

## **BEGINNINGS**

Raimundo Figueroa

Published on the occasion of the exhibition on June 1998 at Galerie Van der Straeten

### **Introduction essay**

I felt a connection with Raimundo Figueroa before we ever met. Seeing his work for the first time in the mid-1980s, I was struck with a sense that he had tapped a source of wondrous energies, and with sensitivity and skill, had brought these untempered forces into focus. This was an artist who understood the role of artist as synthesist – one who assimilates, gathering diverse themes into a coherent whole. Most profound was the feeling that each painting was an adventure. Figueroa was exploring with both a mature creative intelligence and the openness of a child. He was not merely reflecting his artistic influences, he was painting with heart.

We met in 1987; however, it wasn't until recently that I learned more about the extraordinary path of this artist's life. As a musical prodigy on violin, Figueroa was discovered at a very young age by Leonard Bernstein, and was awarded a scholarship to study with renowned violinist Carol Glenn and her husband, pianist Eugene Liszt. He has encountered some of the world's most accomplished musicians, and has received accolades from institutions including the New York Philharmonic, the American Federation of Musicians and the American Violin Society.

Although proficient in music, Figueroa has held a deep love for visual expression since early childhood. While his music studies required exacting discipline, painting afforded him a different venue for creating. In his words, "As musician, I was an interpreter. As a painter, I am the composer."

Being creative in a methodical way has been a part of Raimundo Figueroa's artistic process since he can recall. "Understanding the order inside the chaos" is his daily struggle and discipline. Figueroa first began creating montages and collages in 1974, inspired by major life events of the time. Music, nature, travels, the loss of a friend, a

new love, and sociopolitical events are some for the themes which influence his work. While living in New York in the 1970s and early 1980s, he met and befriended some of the most influential musicians, writers, humanitarians, intellectuals, and artists of our time, including artists of the famous New York School. Although he welcomed the creative influence, he left New York in 1993 and returned to Puerto Rico, where he could re-connect with nature and continue his work without the distractions of the New York “scene.”

Simple observation and a continuous attitude to be introspective, along with a desire to develop his own iconographic language, have led the artist to compose utilizing symbols and gesture to express universal feelings. Exploring the balance between the conscious and unconscious mind, he strives to give meaning to the creative present.

Figueroa’s compositions contain free-hand drawing and fragments of personal “diaries” compiled over many years. In this his most recent series, BEGINNINGS, he expresses reality as a profound experience through rediscovery of the love for life, interaction with ancient cultures, beauty in nature, and the celebration of each day as a new beginning.

Ken Nahan, Jr.

*President*

*Former director of Nahan Galleries, New York*