

JESSE A. FERNÁNDEZ (1925-1986)

Jesse Antonio Fernandez was born in Habana in 1925. When he was seven years old, he moved with his mother and brother to Asturias (Spain), their original region, to escape from the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. In 1936, the Spanish Civil war starts and the family returns to Cuba, with the last boat leaving from Santander. *“I arrived in Cuba and suffered from a cultural shock... then, as I am very ‘habanero’, I spend my youth to the rhythm of ‘danzon’.”*

At fifteen, Jesse A. Fernandez enters the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Alejandro de La Habana. Gifted for painting, he studies there a few years, afterwards he moves to Philadelphia to study as an electronic engineer, a path he quickly abandons to devote himself to art. In New York, he studies painting under the guidance of George Grosz and Preston Dickinson. In 1948, he meets Wifredo Lam who introduces him to the European painters living in New York at that time: Marcel Duchamp, Esteban Frances, Frederic Kiesler. At the gatherings of the Painters' Club on 8th street, he meets Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Milton Resnick.

Between 1952 and 1954, he works for an advertising agency in Medellín (Colombia) where he meets Fernando Botero and Gabriel García Márquez. He begins to take photographs: *“Photography became a form of contact with reality. This is where I developed my own technique. I didn't know anything about photography, not even what a diaphragm was. However, I locked myself up with tons of books and I learnt. I am highly purist, and I was influenced by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Walker Evans.”*

Back in New York, he works as a photojournalist and, distributed by Gamma, his photographs are published in the great magazines. In 1958, he becomes Art Director at the magazine *Visión*. He travels throughout Central America, before photographing, in 1959, at the request of his friend Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Fidel Castro and the early months of the Cuban revolution for the newspapers *Revolución* and *Lunes de Revolución*.

At the end of 1959, he returns to New York and dedicates himself to painting. *“When I returned to New York, I had changed, and I decided to start from scratch. It was then that the first skulls appeared. Many of these skulls are landscapes. And I began repeatedly. The day arrived when, in my view, I had done away with the symbolism. It was just a question of space.* Living in the Village, he regularly meets Jorge Luis Borges, Joan Miro, Antoni Tapies, Antonio Saura, and teaches at the School of Visual Arts.

At the end of the 60s, still teaching in New York, he alternates his work with stays in Puerto Rico, in quest of a setting more conducive for creativity. He also begins to write as an art critic for the *San Juan Star*.

From 1974 to 1976, he lives between Toledo, that he considers *“the most beautiful town in the world”*, and Madrid where his work is regularly exhibited, especially his “boxes” - symbolic synthesis of association between his personal reading of history and universal culture. In 1977, he settles in France where he takes photographs of architecture and portraits of artists such as Joan Mitchell, Francis Bacon, Henri Moore... while participating to a large number of personal or group exhibitions.

At the beginning of the 80s are published *Retratos*, gathering his numerous portraits of artists and writers, and *Les Momies de Palerme*, an “hallucinating report”, will write Dominique Fernandez, the result of two months spent photographing the catacombs of the Capuchin in Palermo. Jesse A. Fernandez dies in Neuilly-sur-Seine on March 13th, 1986 and is buried at the Père-Lachaise cemetery.

Recent solo exhibitions

- 2022 Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris (France) | *An air of freedom, the Jazz of Jesse A. Fernández*
- 2019 Cervantes Institute of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Brasilia (Brazil) | *Errância e fotografia de Jesse A. Fernández*
Jesse A. Fernández, Galerie Nota Bene, Paris (France)
Museo Emilio Caraffa, Cordoba (Argentina) | *Errancia y fotografia, el mundo ispanico de Jesse A. Fernández*
INVESTEC Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town (South Africa); Galerie (S)ITOR
London Art Fair, London (UK); Galerie (S)ITOR
- 2018 Mexican Cultural Institute, Paris (France) | *From Mexico to Paris. Jesse A. Fernández*
Cervantes Institute of Palermo, Naples, and Rome (Italy) | *Vagabondaggio e fotografia, il mondo ispanico di Jesse A. Fernández*
- 2017 Casa de Colon, Salon Iberoamericano, Huelva (Spain) | *Errancia y fotografia, el mundo ispanico de Jesse A. Fernández*
Galerie David Guiraud, Paris (France) | *Jesse A. Fernández - une œuvre 1952-1986*
- 2016 American Jazz Museum, Kansas Public Library and The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (USA) | *Cuba Bound, Photographs by Jesse A. Fernández*
Gallery Throckmorton, New York (USA) | *Under the Cuban sun*
Centre International du Photojournalisme, Perpignan (France) | *Jesse A. Fernández*
- 2012 Maison de l'Amérique latine, Paris (France) | *Tours et détours, de La Havane à Paris*
Galerie Nota Bene, Paris (France) | *Jesse A. Fernández, l'œuvre graphique*
- 2011 ALM Gallery, Ramatuelle (France) | *Jesse A. Fernández. Portraits*
- 2010 Galerie 127, Marrakech (Morocco) | *El ojo que no ceja*
- 2004 Banco Herrero, Oviedo (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*
- 2003 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*

Recent group exhibitions

- 2021 Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris (France) | *Freedom of the line*
- 2020 Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris (France) | *The face of art. Jesse A. Fernandez and his models*
- 2019 Théâtre La Passerelle, Gap (France), Galerie Le Réverbère | *Mexique Aller-Retour*
- 2018 Galerie Le Réverbère, Lyon (France) | *Mexique Aller-retour*
- 2017 Florida Museum of Photography, Tampa (USA) | *Under the Cuban sun*
Galerie Marguerite Milin & (S)ITOR | *Le pied à terre au Médicis*
- 2016 Musée du Petit Palais, Paris (France) | *Dans l'atelier. L'artiste photographié, d'Ingres à Jeff Koons*
- 2013 Paris Photo, Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris (France)
- 2008 Circulo de Bellas Artes y Sala de la Comunidad, Madrid (Spain) | *Lenguajes de papel (dessins de la collection Pilar Citoler)*

Main exhibitions during the artist lifetime

- 1984 Museum of Contemporary Art, Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Retratos*
- 1981 Dominican American Cultural Institute, Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Fotografías*
Art museum of Collège Saint Pierre, Port au Prince (Haïti) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Photographies*
- 1980 Museum of Contemporary Art, Madrid (Spain) | *Retratos*
Museum of Contemporary Art, Caracas (Venezuela) | *Jesse A. Fernández*
Paris Opéra House, Paris (France) | *Les momies de Palerme*
American Cultural Centre, Brussels (Belgium) and Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*
Banque Internationale à Luxembourg (Luxembourg) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Boîtes, dessins, photographies, trois aspects d'une œuvre*
French American Institute, Rennes (France) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Photographies*
Maison de la culture, Rennes (France) | *Jesse Fernández, boîtes et dessins*
- 1979 Cali Chamber of Commerce et Cultural Centre of Venezuela in Bogota (Colombia) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Fotografías 1955-1979*
Galeria Theo, Madrid (Spain) | *Siete años et Otra dimensión*
American Cultural Centre, Paris (France) | *On Jackson Pollock*

- 1978 Maison de la culture, Orléans (France) | *Jesse Fernández*
1976 Galeria Ynguanzo, Madrid (Spain) | *Cajas*
FIAC, Paris (France). Galeria Ynguanzo
Basel Art Fair, Basel (Switzerland)
1975 Vienna, (Austria) | *Realismo fantástico en España*
1974 Galeria Ynguanzo, Madrid (Spain)
1973 Alliance Française et Gallery Botello, San Juan (Puerto Rico)
1972 Museum of San Juan, Puerto Rico
1971 Gallery El Moro, San Juan (Puerto Rico)
1961 Gallery D'Arcy, New York (USA)

Bibliography

- 2017 Errancia y fotografía, El mundo hispanico de Jesse A. Fernández. Instituto Cervantes
2012 Tours et détours, de La Havane à Paris. Filigranes / Maison de l'Amérique latine
2003 Jesse A. Fernández. Texts Juan Manuel Bonet, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Osbel Suárez. Aldeasa / Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia
1984 Retratos. Ediciones Cultura Hispanica, Instituto de Cooperacion iberoamericana
1980 Les Momies de Palerme. Foreword Dominique Fernández. Editions du Chêne
1976 Cajas. Galeria Ynguanzo, Madrid.

Jesse A. Fernández works are in the collections of MOMA (New York), Museo del Barrio (New York), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Museo de Bellas Artes (Caracas)... and in several private collections in South America, United states and Europe.
