# *Surrealism and the Cuban Revolution: Roberto Matta's Works in 1960s Cuba*

Paulina Caro Troncoso
University of Edinburgh

> I saw that the Revolution is a construction; to build it, you have to be more alert, more of a poet: intelligence of the unknown. And that the most important thing is that the poet (the creator) that each of us carries within is not derevolutionized.[1]

Featured in a special issue of *Casa de las Américas*, this quote by Chilean surrealist artist Roberto Sebastian Matta (1911-2002) is an excerpt from his response to a questionnaire on the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) that the magazine published to commemorate its twentieth anniversary.[2] The artist's response gives us an insight into his experience in 1960s Cuba, where he found a place to reflect on the revolutionary role of art, and, had the opportunity to put his artistic practice in dialogue with the new revolutionary cultural landscape.[3] In 1963, Matta visited Havana invited by Casa de las Américas, one of the organizations created after the triumph of the revolution and that has had an important role in promoting exchanges between writers, artists, and intellectuals through cultural events and publications.[4] *Cuba es la Capital* (Cuba Is the Capital, 1963, Fig. 1), a mural currently on display in the entrance hall of this institution, was created by Matta during this visit to the island.[5] In the following years Matta returned to Cuba on several occasions and took part in exhibitions and other initiatives, such as the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, organized in line with the cultural policy of the revolutionary government. In this international event, Matta delivered a speech known as "The Internal Guerrilla" (*La Guerrilla Interior*).

Anglophone scholarship has given little attention to the works Matta made in Latin America in the 1960s and early 1970s. Similarly, the interest shown by artists and writers associated with the Paris surrealist group in post-revolutionary Cuba

Paulina Caro Troncoso: paulina.carotroncoso@ed.ac.uk

Fig. 1. Roberto Matta, *Cuba es la capital*, 1963, soil and plaster on Masonite, Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London (2022)

is a chapter in the history of Surrealism that still needs further research as it sheds light on the movement's political direction during this period.[6] Matta, Wifredo Lam, Agustín Cárdenas, Jorge Camacho, Joyce Mansour, Michel Leiris, Alain Jouffroy and Jean Schuster were among the group of artists and writers that visited the island to participate in cultural events organized following the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana. This important meeting promoted cooperation between Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and contributed to the emergence of international networks of solidarity that brought together artists, writers, intellectuals, and activists.[7] Informed by these experiences, the Surrealists responded to the Cuban revolutionary process in their periodicals *La Brèche: action surréaliste* and *L'Archibras,* published in France in the 1960s. Matta's experience in post-revolutionary Cuba prompts us to reconsider his relationship with Latin America after more than two decades of living in Europe and the United States. Likewise, though to a lesser extent, new attention to the Surrealists' participation in cultural events like the 1967 Salón de Mayo and the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana offers a new perspective for accounts of Surrealism in the Caribbean, revealing how the Cuban Revolution resonated with the movement's political stance.

This essay examines two of Matta's works informed by his experience in Cuba in the 1960s: the mural *Cuba es la Capital* and his speech "The Internal Guerrilla," which has been considered "an appeal for direct political action through the arts."[8] The political consciousness that Matta developed through this experience was particularly significant between the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the artist participated in the events of May '68 in Paris and during the years of the Unidad Popular (1970-1973) in Chile. Matta's visual and written works, made in response to the revolutionary process in Cuba, reveal the artist's role in broadening the horizons of the surrealist group beyond France, as the artist "had a unique position in the geographical, historical, and spiritual triangle of South America (Chile), Europe (Paris), and North America (New York and Mexico), allowing him to comment on Western politics from many vantage points and through numerous iconographies."[9] This idea is central to assessing Matta's work from this period, when the artist demonstrated a sustained attempt to address social, political, and cultural issues in Europe and the Americas.[10]

After joining André Breton's group in 1937, Matta developed a unique approach to Surrealism which was informed by his interests in modern physics, psychology, architecture and philosophy.[11] The artist was among the Surrealists who fled Nazi-occupied France and relocated to the United States, where he lived until 1948.[12] In New York, Matta contributed to the ideas explored by émigré Surrealists; he also developed a visual language that influenced a generation of abstract expressionist painters. However, despite the artist's significant contribution to the movement during this decade, Breton excluded Matta from the surrealist group in 1948.[13] Yet Matta remained in contact with the surrealist circle, as seen, for example,

in his correspondence with the French poet Alain Jouffroy[14] and in his participation in the "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" at Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris in 1959. In the following years, Matta produced a body of work that reveals how the revolutionary ideas of Surrealism continued to inform his artistic practice.

Cuba es la Capital *(1963)*

In 1960, Matta met with the Cuban poet and former director of Casa de las Américas Roberto Fernández Retamar in Paris, where he proposed the idea of completing a mural in Cuba. As a reference he pointed to the aesthetics of his painting *La Question Djamila* (1958), whose title and theme allude to the case of the Algerian activist Djamila Boupacha, and her torture during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962).[15] A few years later, in February 1963, Matta completed this mural in Havana, titled *Cuba es la Capital*, using soil from the Casa de las Américas's surroundings and other materials found *in situ* (Fig. 1). The mural depicts anthropomorphic figures reminiscent of the forms Matta started to include in his figurative paintings of the 1950s. In this work, Matta aimed to create a scene that would be more familiar to a local audience, and, to capture an atmosphere that would resonate with everyday life. This is seen, for instance, in the silhouettes on the left side of the panel that suggest a pregnant female body standing next to a child; and, in one of the central figures represented in what appears to be a birth scene.[16] The title of the mural, on the other hand, provides insight into Matta's attempt to comment on its immediate context.

After the period of exile in New York with the Surrealists between 1939 and 1948, Matta relocated to Rome, where he lived until 1954.[17] During his first years in Italy, he was in contact with the Italian artists Alberto Burri, Emilio Villa, and Corrado Cagli. As Katie Larson explains, the visual work produced by these artists from the late 1940s to the early 1950s focused on the exploration of automatic drawing, and was influenced by Matta's understanding of this technique, which Breton conceptualized in the early years of Surrealism.[18] For this group of artists, automatism was a practice that "provided a means by which to challenge habitual and accultured modes of perception."[19] This artistic technique allowed them to explore subjectivity and a visual language to represent the possibility of socio-cultural transformation, thereby contesting the ideals of fascist aesthetics.[20] In the aftermath of the war, Italian artists pursued new artistic discourses, an attempt not exempt from tensions with the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano), which aimed to influence the art of the time.[21] Matta continued to explore automatism in the following years but in parallel with a new investigation of materiality.

In the summer of 1954, Matta participated in the first "Incontro Internazionale della Ceramica," a three-week ceramic workshop organized by Danish painter Asger Jorn in Albisola, Italy.[22] The workshop brought together international art critics, theorists, and artists, offering them a space for artistic experimentation

with ceramics. After this experience, Matta continued working with earthy materials, incorporating soil into some of his paintings that addressed social, political, and cultural concerns of the time, as seen in *La Question Djamila* and *Cuba es la Capital*.[23] By using soil as raw material on the canvas, "Matta wanted to depict a morphology of humanity in relation to itself, others and the world: he referred to Historical Morphology."[24] This idea illuminates an interpretation of the mural Matta made at Casa de las Américas in 1963, as in this work, materiality seems an interesting tool for Matta to explore themes connected to a specific historical narrative. Furthermore, Matta's experimentation with earthy materials possibly reflects the artist's growing social awareness during his first period in Italy in the 1950s, when, as Claudia Salaris has noted, "Matta discovered politics."[25]

In a recent essay, Niko Vicario offers a compelling examination of *Cuba es la Capital* by focusing on the materiality of this work and its potential for exploring issues of race and gender in 1960s Cuban culture. For Vicario, the economic restrictions that the U.S. embargo imposed on the island in the early 1960s, which resulted in a shortage of goods in Cuba, likely influenced the choice of material for the mural.[26] Yet the author also notes that Matta's decision might be seen as a critical response to these economic circumstances.[27] As Vicario contends, "materiality proves to be a means by which an artist might take a position—however temporary, rhetorical, or performative—in relationship to geopolitical and geoeconomic networks of power, exchange, and in the case of Cuba, blockade."[28] But how does the mural's location contribute to its meaning? Matta worked on the mural at Casa de las Américas, a cultural center founded amidst a revolutionary climate. The interplay between the mural's location and its iconography suggests an attempt to highlight the important work carried out by Casa de las Américas as a cultural hub for Cuba and the rest of Latin America, and, its role in configuring a new cultural landscape after the triumph of the revolution. Created to facilitate cultural exchanges and cooperation with other organizations across the region and to offer the local community an extensive programme of artistic activities, this institution[29] has served as a point of encounter for Cuban and Latin American artists and intellectuals for decades. As Rebecca Gordon-Nesbit explains, soon after its creation, Casa de las Américas "became the revolutionary centre of Latin American culture and remained a nexus for cultural visitors to the island."[30] Casa de las Américas was key for Matta's exchanges with Cuban artists and intellectuals, as revealed, for example, in the correspondence between the artist and Haydée Santamaría, Casa de las Américas's first director and revolutionary involved in the 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks.[31] These letters give us a sense of friendships Matta formed with people from Casa de las Américas,[32] including Roberto Fernández Retamar, who, in 2007, declared that the Chilean artist was "besides Cubans, perhaps the most prominent painter of Casa de las Américas."[33]

*Surrealism and the Cuban Revolution*

During the Cold War period, the Surrealists pronounced their position concerning the political situation in Algeria, Indochina, Hungary, and Cuba in exhibitions and collective statements.[34] In 1960, for example, Surrealists from the Paris group supported the efforts for the independence of the Algerian people with the tract "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algerie," drafted by Dionys Mascolo, Jean Schuster, and Maurice Blanchot, and signed by a large group of French intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, Michel Leiris, and the Surrealists André Breton and André Masson.[35] Intellectuals, writers and artists were also committed to condemning the torture of French-Algerian journalist Henri Alleg and Algerian activist and member of the Algerian National Liberation Front Boupacha. As previously stated,, Matta painted *La Question Djamila* in response to these cases of torture, for which he was awarded the Marzotto Prize in Italy in 1962.[36]

Artists, filmmakers, writers, and intellectuals in Europe observed with attention the development of post-revolutionary Cuba and its role in the redefinition of notions of the Third World and the committed intellectual.[37] In the 1960s, French intellectuals visited the island, which was seen at the time "as an alternative model to the Eastern bloc."[38] Soon publications in France offered a view of the Cuban revolutionary process and the country's military and medical support of Algeria during the War of Independence.[39] Sartre's impressions of Cuba, for instance, were disseminated in France through a series of articles published in the newspaper *France-Soir* between June and July 1960, after his four-week visit to the island with Simone de Beauvoir, who also described this experience in her autobiography *La force de choses* (1963). Likewise, Regis Debray's book *Révolution dans la revolution?*, published in France in 1967, was an influential appraisal of revolutionary struggles and guerrilla warfare in Latin America.[40] The publication of Fidel Castro's speeches in 1961, Claude Julien's reports in *Le Monde* and *France-Observateur*, and Ania Francos's examination of the revolution published in her 1962 essay "La fête cubaine," also contributed to the dissemination of the Cuban revolutionary process in Europe.[41] It is worth noting that in his first reports, Julien positioned Cuba as "a third, middle path between capitalism and communism" in the Cold War context.[42] Similarly, Claude Bourdet's use of the term "Third World" reveals a view of the island "as a test case of the independence of a Third World that had to find equal distance from both nuclear superpowers."[43]

Films like *¡Cuba, Sí!* (1961) and *Salut les cubains* (1963), directed by French filmmakers Chris Marker and Agnes Varda, respectively,[44] as well as the tracts on Cuba that the Paris surrealist group published in their journals, can be seen as examples of how the art scene saw the Cuban Revolution in France. After Matta's visit to Havana in 1963, the Surrealists issued a statement on the Cuban Revolution in *La Brèche: action surréaliste*, a periodical that provided a platform for the political

viewpoints of the Paris surrealist group.[45] In "L'exemple de Cuba et la révolution, message des surréalistes aux écrivains et artistes cubains," published in the December 1964 issue, the Surrealists stated:

> A true revolution must transform mankind in its social and individual totality. It is not enough to destroy capitalist economic structures and install in power another class which exercises its domination according to precepts inherited from the old society: the sanctity of work, love sacrificed to the reproduction of the species, cults of personality, the bureaucratization of the artist who is reduced to the role of a propagandist, and so on.[46]

Furthermore, the Surrealists confirmed their solidarity with Cuba, declaring that

> In the Cuban Revolution, in the admirable insurrection of the Sierra Maestra, in the struggle of the Cuban people for their liberty and in the opposition of Cuban intellectuals and artists to all dogmatism, surrealism pays its respects to a fraternal movement. As it too, as far as its strength and circumstances allow, works towards the liquidation of the ideological and moral values of capitalism, aiming at a radical restructuring of understanding and sensibility, surrealism declares its solidarity with the Cuban artists and revolutionaries who struggle for the same objective in a far more violent and dangerous context.[47]

This statement illustrates the Surrealists' initial endorsement of the Cuban revolutionary process. In the following years, a group of artists and writers associated with the Paris group followed Matta's steps and travelled to Cuba to participate in cultural activities that promoted international solidarity among committed artists and intellectuals. However, it is important to note that the Surrealists' support for the Cuban Revolution soon declined, after the Cuban government failed to condemn the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.[48] In the case of Matta, this critical period also corresponded with the artist's focus on other political and social events, such as the upheavals in France that year and the Chilean revolutionary process during the government of socialist president Salvador Allende in the early 1970s.

*Exhibitions and Cultural Events in Havana*

If the work of surrealist artists from Latin America like Matta, Lam, Cárdenas, and Camacho was important for drawing the attention of members of the Parisian surrealist circle to Cuba, the international gatherings held in Havana to promote transnational artistic solidarity were essential for materializing their participation in post-revolutionary Cuban culture.[49] While Lam was involved in

planning the Salón de Mayo in 1967, Matta participated in one of the committees at the Cultural Congress of Havana, where the artist delivered his speech "The Internal Guerrilla." As Paula Barreiro Lopéz has noted, these exchanges in Cuba not only frame manifestations of tricontinental solidarity but also configure "a Latin American genealogy"[50] to artists' participation in the events of May 1968 in France. From a local perspective, the presence of Surrealists in Havana offers an interesting lens to examine the Cuban cultural landscape in the late 1960s, before the period of restrictive policies and dogmatism, which has been described by Cuban writer Ambrosio Fornet as the *quinquenio gris* (the five grey years, 1971-1976),[51] initiated in the late 1960s. These years were exacerbated by the detention of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla, after being "accused of misrepresenting the revolution to foreign journalists and intellectuals."[52]

Surrealism's influence within this cultural frame reveals the transnational potential of the movement as an approach to revolutionary art, and, as a powerful tool for artists and intellectuals to negotiate the tensions emerging from the intersections of art and politics in different geopolitical contexts. In 1964 and 1967, Matta returned to Havana, where he exhibited works at the Casa de las Américas and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, and collaborated with students from the Escuela Nacional de Arte de Cubanacán on sketches for a large mural designed for the Cooperativa San Andrés, Pinar del Rio.[53] This collaboration elucidates Matta's growing interest in working with students and workers, which was soon evidenced in his participation at the Atelier Populaire in 1968, and, in the creation of the mural *El Primer Gol del Pueblo Chileno* with the Chilean muralist collective Brigada Ramona Parra in Chile in 1971.[54] Similarly, Wifredo Lam exhibited his work in Cuba between 1962 and 1966 and in Europe, including in the 1965 surrealist exhibition "L'Écart absolu."[55] Lam's work from this period also reveals the influence of Third Worldism, as seen in the painting *El Tercer Mundo*, created by the artist at the time of the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, in 1966.[56] Differing from the approach Matta took in his 1963 mural, Lam "expressed in a poetical and violent way the essence of the Third World."[57]

1967 began in Cuba with debates about the role of the intellectual in society, drawing on discussions from the recent Tricontinental Conference. Cuban writers suggested the idea of organizing a cultural congress, a proposal that Fidel Castro welcomed and that came to fruition the following year as the Cultural Congress of Havana.[58] Within this framework, different cultural events were organized in the summer of 1967 that brought together artists, activists, and intellectuals from across the world. These events included the First Conference of the Latin American Organisation of Solidarity (OLAS), the Salón de Mayo in Havana, and the First International Protest Song Meeting held at Casa de las Américas. These initiatives illustrate the efforts of international artists who sympathized with the revolution toward developing Third-World solidarity.[59] In the context of the Salón de Mayo, a

group of artists and writers based in Europe, including the Surrealists Jean Schuster, Joyce Mansour, Roland Penrose, Michel Leiris, Maurice Nadeau, and José Pierre, travelled to Havana. Lam was a key figure in the organization of this event, along with Cuban writer Carlos Franqui.[60] The exhibition showcased the work of more than one hundred and ninety artists of different nationalities who were well-known in Parisian artistic circles,[61] including artists from the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, who participated in the demonstrations in Paris the following year.[62] Picasso, Magritte, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Alexander Calder, Asger Jorn, Guillaume Corneille, Antoni Tàpies, Victor Vasarely, Antonio Saura and Karel Appel were some of the artists who sent artworks for the exhibition held at Pabellón Cuba in Havana. Matta and the Cuban Surrealists Lam, Cárdenas, and Camacho also exhibited their work at the event. In doing so, Llilian Llanes points out, international artists were able "to participate in the Cuban experience and to contribute, in some way, to what was happening [in Cuba]."[63] Llanes states that the political character of this exhibition was clear in the juxtaposition of artworks with other objects, which included the facsimiles of two letters, one from Fidel Castro and the other from Che Guevara.[64] But perhaps one of the most significant initiatives during this international exhibition was the creation of the collective mural *Cuba Colectiva*, which captured the spirit of unity and solidarity of the event.[65] Notably, as the show coincided with other events organized in Havana during that summer, the Salón de Mayo facilitated the contact of artists and activists, such as the leader of the Black Power Movement, Stokely Carmichael, who also attended the opening of this exhibition.[66]

Initiatives that sought to promote cultural and intellectual exchanges in Cuba continued in 1968, known as The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla. Early that year, Matta returned to Cuba to participate in the Cultural Congress of Havana (January 5-12), an international gathering that brought together more than 400 intellectuals, scientists, writers and artists from 65 different nations to discuss the social, political, economic, and cultural challenges affecting underdeveloped countries.[67] As Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt explains, the urge to define the role of intellectuals in revolutionary society was still an ongoing debate in Cuba.[68] Yet Che Guevara's death on October 9, 1967 gave a sense of urgency to this call. During the opening day of the Cultural Congress, Cuban president Osvaldo Dórticos addressed attendees and emphasized the importance of the work of intellectuals in society. In Dórticos' words, those attending this event had "a role not only of analysis and creation by also of action, education and dissemination."[69] This statement would establish a unique setting that addressed one of the congress's objectives: to broaden the definition of the committed intellectual in revolutionary society. Participants were asked to join the commissions and present their work in the sessions scheduled throughout the week, which were organized around the following themes: 1) Cultural and National Independence, 2) the Integral Development of Man, 3) the Responsibility of the Intellectual Concerning the Problems of the Underdeveloped World, 4) Culture and

Mass Media, and 5) Problems of Artistic Creation and Scientific and Technical Work. Works presented in each session were translated and circulated in local publications, as well as in the special issues that the Cuban cultural supplement *Revolución y Cultura* dedicated to the Cultural Congress of Havana. A selection of texts translated into English appeared in a special issue of *IKON* magazine, edited by activist and writer Susan Sherman in the United States.

Matta and Alain Jouffroy presented works in the second commission of the congress, which focused on the topic of the Integral Development of Man. This group's objective was to reflect on the reformulation of a new individual who would support and participate in the Third World's resistance to imperialism.[70] While Matta, in his role as one of the committee's delegates, delivered a manifesto "The Internal Guerrilla," Jouffroy contributed a paper, "The Formation of The New Man." In it Jouffroy reflected on the challenges faced by intellectuals in Europe and the Third World, and emphasized the role of the imagination as a tool to overcome them. The French poet stated that "freedom of thinking and mobility of imagination are, for the new man, what discipline and sternness are for the revolutionary militant today–the required methods."[71] Moreover, Jouffroy, like many of the attendees, made reference to Guevara's death, interpreting it as "the demand of an absolute liberty."[72] Sherman was among the other participants in this panel , and claimed that the new man would need to reach a level of self-knowledge that would allow them to transform both himself and society.[73]

In "The Internal Guerrilla," Matta challenged the topics raised during the congress sessions, pointing to the significance of an integral approach to emancipatory behavior. The artist declared as he initiated his intervention:

> In my opinion one of the most important themes proposed in the agenda of the Congress is the one which refers to the Integral Development of Man. I would like to explain my criterion in regard to this issue and especially in regard to one of its essential aspects: the development of creative imagination, of an intelligence that can rely upon poetic imagination, upon subversive imagination, and even upon erotic imagination. I believe that as well as a collective enterprise from a social point of view, the revolution is also a process that should take place within each person.[74]

For Matta, the imagination was a central aspect of true cultural revolution. Informed by surrealist ideas, he approached the concept of the integral subject from a perspective that highlighted art's key role in radical social transformation, and the subversive potential of poetic thinking. Matta's definition of revolution considered both collective and personal processes, but giving the latter greater attention. According to Matta, "It is not the question of just backing the revolution; it is the question of being revolutionary."[75]

Similar to Jouffroy's claim, Matta emphasized that it is the individual's responsibility to align actions and convictions to support revolutionary efforts. Possibly symptomatic of the reappraisal of the guerrilla strategy that Guevara's assassination brought to some groups of the Left, Matta chose to focus his speech on the personal dimension in the formative process of the new revolutionary individual, proposing the notion of a subjective and cultural guerrilla. Focusing on the role of the revolutionary, he noted,

> If a revolution in culture is to be produced, a **revelation** must take place, all the possibilities of man should be made evident. To have a high sense of responsibility does not mean a systematic practice of self-reproach. In the field of imagination one needs to be as brave as in the battlefield. The builders of a new world, new from a social, cultural, intellectual, and artistic point of view, characterize themselves not only by their generosity, by a constant dedication to their work, but also by their boldness, by their ability to assume with sufficient courage all the risks entailed in every renovation and creative work, in every true revolution.[76]

In Matta's view, poetic thought was at the center of any process of social transformation. But poetic thought was not limited to the work of the poet: "I believe that every true man is a poet, that an integral man must be a poet, because poetry means to grasp more reality, to grasp all reality."[77] For the Chilean artist, the subversive nature of poetry was a potent tool to re-imagine a new social order. In his speech, Matta claimed a more democratic approach for art, stating,

> Art is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Just as the revolution must face new problems in the social field and find new ways of solving them, in the field of artistic creation, of intellectual work, a really creative imagination will propose solutions to this ever renewing complex of problems, and will find the means for investigation and expression to solve such problems adequately.[78]

"The Internal Guerrilla" can be seen as a manifesto that brings together ideas about revolutionary art that Matta had previously developed in texts and public interventions. For instance, in the text titled "L'illumination," published in a special issue of *La nouvelle revue française* in April 1967 to pay homage to Breton after his death in 1966, Matta pondered the role of Surrealism as an approach that demanded a total consciousness of the poet. Interestingly, in this text, Matta already adds the notion of guerrilla warfare to his appraisal of Surrealism, most likely influenced by

his experience in Cuba. As "The Internal Guerrilla" synthesizes Matta's approach to art and revolution, it is an essential text for comprehending the intersections of art and politics in Matta's work in the late 1960s.

*Final Remarks*

After their participation at the Cultural Congress of Havana, Matta and other Surrealists associated with the Paris group took part in student debates, protests, and other initiatives during the events of 1968 in Paris, including the Atelier Populaire and the occupation of the Maison de l'Argentine in Paris, where Matta painted a mural along Argentine artist Antonio Seguí.[79] In doing so, the Surrealists demonstrated that the movement's spirit of revolt and protest was still alive. Their activity during the upheavals in France suggests the impact that their experience in cultural events in Cuba in the late 1960s had on their conception of a cultural guerrilla, as Barreiro López has argued in her analysis of the Salón de Mayo and Cultural Congress of Havana.[80] In 1969, Jean Schuster notably described Surrealism as an "eternal counter-current escaping history in its latent continuity,"[81] arguing that recent demonstrations in Paris were the culmination of a process of social unrest, which, for the Surrealists, revealed the need for a renewed and more radical attitude toward collective initiatives that embrace the intersection of art, poetry and politics.[82] In Schuster's statement, the Cuban revolutionary process was inscribed within a broader revolutionary context:

> Cuba, Prague, May '68, it is history itself tracing a path Surrealism recognizes as its own and to which it remains committed. The great collective festivity (beginning in Havana in July 1967 and continued in Prague the following April, and reaching a climax in the streets of Paris two weeks later) revealed that a superior exigency of the mind— poetic necessity— would henceforth condition political reality.[83]

In light of the Surrealists's engagement with Cuba in the 1960s, this essay aims to propose a view of Matta as an artist who engaged with social, political, and cultural concerns through his participation in the Cuban artistic realm during this decade. Matta's experience in Cuba certainly contributes to accounts of the political agency of Surrealism in the 1960s, and invites us to rethink the artist's relationship with Latin America. The body of work Matta created in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates the political awareness of the artist and his important contribution to Surrealism in its later period.

1 All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated. The original quote reads: "Vi que la Revolución es construcción y que para construir hay que ser más dispiertado (sic), más poeta: inteligencia de lo desconocido y que lo más importante es que no se nos desrevolucione el poeta (el creador) que cada uno lleva en sí." Roberto Matta, "Encuesta: ¿Qué ha significado para ti la Revolución Cubana?" in *Casa de las Américas* (n. 111, Nov-Dec, 1978): 14.
2 Among the artists and writers that participated in this survey were Roberto Matta, Antonio Saura, Eduardo Galeano, Mario Benedetti, Margaret Randall, and Julio Cortázar.
3 Paula Barreiro López, "Cultural Guerrilla: Tricontinental Genealogies of '68," in *Transnational Solidarity Anticolonialism in the Global Sixties*, edited by Cathy Bergin, Francesca Burke, and Zeina Maasri. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 80.
4 Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt. *To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution.* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2015), 59.
5 Jorge Fornet, "El Surrealismo de Roberto Matta y su órbita literaria," in *Diálogo de las artes en las vanguardias hispánicas* (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2019), 125-126.
6 See Anne Foucault. *Histoire du surréalisme ignore (1945-1969). Du Déshonneur des poètes au 'surréalisme éternel'* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2022).
7 Barreiro López, 80. See also Lani Hanna. "Tricontinental's International Solidarity: Emotion in OSPAAAL as Tactic to Catalyze Support of Revolution" in *Radical History Review* (no. 136, January 2020): 169-170.
8 Barreiro López, 78.
9 Alyce Mahon, "A Consciousness of Being: *Burn, Baby, Burn* and the Political Art of Roberto Matta," in *Radical Dreams Surrealism, Counterculture, Resistance*, edited by Elliott H. King and Abigail Susik (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 117.
10 See Inés Ortega-Márquez, "Le Grand Burundún-Burundá est mort," in exhibition catalogue *Matta, du surréalisme à l'histoire.* Musée Cantini, (Heule: Snoeck, 2013); Soledad Novoa Donoso, "Matta Qui? / Matta Óu?" in exhibition catalogue *Matta 100.* (Santiago: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2011).
11 See Caterina Caputo, "Toward a New 'Human Consciousness': The Exhibition 'Adventures in Surrealist Painting During the Last Four Years' at the New School for Social Research in New York, March 1941," in *Networking Surrealism in the USA. Agents*, *Artists, and the Market*, edited by Julia Drost, Fabrice Flahutez, Anne Helmreich, and Martin Schieder (arthistoricum.net: Heidelberg., 2019).
12 Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1995), 410.
13 Mahon, "A Consciousness," 117.
14 See Christian Demare, Marine Nédélec, Ramuntcho Matta, Bernard Blistène, Roberto Matta, and Alain Jouffroy. *Roberto Matta, Alain Jouffroy: Correspondance 1952-1960* (Paris: Arteos: Galerie Diane de Polignac, 2018).
15 Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Palabras inaugurales," in *Año Matta*, Casa de las Américas (Sevilla: Ediciones Boloña, 2007), exhibition catalogue, 11.
16 Niko Vicario, "Roberto Matta's Embargo Primitivism: Making a Mural with 'Cuba's Own Soil,' 1963," *Art Journal* (79:3, 58-69, 2020): 59.
17 The year Matta relocated to Rome is a subject of debate among researchers, although most agree that it was between 1948 and 1950, as Larson notes. See Katie Larson, "Automatism and Autonomy in Postwar Rome: Alberto Burri and His Circle," *Oxford Art Journal* 45 (n. 3, December 2022): 6.
18 Ibid., 3.
19 Ibid., 5.
20 Ibid., 4.
21 Ibid.
22 Karen Kurczynski, *The Art and Politics of Asger Jorn: The Avant-Garde Won't Give up* (London: Routledge, 2020), 120.

23 Marine Nédélec, "Roberto Matta's Earths," in *Roberto Matta, Alain Jouffroy: Correspondance 1952-1960* (Paris: Arteos, 2018).
24 Mathilde Gubanski, "Roberto Matta: Earths," *Art Comes to You* (no. 2, Galerie Diane de Polignac, Paris, n.d), 3.
25 Claudia Salaris, "Tutte le strade portano a Roma," in *Sebastian Matta: un surrealista a Roma* (Milan: Giunti; Rome: Fondazione Echaurren Salaris, 2012), 136.
26 Vicario, 64.
27 Ibid., 65.
28 Ibid., 59.
29 Gordon-Nesbitt, 59.
30 Ibid.
31 See Margaret Randall, *Haydée Santamaría, Cuban Revolutionary: She Led by Transgression* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 141-142.
32 The original letters between Matta and Santamaría are available at Casa de las Américas archive. For some of the published correspondence, see Silvia Gil, Ana Cecilia Ruiz Lim, Chiki Salsamendi, editors, *Destino: Haydée Santamaría.* (La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, 2019).
33 The original quote reads: "Él es acaso el pintor por excelencia, exceptuando a cubanos como es natural, de la Casa de las Américas." Fernández Retamar in *Año Matta*, 12.
34 Alyce Mahon. *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 11.
35 Ibid., 145-146.
36 See exhibition catalogue *Matta.* Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1985), 291.
37 See Kepa Artaraz and Karen Luyckx. "The French New Left and the Cuban Revolution 1959-1971: Parallel Histories?" *Modern & Contemporary France* (17, no. 1, 2009).
38 Nicola Miller, "A Revolutionary Modernity: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* (Vol. 40, No. 4, Nov., 2008): 682.
39 Artaraz and Luyckx, 71.
40 Ibid., 76.
41 Ibid., 71.
42 Ibid., 72.
43 Ibid.
44 For an examination of films on 1960s Cuba, see Susan Lord, "Havana: Irreversible," *PUBLIC* 26 (no. 52, December, 2015).
45 Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 174.
46 The tract, dated Summer 1964, is included in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, edited and translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 127.
47 Ibid., 127-128.
48 Ibid., 126.
49 Barreiro López, 79.
50 Ibid.
51 For further details about the *quinquenio gris* period, see Margaret Randall, *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba* (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2009).
52 Ibid., 177.
53 *Año Matta*, 127.
54 For further information about Matta's participation in Chile during the Unidad Popular years (1970-1973), see Paulina Caro Troncoso, "Between the Museum and the Street: Roberto Matta's Works in Chile during the Unidad Popular," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (March, 2022).

55 Jean-Louis Paudrat, "Biography" in *The EY Exhibition Wifredo Lam*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate. 2016), 215.
56 Ibid.
57 Barreiro López, 84.
58 See Gordon-Nesbitt, 223.
59 Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 80.
60 Llilian Llanes, *Salón de Mayo de París en La Habana, Julio de 1967* (Cuba: ArteCubano Ediciones, 2011), 22.
61 Ibid., 40.
62 Barreiro López, 83.
63 The original quote reads: "(…) participar en la experiencia cubana y contribuir en cierto modo con lo que aquí estaba pasando." Llanes, 21.
64 Ibid., 51.
65 Llanes, 77.
66 Barreiro López, 87.
67 Gordon-Nesbitt, 226-227.
68 Gordon-Nesbitt, 221.
69 Ibid., 229.
70 Gordon-Nesbitt, 235.
71 Alain Jouffroy, "The Formation of The New Man" in *IKON* Magazine (Volume 1, issue 6, Oct-Nov 1968): 7.
72 Ibid.
73 Gordon-Nesbitt, 236.
74 Roberto Matta, "The Internal Guerrilla" in *IKON* Magazine (Volume 1, issue 6, Oct-Nov 1968): 17.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 See Nino Lima, "L'occupation de la Maison de l'Argentine à la Cité internationale," in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* (no. 1, 2018).
80 Barreiro López, 78-80.
81 Jean Schuster, "The Fourth Canto," in *Surrealism Against the Current,* 201.
82 Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 214.
83 Schuster, 200.