

Emilio Sanchez in Cuba 1946–1959: Mid-Century Modernism and the Search for Cultural Identity

The Cuban artist Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999) was a painter and printmaker active in New York City and the Caribbean, specializing in the architecture and landscapes of the West Indies.¹ As a realist painter he was attracted to Cuban folklore and the vernacular, with architectural scenes of everyday life in Cuba taking preference to the great historical narratives of western culture.

Victor Deupi
New York Institute of Technology

His keen eye and remarkable ability to edit incidental elements made him also a painter of architectural enigmas with dreamlike effects, “as if the buildings he represented existed only in memory and not in the immanent world”.² In this sense, Sanchez’ work falls well within the mid-century generation of *vanguardia* artists such as Amelia Peláez (1896-1968), Marcelo Pogolotti (1902-88), and Mario Carreño (1913-99), all of whom sought a more abstract and transcendental national identity for Cuban art.³ The city of Havana and its environs were at the core of this Cuban iconology, and the full repertory of the city’s natural attributes and artifice served the collective effort resulting in what is now commonly referred to as “*el arte moderno Cubano*”. Sanchez though was unique among the modern Cuban artists of this period as he lived and worked primarily in New York.⁴ Nevertheless, it was during his trips to Cuba from 1946-59 that Sanchez began to explore through pencil and ink drawings and watercolors the light and shadow of the island’s architecture and countryside, a study of its cities, towns and landscapes that would absorb him for the remainder of his life and serve as his eternal muse.⁵

BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

Emilio Sanchez was born in the rural countryside of Camagüey into an ancient and prominent family that was among the leading Cuban households in the sugar and cattle industries.⁶ Raised in an elite society, he left his native country in the late 1930s to study in America. After his parents divorced, his mother married in 1937 the noted Peruvian writer and painter,

Felipe Cossío del Pomar, and relocated to Mexico City where he founded the Escuela de Bellas Artes in San Miguel de Allende.⁷ Immediately Sanchez' travel routine shifted from Cuba to Mexico, and though he never enrolled in the school, he began to make drawings and watercolors of architecture, and was exposed for the first time to a stimulating artistic environment. After brief stints at Yale University (1939-40) and the University of Virginia (1941-43), he settled at the Art Students League of New York (1944) to study painting, his lifelong desire.

Sanchez attended the Art Students League on and off for several years while also taking summer courses at Columbia University, though he later admitted to finding art school tiresome at times.⁸ Nevertheless, he absorbed the League's traditional training in figurative art and draftsmanship.⁹ The League's mission was not to promote "poets in paint ... but to make thorough craftsmen, good workmen, people, who, when they have thrust a thumb through a palette, know what to do with the other hand".¹⁰ To that end, Sanchez developed the discipline of *in situ* drawing and painting in pencil, ink, and watercolor, usually of architectural views of New York City's tenements, tugboats, and endless vistas.¹¹ In his more reflective studio work in oils, Sanchez was inspired by the mid-century New York realists such as Edward Hopper and Thomas Hart Benton, developing a kind of idealized architecture that was devoid of people or any extraneous matter. He has often been called a "Magical Realist" though he would quickly deny any overtly surrealist tendencies in his work, preferring to focus instead on the abstract geometries of architectural light and shadows.¹² As an expatriate though, Sanchez began to notice that he felt like a "terrible Cuban," having never really lived there in any substantial way.¹³ As he became more aware of it, he began to miss the island tremendously and therefore his desire to travel to Cuba not only satisfied his sense of cultural longing but also opened up new possibilities for artistic exploration and expression.

From 1946 to 1959, Sanchez travelled and lived in New York, Havana, and the Caribbean islands, establishing himself as the premier representative of daily life in the West Indies, though it was in Cuba where he spent the most time and was certainly the most productive. Travel in Cuba during this period was dominated by North American tastes and preferences, though as a native Sanchez was able to move quickly beyond the conspicuous consumerism that governed the island and seek out the true expression of Cuban buildings, landscapes, and people.¹⁴ His drawings and watercolors of Cuba were quickly exhibited in the late 1940s in New York, and continued throughout the 1950's in Havana, Mexico City, Miami, Philadelphia, London and Paris.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the Revolution brought an end to his direct relationship with Cuba, and though he never claimed any nostalgia for the island, his sexuality would have certainly made it very difficult for him to continue visiting it after 1960.¹⁶

In 1965, A. Hyatt Mayor, the Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired some 50 prints and approximately 200 drawings by Sanchez, nearly all of Cuba in the 1940s and 50s. These architectural drawings, watercolors, and lithographs of Cuba shed enormous light on the cultural identity of the island in the last decades of the pre-Revolutionary era, ranging from the vernacular farm structures of the interior to the fashionable architecture of Havana (Colonial, Neoclassical, and Early Modern).



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Figure 1: Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999), Old City, Havana Cuba, watercolor and graphite, 8 11/16 × 7 9/16 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1946, 65.713.128, © Emilio Sanchez Foundation.

His reflections on the daily life of rural Cuba reveal a profound fascination with light, shadow and color, industrial buildings, farmer's shacks, local businesses, dark interiors, landscapes, dancing and laundry. Similarly, his work in Havana continues these themes in both the residential interiors of the social elite, and in the bustling streets of the day-to-day working residents of the capital city. Seen together, these early studies on the architecture and landscape of Cuba present a rare and critical examination of the island's fabric, its beauty, and contradictions, from a unique perspective that is equally inspiring as it is melancholy, deeply personal and yet painfully removed.

SANCHEZ IN CUBA

By the time he first returned to Cuba, Sanchez had already experimented with topographical views of Manhattan in the form of broad cityscapes, and streetscapes that conveyed the visual appearance of the city in both one and two-point perspectives. His approach, however, was largely intuitive, avoiding the mechanical precision and rigidity of linear perspective, adopting instead a loose empirical approach that resembled the architecture and forms he so admired in Cuba and elsewhere in his travels. He noted in the Brooklyn Museum interview that "the very large government houses and the old palaces have to be drawn with a certain amount of precision or else it doesn't come off. You can draw the little shacks lopsided but the big houses have to be more or less straight and when you're doing doorways or arches or any complicated design, it's stronger if it's fairly accurate. And you don't have to be an architect; you just have to have a general idea of vanishing points and perspective. If the perspective is precise it looks too mechanical. So you can have two or three vanishing points. It makes it look a little bit looser. Of course, it's all incorrect, but no one is going to come over with a surveying instrument and check it".¹⁷ Any Renaissance artist, and certainly his teachers at the Art Students League, would have approved.

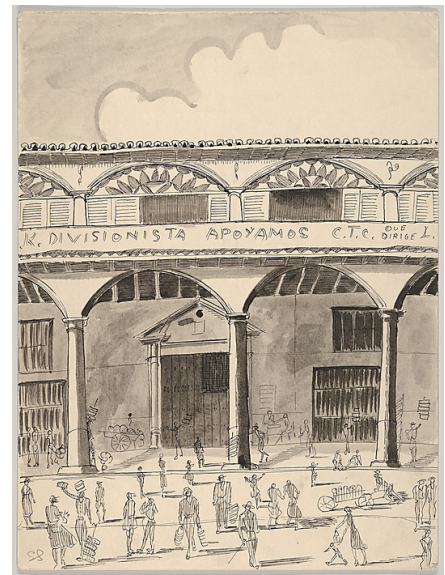
His sketchbook from 1949 shows how from the very beginning he was observing architectural details in Old Havana, the Malecon, and El Vedado.¹⁸ Colored windows (*vitrales*), fanlights (*medio puntos*), colonnettes, light posts, and balconies fascinated him, with the stained glass in the Havana Cathedral being among his favorite ornaments in the city. His early drawings and watercolors of Havana typically skirted the souvenir views and sought out lesser known though equally captivating images of the city's streets, plazas, and buildings. An extraordinary example (fig. 1) is his *Old City, Havana Cuba* (1946), a view of one of the city's principal religious institutions from a lateral side street - most likely the convent of Santo Domingo and church of San Juan de Letrán, the former University of Havana that was destroyed in the early 1950s.¹⁹ The quick pencil and watercolor study of the building's running arcades, bell tower and cupola set against a dramatic sky reveal his preference for discreet views, intense colors, and the dramatic contrast of light and shadow. At the time of his watercolor sketch, however, the convent and church were in a state of significant ruin. Sanchez must have been taken by this incredible sight transforming the dilapidated structure from a regretful predicament to a moment of pure inspiration.

A more nuanced approach can be seen in his pencil and ink drawing of *Havana, Old City* (1949), in which a two-story arcaded Colonial structure containing a banner that has been strategically clipped by Sanchez

reveals only a portion of its politically charged slogan (fig. 2).²⁰ At first glance, the inscription “K. Divisionista Apoyamos CTC que dirige L.” seems like the innocuous street sign of a local business. However, the CTC, or *Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba* (The Workers’ Central Union of Cuba), was the principal trade union of Cuba, founded in 1939 by Lázaro Peña González (1911-74), a Communist and champion of day laborers (*obrer*os).²¹ The Catalan demagogue, Eusebio Mujal Barniol (1915-86) took over the CTC in 1949 creating a split in the union and giving it a new acronym, the CTK (Strike Breakers Labor Confederation) after a clause (K) in a 1943 law that created a questionable retirement fund for secondary school teachers that were not officially registered by the government. In practice, the CTK functioned as a private reserve for corrupt politicians. The informal distinction of *celetarios* (false unionists) was given to the divisive group (*divisionistas*) whose acronym otherwise made little sense. The complete banner partially depicted by Sanchez then would have read something to the effect of “La CTK Divisionista Apoyamos CTC que dirige L. Peña” (the CTK supports the CTC), in a dubious claim of political unanimity. The irony would not have escaped Sanchez who though raised in the elite society of Camagüey was now a critically independent artist from New York whose works of art were purposely neutral and distant. It is generally held that Sanchez was not politically motivated in his art and while that seems to be a perfectly plausible argument in general, his sketch of *Havana, Old City* is without a doubt a reflection on current events in Cuba. Such flagrant contradictions are what made mid-century realism seem at times so unbelievable.

Equally charged was his 1956 series of birds’ eye views of “*Las Yaguas*”, a shanty town on the southern edge of cosmopolitan Havana not far from the upscale El Vedado neighborhood where Sanchez had his comfortable apartment and studio (fig. 3).²² He also began to experiment with printmaking during this time, turning the graphite studies into a well-known series of topographical lithographs.²³ The indigent community of 4,000 inhabitants consisted mostly of day laborers living in favela-like constructions of temporary sheathing, for which the government provided water and electricity.²⁴ Their simple huts, with dirt floors and shed-like coverings provided incredible geometric patterns that Sanchez found irresistible, like the tenements of New York City. It is said that only politicians, communists and priests ever visited Las Yaguas, though in fact Emilio Sanchez was among the acute observers of one of the city’s most derelict communities. As noted by Carlos Ripoll, the neighborhood of Las Yaguas consisted of beggars, unemployed, newspaper salesmen, illiterate children and adults, blacks and whites (more blacks than whites), and poor people that collected food in the houses of the city”.²⁵ The coexistence of this poor community among the wealthy suburbs of Havana’s elites was another aspect of Havana life that Sanchez could not help but portray in his typically eerie and beautiful manner.

Another New Yorker who documented the shanties on the outskirts of Havana was Walker Evans who in 1933 produced 31 images to accompany a book by the investigative journalist Carleton Beals. Titled *The Crime of Cuba*, the book exposed Gerardo Machado’s authoritarian regime, and US complicity with the bloody dictatorship.²⁶ Many of Evans’ photographs from Cuba were later exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in a 1938 exhibition titled “American Photographs.” It is not certain if Sanchez



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Figure 2: Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999), *Havana, Old City*, ink and watercolor, 12 5/8 × 9 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1946, 65.713.74, © Emilio Sanchez Foundation.

ENDNOTES

1. Though Cuba’s position just south of the Tropic of Cancer falls technically within the classification of a tropical climate, there are high promontories overlooking the northern coast and vast stretches of dry grasslands in the interior, making it equally subtropical in climate and character. On Sanchez’ life and work, see in particular John Angeline, Rudi C. Bleys, Rafael DiazCasas, and Ann Koll. *Hard Light: The Work of Emilio Sanchez*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2011.



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Figure 3: Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999), Sketch for Lithograph "Las Yaguas," graphite, 18 1/8 × 14 15/16 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1956, 65.713.42, © Emilio Sanchez Foundation.

2. Ricardo Pau-Llosa. "Sánchez, Emilio." *Grove Art Online*. Oxford Art Online. Oxford University Press, accessed August 6, 2013, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T075592>.
3. See in particular Juan A. Martínez. *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters, 1927-1950*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994.
4. The city had, as he noted in a 1965 interview with the Brooklyn Museum, "the best light for painting and a congenial professional environment that supported dedicated work." Ann Koll. *Emilio Sanchez: Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings, Prints*. [S.I.]: Estate of Emilio Sanchez, 2001, 9. Excerpts from the interview with Arlene Jacobowitz, Assistant Curator of Paintings and Sculpture of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, in the Spring of 1965 can be found at <http://www.emiliosanchezfoundation.org/interview.html>.
5. Giulio V. Blanc, "The Architecture of Light and Shadow," in *Américas*, xxxviii (May-June, 1986), 44-9.
6. Rafael DíazCasas, "Emilio Sanchez, A New Yorker from Camagüey: A Latin American Perspective," in *Hard Light*, 8-10.
7. Ann Koll, *Emilio Sanchez: Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings, Prints*. [S.I.]: Estate of Emilio Sanchez, 2001, 7.
8. Carol Damian, "Emilio Sanchez: the Last Decade," in *Emilio Sanchez*, 29.
9. The Art Students League was at the time under the directorship of Stewart Klonis, with such renowned masters as Frank Vincent DuMond, Kenneth Hayes Miller, George B. Bridgman and Robert Beverly Hale, as enormously popular instructors. See in particular Raymond J. Steiner, *The Art Students League of New York: A History*. Saugerties, NY: CSS Publications, 1999, 95-105.
10. *Ibid.*, 99.

ever knew of these works, though the exhibition traveled to another ten venues, and moreover the similarities between the two artists are too uncanny to ignore. As he explained in the Brooklyn Museum interview, "you see all these places that are completely stark, they're unpopulated and the house carries itself, as if the house were a person, you can give it a lot of human quality. And you don't see the people, but you can feel them, and you can hear them because they're watching out of every window".²⁷ The stillness of his drawing of Las Yaguas, like Walker Evans' photographs, reveals the painful reality of poverty and the increasing polarization of life in pre-Revolutionary Cuba.

Sanchez was of course privileged and travel allowed him to mingle with the elite throughout the island as well. Of particular interest was his love of the countryside and the savannah landscapes of central and southern Cuba where his family and friends owned large sugar plantations and cattle farms. Trips outside of Havana to Matanzas, Camagüey, Cienfuegos, and Trinidad allowed him to explore both the affluent lifestyles of the island's aristocracy and the vernacular farm dwellings of the local *campesinos*. In Matanzas, for instance, Sanchez was fascinated by the architectural details of his spacious room at the Hotel Gran París, a colonial mansion that was previously built in 1888 by the Irishman John Daly who owned a distillery in town.²⁸ In 1959, Sanchez dedicated several pages from his sketchbook to document the interiors and details of the elegant two-story house with colorful stained glass windows.²⁹ Also in 1959, Sanchez spent a considerable amount of time at the Hotel Pasacaballos (horse crossing) near Cienfuegos on the south coast, sketching both the building and the views across the harbor to the Castillo de Jagua, an eighteenth-century fortress that protected the entrance to the bay of Cienfuegos.³⁰ The hotel was the winter beach home of Doña Luisa Terry de Ponvert, a leading philanthropist in the city and the widow of Elias Ponvert y Malibrán, an extremely wealthy sugar baron. Sanchez produced several sketchbook drawings of the castle and hotel as well as a more studied topographical view of the castle and its neighboring houses in graphite.³¹

Near Cienfuegos, Sanchez had the opportunity to study the natural countryside of south central Cuba, in particular the flora at the Atkins Garden, a paradise landscape that was founded in 1899 as the Harvard Botanic Station for Tropical Research and Sugar Cane Investigation.³² Edwin Atkins, an American sugar planter in Cuba, and Harvard professors Oakes Ames and George Goodale, established the garden as both a place of beauty and a center for scientific research. Sanchez noted in his sketchbook that because of its dense foliage and vegetation, the garden was also used by revolutionaries as an effective hideout. In any event, he devoted an entire sketchbook to studying the variety of trees, plants, and flowers there, as well as producing some of his most memorable drawings.³³ His remarkable *Tamarindo, Cienfuegos Cuba* (1959), is a breathtaking graphite study of the twisted trunk of the otherwise leguminous bushy tree.³⁴ Dark shadows in a large crevice near the base of the tree are contrasted by the hanging pods above and the tendril roots that emerge from the earth like tentacles. The clipped view makes it difficult to know which way is up, and the contorted shape of the central trunk resembles a naked human torso.

Camagüey was his home, and aside from Havana, it was the area of Cuba he knew best and would document most carefully through a series of stunning

landscape watercolors, and graphite and ink drawings.³⁵ His frenetic *View of Ranch El Valle in Camaguey Cuba* (1950), a pencil and watercolor study of an onslaught of marching palm trees and their intense midday shadows, is an excellent example of Sanchez' early love of *plein-air* painting, the kind of quick study work that could only be done in haste and *in situ* (fig. 4).³⁶ Sanchez noted in his Brooklyn Museum interview that "I like the designs produced by tropical foliage more than those of trees you see in North America and Europe and I especially like palm trees that are usually completely ignored because they look so very much like decorations for nightclubs".³⁷ His *View of Ranch El Valle* presents the palm trees like the dancing columns in a cabaret. Such theatricality was not uncommon in Sanchez' work, as he was an avid follower of the cinema, theater, and fashionable restaurants in New York.³⁸

Sanchez' most focused study in Cuba, and certainly the work for which he is most remembered, is his study of domestic architecture, be it the farm structures of the island or the penetrating interiors of Havana's mansions. Rural buildings in the province of Havana, Cienfuegos, and Matanzas occupied Sanchez' attention throughout the many years he visited the island, though he produced his most well-known studies as the Revolution was gaining in momentum. His graphite *Farmer's House near Matanzas Cuba* (1959) presents a one-story wooden shack with a front porch, a steeply pitched thatch roof, and blowing laundry hanging on a line attached to the structure's rear (fig. 5).³⁹ The characteristic bellowing laundry set against the skyline appears like geometrically formed clouds on the horizon. Moreover, the informally composed two-point perspective view of the house, set on a little knoll with dark shadows underneath the porch and eaves, ennobles the modest structure, revealing its natural beauty in the face of abject poverty. His signature in the form of the letters ES placed strategically in the bottom center of the drawing also reminds us of where he was standing when he made the stunning drawing.

Similar approaches can be found in his *Farm near Matanzas Cuba* (1959), *Shack Cienfuegos Harbor (Cuba)* (1959), and *View Cienfuegos Cuba* (1959), three striking works in graphite that reveal isolated buildings in semi-dilapidated states occupying privileged positions within the landscape.⁴⁰ Sanchez also provided penetrating interior views of these structures, often portraying their expressive emptiness as in the *Interior Hut near Mariel Cuba* (1959), or the cluttered orderliness of the *Country Store near Mariel Cuba* (1959).⁴¹ In these graphite one-point perspective studies, deep views into the interiors of buildings reveal their intricate contrast of materials and playful geometric properties. The stark contrast between the palatial and the vernacular was one that fascinated Sanchez as well, as his ink drawing *En frente al palacio Havana Old City* (1946) shows a row of one-story masonry dwellings opposite the imposing corner detail of one of Havana's colonial palaces.⁴² In all of these, the main focus is the innate beauty of the structures themselves and their heightened presence in the landscape or city by view of their intricate light and shadows. There is no pretense or parody, just pure form.

Emilio Sanchez was also interested with the neighborhood of El Vedado, a fashionable new residential quarter developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was dominated by North American architecture, with wide porches, expansive lawns and gardens behind iron gated perimeter walls,



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Figure 4: Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999), *View of Ranch El Valle in Camaguey Cuba*, watercolor and graphite, 19 7/8 x 14 5/16 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1950, 65.713.48, © Emilio Sanchez Foundation.

11. Blanc, "The Architecture of Light and Shadow," 46.
12. Sanchez' self-description as a "Realist with a Surrealist twist," is now a bit of a cliché (Blanc, 44).
13. See the Jacobowitz interview at <http://www.emiliosanchezfoundation.org/interview.html>.
14. See "Travel as Transformation," in Louis A. Perez. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012, 166-98.
15. His first exhibition in Cuba was in the late 1940s at the Club de Comercio in Havana, a group exhibition that included such well-known Cuban artists as Amelia Peláez, and Cundo Bermúdez, as well as Latin American artists from Venezuela, Chile and Guatemala. See Emilio Sanchez papers, 1922-1980, in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (D-1941.001). His first solo show in Cuba was at the Lyceum in Havana in 1956. For a full list see Angeline et al., *Hard Light*, 174-76.
16. Homosexuality was generally inconsistent with the early aims of the Revolution. See for example, Reinaldo Arenas, "Homosexuality, Creativity, Dissidence," in Chomsky, Aviva, Barry Carr, and Pamela María Smorkaloff. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 406-11.
17. <http://www.emiliosanchezfoundation.org/interview.html>.
18. Several Sanchez sketchbooks can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (henceforth MMA), Department of Drawings and Prints. For the 1949 sketchbook, see Acc. No. 65.713.205.
19. Notes presented to author by Orestes M. del Castillo del Prado, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus and retired architect from the Office of the Historian of the City (08/07/2013). The drawing can be found at the MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.128.



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Figure 5: Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999), Farmer's House near Matanzas Cuba, graphite, 13 13/16 × 16 3/4 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1959, 65.713.173, © Emilio Sanchez Foundation.

and comfortable spacious interiors with high ceilings and breezy passages. An example of this is Sanchez' drawing of the *Pedroso Family Mansion, Vedado Havana Cuba* (1946), an ink line drawing of the kind he would have learned at the Art Students League.⁴³ The residence, occupying a prestigious site on 17th between A and B streets in El Vedado, belonged to the merchant family who in the eighteenth century was the wealthiest in Cuba.⁴⁴ Also in El Vedado were his discreet views of the *Interior Cossío del Pomar Home Havana* (1958), the home of his mother and step-father in the capital, and the *Interior Apartment, Vedado Cuba* (1956 and 1959), possibly of the same residence.⁴⁵ Similar perspective views can be found in the many drawings of his own studio, the *Artist's Studio Havana* (1959), for which he also made a series of lithographs.⁴⁶ These views, always looking from a one-point perspective through a series of rooms, or in two-point focusing on such geometric details as an interior corner, bookshelf, or his own workstation, were comparable to the introspective views of the rural residences he produced around the same time, with the differences in class being neutralized by his distant point of view. The same may be said for his drawing of the *Artist's Home Senado Camagüey Cuba* (1959), a return to his ancestral home that he captured with the same sense of detachment that by now became one of his signature trademarks.⁴⁷ All of these interior views were significant precursors to his well-known oil paintings that he would subsequently produce in New York, except that in Cuba he was looking inward with a penetrating gaze, whereas later in life he began to reverse the trend and stare outwards, as if he was turning away from himself.⁴⁸

Sanchez' had a sharp eye for minutiae and his penetrating studies would extend to very particular architectural details as well as personal accessories. A sketchbook he kept while travelling in Trinidad, Cuba, in 1946, included sketches in graphite, colored pencil and watercolor, of fanlights, fountains, metal light posts and railings, and the wooden window grills and cornice details that make the city famous.⁴⁹ Similarly, in a 1949 sketchbook, Sanchez was enthralled by *Carnival Figures Carrying Farolas* (lamps).⁵⁰ Here, Sanchez paid particular attention to such fashionable accessories as festival costumes, high heeled shoes (*tacones*), jewelry, and extravagant headdresses. A similar series of figural studies resulted in his charming lithograph of *Niños Paseando* (n.d.), a group of black stick-figured children wearing white hats and clothing parading down a street with their minders, set against a rolling landscape of bulbous trees and ominous clouds in the background.⁵¹ His exceptional graphite study of *Laundry near Cabañas (Western Cuba)* (1959), presents a clothes line suspended by a bamboo pole with the laundry blowing in the wind and attendant shadows dancing on the dirt ground, a study of pure geometry in light and shadow.⁵² Finally, his wonderfully playful lithograph entitled *Rincón de Cuba* (n.d.), or "Corner of Cuba," puts it all together, with vernacular architecture, a variety of figures, foliage, hats, and dark shadows underneath an open porch.⁵³ The focus of the drawing is a stunning woman seen from the rear strolling onto the porch underneath her parasol, while children wearing wide-brimmed hats and other adults stare at the stunning centerpiece. A lone hunched figure, most likely a Cuban grandmother that is barely recognizable in the dark shadows, stares back at the viewer as a haunting reminder of human *vanitas*. In all of these works, Sanchez departs from his exclusive focus on buildings, focusing instead on the loose geometric patterns of figurative elements and natural forms. In his 1965 interview with the Brooklyn Museum, he noted

20. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.74.

21. See Robert Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Cuba*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002.

22. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.42.

23. Koll, *Emilio Sanchez*, 17.

24. Carlos Ripoll, "Evocación de "Las Yaguas"," quoted in *Diario las Américas* (11-21-2009), <http://www.diariolasamericas.com/noticia/89288/evocacion-de-las-yaguas>. See also Michelle Chase, "The Country and the City in the Cuban Revolution," in *Colombia Internacional*, 73 (2011): 121-42.

25. <http://www.diariolasamericas.com/noticia/89288/evocacion-de-las-yaguas>.

26. Evans, Walker, Andrei Codrescu, and Judith Keller. *Walker Evans: Cuba*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011.

27. Quoted in Koll, *Emilio Sanchez*, 15.

28. Joaquín E. Weiss, *La arquitectura cubana del siglo XIX*. Havana: Junta Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, 1960.

29. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.204.

30. The Castillo is also known as the Fortress of "Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles de Jagua," see Joaquín E. Weiss, *La arquitectura colonial cubana*. Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1979, II: 129.

31. MMA, Acc. Nos. 65.713.203 and 65.713.150.

32. Marion D. Cahan, "The Harvard Garden in Cuba-A Brief History," in *Arnoldia* (1991): 22-32.

33. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.202.

34. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.156.

35. In addition to the MMA holdings, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution contains several watercolors. See: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/emilio-sanchez-papers-5543>.

36. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.48.

that “anything can be taken as being abstract. Almost any section of any painting can look abstract. I remember in sketching classes, just for fun, we would draw only corners of the model, an elbow and it would look extraordinarily abstract”.⁵⁴ Just when the revolution in Cuba had overthrown the previous government, Emilio Sanchez had matured as an artist. After thirteen years of visiting the island, it was time for him to leave Cuba.

SANCHEZ IN NEW YORK

As previously noted, Sanchez stopped visiting Cuba after 1960 and settled into a regular pattern of living and working in New York City and travelling to other Caribbean islands, and even further afield to Africa, Europe and South and Central America, during the winter months.⁵⁵ He established a close relationship with Armando Zegri, a Chilean writer and owner of the Galería Sudamericana in New York, who promoted his work and introduced him to other Latin American artists. It was during this time in the mid-1960s, that Sanchez also gave his collection of sketchbooks, drawings, watercolors and prints to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a donation that was valued at \$2,380.⁵⁶ In addition, he began to donate works of art by other artists to the Metropolitan Museum via Armando Zegri’s gallery, as both an act of patronage and as a way of promoting Latin American art.⁵⁷ Sanchez made regular financial donations to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1965 until 1981, for a total of approximately \$1,775, but stopped donating works of art after a change in the tax law in 1969 prevented him from deducting them at their fair market value. Sanchez also started the Felipe Cossio del Pomar Fund at the Museum of Modern Art, named after his step-father, as a similar platform for promoting Latin American artists under William S. Lieberman who directed the Departments of Drawings and Prints from 1971-79.⁵⁸ His support of Latin American art and artists continued throughout his life culminating in the creation of the Emilio Sanchez Foundation in 2005.

The years Emilio Sanchez spent in Cuba, from 1946 until 1959, were undoubtedly fundamental to his development as an artist and as a patron of Latin American art in general. The relationship with Cuba was also reciprocal as he not only gained a great deal of inspiration by visiting the island, but also brought with him a New York sensibility and approach that was not represented by anyone else there. He gave to Cuba a point of view that no one else before him, or afterward, had been able to see. While proponents of this period refer to it as the “Golden Age” of Cuba and its critics as the “Mistress of Pleasure,” Emilio Sanchez was able to cut through the conspicuous consumption and tourism of the island and present an accurate face to what was a truly sad and beautiful place. In this sense, Emilio Sanchez in Cuba presents a unique insight into the complex character of a mid-century Modern artist who specialized in architectural representation as a way of searching for a sense of cultural identity in a land to which he would unwittingly never return, but which forever would remain within his soul.

37. <http://www.emiliosanchezfoundation.org/interview.html>.
38. Robert J. Sindelir, “Emilio Sanchez: a Sense of Place,” in *Emilio Sanchez*, 47.
39. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.173.
40. *Ibid.*, Acc. Nos. 65.713.174, 65.713.166, and 65.713.169.
41. *Ibid.*, Acc. Nos. 65.713.200 and 65.713.176.
42. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.79.
43. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.77.
44. Franklin W. Knight, “Origins of Wealth and the Sugar Revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850,” in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 57.2 (1977): 237.
45. MMA, Acc. Nos. 65.713.189, and 65.713.193-94.
46. MMA, Acc. Nos. 65.713.186-87.
47. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.140.
48. I owe the last suggestion to Dr. Ann Koll.
49. The sketchbook has been disassembled and the sketches are now stand-alone pieces. See MMA, Acc. Nos. 65.713.82-83.
50. The sketchbook has also been disassembled. MMA, Acc. No. 65.713.155 and retro.
51. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.8.
52. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.185.
53. *Ibid.*, Acc. No. 65.713.10.
54. <http://www.emiliosanchezfoundation.org/interview.html>.
55. Koll, *Emilio Sanchez*, 19.
56. The appraisal was carried out by Lucien Goldschmidt on 12/28/1965. See the Emilio Sanchez Papers, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.
57. In a 1969 letter to Arthur A. Houghton Jr. (President of the museum’s Board of Trustees, 1964-69), Sanchez notes, “I have, for the past few years, donated a considerable number of my works to the museum. The Print Department has an almost complete collection of all my graphic works, and in the early 1960’s, also, a large portfolio of drawings of mine which I was able to have brought out of Cuba & which have been shown on one or two occasions - I appreciate the fact that the museum granted me a lifetime fellowship for these donations and some others of Latin American artists through the co-operation of the Zegri Gallery. It will be my pleasure to continue to work for the museum both as a painter and as a member.” (Sanchez Papers, MMA Archives) *The 11th Annual Exhibition of Latin American Prints* (New York: Zegri Gallery, January 5-February 4, 1965) included many of the artists whose works Sanchez donated to the Met: Daniel Serra Badué (Cuban), Julio Augusto Zachrisson (Panama), Roberto Cabrera (Guatemala), and Roland Cabot (Brazilian). Other donations included works by José Venturelli (Chilean) and Luis A. Solari (Uruguay). These donations are recorded in the Sanchez Papers, MMA Archives. See also Armando Zegri, *11th Annual Exhibition of Latin American Prints*. Exh. cat. New York: Galería Sudamericana, 1965.
58. William S. Lieberman Papers, [series.folder]. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.