



Cuban Concrete Art in the International Market

Darié, Soldevilla, Mijares, Martínez Pedro, and Carreño

History, institutional reception, and a framework for reading a small, selective, and uneven market.

Sarracino Art Research & Advisory

Independent research and advisory

September 18, 2026

KEYWORDS

Cuban Concrete art; Los Diez; geometric abstraction; art market; Cuba; provenance

Executive summary

Cuban Concrete art has moved from a peripheral chapter to a recognized field within Latin American modernism. Its history centers on the geometric abstraction developed in Havana during the 1950s, Galería Color-Luz, and the brief activity of Los Diez Pintores Concretos between 1959 and 1961. The international recovery of this episode — through research, exhibitions, publications, and institutional acquisitions — has expanded the audience for artists who were long studied in fragmented fashion.[1]

That historical consolidation has not produced a uniform market. Sandú Darié, Loló Soldevilla, José María Mijares, and Luis Martínez Pedro belonged to the Concrete nucleus. Mario Carreño was not on the formal roster of Los Diez, but his geometric abstraction of the 1950s and his broader position within Cuban modernism place him in the group's immediate field, where the market and several curatorial surveys compare him with its members. Each artist nevertheless retains a different supply structure, critical trajectory, and price curve.

Market thesis

- Date and quality matter more than the mere presence of geometry.
- A documented work from the decisive period is not comparable to a late, decorative, or uncertainly attributed object.
- Public results are scarce and must be filtered for authenticity, provenance, condition, medium, scale, and quality.
- Institutional exposure increases visibility, but does not automatically make every work museum-equivalent.
- In a thin market, a single sale may be exceptional; a trend requires a coherent and repeatable series.

1 Concrete abstraction in 1950s Cuba

Concrete art proposes that the artwork should not represent an external object, but exist as an autonomous reality organized through line, plane, color, proportion, rhythm, and material. Rather than abstracting from a recognizable figure, it constructs a visual fact. This position connected Cuban artists with European and South American networks without reducing them to passive importers. Their solutions responded to Havana's modernization, to design and architecture, to debates about universalism and nationality, and to the political tensions of the decade.[2]

International circulation was decisive. Travel, correspondence, salons, and workshops brought the artists into contact with postwar abstraction, Constructivism, Madí, and optical and kinetic research. In a 1952 catalogue preserved in the Sarracino Archive, Loló Soldevilla placed her work alongside European predecessors and contemporaries and condensed the non-objective principle into a concise formulation: "It is; it does not represent." [3] The document shows that the international dialogue was active before Los Diez was formally constituted.

Abigail McEwen has shown that Cuban abstraction of the 1950s cannot be separated from the period's cultural and political disputes. Formal autonomy did not imply indifference. For these artists, intervening in visual language, modes of display, and the relationship among art, design, and space could constitute a modern practice with social reach.[1]

2 Color-Luz and Los Diez Pintores Concretos

Galería Color-Luz, founded in Havana by Loló Soldevilla and Pedro de Oraá in 1957, provided a specialized platform for abstraction. Los Diez Pintores Concretos crystallized there and was formally active from 1959 to 1961. Its life was brief, but the concentration of its program, group exhibitions, and graphic portfolios gave historical identity to practices that had already been developing.[2]

Broad lists of artists “associated” with the episode should not be confused with formal membership. The catalogue Concrete Cuba assembled works by twelve artists connected at different moments to the development of Concretism and its immediate environment; this selection included Mario Carreño. Its curatorial formulation is deliberately broader than Los Diez.[4] Maintaining the distinction avoids two errors: excluding Carreño from a history to which his geometric work is relevant, or presenting him as a formal member of a group he did not join.

The group’s dissolution in 1961, departures from the country, institutional change, and diverging individual careers prevented commercial continuity comparable to that of other Latin American geometric movements. Some material remained in Cuba, some traveled with artists and collectors, and a substantial portion circulated privately. This dispersion helps explain both the rarity of major works and the documentary weakness of some examples that appear today.

3 Five trajectories and five markets

“Cuban Concrete art” is a useful historical designation, but it is too broad for valuation. The market must read biography, period, medium, and formal quality artist by artist. It must also distinguish an artist’s historical importance from the rank of a particular work.

Sandú Darié

Born in Romania and settled in Cuba in 1941, Darié served as a particularly active bridge between Havana and the international avant-garde. His dialogue with Constructive abstraction and Madi, together with his interest in transformation, structure, relief, light, and movement, produced a body of work that exceeds conventional painting. Columns, transformable structures, boxes, and spatial projects extend his importance into the histories of kinetic and environmental art.[1]

Within the market, works from the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s that clearly embody this research generally form the principal segment. Constructions, reliefs, and paintings of significant scale should not be compared directly with sketches or small works on paper, though the latter may be historically revealing. Condition is crucial: mobile elements, wood, adhesives, and assemblages may have suffered substitutions, losses, or restorations that alter their integrity.

Certificates attributed to recognized specialists appear in catalogues published by Christie’s, Phillips, and other houses.[5] Their presence can strengthen a file only when issuance is directly confirmed and the object matches the record. Documentation does not replace examination of the work.

Loló Soldevilla

Soldevilla was an artist, organizer, cultural diplomat, and one of the decisive agents of Cuban abstraction. Her Paris experience, collages, reliefs, light experiments, and the founding of Color-Luz made her a field-builder as well as a practitioner. She was the sole woman on the formal roster of Los Diez, a fact relevant both to her historical centrality and to the delay in her international recognition.

Her market has undergone a visible reassessment after exhibitions such as *Concrete Cuba* and the 2019 monographic exhibition *Constructing Her Universe*, accompanied by a dedicated publication.[4][6] The term “rediscovery,” however, should not erase the continuity of scholarship, collections, and advocates who preserved her work before that moment.

Works of the 1950s — collages, constructions, reliefs, and compositions in which matter, rhythm, and void are fully resolved — attract particular interest. The scarcity of major pieces can intensify competition, but it also attracts weak attributions. The handmade character of her collages and supports requires study of papers, adhesives, cuts, reverses, aging, and provenance; neither a signature nor an asserted family connection is sufficient.

José María Mijares

Mijares arrived at abstraction through solid painterly training and developed compositions in the 1950s and early 1960s in which color, contour, and structure reach a rigorous synthesis. After leaving Cuba, his language passed through other moments, including biomorphic, lyrical, and figurative developments. His long career explains a public supply that is more abundant and heterogeneous than that of some of his peers.

For the market, “a Mijares” is not a homogeneous category. A Concrete composition of 1956–1961 should be compared with verified works from that phase, not with later paintings that circulate more frequently. Date, compositional tension, chromatic resolution, scale, and documentation determine rank. Auction archives contain works from many periods; collapsing them into one average produces a number with no analytical value.[7]

Certificates connected to the artist’s archive or estate may be relevant, provided their issuance and scope are confirmed. Given the range of his production, the specialist must know not merely a “Mijares signature” but the evolution of materials, drawing, and construction across decades.

Luis Martínez Pedro

Martínez Pedro occupies an essential position within *Los Diez* because of the discipline of his structures and a trajectory that connects Concrete geometry to later research. His strongest compositions organize planes and rhythms without depending on narrative reference. Their apparent clarity can be deceptive: small differences in proportion, tension, edge, and color separate a resolved work from a mechanical repetition.

His public market is relatively thin. When a documented work from the Concrete period appears, its interpretation depends heavily on date, provenance, support, condition, and quality. Later series should be examined in their own context and not used automatically as equivalents. The low frequency of reliable comparisons requires broad valuation ranges and an explicit account of adjustments.

Documentary caution is indispensable. A certificate issued by someone without a verifiable record for this artist, or a definitive conclusion formulated only from photographs, should not raise an attribution to the same level as a physically examined work supported by archive, scholarship, and an established specialist.

Mario Carreño

Carreño pursued a much broader international career, from study in Havana, Madrid, and Paris to his later residence in Chile. Cubism, Surrealism, muralism, figuration, and abstraction succeed or overlap one another in his work. His inclusion in Museum of Modern Art exhibitions in the 1940s, the São Paulo Biennial, and the Venice Biennale gave his name early institutional visibility.[8]

He was not a formal member of Los Diez. His inclusion here responds to the importance of his geometric abstraction of the 1950s and to the way surveys such as Concrete Cuba position him within the broader field. The distinction is economic as well as historical: Carreño's general market is driven in part by emblematic figurative and modernist works of the 1930s and 1940s, not solely by his geometric phase.

Sotheby's public archive illustrates this segmentation. A historical 1943 painting, *Cortadores de caña*, was offered in 2020 with an estimate of \$1.5–2 million, supported by extensive provenance, exhibition history, and literature; works of different date, medium, and rank have carried substantially different estimates.[9] The figure is not an index transferable to Concrete Carreño. It demonstrates instead that period, object, and file govern price.

4 How the international market operates

The market is built across three partly overlapping circuits: specialized private sales, auctions, and institutional legitimation. Private sales may handle important works without publishing prices; auctions supply visible but incomplete signals; museums, exhibitions, and publications alter visibility and confidence over the long term. No single circuit provides a complete picture.

Variable	Typical effect	Necessary question
Period	Favors historically decisive phases	Is the date demonstrated and does it match the sought language?
Quality	Widens the spread among works from the same year	Does the composition possess tension, resolution, and singularity?
Provenance	Reduces uncertainty and may add history	Is it continuous, verifiable, and specific to the object?
Medium and scale	Distinguishes painting, relief, collage, drawing, or edition	Is the comparison made within the same medium and function?
Condition	May preserve or destroy material integrity	What is original and what has been restored or replaced?
Exhibition and literature	Increase relevance when the object is identified	Does the reference reproduce this exact piece?
Sale venue	Changes audience, currency, and costs	Are hammer or premium-inclusive prices compared in the same currency?
Attribution status	Separates the principal market from speculative supply	Is the work 'by,' 'attributed to,' or merely seller-described?

5 Why comparable sales must be cleaned

A database may place under the same artist's name authentic works, attributions, late works, editions, minor objects, and lots with insufficient documentation. Averaging without classification merges different markets. For these artists, one should first build a principal comparison set limited to firmly attributed works with plausible dates, comparable media, and adequate files.

1. Separate sold results from withdrawn, bought-in, or privately priced lots.
2. Distinguish hammer price from the total including buyer's premium, and normalize currency and date.
3. Remove duplicates, reoffers, and entries that merely reproduce an earlier sale.
4. Classify period, medium, size, condition, provenance, exhibition history, and literature.
5. Separate firm attribution, disputed opinion, and work merely "in the style of."
6. Identify outliers and explain why the object was exceptional before using it.

In a small market, an unsold lot also contains information: it may reflect an excessive estimate, documentary doubts, poor presentation, or a temporary absence of demand. A single failure does not define an artist. A valid conclusion comes from sequences, reoffers, lot quality, and behavior across venues.

6 The principal market and the low-confidence segment

It is useful to distinguish a principal market — works supported by sound authorship, coherent documentation, sufficient quality, and transparent sale conditions — from a low-confidence segment of attributions, unconfirmable documents, poor images, or vague provenance. Both may appear under the same name in aggregators and regional sales, but they should not share a price curve.

This distinction is crucial for Loló Soldevilla, Sandú Darié, and Luis Martínez Pedro, whose scarcity encourages weak or incorrect attributions. It also affects Mijares and Carreño because of the breadth of their careers. A low price for a doubtful object does not "lower" the principal market; an ambitious estimate for an unsold work does not raise it.

Catalogue transparency matters. A professional description should state who examined the work, whether a certificate was confirmed, which portions of provenance are documented, what restoration exists, and whether literature identifies the exact object. Absence of this information does not prove falsity, but it increases the cost and risk of research.

7 Institutional reassessment and outlook

The Concrete Cuba exhibitions in London and New York, and their 2016 catalogue with an essay by Abigail McEwen, a chronology by Susanna Temkin, and an interview with Pedro de Oraá, provided a decisive international platform. McEwen's *Revolutionary Horizons*, published by Yale University Press the same year, located the debates around abstraction within a wider cultural history.[1][4]

This reassessment encourages research, newly recovered provenance, loans, acquisitions, and comparisons of quality. Its market effect is real but not linear. Sustainable recognition depends on archives, rigorous catalogues, museum exhibitions, and convincing works becoming available. Speculation that outruns research tends to enlarge the low-confidence segment.

For a collector or institution, the opportunity is not to buy any Cuban geometry in anticipation of a supposed rise. It is to identify works in which historical importance, quality, material integrity, and documentation converge. That selection protects both capital and the cultural narrative of a movement that deserves precise study.

Conclusion

Cuban Concrete art now occupies a firmer international position because scholarship has reconstructed its networks, spaces, and protagonists. Darié, Soldevilla, Mijares, and Martínez Pedro share a collective history without losing their differences; Carreño relates to the episode from an adjacent and broader trajectory. The market reflects that complexity: it rewards major, well-documented works, yet remains thin, irregular, and vulnerable to defective comparisons.

Professional analysis must join history and market without confusing them. An artist's importance does not authenticate a work; a high sale does not turn an isolated result into a trend; a prestigious exhibition does not replace provenance or condition. In this field, rigorous selectivity does not restrict the market. It is the condition of its maturity.

Notes and selected sources

- [1] Abigail McEwen, *Revolutionary Horizons: Art and Polemics in 1950s Cuba*, Yale University Press, 2016.
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 - [2] Abigail McEwen, "Concrete Cuba"; Susanna Temkin, chronology; in *Concrete Cuba: Cuban Geometric Abstraction from the 1950s*, David Zwirner Books, 2016.
<https://www.davidzwirner.com/collect/concrete-cuba-cuban-geometric-abstraction-from-the-1950s-book>
 - [3] Loló Soldevilla, 1952 catalogue, historical document preserved in the Sarracino Archive. The short phrase is translated from the original; the remaining discussion is paraphrased.
 - [4] David Zwirner, *Concrete Cuba*, London 2015 and New York 2016; the catalogue presentation distinguishes artists associated at different moments. <https://www.davidzwirner.com/exhibitions/2016/concrete-cuba>
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Methodological note

This article is a historical and methodological introduction. It is not investment advice, an appraisal, or an authenticity opinion on any specific work. Market references illustrate segmentation and method; prices, estimates, and availability change. Web sources were accessed September 18, 2026.