

BIOGRAPHY

# Alicia Penalba



# Biographical Notes of a Modern Artist

## Jimena Ferreiro\*

*I was very happy that afternoon spent with you. Happy to see you firm, with the reins of your destiny in your hands. Firm and fulfilled. One, at last! And that world of forms you have created like a constellation...*<sup>1</sup>

Ana Montes Silva

*Rebellious, tenacious, demanding of herself and inspired. Volcanic, mimetic, orderly and eloquent.*<sup>2</sup>

Luis Lozada Soucre

## Her Early Years

\* During 2012 and 2013 the author was responsible for organizing and cataloguing the artist's personal archive, conserved at the Alicia Penalba Archive in Buenos Aires. This biographical chronology was constructed on the basis of an investigation carried out following the completion of those tasks, and it places special emphasis on Penalba's reiterated attempts to maintain her professional ties with Argentina's art institutions and art scene. An extended version of the document will be published on the artist's official webpage.

1\_ Letter from YI (Ana "YI" Montes Silva) to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, November, 1964. Personal correspondence I, Alicia Penalba Archive (APA), Buenos Aires.

2\_ Lozada Soucre, Luis, "Alicia Penalba: una inspiración que surge de la rebeldía," in *El Universal*, Caracas, May 28, 1978.

3\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Pablo Neruda, Paris, April 17, 1972. Personal correspondence, APA, Buenos Aires.

### 1913

Alicia Rosario Pérez Penalba was born on August 9, 1913 in San Pedro, in the province of Buenos Aires, where she lived with her family for just two years.

Her parents, Santiago Pérez (Zaragoza, 1879) and Remedios Penalba (Valencia, 1889), first met in Spain. Following their marriage, they traveled to Argentina.

Alicia's sister Josefina had already been born one year earlier.

Her father worked for Ferrocarriles Argentinos, the reason that led the family to itinerate among various cities in Cuyo region, Patagonia and Chile.

### 1915

Her family moved to Valparaíso (Chile), where she lived until 1921.

Many years later, in correspondence with Pablo Neruda, the artist mused:

...it makes me happy to visit today's Chile, where I spent six years during my childhood and to which I feel just as connected as to my own country...<sup>3</sup>

### 1917

Her brother Santiago was born.

### 1921

Her father was transferred again, to a small town called Corral Chico, in the province of Río Negro, in the Patagonia region. On numerous occasions, Alicia Penalba described how important the experience of Patagonia's landscape had been in the genesis of her work.

4\_ Penalba, Alicia, handwritten text, n.d. APA, Buenos Aires.

5\_ "Muestra integrada por trabajos de la Srta. A. Pérez Penalba," 1930. Periodical publications 1930–1959, APA, Buenos Aires.

6\_ Penalba, Alicia, handwritten text, n.d. APA, Buenos Aires.

7\_ Lozada Soucre, Luis, art. cit.

## Youth and the Search for Independence

### 1927–1928

Her father's relocation to the city of San Juan meant another move for the entire family. In an extensive 1978 interview with Luis Lozada Soucre on the opportunity of her retrospective exhibition in Caracas, she recalled her youth:

I decided to leave home and to look for a scholarship to study in Buenos Aires. To these ends I wrote to my province's [San Juan] governor, asking for an interview.

But this was not just any letter. It was written using the young artist's original, plastic calligraphic elements, emanating conviction at all costs, hardly commonplace in an adolescent girl. The governor read it, was highly impressed on both counts and granted her an interview. Unable to offer her a scholarship of any kind—"suspended for economic reasons"—he nevertheless did not want to disappoint or to frustrate the young lady's keen interest; given her magnificent handwriting, he recommended her for a job at the Registro Civil (Vital Records Office).

This is how she came to find her first job, in the city of San Juan, and to take her first art course at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios "Obreros del Porvenir".

### 1929

Her sister died tragically. The artist recalled this traumatic family incident as a turning point in her life:

But my family's opposition [to her desire to study art in Buenos Aires] would have continued had it not been for a tragic event: barely a year earlier, one of my siblings committed suicide at 17 years of age. It left my parents so deeply hurt and terrified that they preferred to stop objecting. That event brought any hint of reticence to an end. So, then, my first job was as a clerk, filling out birth certificates, etc. ... It was at that point that my fate was decided; I decided to break the curse of my parent's house, run away alone, just as I had so often dreamt of doing when I was young, seeking complete independence in my acts, leaving my hands free to do and undo...<sup>4</sup>

### 1930

A review of an exhibition that the artist participated in along with other young art students, held in the Los Andes art space, appeared in a San Juan newspaper. The article mentioned that: "We understand that the exhibitor will leave San Juan shortly to attend the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes..."<sup>5</sup>

We do not know in exactly what year she finally settled in Buenos Aires. There can be no doubt that this step was experienced as a great personal victory.

I did not leave home in order to find recognition, but in order to find myself, in a terrain of equality and justice.<sup>6</sup>

Penalba fought for equal rights for women throughout her entire life. Her discourse is full of recurrent references to the importance of "independence" and "self-determination":

I have had as many difficulties as any woman whose family offers no support of any kind. So I had to begin to stand up for myself at a very young age, to tell them that they could not impose their will upon me, and since I wasn't asking them for anything, they would have to let me do what I wanted to. This is my own madness and they best not interfere. ... My father was a terrible Spaniard and ever since I was very young I confronted his imperatives with those of my own. I was never willing to give up on what interested me. This cost me a great number of severe punishments during my childhood.<sup>7</sup>

8\_ *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Monday, May 5, 1941.

9\_ Letter from Emilio Centurión, Buenos Aires, June 6, 1948. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

## Buenos Aires: Academic Education and the First Salons

### 1934–1935

She began her studies at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes “Ernesto de la Cárcova”. She regularly attended the Painting studio and Aesthetics classes. Toward the end of this same year, however, she decided to abandon them for reasons related to her job, and it would only be a decade later that she resumed her studies.

In spite of not continuing with her formal studies, she remained very active and participated in the *XIV Salón de Otoño* in Rosario.

### 1937

She showed at the *IV Salón de Otoño* held by the Sociedad Argentina de Artistas Plásticos at the Amigos del Arte space in Buenos Aires. She participated with a painting titled *Lía*. In the catalogs her name still appears as “Alicia Pérez Penalba.”

In Montevideo she married Carlos Alonso, about whom we have little information. However, her marriage was short lived, and they were divorced two years later.

### 1939–1940

She met Amadeo Binci, a visual artist who was working as an illustrator for different publications, an activity that would become a source of income for them both.

On February 24, 1940 she married Binci, and they lived together in an apartment at 852 Chacabuco Street in the city of Buenos Aires until she left for Paris.

### 1941

She participated in the *VIII Salón de Otoño* held at Amigos del Arte, where she exhibited *Retrato* (Portrait) among works by Antonio Berni (who was awarded first prize), Raquel Forner, Héctor Basaldúa, Norah Borges, Juan del Prete and many others. The journalist who wrote the review observed that “Alicia Pérez Penalba and Marina Bengochea draw attention for their strong-willed forms.”<sup>8</sup>

### 1944

Her father died.

She resumed her studies at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes “Ernesto de la Cárcova” and attended without further interruption until 1946. Among her professors, Emilio Centurión was one of those that she remembered best.

She felt great admiration at that time for the work of Cézanne, the Fauves, Spilimbergo and the entire tradition of Mexican muralists.

### 1947

On September 11, her painting *Del barrio* (From the Neighborhood) received the incentive award at the *XXXVII Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas*. The first prize was awarded to Raúl Soldi.

She obtained her diploma as advanced professor of Painting. In her classes from that era she was graded “outstanding” with “congratulations from the examination board.”

### 1948

On September 4, 1948, she was awarded the acquisition prize from the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto for her painting *Madre* (Mother), in the Painting section of the *XXXVIII Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas*.

That same year, she received a scholarship from the French government to undertake advanced studies in Paris. In the letter of recommendation that Centurión wrote to the cultural attaché at the French Embassy, he emphasized Alicia Penalba’s “dedication and capacity for work.”<sup>9</sup>

10\_ We cannot determine the precise date of her arrival. The monographic book written by Michel Seuphor mentions that it took place on November 30 (Seuphor, Michel, *Alicia Penalba*, Amriswil, Bodensee-Verlag, 1969), while the court decision granting her divorce from Amadeo Binci indicates that it was on October 4, 1948. APA, Buenos Aires.

11\_ Merkert, Jörn, *Penalba*, Paris, Carmen Martinez éditions, 1977, p. 138.

12\_ Cullen, Martín, "Plástica: Alicia Penalba, esa gran desconocida," in *Panorama*, Buenos Aires, April 14, 1970.

13\_ Letter from Dora Mezzarno de Fernández da Silva to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, July 8, 1980. Professional correspondence V, APA, Buenos Aires.

14\_ Mariani, Edmond, "Alicia Pérez nous a déclaré hier: 'Pas d'Art sans la Paix'," in *Le Patriote*, Paris, April 28, 1949.

15\_ Lozada Soucre, Luis, art. cit., in *El Universal*, Caracas, May 28, 1978. In a photograph published in *Le Soir* newspaper and in *Regards* magazine, Alicia Penalba is seen with Pablo Picasso.

16\_ Merkert, Jörn, op. cit., p. 21.

17\_ Lozada Soucre, Luis, art. cit.

18\_ Undiano, Federico, "Requisitoria a Alicia Penalba," Paris, December 28, 1973, to January 1, 1974, typewritten text. Personal correspondence, APA, Buenos Aires.

19\_ Ballve, Raúl, "Vitalidad y forma," in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Sunday, July 14, 1957, p. 2.

She made the trip between October and November<sup>10</sup> and enrolled in the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts to study Printmaking.<sup>11</sup>

She lived in the Cité Universitaire on Jourdan Boulevard until 1949. Regarding this period, she stated many years later:

I have pulled such a large curtain over my past prior to Paris that I didn't bring any prizes or news clippings. I looked for different techniques: printmaking, sculpture. I felt very confused.<sup>12</sup>

She was 35 when she arrived in Paris. Years later, a childhood friend of hers reminded her in a letter:

In Posadas, where we have lived for the past 15 years, I have two photos that you appear in. In one of them, you recall the date when you moved to France, and among other things, you say, "No one is a prophet in their own land."<sup>13</sup>

### Her First Years in Paris: the World Peace Council Congress and Her Time at Zadkine's Studio

#### 1949

Soon after having arrived, she participated as the Argentinean Delegate at the Congrès Mondial de Paris. In an extensive article published in *Le Patriote* newspaper, she appears in a photograph with Marta Traba.<sup>14</sup> Regarding this highly relevant episode for France and all of Europe, she recalled:

I had the opportunity to meet many celebrities, like Picasso, Paul Éluard, Aragon... For the first time it dawned on me that I was starting to run my own life.<sup>15</sup>

She settled in Montrouge, a town outside Paris, where she lived until 1966. Her first studio was on Jean-Jaurès Avenue.

She obtained the Médaille de Gravure pour les Élèves Étrangers and began to sculpt in Spanish artist Horacio García Condoy's studio at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.

In parallel, she meticulously studied the works of the European avant-garde's most relevant sculptors: Alberto Giacometti, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Constantin Brancusi, Antoine Pevsner and Hans Arp.<sup>16</sup>

At Condoy's studio she met Étienne-Martin, François Stahly and Étienne Hajdu, with whom she participated in numerous group exhibitions throughout her lifetime. From this point on she dedicated herself entirely to sculpture. This turning point in her artistic production was narrated many years later in the following way:

Although she had been sculpting for some time, she nevertheless still felt the need to learn. Her great friend Manolo Ángeles Ortiz (the man who kills the little boy in Luis Buñuel's film "Un perro andaluz"), accompanies her to sculptor Honorio [García] Condoy's house. He accepts making a corner of his studio available for her to use and it is there, observing Condoy at work, that she will learn a multitude of procedures that she had been unaware of before.<sup>17</sup>

She participated in a Paris salon for the first time. She exhibited a painting in the *Exposition d'œuvres d'artistes latino-américains*, at the Maison de l'UNESCO. Her first biographer, Federico Undiano, commented that she still used to paint, "although she didn't much like admitting it."<sup>18</sup>

At that time Henri Matisse made a portrait of the artist in graphite that was reproduced in an article by Raúl Ballve for *La Nación* newspaper in July 1957.<sup>19</sup>

#### 1950–1951

She began to study with the great maestro, Russian sculptor Ossip Zadkine (1890–1967), in his studio. According to Jörn Merkert's dating, she made her first abstract sculpture in 1951.

20\_ Cullen, Martin, "Plástica: Alicia Penalba, esa gran desconocida," art. cit.

21\_ Saucet, Jean, "Zadkine: Libérer l'objet. Maîtres actuels et peintres de demain," 1951. APA, Buenos Aires.

22\_ Labrador Ruiz, Enrique, "Alicia Pérez Penalba," in *El Nacional*, Caracas, 1954.

23\_ Merkert, Jörn, *Penalba*, op. cit., pp. 38–46.

24\_ "However, there is little to be learned about sculpture in Argentina, because most of its practitioners live in Europe and the habitués of exhibitions have long been familiar with the talent of one Alicia Penalba." "À Bagatelle et au Musée Rodin," 1956. APA, Buenos Aires.

25\_ The contract signed in June, 1957 included a clause stipulating that Penalba "promises not to sell or place any of her works in galleries in France or abroad with the exception of the Galerie du Dragon under Director Mr. Max Clarac-Seroux." Regarding the editions of her works, there would be a maximum of 6 examples cast of each sculpture, one of which would be reserved for the artist. The agreement also contemplated a solo exhibition in the Galerie Claude Bernard. Cf. Personal documents, APA, Buenos Aires.

26\_ Hoctin, Luce, "Première exposition," in *Les Arts*, Paris, April, 1957.

At that point, almost all of her previous work had been discarded. "Out of sixty pieces produced during that period—mainly oil paintings—only one piece in marble was saved: the rest was destroyed," she recalled.<sup>20</sup> In an article from 1951, Zadkine highlighted his best student's work.<sup>21</sup> A few years later, she reflected on the time she shared with her maestro:

My path—she amiably tells us—lies in sculpture. I worked with Zadkine, a deserving maestro, but I left him very quickly, that is, as soon as I came to the understanding that the wind was my master; an art that was personal instead of "learned"; what fantasy brings and takes away and the canons that direct and regulate it...<sup>22</sup>

### 1952–1955

She exhibited in the *Salon de Mai*, and the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale acquired her work *Le Vieux Travailleur* (The Old Worker), a bronze casting found today in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, by way of the Direction de l'Enseignement et de la Production Artistique.

In 1953, she sets to work on her first *Totems* and begins to send pieces to different *Jeune Sculpture* (Young Sculpture) competitions.

Jörn Merkert defined this period as the moment when she began to make "her first personal sculptures."<sup>23</sup>

In 1955 she was included among the artists selected for the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, which showed young artists' production on a yearly basis. She continued to participate in this space uninterrupted until 1958.

### First Participation in Large International Exhibitions

#### 1956

She formed part of the *Exposition Internationale de Sculpture Contemporaine* at the Musée Rodin in Paris, along with Argentinean artists Carlisky and Marino di Teana. Penalba showed her work *Homage à César Vallejo* (Homage to César Vallejo).

In an article about the show written by Georges Boudaille, Penalba's participation was underscored:

*En revanche, il y a peu à apprendre sur la sculpture en Argentine puisque la plupart de ses exposants vivent en Europe et que les habitués des expositions connaissent de longue date déjà le talent d'une Alicia Penalba.*<sup>24</sup>

She also intervened in the *Sculpture d'un temps autre* exhibition, organized by Michel Tapié at the Galerie Intérieure in Angers, and in an itinerant show of the École de Paris held in Japan.

#### 1957

Her first solo exhibition took place at the Galerie du Dragon, located in the Latin Quarter. Titled *Penalba*, the show was accompanied by a catalog that included the first monograph about the artist, written by Patrick Waldberg. During the course of the show she met Claude Bernard and signed an exclusive contract with his gallery, in association with the Galerie du Dragon.<sup>25</sup>

A review of the show appeared in *La Nación* newspaper for the Buenos Aires public. Luce Hoctin also praised it very highly in comments that appeared in the publication *Les Arts*.<sup>26</sup>

That same year she participated in an important exhibition titled *Homage de la Sculpture à Brancusi et Prix Émile de Coninck* (Suzanne de Coninck, Paris, 1957). Texts by M. Georges, A. Salles, Henri Pierre Roché and M. J. Cassou were included in the catalog; with the last of these she maintained a very close professional relationship based on great respect and admiration.

The artists who participated in the show were Simone Boisecq, James Brown, Agustín Cárdenas, Louis Chavignier, Costa Couliantanos, Roël D'Haese, Eugène Dodeigne, Paulien Eecen, Étienne-Martin, Shamaï Haber, Henri Hamm, Jean Ipousteguy, Norbert Kricke, Jacinto Latorre, Liberaki Aglaé, Morice Lipsi, Karl-Jean Longuet, Juana Muller, Adam Sjöholm, François Stahly, László Szabó, Shinkichi Tajiri, Raymond Veysset and Isabelle Waldberg, among others.

27\_ Favre, Louis-Paul, "Nouvelles perspectives de la sculpture," *Combat*, Paris, September 23, 1957.

28\_ Bayón, Damián Carlos, "Crónica de paisaje y arte en Nueva York," in *La Nación*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Section, Buenos Aires, May 11, 1958.

29\_ "Una exposición muy importante de arte actual." Correspondence with the United States, February 9, 1959, APA, Buenos Aires.

30\_ Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

A photograph of her studio in Montrouge was reproduced in an article by Louis Paul-Favre titled "Nouvelles perspectives de la sculpture" (New Perspectives in Sculpture).<sup>27</sup>

### Her First Links to the United States and Germany

#### 1958

Her work formed part of the *Sculptures and Drawings from Seven Sculptors* exhibition, presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. The show aimed to present a panorama of contemporary production in sculpture, with works by Eduardo Chillida, Étienne Hajdu, Michael Lekakis, Étienne-Martin, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alicia Penalba and Shindo Tsuji. In addition to a group of sculptures, the artist exhibited works on paper (in gouache and ink). The exhibition was reviewed in *The New York Times* and Damián Bayón wrote a long article about it for *La Nación*. His "Crónica de paisaje y arte en Nueva York" (Chronicle of Art and Landscape in New York) focused especially on Penalba's work.<sup>28</sup>

Late in the year she took part in the prestigious international art event *The 1958 Pittsburgh Bicentennial International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, organized by the Carnegie Institute's Department of Fine Arts. The artist still signed her work "Alicia Pérez Penalba."

In June and July of that year, she formed part of the *Divergences 6* exhibition, held at the Galerie Grange, in the city of Lyon, that included a text by Michel Ragon titled "Salut au baroque" (Cheers to the Baroque). According to the catalog, among the artists selected were Barré, Bertrand, Camille, Carrade, César, Chelimsky, Clerc, Coppel, Deyrolle, Dodeigne, Downing, Feito, Fichet, Gauthier, Guitet, Kemeny, Koenig, Marfaing, Moser, Pan, Panafieu, Penalba, Sato and Tanaka.

#### 1959

She received a letter from Sam Hunter, chief curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, to let her know that he would be taking a trip to Paris and was interested in visiting her studio in relation to plans he was making for "*une exposition très importante d'art actuel*" (a very important exhibition of current art).<sup>29</sup>

She was invited to the second edition of *documenta*, held in Kassel and curated by Arnold Bode, who was responsible—along with Werner Haftmann—for creating the event. Bode was in charge of *documenta* until its third edition, to which he also invited Penalba. She was the first Argentinean artist to participate in this prestigious international exhibition.

She received a letter—dated June 30—from Jorge Romero Brest, then director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, in which he expressed his

...interest in organizing a quality exhibition of your works at the Museum during 1960, but as I am aware that the costs will be significant, I need you let me know by return mail approximately how many works you would be able to send ... with that information I can go about looking for the funding necessary to carry out the exhibition ... Given that I will leave in mid-September, headed first to Brazil and then to France, I hope that we may see each other in Paris in October."<sup>30</sup>

The interest manifested by Romero Brest represented the first formal proposal from an Argentinean institution to exhibit in her country. However, budget limitations signified an important obstacle to bringing her sought-after show to fruition in Buenos Aires; attempts made throughout the 1960s and 1970s all met with failure. In fact, exhibitions of her work in private galleries in Argentina's principal city only took place after her death.

After having signed a commercial agreement with Galerie Claude Bernard, she participated in the *Sculpture* exhibition in June, along with artists Duchamp-Villon, David Smith, Martins, Hajdu, Poncet, Jonas, César, Noguchi, Stahly, Phillips, Beaudin, Consagra, Gilioli, Braque, Ipousteguy, Kricke, Moore, Brancusi, Peyrissac, Picasso, Lipchitz, Calder, Brancusi, Zadkine, Giacometti and Arp, among others. Between September and November she intervened in the *XIII Biennale d'Arte Triveneta* in Italy (Padua, Sala della Ragione; Venice). She then participated in the *Harald Cousins, Étienne Hajdu, Alicia Penalba*.

31\_ Undiano, Federico, "Requisitoria a Alicia Penalba," p. 3. See note 18.

32\_ Burrows, Carlyle, "Drawings by Modern, Early Artists, Shown," in *New York Herald Tribune*, New York, Sunday, October 16, 1960.

33\_ This is how he would be described in the article "Plástica: Alicia Penalba, esa gran desconocida," art. cit.

34\_ M.E.V., "Instantáneas," in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, November 13, 1977. This note makes reference to the article written by Michel Chilo "Rencontre avec Penalba," published in *Combat*, Paris, May 13, 1961.

35\_ "She is superstitious, adores cats—especially black ones—and lovingly prepares Spanish dishes, to her friends' delight." "Alicia Penalba: un des maîtres de la jeune sculpture," in *Le Parisien*, 1961.

3 *Bildhauer aus Paris* show, held at the Museum Haus Lange in the city of Krefeld (Germany). She presented a project titled *Fontaine pour les nouveaux bâtiments de 14 Électricité de France* (Fountain for France's New 14 Electricity Buildings).

### 1960

Her second solo exhibition in Paris took place in May, this time at the Galerie Claude Bernard. On this opportunity, the first monographic book about her was published, written by Michel Seuphor (*Alicia Penalba*, Amriswil, Bodensee-Verlag, 1960), including a bibliography, a list of exhibitions and a biography that listed 1918 as her date of birth; it was a subtle, but intentional change through which Penalba sought to appear a few years younger. Let us recall that she settled in Paris in 1948, when she was 35 years old. She maintained a professional relationship with her first biographer, Federico Undiano, during 1973, which ended abruptly due to a series of personal misunderstandings; regarding the dispute over her date of birth, he wrote to her with great certainty:

How much easier it would have been, and undoubtedly much more important, to have provided your real date of birth, among other events that could be properly situated in time, it also would have obliged recognizing that at almost forty years of age you had the strength and courage to undertake a radical change of direction in your talent, transforming yourself into a sculptor with impressive later works. At an age when other great creators find themselves exhausted and weakened, repeating themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Her first exhibition in the United States was held at the Otto Gerson Gallery in New York in October,<sup>32</sup> and she participated in the *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Painting and Sculpture* show at the same gallery. From that point on, she maintained ongoing communications with American collectors and her works were included in important collections.

She made a fountain for a nursery school in Firminy, France.

### International Recognition

#### 1961

She met writer, photographer and art critic Michel Chilo,<sup>33</sup> who was her companion until death in addition to being a grand collaborator and enthusiastic promoter of her work. Many of the photographs preserved in her archive were taken with his camera, and part of the correspondence with artists, institutions, galleries and collectors bears his signature.

Almost two decades later, Penalba evoked how they first met. A reporter from *La Nación* related the encounter in the following manner:

Alicia Penalba ... recalls how her husband (an art critic who without knowing her had given her a bad review in a newspaper) amply rectified his perception, and in the best way possible, after they had been personally introduced.<sup>34</sup>

She moved to the studio and residence located at 37 Sadi-Carnot Street, also in Montrouge. An article from that era described her this way: "*Elle est superstitieuse, adore les chats – surtout les chats noirs – et confectionne amoureusement des plats espagnols qui font le bonheur de ses amis.*"<sup>35</sup> This year also brought her great satisfaction on a professional level. She gained international recognition after having obtained the International Grand Prize in Sculpture at the *VI Bienal Internacional de São Paulo*, an edition of the event celebrating ten years of continuity, with the participation of 49 countries.

Its doors opened on September 10<sup>th</sup> and, a few days later, news regarding the prizes awarded was communicated to the public. Portuguese artist Maria Vieira da Silva, based in Paris, received the Grand Prize in Painting.



36\_ Professional correspondence, APA, Buenos Aires.

37\_ Dolinko, Silvia, *Arte plural. El grabado entre la tradición y la experimentación 1955-1973*, Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2012, p. 205.

38\_ "Curiously, both laureates are women artists. It is undoubtedly no more than a coincidence, but one that cannot but draw our attention to the increasingly important contribution of women artists, notably in the field of sculpture. From Germaine Richier to Marta Pan, by way of Barbara Hepworth and Louise Nevelson, the number of international class women sculptors only grows larger." Ragon, Michel, "Lauréats de la Biennale de São Paulo. Vieira da Silva et Penalba: une double fascination magique," September, 1961.

39\_ Linares, Salvador, "Alicia Penalba en Buenos Aires," in *Del Arte*, Buenos Aires, n° 3, September 1961.

40\_ In the end, Salvador Linares published these lines verbatim.

41\_ Letter from Amadeo Binci to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, September 28, 1961. Personal correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

Among the special honors granted to Brazilian artists, the prize in painting awarded to Iberê Camargo and Lygia Clark's recognition in the Sculpture section deserve special mention.

The jury comprised J. Sweeney (United States), Jean Cassou (France), R. Stanislawsky (Poland), Jorge Romero Brest (Argentina), Kenjiro Okamoto (Japan), André Gouber (Russia), Mário Pedrosa (director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo), Oreste Ferrari (Italy), JRA Vroom (Holland), Walter Schmalenbach (Germany) and Émile Langui (Belgium). Alicia Penalba stayed in the city for ten days, and the graphic media registered her encounter with the curator for the French envoy to the event, Jean Cassou.

On the occasion of the prize she received congratulations from Argentinean President Arturo Frondizi, who sent her a telegram on September 13: "I wish to express my profound satisfaction and warm congratulations to you in regard to the honorable recognition that obtaining the Grand Prize signifies for Argentinean Art..."<sup>36</sup>

In reference to this successful envoy from Argentina, Silvia Dolinko comments:

In 1961, one of the members of the International Jury in São Paulo was, in effect, [Jorge] Romero Brest, the curator of the Argentinean envoy was Gyula Kosice and the official introduction in the catalog bore [Rafael] Squirru's signature, a string of names that were key elements in the local modernization process, re-edited in developing the Argentinean envoy to Venice in 1962.<sup>37</sup>

The sixth edition of the biennial was particular in that prizes had been awarded to two women, a fact that Michel Ragon considered relevant and on which he reflected:

*Curieusement, les deux lauréats sont des artistes féminins. Simple coïncidence sans doute, mais qui ne manquera pas d'attirer l'attention sur l'apport de plus en plus important d'artistes femmes, notamment dans le domaine de la sculpture. De Germaine Richier à Marta Pan, en passant par Barbara Hepworth et Louise Nevelson, le nombre de sculpteurs féminins de classe internationale ne cesse de s'accroître.*<sup>38</sup>

On her trip to São Paulo, Penalba briefly passed through Buenos Aires. In dialog with Salvador Linares, she referred to the art scene:

Look, what our country lacks in the end is madness, that is, comprehension of that which is fatally the creator's madness, when he or she reaches an absolute state of freedom of expression.... I see it being postponed, muted by excessive aspirations for perfectibility. There is no courage to make mistakes here.<sup>39</sup>

The text of the interview concluded with the transcription of a request on the part of the artist to

...withdraw the terms of the interview; I don't want to seem like a ruthless critic. I've thought about it better and believe that you cannot destroy the efforts of all these wonderful kids. At midday I'm leaving for São Paulo...<sup>40</sup>

During her brief stay in the city she took advantage of the opportunity to make the arrangements for a mutually agreed divorce from Amadeo Binci. In correspondence with Penalba, Amadeo writes:

Your stay and definitively arranging our divorce have been a great relief to me ... You have developed a formidable career there, which I admire, and I hope that you will have the grand studio that you are so in need of for your large sculptures...

In the same letter, he brought her up to date with news about the Buenos Aires scene and commented on the collages that "Berni is making à la Buri."<sup>41</sup>

A precedent to Argentina's powerful presence at the biennial had been the *Arte Argentina Contemporânea* show held at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM) in July of that same year. The project was sponsored by the Argentinean Embassy in Brazil with diplomat Carlos

42\_ See "Hállase en ésta la escultora Alicia Penalba," in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, August 18, 1961, and Mauricio, Jayme, "400 obras de arte para JQ [Jânio Quadros] inaugurar no MAM," in *Correio da Manhã*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Section, Rio de Janeiro, June 30, 1961.

43\_ *A Arte Argentina Contemporânea*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM) (exhib. cat.), Rio de Janeiro, June 1961.

44\_ Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

45\_ Idem.

Manuel Muñiz in charge; a broad-ranging group of works by the Argentinean artists considered by the organizers to be the most outstanding over the past forty years was exhibited on this occasion. Raquel Forner, Fernández Muro, Sarah Grilo, Ocampo, Sakai, Hlito, Pucciarelli, Macció, Carreño, Eduardo Mac Entyre, Federico Martino, Iommi, Batlle Planas, Badii, Curatella Manes, di Teana, Gerstein, Kosice and Paparella participated in the show, with a special space dedicated to Penalba with 28 works brought from Paris on exhibit, as the press pointed out.<sup>42</sup> The catalog included an introductory text by Jorge Romero Brest and Rafael Squirru, in which the Rio exhibition was described as "a veritable invasion of Argentinean culture."<sup>43</sup>

Her correspondence with Romero Brest continued to be very fluid; in their letters both expressed the desire to organize a large exhibition of Alicia Penalba's work in Buenos Aires, taking advantage of her participation in the biennial and the fact that the works were in Brazil for the show in Rio. In a letter dated December 18, Romero Brest congratulated her for the prize she had been awarded and commented:

Regarding your exhibition, Di Tella and I are thinking about having it coincide with the [Torcuato Di Tella] prize, which will not be a grant this year, but an international competition instead. You would exhibit as the only guest of honor. For now the opening date is set for July 7 [1962], and it would close on the 22<sup>nd</sup> that same month.<sup>44</sup>

## 1962

The trial for her divorce from Amadeo Binci was formally initiated.

The euphoria experienced for having obtained the International Prize in Sculpture at the *Bienal Internacional de São Paulo* was overshadowed by extensive complications in the logistics involved in returning her works to Paris.

She exchanged a great deal of correspondence this year with Rafael Squirru and with Gyula Kosice, both responsible for the Argentinean envoy. Their communication became increasingly tense, particularly with Kosice, with whom she broke off relations toward the end of the year. She kept a folder in her archive, labeled in her own handwriting, that reads: "Scandal with Kosice." On May 30, the artist wrote to Squirru in a firm tone:

When you invited me, I was honored and extremely content to be able to serve Argentina with the work of so many years, the nature of which you are well aware. Given that the majority of my works pertain to the Claude Bernard gallery, I pleaded with him to lend them to you, dauntlessly insisting upon the works' security, assuring that they would go and be restituted officially by the Argentinean Government with no expense to either one of us.<sup>45</sup>

The works in question continued to be stranded in Rio after her solo show there at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, from April 26 to May 20, had concluded. The show included the pieces that had been exhibited one year earlier at the biennial.

Following arduous administrative efforts plagued with misunderstandings, in April, 1963, Ramón Avellaneda informed the artist that the sculptures were on their way back to Paris.

They finally arrived at their destination, but having suffered great damage, their surfaces battered and their marble plinths fractured. They had been dispatched without insurance. At that point Penalba initiated a claim against the Argentinean government to cover restoration costs. Many of these pieces—whose restoration the artist had to finance—were the property of private collectors.

This episode was just one more in a series of disputes between Penalba and the Argentinean authorities that led to her decision not to participate in the exhibition that Kosice was organizing in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, to which we will refer further on.

Parallel to these events, in April Romero Brest invited her to participate in the Torcuato Di Tella Prize, dedicated that year entirely to sculpture, in addition to promising her a solo exhibition in the framework of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella's Dirección de Artes Visuales, whose headquarters on Florida Street would open in 1963. This project didn't come to fruition either, due to what its organizers would argue were budget-related reasons.

46\_ "Seis menciones en un concurso para artes plásticas," 1962. APA, Buenos Aires.

47\_ Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

48\_ Idem.

49\_ Correspondence with French institutions, APA, Buenos Aires.

50\_ Professional correspondence I, letter dated October 29, 1962, APA, Buenos Aires.

51\_ Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

Romero's proposal was to have Penalba participate in the international section of the prize, but the artist would have to send small format works due to economic limitations for transporting the sculptures, a restriction that she considered inadequate for an international competition, and all the more so after having received distinction at the *Bienal de São Paulo*. Nevertheless, the press communicated her participation as France's invited guest.<sup>46</sup>

Her decision undermined her relationship with Romero Brest, and her correspondence with him gradually lost its cordial tone and the frequency they had maintained during 1961 and 1962.

It is notable to see that many of these letters are written in French. We have been unable to determine whether this was a strategy undertaken by the artist to put distance between them, or if they were written by Michel Chilo following Penalba's indications. Both options sound quite plausible.<sup>47</sup>

With Rafael Squirru, however, she maintained close ties and a mutual respect. After having left his post as director of the Museo de Arte Moderno, he contacted her on June 11 to commission a work in memory of Miguel Ángel Carcano. He suggested that it be a piece from the *Aladas* (Winged) series, and also mentioned that "when Penalba's name was discussed, objections arose for fear of the cost that an undertaking in such hands would demand." He continued: "It would be the first time that Argentina would re-commission a monument of a national hero within the new artistic consciousness." Squirru ended the letter by confirming these suppositions to a certain extent:

I know you are a practical woman; if this were not the case you wouldn't be able to materialize your visions, but I also know that the essence of your being responds to the urging of the Gods. They will tell you whether you should and whether you can satisfy this request, which will undoubtedly be of great help to clear your fellow countrymen's consciences.<sup>48</sup>

In this way, the image of a temperamental artist, unwilling to grant concessions, emerged from Buenos Aires and gradually took shape.

Meanwhile, in Paris, she was a member of the organizing committee for the *L'Art latino-américain à Paris* exhibition, along with Agustín Cárdenas, Carlos Cairoli, Perán Ermíny, Rodolfo Krasno, Wifredo Lam, Silvano Lora, Roberto Matta, Oswaldo Vigas and Enrique Zañartu. A committee of French professionals was in charge of selecting the works: Jean-Clarence Lambert, Raoul J. Moulins and J. A. França. The show opened on August 2, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and it remained open until October 4, 1962.

The catalog included texts by Julio Cortázar, Carlos Garcete, César Vallejo, Vicente Huidobro, Gabriela Mistral, Jorge Gaitán Durán, Manuel Bandeira, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Carlos Pellicer, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Elvio Romero, Damián Carlos Bayón, Pablo Neruda, Nicolás Guillén, Vinicius de Moraes, Juan Liscano, Octavio Paz, César Fernández Moreno, Mario Trejo, Agustín Lunel, Alejandra Pizarnik, Julio Llinás and Roberto Fernández Retamar. Among the most outstanding artists who participated figure Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta and Agustín Cárdenas, along with younger artists such as Luis Felipe Noé, Jorge de la Vega, Marta Minujín, Rafael Soto, Alejandro Otero, Julio Le Parc, Luis Tomasello, Martha Boto and Gyula Kosice, among others.

The exhibition aimed to show a group of paintings, sculptures, drawings, collages and prints to the French public for the first time; the works were chosen from among Latin American artists living in Paris' most recent production, that which would best represent the region's cultural avant-garde in its latest artistic explorations and experimentation. At the same time, it would render homage to the Latin American artists who were part of the avant-garde at the beginning of the century. The catalog highlighted the fact that the initiative had been promoted by the artists themselves. It is worth pointing out that the texts appeared in French only, without a Spanish translation. The organizing committee aspired to present the show in other European capitals.<sup>49</sup> Ignacio Pirovano visited her studio prior to this, in May. She also received a postcard from Lino E. Spilimbergo from Athens,<sup>50</sup> and a letter from Marta Minujín, who brought her up to date with news from Buenos Aires.<sup>51</sup> They had met during the course of that year, when Minujín traveled to Paris for the first time, after receiving a scholarship.

52\_ Letter from Ambassador Aguirre Legarreta and his wife, Paris, May 1963. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

53\_ "El escándalo de París. Una carta tremenda de la artista Alicia Penalba," unidentified publication included in the "Escándalo Kosice" folder, in APA, Buenos Aires. The letter was signed by Penalba, March 30, 1964.

54\_ "I am sorry to hear of your decision, and hope that it is not irrevocable ... I regret that you, whose talent I so greatly admire, would be absent from an exhibition of contemporary Argentinean art taking place in my museum. My regret is in consideration of my museum and of the exhibition." Letter from Jean Cassou to Alicia Penalba, Paris, December 10, 1963. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

She participated in the *Modern Sculpture from the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection* exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

### 1963

She was commissioned by the Universität St. Gallen with a project for a monumental sculpture. Although there had previously been cases in which her work was articulated in architectural space, this represented a notable change in scale and a formal variant that consisted in disperse elements situated in an outdoor space. The work comprised eleven structures in a 400 square-meter rectangle. The group's largest piece measured 4 meters high. In order to carry out the project she worked in situ for three months in adverse weather conditions, assisted by four construction workers.

On the occasion of the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Revolución de Mayo, she was invited to celebrate with her compatriots at the Argentinean Embassy in Paris.<sup>52</sup>

The organization of the *Arte argentino actual* show for the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris generated a large controversy; it was curated by Gyula Kosice and also included the participation of Argentinean Ambassador Horacio Aguirre Legarreta and Jean Cassou.

The opening was planned for November, but had to be postponed until mid-December.

In light of the bad experience that Penalba had with the shipment of her works to participate in the *Bienal Internacional de São Paulo*, she decided not to participate in the show. Marino di Teana and Luis Tomasello seconded her decision in support of her claim. On the contrary, a group including Antonio Seguí, Julio Le Parc, Martha Boto, Leopoldo Torres Agüero, Gregorio Vardanega, Leonardo Delfino, Ronaldo De Juan, Lucio Fontana and Sergio de Castro voiced their support for Kosice as curator, who found himself in the middle of the polemic.

In order to clarify her position, Alicia Penalba published a harsh letter in which she expresses:

...when Mr. Kosice stepped forward to ask me to participate in the Argentinean exhibition being gestated in Paris, for which he was also the curator, I let him know that since six months had gone by without having received even a hint of news regarding my claim [for the restoration of the works that arrived damaged from Brazil], I was not considering exhibiting in any other exhibitions that depend upon the same official organizations that had caused me such harm without offering the slightest explanation of any kind. Given that he [Kosice] was so insistent in promising to take responsibility, he managed to give me hope and I agreed to exhibit if I received satisfaction prior to the exhibition, for which he requested a photo to be used in the catalog.

Time went by, and seeing that his word was not fulfilled, I sent him my definitive decision not to participate, well in advance of the date. This provoked anger on the part of Mr. Curator, who unleashed offensive articles that twist the facts, as you can attest with this statement.

I will never exhibit in an exhibition where that man is the curator.<sup>53</sup>

Faced with her refusal, Jean Cassou, the person responsible for the museum where the show in question was to be exhibited, wrote to her:

*Je suis désolé de votre décision en espérant qu'elle n'est pas irrévocable [...] Je regrette que vous, dont j'admire tant le talent, vous soyez absente d'une exposition d'art argentin contemporain qui a lieu dans mon musée. Je le regrette pour mon musée et pour l'exposition.*<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Alicia Penalba figures in the catalog, due to the fact that it was already in the process of being produced and the photograph of her work could not be removed.

*Grande cathédrale*  
(*Large Cathedral*), 1969–1970, at the *Esposizione Internazionale di Scultura*, Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, 1972.

*Grand hommage à César Vallejo*  
(*Large Homage to César Vallejo*), 1974, exhibited at the Piazza del Duomo, Pietrasanta, 1976.

*Grand dialogue (Large Dialog)*, 1964–1965, exhibited at the *Exposition Internationale de Sculpture Contemporaine*, Montreal, 1967.

55\_ “[Among the] best sculptors of our time.” Letter from Jean Cassou to Alicia Penalba, Paris, February 3, 1964. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

56\_ Letter from Gustavo Gilli to Alicia Penalba, Barcelona, January 5, 1965. Editorial projects, APA, Buenos Aires.

57\_ Letters from Mathias Goeritz to Alicia Penalba, June 9 and September 7, 1965; January 21, 1966, and August 9, 1967. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

58\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Rafael Squirru, Montrouge, January 17, 1964. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

## Her First Retrospective and Other Large International Shows

### 1964

The Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller in Otterlo (Holland) organized her first retrospective show, held from July to September, later itinerating to the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and to the Städtisches Museum Schloß Morsbroich in Leverkusen. The artist was present at each one of the shows, supervising the installation of the works, true to her custom. A comprehensive catalog was published that includes a biography by Patrick Waldberg.

She was invited to participate in *documenta III* in Kassel, which was inaugurated on June 27, just a few days after her grand retrospective had opened.

The director of *documenta's* third edition was Eduard Trier, who selected her works *Grande ailée* (Large Winged, 1960–1963), *Grand double* (Large Double, 1962–1964), *Sculpture-jeu* (Sculpture-Game, 1964) and *Dialogue* (1964). Meanwhile, Jean Cassou unhesitatingly defined her as “*des meilleurs sculpteurs de notre temps*”.<sup>55</sup>

She entered into a relationship with the Bonino gallery in New York, and they agreed upon an exhibition there two years later. She also established contact with Japan, primarily in response to a request for information about her work for a special edition of the art magazine *Muzue*, that was being published with the theme “The Work of Contemporary Sculptures.” Their aim was to present the best contemporary production in that discipline to the Japanese public.

On the other hand, she was corresponding with Gustavo Gilli, who was preparing the Spanish edition of the book *Les Femmes célèbres* (Famous Women) and wanted to include her work,<sup>56</sup> and an entry on the artist was published in the *Nouveau dictionnaire national des contemporains* (New National Dictionary of the Contemporary).

She received a visit from Mathias Goeritz in her studio. Some time later, he published an article in *Arquitectura* magazine, which he edited in Mexico. They exchanged correspondence for a long period of time, with the idea of organizing a show of Penalba's work in Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes.<sup>57</sup>

On October 15 she traveled to New York, where she made contact with Lefebvre Gallery and she promised to visit Rafael Squirru in Washington. Her plan was to visit Chicago as well.

Gordon M. Smith, director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, communicated with her to let her know that they had acquired her work titled *Chrysalide* (Chrysalis).

On the other hand, at the beginning of the year she had received a letter from Romero Brest inviting her to participate in an itinerant exhibition that the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella was organizing with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis that would visit various museums in the United States. The project was called *New Art of Argentina* and Romero Brest himself along with Jan van der Marck were in charge of the selection.

In the implacable tone that was typical of Penalba at the time, she observed that the communication she received did not have

...any details regarding the other artists chosen and they invite me with a single work, undoubtedly among an infinite number of people ... Van der Marck will select a piece in New York, which I suppose would mean to say that they don't wish to pay the expense of transporting a work from Paris, but would rather content themselves with a work that is at least several years old, among the ones that have not sold in my gallery, Gerson, currently Marlborough-Gerson.<sup>58</sup>

Once again, Penalba objected to Romero Brest's administration, observing with certainty that “every exhibition I am invited to within my professional status customarily provides me with all the details to enable me to decide whether or not the exhibition interests me.”<sup>59</sup>

As had happened one year earlier with the *Arte argentino actual* show, Alicia Penalba asked to be removed from the catalog and preferred not to participate, since she was dissatisfied with the way her work would be shown, in addition to having certain misgivings regarding the selection of artists. Nevertheless, she highlighted the participation of “young [artists] like Noé, de la Vega, Macció, Marta

60\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Rafael Squirru, Montrouge, January 3, 1964. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

61\_ Letter from Jan van der Marck to Alicia Penalba, June 16, 1964. Correspondence with the United States, APA, Buenos Aires.

62\_ Letter from Amadeo Binci to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, July 19, 1965. Personal correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

63\_ Letter from Rafael Squirru to Alicia Penalba, Washington, D.C., February 17, 1965. He also mentioned to her that he was waiting for a response from the University of Texas regarding a monographic article about Argentinean sculpture, "which if confirmed, would be a new contribution to the common cause." APA, Buenos Aires.

64\_ Cullen, Martín, "Plástica: Alicia Penalba, esa gran desconocida," art. cit.

Minujin, Seguí, Le Parc... The exhibition of Argentinean art is middling, except for those I've mentioned, which are the best," she confessed to Rafael Squirru.<sup>60</sup>

Van der Marck's response arrived without delay, and in a letter dated June 16,<sup>61</sup> he expressed his concern over her impulsive decision. He also commented that including her in the show fell somewhat beyond the parameters proposed for it, but that the ITDT had decided to add a special appendix in homage of her international recognition. He asked her to reconsider her position, because the exhibition was in no way an affront to her dignity, explaining that the authorities in Buenos Aires had gone to great lengths to enable her participation.

She finally acceded to participate, and did so with her work *Incógnita* (Mystery), which was in stock at Marlborough Gallery. *New Art of Argentina* was presented at the Walker Art Center, then, from September 9 to October 11. It included artists Hugo Demarco, Julio Le Parc, Luis Tomasello, Carlos Silva, Eduardo Mac Entyre, Víctor Magariños D., Miguel Ángel Vidal, Sarah Grilo, José Antonio Fernández Muro, Miguel Ocampo, Kazuya Sakai, Clorindo Testa, Mario Pucciarelli, Osvaldo Borda, Víctor Chab, Martha Peluffo, Rogelio Polesello, Ernesto Deira, Rómulo Macció, Jorge de la Vega, Luis Felipe Noé, Antonio Seguí, Delia Cancela, Carlos Squirru, Delia [Dalila] Puzzovio, Marta Minujín, Antonio Berni, Rubén Santantonin, Libero Badii, Noemí Gerstein, Ennio Iommi, Gyula Kosice, Alicia Penalba and Marino di Teana. Texts by Jan van der Marck, Suzanne Foley (associate curator) and Jorge Romero Brest figured in the catalog.

The itinerant route was planned to continue at the Akron Art Institute, the Atlanta Art Association and the University of Texas at Austin's University Art Museum.

### 1965

On February 15, a sentence was reached in her trial for divorce. Amadeo Binci, with whom Penalba maintained an excellent relationship, conserved the right to inherit.

Amadeo, who periodically wrote to her, commented in a letter dated July 19 that "last month we had the luck to see an extraordinary exhibition of Henry Moore in the Museo Nacional here in Buenos Aires, what a great sculptor!" In the same letter he said: "The way I think of you has never changed a bit: to put it purely and simply, a brilliant, extraordinary woman."<sup>62</sup>

Rafael Squirru gave an important conference at Princeton University, in which Penalba's work was given a prominent place. He considered her to be "the most important sculptor from our continent, south and north."<sup>63</sup>

Five years after her last individual exhibition in Paris, she showed at the Galerie Creuzevault in that city, from May 20 to June 20.

She traveled to Italy to participate in the *IV Biennale Internazionale di Scultura* in Carrara, from July 11 to September 13. One month later she went to New York and signed a contract with the Bonino gallery for a solo show there, and if possible, others in Canada, Central and South America and Italy over a period of two years.

She made a monumental fountain for the Berufschulezentrum in Leverkusen, and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris acquired her piece *Ailée* (1963).

### 1966

She settled into her new studio-house at 24 Roi-de-Sicile Street, in the Marais neighborhood in Paris. Argentinean architect Angelina Camicia was in charge of the renovation project, making over an old 18<sup>th</sup>-century building to make it functional.

In an article published in *Panorama* magazine, the space is described in great detail:

The exhibition hall opens onto the garden and studio where the clay is modeled. Upstairs, the living room is very calm, with a skylight in the ceiling, plants and a portrait of Alicia done by Matisse, African carvings on the coffee tables and Aramis, a dachshund puppy. From a window that reaches down to the floor, the entire studio can be viewed.<sup>64</sup>

65\_ "Consideran a Alicia Penalba como una gran artista en USA," Buenos Aires, April 9, 1966, unidentified publication. APA, Buenos Aires.

66\_ Letter from Isadore J. Zimmerman to Alicia Penalba, November 5, 1966. Correspondence with the United States, APA, Buenos Aires.

67\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Proart, Paris, August 9, 1966. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

68\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Samuel Oliver, Paris, October 18, 1966. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

She participated in the *VII<sup>e</sup> Salon Grands et Jeunes d'Aujourd'hui* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris early in the year. The list of artists included sculptors Hans Arp, Kosta Alex, José Gamarra, Robert Jacobsen, Philippe Hiquily, Alicia Penalba, Marino di Teana, Marcel Van Thienen, Anthony Morgan, Isabelle Waldberg, Sergio Strel and Takis. Along with the artists included in the "Mouvement et lumière" (Movement and Light) category, Antonio Asis, Sergio de Camargo, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Horacio García Rossi, Julio Le Parc, Jesús Rafael Soto, Luis Tomasello and Gregorio Vardanega were the most outstanding. In the sections related to "Peintures et structures" (Paintings and Structures), Arman, Karel Appel, François Arnal, Lourdes Castro, Sonia Delaunay, Max Ernst, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Alejandro Marcos, Antonio Seguí, Francisco Toledo, Nicolás Uriburu and Victor Vasarely figured. In April-May the much-awaited solo exhibition at Bonino gallery in New York took place: *Penalba. Sculptures*. A brief review of the show was published in *Times* magazine on April 22.

In an article produced during her stay in New York, Penalba shared her impressions of the city:

I find New York's atmosphere seductive ... here there is an incredible sense of vitality, enthusiasm, of exploring all the possibilities that are open to initiatives of the spirit ... I believe that we Latin Americans should observe what happens in this big city very closely, with great respect and all the admiration that we owe to European countries and their great artistic traditions; these days we find them to be a bit more fearful, more closed to the demands of experience.<sup>65</sup>

American collector Isadore J. Zimmerman commented that her exhibition had been a complete success and that practically all of the works had been sold.<sup>66</sup>

She presented a show within the framework of the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., *Sculptures by Alicia Penalba*.

In Buenos Aires, Enrique Raab and Berta Sofovich, from Proart gallery, offered her an exhibition in their space in collaboration with Art Gallery, where small works would be shown.

However, the effects of the military coup led by Juan Carlos Onganía resonated in Paris and Penalba desisted in finalizing the project, explaining:

...according to the news I've heard ... the situation there is very serious ... they're announcing workers' and students' strikes. A large portion of university professors have resigned and that seems a bit tragic to me. ... In any case, I beg you to really consider whether or not it might be best to hold the exhibition a few months later, given Argentina's situation, quite frankly I'm afraid right now.<sup>67</sup>

In parallel, her efforts to arrange for a large show in an official space continued. Samuel Oliver, the director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, also pursued this goal.

In a letter to Oliver, Penalba expressed that she had always thought that her first show in Buenos Aires would have to be in a museum.<sup>68</sup> She also understood that a high budget would be necessary, and that, in order to obtain it, collaboration from the Amigos del Museo would be essential for private fundraising. In the end, it was not possible to arrange the show.

She received a letter from her mother in which she commented that her brother was not well. Due to the many commitments the artist had in France and the fact that she was unable to travel to Buenos Aires as often as she would have liked, she proposed that they both come to live with her in Paris. In September, she received an invitation from the Casa de las Americas in Cuba to have an exhibition. Making the arrangements stretched out and, finally, the project could not be brought to fruition due to budget constraints.

At that time, Penalba could count quite a few official projects that had fallen through, and in this regard she reflected:

69\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Mariano Rodríguez, Paris, November 10, 1968. Correspondence with Cuba 1966–1969, APA, Buenos Aires.

70\_ Letter from Albert Beuret to Alicia Penalba, Paris, May 26, 1967. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

71\_ Adams, Paule, "Au Musée d'Art Moderne. Les mondes fantastiques de Lam, Matta et Penalba," in *Combat*, Paris, May 4, 1968.

72\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Mariano Rodríguez. Correspondence with Cuba 1966–1969, APA, Buenos Aires.

...sculpture's great drama is this, the onerous nature of transport. Generally speaking, when an artist has achieved a certain level of recognition, it is his or her country that pays these expenses. Naturally, in our case it is impossible for you and for me, for me above all because I will never accept anything from the current government of my country...<sup>69</sup>

### 1967

She traveled to Italy during the first half of the year, and on June 26, her mother and brother arrived in the port of Le Havre. Their stay was shorter than they had planned, and by August they were already back in Buenos Aires.

On May 26<sup>th</sup> she received a message from Albert Beuret, the technical advisor for the minister of State in charge of Cultural Affairs in Paris, informing her that she had been designated Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, a distinction that the French government awards to personalities from other countries who develop important professional labor related to France.<sup>70</sup>

Over the course of the year she participated in two large international events. She was part of the French envoy to the *Exposition internationale de sculpture contemporaine* at *Expo67* in Montreal, along with artists Archambault, Archipenko, Armitage, Arp, Bill, Boccioni, Brancusi, Braque, Butler, Calder, César, Chandre, Chadwick, Chillida, Consagra, Duchamp-Villon, Epstein, Ernst, Étienne-Martin, Gabo, Gargallo, Giacometti, González, Hajdu, Hartung, Heiliger, Hepworth, Ipoustéguy, Jacobsen, Kemeny, Lardera, Laurens, Lehmbrock, Lipchitz, Maillol, Manzu, Marini, Martini, Matisse, Mikenace, Moholy-Nagy, Moore, Noguchi, Pevsner, Picasso, Preclick, Richier, Rodin, Roszak, Schoffer, Smith, Teshigahara, Wotruba and Zadkine. She participated with her piece titled *Grand dialogue* (1964).

She also presented work in the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, held at the Pittsburgh Museum of Art (United States), from October 1967 to January 1968. She had already done so in 1957 with the Argentinean envoy, but this time she participated for France, along with Arman, Balthus, César, Dubuffet, Ernst, Étienne-Martin, Étienne Hajdu and Picasso, among others. She had two solo exhibitions in Switzerland, one at the Galerie d'Art Moderne in Basel, and the other at the Galerie Alice Pauli in Lausanne.

In a context of protests against the Vietnam War, she formed part of the *L'Art pour la paix au Vietnam* exhibition in June, accompanied by texts by Jacques Lassaigue and Jean Cassou and design by Alexander Calder.

### 1968

On April 25, *Totems et tabous. Lam, Matta, Penalba* opened at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. This was a large exhibition, shared with two other important Latin American artists. André Berne-Joffroy was in charge of organizing it and his text "Totems et tabous" appeared as the catalog introduction. This was an excellent publication that also included a text by Patrick Waldberg and a brief critical anthology for each artist along with a list of exhibitions and a bibliography.

Pierre Faucheaux was in charge of installing the works and the press emphasized the "fantastic," "mysterious" and "primitive" components of these artists' production.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, the show rapidly faded into the background following student protests and the events of May 1968 in France. Some time later, Penalba would explain:

...when it opened [the Musée d'Art Moderne exhibition] ... the events that were unleashed already a month and a half ago, almost right after the grand exhibition at the Modern Art Museum in Paris had inaugurated, have kept me very busy ... We have experienced moments of revolutionary euphoria, on the verge of changing the face of France. It's a shame that they are smothering all this momentum little by little, leaving us with a sad, failed effort that martyrizes to a great extent. Just the same, something in everyday life has changed all over the world, and stagnated bourgeois life now has a thorn in its side that will not let it sleep as soundly as it did before.<sup>72</sup>



73\_ Letters from Samuel Oliver to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, March 31, 1969, and from Alicia Penalba to Samuel Oliver, Paris, April 7, 1969. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

74\_ Letter from Arturo Frondizi to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, January 5, 1970. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

75\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Arturo Frondizi, Paris, January 29, 1970. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

On December 28, her brother Santiago died tragically in Martínez, in the province of Buenos Aires. He had been working in the Prefectura Naval Argentina until the moment of his death, passionately dedicated to yacht racing. Upon request on the part of his friends, one year later Penalba designed and sent a trophy for a regatta that was celebrated at the Yacht Club de Olivos in memory of her brother.

### 1969

She traveled to Buenos Aires to accompany her mother following her brother's death.

Once back in Paris, the Fondo Nacional de las Artes communicated with her, expressing an interest in acquiring a work of hers to then donate it to a national museum. Similarly, Samuel Oliver informed her of his desire to acquire *Grand double* by way of the Subsecretaría de Cultura. In response, Penalba told him that her artistic explorations followed more along the lines of "working with architects and the problem of integrating space," suggesting that he buy a relief piece.<sup>73</sup> Like so many of the other acquisition processes initiated by national authorities, these would never come to fruition, either. She was invited to *The Exhibition of Modern International Sculpture* at The Hakone Open-Air Museum, located in the town of Ninodaira, some 60 kilometers west of Tokyo. She participated along with 19 local sculptors and 30 others from all over the world, including Barnett Newman (United States), Tony Smith (United States), Agustín Cárdenas (Cuba), Eduardo Chillida (Spain), Max Bill (Switzerland) and César (France). Alicia Penalba traveled to oversee the installation of *Grand relief*, for which she received an honorable mention from the jury, comprising outstanding figures from Japan. The participants' works were later acquired by the museum.

In May she presented the show *Penalba. Sculture* at the Nuovo Carpine galleria d'arte (Rome), her first solo exhibition in Italy. Its duration was exceptional, continuing until September 30.

She exhibited at Toninelli Arte Moderna in Milan in November, and the following month showed with Michel Seuphor at the Maison du Tourisme at the quai de la République in Auxerre, France.

In Buenos Aires, collectors Natalia and Mauricio Kohen, who were great enthusiasts and promoters of her work in Argentina, acquired *Étincelle N° 2* (Spark No. 2, 1969). Due to a lack of space, and taking advantage of the opening of Bonino gallery's new location at 636 Marcelo T. de Alvear Avenue, they lent the piece to be shown at the new venue, which had been renovated by Clorindo Testa.

Between October and November she exhibited a group of works installed outdoors at the Jardins du Capitole in Toulouse, along with César, Chavignier, Dubuffet, Hajdu and Étienne-Martin, among others. She also participated in *La Conquête de l'espace. De Rubens à Giacometti*, in Hervé, Paris, along with works by the artists Étienne-Martin, Antoine Bourdelle, Pol Bury, Jean Cardot, César, Eduardo Chillida, Louis Derbre, Jean Fautrier, Étienne Hajdu, Jean Ipousteguy, Berto Lardera, Henri Laurens, Giacomo Manzù and Germaine Richier.

At year end she received a visit from Arturo Frondizi in her home and they spoke about "our national problems." The ex-president of Argentina declared that he was an admirer of her work.<sup>74</sup>

In response to the friendly letter she received from Frondizi, she mentioned a series of meetings she had been having with

...an important group of Latin Americans [7 Argentineans] to discuss the invitation to exhibit in the *Biennale de Menton* [France] ... The point was to prevent the event from turning into an exhibition officialized and inaugurated by the respective embassies, and I should clarify that the Biennial wishes to place importance on the Latin American artists in Paris this year and most of us don't want to run the risk of representing governments and their current policies.<sup>75</sup>

### 1970

She made a monumental fountain and a bronze relief piece for the new headquarters of the Société Roche on the island of Jatte, in Neuilly.

She presented her first solo exhibition of jewelry design at F&F, Gennari, in Paris. She had been showing her designs for some time during her sculpture shows, but this was the first occasion that she focused exclusively on this aspect of her production.

76\_ Letter from Amadeo Binci to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, May 18, 1970. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

77\_ Cullen, Martin, art. cit.

78\_ Letters between Guillermo Whitelow and Alicia Penalba from February 2 and March 31, 1971. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

79\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Alfredo Bonino, Paris, April 12, 1971. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

80\_ "A la honorable comisión Edilizia: me permito pedir..." handwritten text. Personal documentation, APA, Buenos Aires.

She formed part of the Comité de Ayuda de Artistas Pro Damnificados del Perú, along with Cortázar, Le Parc, Scorza, Carpentier, Guzmán, Camargo, Piqueras, Lam, Otero, Soto, Ribeyro, Zañartu, Delaunay, Cruz-Diez, Torres Agüero, Cárdenas and Saura. The aim was to gather works by Latin American artists to sell via auction. *Panorama* magazine published an article that caused upheaval among her family in Buenos Aires, who reproached her for saying that she was "turning toward the Left."<sup>76</sup> In the same article, she affirmed:

I've never let myself fall into temptation; nothing that is new really touches me unless it is already inside me. I have artist friends who are more intellectual than I am who have let themselves be swept up and carried away by trends.<sup>77</sup>

### 1971

She produced her first series of lithographs and made a tapestry, two techniques she would dedicate herself to intensely over the years that followed.

Guillermo Whitelow, newly appointed director of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires, offered her the venue for a large show of her work. Penalba responded with enthusiasm and proposed an ample selection of pieces, ranging from *Été* (Summer, 1951) to the latest creations from 1970, including relief pieces and architectural projects. Once more, the initiative would dissipate over time and eventually fall through.<sup>78</sup>

She had two exhibitions in Switzerland: the first was at the Galerie Alice Pauli (in Lausanne, from April 22 to June 5) and later, at the Galerie d'Art Moderne (in Basel, from June 12 to August 10). She made a detailed account of her travels for Alfredo Bonino:

From May 10 to June 3, when I will go to Basel for the 2<sup>nd</sup> exhib. in Switzerland, since in 6 days I leave for Lausanne for the 1<sup>st</sup> that opens on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month, then I go to Pietrasanta, where we're thinking of building a house and studio, we've already bought a beautiful plot near the sea, we'll be back on May 10.<sup>79</sup>

The purpose of her trip to Pietrasanta was, in fact, to present the construction plans for the studio and house to the Onorevole Commissione Edilizia di Pietrasanta, with Angelina Camicia as assessor. In the letter sent to the commission, she explained the reasons that led her to choose that particular place:

I am a sculptor and Prof. Giuseppe Marchioni called upon me in 1964 to execute one of my works in marble for the Museo Henraux.

Having discovered the region gave me the impression of it being a veritable paradise for developing the modern sculpture that inspires me. At the same time, the ancient, vulgar craft that dominates in the marvelous craftsmen of this place ignited my spirit's desire to lead these rich resources forward with the best of what is being created in the world today. Since 1964 I have come back every year to produce sculptures in marble and bronze, the latter cast at the Fonderia Tomasi.

This is the origin of my fervent desire to settle here and to construct a house and studio. ... I began putting together this project with the idea of being able to donate a small museum of modern sculpture to the municipality of Pietrasanta after I am gone. With this intention, I acquired a large sculpture by Étienne-Martin, France's most important contemporary sculptor, [recipient of] the Venice prize in 1968, and another piece by Fontana as a start. I hope to be able to situate these works in a carefully studied park with greens and "pelouses" [grasses] in which I expect to put at least one representative work by each of today's famous sculptors. ... two buildings ... a small one where the public enters, museum administration and the larger of the two to house smaller works and my private collection of African art.<sup>80</sup>

Following a short stay in Madrid, she visited her mother in Buenos Aires in October, and they both made a short trip to Mar del Plata to rest. A few days later she flew to New York for several work commitments.

81\_ Letter from Grete Stern to Alicia Penalba, Buenos Aires, June 29, 1972. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

82\_ Letter from Anne France-Lanord to Alicia Penalba, Paris, July 25, 1972. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

83\_ This is how Federico Undiano related it in "Requisitoria a Alicia Penalba". See note 18.

84\_ "Premio a una escultora argentina," in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, May 13, 1974.

## 1972

During the first months of the year, she went to live in Pietrasanta with Michel.

She participated in the *La Table de Diane. Rayonnement surréaliste* exhibition, Christoffle, Paris. The catalog included texts by Pablo Neruda, Jacques Baron, André Pieyre de Mandiargues and Philippe Soupault.

The artists who took part in it were Arman, Breton, Bury, Cárdenas, Carrington, César, de Chirico, Dalí, Duchamp, Éluard, Ernst, Fontana, Lam, Magritte, Man Ray, Masson, Matta, Penalba, Picabia and Tzara, among other outstanding names from the avant-garde.

In Madrid she formed part of the *Escultura abstracta* exhibition organized by José A. Fernández Ordóñez, Julio Martínez Calzón and Eusebio Sempere at the Museo de la Castellana; it brought together works by Julio González, Alberto Sánchez, Pablo Serrano, Alicia Penalba, Francisco Sobrino, Eduardo Chillida and Eusebio Sempere, among others.

The production of her monumental work *Grand double* began in Pietrasanta, cast by Tesconi & C. Fonderia d'Arte S.N.C.; one copy would be sent to Milwaukee in the United States.

Within the framework of the *36 Biennale di Venezia* a parallel sculpture exhibition was organized at the Palazzo dei Dogi, in which Penalba showed her work along with that of other important contemporary sculptors.

She received a letter from Grete Stern, who referred to a visit to her studio during which she had taken photographs of "your beautiful house," some of which are conserved in the sculptor's archive.<sup>81</sup>

Michel Ragon and Michel Seuphor, in charge of editing the book *L'Art abstrait*, requested photographs of *Grand dialogue* and her authorization to reproduce them in the volume corresponding to the period 1939–1970 in Europe.<sup>82</sup>

She donated a piece to the newly founded Nuevo Museo de la Solidaridad in Santiago de Chile, under Director Mário Pedrosa. Pablo Neruda, then the Chilean ambassador in France, and Sebastián Matta expressed their gratitude for her generosity.

Along with her friend Manuel Ulloa, they made plans to install her sculpture *Homenaje a César Vallejo* (Homage to César Vallejo) in Lima (Peru), but they never managed to complete the project.

## 1973

In February she met Federico Undiano, who quickly began to collaborate with the artist, carrying out administrative tasks related to her projects and writing what would be her most complete biography to date. The initiative fell through after long months of work.

Although very young, Undiano was experienced in the field of writing and playwriting, having published works in Argentina, Uruguay and Peru. He was the first person to undertake organizing Penalba's archives. He also wrote a monograph that the artist did not approve that thus remained unpublished, to which she refers in her correspondence. To date, however, no copy of it has been discovered in her archives.

On November 30 she organized a cocktail reception at her home—in celebration of her twenty-five years of residence in Paris—attended by many of her friends, Fernando Botero among them.<sup>83</sup>

## 1974

She received the Gulbenkian Prize, awarded by the Academia del Mundo Latino, whose aim was "to propitiate contact between outstanding representative figures of the world and Latin civilization."<sup>84</sup> This same year she was included in the book *XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, part of Larousse publishers' *Grand Larousse Encyclopédique* collection, where she figured among "*les personnalités françaises du monde des arts, des lettres, des sciences et du spectacle*" (French personalities of the world of arts, literature, science and entertainment).

Romualdo Brughetti wrote to her and mentioned that he was working on his *Nueva historia del arte argentino* and that he was interested in including her work; she also came into contact with Ángel Bonomini, who would become a personal friend and an expert on her work.

She was part of the itinerant project *Escultura francesa contemporánea*, organized by the Association française d'action artistique, presented first at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Mexico City in January, followed by the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas, in March.

85\_ Traba, Marta, "Mujeres: ni 'mujercitas' ni 'sufragistas'," in *El Nacional*, Caracas, March 7, 1976.

86\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Díaz Roncero, Paris, August 3, 1972. Professional correspondence I, APA, Buenos Aires.

87\_ "At the center of this fabulous cavern of modern times, a strange impression is born, mysterious in nature, consisting of fantastic constructions—a symbiosis beyond time of Mayan, Celtic and Gothic civilizations. For Penalba, art is 'a search for visual correspondence with her most powerful emotions.'"

Marchand, Sabine, "Le Sculpteur aux totems," in *Le Point*, no. 238, April 11, 1977.

Marta Traba referred to this exhibition in an article published two years later, on the occasion of the retrospective show dedicated to Penalba's work. In that text she reflected:

In Caracas, in 1974, in the midst of a less than mediocre exhibition of French sculpture at the Museo de Bellas Artes, Alicia Penalba's piece enlivened the adjacent cemetery that surrounded it. Nevertheless, very few people distinguish or point out this splendid sculptor, this great American talent consecrated in France, acclaimed in Germany, accepted in the United States, discarded in her own country, Argentina, and practically unknown on a continent that she has movingly borne witness to.<sup>85</sup>

In November she traveled to Milwaukee to inaugurate *Grand double* (or *The Great Double*, as it is known in the United States), a large piece measuring 9 meters high and weighing 12 tons, installed in a plaza pertaining to the MGIC Investment Corporation.

She also installed a bronze relief piece "inside a space in the building dedicated to the very highest level of poetic suggestion ... it is a sculpture that explodes inside a glass box," according to her description.<sup>86</sup>

The piece referred to is *Escape* (1972).

She then visited Chicago and New York.

She participated in the *Artistes latino-américains de Paris* exhibition at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, which included a long list of artists from several generations.

### 1975

She presented a solo exhibition at the Artel Galerie in Geneva from May 16 to June 30. The catalog included texts by Pablo Neruda, Ángel Bonomini and Pierre Descargues.

### 1976

On March 24, a military coup led by Jorge Rafael Videla overthrew Isabel Martínez de Perón's democratic government and at the same time the artist's mother passed away.

She went to Caracas for her solo exhibition at the Arte/Contacto gallery. The show comprised sculptural work and lithographic prints.

In May she went to Pietrasanta once again. She spent more and more time there.

In March and April she participated in the *Formas en el espacio* exhibition at the Theo gallery in Madrid, along with Cárdenas, Chillida and Lobo. A similar version of this show was presented one month later at the Carmen Martínez gallery in Paris, under the title *4 Sculpteurs. Chillida, Gargallo, González, Penalba*.

In June, she participated in a round table discussion organized by UNESCO, along with over thirty world-famous personalities brought together to reflect on intellectual cooperation and the new international economic order.

Toward the end of the year she was invited to a meeting at the recently created Centre Pompidou.

### 1977

Her grand retrospective exhibition, *Penalba*, opened on March 30 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, after almost a decade since the last time she had held a solo show in this city. Works produced between 1955 and 1976 were exhibited: small- and medium-format sculptures, eight monumental pieces and a series of relief works. Two tapestries done in 1973 were also included.

Specialized critics pointed out that some of her works suffered from a lack of space at the museum, highlighting the fact that her work was more effective outdoors. They were also insistent regarding the fantastic nature of her production:

*Au centre de cette fabuleuse caverne des temps modernes naît une étrange impression de nature mystérieuse, de constructions fantastiques – symbiose, par-delà le temps, de civilisations mayas, celtes, gothiques. L'art est pour Penalba « une recherche de correspondance visuelle à ses émotions les plus fortes ».*<sup>87</sup>

88\_ Comerlati, Mara, "Alicia Penalba. La naturaleza es mi primera, mi única maestra," in *El Nacional*, Caracas, May 23, 1978.

89\_ Letter from Victor Massuh to Alicia Penalba, Paris, May 10, 1978. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

90\_ Letter from Alicia Penalba to Victor Massuh, Paris, May 19, 1978. Correspondence with Buenos Aires, APA, Buenos Aires.

91\_ Paris, September 13, 1979. Professional correspondence IV, APA, Buenos Aires.

92\_ Letter from Hugo Caballero to Alicia Penalba, Paris, August 10, 1979. Professional correspondence IV, APA, Buenos Aires.

Her second monographic book was presented within the framework of the show, written by Jörn Merkert and edited by Carmen Martínez. She participated in a new round table discussion organized by UNESCO. On this occasion the topic was "Les défis de l'an 2000" (Challenges of the Year 2000).

### 1978

In April, the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas presented *Alicia Penalba / Esculturas*, her first large exhibition in Latin America. She showed 27 sculptures, arriving in the city 15 days beforehand to oversee the installation of the works, as was her custom.

The press release announced: "During her stay here, she will carry out a didactic experience with children from the Taller de Creatividad del MBA." In fact, Penalba participated in an activity with children that proposed they model in clay after having visited the exhibition. In this regard, she stated:

For me it is very important that people touch and manipulate my works, that children can climb on and off of them. Further yet—she explains—I want to make a piece with forms and hollows so that little ones can enter, sit down and spend time together inside of it.<sup>88</sup>

Victor Massuh, the permanent delegate ambassador to UNESCO, sent her a letter to

...let her know that the Argentinean government is willing to promote an exhibition of your works in Buenos Aires. It would be sponsored by the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, and it would take place at the Palacio Errázuriz ... in the case that you should travel to Buenos Aires, the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes is considering the possibility of your incorporation to it with the aim of expressing ample homage on the part of Argentina to an artist who has brought honor to the country through the universal reach of her work.<sup>89</sup>

Responding immediately, Alicia Penalba desisted in the proposal and explained:

I have always dreamed of having an ample exhibition of my work in Argentina but—aside from the international commitments I have already contracted for some time—I do not feel that the atmosphere in our country is appropriate at this time.<sup>90</sup>

Uneasy due to the insecure institutional climate, along with other Argentineans living in Paris she filed a public demand sent to the de facto president Videla in denunciation of the disappearance of her friend Federico Manuel Vogelius. The letter was signed by Eugène Ionesco, of the Académie Française.<sup>91</sup>

### 1979

She was among the artists selected for the *Artistes argentins* show, presented at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in March, in which Aizenberg, Badii, Brizzi, di Teana, Espinosa, Macció, Mac Entyre, Ocampo, Pettoruti, Seguí, Silva, Vidal and Xul Solar also participated.

She was invited to participate in the *XV Bienal Internacional de São Paulo*, whose overall theme proposed an analysis of current art by way of the artists awarded prizes in its previous editions (1951–1977), along with a selection of contemporary artists chosen by outstanding critics from each country.

The cost of transporting the work was to be covered by the Argentinean Embassy in France. However, once again, as had been the case on so many previous occasions, she was contacted by official authorities to notify her of

...the impossibility of sending the group of works you selected to the next International São Paulo Biennial to be exhibited there. The weight and total volume (1,000 kilos and 10 cubic meters) exceed the possibilities of shipping by air ... Given the importance of your presence at the Biennial, we beg you to consider eventually reducing your envoy.<sup>92</sup>

93\_ Katzenstein, Inés, "Penalba. Formas escultóricas memorables," in *Artinf*, Buenos Aires, year 18, no. 87, Fall, 1994, pp. 26–27.

### 1981

She presented a new series of lithographs in the *Penalba* show at the Galerie Carmen Cassé in Paris in May and June, as well as two solo exhibitions at the Jardins du Général-Dupas in Paris and at the Centre Culturel Municipal Jacques Prévert, in Villeparisis.

The Banco de la Nación Argentina acquired works by Argentinean artists residing in Paris and exhibited them at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in that city. Among the artists selected was Alicia Penalba.

### 1982

She participated in the *Europa-América Latina* exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro in Venice. She also had work in *Hommage à Krasno. Petits formats artistes latino-américains*, held at the Espace Latino-Américain in Paris.

### An Abrupt End

On November 4, 1982, she died in a traffic accident along with her partner, Michel Chilo. The accident took place at a railroad crossing in Saint-Geours-de-Maremne, in Landes, France, while they were on their way to the burial of Michel's father.

She was 69 years old and had already suffered an automobile accident in 1966.

Her death brought the project for the foundation bearing her name to a halt; its mission was to conserve and protect her work while functioning at the same time as a museum of contemporary sculpture.

On November 21 her friends and colleagues organized a mass in her memory held at the St. Paul-St. Louis church in the Marais area of Paris, attended by Antonio Seguí, Sergio de Castro and Marino di Teana, in addition to diplomatic representatives.

Their bodies were buried together, in accordance with the wishes of both.

### 1983–2014

#### Homages and Historical Shows

In Spring of 1983 the *En hommage à Alicia Penalba* exhibition was held at the Musée de Tarbes, with participation by Cárdenas, César, Étienne-Martin, Hajdu, Parvina-Curie, Peyrissac, Poncet, Stahly and di Teana. In collaboration with the Argentinean government, Rome's Instituto Italo-Latino Americano organized the exhibition *Arte argentina. Dalla Indipendenza ad oggi 1810-1987* (1987). Among the sculptors making up the nucleus of the period covering from 1946 to 1987 were Alicia Penalba, Enio Iommi, Libero Badii, Juan Carlos Distéfano, Jorge Gamarra and María Juana Heras Velasco.

The Maison de l'Amérique Latine in Paris organized the *Hommage à Alicia Penalba* exhibition in September and October of 1988.

In 1993, *Alicia Penalba. Esculturas* was held at the Rubbers gallery in Buenos Aires. On this occasion, Inés Katzenstein, then a young art critic collaborating with *Artinf* magazine, described the show as "one of the most important [shows] of 1993."<sup>93</sup> After over three decades of frustrated attempts, her first solo exhibition in Buenos Aires finally took place.

Another solo exhibition was held at the Rubbers gallery in 1999, and her production was subsequently shown in several editions of the *arteBA* fair—in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2004—in the same gallery's stand, as has been the case in recent years in Buenos Aires' Palatina gallery and Montevideo's Sur gallery.

In 2002 a solo exhibition was organized once again, one titled *Alicia Penalba. Obras de su atelier Paris-Pietrasanta*, held at the Maman Fine Art gallery in Buenos Aires.

Toward the end of 2009, the Centre Pompidou presented work by Penalba in the large exhibition *Elles@centrepompidou. Artistes femmes dans la collection du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, as well as in the *Modernités plurielles de 1905 à 1970* exhibition, being held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris from 2013 until 2015.