

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

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EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO PRESENTS
ZILIA SÁNCHEZ: SOY ISLA (I AM AN ISLAND)
Organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

PRESS PREVIEW | Tuesday, Nov. 19 at 5pm
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NEW YORK, NY, November 14, 2019 – El Museo del Barrio is pleased to present *Zilia Sánchez: Soy Isla (I Am an Island)* the first museum retrospective of the prolific, innovative, and yet largely under-recognized artist Zilia Sánchez (b. 1926, Havana – lives and works in San Juan). Featuring over 40 works and spanning seven decades of Sánchez’s career from the 1950s to the present, the show includes paintings, works on paper, shaped canvases, sculptural pieces, graphic illustrations, and ephemera, and is accompanied by a major publication and newly commissioned artist’s documentary. Organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, and curated by Dr. Vesela Sretenović, Phillips Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, *Soy Isla* was previously exhibited at The Phillips Collection and at the Museo de Arte de Ponce in Puerto Rico, prior to its New York iteration.

The exhibition title, *Soy Isla*, serves as a personal metaphor for Sánchez’s experience as an islander—connected to and disconnected from mainstream art. The retrospective traces from her early days in Cuba and extended travels in Europe in the 1950s, to her residence in New York in the 1960s, and finally her move to Puerto Rico, where she has lived and worked as an artist and teacher since the early 1970s. Throughout her prolific career Sánchez has pursued a distinctive approach to abstraction characterized by shaped canvases that hover between painting and sculpture.

“We are delighted to present *Soy Isla* at El Museo del Barrio in New York, a city where the artist resided for almost ten years before settling in Puerto Rico. Though a beloved figure among artists on the island and in the diaspora, her unique practice continues to remain unknown to wider audiences. On view as part of our Women’s Retrospective series, *Soy Isla* reflects El Museo’s commitment to showcasing the work of important women artists who are under-recognized. Still creating art at age 93, Sánchez is most deserving of this retrospective celebration.” said Patrick Charpenel, Executive Director, El Museo del Barrio.

Often referred to as Topologies, many of Sánchez’s shaped canvases invite comparisons with the body and landscape through their curvilinear geometry. Though never overt, her practice is inherently political, her sensual and sometimes erotic forms reflecting a particular and personal mode of resistance. Thus, many of Sánchez’s works reference female warriors from ancient mythology, such as Trojans, Amazons, Furies, as well as heroines like Antigone. Others have reoccurring motifs of lunar shapes and tattoo drawings

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that map physical and psychological spaces and add another dimension to her curvilinear geometry, rich with metaphorical meaning.

According to Dr. Sretenović, “*Soy Isla* refers to an island—either Cuba, where Zilia was born, grew up, and began her artistic career, or Puerto Rico, where she has long resided and worked, or both—surrounded by the vastness of the sea and the boundless horizon, yet never in complete isolation. It also refers to her own desire for solitary practice, forming an ‘island’ of her own within major art currents.”

The presentation of *Zilia Sánchez: Soy Isla (I Am an Island)* at El Museo del Barrio is organized by Curator Susanna Temkin, and is made possible through support by The Jacques & Natasha Gelman Foundation, series sponsor of El Museo del Barrio’s Women Retrospective Series, and The Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection. Additional support provided by Galerie Lelong & Co.

ABOUT EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

El Museo del Barrio, founded by a coalition of Puerto Rican educators, artists, and activists, is the nation’s leading Latino and Latin American cultural institution. The Museum welcomes visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic landscape of these communities through its extensive Permanent Collection, varied exhibitions and publications, bilingual public programs, educational activities, festivals, and special events.

The Museum is located at 1230 Fifth Avenue at 104th Street in New York City, and open Wednesday to Saturday from 11:00am - 6:00pm, and Sunday from 12:00 to 5:00pm. Pay-what-you-wish.

To connect with El Museo via Social Media, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. For more information, please visit www.elmuseo.org.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America’s first museum of Modern art, presents one of the world’s most distinguished Impressionist and American Modern art collections. Including paintings by Renoir and Rothko, Bonnard and O’Keeffe, van Gogh, Diebenkorn, Daumier and Lawrence, among others, the museum continues to actively collect new acquisitions, many by contemporary artists such as Wolfgang Laib, Whitfield Lovell, Zilia Sánchez, and Leo Villareal. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips’s impact spreads nationally and internationally through its highly distinguished special exhibitions, programs, and events that catalyze dialogue surrounding the continuity between art of the past and the present. Among the Phillips’s esteemed programs are its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; well-established Phillips Music series; and sell-out Phillips after 5 events. The museum contributes to the art conversation on a global scale with events like Conversations with Artists and the International Forum. The Phillips Collection

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values its community partnerships with the University of Maryland—the museum’s nexus for academic work, scholarly exchange, and interdisciplinary collaborations—and THEARC—the museum’s new campus serving the Southeast DC community. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations

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