

LIFE AS ACTIVITY: DAVID LAMELAS

Hunter College Art Galleries, Bertha & Karl Leubsdorf Gallery
132 East 68th Street, New York, NY

Wednesday, November 3 –
Saturday, December 18, 2021

LIFE AS ACTIVITY: DAVID LAMELAS

Curated by Harper Montgomery, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art with Sarah Watson, Chief Curator, and Re'al Christian, Lazarus Graduate Curatorial Fellow, and with MA and MFA students enrolled in the curatorial practicum seminar: The Transgressive Itineraries of Conceptualism.

The Hunter College Art Galleries are pleased to present *Life as Activity: David Lamelas*, an exhibition marking the artist's first solo show in New York in more than a decade. For over half a century, Lamelas (born 1946, Buenos Aires) has made work that pushes the boundaries of contemporary art by defying conventions of artistic media. Although he is globally recognized as a ground-breaking figure of conceptual art, his explorations with the spatial qualities of film and the signifiers of identity have not been adequately investigated. *Life as Activity* focuses on Lamelas's experimentation with film and his examination of identity and narrative fiction in light of his ongoing insistence that his artistic practice has always, in one way or another, been grounded in his sense of himself as a sculptor.

The exhibition brings together sculpture, film, and photography made across many decades and locations to center this aspect of Lamelas's artistic practice. These works include two key sculptural installations he made in Buenos Aires in 1966 and 1967, *Situación de cuatro placas de aluminio* (Four Changeable Plaques), a moveable configuration of aluminum sheets, and *Limit of a Projection*, a spotlight in a dark room; a series of ten photographs shot in London that pose as film stills for a non-existent movie, *The Violent Tapes of 1975*; and two films, *The Desert People*, a pseudo-documentary about a road trip to a Native American reservation which was shot in Los Angeles in 1974 and *The Invention of Dr. Morel*, a film based on the Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares's novel *The Invention of Morel* (1940), which was filmed in Potsdam, Germany in 2000. Both films will be screened on an ongoing basis at set times, which will be available on the Leubsdorf Gallery website: leubsdorf-gallery.org. Showcasing the ways in which Lamelas makes us aware of how the stories we tell ourselves are shaped by encounters with space and time, all of these works invite us to participate in scenarios in which container, contained, observer, and observed become blurred.

On occasion of the exhibition, a publication has been produced that includes texts on Lamelas by Professor Harper Montgomery and students in Hunter's graduate programs in Art History and Studio Art. Essays focus on twelve works by Lamelas and include previously unpublished materials from the artist's papers. Published in collaboration with Hirmer Verlag, the book is distributed by the University of Chicago Press and available for purchase [here](#).

Both the book and the exhibition have been developed in close collaboration with David Lamelas, who worked with students via Zoom on both projects during the course of the pandemic, from spring of 2020 through the fall of 2021.

Life as Activity: David Lamelas results from an Artist Seminar Initiative grant awarded by the [Institute for Studies on Latin American Art \(ISLAA\)](#), which advances scholarship and public engagement with art from Latin America. It was organized under the auspices of ISLAA's Artist Seminar Initiative, an educational and curatorial program that fosters intimate exchanges between students and living Latin American and Latinx artists.

Additional support for *Life as Activity: David Lamelas* is made possible by Joan Lazarus, Gagosian Gallery and the James Howell Foundation in support of the Advanced Certificate in Curatorial Studies, and by the galleries' sustaining supporters the David Bershadt Family Foundation, the Susan V. Bershadt Charitable Fund, Inc., Carol and Arthur Goldberg, the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, and the Leubsdorf Fund.

David Lamelas first studied art at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, Argentina and began to exhibit his work in the lively gallery scene there in 1963. Making sculptural installations that explored minimal forms, the materials of industry and mass media, and pop, Lamelas was at the center of the experimental avant-gardism encouraged by the critic and curator Jorge Romero Brest at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella during much of the 1960s. After winning the prize for sculpture at the 1967 São Paulo Biennial, Lamelas traveled to Europe to represent Argentina in the 1968 Venice Biennial. Having won a scholarship from the British government to study art in London, Lamelas moved to London the same year, where he attended Saint Martin's School of Art. In 1969 and 1970, Lamelas was invited to participate in groundbreaking exhibitions of conceptual art organized by Anny De Decker for Prospect and by Michel Claura and Seth Siegelaub in Paris. In 1969, Lamelas began to use film to explore relationships of time and space and themes of narrative and character development. A trip in 1974 to Los Angeles inspired Lamelas to investigate glamour, dramatic narrative, television, and to make works that highlighted the proximity of reality and fiction. In 1976, Lamelas moved to Los Angeles and during the mid- and late-1970s his work took the form of video and television projects investigating how stereotype and myth fashion reality in the United States. Collaborations with Hildegard Duane during this period produced interrogations of gender and racial and ethnic stereotypes and videos that brought to light the entertainment quality of the news. Film and digital video have continued to be a focus of Lamelas's work, along with his consistent engagement with sculptural projects. In 1997, after Lamelas and other progenitors of conceptualism appeared in the exhibition 1965–1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, he was the subject of the retrospective, David Lamelas: A New Refutation of Time at the Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly known as the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art). In 2006, David Lamelas, Extranjero, Foreigner, Étranger, Ausländer took place at the Museo Tamayo and Malba (Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires); and in 2017 and 2018, respectively, he was the subject of one-person shows at Malba and the University Art Museum, California State University (supported by the Getty Foundation), and at the Broad Museum of Michigan State University in 2018. He continues to make work that questions boundaries and disrupts art historians' attempts to map conventional categories onto his unclassifiable and provocative practice.

INSTALLATION

Installation views of Life as Activity: David Lamelas at
Hunter College Art Galleries' Leubsdorf Gallery, 2021
Photos by Stan Narten

Life as
Activity:
David Lamelas

As the signs of capitalism for the new world in Europe, David Lamelas has pushed the boundaries of artistic production, and in doing so, has become a pioneer of the contemporary art scene. His work is a reflection of the social and political conditions of his time, and he has been a key figure in the development of the conceptual art movement. Lamelas's work is characterized by its use of text, objects, and performance, and it has been widely exhibited in galleries and museums around the world.

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**BERTHA AND KARL
LEUBSDORF GALLERY**



Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 11-5pm
berthakarlgallery.org



Life as Activity: David Lamelas

In the figure of Lamelas we find the role of a sculptor, a painter, a poet, a philosopher and a theorist. He is a man who has lived in the borderlands of art, who has been able to move between the different disciplines and to create a new language. He is a man who has been able to create a new language, a language that is not just a language of words, but a language of actions, of gestures, of movements. He is a man who has been able to create a new language, a language that is not just a language of words, but a language of actions, of gestures, of movements. He is a man who has been able to create a new language, a language that is not just a language of words, but a language of actions, of gestures, of movements.

© 2010 by the artist. All rights reserved. This work is a reproduction of the original work by the artist. The artist's name and the title of the work are printed on the back of the work. The artist's name and the title of the work are printed on the back of the work. The artist's name and the title of the work are printed on the back of the work.





Life as Activity: David Lamelas

As a key figure of Conceptual Art for over half a century, David Lamelas has pushed the boundaries and conventions of artistic media. In 1968, he moved from his native Buenos Aires to London, the first of many relocations that allowed him to develop a site-responsive practice that defies national contexts. He moved to Los Angeles in 1975, spent a stint in New York in the 1980s, and by the late-1990s, he began living in various cities across Europe. Today he lives between Buenos Aires, Paris, and Los Angeles. In the same way Lamelas has embraced an itinerant life throughout his career, he has seamlessly moved amongst various media, simultaneously making installations, films, videos, and performances in response to the immediacy of his surroundings.

Despite his multifaceted practice, Lamelas identifies, at heart, as a traditional sculptor. Inspired by the connections the artist has drawn between sculpture and time-based media, *Life as Activity: David Lamelas* bridges the gap between the sensorial qualities of three-dimensional objects and the filmic conventions of fiction, identity, and narrative. As his sculptures activate and respond to their built environments, the viewer becomes an embodied presence, moving throughout the shared space of the white cube gallery. In his films, disjointed plotlines require us to make cognitive leaps and connections, prompting us to question the logic of our own assumptions and processes of meaning making.

In a now faded, typewritten document created about a year after he had moved to Europe, Lamelas wrote a description of what would become one of his most famous, long-lived works, *Time as Activity (Düsseldorf)* (1969). After typing it, he took a pen and crossed out his initial title "Life as Activity," to replace the word "Life" with "Time." This seemingly simple alteration speaks volumes about a young artist who sought to question the boundaries of territory and temporality, the invisible and yet imperious devices that dictate and divide how reality is navigated. Through the interchangeability of Life and Time, Lamelas mediates on the felt experience of our lived reality, the physicality of time, and the contiguity of life and art.

Curated by Harper Montgomery, Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art with Sarah Watson, Chief Curator HCAG, and Re'el Christian, Lazarus Graduate Curatorial Fellow, and with MA and MFA students: Thomas Baldwin, Eliana Blechman, Hector Canonge, A.E. Chapman, Kevin Geraghty, Amorelle Jacox, Nicole Kaack, Dana Notine, Paula Solimano, Shauna Steinbach, Natacha del Valle, and Mew Weiderspon.

Installation by Phi Nguyen, Liz Naisden, and Joe Gannon.

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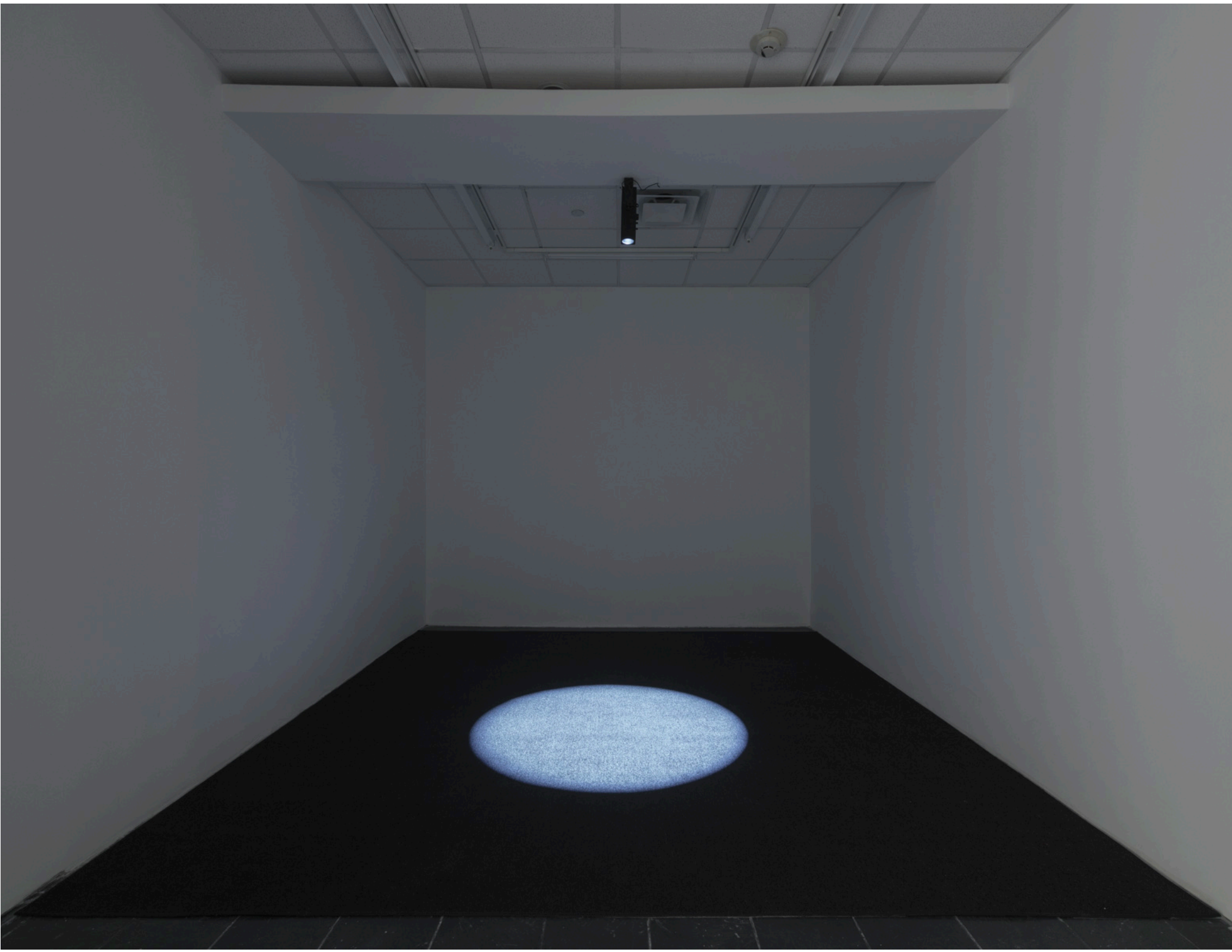
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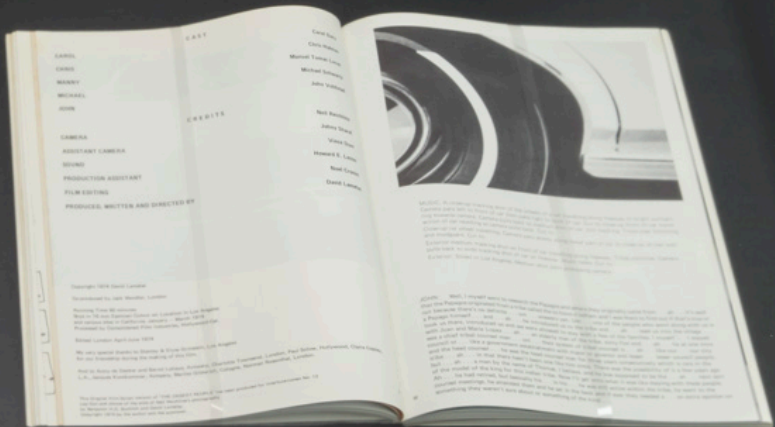
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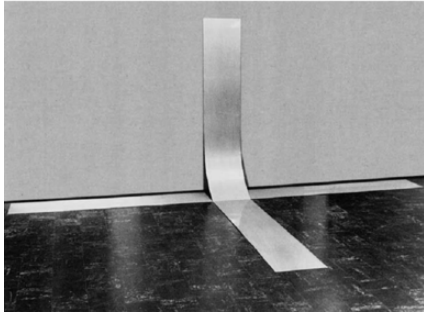
BERTHA AND KARL LEUBSDORF ART GALLERY

Life as
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David Lamelas
NOVEMBER 3 - DECEMBER 18, 2021

Please enter the gallery through the main entrance of the Hunter West Building on the SW corner of 60th Street & Lexington Avenue.



CHECKLIST



Situación de cuatro placas de aluminio (Four Changeable Plaques), 1966/2014
Exhibition copy
Four aluminum plates
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)



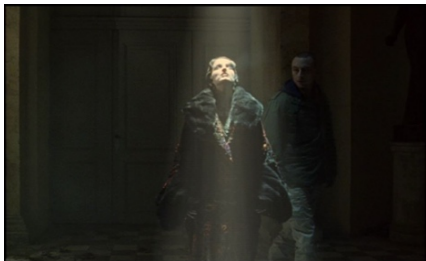
Límite de una proyección I (Limit of a Projection I), 1967 (staged 2021)
Theater spotlight in darkened room
Dimensions variable
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2009



The Violent Tapes of 1975, 1975, 10 black-and-white photographs, passe-partout with printed text "The Violent Tapes of 1975" 9 x 12 inches each (22.86 x 30.48 cm each), edition 1 of 4, Bruno van Lierde Collection.



The Desert People, 1974
Digital video transferred from 16 mm film
Color, sound
46 minutes, 7 seconds
Courtesy of the artist and LUX, London



The Invention of Dr Morel, 2000
Digital video transferred from videotape
Color, sound
21 minutes, 36 seconds
Courtesy of the artist and LUX, London



Archival photographs from *The Invention of Dr. Morel*, with Nicole Ansari (as Faustine) and Brian Cox (as Dr. Morel), 2000; David Lamelas, *Drawing by Faustine in 1939 for The Invention of Dr. Morel*, 2000 (top); Front and back of exhibition invitation for *L'Invention*, Galerie Yvon Lambert, 2002 (bottom); Archival screenplay by Karen Black and David Lamelas for *The Invention of Dr. Morel*, titled *The Invention*, 1997/1998; Typed interview with Adolfo Bioy Casares by David Lamelas, 1996
All materials in this vitrine are from the David Lamelas papers, Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles
Courtesy of the artist, Jan Mot, and Sprüth Magers



Color photographs from *The Desert People*, 1974
Chris sitting in diner (top, left); Manny smoking a cigarette (bottom, left); Carol (top, right); Ford Torino on highway (bottom, right)
David Lamelas papers, Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles
Courtesy of the artist, Jan Mot, and Sprüth Magers
Film script of *The Desert People* published in *Interfunktionen*, no. 12, 1974
Courtesy of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)