

CARMEN, MARTÍN GAITÉ

A PARADIGMATIC
WOMAN OF LETTERS

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

18 / 12 / 2025
14 / 06 / 2026

WITH A GAZE DOMINATED BY CURIOSITY

and a desire to bear witness to the changing face of the Spain in which she lived, Carmen Martín Gaité (1925–2000) is a paradigmatic example of what could be called a *woman of letters* in terms of her intellectual concerns in the history of Spanish culture. Her literary interests were wide-ranging and developed in various directions: from traditional genres (short stories, novels, essays, poetry and theatre) to the hybrid that her daughter christened *Notebook of everything*, encompassing from historical research to literary criticism, and from theatrical adaptations of the classics and television scripts to literary translation from six languages (English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Galician). It is difficult to find another example of a writer with such a wide variety of intellectual interests in 20th-century Spain.



Carmen Martín Gaité's sixth year at the secondary school for girls (Salamanca, 1941–42).

In the school photographs, Carmen (seated, second from left) nearly always appears beside her friend Sofía Bermejo, with whom she invented the island of Bergai. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,82,31



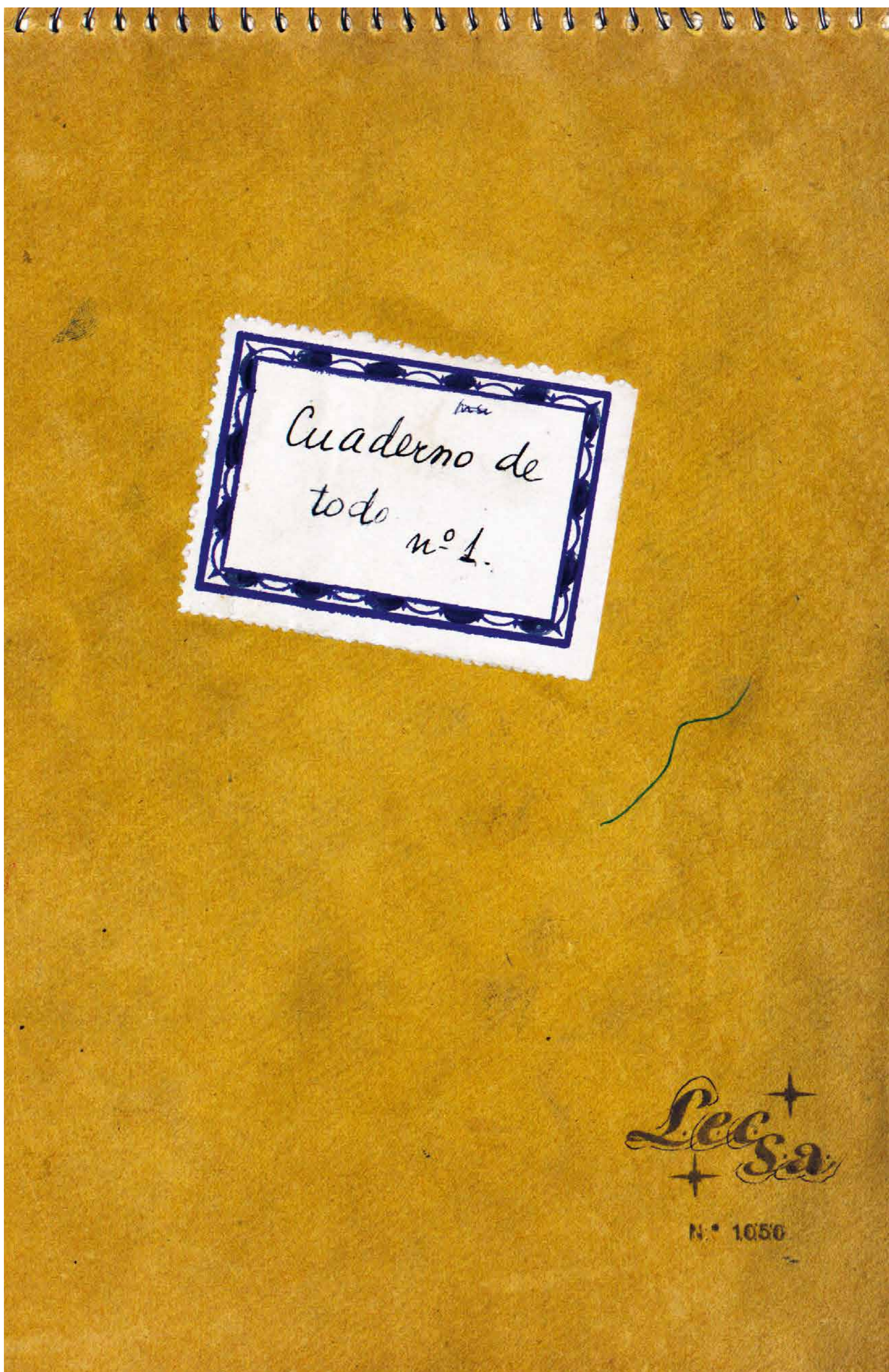
Carmen Martín Gaité with several classmates from the faculty of humanities outside the Anaya Palace: María Dolores Ruiz Olivera, Ignacio Aldecoa and Federico Latorre. Salamanca, 1944.
Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,95,114



Carmen Martín Gaité, Ignacio Aldecoa and Alfonso Sastre.
1954. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,81,166.



Entre visillos [*Behind the Curtains*]. Winner of the 1957 Nadal Prize (first edition). BNE, DL/555860.



Cuaderno de todo [Notebook of everything], No. 1.

Gift from Marta to her mother (Calila) on 8 December 1961. Carmen had used notebooks since her youth, but always for specific topics. From this date onwards, there was a substantial difference, as a *notebook of everything* could contain all kinds of topics and types of writing.

Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,16,11.



EL HOMBRE DESCALZO.

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...Y , sin embargo, yo juraría que la postura era la misma, creo que siempre he dormido así, con el brazo derecho debajo de la almohada y el cuerpo levemente apoyado contra ese flanco, las piernas buscando la juntura por donde se remete la sábana. También si cierro los ojos -y acabo cerrándolos como último y rutinario recurso-, me visita una antigua aparición inalterable , un desfile de estrellas con cara de payaso que ascienden a tumbos de globo escapado y se ríen con mueca fija , en zig-zag, una detrás de otra, como volutas de humo que se hace progresivamente más espeso; son tantas que dentro de poco no cabrán y tendrán que bajar a buscar desahogo en el cauce de mi sangre, y entonces serán pétalos que se lleva el río. Por ahora suben aglomeradamente: veo el rostro minúsculo dibujado en el centro de cada una de ellas como un hueso de guinda rodeado de lentejuelas. Pero lo que jamás cambia es la melodía que armoniza el ascenso, melodía que no suena pero marca el son, un silencio especial que, de serlo tan densamente, cuenta más que si se oyera; eso era entonces también lo más típico, reconocía aquel silencio raro como el preludio de algo que iba a pasar, respiraba despacio, me sentía las vísceras latiendo, los oídos zumbando y la sangre encerrada: de un momento a otro -¿por donde?-, aquella muchedumbre ascendente caería a engrosar el invisible caudal interior como una droga intravenosa capaz de alterar

Manuscript of *El cuarto de atrás* [*The Back Room*] (November 1975–April 1978). Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,5,6.

Despite this heterogeneity, Carmen's literary output is a unified and coherent whole where all genres converge and are intertwined. As an essayist, historian, literary critic, poet, translator and practitioner of other forms of intellectual creation, Martín Gaité never relinquished her status as a storyteller: she turned any subject into a narrative. For her everything was a story that had to be well told: reading material, love, her own and other people's lives, dreams, history.



Martín Gaité visiting the Statue of Liberty during her first stay in New York. April 1979. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 87,41.

The frame of reference for her literary world was organised through a category called *experience*. Even in her historical research and literary criticism she felt the need to describe in detail her particular relationship with the character portrayed, the period studied or the book reviewed. By placing emphasis on manner, she found harmony, and by seeking a pleasurable and meaningful way of telling things to herself, she simultaneously stumbled upon her utopian listener. Interlocution and method merge in her writings as two sides of the same quest.



Collage for *Caperucita en Manhattan* [Little Red Riding Hood in Manhattan] (c. 1988). 'Manhattan is a metaphor for the forest, where it is as easy to dream of freedom as it is to get lost', wrote Martín Gaité in a travel notebook. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 44,37.



For Martín Gaité, the Madrid Book Fair signified the fresh excitement of putting faces to her readers. She described this as her greatest accolade in 'The Age of Deserving' (May 1999). Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 88,193.



Prewar Parker fountain pen that she received from her father (including a cloth case made by the writer herself).

This pen was the 'compass' that guided her writing.

Archivo Carmen Martín Gaité
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 42,42.

Her style is communicative and affective due to the presence of the reader, whom she seeks to involve in the journey: *interlocution* and *affection* were terms that had very bad press among the great male icons of her generation. For her, writing literature presupposed the presence of the other – there was always a recipient. She understood artistic truth to be a shared representation. Her intellectual output also reveals a keen awareness of intergenerational conflicts. That is why we are celebrating the centenary of a writer who is culturally alive.

This exhibition showcases the life and intellectual legacy of Carmen Martín Gaité in the following sections, from which we have selected an image.

CARMEN MARTÍN GAITE

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From December 18, 2025
to June 14, 2026

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