

## Feliciano Centurión: Sol naciente January 9 – February 8, 2025

Ortuzar is pleased to present *Feliciano Centurión: Sol naciente*, a solo exhibition exploring the work of Paraguayan artist Feliciano Centurión (1962–1996), which takes its title, meaning “rising sun,” from a textile work on display. In a short but prolific career, Centurión emerged as a significant figure in Buenos Aires’s cultural scene in the 1990s, mingling regional folk arts with queer aesthetics and humor. Centurión summarized his practice in a letter to a friend: “I embrace ... the banal, the ironic, the playful, happiness, and amusement. Images from dreams, from the everyday, obvious, with a taste of kitsch, all of which confirm to me that painting is simply an act of faith.”<sup>1</sup> By employing historically feminine crafts and incorporating found kitsch elements, Centurión challenged traditional gender norms and celebrated self-expression.<sup>2</sup> Ortuzar’s first exhibition with the artist’s estate features Centurión’s *frazadas*, readymade blankets with embroidered, painted or collaged elements, including *ñandutí*, an Indigenous Paraguayan lace technique; early erotic drawings; and sculptures from his “Familia” series, in which he clothed toy animals in handmade outfits; all executed in the brief period between 1988 and 1994.

Born in San Ignacio, Paraguay, and raised in a matriarchal household, Centurión’s use of craft was inspired by his mother and grandmother, who taught and encouraged him to knit, sew and crochet. After enduring a series of catastrophic floods in Alberdi and fearing the actions of Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner in the early 1970s, Centurión’s family relocated to Argentina, where he remained for the rest of his life. By 1980 Centurión settled in Buenos Aires, joining the city’s bohemian scene and the burgeoning LGBT liberation movement of post-totalitarian Argentina. He also became involved with the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas (El Rojas), a cultural hub established in 1984 that became a pivotal platform for his artistic exploration and hosted over thirty exhibitions of Centurión’s work during his lifetime.

Centurión repurposed household items, toys and other mundane objects purchased from local markets into his work. In his *frazadas*, Centurión treated cheap, patterned blankets as canvases, using embroidery, applique, lace, painting and collage to create playful yet profound scenes. Several untitled textile works feature traditional *ñandutí*, a lace-making technique originating from Guaraní culture that translates to “spider web.” A craft passed down through his family, the humble materials become radiant suns, evoking the generational passage of time. Through their relationship to the body and touch, Centurión’s *frazadas*—many originally used as moving blankets—are metaphors for the refuge the artist sought throughout his life as an immigrant and a queer man. In other works, the artist incorporates toy animals, plating a fake herring on a painted dish or making a small plastic crocodile lie along a depicted river bank. His “Familia” series comprises a family of plastic toy animals eccentrically dressed in hand-knit and crocheted outfits. These material choices imbue Centurión’s art with humor, a childlike *joie de vivre* and sense of play, expressing the pleasure and fantasy possible in our everyday lives.

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1 Feliciano Centurión quoted in *Feliciano Centurión* (New York: Americas Society and the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art, 2020), p. 8.

2 Feliciano Centurión, in correspondence with Verónica Torres, quoted by Fernando Davis in *Feliciano Centurión: Las intensidades de la belleza*, a curatorial text for an exhibition at CAV/Museo del Barro, Asunción, 2013.

Centurión's textiles are rich with personal and cultural narratives, adorned with diaristic texts, coded patterns and mystical symbols rooted in South American traditions. Often Centurión enhanced or modified the blankets' existing designs: overpainting animal motifs, adding in foliage to create an environment, or blanking out areas with paint to emphasize individual elements. Appropriation became a breakthrough strategy for the artist: "... to work on a support that was anything but neutral, with edges, with an identity all its own, something other than a canvas on a stretcher, something with its own presence."<sup>3</sup> His transformation of these kitsch commodities elevates an otherwise humble medium into banners bearing powerful cultural symbols. The tiger, for example, is often associated with power and ferocity in Latin American political and literary contexts, while the crocodile represents fertility in Aztec cosmologies.<sup>4</sup> By reinscribing these figures through feminized crafts, Centurión subverted their traditional meanings, queering both the objects and their symbolic associations.<sup>5</sup>

Following his HIV diagnosis in 1992, during a period of limited medical treatments, Centurión began to incorporate references to his illness in his work. The frazadas, now more intimate in scale, became a space for self-expression, where Centurión could explore and assert his identity, mortality and resilience. The seemingly cheerful embroideries began to carry more weighted meditations: his phrasings—like *Que en nuestras almas no entre el terror* (May terror not enter our souls)—function both as personal mantras and political protests. Through these works, Centurión invited viewers to find the meaning in the everyday, transforming his pain into a nuanced celebration of the complexity of both life and death.

Recent solo exhibitions of Centurión's work include *Telas y Textos*, Duke House at the Institute of Fine Art, New York University (2023); *Ñande Róga*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2021); *Abrigo*, Americas Society, New York (2020); and *Affective Affinities*, as part of the 33rd São Paulo Biennial (2018). Recent group exhibitions include *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art*, Barbican Centre, London (2024); *Threads to the South*, ISLAA, New York (2024); *Eros Rising: Visions of the Erotic in Latin American Art*, ISLAA, New York (2022); and *Bodies of Water*, 13th Shanghai Biennale (2021). His work is held in the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin; MALBA (Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires; Museo Castagnino+Macro, Argentina; Centro de Artes Visuales/Museo del Barro, Paraguay; and the Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid.

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3 Feliciano Centurión quoted in "Feliciano Centurion, el pintor de las frazadas," *ABC*, November 5, 1992.

4 Nicholas J. Saunders, "Predators of Culture: Jaguar Symbolism and Mesoamerican Elites," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): pp. 104–17.

5 Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Karen Marta, *Feliciano Centurión* (New York: ISLAA, Institute for Studies on Latin American Art, 2020), p. 32.