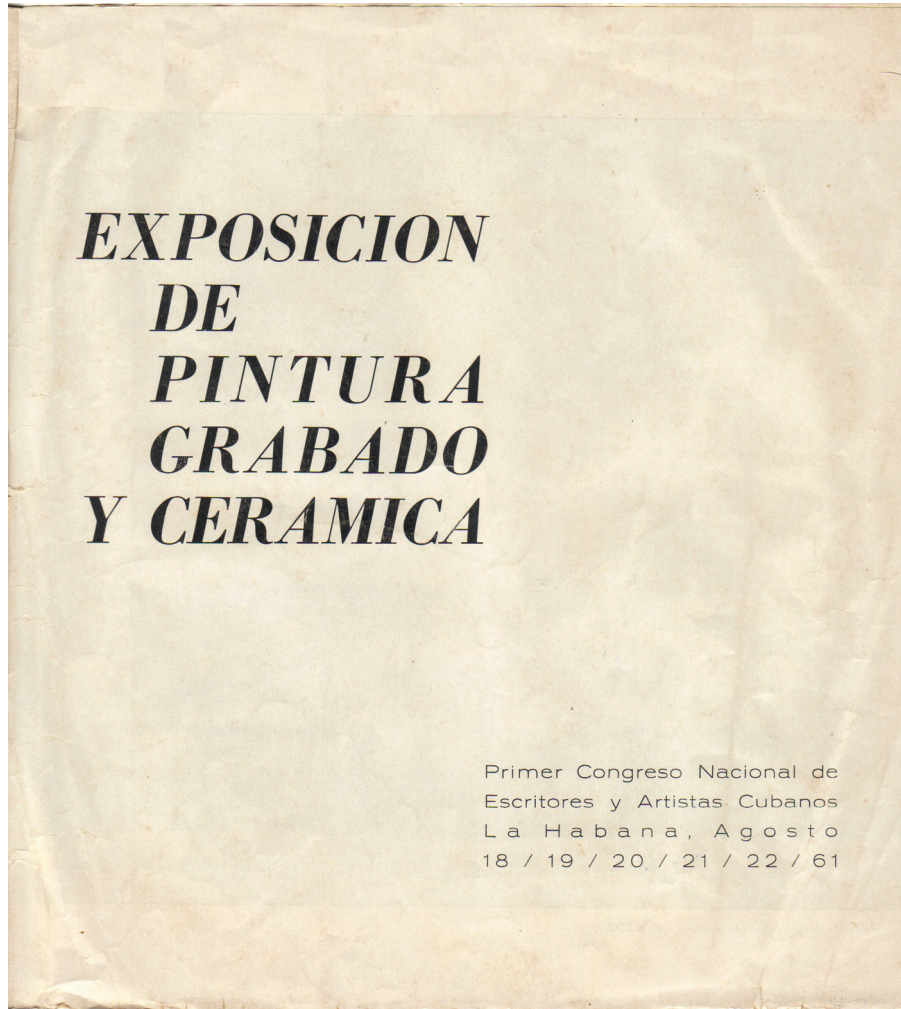


Havana, 1961: An Exhibition and the Construction of a History of Cuban Art

By Juan Sarracino

First National Congress of Cuban Writers and Artists: Periodization, Media, and Cultural Memory



Program cover, First National Congress of Cuban Writers and Artists, Havana, August 1961.

An Exhibition Within a Congress

The cover presents an “Exhibition of Painting, Printmaking, and Ceramics” connected to the First National Congress of Cuban Writers and Artists, held in Havana on August 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22, 1961. Yet the printed program also contains a sculpture section. That discrepancy should be preserved: the cover summarizes three media, while the interior documents four.

This apparently minor detail introduces one of the document’s central problems. The catalogue is not built around a single organizing logic. Its pages combine an exhibition, a historical survey, medium-based categories, and a periodization that distinguishes a colonial stage from a republican stage. The result is less a simple participant list than a proposal for how the history of Cuban art could be visually organized.

The Congress provides the institutional frame, but these pages do not identify a general curator, explain the selection criteria for each work, or state the exhibition venue with precision. The Museo Nacional library stamp belongs to the surviving copy and should not automatically be converted into evidence of venue.

History Enters the Exhibition

The second image reproduces a view of Havana's Alameda de Paula, attributed in the caption to Hipólito Garneray and dated to the nineteenth century. It is not an installation photograph; it is a historical image incorporated into the printed document.

Its presence changes the tone of the publication. Before artists are listed, the catalogue introduces an image of the colonial city. The exhibition therefore appears not only as a panorama of contemporary production but also as a retrospective view that seeks to establish antecedents, sequences, and continuities.

The reproduction functions almost as a visual threshold. Nineteenth-century Havana precedes the pages in which prints and painters are divided between “colonial” and “republican” stages. This relationship can be read as a historiographic decision of the publication, although no accompanying text explicitly explains that intention.

Colonial Prints: City, Sugar Mills, and Territory

The “Colonial Prints” section provides the document's most detailed records. It includes artists, titles, and techniques. Laplante appears repeatedly with views of sugar mills, boiler houses, ports, and urban spaces; Francisco Mialhe with scenes and views of Havana, Matanzas, Gibara, Guanabacoa, and other places. Anonymous works and artists such as Sawkins, Edward Rooker, Canot, Barañano, T. Dutton, Pujadas, and Roi Partridge also appear.

Lithography dominates many entries, though metal and aquatint are also recorded. The abundance of mills, ports, plazas, and urban panoramas makes printmaking a vehicle of visual memory for territory and infrastructure. That observation comes from the titles; it does not allow us to reconstruct the full social meaning of each image without examining the original works.

For provenance research, this section is especially valuable because it combines three identifiers: artist, title, and technique. Compared with the painting and sculpture lists—where these pages provide names only—the print section immediately allows a much higher degree of object-level identification.

GRABADOS COLONIALES					
Gabriel Báez	Angel de la Paz	Metal	Rico	Isla de Cuba. Cienfuegos	
Laplanche	Ingenio Purísima Concepción	Litografía	Bartolozzi	Indios cubanos saludando a Col	
Laplanche	Vista general de los Almacenes de Regla	Litografía	Anónimo	Ingenio	
Laplanche	Ingenio Flor de Cuba (Casa de caldera)	Litografía	Anónimo	Plaza de Armas	
Laplanche	Ingenio Manaca	Litografía	Anónimo	Habana	
Laplanche	Ingenio Buena Vista	Litografía	Anónimo	Habana	
Laplanche	Casa de calderas del Ing. Asunción	Litografía	Anónimo	Entrada de La Habana	
Laplanche	Ingenio Trinidad	Litografía	Anónimo	Molino de Azúcar	
Laplanche	Valle de la Magdalena	Litografía	Anónimo	Isla de Cuba	
Laplanche	Ingenio La Ponina	Litografía	Anónimo	Entrada de la Bahía de Santiago	
Laplanche	Casa de Calderas del Ingenio Santa Susana	Litografía	Anónimo	Puerto María	
Laplanche	Casa de Calderas del Ingenio Alava	Litografía	Anónimo	Cuba	
Laplanche	Ingenio Tinguaro	Litografía	Anónimo	Antillas	
Laplanche	Ingenio San Rafael	Litografía	Anónimo	Antillas	
Laplanche	Ingenio El Narciso	Litografía	Anónimo	Antillas	
Laplanche	Ingenio El Progreso	Litografía	Anónimo	Puerto de La Habana	
Laplanche	Ingenio Unión	Litografía	Hipólito Garneray	Vista de la Plaza Vieja	
Laplanche	Casa de Calderas del Ingenio San Martín	Litografía	Hipólito Garneray	Vista de la Plaza de Armas	
Laplanche	Ingenio Santa Teresa (a) Aguica	Litografía	GRABADOS / ETAPA REPUBLICANA		
Laplanche	Casa de Calderas del Ing. Victoria	Litografía	DE LA SALA PERMANENTE		
Laplanche	Plaza de Armas	Litografía	Carmelo González	El Taller del Grabador	
Fco. Mialhe	La Habana desde Casa Blanca	Litografía	Carmelo González	Pescadores de Vigo	
Fco. Mialhe	Teatro Principal	Litografía	Carmelo González	Idilio	
Fco. Mialhe	Río de Canimar	Litografía	Carmelo González	La ventana	
Fco. Mialhe	Casa de Don Lendro Arozareña (Puentes Grandes)	Litografía	Carmelo González	Iglesia de Paula	
Fco. Mialhe	Entrada del Puerto de La Habana	Litografía	Armando Posse	Cabeza de vieja	
Fco. Mialhe	Fenómeno Natural	Litografía	Armando Posse	Mercado	
Fco. Mialhe	Matanzas	Litografía	Armando Posse	El Maestro	
Fco. Mialhe	Loma de Gibara	Litografía	Armando Posse	Madre e hijo	
Fco. Mialhe	Sagua la Grande	Litografía	Armando Posse	Funeral	
Fco. Mialhe	Iglesia Mayor de Guanabacoa	Litografía	Luis Peñalver	Cabeza	
Fco. Mialhe	Caída del Husillo	Litografía	Luis Peñalver	Mortuorio	
Fco. Mialhe	Los portales a 5 leguas de los Baños de San Diego	Litografía	Luis Peñalver	Medioevo	
Fco. Mialhe	Ranchos de San Diego	Litografía	Luis Peñalver	Capricho	
Fco. Mialhe	Habana	Litografía	Luis Peñalver	Candelabro	
Anónimo	Grabado Inglés	Agua fuerte	López Dirube	Personaje ante la naturaleza	
Sawkins	Vista de la Plaza San Francisco	Litografía	López Dirube	Paranoico	
Sawkins	Vista del Paseo Militar	Litografía	Gisela Hernández	Figura sentada	
Edward Rooker	Convento de San Francisco	Metal	Gisela Hernández	Figura	
Anónimo	Toma de La Habana por los Ingleses	Metal	Gisela Hernández	Grupo	
Canot	Castillo del Morro	Metal	Ana Rosa Gutiérrez	Antora	
Canot	La Flota Inglesa contra La Habana	12 Metales	Ana Rosa Gutiérrez	Ventana	
Canot	Entrada de La Habana	Metal	Ana Rosa Gutiérrez	La serpiente	
Canot y Morris	Vista de la Plaza del Mercado de La Habana	Metal	Ana Rosa Gutiérrez	Pareja	
Barañano	Matanzas	Litografía	Ana Rosa Gutiérrez	La Guerra	
Barañano	Vista de La Habana	Litografía	Lesbia Vent Dumois	Boulevard	
T. Duton	Costa Norte de Cuba (4 vistas)	Litografía	Eugenio Rodríguez	Mujer con flor	
T. Duton	Costa Norte de Cuba (de La Habana a las montañas de los Organos)	Litografía	Juan Sánchez	Desnudo	
T. Duton	Tres vistas de Cuba (Habana, Matanzas y parte norte.)	Litografía	Juan Sánchez	Fiesta	
Pujadas	Negros de Guinea en Cuba	Litografía	Mario Cordovés	Mambises	
Roi Partridge	Metal	Agua fuerte y Punta seca	Mario Cordovés	Antillanos	
			Jorge Rigol	Gente pobre	

Page with colonial prints and the beginning of the republican-stage section.

The “Republican Stage” and a Problem of Periodization

Another section is headed “Prints / Republican Stage of the Permanent Gallery.” It includes Carmelo González, Armando Posse, Luis Peñalver, López Dirube, Gisela Hernández, Ana Rosa Gutiérrez, Lesbia Vent Dumois, Eugenio Rodríguez, Juan Sánchez, Mario Cordovés, Jorge Rigol, and many others.

Its continuation includes titles such as Agrarian Reform, The Present Mantle of Anti-Communism, The Republic and the Revolution, Cuba to the Martyrs, Peasant Reconcentration, Memories of July 26 in the Sierra, and Dictatorships in America. These are titles printed in the catalogue and should be treated as such, not automatically as exhaustive descriptions of the images or as personal political statements by each artist.

A particularly interesting historiographic issue emerges here: the heading “Republican Stage” continues to organize a section containing works with titles explicitly linked to the post-1959 political present. The document does not introduce a separate “Revolutionary” category.

Several explanations are possible: the persistence of an earlier museographic terminology, a historical division not yet reformulated, or a practical editorial solution. These pages do not allow us to choose among them. What they do demonstrate is that in August 1961 the printed scheme could still place works with clearly contemporary revolutionary titles under a republican heading.

Painters: From the Colonial Period to an Exceptionally Broad Republic

The painting section makes the same historical division explicit. Under “Painters / Colonial Stage” appear thirteen names, including José Nicolás de la Escalera, Vicente Escobar, Víctor Patricio de Landaluze, Esteban Chartrand, Guillermo Collazo, and Valentín Sanz Carta.

The “Republican Stage” is far more extensive: sixty-one names appear across its two columns. José Joaquín Tejada, Armando Menocal, Leopoldo Romañach, Víctor Manuel, Eduardo Abela, Amelia Peláez, Carlos Enríquez, Fidelio Ponce de León, Wifredo Lam, Cundo Bermúdez, Mariano Rodríguez, and René Portocarrero coexist with José Mijares, Sandú Darié, Raúl Martínez, Hugo Consuegra, Antonio Vidal, Guido Llinás, Pedro de Oraá, Antonia Eiriz, Salvador Corratge, and Loló Soldevilla, among many others.

The category does not describe a style. It gathers generations, languages, and trajectories that differ greatly within a broad historical periodization. That is precisely why the document is so valuable: it shows how a 1961 exhibition retrospectively organized much of Cuban modernity within a frame still called “republican.”

This classification should not be converted into an aesthetic definition. The joint appearance of Lam, Peláez, Ponce, Mijares, Darié, Llinás, Eiriz, or Oraá demonstrates coexistence within the catalogue’s scheme, not membership in a common school.

PINTORES / ETAPA COLONIAL

José Nicolás de la Escalera
Vicente Escobar
Ceveau
Anónimo del Siglo XVIII
Peoli
Juan del Río
Rodríguez
Víctor Patricio de Landaluze
Arias
Henri Cleenewerick
Esteban Chartrand
Guillermo Collazo
Valentín Sanz Carta

PINTORES / ETAPA REPUBLICANA

José Joaquín Tejada
Armando Menocal
Leopoldo Romañach
Víctor Manuel
Marcelo Pogolotti
Eduardo Abela
Carlos Enríquez
Amelia Peláez
Antonio Gattorno
Lorenzo Romero Arciaga
Aristides Fernández
Fidelio Ponce de León
Wifredo Lam
Jorge Arche
Felipe Orlando
González Puig
Cundo Bermúdez
Mariano Rodríguez
René Portocarrero
Luis Martínez Pedro
Osvaldo Gutiérrez

Julio Girona
Domingo Ravenet
Daniel Serra Badue
Mirta Cerra
Carlos Sobrino
Rafael Moreno
F. I. Acevedo
Roberto Diago
Servando Cabrera Moreno
José Mijares
Carmelo González
Rafael Soriano
Sandú Darié
Raúl Milián
Ana Rosa Gutiérrez
Margot Colosía
Agustín Fernández
Rolando López Dirube
Manuel Couceiro
Raúl Martínez
Hugo Consuegra
Antonio Vidal
Guido Llinás
Fayad Jamis
Pedro de Oraá
Jorge Camacho
Antonia Eiriz
Salvador Corratge
Juan Tapia Ruano
Lolo Soldevilla
Adigio Benítez
Julio Herrera Zaptá
Lesbia Vent Dumois
Angel Acosta León
Orlando Yanes
José Rosabal
Humberto Peña
Roberto García York
Hortensia Gronlier
Enrique Fuentes

List of painters divided between colonial and republican stages.

Loló Soldevilla: Again Between Painting and Sculpture

Loló Soldevilla appears twice: in the extensive list of republican painters and again in the sculpture section. The document provides no titles for her works in either category.

This double presence is important when compared with the previously examined catalogues. In 1953 she appeared with three sculptures; in 1956 she participated with both paintings and metal sculptures; in 1958 the Color-Luz anniversary listed her among the sculptors; in February 1959 she appears as a painter; and in December 1960 an oil painting titled *The Back of the Moon* is recorded. The 1961 program again places her simultaneously in painting and sculpture.

The cautious conclusion is not to build a linear progression from one medium to another. It is to recognize a sustained multi-medium exhibition practice. Across several years, the documents show that Loló could be presented as painter and sculptor according to the occasion, and sometimes in both categories within the same exhibition.

Identifying the specific works shown in 1961 requires other sources. A name in a list documents the artist's participation in that section, but it does not authorize us to assign any known work from the period to this exhibition.

Martínez Pedro, Peláez, and Portocarrero: Categories Do Not Contain the Artist

Luis Martínez Pedro appears among republican painters and again in the ceramics section. Amelia Peláez and Portocarrero likewise appear in painting and ceramics. Carlos Sobrino and Rolando López Dirube appear in both painting and sculpture.

These repetitions are especially revealing. The catalogue's categories organize objects and media, not rigid artistic identities. An artist may appear in more than one section without contradiction.

The document therefore cautions against reading careers through overly specialized labels. The Cuban modernity presented here is not composed of painters who only paint, sculptors who only sculpt, and isolated ceramicists. The index itself demonstrates crossings of practice.

For research, this requires object-based records rather than artist-only records. A name's presence in a section is useful information, but it should be recorded as a specific exhibition circumstance rather than as a permanent definition of the artist's production.

Ceramics and Sculpture: Expanding the Narrative

The ceramics section lists eight names: Amelia Peláez, Marta Arjona, Mirta García Buch, Portocarrero, Elia Rosa Fernández, Rebeca Robés, Luis Martínez Pedro, and María Elena Jubrías. The sculpture section lists seventeen: Juan José Sicre, Tomás Oliva, Eugenio Rodríguez, Alfredo Lozano, Enrique Gay, Francisco Antigua, José A. Díaz, Agustín Cárdenas, Enrique Moret, Loló Soldevilla, López Dirube, Amaro Loriga, Núñez Both, Rodolfo Tardo, Carlos Sobrino, René Valdés Cedeño, and Ernesto González.

The inclusion of sculpture is particularly significant because the cover does not mention it. We do not know whether this was a simplified cover title, a later expansion of the program, or a graphic decision. The discrepancy should be retained rather than solved by intuition.

Together, these sections broaden the narrative beyond painting. They also show that the Congress was proposing not only a canon of names but an organization of media. That organization is uneven: ceramics and sculpture provide no work titles or techniques here, while the print section offers much richer documentation.

Printmaking as a Technical Archive

The two print pages reveal considerable technical diversity. Alongside lithography, metal, and aquatint appear wood engraving along the grain, end-grain wood engraving, color woodcut, linoleum, plywood, and specifically noted combinations.

This makes the graphic section not only iconographic but technological. Technique becomes part of identification. Some records identify murals, diptychs, or groups; others extend one artist's contribution across several material solutions.

The technical precision contrasts with the lack of equivalent data in painting and sculpture. The catalogue is not homogeneous as a documentary instrument. For the researcher, that inequality must be preserved: one section should not be supplemented with data that appear only in another.

The pages also show how a collection or exhibition can narrate the history of a medium through its procedures. In printmaking, history is built simultaneously through artists, subjects, and techniques.

Design as Part of the Argument

The printed object itself deserves attention. The cover uses large-scale typography and an expansive empty field, while the interior pages organize long lists in columns with generous white space.

The final page includes an explicit credit: "design / esteban g. ayala / printer - ponciano - havana." This permits the editorial design to be attributed to Esteban G. Ayala and documents the named printer without relying on stylistic inference.

The composition is sober and functional. Typographic hierarchy separates periods and media, and that visual separation reinforces the catalogue's historiographic structure. Page design is not neutral: it helps transform a diverse body of artists and works into an intelligible sequence.

The Museo Nacional library stamp visible on one copy is different from the editorial credit. It belongs to the material history of the surviving document and should not be confused with authorship, ownership of the works, or exhibition venue.

An Exhibition That Acts as Historical Narrative

The 1961 document does more than gather art. It orders art in time. It places a nineteenth-century image of Havana before the lists, divides prints and painters into colonial and republican stages, acknowledges contemporary practice, includes ceramics and sculpture, and provides an especially rich technical repertory for printmaking.

This structure turns the exhibition into a form of historiography. It is not an art history written as an essay, but it is a history constructed through selection, classification, and juxtaposition.

Its value increases when read cautiously. "Republican" should not be naturalized as an eternal category; the omission of sculpture from the cover should not be erased; an artist's appearance in two media should not be corrected away; and a name without an identified work should not be converted into a complete provenance.

The catalogue allows us to study how, in 1961, a cultural institution attempted to present a broad arc of Cuban art precisely in the context of the First National Congress of Cuban Writers and Artists. That meeting between exhibition and historical interpretation is its strongest documentary contribution.

****An exhibition also writes history when it decides what to gather, how to separate it, and under which names to make it visible.****

Documentary Note

This essay is based exclusively on the six reproductions supplied for this study: cover; reproduction of the Alameda de Paula; two printmaking pages; the list of colonial and republican painters; and the list of ceramicists and sculptors.

Printed data are distinguished from the author's inferences. No external context has been added, and no works have been identified where the document itself does not supply titles. Counts of names derive from the visible lists and should be understood as printed entries, not as a complete material inventory of objects.

The reproductions preserve folds, handwritten annotations, and stamps from the surviving copy. These marks form part of its documentary history and are retained in the consultation facsimile.

Juan Sarracino

Sources consulted: Sarracino Gallery Archives.

Web edition: images cropped and retouched to remove unrelated marks. References in the text to stamps and annotations describe the archival originals.