Core to Carmen Herrera’s painting is a drive for formal simplicity and a striking sense of colour: “My quest”, she says, “is for the simplest of pictorial resolutions” (2012). A master of crisp lines and contrasting chromatic planes, Herrera creates symmetry, asymmetry and an infinite variety of movement, rhythm and spatial tension across the canvas with the most unobtrusive application of paint. As she moved towards pure, geometric abstraction in the post-war years in Paris, she exhibited alongside Theo van Doesburg, Max Bill and Piet Mondrian and a younger generation of Latin American artists, such as members of the Venezuelan Los Disidentes, Brazilian Concretists and the Argentinean Grupo Madi. Her work also chimes with her peers from the U.S. school such as Barnett Newman and Leon Polk Smith. Reflecting on this period, she says, “I began a lifelong process of purification, a process of taking away what isn’t essential” (2005). While allied with Latin American non-representational concrete painting, Herrera’s body of work has established, quietly but steadily, a cross-cultural dialogue within the international history of modernist abstraction.

Carmen Herrera was born in Havana, Cuba in 1915. She moved frequently between France and Cuba throughout the 1930s and 1940s; having started studying architecture at the Universidad de La Habana, Havana, Cuba (1938–39), she trained at the Art Students League, New York, NY, USA (1942–43), before exhibiting five times at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1949–53). She settled in New York in 1954, where she continues to live and work. Herrera’s work was the subject of a large-scale survey at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (2017), which traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio (2017) and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20) in Düsseldorf, Germany (2017–2018). A selection of Herrera’s recent paintings and Estructuras inaugurated Lisson Gallery New York’s 24th Street exhibition space in May 2016. Herrera has also had significant solo exhibitions at the Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern, Germany (2010); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2009); and Museo del Barrio, New York, NY, USA (1998). She has been included in the group shows at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2021); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2021); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain (2019); Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, France (2018); The Underground Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2017); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2016); Phoenix Museum of Art, AZ, USA (2013); and Sheldon Museum of Art, NE, USA (2012), among others. Her work was recently featured in the exhibition Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (17 December 2018 – 4 February 2020). In the past year, two major solo presentations were exhibited in Houston, Texas — Carmen Herrera: Structuring Surfaces at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (21 October 2020 – 25 April 2021) and Estructuras Monumentales at Buffalo Bayou Park (22 October 2020 – 23 April 2021). Herrera premiered her Estructuras Monumentales, massive aluminium structures largely conceived in the 1960s and 1970s, at City Hall Park in New York City in 2019, organised by the Public Art Fund (11 July – 8 November 2019).

Herrera was awarded two fellowships from the Cintas Foundation, New York, NY, USA (1966–68) and a grant by the Creative Artists Public Service, New York, NY, USA (1977). Her work is in numerous public and private collections including the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA; El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY, USA; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC, USA; The Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC, USA; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL, USA; the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, MA, USA; Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Bentonville, AR, USA; the Tate Collection, London, UK; Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern, Germany; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20), Düsseldorf, Germany; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; and the Cleveland Museum of Art, OH, USA.