

SEANKELLY

Solomon, Tessa. "Julião Sarmiento, Artist Whose Intimate Work Focused on Desire, Has Died at 72." *Art News*. May 4, 2021.

ARTnews

 Est. 1902

Julião Sarmiento. Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Portuguese artist Julião Sarmiento, whose films, sculptures, installations, and paintings consider the complexity of desire and intimacy, has died at 72. New York's Sean Kelly gallery, which had worked with Sarmiento since 1989, confirmed the news.

In a statement to *ARTnews*, the gallery wrote, "Julião was with the gallery since its inception. He was inspirational, loyal, and much loved by all who knew him. Over the decades we shared many wonderful memories, exhibitions, and achievements together. He was part of our family, both artistic and personal."

SEANKELLY

Interpersonal relationships were central to Sarmiento's oeuvre, and images of the body—often rendered in androgynous, simplified, intertwined, or dismembered forms—appear in his films, sculptures, installations, and painting. He was lauded for his paintings in which incomplete figures were delicately teased out of thick, textured paint with graphite. The surfaces of these works evokes the shifting, unknowable feelings that endure in even the closest partnerships.

“In a way, I feel like I’m always considering the same subject; it’s a bit like novelists who write the same story over and over,” he told *Artforum* in a 2013 interview. “Nevertheless, I’m interested in so many things: literature, film, art, architecture, music, sex, nature, plants, and so on. As long as these challenge me, I dwell in them. Perhaps I’m always looking at the same stuff, but I don’t really know what that stuff is. If I knew, then it wouldn’t be interesting to me at all.”

Sarmiento was born in 1948 in Lisbon, Portugal. In the mid-'60s, he enrolled at the Escola Superior de Belas Artes in Lisbon to study architecture and painting. According to an interview with the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., he said that the conservatism of the scholars there was “impossibly stagnant.” In 1970, he left the school without a degree. After an obligatory military service, he lived briefly in South Africa, Morocco, and the United States, immersing himself in each country's art scene.

After returning to Portugal, he turned once more to painting, though he never considered that his predominant medium. “I am not really a painter,” he once said, adding, “Painting for me is just a tool and a way to express ideas.”

A number of works pay homage to his undergraduate studies. Two sculptures at a 2014 solo exhibition at Sean Kelly directly referenced Edgar Degas' famous *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (1881). While these works echo the diminutive ballerina's pose, Sarmiento's subjects are robust, fully grown women.

Sarmiento often explored how a lustful gaze subverts privacy or seeks to possess its subject. In his participatory piece *Secret* (2000), he bids the viewer to “take a polaroid photo of someone you secretly lust for and whose picture you don't have.” Then, without looking at it, the viewer is meant to seal the image, still white and undeveloped, inside an envelope. The envelope must never be reopened, according to that work's instructions.

Sarmiento represented Portugal at the 1997 Venice Biennale, and he appeared in the 1982 and 1987 editions of the Documenta quinquennial in Kassel, Germany. and his work is owned by the Hirshhorn, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. A retrospective of his work was presented by the Serralves Museum in Porto, Portugal, in 2012.