



The Numbers, 2021. Mixed media. Dimensions variable

Ricardo Brey: *Every Life is a Fire*

Germantown: November 4, 2022 – January 29, 2023

Alexander Gray Associates, Germantown presents Ricardo Brey: *Every Life is a Fire*. The artist's first exhibition at the Gallery's Hudson Valley location, this focused presentation highlights three works from the artist's ongoing series of intricate, performative boxes, *Every Life is a Fire*. These boxes juxtapose disparate materials to speak to Brey's own identity as an Afro-Cuban artist who has lived and created art in Belgium for more than thirty years.

Encapsulating Brey's artistic aims of constructing transcultural dialogues that delineate the expansiveness of human experience, each box from *Every Life is a Fire* unfolds to reveal a miniature world. Designed to be opened in a measured, meditative way, these sculptures charge their mundane objects with the near sacredness of reliquaries. For example, *The Numbers* (2021) unfurls to reveal an acrylic cylinder containing a collection of painted blue thistles, which rest on top of a closed accordion book. Emblematic of Brey's longstanding interest in cataloguing his surroundings, the box unites botanical specimens with found objects—discarded metal numbers, etc.—to critically reflect on humankind's fraught relationship with the natural world. At the same time, Brey's inclusion of thistles speaks to his own biography. Emigrating from Cuba to Belgium as a young man, Brey found himself building a new life in a vastly different culture and society. Ultimately flourishing in his adopted city of Ghent, he has drawn parallels in the past between his journey and that of the thistle, whose rhizomatic roots enable it to thrive in both the new world and the old.

Brey frequently incorporates rhizomatic forms into his work. Indicative of the artist's indebtedness to Deleuzian theory, the continually growing stems of the rhizome signify both his embrace of the non-hierarchical and his rejection of dualistic understandings of concepts like interiority and exteriority, etc. Brey draws direct parallels between this way of thinking, which foregrounds multiplicity, and *Every Life is a Fire*. He notes, "The boxes are my most personal work. I decided that I was one being and that I would divide myself into a thousand pieces. And the boxes are all me. The boxes are all me because they are my infinite mirror. The boxes are all my philosophy, life, my feminine side, my masculine side, my ethnological side, my religious side. They are the doubling of myself to the infinite degree."

Refuting reductive binarisms, *Every Life is a Fire* engages in an endless, infinite doubling that surmounts divisions between systems of thoughts and values. Brey's boxes ultimately champion a holistic approach to understanding the human condition that recalls his assertion, "I create into my work spaces of interaction in which I link elements that at first seem to be opposite but in reality are indissolubly connected: nature/culture, organic/inorganic, western/non-western, my goal is to transmit with my sculptures and installations ... this hybrid nature, posing questions rather than answers."

Ricardo Brey's work has been the subject of numerous one-person exhibitions, including *Gap in the Clouds*, Museum Hof van Busleyden, Mechelen, Belgium (2022); *Adrift*, Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Bremen, Germany and Museum De Domijnen, Sittard, the Netherlands (2019); *Fuel to the Fire*, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA), Antwerp, Belgium (2015); *BREY*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana, Cuba (2014); *Universe*, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent, Belgium (2006–2007); *Ricardo Brey, Hanging around*, GEM, Museum of Contemporary Art, The Hague, the Netherlands (2004); *Sources*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Crestet, France (2000); Kunstverein Salzburg, Austria (1997); Galleria Civica, Palazzina dei Giardini, Comune di Modena, Italy (1996); Vereniging voor het Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Belgium (1993); and *El Origen de las Especies*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana, Cuba (1981). He has also participated in many group shows, including the 56th Venice Biennale, *All the World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor (2015); Artesur, Collective Fictions, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2013); *Trattenendosi*, 48th Venice Biennale, Italy (1999); *Universalis*, 23rd São Paulo Biennial, Brazil (1996); *Documenta IX*, Kassel, Germany (1992); and *Volumen I*, Centro Internacional de Arte de La Habana, Cuba (1981). He is the recipient of many awards and grants, including the Prize for Visual Arts from the Flemish Ministry of Culture (1998) and a Guggenheim Fellowship for Sculpture and Installation (1997). Brey's work is included in public and private collections in the United States, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, including the Bouwfonds Art Collection, The Hague, the Netherlands; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba; CERA Art Collection, Leuven, Belgium; Collection of Pieter and Marieke Sanders, Haarlem, the Netherlands; Collection de la Province de Hainaut, Belgium; de la Cruz Collection, Miami, FL; Fonds national d'art contemporain (FNAC), France; Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami, FL; Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany; Louis-Dreyfus Family Collection, Mount Kisco, NY; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana, Havana, Cuba; Museum de Domijnen, Sittard, the Netherlands; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA), Belgium; Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, FL; Province of East Flanders Monuments and Cultural Heritage, Belgium; Sindika Dokolo Foundation, Luanda, Angola; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent, Belgium; Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, Germany; Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan, and others.

Alexander Gray Associates is a contemporary art gallery in New York City and Germantown, NY. Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, the Gallery spotlights artistic movements and artists active in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts, and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is an organization committed to anti-racist and feminist principles.

New York: Tuesday–Saturday, 10:30 AM–6:00 PM
Germantown: Friday–Sunday, 12:00 PM–6:00 PM, and by appointment