

LEON TOVAR

GALLERY

Emma Reyes



Emma Reyes was a Colombian painter and intellectual. Born in Bogotá, she also lived in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Jerusalem, Washington, and Rome before settling in Paris. She dedicated most of her life to painting and drawing, slowly breaking through as an artist and forging friendships with some of the most distinguished European and Latin American artists, writers, and intellectuals of the twentieth century, among them Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The year she passed away, the French government named her a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Born in 1919 in Bogotá, the childhood of Emma Reyes was marked by abandonment and poverty, leading her to embark on a series of journeys that saw her life and work primarily between Latin America and Europe, particularly in France, where she consolidated her career and died in Bordeaux in 2003. After winning a scholarship in Argentina in 1947, she studied in Paris with André Lothe and began what would become a successful international artistic career, with solo exhibitions in France, Italy, Israel, Belgium, Germany, and the United States.

The evolution of her work was influenced by various movements such as post-Cubism, abstract expressionism, new realism, and kinetic art, as well as by a distinctly Latin American worldview that aligned with the thoughts of some of her colleagues and mentors like Diego Rivera. Her pictorial language went through various stages, oscillating between figuration and abstraction with a multicolor or monochrome palette. Reyes allowed herself the freedom to explore forms and materials, themes, and conditions of the human essence, over nearly six decades of work.

Her work is endowed with a profoundly experimental formal syncretism, where her visual lexicon was influenced by a constant dialogue with her experiences, her identity, and the places she visited throughout her life. However, a characteristic feature that runs through her entire pictorial oeuvre is the artist's technique, where from a line that appears to be continuous, she constructs the entire structure of the image or painting, creating forms that curl in on themselves resembling labyrinths, spider webs, and weavings. Her compositions suggest movement and are closely framed to represent life.

Her work exhibits an undeniable fidelity to herself, where a language rooted in her personal history is evident. Aspects such as the connection with the abundant Latin American nature emerge in different formal aspects throughout her pictorial practice, as is visible in her multicolor works imbued with magical realism and in her animist tendency, where frequently recurring patterns of threads and rings endow the image with a lively quality and an organic energy.

LEON TOVAR
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Emma Reyes

White Poppy, 1979

Signed and dated "EMMA REYES 79"

Mixed media on paper

104.1 x 71.1 cm

41 x 28 in

(8618)

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Emma Reyes
Haifa, 1958-1959
oil on canvas
80 x 141 cm
31 1/2 x 55 1/2 in
(8619)

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Emma Reyes

Untitled, 1976

Ink on paper

86 x 70 cm

33 7/8 x 27 1/2 in

(9605)

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LEON TOVAR

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Fernando Botero



Fernando Botero (1932-2023) was a celebrated Colombian painter and sculptor renowned for his distinctive style characterized by voluminous, exaggerated figures and objects. Born in Medellín, Colombia, Botero was raised by his mother, a seamstress who supported her three sons after the death of her husband. His early life was shaped by traditional Colombian culture and an initial, brief stint at a matador school—an experience that left a lasting impression on his artistic vocabulary, particularly his recurring bullfighting imagery.

Botero began his career as a teenager, contributing illustrations to a local newspaper. By 1951, he held his first

solo exhibition in Bogotá and, a year later, won second place at the Salón Nacional de Artistas. Influenced by Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, he admired their ability to depict Latin American history with monumentality and meaning. Their work inspired his own commitment to large-scale public art and his exploration of volume in two-dimensional formats.

With the prize money from his early success, Botero traveled to Madrid, Paris, and Florence, where he studied the Renaissance masters. It was during his time in Florence that he came to understand how apparent realism of classical works was filtered through each artist's unique sensibility. These studies laid the foundation for what would become Botero's signature style—a fusion of classical technique and imaginative distortion.

By the early 1960s, Botero had relocated to New York, where he won the Guggenheim National Prize and gained attention for works like *Mona Lisa*, *Age Twelve*, acquired by MoMA in 1961. In the 1970s, he moved to Paris and began producing bronze sculptures, which now occupy prominent public spaces in cities around the world.

Botero's use of exaggerated form and rich color challenged conventional notions of beauty and proportion, while offering a playful yet poignant lens on the human condition. His paintings and sculptures often depict scenes that are joyful and idealistic on the surface, yet embedded with themes of class struggle, political commentary, and cultural critique. He was unafraid to confront darker subject matter—from his satirical portraits of Latin American dictators in the 1960s and '70s, to his haunting depictions of the Colombian drug war in the early 2000s, and his controversial *Abu Ghraib* series (2004-2005), which condemned the abuse of prisoners by U.S. forces in Iraq. Through a career that spanned more than six decades, Fernando Botero created a world entirely his own—at once whimsical, political, and deeply human.

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Fernando Botero

El Nuncio, 1989

Oil on Canvas

208 x 161.9 cm

81 7/8 x 63 3/4 in

(9501)

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LEON TOVAR
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Fernando Botero

Ballerina, 2007

Signed and numbered on base '4/6'

Sculpture, Bronze

64 x 40.8 x 24.9 cm

25 1/5 x 16 1/10 x 9 4/5 in

4/6

(9619)

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LEON TOVAR

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Wifredo Lam



Wifredo Lam (1902–1982) was a groundbreaking Cuban artist whose work fused elements of modernism, Afro-Cuban culture, Surrealism, and primitivism, creating a unique and influential visual language. Born December 8, 1902, in Sagua La Grande, Cuba, Lam was the son of a Chinese immigrant father, Yam Lam, and a mother of mixed African, Indigenous, and European descent, Ana Serafina Castilla. This rich multicultural background profoundly shaped his identity and would later play a critical role in his art.

In 1918, Lam moved to Havana to study at the Escuela Profesional de Pintura y Escultura de La Habana (Academia San Alejandro). His early work showed academic training but also a growing interest in the local cultures and spiritual practices of Cuba, particularly Afro-Cuban religions like Santería.

Seeking broader artistic horizons, Lam traveled to Spain in 1923, where he immersed himself in the European avant-garde and developed politically leftist views. During the Spanish Civil War, his experiences with loss, and injustice deeply affected his worldview and commitment to social causes, which later manifested in his work.

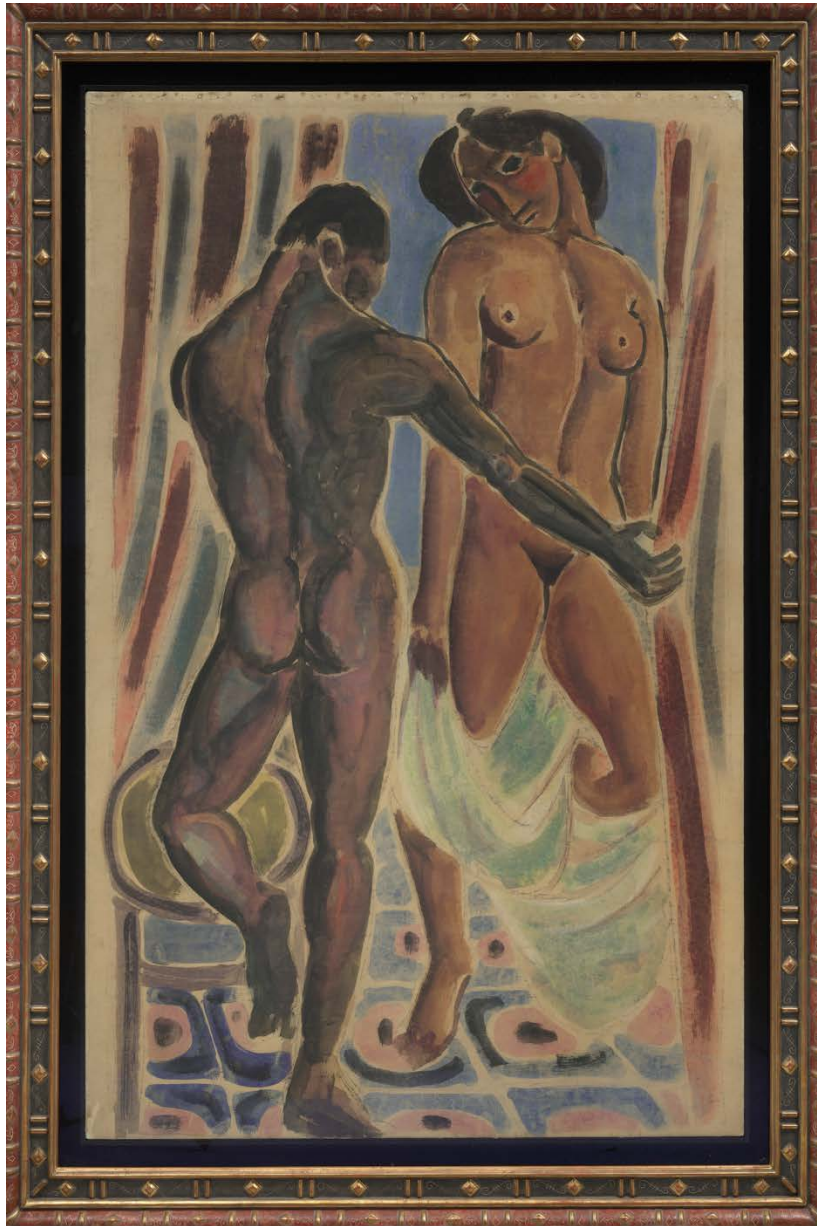
In 1938, Lam moved to Paris, where he was introduced to key figures of the European avant-garde, including Pablo Picasso, who became a mentor and supporter. Through Picasso, Lam met leading Surrealists like André Breton. Paris at that time was a hub for experimentation, and Lam absorbed influences from Surrealism and Cubism but also retained a strong personal focus on non-Western spiritual traditions and mythologies.

During World War II, with Europe increasingly unsafe, Lam traveled briefly to Marseille, collaborating with Surrealists escaping Nazi-occupied France, before ultimately returning to Cuba in 1941. His return to the island was transformative: witnessing firsthand the exploitation of Black Cubans, systemic racism, and the erosion of traditional Afro-Cuban culture under American influence.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s, Lam continued to travel between Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, and Europe, maintaining close ties with intellectuals, poets, and artists committed to anti-colonial and avant-garde movements.

Wifredo Lam died on September 11, 1982, in Paris, but his influence has only grown since. Today, Lam is celebrated not only as one of Latin America's greatest modernists but also as a visionary who expanded the definitions of Surrealism, modernism, and identity-based art. His work has been exhibited globally, including retrospectives at the Centre Pompidou, the Museo Reina Sofía, and the Tate Modern, securing his place among the essential figures of 20th-century art.

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Wifredo Lam

Sans Titre (La Pareja), 1937

Gouache on paper

130 x 84 cm

51 1/8 x 33 1/8 in

(1891)

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LEON TOVAR GALLERY

Saint Clair Cemin



Saint Clair Cemin (b. 1951, Cruz Alta, Brazil) is a Brazilian-born sculptor known for his eclectic and imaginative approach to sculpture, blending elements of surrealism, classicism, and contemporary aesthetics. Cemin has developed a multifaceted body of work that resists easy categorization, ranging from minimal forms to narrative figuration and fantastical objects.

He studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he initially explored printmaking and conceptual art. In the late 1970s, Cemin moved to New York City, immersing himself in the vibrant East

Village art scene. His early sculptures gained recognition for their playful and intellectual engagement with form, material, and cultural references.

Throughout his career, Cemin has worked in a wide range of media—including marble, bronze, wood, and steel—creating works that often bridge the poetic with the architectural. His public commissions, such as *Vortex* (2012) in Manhattan's Riverside Park, demonstrate his interest in scale and the interaction between sculpture and urban environments.

Cemin's work has been exhibited in major institutions worldwide, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Venice Biennale. He has lived and worked in various cities including Paris, Cairo, Beijing, and São Paulo, and continues to divide his time between New York and Brazil.

Deeply philosophical, Cemin sees art as a bridge between material reality and spiritual inquiry, often referencing mythology, history, and metaphysics in his works. His unique trajectory and commitment to form have established him as a significant figure in contemporary sculpture.

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Saint Clair Cemin

Sophie Savage, 1989

Mahogany wood. Plaster base

238.8 x 49.5 x 49.5 cm

94 1/8 x 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 in

(3119)

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LEON TOVAR GALLERY

Diego Rivera



Diego Rivera (1886 – 1957) was a pioneering Mexican painter and a central figure in the development of the Mexican muralism movement. Born in Guanajuato, Mexico, Rivera showed early artistic promise, studying at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. A scholarship allowed him to travel to Europe in 1907, where he immersed himself in the Parisian Avant-garde. Influenced by Post-Impressionists such as Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin, Rivera's early European period culminated in his full engagement with Cubism between 1913 and 1918, a style he explored alongside contemporaries like Picasso, Braque, and Klee.

Despite his success in Europe, Rivera sought a more socially impactful form of expression. Traveling through France, Spain, Belgium, Holland, and England, he studied works by Breughel, Hogarth, and Goya, deepening his appreciation for the art that spoke to and about the broader public. In 1920, Rivera visited Italy, where Renaissance frescoes inspired him to bring monumental public art back to Mexico.

Upon returning in 1921, he was appointed to a government position and began creating murals that would spark the Mexican Mural Renaissance. His first

major commission at the Secretaría de Educación Pública in Mexico City set the stage for a prolific career in public art. Throughout the 1930s, Rivera achieved international recognition, with major commissions in the United States—including murals in San Francisco, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Rockefeller Center in New York—as well as a solo exhibition at MoMA. Rivera's personal life, particularly his complex relationship with fellow artist Frida Kahlo, has been the subject of widespread interest. Their turbulent partnership reflected the passion and contradictions that defined much of Rivera's life and art.

Today, Rivera's legacy endures in major collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago, MoMA, then Museo Diego Rivera in Mexico City, and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

LEON TOVAR
GALLERY



Diego Rivera

Portrait of a Mexican Woman, 1947

Signed and dated bottom left

Watercolor and gouache on paper

72.1 x 58.4 cm

28 3/8 x 23 in

(1982)

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