

# GELES CABRERA: MUSEO ESCULTÓRICO

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EXHIBITIONS

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CABRERA:  
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previous: Geles Cabrera in the museum of her work (El Museo Escultórico), ca. 1960s. Geles Cabrera Archive

opposite: *Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1970. Volcanic rock, 32¼ × 117⅞ × 8½ inches (82 × 30 × 21.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra

## FOREWORD

Americas Society is pleased to present *Geles Cabrera: Museo Escultórico*. Showcasing more than forty years of the artist's work, this is Cabrera's first solo exhibition in the United States. Geles Cabrera's unique place in the history of Mexican art—she is sometimes referred to as Mexico's “first female sculptor”—aligns with Americas Society's commitment to promoting a plural view of culture from the continent. The exhibition builds on our institution's decades of presenting Mexican art, design, and architecture in our galleries. It is also the first in our new series highlighting the legacy of women and female-identifying artists of the Americas, focusing on those

artists who have previously been under studied or overlooked.

I am grateful to Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Director and Chief Curator of Visual Arts, who brought this project to Americas Society and who leads the gallery with exciting programming. Thank you also to the curatorial team, Tie Jojima and Rachel Remick, who worked together on this presentation of Cabrera's work, to Karen Marta for her editorial support of Americas Society's publications, Todd Bradway for his project management, and Garrick Gott for designing this series. Americas Society would also like to thank Agustina Ferreyra, Pedro Reyes, and Sofia Canseco for their support of the research for this publication.

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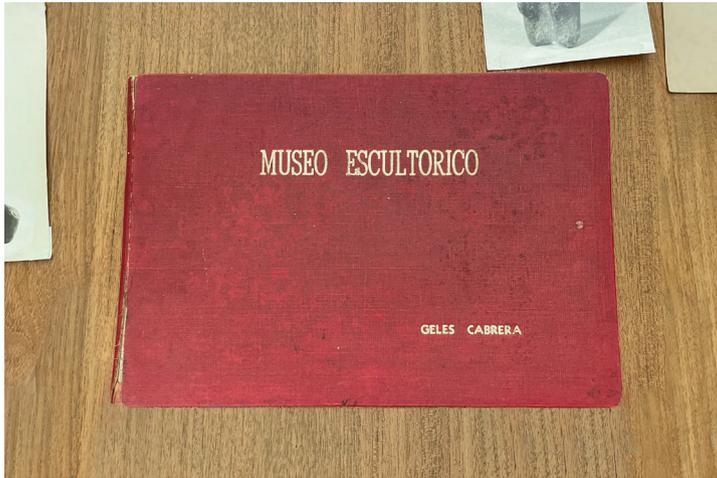
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SUSAN SEGAL  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, AS/COA

# A MUSEUM OF ONE'S OWN

Aimé Iglesias Lukin



Museo Escultórico's guest book, ca. 1960s. Geles Cabrera Archive

I first encountered Geles Cabrera's work by chance in 2018 when visiting Mexico City for a conference. While walking around Colonia Cuauhtémoc with a group of art historians, a local colleague mentioned that we were near El Museo Experimental el Eco and suggested that we visit this storied gallery, which had been built by Mathias Goeritz in 1953.

Right before entering, he pointed out the Monumento a la Madre across the street, a quite spectacular and slightly absurdist modern monument to motherhood inaugurated in 1949, which was, of course, created by a man: Luis Ortiz Monasterio. Interestingly, my colleague explained, this work, which has a phallic shape, has functioned over the years as a gathering place for sex workers offering their services, as well as a site for Indigenous communities protesting through naked sit-ins.

Little did I know at the time how much this peculiar monument to maternity would inform my visit to El Museo el Eco, where the first retrospective of Geles Cabrera's work in decades

was being held.<sup>i</sup> The exhibition was striking; the sculpted bodies looked like figures sunbathing on the patio, carrying on conversations with one another, dismissive of the passage of time and of their place—or lack of place—in art history. I was amazed to realize that, although the group of art historians who had accompanied me to the exhibition included two specialists in modern Mexican art, none of my companions had much of an idea as to who Cabrera was. The show was curated by the artist Pedro Reyes, who has championed Cabrera’s work and legacy. Reyes found in her an important precedent for his own explorations into sculpture, viewing her as a mentor and artistic mother figure, another sign of her influence on contemporary art, and of the complex role that private and public motherhood have played in her career and life.

Today, Geles Cabrera is ninety-five years old. In her near-century on this planet, she has been a contemporary dancer, an artist, a wife, the mother of five children, a high school teacher, and the director and founder

of a museum. In assuming most of these roles, she had to carve a space for herself beyond social expectations for women. But molding and shaping space is her specialty—after all, she is known as Mexico’s “first female sculptor.”

In an act of ingenuity, Cabrera devised an antidote to the exclusion most female artists of her generation have suffered. When, in 1966, her presence in the art world was challenged by personal circumstances and the demands of raising five children, she created her own museum to present her work. Opening its doors near her house in Coyoacán, it received colleagues, neighbors, her high school students, and whoever else wished to visit. Part of a strategy of self-representation that included a carefully preserved archive of her work, the institution was named Museo Escultórico—a title generic enough to evoke the entire discipline, while at the same time emphasizing the bravery of a female artist appropriating the medium of sculpture, which had long been dominated by male artists.

Opening the museum allowed Cabrera to present her work in the form of an autobiographical art history, narrating her decades-long career in the first person. Her modernist interrogation of the limits of figuration and abstraction, effected through dance, modeled bodies, and sculpture, flourished in a space of its own. While Cabrera's oeuvre can be read in dialogue with the revisionism of her mid-century peers, it also asserts a unique independence. As a female sculptor, Cabrera not only carved figures, but also carved out an institutional space and an art history of her own.

It is clear that, as a fantastically gifted artist with a fascinating creative and personal journey, Cabrera is the perfect artist with whom to inaugurate Americas Society's new cycle of annual exhibitions focusing on under-recognized women-identifying artists. At the same time, it seems imperative to ask ourselves, as her audience, and the field of art history as a whole, what precisely is at stake in these acts of so-called recuperation. In 2022, granting

visibility to the overlooked work of women artists is an institutional obligation, even as it is sadly not yet an institutional norm. We must ask ourselves what it means to recuperate an artist, and to what degree such a rescue mission must showcase the failure of institutions to acknowledge these important artists, as much as it stands to show the value of an overlooked artist's work. To acknowledge this failure would encourage institutional humility, preventing us from viewing the increased popularity of these artists as badges of honor, and from comforting ourselves with the notion that we have done the right thing. Necessarily embedded in and negotiating existing power structures, institutions have a duty to offer new avenues of representation, while also remaining conscious of their structural limitations through constant self-criticism.

*Geles Cabrera: Museo Escultórico* is the first exhibition in New York dedicated to the artist. Long overdue, it gives audiences a chance to appreciate the breadth of Cabrera's prolific career,

which has spanned more than seventy years. In the course of this career, Cabrera has used the human figure to revise the formal language of the body while taking inspiration from a wide variety of sources—from pre-Columbian art to modernist sculpture and contemporary dance. It is our hope that this exhibition will present a similar revision, allowing viewers to rethink art history through the voice of a powerful female artist who, quite literally, managed to carve out a space for herself.

#### ENDNOTE

- i. *Geles Cabrera: Mexico's First Female Sculptor*, El Museo el Eco, Mexico City, September 8–November 18, 2018.

# CARVING LIFE INTO STONE

Rachel Remick



Geles Cabrera with *Sin título*, 1966. Geles Cabrera Archive

A camera flash illuminates a curving, cylindrical sculpture sitting atop a decorative stone pedestal (see p. 22). Undulating with vertically oriented curves as the eye travels upward, the form of the sculpture, though carved from stone, is indeterminate. At the top, it separates into two, recasting the sculpture as a pair in embrace. The swooping bulge beneath the right form might be an arm reaching across in a gesture of protection, or perhaps it is not any of this at all—leaving the interpretation up to the viewer. Next to the sculpture, the artist who created it—Geles Cabrera—stands proudly in a red jacket, her hand gently holding the back of her artwork.

This photograph captures Cabrera in 1966, when she opened the doors to her own museum in the Coyoacán neighborhood of Mexico City. The Museo Escultórico Geles Cabrera fulfilled her dream of creating a space exclusively for the exhibition of sculpture. Much of the exhibition space was nestled in the backyard of the house, allowing the vibrant green of the surrounding garden to frame the sculptures, which were

situated in brick niches (see p. 25). Each artwork was given enough space to create an intimate connection with the viewer.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout her career, Cabrera had a unique conception of her work as public art, as something to be shared and enjoyed in dialogue with others. This essay seeks to situate the act of founding her museum in this context, drawing attention to the way that Cabrera chose to return the focus of her museum to the community by creating a space for her neighbors to experience her artwork free of charge and without the support of external funding.

By the time Cabrera opened her museum, she had been a practicing artist for more than twenty years and had achieved recognition for her unique aesthetic and the urgency of her works. Born in Mexico City in 1926, Cabrera came of age during the height of the Mexican muralist movement. During this time in the 1930s and 1940s, painting had achieved prominence as the primary medium of the Mexican national style, while sculpture had become somewhat marginalized. Furthermore, the art



Museo Escultórico Geles Cabrera, n.d., Geles Cabrera Archive

of sculpture was almost exclusively practiced by male artists. Thus, Cabrera's decision to focus on sculpture, and to depict female forms in a wide variety of postures and states, was an unusual one.<sup>ii</sup> In her works, feminine figures exhibit traits coded as feminine like long hair and breasts while still retaining her distinctive abstract style. For example, *Sin título* (Untitled, ca. 1960) takes the form of a seated feminine figure brushing her hands through her hair (see p. 68). The posture is one of relaxed intimacy, markedly different in feeling from a classical female nude or heroic statue.

After completing her artistic education at the Academia de San Carlos and "La Esmeralda" in Mexico City and the Academia de San Alejandro in Havana, Cuba, Cabrera had her first solo exhibition in 1949 at Galería Mont-Orendáin. Using materials like clay, volcanic rock, stone, and bronze, Cabrera molded her figures and heads by hand, rendering them gestural and abstract. Writing in the catalogue, Jorge Palomino described how Cabrera's works "create[d] forms free of vanity,

of the superfluous . . . giving life and imbuing emotion in the land that she works."<sup>iii</sup> Visual relationships to other modernist sculptors like Brancusi and Henry Moore are evident in these early works, including *Sin título* (Untitled, 1950), which eschews a naturalistic imitation of the human form in favor of gestural expression (see p. 53).<sup>iv</sup> In the changing aesthetic tides of Mexican visual art in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Cabrera's sculptures represented a shift toward the individual figure and the abstraction of the body as new modes of artistic expression.

As Cabrera's style evolved during the 1950s, she began to experiment even more with materials, pushing her sculptures further into abstraction. In *Figura* (Figure, 1959), Cabrera uses volcanic rock as a material, producing a sculpture that merely hints at the figure of the title (see p. 60). The head and arms are simple curves emerging from the central cylindrical shape; the porous material grants a tactility to the sculpture; and the stone's dark black and gray shades make the piece visually dense. The use of the body as a vehicle for both abstraction

and conceptual meaning aligned with the aesthetic concerns of Cabrera's contemporaries associated with the Generación de la Ruptura, a term retroactively applied to a group of artists active in the 1950s whose paintings, sculptures, and public artworks explored abstract and conceptual themes as a repudiation of the national, narrative aesthetic of muralism.<sup>v</sup>

While she exhibited steadily in Mexico City in the 1950s and 1960s, Cabrera earned less external recognition in this period than male peers and collaborators like Mathias Goeritz and Rufino Tamayo, as well as women painters like Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington. Compounding this, she did not neatly fit into the mold of a successful artist at that time—she deviated both from the gendered expectations for sculpture, as a female practitioner of a male-dominated medium, and the mode of success achieved by her female peers in Surrealist painting or photography. At the time, some criticized her founding of her own museum as a vanity project (which in itself was perhaps a form of veiled sexism).<sup>vi</sup> I propose instead that

it was Cabrera's way of creating her own space to exhibit her work, outside the paradigms and expectations of the Mexican art world.

With the creative freedom provided by her own museum, Cabrera continued to experiment with her sculptural practice. Her sculptures are not aggressive or sharp, but gentle and profound. As Paul Westheim writes, her sculptures derive their power from giving “sensitivity to what is spiritual or giving spirituality to what is sensitive.”<sup>vii</sup> In the 1970s she began to focus on recumbent figures, which offered a reinterpretation of the female reclining nude. For example, *Sin título* (Untitled, 1978) shows a prostrate figure resting upon her arm, in a gesture of repose (see p. 90). Notably, however, Cabrera deliberately holds back details, applying minimal carving to the face, so that in at least one sense her deployment of abstraction inhibits the objectification of the female form, instead redirecting the sculpture's focus to the conceptual idea of the female form at rest.

Cabrera was never content with merely producing art. She took it upon herself to

archive her artistic practice and accomplishments, not only creating her own museum but also keeping meticulous records of her work and exhibitions, including photographs, newspaper clippings, and other documents. In this way, Cabrera historicized and documented her story on her own terms.

In another photograph from her archive, we see Cabrera leaning on a rectangular relief sculpture in the backyard of her museum (see p. 31). She stares directly into the camera and looks at us with a smile. The year is 1997 and her museum has been open for more than thirty years. Though the space no longer exists today, its memory lives on in this exhibition, where Cabrera's sculptures are on display for new communities and neighbors, thousands of miles away from where they were created.



Geles Cabrera at El Museo Escultórico, 1997. Photograph by Mariana Yampolski, Geles Cabrera Archive

## ENDNOTES

- i. Salvador Alvida Beltrán, "Museo Escultórico Geles Cabrera," *Tiempo Libre*, October 21–27, 1993, newspaper clipping, Geles Cabrera Archive.
- ii. See Shifra M. Goldman, "Six Women Artists of Mexico," *Woman's Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1982–Winter 1983): 1–9, in which Goldman interviews several of Cabrera's peers.
- iii. Jorge Palomino, "Geles Cabrera: Escultora," in *Geles Cabrera: Diecinueve Esculturas*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Galería Mont-Orendáin, 1949), 2, Geles Cabrera Archive (translation by author).
- iv. See Aurora Marya Saavedra, "Presentación," in *Geles Cabrera, otra actitud en la escultura* (Toluca: Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 1990), 11. Saavedra also discusses Cabrera's work in relation to Moore.
- v. See Manuel Felguérez, "La Ruptura, 1935–1955," in *Ruptura, 1952–1965*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Museo Carrillo Gil, 1988), 93–102. Available at Documents of Latin American and Latino Art from the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, ICAA Record ID: 788048.
- vi. See Omar Gasca, "Mas Museos," n.p., n.d., newspaper clipping, Geles Cabrera Archive. This criticism/sentiment is referenced in a narrative conversation (perhaps fictional) and the discussants go on to talk about how Cabrera's museum set a precedent for other artist-founded spaces such as Museo Tamayo.
- vii. Paul Westheim, "Investigación estética," in *Geles Cabrera*, trans. Braulio Rodríguez Verdín (Mexico City: Imprenta Madero, 1977), 16.

HACIA LA DANZA:  
SCULPTURE, DANCE,  
AND THE CITY

Tie Jojima



*Hacia la Danza* (Towards Dance), 1959. Geles Cabrera Archive

A 1959 bronze sculpture by Geles Cabrera titled *Hacia la Danza* (Toward Dance) (see p. 36) suggests the shape of a person reaching toward their knee with their left arm. The bent leg creates a bulging structure, contrasting with the delicate contours of both arms. If facial and bodily details are minimized, volume and presence are emphasized and exaggerated. The work is exemplary of Cabrera's lifelong investigation of the human form—devoid of details, her sculptures interrogate and challenge the limits and definitions of the body. *Hacia la Danza* does not represent dance, but it does materialize the space claimed by a body in motion, while its texture and shape naturally provoke a sensual reading of the work. Unsurprisingly, an examination of Cabrera's work in light of her dance practice and her public art helps to illuminate its exploration of the dynamic between the body and space. Considered in the context of modern architecture and experimental dance, her sculptures negotiate the affective nature of the body and the city.



Geles Cabrera at the Academia de San Carlos, Mexico City, 1946.  
Geles Cabrera Archive

Cabrera began her artistic training in sculpture at the Academy of San Carlos, despite the prejudice she faced from teachers and colleagues who considered sculpture a “man’s art form.”<sup>i</sup> In interviews, Cabrera frequently mentions the encouragement she received from her family to pursue sculpture. Not only was her grandfather a sculptor, but the family also owned a company that created papier-mâché models for Art Nouveau houses, and Cabrera has spoken about her memories of playing with papier-mâché to make sculptures as a child—a medium she returned to in the 1970s.<sup>ii</sup>

Although Cabrera received conventional training in sculpture at San Carlos, she also studied under Alfonso Pallares, an architect who held experimental dance workshops with female students at his home studio.<sup>iii</sup> Cabrera was already practicing dance when she began frequenting Pallares’s workshops every afternoon after art school.<sup>iv</sup> Outside of the institutional space of the art academy, Cabrera immersed herself in experimental dance,

an experience that informed her sculptural practice afterward. In the workshop she practiced Morphochromophonic dance, a genre Pallares created inspired by his architectural thinking, Futurism, and eurythmic principles.<sup>v</sup> Described by Pallares as “the shape and the color of sound in music,” these non-scripted dances involved a combination of sound, movement, color, and light. According to Cabrera, dancers had complete independence to create their own moves according to the music Pallares played on the piano, as well as design their own costumes for performances.

This background in dance informed Cabrera’s sculptural practice. The artist produced a substantial number of works addressing movement that negotiated between figuration and abstraction, while emphasizing embodiment and other physical sensations. In works like *Sin título* (Untitled, 1975, see p. 86), a small-scale bronze sculpture, the artist suggests movement by creating delicate angles in the vertical figure with elements that could be

suggestive of a human body. For instance, a head tilted toward the right, both arms lifted, a torso, and two legs. Besides the dynamism of dance, the sculpture also evokes eroticism. Its small scale and polished texture invite manipulation. One could potentially wrap one's hands around the figure, embracing its body. The bulging end shown on the lower left side of the picture is reminiscent of a glans, sensitive to the touch in both male and female anatomy. Cabrera emphasized genitalia and breasts in many sculptures depicting the human form, even though the rest of their bodily features are stylized and details are minimized (see p. 43). The erotic dimension in her works implicates the viewers' own bodies. Claiming that eroticism can be imaginative, Cabrera has said that if the viewer sees the work as erotic this fact is outside of her responsibility, because it is part of the viewer's own set of life experiences.<sup>vi</sup>

If there is a clear relationship between the affective quality of Cabrera's sculpture and the



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Geles Cabrera Archive



Maquette for public art project at Plaza Miravalle, Mexico City, ca. 1950s.  
Geles Cabrera Archive

multi-sensorial modes she learned in her dance practice, her work also presents a connection between the body, sculpture, and public space as the artist envisioned and created several public art projects throughout her life. In the 1950s the artist planned a sculpture for Plaza Miravalle (Mexico City), which she submitted to the city for consideration. The existing plaster maquette for the project (see p. 44) consists of a structure with shapes resembling people holding hands and dancing in a circle. The sensual and animated figures connect to dance and situate the body in space. Perhaps as a result of the sexist cultural milieu in Mexico in the 1950s or the political and aesthetic battles surrounding public art, the work was never built.<sup>vii</sup>

Almost two decades later, Cabrera joined an artists collective in 1975 focused on public art called GUCADIGOSE.<sup>viii</sup> The group created five large-scale public sculptures for the city of Villahermosa in Tabasco.<sup>ix</sup> The five works were made of concrete and red brick, in conversation with the red clay bricks that

were found in pre-Hispanic structures in the region. The five works emphasized the horizontality of the land itself.<sup>x</sup> Cabrera's piece was placed at the intersection of two roads, at the center of a roundabout (see p. 47). The work had two crosswalks that bisected one another, enabling people to be totally immersed in its structure, because of its downward slopes from the perimeter toward the center.<sup>xi</sup> The slits created by the crosswalks can also be read as a bodily metaphor, literal invaginations built into the earth.<sup>xii</sup>

Unlike her first public art project from the 1950s, which aimed to place sculpted bodies in urban space, the 1975 project accomplished the opposite, as it consisted of the creation of space that people could actively navigate. While the monumentality of these public works—whether they were effectively realized or not—seems to stand in opposition to the small scale of Cabrera's stone sculptures, all of her works testify to the artist's consistent centering of the body and its affects in sculptural practice.



Urban Sculpture in Villahermosa, Tabasco, 1975. Geles Cabrera Archive

## ENDNOTES

- i. Pedro Reyes, "Encuentro con Geles Cabrera," unpublished interview with the artist by Pedro Reyes, 4, Mexico City, April 17, 2018.
- ii. See Laura Arley, "La piedra, dócil ante la belleza," *Jueves de Excelsior*, March 18, 1993, 56–57.
- iii. For more on Pallares's work as an architect, see Elisa Drago Quaglia, *Alfonso Pallares: Sembrador de ideas* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2016).
- iv. Cabrera, interview by Reyes, 14–16.
- v. Pallares's vision for Morphochromophonic dance is informed by his view of architecture, which he defined as "equilibrio y armonía de materiales de un conjunto de ritmos universales y humanos, amalgamados." To him, harmony implicated movement, a negotiation between problems and solutions. In his practice, Pallares sought to integrate the visual arts, architecture, and music. See Quaglia, *Alfonso Pallares*, 43, 143.
- vi. See Macario Matus, "Geles Cabrera," *Arte y Artistas*, June/July/August 1993, 35–38.
- vii. Jennifer Josten argues that public art in mid-century Mexico was a major arena for Mexican political battles, which resulted in a lack of agreement regarding subject matter, media, and style. She claims that such discrepancies resulted from the different stakes at play during the Cold War period in Mexico. See Jennifer Josten, *Modernist Art and Architecture in Cold War Mexico* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 8.
- viii. The title of the collective GUCADIGOSE is an acronym composed of the first letters of its participants' names: Angela Gurría, Geles Cabrera, Juan Luis Díaz, Mathias Goeritz, and Sebastián.
- ix. The original idea for the project was for the artists to create large-scale figurative sculptures that celebrated the products of Tabasco, such as coconut, banana, cocoa, and sugar cane. The idea was criticized in newspapers for being too realist and for recreating in sculpture a theme that painters had already addressed. The original project was ultimately rejected and the group devised a different strategy for the works, incorporating abstraction. See "Plátanos de Concreto, en la Tierra del Plátano," *El Universal* (Mexico City), January 7, 1976.
- x. The emphasis on horizontality in this project opposes the verticality of previous works Goeritz created in public spaces, most notably the Torres de Satélite, which he conceived with Luis Barragán in 1957.
- xi. The inauguration of the works was attended by President Luis Echeverría Álvarez and the Governor of Tabasco, Mario Trujillo García. In a newspaper article the clay tiles utilized in the works were associated with the land and pre-Columbian art of the region. See "El Presidente Inaugural las Esculturas de Guacadigose," *Excelsior* (Mexico City), November 22, 1976.
- xii. The works were not adequately maintained and were subsequently destroyed. See "Lily Kassner Denuncia la Vandálica Destrucción de Tres Esculturas Monumentales, en Villahermosa, Tabasco," *Excelsior* (Mexico City), April 6, 1991.

WORKS



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1950. Terracotta,  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$  inches (9 × 19 × 14 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1950. Bronze,  $5\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$  inches (13 × 29 × 13 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1950. Bronze,  $10\frac{5}{8} \times 11 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$  inches (27 × 28 × 14 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1950. Bronze,  $8\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$  inches (22 × 15,5 × 15 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1950. Bronze,  $10 \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{3}{8}$  inches (25,5 × 14 × 16 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



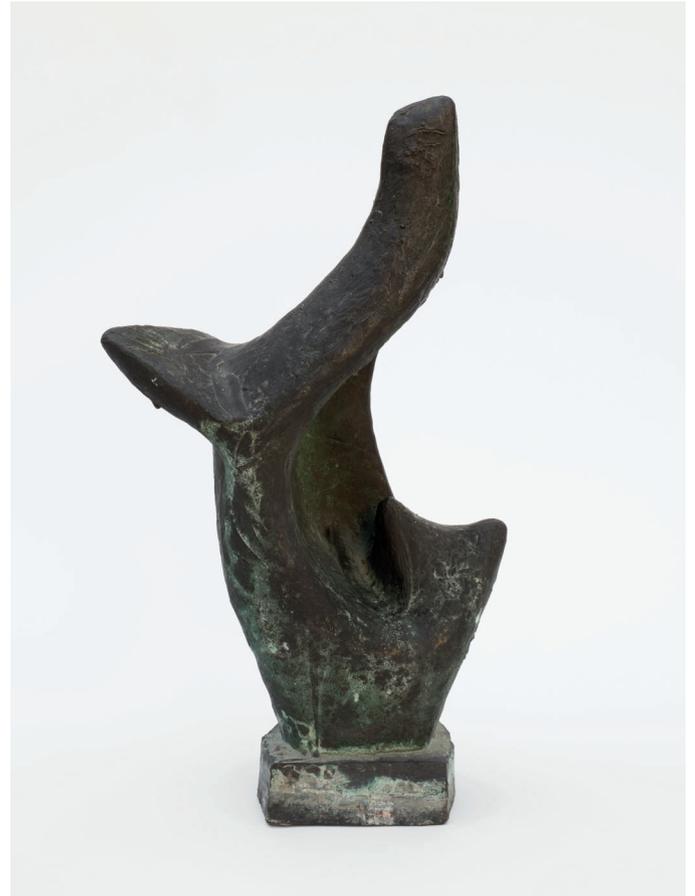
*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1954. Stone, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 12 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches (60 × 32 × 25 cm). Pedro Reyes



*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1956. Bronze, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 5 × 5 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (21.5 × 12.5 × 13 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Figura (Figure)*, 1959. Volcanic rock,  $12\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$  inches (31 × 15 × 15 cm). Pedro Reyes



*Bronze*, 1959. Bronze,  $12\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  inches (32.5 × 17 × 12 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



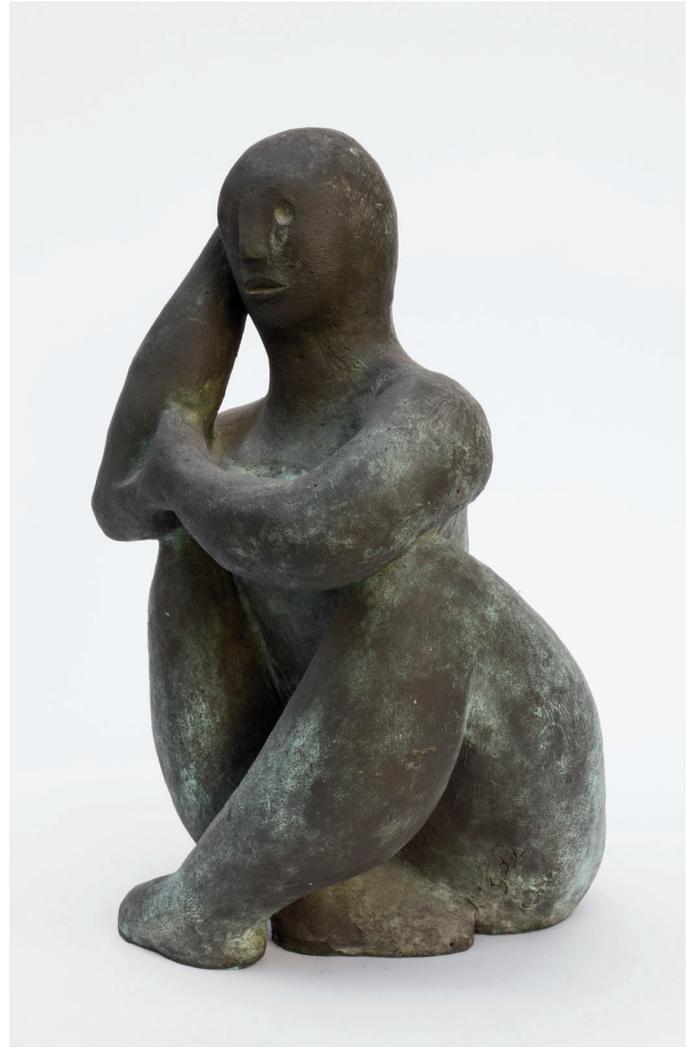
*Sin título* (Untitled), n.d. Volcanic rock, 5 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
(15 × 16 × 11.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1959. Bronze,  $6\frac{3}{4} \times 15\frac{3}{8} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  inches (17 × 39 × 20 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), n.d. Bronze,  $15\frac{1}{8} \times 13 \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  inches (38.5 × 33 × 20 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



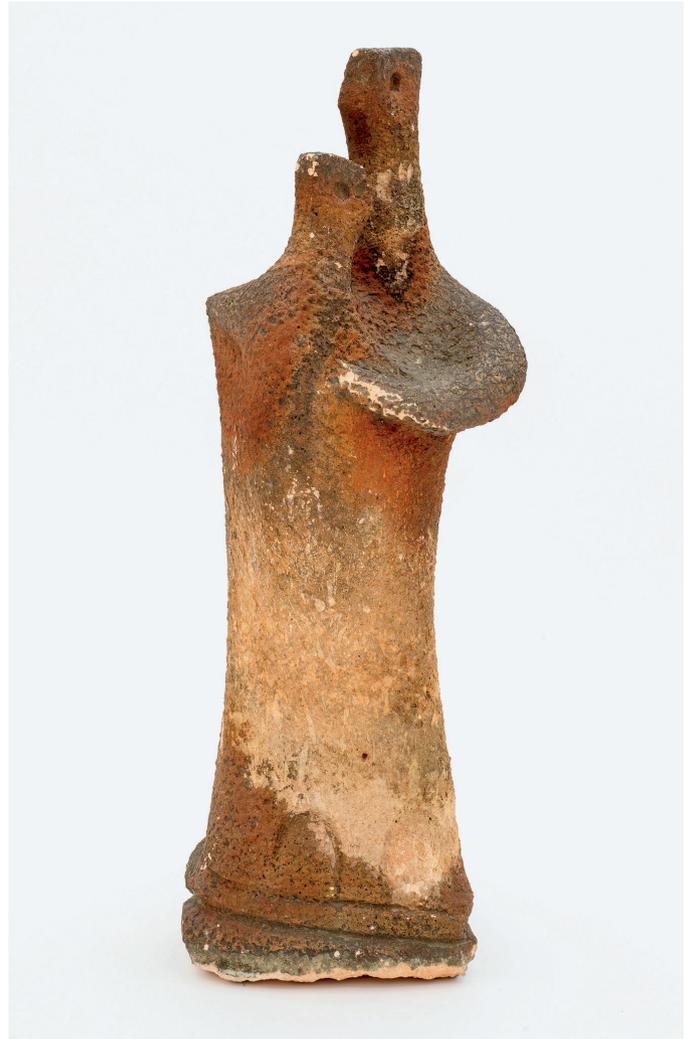
*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1960. Bronze, 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 6  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (37 × 17,5 × 19 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1960. Bronze,  $9 \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$  inches (23 × 14 × 15 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1960. Bronze,  $10\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  inches (27.5 × 16.5 × 20 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1964. Limestone,  $32\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$  inches (82 × 30 × 18 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Nido*, 1966. Hammered copper wire, 27 inches (69 cm) diameter.  
Pedro Reyes



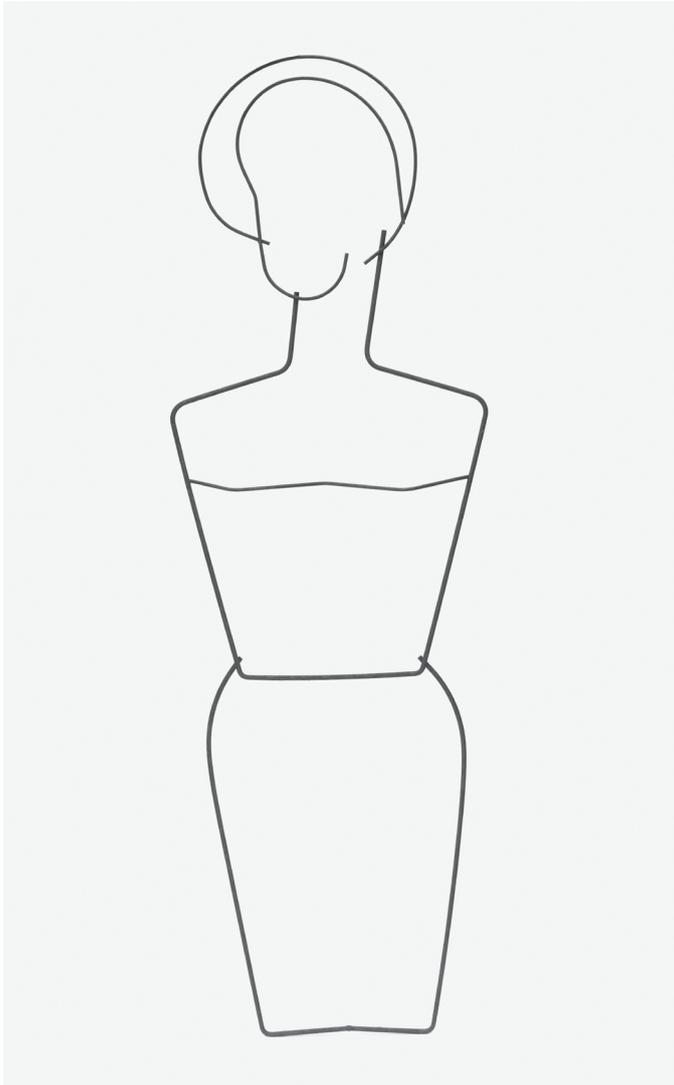
*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1970. Bronze,  $7\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$  inches (18 × 10.5 × 7 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1970. Volcanic rock,  $32\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$  inches (82 × 30 × 21.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1970. Volcanic rock, 17  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 52 × 16  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches  
(45 × 132 × 41 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1970. Iron, 50 × 15 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (127 × 40 × 11 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1970. Bronze, 12 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 8 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (32 × 29 × 22.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Máscara* (Mask), 1970. Bronze and black patina, 16 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 13 inches  
(43 × 33 cm). Private Collection, Mexico City



*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1971. Fibers and iron, 37 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 17 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 17 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
(95 × 45 × 45 cm). Private Collection, Mexico City



*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1975. Bronze,  $6\frac{1}{8} \times 3\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{5}{8}$  inches (15.5 × 9 × 6.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1975. Bronze, 10  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (27 x 17 x 13 cm). Collection of Patricia Hamilton



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1976. Bronze, 5  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (13 x 29 x 13 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra

*Sin título* (Untitled), 1977. Xacoltan stone, 44  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 19  $\frac{3}{8}$  × 17  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches, 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 17  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 15  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches for base (112 × 50 × 44 cm, 20 × 45 × 39 cm for base).  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra





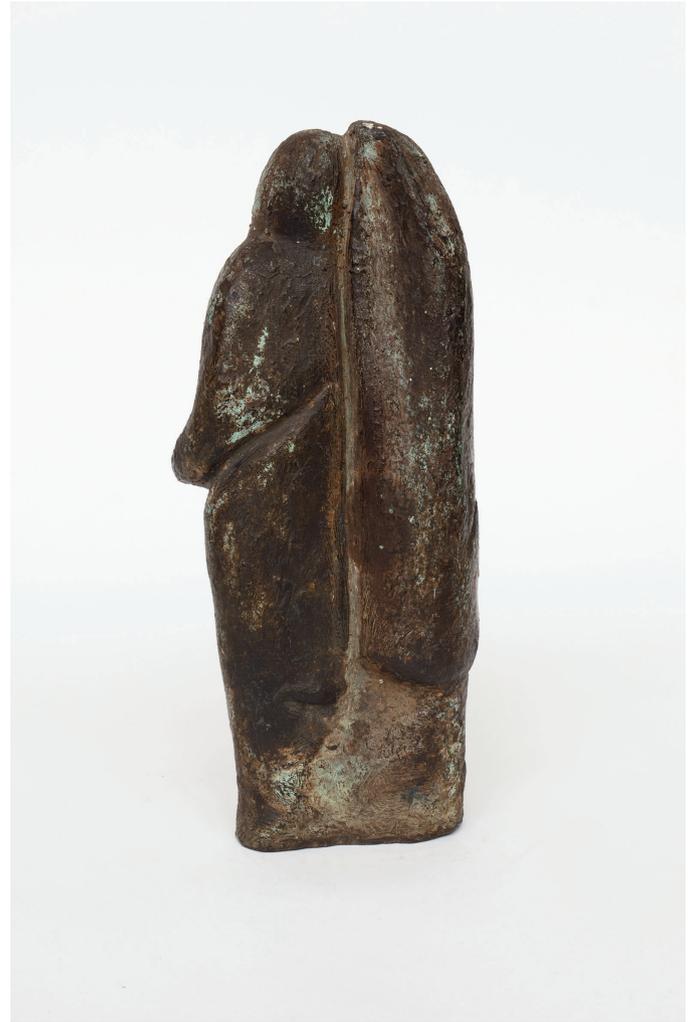
*Sin título* (Untitled), 1978. Bronze,  $3\frac{7}{8} \times 11\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$  inches (10 x 29 x 9 cm).  
Private Collection, Mexico City



*Figura de 4 pechos* (Figure of Four Breasts), 1978. Bronze,  $8\frac{5}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  inches (22 x 13 x 12 cm). Collection Mónica Manzutto & José Kuri



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Bronze,  $7\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$  inches (20 × 12 × 18 cm). Javier Marin Foundation Collection



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Bronze,  $9 \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  inches (23 × 9 × 5 cm). Javier Marin Foundation Collection



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Bronze,  $18\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{3}{8}$  inches (48 x 21 x 13,5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Bronze on wood,  $11 \times 3\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{8}$  inches,  $5\frac{7}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$  inches for base (28 x 10 x 8 cm, 15 x 7 cm for base). Avo Samuelian and Hector Manuel González



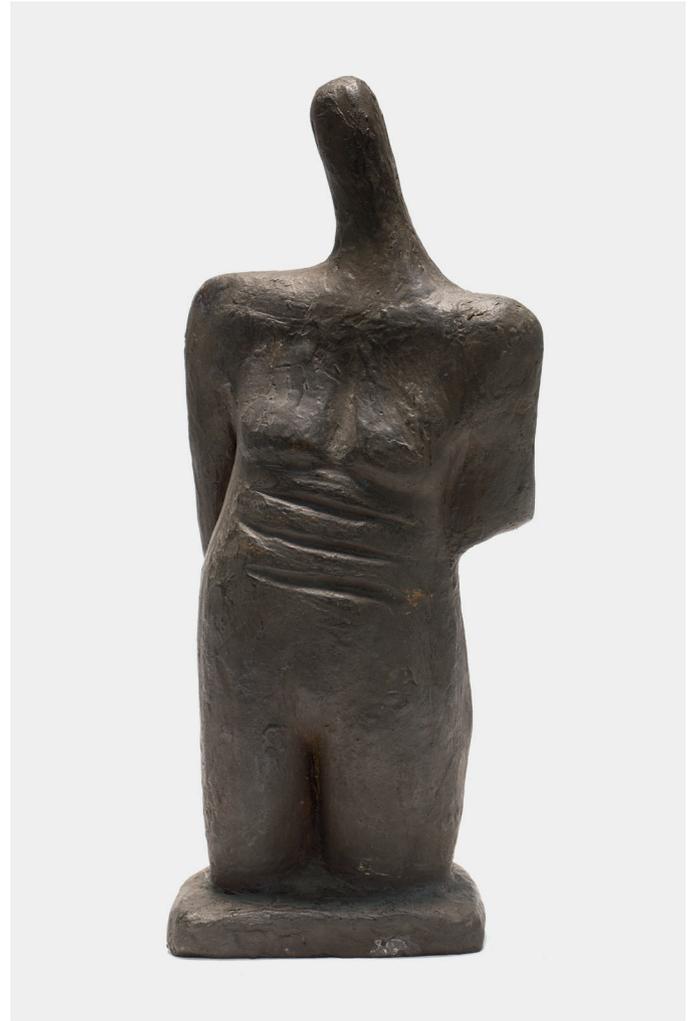
*Sin título* (Untitled), 1979. Bronze,  $6\frac{1}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$  inches (15.5 × 20.5 × 11.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), ca. 1980. Bronze,  $11\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$  inches (30 × 17 × 19 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1980. Bronze,  $8\frac{3}{4} \times 15 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$  inches (22 x 38 x 19 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Hombre (Man)*, 1980. Bronze,  $13\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{7}{8}$  inches (34 x 16 x 10 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1983. Terracotta,  $8\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  inches (21 × 14 × 12 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1983. Terracotta,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$  inches (21.5 × 9 × 18 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1983. Bronze bas-relief,  $12\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{5}{8} \times \frac{3}{8}$  inches  
( $31 \times 32 \times 1$  cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Trabajador (Worker)*, 1984. Bronze,  $10\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$  inches,  $5\frac{1}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{8}$  inches for base (26 × 16 × 9 cm, 13 × 21 × 6 cm for base).  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, 1984. Volcanic rock,  $19\frac{7}{8} \times 24\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{7}{8}$  inches (50.5 × 63 × 22.5 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



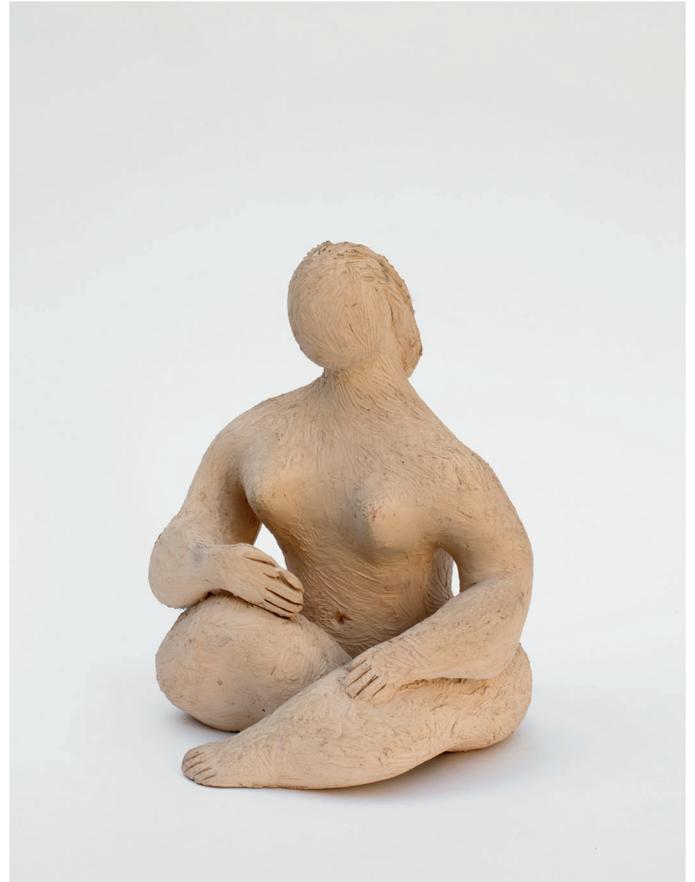
*Sin título* (Untitled), 1985. Bronze,  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{7}{8}$  inches (14 × 45.5 × 10 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1986. Bronze,  $15\frac{3}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{5}{8}$  inches (39 × 28.5 × 22 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



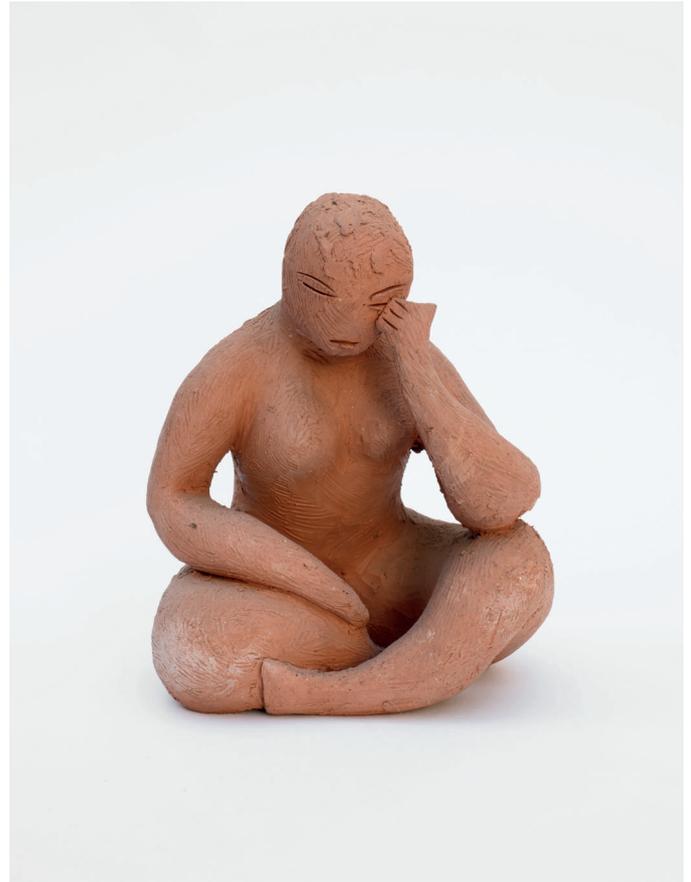
*Sin título* (Untitled), 1988. Terracotta,  $9\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{7}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$  inches (24 × 22.5 × 18 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1988. Terracotta,  $9 \times 7\frac{1}{8} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$  inches (23 × 18 × 17.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1988. Terracotta,  $4\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$  inches (10.5 × 29 × 9 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), 1988. Terracotta,  $7\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{7}{8}$  inches (20 × 16 × 12.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1990. Bronze,  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{8}$  inches (23.5 × 28.5 × 13 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra

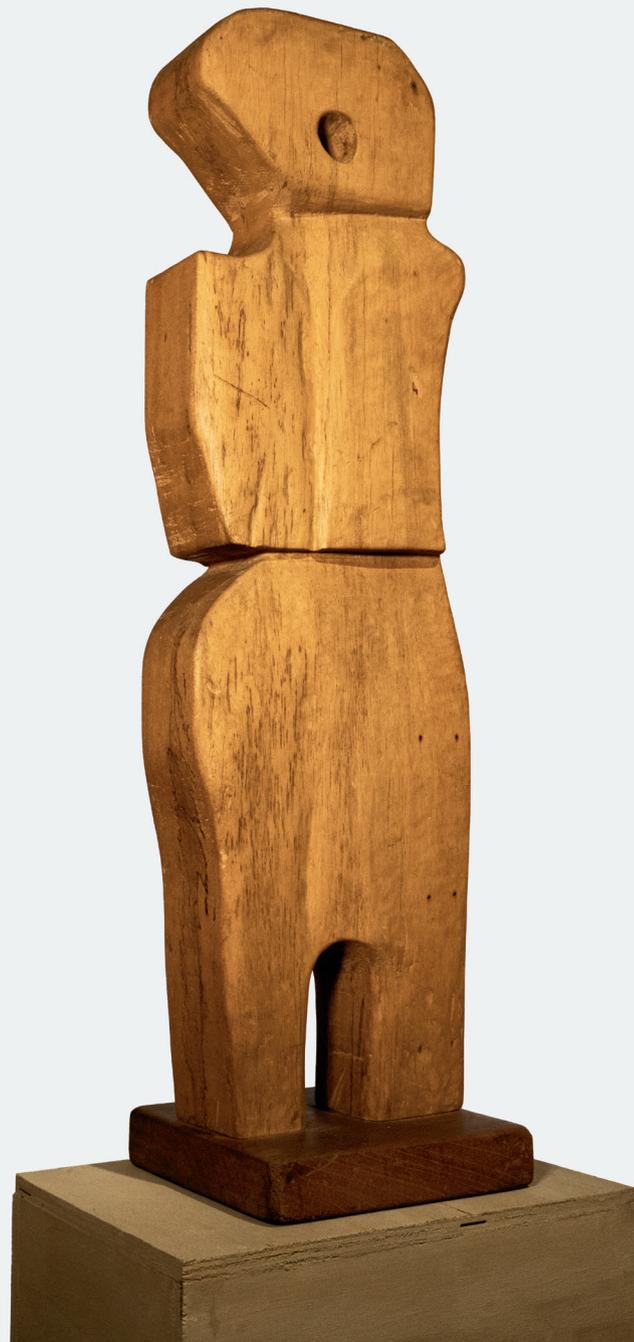


*Sin título (Untitled)*, ca. 1990. Metal, 31 ½ × 13 ¾ × 13 ¾ inches (80 × 34 × 35 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra

*Sin título* (Untitled), 1999. Wood,  $32\frac{5}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{8} \times 3\frac{7}{8}$  inches (83 × 13 × 10 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra



*Sin título* (Untitled), n.d. Kapok wood, 37½ × 9½ × 9¾ inches  
(95 × 24 × 25 cm). Pedro Reyes





Portrait of Geles Cabrera with one of her newspaper sculptures, n.d. Geles Cabrera Archive

## CHRONOLOGY

Lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico

1926 Geles Cabrera is born in Mexico City, the daughter of Salvador Cabrera and Jovita Alvarado. Her father is a civil engineer and her family owns a papier-mâché business servicing Art Nouveau houses (fig. A).

1943–46 Cabrera studies at the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City (figs. B, C), where she receives a traditional training in sculpture from professors Fidias Elizondo and Francisco Zuñiga.

1945–46 While studying at the Academia de San Carlos, Cabrera is invited by one of her teachers, architect Alfonso Pallares, to join his workshop of Morphochromophonic dance (fig. D).

1946–48 Because of her father's work as an engineer, the family lives in Cuba between 1946 and 1948. In Havana, Cabrera attends the Academia de San Alejandro (fig. E), where she meets and befriends Cuban artist Wifredo Lam (fig. F).

1948 Cabrera is awarded second prize in the XXX Salón de Bellas Artes de la Habana, Cuba (fig. G).

1949 Cabrera is awarded first prize in the XXXI Salón de Bellas Artes de la Habana, Cuba.

1949 Returned from Cuba, Cabrera enrolls at the Escuela de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado “La Esmeralda”, in Mexico City (fig. H). The artist often mentions that “La Esmeralda” provided her with greater freedom to create sculptural works in a nonclassical style and experiment with different materials.

1949 Cabrera has her first solo exhibition in Mexico City at Galería Mont-Orendáin (fig. I).

1950–52 Cabrera has two exhibitions at Galería de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, in 1950 and 1952 (fig. J).

1951–63 Cabrera’s children are born (fig. M): Salvador (1951), Erika (1954), Irma (1958), Iris (1960), and Rafael (1963).

1953 Cabrera marries Rafael Cano Rodriguez, a doctor who is a strong supporter of her artistic practice.

1954 Cabrera shows in the Exhibition Salon de la Plástica Mexicana del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, in Mexico City.

1956 *Two Artists from Mexico: Fernando Belain and Geles Cabrera* opens at the Pan American Union in Washington, DC (figs. K, L).

1956 Cabrera shows in many exhibitions in Mexico, including at Gallery Arte A.C. Monterrey, Nuevo León (1957); Galería de la Casa del Arquitecto, Mexico City (1959); and Casa del Lago, Mexico City (1963).

1960 Cabrera has a solo exhibition at Galería Tusó, for which she devises her own system of sculpture pedestals with construction pipes and acrylic sheets (figs. N, O).

1966 Cabrera opens the Museo Escultórico in the Coyoacán neighborhood of Mexico City. The museum is free to the public and promotes sculptural practice (fig. P). It closes its doors in 2006, after forty years.

1967 Cabrera receives an honorable mention in the III Bienal Nacional de Escultura, Mexico City, for her work *Perfil del viento* (Wind Profile).

1971 Cabrera has a solo exhibition, *Formas Ambientales* (Environmental Forms), at Casa de la Cultura in Toluca (fig. Q). She displays pieces made in acrylic (figs. R, S).

1975 Cabrera participates in the exhibition *La mujer como creadora y tema del arte* (Women as Creators and Theme of Artworks) at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, as part of International Women’s Year.

1975 Cabrera creates a sculpture to be given as an award for a flower-arranging contest organized by the feminist magazine *Kena: La Revista de la Superación Femenina* (see p. 85).

1975 Cabrera joins the collective GUCADIGO alongside the sculptors Angela Gurría, Juan Luis Díaz, and Mathias Goeritz (fig. T). The group conducts an archeological investigation of the Mayan ruins at Comalcalco and creates a Campanario at the Tecnológico de Monterrey.

1976 GUCADIGO becomes GUCADIGOSE, with the addition of its fifth member, Sebastián. While working with GUCADIGOSE, Cabrera creates an urban sculpture for the city of Villahermosa, Tabasco (fig. U).

1977 Cabrera shows at Merkupp Gallery in Mexico City.

1979 The collective BUCADIGOSETA—named after the artists Bayer, Gurría, Cabrera, Díaz, Goeritz, Sebastián, and Tamayo—organizes the exhibition *Siete Monedas de Oro* (Seven Golden Coins) at Galería del Círculo (fig. V). Each member of the group creates one small golden coin with the diameter of a pencil. The exhibition is on display for one day only, March 15.

1986 Cabrera exhibits metal and paper works at the subway station Copilco in Mexico City, promoting the idea of the subway as a space for culture, and speaking to the artist's long commitment to making her works available to the public.

1990 *Otra Actitud en la Escultura* opens at the Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura. The institute publishes a trilingual catalogue with an essay by Aurora Marya Saavedra and images of Cabrera's works (fig. W).

1990 Cabrera shows works created with newspaper in the group exhibition *Expresiones en Papel* at Galería Estela Shapiro, April 24–May 22.

1990–98 Cabrera's works are shown at the following galleries and institutions: Melchor Ocampo del H. Senado de la República, Mexico City (1990); Sala Nezahualcóyotl

OFUNAM, Mexico City; (1994); VI Bienal Beca de Creador Artístico, FONCA, Mexico (1994); Museo Taller Nishizawa, Toluca (1995); Dirección de Servicios Médicos UNAM Casa de México, La Habana, Cuba (1996); Casa Universitaria del Libro UNAM, Mexico City (1997); Museo Contemporáneo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City (1998); and el Beca de Creador Artístico, FONCA (1998).

1999 Cabrera exhibits her newspaper sculptures at Centro Cultural Ollin Yoliztli in March. The lightweight works allow for an unconventional exhibition display with sculptural volumes hanging from the ceiling (figs. X, Y).

2000 Cabrera exhibits at Instituto Tecnológico de Celaya SEP, Celaya.

2018 *Geles Cabrera: Mexico's First Female Sculptor*, curated by Pedro Reyes, opens at the Museo Experimental el Eco in Mexico City.

2019 Cabrera shows with Galería Agustina Ferreyra at the Material Art Fair in Mexico City.

2020 Cabrera's work is featured in *Siembra 14, Geles Cabrera y Dalton Gata*, at Kurimanzutto, Mexico City, and the Material Art Fair with Galería Agustina Ferreyra, Mexico City.

2021 Cabrera's work is included in *Monumental: Dimensión Pública de la Escultura*, curated by Pedro Reyes, at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City (fig. Z).

—TIE JOJIMA



A



C



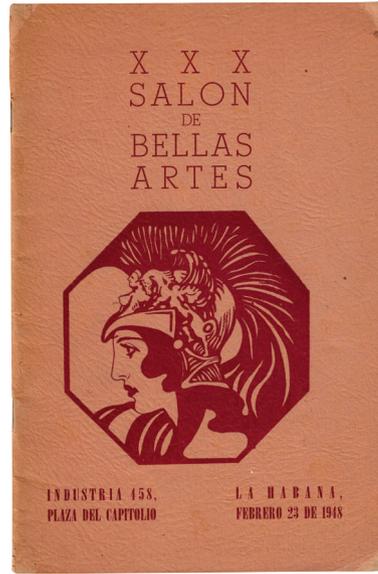
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E



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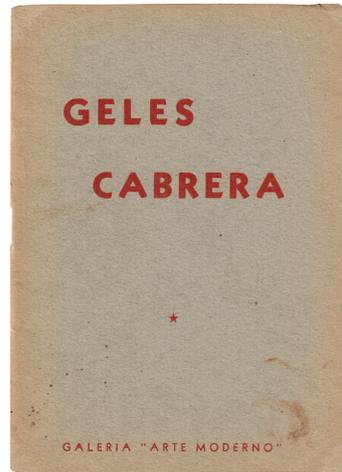
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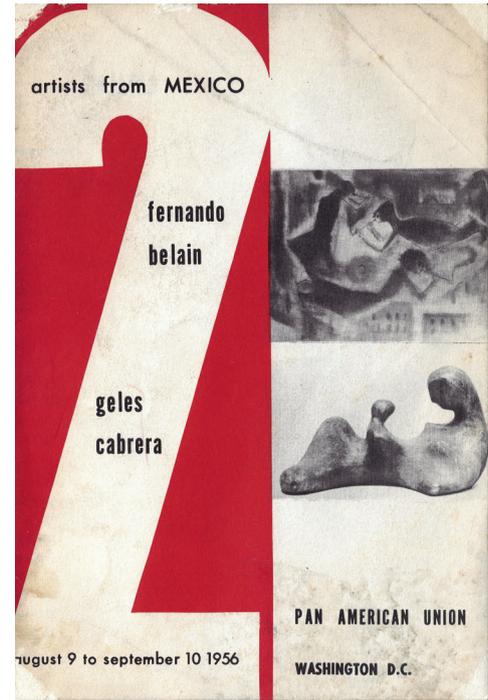
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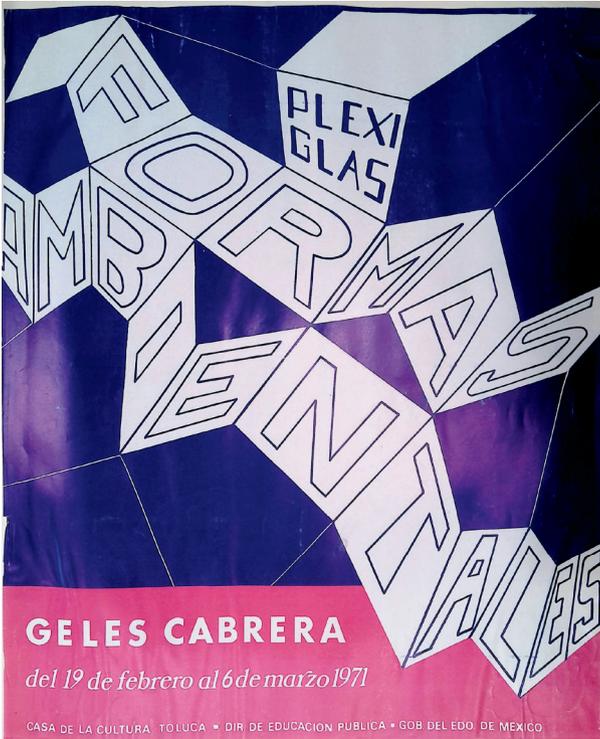
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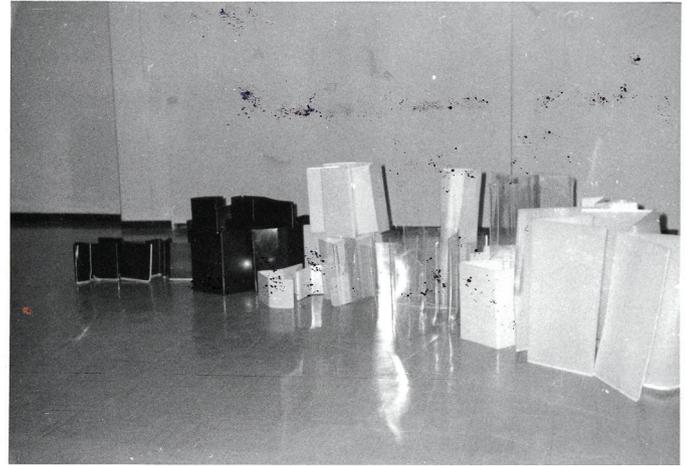
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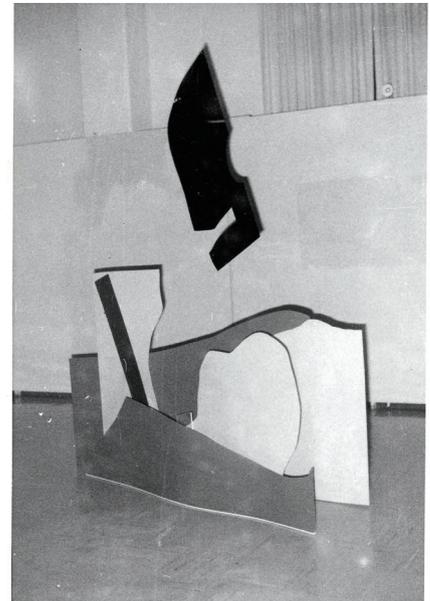
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Q



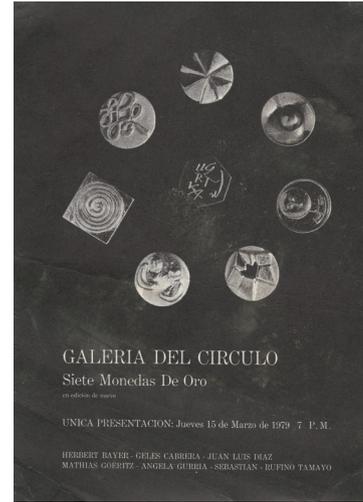
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S



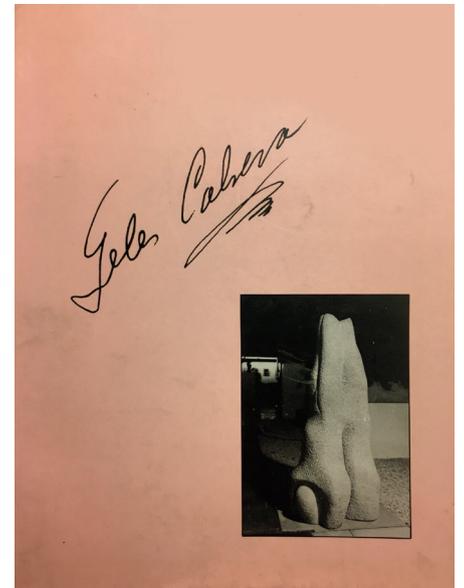
T



V



U



W



X



Z



Y

captions, pp. 126–39:

- A. Cabrera Gran Fabrica de Papier Mache logo
- B. Geles Cabrera's school Identification Card, 1943
- C. Geles Cabrera's sculpture at the Academy of San Carlos, 1946
- D. Geles Cabrera dancing, 1944
- E. Geles Cabrera at Universidad de La Habana, Havana, Cuba, 1948
- F. Wifredo Lam and Geles Cabrera, ca. 1947
- G. Catalogue of the XXX Fine Arts Salon, Havana, Cuba, 1948
- H. Geles Cabrera and colleagues at La Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda" including Francisco Zuñiga, Antonio Ruiz, Fidencio Castillo, Juan Cruz, and Maximiliano González (Dolores del Rio is also standing in the photograph), 1949
- I. *Geles Cabrera*, exhibition catalogue, Galería Mont-Orendáin, Mexico City, 1949
- J. *Geles Cabrera*, exhibition catalogue, Galería de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, 1950
- K. Cabrera with officials of the Mexican Embassy and Fernando Belain during the 1956 Pan American Union exhibition *Two Artists from Mexico: Fernando Belain and Geles Cabrera*
- L. Exhibition flyer for *Two Artists from Mexico: Fernando Belain and Geles Cabrera*, Pan American Union, Washington, DC, 1956
- M. Geles Cabrera with her children Salvador, Erica, and Imma, 1963
- N. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition at Galería Tusó, Mexico City, 1960
- O. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition at Galería Tusó, Mexico City, 1960
- P. Facade of El Museo Escultórico, Mexico City, ca. 1960s
- Q. Catalogue for Geles Cabrera's exhibition *Formas Ambientales*, Casa de la Cultura, Toluca, 1971
- R. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition display, *Formas Ambientales*, Casa de la Cultura, Toluca, 1971
- S. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition display, *Formas Ambientales*, Casa de la Cultura, Toluca, 1971
- T. Members of the artists collective CUCAGIGO (Juan Luis Diaz, Angela Gurría, Geles Cabrera, and Mathias Goeritz), ca. 1975
- U. Members of the artists collective GUCADIGOSE (Juan Luis Diaz, Angela Gurría, Geles Cabrera, Sebastián, and Mathias Goeritz), ca. 1976
- V. Flyer for the exhibition *Siete Monedas de Oro* at Galería del Círculo, Mexico City, by members of the collective BUCAGODIGOSE (Bayer, Gurría, Cabrera, Díaz, Goeritz, Sebastián, and Tamayo), 1979
- W. Catalogue for Geles Cabrera's exhibition *Otra Actitud en la Escultura* at the Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, Toluca, 1990
- X. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition at Centro Cultural Ollin Yoliztli, Mexico City, March 1999
- Y. View of Geles Cabrera's exhibition at Centro Cultural Ollin Yoliztli, Mexico City, March 1999
- Z. View of the exhibition *Geles Cabrera: primera escultora de México* at Museo Experimental el Eco, Mexico City, 2018

## CREDITS

All archival and documentary images are courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra, unless otherwise noted.

p. 31: Photo: Mariana Yampolski

pp. 53–71, 74, 75, 78–88, 90–116: Photos: Ramiro Chaves

p. 76–77, 89: Photos: Octavio Gomez

p. 132: Photo: Crispin Vasquez

p. 139: Courtesy of Museo Experimental el Eco. Photo: Rodrigo Valero Puertas

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*Geles Cabrera: Museo Escultórico*

Curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Tie Jojima, and Rachel Remick

June 8–July 30, 2022

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