

# FROST ART MUSEUM



## TEACHER RESOURCE PACKET

# THE ARTIST



### **Agustin Fernandez**

Agustin Fernández studied at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, Havana (1944–46), venturing abroad for courses at the Art Students League of New York and Madrid's Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. He left Cuba permanently in 1959 and lived in Paris (1959–68); San Juan (1968–72); and New York (1972–2006). During his lifetime Fernández held more than thirty solo exhibitions and participated in over one hundred group shows at major galleries and museums internationally. In 1992 the Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami (now the Frost Art Museum), organized a major retrospective of his work. In 2019, the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami organized *Armaduras*. Fernández is represented in multiple museum collections around the world, including at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum of Art; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana; and the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, among others.

## Agustín Fernández



***La Fleur Bleue (The Blue Flower)*, 1959, Oil  
on canvas, Gift of Joe Novak**

Cuban-born artist Agustín Fernández (1928–2006) was a modern master, blending figuration and abstraction into a non-dualistic visual language. Juxtaposing anatomical imagery with subdued coloration, his work resists placement within the color-saturated Cuban canon of the 1950s—the period during which he studied art in Havana. Even early in his career, ambiguous forms emerge, evoking flesh and eros through a monochromatic palette. Resonating with the broader modernist movement, Fernández’s work grapples with themes of exile, separation, and abandonment.

Self-identifying as a “painter of the brush,” Fernández was also a master draftsman. His drawings depict torn and folded paper, pins, hooks, belts, lines, and spikes—iconographic elements that permeate both his paintings and works on paper. Through this aesthetic, Fernández constructs a world of aggression and conflict, physical pain and metaphysical contemplation, filtering these themes through a psychological lens.

## CLOSE LOOKING ACTIVITY

### Essential Questions

- How does Agustín Fernández use surrealism to explore ideas about identity, the body, and transformation?
- In what ways does Fernández's experience of exile and displacement influence the themes and style of his artwork?
- How can abstraction and surrealistic imagery communicate complex emotions or ideas without using traditional realism?
- What role does ambiguity play in the impact of Fernández's work?
- In what ways does Fernández's work connect to broader movements in art history, such as Surrealism or Latin American Modernism?
- How does Fernández blur the line between the mechanical and the organic, and why might that be significant?

### Discuss

Discuss the artworks by Agustín Fernández. Discuss how he challenges traditional notions of beauty and the grotesque through his visual choices?

### Connect

Visit, tour, and discuss artworks by Agustín Fernández. Using the Close Looking questions expand on the artist's ability to create tension, . Relate his artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to an deepen understanding.

### Vocabulary

Abstraction, Ambiguity, Biomorphic, Cuban Vanguard, Surrealism, Texture

## Studio Experience

### *Exploring Tension and Ambiguity in Drawing*

#### Discuss

Consider how Agustín Fernández, a classically trained artist investigated a visual language and tension without corrupting the foundation of drawing. Discuss the concept of ambiguity in art and how Fernández employs it in his work.

#### Materials

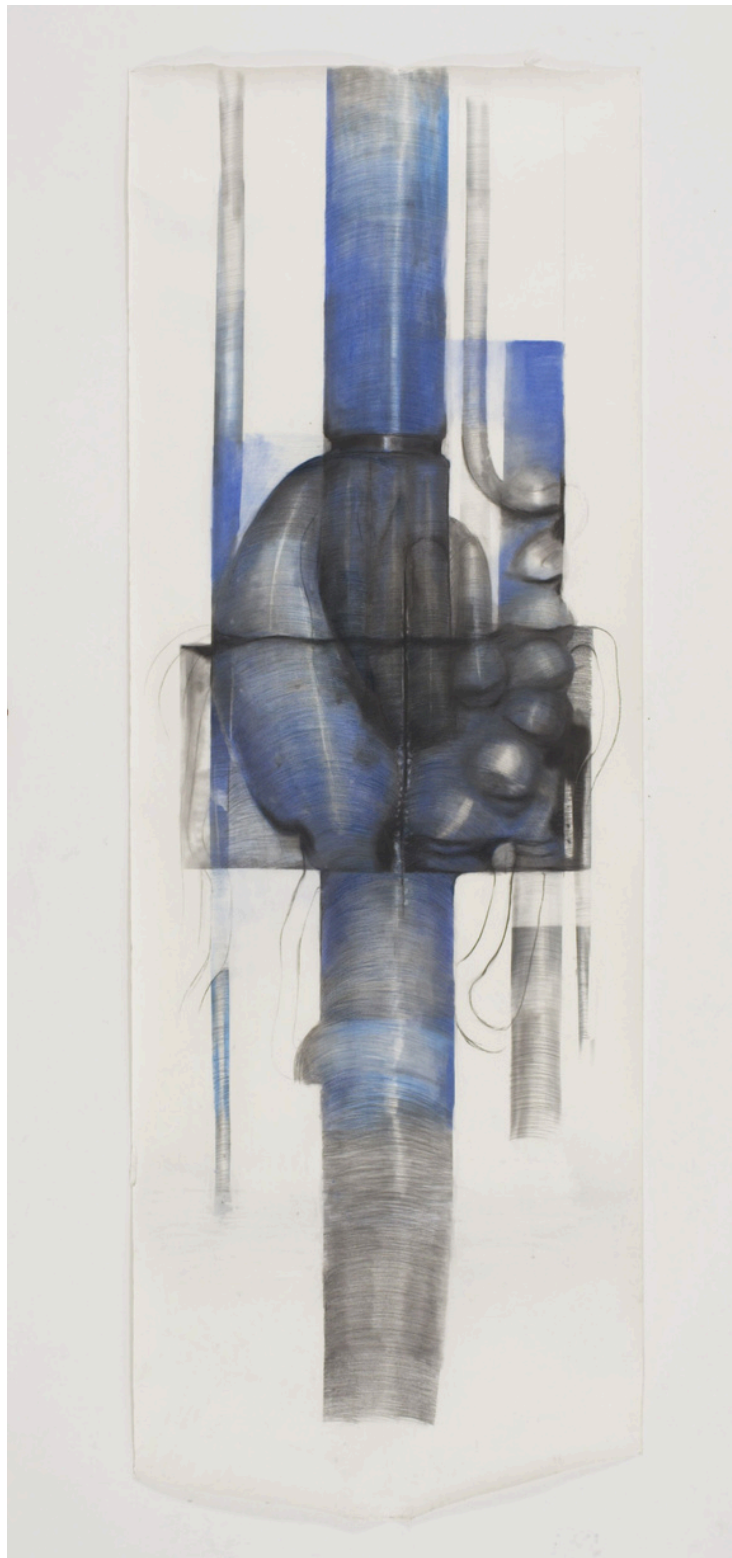
- Drawing pencils, charcoal, and/or ink
- Sketchbooks
- Drawing Paper (120 lb)

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks, focusing on Fernández's use of monochromatic palettes, abstract forms, and psychological theme. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such as blending, lighting, mechanical elements, organic forms, shading, a variety of perspectives, and creating abstract forms. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

**Step 2:** Have students experiment with these techniques using different media, encouraging them to explore how ambiguity can be represented visually. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their own artworks that incorporate ambiguity, drawing inspiration from Fernández's themes and techniques. Have students draft a preliminary sketch and writes a brief artist statement outlining their concept and intended message.

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final pieces applying the techniques and drawing concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's drawings emphasize the effective use of tension ambiguity.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of ambiguity, technique, and the communication of ideas. Discuss how the creative process and exploration of abstract forms, ambiguity, lighting, and mechanical forms, have influenced their understanding of art and personal expression.



***Untitled*, ca. 1995, Pencil on paper, Courtesy of  
the Agustin Fernandez Estate and Leon Tovar**

## Studio Experience

### *Depth, the Psyche and Texture in Drawing*

#### Discuss

Consider how Agustín Fernández, drew from being interested and focusing on metaphysics. Discuss ambiguity, isolation, identity and change, reality vs. illusion and transformation What is human? What is machine? Where is the line?

#### Materials

- Drawing pencils, charcoal, conte, pastels, and/or ink
- Sketchbooks
- Drawing Paper (120 lb)

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks, focusing on Fernández's use of ambiguity, the psychological theme and texture. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such as blending, shading, and obscuring forms. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

**Step 2:** Have students experiment with these techniques using different media, encouraging them to explore the psyche and how it can transform reality into illusion. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their own artworks that incorporate texture, drawing inspiration from Fernández's themes and techniques. Have students draft a preliminary sketch of their selected drawing.

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final pieces applying the techniques and drawing concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's drawings emphasize the effective use of representation of the isolation, ideas from the psyche and texture.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of ideas from the isolation, psyche and, texture. Discuss how the creative process and exploration of ambiguity have influenced their understanding of art and personal expression.





**Untitled, 1984, Pencil on paper, Courtesy of the Agustin Fernandez Estate and Leon Tovar**



## Studio Experience

### *The Early Stages, Influences of Cuban Vanguard Painters Drawing/Painting*

#### Discuss

Consider how Agustín Fernández, drew from his ideology of isolation, identity, longing and political tension in his Cuban Vanguard style paintings. Discuss with students the identity of home, separation, dreams, and struggles. Discuss fragmentation, overlapping forms, and abstracted mechanical/organic imagery in his work.

#### Materials

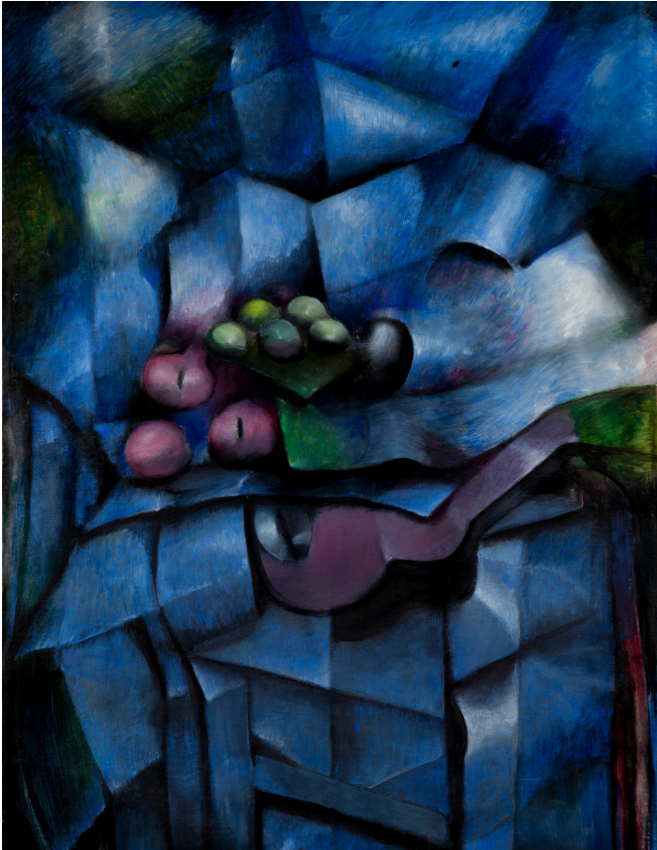
- Charcoal, Conte, Graphite Pencils or Pastels
- Acrylic
- Paint Brushes
- Canvases or canvas board
- Drawing Paper

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks of the Cuban Vanguard style created by Fernández. Discuss Fernández's use of muted, metallic and texture. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such the combination of organic, mechanical shapes, and cubism. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

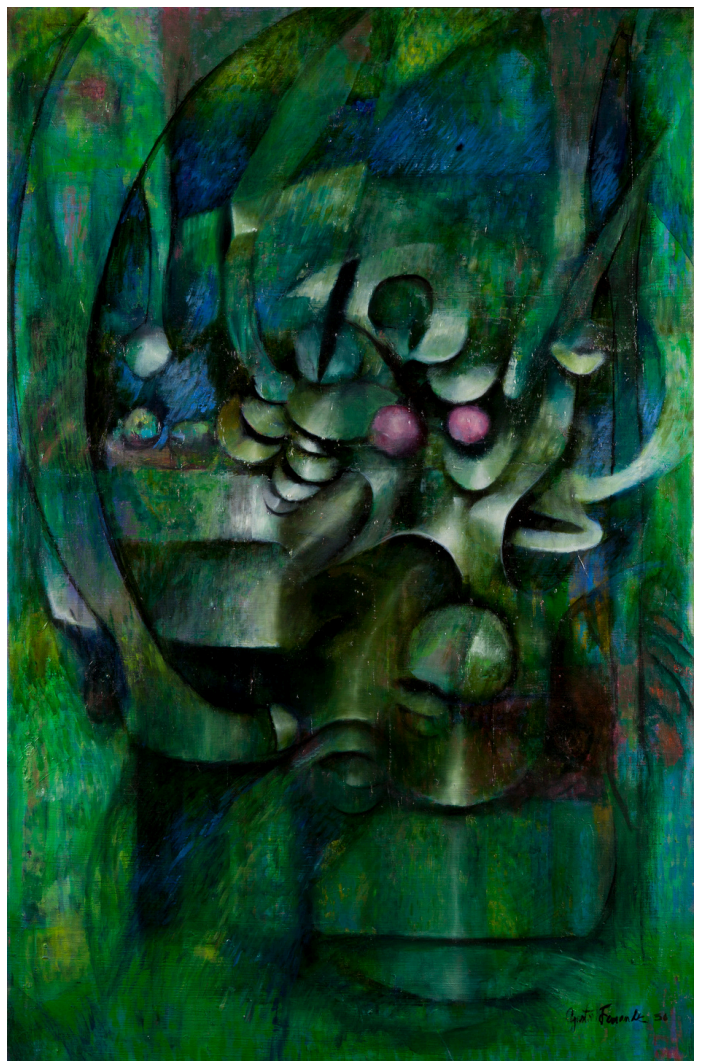
**Step 2:** Have students experiment with these techniques using different media, encouraging them to explore drawing organic and mechanical shapes to develop a painting evoking emotions of identity, home, separation, dreams and . Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their own artworks that incorporate the style of the Cuban Vanguard painters and draw inspiration from Fernández's early works. Have students draft a preliminary sketch of their selected thumbnail sketch to prepare for their large drawing or painting.

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final painting applying the techniques and concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's paintings emphasize the effective use of the Cuban Vanguard style.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of the style of the Cuban Vanguard style. Discuss how the creative process and exploration identity, home, dreams, and struggles.



***The Blue Still Life*, 1956, Oil on canvas, Gift of José Martínez-Cañas**



***Naturaleza muerta y follaje (Still Life and Foliage)*, 1956, Oil on canvas, Gift of José Martínez-Cañas**

## Studio Experience

### ***Exploring Ambiguity Cubism, Abstraction and the Psychological Space***

#### **Discuss**

Discuss realistic painting techniques on how Agustin uses these to trick viewers into thinking painted objects are three-dimensional. Discuss how some artists use extreme detail, shadowing, texture, and perspective using the Trompe-l'œil technique. Create a monochromatic painting exploring ambiguity through cubism, abstraction and treating the space with a physiological mindset. Develop original compositions inspired by Fernández's use of form, contrast, and cubistic imagery.

#### **Materials**

- Acrylic/oil paints (monochromatic palette) and texture mediums (modeling paste, gesso)
- Large canvas or heavy paper
- Palette knives, brushes, sponges

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks created by Agustin Fernández that focus on cubism and abstraction. Discuss Fernandez's focus on themes of exile, ambiguity, and psychological depth/space. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such the combination of cubism, abstraction to add tension and Trompe-l'œil. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

**Step 2:** Demonstrate blending, layering and creating tension through cubistic and abstract shapes. Have students experiment with these techniques using by creating a variety of sketches tht focus on cubism and abstraction. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their paintings that incorporate abstraction, cubism, and tension. Have students draft a preliminary sketch of their selected thumbnail sketch to prepare for their large paintings. .

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final pieces applying the techniques and painting concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's paintings depict the effective use of abstraction, cubism, and tension through blending and layering.

**Step 4:** Demonstrate how blending and emphasizing on Fernández's theory of being the "*painter of the brush*," demonstrate how to add highlights to increase shadows to enhance psychological impact. Have students work with spatulas, brushes to add highlights and deeper shadows to enhance textural techniques.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of abstraction, cubism and figuration to create psychological tension and the mastery of monochromatic painting techniques.



***Cousures (Sutures)*, 1962, Oil on canvas, Gift of José Martínez-Cañas**

## Studio Experience

### *Figures, Abstraction and Space in Painting*

#### Discuss

Discuss realistic painting techniques on how Agustin uses the figure as form of conversation and in essence a style of an exquisite corpse. Explore Agustin's mindset on nature, politics, literature and his surroundings and how they influenced the figures in his paintings. Create a monochromatic painting exploring the figure in exquisite corpse style focusing on color and monochromatic tone value like grisaille.

#### Materials

- Reproductions of Agustín Fernández's artworks from "The Alluring Power of Ambiguity" exhibition.
- Charcoal, Drawing pencils, Ink
- Acrylic paint & paint Brushes
- Canvases or canvas board
- Drawing Paper
- Personal devices for research

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks created by Agustin Fernández that focus on the figure and exquisite corpse style. Discuss Fernandez's focus on themes of nature, politics, his surroundings and the figure. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such the combination of figure drawing and exquisite corpse style. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

**Step 2:** Demonstrate figure and exquisite corpse drawing with a combination of realism and abstraction. Have students experiment with these techniques using by creating a variety of sketches focusing on the figure and exquisite corpse. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their paintings that incorporate these elements. Have students draft a preliminary sketch of their selected thumbnail sketch to prepare for their large paintings.

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final pieces applying the techniques and painting concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's paintings depict figures and exquisite corpse style, focusing on color and monochromatic tone value like grisaille.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of the figure, exquisite corpse using color and monochromatic tone value like grisaille.





***Armadura (Armor)*, 1971, Oil on linen, Gift of Joe Novak**



## Studio Experience

### *Disrupt and Distort: A Punk-Inspired Painting through Optical Illusions*

#### Discuss

Discuss the surreal and provocative visual language of Agustin's biomorphic forms blended with mechanical imagery and how he distorted reality. Explore Agustin's use of distortion, optical illusion, and punk-inspired imagery. Have students watch a short video related to punk music. Create a punk-inspired painting with visual representations that reflect rebellion through visual form using distortion, optical illusion and monochromatic values.

#### Materials

- Sketchbooks
- Acrylic paints, brushes, palettes
- Canvas or heavy paper
- Rulers, compasses, stencils (optional)
- Reference images of punk fashion, zines, and music covers

**Step 1:** Analyze selected artworks created by Agustin Fernández that focus on mechanical and punk-inspired imagery. Discuss Fernandez's focus on themes of nature, politics, his surroundings and the figure. Demonstrate various techniques used by Fernández, such the combination of figure drawing and exquisite corpse style. Have students complete thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks.

**Step 2:** Demonstrate blending and fading using monochromatic colors to emulate punk-inspired imagery.. Have students experiment with these techniques using by creating a variety of sketches focusing on the punk era and mechanical imagery. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for their paintings that incorporate these elements. Have students draft a preliminary sketch of their selected thumbnail sketch to prepare for their large paintings.

**Step 3:** Have students present their sketches for a preliminary critique and then, they will work on their final pieces applying the techniques and painting concepts presented/discussed. The teacher will provide guidance and ensure student's paintings mechanical and punk-inspired imagery, focusing on asymmetry, bold color, text, destruction as creation through color and monochromatic tone.

**Assessment:** Group Critique, have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have students present their completed artworks encouraging constructive feedback focused on the use of mechanical and punk-inspired imagery, focusing on asymmetry, bold color, text, destruction as creation through color and monochromatic tone.



***Femme Oiseau (Bird Woman)*, c. 2000. Oil on canvas.  
60 x 90 in. (152,4 x 228,6 cm.). Private collection.**

## Elements of Art and Principles of Design

- Balance, Color, Contrast, Emphasis, Form, Line, Movement, Shape, Space, Texture, Unity, Value

## Assessments

- Have students research the artwork of Agustín Fernández's and the artists that inspired him and write an essay comparing their artwork to Fernández's.
- Have students participate in a group critique using TAG: T – Tell the Artists Something You Like; A – Ask the Artist a Question; G – Give the Artist a Suggestion. Have the students read their pictures and stories.

## STEAM Connections

**Science** - Explore sketching hybrid mechanical-biological forms after examining anatomical models and machine parts.

**Technology** - Create a 3D digital model that blurs the line between organic and mechanical using Tinkercad or Blender.

**Engineering** - Design a blueprint for a "living machine" inspired by Fernández's forms.

**Math** - Deconstruct Fernández's compositions into geometric diagrams; recreate an artwork using only polygons.

**Art** - Create a collage that blends natural and mechanical imagery, using abstraction and ambiguity. Have students compare and contrast Fernández's work with Joseph Cornell's.

## Artist Connections

Compare and contrast the works of Agustin Fernandez with other prominent surrealist artists such as/but not limited to: Francis Bacon, Salvador Dali, Wilfredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Joan Miro, Paula Rego, and Yves Tanguy

## Visual Arts Benchmarks

### Drawing

VA.912.C.1.2, VA.912.S.2.2, VA.912.F.3.12, VA.912.H.1.3, VA.912.H.2.1, VA.912.O.2.1, VA.912.S.1.3

### Painting

VA.912.C.1.2, VA.912.C.1.3, VA.912.F.1.1, VA.912.F.3.12, VA.912.H.1.3, VA.912.H.1.4, VA.912.H.2.1, VA.912.C.2.2, VA.912.O.1.5, VA.912.O.2.1, VA.912.O.3.1, VA.912.S.1.1, VA.912.S.2.2

**Agustín Fernández**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agust%C3%ADn\\_Fern%C3%A1ndez\\_\(artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agust%C3%ADn_Fern%C3%A1ndez_(artist))

**Agustín Fernández's Biography - Leon Tovar Gallery**

<https://www.leontovargallery.com/artists/25-agustin-fernandez/biography/>

**The Alluring Power of Ambiguity**

<https://frost.fiu.edu/whats-on/events/2025/01/agustin-fernandez.html>

**Agustín Fernández: The Metamorphosis of Experience (Book)**

This exhibition is sponsored by

**Cernuda Arte, Fernandez Estate and MCI**