

mar beautifully elucidates the networks linking naturalists, academicians, economic philosophers, arts, sciences, empires, and trade in the eighteenth century. In short, she has amply succeeded in making the works and their makers visible and knowable for a wide readership.

Like any good book, Bleichmar's provokes questions that she will hopefully address as she continues to employ her impressive ability to speak for and about these images. Her argument that Spain deployed imagery more than other European nations is reasonable, but Spain's exceptionalism would be bolstered by examples of other nations' imperial projects that eschewed or minimized the visual. Similarly, the continuity of Spain's reliance on the visual—"a long-established tradition of using images as documents and of deploying visual evidence for administrative purposes" (p. 9)—begs further exploration. While the sixteenth-century *Relaciones geográficas* shared with the eighteenth-century expeditions the broad goal of knowing territory and improving administration, the two eras had very different ideas about nature, images, and humankind that impacted how the visual material was created and received. Finally, although José Celestino Mutis turned to Madrid's royal art academy for his artists, the author notes that the San Fernando painters were dismissed because they "had strong opinions about art and were not as malleable as he had hoped" (p. 40). The disjunction between the naturalist's needs and the academic understanding of taste, beauty, and nature rested behind the parting of ways. They likewise reflect the separation of art from science that led these images to be relegated to archive drawers until today.

These questions aside, Bleichmar's book makes an immense contribution to Spanish and Spanish American scholarship and should be on the bookshelves of readers from many disciplines.

University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

KELLY DONAHUE-WALLACE

Rafael Ferrer. By Deborah Cullen. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2013. Pp.128. Notes. Bibliography. Index, \$29.95 paper.

In Puerto Rico, the artist Rafael Ferrer is recognized as a vanguard figure of twentieth-century art. In the US, where he has resided since 1966, he is most known for his "process art" installations. His frequently reproduced *50 Cakes of Ice* (1970), installed and photographed in MoMA's sculpture garden for the Information exhibition that year, remains an iconic work of this period. The work consisted of 50 translucent, melting ice rectangles, some of which toppled in the museum's fountain, in humorous contrast with Donald Judd's immutable *Untitled* 1968, a six-part green structure standing nearby.

This and a few other distant works have long stood for the oeuvre of an artist whose creative energy and output have been ongoing since the mid-1950s. Deborah Cullen's monograph aims to overcome this reductionism. As Chon Noriega declares in the foreword, the problem at hand is to make sense of an artist who through a wide-ranging

and prolific body of work “embraces contradictory aesthetic tendencies, from conceptualism to figurativism, using the seemingly simple materials at hand ... towards divergent aims” (p. ix).

The monograph is a textual elaboration of a well-received 2010 retrospective *Retro/Active: The Work of Rafael Ferrer*, organized by Cullen herself while she was director of curatorial programs at El Museo del Barrio. The critical silence on Ferrer’s work since the 1980s is largely due to a change in reception. According to Cullen: “there has been a mistaken perception that his trajectory abruptly ruptured, that he transformed himself from cool American post-minimalist to hot Latin magical realist” (p. 1). This conclusion was made by critics who saw the artist’s shift of interest from installation and sculptural experiments toward a “primitivist” aesthetic embodied by tropical paintings.

Through extensive archival research and interviews, Cullen masterfully weaves biography, social and cultural history, and the formal analysis of artworks to contextualize Ferrer’s creative meanderings. Framed by a lucid introduction and a conclusion, the text is organized into five chapters. The first, focusing on the artist’s early life, from 1933 to 1953, sets the stage for a career survey by presenting us with a set of conditions and experiences that shaped Ferrer’s self-determined and independent character. He was the child of a wealthy and respected family in San Juan who sent him to high school in Virginia, where he learned percussion and became a professional musician. He discovered a passion for jazz and Afro-Caribbean rhythms that would never leave him. His musician colleagues introduced him to Modern art masters like Kandinsky and Picasso. Inspired, Ferrer began to paint on his own. His half-brother, the Academy Award-winning actor José Ferrer, was also a self-driven artist who achieved renown.

The following chapters divide Ferrer’s career into four chronological periods. “Earliest Works, 1953–1966” describes Ferrer’s unusual training with Spanish surrealist Eugenio Fernández Granell, exiled during the Franco regime in Puerto Rico. Fernández Granell discouraged Ferrer from pursuing formal art studies and became his mentor, introducing his protégé to Dada and Surrealism. Ferrer’s earliest painting from this period, *Figura*, 1953, reveals his process of distillation and individuality. The abstract figure modulated in black over a white background recalls at once Wifredo Lam’s sexualized deities in *The Jungle*, while suggesting, as Cullen notes, a proto-pop logotype from a truck mud flap. During a trip to Paris, Granell introduced Ferrer to André Breton and—most impactful—Lam, with whom Ferrer conversed about Picasso, Cuba, and music.

In his first exhibitions, Ferrer’s overturning of artistic conventions stirred Puerto Rico’s cultural establishment. Recognizing his promise, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture provided him with substantial economic help to find broader artistic horizons elsewhere. “Actions and Improvisational Sculpture, 1966–1969” and “From Installations to Images: 1970–1974” recount in detail the height of Ferrer’s career reception. After settling in Philadelphia, he went from welding scrap metal sculptures to exploring sensual forms with flexible steel sheets and rolls of cyclone fence. He also engaged in

action art and built installations with organic and industrial materials like hay, fat, and telephone poles. As Cullen points out, his work engaged the current theoretical issues articulated in Robert Morris's 1968 *Anti-Form* statement. Traveling frequently to New York, Ferrer became part of the city's avant-garde scene and exhibited in major U.S. museums. He was also featured alongside international figures like Joseph Beuys in Harald Szeemann's 1969 landmark show *Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* in Bern, Switzerland.

Gradually, words entered his practice. In the installation *ARTFORUM, 1972* at the Whitney, the artist created a series of spaces within spaces with narrow doorways, halls, and rooms. The title of the work appeared in red, white, and blue neon on a wall. A group of black and white woodcut faces he had made in the 1960s lined the walls of a room. This work proved a turning point in his career. Through his pun on the prestigious magazine *Art Forum*, the artist continued his questioning of art world structures—particularly its intellectual elitism. At the same time, he made a step toward figuration and language, two strains he still cultivates.

By the mid 1970s Ferrer's focus had shifted to a variety of sculptural forms that had been part of his installations, and then to painting. The chapter "From Objects to Painting, 1975–1999" addresses several bodies of work that have been avoided by the critics. These include Ferrer's bountiful and seemingly inexhaustible portraits painted on paper bags, his decorated geographic maps—some of which incorporate text—and his paintings of tropical scenes from the Dominican Republic, where he owns a house. Cullen succeeds at tying these works to long-time interests of Ferrer that include the lyrics of Caribbean music and the symbolic power of words and maps. His prolonged commitment to certain subjects or media respond to an individual, yet consistent, way of working that accepts no outside limits and that tries to satiate curiosity by finding answers in art. Cullen defends Ferrer's consequential inventiveness as the most genuine form of art making, and the freedom of the artist to choose his own direction.

Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery
Washington, D.C.

TAÍNA B. CARAGOL

Grupo Antillano: The Art of Afro-Cuba. By Alejandro de la Fuente. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. pp 348. Illustrations. \$49.95 cloth.

The ideological effects of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 impacted the national creative scene through exploration of the influence of African cultures on the formation of a Cuban identity. In regard to regional trends of Afro-Antillean connections, Cuban Revolutionary intellectuals and artists set out, in the words of Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, to explore "the presence of traditions of African origins in literature and the arts, devoid of exoticism and popular pseudo-culture" (p. 15). Hernández Espinosa, a playwright, was among the founding members of Grupo Antillano—a group of Cuban artists, writers, and other intellectuals who explored the African components of Cuban Antillean (Caribbean) culture. Although Grupo Antillano, founded in 1978, had a