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Finding Harmony Between People and Things: The Political and Social Context for Porset's Evolving Ideas about Design

RANDAL SHEPPARD

Clara Porset's May 1931 lecture "Contemporary Interior Decoration and Its Adaptation to the Tropics" provides a clear picture of her early ideas about design and the context in which they were formed. The lecture took place in the conference room of the grand Theatre Auditorium of the Sociedad Pro-Arte Musical.[1] As was the Lyceum of Havana, where Porset also gave talks during the 1930s, the Sociedad Pro-Arte Musical was representative of the growth in Havana of cultural institutions founded and run by mostly middle- and upper-class women that attempted to promote social change through art and education during the 1920s.[2] Both institutions were located in the relatively new suburb of Vedado that boomed following the completion in 1901 of an electrical trolley system built by the New York City–based Havana Electrical Railway Company. At the time, the country was still under US occupation following military intervention in Cuba's war of independence with Spain in 1898. These cultural institutions and the suburb in which they were located reflected the effects of and were sites for debating Cuba's increasing cultural convergence with and political and economic dependence on the United States.[3] In this essay, I will describe how such political and social contexts shaped Porset's ideas about design and politics from her formative years

2.1.
Residences in the Vedado neighbourhood of Havana, Cuba, in 1939.

in Cuba through to her experiences living and working under the Mexican and Cuban revolutions from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Clara Porset's father, Adolfo Porset, was a staunch and controversial defender of Spanish rule over Cuba and one of the last Spanish governors of Matanzas province.[4] Following Cuba's independence in 1901, Porset was part of a new generation of children sent to the United States to receive an education in English, increasingly deemed necessary by Cuba's upper classes.[5] After studying at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Manhattanville in New York City from 1911 to 1914, Porset returned to Havana, where she frequently attended the mix of cultural and sporting venues characteristic of Vedado's social scene.[6] She was a regular at Vedado cinemas, attending Friday screenings of the latest films from Hollywood and Europe at the luxurious Trianon Theatre, as well as at social events at venues such as the Vedado Lawn Tennis Club that mostly had English-language names.[7]

While she never publicly recorded why she chose to pursue interior design training in New York City and Paris beginning at the age of thirty, it is likely

that a life of cinema outings, fashion shows, and parties in Vedado social clubs proved unsatisfying, given her restlessness and intellectual keenness. Later in life, Porset lamented that she had received a very bad education at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, which promoted an approach in which "the intellectual side of the education given is general rather than special, aiming more at womanly than at professional excellence."[8] By pursuing training in what was then known as interior decoration, Porset chose a relatively new field in which women were held to have special expertise. The gendering of this profession as feminine reinforced traditional gender roles according to which women were chiefly responsible for maintaining the interior domestic space and, increasingly, marketed to by retailers in the United States and Cuba as the principal household shoppers.[9] However, the growing recognition of interior decoration as a specialized field provided Porset and other women with an opportunity to not only earn an income but establish their authority in a growing field at the intersection of art, industry, architecture, and design.[10]

Porset was quick to attract praise as a pioneer of this new field in Cuba. First achieving success by decorating a model home in Havana in 1927 visited by an estimated twenty thousand people, Porset was lauded in Cuban newspapers both as a model of the modern woman and an agent for modernizing Cuban culture.[11] A front page article on Porset's May 1931 lecture in the newspaper *Diario de la Marina* expressed similar enthusiasm for Porset's efforts to educate Cuban families in good taste when organizing the interiors of their homes.[12] The report described the audience as being a select and numerous group including writers and artists, made up of mostly women, and Porset as very much "a woman of our times" who had undertaken practical as well as theoretical training in Paris, where she scaled ladders dressed in overalls, mixing colours with her hands and directing workmen over her shoulder.[13]

The lecture's content signalled Porset's independence in championing ideas that were still marginal in Cuba. This included her frank hostility to the term "interior decoration," which Porset explained to the audience she had employed only because it was the term commonly used for her profession in Cuba and to avoid the appearance of pretension. Instead, she preferred the English term "interior design" and even more so the European

term "interior architecture" and German idea of the "art of organizing enclosed spaces."[14] Porset identified with a contemporary European group of functionalist designers who saw their work as involving the "perfection of forms and the relation of masses" rather than superimposed elements and ornamentation, as the term "decoration" implied.[15] In this lecture and in the pages of *Social*, Porset thus established herself as a remarkably early proponent of functionalism to non-specialist audiences in Cuba, where support for functionalist ideas remained marginal even in architectural journals.[16]

Troubled Waters

The political views that would later play a crucial role in shaping Porset's ideas about design were not fully formed during this period. Despite her approving recognition of the social benefits of functionalism, standardization, and mass industrial production, Porset identified with functionalism as an aesthetic expression of intellectual and spiritual values more than a political project. Her work was also primarily for relatively wealthy private clients, ranging from leisure venues including the Miramar Yacht Club; luxury patient, waiting, and consultation rooms for the prestigious Fortún-Souza medical clinic in Vedado; and the homes of private clients who also often lived in Vedado.[17] Opposition to the rule of Cuban president Gerardo Machado (1925–1934), however, grew during the early 1930s and came from a wide variety of the political spectrum, including the relatively wealthy and educated circles to which Porset belonged.[18]

On September 27, 1932, a series of high-profile assassinations in Havana sparked a prolonged and violent political crisis which forced Porset into her first exile. Among those assassinated was leading opposition figure, senator, university lecturer, and Porset's friend Gonzálo Freyre de Andrade, who was gunned down in his Vedado home along with his brothers Guillermo and Leopoldo.[19] In a 1934 trial over the murders, Porset testified that she had been working on a document with Freyre de Andrade detailing the atrocities of the Machado regime, to be sent to representatives of foreign countries in Cuba.[20]

During the weeks following the assassinations, Havana was gripped by a spiral of violent clashes between government security forces and opponents, as well as the imprisonment of leading opposition figures. On October 8, wire services in the United States reported that Porset and María Teresa Freyre de Andrade, niece of Gonzálo Freyre de Andrade, had taken refuge in the British legation.[21] On November 1, Porset left Cuba by boat, arriving in Key West, Florida, then travelling north to New York City.[22] In his book *The Crime of Cuba*, Carleton Beals, then the most widely read US commentator on contemporary Latin American affairs, situated Porset as among the women who had taken "a brilliant part" in the Cuban opposition and as "a professional woman who had to hide out for her life in a foreign legation, and finally made her escape to the United States."[23] Porset herself told interviewers in New York City that she hid for several months in the British legation after being handed a printed note from a friend listing people targeted by the government for reprisals that included her name.[24]

Porset proved an effective representative of the Cuban opposition for solidarity activities aimed at influencing US public opinion. One of her most important allies in these activities was the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Field secretary of the WILPF's Philadelphia branch, Ellen Starr Brinton, was a particularly enthusiastic advocate for the anti-Machado cause and of Porset herself. Referring to talks Porset gave for the WILPF around Philadelphia, Brinton wrote to exiled Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz that "we find that Miss Porset makes a very delightful impression on the groups. Everyone is charmed with her personality."[25] Among Porset's many activities during this period was organizing an event on May 4, 1933, at the New School in New York City featuring speakers including journalist Heywood Broun, writers Beals and Waldo Frank, historian Hubert Herring, and editor of *The Nation* Ernest Gruening.[26]

During her time in the United States, Porset's politics began to drift more clearly toward anti-imperialism and the left as she integrated into political activist networks.[27] The tone of her public message sharpened accordingly. Porset told a newspaper reporter in May 1933 that women had been "the backbone of the revolution," having prepared manifestos, hidden fleeing students,

2.2.
Clara Porset in Havana, ca. 1934–1935. Photo: Josef Albers. Gelatin silver print (11.4 cm × 7.5 cm).

marched in the streets, and prepared themselves for "drastic action."[28] She highlighted the sacrifices of women activists, noting that "girl students fought beside the boys against police. Numberless women now are in jail."[29] She also confidently predicted that "when the revolution comes the women will fight with the men."[30] This open support for revolution in Cuba made Porset an increasingly uncomfortable ally for the liberal and pacifist WILPF.[31]

Porset returned to Cuba in September 1933 after Machado fell and a new government led by Ramón Grau San Martín was formed. She retained her contacts in the United States, from whom she continued to seek support for Cuban political causes due to the outsized importance of US foreign policy on Cuban affairs. Initially, Porset's activism involved support for the Grau government with which she was sympathetic but that the United States greeted with hostility and refused to recognize.[32] In January 1934, a military coup led by General Fulgencio Batista was successful in forcing Grau to step down. The military then installed Carlos Mendieta as president, who was quickly and enthusiastically recognized by the US government.[33] After his ascension to the presidency, Mendieta introduced restrictions on labour activism and free speech that set in motion the events that led to Porset's second exile.[34]

Porset's continuing engagement in transnational political activism was reflected in her March 1934 article for *The Nation* describing Cuba under Mendieta. In this article, she offered a class-based understanding of Cuba's political situation that clearly established her affiliation with left-wing and student-led movements. Porset's argument was also strongly anti-imperialist, describing recent turmoil in Cuba as "part of the universal class struggle" exacerbated by "the more powerful forces of foreign imperialism, in which, of course, the North American is predominant."[35] For Porset, the Mendieta government was an obstacle to the revolutionary process in Cuba and a puppet of foreign capital. The main aim of Porset's article, however, was to highlight recent decrees passed by the Mendieta government aimed at preventing strikes and dissolving workers' unions and syndicates in Cuba. Porset ended by issuing a blunt warning to the US government not to intervene in support of Mendieta against domestic opposition.[36] This article is particularly notable

as both the only known published piece of political writing by Porset and a documentation of the important role she had by this time assumed in transnational anti-imperialist networks linking Cuba and the United States.

Discovering Mexico

In addition to continuing her political work, Porset assumed a new role as lecturer on art and the artistic director of the Rosalía Abreu Foundation Technical School for Women (Escuela Técnica para Mujeres "Fundación Rosalía Abreu") in Rancho Boyeros, near Havana. Placed under the directorship of the reformist educator Dulce María Escalona by the Grau administration, the school was an ambitious experiment in combining theoretical and practical training for around 120 women from rural Cuba in diverse fields ranging from horticulture to industrial art and dairy farming.[37] Porset described her new place of work as a school "for girls of the Cuban proletariat recently organized on advanced lines" in her communication with Black Mountain College, where she made contact with Josef Albers in preparation for this role.[38] Teaching would remain an important part of Porset's career, and she would later reflect enthusiastically on this experience as one in which her politics and professional activities coincided.[39]

Politics ultimately also led to Porset losing her position at the school. Following anti-government strikes by teachers, university professors, students, and workers in March 1935, the school was closed, staff fired, and Escalona imprisoned.[40] While it would later reopen under a new director, this signalled the end of Porset's first effort at teaching applied arts.[41] She also again faced the possibility of government reprisals as an active participant in the strikes.[42] As the Cuban government arrested opponents and raided opposition political groups in the strike's aftermath, Porset mobilized contacts in the United States on behalf of political prisoners.[43] In mid-1935, however, she again fled Cuba, this time for Mexico City.

The precise details of Porset's decision to leave for Mexico City are less clear than for her first exile to New York City. However, due to the apparently successful synthesis Mexican artists had achieved between artistic production

2.3
Porset during her 1932 to 1933 exile in New York City, with supporters of the anti-Machado cause (*left to right*): Ernesto Gruening, Heywood Broun, Salvador de la Torre, Hubert Herring, Carleton Beals, Eduardo Chibas, and Guy Inman.

and political and social work guided by anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, and Marxism, Mexico had been a favoured destination as a relatively tolerant space of political exile and site of pilgrimage for Cuban artists and intellectuals since the 1920s.[44] For her first five years in Mexico, Porset largely abandoned her work in design and focused her energies on political activities with left-wing and anti-imperialist groups. Most notably, Porset worked in the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (LEAR) which aimed to link cultural production with anti-fascist and anti-imperialist political work and counted many of the hemisphere's most prominent artists, writers, intellectuals, and architects among its members.[45]

As well as quickly integrating into Mexico City's left-wing artistic scene, Porset developed a deep admiration for Mexico's rich aesthetic traditions. A particularly important moment in this regard was a trip Porset took with LEAR members and artists Pablo O'Higgins and Leopoldo Méndez south of Mexico City. She described the trip in a letter to writer Waldo Frank as the most bohemian she had ever taken, with the trio deciding to go "somewhere" and travelling by train from station to station until they finally arrived in Juchitán on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca.[46] Here, Porset was particularly struck by what she described as "the most perfect harmony between people and things that I have ever seen."[47] Porset's signature furniture design in Mexico during future years was the butaque, which, while popular with some variations in Cuba and other parts of Latin America, is commonly used in this region. In 1952, Porset herself described her featured butaque designs as "another stage in the evolution of the butaque of Tehuantepec" in the catalogue for *El arte en la vida diaria* [Art in daily life].[48]

Another pivotal moment in Porset's life and development as a designer was her marriage to Mexican artist Xavier Guerrero in April 1938. Guerrero had been an important figure in the Mexican government's earliest attempts to craft a new national culture in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. As well was being among the first artists involved in the development of Mexican muralism, Guerrero was designated a lead curator alongside US writer Katherine Anne Porter of the 1921 *Popular Arts of Mexico* (*Artes Populares de México*) exhibition of Mexican folk art when it was expanded and transported to Los Angeles in 1922.[49] Guerrero's significance in Mexico's post-revolutionary artistic scene, however, is closely tied to his political work as a remarkably consistent and active member of the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), often to the detriment of his work as an artist.[50] Furthermore, Guerrero had some formal training in skills such as carpentry and architecture relevant to furniture design.[51] In Guerrero, Porset thus found a partner who was at the heart of post-revolutionary Mexico's left-wing political and artistic scene, with knowledge of both a revolutionary nationalist vision of national culture and furniture construction.

Spaces for Living

Porset began to focus her efforts on furniture design in Mexico during the early 1940s and to write articles in leading Mexican journals at the end of the decade, displaying ideas about design that had significantly evolved since her lecture at the Sociedad Pro-Arte Musical. One notable difference was her reappraisal of functionalism, which she now saw as having served a necessary role in "purifying" architecture and design but having lacked equilibrium in failing to consider the need for beauty.[52] Porset remained opposed to ornament and continued to support sincerity in the use of materials, describing a need to find "aesthetic emotion in the form itself, in its texture and in its integrity."[53] However, she now accepted that manual and mechanical production, as well as the use of natural as well as synthetic materials, were equally valid depending on the nature of the project, the qualities of the material, and the most appropriate tools and techniques for working with those materials. Porset also embraced regionalism, meaning design that responded to cultural and historical, as well as the geographical and climactic, factors. Finally, she strongly argued that design had to have a social purpose and should ultimately be directed toward satisfying collective rather than individual needs.[54]

Some of the changes to Porset's approach to design reflected her political evolution. Porset had been surrounded by debates about art and politics since her arrival, and socialist realism, in particular, had been a topic of discussion and ideal expressed by many left-wing artists beginning with those of LEAR.[55] As well as the need for design with social purpose, proponents of socialist realism argued for design that reflected national and regional cultures and against a uniform international style as a Trojan horse for capitalist imperialism.[56] In seeking a model for regionalism, Porset looked to historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford, a key proponent of regionalism in architecture and design who also argued strongly against universal styles but whose politics was, nonetheless, ambiguous.[57] More importantly, Porset was among a relatively small group of artists and architects in Mexico that included Diego Rivera, Juan O'Gorman, and Carlos Lazo who identified in Frank

2.4
Clara Porset's Mexico City apartment and studio, featuring butaques designed by Porset and a traditional equipal chair, 1950s.
Photo: Lola Álvarez Bravo.

Lloyd Wright's concept of organic and site-specific architecture an ideal model for Mexican architects and designers.[58] In her articles and lectures, Porset frequently echoed Wright's use of biological and musical analogies when explaining her own ideas about organic design. She also singled out Wright and works such as Fallingwater (1935) and Taliesin West (1937) as examples of regionally specific architecture and the "dynamic beauty" of organic design.[59]

The most significant opportunity Porset was given to put these ideas about design into practice was in the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán (President

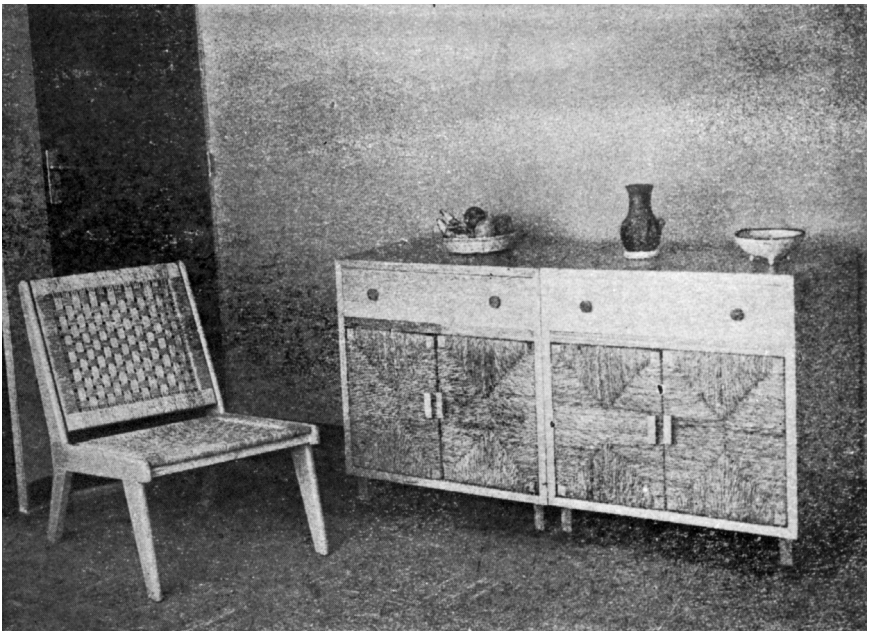
Alemán Urban Center, CUPA) that opened in September 1949. This complex was designed by prominent architect Mario Pani for the Direction of Civil Pensions and involved 1,080 apartments for government employees in six high-rise buildings located in Mexico City's Colonia Del Valle neighbourhood.[60] Porset was hired to design low-cost furniture especially suited to the interiors of the apartments, echoing early European modernist experiments, particularly the Neue Frankfurt social housing projects in Weimar Germany led by architect Ernst May during the mid- to late 1920s.[61] The initial plan was to secure a budget from the Direction of Civil Pensions to furnish the apartments for the cost of one million pesos, with the construction company taking care of production and Porset receiving royalties of two percent.[62] Ultimately, however, the furniture was designed to be manufactured and offered for purchase to residents at a low cost.

CUPA represented the kind of state-led public works project designed to democratize access to well-designed living spaces that Porset advocated. She believed that interior living spaces were vitally important to shaping people's attitudes and developing their aptitudes. For this reason, the "sordid accommodation, with corrupting and destructive environments" in which many working and marginalized Mexicans were forced to live had social and cultural implications beyond problems of hygiene.[63] Porset described this situation—in part caused by the marketing of poorly designed, over-priced furniture to Mexican consumers—with the low-cost furniture she designed especially for the CUPA apartments as a contrast between "places to die … [and] interior spaces for living."[64] Such spaces for living were made possible in this case by the state's social rather than profit-driven motives combined with cost-saving solutions offered by private industry.

In place of the starkly functionalist *Existenzminimum* interiors of Neue Frankfurt which she likely would have admired in 1931, Porset now aimed for "cheerful, cozy, [and] flexible" interiors.[65] In service of this aim, she designed the furniture to be constructed using entirely Mexican materials such as pine and red cedar wood, and, when it became possible, substituting synthetic material initially employed on some chairs for the manufacturer's convenience with palm and tulle weaving. Beyond reducing cost, Porset saw this

2.5
Aerial view of the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán (President Alemán Urban Center, CUPA), ca. 1949.

choice as one reflecting the value of regionalism in design. She argued such materials add "an intrinsic textual beauty to the furniture, and creates a subtle affinity between the furniture and the occupants due to the psychological value of the weavings that, because of their Mexican regional character, integrate more completely into the general complex of the Mexican home."[66] The CUPA project about which Porset wrote in *Arquitectura México* was thus a particularly important landmark in her career not just due to its scale. This project was the most significant opportunity she was afforded to put into practice her ideas of organic design, regionalism, and design with social purpose about which she wrote and lectured, representing the culmination of her training and experience.



2.6
Interior of the President Alemán Urban Center (CUPA), with furniture designed by Clara Porset.

The Danger of Letting Ourselves Be Lulled

Postwar Mexico appeared to provide a promising context in which Porset's ideas could receive support, despite the increasing conservatism and anti-communism of Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional).[67] The development project outlined by President Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) accorded to the left's long-held view influenced by the old Comintern line that Mexico needed to deepen its capitalist transformation and industrialize under state guidance to overcome its semi-colonial and semi-feudal situation.[68] For Porset specifically, Mexico's

accelerated industrialization represented an opportunity to work with the state and private industrialists to put her ideas into practice. Working with private industrialists in this context further resonated with a widely shared belief of the Mexican left since her arrival regarding the existence of a progressive national bourgeoisie willing to negotiate and cooperate with the state, working classes, and socialist left to industrialize Mexico along socially just and economic nationalist lines.[69] On an aesthetic level, the postwar Mexican state under Alemán displayed a shared enthusiasm with left-wing artists for promoting plastic integration of folkloric and indigenista artwork into modern architecture as a way of making Mexico's economic and social progress legibly "Mexican" to domestic and international observers.[70]

Ultimately, however, CUPA and *El arte en la vida diaria* [Art in daily life] were isolated examples of Porset receiving support from the state and private industry to put her ideas into practice. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, particularly given the positive response that greeted *El arte en la vida diaria* and her singular emergence as an authority on design in *Arquitectura México* and *Espacios*.[71] Porset was especially caustic about private industry's disinterest in promoting good design, describing the majority of Mexican industrialists as considering their clientele to be uncultured and thus speaking to them as fools.[72] While CUPA was a personally fulling project, Porset felt that it, too, did not reach its potential, as the government "did not even think to convince" residents to purchase her furniture and the private manufacturer failed to give the collection the publicity and production necessary for it to reach a wider public.[73] Porset thus found herself mostly designing furniture and interiors for individual clients she dryly dubbed "the odd snob" in private correspondence, who were among what she more tactfully described in *Arquitectura México* as "a cultivated minority" that appreciated Mexico's design heritage.[74]

In a 1952 newspaper profile, Chilean writer Luis Enrique Délano described Porset as a woman constantly driven to rush from the stands in the great stadium of life toward the centre of the action.[75] Porset argued that designers must resist what she described as the "danger of letting ourselves be lulled

… by the aesthetic values that result from the excellent execution of our designs" when working with individual craftspeople for private clients and neglecting "other considerations of the form that are just as essential, such as its economic and social projections."[76] While she achieved significant success and prestige as a designer in both Cuba and Mexico, Porset's published articles and the frustrations she at times expressed within them are essential to understanding how her philosophy of design was shaped by her active engagement with the social and political upheavals through which she lived.

NOTES

1 "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*, May 26, 1931, 5; "Calendario Social," *Social*, June 1931, 92.

2 The Sociedad Pro-Arte Musical was founded slightly earlier, in 1918, while the Lyceum was founded in 1928. Berta Arocena, *Los veinte años del Lyceum: Un reportaje en dos tiempos* (Havana: Editorial Lex, 1949), 15–17; Concepción Otero, *El Vedado: History of a Havana Neighborhood* (Havana: Cubalibri, 2013), 66–7; Irina Pacheco Valera, *La Sociedad Pro-Arte Musical: Testimonio de su tiempo* (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, 2011); Rosario Rexach, "El Lyceum de la Habana como institución cultural," in *Actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, ed. Sebastian Neumeister (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1989), 679–80; K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Street: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 74.

3 Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (New York: Ecco Press, 1999), 119.

4 María José Portela Miguélez, *Redes de poder en Cuba en torno al Partido Unión Constitucional, 1878–1898* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2004), 42–47; Inés Roldán de Montaud, *La restauración en Cuba: El fracaso de un proceso reformista* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2000), 623–25; Andreas Stucki, *Las guerras de Cuba: Una historia de violencia y campos de concentración (1868–1898)* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2017), 306.

5 In September 1911, Porset began her studies at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Manhattanville, New York City. The college was highly selective and expensive, catering mostly to the daughters of the Catholic elite of New York City and beyond, stressing

manners and self-discipline in the formation of its two hundred to three hundred female boarders. "Convent of the Sacred Heart," newspaper article (publication unknown), 1893, 14–15. Manhattanville College Archives, supplied via email by Archivist and Special Collections Librarian Lauren Ziarko. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 405–408.

6 Concepción Otero, *El Vedado: History of a Havana Neighborhood* (Havana: Cubalibri, 2013), 63.

7 "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*, January 8, 1921, 4; "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*, August 17, 1921, 4; María Victoria Zardoya Loureda and Marisol Marrero Oliva, "Los primeros cines de La Habana," *Arquitectura y Urbanismo* 35, no. 2 (August 2014): 45–47.

8 Elizabeth Timberman to Sanora Babb, April 22, 1951, Sanora Babb Papers, Series II. Correspondence, circa 1910–2006, Container 52.7, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin; No author cited, *Convent of the Sacred Heart Manhattanville* (New York City: Howard Rush Inc, ca. 1905), 6–7.

9 Lucy Fisher, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 46–47; Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 312–20.

10 Bridget A. May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877–1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Interior Design* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 61–63.

11 "Un triunfo de la srta. Clara Porset," *Diario de la Marina*, May 5, 1927, 13; "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*, July 17, 1927, 9.

12 "Clara Porset desertó sobre decoración," *Diario de la Marina*, May 27, 1931, 1, 10.

13 Ibid., 10.

14 Clara Porset, *La decoración interior contemporánea: Su adaptación al trópico* (Havana: Ucar, García y Co., 1931), 5.

15 Ibid., 4.

16 It was not until 1932 that a Cuban journal emerged—*Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas*—that forcefully promoted functionalism over traditionalism in architecture. Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, *The Havana Guide: Modern Architecture, 1925–1965* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), xi.

17 "Clarita Porset y el 'Miramar Yacht Club,'" *Diario de la Marina*," June 6, 1927, 11; "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*, July 9, 1930, 7; "Habaneras," *Diario de la Marina*,

January 16, 1932, 7; n.a., "Interiores modernas de la casa de los Sres: Álvarez-Sánchez en el Vedado," *Social* (May 1931), 80.

18 Luis A. Pérez, *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 184–5; Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 64.

19 "4 Slain, 2 Wounded by Cuban Assassins; Army Rule in Cuba," *New York Times*, September 28, 1932, 1; "Asesinados Vázquez Bello y los tres Freyre de Andrade," *La Prensa*, September 28, 1932, 1, 3.

20 "Las declaraciones de H. Sotolongo dieron lugar a un animado debate en el juicio," *Diario de la Marina*, February 13, 1934, 2.

21 "Cubans Take Refuge, Fear Fresh Violence," *Lima News*, October 8, 1932, 8; "El Gbno. Cubano afronta todo un problema en el asunto de los politicos 'asilados,'" *La Prensa*, October 8, 1932, 1.

22 Clara Porset entry; SS Cuba Manifest of Alien Passengers, November 1, 1932, list 246, line 5, the Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island archives; "Noticias del Puerto," *Diario de la Marina*, November 2, 1932, 4; Clara Porset to Sara Méndez Capote, November 16, 1932, C.M. Méndez, No. 100, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana.

23 Carleton Beals, *The Crime of Cuba* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Co., 1933), 288; Richard Cándida Smith, *Improvised Continent: Pan-Americanism and Cultural Exchange* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 43.

24 "Woman Describes 'Horrors' Under Present Cuban Rulers," *Constitution Atlanta*, May 3, 1933, 7; "Exiled in New York," *Pittsburgh Press*, May 7, 1933, 8.

25 Ellen Starr Brinton to Fernando Ortiz, February 2, 1932, SPA, DG: 043, Box 25a, Series B, 5 Pennsylvania Branches, Correspondence with/about Cuba—Correspondence with Cubans, 1920 -1936.

26 "Broun, Inman, Beals to Address Meeting Against Cuban Rule," *Columbia Spectator*, May 3, 1933, 1.

27 Randal Sheppard, "Clara Porset in Mid Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Politics of Designing, Producing, and Consuming Revolutionary Nationalist Modernity," *The Americas* 75, no. 2 (2018): 354–55.

28 "Woman Describes 'Horrors' Under Present Cuban Rulers," 7.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ellen Starr Brinton to Esther Crooks, August 15, 1933, Swarthmore Peace Archives (henceforth SPA), DG: 043 WILPF, Series A, 4, Box 17, Committee on the Americas: Correspondence of Brainerd with persons re: foreign affairs: C-G, 1934-1937.

32 Grau had taken office following the quick overthrow of the US government's preferred president, Manuel de Céspedes, and the US government responded by stationing thirty warships off Cuba's coastline, mobilizing one thousand marines in Quantico, Virginia, and refusing to recognize Grau as president. John Gronbeck-Tedesco, *Reading Revolution: Politics in the US–Cuban Cultural Imagination, 1930–1970* (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2009), 154.

33 John Gronbeck-Tedesco, *Cuba, the United States, and Cultures of the Transnational Left, 1930–1975* (New York: Cambridge, 2015), 93.

34 John Gronbeck-Tedesco, *Reading Revolution*, 168.

35 Clara Porset, "Cuba's Troubled Waters," *The Nation* 138, no. 3586 (March 28, 1934), 353.

36 Ibid., 354.

37 Severin K. Turosienski, *Education in Cuba*, Bulletin 1943, no. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 28–29.

38 Clara Porset to Black Mountain College, August 13, 1934, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina, Box 24, Black Mountain College Collection.

39 Luis Enrique Délano, "Clara Porset o la Pasión del Diseño," *Novedades*, April 20, 1952, 8.

40 US Embassy Cuba to Department of State, Despatch 2923, March 18, 1935, file 837.00/6196, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1930–1939, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, US National Archives; Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change*, 1920–1940 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 131.

41 By 1938, the school was operating under the same name without the specification of "para mujeres," though in practice the school was still aimed at female students. Manuel I. Mesa, "La enseñanza de la historia en las escuelas de artes y oficios, técnicas industrials y politécnicas," in *La enseñanza de la historia en Cuba*, eds. Emeterio S. Santovenia et al. (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1951), 68.

42 Katherine Terrell to Ellen Starr Brinton, March 13, 1935, SPA, DG: 053, Box 1, Cuba: Correspondence with H. Portell Vila, 1935, and others, 1933.

43 Clara Porset to Roger Baldwin, May 13, 1935, International Committee for Political

Prisoners Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Cuba Correspondence and Papers 1932–1935; Ana Suárez Díaz, *Escapé de Cuba: El exilio neoyorkino de Pablo de la Torriente-Brau (marzo 1935–agosto 1936)* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2008), 121.

44 The organization of artists and intellectuals into the Grupo Minorista between 1923 and 1929 most clearly expressed the desire for a project of national cultural and political renewal in Cuba that drew inspiration from Mexico. Alejo Carpentier described *minorismo*'s formation as a "violent turn" in Cuba's artistic and literary scene that occurred when "suddenly on the horizon appeared a new man … who was called Diego Rivera." Olga María Rodríguez Bolufé, *Relaciones artísticas entre Cuba y México (1920–1950): Momentos claves de una historia* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2011), 370; Virgilio López Lemus, ed., *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), 202.

45 Francisco Reyes Palma, "La LEAR y su revista de frente cultural," *Frente a Frente, 1934–1938* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista, 1994), 5–6; Stephanie J. Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 153–56.

46 Clara Porset to Waldo Frank, May 27, 1937, Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Waldo Frank Papers, Box 22, Folder 1262.

47 Clara Porset to Waldo Frank, May 27, 1937, The Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania, Waldo Frank Papers, Box 22, Folder 1262.

48 Clara Porset, "El arte en la vida diaria" [Art in daily life], in *El arte en la vida diaria: Exposición de objetos de buen diseño hechos en México* [Art in daily life: Well-designed objects made in Mexico], exh. cat. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1952), 45.

49 Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 135–36; Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art became Official Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 7; Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, "Xavier Guerrero de Piedra Completa," in *Xavier Guerrero (1896–1974): De piedra completa*, eds. María Monserrat Sánchez Soler and Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2012), 19–23; John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 70;

Rick López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 79–80; Kathryn E. O'Rourke, *Modern Architecture in Mexico City: History, Representation, and the Shaping of a Capital* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 102–106.

50 It does not appear that Porset herself ever became a member of the PCM, however she did remain active in associated groups such as friendship societies with the Soviet Union and China, and the pro-Soviet peace movement in subsequent decades. The only record I have found suggesting that she may have been a member of the PCM is a lone report from an FBI informant who in 1946 stated that Porset had joined the party in 1936 as a member of the Expropiación Petrolera cell. This report gives Porset's PCM carnet number as 73. I Have not been able to find her on any list of PCM members that I have located, including in the Expropiación Petrolera cell. Porset did, however, contribute to the PCM's weekly newspaper, co-founded by Guerrero as *El Machete* in 1924 and later renamed *La Voz de México*. Report by Rolf F. Larson, Title of Case: Clara Porset Dumas de Guerrero, Reporting Office: Mexico, D.F., September 24, 1953, FOIA 44851, DOCID: 32680240, Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation; John Dos Passos, *An Informal Memoir: The Best of Times* (New York: New American Library, 1968), 190; John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 87–95, 166.

51 Curriculum Vitae del pintor Xavier Guerrero, Materials for Exhibition Xavier Guerrero (1896–1974). De Piedra Completa, Personal Archive of Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, Mexico City; Rivera, "Xavier Guerrero de Piedra Completa," 24–28.

52 3a Conferencia, January 23, 1948, Redacciones: Universidad de La Habana Conferencias 1947, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM.

53 Ibid.

54 9a Conferencia, February 5, 1948, Redacciones: Universidad de La Habana Conferencias 1947, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM.

55 John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 291–93.

56 Randal Sheppard, "Clara Porset and the Politics of Design," in *In a Cloud, In a Wall, In a Chair: Six Modernists in Mexico at Midcentury*, ed. Zoë Ryan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 83–85.

57 Although Mumford himself is ideologically difficult to categorize, with subsequent

writers adopting labels such as "liberal humanist" and "prophetic utopian," he was influenced by early communist ideas of regionalism, and wrote admiringly about Soviet regionalist projects of political administration and economic development. Porset's surviving library contains a three-volume 1945 Spanish translation of Mumford's classic 1938 text, *The Culture of Cities*, which outlined his approach to regional forms in architecture and design, and she spoke of him in a series of lectures at the University of Havana in 1947. 5a Conferencia, January 29, 1948, Redacciones: Universidad de La Habana Conferencias 1947, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM; William T. Cotton, "The Eutopitect: Lewis Mumford as a Reluctant Utopian," *Utopian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1997): 1; Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1970), 369.

58 Keith Eggener, "Towards an Organic Architecture in Mexico," in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Europe and Beyond*, ed. Anthony Alfonsin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 166–83; Keith Eggener, "Juan O'Gorman versus the International Style: An Unpublished Submission to the JSAH," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 3 (September 2009): 303–304.

59 3a Conferencia, January 23, 1948, Redacciones: Universidad de La Habana Conferencias 1947, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM; Esencias en el movimiento de arquitectura viviente, February 11 and 12, 1948, Redacciones: Universidad de La Habana Conferencias 1947, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM; Matthew Skjonsberg, "Counterpoint: The Musical Analogy, Periodicity, and Rural Urban Dynamics," in *Revising Green Infrastructure: Concepts Between Nature and Design*, eds. Daniel Czechowski, Thomas Hauck, Georg Hausladen (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015), 233.

60 Miquel Adrià, *Mario Pani: La construcción de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Arquine, 2016), 21–22.

61 Enrique X. de Anda Alanís, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad en México: Los multifamiliares durante el periodo presidencial de Miguel Alemán (1946–1952)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2008), 261; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 9–10; John Robert Mullin, "City Planning in Frankfurt, Germany, 1925–1932: A Study in Practical Utopianism," *Journal of Urban History* 4, no. 1 (November 1977): 3–28.

62 Clara Porset to José Antonio Portuondo, May 2, 1948, Fondo José Antonio Portuondo, Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística, Havana.

63 Clara Porset, "El Centro Urbano 'Presidente Alemán' y el espacio interior para vivir" [The President Alemán Urban Center and interior space for living], *Arquitectura México* 32 (October 1950): 117–18.

64 Ibid., 118.

65 Ibid., 119.

66 Ibid., 120.

67 US Embassy Mexico to Department of State, Dispatch 292, February 10, 1948: 812.00/2-1048, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1945–1949, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, US National Archives.

68 Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 153–54.

69 Carr, *Marxism and Communism*, 154.

70 Zoe Goldman, "Imagining a City of Plastic Integration through *Guía de Arquitectura Contemporánea Mexicana/Guide to Contemporary Mexican Architecture*," *Caina* 13 (2018): 63; Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920–1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 29.

71 Rosa Castro, "Genio y Figuras," *Excélsior*, February 24, 1953, 9-C; Helia D'Acosta, "Qué, quién, cuándo, dónde, cómo, quizá?," *Novedades*, January 19, 1952, n.p.; P. Fernández Márquez, "El arte en la vida diaria," *El Nacional*, n.d., 25; n.a., "Exposición sobre el arte autóctono: Bellas artes," *Excélsior*, January 23, 1952, 4-A; n.a., "El arte en la vida diaria, en una exposición," *Excélsior*, February 6, 1952, n.p.

72 Clara Porset, "El diseño en México" [Design in Mexico], in *El arte en la vida diaria: Exposición de objetos de buen diseño hechos en México* [Art in daily life: Well-designed objects made in Mexico], exh. cat. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1952), 15.

73 Clara Porset, "La Forma de las Cosas y la Industria," presentation at INBA as part of "50 años de realizaciones de la Plástica en México," November 3, 1950, Redacciones: Arte en la Vida Diaria 1952, Archivo Clara Porset, Centro de Investigaciónes de Diseño Industrial, Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de

México; Clara Porset, "Diseño viviente: Hacia una expresión propia en el mueble" [Living design: Towards our own kind of furniture], *Espacios* 16 (July 1953): n.p.

74 Clara Porset to José Antonio Portuondo, January 2, 1950, Fondo José Antonio Portuondo, Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística, Havana; Clara Porset, "Arte en la industria: Expresión y utilidad de los objetos de uso diario" [Art in industry: Expression and utility of objects of everyday use], *Arquitectura México* 29 (October 1949): 226.

75 Luis Enrique Délano, "Clara Porset o la pasión del diseño," *Novedades: México en la Cultura*, April 20, 1952, 2.

76 Clara Porset, "Design of Furniture in Mexico Today," (unpublished, June 1951), Redacciones, Archivo Clara Porset, Biblioteca Clara Porset CIDI, UNAM.