

GALLERY SPACE AT WAGNER



FALL
2018



the **S**elgas and
Escher
Effect
1974-2018

artwork by
CEPP SELGAS

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Celebrating Latino Heritage
Month at NYU



Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service | New York University | The Puck Building
295 Lafayette St., 2nd Fl., New York, NY 10012 | 212.998.7400 | wagner.edu/contact/gallery

Curated by
**Frankie Crescioni-Santoni &
Gustavo Valdés-Rivera**

on view
through
04.05.19

COVER: *Night Riders*, 2018

OPPOSITE: *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (detail), 1999
Courtesy of Benjamin Ortiz
and Victor Torchia, Jr.

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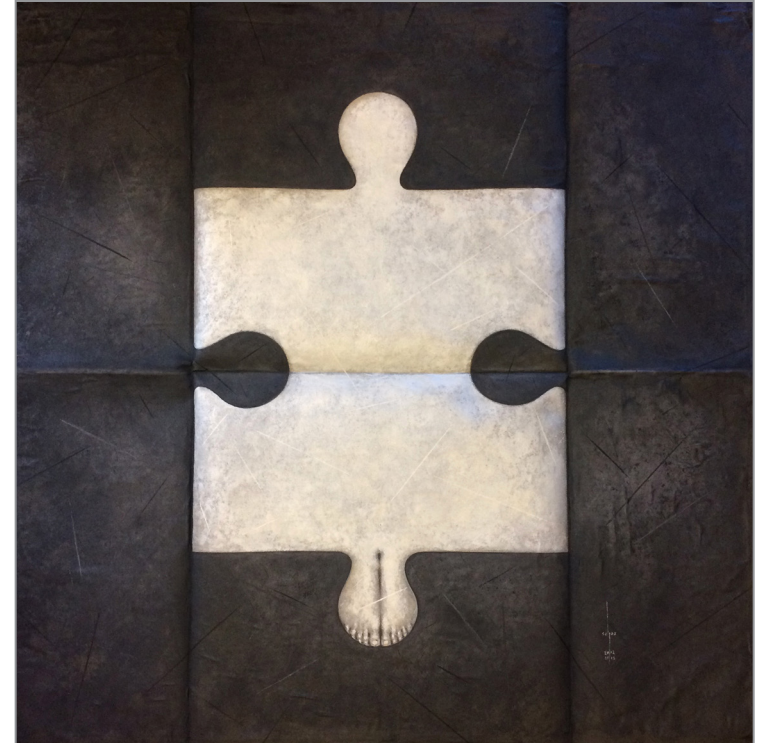


The Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University is home to the Gallery Space at Wagner. With an emphasis on projects promoting diversity, inclusion, and social activism, the mission of this collaborative initiative is to bring artwork into a public-accessible work space in an effort to engage NYU and external audiences in dialogues on contemporary art, culture, and public service.

Since its debut in November 2005, the Gallery Space has hosted a variety of dynamic and innovative exhibits featuring both established and emerging artists. Painting, drawing, photography, pottery, collage, textiles, printmaking, digital video, and mixed media are among the multifarious disciplines showcased in the space. The three annual exhibits held at the gallery are curated by NYU Wagner's communications and design manager Frankie Crescioni-Santoni.

Located on the second floor of the historic Puck Building, the Gallery Space is comprised of two main display areas measuring 10 feet wide by 6 feet tall and 29 feet wide by 6 feet tall, in addition to two auxiliary walls. These spaces are primarily reserved for NYU-affiliated artists with a focus on fostering partnership among the diverse University constituents. Additionally, we host special exhibits by guest artists, curators, and practitioners whose projects align thematically with the school's academic mission and curricula.

For more information about the Gallery Space, including exhibition schedules, proposal submissions, and viewing hours, please visit us at wagner.nyu.edu/contact/gallery. □



Here (Ubiquitous Series), 2013

The Gallery Space at Wagner is proud to commemorate New York University’s celebration of Latino Heritage Month with the opening of *Selgas & the Escher Effect, 1974-2018*. In bringing this project to fruition, we owe deep gratitude to featured artist Cepp Selgas for sharing his celebrated artwork with us. This exhibit would not be possible without the generous support of Gustavo Valdés-Rivera, Benjamin Ortiz, Victor Torchia Jr., and our co-presenting partners at the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CLACS). We would also like to thank the two co-sponsoring student organizations, the Association of Latin@s and Allies in Public Service (ALAS) and La Herencia Latina, for their assistance. Their individual and collective contributions were paramount to making *Selgas & the Escher Effect* a

CO-PRESENTER



Founded in 1966, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) was the first area studies center at New York University. Today it is considered one of the premier centers of its kind in the United States. Its national and international reputation derives from the strength of a research-active faculty and a prestigious interdisciplinary MA program. One of the oldest and most successful in the field, CLACS's MA program offers joint degrees with Global Journalism, Museum Studies, Law, and Library Science, while their graduates have gone to work for leading organizations, including the Americas Society, the Washington Office on Latin America, the Huffington Post, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations. Its Quechua language program, launched in 2008, provides rigorous language training and has earned media attention from local, national, and international news agencies. The Center is also home to the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), whose quarterly report is a long-standing voice in foreign policy analysis. clacs.as.nyu.edu

CO-SPONSORS



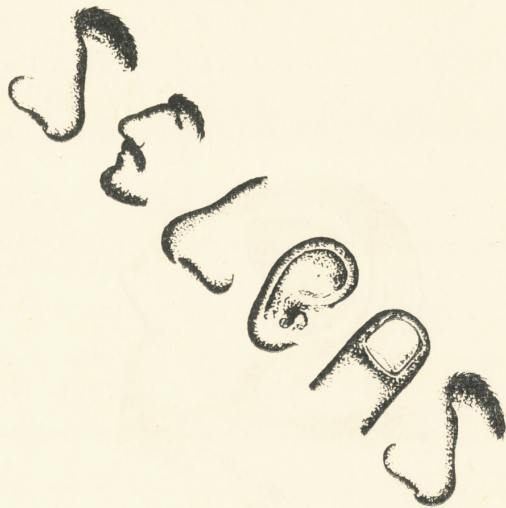
The Association of Latin@s and Allies in Public Service (ALAS) enhances the educational and social experience at Wagner by creating platforms from which the NYU community can engage and advocate for issues at the intersection of our fields of study and topics relevant to Latin@s and their Diasporas around the world. ALAS provides a community-based space for exchanging knowledge, networking, and making cultural connections. wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/engagement/organizations/groups/alas



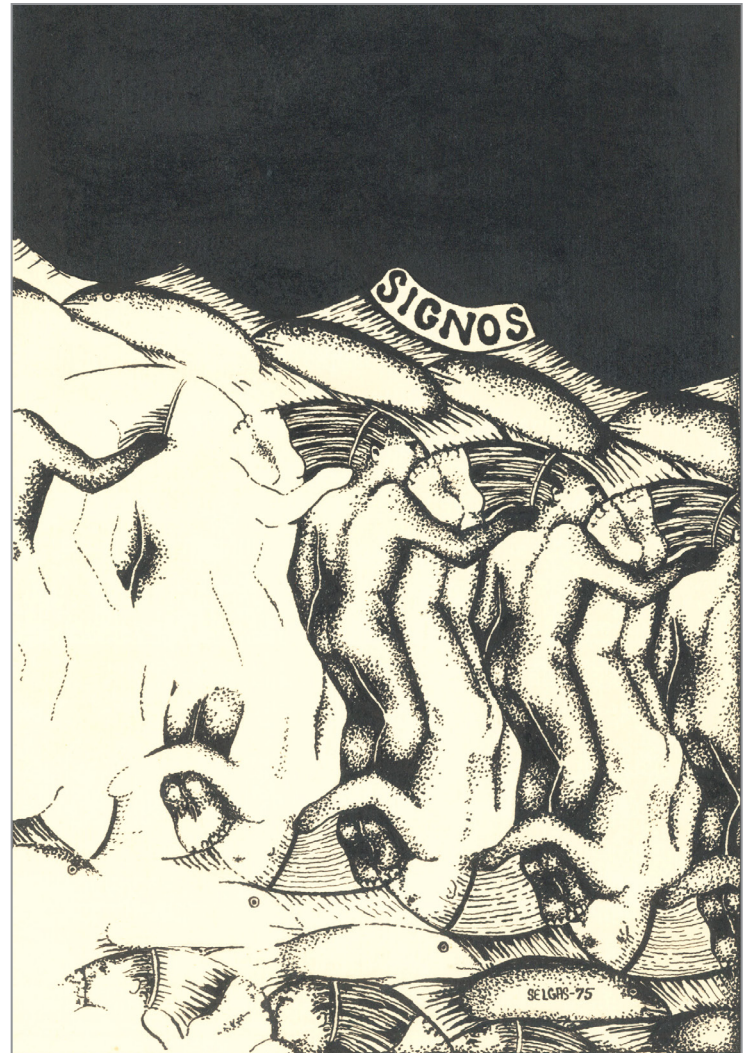
Held every November, La Herencia Latina commemorates and promotes cultural diversity through educational and social events, and creates an awareness of Latino culture and heritage at New York University. La Herencia also strives to identify and deal with the current challenges affecting the Latino community, as well as to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions made by Latinos. This annual celebration includes panel discussions, lectures, concerts, and other intellectual, social, and cultural activities. orgsync.com/61821/chapter



LAS PORTADAS
Y
DIBUJOS
INICIALES
FUERON
RAYADOS
POR EL
DIBUJANTE CIENFUEGUERO



Selgas, introductory page to *Signos Magazine*, 1976



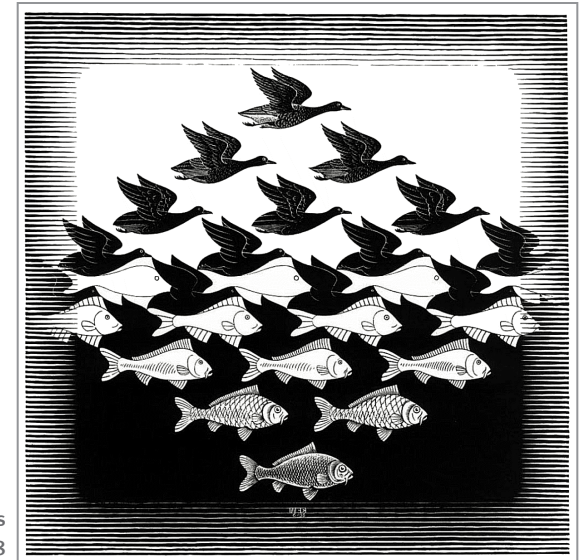
Cojimar (*Indo-cubanos y Peces*), cover proposal for *Signos Magazine*, 1975

Selgas & the Escher Effect, 1974-2018 is a dual homage. It celebrates the vast richness of Cuban art and culture, while simultaneously placing a deserving spotlight on the creative genius of one of its diaspora ambassadors, queer artist Cepp Selgas. An intimate and retrospective look at a career spanning over four decades, the exhibit fittingly focuses on the artist's body of work inspired by his chief influence, graphic art master M.C. Escher. The selected paintings and works on paper showcase Selgas' inventive and meticulous application of tessellation techniques to a variety of imagery, in particular, iconography evoking his native land. Cultural, religious, and political motifs referencing the artist's Caribbean upbringing are prominent throughout the exhibit.

A self-described figurative artist, Selgas has dedicated much of his studio practice to exploring the abstract quality of objects and the intrinsic dynamic between *form* and *concept*. The deconstruction, fracturing, and recreation of the figure is a consistent theme in his art—a process often resulting in the depiction of partial entities that change, transform, and replicate themselves.

Interestingly, Selgas' exploration of Escherian techniques predates his discovery of the Dutch icon. He vividly remembers being mesmerized as a child by the tessellation diagrams used to make decorative paper bells during Christmas in Cuba. He was intrigued by the simple genius of the patterns, which allowed one to simultaneously create a bell cutout while cutting along the contour of an adjacent one. So essentially, a paper-saving, arts-and-craft technique was what would inspire a young Selgas to experiment with hypergeometry, patterning, and tiling, as well as the treatment of negative space as positive space in his early drawings and paintings. Over time, these studies in composition became increasingly complex, and his eventual exposure to Escher in the mid-1970's became a catalyst to pursue more challenging arrangements and to ultimately expand his artistic repertoire.

The influence of Escher is undeniable throughout various phases



M.C. Escher's
Sky & Water, 1938

of Selgas' career. However, one key distinction between the two is that the former considered himself first and foremost a mathematician, while the latter omits arithmetic calculations from his process altogether. Escher embraced the scientific aspect of his work and credited it for achieving his masterpieces of geometry and quintessential depictions of *the impossible*. While Selgas profoundly admires Escher's methods, his own organic execution of tessellation entirely by eye is an integral and defining part of his practice.

Unique to Selgas' approach is also his application of tessellation to a distinctive array of Cuban themes and pictorial elements. This fusion of form and concept is evident in works like *Cojimar* (p. 9), *Love Guayaberas* (p. 26), and *Children of Obbatalá* (p. 13)—the centerpiece of the exhibit. *Cojimar*, where Indo-Cuban figures transform themselves into fish, is a visually arresting tribute to the indigenous past of the region in Cuba after which the illustration is named. The study painting *Love Guayaberas* is another folkloric homage, this time featuring a group of *caballeros* sporting the classic Cuban shirt and placed on the canvas in a tiling configuration. The imposing *Obbatalá*—a male/female creational

Children of Obbatalá,
2009

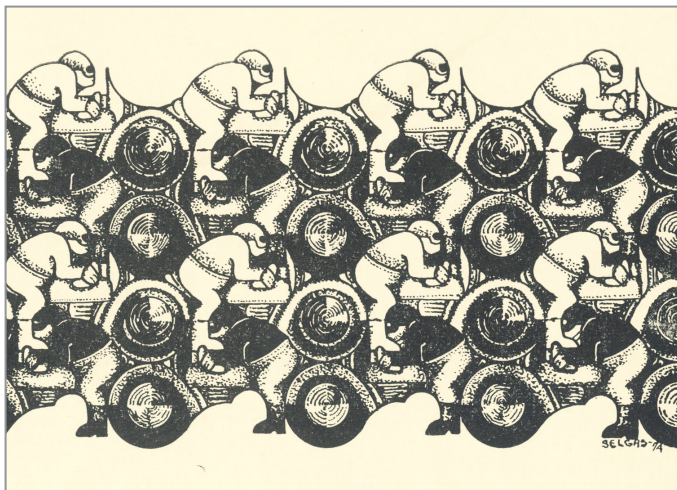
deity in the Afro-Cuban Santería tradition—is depicted breastfeeding a multiplicity of offspring, with the space between the infant heads giving way to delicate white doves. Obbatalá's split head alludes to its hermaphroditism, while the nursing infants symbolize the birth of humankind.

Selgas' liberal use of color blocking, along with his rendering of disjointed and suspended body parts, grants *Children of Obbatalá* a visual tension that stands in contrast to the serene mood captured in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (p. 3). These two works, which bookend the main section of the exhibit, interact within the layout as intriguing companion pieces. Although one mythological and the other historical, both Obbatalá and Sor Juana (a nun and illustrious poet and scholar in 1600's New Spain) represent influential, iconic female figures within their respective religious canons—Santería and Catholicism. Just as these religions have been tightly intertwined since Cuba's colonial times, these two tessellated portraits establish a visual dialogue echoing the country's syncretism and complex religious and sociopolitical realities.

Employing tessellation to explore his Cuban heritage and artistic curiosities has been a prevailing and central feature of Selgas' accomplished and prolific career. Though he continually seeks inspiration in different periods of art history, freely experimenting with styles and mediums, his faithful study of the Escher effect has gracefully guided his work onto a surreal terrain, where his imagination and genius continue to flourish. Ultimately, Selgas is most interested in establishing a Gestalt, two-way communication with the spectator, as he believes that art, whether figurative or abstract, reaches full circle when it makes the viewer an active participant of the creative experience. □

— Frankie Crescioni-Santoni
Curator, Gallery Space at Wagner





*Bloque Motociclo/Motorcycle Block, 1974,
published by Signos Magazine in 1976*



*Don Quijote Infinito/Infinite Don Quixote (detail), 1975,
published by Signos Magazine in 1976*



*Zapato, Zapatero/Shoe, Shoemaker, 1975, published under
the title Productividad by Signos Magazine in 1976*



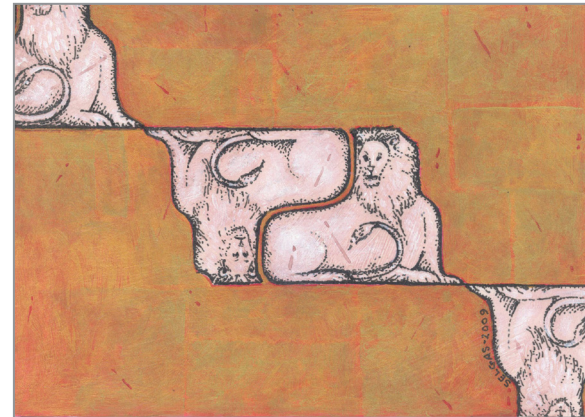
Black Dolls II, 1996



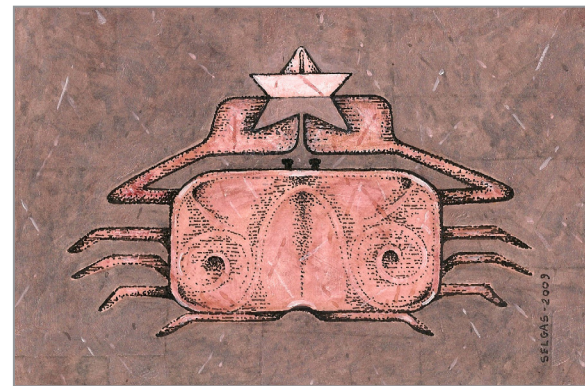
At Odds Numbers (study), 2018



*Gemini,
2009*



*Leo,
2009*



*Cancer,
2009*

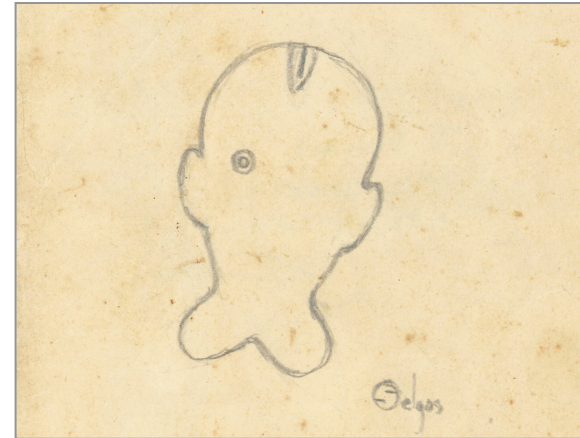
CEPP SELGAS



Cepp Selgas (Cuba, 1951) is a painter and multimedia artist with a vast body of work in multiple visual arts disciplines. For over four decades, he has had a national and international presence in art galleries and museums, including: the Newark Museum, New Jersey; the Paul & Lulu Hilliard Art Museum, Lafayette, Louisiana; the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Connecticut; the Discovery Museum, Bridgeport, Connecticut; MoCHA, New York City; and the National Museum of Decorative Arts, Havana, Cuba, among others. He has participated in numerous group shows and has had solo exhibits in Paris, Germany, Belgium, and throughout the United States. In 2012, he was nominated for a fellowship with the Painters & Sculptors Grant Program of the Joan Mitchell Foundation.

Selgas studied fine arts at the Fine Arts School of Las Villas, the National School of the Arts (Cubanacán), and the National School of Design in Havana. While still in Cuba, Samuel Feijóo published several of his drawings in the 1976 edition of *Signos Magazine*, marking the beginning of a career-defining partnership with the publication.

In 1980, Selgas emigrated to the United States during the Mariel refugee crisis. He ultimately established himself in New York City, where he studied photography at the Fashion Institute of Technology. He currently runs the contemporary art blog selgasart.blogspot.com and maintains an art studio in Inwood, Manhattan. □ ceppselgas.com



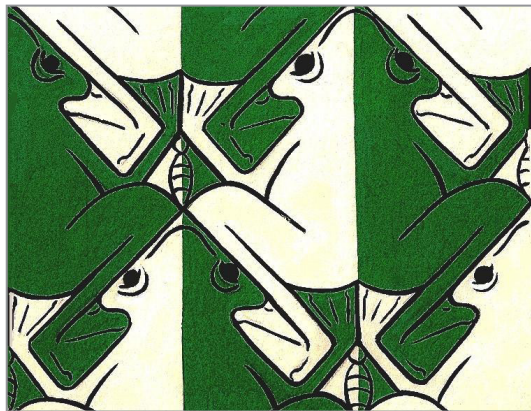
*Pez Cabeza/
Fish Head
(Self-portrait),
1968*



*7... 8
(Self-portrait),
1987*



Owls (detail),
1983



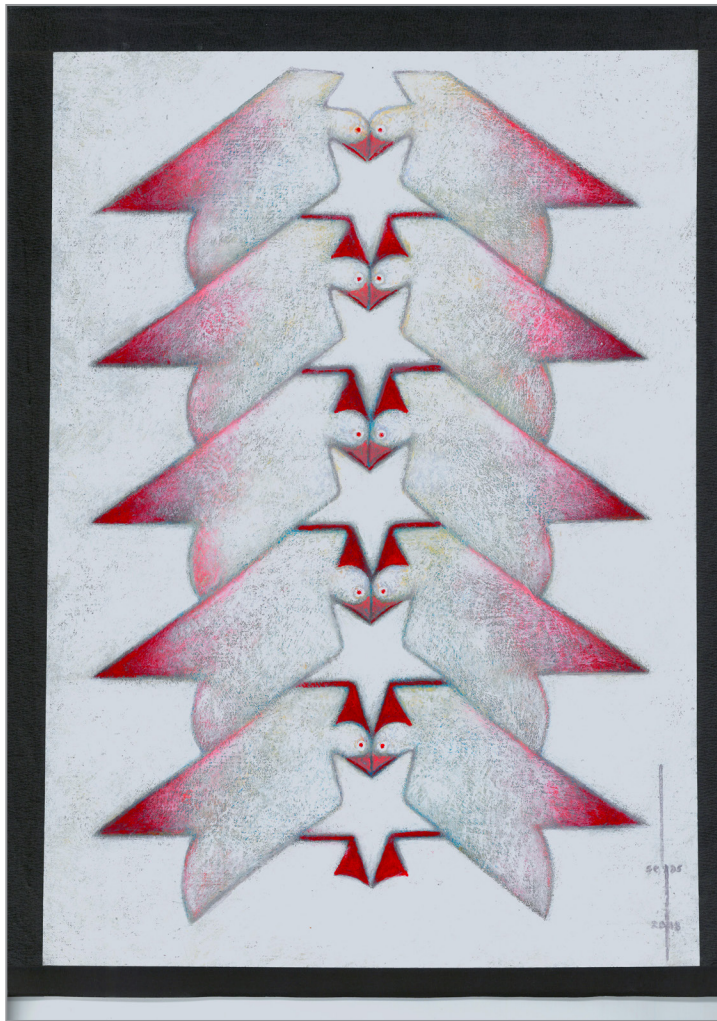
Frogs & Flies
(detail), 1981



Birds & Stars
(detail), 1983



Tattoo II, 2018



Stars of Silence, 2018



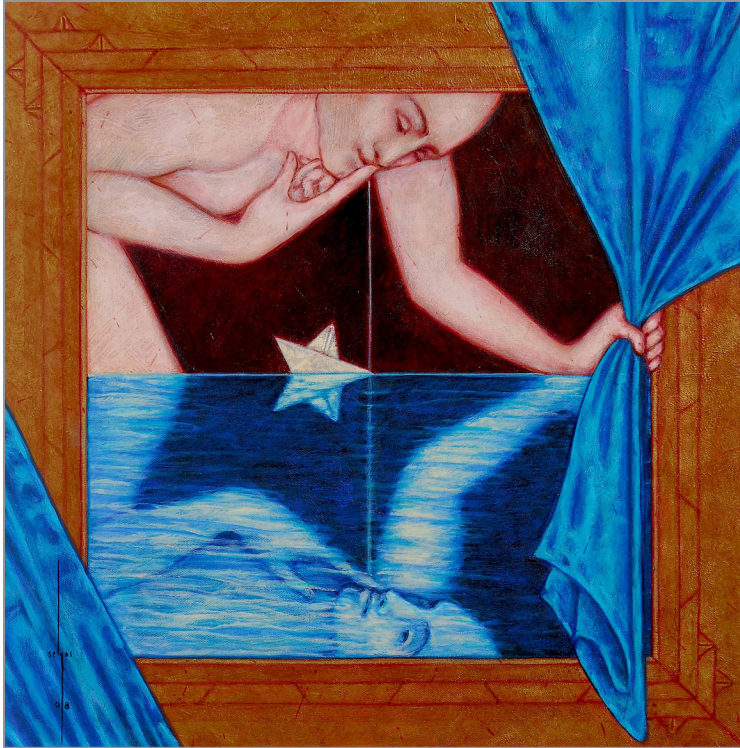
Infinite War, 2018



Love Guayaberas (study), 2018



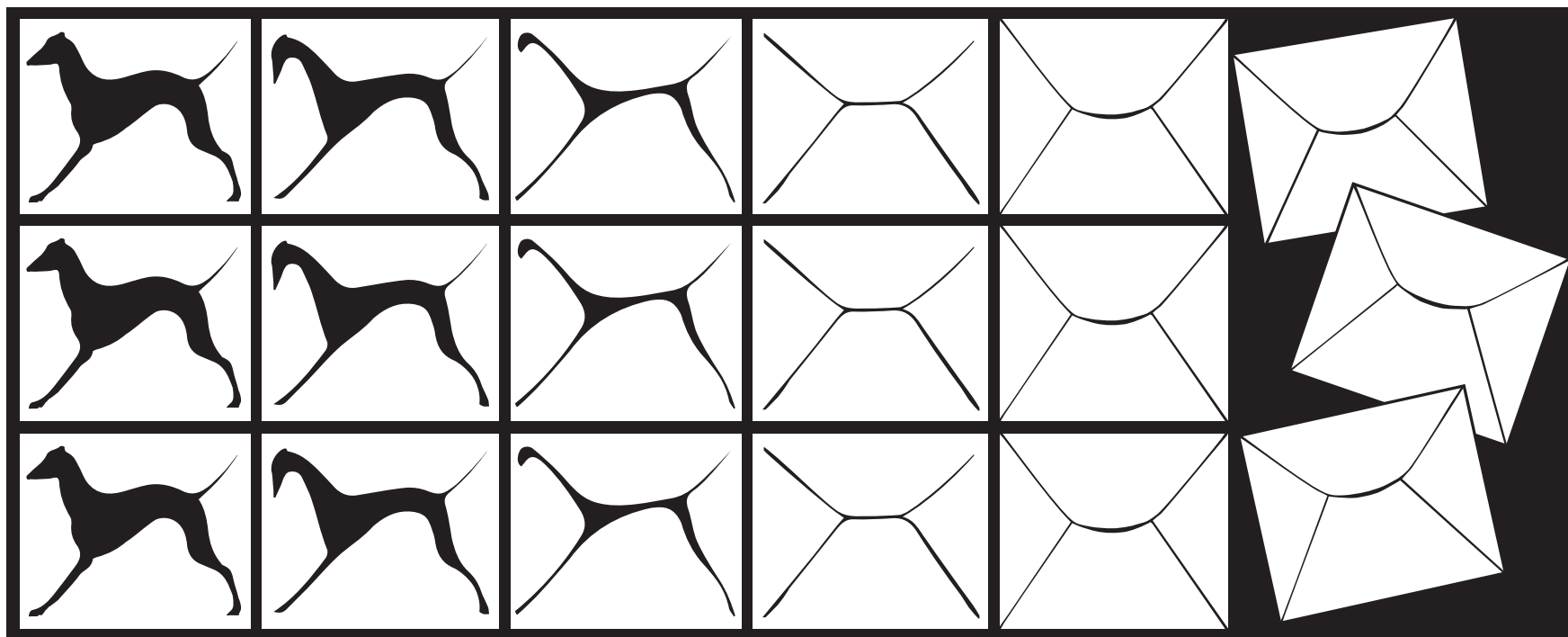
Toys Are US, 2006



Narciso, 2008



Don't Rock the Boat, 2018



SELGAS 1986

Buzón/Mailbag, digital rendering of 1986 ink-on-paper drawing for *AKC Gazette Magazine*



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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is courtesy of Benjamin Ortiz and Victor Torchia, Jr. All other artwork is courtesy of the artist. For information on Cepp Selgas' work, please email:

ceppselgas@gmail.com



The Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service prepares public service leaders to translate ideas into actions that have an effective and lasting impact on the public good. We ensure that students learn critical analytic skills and frameworks, understand the distinct context in which they are working, and take full advantage of the connections and opportunities within New York City. Ranked eleventh nationally among all schools of public affairs, NYU Wagner has been teaching rigorous methods of management, policy, and planning for over 75 years. We offer Master of Public Administration, Master of Urban Planning, Executive Master of Public Administration, and Doctor of Philosophy degree programs. Learn more at wagner.nyu.edu.