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The Cuban artist Loló Soldevilla, born Dolores Soldevilla Nieto, died in 1971. Her first New York solo show is taking place now, 48 years later. Patience is a virtue, even for the deceased. Born in Havana in 1901, she was a key figure in *Los Diez Pintores Concretos* (10 Concrete Painters) who showed in Cuba between 1957 and 1961. During the '50s, Soldevilla



Loló Soldevilla, *Untitled (Sin título)*, 1956. Collage, mixed media on cardboard, 15 1/2 x 21 3/4 inches. © Martha Flora Carranza Barba, universal heir of the work of Loló Soldevilla. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

produced an exceptional body of work rendered invisible by critical indifference and political oppression.

Soldevilla is best understood within the context of Concrete art, a highly diverse, ubiquitous, and long-lived movement. Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) might be considered its starting point, but the Concrete aesthetic spread globally throughout the 20th century, from Theo van Doesburg with the De Stijl movement in the 1920s, to Joaquín Torres García, then to Brazil and Argentina after World War II, and as far as Cleveland, Ohio with the Anonima Group active during the 1960s. Concrete art first arose at a moment when the two revolutionary ideologies of the 20th century, Fascism and Communism, were demanding that artists join them and subordinate their art to their political demands, and thus divorce itself from any emotional expression. Concrete art rejects any ideology, as if artists, irrespective of their personal political beliefs, were simply exhausted by the demagogues and decided to withdraw to a world of their own. Concrete art—not to be confused with concrete poetry or concrete music despite the identical term—constitutes a utopia: an island of imagination where artistic expression is not subordinate to a party line or propaganda.

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Loló Soldevilla, *Untitled (Sin título)*, 1954. Mixed media, wood, masonite, and jute, 13 x 16 15/16 inches. © Martha Flora Carranza Barba, universal heir of the work of Loló Soldevilla. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

Sean Kelly's panoramic, chronological presentation of 66 works by Loló Soldevilla is a welcome addition to the group shows, *Concrete Cuba* (2016) at David Zwirner and *Diálogos Constructivistas en la Vanguard Cubana* (2016) at Galerie LeLong. *Constructing Her Universe* is the first monographic presentation of any Cuban Concrete artist. It goes without question that Loló Soldevilla was a pioneering figure both in Cuban art and in international Concrete art, but there is another significant fact: Concrete art is gender-neutral and demands only that the viewer understand that its only subject is itself. The artist is irrelevant here.

This meticulously curated show, in which each modestly-sized work bears an “accompanying certificate of authenticity”—so important in the case of an artist whose dispersed, un-cataloged work can so easily be copied—opens with four vaguely expressionistic portraits made between 1950 and 1960. Three are of friends, but one, from 1952, is a self-portrait. An enigmatic, stylized face stares out at us, as if dreaming of the geometric oeuvre the artist was then in the process of creating. Floating around the face is confetti—on closer examination, minute multicolored squares—while a circle surrounds the left eye: color and geometry eclipse personality.

Abstraction's struggle for control over the canvas appears in a black, white, and gray oil on canvas from 1952, capturing motion in an echo of a Futurist aesthetic. Just as personal identity will be purged out of her signature works,

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motion too must be expelled. The road to her particular brand of abstraction required Soldevilla to renounce many of the obsessions of Modernism, from its cult of emotion to its dynamism. The sacrifice was more than worthwhile.

What distinguishes Soldevilla's work from other Concrete art is its play of relationships: within the work we see lines of communication, a dialogue among carefully arranged geometric shapes. We see her obsession with affinities throughout this mesmerizing show, but most especially in four works from 1956, three oils on canvas, and one collage on cardboard. Here Soldevilla uses a black surface on which she floats her circles and rectangles. The blackness simultaneously looks back to Malevich's void and foreshadows so many black paintings of the later 20th century, from Ad Reinhardt to Robert Rauschenberg. The affinities between Concrete painting and Minimalism are evident but deceptive. Beyond wanting us to contemplate a plane of color or a sculptural mass, Soldevilla wants us to engage with the relationships she establishes among her forms. These works contain hieroglyphs or ideograms whose meaning is always just beyond our grasp.

Soldevilla's sculpture is a digression from her painting. But she manages to amalgamate the two in a stunning checkerboard work from 1955, *El Damero*. The work brings into focus another aspect of the Concrete aesthetic: art as game with fixed rules within a fixed space, but a game in which the viewer participates. From a biographical perspective this work also constitutes an irony: with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Soldevilla's work was deemed counterrevolutionary and she was obliged to discontinue her artistic practice and work in a factory making wooden toys for children.