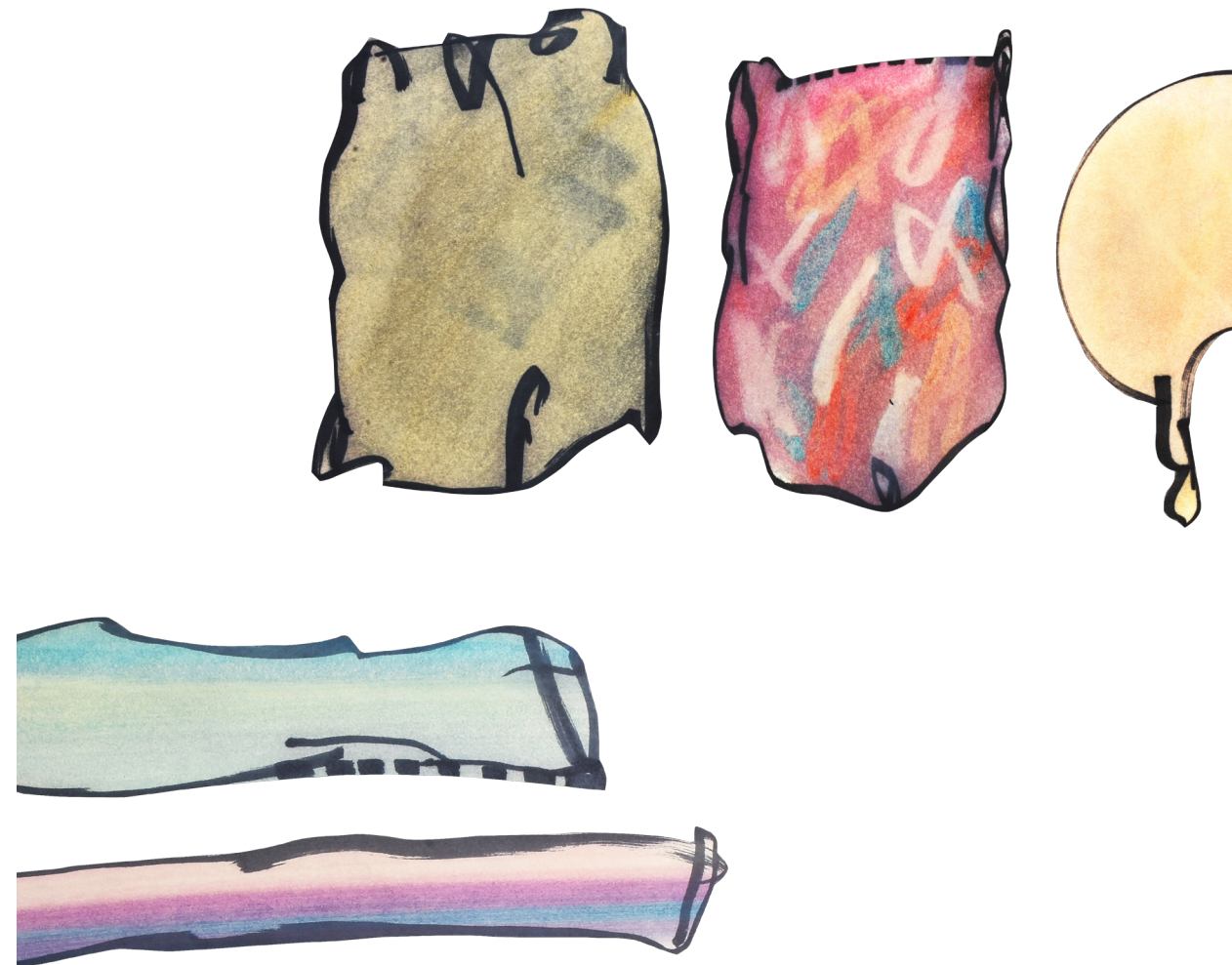


SALCEDO PRIVATE VIEW



Roberto Chabet
Early Works & Ephemera

Private collection, New York



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25 May - 29 June 2019 / NEX Tower, 6786 Ayala Avenue, Makati City

ROBERTO CHABET: *EARLY WORKS & EPHEMERA*

In January 1968, Roberto Chabet left the Philippines and embarked on a yearlong trip in preparation for his appointment as the founding museum director of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). He received a generous grant from the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund, now known as the Asian Cultural Council (ACC), to survey museum practices and collections and observe contemporary art developments in the United States, Mexico, and Europe. Based in New York, the JDR 3rd Fund has long been instrumental in fostering cultural exchange between Asia and the United States. In the 60s and 70s, around forty grants were given to artists and cultural professionals from the Philippines, including Chabet, Leonidas V. Benesa, Henry Francia, Alejandrino Hufana, Jose Joya, Lucrecia Kasilag, Jose Maceda, Rod Paras-Perez, Alice Reyes, Manuel Rodriguez, Ramon Santos, and many others.

An architect by training, Chabet achieved early critical success with his first solo exhibition of paintings, drawings and collages at the Luz Gallery in Manila in 1961, the same year he also won the top prize at the annual competition of the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP). His works were described by Arturo Luz as “quietly impressive, subdued in theme, style and color, and restrained to the point of solemnity, saved, however by a sense of design which is uncanny. Limited in materials and palette (watercolor and gouache) and executed on the most unpretentious of materials (chipboard and empty cardboard crates), the pictures achieve a richness through

the subtle manipulation of simple flat areas and subtly related tones...His approach to art is painterly: he grapples with the elements of his craft rather than the subjects of his paintings. His themes are limited and simple: landscapes with architectural overtones, figures posed against simple backgrounds, and collages made up of clippings from newspapers and magazines. Buildings and houses predominate, rendered in abstract terms, improvised, imaginary, and simplified in the interest of pictorial clarity.”

By the end of the 60s, Chabet established a body of work that was clearly a counterpoint to the kind of modernism that was in place in the country at the time. This exhibition of his early works, including a number of pieces created in or around 1968, provides a glimpse into the forms and processes of the artist at a time when the world was undergoing a period of upheaval and change. It is important to note that 1968 was a turning point both in terms of social and political history as well as in art, which Chabet witnessed firsthand while he was travelling across the United States and Europe. It was the year when Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, sparking violent riots and demonstrations all over the United States. In Europe, students and workers were striking in France and Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Soviet Union. In both continents, demonstrations were held in protest of the war in Vietnam.

At the same time in the art world, modernism was being questioned for its failed utopian

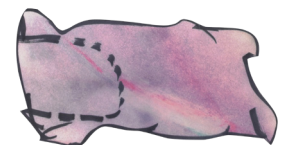
promises. It has been noted that, “much of the art first made or shown in 1968 seems to reveal a transformation as profound as that in the political climate. Gallery exhibitions and theoretical writings defined radical new aesthetic initiatives. The appearance of new media, new modes of organization, and a generation of young, iconoclastic artists suggested a new sensibility.” The reemergence of conceptualism, in particular, challenged and redefined the nature of art, creating pathways for new expressions and forms. Conceptual art, along with developments in photography and postminimalism, formed the triumvirate upon which Chabet would anchor and expand his art.

The works featured in this exhibition are all drawn from the personal collection of Luis Romero, a close friend of Chabet from his student days. Both studied architecture at the University of Santo Tomas and worked together in establishing their own architectural firm. Though Chabet did not pursue his career in architecture, the two remained friends. Chabet stayed in Romero’s apartment in New York during his trip in 1968 and left many works, including four collages from his 1968 Ceche series, which are highlighted in this exhibition. Anticipating his modular compositions and installations in the 70s, these collages are made up of carefully composed ambiguous forms floating in empty space. Unlike his other collages, which utilized found material and imagery, these collages were significantly made from his own cut-up drawings, which were then heavily outlined and dotted, creating relationships and tensions within the image.

There are also a number of earlier pieces by Chabet, including a rare, undated mixed media on cardboard, which he still signed as “Rodriguez”. Most likely from the same set of works for his first solo exhibition in 1961, it shows the artist’s concern for rawness and simplicity of form and material. Along with these are several sketchpads and notebooks containing drawings and notes that further illustrate the artist’s interests and thinking process. Chabet and Romero also collaborated on a series of works – a combination of drawing and collage, which are then finished with a thin, translucent layer of white wash. This technique can also be seen in Chabet’s later works on paper, wherein images appear to be covered with a veil. Postcards, letters, exhibition posters, catalogues, and other ephemera collected by Romero and Chabet are also included, indicating the kind of milieu they were in and at the same time, illuminating their friendship.

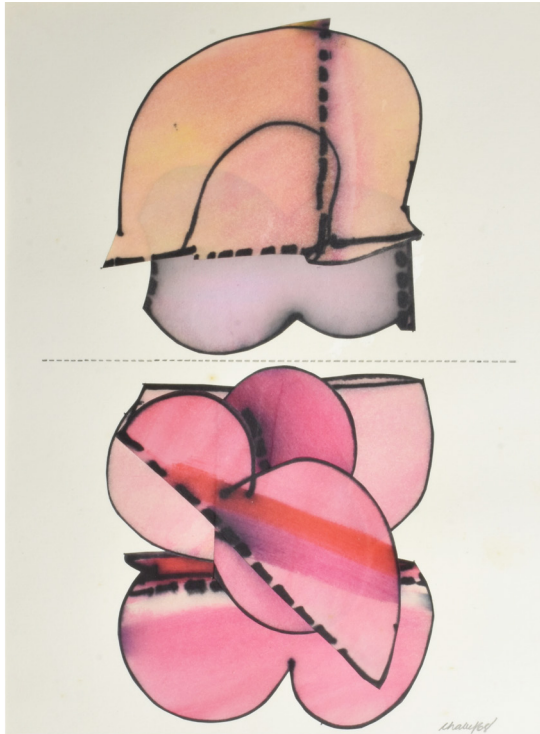
This exhibition provides a unique opportunity to survey the foundation of Chabet’s highly complex body of work. While it would later evolve into large-scale, immersive installations using plywood, readymades and other found material from the 70s onwards, drawing and collage remained an essential part of his art practice. He always threshed out his ideas on paper, regardless of their final form. Filling a gap in the research on Chabet’s work, which until now, has been grounded on material available in Manila, this exhibition is a window allowing viewers a broader understanding of his work.

Ringo Bunoan



¹Luz, Arturo. “Roberto Chabet Rodriguez: Artist of Promise” (Manila: Luz Gallery, April 5, 1961)

²Sundell, Nina Castell & Marjorie Talalay, “The Turning Point: Art and Politics in 1968” (New York: Lehman College & Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1988)



Untitled (Ceche Series)

1968
WATERCOLOR, INK, COLLAGE
34.5 X 18 CM (13 1/2 X 7 IN)



Untitled (Ceche Series)

C. 1960s
WATERCOLOR, INK, COLLAGE
34.5 X 18 CM (13 1/2 X 7 IN)



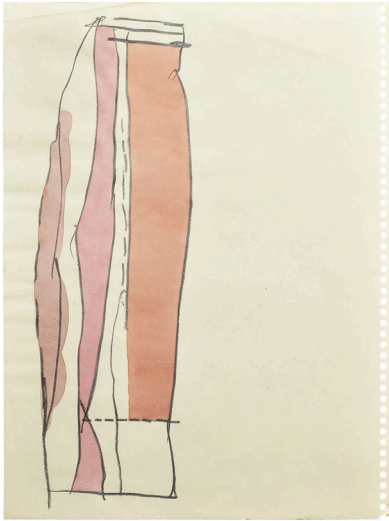
Untitled (Ceche Series)

C. 1960s
WATERCOLOR, INK AND COLLAGE
35.5 X 28 CM (14 X 11 IN)



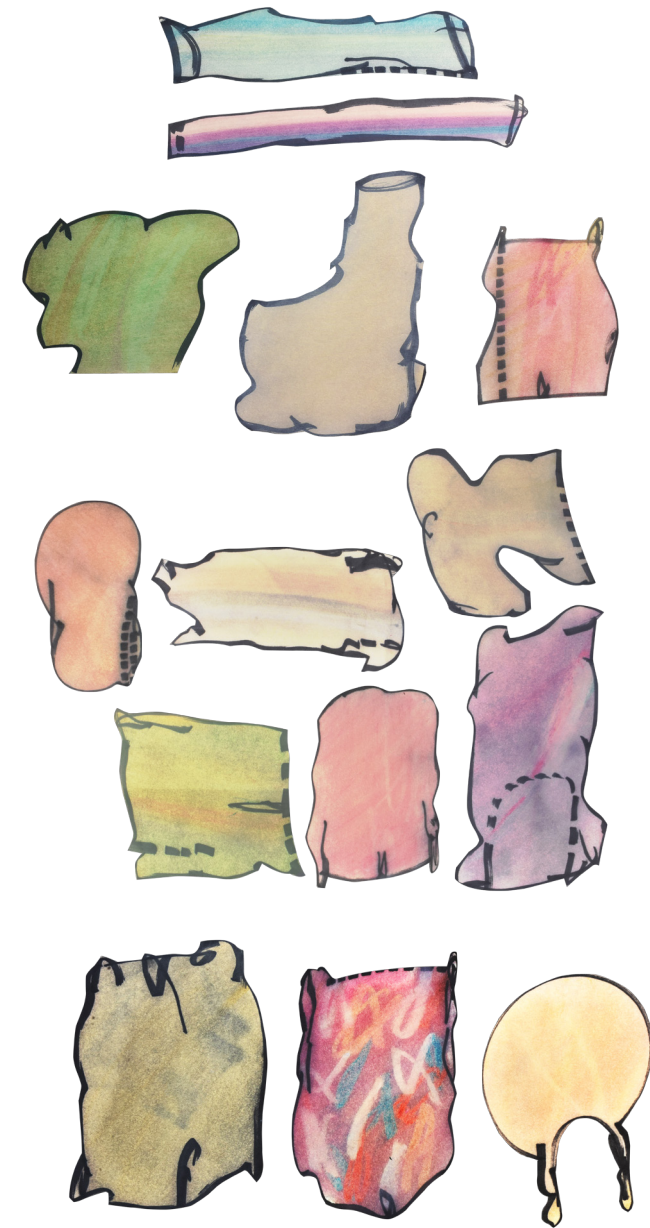
Untitled (Ceche Series)

1968
WATERCOLOR, INK AND COLLAGE
34 X 25.5 CM (13 1/2 X 10 IN)



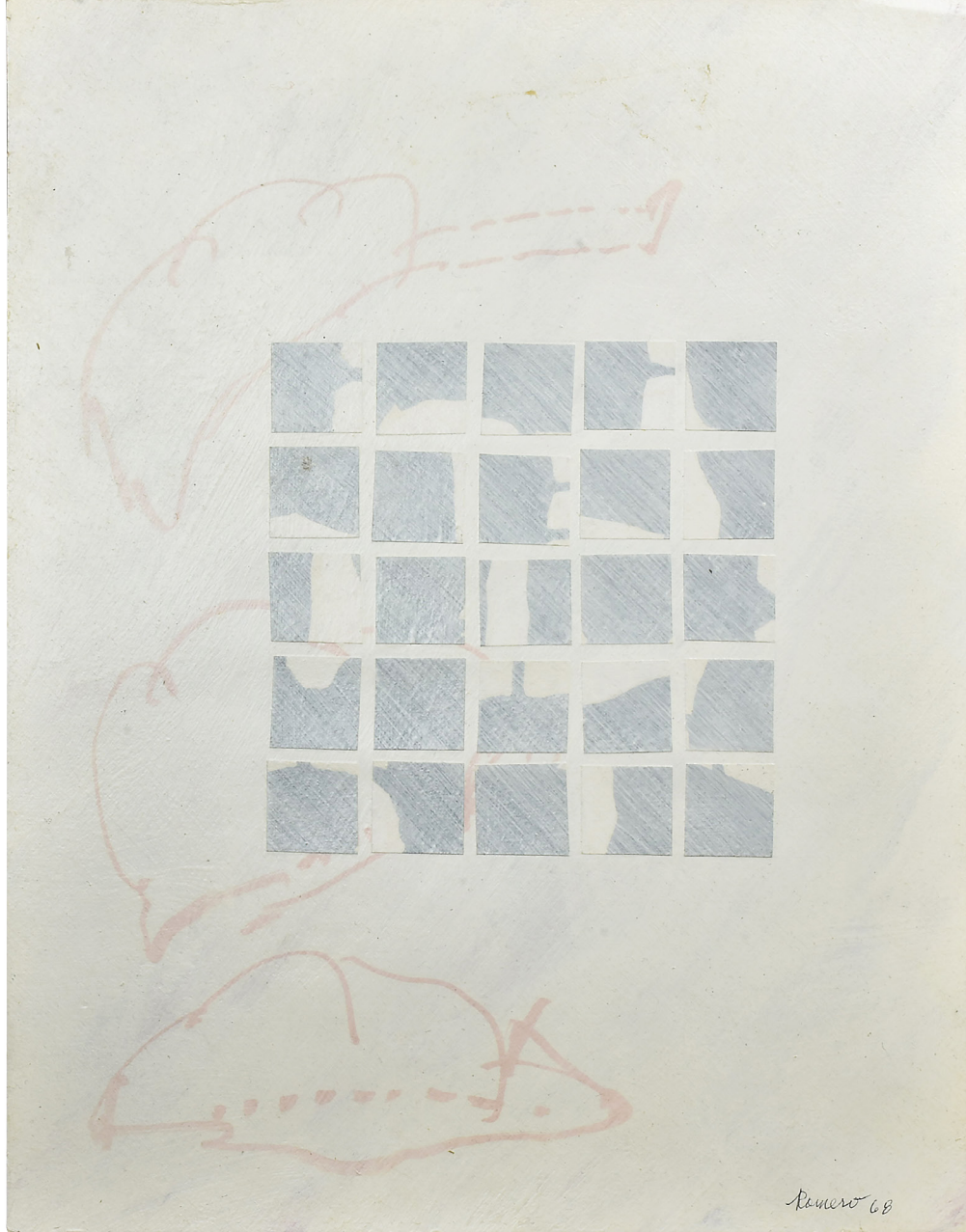
Three untitled drawings

C. 1960s
INK AND WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
30.5 X 23 CM (12 X 9 IN) EACH



Sixty collage shaped cutouts (Ceche series)

1968
INK, PASTEL, AND PAPER
VARIOUS DIMENSIONS



Roberto Chabet and Luis Romero

Split Landscape Series #1

1968
COLLAGE, WATERCOLOR, INK ON BOARD
35.5 x 28 CM (14 x 11 IN)



**Roberto Chabet and
Luis Romero**

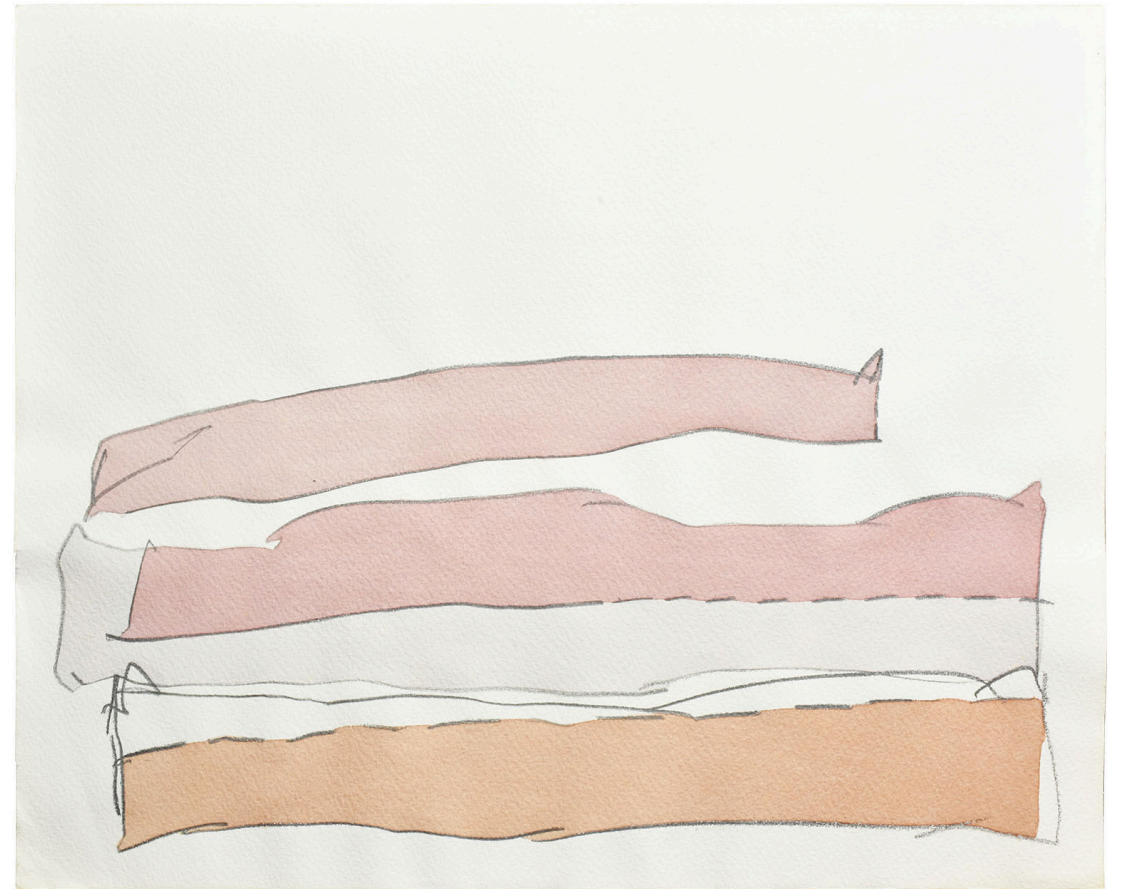
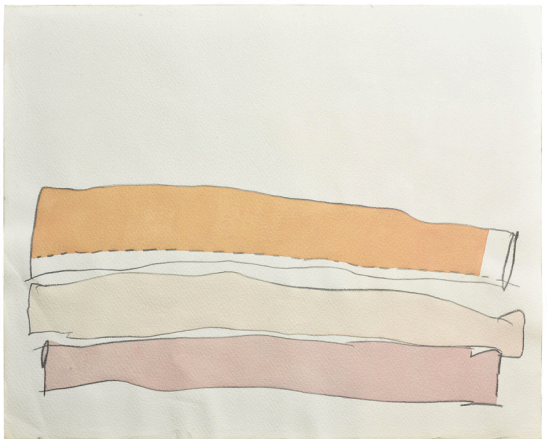
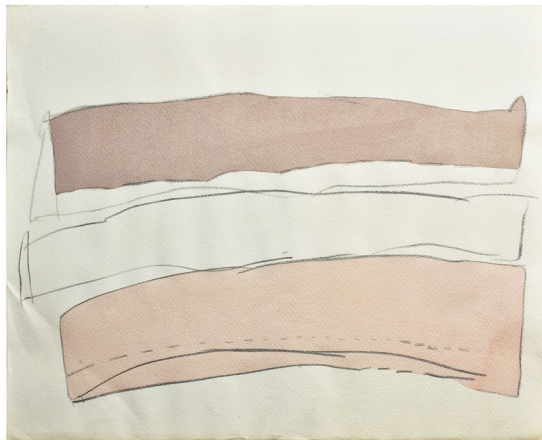
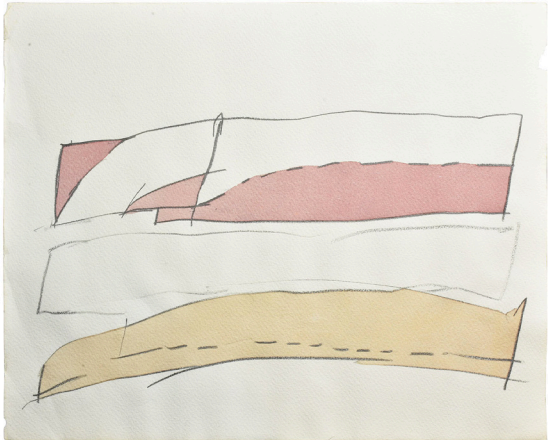
Split Landscape Series #2

1968
COLLAGE, WATERCOLOR, INK ON BOARD
35.5 x 28 CM (14 x 11 IN)



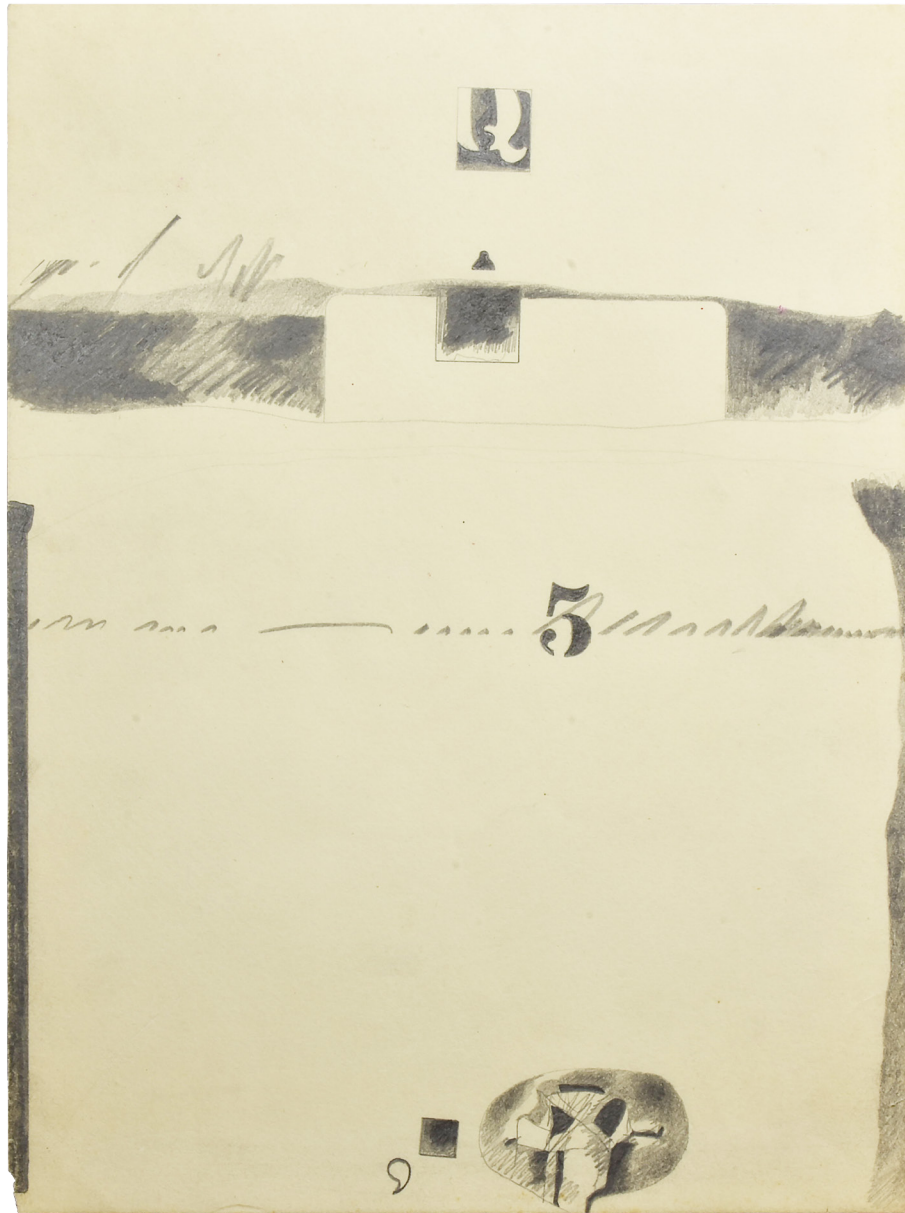
Untitled (Verandah)

C. 1960
MIXED MEDIA ON CARDBOARD
65.5 X 42 CM (25 X 16 1/2 IN)
SIGNED RODRIGUEZ



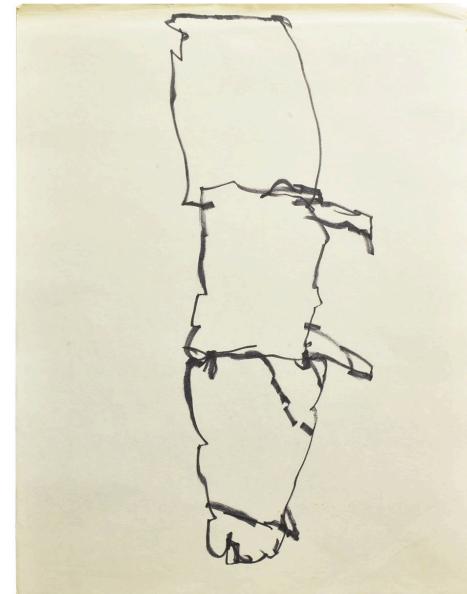
Five untitled drawings

C. 1960s
GRAPHITE AND INK ON PAPER
33 x 40.5 CM (13 x 16 IN) EACH



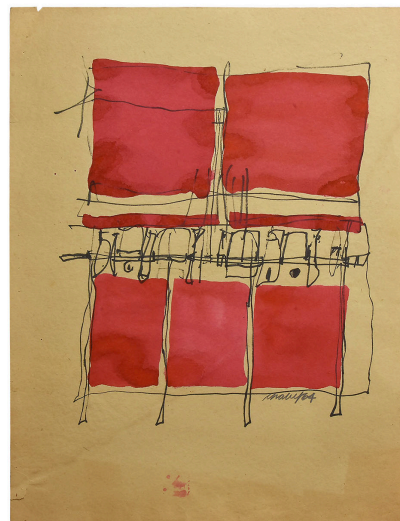
Untitled

C. 1960s
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
28 X 21.5 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)



A lot of four untitled studies

C. 1960s
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER
35.5 X 28 CM (14 X 11 IN) EACH



Untitled

C. 1960s
 PASTEL ON PAPER
 30.5 X 23 CM (12 X 9 IN)

Untitled

C. 1960s
 ACRYLIC ON PAPER
 28 X 21.5 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)

Untitled

1964
 WATERCOLOR AND INK ON PAPER
 28 X 21 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)

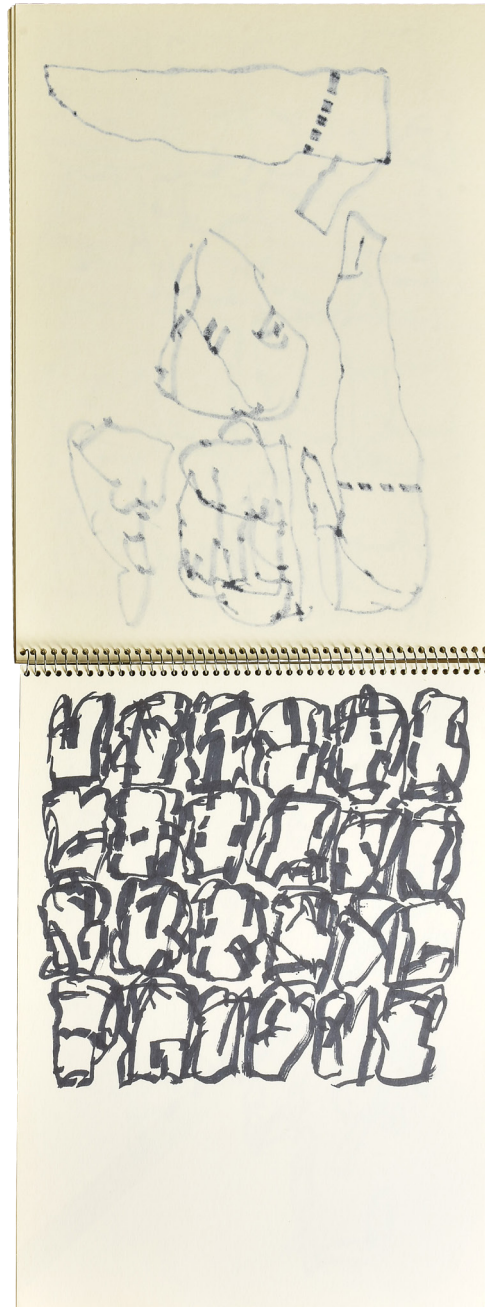


Untitled

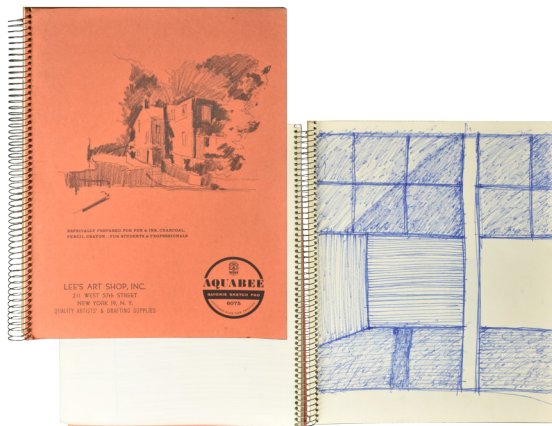
C. 1960s
 WATERCOLOR ON PAPER
 28 X 21.5 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)



A spiral sketchbook of 16 works
29 X 21.5 CM (11 1/2 X 8 1/2 IN)



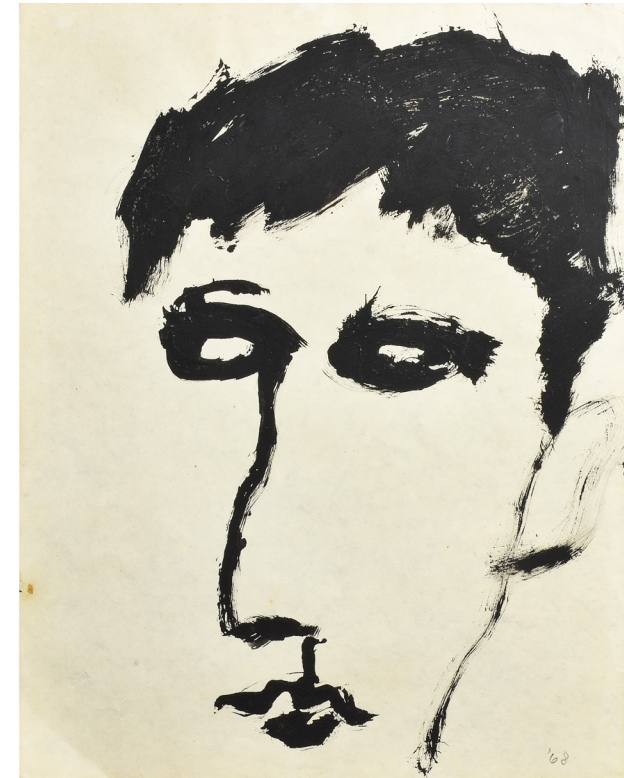
A Sketchbook with 15 sketches
30.5 X 23 CM (9 X 12 IN)



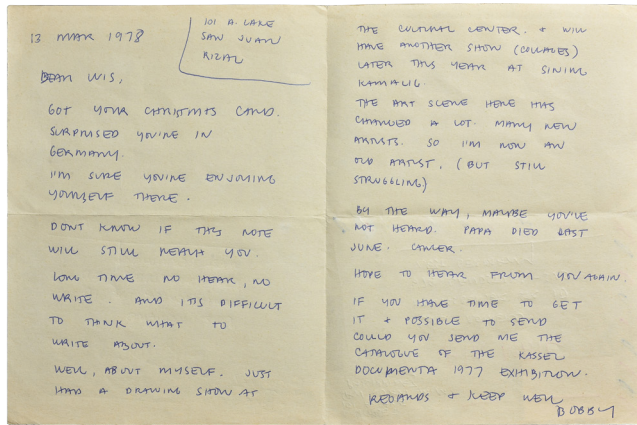
An Aquabee sketchpad with 23 pieces
43 X 37 CM (17 X 14 1/2 IN)



Untitled (Portrait of Luis Romero)
C. 1960s
WATECOLOR ON PAPER
28 X 21 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)



Untitled (Portrait)
1968
INK ON PAPER
28 X 21.5 CM (11 X 8 1/2 IN)



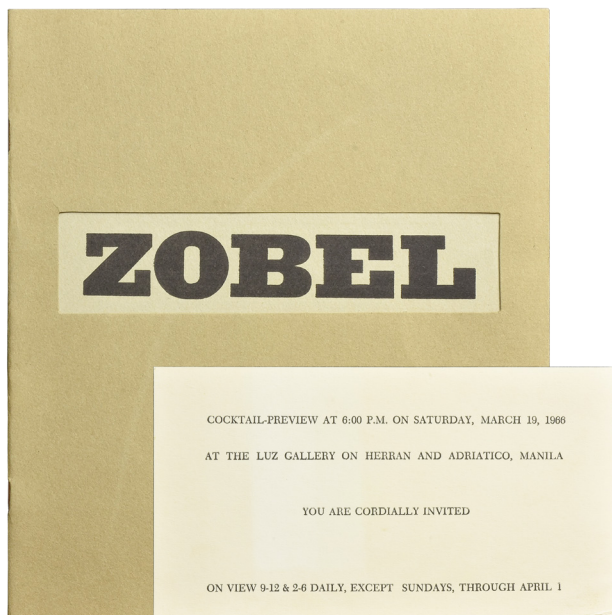
Detail of a letter from Roberto Chabet
addressed to Luis Romero

1978
15 x 23 CM (6 x 9 IN)



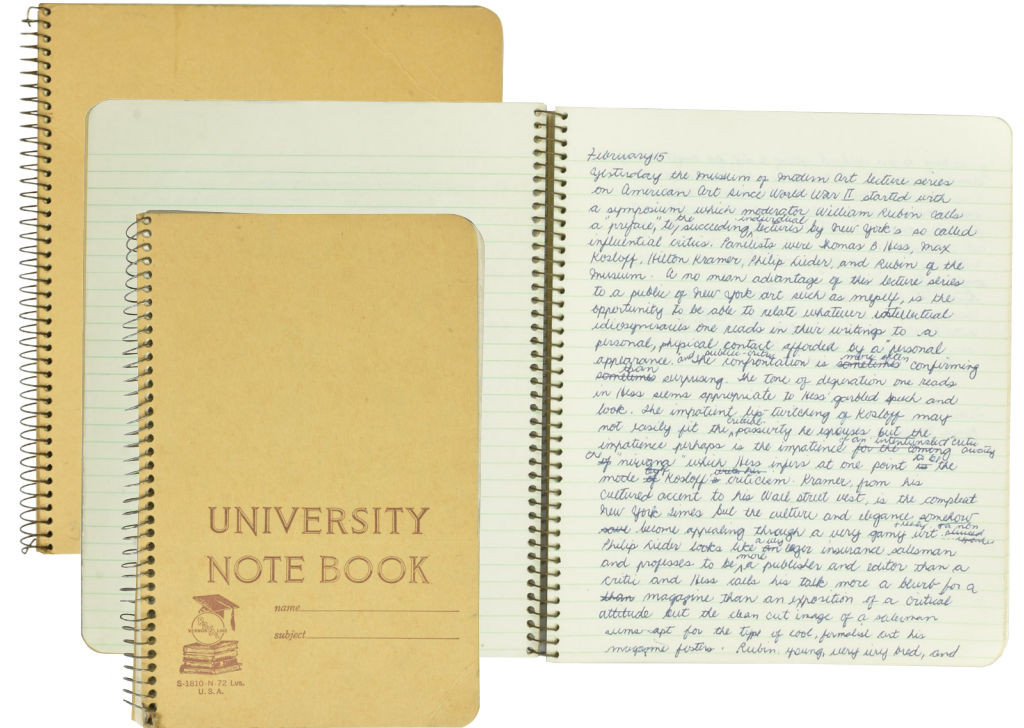
An Antonio Lopez Garcia
exhibit booklet

1968
20.5 x 23 CM (8 x 9 IN)



Fernando Zobel exhibition booklet,
Luz Gallery

1966
24 x 24 CM (9 1/2 x 9 1/2 IN)



Three notebooks

C. 1960s
21.5 x 18 CM (8 1/2 x 7 IN) / 21.5 x 18 CM (8 1/2 x 7 IN) / 19 x 14 CM
(7 1/2 x 5 1/2 IN) / 19 x 13 CM (7 1/2 x 5 IN)

