



# Cuba

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*translated by Sandra Venegas and Emilia Ismael<sup>1</sup>*

Women Cuban theatre directors presented their first scenic works at the turn of the 1940s. Without a doubt, the long road traveled from then has been more than successful. These women, most of them actors in their origins, have combined personal poetics with the most artistic influences from Europe, the United States, and Latin America.

## Women's Rights: Historical Context

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Cuban women have been part of the feminist movement. According to historian Julio César González Pagés, there are four periods of the women's movement, from the beginning of their struggles in 1880 until they won the right to vote in 1934. In the first period from 1880 to 1912, the focus was on social feminism. It was during this period, in 1902, that the Republic of Cuba was officially established.<sup>2</sup> The first suffragists appeared in the second period, which spanned from 1912 until 1917, and their main purpose was to obtain the right to vote. The third period, which lasted from 1918 until 1933, saw the acceleration of liberal feminism and the spreading of feminist institutions, such as different kinds of feminist parties. In addition, suffrage became a more comprehensive issue with regard to the rights inherent to any woman, no matter her social origin, educational level, or race. The fourth period started in 1934 and ended in the same decade, when the government provisionally approved the law that gave women the right to vote as a result of the Revolution

of 1933, in which dictator Gerardo Machado y Morales was overthrown. The feminist movement joined the left political wing, which was in charge of the government that decade and responsible for the many social changes of the period. By 1940 the new constitution guaranteed the right to vote to both men and women, increasing the number of voters but at the same time generating a lack of unity among the various women's movements.<sup>3</sup>

A more detailed examination of these periods reveals the names and organizations at work. Two women were the most visible exponents of women's movements in the early years. Beginning in 1841 Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga (1814–1873), a poet and novelist often compared to American author Harriet Beecher Stowe, focused her narrative work on abolitionist themes as well as interracial and interclass love. Ana Betancourt Agramonte (1832–1901), wife of the revolutionary leader Ignacio Agramonte, was active in the fight for Cuba's independence. She always included the importance of considering women's rights as part of the liberating movement in her fight.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, feminists founded magazines, newspapers, and political parties.<sup>4</sup> In 1917 a law allowing women to have parental custody regardless of their marital status was approved, followed by the Divorce Law, which allowed women to divorce their husbands. Also, in 1917 the Female Club (Club Femenino) was founded. The outstanding women intellectuals who composed this institution had been part of the struggle for the right to vote and other social accomplishments, such as night schools for working class women. In the female prison in Guanabacoa, they centered their efforts on rehabilitating the inmates through education. The incarcerated women could take classes to improve their literacy, and they could learn clothing design, thus creating better living conditions for themselves through their work. In 1923 the National Federation of Female Associations of Cuba (Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Femeninas de Cuba) convened the First National Women's Conference (Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres) in Havana. The second conference took place in 1925 and summoned outstanding researchers and essayists as well as social leader Enrique Loynaz del Castillo. That same year, the National Organization of Female Associations (Organización Nacional de Asociaciones Femeninas), consisting of eleven different affiliates, conducted campaigns to increase women's access to education.

Female associations like the Civic Front of Martiana Women (Frente Cívico de Mujeres Martianas) and United Opposing Women (Mujeres Opositoras Unidas) played an important role in the struggle to overthrow the tyranny of dictator Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, resulting in the triumph of the Revolution of 1959. The new government created a state policy that presumed equality of gender. However, prejudices and cultural stereotypes were deeply rooted in the society, causing rejection of feminist ideals—wrongly associated with capitalism—by some revolutionary leaders and other social figures.

Since the 1970s important women who have worked primarily as writers and university professors, such as Camila Henríquez Ureña, Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, Mirta Aguirre,



Vicentina Antuña, and Luisa Campuzano, debated openly through their publications and actions, which favored women's rights. During the 1990s it was possible to see a more open approach to the ideas of feminism, which was accomplished through the spread of gender and women's studies, research, conferences, and books. Although perpetual topics such as abortion rights and salary equality remained basic principles of discussion, feminists had to address their collective aspirations as well (López Cabrales 23).

## Early Women Directors

The first women directors began working on the stages of Havana in the 1940s. The American actor, director, and professor, Lorna de Sosa (1913–2009), studied theatre, music, and literature at the University of Cincinnati, where she founded the Cincinnati Theater Guild. During the fifteen years she stayed in Cuba from 1940 to 1955, she taught at the Academy of Dramatic Arts of the Free School of Havana (Academia de Artes Dramáticas de la Escuela Libre de la Habana), also known as ADADEL. Her directing credits at ADADEL in the 1940s favored British and American plays such as *Becky Sharp*, based on William M. Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*; Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*; Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms*; and Somerset Maugham's *Theater*.

Spanish-born Isabel Fernández de Amado Blanco (1910–1999) and Cuban-born Celia (Cuqui) Ponce de León (1916–2009) became a creative pair in the Cuban theatre in the mid-twentieth century. They wrote two comedies together and directed several productions for the Theatre Council (Patronato del Teatro) in Havana. In 1947 both women received the Talía Award from the Theatre Council as recognition for their brilliant work directing Rafael Suárez Solís's *The Mad Man of the Year* (*El loco del año*).

Fernández, who graduated in 1932 from the University of Madrid (Universidad de Madrid) with a degree in philosophy and literature, came to Havana with her husband in 1936 and worked as a journalist and essayist (Cuadriello 69). Ponce de León graduated with a degree in art history in 1979 from the University of Havana (Universidad de la Habana). Besides being one of the founders of CMQ—the only Cuban television broadcasting station active in the 1950s—Ponce de León had a long professional career as a theatre director. She founded a theatre company called Rita Montaner in Havana in 1962 and directed there during the 1960s.

The Hungarian artist Clara Ronay started her directing career in 1949, working with experimental pieces at the Free Stage Group (Grupo Escénico Libre) in Havana. The group's puppetry troupe collaborated with Ronay who, in collaboration with the Cuban director and actor Vicente Revuelta Planas, wrote and directed *The Magic Chalk* (*La tiza mágica*) the same year. Then, in 1950, the two of them directed another project—but this time for television: *Creole Puppets* (*Títeres Criollos*), a show that was created by Revuelta and Ronay for adults. For the rest of the decade, Ronay continued producing and directing for television. In 1960 she also started working with Revuelta's Studio Theatre (Teatro Estudio) in Havana. Her first production was *Death of a Salesman* by

Arthur Miller in 1960, followed the next year by *Gloria*, written by Cuban playwright Ingrid González. Years later Ronay moved to Spain to continue working on television productions.

Another important Spanish-born woman who worked as a director and actor in Cuban theatre was Adela Escartin (1913–2010). She studied in 1947 at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Declamation (Real Conservatorio de Música y Declamación) in Madrid. A year later she moved to New York, where she studied direction with Erwin Piscator and Lee Strasberg. Beginning in the 1950s, she helped mentor several generations of performers in Cuba. In 1958 Escartin directed her own theatre venue, Prado 260 Theatre (Sala Teatro Prado 260), in Havana. One of the works she directed there, Ramón Ferreira's *A Color for This Fear* (*Un color para este miedo*), was a production she took to Mexico in 1958 for the Pan-American Theatre Festival. Between 1963 and 1970 Escartin worked as a professor of acting and directing at the School of Theatre Instructors (Escuela de Instructores de Arte) in Havana, where she directed Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Other credits during that period include Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*; Verdi's opera, *La Traviata*; Franz Lehar's operetta, *The Happy Widow*; Sophocles's *Antigone*; Leroy Jones's *Dutchman*; and Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Escartin moved to Spain, where she continued to teach after two decades of work in Cuba.

In the area of a more commercial theatre, it is possible to find the work of talented women actor-directors such as Enriqueta Sierra, Pilar Bermúdez, Mary Munné, and Socorro González (González Freire 156).

## Working Climate in the Twenty-First Century

Women directors have received public recognition very slowly, although their recognition started increasing during the 1980s. Most of these artists did not receive formal education to become directors, except for some training classes in various theatre schools. The Superior Institute of Art created a specialized theatre training program in 1990; however, this did not mean that all its graduates would dedicate their lives to the directing profession (Azor, "Cuban Actor" 223). One can certainly find performers who decided to direct their own groups and productions; they also teach, and their work in academia has furthered the education of new artists, who in many cases became new members of their own companies. Although women directors have received more public recognition, illustrated through awards and invitations to be part of international festivals, the proportion between men and women is far from well balanced.

Cuba's Secretary of Culture has organized the theatre system through the National Committee for the Stage Arts (Consejo Nacional de las Artes Escénicas) since the late 1980s. Although its efforts do not supply enough funding and theatre spaces for all the companies, the committee still provides possibilities for many of them to develop their creativity, and the government funding does not have gender restrictions. Many women directors lead their own companies.



### Pioneers Raquel Revuelta and Berta Martínez

Although Raquel Revuelta and Berta Martínez did not have formal university educations, they were part of several workshops and professional productions in Cuba and abroad, and both received honorary degrees (Doctor Honoris Causa) from the Superior Institute of Art (Instituto Superior de Arte) in Havana in 1985 and 2000 respectively. Revuelta and Martínez also became important pioneers as women directors in Cuba.

Revuelta (1925–2004) started her career as a performer in Cuban radio in 1936, where she stayed for eleven years. In 1941 she joined a theatre group called the Eugenia Zuffoli Company in Havana as an actor, and in 1956 she starred in Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine* in Hubert de Blanck Theatre (Sala Hubert de Blanck) in Havana (Leal 128). She received numerous awards for this production, and three years later she starred in a movie for the first time. Revuelta became one of the most important promoters of contemporary theatre in Cuba.

Revuelta was the artistic director of the highly regarded Studio Theatre—founded by her brother, Vicente Revuelta in Havana—for more than thirty-six years. The first production she directed with the studio in 1980 was Federico García Lorca's *Ms. Rosita, the Single One* (*Doña Rosita la soltera*). Other productions she directed with this company in the following two decades included Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde*; *Baroque Concert* (*Concierto Barroco*), inspired by Alejo Carpentier's novel of the same name; and Molière's *Tartuffe*. She received several awards during her long artistic and political trajectory, among them the National Theatre Award (Premio Nacional de Teatro) in 1999 and the Orders Félix Varela and Juan Marinello.

Revuelta's acting training comes from teachers such as Enriqueta Sierra and her brother Vicente Revuelta, who had very different styles. Sierra closely followed the theatre tradition “del buen decir” (good speaking),<sup>5</sup> but her brother was known for his peculiar eclectic style inspired by Stanislavski, Brecht, Grotowski, and Brook. As a result of this background, Raquel Revuelta focused on acting as the key to success for her directing work. She was not considered an experimental director but rather an actor who decided to work as a director. However, she has been recognized as the builder of a trajectory that broke the boundaries of the Spanish traditions of the nineteenth century and for being a promoter of a directing style that focused on the coherence of internal work in the construction of a character.

Like Revuelta, Berta Martínez—known for a career spanning more than five decades—started as an actor and then moved to directing, at first in the style of Vicente Revuelta, her teacher. Martínez's choices for productions were always dictated by the high quality of the texts whose complexity created big challenges for the construction of characters (Azor, “Return” 15).

The complexity of the design in her repertoire—which consisted of groups of performers substituting for the actual scenic pieces and sound elements—came together in an integrating aesthetic purpose, which dialogues with Spanish culture as the origin of the Cuban theatre. Famed actor-director Nuria Espert and several international critiques praised Martínez's approach to Lorca and Tirso de Molina and extolled her as a director who revises classics to interrogate the present (Azor, “Return” 15).

Martínez likes to explore different theatrical styles: from Alejo Carpentier's *The Witch's Apprentice* (*La aprendiz de bruja*), a serious drama about the Conquest of

America, to merrier, musical fare, such as the Spanish zarzuelas *The Festival of the Dove* (*La verbena de la paloma*) and *Uncle Francisco and the Leandras* (*El Tío Francisco and las Leandras*). She almost always twists the nicer side of a play with the purpose of achieving a deeper approach to the themes, focusing on those that have a bigger impact on the audience (Azor, "Return" 16). Her work is a tribute to the "cómicos de la legua" (comics of the league),<sup>6</sup> the century-old Cuban lyric tradition, as well as contemporary cultural Spanish influences. The legacy left by Martínez certainly explains her various prizes, such as the National Theatre Award, as well as her tremendous success with European and Latin American audiences.

## Profiles of Contemporary Directors

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### *Flora Lauten*

Like Revuelta and Martínez before her, Flora Lauten did not obtain a formal university education but received an honorary degree (Doctor Honoris Causa) in theatre from the Superior Institute of Art in 2001 based on her body of work. By the end of the 1950s, Lauten became a disciple of Vicente Revuelta in the academy of his Studio Theatre. After several experimental works, including a Grotowski-based project using a ritual text by José Martí, she decided to submerge herself in a theatrical and sociological research project in El Escambray, a mountainous zone of heavy class conflict located in the center of Cuba. With a group of actors, sociologists, university professors, and psychologists, she started to explore the political, economic, and social conflicts of the area. This research and artistic project initiated the most important community-based theatre in Cuba, the Escambray Theatre (Teatro Escambray), founded in 1968 in El Escambray. The problems of the peasantry were the main focus for this theatre, which included plays, performances, and community debates as collective theatre creations. As such, this theatrical work developed in parallel to theatrical activity in Colombia, Brazil, and other Latin American countries. Artists presented their theatre performances, improvisations, and their collective writings on important social issues through the Escambray Theatre.

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Because she needed to find better schools for her young children, Lauten decided to leave El Escambray in 1973, but she established herself in a nearby town, Mataguá. Here, with the municipal government's help, she founded the La Yaya Theatre (Teatro La Yaya). The main goal of this new theatre group was to depict the people's most urgent conflicts. Author Rine Leal explains that Lauten used "*acts or games (actos o juegos)*, short pieces—that she wrote based on her sociologic research—in which the problems were presented in a direct way" in order to stimulate change through confrontation (Leal 163). These short pieces included themes such as the incorporation of women

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into the workforce, thus breaking centuries of tradition steeped in different social and economic dynamics.

While a professor at the Superior Institute of Art, Lauten founded the Buendía Theatre Company (Teatro Buendía) in 1985, the company where she still works. It started in the basement of an Orthodox church in Havana, with actors who were the first graduates under Lauten's professorship. From the beginning she started applying the methodology for collective creation that she had learned while working with Colombian and Danish teachers in the 1970s and 1980s. Improvisation, dance, actor's dramaturgy, gesture, live music, and masks became her main tools to create productions that eventually toured five continents.

Examples of some of Lauten's directorial credits with Buendía Theatre include *The Pearls in Your Mouth* (*Las perlas de tu boca*) in 1989, *Candida Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother* (*La Cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada*) in 1992, *Another Tempest* (*Otra tempestad*) in 1997, *Life in Pink* (*La vida en rosa*) in 1999, *Bacchanals* (*Bacantes*) in 2001, *Charenton* in 2005, *Woyzeck's Ballad* (*La balada de Woyzeck*) in 2008, and *The Old Lady's Visit* (*La visita de la vieja dama*) in 2009. These theatre pieces were all formed by a collaborative theatre company, which was guided by Lauten and Raquel Carrió, a dramaturge who has worked with Lauten since the beginning of the Buendía Theatre Company. Each one of the productions starts with an iconic classic play which is retold through the creation of a parallel text that explores themes such as power, seduction, spiritual and material scarcity, dysfunctional families, risks, memory, exile, migration, or myths.

One example of Lauten's working process is *Another Tempest*, in which the wish to follow the Shakespearean text is contrasted by aspects that are key to Cuban culture. In an article for *American Theatre*, Caridad Svich explains,

In response to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Lauten and her longtime dramaturge Raquel Carrió envisioned not merely a post-colonial critique of Shakespeare's text, but also a collision of Prospero, Caliban and the other inhabitants of Shakespeare's mythic "islands" with the Orishas of Yoruban culture. In this syncretic collision, which incorporated texts from Carpentier, Paz, Martí and others, audiences were made witness to questions of cultural and societal displacement—questions that arose from the labyrinth of Shakespeare's text that contest easily read signs of behavior, class, sexuality, gender and race. (Svich)

In 1998 the Teatro Buendía company received the Ollantay Award from the Latin American Center of Theatre, Creation and Research (Centro Latinoamericano de Creación e Investigación Teatral [CELCIT]), as recognition for the quality of its productions and its contribution to Latin American and Caribbean theatre. In 2005 Lauten received the National Theatre Award, and she continues accumulating professional success beyond the borders of her country.

### *Miriam Lezcano*

Miriam Lezcano graduated as an actor from National School of Art (Escuela Nacional de Arte) in Havana in 1968, though her career has always focused on directing. Lezcano also earned a master of arts in directing in the Soviet Union at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1979 as well as a bachelor of arts in history at the University of Havana in 1981. When she returned from Moscow in the early 1980s she directed several Russian and Cuban plays in a company called Bertolt Brecht. In 1987 she and her husband, the prominent playwright Alberto Pedro Torriente, founded My Theatre (Teatro Mío) in Havana, giving the Cuban theatre the most polemic plays of the next two decades. *Weekend at Bahia* (*Weekend en Bahía*) in 1987, *Animal Fat* (*Manteca*) in 1993, *Havana Delirium* (*Delirio Habanero*) in 1994, *Our Sea* (*Mar nuestro*) in 1997, and *Waiting for Odiseo* (*Esperando a Odiseo*) in 2001, all written by Pedro Torriente, are some of the productions that shook audiences in Cuba and overseas because of their treatment of the most conflictive themes on the island. For example, in *Weekend at Bahia*, two former lovers are reunited after one of them is exiled, and in *Havana Delirium*, an imaginary, impossible meeting takes place between the two Cuban musical icons, one of whom was exiled and one of whom passed away shortly thereafter. Also, in *Animal Fat*, a family debates Cuba's principal economic and ideological problems. Audiences follow My Theatre productions because they can participate in a social forum about urgent issues.

Lezcano and her company have received awards such as Atlantis of Cadiz (Atlántida de Cádiz) from Spain; The Golden Mask (La Máscara de Oro) from Rostock, Germany; Próspero Morales from Colombia; and several others from the Cuban critics who recognize her as an undeniable pioneer of a symbolic and critical political direction during the last few decades.

Inspired in the most polemic and typical style of the early years of Soviet culture, such as Mijail Bulgakov's plays and novels from the 1930s, Lezcano emphasizes a critical vision of political and social authoritarianism but not with a direct language. Instead, her stage creations seduce audiences with mysterious images coming from dreams, combined with a hilarious tone. Her own aesthetic identity is a mixture between magical realism and satire.

### *Fátima Patterson*

Fátima Patterson does not have a formal university education and works from the eastern part of the island. She founded her group Macubá Studio Theatre (Estudio Teatral Macubá) in 1992 in Santiago de Cuba. In her company, in which she works as an actor, director, and playwright, she emphasizes themes that make reference to the Caribbean woman through dance, music, and oral narration.

*Ringin' for Mafifa* (*Repique por Mafifa*) was a hit and won three awards in 1992. Co-written by Patterson and Marcial Lorenzo Escudero, the play is a monologue performed



by Patterson herself. It is based on the life of musician Gladys Linares Acuña—known as Mafifa—who had twenty-five years' experience performing in the Conga de los Hoyos, a musical carnival group—*comparsa*—in Santiago de Cuba. Although she had been described by society as being a lesbian and sometimes a prostitute, Mafifa received honors when she died in 1984. The play begins with Mafifa's death; without fully realizing that she has died, she goes over her own life in a sort of assessment. Critic Adonis Sánchez Cervera describes that Mafifa “makes associations with life from death itself, which is not assumed or she doesn't realize it yet, until the end of the play, reaching a high level of lyricism. Two other planes are also present: the living and the dead, and both converge in the music, just as palpable as it is in the soliloquies that her character holds with the musicians, who can't see her” (Sánchez Cervera). At the end, a battle breaks out between Mafifa and a percussionist representing Iku, the Death, but finally they leave the scene with the rhythm of the conga.

In 2000 Patterson's production of *The Small Square* (*La plazuela*)—which was her own adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's play by the same title—demonstrated a strong influence from the Relations Theatre (Teatro Relaciones) and the Carnival of Santiago. Both of these popular traditions from the city of Santiago de Cuba have a powerful theatricality. Relations Theatre, for instance, retells Afro-Cuban mythological narrations, while the Carnival is the most popular celebration of the city. Physical and verbal performances at the Carnival include musicians, singers, and dancers, and these aspects are all incorporated in *The Small Square*.

Patterson is not only an actor, she is also a dancer and a singer. The style of this director incorporates the aesthetics of contemporary theatre and ritual aspects of music and dance from Cuban culture. Some ritual traditions such as the Yoruban ceremonies of Santería and oral tradition from Palo Monte<sup>7</sup> survive through the Macuba Studio theatre productions directed by Patterson. One article noted, “Memory, dream interpretation, and Antillean poetry are also some of the main components of her aesthetics as director” (López Jiménez). Her work has been widely presented throughout the American continent and Europe.

### *Nelda Castillo*

Nelda Castillo graduated as an actor from the Superior Institute of Art in 1984 and directed her first productions, which she also wrote, with material adapted from authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Laura Devetach. Her works with the Buendía Theatre Company include *Rag Doll in the Sand* (*Monigote en la arena*) in 1987, *An Elephant Takes Up Too Much Room* (*Un elefante ocupa mucho espacio*) in 1989, and *The Circular Ruins* (*Las ruinas circulares*) in 1991.

In 1996 she founded The Enchanted Deer (El Ciervo Encantado) with a group of her former students who had just graduated from the Superior Institute of Art. They were preoccupied with clarifying the forces that articulated Cuban history through

the years, so they embraced the idea of investigation that would give them back the image—the genesis and evolution—of the island through personal discoveries. This group has tried to unveil the dark zones in the Cuban soul in the company's own language and theatrical point of view, which is characterized by a strong interest in the training of the actors. This allows the metamorphoses of the actor in a “channel body” through which ancestors and unknown beings, which are part of the genetic map of the performer, are able to express the collective unconscious of the entire nation.

The productions of *The Enchanted Deer* are known for their exploration of the visual and sonic elements, as well as for their use of literary, historical, plastic, musical, and dance sources toward an original, artistic language that differs from traditional expression. For example, *The Enchanted Deer*—the production that gave its name to the group—tries to uncover a mirror in which both the actors and the audience can see the nation. Three characters—an indigenous, a native (*criollo*), and an Afro-Cuban—are looking for a deer, a spirit in which they believe they could find their patriotic desires realized. The music drags them into that search while they recite verses from Virgilio Piñera, a prominent Cuban writer from the twentieth century, and fragments from a battle diary from the war of independence against Spain in the nineteenth century.

The company's research around important Cuban authors such as Esteban Borrero, Virgilio Piñera, Fernando Ortiz, Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante is very relevant, for the last three were exiled and practically unknown to Cubans. Thus, the experimental calling of *The Enchanted Deer* is focused on exploring the margins of the Cuban cultural identity and recovering the richness and complexity that distinguishes it. Among its most significant productions, which were directed by Castillo, are *Visions of Cubanofia* (*Visiones de cubanosofia*) in 2005 and *Galiano Varieties* (*Varietades Galiano*) in 2010.

In *Visions of Cubanofia* Castillo includes subjects such as faith, power, slavery, prostitution, frustration, prepotency, dementia, hallucinations, shame, creation, resistance, solitude, abandonment, and absence. All of these are visions of the Cuban being, who observes from his or her greatness the sparks of a historical, psychic, and social development of the island, always under construction, always under resistance. The Cuban critic and researcher Roberto Gacio expressed, “The action develops in complicity with the audience, as if it was a hidden secret that turns into an open one. We [the audience] have to decipher codes and vital keys, since some scenes are presented almost as a cryptic, accompanied by others that are more comprehensible. All this happens through a very fragmented structure that encloses different frames, each one of them with a different purpose that is essential to the storytelling” (Gacio).

As a director, Castillo has presented her work in theatre festivals in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, England, France, Germany, Holland, Korea, Mexico, Russia, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, and Spain, among other countries. She has received numerous awards from several artistic Cuban institutions.





In addition to women who live and work as directors in Cuba, several women have been exiled or have obtained jobs directing in other countries. For example, the veteran actor and professor Teresa Maria Rojas founded the Teatro Prometeo (Prometheus Theatre) in 1975 at Miami Dade College in Florida and led the company until 2006; Lilian Vega (Lauten's daughter) also works in Miami, where they both have developed reputations as directors.

Twentieth and early twenty-first century Cuban women directors have achieved noteworthy significance with their work, and this has paved the way for those who want to begin the same journey.

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### Notes

1. With additional editorial assistance by Sandra Venegas and Emilia Ismael.
2. Tomas Estrada Palma, the first president of Cuba, was very interested in improving the level of education in the country.
3. The new constitution also addressed labor laws, which included maternity leave.
4. In 1912 several parties were formed: the Feminist Popular Party (el Partido Popular Feminista), the Cuban Voters Party (el Partido de Sufragistas Cubanas), and the Feminist National Party (el Partido Nacional Feminista).
5. "Del buen decir" (good speaking) refers to the Spanish theatre tradition that privileged the versed text and to a specific acting style that became very popular in Cuba during the first half of the twentieth century.
6. "Cómicos de la legua" (Comics of the League) refers to the artists from the Spanish Golden Age, who would travel as small companies from town to town.
7. The Palo Monte is an African Cuban religion from Bantu people who came as slaves in the sixteenth century to Santiago de Cuba from Cameroon, Mozambique, and Angola. Palo Monte had an oral tradition that the Cuban descendents combined with different magical elements to transmit their legends about gods (Nkisi, Orishas, Christian saints) and mythological elements in nature. Santeria is another African Cuban religion that came with Lucumi slaves from the Yoruba culture. The Cuban descendents created a syncretism with saints from Christian religions and other magical beliefs. Santeria celebrates many rites related with prophecies and corporeal spirits, and incarnations by dances and singing performances. The orishas or gods of Santeria are very venerated by Cuban people today.

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