

**MARIANO
EVERYTHING POSSIBLE
SELECTED WORKS 1940-1986**

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LATIN ART CORE
FINE ART GALLERY
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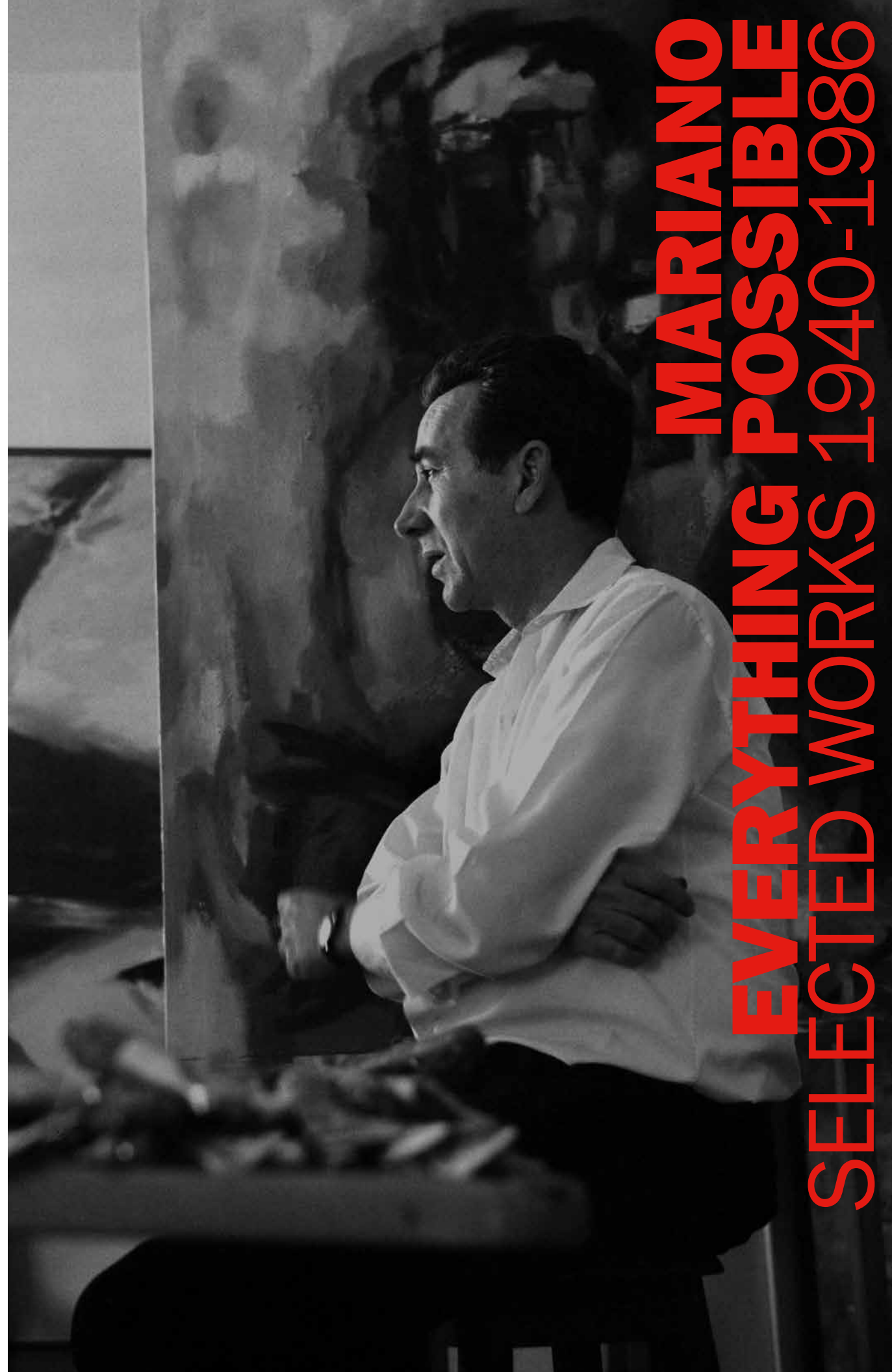
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Cover:
Mujeres en interior
(Women in Interior),
1943
Oil on board on canvas
24 x 20 in

Facing Page
Mariano in his studio.
Havana, ca. 1959.
Photo by Mario García
Joya (Mayito). Courtesy
Mariano Rodríguez
Foundation archives.

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MARIANO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE SELECTED WORKS 1940-1986

Mariano, Everything Possible

When in 1939 the Cuban critic and intellectual Guy Pérez Cisneros wrote about Mariano Rodríguez in the first issue of the magazine *Espuela de Plata*, he acknowledged “a latent force”, an “emerging action” in his work. At that time Mariano experienced a period of Mexican influence after studying with his mentor, the famous Mexican painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. Although Guy predicted Mariano's career to be a long one, he still did not commit openly. It was not until two years later, in the initial nineteen forties and witnessing Mariano's rapid growth and urge for experimentation that he would admit: “The painter is already a true painter (...) Today I must take back what I said. The miracle has happened, the brush has been the magic wand (...) solidly incorporating to the architecture of his patios of the Cerro such Cuban forms and lights that we could not help but feel resentful for not having considered them susceptible to appear in our painting”.¹

Already in that decade and scarcely thirty years old, Mariano had become a master of color and form, but above all, of styles. If something is unquestionable in his early works is the mastery with which he could appropriate the most diverse international styles: muralism, figuration, cubism, abstraction or expressionism, but always in defense of a painting of profound Cuban lineage. The characters in his works would always be the simplest and cheerful: a peasant drinking coffee or playing the guitar, a woman in her ordinary domestic environment. This vision of women inevitably corresponded to the social behaviors of the period. Over time, Mariano deprived them of ties to turn them into free beings and the incarnation of universality.

Mariano's admiration for the Latin American muralists in the thirties, the European vanguards in the forties, the American abstract masters in the fifties, and his close relationship with Latin American artists and intellectuals (living in the continent or in exile at the time) contributed a large number of experiences that he transferred to the canvas on numerous occasions. His constant changes and adaptation of styles made José Lezama Lima say: “His achievements do not seem to turn to stone”, and Mario Benedetti later defined his work as an adventure or a “search for sensations”.

In Mariano there are no labels or formulas, he was a chameleon-like painter. Regardless of the style he chose to mutate, he always enjoyed the company of his muses, his peasants, his tropical fruits, and, of course, his faithful roosters.

Following the retrospectives at McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College (September-December 2021) and Pérez Art Museum Miami PAMM (August 2022 - January 2023), and particularly the book *Mariano. One Hundred Masterpieces*, recently published by the Mariano Rodríguez Foundation, the presence of this artist has gained recognition and visibility among the American public. His excellence and copious production offer an inexhaustible source of research.

Mariano. Everything Possible praises that artist of multiple talents, enraptured by the culture of his native country, its countryside, its habits, religions, and colors.

This carefully curated exhibition presents a selection of Mariano's paintings and drawings from 1940 through 1986, covering all his periods and revisiting some classic works in dialogue with other masterpieces less known by the big public. Selecting and summarizing among such vast heritage will always remain a challenge, but will provide a new glance to help complement and verify that in Mariano everything was possible.

Cristina Figueroa

¹ Guy Pérez Cisneros. “...Traía las manos tintas de la mucha cereza (a propósito de Mariano)”. In *Grafos*, Havana, November-December, 1942.

This painting, created a few months after the outbreak of World War II in Europe, is one of the most important works of Mariano's first period. It was exhibited in the famous "Contemporary Cuban Art" show at the Capitol in Havana during the Second American Conference of National Commissions for Intellectual Cooperation in 1941. At this conference, topics such as freedom, respect for democracy and America's position in the context of the war were debated. Mariano shows his profound humanism with the portrait of a woman dressed in white, facing the sea, offering a dove, also white, as an allegory of justice and peace. A premonitory piece, years before Picasso, of the symbolism that the dove would acquire at the end of the war.



La paloma de la paz (The Dove of Peace), 1940. Oil on canvas, 29 x 25 in. Col. Lourdes and Alejandro Rodríguez

The eroticism present in Mariano's work is subtly aggressive. This theme, so recurrent in the history of art, found one of its most faithful followers in the artist. Works like "Mujer en interior con piña" and "Mujeres en interior" have an intentional symbolic use of the fruits, loaded with delicate references to sexuality. In these paintings, everything is said through suggestion and hiding.



Mujer en interior con piña (Woman in Interior with Pineapple), 1943. Oil on cardboard, 23.9 x 17.9 in



Mujeres en interior (Women in Interior), 1943. Oil on board on canvas, 24 x 20 in



Those drawings that began as studies of composition or color for future works, in time became completely autonomous expressions. The hundreds of drawings that the artist conserved confirm his vocation for the synthesis of the idea and his conscience of the importance of drawing as origin of the creative process.





“The first time I wrote about Mariano I pointed out his capacity to construct a tropical, exuberant, and sensual landscape over the deteriorated views of Havana's outskirts, dry and dusty; and beyond the heritage left to him by the generation of painters that preceded him. (...) That tropical nature – so new and yet so much longed for among us – made me trust Mariano immediately; he sensed the baroque, and our essence reveals itself ever more in the baroque.”

Guy Pérez Cisneros, *Grafos*, 1942



Paisaje (Landscape), 1945. Oil on canvas, 16 x 11 in

Paisaje tropical (Tropical Landscape), 1945. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25.9 in

“In the splendid darkness of the Tropics, Mariano wanted to discover colors unknown to those who paint ‘the obvious’. The color in his paintings always reveals the imaginary quality of the object. In this way he presents us the gift of a world in which the most prosaic objects metamorphose into poetic things.”

José Rodríguez Feo, *Orígenes*, 1944



Naturaleza muerta (Still Life), 1946. Oil on canvas, 25 x 32 in



Bembé, ca. 1948. Ink and gouache on paper, 11 x 14 in



Figura (Figure), 1955. Ink and watercolor on paper, 11 x 14 in



Paisaje con figura (Landscape with Figure), 1955. Felt pen, ink and watercolor on paper, 11 x 14 in

“My period of abstract expressionism gave me a freedom of expression for the time when I returned to figuration. I was never completely abstract, because I'm always connected with the surrounding world, with the things I see. It is so that when you start painting you live inside the painter – I read that somewhere – meaning that you get used to observe as a painter everything that surrounds you.”

Mariano



Abstracción (Abstraction), 1959. Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 in



“Mariano was always a painter of life. When the critics tried to pigeonhole him (...) paradoxically they could only appeal to the adjectives of insubordination, and therefore they say his painting is exuberant, joyful, dynamic, and essential. That is why the rooster accompanied him from dawn to dawn (he never sees off the sun, he always announces it). Each journey or stage of his work includes an early joy in the form of a rooster, a joy that at times may be hand-tied and convicted, but Mariano always knew how to untie it. He sensed that in a new dawn, the very rooster-like dreams would sing again.”

Mario Benedetti, 1990



Gallo (Rooster), 1968. Oil on canvas, 25 x 20 in

Gallo (Rooster), 1956. Watercolor on paper, 14 x 17 in

These works belong to the artist's period defined as grotesque. Mariano maintains a marked sensuality from the use of chiaroscuro. In these works there's a duality, lights and shadows, what is hidden and what is disclosed. It was an interest of Latin American artists from the sixties to show their realities by using a provocative painting, which at times was monstrous. During this period, there is a dialogue with the expressionist painting of his Latin American contemporaries, such as the Cuban Antonia Eiriz and the Mexican Rafael Coronel; and with the New Figuration of Argentinian Luis Felipe Noé and Venezuelan Jacobo Borges.



El deseo (Desire), ca. 1965. Oil on canvas, 59 x 79 in. Col. Lourdes and Alejandro Rodríguez



La familia (The Family), 1965. Oil on canvas, 31.9 x 47.5 in. Col. Lourdes and Alejandro Rodríguez



Hombre tras la puerta [Mirón] (Man behind the Door [Voyeur]), 1965. Oil on canvas, 30.3 x 41.1 in. Col. Lourdes and Alejandro Rodríguez



Mujer con flores (Woman with Flowers), 1967. Oil on canvas, 40 x 35 in

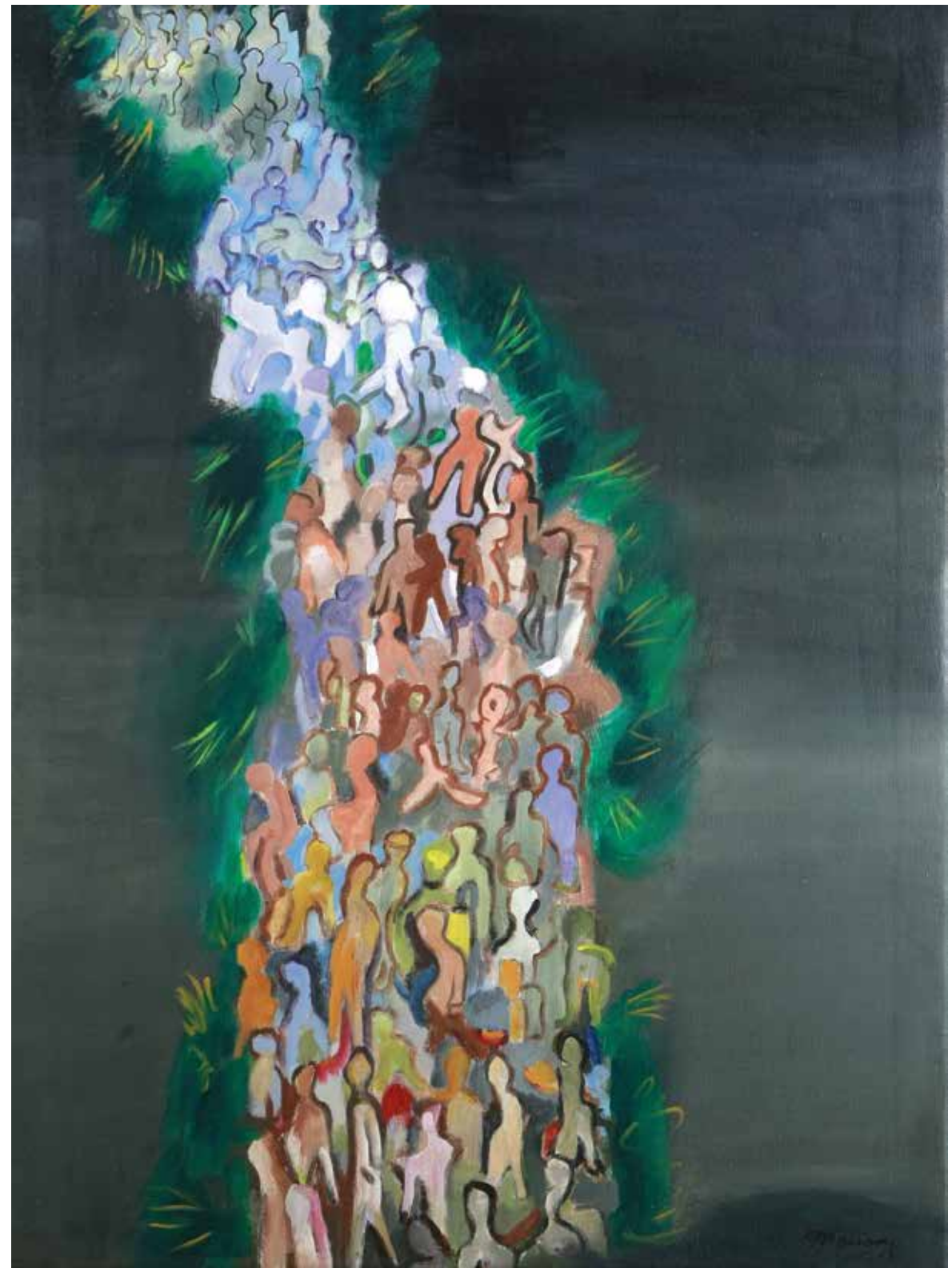
The fruit theme, which had already been visible in Mariano's work since the 1940s, reaches its point of greatest symbolism in the series *Frutas y realidad* (Fruits and Reality) in the late sixties and early seventies. In this period, the artist presents the union of all his recurrent themes (fruits, women, roosters, nature, and eroticism) at its maximum capacity of expression.



De la serie *Frutas y realidad* (from the series Fruits and Reality), 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 59 x 79 in



Descanso (Rest), 1982. Oil on canvas, 42.9 x 31.5 in



Masas (Masses), 1982. Acrylic on canvas, 47 x 35 in

Few praised love as much as Mariano: the young love, the late love, the free love, and even the polyamory. This mixture of free bodies deprived of identity contains all the possible forms of affection. Mariano was always a defender of love without labels. In his last series, "*Fiesta del amor*" (Festival of Love), we find the highest expression of eroticism and freedom in his work.





“And I started painting roosters and roosters. To me, things do not represent symbols. To me, in painting, what is capable of impressing me, what I can use in drawing, is worthwhile, and if the rooster has become a symbol of Cuban (...) it is because I am very Cuban.”

Mariano



Gallo (Rooster), 1986. Acrylic on paper, 25 x 19 in

Gallo (Rooster), 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 27.5 x 39 in

Mariano Rodríguez (Havana, 1912-1990) is regarded as one of the most important and influential painters of the second generation of the Cuban vanguard. While best known for his paintings of roosters, Mariano also embraced landscape, portrait, *guajiros* (peasants), still life, marinas, as well as religious and syncretic motifs. In his work, Mariano introduced a variety of stylistic approaches ranging from Figuration to Geometric Abstraction, Abstract Expressionism, and Grotesque imagery.

Mariano studied at San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy in Havana and at San Carlos Academy in Mexico under the tutelage of the renowned painter and muralist Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. Mariano's work has been present in group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and Brooklyn Museum, New York, as well as at the Pan-American Union in Washington D.C. His work has also been featured at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; 5th and 7th São Paulo Biennials; former Museo de Arte Moderno, Madrid; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, and the Havana Biennial, among others. The first major retrospective on Mariano Rodríguez in the United States "Mariano: Variations on a Theme", was presented at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College (September-December 2021) and at the Pérez Art Museum Miami - PAMM (August 2022 - January 2023).

His work is part of several prestigious private as well as public collections such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana; National Gallery Sofia, Bulgaria; UNESCO, Paris; and Pérez Art Museum Miami, among others.

In recent years the Mariano Rodríguez Foundation, run by Mariano's Estate has published several books on the artists: the two volumes of the Catalogue Raisonné (Vol I. 1936-1949) (Vol II. 1950-1966); the catalogue of the exhibition *Mariano Variations on a Theme* in conjunction with the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, and the most recent *Mariano. One Hundred Masterpieces*, a careful selection from the artist's extensive career.

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