

RAFAEL FERRER

Born 1933, Santurce, Puerto Rico

Lives and works in Greenport, NY / Vieques, PR

Rafael Ferrer was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1933. He attended the Staunton Military Academy in Virginia, where he cultivated an interest in music. In 1951 and '52, he studied at Syracuse University, then returned to Puerto Rico in 1953, resuming his education at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. He studied painting and literature with exiled Spanish Surrealist Eugenio Fernández Granell, who introduced him to the Surrealists in Europe on his first visit there in 1954. In Paris, Ferrer met André Breton and developed a close friendship with Wifredo Lam, who exerted a profound influence on the young artist and fueled his passion for Afro-Caribbean music and culture. On his return to Puerto Rico, in 1953, Ferrer continued painting and became a professional musician. In 1955 he moved to New York City, where he found work as a musician in East Harlem.

Ferrer's relationship to Puerto Rico is a significant theme in his work, his repeated migrations between the island and the cities of the Northeastern United States continually, surfacing in abstract and narrative forms. He first exhibited his art in Puerto Rico in 1961, but he felt his collaged paintings, environments, and Minimalist sculptures were misunderstood, prompting him to move, in 1966, to Philadelphia, where he began teaching at the Philadelphia College of Art. In the later 1960s, he shifted toward Conceptual and process-oriented actions and environments, in which he combined ephemeral, industrial, and natural materials.

In the 1970s, Ferrer made narrative installations including a series of hanging kayaks and a set of drawings on maps and navigational charts, both projects suggestive of voyages. In *50 Cakes of Ice*, Ferrer's contribution to the exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art (1970), he installed the 300-pound blocks of the title on the bridge of the long pool in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden and left them to melt, aligning their physical transformation with shifting states of consciousness. (Ferrer has spoken of a fascination with ice as a "magical" material not often seen naturally in the Caribbean.) He returned to easel painting and figuration in the 1980s, depicting the culture of the tropics in ways that undermine stereotypical imagery of the region. Ferrer's re-engagement with painting lasted for nearly two decades, during which he lived and worked part-time in the Dominican Republic.

Ferrer has had solo exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1970); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1971); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (1971 and 1979); and Museum of Modern Art, New York (1974). A major traveling retrospective of his work was organized by El Museo del Barrio, New York, in 2010. Ferrer participated in the important group exhibitions *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern (1969, recreated at the Fondazione Prada, Venice, 2013); and *Op Losse Schroeven*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1969). He has also exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1969 and 1984); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1970 and 1984); Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1971); and Museum of Contemporary Art,

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Chicago (1971 and 1972). His work was featured in the Whitney Biennial, New York, in 1972 and 1981. He has also received commissions for public art projects in the Bronx, New York (1979), Philadelphia (1982 and 2013), and Puerto Rico (2004). Ferrer is the recipient of several grants, including three from the National Endowment for the Arts (1972, 1975, and 1989). He lives and works in Long Island, New York, and Vieques, Puerto Rico.

The above text is borrowed from the Guggenheim Museum's online profile of Ferrer: [LINK](#)

For more information on Rafael Ferrer, please visit his website: [LINK](#)