

The Museum of Modern Art

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106
NO. 37
FOR RELEASE:
APRIL 27, 1974

PROJECTS: RAFAEL FERRER ISLA

An environmental work, ISLA, has been installed in The Museum of Modern Art by the well-known Puerto Rican artist Rafael Ferrer where it will be on view through May 27. Ferrer has used several materials which evoke the exotic, such as logs, a 16' fishing boat, neon signs, and a stuffed anaconda snake.

Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, in 1933, Rafael Ferrer attended Syracuse University and the University of Puerto Rico. After several years of travel in Europe he settled in New York, then returned to Puerto Rico to live. In 1966, he moved to Philadelphia, where he still lives and teaches.

In the late 1960s, Ferrer's sculpture moved away from the formalist concerns of such artists as Anthony Caro and David Smith when he incorporated flexible steel sheets which sagged and thereby assumed, under the force of gravity, their own shape. His subsequent pieces utilized, among other materials, leaves, ice, hay and grease, which epitomized an interest shared by several artists at the time in new materials, process, impermanence and/or changes in time, and the making of pieces for and at specific sites.

Critic Carter Ratcliff, in a catalog Deseo (available in the Museum bookstore) published in conjunction with a Ferrer exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1973, has stressed the importance of the symbolic function in Ferrer's work. Whereas much recent art has operated within certain critical conventions or rules called by Ratcliff "the post-Romantic sign system," Ferrer has challenged this "conventionalized avant-garde" with his "vitality, his aggressiveness, his capacity to return to the most valuable

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aspect of the modern personality -- its reliance on its own creative capacities...."

Ferrer's most recent work has extended this symbolic function through an ever more complex elaboration of varied and often ambiguous objects and configurations. His structures utilize the building techniques and materials of vernacular architecture, particularly that of the tropics, and images of travel or voyaging -- maps, names of faraway places, boats -- are prominent in his work. These pieces defy easy categorization with such recent art movements as conceptual art or body art. Ferrer's work is a continuing propagation of symbolic images and objects which are often strange, ambiguous and dramatic in their juxtaposition.

The Rafael Ferrer exhibition is directed by Kynaston McShine, Curator of Painting and Sculpture, and is part of the Museum's Projects series devoted to recent explorations in art. Projects is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, The Museum of Modern Art gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the New York State Council on the Arts.

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