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**Karin Broker**  
*Self-Portrait on Valentine's Day, No. 1, 1991*  
 Mixed-media assemblage,  
 11 3/8 x 8 1/2 x 3 in. (29.9 x 21.6  
 x 7.6 cm). Museum purchase  
 with funds provided by Joan  
 Morgenstern, 91.1549.

of religious objects and personal mementos found in domestic *ofrendas*. However, as suggested by the titles printed on each image, these constructions address sexual archetypes: "Ella" shows a little girl's dress, shockingly crimson, surrounded by romantic charms and images of the Sacred Heart; "El" shows a boy's white christening gown surmounted by a sun god and surrounded by knives and Day of the Dead skeletons.<sup>68</sup> The cabinet doors open to reveal additional texts and a collection of talismans that complement and reinforce the images seen on the front panels. Created to honor the marriage of friends, Dallas artists Kay and James Chefchis, "Ella" y "El" celebrates the union of male and female. As Moira Roth has documented, "When the tabernacle doors open, we read in the narrative that Jaime collects

*calaveras* (skulls). She (Caterina) fancies fine old funeraries. To start a new life together, they roamed old countryside, looking for old cemeteries."<sup>69</sup>

At the same time, Muñoz invites the viewer to deconstruct her stereotypical images of sacrifice, sexuality, and violence. Michael Ennis has commented: "In 'Ella' y 'El,' Muñoz appropriates a number of conventions from Mexican art . . . . But the richly layered Mexican elements in 'Ella' y 'El,' aren't intended as declarations of Muñoz's bicultural identity. Instead, the photographs of ornately costumed his-and-hers *santos*, framed on the outside of this secular folding altarpiece, and the elaborate symbolic attributes displayed inside, ironically emphasize a pan-cultural theme, the complex expectations and conflicting roles imposed on modern relationships."<sup>70</sup>

Appropriating Mexican religious icons as a means of delving into autobiography is not limited to Hispanic artists; Karin Broker, who is best known for her monumental drawings and graphic work, has also created a number of boxes that owe a debt to the *cajones* that act as informal reliquaries in Hispanic households.

Born in rural Pennsylvania, Broker attended the University of Iowa, Atelier 17 in Paris, and the University of Wisconsin, before coming to Houston in 1980 to join the faculty of Rice University. Houston introduced Broker to Mexican culture, and her Catholic background made her particularly receptive to the religious art of Mexico. In 1986 she began creating boxes out of found materials. Diane Kett has described the evolution of these works: "The physically aggressive arrangement of scrap metal, hammered nails, and twisted wire almost camouflage the spiritual intensity of these pieces. Gleaning metal *milagros*—the tiny embossed images historically offered in prayer to the saints—were initially used by Broker simply as decoration. But [more recently] the spiritual significance of the *milagros* became an integral part of the work's content. The production of each box is no longer mere creation, but now sincere supplication—a private religious ritual that invokes salvation from human misery."<sup>71</sup>

*Self-Portrait on Valentine's Day, No. 1, 1991* (plate 73), reflects a particularly difficult moment in the artist's life. Shortly before Valentine's Day, she was attacked by a