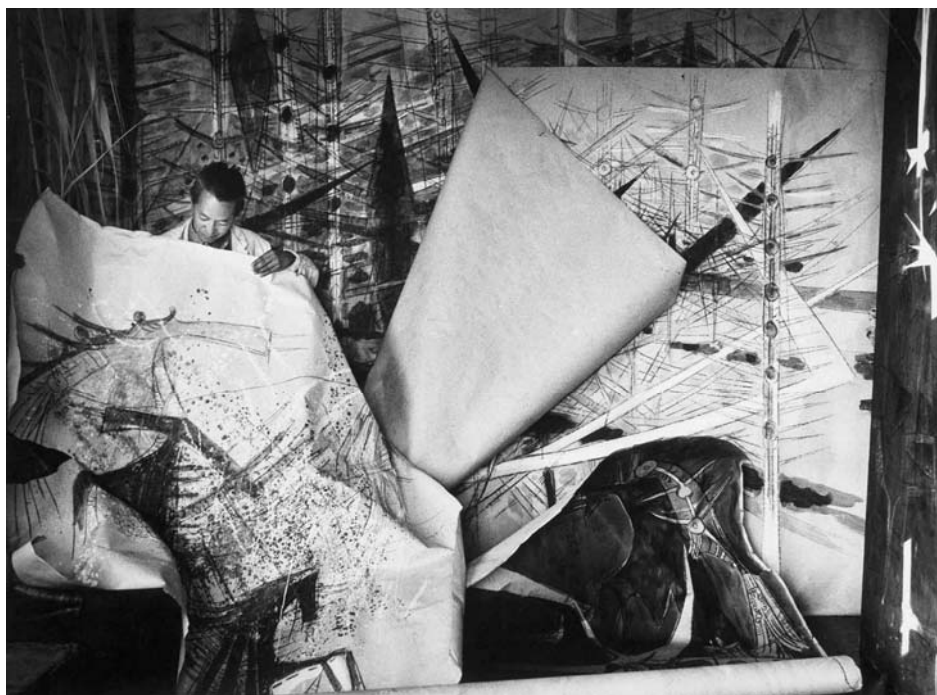


## Wifredo Lam



Wifredo Lam ante una de sus obras de la serie Brousses en su taller de Albissola, 1963  
© Archivos SDO Wifredo Lam

- DATES:** 5<sup>th</sup> of April – 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016
- PLACE:** Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini. Building, 1<sup>st</sup> floor.
- ORGANIZED BY:** Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, París, in colaboración withl Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid and Tate Modern, London
- CURATED BY:** Catherine David (Centre Pompidou / Musée national d'art moderne) and Manuel Borja-Villel (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía)
- COORDINATION:** Belén Díaz de Rábago and Carolina Bustamante
- TOUR:** Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, París (30th of September 2015 – 15th of February 2016)
- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (5th of April – 15th of August 2016)
- Tate Modern, London (14th of September 2016 – 8th of January 2017)

Born in Sagua la Grande, Cuba, in 1902, he went to Spain in 1923 with a grant to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid. His work was impregnated with many references, the result of close observation of his context, beginning with the Old Masters at the Prado and ranging across the forms of German Expressionism and the avant-garde art of Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Henri Matisse and Joan Miró. Nevertheless, he kept a certain distance from these movements, taking up a personal position from which he could problematize European languages and motifs. With a predilection for working with paper, his forms advanced from an initially somewhat classical approach along a path of simplification and refinement.



Wilfredo Lam en su estudio parisino de la rue Armand-Moisant en 1940  
Fotografía de Marc Vaux

Interested too in the sociopolitical issues around him, with a view of relations of dominance influenced by Marxist readings, he incorporated social figures and settings in works like *Campesino* [Peasant, 1926] or *Campesina castellana* [Castilian Peasant Woman, 1927], and in the thirties he espoused the Republican cause. Added to this critical conscience was his growing concern with colonial reality and its integration within various structures, such as the social and the artistic. Shortly before, he had suffered one of his greatest personal tragedies when his wife, Eva Píriz, and their son both died of tuberculosis. These events were translated into two self-portraits, one of which –*Autoportrait, II* [Self-portrait, II, c. 1938] – is shown in this exhibition. The severely schematized faces are rendered as monochrome ovals in an Expressionist idiom that works with the notion of the mask, conflicting identity and the fractured psyche.

In May 1938, the course of events in the Civil War forced him into exile in Paris, where he went on Picasso's advice to see the Black African statuary at the Musée de l'Homme. Two years later, the occupation of Paris by the German troops obliged him to leave once more, and he made his way to Marseilles. There he coincided with André Breton and part of the Surrealist circle, who awakened his interest in collective and automatic practices (*cadavres exquis*, collective drawings, the cards of the *Jeu de Marseille* [Game of Marseille]). Lam took part in these sessions and filled numerous sketchbooks with drawings in India ink whose hybrid figures anticipated the work of his return to Cuba.

In 1941, with his spirits sunk after two exiles, he returned to his native land. The Cuba of Gerardo Machado's regime, wracked with poverty, corruption and racism, deeply disappointed him, and he made contact with the island's artistic and intellectual circles with a view to constructing a divergent account of Cuban identity. With Lydia Cabrera, Fernando Ortiz, Virgilio Piñera, José Lezama Lima and Aimé Césaire, he shared a desire to trace out new narratives, resisting imposed forms of portrayal and advocating "another" modernism. From Fernando Ortiz, Lam took the concept of "transculturation" and approached it from a plastic perspective, defining his painting as "an act of decolonization".

He thus vindicated the plurality and cultural interchange that constituted the island's collective identity as well as his own, unstable and hybrid. In his works of the forties, like *El sombrío Malembo* [The Dark Malembo, 1943], *La luz de la jungla* [The Light of the Jungle, 1944], *Oyá, divinidad del aire y de la muerte* [Oyá, Divinity of the Air and of Death, 1944] or *El rumor de la tierra* [The Sound of the Earth, 1950], María Zambrano detected a musical and orphic sensibility, dominated by increasingly schematic figures, with which the artist reveals and records the rhythm, sounds and uneasy silence beneath the apparent calm of tropical nature. The dialectic of the mask reappears along with the tension between the visible and the invisible, and between imposed and vindicated readings.



WIFREDO LAM  
*Le repos du modèle* (El descanso de la modelo), 1941  
Témpera sobre papel encolado sobre lienzo  
144 x 155 cm  
Colección particular, París  
© Archivo SDO Wifredo Lam

From 1952, as his international stature grew, the artist went on various journeys and eventually took up residence again in Paris. His international shows multiplied, especially those in which he exhibited alongside the artists of CoBrA, who were introduced to him by his artist friend Asger Jorn. The group's spontaneity, collective dimension and interest in popular art led him to confront new materials like terracotta, a medium which drew him with its promise of spontaneous liberation and its element of chance when working with it. In 1954, he went with Asger Jorn to the Italian town of Albissola, an important center of ceramic production where he bought a house in 1962, living there on a regular basis until the end of his life. In 1975 he made about three hundred ceramic pieces whose symbolism refers back to his paintings, and he also started work on the autobiographical *El nuevo Nuevo Mundo de Lam* [Lam's new New World], which he exhibited in 1976. This is an atlas of poetic and sociopolitical affinities that reflects a rich array of references and languages and a determination to fashion them into a personal discourse. The life of this tireless worker came to an end in 1982 after he had completed the engravings for his last artist's book, *L'Herbe sous les pavés*, with texts by Jean-Dominique Rey.

Madrid, 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2016

**For further information:**

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