

## Lenica – Matta – Chile, Chile

### Summary

In his *Drogowskazy* [Signposts] Lenica presents artists that inspired him over the years. He writes of Roberto Matta: "...Matta – engrossed in morphology, engaged in the contemporary world's dramatic conflicts – Cuba, Chile". They shared a lot, starting from the fact that both came from the countries that were peripheral on the map of contemporary art and both paved their ways to painting single-handedly via other creative experience. For Matta, the road led from architecture, for Lenica – from music, a discipline based on mathematic harmony. With time, they became artistically, ideologically and socially close to surrealism. Matta was among the precursors of gesture painting. Lenica is considered a leading representative and creator of touchism in Poland: his experiments in that direction date as far back as the 1940s. The artistic and ideological ties between the two artists evolved into personal friendship. It is hard to say now when the two met. It might have been in 1958, when Lenica first went to the West. He visited Paris, where Matta had lived from 1954. From that moment on, Lenica's and Matta's paths kept crossing more and more often. Through his contacts with the West, Lenica landed a prestigious commission: at the turn of 1960 and 1961, he made the monumental mural *The Three Elements – Love, Fire and Water* at the UN building in Geneva. One might ask: was this work inspired by Matta's famed *La Plus Grande Overture sur le Cosmos* in the UNESCO building in Paris, which Lenica visited in 1958? What the two pieces had in common were enormous scale, technique and conceptual treatment of universal, timeless notions.

Both were politically involved, left-leaning activists. Matta was a staunch supporter of the Cuban revolution, and in 1970 he headed the Culture Congress in Havana. On that occasion Lenica visited Cuba, where he showed his paintings in 1970–1971. Matta was a prominent figure in Chile as well, when he returned to his home country invited by President Salvador Allende. He was much engaged in support for the new, Socialist government. It might have been Matta that the Polish artist owed his invitation to Chile. In September 1973, the coup that led to the ousting of Allende took a heavy civil toll. Matta was among the Chilean artists most hated by Pinochet's regime. His paintings were taken away from the National Gallery and the army systematically destroyed the murals and frescoes he contributed to. Lenica's reaction was spontaneous and very emotional, echoing the surrealists' belief in influencing reality through art: he painted the series *Chile, Chile*, which he dedicated to Matta and the Chilean nation. It comprised a series of 14 images under the common title *Chile, Chile*, which, put together, formed a monumental composition sized 350 x 1022 cm. In the centre of one of the pieces Lenica spelt MATTA in huge letters. The colour scheme of the painting is that of Chile's national colours: red, white and blue. Another painting is composed of newspaper cuttings stained with red paint as if with blood, which give an account of the events in Chile. Images of Allende, mass manifestations and Pablo Neruda's catch the eye. The series *Chile, Chile* stands out from Lenica's later works. Its enormous size conjures up Matta's murals in an expression of the artist's involvement in the world's matters. In the catalogue of one of his last exhibitions, the already aged Lenica included a rhyming piece entitled *Chile, Chile*, dedicated to Matta.