

Francisco Matto

b. 1911, Montevideo, Uruguay - d. 1995, Montevideo, Uruguay



Francisco Matto, c. 1944

1911 Francisco Alberto Matto Vilaró was born in Montevideo on October 18th. His father Francisco Alejo Matto Vilaró, was musically inclined and his mother María Eulalia Vilaró wrote poetry. His brother Jorge, died at age 8 and his younger sister Graciela, died in 1945.



The Matto Family, 1918

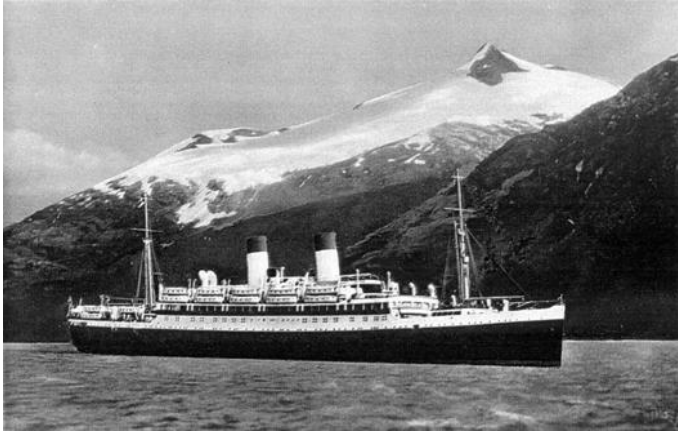


The Matto family on the side of river Santa Lucia, c. 1924

1922 Matto wrote his first poems and took painting lessons with the Uruguayan painter Carlos Rúfalo. He was privately tutored at home.

1926 Father died.

1932 Traveled to Tierra del Fuego in Southern Argentina and Chile where he purchased the first pieces of what would become an important collection of Pre-Colombian Amerindian art.

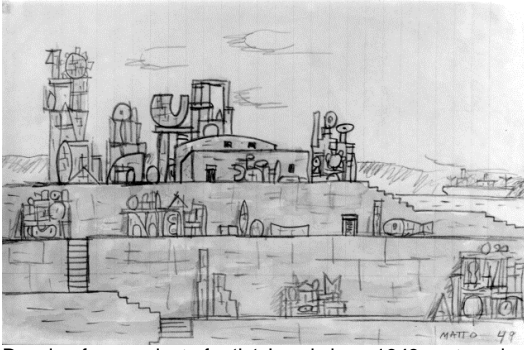


Boat which Matto travelled to Southern Argentina, 1932



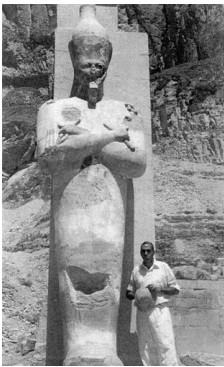
Francisco Matto and travel companions on board, Hortensia Vilaró and Mrs. Herman, 1932

- 1935** Composed and painted surrealist poems and murals on the walls of his studio. Through his friend the French-Uruguayan poet Jules Supervielle, and Susana Soca, met Henri Michaux who spent the year 1936 in Uruguay.
- 1938** Painted large-size irregularly shaped wood panels such as "Woman and Rooster."
- 1939** Met Torres-García and began to attend his lectures.
- 1940** Submitted two paintings: *Portrait of J.M.V.* and *War* to the I Municipal Salon. In the IV National Salon, he exhibited: *Woman in a Striped Dress* and *A Corner in the Park*.
- 1941** Exhibited *Cain and Abel* at the II Municipal Salon and *The Red Chair* at the V National Salon.
- 1942** With Augusto & Horacio Torres and Alceu & Edgardo Ribeiro, Matto was a founding member of the Taller Torres-García. From then on until the TTG's demise, he participated in all of the Taller Torres-García group exhibitions. Exhibited at Amigos del Arte with Augusto and Horacio Torres.
- 1943** He wrote *Pictorial Letter, Geometry in Modern Art* (unpublished) that foretold the important changes that his work would undergo. In spite of the title that refers to geometry, the text is illustrated with figures on a beach. The literary style is remarkably different from his previous writings that were filled with surrealist and symbolist metaphors.
- 1944** René D'Harnoncourt, traveling in South America for New York's Museum of Modern Art, visited the Taller Torres-García and Matto's studio. Returning to New York he wrote to the Director of the Interamerican Bureau of Information in Montevideo, expressing his interest in purchasing for MoMA Matto's *Three Spanish Ladies*, an oil on wood panel dated 1941. Matto declined to sell the work. In June, the Argentine literary magazine *Verde Memoria* published an issue dedicated to Uruguayan poetry, which included Matto's *Ode to Lampeao* and poems by Mario Benedetti.
- 1945** Matto wrote an essay (unpublished) in the third person about how his painting changed that year: "Towards 1945, Torres-García's influence is more evident. The accent on the vertical and horizontal and the metaphysical component in his work caused great impact on Matto. Furthermore, studying the Pre-Columbian pieces from the Altiplano changed his perspective; both Torres-García and Amerindian art led him [Matto] to develop a markedly orthogonal order in his compositions and a synthetic and frontal style of painting."
- 1946** In April, the VII National Salon awarded prizes to Torres-García, Manuel Rosé, Gonzalo Fonseca, Lincoln Presno, and Matto who submitted a painting titled *Harbor Scene*, which is now in the collection of the Blanes Museum. Torres-García suggested that Matto join the other Taller artists studying painting and constructivism. He painted abstracted geometric still lifes in primary colors.
- 1947** Wrote and illustrated: *Formal and Decorative Variants in Tiahuanaco Ceramics*, a study of the pieces in his collection. Interpreted by a contemporary artist as art works rather than as anthropological examples. The original manuscript is in the Getty Foundation for Research.
- 1948** Matto made his first wood construction reliefs and drawings for large scale outdoor sculptures.



Drawing for a project of artists' workshop, 1948, watercolor and pencil on paper, 7 x 11 in. 18,2 x 28 cm.

- 1949** He conceived a project that was never realized to build an artist's community in Belastiquí on the river Santa Lucía. A series of his drawings illustrate buildings and sculptures of brick that would be made and fired on site. Each artist would design his or her own studio and monuments, creating a unified architectural environment. On August 8, Torres-García died.
- 1950** First trip to Europe; in Paris he met Paul Rivet, Director of the Musée d'Etnographie du Trocadéro.
- 1952** Contributed a work for reproduction in *Thirty Constructivist Drawings*, published by the Taller Torres-García.
- 1953** Five paintings by Matto and other works by artists of the Taller Torres-García were part of the Uruguayan presentation at the II São Paulo Biennial.
- 1954** Married Ada Antuña Zumarán. They traveled to Europe and Egypt. The architect Mario Paysé Reyes commissioned a brick relief for his home in Santander Street in Carrasco, a suburb of Montevideo. Paul Rivet, Director of the Musée d'Etnographie du Trocadéro (Musée de L'Homme), visited Matto's collection of Pre-Columbian art.

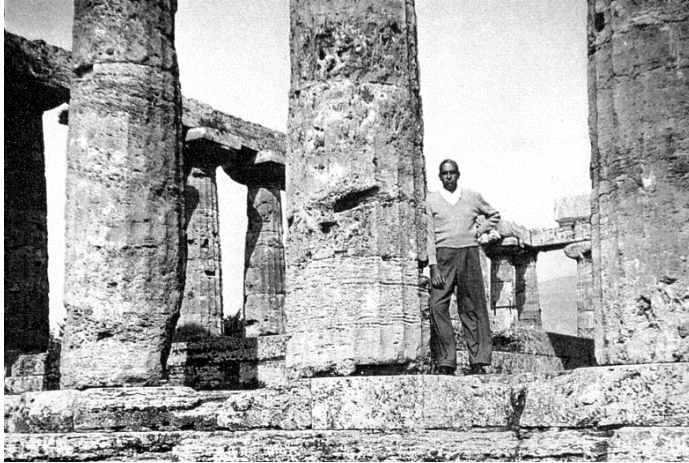


Matto in Egypt, 1954



Francisco Matto in the Temple of Deir el Bahari, Egypt, 1954

- 1955** While Julio Alpuy traveled abroad, Matto took over the painting classes at the Taller Torres-García that Alpuy had led since 1945.
- 1958** Matto again traveled to Europe, this time he visited Sicily.

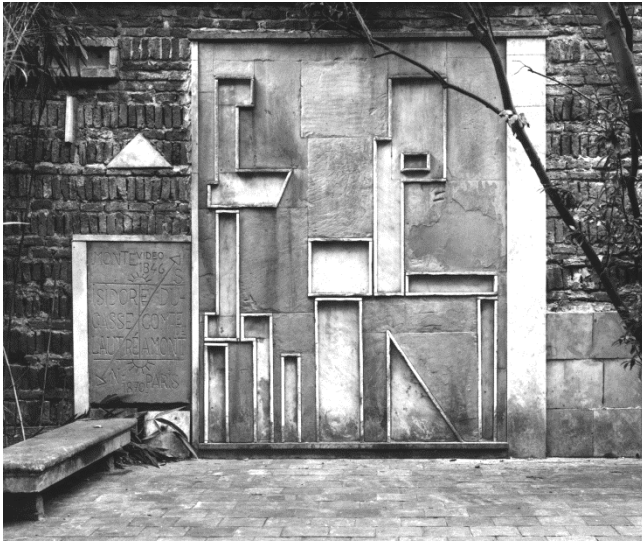


Matto in Sicily, 1958



Matto with Paracas Tapestry, c. 1958

- 1960** Designed an adobe mural relief and a stained glass window for the high school building in Las Piedras a town near Montevideo. The building also features murals by other members of the Taller Torres-García. Made his first wood totems.
- 1962** Matto opened his collection of Amerindian art to the public. The Museum of Pre-Columbian Art housed ceramics, textiles and sculpture from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. The architect Ernesto Leborgne designed the installation and Raúl Campá Soler did the archeological research. The photographs for the collection catalogue were by Alfredo Testoni, and the text by Esther de Cáceres. In it she explained, "The works themselves (without any archeological or ethnographic information) tell of what is essential and transcendental about them. This is a Museum created by an artist, who knows that looking at art is a direct, silent and personal experience that will shape the inner self beyond the cultural or intellectual effect." Marcha, a weekly newspaper, quoted Matto's comment on the works in his collection. "These art works have a continuity that reaches from their origin to the present. Modernism is unavoidably linked to these great pieces from America's past."
- 1965** For the garden of his friend the architect Ernesto Leborgne, Matto designed three works, a mural in gray stone and marble, *Homage to Lautreamont*, the French poet born in Montevideo, a constructivist cut-brick relief and a constructivist carving in limestone.



1965, marble and flagstone, 106 x 90 in. 269 x 230 cm. House of architect Ernesto Leborgne, Montevideo

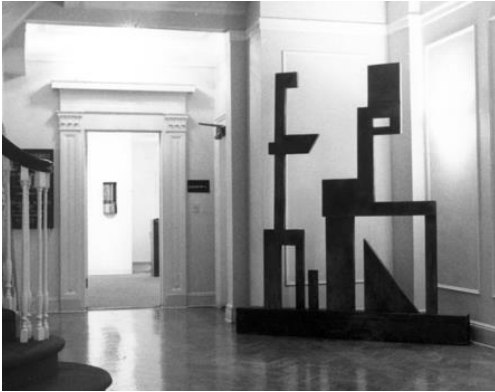
1966 Carlos Gradín of La Prensa in Buenos Aires published a February 27 review of Matto's museum.



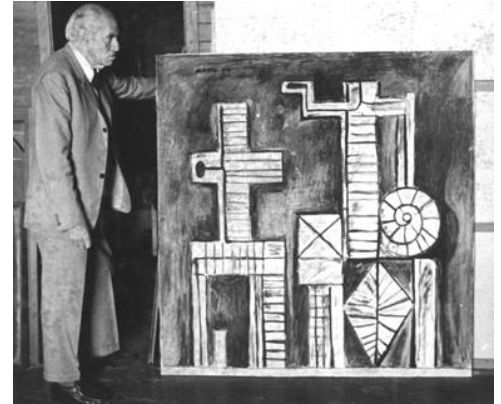
Matto at his studio, c. 1966

- 1967** In Hamburg, the magazine Humboldt, № 29, reproduced several Pre-Columbian pieces from Matto's collection.
- 1968** Matto's Museum of Pre-Columbian Art presented an exhibition of 88 objects of diverse Amerindian origin titled *The Figure of the American Man*, organized by Ernesto Leborgne and Matto. They published an illustrated catalogue with a text by José María Montero Pérez. The Museum also organized an exhibition of African Art, with 82 pieces from the collections of the Taller Torres-García artists and their friends.
- 1969** The Central Bank of Uruguay commissioned Matto to design a silver coin for the FAO (United Nations Organization for Agriculture and Food). Ernesto Leborgne made the plaster cast and the Casa de la Moneda in Chile minted the coin. In Uruguay it was put in general circulation and was worth 1000 pesos.
- 1970** Traveled to New York for the opening of Torres-García's retrospective exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Visited México and Peru.
- 1971** The international numismatic association "Gesellschaft Fur Internationale Geldgeschichte" with headquarters in Germany awarded that year's first prize to Matto's coin.

- 1973** Traveled to Europe and the United States. Exhibition at Galería Monzón, Madrid.
- 1974** To celebrate Torres-García's Centenary, Matto's Museum of Pre-Columbian Art organized an exhibition and published an illustrated catalogue of Torres-García's Wood Constructions and Toys.
- 1978** The Municipal Government withdrew their modest support of Matto's Museum of Pre-Columbian Art and he was forced to close it. It has remained closed ever since. In 1998, Matto's widow donated the collection to the city of Montevideo. Painted first of a series of simplified faces inspired by early Christian painting.
- 1979** Matto designed a wrought iron window grill for the house of the architect Rafael Lorente Escudero in Carrasco, a suburb of Montevideo.



Formas en azul, 1979, Oil on wood, 88 x 14 x 84 in. 225 x 35 x 215 cm.
Shown at the *Torres-García and Its Legacy* exhibition at the Kouros Gallery, 1985



Matto with *Dos Formas*, c. 1980

- 1982** Matto was invited to participate in the First International Meeting for Modern Sculpture in Punta del Este; a project of sculptures for public spaces. The participants were: from Argentina, Gyula Kosice, Ennio Iommi, and Jacques Bedel; Brazil, Waltercio Caldas; Colombia, Edgar Negret; Chile, Mario Irarrazabal; Paraguay, Herman Guggiari; and from Uruguay, Nelson Ramos and Matto. He designed a 4-meter high U shaped form in cement that still stands on the shoreline.



Matto preparing the model for the *U sculpture*, c. 1982



Matto with *U sculpture*, Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1982

- 1985** Traveled to New York for the opening of the exhibition *Torres-García and Its Legacy* at the Kouros Gallery. This was his last trip abroad.
- 1991** Involved himself in the production and design of the catalogue *Matto, Painting and Sculpture* with text by Anhele Hernández, photos by Alfredo Testoni and Daniela Chappard.

1995 Matto died on September 15, nearly 84. Anhele Hernández wrote, “Matto wasn’t fond of theorizing, when someone did, he started to whistle an air by Bach or to praise Stravinsky. But that didn’t prevent him from elaborating the clear and concise thoughts that guided him. Matto wrote, ‘If we succeed in creating elemental forms, we will achieve the understanding of mystery.’”



Matto painting, 1994