

TALKATIVE FILES: Carlos Enríquez's muse

18/09/2017



Sara Cheméndez posed for “The Kidnapping of the Mulatto Women” (El rapto de las mulatas). The steamy and beautiful mulatto Sara Cheméndez could well reincarnate one of the classic “Three Graces” (Tres Gracias), the goddesses of beauty, spell and joy.

She, in her best times, has everything at her feet, and to shine, she serves as a model for Ramos Blanco, Fidelio Ponce de León and, in particular, Carlos Enríquez, the rebel bohemian painter, enemy of the academy and avant-garde of the grove of guava trees, the almond trees, the palm tree, cigar boxes, rural myths and peasants in black and white, who will never forget his youthful and audacious treatment of female nudes.

Born in 1920, in Havana's La Vibora neighborhood, Sara, Vizcaino by name, began her artistic life at the age of ten by the hand of sculptor Casagrán, who needed a little girl to make little clay heads. Then, after several years, Carlos Enríquez, a friend of the stone cutter, went to the girl's house, took her for a walk, begged her mother, and at the end, hired her as muse of some of his oil paintings, in which the dynamic, fine, flashing and incisive lines as well as soft, elegant and very sensible colors stand out.

Over the years, Sara lives a complicity of flesh and soul with Carlos Enríquez at El Hurón Azul Farm, where the creator of the Romancero Guajiro, debtor, at the same time, of patriots and bandits and illustrator of texts by Guillén and Carpentier, enjoys very good Creole lunches with Félix Pita Rodríguez, Marcelo Pogolotti or Juan David. The dwelling, a copy of a train station in Pennsylvania and pride of Havana's Párraga neighborhood, is named after the skin of this rodent that the artist tans and paints that color. El Hurón, a museum nowadays, is full of barefoot legends. María Elena Balán upholds this on her website Arca de Cubaña:

"I asked Alberto Valcárcel, specialist of the museum house, about the curious footprints of the owner that remain, despite the years, on the steps and have given way to various versions. One of them belongs to Sara Cheméndez (...). One day, while he was resting in a hammock in the yard, the rope broke and he fell to the ground. The girl, who was looking at him through a window from above, screamed and Carlos ran up the stairs. While hurrying, he set foot on a tray of yellow paint and his footprints remained marked on the steps. It is also likely that Carlos was provoking the traces, to leave them in a veiled way as something perceptible and at the same time, soft. "

Once, the painter of paintings such as "The King of the Fields of Cuba" (El Rey de los Campos de Cuba) (Manuel Garcia), awarded in 1935, "The Bathers of the Lagoon" (Las bañistas de la laguna", "Dos Ríos" and "Virgen del Cobre", an oil painting with a strong Afro-Cuban presence, chains his mestiza on the back of a stallion and orders to hit the furious animal with a

whip. Thus, *The Kidnapping of the Mulatto Women* (1938), one of his most famous works, is born from the desperate ripping of the natural thing, where sensory links are established among men, women, horses and a landscape seen through loose and kinetic brushstrokes, shades, glazes and transparencies.

Later on, Sara, cheerful and witty, frees herself from the omnipotent vocation of her tutor, who replaces her with models such as Eva and Germaine, and poses at San Alejandro Academy for Armando Menocal, the author of *"The Death of Antonio Maceo"*. For his part, Manuel Vega makes her unforgettable in his painting *"Black Pearl"*, which causes stir in Spain by showing a black and Caribbean aesthetics that is intertwined with the beauty of a woman as voluptuous as sacralized.

During the 1940s, Sara put up wall posters against the Ramón Grau San Martín government and hid one night at La Vigía Farm, belonging to Ernest Hemingway, where she was about to be bitten by two huge dogs. Then, she became a theater actress in Andoba and joined other projects to show a maturity carved in the map of her followers. One day, at the residence of a common friend, she managed to see Carlos Enríquez, who died in 1957 in Havana after also dabbling into the novel, and gave him her last joy: along with her joyful smile are those earrings he gave her one day. She never takes them off: they're eternal, like his paintings.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamin / Cubasi Translation Staff
