

Thirteen Artists and Three Media at the Lyceum in 1959

By Juan Sarracino

An exhibition of women artists brought painting, sculpture, and ceramics together and made Rita Longa's career part of the institution's memory

Amelia Peláez appears twice in the program for *13 artistas cubanas*: among the painters and among the ceramic artists. That repetition helps explain the exhibition announced at the Lyceum from February 20 to March 6, 1959. The disciplines organized the presentation without confining each artist to a single practice. The exhibition brought together media and careers that a history focused exclusively on painting can leave outside its field of vision. [1, pp. 1-2]

The cover connects 1929 with 1959, placing the gathering within thirty years of institutional memory. The recovered source is a typographically recomposed version of the program, rather than a verified facsimile of the period publication. It allows us to study the transmitted content without assigning its present design to 1959. This Lyceum exhibition should also be distinguished from the Woman's Club event of the same year: the central question here is how an institution brought together and presented the work of thirteen women across three media.

A name crossing classifications

The painting section lists María Capdevila, Mirtha Cerra, Antonia Eiriz, Carmen Herrera, Raquel Lázaro, Amelia Peláez, and María Luisa Ríos. The page gives Rita Longa a distinctive space and adds Martha Arjona, Elia Rosa de Mendia, Mirtha García Bush, Elsa Pérez Ribas, and Raquel Rebeca Robes, as well as listing Peláez again. These are the spellings transmitted by the document; some need checking against the original program. Their presence together records an exhibition selection, rather than a shared style or collective allegiance to a manifesto. [1, p. 2]

Peláez's double entry has a precise critical consequence. If the exhibition's organizing unit were exclusively the medium, the artist would have to be divided between two histories. By retaining her name, the program lets us follow an authorship across materials. Painting and ceramics become related fields within a career, although the surviving pages do not allow us to reconstruct the particular works or compare their motifs.

This distinction matters when considering what an exhibition makes visible. The ceramics heading recognizes a practice within the same framework as painting and sculpture. Their proximity offers an opportunity for comparison and public appraisal. It does not demonstrate that every technique enjoyed equal prestige, nor does it reveal how they were arranged in the gallery. It does establish that ceramics was an explicit part of the exhibition and that the artists associated with it deserved to be named.

Rita Longa and an institution's time

Longa's entry introduces something absent from the others: a narrative. According to the program, she began studying sculpture at the Lyceum under Isabel Chappotín. Her three works dated from 1934, 1945, and 1958; the first two had already been shown in that gallery, while the last was described as previously unexhibited. The wording should be treated precisely: it gives dates and exhibition history, but no titles, materials, or dimensions. [1, p. 2]

The selection therefore spans different moments in a career. The institutional anniversary takes concrete form: the place of learning welcomes earlier works alongside a recent one. Teaching and exhibiting are connected through time. By naming Chappotín, the program also preserves another woman's role in that transmission. The institution can be read as a place that teaches, exhibits, and remembers.

The earlier pieces are more than companions to the new work. Their return invites comparison and places recent production within a process. Without images, we cannot establish what changed in Longa's sculptural language. What we can analyze is the exhibition's operation: making a before and an after available to viewers. Memory becomes more than a list of events; it is organized through the gathering of works.

Ceramics regains a material presence

A later museum source broadens the visual horizon. In the McMullen Museum's documentation for *The Lost Generation*, a photograph is linked to *13 artistas cubanas*, and ceramics by Mirta García Buch and Rebeca Robés Massés are identified. The label states that several objects in its contemporary display case had been shown together in 1959. This is the museum's attribution, useful for directing an examination of the objects rather than replacing the original catalog. [2, PDF pp. 121-122]

For a moment, the photograph lets us move beyond the abstraction of a list: plates and vessels of different heights appear, some raised on small supports. Volume and surface share the visual field. Their coexistence helps formulate a question opened by the program and requiring the works themselves to answer: how does an image change when it organizes a vessel, curves, turns, or asks the viewer to move? The available documentation does not authorize identifying every object through resemblance, but it does demonstrate that ceramics calls for attention to its material condition.

Read in this way, the 1959 gathering proposes a broader history of women’s authorship. It places artists within a shared exhibition without erasing the variety of their practices. In Peláez’s case, the repetition of a name connects media; in Longa’s, three dates connect stages in an artist’s career and an institution’s history. Recovering that structure makes it possible to value the exhibition for what it actually brings together: a public space in which women’s production, teaching, and memory could be seen alongside one another.

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Thirteen artists, three moments

Lyceum · 20 February–6 March 1959 · Reading the transmitted programme

13 distinct names in a list of 14 mentions: Amelia Peláez appears twice

María Capdevila

Mirtha Cerra

Antonia Eiriz

Carmen Herrera

Raquel Lázaro

Amelia Peláez

María Luisa Ríos

Rita Longa

Martha Arjona

Elia Rosa de Mendia

Mirtha García Bush

Elsa Pérez Ribas

Raquel Rebeca Robes

RITA LONGA / THREE WORKS ACCORDING TO THE PROGRAMME

1934

Previously shown in the gallery

1945

Previously shown in the gallery

1958

Described as not previously shown

Fuente / Source: C01, pp. PDF 1–2.

Source spellings retained; Longa dates follow the programme. One work per artist is not inferred.

Roster and dates of Rita Longa’s three works according to the transmitted programme for 13 Cuban Women Artists, Lyceum, 1959. Editorial diagram.

Sources and references

[1] Lyceum. 13 artistas cubanas. February 20–March 6, 1959, according to the recovered document. PDF pp. 1–2. Re-typeset transcription; the original printed program has not been consulted. Sarracino archive, document C01.

[2] McMullen Museum of Art; gallery texts by Elizabeth Thompson Goizueta and Kate Shugert, edited by Nancy Netzer. The Lost Generation / La generación perdida: textos de sala. Exhibition, 2024; PDF hosted at a 2025 URL. PDF pp. 108, 121–122; photograph on p. 122. Later museum documentation, not the original 1959 program. Online source