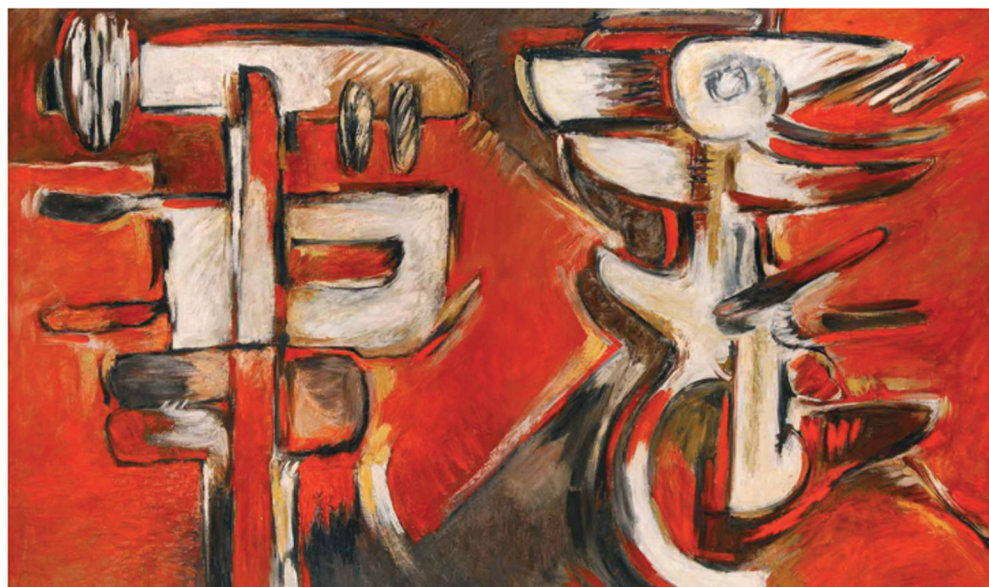


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Homage to History: Oswaldo Vigas at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá

BY SARA ROFFINO, MODERN PAINTERS | AUGUST 15, 2015



Oswaldo Vigas's "Genesis," 1980.
(Oswaldo Vigas Foundation)

The oeuvre of self-taught Venezuelan painter and sculptor Vigas reads like a 70-year history of modernism in Latin America. In dialogue with Roberto Matta, Rufino Tamayo, and Wifredo Lam, Vigas, who passed away in 2014, was a prolific artist in the modernist milieu of his time yet failed to receive acclaim on par with that of his contemporaries. A touring retrospective of his work, curated by writer, historian, and former director of the Art Museum of the Americas Belgica Rodriguez, seeks to address this oversight, offering a small window into Vigas's thousands of paintings, works on paper, sculptures, and tapestries.

Throughout his childhood in the state of Carabobo, Vigas painted. And he continued to paint after enrolling in medical school—managing to exhibit and participate in the cultural life of Caracas while completing his studies. Shortly after graduation, he found himself the recipient of the National Fine Arts Prize, and within a year he left for Paris, where he lived in a hotel with many other Latin American artists in Saint Germain des Prés. After 12 years there, he returned to Caracas in the mid-1960s, by which point he was established in his role as an artist and embarked on his career within the city's art institutions, serving as a director of the National Culture Institute, the National Culture Council, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the National Art Gallery. The result of Vigas's expansive relationships is a varied body of work.

In addition to Vigas's multitude of interests, he, like many other Latin American artists of the 20th century, maintained a deep fascination with pre-Columbian iconography. His witches, or *brujas*—modernist depictions of the ancient Venus de Tacarigua figurine—are the works for which he is most widely recognized. *Bruja Infante*, 1951, stands as one such example, with strong black lines outlining the figure's oblong head, extended neck, and torso, which is divided into long rectangles bisecting two uneven breasts. Paint is thin, and for the most part, color is reserved. Two exceptions to the sparse color are on the face—one an asymmetrical circular shape in carmine, the other a dusky green mouth—where the paint is thick enough to be cut through to the canvas with small abstract patterns of lines.