

Francisco Infante

Despite his Spanish name, Francisco Infante (pronounced “In-fahn-tay”) is a thoroughly Russian artist. Born in Vassilyevka, Russia in 1943, Infante consciously works in the tradition of the Russian Constructivists of the early 20th Century. This experimental artist attended the Surikov Art Institute in Moscow and the Moscow College of Decorative and Applied Arts. He was one of the leading figures in the Russian “unofficial” art movement. Infante’s work centers around such themes as chance, paradox, and the relationship of man and nature. His works include kinetic (moving) sculptures, tempera paintings and photographs of his installations.

Infante has always been fascinated by geometric space and a quest for a conceptual understanding of the perfection of the universe. For example, in his 1965 tempera painting Spiral, shown on the cover of this card, Infante tries to depict the path of a dot of light that simultaneously strives for the ideal vertical and the ideal horizontal. This work is part of a series of spirals, each of which is a different “representation” of the same tendency toward the vertical and horizontal. Some works in this series have tighter or looser spirals, and some are primarily horizontal rather than vertical. In each work, Infante “depicts” artistically a conceptual understanding of the universe that cannot be directly represented.

Infante also asks that his Spirals be framed without a “mat.” This makes it seem as if the frame is a small window that has been opened to reveal a portion of a spiral that extends infinitely into space. The abrupt ending of the picture of the Spiral at the edge of the frame reminds the viewer that the complete Spiral has not been captured and, in fact, cannot be captured because it is endless. (It is impossible to portray this effect completely on this card because the printer needed to have white spaces on the left and right of the image in order to adequately reproduce it.)

During the 1960s, Infante was a leader of the artistic group “Dvizhenie” (meaning “Movement” in Russian) and worked on a series of “kinetic” sculptures (sculptures that have moving pieces). Movement is central to much of Infante’s work, which is based on the artist’s belief that nothing in “real” life is ever static. Infante believes that life is constant movement and involves movement of time as well as movement of objects. This thought was articulated in the early 20th Century by the Russian constructivist Naum Gago, who once said “Kinetic rhythms [are] the basic forms of our sensations of real time.” Infante has said that all of his works (including the ones that do not move, but which depict movement) are based upon his “kinetic attitude to the world.”

The kinetic sculptures can be seen as microcosms of the natural universe, creating movement that is logically complex and precise, yet also very emotionally satisfying. In addition, for many of the sculptures, there is no “right” way to have them move. Rather, it is possible to have them move in different ways at different times, depending upon how the person setting them in motion decides to proceed. This incorporates the element of chance that Infante believes comes into play in life.

Unfortunately, many of Infante's kinetic sculptures have been destroyed or otherwise allowed to deteriorate, and they now exist primarily in Infante's drawings and plans. Other Infante "kinetic" works, from the beginning, have existed only in concept. For example, Infante has developed detailed plans for sculptures in space and other "futurological" designs.

In the 1970s, Infante concluded that his earlier, man-made "depictions" of nature were inadequate representations of the complexity of reality. Since then, he has avoided creating static art objects and, instead, has worked primarily by briefly placing a man-made (frequently geometric) object in the natural environment in such a way that it confuses the viewer as to what is "real" (i.e., part of the natural environment) and what is not.

Infante, for example, has cut a mirror in the shape of a cloud and hung it in the sky so that the viewer sees a reflection of the ground in the mirror. When looking at the scene presented, the viewer sees a "cloud" made of dirt floating in the sky with other, "natural" clouds (the viewer cannot see the strings that hold the mirror in the sky). The viewer knows that what he sees cannot be real since clouds cannot be made of dirt, yet in some mysterious way it is in fact occurring. Infante captures this art event – this mystery, this interaction of man and nature – through a photograph, which he calls an "artifact." To Infante, the artifact is the embodiment of the mystery of the universe and man's relation to it. This concept is related to attempts by various ancient cultures to create objects that depict the mystery of life. Although this may seem bizarre to those who have not seen them, the artifacts are beautiful works that are simultaneously natural and mysterious. In contemplating them, the viewer is forced to consider what is real.

Although Infante's work was first shown in the West in 1965, it did not receive much attention outside the Eastern Bloc countries until the advent of glasnost. Since then, Infante has been recognized as one of the world's leading conceptual artists. His work has been shown throughout the world, including the United States, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, Hungary, Finland and South Korea. His work is included in numerous public and private collections.

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