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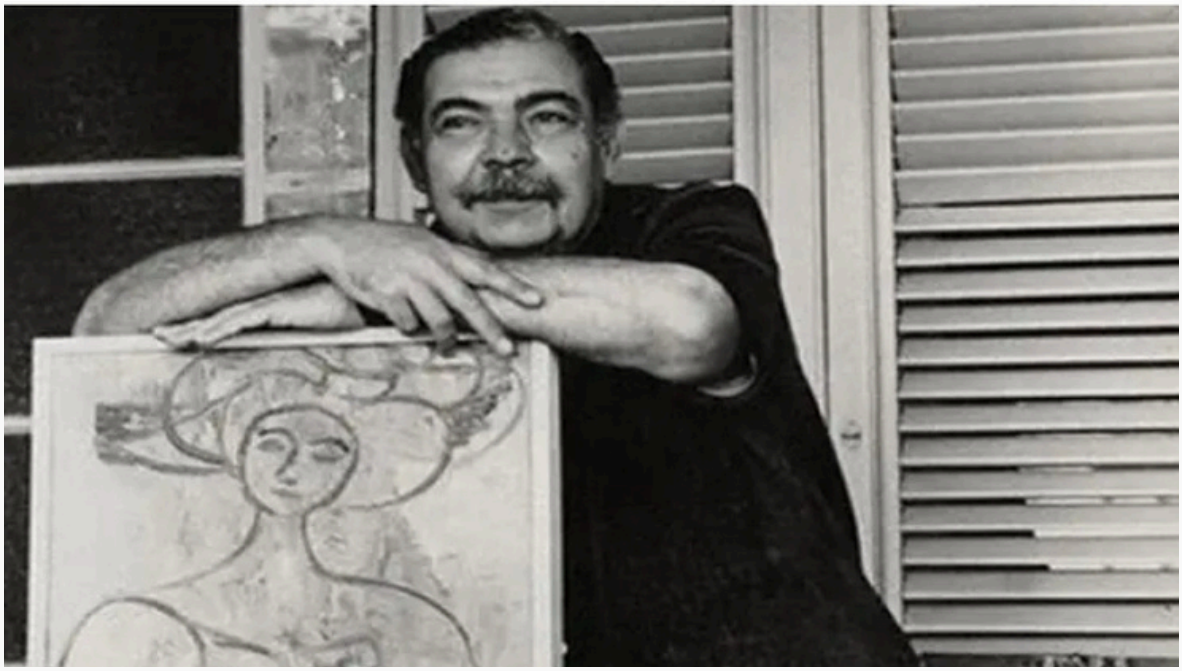
A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

26 May 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

René Portocarrero: The Visionary Cuban Painter Who Redefined Latin American Art

René Portocarrero, one of Cuba's most celebrated artists, left an enduring legacy in painting, drawing, graphic design, and muralism, shaping the island's artistic identity while redefining Latin American visual expression.



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Born in Havana in 1912, Portocarrero's explosive use of color, dynamic compositions, and depictions of Cuban life and mythology set him apart. His works, including "Historia de las Antillas" and "Flora", reflect the spiritual, folkloric, and architectural elements of Cuban heritage.

Beyond canvas, his impact extended to monumental murals, such as those adorning Havana's National Prison and Cuban theaters, embedding his vision in the public sphere. His mastery earned him international recognition, making him one of the most influential Cuban modernists.

Portocarrero's work remains a pillar of Caribbean artistic identity, celebrating the fusion of African, European, and Indigenous influences that define Cuban culture. As Latin American art continues to gain global prominence, his legacy remains unshaken, inspiring new generations of creators.

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Chile: The King of Mexican Cuisin

The chile pepper, a fundamental ingredient in Mexican gastronomy, continues to dominate traditional and modern culinary creations, cementing its status as the “king of Mexican cuisine.”



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Diversity of Chiles and Regional Identity

Mexico boasts 64 native varieties, each contributing distinct flavors, aromas, and heat levels to traditional dishes. Among the most prestigious varieties are:

• Habanero from Yucatán, renowned for its intense heat, earning Denomination of Origin status.

• Chile de Yahualica from Jalisco, celebrated for its unique smoky-spicy profile.

Cultural and Economic Importance

Beyond its role in food, chile is a cultural icon, featuring prominently in Mexican identity, festivals, and export markets. The Secretariat of Agriculture highlights its economic impact, as chile cultivation supports thousands of farmers across the nation.

A Staple in Traditional and Contemporary Cuisine

From classic dishes like chiles en nogada and salsas to innovative fusion recipes, the versatility of chile ensures its continued dominance in Mexican kitchens and international gastronomy.

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Soviet Cars in Cuba: Rolling Relics Still on the Move

On the streets of Cuba, Soviet-era cars continue to play a key role in daily life, decades after the Cold War ended. Models such as the Lada, Moskvich, Volga, Niva, and Zil—mass-imported during the Soviet era—are still a common sight across the island's cities and towns, becoming true icons of the Cuban urban landscape.



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The Lada, in particular, has become one of the most prevalent and functional vehicles, used not only for personal transport but also as taxis, ambulances, and police cars. It is estimated that around 250,000 Ladas are still on the road, a significant number that reflects their durability and adaptability to local conditions.

However, keeping these cars running poses a constant challenge. The shortage of spare parts—exacerbated in part by Western sanctions on Russia—has pushed many Cubans to find creative solutions: from handcrafting replacement parts to adapting engines from other brands such as Toyota. This resourcefulness has extended the lifespan of vehicles that are often more than forty years old.

Beyond their practical use, Soviet cars have also fostered an active automotive culture. In Havana, for example, the Lada Club brings together enthusiasts who share technical knowledge and organize community events.

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Despite government efforts to modernize the island's vehicle fleet, these cars remain essential. Recently, Russia sent 50 Moskvich vehicles to help update Havana's taxi system, a sign that the automotive connection between the two countries endures.

In Cuba, Soviet cars do more than transport people—they carry a living piece of history and national identity.

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The Enduring Mystery of the Moai: Rapa Nui's Silent Sentinels

The Moai statues of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Chile, have captivated the world since Dutch explorers first arrived on Easter Sunday in 1722. Even by the late 19th century, French traveler Pierre Loti described them as "colossal heads emerging from the earth," remnants of a lost civilization watching over visitors from the past.

Despite centuries of study, the massive stone figures remain shrouded in mystery. Loti once noted, "They have no eyes, yet they appear to watch and think."



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Rapa Nui, situated 3,800 kilometers off Chile's coast, was settled by Polynesian navigators, likely arriving from Mangareva, in the Gambier Islands, some 3,000 kilometers away.

The word Moai means "sculpted person" in Rapa Nui's indigenous language. These half-bodied statues, ranging from 4.5 to 22 meters tall, are scattered across the island, with nearly 900 documented figures. Their elongated noses, stretched earlobes, and prominent foreheads give them an austere expression, reinforcing their mystical presence.

Many Moai stand on stone platforms called Ahu, facing inland, believed to be sacred burial sites or monuments honoring ancestors. The largest known complex, Ahu Tongariki, features fifteen imposing statues seemingly gazing at the stars.

Originally, Moai had coral eyes, adding intensity to their penetrating gaze. However, Rapa Nui clans removed them during inter-tribal conflicts, a symbolic act to strip rival spirits of their power. Some figures also wore Pukao, cylindrical red stone hats that may have represented a form of nobility or leadership.

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The island's legendary history ties back to King Hotu Matu'a, who led the first settlers to Anakena Bay, considered the birthplace of Rapa Nui culture.

While most Moai were carved in the Rano Raraku volcanic quarry, variations exist. The most unique among them is Moai Tukuturi, the only kneeling statue, intricately carved below the waist.

Despite numerous theories, the true purpose of the Moai remains elusive—a silent testament to Rapa Nui's lost world and the ingenuity of its ancient people.

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Tegucigalpa: Historical and Cultural Heart of Honduras

Founded on September 29, 1578, as a mining settlement, the Honduran capital has evolved into the country's political, cultural, and economic center. Nestled among mountains and rich with colonial heritage, Tegucigalpa marks over four centuries of history.



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Originally established as the “Royal Mines of San Miguel of Tegucigalpa,” the city reflects a fusion of Indigenous roots and Spanish colonization. In 1880, it was officially designated the nation’s capital, replacing Comayagua under the leadership of Marco Aurelio Soto.

Tegucigalpa is not just the capital of Honduras—it is a living testimony to the nation’s history and a constant invitation to discover its soul through its streets, plazas, and scenic viewpoints.

Today, Tegucigalpa offers locals and visitors a blend of modern life and historical charm. Its iconic landmarks include the towering statue of Saint Michael the Archangel in El Picacho Park, the 18th-century Cathedral of San Miguel, and Los Dolores Church, a gem of colonial baroque architecture.

Natural spaces also play a vital role in the city’s character. La Tigra National Park, just a few kilometers from the city center, protects rich biodiversity and attracts hikers and nature lovers. Other green areas, such as Cerro Juana A. Lainez and La Concordia Park, provide panoramic views and peaceful retreats.

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On the cultural front, Tegucigalpa thrives with institutions like the Museum for National Identity and the Spanish Cultural Center, which promote art, historical memory, and critical thought.

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