

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Artist: Roberto Matta

Title: Dors L'ing, 1975

Medium: lithograph

b. 1911, Santiago, Chile d. 2002, Civitavecchia

Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren, or Roberto Matta as he came to be known, was born in Chile in 1911. Matta was a painter, draughtsman and architect, perhaps best known for his association with the surrealist movement, though in his later years he would abandon the stricter tenets of this term. Matta studied architecture from 1929-1931 at the Catholic University of Santiago. Following this, he went to Europe and was apprenticed to Le Corbusier's office in Paris in 1934. Whilst working as an architect, Matta travelled around Europe coming in to contact with Modernist architects Walter Gropius and Alvar Aalto and meeting many important figures for the Surrealist movement such as Salvador Dalí, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp.

Matta was making his own drawings at this time and was invited by Breton to exhibit them at the 1938 *Exposition Internationale de Surréalisme*. It was in this year that Matta began to paint, his early work was distinguished by expressively painted biomorphic forms which he cast against an often dark and stormy setting intended to evoke a psychic world. Contrary to surrealists such as Dalí and Magritte, there was no reference to real objects or experiences placed in a confrontational, distorted world, rather Matta's forms were totally imagined and symbolised metaphysical or higher beings suspended in a distorted landscape.

When Matta moved to New York at the beginning of WWII, he became acquainted with Abstract Expressionist art and met artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. In 1941, Matta travelled to Mexico with his friend, fellow artist, Robert Motherwell. Matta was inspired by the landscape and visual culture of Mexico, and particularly interested in the work of mural painters David Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. The artist's first solo exhibition was held in New York in 1942; At this point, Matta's work maintained a surrealist quality, though the scale and ambition of his work revealed the influence of the Mexican wall paintings he had seen as well as the particular influence of Picasso's *Guernica*. The work impressed André Breton as well as members of the American Abstract Expressionist movement such as Arshile Gorky.

After the war, Matta developed a more figurative style, often expressing social and political concerns in his art. His work fell out of fashion with the surrealists who expelled him from the group in 1948. Matta continued to exhibit all over Europe and the Americas, including a show at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1977. His work also featured in *A New Spirit in Painting* at the Royal Academy, London, in 1981. Matta continued to paint, travel and engage in contemporary politics until his death in 2002.

The information in this article has been taken from Oxford Art Online and <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/nov/25/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>

This information has been compiled by Art Collections assistants, interns, and volunteers
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