

RUBY CITY

ARTURO HERRERA:
CONSTRUCTED
COLLAGE



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STUDIO

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ARTURO HERRERA: CONSTRUCTED COLLAGE



Dance (1 suite, 9 prints), 2014, photogravure, ed. 19/24, sizes vary. Gift of the artist, Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas. © Arturo Herrera

Arturo Herrera became well-known in the 1990s for his collages that contain traces of recognizable images and precisely cut forms derived from popular culture source material like coloring books. *Constructed Collage* focuses on works made shortly thereafter, between 1998 and 2019. Collectively they demonstrate Herrera’s ongoing investment in collage—an example of which is on view here—but perhaps more important, the pivotal impact collage exerts on all facets of his practice, including his expansive conception of this art form. The implications of this influence are reflected in any medium in which he works, whether printmaking, drawing, painting, sculpture or cut-felt wall hangings, all of which are represented in this exhibition.

Collage is an important touchstone for Herrera because he considers it the quintessential expression of, in his words, our “fragmented world, which we make sense of by associative

thinking.” He relies on a visual language rooted in the practice of combining, fragmenting and layering. Prints such as *Las Bodas* (2019) and *Dance* (2014) demonstrate the artist’s natural affinity for a process akin to cutting and pasting. Printmaking also allows for the combination of multiple sources (in countless ways) into a completed whole. Even the large-scale painting/sculpture *Here* (2000), with its incised drawing, derives its appearance from Herrera’s collages that incorporate fragments of images reduced to simple gestures and shapes capable of suggesting multiple associations—in this instance, as he’s indicated, to a small river, tree, road or passageway.

Herrera also considers collage from a three-dimensional perspective. *Untitled* (2002), a red cut-felt wall hanging, and sculptural wall works such as the cloudlike *All Day* (2000) and *Adam* (2013), an offsite public wall painting, are, in his words, “collaged elements in space.” Similar to his works on paper, they often feature precisely excised sections or areas devoid of color, but they also function as evocative forms Herrera can juxtapose and combine. This enables him to conceive of collage on a grand scale, capable of transforming a gallery or even an urban space.

Arturo Herrera: Constructed Collage also reveals the artist’s encouragement of audiences to bring their own interpretations to his works. Confronted everywhere—online and in person—by disjointed images, viewers constantly interpret this kaleidoscope of information that is contemporary existence. Herrera revels in this experience, noting that through collage “we can always see the world in new and unexpected ways.”

DRAWING AND COLLAGE

Herrera's ongoing engagement with collage has influenced his drawing practice, and examples of this abound in the exhibition. *Untitled* (2003), the yellow sculptural form at the entrance to the gallery; *Untitled* (2002), the red felt wall hanging and *Untitled* (2000), four black-and-white prints, are among those based on drawings by Herrera. As fluid or spontaneous as his line work appears, his drawings and the works derived from them actually take their appearance from the exacting forms he cuts from printed materials, the singular juxtapositions of such forms, and the striking negative spaces he creates.



Untitled, 2003, urethane on mdf, 19 x 17 in. Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas.
© Arturo Herrera

EXPANDED COLLAGE

Herrera views collage expansively, as something one might move through and experience physically rather than only look at. In his conception, the careful placement of his unframed works in a gallery or public space result in vivid, three-dimensional collages. He takes an avid interest in the presentation of his work and, like many other artists, recognizes that narrative and meaning can be influenced by how works are installed and how they relate to each other. *All Day* (2000), a small, bulbous form that sits high on the wall, might conjure a horizon or sky given its positioning and cloudlike appearance. The diminutive *Untitled (BLUE)* (1998), installed on the floor, draws one's eyes down and may signal the outline of animals or plant forms. *Bang* (2015), situated on its pedestal in proximity to these others, inserts a slightly more ominous tone or narrative, given the cake form's similarity to a mushroom cloud caused by an atomic bomb.



Las Bodas, 2019. silkscreen collage, 15.5 x 22 in. each. Gift of Arturo Herrera, Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas. © Arturo Herrera

LAS BODAS, 2019

For over thirty years, Herrera has been an avid admirer of dance. This passion, combined with his investment in collage, is laid bare in *Las Bodas* [The Weddings]. Herrera's suite of prints combines multiple source materials and is based on Igor Stravinsky's 1923 musical score composed for a ballet about a Russian peasant wedding, *Les Noces* [The Wedding]. An obscured fragment of a photograph featuring the original dancers in rehearsal serves as the background of each print. Collaged atop is a copy of Stravinsky's sheet music, with silkscreened drawings executed by the artist as the final layer. Herrera's dynamic line work is a visual representation of the music and movement integral to the ballet.

DANCE, 2014

Herrera's passion for dance has led him to make works throughout his career in response to this art form. The suite of nine prints in *Dance* demonstrates his constantly evolving approach to creating compositions based on cutting, layering and pasting source material. The basis for this suite is *Danse*, a book by Serge Lido originally published in 1947 that features photographs of notable dancers rehearsing, performing or at rest. Herrera selected specific images upon which he laid discarded materials, such as string or misshapen wire or metal, he found in the print studio. The results are "spontaneous collages" made permanent through the printmaking process. Although the dancers are mostly concealed, their poses and movements are matched by the lively, abstract shapes that seamlessly form the completed image.



Bang, 2015, mixed media, 13 X 19 X 12 in., edition 1/15. Gift of Arturo Herrera, Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas. © Arturo Herrera

BANG, 2015

The limited edition work *Bang* represents the intersection of printmaking, sculpture and collage. A cake pan with printed images and paint applied by hand sits on a brightly colored platform, itself a collage, covered with printed images on various materials. The resulting work is an explosion of colors, images and textures that seems to keep one's eye constantly moving. Herrera's choice of title reflects this frenetic, even joyful, energy and suggests an underlying tension. The artist chose the oversize cupcake form because it reminded him of a mushroom cloud caused by an atomic bomb. Ranging between two extremes, *Bang*, like much of Herrera's work, offers and encourages multiple readings.



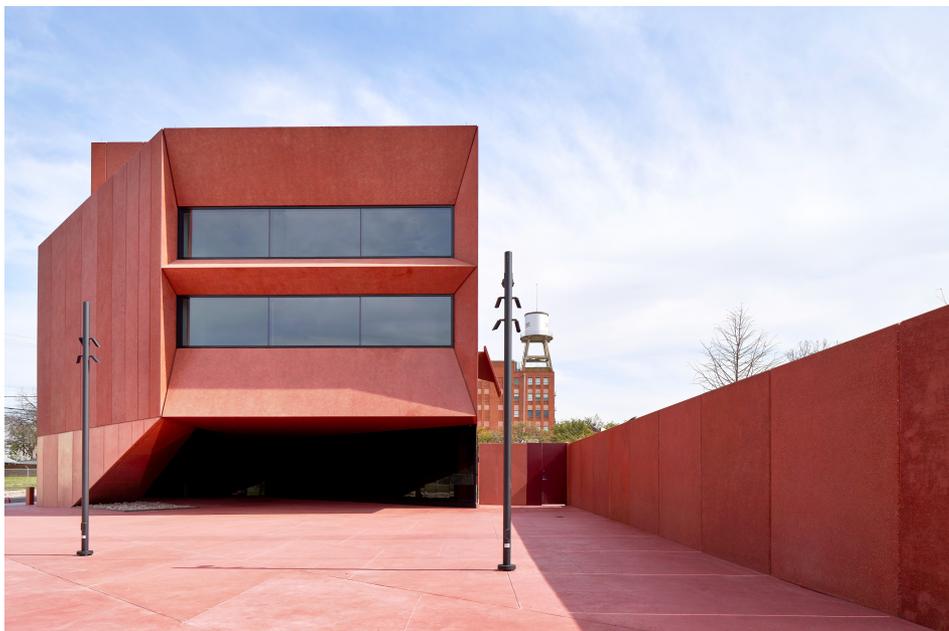
Adam, 2013, site-specific wall painting, location: Main Plaza, Frost Bank Parking Garage at the northwest corner of Commerce St. and Main Ave, 25 × 98 ft. Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas. © Arturo Herrera

ADAM, 2013

Adam, Herrera's large-scale outdoor painting, is inspired by, as he states, "movement, the dynamism of abstraction and a soaring energetic field, like spring, when everything awakens." Located in downtown San Antonio's Main Plaza, *Adam* is also indicative of how the artist approaches public projects with a collagist perspective.

Main Plaza is considered the 1730 birthplace of San Antonio. Its historic charm remains, as does its importance as a hub for culture, commerce and municipal administration. The contemporary city that has grown around the Plaza continues to permeate, infusing it with a cacophony of visual experiences. *Adam* adds another layer to the Plaza's period mishmash and prevailing liveliness. Here, Herrera's work functions on a larger scale as a collaged form he inserted into the pictorial plane that is the entirety of the Plaza. In so doing, he builds upon the energy of the site and the medley of images that continually shapes our individual conceptions of the urban landscape.

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Back cover: Photo by Dror Baldinger.

Front cover: *Untitled*, 2002, wool felt, color, 84 x 44 in. Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas. © Arturo Herrera

About the artist:

Arturo Herrera was born in 1959 in Caracas, Venezuela and currently lives in Berlin. His work is exhibited internationally with selected solo exhibitions including: *Together* (wall painting), Bass Museum of Art, Miami, FL (2020); *HOP*, Kunst-station im Hauptbahnhof, Wolfsburg, Germany (2018); *Opener 29 Arturo Herrera: Day Before*, Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum & Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, New York, NY (2015); *Hammer Project: Arturo Herrera*, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2001); *Before We Leave*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City (2001). Herrera has been the recipient of many awards including a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. Selected public collections include: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York City; Tate Modern, London; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; among others.