

AGUSTÍN CÁRDENAS

(Matanzas, Cuba, 1927 - La Habana, Cuba, 2001)

This thing of not knowing my origin, where I come from, what I am, where I want to go, all this also drove me to leave. In Paris I discovered what a man is... what African culture is... what a black man is.

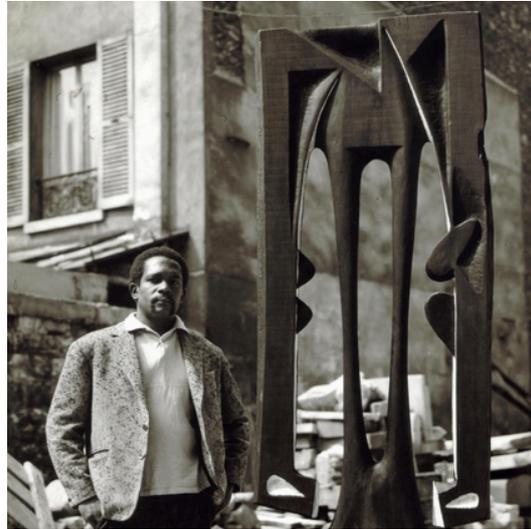
Agustín Cárdenas was born in 1927 in Matanzas, a sugar port a few kilometres away from Havana, Cuba. Like any other artist of his generation, including Joachin Ferrer, Fayad Jamis, and Roberto Altmann, Cárdenas spent the first part of his career as an artist in Paris.

Previously, Cárdenas had become familiar with the techniques of sculpture at the National School of Fine Arts in Havana, with professor and sculptor Juan José Sicre. Influenced by the work of French artists such as Antoine Bourdelle and Aristide Maillol, Sicre taught him modelling and direct carving, which he continued to work on throughout his career. Agustín Cárdenas graduated in 1949. In the following years he stripped away learned patterns and began focusing on the search of his own aesthetics. Thus, he slowly left behind figuration and begins to carve directly in wood monumental silhouettes of great expressive force. Cárdenas left Cuba in 1955 and moved to France, where André Breton, the leader of the Surrealists, received him warmly in the cultural circle of Paris and participated in the group's great exhibitions in the sixties.

Since 1968 he has been living and working in Meudon-Bellevue, south of Paris. During these years he travelled through Canada, Austria, Japan, Israel, Korea and, above all, Italy, - in Carrara he chiselled in marble and in Pietrasanta he casted his sculptures in bronze. Between 1994 and 2001 he returns to Cuba to live in Havana, where he dies in 2001.

Cárdenas is considered one of the forerunners of modern abstract sculpture, on a par with Brancusi and Arp. He belongs to the last group of the Surrealists, and together with them he holds many exhibitions. The sensual lyricism of his sculptures, inherited from African myths and the primitivism of the origins, is mixed with animist rituals and gives his work a universal scope. Between zoomorphism and anthropomorphism, the masculine and the feminine, his work revolves around the notion of hybridity and brings together different notions through a unique aesthetic charged with sensuality.

His work is part of public collections such as the National Fund of Contemporary Art in Paris, France, the CAP Museum, Carrara, Italy, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France, Musée de Sculpture en plein air de la Ville de Paris, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint Etienne,



Agustín Cardenas with *Mon ombre apres minuit*, 1963.

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