

# Introduction

The artistic interpretation of literature is nothing new. A great part of the history of Western art has been concerned with rendering stories, myths, and adventures first recorded in literary genres into the media of art. The subjects of much Greek and Roman art were the myths of the gods that had first been cast in oral or written texts. In late antiquity and in the Middle Ages, many of these stories were replaced by the Judeo-Christian stories found in the Bible. In the Renaissance, as many works of art dealt with Christian stories as with classical subject matter. Michelangelo's rendition of the story of Genesis on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel is perhaps the most dramatic and well known of these. The images of God giving life to Adam, of his creation of Eve, their temptation by the serpent, and their subsequent expulsion from Paradise, among others, are all effectively retold by Michelangelo's frescoes. Interpretations of literature are so common that it is hard to walk into an art museum and not be confronted with works whose subject matter is literary. How many artistic depictions of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* have been produced?

In spite of this abundance, the general investigation of the artistic interpretation of literature is relatively infrequent. Most commentators are content with discussing particular artistic interpretations of literary works, ignoring the more general questions that such interpretations raise, questions such as: How are artistic interpretations of literature different from other kinds of interpretations? What makes them interpretations as opposed to something else? And what are their legitimate limits?

## The Problem and the Task

The task of this book is not to investigate, let alone adequately answer, these and the many other related questions that surface in the context of the artistic interpretation of literature. Such a task is well beyond the boundaries of this enterprise, but I hope to formulate some questions and suggest some ways of considering them that should help us understand the general phenomenon and to explore some of the problems that it raises.

The problems posed by the artistic interpretation of literature spring from the differences between literature and art, although not every aspect of literature is different from every aspect of visual art. Indeed, literature is art, visual art often integrates literary texts into itself, and literary texts often evoke visual images similar to the ones that are used in visual art. Still, there are important contrasts.

One of these is that literary works are always composed of language, and language is in turn composed of a vocabulary and the rules whereby that vocabulary is arranged into units that convey more or less complex meanings. Particular words and rules are essential to particular languages and give them the character they have, thus distinguishing them from other languages. Literature depends on language and feeds on it. Visual works of art, by contrast, are composed of images and, although there may be some rules of composition that visual art obeys at some times, these rules are much more open and their adoption is up to individual artists—the latitude of the artists in how they use or abuse them is much broader than that of writers with respect to the rules of language. True, some art uses texts, but it is not essential for art to do so, or to follow the rules of the language to which they belong. Often artists use letters and words for their value as images, rather than for the meanings they have in particular languages and this is something that literature does not do systematically.

The dependance of literature on language, and the fact that language always begins with sounds, carries with it a burden that is not present in visual art. The literary is usually related to sound. Most obviously this is so in poetry, but it is also true in prose. Indeed, we often talk about characteristics of prose that are sound related. Literary critics have no qualms about referring to works in prose in terms of a certain cadence or even rhythm. Visual art, by contrast, does not carry this burden—sound is not something that characterizes its medium. The medium of visual art is images, and the burden of images is not oral; it has to do with color and shape, among other things.

Apart from this source of contrast and difficulty there are matters of extension that separate literature and visual art. A novel may have one thousand pages, but a painting is very

limited in scope by comparison. Most paintings can be seen whole from a visual standpoint, and thus be completely present to the observer at once. But this is not possible with most works of literature in that they have to be read over a period of time. Indeed, even those that are short, have a kind of discursive dimension, either oral or visual, that does not characterize visual art, except in the case of film. But even film, which shares some properties with literature, illustrates some other differences between literature and art. In a novel we can get into the minds of the characters through the narratives of their psychological states, but in film we can only glance at a mood or feeling revealed through images. Visual art is more circumscribed than literature in what it can express and how it can express it.

The differences between literature and art point to the difficulties involved in the interpretation of literature in visual art. The difficulties do not have to do with whether artists can create interpretations of literary works, but whether their interpretation can be legitimate. The challenge for artists is to create visual interpretations of works that are not visual. And how can something visual be an interpretation of something in which the visual is secondary to sound? Pictorial interpretations of literature abound, and some are regarded as great masterpieces both of art and of interpretation. So, we are entitled to ask: What is the secret of their success? How do the artists achieve this feat? What techniques and procedures do they use to present us with interpretations of literature that successfully bridge the gap between literature and visual art?

## The Plan

I propose to approach these questions by, first, examining some examples of artistic interpretations of literature and, second, reflecting on what they tell us about the issues that they raise. I also add brief interpretations of the literary texts we will consider in order to compare them with artistic interpretations and thus get a better understanding of how visual art interprets literature.

I could have chosen some of the many famous examples of the phenomenon found in the history of art. Why not go to Michelangelo, Leonardo, or Goya? One reason is that the variety of literary works they and others have interpreted is too great, creating unnecessary distractions. Another is that the religious stories and myths so frequently used by them add further difficulties that complicate matters to no end; it is one thing to interpret a literary text that has no religious overtones, and another to interpret one that believers consider a divine revelation. Then there is the exhausting, and often irrelevant for our purposes, discussions of these works by critics and historians of art. To pick a work such as Michelangelo's pictorial interpretations of Genesis

in the Sistine Chapel would have forced me to deal with many issues that are only marginally related to the core topic of present interest. The weight of the past is sometimes too heavy and counterproductive. In short, I needed to simplify matters in order to maintain a focus, and I chose two ways of doing it. First, I selected only one literary author, and second, I picked contemporary artists whose work is not burdened with a long history of criticism.

Considering the philosophical bent of this book, it was also essential to have a literary author whose work has philosophical depth, and artists who are sensitive to conceptual content. The choice of author was not difficult. Jorge Luis Borges is one of the most prominent literary figures whose work is also profoundly philosophical and thus lends itself easily to this inquiry. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that he is a philosopher, and that his work, apart from its literary merits, should be considered part of philosophy. Moreover, he has been the source of discussion and interest among some of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century. Two of the most important philosophy books published in the last fifty years have found in Borges's work a good point of departure for their analyses. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* finds in the Chinese encyclopedia mentioned in Borges's "The Analytic Language of John Wilkins" the foundation for a theory of categories. And Arthur Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* uses Borges's "Pierre Menard, the Author of the *Quixote*," as the basis of his discussion of the identity of works of art. The philosophical fascination with Borges should not be surprising insofar as his stories are filled with conceptual puzzles that prompt the reader to think about the most fundamental issues related to human existence. Indeed, one of the great advantages of choosing Borges is that his fictions abound not just with conceptual puzzles, but also with factual incongruities and historical inaccuracies presented as fact that cry for resolution but also impede it, opening endless avenues of interpretation and speculation. The lines between reality and fiction merge in unexpected ways, forcing audiences to play an active role in the construction of the world they reveal.

Once the choice of author was made, the field of artists narrowed. It made sense to choose artists who had already produced interpretations of Borges's stories, thought that their art had been influenced by Borges, or were fascinated by some aspects of Borges's work. Borges is perhaps the most important literary figure Argentina has produced and so it is understandable that among Argentinean artists his work has had a most evident impact. This is particularly true of artists who are *porteños*, born and raised in Buenos Aires, for Borges is quintessentially a *porteño* even though he was not born in the city. So it was not difficult to find the artists I needed. However, because interpretation is a matter of perspective, it was also necessary to use artists whose work manifests different points of view. I thought it would be useful to

have substantial variety in the artists so that their artistic creations would illustrate the many avenues that interpreters follow when confronted with literature. I searched for artists at different career stages, women and men, belonging to different social classes, with different ideologies and interests, and even having different ethnic origins, some who live exclusively from their art and some who have to do other things to survive, artists who began to create when they were children and artists who started their careers at a mature age, painters, engravers, and multifaceted and mono-faceted artists.

Some of the artists work exclusively in one medium, some use one primary medium but also work in others, and some have no favorite medium. Some have a definite style and a range of topics they explore, whereas others have not limited themselves to one style or a limited range of topics, but continue experimenting with a variety of approaches and subjects. In terms of generations in particular, seven of the seventeen artists are in their fifties—an age in which artists are often at the height of their artistic maturity and already have a substantial body of work—with five over sixty and five under fifty. Of those over fifty, two are in their sixties, and one each in their seventies, eighties, and nineties. And for those under fifty, three are in their forties and two in their thirties. The oldest artist is over ninety years old, and the youngest is in her early thirties. In short, I looked for variety as far as possible, although the nature of our topic, and its philosophical perspective, favored those whose work is figurative and sensitive to conceptual content.

Apart from this variety, I also thought important to include some artists who were neither Argentineans nor from Buenos Aires. This city in particular, like New York, has a culture that is unique, and I felt that to expand the value of this investigation I needed to consider art from another cultural matrix. But what to choose? I found the lead for this in José Franco, a Cuban artist who resides in Buenos Aires and had produced works based on Borges's stories. The idea of including him made sense in that it would reveal how an adopted Argentinean would look at Borges. In time this led me to think of other Cubans living outside Argentina, and particularly of those who reside in the United States. This would help to compare interpretations from artists from three nationalities, insofar as Cuban-American artists are as American as they are Cuban. My familiarity with Cuban-American art made the task easier. At the same time, with all this variety of origin and perspective, it became important to maintain a certain unity and focus, which I achieved by restricting, with one exception, the artworks to paintings, drawings, etchings, and mixed media, all on a flat format.

In consultation with the artists, their current interests, and the work that they had done before, I selected twelve stories by Borges, which I gathered under three topics: identity and

memory, freedom and destiny, and faith and divinity. These are favorite topics for Borges, who likes to explore them in various contexts, including three particular ones: tales about Argentinean culture and society, such as “The South,” “The Interloper,” “Funes, the Memorious,” and “The Gospel According to Mark”; stories about mythical figures and civilizations, such as “The House of Asterion,” “The Writing of the God,” “The Immortal,” and “The Circular Ruins”; and stories about intellectuals, including himself, such as “The Garden of Forking Paths,” “The Secret Miracle,” “The Other,” and “The Rose of Paracelsus.” Two artistic interpretations by different artists are given of each story, adding up to twenty four works of art by seventeen different artists.

The works of art fall into two categories: works produced before this project was undertaken and works produced for this project. And the artists fall into three categories. Some had created works dealing with Borges before but did not create any works for this project (León Ferrari, Etienne Gontard, Mirta Kupferminc, Nicolás Menza, Estela Pereda), some had produced works before but also produced some for this project (Alejandro Boim, Ricardo Celma, Claudio D’Leo, Héctor Destéfanis, Carlos Estévez, José Franco), and some created works for this project but had not done so before (Luis Cruz Azaceta, Laura Delgado, Mauricio Nizzero, Alberto Rey, Paul Sierra).

The book is divided into two parts. Part I consists of twelve essays on the stories and the art. Their titles are taken from Borges’s stories and each is divided into three sections. The first presents an interpretive summary of the plot of the story together with a brief analysis of its significance; the other two are devoted to the discussion of the artworks that interpret it. Images of the works are included in the appropriate places.

The essays are gathered into the three sections mentioned that reflect some of the central themes explored in the stories. The first concerns identity and memory. The identity central to Borges’s thought is personal: Who am I? Am I the same person today that I was long ago? How does my identity incorporate my experiences and surroundings, and the social and national contexts? Memory is essential to identity because it is through memory that we can think about ourselves and our experiences. But what is memory? What are the boundaries between fiction and reality in it? And how does memory affect identity?

The second section is devoted to freedom and destiny. Again, the freedom explored by Borges is personal. Am I free? Is freedom real or apparent? How free am I? And how do the people and events that are part of my world curtail my freedom? Freedom is tied to destiny. Is there a predetermined end that I will reach regardless of what I think or even do? Or is the end open to change by what I, or others, do? And what is the role of chance in the fulfillment of my destiny?

The third section explores faith and divinity. Borges is particularly interested in the relation of religious faith to doubt and evidence. Must faith be blind, or does it require evidence? Does doubt disqualify faith or is it integral to it? Can faith change the course of events? These questions and their answers lead us to divinity. Has God revealed himself to us, and does he answer our prayers? Or is God a mere creation of humans, derived from their ignorance and fear?

The breakdown of the discussion of the stories and their interpretations uncovers various avenues that the artists follow, what they emphasize, what they ignore, and the various strategies they use to convey certain ideas or views. This is particularly important when the stories under interpretation have, as in most cases, strong philosophical content.

The interpretations of Borges's fictions raise many interesting hermeneutical questions. The variety of media, approaches, and strategies the artists use lead to the core of the philosophy of interpretation. All the works, with the exception of one, are pictorial when this is taken broadly, although some are paintings and others are drawings and etchings. The range of media employed varies widely, going from oil, acrylic, markers, ink, coffee, and digital images on canvas, plaster, or paper. Styles also differ, for although all works are figurative, they range from cubism to abstract expressionism, surrealism, and super-realism. Color goes from muted to brilliant, and monotone to multitone. And although some of the works are traditional in many ways, others move in novel directions.

The discussion of the hermeneutical issues raised earlier is taken up in Part II of the book, which is devoted to the philosophical analysis of the artistic interpretation of literature. A first and necessary step in the understanding of the complex relation between an object of interpretation and its interpretation is to establish some parameters about the identity of the relata, which here are the works by Borges, the works of art that interpret it, and my philosophical discussions of both the stories and the works of art. In the first chapter of Part II, then, I explore the identities of works of literature, art, and philosophy and propose a theory about how to distinguish them.

This is followed by a chapter whose task is to lay out the structure, kinds, and aims of interpretation. It begins with a discussion of the structure of interpretation, both internal and contextual, considering such things as the author, audience, and context of the work under interpretation and of the interpretation, among others. Then it briefly discusses various phenomena often confused with interpretation, before turning to its aims and kinds.

The next chapter takes up the topic of how the artists who have interpreted the stories by Borges discussed in this book approached their task and the strategies they used to bridge the gap between art and literature. What is their focus, what have they neglected, what have

they emphasized, how far away from the work do they move, and how have they transformed a text into a picture? It provides a classification of the strategies used and the way they are illustrated by the works of the artists.

Last, I include a chapter on the limits of interpretation that tries to determine the boundaries that must be respected in the artistic interpretation of literature in order for the interpretations to be legitimate. Because interpretations can be either understandings or instruments to cause understanding, the question of whether there are limits to interpretations takes two forms: whether there are limits to the understanding of works under interpretation, and whether there are limits to the instruments used to cause their understanding. The answer to the second question is parasitic on the answer to the first, and it is clear: there are limits to the instruments used to cause the understanding of interpretanda insofar as not everything can be used to cause such understanding. The important question for us, then, is the first. And the key to the answer is the degree to which interpretations satisfy the aims for which they are undertaken, which in turns gives rise to different kinds of criteria.

## The Artists and Their Work

The role that the artists play in the process I have outlined cannot be overestimated. So I begin by saying something about them, their background, their interests, styles, careers, and work. This should help us understand what they have done. Seventeen artists participated in this project, and in the following paragraphs I shall say something about each of them. I have arranged my comments alphabetically to avoid any impression of preferential treatment. The information my comments contain has been gleaned from publications, interviews I filmed with each of the artists personally, and information posted on their Web sites. What I say, however, is entirely the product of my own impressions, judgments, and inferences.

Luis Cruz Azaceta was born in 1942, in Marianao, which is a suburb of Havana, Cuba. He came to the United States in the early sixties, in the first exodus resulting from Castro's Revolution. He settled in New York City, where he attended The School of Visual Arts, and currently resides in New Orleans. His work has received wide recognition; it is present in important museum collections in North and South America and in Europe, and it has been exhibited in Australia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela. Among the many honors Azaceta has received are Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National



Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. The renown he has achieved has allowed him to devote himself completely to his art. The work has a strong character that occasionally borders on the shocking. A cartoon-like quality often reveals ties to popular culture and the long tradition of drawing and satire characteristic of much Cuban art, but Azaceta adds an element of suffering and pain that deepens the impact of the art, making it transcend particular cultures and circumstances. A good portion of the work explores the phenomenon of exile, emigration, and cultural dislocation, effectively employing the context of the rafts (*balsas*) used by the Cubans who, in desperation, have risked their lives to cross the channel that separates the island from the United States. More recently, Azaceta has been exploring labyrinths and journeys by concentrating on venues of travel such as airports and terminals, using them as symbols of the human existential predicament. The interpretation of Borges's story he created for the present project fits within this framework, both in that it deals with the Minotaur, a monster who is trapped in the labyrinth in which he resides, and continues a stylistic journey that has led Azaceta to greater simplicity and sharp drawing techniques in which solid colors are juxtaposed to create an engaging image. This is the first work of Azaceta on a Borges story, although he has always felt the challenge of Borges's fictions. He found in "The House of Asterion" a venue of interpretation to express some of his most cherished ideas about human solitude and despair.

Alejandro Boim was born in Buenos Aires in 1964. His interest in art began when he was eight years old in response to an incipient love for a teacher, Leticia. He began to draw for her after she called him Alejandro instead of Boim. At fourteen he did a workshop in art, and after graduating from high school he entered the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón in Buenos Aires. Then he left for France, where he studied art at the Université Paris VIII, Saint Denis. After returning to Buenos Aires, he continued painting and teaching art. His work is always motivated by a curiosity which has led him to incorporate into it elements from the work of other artists he likes. The pieces tend to have dark tones, following his interest in Caravaggio and Rembrandt. Among other artists from whose work he has profited are Klimt, Alonso, and the members of the naturalist movement in France. The medium is primarily painting and the work figurative and realist—he regards it as *avant garde* in that it is a reaction against the overwhelming dominance of abstraction in the twentieth century. Boim has never been interested in the movement of "art for art's sake"—his art always responds to a personal interest. Unlike many other artists, he does not create series; each piece is unique and a reaction to what has gone on before—it is, as he puts it, "a way to fight boredom." If he produces a red piece, the next piece will contrast with it by being, for example, blue. After several

years in Buenos Aires, Boim moved to Montreal, where he works and offers private lessons to advanced students and artists. He paints between three and six hours every day, and has already created a substantial body of work that has received considerable recognition through various prizes and expositions in Argentina, Canada, France, and Spain. He is a recipient of the Gran Premio Nacional de Dibujo de Argentina (2008). Boim is not a devotee of Borges, although he has maintained an interest in his poems and conferences in particular. In general he is somewhat reticent about Borges's prose, because he finds that this author tends to stretch words excessively. But he likes some of his stories, such as "The South," the object of his interpretation here.

Miguel Cámpora was born in 1961, in San Nicolás, province of Buenos Aires. He studied art in the Escuela de Bellas Artes. His work has been exhibited in Argentina, Austria, Colombia, and the United States, and was recently selected for an exhibition by the World Bank. Cámpora is particularly interested in topics that have to do with Argentinean society and its proverbial origin, the countryside, what Argentineans call "*el campo*." Issues of fairness, exploitation, poverty, and displacement can be found in most of his pieces, joined to questions of social and national identity. What does it mean to be Argentinean? Where does he fit in this complicated society? Depictions of the countryside south of Buenos Aires take a good portion of the work. We see people and animals in vast expanses of land, migrating, moving, finding new places to survive and make their own. The human figures are rough, weathered, ravaged by the enormity of the land and its merciless oppression and beauty. The faces are grim, sad, resigned. Some colors are vivid, like the yellows of the pampa, but the greys and greens are subdued and mixed, adding a mood of sadness and struggle. Cámpora had not worked on particular works of Borges before he undertook to contribute to this project, although he had always had an interest in him, particularly in the stories that, like "The South," have to do with the Argentinean countryside.

Ricardo Celma is one of the most accomplished young artists in Argentina today. His work consists primarily in painting, but also sculpture and drawing. He was born in 1975 in Buenos Aires. He sees himself as a careful observer, and his art reflects this attitude. At first one's reaction is to classify the work as a kind of super-realism, but upon closer scrutiny there is a major difference between this movement and Celma's work. Celma does not see his art as competing with photography and his topics are not the standard ones in super-realism. He prefers a characterization that brings his work closer to the literary revolution that swept through Latin American letters in the twentieth century known as magical realism, and thus as a reaction against the excesses of contemporary art. For him, the kind of art common today is forced upon artists by curators and gallery directors who have displaced artists as arbiters of good art. They have taken the place of God and the Church in art, becoming the authorities who

determine value and destiny. This imposes limitations on the artists who are forced to comply with their whims in order to survive. Already as a child, Celma wanted to be a painter. He grew up surrounded by books on painting, and after he produced a portrait of his grandmother in profile, the family understood his vocation. His siblings are engineers and scientists, so in high school he had to face the question of survival. How could he earn a decent living? Design was a possibility, but then he got some students to study art with him and this solved his problem. From the beginning he felt a special attraction for late Gothic and Flemish painting and for the ornamental Baroque in the works of Ribera and Rembrandt, and later for the descriptions of pain that flourished in the nineteenth century and the Baroque. He tried abstraction for a while, but eventually rejected it, because he needs to tell stories that have a rational denouement. He feels himself to be a kind of writer in that his work consists of narratives of moments he considers sacred. In these narratives woman has a special place and is almost always included in his work. He is fascinated by the psychology of women, the mystery of what they think, of their motives and intentions. This leads to portraits that are engaging, but thoughtful and mysterious, simultaneously revealing and concealing. Celma is a graduate of the Instituto Universitario Nacional de Arte, and the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón. He visited Mexico and resides in Buenos Aires. His work has drawn attention in Argentina, Canada, China, France, Holland, Japan, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United States, and has been recognized with a variety of prizes, including the Primer Premio, Salón de Pintura, Sociedad Argentina de Letras, Artes y Ciencias (SALAC). Borges has always been a writer of interest to Celma for obvious reasons: the complexity and depth of Borges's work has attracted and challenged him. "The Gospel According to Mark" is not the first of Borges's works that has given rise to a pictorial interpretation by Celma, but it is the one used here.

Laura Delgado is the youngest artist participating in this project. She was born in 1978 in Buenos Aires. Like most other children, she enjoyed painting and drawing, but there was no space for art in a family of accountants like her own. So when the time came, she turned toward psychology, in which she received a degree from the Universidad de Buenos Aires. But she was not certain that psychology was for her. This feeling was solidified when she participated in a painting workshop that awakened her vocation in art. She enrolled in Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, without objection from her family and she then went on to Escuela de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova and the Instituto Universitario Nacional de Arte. For a while she practiced both psychology and art. Her initial work in art was academic, and was greatly influenced by mannerism, but eventually she turned toward a realist expressionism, in which she uses color as a symbol, and works with a loose stroke of the brush. She looks back

to the Renaissance, and then to the work of El Greco, Goya, Alonso, and Nicolás. She does not see art as fundamentally demonstrative, but rather as suggestive. Some subjects that attract her in particular are children, animals, and everyday objects, which she organizes so that they speak to us of identity, memory, and the self. In 2001, economic catastrophe hit Argentina hard and this yielded an explosion of new spaces for people who wanted to sublimate their financial difficulties. In their desperation they turned to art, literature, and other cultural forms, and this created a demand for art workshops, making it possible for Delgado to leave psychology altogether and turn exclusively to art. Delgado is a prolific artist whose work has already caught the attention of the art-loving public in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Peru, and has been recognized with various prizes, including the Segundo Premio, 14 Salón Mercosur Internacional “Diógenes Taborda,” Museo ITIMuseum. Unlike many of the artists represented here, her initial reaction upon reading Borges when she was younger was rejection; she felt horrified by what she perceived as his pedantry and artificiality. Indeed, one of the stories that she found most objectionable is “The Other” (of which she has produced three different interpretations), because she thought the story had nothing to do with “the other,” but was exclusively about Borges. After some years away from Borges, she came back to him and developed a new appreciation for his work, a fact that paved the way for her participation in this project. Indeed, apart from three interpretations of “The Other,” she created two of “Funes, the Memorious.” Two of these pieces are used here.

Héctor Destéfanis is a mature artist with an established career, born in Buenos Aires in 1960. He is Profesor Titular in the Instituto Universitario Nacional de Artes and he is in charge of the Extensión Cultural of the Museo de Artes Plásticas Eduardo Sívori. His work has traveled to various countries—Argentina, Italy, the United States, and Uruguay—and has been recognized with various prizes, including the Segundo Premio de Dibujo, Salón Manuel Belgrano awarded by the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. Destéfanis describes himself as a painter and drawer rather than as an artist. A look at his creations shows a strong influence of drawing, even in paintings. He began drawing when he was four years old in a middle class family from which the father was absent. He studied publicity in the Universidad El Salvador in Buenos Aires, but he hated his work in this field, and kept drawing on the side. When he turned twenty he enrolled in the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón. His art is motivated by a sense that Argentinean artists have forgotten about themselves qua Argentineans, when in fact the key to the creation of universal art is precisely to begin with the particular. He begins to work, then, with what impresses and surprises him first in his surroundings, and generally ends where he began. The result is an abstraction from what he sees, and the creation of a new

reality that is the product of emotion, the stuff out of which art is made, according to him. He creates surrealist spaces in which figures, colors, tones, and values enter in dialogue and carry a psychological burden, such as the loneliness of death. He begins a painting by applying color, because this is most obvious to the senses, and then gradually generates a figure. This leaves the work with large areas where certain colors predominate, breaking up the surface into separate spaces that interact in various ways. In this context, shadows play important roles, suggesting more than they tell, and creating ambiguities and possible avenues of interpretation. The brushstrokes and drawing lines can be separate or merge, and figures can be truncated or presented in full. His work has been compared to that of Hopper, because of its metaphysical spaces. The artists who have influenced him the most were his teacher, Roberto Duarte, and classics such as Goya. Given Destéfanis's surrealist leanings and metaphysical preoccupations, it is not surprising that he has taken an interest in Borges, interpreting his work pictorially on a number of occasions. For this project he produced an interpretation of "The Gospel According to Mark," which is included here, and two renditions of "The Circular Ruins."

Claudio D'Leo is a *nom de plume* that Claudio Barrera uses as an artist. D'Leo is a mature artist, born in 1959 in Buenos Aires. He is an architect by training, but architecture did not satisfy his artistic needs, so he enrolled in the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón and devoted himself to art. At present, he teaches art in the Universidad del Museo Social Argentino and is Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the same university. His work has been exhibited in various venues in Argentina, Colombia, the United States, and Uruguay, and has received recognition through various prizes, such as the Premio Alianza Francesa, Centro Alfredo Fortabat. D'Leo's paintings have a strong social dimension, in which art is used to expose abuse and violence and the evils of an unconcerned society. For example, he created a series of oils on homeless people in Buenos Aires, and has often used his art to criticize structures of power in Argentina. Apart from his work at the university, he also offers workshops at a center closely oriented to the community. Some of his art has a sense of coming from the underground and being in opposition to anything associated with the establishment. Although he abandoned architecture for art, his art has not abandoned architecture. There is a strong structural aspect to it that is clearly visible. This is one of the reasons why his creations also appear to have been strongly influenced by cubism and other currents in art that take a more scientific approach. The main explicit influence on his work is that of the Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamin, whose style, technique, and motifs are clearly echoed in the work of D'Leo. Indeed, after spending some time in Ecuador working with this artist, D'Leo broke away from a series of elements that were present in his art prior to this time, one of which is a white background. Contrary

to prior practice, he begins with painted canvases, often starting with dark colors, on top of which he adds light that merges into darkness. The influence of Caravaggio and his frames of penumbras are clearly visible in it. This stage supercedes the early period, in which he used a Cubist style that explored multidimensionality and geometric structures to visualize an object from different points of view. Like several of the artists represented here, D'Leo has worked on Borges a number of times. One of his pieces, from the early part of his career, is on "The Aleph," but more recently his interests have shifted to subjects that deal with the human condition, such as the work represented here, which concerns "The Immortal."

Carlos Estévez is a Cuban artist, born in Havana in 1969. He presently resides in the United States. He is a graduate of the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana. Although still relatively young, he has already achieved considerable recognition. His work has been exhibited in many countries, including Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, England, France, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Martinica, Mexico, Norway, Panama, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and Venezuela. Among his many prizes is the Gran Premio, Primer Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo in Havana. He has been very prolific, having produced hundreds of works. His art has attracted substantial attention in Europe, the United States, and Latin America, where it is found in major public and private collections. The range of the art extends from sculptures and installations to oil and acrylic paintings on canvas and paper, drawings on paper, assemblages, collages, and combinations of these. Estévez works with traditional materials, but has also incorporated nontraditional elements in the art. He regularly collects objects of various kinds, particularly artifacts such as bottles and gadgets he finds in rummage sales and flea markets, which he later integrates into his works. Estévez's art is unique and its style easily recognizable. Its originality is a most prominent characteristic. One author who comes to mind as a background influence is Leonardo da Vinci. We find the same interest in machines, wheels, and contraptions. Estévez has also a fascination with anatomy, although for him this tends to concentrate on bugs, birds, fish, butterflies, lizards, and other animals. His humans are frequently puppets, mechanical devices with minds and emotions. Other common images found in the work are buildings and balloons. The mind behind the art seems to be as fascinated with new discoveries and the mechanics of the world as that of Renaissance and Enlightenment scientists and explorers. This quality is evident in his use of balloons and early models of machines. Much of this art alludes to the age of exploration, when Europeans were engaged in the expansion of their world. It aims at pushing the boundaries of the imagination, while using wheels, pulleys, and levers to explore the nature of the world that surrounds us,

and in particular the world of the mind and our emotions. Estévez's art is a laboratory of sorts, an observation platform. Given his metaphysical interests, it is not surprising that he has been interested in Borges. The two works included here were created for this project as interpretations of "The Rose of Paracelsus" and "The Garden of Forking Paths," a third dates from an earlier time, and a fourth was painted in 2011.

León Ferrari was born in Buenos Aires in 1920. He works with many materials, such as plaster, cement, wood, wires, plastic, metals, and pottery, and has used many techniques, including sculpture, photography, heliography, video, text, and so on. He is probably the most internationally celebrated artist from Argentina today, having been chosen as the best artist on the Venice Biennial in 2007, and having received many significant international prizes and accolades. His work has been exhibited in many important venues throughout the world, including the MoMA. But this success did not come easily. Until recently, he had to live by doing other things in addition to art, and in 1976 he had to leave his native land for political reasons. Part of his difficulties arose from his acerbic criticism of the structures of power in Argentina, and particularly of the alliance between military governments and the Catholic Church, as well as various religious beliefs and values common in Argentinean society. He was trained as an engineer and most of his life earned a living by working in related jobs. A trip to Europe, the result of an attempt to find a cure for his three-year old daughter whose prognosis had been hopeless, took him to Florence, and then to Rome, where he began studying pottery. In 1955, when he was 35 years old, he tentatively started an enterprise that produced cellulose. Five years later, in 1960, he had his first exhibition in the bookstore Galatea, where he first presented his work with wires. This initial breakthrough informs many of his subsequent works, even some pieces that do not use wires. One can grasp the expression of this initial insight in the multiple interlocking lines of some works and even in the kind of cursive writing that has become so distinctive of some of his creations. It was not until 1976, during the military dictatorship in Argentina, that his criticism of religion began, and also the integration of the Braille script in his art. For years his work was harshly criticized by members of the art establishment, and galleries, museums, and universities ignored it. It achieved considerable notoriety when in an exhibition in 2004, in the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, a group of thugs, led by a Catholic priest, attacked the exhibition, breaking, among other pieces, the very one presented here on Borges's "The Immortal." Ferrari has been interested in Borges for quite some time. In particular, he has worked on various of his poems, integrating Braille and photographs of nudes.

José Franco was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1958. He now resides in Buenos Aires. With a substantial body of work and a long list of accomplishments, he is a very well-known artist.

His work is represented in the collections of important museums in Europe, and North and South America, and has been exhibited in many countries, including Argelia, Argentina, Bolivia, China, Cyprus, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Spain, Sweden, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Among the many recognitions he has received is a Guggenheim Fellowship. His taste for art goes back to his childhood. His family was neighbors and friends of the Cuban painter Eduardo Abela, and in his secondary school days he became a friend of Abela's son and visited his home frequently. He was fascinated by the artist's workshop, next door to which resided the caricaturist Juan David. He entered the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas San Alejandro in the early seventies, where he worked primarily in sculpture. After graduating from San Alejandro, he enrolled in the Instituto Superior de Arte, where he took classes with five members of the Russian Academy of Moscow, and through them became acquainted with Russian Realism. At the time he concentrated on colonial themes and emulated the work of Amelia Peláez and other Cuban artists. After the Russians left, the art world in Havana became open to new currents, and in a biennial he was first introduced to conceptualism. His school thesis was entitled "Abstraction and Reality," giving a sense of his interests at the time. His work incorporated nature, particularly animals, and eventually abstraction. Magritte, Duchamp, and Warhol have had a great influence on Cuban artists, and Franco is no exception. Indeed, in an important venue, the Salón de Mayo, Franco saw a work by Magritte that made a lasting impression on him. The piece depicted a man, dressed as a leopard, holding a weight that was a head. After this experience, Franco's art took the turn that he has followed ever since: the interest in animals and nature, using the black line of the draftsman typical of much Cuban art. The work has a surrealist sense mixed with an emphasis on vegetation that reminds one of Rousseau. Franco's interest in Borges goes back to Cuba, where the writer was popular in spite of his politics. In an art exhibition in Panama, seeing some of Franco's work on animal skins, someone mentioned Borges's story "The Writing of the God" and this prompted him to read more. He realized that Borges had been fascinated with tigers from childhood—indeed, one of the few surviving childhood drawings from Borges is of a tiger. When Franco arrived in Argentina, he began to paint on literary subjects and organized an exhibition in 1996, with a slightly modified title of Borges's story, whose lead work had the same title. For this project he has produced a painting with the same title as the first and inspired by it.

Etienne Gontard was born in 1934, in Buenos Aires, from a French Huguenot family of German origin. He wanted to paint from childhood, but instead of following this inclination, he studied business and practiced that profession until 1986, after which time he devoted himself



entirely to art. All along, however, he had explored his original interest in art and had his first solo exhibition in 1976, when it became clear that he had become serious about what until then had been a hobby. He explored the various currents of contemporary art, cubism, expressionism, conceptualism, and dabbled in photography, but he never incorporated in his work the insights of Magritte's surrealism, which was popular at the time. His work may be described as having an expressionist root with a post-conceptual character. He has kept an interest in nature, particularly the Argentinean landscape and animals, but the work is not that of a naturalist; he always alters what is presented to him into an image of what he sees. He studied oil painting in the sixties with Ignacio Colombres, acrylic painting in the seventies with Kenneth Kemble, and etching with Eduardo Levy. He has frequently visited countries in South America in connection with his art, has also traveled to Mexico, the United States, and Europe, and has had exhibitions in Ecuador and Uruguay. In 1983 he joined the Grupo Intercambio, and he set up his studio, where he also taught, in Palermo, and later in Olivos. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions and has had many solo exhibitions. Most important in the last ten years, he participated in the Retrospective of the Group Intercambio in the Foundation of the Banco Mercantil Argentino (1998), the Outlet de las Artes in Puerto Madero (2002), *Artistas Argentinos* in the Palais de Glace (2008), and *France est Magnifique* in the Hotel Sofitel Arroyo (2009). His pictorial interest in Borges goes back to 1991, when he participated in an exhibition devoted to the writer, for which Gontard created two works, "La intrusa" (included here) and a pencil portrait of Borges that was stolen. The part of Borges's work that interests Gontard has to do with the description of human beings and their complex emotional interrelations.

Mirta Kupferminc was born in Buenos Aires in 1955. Educated in the Escuelas Nacionales de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano, Prilidiano Pueyrredón and Ernesto de la Cárcova, she is one of the most versatile of Argentinean artists today. She was trained in engraving, but has done extensive work in sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, videos, and installations. Among the many expressions of her work is the creation of a handmade book, of limited edition, in which she cooperated with Saul Sosnowski. Kupferminc is very active worldwide, and her art is known in many countries, including Argentina, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Taiwan, and the United States. Among her prizes is the Primer Premio Salón Nacional Argentina. She has not developed a particular style, but rather uses a variety of approaches to reach ends that are aesthetically informed but have a contextual focus. Most of her work integrates different media and techniques, making it difficult to classify, since it does not easily fit into any single one of the established categories. Nonetheless, there are clear recurring motifs in it, and some of her pieces remind us of aspects of surrealism.

Two of the most commonly used motifs are a chair and the figure of the poet. Both appear tri-dimensionally and on flat art. The first has evolved in many different ways, developing wings, optical illusions, and various colors, and appearing in different contexts. Its symbolism varies from context to context, sometimes referring to waiting, but other times to learning and meditating, among others. In all cases the device is used to bring the audience into the work. The image of the poet also is used in various ways to recall learning, patience, and creativity. It was originally done in clay, a reference to the story of Genesis, but later it began to appear painted in other contexts. Both, the chair and the poet, are motifs connected to an important element that informs a great part of Kupferminc's art, the exploration of her Jewish background. This is carried out through allusions to Jewish culture and roots, and it is one of the points of contact of her work with Borges, who was fascinated by Jewish history and the Jewish experience. She is one of the living Argentinean artists who has frequently, intently, and consistently related her work to Borges's stories. Indeed, she recently had an entire exhibition devoted to work on Borges and the Kabbalah at the University of Maryland.

Nicolás Menza is one of the most prolific and visible artists in Argentina today. He has had a very large number of exhibitions in many countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, France, Germany, Italy, Israel, Peru, Spain, Sweden, the United States, and Uruguay. Among his many awards is the Primer Premio de Dibujo, Salón Municipal Manuel Belgrano (Buenos Aires Government), Museo Eduardo Sívori. He was born in Buenos Aires in 1960, into a family in which he was the only male child and was surrounded by sisters. He began to draw and paint at a very early age and took the activity so seriously that before going to play, he always spent some time drawing. During adolescence he engaged in many creative activities—painting, music, theater, literature, and philosophy, among others—but at eighteen he decided to devote himself to art and enrolled in Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón, and later in Escuela de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova. His work displays extraordinary variety: boxes, sculpture, installations, painting, and drawing. Although he is probably best known for his oils, temperas, and pastels, he finds in drawing the advantage that it is a more narrative medium in which color is suppressed in order to decrease psychological sensuality. His use of color is one of the most obvious and impressive features of his art—his creations are filled with brilliant, almost electric colors, big splashes of them, with areas of impasto, arranged in architectural designs that remind us of the Italian metaphysics of De Chirico and Morandi, artists to whom Menza acknowledges a debt. The style is recognizable, but it is not easy to describe or characterize. In part this is because Menza's work is a very personal expression that seeks to be unique. Some of his art borders on the grotesque, the metaphysical, the latent—an

implicit expression of what is hidden—and is complex and challenging. But there is also the context of Buenos Aires, the city that formed him and continues to be present in his creations. One can see a surrealist quality, as well as elements of expressionism and symbolism in the work, but none of them owns it; the work transcends schools and fads. Among recurrent themes are women, clowns, children, still lifes, the painter and his materials, toys, scenes from Buenos Aires such as the typical cafes, and of course Borges's work. The last one has been a constant source of inspiration for Menza. He began to read him early on and has continued exploring his labyrinths ever since. He has created many works related to Borges, including portraits of the writer, but more important for us here, many interpretations of his works, both the stories and the poems. The key to this fascination is the structure of the thought. Menza finds an affinity between Borges's *modus operandi* and his own, the way they approach the world, a certain metaphysical pattern of understanding that is common and bridges the gap between literature and art. Here I include his interpretations of three stories: "The Circular Ruins," "The Garden of Forking Paths," and "The Secret Miracle."

Mauricio Nizzero was born in Buenos Aires in 1958. He graduated from Escuela de Bellas Artes, and currently teaches metal design in the Escuelas Técnicas Raggio, where he is one of the directors. He is prolific and has produced many public works. His art has been exhibited in Argentina and Uruguay and has received various awards, including the Premio Bienal de Pintura de Quilmes. His work consists to a great extent in drawings, although he also paints, but even his paintings have a strong drawing flavor. He began drawing when he was a child. He had an aunt who was an artist in Chile. When she visited at Christmastime when he was six, he had gifts for everybody but for her, so he made a drawing of a package and gave it to her and this event marked an important moment in his life. He always felt the need to say something through the metaphors of drawings. He went to a technical secondary school where he spent many hours drawing with an emphasis on the ornamental, and working with metals. In the Escuela de Bellas Artes, he began sculpting and then followed with color and tri-dimensional space. He has often painted street murals. For him teaching is important because it gives him the possibility of an encounter with the visual arts and literature. He has a loose style that avoids what he considers unnecessary details in order to concentrate on an important element he wishes to express. He focuses on first impressions—the sensation of the moment and the before and after—in order to capture the human comedy and human conduct, that is, the crucial instant viewed through the filter he, as artist, imposes on the occasion. His interest in Borges goes back some years, and although he had not produced interpretations of his works before, they have now surfaced in various creations. In the process of interpretation he applies the filter he uses

in his art, looking at the work of literature through a funnel that enhances what impresses him as the key aspect. One reason he likes Borges is because of the emphasis on memory, which he considers essential in the creative process and inspiration. Memory is convenient in that it is selective and glides over unessential details. In connection with this project, Nizzero produced a number of works, two of which are included here. They deal with the stories “The Other” and “Funes, the Memorious.”

Estela Pereda is the second most senior artist whose work is included here. She was born in 1931, in Buenos Aires and has had a long and distinguished career. Her art has been exhibited in many countries, including Argentina, Canada, Ecuador, France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and has received many awards, such as the Medalla de Oro de la Asociación de Críticos and the selection for the mural and prize “Nunca Más,” for the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Buenos Aires. Pereda grew up in a family with a strong artistic presence. Both her mother and grandmother were artists, and now her daughter also has followed suit. Her mother was a well-known writer and her grandmother created tapestries that she integrated into other works as well. The grandmother’s family had an Italian origin with a strong tradition of creating objects; they were artisans and artists and Pereda’s mother frequently took her to workshops, when she was thirteen or fourteen. When the time came to choose a career, although she wanted to go to the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, she did not have the courage to do it and chose instead something practical that could help her earn a living. She enrolled in the career of public translation, in the Faculty of Law, but never finished. She married young and moved to the country, and only slowly got back into art, in 1962. Her training took place in the workshops of Mariette Lydis, Bernard Bouts, Vicente Puig, Héctor Basaldúa and Araceli Vásquez Málaga, and she was part of the Grupo Intercambio. She studied the masters from the Renaissance, whose influence is still evident in her work, as is the case with Mantegna on the piece included here, which is an interpretation of Borges’s “The Interloper.” The move to the country awakened in her an appreciation for *mestizo* art. She had the opportunity of visiting the Christian chapels of northern Argentina and Chile, where the native peoples had left a record of their reading of the Christian stories and created an idiosyncratic art. Pereda was inspired by this and began to re-read these works, incorporating in her art elements from the land and its fruits. Yet, in her own words, she tried “to avoid becoming a folklorist,” turning instead into what she calls “an Americanist” whose aim is to uncover and rediscover the riches of America. *Mestizo* art, with its musical angels and armed archangels, prompted her to introduce many changes in her work, but she never developed a set style. She has always liked to experiment and change. Her art varies in the use

of media, which goes from oil and acrylic to drawing, sculpture, carving, weaving and sawing, the use of paper and collage, tempera, and the incorporation of various ready-made objects she finds. Among the topics that have particularly interested her is the place of women in society in general, and especially in Argentina. This is where the work I use here fits, and the explanation for her interest in Borges. Another of her pieces on Borges, a portrait, juxtaposes part of the image of the writer and a labyrinth.

Alberto Rey was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1960. His family emigrated to the United States when he was three years old. He is currently State University of New York Distinguished Professor at the State College at Fredonia. He holds a BFA from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a MFA from State University of New York at Buffalo with additional postgraduate work at Harvard University. He has received many awards, including the State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activities. His art is in the permanent collections of several important museums in the United States, and has been exhibited in Mexico, Spain, the United States, and the Vatican. Originally an abstract painter, Rey eventually turned to realism as he began to explore his Cuban identity. During the 1990s he focused on depicting Cuban landscapes recovered from old black-and-white photographs, exploring Cuban and American locales, representing Cuban cultural objects, such as bars of guava and bottles of rum, painting portraits of Cubans and Cuban Americans, and integrating religious images in his art. All of these pieces combine to raise issues having to do with identity, which are affected by religion, places, pop culture, and people. By this time, Rey had developed a painting technique over plaster in turn placed over canvas with a wood backing. This was an attempt to recover a feel for the work of old masters. The return to the history of art has always been important to him, as we see in his interpretation of Borges's "The Rose of Paracelsus" for which he uses as point of departure a detail of a work by Caravaggio. This piece also points to his continuing interest in questions concerned with religious faith. The exploration of places and his interest in fishing led Rey to look into his natural surroundings in a series of works dealing with New York State fish and flora, particularly around the place where he currently resides, as well as in Cuba. These are large canvasses of live and dead fish, underwater videos, and combinations of some of these in a large installation.

Paul Sierra was born in Havana, in 1944, and emigrated to the United States in 1961. He resides in Chicago, and studied art in the School of the Art Institute in that city. He is a senior artist with a large number of exhibitions and a substantial body of work, and has lived from his art for many years. His creations have been exhibited in France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the United States, and Uruguay, and are included in important collections in the United

States and Europe. Among the many awards he has received are two Cintas Fellowships. Sierra started drawing and doing watercolors when he was a small child. He had an uncle who was a Sunday painter, and let him use his paints. He fell in love with painting then and eventually enrolled in The School of the Art Institute in Chicago. At about twenty-two or twenty-three he had his first solo show and did not sell anything. He quit school and went into advertising to subsidize his painting, which he did after hours and on weekends. Eventually he was making more money from painting than from the advertizing business, so he quit advertizing and has been exclusively devoted to painting ever since. He is one of those artists who early on are able to support themselves with their art, even though he did not compromise his art and did not paint to suit clients. His work is strong and vigorous, the colors vivid, the brushstroke powerful, and the topics often disturbing: a man falling from a burning skyscraper, a lonely figure in a landscape, swimmers going against the current, crashed automobiles, and a dead Minotaur. But much of it can be strangely beautiful, lush landscapes, birds, and butterflies in starry nights, and golden fish swimming in creeks in the forest. In the landscapes he often places an animal or a statue that stands alone, and he never uses more than one figure. Loneliness and uniqueness are recurrent themes, but also the idea of paradise. Obviously there are influences, one can detect those of Rousseau, Gauguin, Goya, and De Kooning. In contrast with many Cuban painters living outside Cuba who work on Cuban themes, Sierra has never done so. His art is universal and finds inspiration in literature and the work of the masters. The Chicago Art Institute has been a great resource for him, and it is no surprise that he would be interested in Borges. Nor is it surprising that for his story he chose "The House of Asterion," a work about a monster who suffers loneliness and isolation, and ends up welcoming death.