

praised in the highest form and it is understood that we are not gazing on a passive beauty, but rather a beauty that has the qualities of fire and of explosion.

Destruction purified by the artist, taken by the hand by the bitter, caustic, irrelevant guide of humor, will show us unknown mechanisms of beauty, thus setting its aesthetic destruction in opposition to that orgy of annihilation in which the world today is drowning.

—Originally published as “Fundamentos de una estética de la destrucción” in *Arte destructivo* (Buenos Aires: Galería Lirolay, 1961). Translated by Mark Schafer.

RUBÉN SANTANTONÍN

An intense use of writing was one of the key elements in the artistic work of Rubén Santantonín. His archives contain detailed descriptions of projects and a brief diary with annotations about his role as an artist and about the importance of offering the viewer a perceptive experience different from the mere confrontation with an object.

For Santantonín art was a vital commitment, “a participated existential devotion, a devotion without peace or lassitude” (from the catalogue *Hoy a mis mirones* [*Today to My Peeping Toms*], Galería Lirolay, 1961). In 1961 he exhibited for the first time a group of “squeezings,” made with cardboard, rags, wire, and plaster that he called *cosas* [“things”]: not sculptures nor paintings nor objects. Reflection on the existential and phenomenological particularities of these works form the fundamental nucleus of his texts.

This is the introduction to his exhibition *Cosas*, at Galería Lirolay in 1964.

Why I Call These Objects “THINGS”

By Rubén Santantonín

There is something in the object that gives man the feeling he is being confronted by it. As if it were looking at him, encompassing him, or judging him. It is the sensation produced by the object's cold, inaccessible presence. In their lack of any sign of humanity there is something unbearable about objects, something that forever remains separate from man, as if objects were indifferent witnesses to man's ineffectual attempt to penetrate them, implacable judges that neither condemn nor absolve him for having been unable to achieve that closed existence that characterizes them. They make him feel guilty for not being able to part from his passions, for which the impenetrability of objects is perfect. He feels condemned without any sentence; it would seem that their impenetrability serves as an eternal condemnation whose purpose is to render man's emotionality useless. That is how I see objects: closed within themselves, in their existence for themselves alone. On the other hand, I think of the THING as transcending the object in the sense that those same objects, cold and hermetic, brought to life by the inevitable passion of humans are transformed into THING. It is a transcendence of the object to the extent that it allows itself to be perceived as an object lived by man,



Rubén Santantonin. *La mordaza* [The Gag].
1961. Cardboard, wood, fabric, and paint. 19¾ ×
11⅞ × 6" (50 × 30 × 15 cm). Private collection,
Buenos Aires

penetrated and even modified by his passion-filled, plundering examinations. Facing the THING, man does not feel as disoriented, strange, and restrained as he does when facing objects, because he appears not to be facing the mortifying silence of witnesses.

The THING as a problem for artistic preoccupation is the coming into being of the object. It COMES INTO BEING thanks to that life we extend to it when we conceive of it as a THING. For as soon as we take away the adhesion our lending it life implies, it will return irremediably to being an object. I understand the THING as the triumph of human nature over objects, the vital poetry of the object.

This new form should be understood as THING in the singular, since that is how it achieves the sought-after meaning: the THING understood as expression. It should not be interpreted as an "art of things," which would lead one to assume to some extent an art-reflection. Nor should it be taken merely as the placement of objects in the world, since it aspires to produce the doubling of man in things. It wishes to be that imaginative confrontation. The intent, to the extent possible, is that man no longer CONTEMPLATES things but he immerses himself in them with his pleasure, with his distress, with his imagination. That he does not feel transcended, but rather affected, complicated, commingled. That he doesn't have the experience of feeling small in the face of the THING; that he be caught unawares, that he is exalted or that he takes pleasure in its presence, but never surpassing the measuring stick of his existential coming into being. Look for the primordial content of the THING in that human dimension and you will see that it remains an artistic content—but fitting the limited measure of man, not that of his paradoxical enormity.

I call these objects THINGS because if I were to call them objects, I would be placing them in the realm of objectivity, and I wish, in fact, for them never to leave the realm of thingness, the only realm at present in which they can attain artistic meaning.

—Originally published as "Por qué nombro 'Cosas' a estos objetos," in *Cosas* (Buenos Aires: Galería Lirólay, 1964). Exhibition took place June 15–27 of that year. Translated by Mark Schafer.