

DARIÉN

write art criticism for Romanian newspapers and contributed humorous sketches to the French press. Darié immigrated to Cuba in 1941 and embraced Cuban life and culture; he subsequently became a full citizen. In 1949 he had his first solo exhibit, at the Lyceum in Havana, and another showing in New York. He exhibited at shows in Brazil, Mexico, Italy, Argentina, and Japan, and has pieces in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Darié's work is uniquely interactive: through his transformable constructions, such as *Estructura espacial transformable* (1960), the viewer is able to participate in the creative process.

See also **Art: The Twentieth Century.**

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DARIÉN. Darién, the first Spanish settlement on the North American mainland, was established in 1510 when Martín Fernández de Enciso captured a village on the hot, swampy Caribbean coast of Panama, which he christened Santa María La Antigua de Darién.

Enciso was not an able leader, and one of his lieutenants, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, soon took over control of Darién. Balboa established an agricultural economic base for Darién, worked by native labor, and the settlement thrived. In 1513, Darién served as the base for Balboa's expedition to find the "Southern sea," during which Balboa became the first European to set eyes on the Pacific Ocean.

Although the crown rewarded Balboa with the title of "*adelantado* of the Southern sea," his own

father-in-law, Pedrarias Dávila, contested his control over the settlement. In 1517 Pedrarias beheaded Balboa and assumed control of Darién.

Darién suffered under Pedrarias's administration. In 1519, Pedrarias moved the Spanish population from the swamplands of Darién to the more healthful climate of Panama City. In 1524, Darién was formally abandoned. Darién was also the site of Scotland's failed attempt to establish a colony at the Isthmus of Panama; the colony was abandoned in 1699 after less than a year.

See also **Balboa, Vasco Núñez de; Enciso, Martín Fernández de.**

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DARIEN GAP. The Darien Gap is the "saddle," or ridge, in the Serranía del Darién over which, in September 1513, the expedition led by Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama en route to the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. In 1510, Balboa had set out from Santa María la Antigua del Darién, the strategic base founded on the mainland of Central America, so that he would "pass to the other sea on the side of the south" which native informants told him "is very good to navigate in canoes, being always pacific, and does not turn wild as it does on this [Atlantic] coast" (letter to the king, January 1513). Like all conquistadors, Balboa was driven (and deluded) by the prospect not only of discovering new lands and peoples but of finding gold and, in this case, pearls as well. Indian leaders, with whom Balboa is said to have enjoyed less hostile relations than his counterparts elsewhere, assured him that gold was present in quantity in all the rivers of the other coast sufficient motivation to endure extreme hardship and privation, lack of food and unhealthy conditions above all. Balboa understood the necessity of native collaboration for the goals of Spanish conquest better than most of his more shortsighted contemporaries, especially his father-in-law, Pedro Arias (Pedrarias) de Ávila, who beheaded

Balboa in 1519 to assert his authority as “Captain and Governor of Tierra Firme.” The treatment that Pedrarias meted out to his son-in-law was replicated time and again in his dealings with native inhabitants, so much so that Darién soon was lost and desolate, causing the Spanish base in the region to be relocated, in 1524, to Panama City.

An intrepid explorer who processed information relayed to him assiduously, Balboa took pains to document his deeds, even if others failed to record them properly. His sighting, “silent, upon a peak in Darien,” of the Pacific Ocean was attributed by the English poet John Keats, famously but erroneously, to “stout Cortez.” Balboa choreographed his trek into history to ensure that, following native counsel, he alone walked to the vantage point where he became the first European to contemplate the Pacific on either September 25 or 27, 1513. Two days later Balboa was among the first Christians wading in the South Sea, all trying the water with their hands and proving that it was salt. A ceremony of possession was performed. Balboa’s party, after a four-month reconnaissance, returned to Santa María del Darién in early 1514.

Though native communities were able to furnish their Spanish masters with impressive amounts of gold and pearls, geographical setting was the chief reward for all those who sought to profit from establishing a presence in Darién. Realizing the wealth that could accrue by controlling transoceanic trade across the isthmus, an ill-fated colonization scheme in the late seventeenth century saw Scottish investors ruined, and naive countrymen of theirs fall sick and perish, in the Darién tropics. Scotland’s disastrous endeavor is enshrined in Panamanian place names such as Cerro Caledonia and Punta Escocés. It would take the building of the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century, at considerable expense of money and men, for the vision of William Paterson, the Scottish merchant who attempted to transport cargoes overland at this site, to materialize. The environs of Darién may still be “door of the seas, and the key of the universe,” but taking advantage of the location for entrepreneurial gain has always come at a price.

See also **Balboa, Vasco Núñez de**; **Panama**; **Panama Canal**.

DARÍO, RUBÉN

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DARÍO, RUBÉN (1867–1916). Rubén Darío (b. 18 January 1867; d. 6 February 1916), born Félix Rubén García Sarmiento in Nicaragua, was the leading poet writing in Spanish between 1888 and 1916.

Life and Works. Darío was born in Metapa (now Ciudad Darío). After his parents separated, he was reared by his great-aunt Bernarda Sarmiento Ramírez and her husband. He studied with the Jesuits and at the National Institute, reading the classics and publishing poetry from age twelve. By age fourteen he had joined the editorial staff of the local newspaper. In 1883 he traveled to El Salvador, where President Rafael Zaldívar enrolled him in school. Upon his return to Nicaragua (1884), he worked as a journalist and read voraciously at the National Library. In 1886 he moved to Chile. Through his friendship with the president’s son, Pedro Balmaseda, he became immersed in French poetry, especially the Parnassians, which is the most salient influence in his *Azul*, a collection of short stories and verse, published in Valparaíso (1888).

In 1889, Darío returned to Central America and worked feverishly on his poetry and newspaper articles. The following year he married Rafaela Contreras. They moved to Costa Rica in 1891. In 1892 he was named secretary of Nicaragua’s delegation to Spain’s celebration of the fourth centennial of Columbus’s voyage of discovery. Upon his return, he learned of his wife’s death and was named Colombia’s consul to Buenos Aires. He married Rosario Murillo in 1893, but left alone for Argentina via