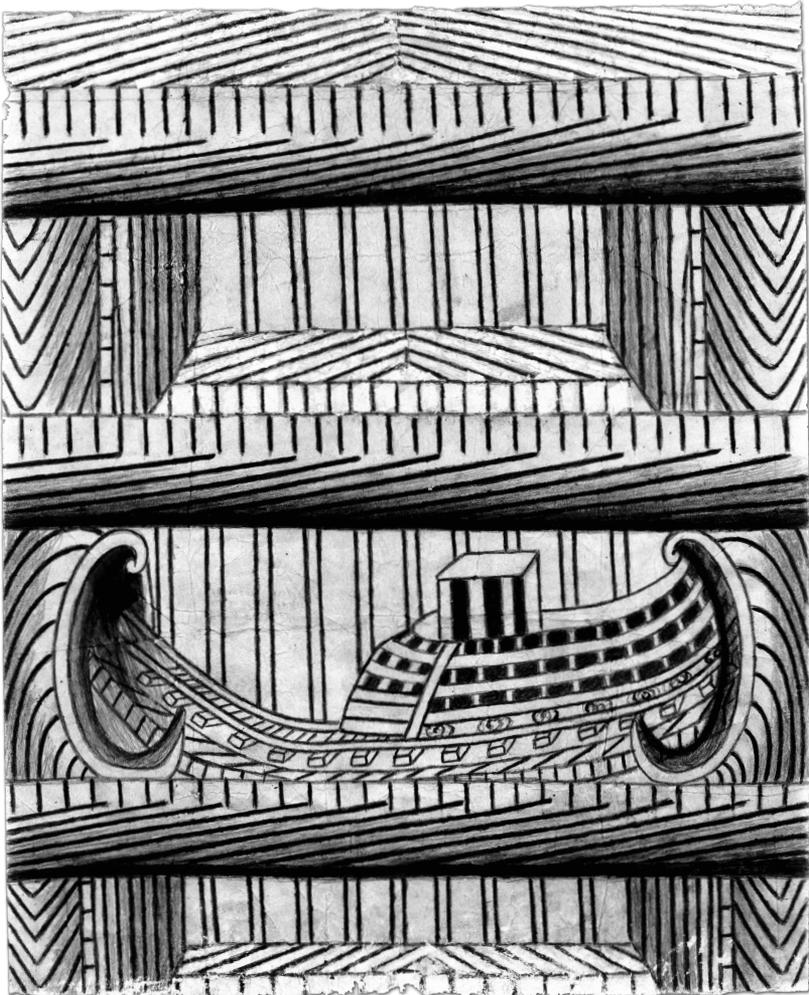


# Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation



Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
9/9/17–12/31/17



*Exhibition Brochure*

# Martín Ramírez:

## His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation

9/9/17–12/31/17

*Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation* is the first monographic presentation in Southern California of the self-taught artist Martín Ramírez (1895–1963). The exhibition includes a range of works—from small-scale abstractions to monumental figures and landscapes—some of which are being presented to the public for the first time.

Born to a family of sharecroppers in Jalisco, Mexico, Ramírez migrated to the United States in the 1920s to seek work on the railroads. Following the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929, Ramírez found himself unemployed and homeless. In 1931, he was detained by police for vagrancy and interned in state psychiatric hospitals without due process until his death in 1963. In recent years, Ramírez's psychiatric diagnosis has been called into question, suggesting that the artist was the victim of discrimination and institutional bias. Even under these difficult circumstances, Ramírez produced a body of remarkable drawings that established his iconic visual language of rhythmic mark making and singular imagery. Moreover, his work highlights the many social concerns that endure as challenging topics of debate today—immigration, national borders, incarceration, and the rights of the mentally ill.

To create his drawings, Ramírez collaged found papers and executed his linework with pencils, crayons, burnt matchsticks, and other makeshift implements. He populated his pictures with a constellation of figures—cowboys, religious icons, tunnels, trains, and animals—creating spaces both real and imaginary. References to Catholic imagery and Jalisco's *ranchero* culture that appear throughout the drawings demonstrate the artist's enduring connection to Mexican cultural themes and memories, while the occasional use of images from magazines, film, and television reflects his growing awareness of

popular American culture. Ramírez’s unique draftsmanship lends an optical rhythm and depth to his compositions, and his manipulations of found papers through piecing and layering extend his drawings into a sculptural dimension. Although Ramírez is often discussed in the context of “self-taught” or “folk” art, his compositions demonstrate a formal ingenuity that is both aligned with and independent of artistic conventions of his day.

This exhibition acknowledges the artist’s history before his arrival in California as a necessary context for examining his work. By illustrating Ramírez’s progression of motifs and improvisational techniques through drawings that seem to be from various periods, the show situates his singular visual style in the critical orbit of art made in California, where the crossover between Latin American art and American modernism found its fullest realization.

*Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation* is organized by Elsa Longhauser, Executive Director, with Jamillah James, Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

*Martín Ramírez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation* is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty with art institutions across Southern California. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.



**Pacific  
Standard  
Time: LA/LA**  
Latin American  
& Latino Art in LA

Presenting Sponsors



The Getty

**Bank of America** 

Major support for this exhibition and related publication is provided through grants from the Getty Foundation.



**The Getty Foundation**

Additional support has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Robert Lehman Foundation, Madeline and Bruce M. Ramer, Wyeth Foundation for American Art, and Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation.



**National  
Endowment  
for the Arts**  
arts.gov



DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
City of Los Angeles



*Photographer unknown, portrait of Martín Ramírez from postcard sent to Ramírez family from California, late 1920s. Courtesy the Estate of Martín Ramírez and Ricco/Maresca, New York*

## *Timeline for Martín Ramírez*

### **1895**

Martín Ramírez González is born on January 30 in Rincón de Velázquez, Tepatitlán, Jalisco, Mexico. On January 31, he is baptized in San Francisco de Asís, the central parish of Tepatitlán.

### **1918**

On May 31, Ramírez marries 17-year-old María Santa Ana Navarro Velázquez in the small parish of Capilla de Milpillas, Tepatitlán. The Ramírez family moves to Tototlán, Jalisco.

### **1919**

On March 8, the Ramírezes' first daughter, Juana, is born in El Venado, Tototlán.

### **1921**

On January 8, the Ramírezes' second daughter, Teófila, is born in La Puerta del Rincón, Tototlán. On May 20, Ramírez's older brother Atanacio marries Dominga Navarro, the younger sister of María Santa Ana.

### **1923**

On August 28, the Ramírezes' third daughter, Agustina, is born in El Pelón, Tototlán. Ramírez buys a small piece of land on credit, in a ranchería near San José de Gracia, Tepatitlán.

### **1925**

On August 24, Ramírez leaves for the United States.

### **1925–1930**

Ramírez works on the railroad and in the mines of northern California.

### **1926**

On February 2, the Ramírezes' only son, Candelario, is born in San José de Gracia.

## **Late 1920s**

Ramírez makes his first drawings in the margins of letters to his family.

## **1931**

On January 9, Ramírez is picked up by the San Joaquin County, California, police and committed to Stockton State Hospital, where he receives a preliminary diagnosis of manic depression.

## **1932**

In April, Ramírez makes his first escape from the hospital.

## **1933**

In July, Ramírez escapes Stockton for the second time. After a few days in jail, he is committed to the hospital again. On August 12, he is diagnosed with dementia praecox, catatonic form.

## **1934**

Ramírez escapes Stockton again but returns of his own volition after spending three or four days on the streets.

## **Mid-1930s**

Ramírez begins to draw on a more regular basis. The Ramírez family receives a letter from Stockton State Hospital, informing them about Ramírez's condition.

## **1948**

Some of Ramírez's drawings are sent by Stockton State Hospital to his family in Mexico. Ramírez is transferred to DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn, California. Tarmo Pasto, who has just become professor of psychology and art at Sacramento State College, meets Ramírez.

## **1951**

Ramírez's first solo show is organized at the E.B. Crocker Art Gallery in Sacramento.

## **1952**

On January 6, Ramírez receives his first and only visit from a family member when his nephew José Gómez Ramírez arrives for two days. Tarmo Pasto receives a grant from the Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education for yearlong research into "psychology

theory and art expression.” In November, a solo Ramírez exhibition is organized by Pasto at the Women’s clubrooms of Stephens Union at the University of California, Berkeley.

### **Early 1950s**

The first solo Ramírez exhibition on the East Coast, organized by Pasto, takes place at the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Center at New York’s Syracuse University. In January, the solo Ramírez show “The Art of a Schizophrenic” opens at the Mills College Museum of Art in Oakland. In May, Pasto organizes an exhibition of artwork by patients from various California mental hospitals, including Martín Ramírez, at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco.

### **1955**

Pasto sends ten of Ramírez’s drawings to James Johnson Sweeney, director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, but no plans are made for an exhibition.

### **1956**

Pasto goes to Helsinki on a Fulbright fellowship. His visits to Ramírez become less frequent.

### **c. 1959**

Pasto visits Ramírez for the last time.

### **1963**

On February 17, Ramírez dies at DeWitt of a pulmonary edema.

*Reproduced by permission from Brooke Davis Anderson, Martín Ramírez (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2007), 179.*



1.

*Untitled (Alamentosa)*, c. 1953

Pencil and watercolor on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Latin American and Caribbean Fund and Committee on Drawings Funds

2.

Untitled, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

3.

*Untitled (Tunnel)*, n.d.

Graphite, crayon, and colored pencil on paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

4.

*Untitled (Pattern and Caballero)*, 1952

Graphite, tempera, and crayon on collaged paper

Courtesy of The Estate of Martín Ramírez and Ricco/Maresca Gallery, New York

5.

*Untitled (Vertical Tunnel with Train)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Private collection

6.

*Untitled (Jesus)*, n.d.

Artist-made black ink, wax crayon, and traces of graphite on pieced paper

Philadelphia Museum of Art; Promised gift of Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz

7.

*Untitled (Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite and gouache on paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

8.

*Untitled (Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite, colored pencil, and crayon on brown kraft paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

9.

*Untitled (Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite and pencil on paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

10.

*Untitled (Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite and colored pencil on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

11.

*Untitled (Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite, colored pencil, and crayon on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

12.

*Untitled (Architecture)*, n.d.

Graphite and crayon on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

13.

*Untitled (Architecture)*, n.d.

Graphite, pencil, and crayon on paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

14.

*Untitled (White Face Caballero)*, c. 1948–52

Mixed media on paper

Collection of Audrey B. Heckler

15.

*Untitled (Bird)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

16.

*Untitled (Arches)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache and graphite on pieced paper

Courtesy of The Estate of Martín Ramírez and Ricco/Maresca Gallery,  
New York

17.

*Untitled (Arches)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache and graphite on paper

Courtesy of The Estate of Martín Ramírez and Ricco/Maresca Gallery,  
New York

18.

*Untitled (Avana Cuva)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on paper

Collection of Mary Lee Copp and Peter Formanek

19.

*Untitled (Train and Tunnel)*, n.d.

Graphite, crayon, and colored pencil on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

20.

*Untitled (Train and Tunnel)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Mary Lee Copp and Peter Formanek

21.

Untitled, n.d.

Graphite, pencil, and crayon on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

22.

*Untitled (Tunnels and Train Tracks)*, n.d.

Graphite and gouache on ivory wove paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

23.

*Untitled (Tunnels and Train Tracks)*, n.d.

Graphite and watercolor on ivory wove paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

24.

*Untitled*, c. 1950

Crayon, colored pencil, graphite, and tempera on paper

Collection of John Jerit

25.

*Untitled (Double Courtyard)*, 1952–53

Graphite, tempera, and crayon on paper

Courtesy of The Museum of Everything, London

26.

*Untitled (Vehicle and Tunnel)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

27.

*Untitled (Landscape with Seven Figures and Buildings)*, c. 1950

Ink, crayon, and pencil on paper

Courtesy of The Museum of Everything, London

28.

*Untitled (Figure with Abstract Pattern)*, n.d.

Graphite and crayon on paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

29.

*Untitled (Reina)*, c. 1960–63

Paint, crayon, pencil, and collage on pieced paper

American Folk Art Museum; Gift of the Family of Dr. Max Dunievitz  
and the Estate of Martín Ramírez

30.

*Untitled (Abstract Patterns with Four Animals)*, c. 1953

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on paper

Collection of Siri von Reis; courtesy of Ricco/Maresca Gallery, New York

31.

*Untitled (Landscape with Deer and Caballero)*, c. 1952–53

Gouache, colored pencil, and crayon on paper

Collection of Jeffrey Gold and Jody Uttal

32.

*Untitled (Stag and Architecture)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

33.

*Untitled (Figures, Abstract Patterns, Tunnels)*, n.d.

Graphite, crayon, and colored pencil on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

34.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, c. 1950

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

35.

*Untitled (Madonna)*, c. 1952–53

Graphite, tempera, and crayon on paper

Collection of Audrey B. Heckler

36.

*Untitled (Vertical Tunnel with Cars)*, n.d.

Wax crayon, graphite, and water-based paint on pieced paper

Philadelphia Museum of Art; Promised gift of Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz

37.

*Untitled (Corpse)*, n.d.

Graphite, ink, and crayon on pieced paper  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

38.

*Untitled (Male Figure, Bull, Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Crayon, colored pencil, graphite, and pieced papers  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

39.

*Untitled (Stag and Architecture)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

40.

*Untitled (Parade Horn and Rider with Bugle and Flag)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Howard and Janet Ecker

41.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider with Large Bugle)*, c. 1960–63

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Bob Roth

42.

*Untitled (Horse and Red Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

43.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

44.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper  
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

45.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

46.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

47.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider with Frieze)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

48.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider with Frieze)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

49.

*Untitled (Seated Figure)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

50.

*Untitled (Horse and Rider)*, n.d.

Gouache, colored pencil, and graphite on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

51.

*Untitled (Scroll)*, c. 1950

Crayon, graphite, colored pencil, ink, and charcoal on pieced paper

Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

1717 East 7th Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90021  
theicala.org | @theicala