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# Alchemy and Symbolism in the Work of Carlos Estevez

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ALCHEMY AND SYMBOLISM IN THE WORK OF CARLOS ESTEVEZ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LIBERAL ARTS

by

Irina Leyva-Perez

2012

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Irina Leyva-Perez, and entitled Alchemy and Symbolism in the Work of Carlos Estevez, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Carol Damian, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 8, 2012

The thesis of Irina Leyva-Perez is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
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Florida International University, 2012

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### ALCHEMY AND SYMBOLISM IN THE WORK OF CARLOS ESTEVEZ

by

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Florida International University, 2012

Miami, Florida

Professor Carol Damian, Major Professor

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how alchemy has influenced Carlos Estevez's work through a study of the symbolic repertoire and the philosophical concepts associated with it in his art, particularly how these are expressed in his artworks and how alchemy has evolved thematically in his oeuvre. The study of alchemy influenced this artist so deeply that even pieces that were not primarily inspired by this philosophical system show traces of it, essentially by representing the concept of transformation, crucial to understanding the alchemical process. The foundation of my thesis is Carl Gustav Jung's idea of metaphysical transformation as one of the main aspects of alchemy, and on his theory of active imagination as a tool to represent thoughts through artworks. Alchemy transformed Estevez's art, and by extension the way he approaches life, making him conscious of the importance of transmutation and alchemical concepts.

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## INTRODUCTION

Alchemy has sparked artists' imaginations for many centuries, perhaps because of its mystery as a philosophical and scientific construct. Alchemy has proven to be a source of inspiration for many visual artists who have represented alchemical laboratories and the alchemist working in isolation in their work. There have also been artistic renderings of alchemical themes, mostly made for books that specialize in the subject and sought visual imagery to accompany their stories. The interest in alchemy has spanned centuries and now contemporary artists have fallen under the spell. One of the artists whose work has been heavily influenced by alchemy is Carlos Estevez (b.1969). Estevez has created an extensive body of work in which he visually explores and develops many of alchemy's key ideas and concepts. The purpose of my thesis is to study the symbolic repertoire and the philosophical concept associated with alchemy in Estevez's work, particularly the way he translates them in his art and how they have evolved as part of his oeuvre. My hypothesis is that Estevez's art has been affected by his alchemical studies to the extent that even works that were not completely inspired by it still show its influence.

Estevez was born in Havana, Cuba and has lived and worked in Miami, Florida since 2004. He studied art in Cuba and graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte (Higher Institute of Art) (ISA) in 1992. The same year, he presented his first solo exhibition<sup>1</sup> at the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales (Visual Arts Development Center), in Havana. Soon he was considered

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<sup>1</sup> This exhibition was concurrently his graduation thesis from ISA.



to be one of the most important and prolific artists of his generation. Since that first exhibition, he has had many solo exhibitions<sup>2</sup> and has been included in countless collective shows. His work can be found in important museums, cultural institutions and private collections worldwide, and he has been the recipient of important scholarships, awards and artist's residencies.

Estevez's work has always gravitated towards spiritual and philosophical themes and from very early in his career he has been interested in the medieval period, which led him to discover the fascinating world of alchemy. He understood and embraced the alchemical methodology and applied it to the way he made art. His interest is in the visual repertoire of symbols that alchemists left behind and the graphic interpretations of it created by other artists over the centuries. Estevez consciously selects specific alchemic themes and symbols, which he has made part of his artistic language, thus bringing the centuries-old practice to life. In his works, he also conveys concepts that had traditionally been associated with alchemy to solve personal and intimate conflicts in a philosophical way from its perspective. He has used these concepts to address and portray contemporary situations. He also applies an alchemical methodology in the process of research for his work. The only difference between alchemists and Estevez is that for him the searching is the gold and not the other way around. The reward for him is just the process, not the final result.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first one deals with alchemy, its definition, development, main ideas, and principal figures, with a brief

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1 contains the complete curriculum vitae of the artist.

reference to how artists have represented it visually. The second chapter deals with the theoretical perspective, derived from the theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), who extensively studied alchemy and alchemical symbols. Jung defended the idea of metaphysical transformation as one of the main aspects in alchemy, the central aspect of this study. The third and final chapter concentrates on Estevez's work, his study of alchemy, how he translates alchemic ideas into artworks and how it has transformed his philosophical perspective.

## CHAPTER I

### Alchemy

Alchemy, once considered a science, is an ancient discipline that examined transmutation. The process of transmutation involves a physical conversion that comprises material metamorphoses, like the quintessential metal to gold, and the metaphysical progression that refers to the transformation of the human being. The first type relies mostly on chemistry and the second on philosophy and religion.

The definition of alchemy has varied through time, mostly according to the current views on the subject. The perception about alchemy has also been influenced by the way alchemical sources have been used and information about this practice transmitted. Often the result of discoveries in the field, such as previously unknown manuscripts, or by the meticulous study of a text or writer associated with the subject. The intention of the present chapter is to bring in a compendium of definitions of alchemy to develop an operational definition of alchemy for my thesis. The new definition would reflect the way alchemy has come to be part of Carlos Estevez's life and work.

Definitions of alchemy in the existing bibliography demonstrate that some authors had written theirs by following the etymology of alchemy, while others had used the essential principles of alchemy to establish it. There are basically two tendencies in this last group: the first concentrates on the physical and experimental aspect (i.e., working with metals), and a second that is more interested in philosophical and spiritual transformation. However, according to

Stanton J. Linden, from as early as 1605 Thomas Tymme noted the difference and the risks found in the definition of alchemy only as it refers to the process of metal transmutation, pointing out the importance of considering the transformation of the human being as well.<sup>3</sup>

One of the acute problems with the definition of alchemy is that there is not a consensus; another is its diversity. Yet another consideration is that many alchemical texts do not offer a definition of alchemy, but concentrate on whichever topic is its focus (i.e., elixirs, philosopher's stone).

The meaning and origin of the word varies according to authors and their sources. Arthur John Hopkins in *Alchemy. Child of Greek Philosophy* establishes that the word alchemy is considered as a derivation of *chem* or *cham*, which in Egyptian means black (Hopkins, 5). John Read in *From Alchemy to Chemistry* gives us another explanation: *Khem* was the ancient name of Egypt and *al* is the Arabic definite article (Read, 12).

Gareth Roberts in *The Mirror of Alchemy* cites Suidas,<sup>4</sup> a tenth-century lexicographer who wrote the first known Greek lexicon and entered his definition of alchemy under the word *chemeia*, defined as the preparation of silver and gold. Roberts picks up that thread to give us his conclusions about the origin of the word, similar to Read:

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<sup>3</sup> Linden is referring here to Thomas Tymme's book *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, published in 1605 (Linden, 5).

<sup>4</sup> Suidas lived in the tenth century, probably around the middle. There is not much information about his life, only that he lived in Constantinople. It is believed that he was a member of the clergy, but this is not certain. He authored the first Greek encyclopedia, known as the Lexicon. This was a dictionary of words in alphabetical order.

In its turn **chemeia** may be derived from **Khem**, an ancient name for Egypt itself. The word 'alchemy' is formed by prefixing to chemeia the Arabic definition article al- (as in algebra and alcohol) and that article indicates that alchemy's immediate origins for medieval Europe were Arabic (Roberts, 19).

One of the earliest definitions of alchemy was printed in a book in 1597 with the same title (*The Mirrour of Alchimy*) attributed to Roger Bacon:<sup>5</sup>

In many ancient Bookes there are found many definitions of this Art, the intentions whereof we must consider in this Chapter. For Hermes saith of this Science: Alchimy is a Corporal Science simply composed of one and by one, naturally conjoyning things more precious, by knowledge and effect, and converting them by a naturall commixtion into a better kind. A certain other saith: Alchimy is a Science, teaching how to transform any kind of mettall into another: and tht by a prope medicine, as it appeareth by many Philosothers Bookes. Alchimy therefore is a science teaching how to make and compound a certain medicine, which is called Elixir, the which when it is cast upon mettals or imperfect bodies, doth fully perfect them in the verie projection.

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<sup>5</sup> Roger Bacon's life and work will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Roberts, in his aforementioned *Mirror of Alchemy* defines alchemy on the basis of a compendium of others texts from different sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

Alchemy is a branch of knowledge by which the origins, causes, properties and passions of metals are thoroughly known, and by which those that are imperfect, unfinished, mixed and corrupt are changed into true gold' (Petrus Bonus 1546: f.26v); 'a science teaching the transformation of metals, which is effected by a medicine' (Bacon, *Speculum alchimiae* in Geber 1541: 258); 'the separation of the impure from a purer substance' (Rulandus 1612:26); separation of the pure from impure (Dorn 1650:sig. Aaav) (Roberts, 99).

The common denominator in these definitions is that all are focusing on the physical aspect of transmutation, emphasizing the work with metals. In every one, the highlighted factor is the chemical process applied to metals.

However, later on the perception of alchemy changed and definitions were focused equally on the philosophical value as well as the experimental one. One of the writers who defined it as such was H. Stanley Redgrove who, in his *Alchemy: Ancient and Modern*, published for the first time in 1911, defined alchemy as both a science and a philosophic system:

Alchemy was both a philosophy and an experimental science, and the transmutation of the metals was its end only in that this would give the final proof of the alchemistic hypotheses, in other words,

Alchemy, considered from the physical standpoint, was the attempt to demonstrate experimentally on the material plane the validity of a certain philosophical view of the Cosmos (Redgrove, 2).

In the early days of alchemy there were numerous experiments and intense laboratory work concentrated mainly on the elixir's preparations, or trying to obtain the philosopher's stone. So there is cause to see alchemy as one of the precursors of chemistry.<sup>6</sup> While several scholars have defended this idea, one in particular, John Read, developed it further in his *From Alchemy to Chemistry*, published in 1957. Read made an elaborate analysis to support his theory, and is one of the few who up to that point in time, despite the many years of study of alchemy, defined it in a broader sense:

(...) In its wildest interpretation, however, alchemy was a grandiose philosophical system, which aimed at penetrating and harmonizing the mysteries of creation and of life. It sought to bring the microcosm of man into relation with the macrocosm of the universe. The transmutation of one form of inanimate matter into another, placed in this larger context, was merely an incidental aim of alchemy, designed to afford proof on the material plane of its wider tenets, in particular that of the essential unity of all things. Alchemy was much more than a rudimentary form of experimental science (Read, 14).

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<sup>6</sup> Carl G. Jung opposed this idea and based his theories on a different approach, to be discussed in the second chapter.

After following the development of the term through centuries and noting the lack of precision in defining alchemy, contemporary scholars have recognized the difficulty of the task and instead of narrowing the scope of the definition they brought attention to its diversity. In his *The Alchemy Reader*, Stanton J. Linden comments:

(...) In fact, current scholarly concern is much more with the variety and diversity of conceptions of alchemy, the multiplicity of its definitions, the theoretical and practical malleability that makes alchemy useful and attractive to a broad interdisciplinary audience, and its origins in several ancient cultures. (...) it is now much more common to see alchemy as pluralistic rather than singular, as “alchemies” rather than “alchemy” (Linden, 4).

Linden makes an excellent point when he says that one of the main aspects to consider about alchemy is precisely its plurality. The diversity of alchemic practices is particularly important to take into consideration when selecting or working on a definition. After analyzing the different definitions cited throughout this text, and the changes that the practice has seen through time, I will define alchemy as a philosophical system, rather than a science, defined by transmutation.

The history of alchemy, especially its beginnings and first alchemists, is far from being complete. The sources available today are a fraction of what it is suspected was written centuries ago, and many have been lost forever. As a consequence, the history of alchemy is incomplete in terms of the records about



all the practitioners and their times. However, from manuscripts and books that survive today, we can weave a partial history of the development of alchemy throughout the centuries.

Although there are problems with the sources (such as wrong attributions and dates), these documents and books still provide all the information we have today about alchemy. Important contributions were the anthologies published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which made available many texts that otherwise would have been almost inaccessible. They also provide records and names of alchemists once unknown. Examples of these anthologies are: *De Alchemia*, published in 1541 by Petreium in Nuremberg, and early in the seventeenth century, the *Theatrum Chemicum*, compiled by Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) and published by Lazarus Zetzner in Strasburg (Linden, 2). These texts made possible the widespread knowledge of alchemy, increasing interest in it and reviving its importance. They have become important sources of reference for those interested in alchemy even today, among those the subject of this study, Carlos Estevez, who has deeply studied them.

Although for many years Egypt was considered the birthplace of alchemy, recent studies have proved otherwise. Some authors had defended the idea of China as the first place where alchemy appeared, because there is a text, *Chou I Tshan Thung Chhi (Book of the Kinship of the Three)*, from 142 A.D., which predates any known ones from the Western tradition (Linden, 6). Discovery of the Chinese text has helped to prove that Chinese alchemists were practicing long

before their counterparts in other regions, particularly the West. However, there were notable differences between the two:

(...) While Chinese alchemy shares a number of characteristics with Western alchemy – its basis in a theory of the elements, correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm, its aurifictive and aurifictive aims, and its insistence on the moral purity of the practitioner – there are also important differences. The theory of elements in which it is grounded includes five elements, rather than the four familiar in the West: wood, fire, earth, metal and water (Linden, 6).

Although it has been proven that Chinese alchemists were active in the third century, there is not much information about who they were or their names. Only a couple of them were passed down and among these very few was Ko Hung (383-343 A.D.), who authored a book that contained recipes for elixirs. There is also a book, perhaps the most prominent book of Chinese alchemy, titled *Tao chin yao chuen (Great Secrets of Alchemy)*, attributed to Sun sun-miao (581-673 A.D.), that was about making elixirs (Sánchez, 2003). The history and development of Chinese alchemy was fairly consistent for centuries. It mainly differed from its Western counterpart in that, instead of searching for the perfect way of making gold, it focused mainly on medicine, the possibility of immortality, and the improvement of health in general.

The practice of alchemy in India can be traced to the third through the tenth centuries A.D. and it seems probable that this was the result of constant

exchange with China. Trading between the main cultures of the period was based on commercial relationships in the region, and human movement from one place to another. The first indication of alchemy in India goes back to the sacred books, Vedas (1500-1200 B.C.)<sup>7</sup> in which there are references to a connection between gold and long life. According to David Gordon White, Indian alchemy can be divided into periods, beginning with an early one that was dominated by seeking gold. Later, Indian alchemists would concentrate more on searching for immortality (Linden 7). A third period was related to a medicinal approach, coinciding with the path that alchemical studies took in China, by moving away from the original gold-making pursuit into a human quest for health.

The first alchemist mentioned in Western alchemic texts is Hermes Trismegistus. He was called 'thrice great' for his triple function as King, philosopher and priest. There is no concrete evidence of his existence, despite his being mentioned in many texts as the first alchemist and the founder of the discipline. He was really a mythical character born out of the syncretism between Greeks and Egyptians that took place during the Hellenistic period (323 B.C. to 30 B.C.),<sup>8</sup> especially during the Alexandrian Age (fourth century B.C. to seventh A.D). Trismegistus is the result of the fusion of two gods: the Greek Hermes and

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<sup>7</sup> Vedas are the oldest known sacred books written in Sanskrit.

<sup>8</sup> The dates for the Hellenistic period vary. Although all coincide on the end date of Cleopatra's death in 30 B.C., the beginning is considered by some as 336 B.C. with Philip II's death and the ascension of Alexander as King of Macedon. Others consider Alexander's death in 323 B.C. and the formation of the Hellenistic kingdoms as the beginning of the period. Although most historians tend to accept the first date I will use the second as the beginning of the period.

the Egyptian Thoth. Both were regarded as the regents of communication, writing and magic, respectively. Today the consensus is that Trismegistus is a legendary figure, although several sources describe him as a real person and place him in Egypt. Also, there are several texts attributed to his penmanship, among those the legendary *Emerald Tablet of Hermes (Tabula Smaragdina)* that Alexander the Great supposedly found when he discovered his tomb in Egypt. The text is the cornerstone for alchemy, listing its basic principles. The importance of Hermes Trismegistos is that he transcended his time and the scope of alchemy, and the science, Hermetism, derived from his name and work.

The *Emerald Tablet* is not the only text attributed to Trismegistos.<sup>9</sup> According to surviving sources, he was the author of twenty- thousand books, an impossible task for one man. Typical exaggeration is one of the problems with sources that very often have been attributed to older authors in an effort to legitimize them.

Greek philosophers are credited with the majority of the philosophical theories of the ancient world. They were responsible for most of the theoretical contributions about alchemy. Among the Greek philosophers are Empedocles (490 B.C.- 430 B.C.), Plato (c.427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).

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<sup>9</sup> Issac Casaubon in 1614 (...) proved that the Hermetic writings were not those of an ancient Egyptian divinity or priest who lived in primordial times, but were composed anonymously during the period of the Roman Empire and the first few centuries A.D. with their eclectic mix of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Christian thought and philosophical diversity, including Platonism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Stoicism (Linden, 27).

There are no specific contributions attributed to Empedocles about alchemy. However, the famous Four Elements Theory, which Plato adopted and Aristotle would later develop to its maximum extent, is originally from Empedocles.<sup>10</sup> There is not much information about his life, except that he was born in Acragas, Sicily.

Plato did not write about alchemy directly, despite the fact that many texts are attributed to him.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, alchemists mainly took from him his form of writing (the *Dialogues*) and his core idea about the creation of the world with a soul (*anima mundi*). The way he described creation and the role of transformation in it was vital to alchemists. Plato also included the Four Elements Theory in his famous *Timaeus* as part of his explanation of the creation of the world:

Now the creation took up the whole of each of the four elements, for the creator compounded the world out of all the fire and all the water and all the air and all the earth, leaving no part of any of them nor any power of them outside (Linden, 29).

Aristotle's main contribution was his use and explanation of the Theory of the Four Elements, which was for centuries one of the main tenets of alchemy. According to this theory, he viewed the world based on four elements: fire, water,

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<sup>10</sup> Since Aristotle developed his alchemical theory to its full extent and many alchemists cite him, his theory will be explained in further detail in the section under his name.

<sup>11</sup> Many alchemists attributed their writings to Plato in an effort to make them more relevant.

earth and air. These elements formed opposite pairs: hot and cold, wet and dry. There was also a fifth element that he proposed: ether.

Aristotle called it ether, the element of the stars; the neo-Platonists called it Logos, otherwise the Word, God, or Reason; and among the medieval philosophers it was known as the quinta essencia, fifth being, or quintessence, sometime confused in alchemy with the Philosopher's Stone (Read, 3).

The importance of this theory relied on the transmutation capacity of one element into the other, and was the basic notion used by alchemists for many years, becoming the core of most texts written until the seventeenth century. The Philosopher's Stone became the obsession of alchemists since whoever had it would be able to make all transmutations. The Theory of the Four Elements would also be applied to human beings and their capacity to change, developed later by Carl Gustav Jung.<sup>12</sup>

There were several notable Egyptian philosophers from the Greek School who also made contributions to alchemy, including a few scholars who lived and worked in Alexandria, Egypt. However, theirs was as a short-lived activity since it is recorded that in 292 A.D., the Romans, under the Emperor Diocletian, expelled the alchemists from Egypt and burned their texts (Hopkins, 8). Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the texts from the period are so scarce. Today, we have records of Zosimos of Panopolis (c. 300 A.D.), as practicing at the end

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Gustav Jung's theories will be discussed further in the second chapter.

of the third century A.D. and beginning of the fourth, and Stephanos of Alexandria (first half of the seventh century A.D.). Unfortunately, there is not much information about them and most of their work has not survived.

Zosimos was born in Panopolis but lived in Alexandria during his adult life. He was the author of many books, also regrettably most of them lost.<sup>13</sup> His remaining texts are detailed accounts and precise descriptions of the tools of alchemy and procedures used then, mostly by artisans. He was also very descriptive about metals, and especially interested in transmutations. He created an encyclopedia of alchemy titled *Cheirokmeta*, a twenty-eight-volume work. The importance of Zosimos is that he compiled in his encyclopedia all known and isolated 'recipes' and procedures, paving the way for future alchemists. "Intent on setting forth alchemy's spiritual aspects, Zosimos's works often take the form of arcane allegorical visions or utilize highly cryptic symbols that appear to set forth instructions for the alchemical work, such as the famous Formula of the Crab" (Linden, 8-9).

Stephanos of Alexandria (first half of the seventh century A.D.) was a philosophy teacher in Constantinople. He is best known for his text, *The Great and Sacred Art of the Making of Gold*, also known as *De chrysopoeia*, meaning

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<sup>13</sup> In 1995 the *Keys of Mercy and Secrets of Wisdom* was discovered, a book by Al-Tughra'i, an Arab alchemist from the twelfth century. It contained a text by Zosimos, revealing more information about this alchemist and his work. It is believed that it was not a verbatim transcription of Zosimos' theories, and it does not seem to be complete either. The same problem applies to other texts attributed to Zosimos, raising doubts that he was really the author.

gold-making.<sup>14</sup> The text has nine parts and it seems to be originally conceived as lectures (Linden, 54). The assumption could be related to the nature of its rhetoric, which makes sense taking into consideration the style of the period and the fact that Stephanos was a professor. The text is basically about the processes of making gold, as the title indicates. The importance of this text in particular is that it was disseminated among the practitioners, becoming an important reference and one of the first in the field.

Alchemy passed from Greeks to Arabian scientists when Alexandria was conquered in 642 A.D. Since Greek philosophers and scholars left numerous texts behind, it was relatively easy to follow their ideas and discoveries. Islamic alchemists got hold of the written material, studied it, translated and made their own contributions to the science mostly in the way of scholarly texts. There are records of at least three major Islamic alchemists, active during the eight century: Khalid ibn Yazid (635-c.704 A.D.), Jabir ibn Hayyan (known also as Geber) (c. 720 A.D. –c. 800 A.D.), and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya (c. 825 A.D.-925 A.D.).

Khalid ibn Yazid's notoriety in the field of alchemy derives from his role in translating many texts from Greek into Arabic. There is very little information about his personal life, only that he was from Damascus and was a student of Stephanos of Alexandria. He was the author of *Secreta Alchymice*, in which he wrote about processes and described laboratory equipment. Among the central

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<sup>14</sup> Stephanos' authorship of this text was once questioned, but his translator, F. Sherwood Taylor, authenticated it in 1937. (Linden, 55)



ideas discussed in this text is the separation of elements, following the Aristotelian theory of four elements (Earth, Water, Air and Fire) (Linden, 78).

Jabir ibn Hayyan, perhaps the most famous of all Islamic alchemists, was commonly known as Geber in the Western World. He was born in Persia and it is believed that he was the son of a pharmacist, although details about his life are not completely clear and vary. It is also believed that he practiced medicine.

Geber's main contribution was to announce that metals were composed of sulfur and mercury. In alchemy, like most of his fellow Islamic alchemists, his work followed Aristotle's principles. He was a prolific writer, to such an extreme that he claimed authorship of approximately 3,000 books and other texts.<sup>15</sup> However, many of these texts are believed to be the work of either his disciples or followers. He has been credited for the following texts: *The Hundred and Twelve Books*; *The Seventy Books*; *The Ten Books of Rectification*; *Of the Investigation or Search of Perfection*; *Of the Sum of Perfection*; *Book of Furnaces*, and *The Books of the Balances*. Since he wrote extensively, he had the opportunity to cover philosophical matters related to alchemy to the detailed

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<sup>15</sup> "Thus speaks Abu Musa (Geber, that is) I have written 300 works on philosophy, 1,300 books about the works of art (Ruska believes this phrase to refer to machines, automats, specific instructions, and the like), and 1,300 works on the combined subjects of arts and machinery of war. Also, I have written an extensive book on medicine, as well as other smaller and larger works, to a total of some 500 books on medicine, including the *Book on Diagnosis and Anatomy*. I also wrote books on logic, based on the view of Aristotle. Then I composed the sophisticated Astronomical Table of some 300 pages, the *Book of Euclidean Commentaries*, the *Commentaries to the Almagest* (the Ptolemaic astronomy), the *Book of Mirrors*, books on asceticism, hortatory books, books on spells and exorcism... and finally I wrote a book on the art (chemistry) known as *The Gardens*" (Federmann, 60).

description of instruments and processes.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, Geber benefited by living in the times of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (c.766 A.D. -809 A.D.),<sup>17</sup> especially from the cultural environment that this caliph established. Geber's texts were translated into Latin and were used extensively as references by alchemists in Europe for centuries after his death.

Another influential Islamic alchemist was Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya, also known as Razi (Rhazes) or the *Man from Ray*, where he was born. He was known in his time as a doctor and some of his texts were used in universities in Holland up to the seventeenth century. For him, the object of alchemy was the transmutation of base metals into silver or gold by means of elixirs. He also thought it was possible to improve common crystals, such as quartz, by similar means, into emeralds, rubies, and sapphires. Razi also shared Geber's sulphur-mercury theory of metals, but introduced a third elementary principle of salt, which became established later in alchemical literature, especially through Paracelsus, who would consider it as one of the pillars of his theories (Goodrick-Clarke, 73). Among Razi's most important books about alchemy are *The Book of Experiments*; *Treatise on the Stone*, and the *Book of the Secret of Secrets*. Razi's texts,<sup>18</sup> like those of his predecessor Geber's, were also translated into Latin and spread throughout Europe. His medical books deserve

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<sup>16</sup> As in Chapter 1 of *His Book of Furnaces*, where he describes how the furnaces should be made, including specific information such as size (Linden, 94).

<sup>17</sup> Harun al-Rashid ruled from 786 to his death in 809. His reign was known as a prosperous time for the arts and sciences.

<sup>18</sup> Razi, like Geber, wrote books about other subjects, such as music.

special mention for they were established as required references in medical schools in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century (Federmann, 67).

Western alchemy in the twelfth century appeared to be in full splendor. Albertus Magnus (1193 or 1206-1280), a practitioner, was a prolific philosopher and theologian of the medieval period. He was born in Swabia, Germany and was ordained as a Dominican. His time in the order included important tasks such as holding office in Ratisbon, Germany, from 1260 to 1262 (Linden, 99).

Magnus, as many of his predecessors, was basically an Aristotelian and, as such, he formulated his theories following the Greek philosopher's concepts. He also followed Geber's sulfur-mercury theory. Magnus' experience in alchemy was essentially empiric and his main contribution was in the form of books. As with other alchemists, there are many texts attributed to him, but there are at least seven about alchemy confirmed as his: *Alchemy; Metals and Materials; Secrets of Chemistry; Origin of Metals; Origins of Compounds, Concordance and Libellus de Alchimia*. His writing demonstrates a major change from his forerunners, as he left behind the heavy rhetorical tone that plagued earlier texts. His *Libellus de Alchimia* is not an easy read, but at least it is written in a clear manner. In this book, Magnus enunciates different alchemic concepts: Distillation, Ceration and Solution,<sup>19</sup> and explained them. He also described processes, such as the Fixation of Powders (Linden, 109), and how to achieve

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<sup>19</sup> For a description of the concepts, see a section from his *Libellus de Alchimia* (Linden, 108).

them. One of his main philosophical points is that alchemy was a science that imitated nature.

As with Magnus, Roger Bacon (c.1219-c.1292) identified himself with Aristotle's principles and with Geber's sulfur-mercury theory. Bacon was an English Franciscan friar and a philosopher who lectured at Oxford on Aristotle. Therefore, it is not a surprise that his alchemical thoughts were closely related to those of the Greek philosopher. He was also a lecturer at the University of Paris. Known for his experimental approach, Bacon had problems in his time because of the nature of his ideas. A very prolific writer, he wrote about philosophy, religion, mathematics, geometry, astrology and alchemy. His major contribution to alchemy was three main books: *Opus Majus (Great Work)*; *Opus Minus (Lesser work)*, and *Opus Teriliium (Third Work)*, written in two years and done in secret because of their disputed nature. There are thirty alchemical texts credited to Bacon, among those is *Speculum secretorum alchemiae (The Mirror of the Secrets of Alchemy)*. In 1597, an English translation was published under the title *The Mirror of Alchimy (Roberts, 36)*.

The controversies surrounding his books, along with the fact that his work was very experimental, contributed to the fact that when he died his work had not received the recognition that it deserved. Centuries after his death, his fame flourished and he was recognized not only as an important scientist, but also as an occultist, to whom special powers were attributed.

Nicolas Flamel (c.1330-c. 1417) is one of the most flamboyant characters to have contributed to alchemy, if in fact he existed at all. According to available

records, he was a scrivener who also sold manuscripts and was a thriving businessman. However, his economic success was attributed to his alchemy and not to his businesses. Flamel was credited for being able to effectively achieve metal transmutation. Theoretically, he supported the sulphur-mercury theory, first enunciated by Geber. *The Triumphal Chariot of Antimony*, attributed to Flamel and first published in 1685, was his most important contribution, if in fact it is his work. In this text, he describes in detail the properties of antimony. Lately many scholars have questioned the existence of Flamel and they wonder if he really existed or if he was a marketing strategy of P. Arnauld de la Chevalerie, publisher of his *Exposition*, in the seventeenth century (Linden, 123). The suspicion arouse because there is no evidence of the existence of the book prior to that date.<sup>20</sup>

During the Renaissance, there were several active alchemists, among them Paracelsus (1493-1541), who is considered to be one of the main contributors to the discipline.

His major contribution to alchemy was its reorientation from gold-making and the pursuit of the philosopher's stone to the formulation and application of medicinal preparations from mineral and chemicals (Linden, 151).

His real and complete name was Philippus Aureolus Theophrast Bombast von Hohenheim, and he was a Swiss alchemist. Paracelsus' main theory was

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<sup>20</sup> However, it is documented that there was a Nicholas Flamel who was a businessman and lived in Paris. The discrepancies are more related to the attributed dates for the book and the fact that there is no proof of its existence during Flamel's lifetime.

that he considered illness as a chemical process, therefore insisting on cures through medicine. He believed that illness was the result of a lack of harmony between man and the cosmos. A complex man, Paracelsus made his way at the University of Basle by lecturing in German and not in the customary Latin, therefore opening the doors for common people such as barbers, who were practicing medicine in those days. Such a decision caused conflicts that soon resulted in his resignation. In alchemical terms, he developed what can be considered as (...)“three –principles theory” (*tria prima*) of salt, sulphur and mercury, the making of homunculus, the generation of metals, the doctrine of signatures, and the role of magic and astrology in his practice of the “Spagyrical Art” (...) (Linden, 151). Paracelsus is a clear example of the vast reach of alchemy and its contribution to other disciplines. His theories proved to be the seed of what would later be medical treatment and cure through actual medicines.

Early in the fourteenth century, Pope John XXII published *Extravagantales decretales: De crimine falsi*, a papal prohibition against alchemy. Despite the existence of this document declaring its position against alchemy, and the powerful control that the Church exercised over most of Europe, the popularity of the practice continued for at least two hundred years more.

Isaac of Holland is recorded as the first alchemist in Holland, and probably lived during the fifteenth century. Information about him is very limited, only that he worked with his son and that they followed Geber’s principles. Nevertheless, their writings recorded their experiences in the field, especially detailed

experiments about work with metal. Among the most important are his directions for extracting the Quintaessence from sugar and other organic elements. He is also credited as the first to mention the sulphur-mercury-salt theory (Redgrove, 1973).

George Ripley (1415-c.1490) is perhaps the most famous English alchemist. Ripley studied in Italy and was associated with the Augustinian Priory at Bridlington, Yorkshire, where he had a laboratory. One of his best-known texts was his influential *Compound of Alchymy*, an alchemical poem dedicated to King Edward IV. The poem was written in 1477 and was about how to make the philosopher's stone. It was finally printed in 1561 for the first time and was one of the first alchemy texts printed in England (Linden, 141). Ripley wrote other texts, notably *Medulla alchemiae (The Marrow of Alchemy)*, dedicated to George Nevill and published in 1476.

Thomas Norton (c.1433-1513/4) was another English alchemist active in the fifteenth century. Norton briefly studied with Ripley, and later continued on his own. During his lifetime, he conducted many unsuccessful alchemic experiments. However, he is credited with being able to make the elixir of life twice (Roberts, 41). In the alchemical field, he is notable for his text *Ordinall of Alchemy*, which described what is believed to be his own initiation in alchemy

through verses.<sup>21</sup> There are two other texts attributed to him: *De transmutation metallorum* and *De lapide philosophorum*, but there is no record of them.<sup>22</sup>

In the seventeenth century, alchemy started to decline as a science and chemistry gained importance. As a matter of fact, the words would be used alternatively until the eighteenth century, when a clear distinction between them was established. Chemistry became a new science in development, while alchemy was declining as a mystic practice related to gold-making. However, during the seventeenth century, there were still some important alchemists that continued working and publishing their findings.

One of the alchemists who worked during the seventeenth century was Michael Sendivogius (1566-1636), a Polish alchemist, philosopher and medical doctor. Sendivogius experimented with metals, but his main contribution was to discover that air was composed of various elements and that one of them was oxygen, although he did not call it that, for him it was the “food of life.” He developed this theory in his writings, for which he was best known. But it was his publication, *Novum Lumen Chymicum (A New Light of Alchemie)*, that catapulted him to fame.<sup>23</sup> *Novum Lumen Chymicum* was originally written in Latin and published in 1604 in Prague. In 1650, it was translated into English and published in London. After that it was translated into several languages and published in different cities. The book is divided into treatises of different themes,

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<sup>21</sup> Norton’s *Ordinal of Alchemy* was also published in the *Theatrum Britannicum* in 1652.

<sup>22</sup> Ashmole mentions these two works as having been attributed to Norton (Roberts, 41).

<sup>23</sup> For an abstract from the book, see Linden 175- 190.



ranging from his interpretations of how the universe was created, working with metals, and his theory of the “food for life,” an important discovery for science, especially chemistry.

Another important alchemist and philosopher in this period was Robert Boyle (1627-1691), the “Father of Modern Chemistry.” He was known for his scientific and experimental work, especially in the field of chemistry,<sup>24</sup> hence his title. Boyle’s activities led him to write and publish in 1678 *An Historical Account of a Degradation of Gold Made by an Anti-Elixir: A Strange Chymical Narrative*. As the title of the text indicates, Boyle was interested in the process of metal transmutation, especially in gold-making.

The last great alchemist was Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) whose contributions to science in general were immense.<sup>25</sup> Known as the “Father of Modern Science,” or the “Last of the Magicians,” Newton was an English philosopher, mathematician, theologian, physicist, astronomer and alchemist. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment is related to the laws of gravitation, although he contributed to sciences in general in many other ways through his discoveries in mechanics, calculus, optics and physics.

Newton’s interest in alchemy inspired him to write extensively and he left behind abundant material on the subject. Two of his papers indicate his thoughts on major alchemical principles, such as making the Philosopher’s Stone. The first

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<sup>24</sup> His experimental work with gas led him to discover what was passed down as Boyle’s law, about the relationship between gas’ volume and pressure.

<sup>25</sup> For the sake of clarity and the focus of this study, I will only concentrate on his contributions to alchemy.

paper is *The Key*, an early work with the central idea “to produce the ‘philosophical mercury’ or universal solvent so prized by alchemists as the necessary first step in preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone” (Linden, 243). Another manuscript, his *Commentary on the Emerald Tablet*, as the title indicates, was about one of the central tenets of alchemy. In this later paper, Newton commented about the creation of the world according to alchemical laws.

Although alchemy has always been present in one way or another, after the seventeenth century it substantially declined as a practice. Recently there has been renewed interest in it, especially from the perspectives of artists, who have found an endless reservoir of inspiration in this ancient practice, especially of richness of its symbolism.

Alchemy is legendary for its symbolism, not only visually, but also in the language alchemists used in their texts. They consciously tried to write in a manner that was not easily understood for those who were not part of the trade.<sup>26</sup> A good example of this hermetic language and its cryptic nature is the following extract from one of Zosimos’ texts:

(...) one must slaughter the dragon (the serpent Ourobouros) and thoroughly mince its flesh and bones. This dragon would have three ears, one each for the three exhalations of sulfur, arsenic, and mercury, and four legs- lead, copper, tin and iron. The blood and

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<sup>26</sup> Anyone who inadvertently enters this linguistic arena will suddenly find himself in a chaotic system of references, a network of constantly changing code-names and symbols for arcane substances, in which everything can always apparently mean everything else, and in which even specialist, Baroque dictionaries and modern lists of synonyms provide few clues (Roob, 11).

bones of the dragon are obtained through smelting and incinerating. Both the dream and the gory description of the dragon's slaughter are encrypted formulas of alchemic procedures (...) (Federmann, 23).

Their allegories were intentionally crafted in a way that would preserve the hidden knowledge. They tried to keep secret their procedures and formulas, and for that reason created similes that would function as secret codes. For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on visual representation, most relevant to artistic practice.

Symbolism in alchemy was consistent through its main idea: transformation. Symbols would always aim to represent the different stages and process involved, and they often varied from artist to artist, and according to the epoch and the text they were illustrating.<sup>27</sup> Artists created a more specific compendium of symbols that can be traced in alchemic imagery throughout time. A basic list of recurrent symbols includes dragons, the conjunction of man and woman, hybrid creatures, and the sun and the moon. Animal riddles were part of the writing code so it is not uncommon to find many examples of fauna in the repertoire, including the green lion, representing Mercurius,<sup>28</sup> and the serpent representing conventional evil. Birds are usually associated with spirituality, so it

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<sup>27</sup> Symbolism in alchemy is so vast that just exploring this section could be the subject of a complete thesis. For that reason, I mention a few symbols in this introduction and later, in the third chapter, will be more specific discussing the work of Carlos Estevez.

<sup>28</sup> (...) 'Mercurius is the medium of conjunction.' Mercurius is the soul (anima), which is the 'mediator between body and spirit' (Schwartz-Salant, *Encountering Jung on Alchemy*, 169).

is not a surprise that alchemists included them in their illustrations. The black crow or raven represents the initial stage of work in alchemy; the pelican indicates sacrifice, and the peacock the inner being. Deer are important animals in several cultures, and in the alchemical context represent the soul. Mythological creatures such as unicorns are used to represent the spirit.

Alchemists frequently took already established symbols such as those associated with Christianity (i.e., dove to represent God) and the fish, which paired in twos would represent soul and spirit. A very particular symbol is the egg, used to represent birth, death and the process of a new beginning.

The hermaphrodite and androgyny are frequent symbols in alchemical texts. Mostly used to illustrate *Conjunctio* (Conjunction),<sup>29</sup> they are usually represented as half-woman and half-man, or half-sun and half-moon, sometimes as a winged creature, and often wearing a crown. Fortresses are also common in alchemical illustrations and were used to represent the inner self and the personality. Buildings and cities were incorporated to symbolize similar qualities. Alchemists used to consider Jerusalem as an “allegory of the Great Work,” in its perfection (Battistine, 340).

There is also customary representation that went with each period, such as illustrating nature as a woman, or the diverse elements (earth, water, wind

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<sup>29</sup> Although the conjunction is unquestionably the primordial image of what we today would call chemical combination, it is hardly possible to prove beyond a doubt that the adept thought as concretely as the modern chemist. Even when he spoke of a union of the “natures”, or of an “amalgam” of iron and copper, or of a compound of sulphur and mercury, he meant it at the same time as a symbol: iron was Mars and copper was Venus, and their fusion was at the same time a love-affair. The union of the “natures” which “embrace one another” was not physical and concrete, for they were “celestial natures” (...) (Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 457).

and fire) as women with their respective attributes. Other symbols also follow traditional interpretations, such as the Phoenix, which universally means rebirth.

In addition to all these symbols, alchemists would include their tools, instruments and processes in a descriptive manner, often disguised in a way that would look more like a fantastic image.

Looking at this condensed compendium, we can see a common trend: in one way or other the selected symbols are indicative of change. Death, dismembering and resurrection are some of the recurrent images to illustrate passing through a stage. The specific representations of alchemical processes, such as putrefaction, separation, sublimation, to name a few, show stages in the transmutation. There is also the use of emblems, which mainly corresponded with the illustration of a process in several phases, usually presented in the same image, or at least the same page. Examples of such are representations of the Cosmos and creation.

Later we will see numerous paintings of alchemists working in their laboratories. Some of the images capture the mysterious aura that surrounded the creation of gold from any metal, and the essence of their isolated work. Others would ridicule the role of alchemists, and present them as charlatans and time wasters.

Most of the older examples follow written descriptions that artists used as guides to fulfill their commissions to illustrate them as part of alchemical texts. But there were also other artists who were simply inspired to create renderings of alchemical passages, according to their own views on the subject, including

Carlos Estevez. Among this last group are Hans Memling (c.1430-1494), Hieronymus Bosch (1460-1516), Lucas Cranach (1472-1553), Peter Bruegel the Elder (c.1525-1569), William Blake (1757-1827) and Marc Chagall (1887-1985).

The artists who represented these themes in the previous centuries were careful enough to disguise their symbols in what seemed to be an excessive use of fantastic resources. Only those initiates could fully understand what they really wanted to represent. A classic example is Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1504),<sup>30</sup> his most famous painting. Bosch is especially notorious for his symbolism and has inspired many theories in attempts to decipher its meaning. Among these theories is one that says he included symbols that were allusions to alchemical processes. One of these symbols, perhaps the most visible, is the egg, that can be interpreted as an allusion to the Philosophical Egg and the purification that follows. He also included couples in various acts, which could be seen as his representation of the union of opposites. Other symbols are bulbous forms that could be considered as alchemical vases (alembic).

Although we can trace the development and apogee of alchemy as a science roughly until the seventeenth century, it never disappeared completely as a philosophical current, and has been a constant presence. In the twentieth century, with the writings of Carl G. Jung, alchemy gained visibility. Jung's books made possible a revamped interest in the practice by highlighting the links between alchemy and other sciences, such as psychology.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is a triptych made in oil on wood, 76.77 x 86.81 inches, Museo del Prado in Madrid, Spain.

Surrealist artists also were notorious for the symbolism they used in their works, and alchemy was a great source. Artists such as Max Ernst (1891-1976) represented concepts such as Coniunctio in paintings such as *Men Shall Know Nothing of This* (1923). Other artists in the same movement, such as Remedios Varos (1908-1963) and Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) also represented alchemical concepts in their works.

It may be no surprise that contemporary artists, such as Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Anselm Kiefer (b.1945), have been attracted to its rich symbolism and have felt tempted to explore the cryptic texts and images that alchemists left behind and incorporate them into their work. These artists continued exploring transmutation, an ancient problematic idea, from a contemporary perspective. Perhaps this is due to the fact that alchemy, by offering a way of physical transformation, is also giving artists the means to change their own lives in a philosophical manner, a spiritual evolution to a higher stage.

## CHAPTER II

### Carl Gustav Jung's Theories of Transformation

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a very influential Swiss psychiatrist, the founder of analytical psychology, known as Jungian psychology. Jung's studies related to psychology were novel for his time since he incorporated other disciplines, such as philosophy. His theories impacted not only his field, but also many others in the humanities, such as art and literature.

Jung was born in 1875 in Kesswil, a small town in Switzerland, and studied medicine at the University of Basel, graduating in 1900. The same year he went to work at the Burgholzli Mental Hospital in Zurich, where he became interested in psychiatry, which became a lifelong pursuit. When he received his Doctorate in 1902 from the University of Zurich, his dissertation, *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena*<sup>31</sup> was a study related to this field. In 1905, he began lecturing on psychiatry at the University of Zurich, which he continued doing until 1913.

An important chapter in his life was his relationship with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).<sup>32</sup> They began exchanging ideas in 1906, which led to an intense friendship and professional collaboration. However, this association would be dissolved in 1912, after six years of alliance, when they engaged in some

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<sup>31</sup> Published in 1903.

<sup>32</sup> Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist, perhaps the most influential of the twentieth century. Freud is specially known for his theories about how sex influence life in general. Among other contributions to the field, he created psychoanalysis, a complete new way of analyzing patients. His theories are still in use.



theoretical disagreements and parted on bad terms. The connection between them was never mended and Jung continued working alone. It is during this independent period that he made most of his contributions to psychology.

Jung was particularly known for his interest in symbols and its interpretations, devoting an extensive part of his career and writings to understanding and explaining them. It is not a surprise that this path led him to alchemy, which proved to be an endless source of encoded symbols. During the last forty years of his life, alchemy became the focus of his work and a kind of obsession.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Jung, alchemy enjoyed a renewed prominence and became the center of interest for intellectuals, particularly for philosophers, writers and artists in the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

His first approach to the subject can be traced to 1929 when he wrote *Commentary on "The Secret of the Golden Flower,"* an analysis of a Chinese alchemical text. In the following years, he continued his studies about the relationship between alchemy and psychology. Between 1936 and 1937, he wrote several texts explaining how he saw this relationship, compiled in *Psychology and Alchemy* (published in 1944). Among those texts were *Individual*

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<sup>33</sup> It is known that Jung collected original alchemical texts and books.

<sup>34</sup> Although the Surrealists had drawn attention to alchemy from a visual viewpoint, Jung's writings inspired a new wave of interest in the subject since he approached it from a different angle.

*Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy* (1936) and *Religious Ideas in Alchemy* (1937).<sup>35</sup>

Later he would pen a second group of texts more specifically about alchemy. These were *The Visions of Zosimos* (1938); *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon* (1942); *The Spirit Mercurius* (1943), and the *Philosophical Tree* (1945), published in 1968 as a volume titled *Alchemical Studies*.<sup>36</sup> Between 1955 and 1956, Jung wrote *Mysterium Coniunctionis, an Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*,<sup>37</sup> considered his most important and complete book about the subject. It is in this volume that he developed conclusive concepts on which he had been working for a while, such as active imagination, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Jung's fascination with alchemy made him realize that what many others saw or understood as a chemical method of transformation was really much more than that, transcending the pure physical possibilities to include the psychological and spiritual ones. However, in *Psychology and Alchemy*, he explicitly stated that long before him many alchemists were fully aware of alchemy's transformative

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<sup>35</sup> These texts were published later as part of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 12, by Princeton University Press, 1944, 1953, 1968.

<sup>36</sup> *Alchemical Studies* were published also as Volume 13 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Princeton University Press, 1968. Since then it has been reprinted several times.

<sup>37</sup> *Mysterium Coniunctionis* was also published as Volume 14 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Princeton University Press, 1963, 1970. This book has been printed many times since then, in several editions by different publishing houses.

power for the human being versus the gold-making end result.<sup>38</sup> His key argument was that he saw parallels in the main stages of alchemy (*Nigredo*, *Albedo*, *Citrinitas* and *Rubedo*)<sup>39</sup> and those in the transformation of the self. He went as far as to see the same phases equally in both transmutations: the alchemical and the spiritual.

In alchemy the first stage would be Nigredo or blackness:

*Nigredo* or blackness is the initial state, either present from the beginning as a quality of the prima material, the chaos or *massa confusa*, or else produced by the separation (*solutio*, *separatio*, *divisio*, *putrefactio*) of the elements. If the separated condition is assumed at the start, as sometimes happens, then a union of opposite is performed under the likeness of a union of male and female (called the *coniungium*, *matrimonium*, *coniunctio*, *coitus*), followed by the death of the product of the union (*mortificatio*, *calcinatio*, *putrefactio*) and a corresponding *nigredo* (Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 230).

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<sup>38</sup> (...) there were always a few (alchemists) for whom laboratory work was primarily a matter of symbols and their physic effect. (...) they were quite conscious of this, to the point of condemning the naïve goldmakers as liars, frauds and dupes. Their own standpoint they proclaimed with propositions like “Aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgi” (Our gold is not the gold of the masses) (Jung, 34).

<sup>39</sup> The name and number of stages in alchemy vary according to authors, a similar situation in defining alchemy. Jung used three stages, which are the ones cited and discussed here. In his *Religious Ideas in Alchemy*, Jung describes how the original four stages enunciated by Heraclitus were slowly changing into the three discussed here. He also called attention between the correlation of these initial four stages and the four elements (earth, wind, water and fire).

The similarity in the process of *Nigredo* in alchemy to the transformation in a person's life corresponds to the beginning of their journey to self-knowledge, when the subject of the transformation becomes aware of the problems and what needs to be solved. It could also be the starting point in a learning process. As in everything in alchemy, the color is symbolic and black is used to represent this stage, which is why Jung refers to this stage as blackness. It could also be considered as an embryonic state, since the person is embarking on a sort of 'rebirth.' The progression can be applied to a spiritual journey in which the person is growing internally, when he realizes the need for such growth.

The stages should succeed one after the other in an uninterrupted sequence. Therefore, the second stage *Albedo*, should be a continuation of the first stage. Going back to alchemy, it would continue:

From this the washing (*ablutio, baptisma*) either leads direct to the whitening (*albedo*), or else the soul (*anima*) released at the "death" is reunited with the dead body and brings about its resurrection, or again the "many colours" (*omnes colores*), or "peacock's tail" (*cauda pavonis*), lead to the one white colour that contains all colours. At this point the first main goal of the process is reached, namely the *albedo, tinctura, alba, terra alba foliata, lapis albus*, etc. highly prized by many alchemists as if it were the ultimate goal. It is the silver or moon condition, which still have to be raised to the sun condition. The *albedo* is, so to speak, the

daybreak, but not till the *rubedo* is it sunrise (Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 23).

*Albedo* becomes a transitional or intermediate stage in the person's renovation. It is perhaps one of the most intense parts of the process since it is right in the middle, when the person is half way between the initial darkness and the way of understanding, casting away his own shadows and getting ready for the final stage: knowing himself. The intensity of this part is reflected in the image of all the colors together, meaning difficulty. The metaphor of the daybreak or dawn is symbolic of the passing through, a way of recognizing the development. The next stage is known as *rubedo* and in alchemical terms:

The transition to the *rubedo* is formed by the *citrinitas*, though this, as we have said, was omitted later. The *rubedo* then follows direct from the *albedo* as the result of raising the heat of the fire to its highest intensity. The red and the white are King and Queen, who may also celebrate their "chymical wedding" at this stage (Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 232).

The symbolism of the heat is referred to as the intensity of the process, something that often was mistakenly associated with physical heat in a furnace. Here the laboratory is the world and the furnace is the interior battle that every human being is going through in order to develop himself. It is in this step that the person should have arrived to the point of self-knowledge as a way of understanding his personality. At this stage, the 'shadow' should have disappeared and the person must be in full control of himself.

The idea of a human transformation was central to the later revival of alchemy as a philosophical trend. The primary objective of obtaining gold from other metals was substituted for the idea of reaching a new phase in a person's life through its development, which Jung would call 'personal growth.'

Jung's exchange with his patients, and his own life experience, made him realize the power of imagination and its role in turning around somebody's life. He became interested in studying its reach and the possibilities that it offered, and as a result the term active imagination was born. Active imagination was one of Jung's early concepts of transformation, and would encapsulate this idea of renovation. Active imagination presents the act of transformation in a continuous flow, from the moment that it is an idea, a dream or a vision, to final completion. The concept of active imagination, which later became a work method for him, was precisely what helped him to overcome his own crisis after separating professionally from Freud during the years 1913 to 1916. He wrote his first paper about it in 1916, and titled it *The Transcendent Function*.<sup>40</sup> However, it was not until 1935 in the Travistock Lectures<sup>41</sup> in London, England, that he called it active imagination for the first time.

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<sup>40</sup> This paper was left aside until 1958, when he revisited and reworked it. Jung often wrote papers, left them aside to later revise.

<sup>41</sup> In 1935, Jung was invited to deliver a series of five lectures at the Institute of Medical Psychology, known as the Travistock Clinic, located in London, England. The lectures were recorded and published in a mimeographed format. Later on they were published as part of his *Collected Works*, Volume 18, and also independently as *Analytical Psychology: its Theory and Practice*.

Active imagination was first a concept and later became a work method for Jung, a process that took him a few years. In the beginning, he did not call it active imagination, but referred to it as transcendent function, picture method, active fantasy, active phantasying, trancing, visioning, exercises, dialectical method, technique of differentiation, technique of introversion, introspection and technique of the descendent (Chodorow, 3). Active imagination shall not be confused with fantasy, and that is a distinction Jung made also at the Travistock lecture:

I really prefer the term 'imagination' to 'fantasy', because there is a difference between the two which the old doctors had in mind when they said that 'opus nostrum,' our work, ought to be done 'per *veram imaginationem et non phantastica*' – by true imagination and not by a fantastical one. In other words, if you take the correct meaning of this definition, fantasy is mere nonsense, a phantasm, a fleeting impression; but imagination is active, purposeful creation.

A fantasy is more or less your own invention, and remains on the surface of personal things and conscious expectations. But active imagination, as the term denotes, means that the images have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic- that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere (Jung, 144-145).

By making the distinction between imagination and fantasy and emphasizing their diametrical difference, he proved that he saw this as a scientific method and

not mere ranting. It is not a surprise that he would later develop it as a method to work with his patients. Jung continued working in the technique of active imagination for a long while, and in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* he explained how he saw it as a way to self-knowledge. Once again, he compared this process to alchemic ones:

Expressed in the language of Hermetic philosophy, the ego-personality's coming to terms with its own background, the shadow, corresponds to the union of spirits and soul in the *unio mentalis*, which is the first stage of the *coniunctio*. What I call coming to terms with the unconscious the alchemists called 'meditation' (Jung, 17).

Jung is conferring an ultimate importance to active imagination as a way of bringing out hidden elements in the person's life, and divided the process into two parts: *letting the unconscious come up* and *coming to terms with the unconscious*.<sup>42</sup>

He saw alchemy as a way of transformation and active imagination as a method to achieve it. These two concepts are essential to the thesis in this paper: Estevez's own transformation through his study of alchemy made possible the idea that even artworks that were not created or inspired primarily on alchemy show traces of it by reflecting his transmutation. For Estevez, alchemy

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<sup>42</sup> There are other authors who have studied Jung's work in depth, such as Marie-Louise von Franz (*Alchemical Active Imagination*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1997) who proposed more stages in the process. However I will use Jung's original two for this thesis since it seems more appropriate (Chodorow, 10).



was first an object of study, later became a source of inspiration, and finally proved to be a guide for his personal growth as an artist and as a human being. His *Nigredo* began when he started reading books about alchemy. By the time he was at *Albedo* all that knowledge was becoming part of his mind, to come out later in the form of artworks in his *Rubedo* period.

The work of Carlos Estevez shows how he assimilated the information and the knowledge he acquired from the study of alchemy, and how through a process similar to active imagination he created images in his mind that he later converted into artworks. Such a progression also allowed him to dissect his own ideas and to transform them, influencing his own philosophical viewpoints. This transformation will be discussed in detail through Estevez's artwork in the next chapter, by analyzing from a thematic perspective how he progressively included alchemical symbols in works that reflected his own transmutation. Some of his later works would not exactly reflect alchemical symbols and concepts in the same explicit way than the earlier, but will show elements of it, mostly his transformation as a human being, which is a consequence of his alchemical studies.

## CHAPTER III

### Alchemy and Symbolism in the Work of Carlos Estevez

The aim of this chapter is to present Carlos Estevez's work and to study how alchemy influenced him, which is the core of this thesis. This thesis concentrates specifically on his study of alchemy, how it is reflected in his oeuvre and how, as a collateral result, it influenced him as a person. **The effect** will be traced and analyzed from a thematic point of view, identifying themes from alchemy that he has worked on and how he has represented them in selected pieces from different periods. The main alchemic ideas that were identified and analyzed are: the human body as a laboratory; God as architect; Macrocosm and Microcosm; journeys as way of transformation; nature as perfect, and *Conjunctio* or alchemical wedding. These ideas were imbedded in his mind and through active imagination he developed his own images to convey them. Some of the imagery has been consistent through the years, while several symbols changed as a consequence of the deepening of his studies and his experiences, directly in proportion to his own development as an artist and as a human being. The transmutation that he went through is reflected in his work and will become evident. Even artworks that are not initially inspired by alchemy still show ideas and elements from it, since those pieces are about transformation.

Estevez was born in Havana, Cuba in 1969. He grew up in the Habana Vieja (Old Havana) neighborhood. The extension of his contact with art as a child was limited to the usual drawing and doodling. He recalls that he enjoyed

drawing but never thought consciously about art.<sup>43</sup> One day he answered an open call for art students with a friend, and that is how it all started. After he passed the test in 1981, he matriculated at the Escuela Elemental de Artes Plásticas 20 de Octubre (Elemental School of Plastics Art 20 of October) located in El Vedado. The school offered him the essential tools to create art and during his time there he tried different techniques. He graduated in 1983 and the same year he entered in the prestigious Academy of San Alejandro, where he studied mostly painting. It was in the Academy's library that he first made contact with alchemy and esoteric matters through Mircea Eliade's books, among them *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy*. Eliade's ideas about alchemy and the antique world resonated in his mind for years to come and generated in him the need to further explore the subject. In 1987, after graduating from San Alejandro, Estevez continued his artistic education at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) (Superior Institute of Art), a prestigious institution which many young artists in the country attended. He studied sculpture there until 1992, when he completed his education. The climate in these institutions proved to be vital in Estevez's formation and his later pursuits as an artist. One of the benefits of attending these schools during these years was that many of his professors were precisely the artists who were the protagonists of the intense art

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with the artist at his studio in Miami, June 2012.

scene of that time, and the changes produced in Cuban art.<sup>44</sup> Among those, the most significant for him was the late Juan Francisco Elso (1956-1988),<sup>45</sup> who taught him sculpture at the Elemental School. Elso's influence as an art professor impacted not only Estevez but also many young artists during the years that he taught art at different schools.<sup>46</sup> His work also had an effect on other artists of his own generation and, in a way, shaped the art that was made in Cuba in the eighties. Elso's anthropologic approach to art was a remarkable contribution to the visual arts in this period. In Estevez's case, that influence was present mainly in the early works. However, at his first professional solo exhibition in 1992 at the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales in Havana (Center for the Development of Visual Arts), it was clear that he had found his own voice early on. The works he presented back then were mostly inspired by philosophical matters, such as man's position in the world. The central piece of this show, which also gave the title to it, was *A Través del Universo (Through the Universe)*, made the same year.

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<sup>44</sup> The decade of the eighties in Cuba is considered in art history as the Cuban Renaissance, when the numbers of exhibitions triplicated and young artists made a point of protesting against the social order in the country through their art.

<sup>45</sup> Juan Francisco Elso (1956-1988) was a Cuban artist and art professor. His cosmogonist approach to art became a guide for the arts of the period, and was seminal for the Cuban art and artists in the eighties and nineties. His groundbreaking pieces, especially his installations such as *El Monte (The Wilderness)* (1983), *Por America* (1984), and *La Mano Creadora (The Hand of the Creator)* (1987), challenged the notion of art in the country. His works were distinguished by the fusion of mythical and philosophical elements and his questioning of man as a universal entity.

<sup>46</sup> Elso taught art in several schools, starting in 1979 at the Escuela Formadora de Maestros Salvador Allende (Teachers Formative School), in 1980 at the Escuela Vocacional Vladimir Lenin (Vocational School), and in 1982 at the Escuela Elemental de Artes Plásticas 20 de Octubre (Elemental School of Plastics Art), all located in Havana, Cuba.



Figure 1. *A Través del Universo* (Through the Universe), 1992. Wood, fabric, candle and glass eyes. 79 x 157.5 x 12 inches. The Farber Collection.

The sculpture is a life-size human figure, Christ-like, with gigantic wings on its back. Formally, the piece was clearly inspired by the Baroque tradition of polychrome wood life-size saints, some of which can still be found in altars at Catholic churches in Cuba. The chest is hollow with a cavity where a real candle should be burning when on exhibition, as an analogy to the interior light of every human being. The early piece is charged with a detailed symbolism that extends to the whole, but also to each part. The wings represent knowledge and are covered with ink drawings similar to hieroglyphs. The left wing registers man's creations, such as machines, buildings, and other inventions. The right one is dedicated to nature, to animals and plants. *A Través del Universo* (*Through the Universe*) summarizes Estevez's work from his student years and illustrates his worldview at that time. The piece was inspired by two of the most important ideas in alchemy: the idea of the human body as a laboratory, and God as the architect of the universe. Estevez used the iconic image of Christ as his concept of God at that time and created a whole cosmos around the figure. At the same time, by

giving him a human figure he was talking about the idea of the body as a laboratory, where knowledge was processed. The wings represent the imaginary flight that human beings take while searching for knowledge, and ultimately in the process of discovering themselves. *A Través del Universo* is the earliest piece that shows the idea of transformation in a spiritual way through knowledge. Later, and throughout the years, Estevez would revisit these ideas and create more pieces influenced by them.



Figure 2. *Homos Absconditus*, 1991. Wood, human hair and candles. 79 x 79 x 12 inches.

Another early piece also exhibited in his 1992 exhibition and illustrates the idea of the human body as a laboratory, is *Homos Absconditus* (1991), a gigantic red heart made out of wood, with connecting blood vessels recreated by sinuous shapes. Estevez also placed candles in this piece; this time instead of a focal point he created many, highlighting its intricacy. Candles are possibly the most common symbol of light, as in inner knowledge and illumination in a philosophical sense.



Figure 3. *Laboratorium*, 2006. Oil and pencil on canvas. 56 x 38 inches.

The human body as a laboratory is one of the most important ideas that Estevez has used for a substantial amount of works over the years, as he revisits this concept and produces different works. In 2006, he painted what could be considered as his clearest image of the body as a laboratory. It is titled *Laboratorium*, as a clear indication of his conceptual meaning. The image consists of a male human body covered with protruding tubes and mechanisms, a hollow chest and an empty cranium cavity, corresponding to the heart and the brain, meant to relate to thoughts and feelings.



Figure 4. *The Mystery of Beauty*, 2009. Oil and pencil on canvas. 56 x 70 inches.

Other pieces done with the same theme show the whole body, as in *The Mystery of Beauty* (2009), in which he painted a female body, but instead of her usual anatomical parts, this woman is made up of a complex mechanical system, a machinery of tubes and keys. In *El Arte de Tejer sus propios sueños* (*The Art of Weaving its Own Dreams*) (2007) he used a similar approach, but in this image he divided the woman in half, distributing equally the biologic and the mechanical. *El Absurdo Logico* (*The Logical Absurd*) (2008) shows a male body created from mechanical elements. At its side, an intricate system connected by gears simulates the complexity of the human body. In 2009, he revisited the theme and made one of his box construction, titled *El Enigma Humano* (*The Human Enigma*), in which a male body is made up of watch pieces, creating a perfect cog, which is how he sees the human body.

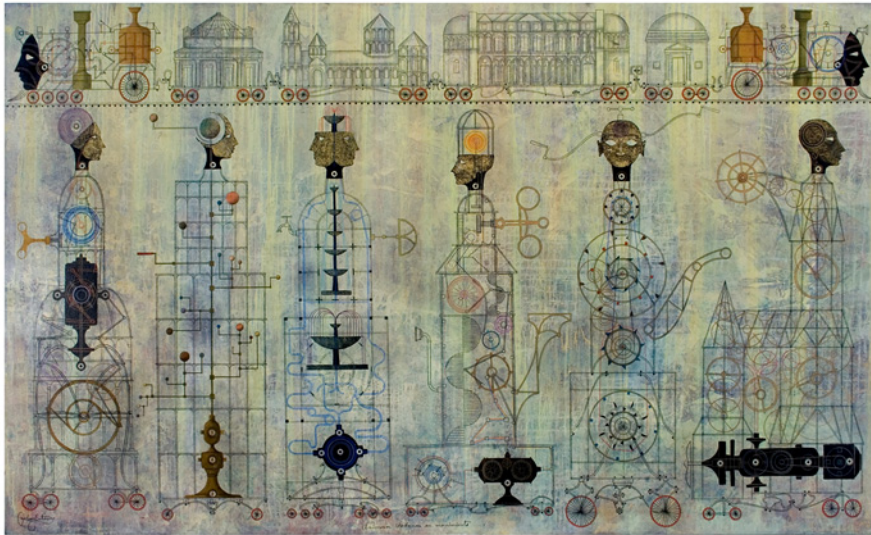


Figure 5. *Universos Urbanos en Movimiento* (Urban Universes in Movement), 2008. Oil and pencil on canvas. 50 x 84 inches.



Perhaps one of his most intricate pieces in this theme is *Universos Urbanos en Movimiento (Urban Universes in Movement)* (2008), a scene in which six persons are interacting in a city. All the bodies are mechanisms of diverse nature: some are water fountains, while other are tubes and motors, all on wheels. On the topside of the painting, two trains with human faces are moving in opposite directions. The wagons are buildings, again on wheels, evoking constant movement. Here Estevez is using a recurrent symbol of alchemy: the drawings of buildings corresponding to human bodies. Alchemists often encoded messages in the illustrations of their treatises, something that Estevez is replicating in his work.



Figure 6. *Estado de Sitio (State of Siege)*, 2007. Oil and pencil on canvas. Diameter 48 inches.

Others pieces created from the same principle concentrate on one specific human organ, like the heart in *Estado de Sitio (State of Siege)* (2007), or *Fire Apparatus* (2011).<sup>47</sup> In both pieces, Estevez uses a heart as the central motif. In *Estado de Sitio* he presented it as a city surrounded by ships, while in *Fire*

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<sup>47</sup> These pieces can be seen as a continuation of *Homos Asconditus* (1991), exhibited at *A Traves del Universo*, in 1992.

*Apparatus* the heart is the motor for a fire truck, a metaphor of using feelings as guide.



Figure 7. Where the Demiurge Dreams, 2002. Mixed media installation. Dimensions variable.

Another idea linked to the laboratories is their visual representation. Like many of his predecessors, Estevez made his own renderings. The most complete is his installation, *Where the Demiurge Dreams* (2002), a sort of treatise of interests for Estevez where he cited all his sources of inspiration up to that point. The installation consisted of a full-scale hut, partially replicating the place that the artist used as studio in Havana, and to some extent an ideal space to create, in alchemical terms: his laboratory. Inside the hut, he placed real furniture and objects that belonged to him. The walls were completely covered by images and objects in a *horroris vacuum* (no empty space) fashion. One of the walls served as the support for a group of hand puppets made in the likeness of people such as Federico Fellini, Sebastian Bach, Charles Chaplin, Nicolas Copernicus, Mother Theresa, just to name a few. Other walls show multiple botanical and fauna images, drawings and reproductions.

In this installation, he included many of the symbols that he would later use, such as animals. Conceptually, this piece related essential philosophical questions, such as his role as a human being in the universe, something that he began to question as early as his first exhibition and will continue throughout his career.



Figure 8. El Lado Divino de la Existencia (The Divine Side of Existence), 2008. Construction Box. 64 x 34 x 3 inches.

God as architect is another subject based on the alchemical idea that God is the mastermind and maker of the universe, and it is one that Estevez has used as inspiration for several pieces. As discussed previously, in his exhibition of 1992, the main work, *A Través del Universo (Through the Universe)*, was based partially on this idea. *El Lado Divino de la Existencia (The Divine Side of*

*Existence*) (2008), one of his boxes,<sup>48</sup> is another work inspired by the idea of God as an architect. The central panel shows a wooden hand that contains inside it a puppet also made of wood. Both the hand and the puppet have mechanisms that allow the hand, the fingers and the puppet's limbs to move. The hand is connected to two human heads by a complex system of thread bobbins. On each side of the hand there is a collection of scientific tools. The message contained in this piece is that the hand (God's will) is controlling the mind of the humans and influencing everything. Therefore, He is the architect of human existence and its development.



Figure 9. *Mystical Supper*, 2009. Oil and pencil on canvas. Diameter 85 inches.

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<sup>48</sup> This is part of his series of boxes, which is discussed further in this chapter.

*Mystical Supper* (2009) was made after the famous biblical passage, and is arranged in a similar manner to King's Arthur Round Table. In it Estevez is presenting his view of the Twelve Apostles and of God. He chose to represent the apostles as characters defined by symbolic elements, inspired by their particular attributes. When the opportunity for representing God appeared again, he chose a hollow human body with a head surrounded by several smaller ones, similar to satellites, representing God's power of ubiquity. Estevez decided to present us with a universal idea of it, therefore pleading for an integrative view of religion, instead of a definitive representation of God following any of the main religions. This is a new approach to the subject, and looking back to *A través del Universo* (*Through the Universe*), we can see how he is bringing a broader vision to a similar theme.



Figure 10. *El Mundo en que Vivimos* (*The World in Which We Live*), 1999. Oil on cloth. 70.9 x 196.9 inches.

The use of a hand as a symbol is perhaps one of the oldest in humanity and can be traced as far back as the cave paintings. The interpretations and meanings of it varied from one cultural group to another, ranging from indicative of power to spiritual presence. In alchemy hands are used to symbolize the practice and its process, and also to embody macrocosm harmony. Throughout his work, Estevez has used it alternatively as a representation of both.<sup>49</sup> One of his most impressive pieces that relates to the idea of the hand as a representation of macrocosm harmony is *El Mundo en que Vivimos (The World in Which We Live)* (1999), an imposing black hand of large format contains many astrological symbols related to each other. In the space that corresponds to the palm he placed a sun, which for Fludd is “the heart of the macrocosm”.<sup>50</sup> *La Ciudad de Dios (God’s City)* (2006), also illustrates the same principle. In this collage, the hand, also black, contains a cityscape represented by a multitude of buildings. Red dots mark the vertebral points in each fingertip, the palm as center and other vital zones in the hand.

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<sup>49</sup> Estevez has used the hand as a symbol from very early in his works as the representation of the tool to create. Later, although this meaning would be present, he included other interpretations, such as the hands as representative of alchemy, consistently based on the traditional symbolism in alchemical treatises.

<sup>50</sup> R. Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi, Vol. I, Oppenheim, 1617*, cited in *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy & Mysticism*. Alexander Roob, London: Taschen, 1997, p. 56.





Figure 11. *Flujos Cosmoteluricos (Cosmotelluric Fluxs)*, 2010. Oil and pencil on canvas. 55.9 x 38 inches.

One of his finest examples of hands as the representation of the practice of alchemy is *Flujos Cosmoteluricos (Cosmotelluric Fluxs)* (2010), in which a hand contains a fleet of flying balloons. He has also used the hand to represent alchemy in *Maquinaria Divina (Divine Machine)* (2008), where the hand stands open with different symbols on each finger.

One of Estevez's most revealing series, and perhaps the most directly related to alchemy, is that of his 'boxes'; influenced by Joseph Cornell's iconic assemblages, Estevez takes advantage of a similar structure by making wooden boxes, but painted in black.<sup>51</sup> Like Cornell's, his boxes are inspired by specific themes. He started to make them in 2005 as an ongoing project that came together in his solo exhibition of 2008 under the title *Hermetic Garden*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) was an American artist mostly known by his assemblages and collages made with found objects, although he was also a sculptor and a filmmaker. His surreal compositions have influenced many artists, making him one of the most notorious artists of the twentieth century.

The title of the series is a clear allusion to the garden as seen in alchemy, as his intimate haven, a repository of the most secret thoughts. Therefore, his boxes become that: the ultimate repositories of his views on philosophical themes. They immediately bring up the concept of a cabinet of curiosities, arguably the origin of collecting, and evidence of Estevez's passion for collecting objects, which he incorporates in his works. His collection becomes his work and the other way around: he accumulates objects that are appealing to him and uses them later in his assemblages and sculptures, in this case, boxes. Each box is self-contained and basically has three kinds of objects: found, made by him, and objects that previously belonged to him. Very often he makes the elements he envisioned as part of the piece, such as dolls, to be sure it will be portrayed exactly as he imagines.

With these boxes, Estevez created a parable about the Macrocosm and the Microcosm, and the relationship between them. The complete series represents a Macrocosm, while each box functions as independent small Microcosms, and as such each one functions as a different small world.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This exhibition was also presented at his gallery in Miami: Pan American Art Projects, in 2008. Since each box was done to address separate ideas some of the boxes will be discussed in this part, while others will be analyzed in the correspondent thematic section in this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> The principle of the Microcosm and the Macrocosm is one of the ideas that Estevez has explored very often in his works, sometimes independently or combined with other subject matters. Estevez see men as individual entities in their own microcosm, and then as part of the universe, which he sees as a macrocosm.





Figure 12. Planetarium Domesticum, 2005. Construction Box. 48 x 24 x 3 inches.

The first box in the series was *Planetarium Domesticum* (2005), an intricate-looking assemblage showing many spheres connected to each other by a thread. The central sphere is attached to a doll whose limbs are also joined to the mechanism. The piece alludes to the delicate balance that establishes peace at home, and the importance of harmony for any human being. *Planetarium Domesticum* contains in itself the whole idea of the series, since it is a microcosm represented by the home in a bigger scale of a macrocosm, represented by the world at large.



Figure 13. *Feminologia Práctica (Practic Feminology)*, 2005. Construction Box. 46.5 x 37.8 x 3 inches. The Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum, Florida International University, Miami, Florida.

*Feminologia Práctica (Practic Feminology)* (2005) is another box exhibited with the group. It contains emblematic objects of femininity, such as lace gloves and perfume bottles, but also includes surgical instruments. He is bringing in together the duality of pain and pleasure that could be associated with women and their lives. Estevez created the term *Feminology* to talk about women and their intimate space, what he sees as a microcosm of a complete and more complicated world, the human. *Mysterium Femininum* (2006) is another box made about the same subject matter, women's microcosm.



Figure 14. *Mecánica Celeste (Celestial Mechanic)*, 2009. Oil and pencil on canvas. Diameter 85 inches.

An important part of Estevez's work is devoted to studying the relationships among human beings. Searching the range of alchemical imagery, he decided to use the symbolism of *Conjunctio* or Chemical Wedding, to talk about it. In alchemical terms, it represents the "generation of the philosopher's stone" (Roob, 326). Jung saw this stage as "the union of spirits and soul in the *unio mentalis*" (Jung, 17), closer to what Estevez is seeing in the image.

The *Conjunctio* has been illustrated many times in alchemical manuscripts and books as the union between a man and a woman, a king and a queen, therefore ideal as a contemporary counterpart of this idea of relationships. The artist brought this concept to his work and chooses to represent it in a similar manner, as it has been done for centuries. In his paintings he illustrates it as the union of a couple, as in *Mecánica Celeste (Celestial Mechanic)* (2009), a circular

piece that shows the sexual union<sup>54</sup> of a man and a woman, both looking half-human and half-machine. This alchemical stage is also represented in his *Amores Dificiles (Difficult Loves)*, from the same year. In this scene a moth with broken wings is facing a mechanical one, an almost opposite couple. This image illustrates the difficulty of a relationship between them, nevertheless the need of a physical union.

Another alchemical concept that Estevez has illustrated in his work is the journey as a way of transformation. In his case, he is referring basically to two kinds of journeys: the spiritual and the physical. Being an immigrant himself, he understands the significance of a journey as a passage of transformation. One of his works inspired by this idea is the installation *Bottles to the Sea* (2000),<sup>55</sup> which may be seen as a premonitory work that announced his departure from Cuba in a poetic way.<sup>56</sup> He made one hundred drawings similar to old manuscripts that were individually encased in glass bottles of different sizes and colors. Each drawing is unique, therefore the piece becomes a philosophical compendium of his thoughts and perspectives. He also wrote individual texts for each one, and illustrated them with personal symbols, especially his winged

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<sup>54</sup> “The sexual metaphor, a *topos* of alchemical literature drawn from the erotic mysticism of biblical texts such as *The Song of Solomon*, aids the adept in understanding the arcane secrets of the transformation of matter in the Hermetic flask (compared to the female womb)” (Battisti, 326).

<sup>55</sup> This piece was originally shown at the Havana Biennial in 2000, Cuba; then at his solo exhibition *Dreamcomber* at the Huntington Gallery at the Massachusetts College of Art, in Boston, and the last time in his exhibition *The Mystery of Migrations*, in 2009 at Pan American Art Projects, in Miami, Florida.

<sup>56</sup> Estevez left Cuba in 2003, lived in Paris, France for a year while in an artist’s residency, and came to Miami in 2004.

hybrid characters that had become a sort of trademark. In them we can see compiled many of the themes he was working on at that time and others that he later developed. The idea behind this project was to throw a bottle into the sea in different cities and later locate who finds them. This piece relates to fate and destiny, and the lack of control over it. It also emphasizes the journey that the bottle will take, from the moment that it is thrown into the sea to the point that somebody finds it, if in fact that happens at all since it could wander in the sea forever. The bottle journey is impossible to predict, the same as what happens with life: only the departure point is known, arrival is a mystery until it ends, and the journey itself is what counts.

There is another of his boxes, *Tratado de las Despedidas (Treatises of Farewells)* (2006) that represents journeys in a symbolic way. The central panel represents an airport in which the center is made out of a head connecting all the planes in the terminal. The top and the bottom of the box show other modes of travel, like trains, buses and ships. Estevez is using means of transportation as symbols of movement, therefore the beginning and end of journeys.



Figure 15. El Misterio de la Migraciones (The Mystery of Migrations), 2009. Oil and pencil on canvas. 68 x 96.50 inches.

In 2009, he presented a solo exhibition titled *El Misterio de la Migraciones* (*The Mystery of Migrations*), illustrating the importance of journeys as ways of transformation for him.<sup>57</sup> Among the paintings, there was one that gave title to the exhibition. The scene is formally solved in two focal areas: the upper and the lower. In the upper part he placed a seahorse leading a boat with rowers that look like human beings with bird heads. The uniformity of the rowers is an allusion to the situation that everybody is trying to get to the same destination. The lower part of the piece is far more complex: there is a mechanism of relationships established between all the represented characters, all linked in one way or another. Mythical creatures populate the painting, among those his trademark bird-headed beings, biped-hybrid creatures whose bodies are birdcages or chemical tubes. In this piece there is also another idea related to alchemy: the idea of transformation reflected in the imagery. There are not simple human beings anymore, the whole process of assimilation has made a profound impact, and therefore the change is inevitable. Estevez is talking about the foreseeable transformation that people experience as time passes, and as they go through traumatic and life-changing events, such as migration. Therefore, the journey becomes the way of transformation and transmutation in alchemical terms.

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<sup>57</sup> As an immigrant himself, Estevez understands the process of the journey, leaving his country and establishing himself in a new one as a profound way of transformation.



Figure 16. Round Trip, 2008. Oil and pencil on canvas. Diameter 85 inches.

Another piece based on this alchemic idea of journeys as illustration of change is *Round Trip* (2008). Made the same year and exhibited at the same exhibition, *Round Trip* is simultaneously the illustration of a journey and his interpretation of life's concatenated facts, the cause-effect factor. Estevez is talking about the idea of a cycle, and how it is developed throughout somebody's life as a repetition of universal law. Here again, he is following the alchemic idea of macrocosm and microcosm, which describes every human being as a macrocosm itself at the same time that it is a microcosm, part of the universe.

In this piece, there is constant flow of trains, coming and going. Perhaps he is paraphrasing the popular aphorism of "taking the last train", and sees life as an endless succession of trips and journeys. *Round Trip* is the image of his understanding of transformation as a constant process, a sort of mutation that takes human beings from one phase to another in life. The concept is illustrated by choosing a circular format and an image in which it is impossible to detect its



beginning and end. These trains are moving in a constant loop around each other in concentric circles. He is also exploring the place of human beings in the universe as part of a system and their individual cosmos, the wheels that move it all and makes possible its functioning. The existence of microcosms and macrocosm is another idea he has taken from the principles of alchemy.

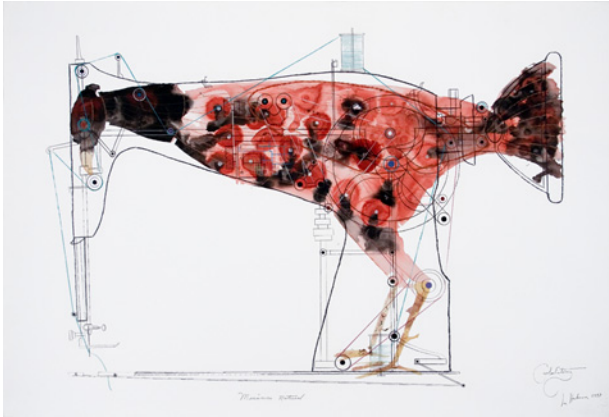


Figure 17. *Mecánica Natural* (Natural Mechanic), 1997. Mixed media on paper. 43.5 x 29 inches.

Nature, as God's creation, is considered as a perfect work and as the model to imitate in the alchemical world.<sup>58</sup> Estevez is a firm believer that everything has been done before by nature, and that all that men create has already its counterpart in the astonishing natural world. To illustrate this theory he made a series of drawings in which animals' bodies are transparent, like x-rays, and the interior, instead of vital organs, is occupied by complex machines reminiscent of man-made technology. Excellent examples are *Mecánica Natural* (*Natural Mechanic*) (1997), an image in which a hen becomes a sewing machine; and *Horadar* (*Drill*) from the same year, a wasp that looks like a drilling machine.

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<sup>58</sup> Aristotle in his *Poetics* introduced the idea that art imitates nature. As discussed in Chapter 1, a considerable number of alchemists were followers of Aristotle.



In *Meditar es una forma de construir (Meditating is a way of Building)* (1999), a crab is mapped out internally as a digger machine. In 2001, he made another work on paper within the same theme: *Mutaciones de la Naturaleza (Nature's Mutations)* (*Argyropelecus Sp.*). This time he chooses a fish that shows its similarities to a steam ship. In 2006, he made a series of collages for the first time. One of these, *Borboletta*, is inspired by this same idea of nature's perfection and how it existed before men would explain it through science. In this instance he reverted the idea: he pasted a helicopter and completed it with insects' legs and moths' wings. He has worked on this series of works consistently over the years, finding analogies in both worlds. He has extended this observation from animals to humans and in many of his works he represents human bodies half-biologically, with natural limbs, and the other half as machinery. This is a way of calling attention to the perfection of the human body, which works with the precision of a perfect machine.



Figure 18. *Ciclos Evolutivos Personales (Personal Evolutive Cycles)*, 2007. Oil and pencil on canvas. 56 x 38 inches.

After analyzing Estevez's representation of alchemical ideas and concepts in his oeuvre, it is easy to see how alchemy takes him to the ultimate goal: transmutation, in his case, a transformation of himself. He represented the main alchemic concepts in his work, and ultimately experienced the principal purpose behind it: transformation. This is how pieces that would not be linked to alchemy are connected. It was the study of alchemy that ultimately transformed him as an artist and as a human being. He has made several pieces in which this idea of his own change is explicitly developed through his traditional imagery. One of the earlier ones, which instantly refers to this idea is the painting *Ciclos Evolutivos Personales* (*Personal Evolutive Cycles*) (2007). The image represents the evolution that people go through in their lifetime or at a particular point in time. The body has two wheels that can turn, one is the head and the other is placed over the genital area<sup>59</sup>. The head wheel changes with animal heads (deer, lion, elephant, bird, fish, and alligator) that can alternatively be in place of the human one. Following the traditional symbolic attributes of these animals, he confers their related values, giving the work a fable connotation. Wheels are one of the main symbols of transformation in alchemy. The piece seems to be inspired by Arnald de Villanova's idea of transformation when he said "transforming nature is nothing but driving the elements around in a circle" (Roob, 637). In *Ciclos Evolutivos Personales*, the transformation happens as he takes on qualities of the different animals whose heads he placed on the main wheel.

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<sup>59</sup> "Apart from the image of the egg, according to Hildegard Von Bingen, the wheel is the symbol best suited to explaining the working of the macrocosmic plan" (Roob, 661).



Figure 19. *Eternal Return*, 2009. Oil and pencil on canvas. 56 x 38 inches.

Estevez makes it a point to establish differentiations in transformation according to gender, since he is considering the female world as a microcosm. One of his most lyrical pieces created from this idea is *Eternal Return* (2009), a canvas which illustrates his views about the correlation between beauty and time for women. His representation of women is not based on the traditional beauty attributes, and he consciously avoids them, therefore adorning elements such as hair or jewels are left out on purpose. His “women” are intentionally bold; he wants to concentrate his attention on their emotional and spiritual distinctiveness. In *Eternal Return*, there is a woman staring directly at the viewer, dressed in a red gown, covered from neck to toe. There are scissors nipping at every corner of the dress, while the woman is very still, like there is nothing she can do to stop them. *Eternal Return* is Estevez’s view of the passage of time and the inexorability of it, reinforced by the traces visible on her face and body. The

transformation that this woman is enduring is not a conscious exercise, however, it is happening and it is constant.

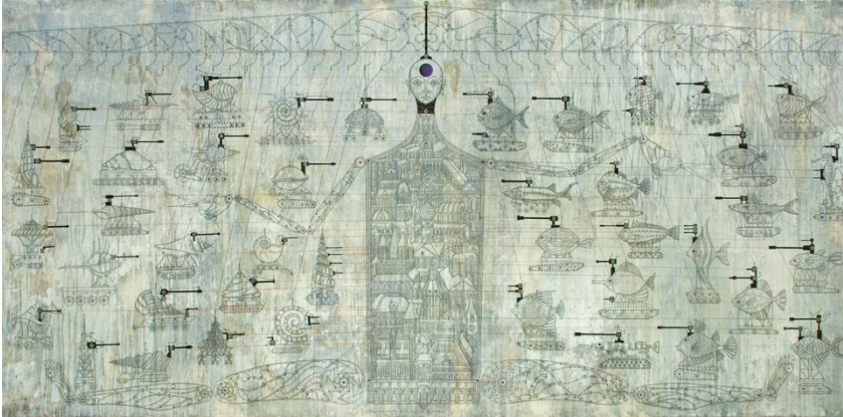


Figure 20. Permanent Battles of the Transitory Existence, 2010. Oil and pencil on canvas. 68 x 144 inches.

Transformation is a process that involves the inner self and this is an idea that Estevez has represented extensively throughout his work. One of the most exquisite paintings inspired by this thought is *Permanent Battles of the Transitory Existence* (2010), which illustrates the daily emotional and spiritual “battle” people go through, mostly against themselves. The central figure is a man showing his torso made of the plan of a city; his head is attached to a revolving carousel with hanging armed fishes and shells besieging him. As previously discussed, in alchemy, cities represent the inner self, the most intimate thoughts and the personality of anyone. So here it is the image of this man, but what he really is talking about is how he sees himself, in the middle of his imaginary battle against the odds. Estevez is representing a generic man, which could easily be anybody. Here he is also bringing in the idea of the microcosm (the man) and the macrocosm (the world). In his viewpoint, there is a need to know and

understand himself first, and then try to understand the universe. Once more he is reinforcing the idea of each person in the totality that represents the world.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Over the years, Estevez's work has evolved and matured as he developed a complex imagery based on numerous sources, from the aesthetic to the philosophical. His cosmogony has been nourished from a broad spectrum of research in such subjects as medieval literature, illuminated manuscripts, antique philosophy treatises and esoteric books, among others. His work is about his constant questioning of life and the surrounding world. It is an inquisitive overview of humankind and of his place in the world that has driven his work ethic. In this quest, alchemy has provided him with a set of laws and principles to follow, taking him into the path of transforming himself and, as a consequence, his perception of the world and ideas to make art. Estevez not only took philosophical concepts from alchemy, but also certain elements from the process as well. As were many of his medieval counterparts, Estevez is inspired by the objects he collects, often including them in his artworks. In a way, his "boxes" are similar to the ones that alchemists used as repositories for their sacred objects. Estevez sees in the objects their symbolic meanings, but also their aesthetic values, and the opportunity to combine by including them in his works.

Formally, there are also changes that can be followed in the creation of his pieces overtime. One is the progressive richness of the iconography, which grew with his knowledge and research. He started including in his works images inspired by the old alchemy treatises, and many of the symbols and codes that speak of a very particular world. His work became more complex and dense,

especially the paintings in which the compositions were increasingly larger and more intricate.

Thematically, he has taken many alchemical concepts and created his own interpretation, mixing known symbols with others that are very personal to him, and in the process created his own imagery. The development of specific alchemical ideas in his work is carried from one piece to the next by an insightful understanding of its philosophical principles. Working with these ideas, his perception of the world and the universe at large was shaped into a combination of logic and intuition.

Estevez developed his own imagery based on his studies of the ancient practice, but it was through the method of active imagination that he was able to represent many alchemical passages in his paintings and sculptures. This process allowed him to illustrate them directly from his mind to his artwork. Estevez represents the embodiment of Carl Gustav Jung's idea of alchemy's power of metaphysical transformation, a process that is illustrated in his work. The evolution can be seen by looking at pieces from different times, but inspired by the same theme. Although Estevez may be inspired by the same themes and produce more than one work based on them, each one is different because he always has a fresh point of view. He works with a chosen theme until he considers it exhausted. At the same time that his art was growing, he was developing himself as a human being, a transformation that was happening in a similar fashion to that which occurs in the alchemical process: he passed from a

state of *Nigredo* (when he started studying alchemy) until reaching his *Rubedo* (when he understood and represented his own transformation).

Transformation is one of the most important principles in Estevez's work: the act of transmutation, the central idea of alchemy, but instead of transmuting metals into gold, Estevez is interested in human change and inner transformation. To symbolize transformation, he uses his distinct iconography that includes hybrid creatures: half-human and half-animal, or half-human and half-machine. His characters have human bodies and birds' heads, birdcages as bodies and human heads, mechanical limbs and human hands, all creating exquisite metaphors and parallels between the animal world and the mechanical. The artist sees machines as similes of the work hitherto done by nature. In his eyes, "wheels are interpretations of the animals' legs and wings are an assimilation of birds' aerodynamics." At the same time he sees the human body as an extraordinary and perfect machine. However, these images are also comments about transformation and the endless cycle of life. Estevez is interested in what happens to people throughout their lives in a philosophical way, and to represent this he uses a mixture of autobiographical references and universal elements, as do many artists, with his own life as a point of departure.

Looking at the development of his oeuvre through time, it is easy to see the role of alchemical studies. Alchemy has influenced him to an extent that even pieces that were not completely inspired by the philosophical practice show its effect, where the central theme is transformation. Ultimately, his works show the



transformation of the artist as a human being and his quest to understand the process of creating art.

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Weinstein, Joel. 2005. *Knowingness*. In *Existir en el tiempo/Existing in Time*.  
Exhibition Catalogue. Miami, Florida: The Olga M. & Carlos Saladrigas Gallery,  
The Ignatian Center for the Arts.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1- Curriculum vitae of Carlos Estevez

CARLOS ESTEVEZ

1969

Born Havana, Cuba

Currently lives and works in Miami, Florida

#### EDUCATION

1992 Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba

1987 Escuela Provincial de Artes Plásticas San Alejandro, Havana, Cuba

1983 Escuela Elemental de Artes Plásticas 20 de Octubre, Havana, Cuba

#### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 Memorabilia. Pan American Art Projects, Miami, Florida.  
Intersticios. Allegra Gallery, Panama City, Panama.  
Diluvios Intimos (Intimate Deluges). Lyle O'Reitzel, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.
- 2011 Encrypted Messages. Couturier Gallery, Los Angeles, California.  
Lucernarium. Havana Galerie, Zurich, Switzerland.  
Psychomanteum. Galerie JM'Arts, Paris, France.
- 2010 Itinerarium Mentis. Luz and Suarez del Villar Gallery, Madrid, Spain.  
Oblivion. Pan American Art Projects, Miami, Florida.  
Apocryphus. The Abud Family Foundation for the Arts, Lawrenceville, New Jersey.
- 2009 Carlos Estevez: Images of thoughts. First major retrospective 1992-2009. UB Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.  
Laboratorium. Couturier Gallery, Los Angeles, California.  
The Mystery of Migrations, Pan American Art Projects, Miami, Florida.
- 2008 Secret Keepers, Couturier Gallery, Los Angeles, California.  
Hermetic Garden, Pan American Art Projects, Miami, Florida.
- 2007 Speak (Again) Memories. Contemporary Art Center New Orleans. New Orleans, Louisiana.  
Labyrinthus, Panamerican Art Projects. Dallas, Texas.  
Inner Voices, Sandra and Philip Gordon Gallery, Boston Art Academy, Boston.
- 2005 Irreversible processes, Couturier Gallery, Los Angeles, California.
- 2004 Théories et explications, Selam Gallery, Paris, France.
- 2003 La vida y sus implicaciones, Galería Sacramento, Aveiro, Portugal.  
Human Transparency, Galería Couturier, Los Angeles.  
Viridarium, Cuban Art Space, New York.  
No Man's Land, Galería 106, Austin, Texas.
- 2002 El alma es un lugar, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana Cuba.  
The Dark Theater, ALVA Gallery, New London, Connecticut.  
Dreamcomber, Bakalar Gallery, Mass College of Art, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 2001 The Theater of the Soul, Chidlaw Gallery, Cincinnati.  
The Theater of Life, Galería Couturier, Los Angeles.  
Drawings and Sculpture, Space of the Center for Cuban Studies, New York.
- 2000 Stains of Life (con Claudia Bernardi), Galería Habana, Havana, Cuba.
- 1999 Bestiarium, Galería Couturier, Los Angeles, California.
- 1998 Lieux Inconnus, Château de la Napoule, France.  
Mundo viviente. Arizona State University Art Museum, Arizona.  
Teatro invisible, The Nordic Artists' Centre, Dale, Norway.
- 1997 The Heart is a Brigde, Gasworks Gallery, London, England.  
Visionario, Academia de San Carlos, DF. Mexico.

- 1996 Tratado ontológico, Galería Espacio Abierto, Revista Revolución y Cultura, Havana, Cuba.
- 1995 El destino es tuyo. Galería Latinoamericana, Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba.  
Revelaciones gnómicas, Museo Nacional Palacio de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba.
- 1993 No sé por qué voy a los extremos (con Luis Gómez), Galería Habana, Havana, Cuba.
- 1992 A través del universo, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana, Cuba.

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 Of Cuban Invention. The Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 2011 Uprooted/Transmigrations. Pan American Art Projects, Miami, Florida.  
Cuban Visions. Metropolitan Pavilion, New York.  
Art in Depth. Newark Museum, New Jersey.  
Ajiaco. Stirrings of the Cuban Soul. Newark Museum. Newark, New Jersey.
- 2010 Cuban Artists' Books and Prints, an exhibition at the Grolier Club, New York, New York. This exhibition is combined with Stripping bare the soul, a talk by Carlos Estevez at the The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Ajiaco. Sittings of the Cuban Soul. Paul and Lulu Hillard University Art Museum, La Falleye, Louisiana.
- 2009 Contemporary Cuban Art in New York. Dactyl Foundation, New York.  
Cintas Finalists Exhibition, Frost Museum, Florida International University, Miami, Florida.  
What is Cuban Art? Oglethorpe University Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia.  
Ajiaco. Stirrings of the Cuban Soul. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Connecticut.  
Cuban Artists' Books & Prints 1985 -2008. Grolier Club, New York. Charlotte and Philip Hanes Art Gallery, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.  
A New Revolution. The Art of Cuba. Artspace, Texas.
- 2008 Fiera Internazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Milan, Italy.
- 2007 Cuba Avant-Garde: Contemporary Cuban Art from The Farber Collection. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida.  
Laudible Latins. The Ormond Memorial Art Museum & Gardens, Ormond Beach, Florida.
- 2006 In Transition. Latinis Foundation, Limassol, Cyprus.  
Do Outro Lado do Atlântico, Sete Artistas Cubanos na Universidade de Aveiro. Portugal.  
Blow out. The Cuban Art Space of the Center for Cuban Studies, New York.
- 2004 Cuba From The Inside Looking Out. Wayne State University. New York.
- 2003 Contemporary Cuban Art and the Art of Survival. Natalie and James Thompson Gallery, San Jose State University, California.  
Inside/outside. Contemporary Cuban Art. Charlotte and Philip Hanes Art Gallery, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.  
Invadiendo territorios. Arte Cubano Contemporáneo. Museo Bellas Artes Gravinia, Palacio Conde Lumières, Alicante, Spain.



- Cuban Art from the Permanent Collection. Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona.
- 2002 Arte de Cuba. Colección Ludwig. Museo Estatal Ruso, San Petersburgo. Russia. Present Art IX: A Large Show of Small Work, Galeria Couturier, Los Angeles, California.  
Arte cubano contemporáneo, Muestra colateral a la Bienal de Sao Paulo. Galería Marta Traba. Memorial América Latina. Sao Paulo Brazil.
- 2001 Contexto: Arte reciente de Cuba. Museo del Bronx, New York.  
Cuba: Five Odysseys. University of California, Northridge, California.  
Cuba. Isla infinita. Museo de Arte Costarricense, San José, Costa Rica.  
Arte cubano: entre el lienzo y el papel, Sala Miró, Sede de la UNESCO, París, France.
- 2000 7ma. Bienal de La Habana. Uno más cerca del otro. Havana, Cuba.  
La gente en casa, 7ma. Bienal de La Habana. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba.  
Contemporary Art from Cuba. The Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University, Boston.  
Bienal de Estandartes, IV Salon. Centro Cultural de Tijuana, México.  
International Young Art 2000. Sotheby's Tel Aviv, Israel. Sotheby's Chicago. Sotheby's Vienna, Austria.
- 1998 Il Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana, Cuba.  
La isla futura. Arte Joven Cubano. Centro de Cultura Antiguo Instituto, Gijón, Spain.  
Arte Cubano de Fin de Siglo. Festival Iberoamericano de Cádiz, Baluarte de la Candelaria, Cádiz, Spain.  
VI Bienal Internacional de Pintura. América: Vidas, Cuerpos e Historias. Cuenca, Ecuador.  
Contemporary Art from Cuba: Irony and Survival on the Utopian Island. Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona. Traveling exhibition.  
Comment peut-on être cubain?. Maison de l'Amérique Latin, Paris, France.
- 1997 El arte que no cesa. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, La Habana, Cuba.  
V Salón de Dibujo. Museo de arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.  
Salón Nacional de Grabado 97. Centro Provincial de artes Plásticas y Diseño, la Habana, Cuba.  
VI Bienal de La Habana, Recintos Interiores. Fortaleza San Carlos de la Cabaña, La Habana, Cuba.  
First Public Exhibition of The Cuban Art. Space of the Center for Cuban Studies, Metropolitan Book Center, New York.
- 1995 Segunda Bienal Barro de América. Centro de Arte Lía Bermúdez, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
Primer Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo. Museo Nacional Castillo de la Real Fuerza, La Habana, Cuba.  
Libro objeto. Centro Wifredo Lam, La Habana, Cuba.  
Salón de Pintura Cubana Contemporánea Juan Francisco Elso. Museo Nacional Palacio de Bellas Artes, La Habana, Cuba.  
Iluminación. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, La Habana, Cuba.

- 1994 Datos de Medianoche (V Bienal de La Habana). Galería La Espuela de Plata, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, La Habana, Cuba.
- 1992 Nacido en Cuba. Exposición itinerante por ciudades de México, Puerto Rico y Venezuela.
- 1989 III Bienal de la Habana. Muestra colateral del Instituto Superior de Arte, La Habana, Cuba.

#### SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2009 Félix González-Torres Community Art Project Visiting Artist, Florida International University, Miami, Florida.
- 2007 Artist in residence. Boston Art Academy, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 2005 Visiting Artist, Master Prints Series, Mass College of Arts, Massachusetts.  
Artist in residence. Montclair State University, New Jersey.
- 2004 Artist in residence. Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
- 2003 Artist in residence. Sacatar Foundation, Isla Itaparica, Salvador de Bahía, Brazil.
- 2002 Artist in residence. Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 2001 Artist in residence. TALLIX FOUNDRY, Beacon, New York.
- 2000 Artist in residence. Nordic Artists' Centre, Dale, Norway.
- 1998 Artist in residence. Fundación Art-OMI, New York.  
Artist in residence. UNESCO-ASCHBERG en Nordic Artists' Centre, Dale, Norway.
- 1997 Artist in residence. Gasworks Studios, London, United Kingdom.  
Artist in residence Academia de San Carlos (UNAM), DF. Mexico.
- 1995 Gran Premio Primer Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo, La Habana, Cuba.
- 1994 Gran premio Salón de la Ciudad, La Habana, Cuba.  
Premio del Consejo Nacional de las Artes Plásticas al Salón de la La Habana, Cuba.

#### COLLECTIONS

- Museo Nacional Palacio de Bellas Artes, La Habana, Cuba.
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- The Patricia and Philips Frsot Museum, Florida International University, Miami, Florida.
- Fundación Arte Viva, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Museo del Bronx, New York.
- Bacardi Art Foundation, Miami, Florida.
- Fort. Lauderdale Art Museum, Fort. Lauderdale, Florida.
- Association d'Art de La Napoule, France.
- Drammens Museum for Kunst og Kulturhistorie, Drammens, Norway.
- Acerbo Histórico de la Academia de San Carlos, DF. Mexico.
- Kunst Forum Ludwig, Aachen, Germany.
- Colección Casa de las Américas, La Habana, Cuba.
- Center for Cuban Studies, New York.
- Arizona State University Art Museum, Arizona.
- OMI Foundation Collection, New York.
- Private collections in USA, Switzerland, Portugal, Mexico, Brazil, France, Holland, Spain, England, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Haiti, Sweden and Norway.