

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK CULTURAL CENTER

# ***URNS AND DIRECTIONS***

**Changes in the Arts of Central America's  
Spanish-Speaking Nations and Panama  
During and After the 1950s**



AUGUST 16 TO NOVEMBER 19, 2010



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# ***URNS AND DIRECTIONS***

## **Changes in the Arts of Central America's Spanish-Speaking Nations and Panama During and After the 1950s**



### **Presentation**

This exhibition, entitled “Turns and Directions,” is part of an ambitious project, “About Change,” organized by the World Bank Art Program, with the collaboration of a number of institutions, including the Cultural Center of the Inter-American Development Bank. The idea is to focus on the arts produced in Latin America and the Caribbean during the last decade through the works of artists thirty-five years of age or younger, with the purpose of exploring the changes that have resulted, in great part, from the effects of economic globalization and information technology.

Before “About Change” opens in 2011, collaborating institutions have agreed to organize smaller exhibitions to anticipate the main exhibition, which, because of its size, will also be displayed in various venues throughout Washington, DC. These other exhibitions will feature art from the last five decades of the twentieth century, creating a context against which the changes observed over the last ten years can be measured and analyzed. As a prelude to the main exhibition in 2011, the IDB Cultural Center Art Gallery has organized the present exhibition, dedicated to Spanish-speaking Central America and Panama.

On behalf of the IDB Cultural Center, I would like to thank the Art Museum of the Americas of the Organization of American States for facilitating the loan of some of the artworks from its remarkable Permanent Collection, thereby helping to implement the present exhibition. Our appreciation also goes to the World Bank and the World Bank Art Program, for inviting the IDB and its Cultural Center to be part of such a significant project. In several ways, the IDB’s participation is an acknowledgment of our leading role promoting culture in Latin America and the Caribbean since the opening of the IDB Cultural Center in 1992. The Center’s Exhibitions and Art Collection Programs, the Cultural Development Program, and the Inter-American Concert, Lecture and Film Series have promoted culture as an important component of social and economic development in the Americas.

**Luis Alberto Moreno**

President

Inter-American Development Bank

Washington, DC

## Introduction

During the 1950s and the decades that followed, the Western Hemisphere experienced extraordinary activity in the arts. The United States witnessed the emergence of Action Painting and Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Pop Art, Hyper-Realism, and many other trends such as Neo-Figuration, Conceptualism, and Performance and Installation Art; despite their European origins, New York City took charge of developing and recycling these ideas for almost thirty years. Around the 1980s, Europe was able to reclaim some of its former role in determining the direction of Western art, adding to the catalogue of *-isms*, such as German Neo-Expressionism and Italian Trans-Vanguardism, for which the second part of the twentieth century will be so well remembered.

Latin America was not exempt from the winds of change and renewal that had overtaken the world after the Second World War. The exhilaration, however, was mixed with anxieties created by the Cold War and the emergence of China as a superpower sustained on its Maoist ideology, which many considered an alternative to the extremes of the right, represented by capitalism, free enterprise, and consumerism, and the left, unequivocally linked to state-controlled communism.

### The Influence of Mexico

In the preceding decades, the Mexican School, with its figurative symbolism, narrative, and sociopolitical discourse, had either dominated or influenced artistic expression not only in Mexico, but also in a good number of countries everywhere in the Americas. The impact was felt to such an extent that in several countries, clusters of artists emulating the Mexican model showed distaste for other forms of expression.

The power of the Mexican Muralists was not just apparent. In some countries, however, like Argentina, the cultlike rush to figuration coincided with the imagery and aesthetics of late-stage post-First World War Futurism, a tendency that intended to recover some of the simplicity and classic spirit, if not the features, of great Italian art. Although this aspect has been rarely studied and researched by scholars in Latin America or elsewhere, its basis in fact is easily understood when one visits the Galeria de Arte Moderna in Rome; compare some of the works there with much of the art made in Rosario, Córdoba, and Buenos Aires in or around the 1930s by Antonio Berni, Lino Enea Spilimbergo, and other artists of their generation.

The digression is relevant not only because many of the Argentine artists were of Italian origin and were sympathetic to the social agenda implicit in the original manifesto of Futurism, but because it also applies to Diego Rivera. His figurative style and later social-oriented ideology that nonetheless accepted the realities of industrialization and progress are not that dissimilar in many aspects from those of the Futurists. One wonders if he might have acquired first-hand knowledge of these artists through their exhibitions in Paris, where Rivera lived, or during his sojourn to Italy before he returned to Mexico, called back by the Minister of Culture, José Vasconcelos, to create public art, and subsequently covering the walls of public buildings with frescoes, in the manner of the Italian Renaissance masters.

### The Postwar Years

The openness to be found in the New World after the end of the war was undoubtedly both a sign of relief at the end of the conflagration and a promise to prevent such a human catastrophe from occurring again. A multitude of ideas migrated to the Americas from Europe and were reinvented in a land that had not been physically affected by the conflict, but was, however, temporarily disabled and psychologically and economically terrorized. With Europe in ruins, just a quarter-century after the First World War, the Americas emerged more than ever as the land of opportunity, or better yet, of the future. With Europe engulfed in nothing but gloom, remorse, and reconstruction concerns, the historic moment was seized by the New World under the leadership

of the United States, which was determined to prevent a similar catastrophe from ever taking place in the hemisphere. The story, we know now, did not develop as imagined for everyone.

Most of the art in Latin America up to the end of the 1940s followed figurative models, with the exception of that of a few individuals and the unique case of Argentina, which, as a whole, was quite advanced in the field of geometric abstraction. As far as content, art was descriptive and infused with heavy regionalism, when not espousing nationalistic rhetoric, which, depending on the talent of the individual, produced more or less interesting results—more, in the case of the Colombian Ignacio Gómez Jaramillo. Within this trend, it was possible to distinguish two different and opposite paths. The first had been set by the Mexicans, of course, and was characterized by the epic feeling of transformation of the social order. That country's revolution salvaged the dignity of the unprivileged masses that had been oppressed for centuries and empowered them with a return of their historical, political, and social roles in a territory they could rightfully claim as their own. The second was an adaptation of European philosophical and intellectual principles within the realities of the New World; as such, the artists following this trail were preoccupied with aesthetics and speculation, visual theory, formal values, and the reformulation of traditions within Western art that were not incompatible with age-old American, pre-Columbian, colonial, or postindependence traditions.

In the arts—the subject that concerns us here—the leading, most-respected artists from Latin America had been educated in European cities before the war (mostly Madrid, Paris, and Rome) or in Mexico City. For those who had already decided which road was more appropriate for self-realization when they returned to their respective countries, it was clear that following in the steps of the Mexican School presented the least problematic position and the promise of the most extensive acceptance. As for the others, like the Mexican Rufino Tamayo, it would take many years of rejection and controversy, along with the recognition of a small but influential public, such as the New York gallery and critics circles, before their art was validated among their fellow countrymen.

Some artists were torn between the cultural connections they maintained with Old World traditions and newer, more local contexts; their loyalties fluctuated, and their expressions reflected the struggle: this was the case with Carlos Mérida or Tamayo himself. Mérida is represented in this exhibition with two works, one of them is the 1943 lithograph series he produced in Paris that was inspired by the *Popol Vuh*. This graphic series is not very different, in its formal terms, from “Stormy Purple: Under the Texas Sky” of the same year, where evidence of Surrealism and other abstract vocabularies is found.

After the end of the war, when the hegemony of the Mexican School was showing signs of exhaustion, the spirit in the Americas was that of a new beginning. The 1950s were years of transformation and innovation. These two impulses had to be pursued with character and authority. After all, despite its glorious past, what else but arrogance and self-destruction was left to be learned from Europe? Many European artists, architects, scientists, film directors, and actors had “defected” to the Americas, both North and South. America was destiny. America was life. The Americas were the choice for freedom and liberty.

## Nicaragua

**Rodrigo Peñalba** (León, Nicaragua, 1908–Managua, Nicaragua, 1979) went to study in Mexico after the Spanish Revolution forced him to leave the Royal Academy of San Fernando, in Madrid, where the Nicaraguan government had granted him a scholarship to study. Later he went to Italy, where he managed to live during the entire World War II conflict. Peñalba's two works included in this exhibition illustrate the mixed-loyalties dilemma outlined above in the case of Mérida. On one hand, the “Untitled” piece (probably a study for a larger composition), from 1945, shows an expressionistic sensibility that is difficult to disengage stylistically from José Clemente Orozco; the colors are reminiscent of the German and Scandinavian Expressionists, yet Peñalba retains a personal imprint. The other, “The Sorcerers from Nonimbo” (1946), is definitely Mexican in spirit, or should we say Nicaraguan, since it maintains Peñalba's expressionistic quality, but again, the result suggests

coincidences with Orozco, the Germans, and the Scandinavians. Certainly Orozco was not unknown to Peñalba; we are less sure about the influence of artists such as Edvard Munch or Emil Nolde.

A turn in the direction of Nicaraguan art is visible in the work of Peñalba's pupil, **Armando Morales** (Granada, Nicaragua, 1927–). It is possible that Morales inherited his teacher's proclivity for handling heavy impastos and matter, a propensity he encountered again in the North American Abstract Expressionists during the 1960s, when he lived in New York. The handling of thick pictorial pigment



differs from Peñalba's in the sense that with Morales, it is more premeditated and cerebral; this suggests—or tends to coincide with—the work of U.S. artists such as Conrad Marca-Relli, but the result differs from that of these Americans in the sense that Morales does not hide his controlled, intense lyricism, which is an unusual trait among the Abstract Expressionists of the time, who were more concerned with the possibilities of form, color, and paint as matter in relation to the pictorial surface.

The third Nicaraguan artist included in this selection, **Alejandro Aróstegui** (Bluefields, Nicaragua, 1935–), is a by-product of the emancipation that characterized abstract trends still in evidence everywhere during the 1970s. By then, abstraction had achieved a generalized acceptance among progressive Latin American art lovers. Aróstegui's work in this exhibition conjugates influences of Italian Arte Povera and Spanish Informal Abstraction, two European tendencies that emerged after the Second World War that were characterized by the roughness with which painting and surface blended with the addition of scrap materials. Given the particular socioeconomic conditions of Latin America, these two trends attracted a number of followers from Guatemala and Mexico City to Buenos Aires, in part because—aside from their being visually progressive—it was possible through them to relate to many aspects of Latin American reality, and they did not relinquish the social content many still considered important. Not coincidentally, some of those artists were, again, of Spanish or Italian descent and went back to Spain and Italy after the war.

An exception to the previous examples is **Asilia Guillén** (Granada, Nicaragua, 1887–1964). Guillén never received formal instruction, but her imagination and manual dexterity led her to the practice of painting. Spontaneous artists have abounded in Latin America since colonial times. During Spanish domination, the church monopolized the practice of art for religious purposes, and workshops usually concentrated on mass-produced images. The laborer adopted the attitude of a craftsman who put his ability at the service of a higher cause. After independence, many of these workshop artists remained connected to the church, serving people with the manufacture of ex-votos or through popular portraiture or acting as chroniclers of their own times.

The outward vision of the first three Nicaraguan artists, Peñalba, Morales, and Aróstegui, contrasts with the inward, introspective look Guillén gives us of her own country, its people, and the significant moments in its history, as illustrated in the episode narrated by the painting included in this exhibit. Originally trained as an embroiderer, Guillén decided, at the suggestion of a poet friend, to execute her compositions in painting. Encouraged by Peñalba, then director of Nicaragua's National Fine Arts School, she continued to paint in isolation. Eventually she won national recognition and was given a solo exhibition at the Organization of American States in Washington, DC, in 1962; this helped her establish a solid reputation in Nicaragua, and the limited number of paintings she was able to produce during her life are still sought eagerly by collectors. Guillén is one of the two most interesting visionary woman artists from Nicaragua during this period, and one whose legacy helped to reconnect with a tradition that, despite many agendas from different political sides, persists today in the country.



(Opposite page)

**Rodrigo Peñalba**

b. León, Nicaragua, 1908–d. Managua, Nicaragua, 1979

*Sin título (Untitled)*, c. 1945

oil on cardboard

16 x 19 1/2 in; 40.64 x 49.53 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas, Gift of José Gómez-Sicre

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**Rodrigo Peñalba**

*Los brujos de Nonimbo (The Sorcerers from Nonimbo)*, 1946

oil on canvas

28 x 33 in; 71.12 x 83.82 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas, Gift of IBM



**Armando Morales**

b. Granada, Nicaragua, 1927–

*Guerrillero muerto VIII (Dead Guerrilla VIII)*, 1962

oil on canvas

40 x 65 in; 101.6 x 165.1 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



**Alejandro Aróstegui**

b. Bluefields, Nicaragua, 1935–

*Paisaje gris (Gray Landscape)*, 1978

mixed media on board

31 7/8 x 47 7/8 in; 80.96 x 121.6 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



**Asilia Guillén**

b. Granada, Nicaragua, 1887–d. 1964

*Rafaela Herrera defendiendo el castillo contra los piratas (Rafaela Herrera Defending the Castle against the Pirates)*, 1962

oil on canvas

25 x 38 in; 63.5 x 96.52 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



## Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, two of the most prominent figures with an international appeal that emerged around midcentury are **Francisco Zúñiga** (San José, Costa Rica, 1912–Mexico City, Mexico, 1998) and **Francisco “Don Paco” Amighetti** (San José, Costa Rica, 1907–1998).

Zúñiga inherited from his father the ability to sculpt and draw. He was also an accomplished painter, but he is mostly known for his bronze sculpture, which stylistically is connected to the figuration of the Mexican School. He knew how to incorporate classical and modern elements in the treatment of the surface and consolidation of volume, as it is possible to appreciate, in particular, in his well-known compositions of standing and solitary peasant women. He studied in Mexico, and his early career does not differ from that of many artists who followed the path established by the Mexican School. It was not until the

mid-1960s that Zúñiga began the practice of lithography, which he would not abandon until the end of his life; a beautiful example of his lithographic work is included here.

Also trained in painting and drawing, but mostly a printmaker, Amighetti’s work grew around a Costa Rican concern for identity, a common preoccupation among Costa Ricans in general (considered the most “Europeanized” population among all the Central American nations) since the end of the nineteenth century. The same concern is also present in the work of early-twentieth-century artists such as Enrique Echandi, Emilio Span, and Juan Ramón Bonilla. The effort to illustrate whatever could be considered a Costa Rican cultural character, with a proclivity toward the local, continued past the first half of the century with artists like Carlos Salazar, Teodorico Quirós, and Fausto Pacheco and extended to a more general “Latin American” preoccupation into the 1960s with artists like Lola Fernández.

Amighetti’s early work was influenced by the style of the Mexican Muralists. He manifested an interest in printmaking, xylography in particular. He visited Argentina at the end of the 1930s and went to the United States for a few months in the early 1940s. But a decisive moment in his career appears to have been his printmaking studies in Buenos Aires, where he returned at the beginning of the 1950s, marking the end of his formative years and the beginning of a second period that extended to the mid-1960s, when his style matured with the practice of color xylography.

Amighetti used his familiarity with printmaking in his work on illustration, but his interest extended beyond just that. In 1947, after his U.S. experience, he had returned to Mexico to study mural painting with Federico Cantú (a disciple of Diego Rivera) and published a portfolio of xylographs entitled “Francisco in Harlem.” Later, after his return to Costa Rica from Argentina, Amighetti became more active in book illustration than ever before, but never abandoned oil and mural painting. His stronghold was, however, printmaking, and it is this technique that defines the true character of Amighetti’s work: bold and extremely synthetic, evocative of the land, the vision of life, and the people from whom he sprang, all infused with a quasi-nostalgic longing for a bygone era when life was uncomplicated. His graphic work evidences a poetic capacity to endow the image with a visual power he shares in common only with other great printmakers of the time, such as Leonard Baskin and Antonio Frasconi, although Amighetti’s images may appear less symbolic, raw and rather simplistic.

The concern for a national identity in Costa Rica takes some abstract turns, one of them with the art of **Lola Fernández** (Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia, 1926–). Fernández’s Colombian ancestry may have played a role in the early development of her career, as represented in the two paintings included in this exhibition, which were featured in her solo show at the Organization of American States in 1968.

The pre-Columbian Gold Cultures of the Colombian Caribbean also influenced the Costa Rican tribes and were combined with what the Mayans and other Meso-American cultures may have furnished in the



(Opposite page)

**Francisco Zúñiga**

b. San José, Costa Rica, 1912–d. Mexico City, Mexico, 1998

*Campesinos (Peasants)*, 1980

color lithograph on woven paper, #16/125

27 1/2 x 19 5/8 in; 69.85 x 49.85 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection

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**Francisco Zúñiga**

*Maternidad (Motherhood)*, 1974

graphite and colored pencil on paper

25 9/16 x 19 5/16 in ; 65 x 49 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



**Francisco Amighetti**

b. San José, Costa Rica, 1907–d. San José, Costa Rica, 1998

*Trópico (Tropic)*, 1972

color woodcut on paper, AP

15 x 22 in; 38.1 x 55.88 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



**Francisco Amighetti**

*Puerto (Port)*, 1986

woodcut on paper, #6/51

15 1/2 x 23 1/4 in; 39.37 x 59.06 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



**Lola Fernández**

b. Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia, 1926–

*Return of the Ancestor (Regreso del ancestro)*, 1967

oil on masonite

67 x 48 in; 170.18 x 121.92 cm

Organization of the American States (OAS), Art Museum of the Americas

(Next page)

**Lola Fernández**

*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1968

oil on masonite

48 x 32 in; 121.92 x 81.28 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



realm of stone carving; all of these influences are represented in the superb collections of the museums in San José. The spectacular collection at the Gold Museum in Bogotá, managed by the Central Bank of Colombia, is also an important reference.

The increased esteem that societies in many countries of the region bestowed upon their pre-Columbian historical and cultural achievements—an example set by Mexico and Peru in many ways—and the desire to reevaluate indigenous sociocultural significance, after many centuries of its being denigrated by the colonial regimes or underestimated by the early republicans, awakened in some artists a longing to connect more with national customs, traditions, and memory. The poetic abstract language that had originated in the 1950s, with references to the Americas' pre-Columbian past, were represented strongly with Fernando de Szyszlo in Peru, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar in Colombia, and Enrique Tábara in Ecuador, and settled well among young artists.

## El Salvador

During the late 1930s in El Salvador, two separate events had a particular impact on the local artistic scene. One was the creation of a group of artists led by writer and painter Salarrué (Salvador Salazar Arrué). These artists gathered under the name of Amigos del Arte (Friends of the Arts). The other was the creation of the Art Academy of Spanish artist Valero Lecha. While Salarrué may be considered progressive and self-taught to a certain extent, Lecha had a technical proficiency in drawing and painting, derived from training. The two groups were at odds in their vision of the arts and conceptualization of their mission; the only point in common was their interest in figuration (although Salarrué dared to make an incursion into Surrealism occasionally), and there were notable alumni on both sides. It was not until the mid-1940s, when Carlos Cañas (b. 1924) founded the Group of Young Salvadoran Painters, that independence was declared from both groups of predecessors. Coming from the two sides of the field, the younger painters soon split as well. One of the Lecha's most original pupils was Noé Canjura, who left El Salvador at a fairly young age for Paris.

Artists like Canjura who left El Salvador relatively early in their lives were able to develop a plastic language of their own with an international appeal. The first to mention is **Mauricio Aguilar** (El Salvador, 1919–1978), who is represented in this exhibition with two works. Aguilar lived in Paris almost his entire life, except for his final years, when he moved to New York. His work is very personal, combining simple shapes such as a glass and a pear with rich impastos and textural finishes that speak of a sensibility associated with matter and form for their own sake. The other is **Benjamín Cañas Herrera** (Honduras, 1933–Arlington, Virginia, United States, 1987), who lived in the Washington metropolitan area after spending time in Mexico associated with the Neo-Humanists, a relationship that in great part determined his Neo-Figurative style, which he would later combine with a fantastic, gothic-like iconography. “Kafka, Letters to Milena,” included here, is an excellent example of his mature work.



(Clockwise from above)

**Mauricio Aguilar**

b. El Salvador, 1919–d. 1978

*Pear (Pera)*, 1973

oil on masonite

48 x 36 in; 121.92 x 91.44 cm

Organization of the American States,  
Art Museum of the Americas



**Mauricio Aguilar**

*Glasses in Green (Vasos en verde)*, 1962

oil on masonite

36 x 48 in; 91.44 x 121.92 cm

Organization of the American States,  
Art Museum of the Americas



**Benjamín Cañas Herrera**

b. Honduras, 1933–d. Arlington, Virginia,  
United States, 1987

*Kafka, cartas a Milena (Kafka, Letters to Milena)*, 1976

oil on wood panel

61 x 61 in; 154.94 x 154.94 cm

Organization of the American States,  
Art Museum of the Americas

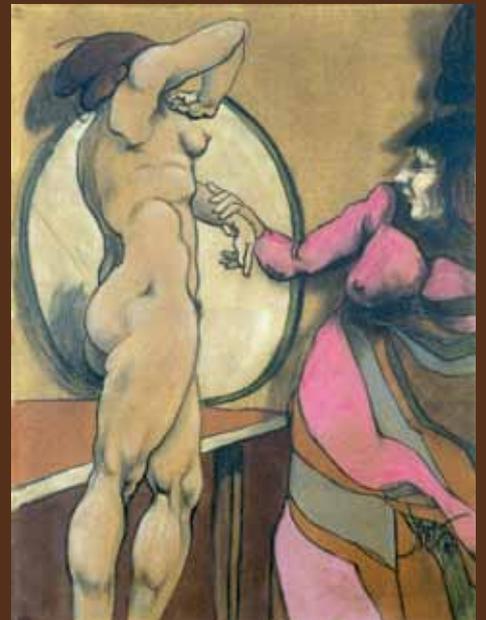
**Benjamín Cañas Herrera**

*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1981

pastel on paper

29 1/4 x 22 in; 74.3 x 55.88 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection





(Opposite page)

**Carlos Mérida**

b. Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 1891–d. Mexico City, Mexico, 1984  
*Estampas del Popol Vuh (Illustrations for the Popol Vuh)*, 1943  
color lithographs (group of 10 pieces)  
16 1/4 x 12 1/2 in; 41.28 x 31.75 cm  
Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas

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**Carlos Mérida**

*Púrpura de tormenta (Stormy Purple)*, 1943  
*Serie de los cielos de Tejas (Texas Skies Series)*  
oil on canvas mounted on masonite  
24 x 20 in; 60.96 x 50.8 cm  
Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



**Roberto Ossaye**

b. Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1927–d. Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1954  
*Naturaleza muerta en un tema de laboratorio*  
*(Still Life in a Laboratory Theme)*, 1952  
oil on canvas  
10 1/2 x 15 1/4 in; 26.67 x 38.74 cm  
Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



**Rodolfo Abularach**

b. Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1933–  
*Fugitive from a Mayan Lintel*  
*(Fugitivo de un dintel Maya)*, 1958  
pen and ink on paper  
27 x 38 in; 68.58 x 96.52 cm  
Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



**Rodolfo Abularach**

*Sueño (Daze)*, c. 1969  
lithograph on paper, #35/100  
22 1/4 x 29 in ; 56.52 x 73.66 cm  
Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



## Guatemala

By the time **Carlos Mérida** (Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 1891–Mexico City, Mexico, 1984) executed the painting and lithograph portfolio included in this exhibition, he needed “no introduction as a painter of international reputation whose work is as well known in Paris and New York, as it is in Mexico”; these were the words of Leslie Suitzer, Director of the Division of Intellectual Cooperation at the Pan American Union, who introduced an exhibition of Mérida’s work in Washington, D.C., in March of 1945, inaugurating “a series of small exhibitions from its Loan Collection, which is available to educational institutions, including libraries and museums.” Mérida at the time was one of those exceptional artists from Latin America who, thanks to its connections to Europe to a great extent, successfully developed a career and received recognition of his work outside the traditional lines established by the Mexican School.

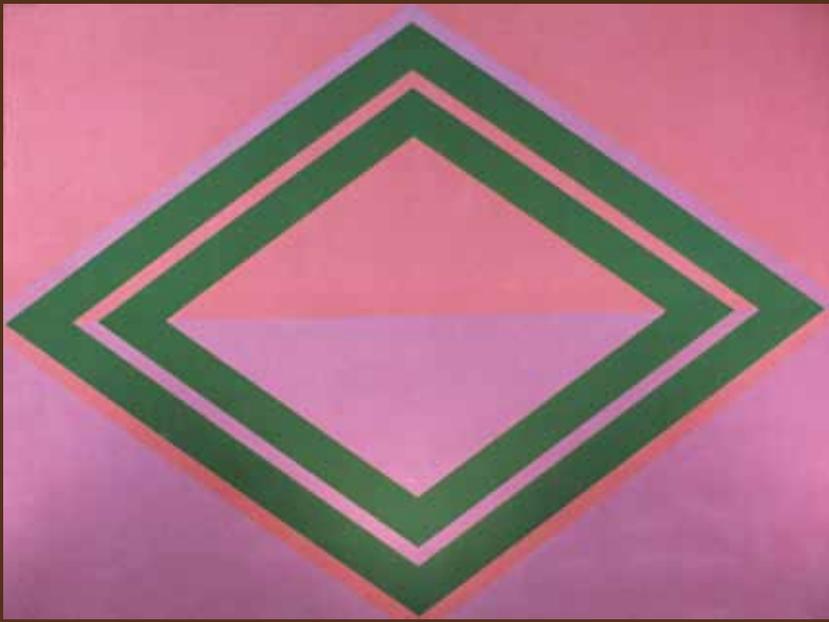
Mérida had returned to Guatemala from Paris at the beginning of World War I, and in 1919 he went to live in Mexico, where he joined the group of Mexican Revolutionary Painters. This appears to have been more of a practical move than a matter of principle. He moved to Paris again in the mid-1920s, only to return to Mexico again in 1929. The case of Mérida well illustrates the dilemma mentioned earlier in this essay, encountered by some artists who had to choose between acceptance and job opportunities, especially during the 1920s in Mexico (the most notable hub of art activity in Spanish America at the time). His attitude during the years he worked as Director of the Galería de Arte Moderno, taught at the School of Plastic Arts, and directed the School of Dance of the Secretariat of Public Education was to keep a low profile in regard to his personal ideas, but Mérida was not unique in this predicament, of course. In 1932 he began to experiment with pure abstract forms. Late in the 1930s and into the 1940s he combined abstraction with motifs inspired in Mayan imagery, and in the 1950s he opted for a more geometric repertoire that appears to reconcile his concerns about being contemporary and being loyal to his ancestors at the same time.

By the time Mérida had achieved international recognition, a number of the younger postwar Guatemalan artists had gained some notoriety in that country, and **Roberto Ossaye** (Guatemala City, 1927–1954) deserves special mention. At the time of his death at the early age of 27, he was considered the leading artist of his generation. He had moved to New York in 1948 with a scholarship granted by the Guatemalan government, and there exhibited his work, which had experienced substantial transformation since its Rivera-influenced beginnings. His eagerness for experimentation is reflected in the small painting selected for this exhibition, and the title, “Still Life in a Laboratory Theme,” reinforces it even more. Records confirm that one of his paintings, offered by his Dominican wife and daughter, was accepted by The Museum of Modern Art four years after his death.

**Rodolfo Abularach** (Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1933–) is another artist who, during the 1950s, attempted to reconcile the legacy of the Mayans with a vocabulary that was both original and contemporary at the same time, before moving into a more personal dimension. His studies at the National School of Plastic Arts, combined with his simultaneous work for the Ministry of Fine Arts documenting artifacts for museum registration, gave him a knowledge of and familiarity with forms associated with Guatemala’s pre-Columbian past. His breakthrough came in 1958, when he moved to New York with a grant from the Guatemalan government; he made the city his home for three decades, then moved back to Guatemala, where he lives today. The two works representing him in the exhibition, a drawing and a lithograph, are characteristic of his 1950s and 1960s styles, respectively. The lithograph becomes a Surrealist image generated by a hyperrealistic rendering of the eye, a subject that fascinated Abularach for almost two decades.

**Margot Fanjul** (Antigua, Guatemala, 1931–Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1998) was, for many years, the pseudonym of Margarita Azurdia, who later changed her name to Anastasia Margarita; these changes were part of the dynamic behind her work and behavior throughout the course of her life.

Fanjul started in the early 1960s as an Abstract Expressionist painter, switching soon after to geom-



**Margot Fanjul**

b. Antigua, Guatemala, 1931–d.  
Guatemala City,  
Guatemala, 1998

*Joyabaj Nebaj*, 1967

oil on canvas

62 x 85 in; 157.48 x 215.9 cm

(in four panels)

Inter-American Development Bank  
Art Collection



**Ezequiel Padilla Ayestas**

b. Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1944–

*La vida (Life)*, 1991

acrylic and crayon on canvas

55 x 47 in; 139.7 x 119.38 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas



**Ezequiel Padilla Ayestas**

*Fruto de tu vientre (Fruit of Your Womb)*, 1990

acrylic and crayon on canvas

68 x 49 in; 172.72 x 124.46 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas

(Opposite page)

**José Antonio Velásquez**

b. Caridad, Departamento de Valle, Honduras, 1906–d. San Antonio  
de Oriente, Honduras, 1983

*San Antonio de Oriente (View of the Town of San Antonio de Oriente)*, 1972

oil on canvas

47 1/4 x 60 1/2 in; 120.02 x 153.67 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum of the Americas

etry. The artwork included in this exhibition belongs to the period when she participated in the 1969 São Paulo Biennial, receiving an honorable mention. Her geometric images can be compared with those of other artists working at the time, or equally with the designs—however modified—of Guatemalan textiles still produced today by various communities of Mayan descendants. An existential yearning, filled with an anxiety to transcend, is implicit in her attitude toward art and cannot be overlooked, since such a state of mind is part and parcel of Fanjul's persona.

Filled with geometric shapes and fields generated by intense, daring contrasts and diagonal bands of color, Fanjul's geometry belongs comfortably to the geometric abstraction trend generated in several Latin American countries during the 1960s. Here we may again see a desire to articulate a contemporary language through ancient habits. But if, in fact, Fanjul tried to do that, she must have thought about tradition as a way to open life to the future; she can be considered an early Latin American feminist (a pioneer in Guatemala) who passionately opposed figurative images in art and the chauvinistic dominance of her male counterparts. The impression she projected of herself as an intransigent character, on top of societal prejudices, put her at odds with the Guatemalan art establishment. Coming from a well-to-do family, she used her own resources—and her eccentricity—to advance a personal and artistic agenda, and she managed to achieve a position of prestige among her peers in the international artistic community.

At the 1972 Medellín Biennial, Fanjul appeared with a group of marble sculptures assembled in a manner that allowed for their configuration to be rearranged at will, an artistic decision in which she was probably influenced by Lygia Clark, to whose work she would have been exposed at São Paulo. In the mid-1970s, Fanjul moved to Paris and wrote poetry. When she returned to Guatemala in the early 1980s, she practiced photography, dance, and body art and experimented with installations, among other things.

## Honduras

Honduras's contribution to the exhibition encompasses two completely opposite expressions, illustrating the contradictions created by adopting change and the sweeping, inevitable transformation that results in a country not accustomed to drastic remodeling. After the death of his parents, **José Antonio Velásquez** (Caridad, Honduras, 1906–San Antonio de Oriente, Honduras, 1983) moved from his birth town to the coast of Honduras and became a barber and telegraph operator. Because of the latter job, he moved to the town of San Antonio de Oriente, thirty kilometers away, where he was elected mayor three times. He loved his adopted town so much that in his free time he started painting views of the small city from different angles for the pure pleasure of it; one version of these is presented in the exhibit. Eventually Velásquez was “discovered,” enjoying great success and accolades as a “naïve” artist.

Velásquez's view of the world is that of an innocent soul who finds solace in the positive aspects of the reality around him: nature and friends, and the routine of daily activity. For him time has been frozen in a self-contained universe, and he has no other ambition except to live an undisturbed life, requiring no modification whatsoever.

**Ezequiel Padilla Ayestas** (Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1944–), on the other hand, is the antithesis of

Velásquez, an Expressionist whose lack of conformity comes across in his painting. Each of his works carries a commentary of social dissatisfaction that resounds in the distorted use of figures and the visual context they inhabit. Padilla's work, two examples of which appear here, represents a big leap in moving Honduran art forward during the two decades prior to the end of the twentieth century. Recently, considerable transformation has occurred in the art scene in Honduras, led by a group of younger artists who are supported by a few patrons and progressive individuals.





**Guillermo Trujillo**

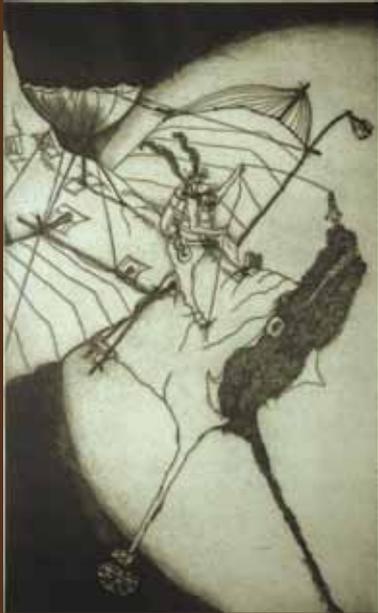
b. Horconcos, Chiriqui, Panama, 1927–

*El bodegón (Still Life)*, 1975

oil on canvas

20 x 24 in; 50.8 x 60.96 cm

Organization of the American States, Art Museum  
of the Americas



**Julio Augusto Zachrisson**

b. Panama City, Panama, 1930–

*Sin título (Untitled)*, undated

etching, #36/100

25 x 15 in; 63.5 x 38.1 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection



**Julio Augusto Zachrisson**

*Figurina (Figurine)*, 1982

ink and tempera on paper

39 3/8 x 27 3/16 in; 100 x 69 cm

Inter-American Development Bank Art Collection

## Panama

Resumption of normal trade after the Second World War between the Western Hemisphere, Europe, and the East restored economic prosperity to Panama, and by the 1950s a generation of younger artists was open to the influences that had become part of the repertoire of the international artistic community. A group of Expressionists and Abstractionists emerged, among them Alfredo Sinclair and Antonio Alvarado. Because of the privileged geopolitical situation of Panama and the Panama Canal in the Caribbean Basin, Panama's relationship to the United States, the geographic transition between North, Central, and South America that Panama represents geographically, and hardly a half-century of separation from Colombia, Panamanian artists of the time were particularly sensitive to issues of national identity.

**Guillermo Trujillo** (Horconcitos, Panama, 1927–) was one of those artists; he was well versed in art history and the pre-Columbian history of Panama. Around the early 1970s, Trujillo developed a symbolic imagery with anthropological and biomorphic connotations; this served as a framework for indigenous-like iconography that echoed the visual intricacies of native weaving and textiles known as *molas*. The piece included in this exhibition comes from that decade; however, its subject matter is more conventional. What is not conventional is the particular technique Trujillo was able to implement in the visual construction of shapes, and premeditated, cunning compositions. Volume and space are defined with small dots of colors in multiple hues that end up creating a rich chromatic atmosphere, in layers of extraordinary plastic depth.

In contrast, **Julio Augusto Zachrisson** (Panama City, Panama, 1930–) moved to Madrid in the 1960s after studying in Panama and Mexico and has lived there ever since. Also a painter, Zachrisson's most important body of work is represented by printmaking and drawing, and he was awarded Spain's prestigious Aragón-Goya Prize in 1996. His style has always been satiric, involving figures distorted with a flair for the grotesque. The result is not far from the realm of Latin American Neo-Figurative artists, the main difference being Zachrisson's predilection for the graphic medium in a time when painting seemed to dominate the scene. He also was able to infuse his compositions with solid humor and intelligent sarcasm, aimed at the contradictions in human nature.

## Conclusion

The 1950s was for Latin American and Caribbean artists a period of examination and reflection about the past, as geopolitical, economic, and cultural circumstances posed new questions about the future and whatever vision of life existed before the outcome of the Second World War. After two decades of intense activity inside the country as well as abroad in which the Mexican model consolidated its agenda, the extended influence of the Muralist School waned, its artistic and ideological fundamentals rendered obsolete and its conceptual frame out of sync with a design more appropriate for the realities of the modern world.

The artists selected for this exhibition are just a few among a large number of art practitioners who together helped define artistic themes and other directions among Central American Spanish-speaking countries and Panama during the postwar years and thereafter. Concurrently, the arts of the entire continent experienced fundamental mutations as the rest of the world adjusted to the international trends dominating the art world at the time. These, and many others, are outstanding examples of the turns and directions taken by the arts in Latin America around the 1950s and the half-century that followed.

### **Félix Ángel**

Director and Curator  
Inter-American Development Bank  
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Washington, DC



The IDB Cultural Center was created in 1992 and has two primary objectives: (1) to contribute to social development by administering a grants program that sponsors and co-finances small-scale cultural projects that will have a positive social impact in the region, and (2) to promote a better image of the IDB member countries, with emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean, through culture and increased understanding between the region and the rest of the world, particularly the United States.

Cultural programs at IDB headquarters feature new as well as established talent from the region. Recognition granted by Washington, D.C. audiences and press often helps propel the careers of new artists. The Center also sponsors lectures on Latin American and Caribbean history and culture, and supports cultural undertakings in the Washington, D.C. area for the local Latin American and Caribbean communities, such as Spanish-language theater, film festivals, and other events.

The IDB Cultural Center Exhibitions and the Inter-American Concert, Lecture and Film Series stimulate dialogue and a greater knowledge of the culture of the Americas. The Cultural Development Program funds projects in the fields of youth cultural development, institutional support, restoration and conservation of cultural patrimony, and the preservation of cultural traditions. The IDB Art Collection, gathered over several decades, is managed by the Cultural Center and reflects the relevance and importance the Bank has achieved after four decades as the leading financial institution concerned with the development of Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Books and Catalogues of the IDB Cultural Center by Year**  
<http://www.iadb.org/topics/culture/cultural/Catalogues.cfm>



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