

Art

## 11 Radical Latin American Women Artists You Should Know

• By [Alexxa Gotthardt](#) May 23, 2018 6:09 pm [f](#) [t](#) [e](#)

Ask an average person to name an Latin American woman artist, and they'll most likely mention [Frida Kahlo](#). There's no disputing Kahlo's place in the art-historical canon as a master of [Surrealism](#) and self-portraiture. But even she confronted hurdles on her journey into history books and popular consciousness—including the flagrant marginalization she faced as both a female and Latin American artist.

While Kahlo's practice has mostly transcended sexist readings, many other Latin American women artists haven't been as fortunate. "Throughout art history, the people who've had the power to write dominant narratives decided to exclude women *and* art made in Latin America," curator Cecilia Fajardo-Hill told *Artsy*. "It's a form of segregation, and it is unacceptable."

Fajardo-Hill is the co-curator of "[Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985](#)," a sprawling show that began its tour at Los Angeles's [Hammer Museum](#) and is currently on view at the [Brooklyn Museum](#). It is only the second-ever large-scale American museum exhibition to spotlight Latin American female artists, but it marks a growing effort by curators and historians to assert their influence. "Talking about women who've been overlooked requires many exhibitions," Fajardo-Hill continued. "This is the first of *many* that should happen."

Below, we highlight 11 Latin American women artists (from "Radical Women" and beyond) whose work has influenced countless artists, but who've yet to receive recognition on par with their male peers.

### [Tarsila do Amaral \(1886–1973\)](#)

Lived and worked in Brazil



Tarsila do Amaral *Tapestry Tarsila do Amaral - Antropofagia, 2016*  
By [Kamy](#)

Tarsila do Amaral is Brazil's most famous 20th-century artist, but until recently, her work received sparse attention outside of her home country. Last year, the [Art Institute of Chicago](#) became the very first United States institution to present a solo exhibition of the modernist painter's work (it is now [on view](#) at New York's [Museum of Modern Art](#)).

A member of the São Paulo bourgeoisie, do Amaral traveled to Paris in the 1920s, where she took lessons with great [Cubists](#) like [Fernand Léger](#) and rubbed elbows with the likes of Pablo Picasso and Constantin Brancusi. She brought elements of their modernist paintings—flattened forms, fractured space, distorted bodies—back to Brazil, but made them her own by including content ignored by her European counterparts.

powerful, abundant bodies of female figures. These paintings inspired Brazil's Anthropophagy movement, which prompted artists to define a new, uniquely Brazilian style by "cannibalizing" defining aspects of Western art. In the process, do Amaral's practice helped shape her country's postcolonial national identity.

### María Izquierdo (1902–1955)

Lived and work in Mexico



María Izquierdo *Our Lady of Sorrows*, 1943  
"Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950" at Philadelphia Museum of Art

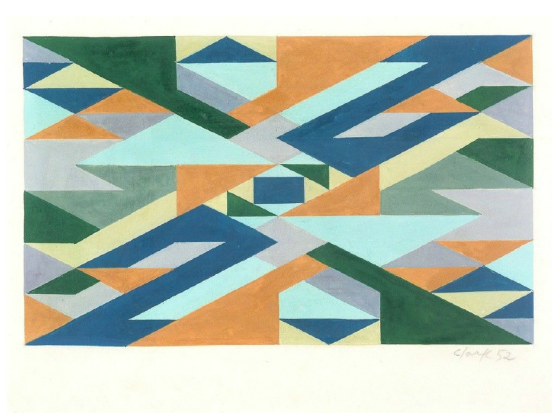
María Izquierdo *Cibeleas Henestrada niña*, 1943  
Galería Oscar Roman

María Izquierdo was a single mother raising three children when her portraits and mystical, Surrealist paintings of interiors began to make waves in Mexico City in the 1930s. Previously, she'd taken classes at the capital's National Fine Arts School, where renowned muralist Diego Rivera praised her early work. From then on, Izquierdo developed a practice that "rejected the political art that prevailed at the time," as critic Holland Cotter has pointed out, and instead mingled elements of myth and Mexican popular culture with content related to her own identity, emotions, and subconscious. In 1930, she mounted a solo exhibition of her work in New York, making her the first Mexican female artist to do so (even before Kahlo).

Izquierdo's popularity amongst Mexico City's artistic elite began to wane, however, in the 1940s, when Rivera and fellow muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros blocked her from receiving an important public mural commission for which she was a finalist (a rare coup for a woman artist at the time). The two men called her unqualified, and from then on, her career suffered. Overtime, her legacy became hazy, too, despite her influence on Surrealist and figurative painters—both her peers, and those who came after her.

### Lygia Clark (1920–1988)

Lived and worked in Brazil



Lygia Clark *Superfície modulada*, 1952  
Romie Mesquita Galeria

Lygia Clark was one of several artists in 1960s Brazil to pioneer interactive, immersive art—an attempt to break down the boundaries between art and life. Clark began her radical practice by exploring geometric abstraction during a time when realism was still the dominant motif in Rio de Janeiro. She gleaned early inspiration from European modernists like Paul Klee and Léger, but broke from their style by bringing the hard-edged forms of her paintings into three-dimensional space. Her canvases jutted out into the air,

and she began making angular sculptures—her famous “Bichos (Critters)”—with the intention of being handled by viewers.

With fellow Rio de Janeiro-based artists [Lygia Pape](#) and [Hélio Oiticica](#), Clark founded the Neo-Concrete movement, which encouraged participation, experimentation, sensuality, and even political discourse within abstraction. Later, Clark gravitated towards film and performance art as a means to express her increasing desire to bring art and life closer together. Eventually, she began to focus less on artmaking, and more on her practice as a psychologist. Drawing from early observations of people playing with her sculptures, Clark developed methods in which patients interacted with objects as part of their healing process.

### [Lygia Pape \(1927–2004\)](#)

Lived and worked in Brazil



Still of Lygia Pape, *O ovo, (The Egg)*, 1967. © Projeto Lygia Pape. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth and the Brooklyn Museum.

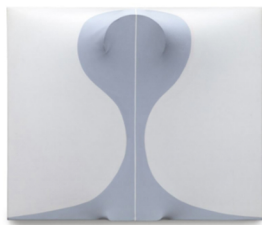
Like Clark, Lygia Pape laid the groundwork for countless experimental artists who aimed to close the gap between art and the world around it. Pape’s practice also grew from an initial interest in geometric abstraction, but quickly moved towards performance, installation, and film as a means to explore art’s social dimensions. She made unbound books that were meant to be held and rearranged, and choreographed group performances.

Her most famous of the latter, *Divisor* (1968), was activated by a large group of schoolchildren from a Rio de Janeiro favela. Upon sticking their heads through holes in a massive white sheet, their individual movements became restricted as they metamorphosed into a single organism. At the time, Brazil was ruled by a dictatorship, and Pape’s piece boldly commented on the limitations to personal freedoms imposed by the government.

Her films were equally experimental and audacious. In *Eat Me* (1975), she filmed a mouth up-close as it sucks on and grotesquely spits out various objects. The piece simultaneously references the “cannibalism” of do Amaral’s Anthropophagy movement, and the violence that increasingly plagued Brazil.

### [Zilia Sánchez \(b. 1928\)](#)

Lives and works in Puerto Rico



Zilia Sánchez *Antígona [Antigone]*, 1970  
El Museo del Barrio



Zilia Sánchez *Amazonas*, 1999  
Galerie Lelong & Co.

In the 1960s, Zilia Sánchez reinvented hard-edged, geometric abstraction by introducing shaped canvases and undulating forms evoking sensuality and eroticism. Born in Cuba, Sánchez was raised in the rocky years before the revolution and began her career as a painter and set designer for radical

making mixed paintings, a practice she further developed in Puerto Rico after settling there in the early 1970s.

In Sánchez's three-dimensional paintings, like the 1976 *Topología Erótica*, pointy areas of the canvas protrude into space, their resemblance to nipples enhanced by the pink, painted forms that encircle them. Throughout her career, Sánchez has also joined multiple canvases together; where they meet, openings recalling vulvas and other orifices appear.

## Marisol (1930–2016)

Lived and worked in Venezuela and the United States



Marisol *The Family*, 1969  
El Museo del Barrio

Marisol *Portrait of Martha Graham*, 1977  
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Marisol, born Maria Sol Escobar, was said to have received “more press and more visibility than Andy Warhol” in the 1960s. But like many women artists, her influence was eventually eclipsed by her male counterparts. Born in Paris to a wealthy Venezuelan family, Marisol began spending time in New York in the 1960s, soaking up the emerging Pop art scene.

It wasn't long before she was showing her playful, satirical sculptures that blended influences as wide-ranging as Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages and pre-Columbian folk art. The resulting totemic figures depicted both famous figures, like the Kennedys, and everyday families, while also incorporating elements molded from Marisol's own body. In this way, she combined the personal and the political, hinting at the nascent feminist art movement.

## Marta Minujín (b. 1943)

Lives and works in Argentina



Marta Minujín *All the Lovely People*, 2010  
Praxis Prints

Marta Minujín also spent the 1960s ensconced by the burgeoning Pop art movement, where she occasionally collaborated with Warhol. Minujín's work, however, was nothing like the slick, mass-produced paintings of her silver-haired male counterpart. Instead, her plush sculptures, environments strung with glowing neons, and public performances invited active participation and physical contact.

central elements of environments like *La chambre d'amour* (1963) and

*¡Revelaques y Viva!* (1964), in which Minujín encouraged participants to leave their inhibitions at the door and roll around in a sea of cushions.

Minujín's work has also addressed political issues like the ills of totalitarian rule and oppression. For the ongoing series "La caída de los mitos universales," she erected replicas of famous monuments like the Parthenon using fraught objects, such as books banned by the former Argentine dictatorship. Once a given structure is dismantled, its individual components are distributed to the public.

## Teresa Burga (b. 1935)

Lives and works in Peru



Teresa Burga *Sin título / Untitled, ...*  
Barbara Thumm



Teresa Burga *Cubes, 1966*  
"The EY Exhibition: The World Goes Pop" at Tate Modern, London

Throughout Teresa Burga's 60-year career, she's placed the female body at the center of her Pop-inflected practice. Her playful, incisive paintings and sculptures have questioned female stereotypes and patriarchal art-world hierarchies. Simultaneously, they implicate mass media and totalitarian rule as a culprits of chauvinism.

Burga began her career in the 1960s, as political unrest in Peru escalated. A founding member of Groupe Arte Nuevo, which helped introduce the avant-garde work of Pop art and Happenings to Peru, her early work resisted dictator Juan Velasco Alvarado's nationalist preference towards indigenous art. Bright figurative paintings from the '60s parodied sexist portrayals of women, while modular sculptures built from cubes (think Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, 1964) depicted body parts and addressed commodification of the female form.

Other pieces were more research intensive. For *Profile of the Peruvian Woman* (1980–81), Burga and psychotherapist Marie-France Cathelat researched the lives of middle-class women as fodder for a multimedia installation exploring the dissonance between real Peruvian women and the stereotypes placed on them.

## Beatriz González (b. 1938)

Lives and works in Colombia



Beatriz González *Mi Lucha, 1974*

Looking back on her career in 2015, Beatriz González described herself as a “transgressor that didn’t fit in her time.” The Bogotá-based artist came of age in the 1960s, during the dawn of Pop art and a period of conflict in Colombia known as *La Violencia*. González fused both of these influences into a body of work that referenced images from art history and the social and political unrest of her time.

In perhaps her most famous work, *The Sisga Suicides I, II and III* (1965), González appropriated a photo reproduced in local newspapers; it showed the smiling faces of a deeply religious couple who committed joint suicide in order to absolve the woman’s sin. González reinterpreted the image in a series of bright, flat paintings that spotlight the couple’s tragic end and the disturbing media sensation it sparked. Other works question mass production by reproducing famous art historical works onto everyday, household objects, like soiled curtains and towels.

## Paz Errázuriz (b. 1944)

Lives and works in Chile



Paz Errázuriz Evelyn, Santiago from Adam's Apple, 1988  
Phillips

In the 1970s, photographer Paz Errázuriz dared to document communities being marginalized under Chile’s Pinochet-led dictatorship. Ignoring laws that restricted women’s access to certain areas, she entered brothels populated by queer and trans sex workers; psychiatric hospitals; circuses; and boxing clubs. After befriendng members of these disparate scenes, she took their portraits. The resulting photos exude intimacy and warmth, revering their subjects and exposing the oppression they faced. “They are topics that society doesn’t look at,” Errázuriz has said of her ongoing work, “and my intention is to encourage people to dare to look.”

## Mónica Mayer (b. 1954)

Lives and works in Mexico



Mónica Mayer Primero de diciembre, 1977  
WALDEN

Mónica Mayer’s feminist practice was sparked in art school, when she heard a group of male students state “that women were less creative than men because we gave birth,” as she later recalled in an artist statement. In 1978,

the American feminist art movement, like Judy Chicago. Later that year, Mayer brought her blossoming performance practice back to Mexico City, where she produced *El tendadero* (1979). The interactive piece encouraged

the public to finish the sentence: "As a woman, the thing I detest most about this city is..."

Other works poked fun at traditional ideas of sexual normalcy, or celebrated women's desires. Mayer went on to found two feminist art groups of her own, and has promoted her feminist ideology through channels outside of her practice. "I think the most important thing feminist art has given me is the understanding that an artist's work is more than producing art works," she's explained. "Doing research on women's art, writing about them... teaching, protesting and supporting other women artists is part of my work." ●



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*Cover Image: Marta Minujin, La Menesunda, 1965. Photo via Wikimedia Commons; Artist Maria Sol Escobar, known as Marisol, photographed in 1968. Photo by Jack Mitchell/Getty Images; Unknown Photographer, Tarsila do Amaral, ca. 1925. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.*