

PRESS RELEASE

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Galerie

Paris

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mardi > samedi 11h > 19h

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Jesse A. Fernández

VANITAS

Art fair

12/14 May. 23

Opening cocktail on 12 May from 6pm



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Immortal. Elizabeth Taylor, New York, 1957 / Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980

Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 40 x 30 cm



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Success. Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980 / Françoise Sagan, New York, 1956

Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 40 x 30 cm

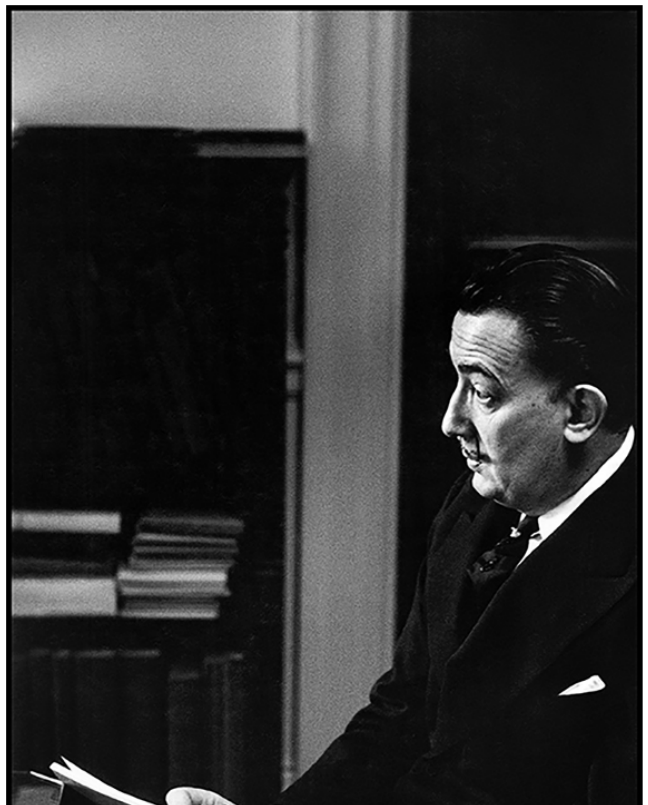




© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Mirror. Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980 / Joan Mitchell, Vétheuil, 1979

Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 30 x 24 cm - 30 x 40 cm



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Dandy. Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980 / Salvador Dali, New York, 1958

Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 40 x 30 cm



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In Palermo there is a cemetery unlike any other: the catacombs of the Capuchin convent. Since 1599 on for almost three centuries, a whole society has been buried there, from the humblest to the most noble: princes, bishops and public figures. Reclining or upright, isolated or in groups, here the dead have not been buried, hidden forever from the eyes of the living. Here, they are displayed, staged and deeply moving; corpses whose mummification has preserved their clothing, attitudes and expressions in a particularly disturbing way.

In black and white, using the little natural light escaping from the few light shafts, is an extraordinary photo reportage that Jesse A. Fernández made in 1980 for his friend Anne de Margerie, then director of Éditions du Chêne. With striking images, at times so poignant as to be unbearable, the expressive nature of these mummies seems to invite us to follow a sort of grandiose and funereal opera in which the glory, vanity, misery and decay of the world play the leading roles.

In this photo reportage of such an uniquely strange place, documentary intention is sublimated by the incisive eye of Jesse A. Fernández.

At the sight of these funereal pictures, are we obliged to classify them as macabre, disgusting, awful, horrible? Yes if we assume a visceral reaction without bothering to look deeper into the history and customs of Sicily. The mummies of Palermo are not macabre for the Sicilians, insofar as they are not perceived as dead bodies, as pieces of nothingness having definitively transformed into non-being, but as half-living people who have passed on to a different yet positive stage of existence, like soldiers on leave ready to return to humanity.

Alexandre Dumas, who among so many travellers is the one who best understood Italy, put it into context perfectly by speaking of the ironic familiarity of the Sicilians with their dead and the impossibility of believing in ghosts in a country where the dead are made to resemble the living!

What a contrast with France where today death is treated as an almost shameful episode, where we hurry to discreetly bury the dead and where funeral processions have disappeared from the streets.

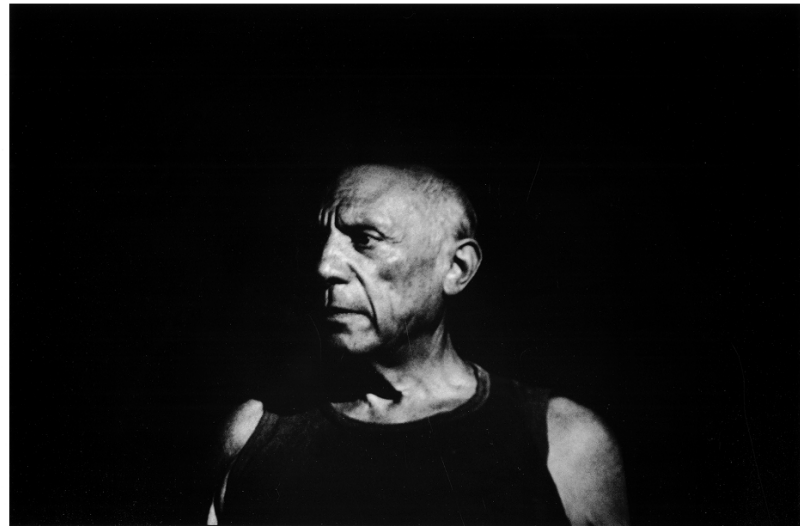
In the past, making love was a private affair and death a public one. Today, it is the opposite: beautiful revenge of Eros on Thanatos, writes Dominique Fernandez, who inspired the whole of this text by his work published by Éditions du Chêne on the mummies of Palermo by Jesse A. Fernández.

The juxtaposition of a well-known figure and «his mummy», as Jesse A. Fernández might well have imagined, allows the visitor to Photo Doc to look without looking away at this preserved humanity, explained in the extraordinary Capuchin convent. The diptychs presented by the gallery today allow us to perceive all their meaning.

And isn't it an incredible opportunity for these mummies to be able to resume the conversation interrupted in their home. For in these imaginary double self-portraits, it is indeed conversation and introspection that prevail.

Sitor Senghor
directeur





© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Vision. Pablo Picasso on television in *le mystère Picasso*, 1967 / Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980
Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 30 x 40 cm



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Blurred. Francis Bacon, London, 1978 / Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980

Tirages argentiques modernes (Chambre noire, Paris) / 30 x 40 cm - 24 x 30 cm - 30 x 40 cm



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Checkmate. Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980 / Françoise Sagan, New York, 1956

Modern silverprints (Chambre noire, Paris) / 30 x 40 cm



Biography



© Jesse A. Fernández Estate / Collection F. Mazin Fernández

Jesse Antonio Fernández was born in Havana in 1925. When he was seven years old, he moved with his mother and brother to Asturias (Spain), his parents' original homeland, to escape the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. In 1936, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the family returned to Cuba on the last boat leaving Santander. "I arrived in Cuba and suffered from culture shock... then, as I am very 'habanero', I spent my youth to the rhythm of 'danzón'."

At fifteen, Jesse A. Fernández entered the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Alejandro de La Habana. A gifted painter, he studied there for a few years, before going to Philadelphia to study as an electrical engineer, a path he quickly abandoned to devote himself to art. Once in New York, he would study painting under the guidance of George Grosz and Preston Dickinson at the Art Students League. In 1948, he met Wifredo Lam who introduced him to the European painters living in New York at the time: Marcel Duchamp, Esteban Frances, and Frederic Kiesler. It was at the gatherings of the Painters' Club on 8th street, that he met Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, and Milton Resnick.

Between 1952 and 1954, in Medellín (Colombia) he worked for an advertising agency where he met Fernando Botero and Gabriel García Márquez. He began 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 studied. I am a purist, and I was influenced by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Walker Evans."

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. Back in New York, he worked as a photojournalist. Distributed by Gamma, his photographs were published in well-known magazines and in 1958, he was hired as Art Director at the magazine *Visión*. He travelled 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 returned to New York and dedicated himself to painting.

“When I returned to New York, I had changed, and I decided to start over. It was then that the first skulls appeared. Many of these skulls are landscapes. And I would begin over and over again. The day arrived when, in my view, I had done away with the symbolism. It had become a simple question of space.” Living in the Village, he kept company with the likes of Jorge Luis Borges, Joan Miro, Antoni Tàpies, Antonio Saura, and taught at the New York School of Visual Arts.

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

From 1974 to 1976, he lived between Toledo, which he considered “the most beautiful city in the world”, and Madrid where his work was regularly exhibited, especially his “boxes” – symbolic synthesis of association between his personal reading of history and universal culture. In 1977, he settled in France where he took photographs of architecture and portraits of artists such as Joan Mitchell, Francis Bacon, Henry Moore... while participating in numerous solo or group exhibitions. At the beginning of the 80s he published *Retratos*, bringing together his many portraits of artists and writers, and *Les Momies de Palerme*, a “reportage hallucinant”, wrote Dominique Fernandez, the result of two months spent photographing the catacombs of the Capuchin in Palermo.

Jesse A. Fernández died in Neuilly-sur-Seine on 13 March 1986 and is buried in Père-Lachaise cemetery.



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Jesse and his mummies. Catacombs of the convent of the Capuchins, Palermo, 1980

Vintage silverprint (Chambre noire) / 22,5 x 29,6 cm



Selection of solo exhibitions

2023

Photo doc.; Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris | *Vanitas*

2022

Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris | *Air of Freedom*

2019

Institute Cervantes in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Brasilia (Brazil) | *Errancia y fotografía, el mundo ispanico de Jesse A. Fernández*

Jesse A. Fernández, Galerie Nota Bene, Paris | *Vis à vis*
Museo Emilio Caraffa, Cordoba (Argentina) | *Errancia y fotografía, el mundo ispanico de Jesse A. Fernández*

INVESTEC Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town (South Africa); (S)ITOR

London Art Fair, London (UK); (S)ITOR

2018

Institut culturel du Mexique, Paris | *De Mexico à Paris. Jesse A. Fernández*

Institute Cervantes in 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 fotografía, el mundo ispanico de Jesse A. Fernández*

Galerie David Guiraud, Paris | *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 | *Jesse A. Fernández*

2012

Maison de l'Amérique latine, Paris | *Tours et détours, de La Havane à Paris*

Galerie Nota Bene, Paris | *Jesse A. Fernández, l'œuvre graphique*

2011

ALM Gallery, Ramatuelle | *Jesse A. Fernández, Portraits*

2010

Galerie 127, Marrakech (Marocco) | *El ojo que no cejas*

2004

Banco Herrero, Oviedo (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*

2003

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*

Selection of group exhibitions

2021

Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris | *Freedom of the line*

2020

Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris | *The faces of art. Jesse A. Fernandez and his models*

2019

Théâtre La Passerelle, Gap; Galerie Le Réverbère | *Mexique Aller-Retour*

2018

Galerie Le Réverbère, Lyon | *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 | *Dans l'atelier. L'artiste photographié, d'Ingres à Jeff Koons*

2013

Paris Photo; Galerie Dominique Fiat

2008

Circulo de Bellas Artes y Sala de la Comunidad, Madrid (Spain) | *Lenguages de papel (drawings from the Pilar Citoler collection)*

Principales expositions du temps de l'Artiste

1984

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Retratos*

1981

Instituto Cultural Dominicano Americano of Saint Domingue (République Dominicaine) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Fotografías*



Musée d'art du Collège Saint Pierre, Port au Prince

(Haïti) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Photographies*

1980

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Retratos*

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Caracas (Venezuela) | *Jesse A. Fernández*

Opéra de Paris, Paris | *Les momies de Palerme*

American Center in Brussels (Belgium) and in Madrid (Spain) | *Jesse A. Fernández*

Banque Internationale à Luxembourg (Luxembourg) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Boîtes, dessins, photographies, trois aspects d'une oeuvre*

Institut franco-américain, Rennes | *Jesse A. Fernández, Photographies*

Maison de la culture, Rennes | *Jesse Fernández, boîtes et dessins*

1979

Chamber of Commerce in Cali and Cultural Centre of Venezuela in Bogota (Colombia) | *Jesse A. Fernández, Fotografías 1955-1979*

Galeria Theo, Madrid (Spain) | *Siete años e Otra dimensión*

American Center, Paris | *On Jackson Pollock*

1978

Maison de la culture, Orléans | *Jesse Fernández*

1976

Galeria Ynguanzo, Madrid (Spain) | *Cajas*

FIAC, Paris; Galeria Ynguanzo

Art Basel, 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)

Ouvrages

2021

La liberté du trait. Text Zoé Valdes. Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris

2020

L'art a un visage. Jesse A. Fernandez et ses modèles. Texts Serge Fauchereau and Juan Manuel Bonet. Galerie Orbis pictus, Paris

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 Fernandez. Editions du Chêne

1976

Cajas. Galeria Ynguanzo, Madrid



Photo Doc.

Le salon des nouvelles écritures de la photographie documentaire



AUTO PORTRAIT :
VERS UN COMMUN DE L'ŒUVRE
12 — 14 mai 2023 Halle des Blancs Manteaux
48, rue vieille du temple 75004 Paris

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