



Art Basel

Feature: Feliza Bursztyn

Stand D4 | 18 – 21 June 2026

The Mayor Gallery is pleased to announce its participation in the Feature sector at Art Basel with a focused presentation dedicated to the Colombian sculpture Feliza Bursztyn (1933-1982).

Born in Bogotá in 1933 to Polish-Jewish immigrants, Bursztyn carved a singular path in the male-dominated Colombian art world creating beauty out of what others discarded -scrap metal becoming the first woman in Post-War Colombia to work with the medium of sculpture and to use non-art industrial materials.

Her father owned a small textile factory, his economic success allowed Bursztyn to pursue studies first in Bogotá, then the Art Students League in New York, followed by two long stays in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.

In 1960 she converted a section of her father's factory into an art studio, igniting a creative revolution that would scandalise and mesmerise. The studio became a social hub for Colombia's intelligentsia and creative scene, protagonists of the avant-gardes and cultural activists opposing the restriction of freedom in Colombia such as the famed writer Gabriel García Márquez, the painter and muralist Alejandro Obregón, curator Marta Traba, the theatre director Santiago García and the filmmaker Álvaro Cepeda Samudio.



It was in that studio that she installed a welding station and produced her first metal sculptures. Her early decision to work with scrap metal and other pieces of discarded material was due to a combination of accessibility and of having met the Nouveau Réalisme sculptor César during her second stay in Paris.

But her critical debut was met with sharp criticism so when she presented her first eleven *Chatarras* (sculptures made from scrap) in 1961, she received a harsh review from Walter Engel, one of Colombia's leading art critics. However, by 1964 and for her second solo show Engel and others had reconsidered the possibilities of junk as an art medium.

In 1965 Bursztyn won First prize in sculpture at the 17th Salón Nacional, and in 1967 she unveiled a new body of work, made of stainless steel and with a kinetic component, which she titled *Las Históricas*, part performance part rebellion. These motorised sculptures were occasionally presented in immersive environments that included not only a loud mechanical sound but also a short film titled *Hoy Feliza* by the experimental filmmaker Luis Ernesto Arocha.

Bursztyn's life, marked by dramatic and existential events like her severe car crash in 1968, losses of family and close friends, as well as by cultural prejudice and political persecution, explains the deep emotions she carried throughout her singular and short career. Married at nineteen and divorced at the age of twenty-four against the will of her family, her three children were taken away from her to live with their father in the United States. At the time of Colombia's alignment with US-Cold War politics and increasing dictatorial repression, Bursztyn's left-wing politics and her ardent support for the Cuban revolution, as well as her unconventional lifestyle and art production resulted in 1979 in her persecution by the state security forces, followed by an arrest and two-day brutal detention in 1981.

She fled the country and was granted political asylum in Mexico where she met up with her long-time friend author Gabriel García Márquez leading her to emigrate to Paris. Shortly after her arrival, on 8 January 1982, during a dinner amongst her friends, Bursztyn died of heart failure at the age of forty-eight.



Since then, her legacy has grown internationally and her work has been collected privately and by public institutions such as Museo de Arte Moderno, Museo Nacional de Colombia, and Banco de la República in Bogotá. Tate



Modern acquired *The Mechanical Ballet* (1979), a large kinetic installation, rarely seen by the public due to its exceptional size. LACMA acquired one of her earlier anthropomorphic works from The Mayor Gallery in 2024. Subtly titled *Welding Madness*, a large retrospective of her work was held at Muzeum Susch, Switzerland in 2022.

Two important museum exhibitions will highlight Bursztyn avant-garde works this year: Museum Tinguely Basel will present works by the artist in *Labouring Bodies* (10 June – 8 November 2026) and five sculptures offered by The Mayor Gallery in Feature Art Basel, will be lent to Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany, for *Radical Realities, Nouveau Réalisme and the Art of the 1960s*, 3 July – 11 October 2026.

High-res images available on request

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