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| **Valenzuela, Rosa Mena (1913 – 2004)** |
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| As a pioneer of **Expressionism** in El Salvador, Rosa Mena Valenzuela is responsible for some of the most radical transformations in Salvadoran art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Valenzuela began her own exploration of materials and form prior to her journey abroad in the 1960s and hers were the earliest expressions in El Salvador of developing international trends and experiments. Valenzuela transgressed artistic traditions with her unique abstract and expressionistic style, as well as in her experimentation with diverse mediums and materials. Valenzuela worked on an intimate scale and developed her own unique language for and approach to the two dimensional plane where she painted, drew, and collaged various materials, such as paper, cardboard, fabric, industrial paint, aluminum, and cement. The spontaneous and energetic nature of her line simultaneously creates and erases both a sense of form and atmosphere. Line and color are concomitant elements of her visual language, her images often filled with vibrant colors, and at times subdued given way to narrative. Another important aspect of Valenzuela’s work is the effort to reveal if not highlight her process and materials, which can be interpreted as some of the more significant aspects of what makes her work unique to Salvadoran art.  She began her art studies in 1953 at one of the two art schools in the country, The Valero Lecha Art Academy, which was established in 1936 and closed in 1968. The artist began to show her work nationally in 1960, her first solo exhibition taking place at the Salvadoran Institute of Tourism. Although artist Valero Lecha followed strictly formal academic standards, his school hosted many of the artists who would challenge traditional forms of art and shape modern Salvadoran art. Some of these artists traveled, lived, and studied abroad in Mexico and Europe, and eventually returned to El Salvador bringing with them new art concepts, forms, and techniques. Unlike her fellow artists, Valenzuela did not live and study abroad, although during the early part of sixties she did travel throughout parts of the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. These travel experiences resulted in a series of work exhibited as *Recuerdos de viajes (Travel Memories)* in 1965 now at the El Salvador National Library. Her travels allowed her access to the work of great masters and exposed her to new trends and she would remain in dialogue and experiment with an international aesthetic throughout her career. |
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