

Exhibition: **Cuba. Vanguardias. 1920 – 1940. (Cuba. Avant-Gardes. 1920 – 1940)**  
Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, IVAM  
18<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2006

Coproduced by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern &  
Fundación Palazzo Bricherasio of Turin

Curator: Lillian Llanes

Locales: Valencia – IVAM  
18<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> July  
Turin – Palazzo Bricherasio  
14<sup>th</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup> October

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The exhibition *Cuba. Vanguardias. 1920-1940* comprises sixty paintings, fifty-eight of which are from the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba and two from the Casa Museo José Lezama Lima. The exhibition to be held at the IVAM until 2<sup>nd</sup> July next will travel to the Palazzo Bricherasio in Turin, where it shall be displayed from 14<sup>th</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006.

The exhibition includes works of some of the artists who brought about a definitive change of viewpoint in Cuban art history and made it possible to speak of “Cuban art”, whereas earlier works were known as “art in Cuba”. The following artists participate in this show: Antonio Gattorno, Jorge Arche, Amelia Peláez, Mario Carreño, René Portocarrero, Mariano

Rodríguez, Víctor Manuel García, Fidelio Ponce de León, Arístides Fernández, Carlos Enríquez, Eduardo Abela, Wilfredo Lam and Marcelo Pogolotti. The catalogue published for the exhibition reproduces the works displayed and contains texts by the director of the IVAM, Consuelo Císcar, the curator of the exhibition, Lillian Llanes, and the director of Palazzo Bricherasio, Daniela Magnetti. The catalogue also contains a chronology of the period and the biographies of the thirteen Cuban artists represented in the show.

The works that comprise this exhibition are divided into three groups so that the spectators can organise their own viewpoints taking into account the guiding principles behind the modernisation of Cuban painting and the formal universe in which the artists were immersed.

The first of these groups is the subject of woman and female portraits, traditionally present in Cuban art. The second addresses the vision of modern painting related to the thesis of cultural identity, the root and foundation of avant-garde ideals. Finally, the exhibition closes with one artist, Mario Pogolotti, whose work serves to show the introduction of a social current in Cuban painting.

This exhibition purports to be merely a glance at a more complex phenomenon that affected all Cuban society, whose problematic, incidentally, can clearly be seen in the show.

Closely linked to the awakening of national consciousness, the Modern Movement in Cuba originally expressed itself by means of a rejection of the prevailing neo-colonial political and cultural models, and reached its greatest heights in the nineteen twenties and thirties, when it played an important role in the definitive formation of the concept of a Cuban nation.

In essence, the Modern Movement in Cuba constituted a reaction towards the widespread feeling of frustration and conservatism amongst the country's artists and intellectuals during the first twenty years of existence

of the Republic. An attitude that, in its character of nonconformity, inevitably took many of its members further, for, on scrutinising their own environment, conflicts were exacerbated, formulas were breached, paths of experimentation were opened up with new means, the country's structural problems were brought to the fore and the maximum pretension of Cuban avant-garde poetics was voiced: a commitment to the times.

As regards aesthetics, the rebellion of the Cuban avant-gardists found the basis of their identity in the investigation into their roots, and they discovered that diversity was the essential component of this process of collective self-examination and they gave each individual's contribution to the formation of the nation its just deserts, regardless of race or social class. In general terms, they defended popular culture and fought for the recognition of their contributions to national culture; they promoted the development of the sense of belonging to a different, well-defined space, discovered in its intimate peculiarities, without declining to belong to the universal space or renouncing the right to use the contributions of international modern society; they used new themes taken from everyday life, exalting local customs. All these elements can be seen in the different fields of artistic and literary creation, whose protagonists cohabited and supported each other in contributing to the creation of a genuine moment of cultural effervescence on the island for the first time.

Given the circumstances of cultural devaluation and the loss of identity as a result of the introduction of new values proceeding from American positivism, alien to the traditional humanism that had provided the roots of the cultural identity of Cubans, this avant-garde made a last bid for independence by bringing the identification of their own values and contributions to the fore. In short, it was the expression of a longstanding hunger for independence. A feeling that in the field of the visual arts led to a new perspective in relation with art, giving rise to a polemic that is still

unresolved in the country between the function of art and the role of the artist in society.

Some might say there is not sufficient merit in modern Cuban painting, basing their analysis on the pursuit of originality rather than the appropriation of languages taken from important centres of modern art. But this view should not prevent us from enjoying other values, among others the acknowledgement of the fact that it was the first time in the history of the national art that common men and women found their space and were extolled.