

The Japan Times, *Nothing is ordinary for Leandro Erlich*, text/ Sachiko Tamashige, 03 July, 2014

The Japan Times



Unusual steps: Leandro Erlich stands in front of 'Staircase,' one of the works of his solo show at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. | SACHIKO TAMASHIGE

ART

## Nothing is ordinary for Leandro Erlich

BY SACHIKO TAMASHIGE

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

A spiral structure stretches out toward the far end of the room. It's an arresting sight — strange and yet somehow also familiar. What is it? Then, you suddenly remember. You've seen it before, from the top floor of a building maybe: it's a staircase — turned on its side.

"Staircase" (2005) is one of the 17 artworks shown in "Leandro Erlich — The Ordinary?," Erlich's first solo show in Japan, organized to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. The museum already permanently houses Erlich's "The Swimming Pool" (2004), also known as "Leandro's Pool," which, installed in the courtyard, is an integral part of the building's SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa) designed architecture.

"The Swimming Pool' has been the most popular piece of our museum since it opened. It's an immersive work that the elderly as well as children can enjoy and experience, says Yuji Akimoto, the museum's director. "Although they are accessible because he uses ordinary images, Erlich's conceptual artworks boldly intervene in our everyday lives because they are thoroughly thought over and carefully planned to play with our perception, which drills a hole through our rigid reality."

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A pseudo bathing pool, the surface of “The Swimming Pool” is a shallow layer of water (about 10 cm deep) on a reinforced glass sheet, which becomes the ceiling to an open space below. From above, viewers can look down through the water and see people wandering in the blue space below, and from below viewers can look up through the glass-and-water ceiling.

“The Swimming Pool’ opened many doors for me, too,” says Erlich, the Argentinian-born artist who was visiting Japan from his current home in Montevideo, Uruguay. “It has been viewed by so many people, as well as been photographed, with people sharing the images on the Internet. This enables me to feel I have a strong connection with people around the world.”

“Staircase,” which similarly toys with an everyday architectural structure, was inspired by a trip to a department store in Tokyo. “The staircase is symbolically a meeting place to me,” Erlich explains. “But I wondered what would happen if such a staircase lost its function.”

It might make you feel unsettled or frustrated because it leads nowhere. If you’re afraid of heights, it might elicit feelings of safety, or it could make you dizzy to see the steps as walls. “The Staircase” evokes different feelings, emotions and thoughts by altering the viewer’s perception of a mundane object — and in this way Erlich is able to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

“I just observe reality around me. I hardly ever take photographs for work, or even private purposes, as it spoils my focus on the reality. Swimming pools, staircases and elevators are ordinary places that we never question, as we think that we know about them already. But is that true? Do we really know them?” Erlich asks, raising an ancient philosophical question posed by the Greek philosopher Plato that he says remains unanswered.

“When we were children, the world was full of wonder and surprise, even in the everyday life. But as we grow older, we are less surprised by things around us because they become too familiar,” he continues. “I resist having a fixed view of things. There are many other ways to see reality.”

Erlich’s *raison d’être* of challenging habitual perception may stem from his own upbringing. Born in Buenos Aires, 1973, he grew up under a military dictatorship (1976-1982) led by the president Jorge Rafael Videla, when the opposition were thoroughly oppressed. “It was a time when we could not see a thing freely as it was.” Erlich recalls.

21ST CENTURY MUSEUM  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART,  
INSTALLATION,  
KANAGAWA, LEANDRO  
ERLICH

## ART

- When it came to horror, ukiyo-e artists kept their wits about them
- Combinations that break the surface like a lotus flower
- ‘Hokusai and Riviere: Thirty-six Views Compared and the Hokusai Manga’
- ‘George Nelson: Architect, Writer, Designer, Teacher’



## LEO XU PROJECTS

After studying philosophy at UBA Universidad de Buenos Aires, he later encountered and was inspired by the ideas of French novelist, Georges Perec who coined the term “the infra-ordinary,” the exploration and questioning of ordinary and habitual aspects of everyday life.

Even the way Erlich lives — in a loft-style space without fixed partitions, so that the function of his surroundings remains fluid — reflects his philosophy of denying fixed or conventional ideas.

“My father, aunt and brother are architects, and normally architects are constrained to design a building or space, such as a kitchen or bathroom, by its function. But I look at architecture and space in different way to make a story, by removing its function,” he says. “Then something can surprise you when you see it in a new dimension of reality. I compose a space in a more abstract and poetic way.”

So what is “space” to the artist?

“It’s the ‘stage’ of our lives. Your life experiences take place within the stage of your life. My work is like opening a window to see the new world (and other realities), and to expand the feeling.”