

Fundación Eugenio Granell



In 1951 Eugenio Fernández Granell (A. Coruña 1912- Madrid 2002) wrote one of his most significant books, *Isla cofre mítico* (Mythical Chest Island). The work, illustrated by the author, is a tribute to the work of his surrealist colleagues and more specifically to the author of the 1924 surrealist manifesto, André Breton. The text is inspired by the experiences of Breton and his colleagues during their exile in the Caribbean when they were impacted by the exuberance of the landscape and the Caribbean culture seen from a surreal perspective. However, since 1950 Granell also lived on an island, Puerto Rico. Upon his arrival from exile in Guatemala at the invitation of the rector of the University of Puerto Rico, Jaime Benítez, he worked as an art professor at the UPR, Río Piedras Campus. In his management as a teacher and among the disciplines he developed, a rarely recognized feat stands out.

Granell begins to gather a group of students and prepares them to experiment and work with the modern art trends of the first half of the twentieth century. Starting from the idea of Surrealism, the professor begins to expand the critical thinking of young artists, offering a new perception of art

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outside of the traditional connotations that were practiced in Puerto Rico at that time. Before his arrival, the aesthetics in the Puerto Rican arts were formulated in folkloric narratives from the definition of Puerto Rican identity, nature and representation.

This exhibition is based on my study at the Fundación Eugenio Granell during my research stay in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2023). The documents related to the subject of Puerto Rico considerably expanded my knowledge of Granell and his work in Puerto Rico. All the works represented in this exhibition are part of the collection of the Eugenio Granell Foundation but they don't represent the whole production of the artists nor the whole of all his disciples.

In the summer of 1951, Granell prepared the first exhibition of modern art by Puerto Rican artists documented in the historiography of Puerto Rican national art at the University. Apart from this flagship exhibition, I found out that this initiative will be recurring for years to come. Granell organized exhibitions by his students in the exhibition hall of the Faculty of Humanities in 1952 and 1953. His cultural management, apart from his personal work as an artist, also produced art exhibitions at the Mayagüez University Campus of the UPR, (RUM) where he sought the expansion of the modernist theme outside the Río Piedras University Campus. Granell initiates through his actions a new school of modern Puerto Rican art with the recruitment of new consolidated talents in exhibitions and continuous practices inside and outside the classrooms. This achievement is unique compared to his performance in the other countries where he lived.



Cossette Zeno, *Imitación*

Granell's tenure marks an important milestone in the historiography of the Puerto Rican national arts that lasted until the termination of his contract as a professor at the University in 1959 and his relocation to the United States in 1960. This decade of artistic experimentation (1950-1959) was essential for the development of modern art on the island.

The 50s, apart from the nationalist reference and folklore, were one of experimentation and new paradigms that auscultated modernism and gave way to a handful of artists, disciples and students of Granell such as; Rafael Ferrer, Roberto Alberti, Cossette Zeno, Luis Hernández Cruz, Frances del Valle, Virginia Vidich, Ernesto Ruiz de la Matta, Luis Maisonet Crespo, among many others, managed to transition to the 60s and hatch in total freedom of genres in the decade of the 70s, which was free experimentation.

A year and a half after starting his administration, Granell wrote to the rector of the UPR, Jaime Benítez, in 1951 about his administration that began in 1950.

"I am very happy to have been able to contribute minimally to the appearance of this group of young artists who, for the first time, manifest what until now has been known; that in Puerto Rico, as in the entire Antillean area, pictorial talent waits only for the opportunity to sprout with characteristic strength and sense of its own. Thanks to you I have been able to help these young people to start on their way. Hopefully they can continue."

Jose Correa Vigier, Historian and Curator