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EMILIO SANCHEZ

By Carol Damian



"Casita al mar"
(Little House By The Sea),
1974, lithograph,
50.8 x 74.9 cm - 20" x 29 1/2"

DURING A LIFETIME OF TRAVEL AND ARTISTIC EXPLORATION, EMILIO SANCHEZ WAS ALWAYS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE ORDERING OF THE VISIBLE WORLD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN CAREFUL SENSE OF ABSTRACTION. EVERY NEW ENVIRONMENT BECAME THE SOURCE FOR ASTUTE PICTORIAL RENDERINGS THAT WERE AS CONCERNED WITH A SENSE OF PLACE AS THEY WERE A SENSE OF DESIGN. CONSTANTLY REORDERING HIS VIEWS OF ARCHITECTURE, THE LANDSCAPE, SEA AND CITY, SANCHEZ RELIED ON A STYLISTIC APPROACH BASED ON RADICAL SIMPLIFICATION OF FORMS AND PRECISE AND CAREFULLY ILLUMINATED COLOR HARMONIES AND CONTRASTS. HE WORKED IN SERIES, OVER MANY YEARS, TO FINALLY "OWN" HIS SUBJECTS — CARIBBEAN CASITAS, VERDANT LANDSCAPES WITH SENTINEL PALMS, THE BLUE SEAS OF HIS BELOVED ISLAND OF CUBA, MANHATTAN ARCHITECTURE, AND BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS.

Dr. Carol Damian is Director of the Frost Art Museum in Miami, Florida, and Professor of Art History at Florida International University. She received her B.A. in Art History from Wheaton College in Norton, Mass., and her M.A. in Pre-Columbian Art and Ph.D. in Latin American History from the University of Miami. She is the author of *The Virgin of the Andes: Art and Ritual in Colonial Cuzco* (Grassfield Press, 1995) and is the Miami correspondent for Art Nexus and Arte al Dia.

The brilliance of the tropical sun casts deep shadows on the small and colorful houses, his *casitas*, that he captured throughout his lifetime based on travel to the islands of the Caribbean and, of course, his memories of the architecture of Cuba. Each series of houses reinforced the nostalgia as much as it clarified his aesthetic intent. The stained glass details of Cuban doorways and the curlicues on the iron balconies in Old Havana may give way to the open windows of small clapboard houses with wooden slats marking their porches, but the play of color never fails and becomes brighter over time. In *Casita del Mar* (*Petite maison à la mer/Little House by the Ocean*), 1974, the simple wood structure becomes a tour de force of formal design. Certain elements of architecture fascinated Sanchez and the application of color and shadows to the straight lines of construction transformed a building, its façade, its decorative details, and entire spatial configuration into a painting in the true sense of the word — not a picture of something, but the application of pigment

onto a flat surface to become a singular object of its own definition. *The Casita del Mar* can be seen as a study in horizontals and verticals, bold stripes of color, and the ever-present shadows, especially diagonal shadows, that he so favored, with darks and lights in repetition. It takes remarkable attention to compositional precision to reduce a building to such aesthetic essentials, and not lose its character.

Sometimes Sanchez concentrated on a particular detail — a porch, a window, the gingerbread decoration of a roofline — or just on the shadows that change an ordinary building into one of mystery. Seldom did he include people, but we sense they are there, within the cool darkness and out of the brilliant hot sun. Occasionally the shadow of a child appears, waiting for others who are never revealed. The houses are not really deserted, nor empty or lonely. They just serve a specific purpose for the artist who used their structures as the basis for a modernist's approach to abstraction, particularly the geometric abstraction that was essential

to the development of the New York School, of which he was a part, but not a member. Emilio Sanchez understood the intentions of modern art and the force of abstraction to alter pictorial reality, and traveled down his own path to a personal vision that has become very much his own.



"Barandales" (Railings),
c. 1970, oil on linen, 91.4 x 177.8 cm - 36" x 70"

EXHIBITION

The estate of Emilio Sanchez
is represented in Montréal
by Beaux-arts des Amériques.

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