



PEDRO DE ORAA
DIVERTIMENTOS II

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LATIN ART CORE

CUBAN FINE ART GALLERY

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Untitled 2015 Acrylic on Canvas 16 x 56 in

Untitled 2017 Acrylic on Canvas 16 x 56 in

PRECEPTO DEL PINTOR

La superficie vacía del lienzo
se nos presenta como un reto de la actualidad.

La realidad basta y múltiple
crea nuevos espacios.

Puro espacio ella misma,
se inventa la presencia que la habita.

Presencia sucesiva,
soplo de la conciencia que rehace su tiempo.

La realidad alberga la conciencia,
y la conciencia la fecunda.

El rectángulo del lienzo
está inmerso en el espacio de la realidad.

El espacio del lienzo asume el entorno:
quiere ser Conciencia.

El lienzo se llena de los ecos
y reverberaciones de la realidad.

Desaparece la oquedad del lienzo:
el espacio se reintegra.

La imagen del lienzo
no está contra la realidad ni fuera de ella.

Es realidad.

PAINTER PRECEPT

The empty surface of the canvas
is presented as a challenge today.

Reality plentiful and multiple
creates new spaces.

Pure space itself,
conceives the presence that inhabits.

Successive presence,
breath of conscience that remakes its time.

Reality houses consciousness,
and consciousness makes it fertile.

The rectangle of the canvas
is immersed in the space of reality.

The canvas space assumes the environment:
wants to be Consciousness.

The canvas is filled with echoes
and reverberations of reality.

The hollow of the canvas disappears:
the space is reintegrated.

The image of the canvas
is not against reality or outside of it.

It is reality.





Untitled 2016 Acrylic on Canvas 13 x 38 in



Untitled #5 2017 Acrylic on Canvas
39 x 39 in

Pedro de Oraá: An abstract poet |

By Rafael DiazCasas

The second half of the 20th century in Cuban art history witnessed the rise of a significant number of abstract painters who enriched the visual arts panorama. Among the most relevant of them, and one who is still committed to the genre today, is Pedro de Oraá (Habana, 1931).

Over the years, Oraá's artistic allegiance with abstraction has been, perhaps, the strongest way in which he has channeled his sophisticated intellectual interests, comparable only to his devotion for poetry. His paintings are a pictorial creative space, in which he has been able to articulate a personal and distinctive sense of visuality. Without a doubt, the combination of painting and poetry inherent in his creation is an unparalleled development within the Cuban art scene of the past century.

Growing up in an extensive lower-middle class Habanera family in the Lawton neighborhood, Oraá and his six siblings displayed intellectual curiosity early in life, while their father worked as a subcontracted tailor for local department stores. An avid consumer of literature, the young Oraá became a successful artist once he started making and selling experimental abstract drawings as a way to help support his household's finances.

Early in life, Oraá joined the San Alejandro Academy while still underage, through the recommendation of avant-garde caricaturist Rafael Blanco, as an auditing student at the Anexa School. There, he took classes with modernist caricaturist Armando Maribona and the traditional painter Emilio Rivero Merlin, among others. He never finished the art academy due to economic reasons, but his creative commitment as a visual artist was set, and it would carry on throughout his life. ||

He has built his visual language upon the combination of elements of hard-edged with organic abstraction, assembling a mixed personal imagery that encompasses and enhances his enthusiasm for poetry.

Throughout his career, Pedro de Oraá has approached the creative process as a dialectical relationship between the certain and the uncertain, between poetry and painting. Whereas in one he expresses his ideals using clear symbols – words – in the other those ideals are shaped in pictorial forms that do not engage with a preconceived narrative. At the same time, both are pure expressions of his concerns as a utopian creative soul who embraces art for its potential to establish order and resolve the challenges of daily life.

Visually, Oraá has devoted his artistic life to fostering an abstract poetic that is

funneled and resolved on his canvas and sculptures with a reductive color palette, in which black, white, red and purple have an indisputably dominant presence.

The inward tensions within each of his paintings are the expressions of a highly intellectual mind that is driven by his humanistic utopian vision, through which he organizes and composes forms and colors to propose his inner order as universal. Overall his poems are the expressions of that internal dialogue between his devoted aesthetic and ideological concerns that have marked so much of his lifetime. At the same time, they can be experienced as a continuous dialogue with himself and his generation, in which he has maintained a conversation with some of the most relevant players in his life. Examples of these poems include “Parabolic of the night owl” (1956), “Baragaño Walking into the Mirror” (1960s), “In Order to Remember Fayad Jamis” (1988), and “Greeting to Cardenas” (1993), among others.

Since the very early stages of his career his artworks have caught the attention of prominent intellectuals and artists. One of his first art patrons, who bought Oraá’s early drawings (built using geometric elements) and covered the cost of his second book of poems, *El Instante Cernido* (1953), was the prominent intellectual and editor of the Habanero newspaper *El Diario de la Marina*, Gastón Baquero.

By 1957 Oraá had become Lolo Soldevilla’s personal assistant while she was back in Havana after finishing her duties as Cuban Cultural Attaché in Europe. They met continuously at the cafes, Las Antillas and Las Americas, artistic gathering spots where he was hanging out with other young writers, intellectuals and painters. Among the artists were members of Los Once, a group with whom Oraá wound up exhibiting. Los Once had come together after following an informal Abstract aesthetic, in direct dialogue with European Tachism and North American Abstract Expressionism.

On March 15, 1957 Oraá married Soldevilla in a private ceremony. He wrote in her journal: “Cruzamos nuestros signos, nuestros brazos estelares.” Three days later they took off for a long artistic exploratory trip to Venezuela, where Cuban art dealer Florencio García Cisneros was waiting. Both ended up exhibiting and collaborating with the avant-garde Sadio Gallery in Caracas and the literary Apocalipsis Group in Maracaibo – associations that promoted a combative stance against the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. ■■■

At Sadio Gallery, in May 1957, Oraá showed poetic collages alongside relevant Venezuelan artists like Gego, Elsa Gramko, Alejandro Otero, Víctor Varela, and others. In the summer of 1957, he published his fourth book of poetry, *La Estación de la Tierra*, six reflective poems of daily life from his Habanero neighborhood of Lawton to the cosmopolitan city of Caracas. All the while, he was a painter following abstract realm.

It was in fact at Caracas Sadio Gallery where Oraá had his first solo show, with the help and guidance of Soldevilla, alongside whom he developed a predilection for and growing commitment to abstraction.

Loló Soldevilla was an artist and woman that Oraá always admired and loved on different levels. As expressed in his 1987 poem *Lolo*. After her death and in later years, she became, an unrecognized and forgotten art historical figure in Cuba and internationally.

The Venezuelan journey fueled Soldevilla and Oraá’s interest in founding Color Luz Gallery in Havana at the end of 1957. Color Luz was a space where some of the younger artists were able to articulate a visual dialogue with Cuban early modernist painters like Amelia Peláez and Wifredo Lam, as well as international abstract painters such as Agam, Dewasne, Herbin and Vasarely, among others from the Paris School. At the same time, it was a space of creation and experimentation. The gallery later housed the only geometric abstract group in the island’s art historiography, *10 Pintores Concretos* (1958-61), in which Oraá was an active member.

As a way to fulfill his avid intellectual curiosity and grow artistically, Oraá throughout his career as a visual artist joined other artistic associations, among them *El Güije Rojo* (1973-1984), *Espacio 5* (1979), and *Equipo Múltiple* (1984). His involvements were always marked by a high personal level of intellectual commitment

Over the years he has represented Cuba at the V Sao Paulo Biennial (1959), *Bienal Inter Americana*, Mexico (1960), VII *Bienal Internacional de Pintura de Kosice*, Eslovaquia (1984), and VII *Salon d’Ete d’Arts Plastiques International 90*, Tunisia. Intermittently, from 1970 to 1980, Oraá was part of the *Premi Internacional Dibuix Joan Miró* in Barcelona, Spain.

His ideals of utopian humanism moved alongside the intended changes that were to happen after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, still unresolved today. In 1961 Oraá became a founding member of the UNEAC, National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, an organization in which he was First Executive Director of the Visual Arts section during a significantly tense period of Cuban history known as the *Quinquenio Gris* (1969-1976). At the same time, Oraá connected himself with a younger generation of artists: by the 1970s Oraá was an enthusiastic supporter of the geometric abstract work created by the short-lived *Grupo Cubano de Arte Optico* (1979).

As a designer and art director he worked at the *Teatro Nacional* (1960-62), *Consejo Nacional de Cultura* (1962-64, 1967), and the *Revista Unión* of the UNEAC (1992-96). Also, for the *Revista Unión* he worked as an editor and writer beginning in 1968, and in 1969 was the organizer and director of *Noticias*

de Arte, another national official artistic publication.

Since 1982 he has been a member of the International Association of Art, a UNESCO organization branch partner. In 2011 he received the National Designer Award of the Cuban Book Institute.

Pedro de Oraá's pictorial visual voice stands alone within the Cuban art scene. Internationally, his distinctive visual aesthetic engages in a formal dialogue with the work of Jean Arp, Dewasne, and Karl Benjamin, among others. Moreover, his paintings have established a dynamic conversation with the early work of Venezuelan Elsa Gramko, with whom he exhibited in 1957. In recent years, he has playfully used computer programs to nurture his visual world, making him one of the oldest pioneers in the island nation to explore technology as an effective tool to strengthen and complement conventional painting.

In his 2015 Annual National Visual Art Award acceptance speech ceremony at the Cuban National Museum, Oraá credited his aesthetic affiliation with abstraction as being responsible for the honor, along with those artists who, like himself, committed to and fought for it over the years. Humbly he dedicated his award to all, particularly alluding to award honoree, Antonio Vidal (1999), and the previous year's nominee, friend and fellow concrete painter Salvador Corratgé, who had passed away, as deserving of the national tribute.

The National Visual Art Award comes as a lifetime recognition for Pedro de Oraá's work as a painter, a labor that is complemented by his extensive role as an art critic, essayist and poet. It is also a recognition of his humanistic utopian vision of life, through his persistent commitment to abstraction. Oraá's award designation reopens avenues that embrace abstraction as a valid and active genre in Cuba, reinserting it back into the dynamic dialogue of island's national cultural legacy.

Divertimento II is an exhibition in which Oraá keeps extending his ongoing investigation into the margins of Geometric Abstraction. Painting within his reduced customary palette of colors, he formally explores a new geometrical order, one that is exposed to the eye, alongside another that is not always obviously seen. In his artworks, he proposes a new ordered reality that at times emulates what could be a natural geographical terrestrial site; at others, something that man might have created.

Pedro de Oraá's recent work keeps pushing the boundaries of known traditional landscapes while crafting an indisputably new reality, one that proposes a characteristic personal vision at large.

I *A version of this essay was published in Art on Cuba: The Cuban Visual Arts Magazine 10. Havana- Miami, March – May 2016.*

II *In conversation with Pedro de Oraá, Miami, 2013.*

III *"We crossed our signs, our stellar arms". Lolo Soldevilla's personal journals. Private collection Havana - Miami.*

Rafael DiazCasas is an art historian and independent curator. He works as an art advisor based in New York City. Interested in modern and contemporary art, with a focus on Latin American and Cuban born artists. He has curated exhibitions in the United States and abroad. He writes about art and culture for several national and international publications, and is co-author of *Hard Light: The Work of Emilio Sanchez*. (Prestel London – New York, 2011). He has been doing research and writing about the history of abstraction in Cuba in the second half of the 20th century.



Untitled 2012 Acrylic on Canvas
29 x 59 in



Untitled 2017 Acrylic on Canvas
28 x 59 in



Untitled #2 2017 Acrylic on
Canvas 39 x 39 in



Untitled #4 2017 Acrylic on Canvas
39 x 39 in



Horizonte de Eventos I 2006 Acrylic on Board 24 x 32 in



Horizonte de Eventos IX 2006 Acrylic on Board 24 x 32 in



Untitled 2016 Acrylic on Canvas
13 x 29 in



Untitled 2011 Acrylic
on Canvas 29 x 59 in



Untitled 2016 Acrylic
on Canvas 12 x 28 in



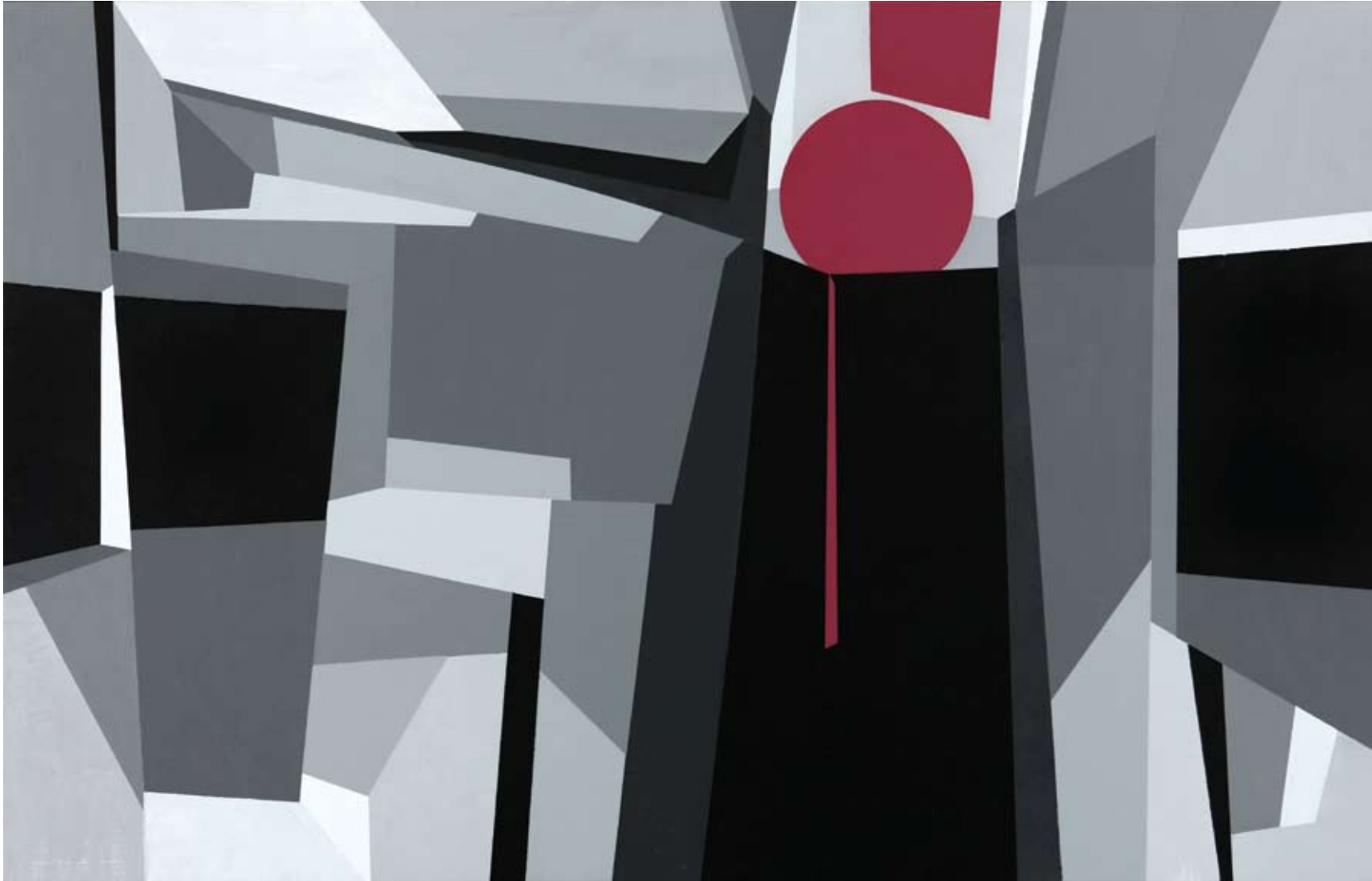
Untitled 2016 Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 55 in



Untitled # 22 2017 Acrylic
on Canvas 37 x 30 in



Untitled # 4 2015 Acrylic on Canvas 39 x 59 in



Untitled #2 2016 Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 55 in

Untitled 2014 Acrylic on Canvas 32 x 40 in



Pedro de Oraá

b. 1931

Selected individual exhibitions

- 2018 DIVERTIMENTOS II. Latin Art Core, Miami, FL
2017 DIVERTIMENTOS. Galería Collage, Havana, Cuba
2016 ABSTRACTIVOS. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba
2015 CONTRARIOS COMPLEMENTARIOS II. Galería Villa Manuela, Havana, Cuba
ABSTRACTIVOS. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Bayamo, Cuba
2012 CONTRARIOS COMPLEMENTARIOS. Galería Orígenes, Havana
2011 CONJUNTOS ESPORADICOS. Casa de la Poesía, Havana, Cuba
2009 LAND. Borders Gallery, Miami, FL
2008 BITIPIAS Y MONOTIPIAS. Taller Experimental de Gráfica, Havana, Cuba
2007 HORIZONTE DE EVENTOS. Galería Luz y Oficios, Havana, Cuba
2006 HORIZONTE DE EVENTOS. Galería Fayad Jamís, Alamar, Habana del Este, Cuba
2004 IMÁGENES SOÑADAS. Galería Raúl Martínez, Instituto Cubano del Libro, Havana, Cuba
"S/T". Galería La Acacia, La Habana
2002 ALTERNATIVAS. Consejo Nacional de las Artes Plásticas, Havana, Cuba
1997 EN BLANCO Y NEGRO. Galería Espacio Abierto, Havana, Cuba
1980 ABSTRACTO TARDÍO. Casa de Cultura de Plaza, Havana, Cuba
1974 EXPOSICIÓN INTROSPECTIVA. Galería L, Havana, Cuba
1957 PINTURAS, COLLAGES, DIBUJOS, Galería Sardo, Caracas, Venezuela

Selected group exhibitions

- 2017 – 2018 ADIÓS UTOPIA. Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas / Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
2017 IMAN. Encuentro Nacional de Arte Abstracto, Galería Portocarrero, Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba
SE HACE CAMINO AL ANDAR, Sala Carpentier, Gran Teatro de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
FUENTE DEL OTRO, Galería Portocarrero, Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba
SINCRONÍAS, IV Encuentro de Arte Abstracto, Centro Provincial de Arte, Bayamo, Cuba
2016 ¡PRESENTE! Contemporary Art from Cuba, GX Gallery, London, England
FUERZA Y SANGRE. Imaginarios de la bandera en el arte cubano. Gran Teatro de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
POST-WAR. Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945 -1965. Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany
CAVILACIONES. III Encuentro de Arte Abstracto FORMART, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Bayamo, Cuba
PLUS. PREMIOS NACIONALES DE ARTES PLÁSTICAS. Galería Orígenes, Gran Teatro de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
INSTINTO BÁSICO. Obra sobre papel en la Colección del Consejo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Sala Dalí, Instituto Cervantes, Rome, Italy
CONCRETE CUBA. David Zwirner Gallery, New York
2015 CONCRETE CUBA. David Zwirner Gallery, London, England
BLACK INK. Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus Gallery, Hialeah, Miami, FL
2014 10 AÑOS 95 EXPOSICIONES. Galería Villa Manuela, Havana, Cuba
RODANDO SE ENCUESTRAN. Arte Cubano Contemporáneo en la Colección del Consejo Nacional de las Artes Plásticas. Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center, (SUPEC), Shanghai, China
100 ABSTRACTOS. Casa del Alba Cultural, Havana, Cuba
2013 THE SILENT SHOUT. Voices in Cuban Abstraction 1950-2013. ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries, Coral Gables, Miami, FL
TABLE TENNIS ART. Galería Enlace Arte Contemporáneo, Lima, Peru

- 2012 RED, GREEN, BLUE. Zeitwössische Kunst aus Kuba. The Browse Gallery, Berlin, Germany
FANS FOREVER. Museum of Art and Design, Miami Dade College, Miami, FL
BOLA VIVA. Pintura cubana de hoy. Galería de la Aduana, Barranquilla; Museo de Arte Moderno, Cartagena; Museo Zenu de Arte Contemporáneo, Montería; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santa Marta; Centro Cultural Gabriel García Márquez, Bogotá, Colombia
2011 REACCIONES ADVERSAS. Galería La Acacia, Havana, Cuba
2010 IRRUPCIONES. Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas y Diseño, Havana, Cuba
CAMPUS UBERRIMUS. Colección de Arte de la Universidad de Ciencias Informáticas, Museo-Biblioteca Servando Cabrera Moreno, Havana, Cuba
LA OTRA MIRADA. Una historia del arte abstracto cubano. Homenaje a Vasily Kandinsky. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba
2009 ABSTRACTOMICINA. A la memoria de Jesse Rios. Cremata Gallery, Miami, FL
2008 PALABRA Y PINCEL. Cuatro siglos de Literatura cubana 1608-2008. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba
EXPOSITION D'ART CONTEMPORAIN CUBAIN. Espace Ricard, Foire de Lyon, France
LES FANTASÍAS / Exposition d'Art Cubain, Maison des Dauphins, Lyon, France
2007 CINCO PINTORES ABSTRACTOS. Galería Villa Manuela, Havana, Cuba
2006 XII SALÓN DE ARTE EROTICO. Galería del Hotel Meliá - Cohiba, Havana, Cuba
2005 CONSTANTES ABSTRACTAS, Galería Orígenes, Havana, Cuba
2004 TURBULENCIA POST. Galería Servando Cabrera Moreno, Havana, Cuba
2003 ABSTRACCION ACTIVA. Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración de Monumentos (CENCREM) VII Bial de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
2002 ARTE CONCRETO. LA RAZÓN DE LA POESIA. Diez Pintores Concretos Cubanos. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba
GALERIA RODANTE. Performance en ruta Habana-Varadero-Habana. Consejo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Havana, Cuba
2000 TONO A TONO. Hotel Habana Libre, Havana, Cuba
1999 ABSTRACCIÓN ACTIVA. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba
1997 PINTURAS DEL SILENCIO. Galería La Acacia. VI Bial de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
1959 10 PINTORES CONCRETOS. Galería Color-Luz, Miramar, Havana, Cuba

Selected international events

- 2017 CONTEXT ART FAIR, Moleiro's Gallery, Miami, FL
2016 PIONEROS (stand 02), IV Feria Internacional Art Lima, Lima, Perú
2015 ZONA FRANCA (stand D 15), XII Bial de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
2012 DE LO VIVO A LO PINTA'O (pabellón K), XI Bial de La Habana, Havana, Cuba
1990 VII Salon d'Ete d'Arts Plastiques International 90, Túnez
1984 VII Bial Internacional de Pintura de Kosice, Eslovaquia
1981 Fifth Triennale India, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India
1980, 1979, 1971, 1970: XIX, XVIII, X, IX Premi Internacional Dibuix Joan Miró, Fundación Joan Miró, Barcelona, Spain
1960 Bial Iberoamericana de Arte, México D. F., México
1957 V Bial de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil



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