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ALEJANDRO IKONICOFF

Works and Documents from the 2000s

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Alejandro Ikonicoff Collection

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By Alejandra Aguado

In the 2000s, an energetic artistic scene emerged, carving out space both within and beyond the legitimizing and traditional art institutions. Rallying around the banner of contemporaneity—a category that fueled the drive to follow one's own creative instincts without the pressure of adhering to a particular artistic tradition or discipline, yet with the demand and risk of radicality—artists forged a deep connection with the material reality of their context. They used it both as medium and subject, unfolding in their expansive works the tensions and experiences brought about by consumer culture, technological developments, economic precarity, the frenzy of the urban landscape, the relentless flow of information, and a field of social relations—of friendship, love, or affinity—whose nature they rendered visible.

Domestic, urban, commercial, and nocturnal landscapes reappeared in their work with frankness, yet permeated by absurdity, humor, melancholy, extravagance, and beauty—embraced not with resignation but with the capacity to find opportunity within that very reality.

Through operations of seemingly simple appearance, these artists transformed the commonplace into something novel and compelling. They mutated the ingredients of everyday scenarios into playful scenes and delirious images, into dreamlike and intimate visions, into codes capable of deciphering reality while posing questions about our existence at the threshold of the new millennium. A cocktail that combined futuristic fantasy, extreme crisis, and a sense of liftoff.

Driven by this transformative force in a city that was ablaze, many artists committed to an art that sought to generate meaning in the very instant of its manifestation: when it appeared in a specific space and was shared with an audience that consisted, fundamentally, of their peers. A community inclined toward gathering and conversation accompanied the experiments that emerged in workshops, clinics, galleries, and awards, or that took shape through self-managed or spontaneous projects unfolding in parks, streets, and urban spaces. Artists sought to expand the spaces of production and exhibition so as to bypass conventions and avoid preambles—regardless of whether this meant that neither they nor the audience had a "user

manual"—in the words of Leopoldo Estol—for interpreting or pre-formulating these practices.

A large portion of the production of that moment—both large-scale installations and singular two- or three-dimensional works—thus arose in the heat of collective processes and as a result of exchange and collaboration. Theirs was a democratic art—created with materials and methods at hand, generally inexpensive and artificial—popular in the familiarity of its imagery and sharp in its vision. While grounded in the given world—plastic objects, the image of a vase on a table, cigarettes, the multiplying potential of a photocopier, the imprint of a sidewalk on paper, light on a plastic bag, a set of markers, song lyrics, the graphic logic of a video game, or basic cleaning products—these works became powerful expressions of singularity and locality.

They succeeded in unraveling the origins of magic, empathy, provocation, and the inconveniences of the everyday; they displayed without modesty their simplicity and their material rawness or stridency; they revealed that even amid material abundance or crowds, solitude and longing persist. They unfolded the seams of established order to let candor, danger, disgust, or excess escape; they conceived their works as safe-conducts for channeling hidden or marginal logics that could be perceived once the initial impression of chaos was overcome.

In many cases—especially when approaching large-scale projects—they amplified pleasure and intensity to the limits that body and spirit could sustain, introducing into the artistic landscape new images and operations that acted as manifestos of the energy with which those days were lived. As Lucrecia Palacios wrote of some artists of this generation, "all of them (...) knew that the world was not beautiful, but it was real and could come through the window at any moment."

Alejandro Ikonicoff's collection emerged in the midst of these practices and from his shift toward the visual arts, redirecting energy he had previously invested in attending rock concerts and aspiring to become a music producer. But it also took shape because he was in the right place at the right time: the gallery Belleza y Felicidad, which he reached through artists Cecilia Szalkowicz and Gastón Pérsico. He had a familial connection with them, and they became his gateway into the Buenos Aires creative scene—from the artists' side.

Motivated by the vitality and experimental nature of this scene, by an art that "didn't ask for permission"—as Eduardo Navarro described it to me—Ikonicoff joined this creative momentum and made available a program of exchange with artists, spaces, and collectives that sought to be mutually enriching. Documenting this scene as a community also became part of the focus of his collection, as well as a kind of shortcut for thinking about how to encompass a representative set of practices. This was facilitated by the programmatic character of certain spaces that artists frequented at the time and that consolidated important communities and networks: workshops such as Pablo Siquier's in the early 2000s, the Kuitca Scholarship Program (2003–05 and 2010–11), and the Art Program created by Inés Katzenstein at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella.

Ikonicoff's was a way of participating, collecting, and supporting production that was far from orthodox, nourished by spontaneous agreements, characterized by closeness and a productive tendency toward vertigo that allowed him to align with some of the risks taken by artists of the time. Examples include Eduardo Navarro's Anti-Smoking Marathon (2005) or the installation project Jardines de mayo, curated by Fernanda Laguna at Casa de la Cultura in 2006. His almost fanatical openness to unconventional forms of art led him to acquire works such as Pasaje Ámbar by Juliana Iriart (2006); some of Luciana Lamothe's earliest public-space exercises (2003), where she recorded the imprint of sidewalks or fences on paper; or Diego Bianchi's pieces filled with organic elements, produced from 2002 onward.

In many cases, the speed and spontaneity of projects—often conceived without expectations of permanence—found him incorporating objects, paintings, photographs, or drawings that were part of artistic processes or fragments and traces of larger projects. Fundamentally, however, the works he acquired signaled an active relationship with their authors. Ikonicoff's receptiveness and his way of contributing—like others who directed their support toward sustaining both life and work—helped channel the particular energy that arises from artistic practice when ideas are freed from constraint. All of this left, in its wake, a kind of treasure chest that we now call a collection.

From those beginnings in the rooms and on the sidewalk of Belleza y Felicidad, countless events followed in which Ikonicoff participated as viewer, collaborator, or collector. These include Parque, Leopoldo Estol's first solo exhibition at Ruth Benzacar (2005); the overwhelming project by Estol and Diego Bianchi, La Escuelita Hirshhorn, at Belleza y Felicidad (2005); Diego

Bianchi's solo exhibition Imperialismo Minimalismo at Alberto Sendrós (2006); the RIIA residencies; Luciana Lamothe's first solo exhibition at Juana de Arco (2005); Eduardo Navarro's early drawing show at Belleza y Felicidad (2004); Juliana Iriart's exhibition at Appetite (2006); or the experiences proposed by the collective Rosa Chancho, such as Fuerza y elegancia, the delirious daytime party with a limousine ride in 2007. The collection also records his engagement with the studios and exhibitions of a wide range of artists—including Gabriela Forcadell, Javier Barilaro, Guillermo Ueno, Cecilia Szalkowicz, Sandro Pereira, Martín Legón, Diego de Adúriz, Máximo Pedraza, Lux Lindner, Max Gómez Canle, Marcelo Galindo, Rosana Schoijett, Miguel Mitlag, Adrián Villar Rojas, Mónica Heller, and Irina Kirchuk—who, among others, have left a strong mark on the development of visual arts from the early 2000s to the present.

The collection as a whole also maps the projects and spaces that shaped the Buenos Aires art scene of the time and that Ikonicoff avidly traversed: venues that included, beyond Belleza y Felicidad, Espacio Giesso, Hotel Boquitas Pintadas, the galleries Ruth Benzacar, Dabbah Torrejón, Daniel Abate, Alberto Sendrós, Foster Catena, Jardín Oculto, and Appetite, among many others, as well as awards such as Currículum 0 and arteBA-Petrobras.

An intimate diary, a catalogue of techniques, a record of an economy, a sentimental manual, a pop explosion, late-night art, worlds prior to the existence of the smartphone, a material journey to experiences from some twenty years ago—the Alejandro Ikonicoff Collection—of which this exhibition presents only a fragment—is, like any archive, one and many things. Today it contributes to revisiting a body of work full of vigor that brought about a profound renewal of local artistic production in the 2000s, and whose relevance and maturity we witness today. A collection filled with anecdotes that reconstruct affinities, searches, and the ways in which ideas circulated, bringing together germinal and authentic works—those we seek when we attempt to reach the core of artists' concerns and obsessions. Practices that were, borrowing the words of Divididos, a "curious engine of humanity," and that together unfold, without reservation, what defined this moving repertoire of imaginations and singular languages.

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.Galería Nora Fisch | Av. San Juan 701, Buenos Aires, Argentina
+54.911.62352030 | www.norafisch.com | ig:@galerianorafish