

ARTFORUM



Ángel Ferrant, *Maternidad* (Maternity), 1949, cork, 12 5/8 × 9 1/2 × 11".

Antonio Ballester Moreno and Ángel Ferrant

MUSEO PATIO HERRERIANO DE VALLADOLID

The contemporary art world's interest in education may seem a constant, but it's one that varies in intensity. At times, an accent on pedagogy can dominate, while in other moments it can come across as condescending or, worse, futile. But beyond the flux of fashion, the art of our time is inextricably linked to questions of accessibility and the relationship of creative production to its historical context beyond close-knit clubs of specialists and connoisseurs.

The Museo Patio Herreriano took up such questions by inviting Antonio Ballester Moreno to work with the archives of the avant-garde Spanish sculptor Ángel Ferrant (1890–1961), which are housed in the institution. Along with an aesthetic affinity, both artists share a sincere interest in pedagogical models. In 1931, Ferrant published the essay "*El estado y las artes plásticas: diseño de una configuración escolar*" (The State of the Plastic Arts: Design of a School Configuration), in which he defended an educational approach that prioritized expressive freedom over conventional, more authoritarian teaching methods. As for Ballester Moreno, he has frequently integrated audience participation into his work, for example conducting on-site creative workshops tailored to recent exhibitions at Madrid's La Casa Encendida and the São Paulo Bienal.

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Tanya Leighton

The result of this transgenerational pairing, “*Ánfora, Grotesco, Armazón, Maniquí: Una exposición sobre pedagogía*” (*Ánfora, Grotesco, Armazón, Maniquí: An Exhibition on Pedagogy*), developed through the patterns, or *arsintes*—a coinage that elides *arte* (art) and *síntesis* (synthesis)—that Ferrant designed in 1935 to engage children in free combinatorial exercises (the exhibition’s title derives from the four most frequently used by the artist). In a truly brilliant decision, Javier Hontoria, the museum’s director and the curator of the exhibition, commissioned the local carpenter Jesús Morejón to produce wooden tables and plinths in the shapes of these patterns, to be used instead of traditional pedestals. As display devices, they established a conversation between Ferrant, Ballester Moreno, and a multitude of unknown authors, while freeing the museum space of its traditional rigidity.

Unusual though it may have been, the gathering settled quite organically through the two dedicated galleries. Ballester Moreno’s paintings entered easily into dialogue with Ferrant’s delicate mobiles, drawings, and small sculptures composed of objects found on the beach. Using basic materials, including cardboard, cork, wood, and burlap, both artists draw their visual vocabularies from almost childish elementary forms, such as imperfect circles, stalks of leaves, birds, or rudimentary representations of the human body. That neither Ballester Moreno nor Ferrant is particularly interested in virtuosity or sophistication (in the snobbish sense of the word) makes their works accessible to a wide audience. During the exhibition, Ballester Moreno conducted public workshops directly in the gallery space. The output from those sessions was then displayed on the *arsintes* plinths. Ducks that Ballester Moreno fashioned from repurposed window frames sidled up alongside anonymously authored Plasticine pieces and Ferrant’s *Maternidad* (Maternity)—a 1949 take on the Madonna and child exquisitely cobbled together from cork. Drawings, sculptures, and objects made by children in one of Ballester Moreno’s workshops mingled with the artist’s own collages or a selection of freehand geometries, plants, and birds painted on burlap.

While contemporary art may often be seen as elitist and pretentious, this exhibition demonstrated how connections between historical, contemporary, and anonymous artists can be established organically, even within the structured confines of an institutional space. Perhaps even museums have something to learn.

Translated from Spanish by Michele Faguet.

— Joaquín Jesús Sánchez