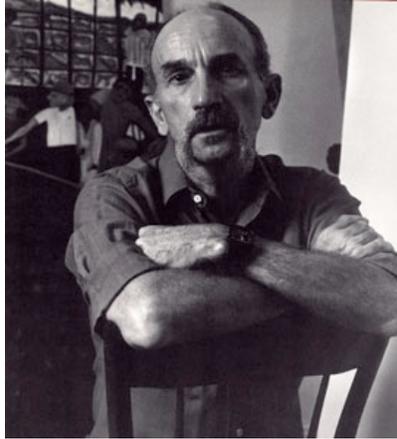




## Rafael Ferrer, SMA '51



Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1933 and entered Staunton Military Academy (SMA) in the fall of 1947 as a freshman. He learned to play drums at SMA and was in the Winsocki Octet as a sophomore and junior and was a member of the Blue Knights as a senior. He was also a member of the varsity rifle team as a senior and the Sergeant-at- arm of the Senior Class. Rafael graduated as a Lieutenant in the Band IN 1951 and went on to Syracuse University from 1951 to 1953. In 1953 he returned to Puerto Rico and enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, where he spent one year studying with Eugenio Granell, a surrealist painter and writer who was an exile of the Spanish Civil War. Through this teacher he met many of the surrealist group in Paris, including its "High Priest" André Breton. His most important early connection was a friendship with the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, who gave and dedicated one of his drawings to the young Ferrer.

Since his years at Staunton, where he learned to play drums, he has been involved with Afro-Cuban Music. In the early 1950s he moved to New York to work as a musician. He was a professional percussionist until 1960, after which he used it as a means of support while he focused more on his work as an artist in his studio. Since the mid-1960s, he has had exhibitions and given lectures and seminars across the US, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Ferrer's success began in the late 1960s with installations engaging conceptual and process art. These first involved actions, such as his "3 Leaf Pieces" at the Castelli Warehouse and then developed into installations that became progressively more narrative in tone, which included complicated artifacts assembled and fabricated by the artist which inferred voyages. Many of these artifacts became part of recurring themes or series, including this paper bag faces, kayaks and maps, themes that he returns to up to the present. These installations were done at prominent museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museums Of Contemporary Art in both Philadelphia and Chicago. In the 1980s he became known for his expressionistic paintings of his native Caribbean,

works that dealt with the tropic's under belly, breaking the stereotype of the tourist cliché. These works deal with the marvelous, the rough, the frightful and the beautiful as seen through the eyes of one born of these regions. Painting enabled Ferrer to go back to the privacy of working alone in his studio.

Aside from his continuing interest in sculptures made in the studio, Ferrer has been commissioned to create permanent sculptures, such as "Puerto Rican Sun" featured on Art in America, March 1980 issue. Fabricated by Lippincott out of steel, it was erected in the South Bronx in 1979. The sculpture depicts the two sides of the Caribbean, light and dark, sun and moon. In 1981 he was commissioned by the Fairmount Park Art Association to make a sculpture for the city of Philadelphia. With the fabricator Bob Giza he created an aluminum crown which sat on an existing building featuring cutouts of acrobats and performers and words which spelled out its title or marquee: "El Gran Teatro de la Luna". (since dismantled from Fairhill Sq. to be reinstalled by the city in 2012). In 2002 Ferrer was commissioned by the Government of Puerto Rico to create a permanent sculpture for the waterfront of La Parguera, a village on the southern coast where boats depart for the Phosphorescent Bay. Installed in 2004 and titled "El Museo Rodante" (the rolling museum). It comprises 5 bronze sculptures, cast from wooden templates which contain imagery from artist's throughout history that Ferrer has admired.

Rafael Ferrer's career defies categorization. In his words: "My earlier life as a musician created in my psyche a sense that what you do is dictated by the needs of the moment, all within a repertoire...It's not about repetition, but it's about the challenge of the moment." With this improvisatory approach, he turned from making music and oil-on-canvas paintings to filling galleries and museums with ephemeral materials, like autumn leaves, in the late 1960s and early '70s. The mediums Ferrer has worked in include sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking, and installation art. Ferrer taught at several universities: University of Pennsylvania, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, New York's School of Visual Arts, New York, The San Francisco Art Institute, and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Living and working on the North Fork of Long Island since 1999, Ferrer has returned to his earlier influences, the visual world used only to spark the imagination. Along with paintings and a multitude of works on paper, including his ongoing series of paper bag faces, he has developed a new format which enables him to combine his fascination for both images and words: large blackboard installations. He had a major exhibition at El Museo Del Barrio in 2010 titled Retro/Active from June 8 - August 21 and a Survey of Works on Paper at the Lancaster Museum of Art from September 7 - November 11, 2012, both with comprehensive catalogues. He is represented in New York City by the Adam Baumgold Gallery and by the David Castillo Gallery in Miami. A monograph on his work was released in November, 2012 by UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, A Ver Series, distributed by the University of Minnesota Press.

1972 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship

1975 Guggenheim Award

1978 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship

1989 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship

1993 Pew Foundation Grant

1998 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Grant

2011 Annalee and Barnett Newman Foundation Grant

*artnet.com/artists/rafael-ferrer/biography; artsy.net/artist/rafael-ferrer#!; and.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafael\_Ferrer\_(artist). Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA '59*