

ESOTERIC POP: CHARLIE SQUIRRU
SOLO SHOW
CURATOR | GONZALO AGUILAR
OPENING | 22.08.2025 - 6PM
PERMANENCE | 22.08.2025 - 10.10.25

Rolf Art | Esmeralda 1353
Buenos Aires, Argentina
PRESS KIT: <https://cutt.ly/lrD2JgwR>

Rolf Art is pleased to announce the opening of the exhibition *Esoterismo Pop: Charlie Squirru*, an unprecedented solo show featuring a carefully curated selection of works and personal archive materials by Charlie Squirru (1934–2022, Argentina), a key figure of the Di Tella scene and modern Argentine art. Curated by Gonzalo Aguilar, the exhibition focuses on the body of work Squirru developed during the 1960s, marked by the influence of Pop Art and a unique fascination with esoteric imagery that would permeate his entire oeuvre from that point forward.

As Kenneth Kemble pointed out in his columns for The Buenos Aires Herald, Charlie Squirru was the one who introduced Pop to Argentine art. However, his approach was unique: beyond his wide range of interests and intersections with figures such as his partner Dalila Puzzovio (b. 1943, Argentina)—an icon of modern art and fashion, also represented by Rolf Art and currently the subject of a major retrospective at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires—his work incorporated an enigmatic and seductive dimension, infused with esoteric references, occult symbols, and an alternative spirituality that would profoundly shape his entire career.

During his early years in New York, studying at the Art Students League and the Pratt Institute of Graphic Arts, Squirru began to explore abstract expressionism and collage, using—much like Kurt Schwitters—precarious and everyday materials. In 1963, following a premonitory dream and a piece inspired by the assassination of John F. Kennedy, his work became forever marked by symbols and a series of recurring figurative motifs: brains, spark plugs, motorcycles, spurts of blood, chains, and insects. Likewise, emblematic works from his esoteric production such as *The Sorcerers of Pneumonia* (1963), a painting featured in the international exhibition New Art of Argentina at the Walker Art Center, organized in collaboration with the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, which marked a milestone in the international projection of contemporary Argentine art by positioning a new generation of artists on the global stage and establishing Di Tella as a hub for Latin American avant-garde movements of the 1960s—, *The Pyramid of Saturn* (1965)—a performative audiovisual sculpture presented at the Instituto Di Tella Prize in 1965—, or *La gruta non sancta* (1964)—a large-scale painting filled with occultist symbolism, now held in the collection of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires—are key works not only for understanding the arrival of Pop Art on the local scene, but also the singular nature of Squirru's vision within that language.

"Charlie Squirru was an emblematic Pop artist, yes—but above all, he was a herald of esoteric Pop."

– Gonzalo Aguilar

The exhibition proposes an immersion into the fascinating universe of Charlie Squirru through an unprecedented and detailed revision of his documentary archive—including original print photographs, slides, documents, texts, correspondence, and sketches—articulated alongside early works such as paintings and installations. These pieces resonate deeply with Informalism and the emergence of Pop within the Di Tella generation of 1960s Argentina, allowing us to trace the origins of a unique visual language that persistently fuses esotericism with a Pop sensibility throughout his work.

The opening event will take place on Friday, August 22, 2025, at 6 PM at Esmeralda 1353, Buenos Aires, Argentina. The exhibition, with free admission, will be open to the public Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., until October 10, 2025. On Friday the 22nd at 11 a.m., a special press tour will be held, led by Dalila Puzzovio, exhibition curator Gonzalo Aguilar, and the executors of Charlie Squirru's archive.

We hope you can join us and thank you for helping spread the word!

POP ESOTERICISM: CHARLIE SQUIRRU | Gonzalo Aguilar

Charlie Squirru was a key figure in Argentine art during the turbulent 1960s. Brother to Rafael Squirru—founder of the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires—and partner of Dalila Puzzovio, Charlie was an active participant at the Instituto Di Tella, posed for the celebrated *Primera Plana* cover announcing the arrival of Pop Art, and conceived—together with Dalila and Edgardo Giménez—the billboard *Why Are We So Wonderful?*, which occupied for thirty days in 1965 the emblematic corner of Viamonte and Florida.

Along-side Dalila, they undoubtedly formed the most fabulous couple in the art world of those years. They were the subject of countless magazine features, with flamboyant headlines such as “The Popes of Pop” or “Before and After Us There Is Nothing,” and conceived exhibitions like *La muerte* (1964). They also developed numerous ventures related to design and fashion, and shared an entire life together: they met in the early 1960s and remained together until Charlie’s death in 2022. Over those decades, Charlie Squirru created a singular body of work, whose key perhaps lies in the object he chose to carry as an emblem in the famous *Why Are We So Fabulous?* billboard: a blood transfusion bag.

The central theme of Charlie Squirru’s work—pursued with insistence, and almost obsession, until his final pieces—was already foreshadowed during his New York period, when he studied at the Art Students League and, in the early 1960s, at Graphic Arts of New York. During this time, he explored the prevailing languages of the moment, such as Abstract Expressionism and collage, using—à la Kurt Schwitters—discarded, everyday materials: newspaper clippings with images of the Duchess of Alba or cognac advertisements, for instance. At some point in 1963, Charlie dreamt that President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated—something that, in fact, would happen in November of that same year. “I had a premonitory dream and saw the entire assassination, including the crossfire from the two people who killed him. The dream about Kennedy’s death was like a film playing before my eyes. And I realized that Oswald hadn’t killed him, although they tried to make it look as if he had,” he would later recall. In addition to a few drawings of the supposed assassins—which are still preserved—Squirru painted a work depicting the president’s blood-stained face, a shroud, and “the scissors of the black mafia.” Already present in this piece were the techniques he would use for nearly his entire career—silhouettes sprayed with aerosol paint—and a set of figurative motifs that would become recurrent: brains, spark plugs, motorcycles, spurts of blood, chains, insects.

With *La Pirámide de Saturno*, presented for the 1965 Di Tella Prize, Squirru was a pioneer of the Pop turn, creating an experimental device that combined sculpture, painting, sound, and walk-in spaces. The work—now lost—can be partially reconstructed from surviving photographs: three steps led viewers into the interior of the pyramid. Once inside, lights would switch on, revealing walls covered with blood-stained bibs and baby booties, accompanied by an electronic composition by Miguel Ángel Rondano (a member of the Di Tella Music Department) that mixed abstract sounds with military marches, bursts of machine-gun fire, and the cries of babies. On the exterior, silhouettes of a figure riding a motorcycle were stamped on the faces of the pyramid. On either side, two blood transfusions extended outward, connecting to the profiles of two faces. As Dalila Puzzovio recounted to Fernando García for his book *El Di Tella*, the 1965 Prize gallery was overseen by Samuel Paz, “who was like a nun in charge. Everything had to be spotless, or he would lose his mind. Charlie was assembling the pyramid—*La Pirámide de Saturno*, a proto-installation—and he had the idea of placing a plate of ground beef and a bottle of La Martona milk. Since Samuel knew I was his partner, he would come and talk to me to convince me to get Charlie to drop the idea. And he did.”

A devotee of esotericism, Charlie Squirru liked to think of himself as a visionary: according to him, he not only anticipated the assassination of Kennedy in his works, but his silhouettes also served as a premonitory precedent to the *Siluetazo* of 1983. Beyond his eagerness to cultivate his own personal myth, it is true that unleashed violence appears as a constant in his production. Critics such as Rafael Cippolini and Miguel Grinberg have noted, regarding the circle of sacrificed piglets in *La gruta non sancta* (1964)—now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires—that it is “a prophetic figure of the fate that awaited us.” The combination of bloody violence and esoteric language in his work gives rise to images of great symbolic power. In one of his pieces for the exhibition *La muerte*, Squirru combines two silhouettes of human profiles with brains, motorcycles, and the word “אברא כדברא” (abracadabra) written in the shape of a triangle in one of them, while the other contains a magic square in which the numbers add up to 15 in every direction. The word “אברא כדברא,” of Aramaic origin, can be translated as “I will create as I speak.” It is believed that making one letter disappear in each line, as Squirru does, conferred protective or healing powers, especially against illness. In other works, he incorporates the inscription “JHS” (a reference to Jesus), the word “God,” or even turns to popular curses, as when representing, for example, a chained sow. “The iconography of the silhouette,” he once said, “comes from my occultist studies.”

In Squirru, various esoteric traditions that were part of Argentine art converge—from Leopoldo Lugones and Xul Solar to Benjamin Solari Parravicini, with whom he was close friends. This mystical vein—a subterranean current running, like a trail of gunpowder, through a culture that prides itself on being secular and civilized—forms a distinctive feature of the Argentine imagination. According to Kenneth Kemble, writing in his columns for *The Buenos Aires Herald*, Charlie

Squirru was the one who introduced Pop into Argentine art. But he did so in his own way: beyond an interest in fashion and nightlife, in mass media and serial reproduction, his work carried with it a dark and fascinating drive rooted in the occult sciences. For this reason, Charlie Squirru was indeed an emblematic Pop artist—but, above all, he was a herald of esoteric Pop.

POP ART HAS FINALLY ARRIVED | Kenneth Kemble.

Buenos Aires Herald Newspaper, November 11, 1963.

Ladies and gentlemen, Pop Art has at last reached Buenos Aires, and it is likely to stay with us for some time.

The exhibition of collages by Carlos Squirru at Galería Bonino, Maipú 962, may be considered a local, Latin-inflected version of this new trend. Anyone wishing to keep abreast of contemporary art should not miss it.

The movement, which emerged in New York just over a year ago and is practiced by artists such as Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Dine, Warhol, and Indiana, has caused a sensation. It has been debated, denounced, and ardently defended—until, finally, it won over critics and collectors alike.

Time, Life, and Show magazines have all published illustrated articles on Pop Art, and the American art world has not been the same since.

As G. R. Swenson wrote in Art News in September 1962: "The artists share a common interest in the products of their craftsman-cousins, the painters of commercial billboards and the designers of advertising posters. Words, trademarks, commercial symbols, and fragments of advertising copy are transformed into visual statements and arranged according to the personality of the artist. 'Everyday objects that stimulate our associative capacity, accompanied by a technique that surprises due to its extreme simplicity, create the tone of this new painting.'"

Squirru, however, has introduced a twist that sets his work apart from that of his peers. Particularly in some of his most recent works—Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 in the catalogue—there is a refinement in both technique and color that is characteristic of Buenos Aires' art scene.

His designs, printed on fabric and superimposed onto animal or human silhouettes—also printed, but sometimes filled with textures or subtle colors unrelated to the subject—create a delicate atmosphere of fantasy and poetic suggestion.

It is a poetry that alludes to our daily life, to be sure, but is as valid as any exotic image. One might compare it to the poetic imagery found in some of the finest Italian films: the poetry of the commonplace. Nor is it without humor. There are also echoes of the arbitrary associations favored by the Surrealists, yet resolved in a manner that is wholly his own—marked by sophisticated wit and, above all, a magical world such as only a true artist can create.

CHARLIE SQUIRRU | BIO

Charlie Squirru (1934, Buenos Aires – 2022, Buenos Aires) formed, alongside Dalila Puzzovio, an emblematic couple of the Argentine 1960s, with the Di Tella pop scene at its core. He studied drawing and painting with Robert Hale and Tom Fogarthy at the Art Students League of New York. In 1962, he received a scholarship from the Pratt Institute of Graphic Arts of New York to study printmaking and lithography. Trained in New York and Europe, he participated in happenings, in the first café-concert performance, in the 1965 Di Tella Prize, and in the legendary poster-panel "¿Por qué son tan geniales?" ("Why Are They So Cool?"). His paintings marked the transition from Informalism to Pop Art, with an iconography that already hinted at the political violence of the 1970s. He held solo exhibitions at the Ligoa Duncan Gallery (1960) and the Hilda Carmel Gallery (1963) in New York, at Galería Bonino and Galería North in Buenos Aires, both in 1963, and at the OAS in Washington, D.C. (1964), among others. His works are part of the collections of the MoMA, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, as well as the MAMBA in Buenos Aires. He is recognized as an emblematic figure of Pop Art.

PRESS KIT



Link to press kit & HD images: <https://cutt.ly/lrD2JgwR>

ABOUT ROLF ART

Rolf Art, located in Buenos Aires and founded in 2009 by Florencia Giordana Braun, is the only art gallery specialized in technical image in Argentina. Focused on contemporary Latin American visual arts, the gallery represents and promotes a selected group of artists & Estates that explore the limits of the image in its several expressions. The curatorial profile challenges the given conjuncture considering the social, political & economical background of artistic production as a determining factor for art's interpretation.

In order to promote the production and appreciation of contemporary art, Rolf Art develops a solid global program comprising research and archive work, exhibitions, sustained participation in leading international art & photo fairs, editorial and audiovisual projects, educational and training courses, institutional collaborations, and public & private acquisitions management; positioning the work of Latin American artists internationally and contributing to the legitimization of the visual expressions from the Latin American region worldwide.

EVOLVING NOW | GALLERY RENOVATION OPENING SOON | 22.08.25

Rolf Art is pleased to announce the reopening of its space, marking a new chapter with a completely reimagined approach to its exhibition architecture. This new phase introduces an innovative design that seamlessly weaves the gallery's photographic, videographic, and pictorial archive into the curatorial experience, establishing a space that is specialized in both exhibition and conservation. More than a physical expansion, this transformation positions the archive as an active and fundamental element of the artistic narrative and artworks' documentation.

With this new configuration, Rolf Art reinforces and deepens its ongoing commitment to the professionalization of photographic archives, critical research, and the advancement of contemporary artistic practices and their evolving languages, consolidating its institutional evolution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Rolf Art Team

Violeta Macri

info@rolfart.com.ar

+54 9 11 7039-0055

Esmeralda 1353 - C1007ABS

Buenos Aires, Argentina.

t: +54 9 11 5178-7629

e: info@rolfart.com.ar