



Latin America Rediscovered



NICOLAS LEIVA

Ana Sokoloff

Nicolás Leiva began working with ceramics in the mid 1990s when he was encouraged by his friend and gallerist Gary Nader to make a dinner set for his personal use. Leiva, taken by the challenge, went to a family owned shop run by a Cuban man named Uria. The first plates and amphoras made by Leiva were painted on the commercial molds that the workshop had. Leiva recalls that he treated these as a blank canvas on which he expressed his full creative force. The end results were very colorful and depicted organic forms, similar to those present in his paintings of the time.

Leiva grew fascinated with the potential that this medium offered to his own artistic development. Likewise, Nader and the public in general received the pieces with applause, further tempting the artist to get involved with the production of ceramics and its aesthetic possibilities. In the late 1990s Leiva went to Italy and spent three months in the Graciano Pompilli workshop. Today he travels five or six times a year to work with the expert ceramists at the Bottega Gatti workshop in Faenza. Ceramic production has taken a primordial role in his current body of work.

The ceramic objects that Leiva produces at present start from a sketch. When not in Italy working with clay, Leiva spends his time drafting possible designs to be produced in ceramic. In Italy, he always collaborates with a master ceramist. This gives Leiva the opportunity to focus on the artistic possibilities of his work and to achieve new limits in the ceramic world. His ideas and his interest in the pictorial

experimentation of glazing and coloring along with the knowledge of the master technician, allows them to push the boundaries of the procedure into achieving new textures and finishes for the objects created.

Seeing ceramics as an extension of painting and a natural progression in his work, Leiva has informed his objects with the same ideas that shape his oeuvre. He believes in art as an extension and celebration of life: life as form, life as color, as an organic progression of activities. As such, he explores ideas of sexuality, fecundity, family and religion while trying to achieve all embracing installations that result in a direct confrontation of the spectator with the oeuvre itself.

Leiva is currently working on a large-scale installation in ceramic that will force the viewer to enter a confined room where he will be embraced by the artist's exuberant world of color and form. Inspired on the Kama Sutra, he is creating a space where pleasure plays a definitive role in the unconscious transformation of the world undergone by the spectator when entering it.

Leiva sees part of his body of work as "toys for adults"; he has designed blue jeans for women, painted cars, motorcycles, and surfboards. What interests him most are the open possibilities of enjoyment, beyond the mere contemplation of the object, that these particular things grant the spectator. Beyond the message that the artist intends to transmit, the experience is more complete and allows for the true fusion of art and life.

Ana Sokoloff recently held the positions of assistant vice president and senior specialist of Latin American paintings at Christie's in New York. She is an art scholar and curator, and is currently engaged in freelance work.

Facing page 23: Caja (1999), 11" x 13" x 8 1/2", ceramic.

Overleaf pages 24-25: Detail of El Jardín de las Delicias (2000), dimensions variable, ceramic.