *Martín Ramírez*, exhibition catalogue, American Folk Art Museum, New York, 2007.

Inner Worlds Outside, exhibition catalogue, Fundación "La Caixa," WhiteChapel Gallery, Irish Museum of Modern Art & Ediciones El Viso, Madrid, 2006.

Dubuffet & Art Brut, exhibition catalogue, 5 Continents Editions & Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, 2005.

Tuchman, Maurice and Carol S. Eiel, *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1992.

Martín Ramírez: Pintor Mexicano(1885-1960), exhibition catalogue, Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, 1989.

Bowman, Russell, et al., , exhibition catalogue, Goldie Paley Gallery, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, 1985.