

Loló Soldevilla in a Network: How the Memory of an Artist and a Generation Is Constructed

By Juan Sarracino

From Paris to Color-Luz: Interlocutors, Affinities, and the Retrospective “Loló, un mundo imaginario”



Poster for “Loló, un mundo imaginario,” Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2006-2007.

A Retrospective That Proposes a Genealogy

“Loló, un mundo imaginario” should not be read only as a monographic exhibition. The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes retrospective in Havana, opened in October 2006 and extended into January 2007, reconstructs an individual career and, in doing so, proposes a genealogy: it places Loló Soldevilla in relation to artists, workshops, galleries, critics, European movements, and Cuban peers who help explain both her formation and her activity within artistic modernity.

The methodological distinction is essential. The 1953, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1961 catalogues we have examined are period documents. The retrospective looks backward, selecting and connecting facts from a later position. It does not replace the primary sources; it interprets them.

Its best use is therefore double: to study the image of Loló constructed by the museum, and to confront that reconstruction with historical documents preserving contemporary titles, media, and classifications.

Wifredo Lam: Early Encouragement, Not a Stylistic Lineage

Wifredo Lam occupies an early place in this network. Curator Elsa Vega Dopico recalls the friendship between Lam and Loló and the importance of that contact when Soldevilla began painting. In Vega's later account, a letter from Lam recognized the courage, passion, and creative freedom of her early work.

Friendship and encouragement do not prove formal influence. Loló should not be presented as a derivative of Lam. The relationship matters because it places her earliest artistic decisions inside a broader field of conversation and legitimacy rather than in isolation.

Kretz and Zadkine: Sculpture as Foundational Training

The Paris period introduces Léopold Kretz and Ossip Zadkine. Vega's reconstruction places Loló's sculptural formation in the orbit of the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and workshops related to these artists.

This helps explain why sculpture recurs so insistently in our period sources: three sculptures in 1953, simultaneous painting and sculpture in 1956, sculpture again at Color-Luz in 1958, and both media once more in 1961.

Kretz and Zadkine should not be reduced to stylistic labels. Their significance lies in situating Loló within a Parisian environment where figure, volume, carving, expressive deformation, and material experimentation were active practices.

Vasarely, Jean Arp, Dewasne, and Pillet: The Turn Toward Abstraction

The curatorial narrative associates Loló's turn toward abstraction with exchanges in Paris involving Victor Vasarely and Jean Arp and with study in the workshops of Jean Dewasne and Edgar Pillet. These names provide an intellectual context for the movement from representation toward increasingly autonomous investigations of form, color, rhythm, and space.

Their roles differ and should not be collapsed into a single chain of influence. One reproduced work provides direct evidence of a conscious reference: "Construcción (Homenaje a Jean Arp)," dated 1957. A documented title is a stronger basis than broad formal resemblance.



Works reproduced in the catalogue: figuration, abstraction, and construction coexist within the career.

Max Bill, Van Doesburg, and an Intellectual Genealogy of Form

Vega's reconstruction broadens the context toward Theo van Doesburg and Max Bill. Here the names function less as direct teachers than as references within a rational and concrete tradition concerned with precision, objecthood, and purified formal components.

This conceptual genealogy must be kept separate from personal relationships. Some artists were direct interlocutors; others serve as historical precedents within the museum's narrative.

The comparison is useful because Cuban concrete art did not emerge in a vacuum. It participated in a transnational conversation about geometry, structure, objecthood, and color while producing its own local forms.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Construction as a Spatial Problem

One of the most suggestive comparisons in Vega's interpretation links Loló's constructions with Sophie Taeuber-Arp's tableaux-reliefs. The comparison does not prove personal contact or identify a direct

source. It proposes a historiographic affinity: movement beyond the flat picture toward objects in which relief, void, and materiality transform spatial experience.

The reference also broadens the genealogy beyond male figures. It helps explain why the retrospective's graphic design privileges geometry even while the exhibition includes portraits, drawings, and figurative works.

Eusebio Sempere: Collaboration, Light, and Experimentation

Eusebio Sempere occupies a different position because the professional relationship is documented. Vega connects Loló's luminous reliefs with exchanges with the Spanish artist and recalls that they exhibited together in Valencia in 1954.

This is crucial for understanding works incorporating artificial light. Technology, temporality, and perceptual transformation enter the problem alongside geometry.

The relationship places Loló within an experimental Iberian network before the later international consolidation of kinetic art.

Sandú Darié: Parallel Investigations of Light, Movement, and Structure

Within Cuban art, Sandú Darié offers one of the most productive comparisons. Vega sees Loló's luminous works as anticipating problems later developed in Darié's Cosmorama and also stresses the pioneering importance of his transformable structures in the encounter between art, science, and movement.

This should not become a competition over priority. Period documents show distinct investigations and shared exhibition contexts. In the 1956 National Salon, for example, Darié appears with "Ritmos espaciales," while Loló is represented by both paintings and metal sculptures.

The stronger historical question is how different artists in the same Cuban environment investigated light, rhythm, structure, and transformation through distinct solutions.

Pedro de Oraá and Color-Luz: From Artistic Relationship to Cultural Infrastructure

Pedro de Oraá appears not only as a member of a group but as Loló's partner in founding Color-Luz in 1957. The gallery was cultural infrastructure: it enabled exhibitions, encounters, circulation, and the later articulation of the concrete painters.

Our 1958 anniversary document reinforces this reading because Color-Luz presented itself through a broad gathering of Cuban painting and sculpture rather than exclusively as one group's venue.

The Loló-Oraá relationship should therefore also be studied as institutional collaboration. Creating a space changes art history by creating conditions under which other works can be seen together.

The Ten Concrete Painters: A Network, Not an Extension of Loló

The curatorial narrative reconstructs the Ten Concrete Painters through a network in which Loló and Oraá hold central positions. With them appear Sandú Darié, Luis Martínez Pedro, Salvador Corratgé, Wilfredo Arcay, Alberto Menocal, José Mijares, Pedro Álvarez, and Rafael Soriano; José Rosabal joined shortly afterward.

Recognizing Loló's convening power does not make the others disciples. Many had independent careers before the group's formal constitution. The more interesting history is one of convergence among individual artists sharing a desire for abstract-geometric renewal.

Our period catalogues restore that autonomy: Mijares appears already in 1953 with "Luz Vertical"; Darié in 1956 with "Ritmos espaciales"; Corratgé with "Composición" and "Composición de formas" in 1953; Arcay with three oils in 1956; and the others likewise in independent records.

Restoring Individuality Within the Collective

A narrative centered too heavily on Loló risks explaining a collective through one figure. The retrospective provides an opportunity to do the opposite.

José Mijares, Luis Martínez Pedro, Salvador Corratgé, Wilfredo Arcay, Alberto Menocal, Pedro Álvarez, Rafael Soriano, and José Rosabal each require separate documentary files. Their presence within the group should be studied as one episode within broader careers.

Not all such characterizations can be reconstructed from the photographed catalogue alone. What the catalogue supports is the importance of understanding Loló among peers, not as the exclusive origin of Cuban concrete art.

José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, and the Critical Production of Context

Loló's network was not only visual. José Lezama Lima wrote the presentation for the opening exhibition of Color-Luz; Severo Sarduy was linked to the catalogue of the 1957 Venezuelan exhibition. Their presence reminds us that Cuban avant-gardes developed within an intellectual field in which writers and critics actively produced meaning.

An exhibition consists not only of artworks but also of invitations, catalogues, essays, reviews, and speeches. Reconstructing Loló requires preserving this literary and critical dimension.

Gindertael, Boudaille, and Michel Seuphor: International Critical Reception

The retrospective recalls Loló's international reception through R. V. Gindertael, G. Boudaille, and Michel Seuphor. Seuphor included her in his repertory of abstract painting alongside Latin American artists such as Carmelo Arden Quin, Luis Guevara, and Gyula Kosice.

Such references should not be used as commercial arguments from authority. Their value is historiographic: they show circulation within international critical networks.

Critical reception is a different source category from exhibition history. Both can enrich a research file, but they are not interchangeable.

Women and Omissions: Mirta Cerra, Zilia Sánchez, Carmen Herrera, and Later Recoveries

Years after the retrospective, Elsa Vega revisited the project and explained that her reflection had been shaped by what Eusebio Leal called the "misfortune of gender." In that later essay she placed Loló alongside other women insufficiently recognized in Cuban art history, including Mirta Cerra, Mimí Bacardí, María Pepa Lamarque, Zilia Sánchez, and Carmen Herrera.

This 2020 reflection should not be projected backward as though all those names had been part of the 2006 exhibition. It is a later expansion by the same curator of the historiographic problem that motivated her earlier work.

The distinction lets us observe how interpretation itself evolves.

A Network Beyond Cuba

Loló's trajectory connects Havana, Paris, Valencia, and Caracas. In Paris she studies and exhibits; in Valencia she collaborates with Sempere; in Venezuela she exhibits and maintains links with artists and cultural networks; in Havana she transforms that experience into cultural action.

This geography breaks with a purely national narrative. Cuban concrete art was a local production traversed by transatlantic and Latin American circulation.

Loló's singularity lies partly in her ability to convert personal mobility into cultural infrastructure: trips, documents, reproductions, contacts, exhibitions, and ultimately Color-Luz.

The 2006-2007 Retrospective as Historical Repositioning

The stated purpose of "Loló, un mundo imaginario" was to reposition her work within the continuum of Cuban art. The phrase implies a prior discontinuity, a period of limited visibility, and the need to reconstruct lost connections.

The retrospective gathered not only works but relationships: Lam, Kretz, Zadkine, Vasarely, Arp, Dewasne, Pillet, Sempere, Darié, Oraá, the concrete painters, writers, and critics. It turns an individual career into a constellation.

This is the principal correction to our first version: Loló remains the center, but the history should not rotate around her in empty space. Her significance becomes clearer when we observe the system of relationships she helped create and from which she also emerged.

The Archive's Next Step: Artist-by-Artist Files

Research should now continue through separate files for each related artist: relationship type, verified dates, shared exhibitions, correspondence, comparable works, and sources.

For the Cuban concrete artists, enough documentation already exists to begin parallel chronologies for Mijares, Darié, Martínez Pedro, Corratgé, Oraá, Arcay, and Soriano, measuring when they actually intersect with Loló. This will distinguish aesthetic affinity, institutional association, and common exhibition participation.

For European artists, the task is different: locate Paris salon catalogues, workshop documentation, correspondence, and criticism. The goal is not to prove influence at all costs but to measure the nature and intensity of each connection.

Conclusion

The importance of "Loló, un mundo imaginario" lies not only in restoring visibility to one artist. The retrospective proposes a relational history of modernity: a creator forms among European sculptors and

abstractionists, dialogues with kinetic artists, promotes exhibitions, founds a gallery, participates in a group, and attracts international critical reception.

Seen this way, Loló ceases to be an isolated exception and becomes a node in a network. That network includes highly autonomous figures—Wifredo Lam, Jean Arp, Victor Vasarely, Eusebio Sempere, Sandú Darié, Pedro de Oraá, Mijares, Martínez Pedro, and many others—whose careers should not be subordinated to hers.

The history of an artist becomes more precise when we stop seeing her alone.

Documentary Note and Complementary Sources

The primary basis of this essay is the supplied photographic material from the catalogue and associated material for “Loló, un mundo imaginario,” Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, opened in October 2006 and extended into January 2007. Pages from other publications photographed in the same group have not been treated as part of the catalogue.

For contextual support, the later essay by the same curator, Elsa Vega Dopico, “Loló Soldevilla,” published by ArtNexus in 2020, was consulted because it explicitly revisits and expands arguments developed from the retrospective. Information from that later text is conceptually distinguished from the visible catalogue data and from period documents in the Sarracino Gallery Archives.

Complementary Sources

- Elsa Vega Dopico, “Loló Soldevilla,” ArtNexus 113, 2020. A later text by the same curator revisiting and expanding the research initiated with “Loló, un mundo imaginario.”
- 1953-1961 catalogues, invitations, and programs preserved in the Sarracino Gallery Archives and analyzed in this series.

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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.