

***“Moriré de cara al sol:”* Anna Hyatt Huntington’s Central Park Sculpture of José Martí on Horseback**

Anna Hyatt Huntington’s monumental bronze equestrian sculpture of José Martí (1853-1895) depicts Cuba’s national hero at the moment of his death on 18 May 1895 at Dos Ríos (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1. Anna Hyatt Huntington, *Statue of José Martí*, 1958 (installed in 1965), Central Park, New York, New York (Photo by David Shankbone, via Wikimedia)**



The six-ton, 35-foot high monument is a visual essay in movement and high drama capturing the tragedy that unfolded on the battlefield and killed Cuba's most famous son. The rearing horse, with fear in its eyes and its nostrils flared (Figure 2),



**Figure 2.** Anna Hyatt Huntington, *Statue of José Martí*, 1958, Detail, Central Park, New York, New York (Photo by N. Leyva-Gutiérrez)

contorts its body threatening to topple the poet who, with lips parted, furrows his brow and clutches at his chest (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup>







Figure 3. Anna Hyatt Huntington, *Statue of José Martí*, 1958, Detail, Central Park, New York, New York (Photo by N. Leyva-Gutiérrez)

The sculpture forms the apex of a triangle made up of American heroes on horseback placed in the highly trafficked plaza located at Central Park South and Avenue of the Americas in New York City. Flanking Martí to the left stands the 1951 monument to Argentine general José de San Martín (1778-1850) by Louis-Joseph Daumas (1801-1887) and to his right is the 1921 monument to the Venezuelan patriot Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) by Sally James Farnham (1869-1943)(Figure 4)(Durante 155-162).<sup>3</sup>





Figure 4. Sally James Farnham, *Statue of Simón Bolívar*, 1921, Central Park, New York, New York (Photo by David Shankbone via Wikimedia)

Hyatt Huntington's statue, the most visible and dynamic of the three, was the last to be installed in Central Park and was begun in the mid-1950s when the artist was over eighty years old.<sup>4</sup> A noted sculptor of equestrian themes and a woman with deep connections to the Hispanic world, Hyatt Huntington was a natural choice for the project. Nonetheless, the work and its installation were surrounded by controversy from the start. Its completion in 1959 coincided with the final year of the Cuban insurgency against dictator Fulgencio Batista, who had supported Hyatt Huntington's equestrian. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution not only gripped the island but also derailed the sculpture's dedication in New York, where riots between pro- and anti-







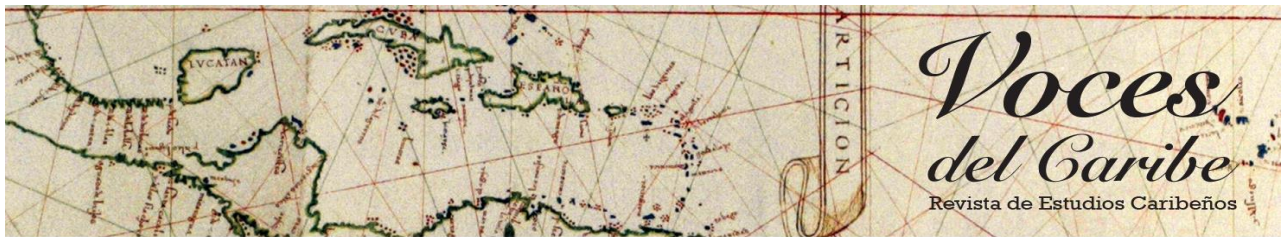
Castro factions paralyzed the work's installation. The sculpture disappeared from public view until 1965. Only then, six years after its completion, did Cuba's national hero take his place in Central Park alongside Bolívar and San Martín.

The thorny politics that delayed the unveiling of the sculpture were not the only controversies Hyatt Huntington faced. The work's subject, its composition, and even the details of its depiction, were all points of debate and contention. Yet despite the work's near-iconic status, its completion by an internationally renowned 80-year old female sculptor, its lofty subject matter, and the fascinating controversy that engulfed its production and installation, surprisingly little has been written about it in both art historical and historical literature.

This essay addresses this gap in the research by examining the monument against the stylistic, political, and historical circumstances that informed its production. Moreover, the paper posits that the sculpture's relative invisibility in the scholarship, notwithstanding its visibility in New York City, reflects its unwitting entanglement on various fronts.

Completed just at the moment Cuba finds itself in the throes of revolution, the sculpture's empty pedestal between two American heroes in the middle of the city became the literal staging ground for pro- and anti-Castro political polemics. The monument's depiction of José Martí – patriot, intellectual, and perhaps most





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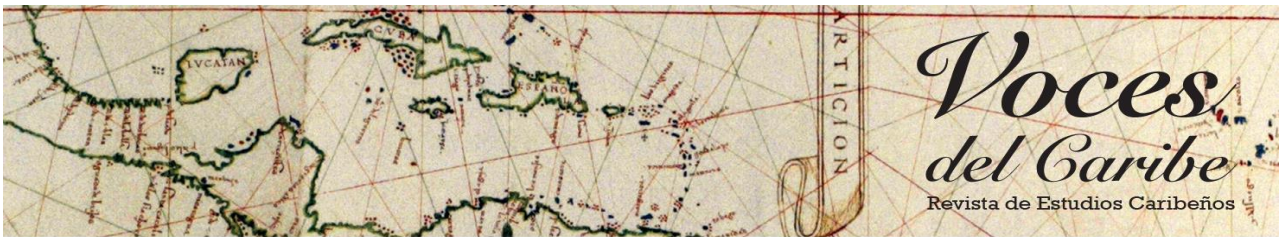
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ironically, unifier of the people of the Americas – did little to quell the conflicts. Martí, a man fervently claimed by people of all ideological persuasions, in fact emerges a contested figure emblemizing the political divide of Cubans on and off the island. Finally, the sculptor's naturalistic and dramatic rendition of the demise of Cuba's *Apóstol* appears out-of-step with the artistic currents of the day, which steadily moved away from Hyatt Huntington's conservatism toward an embrace of abstraction. In this way, between 1959 and 1965, the monument to Cuba's greatest hero was caught between the conservative and the revolutionary.

### **Anna Hyatt Huntington: American Sculptor**

Anna Hyatt Huntington was born on 10 March 1876 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the daughter of Audella and Alpheus Hyatt II. Her strong interest in naturalism and her keen observation of nature -- in particular the anatomy and movement of animals -- were fostered by her father, a paleontologist and zoology professor at MIT and Boston University (Eden 102). Hyatt Huntington was surrounded by animals since she was "knee-high to a grasshopper," and was particularly obsessed with horses, which she rode and whose anatomy she studied closely (Hyatt Huntington). Her academic training consisted of short stints in the studios of Henry Hudson Kitson in Boston and Hermon A. MacNeil and Gutzon





Borglum in New York. Mostly, however, she worked directly from nature (Higonnet 176).

In 1903, Hyatt Huntington moved to New York City, continuing to study animals at close range and becoming an almost permanent fixture at the Bronx and Brooklyn zoos. New York proved lucrative for the artist as she began selling small animal figurines for a growing private sculpture market. By 1912 the sculptor was one of only twelve women earning \$50,000 a year in the United States (Rubinstein 165). In addition to her financial success, museums like the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art began adding her works to their collections (Higonnet 176).<sup>5</sup>

In 1910 she created her first equestrian sculpture for the Paris Salon: a life-sized, armored *Joan of Arc* (Hyatt Huntington).<sup>6</sup> The work's success led the leader of New York City's Joan of Arc Statue Committee, which was founded to promote Franco-American friendship, to commission Hyatt Huntington to create another statue of the French heroine martyr, which today stands at Riverside Drive and 93<sup>rd</sup> Street in New York (Figure 5).







Figure 5. Anna Hyatt Huntington, *Statue of Joan of Arc*, 1910, Riverside Park, New York, New York (Photo by Chenumuri, via Wikimedia)

The sculpture of the brave female hoisting her sword toward the heavens with determination, was the first of its kind. A memorial to a woman, created by a woman artist, the 1915 historic monument resonated both with the growing women's suffrage movement and those watching as war consumed Europe (Beach).







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Hyatt Huntington's career entered into a new phase in 1923 when, at forty-seven years of age, she married Archer Huntington. The couple had met two years earlier when Archer commissioned the artist to design the William Dean Howells medal, awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. (Higonnet 179). A renowned Hispanist, Archer founded and financed multiple cultural organizations in New York City, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Numismatic Society, and the Hispanic Society of America.<sup>7</sup> It was for the Hispanic Society in 1927 that Hyatt Huntington executed a large sculptural program that included an equestrian statue of 11<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish hero and knight, *El Cid* (Figure 6), based on the medieval epic poem which Archer had translated into English in 1897.





Figure 6. Anna Hyatt Huntington, *El Cid Campeador*, 1927, Hispanic Society of America, New York, New York (Photo by Sailko, via Wikimedia)

Hyatt Huntington was both impressed by the strong, heroic aspects of the knight and motivated by how to best bring him to life.<sup>8</sup> The result is an image of the figure astride a horse, triumphantly raising his banner and spear. By the time Hyatt Huntington had completed the female martyr and the Spanish knight, her reputation as a master of the equestrian sculpture was cemented.

In 1939, the couple purchased 900 acres of land in Redding, Connecticut, where the artist built a studio large enough to accommodate her monumental sculptures. Archer's considerable wealth afforded his wife the opportunity to work on a large scale and to gift her works to institutions and governments throughout the world, which she did for the next three decades. Sundays in Redding were reserved







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for teas. Scholars, illustrious figures in the arts, and friends would assemble around the table spending long hours visiting with the Huntingtons discussing art, politics, literature, and the day's events (Rubinstein 166-167).

### **Imagining a Hero on Horseback**

Among the visitors to the Huntington's Redding farm was the Cuban journalist and professor of Spanish civilization at New York University, José García-Mazas. García-Mazas was a long-time friend of the couple, who in 1962 published his account on the Huntingtons entitled *El poeta y la escultora: la España que Huntington conoció*. It was during one of their Sunday *tertulias* that the topic of José Martí was discussed. After hearing how his brief but momentous life had ended, Hyatt Huntington began to envision a sculpture with Martí on horseback as a gift to the Cuban government for presentation to the people of New York City.

Hyatt Huntington was known for donating her works to institutions and to governments in Europe and Latin America and the artist was no stranger to Cuba or to Fulgencio Batista. In 1955, the dictator had accepted a copy of the artist's large-scale *Torch Bearers* (Figure 7) as, according to the artist, an "American gift of good will"(Letter to Frances Dávila).





**Figure 7. Anna Hyatt Huntington, *The Torch Bearers (Los Portadores de la Antorcha)*, Havana, Cuba (Photo by Carlos G. Rubido Morales, via Wikimedia)**

The sculpture, symbolizing the passing of “the torch of knowledge” from one generation to the next, was installed in the court of the National Museum in Havana, just one year after a version had been gifted to the people of Spain (Ciudad Universitaria).<sup>9</sup> According to a letter written to the artist by García-Mazas, the Cuban press, along with officials from the U.S. Embassy, the Presidential Palace, and the Ministry of Education, had all uniformly praised Hyatt Huntington’s donation. More importantly, the gift to Cuba was seen as a cultural symbol of unity. In the same letter, García-Maza enthusiastically remarked that the “Cuban people and the North







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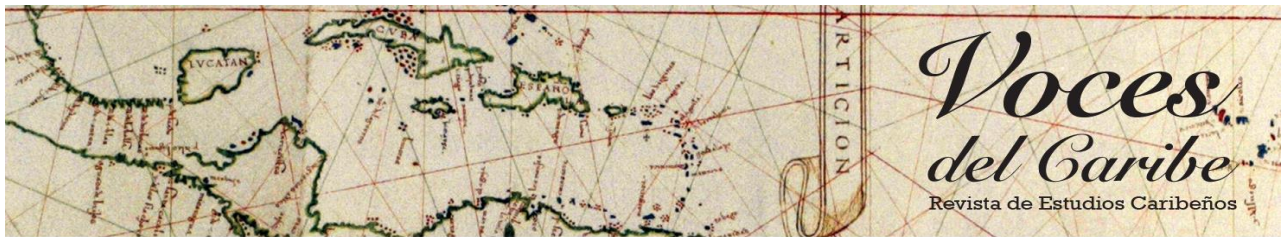
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American and Spanish communities in Cuba are very satisfied about this donation, which brings them together in celebration” (15 June 1955).<sup>10</sup>

Hyatt Huntington appreciated that in creating a large monument exalting Martí in New York she was offering yet another opportunity to unite the people of Cuba and the United States. As part of her gift, she offered to assume the bulk of the costs of the construction of the statue. Batista, for his part, pledged \$100,000 toward the expense of the sculpture’s pedestal. The dictator must have shared the artist’s enthusiasm for the project. In a letter to Hyatt Huntington, he thanked the artist for her “new and altruistic initiative to pay homage to Cuba through the figure our Apostle of Independence.” He also expressed his admiration for the Huntingtons, a message he hoped his newly-appointed director of the National Institute of Culture (INC) Dr. Guillermo Zéndegui (1901-1998), would personally deliver on his behalf:

Dr. Zéndegui, who knows my thinking and the high esteem that I have always held for the work of your illustrious, Hispanist husband, delivers to you a heartfelt message that cannot be transmitted by a simple letter. You should know, our most distinguished friend, that we Cubans will always hold your name and that of your husband in the highest regard and that in our country





you will always find, in every opportunity, grateful hands that will welcome you whenever you decide to visit us (13 February 1956).<sup>11</sup>

The INC was established by Batista in 1954 as a state-run organ with the mission of consolidating the arts and advancing a national, official cultural narrative (Scarpaci, et al. 115). Widely seen by its detractors as orthodox, amateurish, and unyielding, the INC was also accused of promoting “outmoded aesthetics, alleged handouts, desultory (and worse, imported) exhibitions” (McEwen 97).<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, it took on Hyatt Huntington’s project with great enthusiasm, no doubt oblivious to the political firestorm that would ensue over the next nine years.

### **The Apostle of Independence**

Hyatt Huntington began the project in 1956, conducting research on Martí and working closely with Zéndegui, whom Batista had assigned coordinator of the enterprise.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, the specific details of the project were turned over to scholar and director of the Museo Fragua Martiana, Gonzalo de Quesada y Miranda, who provided the artist with exhaustive information on Martí.

Born in Havana, Cuba in 1853 Martí was a poet, essayist, political theorist, organizer, philosopher, and journalist. Between 1880 and 1895 he lived in New York, where he founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party and wrote and reported on life and



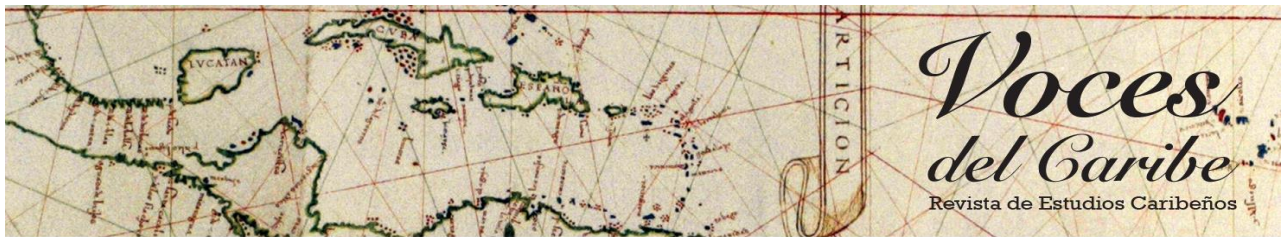




politics in the United States. More importantly, Martí became the most well-known leader and symbol of the fight for Cuba's independence against Spain in the nineteenth century. A civilian, lacking any military training, Martí nonetheless was moved to bear arms in 1895. Riding into battle astride a white horse shortly after the start of Cuba's last War of Independence, Martí was mortally wounded by Spanish troops. For Hyatt Huntington, Martí's death on horseback was what compelled her to take on the project of sculpting a monument to the great Cuban hero. Describing the moment of Martí's demise, the artist reflected: "He was riding quietly, and suddenly Bang! Bang! The horse was also hit and reared up, as any horse will, and Martí grabbed his wounds" (Longgood). Martí's civilian status made for an uncommon subject on horseback, thus challenging the artist from both an iconographical and a compositional standpoint. The fact that no other equestrian sculpture of the poet existed, was surely an added incentive for an artist like Hyatt Huntington, who consistently searched for original ways to represent ubiquitous subjects.<sup>14</sup>

In numerous letters from the period, Quesada y Miranda sent the artist extensive information on the Cuban hero as well as photos of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Cubans on horseback so that Hyatt Huntington would render her sculptor with historical accuracy. For example, he indicated that Martí should wear *polainas* (leggings), *borceguíes* (boots), and spurs and suggested that the subject's saddle, "might have





been one of the so-called McClellan, which was the type used by the Cubans, a saddle by no means heavy, but light” (11 September 1956). Hyatt Huntington pored over the details contained in Quesada y Miranda’s letters. And despite her overall fidelity to the specifics, in some cases, she also employed artistic license, making alterations where she deemed aesthetically necessary, as she detailed in a letter to the scholar justifying her exclusion of the *borcequíes*:

I tried the half-boots on the model and it seemed to me to take away from the emphasis of his being a civilian, as I felt his civilian status went with his high intellectual character and poetic ideas. These characteristics made his death from ambush all the more tragic, the cutting short of an idealist in his prime of life (12 March 1957).

For Hyatt Huntington, the tragic nature of Martí’s death along with his civilian status lent gravity to the sculpture and in no way diminished his significance.<sup>15</sup> It seems that the artist’s unconventional idea to place Martí astride a horse at the moment of his death, eventually won over Quesada y Miranda and allayed any reservations he may have had, since in a 1956 letter to the artist, the scholar enthusiastically conveyed his approval of the project, stating: “I feel sure you will dramatize the moment of his



death and in no moment give the impression that he was anything else but a great crusader of the rights of man”(14 April).<sup>16</sup>

### **The Death of Martí**

In presenting Martí on a horse, Hyatt Huntington was departing from the conventional iconography of the figure, but appealing to a long tradition of equestrian portraiture and sculpture, dating back to the statue of the great Emperor Marcus Aurelius (Figure 8) from 173-76 CE.



**Figure 8.** *Replica Statue of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, 1981 replica of 175 CE original, Piazza Campidoglio, Rome, Italy, original in Capitoline Museum, Rome, Italy*  
(Photo by NoJin, via Wikimedia)







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Since then, the equestrian sculpture was associated with figures of high, noble, and powerful status. Revived and popularized during the Renaissance by Donatello (*Equestrian Statue of Gattamelata* (1440-1450, Piazza del Santo, Padua, Italy) and gaining momentum throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-centuries (e.g. Hubert le Seur's 1633 bronze of *Charles I* of England; Pietro Tacca's 1640 equestrian bronze of *Philip IV*; and Francois Girardon's 1699 version of *Louis IV*, among many others), equestrian sculpture took on particular significance in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America as artists were increasingly called upon to memorialize their young country's leaders. Between the 1850s and 1860s four key equestrian monuments were produced in America: Clark Mill's monument to Andrew Jackson (1848-52, Washington, D.C.); Henry Kirke Brown's to George Washington (1853-56, New York, NY); Thomas Ball's to George Washington (1869, Boston, MA); and Thomas Crawford's to Washington (1843-1857, Richmond, Virginia) (Figures 9-11).





**Figure 9.** Clark Mills, *Equestrian Sculpture of Andrew Jackson*, 1852, Lafayette Square, Washington, D.C. (Photo by AgnosticPreachersKid, via Wikimedia)





Figure 10. Henry Kirke Brown, *Equestrian Sculpture of George Washington*, 1856, Union Square Park, New York City (Photo by Jim.henderson, via Wikimedia)







**Figure 11. Thomas Ball, *Equestrian Sculpture of George Washington*, 1864,  
Boston Public Garden, Boston, Massachusetts**





**Figure 12. Thomas Crawford, Equestrian Sculpture of George Washington, 1857, Richmond, Virginia (Photo by Einar Einarsson Kvaran, via Wikimedia)**

A look at these American precedents and the statues that flank Martí underscores the vitality of Hyatt Huntington's sculpture. Rejecting the more controlled Aurelian model, the artist's horse and figure move in lyrical concert – as the horse's body ascends, Martí pulls back, clutching at his chest, almost as if in mid-swoon. The sculpture is rhythmic and the horse as noble as its figure. For Hyatt Huntington, the unpredictability of an animal's movement dictated the sculpture's





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overall composition. Hyatt Huntington envisioned the tragic instant, but it is the horse who sets the scene into motion.

Describing her fidelity to nature, the artist remarked:

I had my own idea that I just portrayed the animals as they were; I never thought about how to portray them in any different styles or anything of that sort. I just worked at them and made them as natural as possible. That was my one idea and that has always been on my idea in doing anything – to try to get the animal itself without thinking about how it was done or any definite style, you see (Hyatt Huntington).

The accentuated dynamism and naturalism of the sculpture is in some ways more reminiscent of Baroque works of exultant figures such as Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens' painting of *St. George Fighting the Dragon* (1606-1610, Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain), where the horse struggles to sustain the figure, his body full of tension and power, or Gian Lorenzo's Bernini's 1654-70 *Vision of Constantine* (Figure 13), a sculpture located on a landing of the Scala Regia, St. Peter's, Rome.



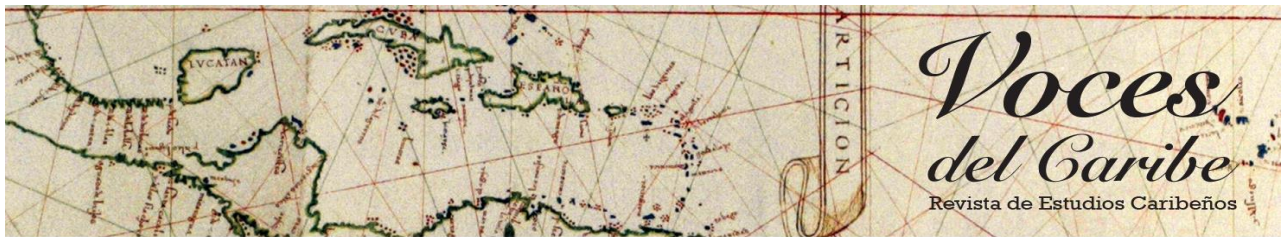




**Figure 13. Francesco Faraone Aquila (1676-1740) after Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Vision of Constantine*, 1690-1740, etching. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Walter Liedtke, 1991, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)**

Like Bernini, who has depicted the exact moment of Constantine's conversion at the sight of the *Chi-Rho* symbol of Christ appearing in the sky, Hyatt Huntington has chosen to capture the precise moment Martí is mortally struck. Eschewing restraint, Hyatt Huntington opts for unmitigated drama creating a work that demands to be appreciated from all angles; a work that exists in perpetual motion and one that places the viewer at the scene of the poet's death. In choosing the equestrian sculpture model, Hyatt Huntington elevated Martí to the status of a great commander,





leader, or perhaps even, a saint. Despite his civilian status, it was his bravery and dedication to the cause of freedom that prodded him to mount his horse into battle. Like El Cid or Joan of Arc, Martí's uncommon heroism could not be overlooked. In this way, the spectator is witness to the moment Martí the man, is converted into Martí the martyr.

And yet, Hyatt Huntington's sculpture, for all its vitality, was out of sync with the growing modern art movement, a fact the artist herself acknowledged and lamented. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, artists such as Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and David Smith, among others, began experimenting in new approaches to sculpture, increasingly moving away from the figurative tradition and embracing new materials and more abstract, anthropomorphic, or geometric forms. A look at David Smith's *Cubi VI* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem) (Figure 14) dated 1963, two years before Hyatt Huntington's statue was finally unveiled in New York City, elucidates the waning popularity of Hyatt Huntington's more conservative style.





Figure 14. David Smith, *Cubi VI*, 1963, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem  
(Photo by Yair Talmor, via Wikimedia)

The artist was aware of the shift in taste and culture.<sup>17</sup> Writing to the artist Charles Bregler in 1941, she expressed her distaste for the prevailing style:

I am downhearted about the present outlook for sculpture. I see about me our very best men with no orders to fill their time – their best years to be unproductive and even when they have produced brushed aside, with an assured ‘outmoded!’ There is nothing to be done, as you cannot fight a tide – you have to wait for the inevitable recoil. (Eden 17)







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While the artist's style may have held on to tradition, her decision to represent the Cuban hero at the time of his death on horseback was indeed risky since it was openly at odds with conventional depictions of the patriot. Unlike the monuments dedicated to famous Cuban generals like Máximo Gómez (Aldo Gamba, 1936), Antonio Maceo (Domenico Boni, 1916), Ignacio Agramonte (Salvatore Boemi, 1912) and Calixto García (Felix de Weldon, 1985), all of which feature the subject on horseback, the countless images of Martí that proliferated all over the island almost always envisioned the figure as the intellectual he was, either with an Aurelian outstretched-hand or holding a book. Indeed, the one pictorial precedent that existed of Martí on horseback was a 1917 painting by Cuban artist Esteban Valderrama (Figure 15), which had been summarily rejected when it was exhibited in the 1918 *Salón de Bellas Artes in Cuba*.<sup>18</sup>





Figure 15. Esteban Valderrama, *The Death of José Martí in Dos Ríos*, 1917

Hyatt Huntington knew of the painting through a 1918 reproduction published in the magazine *Bohemia*, which was sent to her at the beginning of the project by Quesada y Miranda, who was also apparently unimpressed by Valderrama's depiction of Martí since in a letter to the artist he described it as "most unfortunate and evidently depicts the horse after much hardships" (Letter [1 October 1956]).<sup>19</sup>

Valderrama's aim in depicting Martí's death was to document the historical event through paint since no other visual record existed. In this spirit, the painter went to great lengths to reproduce the conditions surrounding this tragic moment. His





meticulous process included lodging at Dos Ríos during the month of May, sketching his carefully placed model at the exact hour of the poet's death, attempting to recreate the angle of the figures, and employing the light appropriate to the time of day.

Ironically, however, the painting was heavily criticized for its lack of realism, causing the artist to destroy it (Bejel 95-99).

Along with the perceived lack of realism in Valderrama's work, likely at the core of the critics' dissatisfaction was the depiction of the extraordinary Martí suffering a tragically ordinary death. The white horse on which Martí rides continues its stride forward as the poet raises his right hand to his heart. Acknowledging the sting of the bullet, he gently lifts his shoulder and gingerly tilts back his head. Valderrama's depiction of Martí's abrupt death lacks any dramatic potential. To be sure, the most remarkable element in Valderrama's painting is the rearing horse placed behind Martí that boldly reacts to the gunshot. In contrast, Hyatt Huntington in her sculpture eschews the diminutive horse imagined by Valderrama and instead draws inspiration from the more imposing, rearing horse. And the heightened drama is not limited to the depiction of the horse in Hyatt Huntington's work. The sculptor's Martí emerges composed, noble and fearless, his body echoing the form of the magnificent horse, in contrast to Valderrama's hero whose awkward, disjointed body appears static.







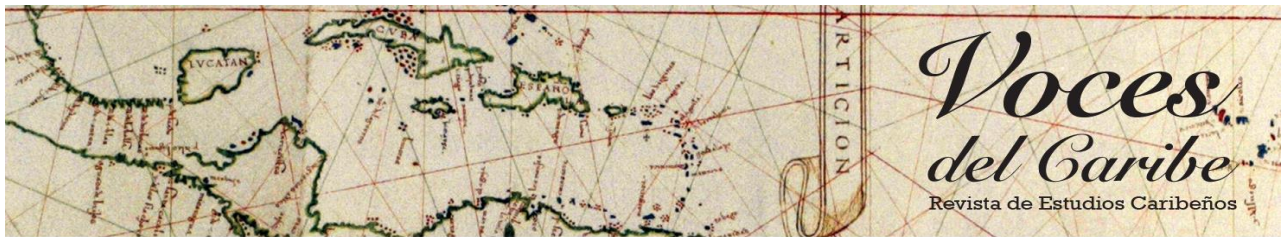
### **Playing Politics: The Empty Pedestal in Central Park**

After the equestrian sculpture was finally cast in plaster, it was shipped to the foundry for its final bronze casting and by May 1959 it was expected that it would take its place in Central Park. In the meantime, however, the Cuban Revolution had toppled Batista's government and the political bedlam that followed made the unveiling of the work in New York impossible. The statue's dedication was postponed until October, and then, it seemed, indefinitely. Instead, an empty pedestal was installed at the site, enraging Cubans in New York and on the island. The pedestal without its hero would stand in the center of Central Park six long years as a symbol of political paralysis and impassioned polemics.

Correspondence related to the project reveals that the period between October 1959 and May 1965, when the statue was finally unveiled in New York City, was marked by confusion and conflict. How and when the statue would be installed and who would organize the dedication ceremony surrounding the unveiling were at the core of what increasingly appeared to be a political issue. Indeed, it seems that just as the relationship between Cuba and the United States was beginning to break down, so too were the negotiations surrounding the statue and its installation.

In 1959 letter from Robert Moses to the Consul General Minister of Cuba, the commissioner writes that the city was unable to accommodate the 10 October date





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(anniversary of the *Grito de Yara*) that the Cuban government had chosen for the work's installation since the work would not be ready and instead suggested the end of October for the installation and dedication of the sculpture (19 August). In the meantime, and on the same day, Moses sent a letter to Robert A. Stevenson, Officer in Charge of Cuban Affairs at the State Department expressing his uneasiness about the installation and especially the extent to which the Cuban government would be involved in the ceremonies. Moses writes:

In view of present conditions in Cuba, we should greatly appreciate your early advise [sic] in connection with the proposed dedication. We shall be guided by you in this matter. Specifically, we want to know whether we should proceed with the dedication and if so, when. We shall also appreciate your help in getting immediate replies to our questions concerning the details of a dedication ceremony (Letter to Stevenson).

It seems that Moses was especially preoccupied about local logistics since in the same letter he anticipates that the participation of the “heads of the Cuban government” would occasion great “fanfare,” potentially causing a “police problem” (Letter to Stevenson).





Stevenson's letter in response to Moses offered the city official reassurance that the installation could proceed. In addition, Stevenson remained hopeful that the statue's presence in New York could "only serve to strengthen the ties between Cuba and the United States and that a dedication ceremony would be a fitting tribute" (23 September 1959).

By October, the plans for the installation and dedication of Hyatt Huntington's statue of Martí appeared set. According to Moses in his follow-up letter to Stevenson, the Cuban government agreed to both sponsor the dedication ceremonies and send a delegation to the event. Moreover, they requested that the ceremony take place on 28 January 1960, in honor of the anniversary of Martí's birth (5 October 1959).

It is unclear what happened next, but by December Moses sent a letter to Antonio De Souza, the Consul General Minister of Cuba, notifying him that the dedication and installation would have to be postponed until the spring, owing, he said, to "problems with construction and winter" (9 December 1959). The delay confounded Hyatt Huntington, who did not seem to know why her sculpture, which had left her studio *en route* to the Parks Department, had not been placed on its pedestal after its completion. Indeed for some time, the artist was not sure who was in possession of her statue.





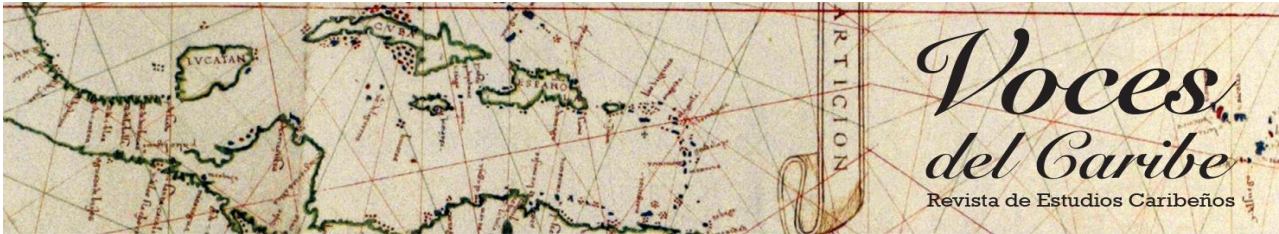


Despite the Parks Department's claim that the work was unfinished and thus not ready for its installation, in fact, the work had been taken hostage. In a *New York Times* article from 13 April 1960, it was reported that in November 1959 Domenico Scoma, a representative of the Roman Bronze Works, Inc., which had executed the final casting of the sculpture, claimed his company had received a call from the office of Stuart Constable, executive officer of the Parks Department, requesting that the shipment, already on its way to the site, be halted (Talese "Statue of Cuban").

In the spring of 1960, Hyatt Huntington's work was discovered hidden in a storage yard of the East Bay Contracting Company in the Bronx, under a large piece of canvas, protected by two guards placed there by Moses, acting, he claimed, "under advice from the State Department" (Talese "Statue"). Whether the decision to stow the statue rested with the State Department or with city officials remains vague. Nonetheless, it is likely that growing tensions between the United States and Cuban governments were playing out on the local stage. The sculpture had come to represent more than an homage to Martí. The sculpture had become an emblem of an ideological tug of war.

No doubt the events of 28 January 1960 did little to conciliate the situation. On the anniversary of Martí's birthday, the date Hyatt Huntington's statue was to take its place in Central Park, violence erupted at the site of the empty pedestal. On that





cold winter day, a group of Cubans from the pro-Castro 26th of July Movement confronted a faction from the anti-Castro White Rose Organization. The battleground had been primed a month before when the 26th of July Movement had been denied a permit by city officials to hold a celebration at the pedestal only to learn that the White Rose Organization had secured a permit for a wreath-laying ceremony. The bitter encounter devolved quickly – eggs, tomatoes, stones, and umbrellas were hurled, along with a stream of insults -- leading to three injuries and twelve arrests. The wreath that had been taken to the pedestal to be placed in Martí’s honor according to the *Herald Tribune* “wound up in the gutter, trampled by an excited and milling mob of 75 persons of Latin ancestry and short temper!”(Kelley). Two hours after the riot was contained and arrests were made, members of the White Rose Organization placed another white wreath at the site of the pedestal. This time police guarded the area (Baum 5).

Fifteen mounted police, fifty-five patrolmen, and twelve detectives were again called to duty that same evening when 250 pro-Castro protestors picketed outside of the Belmont Plaza Hotel where the White Rose Organization was meeting. In attendance at the meeting was the organization’s founder and former Under-Secretary of Interior for Batista, Rafael L. Díaz-Balart, who had been arrested at the earlier riot and eventually released. Addressing the organization, he said, “We have friends in





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Cuba ready to act to end the tyranny and free Cuba from the clutches of Communism” (Baum 5). The pedestal, even without its hero, had become a political landmine. Notwithstanding his invisibility, Martí’s political significance was obvious.

Despite the apprehension of officials in New York City, the Cuban community was relentless in pressing for the statue to be unveiled. Hunger strikes and other protests were planned at the site of the monument. In a 1964 letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, a writer from Brooklyn captured the ongoing frustration of many Cuban New Yorkers, when he wrote:

The failure of the Parks Commissioner to mount the statue of José Martí, the apostle of Cuban independence on its pedestal in Central Park, is a disgraceful and unjustifiable action. The excuse used by the State Department and the Parks Department is that it would mean the United States’ condonation of the Communist regime in Cuba. Since when has the respect shown to a champion of freedom meant the condonation of a tyrannical regime? On the contrary, it would mean a devotion to freedom and a belief that all oppressed peoples have an inalienable right to overthrow their tyrants, a principle explicitly stated in the Declaration of Independence (Keselman).







Speaking to a reporter for the *Newton Bee* on in 1963, the sculptor also expressed her exasperation with the State Department, describing it as:

Just a bunch of disorganized people. One group doesn't know what the other is doing. The thing might just as well be at the bottom of the sea. Martí, a patriot at the turn of the century, is a hero to every Cuban no matter what his political affiliation. He has nothing to do with the present regime – that's why you can't understand why they don't go ahead and put it up. It's one of those curious things. I'd just like to see it up before I die (Low).

But, in a way, Martí did have something to do with the “present regime.” To be sure, throughout his defense speech after the failed Moncada attack in July 1953, Fidel Castro referred numerous times to Martí as the forerunner of his revolution. By the time he seized power, his most memorable speeches, mass rallies, and demonstrations took place in the *Plaza de la Revolución* (formerly known as Havana's Civic Plaza), where the monumental sculpture of José Martí by Juan José Sicre (Figure 17) dominates the landscape and serves as the centerpiece of the nation's administrative center. The monument to Martí, along with the 358-foot star-shaped tower behind it made from marble from the Isle of Pines, were projects initiated by Batista in 1953 and became symbols of his regime (Bejel 56).<sup>20</sup>





**Figure 17. Juan José Sicre, Statue of José Martí outside the Memorial to José Martí, Havana, Cuba (Photo by N. Leyva-Gutiérrez)**

Associating himself with the national hero made plain Batista's pretensions of greatness and his own status as monumental leader. No doubt, Castro's re-appropriation of the monument was at once an erasure of its past association with the former regime and a declaration of Martí's new role as the Revolution's intellectual forbearer.

In New York, however, the Cuban community and the committees assembled to see the project through remained steadfastly undeterred. In the fall of 1964, a group of Cuban exiles –led by García Maza – took it upon themselves to resolve the situation and hatched a scheme to once and for all lay claim to the sculpture and, indeed, to the image of Martí himself. With Hyatt Huntington's permission, the group





acquired a six-foot tall plaster model of the sculptor's eighteen-foot bronze statue from the artist's Redding studio and brought it to New York in a rental truck with the plan of placing it on the empty pedestal themselves. They met at midnight at the home of Cuban exile leader Enrique Abascal on 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, where they planned their mission. By 12:30 a.m., all fifteen of them made their way to the street headed for the park. By 2 a.m., police were called by neighbors concerned about the ruckus unfolding on the street, but the group continued and eventually assembled around the Central Park pedestal at 3 a.m. An hour later, the head of Martí was placed on the pedestal but, alas, the body and horse proved too heavy to hoist. Frustrated but indomitable, the group decided to leave the body at the foot of the pedestal, confident that the 600-pound statue would be nearly impossible for police to carry away. By 8:00 a.m the statue had been removed by the police (Talese "Cubans Fail"). Nonetheless, the group of Cubans who assembled that night had clearly emphasized the significance of the statue and their frustration with the sluggish progress of its installation.

For years tempers had flared in regard to the city's immobilization and its apparent fear of engaging in the politics that had exploded around the erection of the monument. Hyatt Huntington's sculpture, intended to unite Cubans on two islands, had become a symbol of disunity. In the press, the artist expressed, in rather naïve



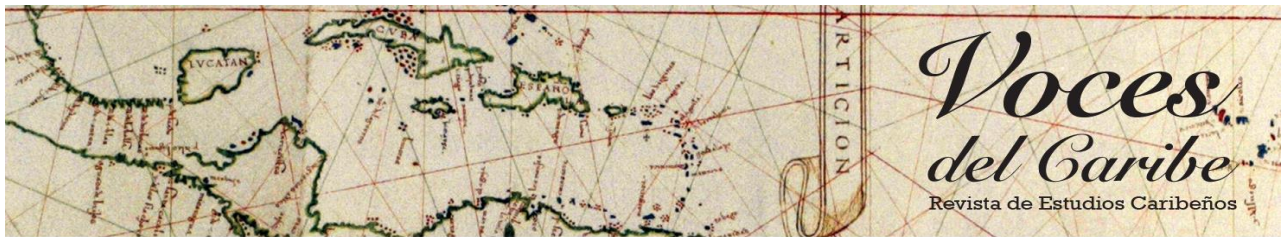




terms, her disbelief: “It’s as if the Republicans and Democrats were to fight over their right to claim George Washington as their hero” (Brandes).

The statue was finally unveiled in New York City on 18 May 1965. After all of the controversy and conflict surrounding the statue, the ceremony was rather muted. On the platform were Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris, Richard C. Patterson Jr., Commissioner of Public Events, and the 89-year old sculptor, Anna Hyatt Huntington. Conspicuously absent from the festivities were both exile political leaders and activists and representatives of the Cuban government. Only César Romero, the noted Cuban-American actor was present.<sup>21</sup> The dedication of the statue of Cuba’s national hero took place one day before the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martí’s death – the moment so dramatically represented in Hyatt Huntington’s work. Officials in Washington, D.C. had carefully chosen to honor Martí on an ordinary day, one stripped of any particular significance, as had been imagined by the Cuban community. Martí, former New York resident, hero, poet, political organizer, icon of freedom, and martyr to a cause, had finally taken his place in Central Park. Press reports from the day observed that as the dedication ended a broad-shouldered Cuban quietly placed a single white rose at the base of the pedestal -- perhaps staking his claim to the great hero.





## Conclusion

Anna Hyatt Huntington could not have anticipated the controversy that her monument to Martí on horseback at the moment of his death would instigate. She likely did not fully grasp how contested a figure he had become, what he symbolized, and how important he was to Cuban identity. Yet, it is not entirely surprising that the work generated so much debate, despite the artist's claim that Martí transcended politics. From the moment the project began, Batista's endorsement, his financial support for it, and his investment in how the figure ought to be represented, underscored how tirelessly his regime had sought to tie itself to the figure of Martí in a bid to promote its own legitimacy. But, by the time the statue was ready to take its place in Central Park, the politics had decidedly shifted, and the attempts by Batista to identify himself with Martí were deeply contested by Fidel and the early Revolution. Indeed, the new leader of Cuba intended to supersede this connection by promoting the Revolution of 1959 as the continuation of the Revolution of 1895, but this identification too, was disputed especially among the exile community in New York, who saw Martí as a symbol of freedom. Hyatt Huntington's empty pedestal had in fact become a political cauldron, exposing the complicated polemics that had surrounded the iconic figure for decades.





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Hyatt Huntington's equestrian sculpture, perhaps unwittingly, confronted the tempestuous arguments about Martí's place in Cuba's post-Revolutionary life. Yet, from an artistic standpoint, the work acknowledges Martí's outsized nature, by collapsing traditional iconography and offering a unique interpretation of the great hero. Martí was not a martial figure and yet there he stands between two renowned generals whose depictions hardly conjure up bravery on the battlefield. Martí and his horse, on the other hand, are in active motion revealing the misfortunes and accidents of war. In capturing the pregnant moment of his demise, Hyatt Huntington allowed the viewer to witness Martí's courage, his martyrdom, and perhaps, even, the most important example of self-sacrifice in the political history of Cuba.

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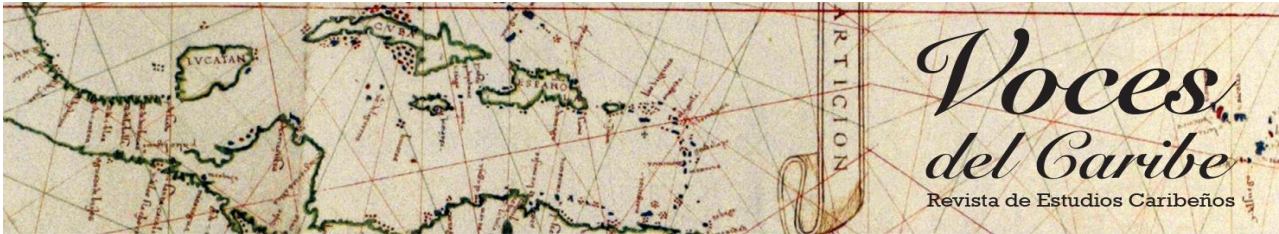
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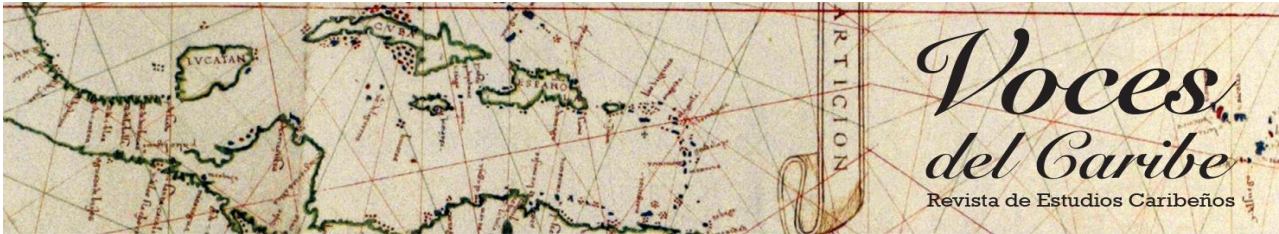
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### Notes

1. I would like to thank the staff of the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries for making available the Anna Hyatt Huntington Papers.

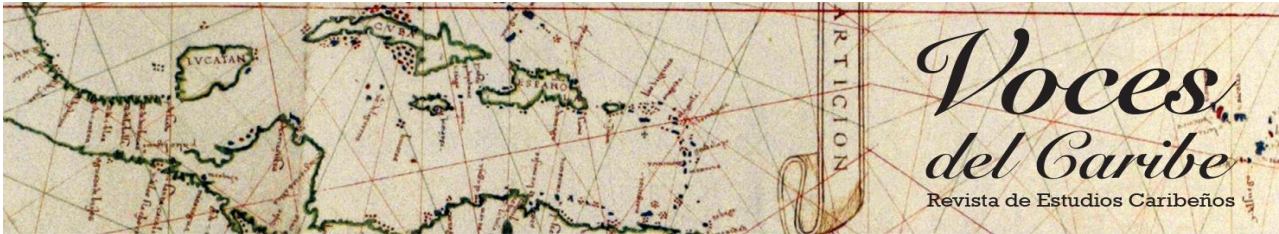
2. The inscription on the monument reads:

APOSTLE OF CUBAN INDEPENDENCE/LEADER OF THE PEOPLES OF  
AMERICA/AND DEFENDER OF HUMAN DIGNITY/HIS LITERARY  
GENIUS VIED WITH HIS/POLITICAL FORESIGHT. HE WAS BORN/IN  
HAVANA ON JANUARY 28, 1953/FOR FIFTEEN YEARS OF HIS EXILE  
HE LIVED IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK./HE DIED IN ACTION AT DOS  
RIOS IN/ORIENTE PROVINCE ON MAY 19, 1895.

3. The San Martín statue is a copy of the 1862 original by Daumas, which is located in Buenos Aires. In 1950 the city of Buenos Aires gifted the work to New York City where it was dedicated on May 25, 1951. The statue of Simón Bolívar was dedicated in 1921 at its original location at West 83rd Street in New York City. It was gifted to the city by the government of Venezuela. On April 19, 1951 it was rededicated at its current site in the new plaza where the Avenue of the Americas meets Central Park.

4. Between 1955 and 1966, Hyatt Huntington completed five large-scale equestrian sculptures for the United States: José Martí (1955); Sibyl Ludington (1960); Abe





Lincoln (1963); Andrew Jackson (1964); General Israel Putnam (1966), which was completed when the artist was eighty-nine years old.

5. The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquires *Two Horses and Winter* (aka *Winter Noon*) in 1906. By 1912 it had acquired two more of the artist's works. And in 1902 The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences commissioned a group of animals for its paleontological department.

6. Once completed, she earned an honorable mention for her work, a lesser prize than the one she was owed since the jurors did not believe the scale and caliber of the horse could have been carried out by a woman.

7. Together, the pair shared a great love of art. In 1931 they founded Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina, a first-of-its-kind outdoor 9,100 acre-sculpture park and wildlife preserve.

8. Her copy for Spain earned her the Grand Cross of King Alfonso XII by the Spanish Government. Versions of Hyatt Huntington's *El Cid* can be found in Seville, Valencia, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, and San Diego's Plaza de Panama in Balboa Park.

9. In a letter dated from 5 March 1956, Anna Hyatt Huntington writes the following to

Fulgencio Batista: "My husband Archer Huntington was a great admirer of Cuba and the Cuban people and was more than pleased to give to you and





Havana, as their head of government, my statue the “Torch Bearers,” a symbol to Cuban bravery and youth.”

10. “El pueblo cubano y la colonia norteamericana y española están muy satisfechos por este donativo que los une a todos en un común homenaje.” In 1958 García-Mazas received a letter dated 7 February from Guillermo de Zéndegui, Director of the National Institute of Culture, Havana, Cuba, thanking Hyatt Huntington for her recent gift of Diana the Huntress, for which Zéndegui had reserved a space for its installation in the gardens of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. The first permanent installation of the Museo Nacional at the Palacio de Bellas Artes took place on July 22, 1955. Originally founded in 1913, the new venue for the museum was established to house works accepted by the state, and was seen as a “national symbol and jewel of the modernizing city” (McEwen 99).

11. “El doctor Zéndegui, que conoce mi pensamiento y la alta consideración que siempre me ha inspirado la obra hispanista de su ilustre esposo, lleva ¿a? usted un mensaje personal, cuya emoción no podría ser transmitida en una simple carta...Sepa la distinguida amiga que los cubanos tendremos siempre su nombre y el de su esposo en la mayor estimación y que en nuestro país encontrará usted, en toda oportunidad, manos agradecidas que se adelantarán a recibirla en cualquier momento que se decida a visitarnos.”





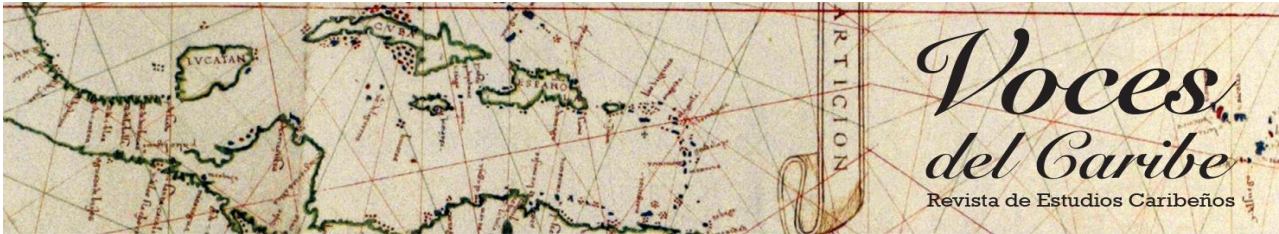
12. Jokes regarding the INC and Zéndegui's lack of training circulated among the upper classes. According to Scarpaci et al. (15) one of the most popular of these told of how an uneasy Batista asked new director Zéndegui about an upcoming exhibition of the Mona Lisa about which the director, unsure himself, instructed the dictator to pause, take a few steps back, and upon seeing the masterpiece and exclaim "¡Qué cara! ¡Qué gesto! The next day Batista visited the show and confusing the instructions, exclaimed: "¡Qué carajo es esto!"

13. For example, Batista himself proposed that the sculpture include marble from the Isle of Pines since Martí had been imprisoned there and had been forced to work in its quarries (Davis 2). This idea was rejected by New York City's Department of Parks' Executive Officer, Stuart Constable, who, writing to Hyatt Huntington maintained:

"No sort of marble will be approved because none will stand the weather in this climate." More importantly, Constable contended that a marble base would distinguish the statue of Martí over those of Bolívar and San Martín and that the "only material which will be approved for the base is the same material used in the bases of the statues of San Martín and Bolívar. This is a dark Quincy granite." (27 May 1957).

14. For example, her Abraham Lincoln statue from 1961 depicts the future president reading a book while on a grazing horse and her Andrew Jackson from 1967,





represents the president not as a general as was customary, but as a young farm boy riding bareback on a horse.

15. But Quesada y Miranda argued that including leggings and spurs on Martí to preserve historical accuracy, arguing:

“all our martianos share the opinions that these details should not be omitted.

We donot [sic] believe that anyone will mistake him for a soldier because he has the boots and spurs.” After viewing a photo of the artist’s progress, he further suggested that she cut down the trousers at the bottom since he believed them to be too wide” (Letter to Hyatt Huntington [25 May 1958]).

As evidenced in the final version installed in Central Park and as explained by Hyatt Huntington herself, Quesada y Miranda’s instructions were received after she had already constructed the half-life model making it impossible to consider the adjustments, save for the spurs, which do appear on the sculpture and were probably added later (Letter to Quesada y Miranda [29 May 1958]).

16. Correspondence from these early negotiations regarding the particulars of the project also reveals how this public monument in New York City in honor of the Cuban patriot became an opportunity for other groups to clamor for representation. The New York-based Club Cubano Inter-Americano, for example, wrote to the artist requesting that she include a statue of Lt. General José Antonio de la Caridad Maceo





y Grajales (1845-1896) alongside Martí. Maceo, born to a Venezuelan father and an Afro-Cuban mother was second in command of the Cuban Liberation Army of Independence and like Martí, by whom he was greatly admired, an important political tactician. The “Bronze Titan,” as he came to be known, was championed by the Club Cubano Inter-Americano, whose membership was comprised mostly of Afro-Cubans living in New York City. The opportunity to include its hero alongside Martí no doubt appealed to the organization. In Cuba, however, the idea was immediately rejected as communicated in a letter to Hyatt Huntington by Quesada y Miranda, who strongly advised that the statue should be of “Martí and only Martí. It is absurd that some people should suggest other figures. It is unartistic and besides Martí is our great hero [sic]” (14 April 1956). In an undated letter written by Hyatt Huntington responding to the Club Cubano’s initiative to include Maceo, the artist wrote:

I have received your letter of April 6th regarding the Club’s dissatisfaction with the single statue to José Martí. When I offered to model this statue of Martí, I saw the opportunity of a dramatic and decorative composition and I think the result should appeal to all patriotic Cubans regardless of personal loyalties. Also the expense of this single model is all that I feel justified in contributing. A double statue would be double the cost to me and entail a







difficult composition. I could only undertake it if all expenses for the Maceo statue could be met by the interested parties (Letter to Club Cubano).

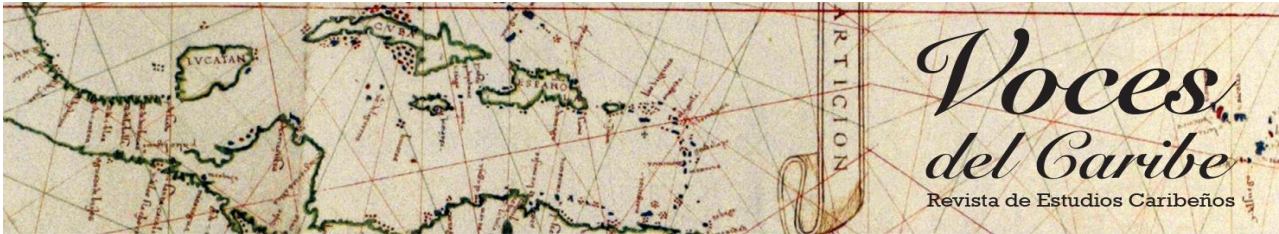
Hyatt Huntington was, quite obviously, unwilling to become embroiled in the complicated racial politics of Cuba, but these letters shed light on the complicated racial politics of Cuba's past as seen through the lens of the Afro-Cuban community in New York.

17. Despite Hyatt Huntington's accurate assessment of the changing artistic climate she continued producing her works with the same naturalism she had always embraced and wore her conservatism as an ideological badge of sorts, conflating her art with her politics, despite often publicly claiming neutrality. By 1964, she boldly made plain the connection, explaining:

I'm very much of a conservative. I'm a great conservative in politics. I was for Goldwater. I stuck my neck out for Goldwater in the very early years. And then that follows through for art. The modernists are undoubtedly extremely interesting to a great number of the young people, but they don't satisfy me very much. (Hyatt Huntington)

18. There existed other drawings from the end of the 19th century/early 20th century imagining the death of Martí, but none had generated public interest.





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19. In a letter from 12 January 1955, García-Mazas write to Quesada y Miranda thanking him for offering to send the artist information on Martí. He also reminds the scholar that Hyatt Huntington intended to place Martí on horseback, depicting him on the same scale as the other equestrian portraits in Central Park. He asks Quesada y Miranda to furnish as much information on the horse Martí may have been riding. In response, Quesada y Miranda in a letter dating 1 October 1956 sends a copy of the Valderrama painting for the artist's reference.

20. Perhaps in a bid to connect the two works, Batista advocated for the use of the same marble for the New York statue.

21. César Romero is the son of César Julio Romero and María Mantilla, who is said to be José Martí's daughter (López 196-200).

