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BY EXCELENCIAS

arte

Biennial Alternative

Art in Nicaragua

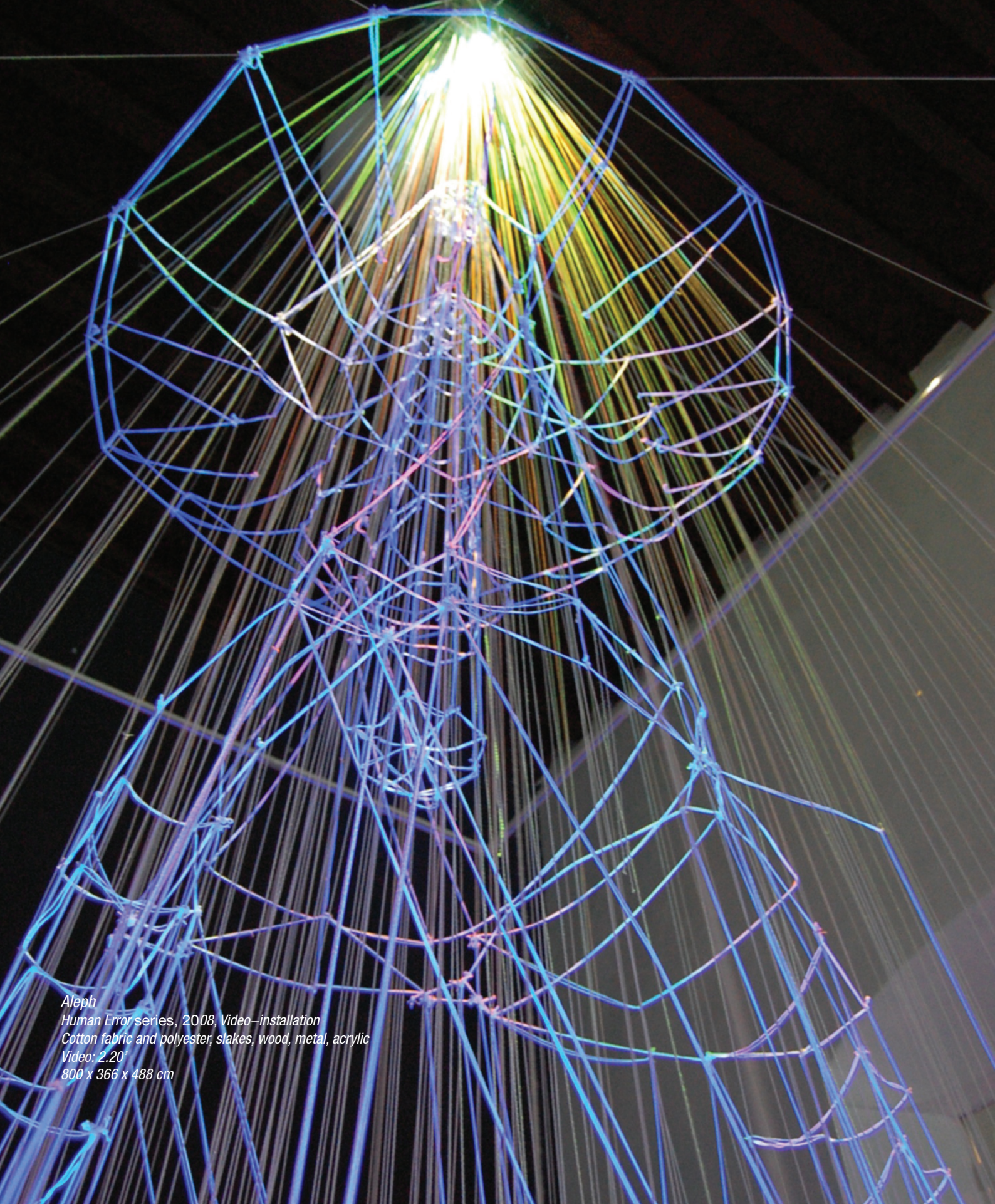
Caribbean
Mega-exhibits

José Bedia: Another Look

Elusive Paraguay

DUVIER DEL DAGO

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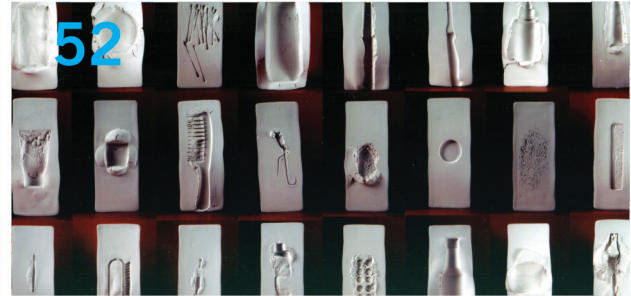
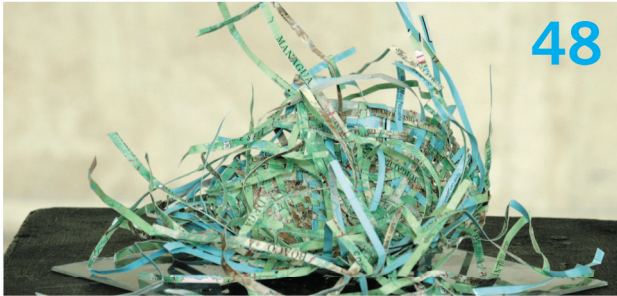
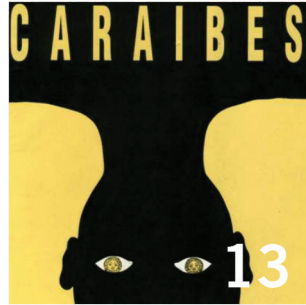
Aleph
Human Error series, 2008, Video-installation
Cotton fabric and polyester, slakes, wood, metal, acrylic
Video: 2.20'
800 x 366 x 488 cm

EDITORIAL

Our publishing group is giving its readers *Art by Excelencias*, a magazine envisaged to bear testimony to the creative processes within the framework of the fine arts and their main figures in the Americas and the Caribbean. From the standpoint of cultural journalism and its multitude of genres, we intend to provide a place of international scope aimed at strengthening analytical and reflexive thinking –such a scarce commodity in the face of today’s art market- at creating means to legitimize the conceptual and esthetic values, at fostering creative diversity and awareness of debate, at updating bibliographies and recovering the historic memory.

In this first issue, in which we counted on the support and collaboration of prestigious experts and artists, we take a significant step in the establishment of a network of informative and cultural exchange that will no doubt reach out further to curators, critics, museographers, researchers and creators from other world regions.

Jose Carlos de Santiago
Managing Editor



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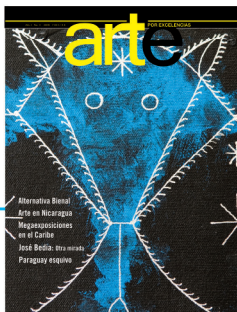
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Crist



Cover Artwork
José Bedia
Nayery, 2004 (detail)
Acrylic on cloth, 18,5 x 90 cm
Coll. Orlando Hernandez



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East Africa Art Biennale 2005

EASTAFAB 2005

the alternative Biennial



NELSON HERRERA YSLA

WE'RE LIVING IN VERY COMPLEX TIMES WITHIN THE UNIVERSE of contemporary art, according to the signals coming from everywhere under the sun, either inside the country or outside. Never before there's been such an amount of creators and expressions rubbing elbows with one another, churning out artworks in the most surprising techniques and materials; never before so many museums and galleries, national and international events, art centers, magazines, auctions, fairs, biennials and megabuck sales have been reported. For moments, these are times of confusion, doubts and uncertainty. So much that many wonder what the requirements and the limits are for something created by the hands of an artist –or by means of the most refined technology- to be considered a work of art.

Images: Courtesy of the author

Without ferreting out the factors that make these peculiar occurrences happen, I may say from the word go that there's a clear-cut overspill of artistic contents, their forms, their expositional structures; a genuine uptick in the number of disciplinary exchanges that allows for the making of a piece in which the artist does not only rely on materials, tools and traditional techniques, but also on statistics, sociology, anthropology and cinema on his quest for expressing far more of what has been expressed up to now. I mean, the making of a more complex artistic speech as long as reality and life become increasingly more complex, too.

The number of events dealing with art promotion and marketing are progressively on the rise. On top of the list – together but not closely knit – stand the biennials, the auctions and the fairs, each and every one of them with features, spaces, domains of their own, of course. However, today we see how they benefit from one another, even in the midst of their structural and conceptual differences. There are moments when they share methods to lure the public and experts in a completely unbiased atmosphere. To top it all off, new events have to be added to the overall picture of the arts, like artist re-

sidence programs, scholarships, workshops, specialty festivals, international projects that here and there magnify the presence of artists in and from any part of the world.

We're therefore at the threshold of a complicated problem, a hard nut to crack, to comprehend and to demonstrate, in which the artist's new attitude toward his ongoing reality and that of the arts is paramount.

If we were to page down the origin of all this, we wouldn't hesitate to say that it all began back in 1917 thanks to French artist Marcel Duchamp's gesture of placing a white porcelain urinal signed with his penname in a New York art gallery. His *gesture* triggered –perhaps without a complete coincidence and with no immediate repercussions- a genuine turning point in the history of art: from that moment onward, nothing would ever be the same. This attitude unleashed a piecemeal response by other artists against the "establishment" until it evolved, by the hand of varied modalities, into a reaction even against the alternative and the dissonant for years and decades to come.

Today, the knowledge of material re-

ality and the individuals –owed to breakthroughs in science, technology, communications- is within the reach of nearly all human beings, not only of artists, yet the latter ones take on the sentiment that everything can be changed, that everything is inclined to transformations beyond the boundaries imposed by institutions and society. That spells out the nonstop reaction not only in the specific creative environment, but also, for example, against the traditional expositional way of artworks outside the closed spaces of galleries and the need to reach out to the total framework of the city in a bid to get to the pedestrian, the citizen and those who remain uncaring to the arts. This attitude leads to unsuspected paths in the historic relationships between artistic expressions and individuals, and in recent years it has given way to one of the most interesting and controversial expressions of contemporary art: the so-called *relational esthetics* or *behavioral art* that's spreading everywhere like a prairie fire with countless variations under its belt.

If, on the other hand, we bear in mind
MARÍA ALÓS AND NICOLÁS DUMIT
(Dominican Republic)
The Passerby Museum, 2002

With the support of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

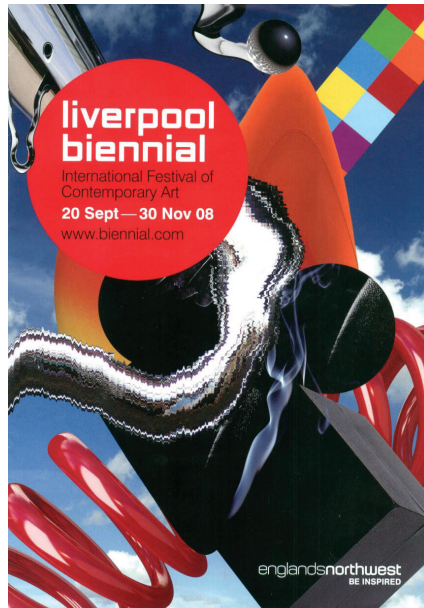


the artist's capacity to take in the information that gravitates around him through the ears, the skin, the nose, not only through the eyes, the plot thickens. It puts critics and historians before the need of recognizing ways of expression through the use of these senses when it comes to making esthetic speeches. The multitude of problems we all must be worried about –especially today's creators everywhere- turns those creators, whether we like it not, into more than mere artists; it turns them into *other* intellectuals nearly up to par with philosophers, essayists, sociologists, scholars and writers. We're thus before an individual willing to contribute to the current thinking, to engage in the public debate about any topic, leaving behind those times when artists used to heed only the beauty; to the pure creation of forms, to the description of nature and society. His attitude now is, therefore, more critical than in past times, driven this time around by the awareness of *a more hands-on, active role rather than a passive one.*

It'll be misleading to spell out the possibilities open to today's artists and the arts. Suffice it to say they are far more complex and numerous than when they reached the first halls in the 18th century or after the grand opening of the world's first International Arts Biennial in the city of Venice in the late 19th century –precisely in 1895.

How can we then show, see, touch what's going on around us and, at the same time, in so many different parts? How can we contribute to make the public further understand the speediness of the changes going on in the realm of arts as well as the emergence of proposals and trends, or the sense of certain institutions linked to today's teaching, or the meaning of the different scales of the symbolic creation?

The traditional mortar-and-brick gallery doesn't seem to do the trick in such major endeavor, nor the museum, regardless of its rich heritage, tradition and history, not to mention the art fair, so fleeting in space and time. This is then the Biennial's showtime as a possible, feasible alternative, and in it the figure of the *curator*, the centerpiece



for the articulation of the event's complex framework.

Without going into details on the appearance and significance of this new kind of intellectual, this individual showed up for the first time back in the 1980s to take up the slack of the contemporary art system that not even curators and collectors, historians and gallery owners, critics and scholars, so plentiful in so many places and major cities, had achieved.

The Biennial came to stay as a real fact, to show every other year and for one, two and up to three months, a good deal of the art system whose underpinnings, processes and perspectives are accruing in geometrical proportions, unlike other cultural expressions like cinema, literature, dance, the performing arts, music and architecture, that are bound to arithmetical progression. Despite the fact that the Biennial takes a lot of flak for being a hegemonic, global and dominating –as some people say- “model” for the multiple and comprehensive exhibition of artworks, no other tool has come in handy so far to replace it.

The emergence and development of new nations and the corresponding increase of their symbolic creations laid bare that Venice was not good enough to “show” what was going on. In the mid 20th century, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and aloof from

the Old World, the Sao Paulo Biennial took place, maybe as an copycat of the Italian harbinger, yet with a marked interest in going one better since its kickoff edition in 1951. Its regional influence became a fact because a few years later similar events in Medellin, San Juan and Cali during the 1970s, and Havana, Cuenca, Santo Domingo and Lima in the 80s, jumped on the Biennial's bandwagon, together with others in faraway places like Sydney, Istanbul, Cairo, Dakar, Lyon and Liverpool. In the course of the 1990s and through the 2000s, Mercosur, Kwangju, Bhutan, Sharjah, Prague, Moscow, Seville, Valencia and Ushuaia came on strong. And make no mistakes about it; as we speak, new biennials are probably brewing in some other cities on the face of the earth.

In a humble, low-profile fashion –not aiming that high at the world scene- other events of this kind popped up in Latin America, especially in Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela with their local artistic creations acting as driving forces behind their biennials. In Central America and based on the same principle, the Arte Paiz Biennial emerged in Guatemala in 1978 under the sponsorship of a name-like private foundation that almost immediately made a splash in other similar institutions across the area –entrepreneurial, banking- until it spilled over to the rest of the region's countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, in an effort to rekindle its traditional scenarios and win a larger cultural space in the region.

While this was going on in our mainland and on our islands, in the distance the city of Venice was enhancing its cultural space with the organization of parallel film and architecture biennials and engaging in the resizing of its historic Arts Biennial, this time around going beyond the enclosed boundaries of the national pavilions through the addition of parallel events that, in some editions, peaked 34 in all with little more than 500 participating artists. From a gigantic international showcase of arts, designed to “keep us posted” on the latest developments and mostly secluded in the Castello Gardens area, the Venice Biennial turned out a humon-

gous visual show around the entire city.

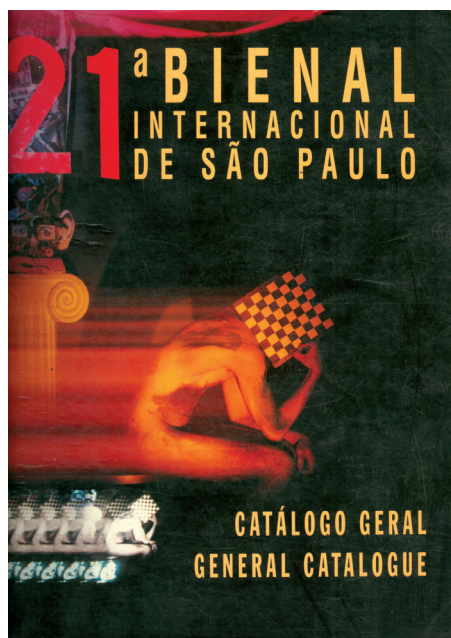
These biennials that came afterwards, however, didn't cling faithfully to the Italian showcase model, though they did pay heed to the parallel events and special exhibits, some of historic and essay-oriented character. The times demanded a kind of event closer to the need for bigger intellectual configuration based on the invitation to boldface names of historiography and critique, academic institutions and promoters amid eyebrow-raising questions about that Venetian model. This prompted them to give their own events a certain reflexive nature. That is, the Biennial as a space and meeting ground for the discussion and confrontation of ideas –not only for the exhibition of artworks- and perfect setting for a number of projects capable of moving the public opinion by raising awareness on the very nature of the arts, culture and society. Works, artistic projects, either formally clustered or in progress, panned out to be extraordinary means for the transformation of notions on art itself, its outreach, territories, ways of integrating or inserting in other walks of life, assimilating the crisscrossing with other disciplines, enthralling wider sectors of the public.

In the heart of this ideological and cultural context, the Havana Biennial came into being. Virtually from its very beginning, this event took on these necessary foundations that were in many people's speech. Its stepped-up development prompted a milestone in its third edition back in 1989 as the event set the tone for the deepening of those foundations and shifted onto a path far more promising than in other parts of the planet. The Havana Biennial gave birth to a new thinking on this kind of international event, even though it didn't have so much of an influence on the many humbler national biennials in so many Latin American cities for they couldn't understand their role as communication bridges among artists, institutions and the public, the mustering axes of thinking, the broad cultural spaces, the recapping exercises and, above all, their contribution to the collective memory of each and every country and the world as a whole due to their repercussions on the social and political life.

ROBERT STEPHENSON (Haiti)
Untitled, 2003
Digital printing
91,5 x 44 cm



OUR SPECIALIZED INSTITUTIONS
ACT IN AN OVERALL FRAGMENTED
WAY, SUBORDINATED TO THEIR
EXCLUSIVE INTERESTS AND UNABLE
TO SEE THE EXTRAORDINARY
POTENTIAL THIS EVENT HAS FOR
CULTURE AND MEMORY IN THEIR
MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS





There's a point in saying that a majority of national assets in our region showed up in tough times as a result of intense local conflicts, when violence was in full swing, when military dictatorships, extreme poverty, illiteracy, corruption, missing people and kidnappings were rampant. These conditions kept them somehow away from the changes that were sweeping the world of the arts. And to add insult to injury, the widespread lack of regional interest in culture at that time shed much light on the scarce significance of their particular contexts. Today, a few decades later from that first biennial in the continent, we understand that keeping most of the biennial events up and running was possible due to the support of private entities, hardworking companies, individual promoters and groups that fight against all odds.

With their achievements and shortcomings, virtues and mistakes in each and every one of their host nations, we

may wonder, however, is there a better space than an art biennial to capture every other year the fast-paced advance of the arts, their varied expressions, the lines of reasoning that tag along with them? The Biennial is destined to play that gathering, rallying role of individuals and social sectors toward a common goal in which actions wielded by the artistic and intellectual communities come together, both locally and globally, even though Central America and South America still can't find an adequate, effective fitting definition for their mega-events in the field of visual arts. Beyond the contexts that brought them to life then and those that rule today –as-a-matter-of-factly much better than those in the past– our specialized institutions act in an overall fragmented way, subordinated to their exclusive interests and unable to see the extraordinary potential this event has for culture and memory in their many different levels.

In the 1990s, for instance, Venezuela

used to host nearly ten regional biennials, almost one for each state, plus many others that were held in other countries of the region. The curious thing is that most of them never merged into those battlefields where the main struggles for both spiritual and intellectual enlightenment are waged: their short-lived media hype is barely limited to reporting winning artists and backing up the sponsors' own PR campaigns. That's it, perhaps just a tad more. The academic field, the research institutions, historians, critics, curators, renowned artists, art students, remain on the sidelines.

However, Latin America is now in better conditions to put up with the development of cultural events for there's far more regional, continental awareness on the whole as a group or community of nations; there's a more active role for the part of social sectors that used to be marginalized in the past by the ruling power; banks are being founded at a continental level and leagues

of southern nations are rising; regional economic blocs are emerging and the historical ties with Europe and the United States are being reconfigured. Today's biennials, no matter the level they might have, should therefore reflect these fundamental changes that are going on because in each and every one of our countries there are intellectuals formed as critics and curators, as historians and researchers, sufficiently informed about all happenings in the universe of contemporary art. With more reasoning than enthusiasm, time has come to call them for action as agents of change, figures ready to take on the challenges of these times and speak out with their own voices, our voices, as communities, peoples and nations within this universal concert.

A curator is in a position to shed public light on the complex artistic expressions that we're experiencing today without downplaying the works and art projects that are the very essence of a Biennial or any other similar event in the first place.

The Biennial is a challenge for people involved in it. The biggest challenge we're facing today. A choice and a risk to support a hefty and rewarding relationship with the public from an esthetic viewpoint since every edition puts a multiplicity of cultural, moral, social, political values at stake in which, by the way, there's no room for the market's overblown figures and wishful thinking that are increasingly putting the biennials in harm's way with each passing day. The market has become a space for the sanctioning and sanctification of artworks and artists alike over any other type of value, even over history. It's known that the market has reenergized collector's lust, both public and private, sales and auctions, and has dragged countless cities on the planet into the new stock markets where people go to either directly or through the Internet. The fair, the market's elegant and satisfactory face, has managed to assimilate the biennial model for its own benefit to expose itself as a truly cultural place –the way the biennials are actually like- when indeed it's all about a different kind of value, a mere financial performance in which the collector is the star of the show and the true fund.

This is not about demonizing the market because it's been in the global art system for over 400 years now, challenging up results with mastery and efficiency because it knows how to melt into fast-developing economies whose main components are mostly seen as goods. Fairs are distinguished responses that certain power circles give to the contemporary visual culture. With increasingly larger turnouts and influence, these commercial events become genuine short-time shows that sometimes blur the biennials since some of them manage to reel in over 5,000 people for the opening night and average 120,000 visitors in four days. By moving from booth to the next, whether you're a potential buyer or not, you're definitely trying the *zapping culture* originated and promoted day after day on television and you may also sort of gauge quite quickly a specific area of contemporary art like in no other event of its kind.

The Biennial, for its part, goads curious, indifferent or forewarned spectators into broader reflection, making them ask questions to themselves when they eye a humble, traditional work or in the

face of a complex project in progress, in its structure. In the same breath, they know about panels, roundtables, lectures, discussions that blaze new trails for artistic thoughts and put on *performances* in several locations, video sessions, city-related actions. Such a bunch of activities takes time, attention for an adequate appreciation and enjoyment. It can be visited in a hurry, but the distance between the venues and locations will prevent visitors from doing so.

Cuba boasts a modest but longstanding experience since the opening edition of the Havana Biennial in 1984. With peaks and valleys in the editions that came later, this event model has allowed a legit contact with symbolic creations from roughly all parts of the globe on the basis of a notion of visual culture as esthetic enjoyment and reflective drill. Unfortunately, the latter is the missing element in most of the biennials taking place in our continent. To put it this way, a "provincial" approach to this global-character phenomenon still prevails.

Despite our going through hard times, our societies and nations appear eager,



THE MARKET HAS BECOME A SPACE
FOR THE SANCTIONING AND
SANCTIFICATION OF ARTWORKS
AND ARTISTS ALIKE OVER ANY OTHER
TYPE OF VALUE, EVEN OVER HISTORY

more than never before, to cope with all kinds of challenges in the continent. Culture rises as one of the most treasured tools we can count on to face those tough times because their wealth stands tall above our historic and daily hardships that many government try to get over in a bid to find the right way of leaving the colonial and republican backwardness behind –still hanging over our heads- and put us on the road to the modernization, peace, welfare and democratization that we need.

The visual arts are destined to chip in a modest contribution of their own to this effort from the realm of contemporary culture. Their ability to arouse provocations in the esthetical and ideological fields is one of the most effective methods to acquire certain awareness of the phenomenon: artists and part of the public do know that... but not in the same extent. The biennials point to that humanist scope of rock-solid social implications; the art market doesn't. That's why it's necessary to max out this main event of our visual cultures together with others in different spheres, and not to yield to opulence and the power of money that today attempt to rule and direct so many aspects of our lives.

Nelson Herrera Ysla (Cuba)
Curator and Art Critic
herrera@wlam.cult.cu

ROBERTO DIAGO (Cuba)
Obbatala for Always, 2005
Light box, wood and B & W photo
84 x 74 x 11 cm

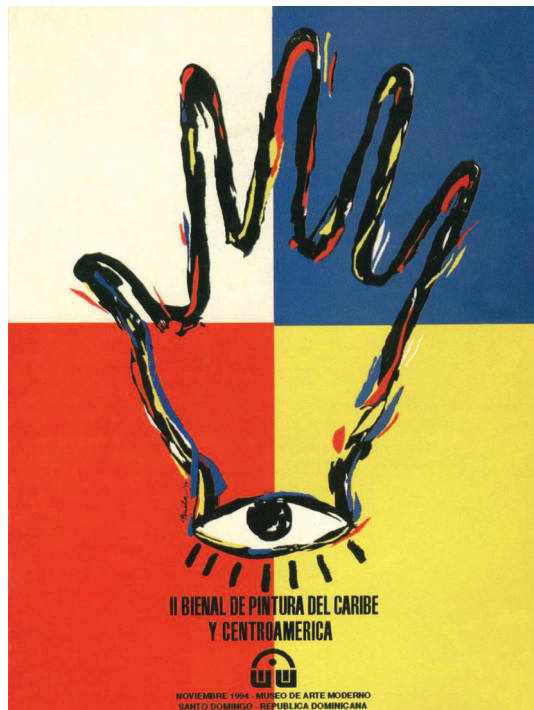


SIMON VEGA (Puerto Rico)
Boxed City, 2004-2006
Installation



MAKE A WISH
2008
Installation (detail) variable sizes

eduardo ponjuán
ponjuan@cubarte.cult.cu



YOLANDA WOOD

Caribbean Art

THE LAST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

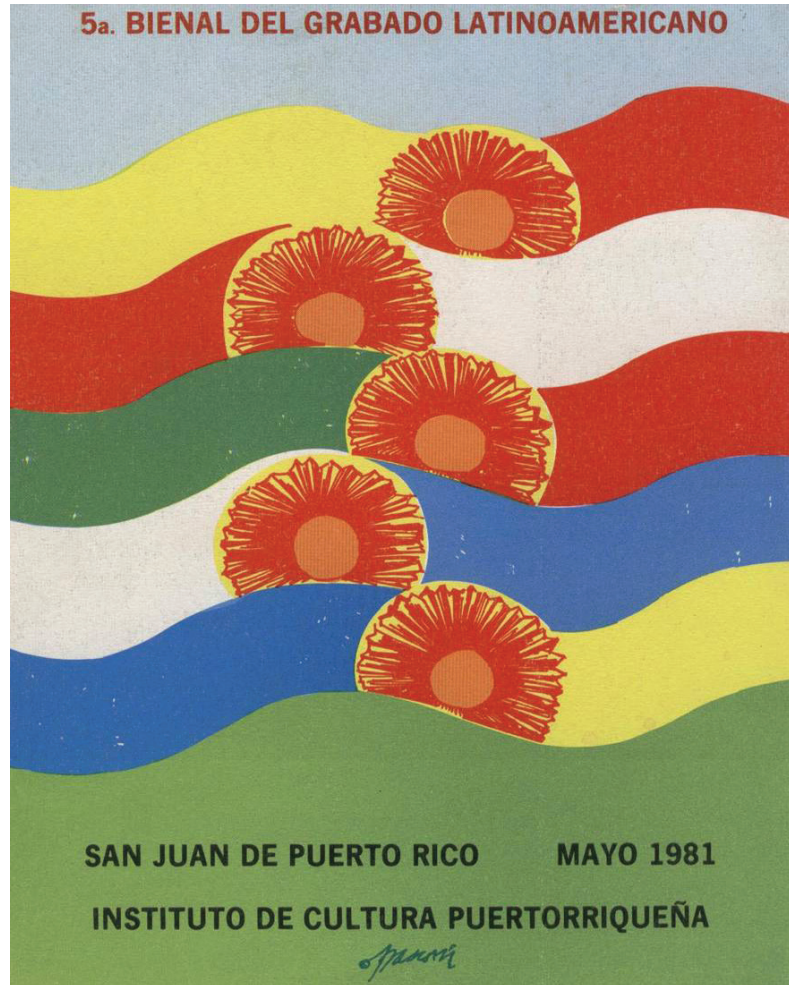
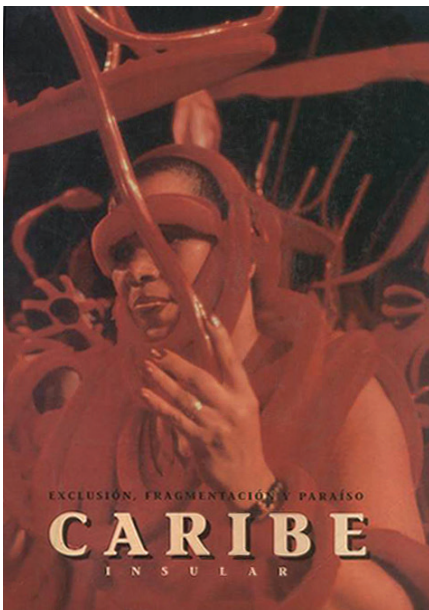
WHEN THE PAST CENTURY CAME TO A CLOSE, THE CARIBBEAN ART WAS BASKING IN the international limelight. The 1990s were fertile in the opening of regional exchanges and in terms of major world-class exhibition events. The Caribbean plastic arts had never before been in such full swing. This intense pace showed artistic expressions from different territories of the regional archipelago, encouraged interest and also revealed the unmatched levels of the different creative and maturity levels within the contemporary arts. On the islands the process had acquired far more intensity overall during the second half of the 20th century, yet not all of them boasted the necessary conditions to foster a public projection of the arts and the formation of creators. This process was being expressed through a number of chronologies. In the highly-populated, largest territories, the artistic practice had visibly been in the hands of natives since the late 19th century, marked mostly by modern trends associated to esthetic renovation and the search for an art of national expression. But the updating process in some and in others, coupled with the openness toward new artistic trends in the second half of the 20th century was happening at a time of great internationalization of the arts, of studios moving out toward the former metropolises and the U.S., of precedents in other arts that favored the transverse dialogue among creators from different disciplines. In a word, a collective fizzling process was providing the linkage points in a region that was rediscovering its own creativeness and visual creation, and it was doing so amid circumstances in which such hot topics as multiculturalism, racial behaviors, migrations and genre discussions were at full throttle, when the Caribbean and its artists had interesting things to say based on the region's recent history and its own contemporary socio-cultural interests.

In the exhibition field of the 1990s, the Caribbean was painting a non-homogeneous, yet commonly exploratory picture that was revealing itself worldwide as emerging anti-hegemony art. But at the same time, it was putting on the face of a creation capable of making cultural borderlines fade away, the same limits that had put the region on the margins of the cultural map designed by the power and ruling circles. By doing so, the Caribbean was showing off its artistic potentials as a *world region*.

On the other hand, certain international trends toward the ethnical art, some kind of nostalgia for the primitive and the ancestral marked by an epochal sign of *Les magiciens de la terre*, the vindications of Africa –increasingly threatened by the perils of extinction- that sent their vibes all across this part of Africa-America¹ called the Caribbean, as well as the

¹ See Nancy Morejon: “*Afroamérica ¿la invisible?*”, *poética de los altares*, Letras Cubanas, Havana, 2004, p. 7.

THE BASICALLY THEMATIC CHARACTER OF THE BIENNIALS LET CARIBBEAN ARTISTS IN ON THE FACT THAT MANY OF THEIR UNCERTAINTIES AND INTERESTS WERE ALSO SHARED BY CREATORS FROM NEARBY AND FARAWAY PLACES OF THE WORLD



significance of the West Indian diasporas in the U.S. and Western Europe, were all factors that started making observers turn their heads to certain areas –like this one- that had been gagged by the West’s cultural cartography. And I say so because artists, countries and major exhibits had taken shape inside and outside the region before the 1990s, yet the dynamics of that decade brought up the marking of a regional sign –the biggest highlight of all at the time. Those same international trends mentioned above, that presented themselves as opportunities for the margins, contained multiple contradictions because through their notions they were portraying misleading and faking trends leaning toward the systems of esthetic-artistic values of the south countries. The Caribbean itself, that singled out its existence as an artistic space back in the 1990s, was bound to face off these challenges once again and under new circumstances this time around.

FROM WITHIN

It all began inside the entrails of the region. World-scope projects that popped up all at once over the past three decades set the tone and outlined a considerable chunk of the process intensity at the end of the century. Great developments like the Latin American Engraving Biennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico (1970), the Havana Biennial in Cuba (1984) and the Central American & Caribbean Painting Biennial (1992) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, panned out to be –from different perspectives and approaches- the perfect settings to put a white-heat spin on the islands’ arts, eventually *cascading* –I’d rather use the more tropical, refreshing and sounding word *cascading*, and not the more-fitting *snowballing* term here- into other fields. These biennials opened in times of major confrontations

tations and dialogues among artists, critics and curators from the Caribbean, Latin America and far beyond.

Other lands of the Lesser Antilles jumped on the bandwagon on a quest for meeting alternatives, like in Guadeloupe in 1991 during the local arts festival (FESTAG), that under the title name Indigo eventually evolved into a Caribbean Plastic Arts Festival from 1995 onward. These festivals helped keep this Eastern Caribbean island as a giant venue for the arts throughout an entire decade.

CaribArt was held in Curacao back in 1993. Organized by the UNESCO Netherlands Antilles National Commission, it turned out to be an unprecedented event that gathered scores of artists and art scholars from the region. In an organic fashion, this event managed to integrate the arts of all the Antilles under a selective participation concept by nations and in correspondence with their demographics. It also made theoretical and discussion room for the publishing

of the book entitled “History of the Caribbean Arts” written by several authors and with major contributions from all territories.

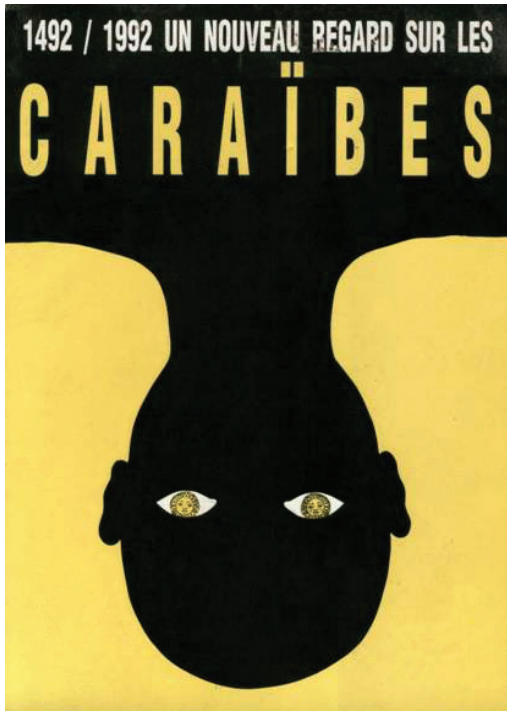
There are three biennials that came to pass in the Caribbean between the 1970s and the 90s that need to be underscored: the Latin American Engraving Biennial in San Juan, the Havana Biennial and the Central American & Caribbean Painting Biennial.

When the mega-exhibits of the 20th century's last decade were projected, over ten editions of the Latin American Engraving Biennial in Puerto Rico's San Juan had already taken place. Even though they did encourage creation in the specific field of engraving based on the tradition that Puerto Rico had acquired in this particular expression, its repercussion was not that big in terms of insular Caribbean attendance, except for the Dominican Republic and Cuba, because the rest of the islands didn't have a graphic movement up to par with the regional or international competitiveness. When the last decade of the past century began, the Havana Biennial had held four editions. From the very beginning, the turnout of Caribbean artists was outstanding not only in quantitative terms, but also in the number of boldface names that had already left their footprints in the Caribbean arts and helped underline some new values of the region's plastic arts. Despite the fact that those biennials had its ups and downs in the 1990s², attendance of Caribbean islanders during the first four editions totaled 136 artists³, even some of them –and this is highly important– hailing from such nations as Surinam and Guyana, whose artistic creations had remained quite unknown both within the region and overseas,



² I Biennial (1984), 42 artists from 5 countries; II Biennial (1986), 63 artists from 9 countries; III Biennial (1989), 14 artists from 5 countries and IV Biennial (1991), 17 artists from 6 countries. (This information does not include Cuba's attendance as host nation since it could distort the real participation of the remaining insular Caribbean territories).

³ Insular Caribbean nations that attended the first four biennials in Havana: Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Guyana, Martinique, Surinam, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and French Guyana.



with the sole exception of Casa de las Americas⁴ and the Caribbean Cultural Festival in Santiago de Cuba, where they joined collective exhibits.

At the Fifth Havana Biennial (1994) –penciled in by the critics as an expression of the event’s conceptual maturity- two dozen Caribbean artists displayed outstanding collections that stood tall for their contemporariness and the debut of nations like Aruba, the Bahamas and Curacao that had never before attended such world-class artistic events. A couple of other biennials took place simultaneously with the mega-events held outside the Caribbean region in those years previous to the end of the last century.

⁴ Art of Surinam Exhibit. April, 1983. Casa de las Americas. Cuba. 27 artists attended.

⁵ From the National Collection. Guyana. 1987. 11 artists attended.

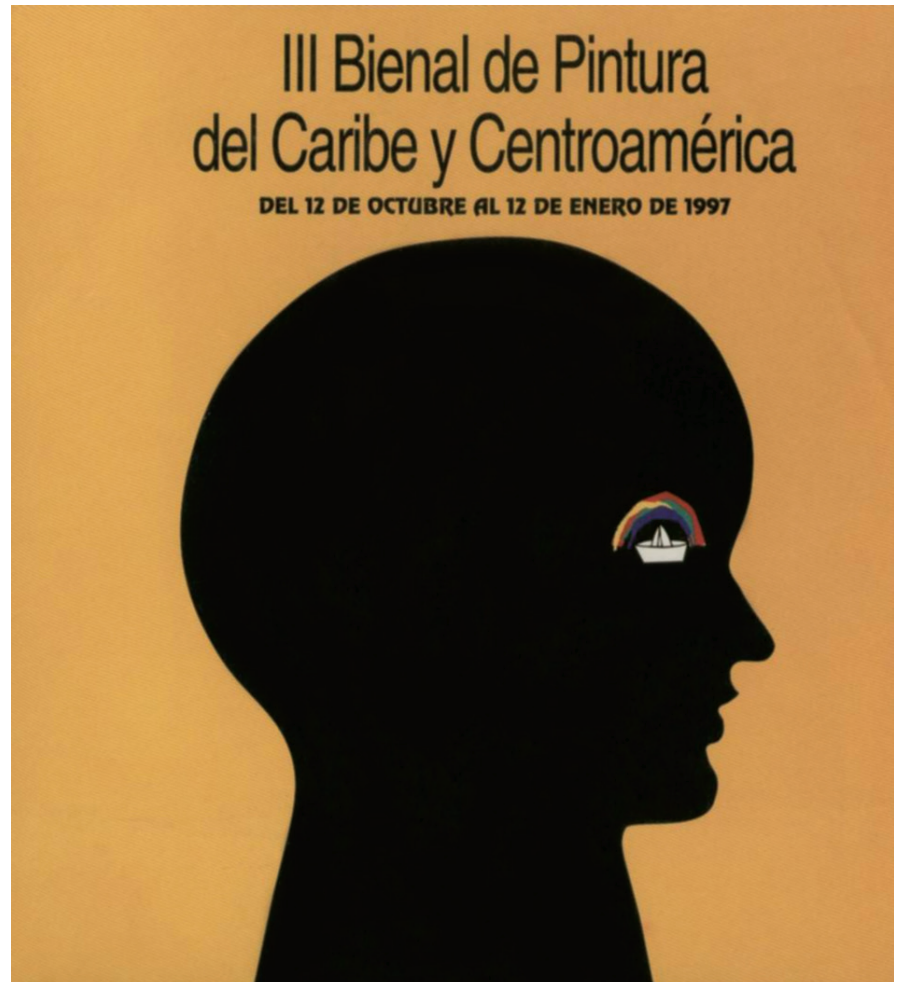
In 1992, the Central America and Caribbean Painting Biennial in Santo Domingo got started, though limited to the field of painting and featuring a contest format. This event came up with a wider vision of artistic creation as it included territories other than the Caribbean islands. In their own way, each and every one of these biennials served to reenergize the region’s artistic circuits. The strength of their summoning efforts was able to either expand or shrink the Caribbean space, thus putting regional creation in different angles of the esthetic-artistic confrontation with Latin America and the Third World. Above all, the Havana Biennial, marked by more open-mindedness in terms of the trendy creations within the realm of the contemporary arts, soon became a place for Caribbean artists to rediscover themselves in the use of other possible creative methods and the assessment of the value of those new methods they were making use of. The basically thematic character of the

biennials let Caribbean artists in on the fact that many of their uncertainties and interests were also shared by creators from nearby and faraway places of the world. From the Havana Biennial, networks of similarities and dissimilarities were woven. At the end of the day, they helped make the outreach of Caribbean artists much broader and safer in terms of self-confidence and their own contemporariness.

The presence in these events of creators, critics, curators and both regional and international commissioners paved the way from *within* for the launch of projects that churned out different kinds of connections with other people in the Caribbean and acted as multiplying factors inside and outside the area during the 1990s.

OUTWARDLY

Everybody’s enthusiasm was rapidly spreading over the artistic scene as a number of different initiatives kicked in.

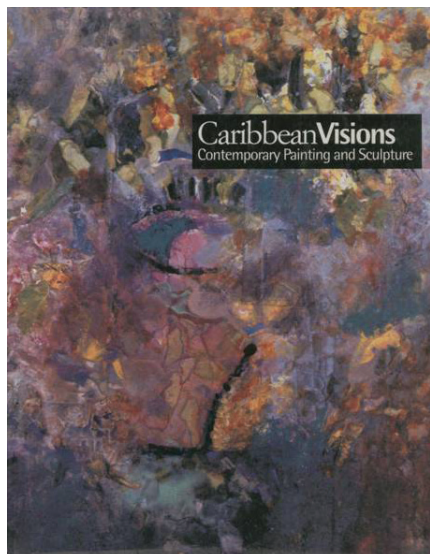


Good cases in point were the exhibits *Un nouveau regard* (France, 1992); *Karibische Kunst Heute* (Kassel, 1994); *Caribbean Vision* (Florida, United States, 1996); *Caribe: exclusión, fragmentación y paraíso* (Extremadura, Spain, 1998) and *Mitos en el Caribe* (Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba, 2000).

These were multiple and timely actions that tied up with one another to eventually get ingrained in the fabric of an unearthed circuit. Up to a certain degree, all these expositions were both important and different. The planning and bankrolling of these events engulfed a number of public and private institutions from the turf and other parts of the world. None of them set out to hold on to continuity, something that marked the view of them as unique and unrepeatable gatherings. However, these mega-exhibitions set the tone of the decade. Their pulse was highly intense and extremely encouraging for the arts of these islands. The experimental and exploratory action has long been an unstoppable symptom of the plastic arts in the region without causing major shakeups in the institutional platforms of teaching and promotion, even in those places where the institution-art relationship is soundly established and well recognized. Regardless of their sensitive contribution to enhancing the vision of the regional contemporary art creation for countries perched on the edges of the big-time hegemonic art centers, the persistence of esthetic-artistic stereotypes over that creation and the contradictory axes the debates hinge on when they are relocated in the internationally-acclaimed legitimizing circles also emerged.

In the five abovementioned exhibits, the turnout of Caribbean artists swayed somewhere between 35 and 109 artists. That means that in a six-year term –only as far as mega-expositions are concerned– over 250 artworks by Caribbean artists, most of them hailing from the island nations– were exhibited.

As it's been said, the first of these mega-exhibits unfolded in France in 1992 under the title *A New Look at the Caribbean*. The curating job started out in the very Caribbean countries



and though that painted a somewhat participative democratization picture⁶, it was also exposing a communication mesh between institutions and artistic agents on the island nations –an unprecedented fact in the history of the Caribbean arts. The catalog included the voices of critics and art historians from the countries represented there in the form of texts that suggested, in some cases, a glimpse at the first attempts to systematize artistic creation in the insular Caribbean, as seen in an article about Barbados and the small English-speaking islands. It's interesting that the catalog's main text proposes an exposition reading from a Creole esthetical standpoint as construed in its anthropological and cultural meaning.

Between 1994 and 1995, two different kinds of mega-exhibitions took place in Germany and Miami, the former in the context of the great international exhibit *Documenta*. The event made such a huge splash because for the first time ever the Caribbean was putting on a regional show in an exhibition like *Documenta*⁷. And even though this artistic powwow gathered young and boldface artists alike, the exotic character –still so commonplace among European spectators– came on strong due to the prevalence of Haiti's so-called *naïf* art

⁶ Countries with largest turnouts: Dominican Republic (21 artists), Guadeloupe (16 artists), Jamaica (15 artists), Puerto Rico (13 artists), Martinique (11 artists) and Trinidad & Tobago (10 artists).

to the detriment of showcasing a handful of current artists from that neck of the woods –something that generated a tremendous contrast in relation with the remaining participants who were very interested in displaying their own contemporary artworks.

With a completely different view, the *Caribbean Vision* was pieced together by a team of curators from U.S. institutions in Florida, Connecticut and New Orleans. When you check out the list of participating countries, the supremacy of the linguistic criteria meets the eye –a condition that made the regional impact pulled their punches dramatically in terms of turnout. Most of the attendants were from the English-speaking West Indies and countries with mighty exiled populations in Florida, like Haiti, Puerto Rico and Cuba –in the case of Cuba, all artists but Wilfredo Lam were U.S. residents. The catalogs' texts include the voices of Derek Walcott and Rex Nethelford, who shed substantial light on the analysis of art and cultural problems in the Caribbean.

The *Caribe insular, exclusión, fragmentación y paraíso* (1998) exhibition turned out a very coherent and ultimate event for the Caribbean contemporary arts based on the thorough criteria for the handpicking of participating artists, the quality of the texts and the update of some of the latest creative trends. An intense effort in terms of contacts with artists and critics from those territories gave way to such an expositive newness.

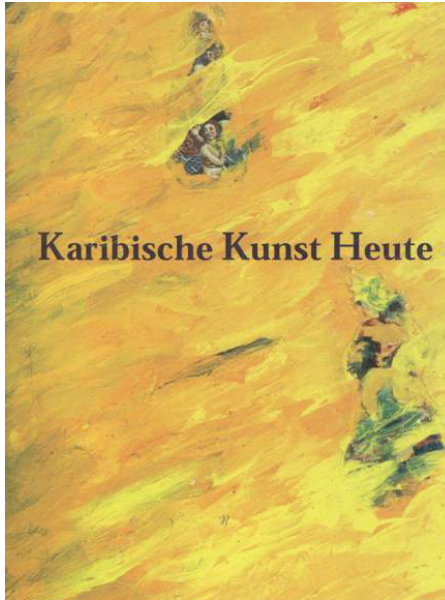
The century came to a close in Havana with the *Mitos en el Caribe* mega-exhibit organized by Casa de las Americas. This thematic exposition intended to provide a new reflection and extension of the mythical in the insular Caribbean to other fields of the contemporary social and cultural thinking, and it even managed to make artists from different Caribbean islands come together around a very original speech as far as museology and theoretical discussions are concerned.

⁷ Best-represented countries: Haiti (11 artists), Puerto Rico (8 artists), Dominican Republic (7 artists) and Cuba (7 artists).

⁸ Best-represented countries: Jamaica (14 artists), Trinidad & Tobago (7 artists), Puerto Rico (6 artists), Haiti (6 artists), Cuba (6 artists), Barbados (5 artists) and Guyana (5 artists).

These mega-exhibitions disclose a process of international projection of the contemporary Caribbean whose genesis was lodged in big-time regional events and that dialogued with them through a circuit of exhibits and biennials that even though they were born out of the plastic arts' own dynamics, they also encouraged them and egged them on. They showed different aspects of that international projection of the insular Caribbean and made Caribbean art far more visible inside and outside that world region. And what did that last decade of the 20th century hand down to the projection of the insular Caribbean art for this new 10-year period? Reflection? Legend? Evocation or yearning? Don't miss out on the upcoming chapter.

Cojimar, October 18, 2008



Yolanda Wood (Cuba)
Professor, Doctor of Art Sciences
and art critic
venus@cubarte.cult.cu



Fear, 2008 Oil on linen, 100 x 130 cm

www.jlballart.com

jlballart@yahoo.com

Jorge Luis BALLART

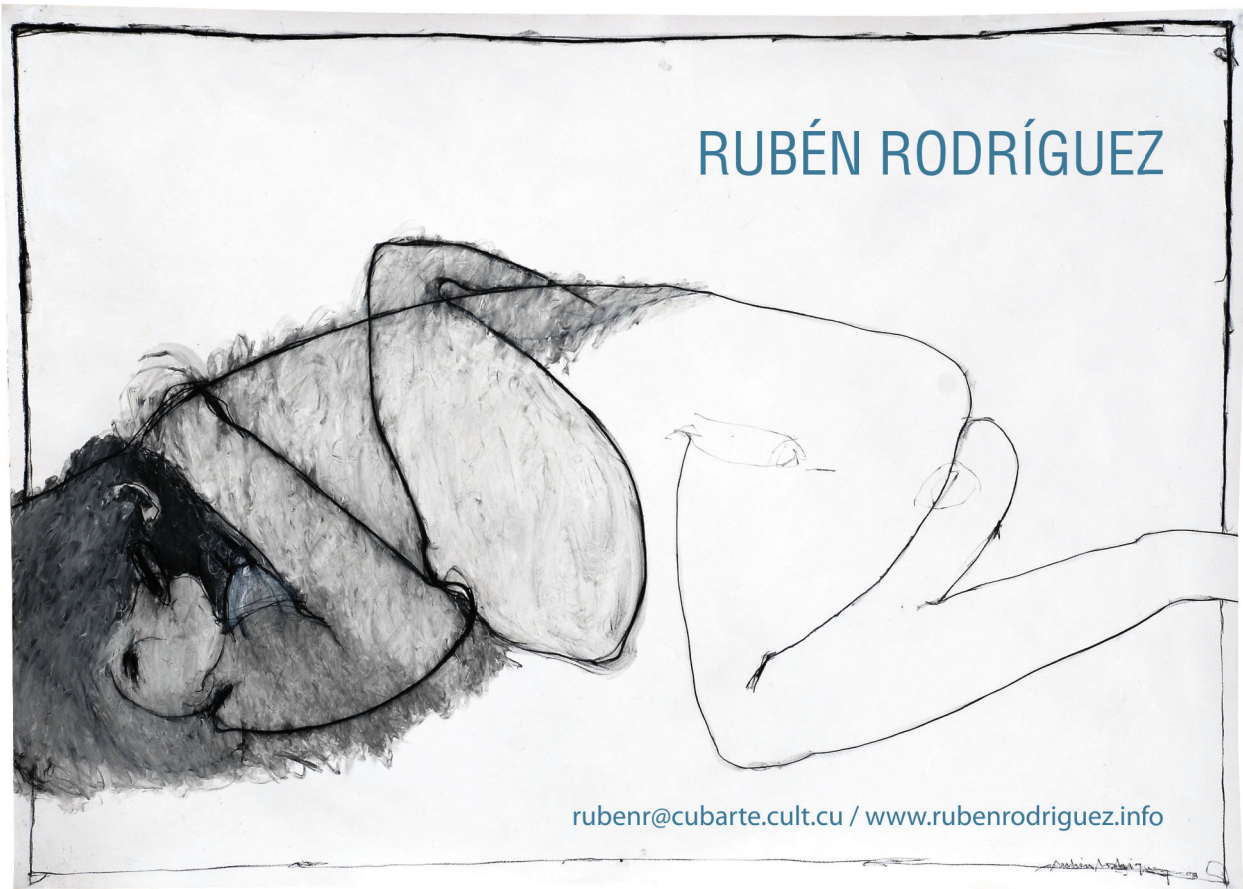


Ángel Ramírez

4monos@cubarte.cult.cu • www.amramirez.com

Something of Triumph, 2007

Sculpture-painting, monument project, 70 x 75 x 34 cm



RUBÉN RODRÍGUEZ

rubenr@cubarte.cult.cu / www.rubenrodriguez.info

Black arms, 2008, Oil on cloth, 112 x 80 cm

all

by Oneself

BY RUFO
CABALLERO



VOICES LIKE ECHOES

The fact that America is a young people is borne out, first of all, by the very history of the United States. The arch of sense that would fundamentally span from the 2000 to the 2008 presidential elections speaks plentiful volumes about the youth of America. In 2007, HBO aired the feature presentation of *Recount*, starred by Kevin Spacey, Laura Dern and John Hurt, a film that lays bare the public show, like the one found in a fair, that eventually worked out the 2000 electoral helter-skelter in the U.S. As the vote count between George W. Bush and Al Gore was getting too dangerously close to call and in the face of reasonable doubts triggered by the electronic polling devices –the ill-fated punch cards with their hanging chads- a mechanical vote count was convened. And it happened. But the gap between both candidates continued to be way too narrow as the images showed the hesitation of quite a number of elderly people with their eyes glued on the mechanical cards: Democrats or Republicans?

The latter looked like a beaten track, a dicey *déjà vu*, an exclusion in the name of global hegemony and freedom, but the former was bringing about the suspicion of communism, of black people ruling the country, of gays and women getting their own way. So help me God from this election, but a second voting was needed. Once again and a summoning –without too many snags in the way– for a hand count. And amid this count, the Supreme Court of (In)Justice delivered an institutional coup d'état: it put George W. Bush in the White House by a right of his own and because there was a need to safeguard the universal image of the United States. The cynical look of a brilliant Laura Dern taking a deep breath, smiling histrionically, ready to announce the final decision, is a must-see. She was, as Lars von Trier would put it, “the chief of all this” in Florida and she trumpeted the final blow. That legal license to stunningly ignore the little sign of democracy is called the “nuke option” in the U.S.

Heed is to be paid to the dialogues among the characters to further cotton on to the functioning of a young culture so cocky about itself. The character played by Hurt claims that “the world watches. We're in theory the last great democracy. If we can't work this out in a dignified way, the post's that up for grabs, what

kind of hope are we giving to those countries that want to share our values?” A few seconds later, another character takes a deep breath and butts in, “Last great democracy! That's got to be a fucking joke!” and Kevin Spacey just lets off a long sigh, trapped between sarcasm and helplessness. Thousands of African-Americans were disenfranchised in the name of weird confusions, their names and surnames mixed up with those of criminals. Nothing mattered. The nuke option unleashed its fallout over new Hiroshima and Nagasaki scenarios. By sitting a new ignorant on the presidential saddle, whose foolishness level is directly proportional to his belligerence degree, a young culture with a longing for globalization would wage new economic wars under the naïve pretext of spreading freedom in pursuit of currency leverage and the oil stashed in the outskirts.

Eight years of crassness was the price to pay for such a Bushist adventure, thanks to the rapture of a President who used to mix up an ethnic group with a rock band. That man was the king of the world. But the fact of the matter is that eight years later, the show is running on empty and it's no longer doling out the economic warranties that matter so much to the country of fast food and Julia Roberts' stardom. And hope peeks in, the Democrats win without the need of mechanical or hand counts. In a promising speech in which the “Yes, we can” chant reminds vaguely yet encouraging Cuba's “*Sí se puede*” –the antipodes agree- the black President asserts that only in America a black man could reach the presidency and fulfill the country's dreams. The new democracy is born out the same hegemony's arrogance, yet it's feasible to think he'll try to make many of those dreams come true. The question then is, will all those citizens who loved Bush let him do so because “finally we have a President who represents us and stands up for us in the international arena?” Could that black guy in the throne fulfill the dreams of millions of immigrants that one day founded a country and today suffer from it, as ironically portrayed in Martin Scorsese's flick *Gangs of New York*? Will the globalization project take a spin to shut off the economy and the martial, and zero in indeed on a possible encounter of subjectivities?

This is no doubt the story of a young people. That is, there's no need to turn to other peoples with the alibi of the most resounding social and economic backwardness to take a firsthand look at the tragicomedy of a young people. But if we stroll around other nations and visit museums, galleries, art halls, we'll surely find an odd persistence of the memory. The young people forget about oblivion and anchor themselves, as if it were for good, on the soothing shelves of memory. Snug wardrobes. Things are stored and prayed for there; things are founded and forged there everyday. The young people define and deny themselves everyday. Twenty four hours later, after all, redefinition will set in. The young people suffer from identity anxiety, from self-recognition in uppercased History that by definition is expressed as hunger: voracity for defining everything, for outlining everything, for making whatever roams and flies like tulle tangible.

The young people need to feed on themselves, to know with accuracy, to rub the intangible, to dominate reason and deploy virtue in the mirror. The young people never quench their appetite for definition, an ancestral hunger –ancestral within their own youth- in terms of identity, that modern concept that attempts to shape the face right there where the complex verges on the rhizomatous, in those things that never subside, that definition never tracks down and grabs. In installations, object variations, paintings, photographs, performances, drawings, addresses, the young people pin their hopes of perpetuation on puns. The young people ante up everything they have in every effort, they go the

extra mile from the word go. That's why the transcendentalist eagerness of the art that floods –and this is an accurate idea: the art that floods- is capable on several occasions of wanting everything, saying everything, grabbing and grappling with everything in only one artwork. Pictures that try to be the datum of a memoir or all-out narration, installations that aspire to reorder the world in the same way objects are arranged in space, cosmic –and comic- paintings in which logos get as thick as pastes. Burned pictures, bone traits, sprinkles and provocation, defiance all at once. Hotheadedness. In a typical young people, it's possible, for instance, to engage in an angry discussion for hours about the boundaries of video art.

That's typical of a young people: hunger for identity is expressed in the hunger for definition, but the hunger for definition is expressed in the thirst for labeling. Even when the video art of the maestros –not today's- used to contemplate morphological variations: visual experimentation on electronic images, video installation of even the urban environment, an acting on tape, a performance in which the environment may act either as a register or as a rewriting, etc., today it still takes long hours to discuss about the labeling boundaries of video art. An ideal speech right there where substance leaks out and matter flees. If we know that in contemporary art the boundaries, the limits, the genres are nothing but slippery conventions at the mercy of a clear-cut principle: the solidity of the idea to put across and the suitability of the media that have been called on to convey it –no matter the nature of those media- are all the matter. Oh, no, it's important to classify, subdivide, delimit, rule out, echelon. The modern accent doing its stuff over the sliding plasma of the postmodern: the eagerness of transcendence. All this much is wielded in the name of a word that has acquired a gallows look: rigor. How many crimes are committed based on this aspiration? What the hell is rigor outside the ability to understand the complexity and the endless variations of the phenomena? Every time a finger is raised in the name of rigor, knowledge trembles. Every time a school-teacher with a flair for national pedagogue shows up, illusion quivers. Soliloquies, people who need a public of dilettantes ready to clap their hands. Hunger. A hunger that supports everything and argues everything in the name of rigor, the definition, the identity. Oh, the young peoples.

The young people's yearning for rigor prefers erudition to culture. We all know the basic difference between the two of them lies in the fact that the former accumulates knowledge, while the latter knows what to do with it. The young people's rigor battles unflinchingly to "be in the know." Being in the know means fall into a repetitious merry-go-round of categories and notions established by the mainstream centers. If someone form the young outskirts comes up with a notion, he or she is taken down as a lunatic, misinformed, cock-and-bull story buff because that concept is construed differently somewhere else. The young individual is doomed to repeat time and again, like a puppet that plays its role, the thoughts hailing from faraway lands, which are more validated by tradition.

The folklorist approach and the landscape of a vanity fair and phony humbleness do not stem exclusively from the young people. In the film *Eight*, in which that same amount of moviemakers hope to turn into fiction the eight development lines –better yet survival lines- established by the UN before the indecency of barbarism in the non-lives of the periphery, fiction short-length films that are nothing but naïve pamphlets coming from a tender pedagogy, Wim Wnders broaches an esthetic and aberrantly esthetic idea of a bunch of Africans jumping out of the computer screens to remind both mass media editors and tycoons of the pertinence of

private and partial financial credits in order to slash malnutrition and unhealthiness, the lack of protection for those living on the edge. Let's see: if a millionaire gives 200 bucks to the Nigerian black woman, she could work out the continuity of her life for one month. The end is ironically gripping: order is restored and the makers of realities in the mass media keep the show (their slack attitude) on the road as if nothing had happened.

In the meantime, new breeds of creators are rising here and there, young people who don't give a damn for where the convention begins and where it ends, or for the consensus on video art; people who don't believe in burned pictures, nor in the bone traits or the footsteps of the ancestors, people who don't believe in the life-forgiving indulgence of the kindhearted executive. They listen to an echo, retake that echo, yet they are aware that it's nothing but an echo. For the time being, they work, register, create, think their own world without so much enthusiasm to build on each word, each gesture, each item. America must trust in those youngsters who break away from the standstill of centuries-old resonances and rush to do their own stuff outside the planetariums and the teachers' guidelines, outside the handbooks and the precepts.

Unless we notice one fine day how these youngsters of today also start listening to voices coming from everywhere, hard echoes that resound in their ears, and they also begin to raise a finger, to gauge creation, to draw limits. The young peoples live running in circles. How can it be possible to escape the waterwheel in the days when the last democracy believes it could have realized itself and when the years to come must undertake the twisting of the speech into sharp and resounding reality, not just into the mere overblown reality of the mass media?

Will there be in America a way to skew the dynamics of the cycles and run away from the dictatorship of definition?

Rufo Caballero (Cuba). Doctor of Art Sciences and Art Critic



KADIR LOPEZ NIEVES
Esso, 2008
 Mixed technique on metal 100 x 150 cm

Heading illustration / ARES



The Yellow Submarine, 2008. Watercolor on paper, 76 x 112 cm

Reinerio TAMAYO

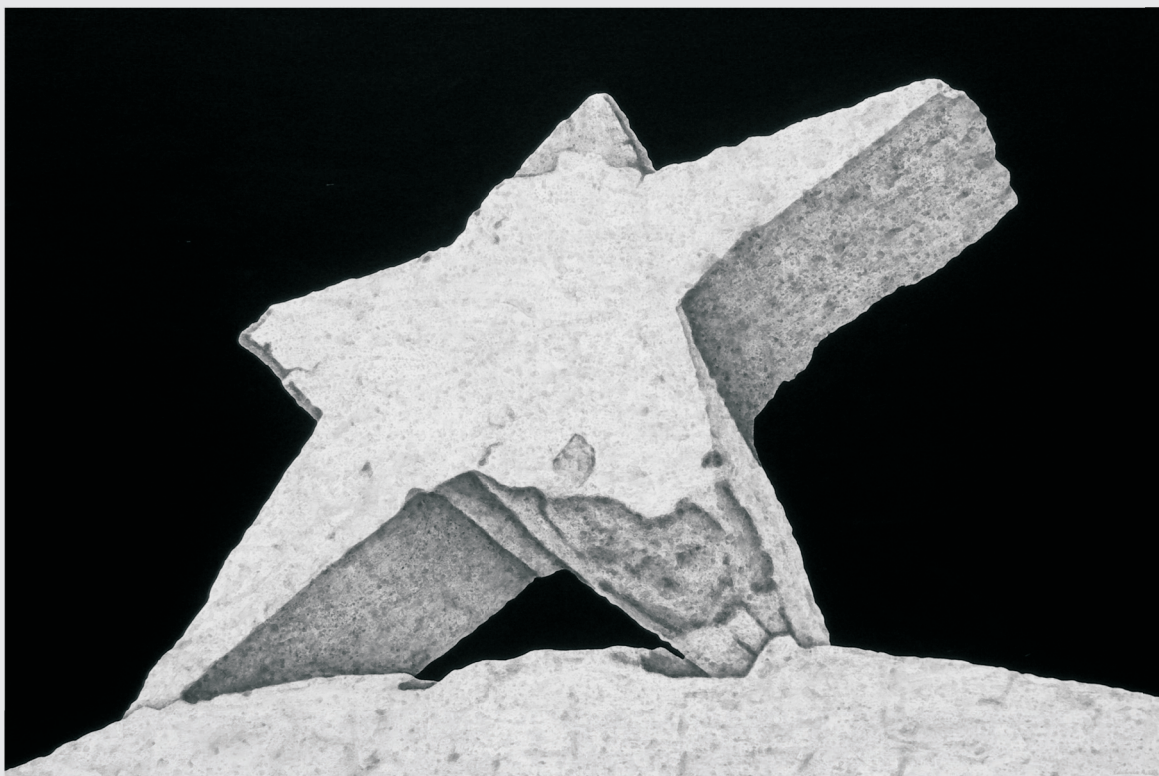
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EDUARDO RUBÉN eruben@cubarte.cult.cu



Trekking Star II, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 150 cm



ARTURO MONTOTO



The Tobacco Path, 2008
Oil on linen, 120 x 150 cm

www.arturomontoto.com • info@arturomontoto.com • montoto@cubarte.cult.cu

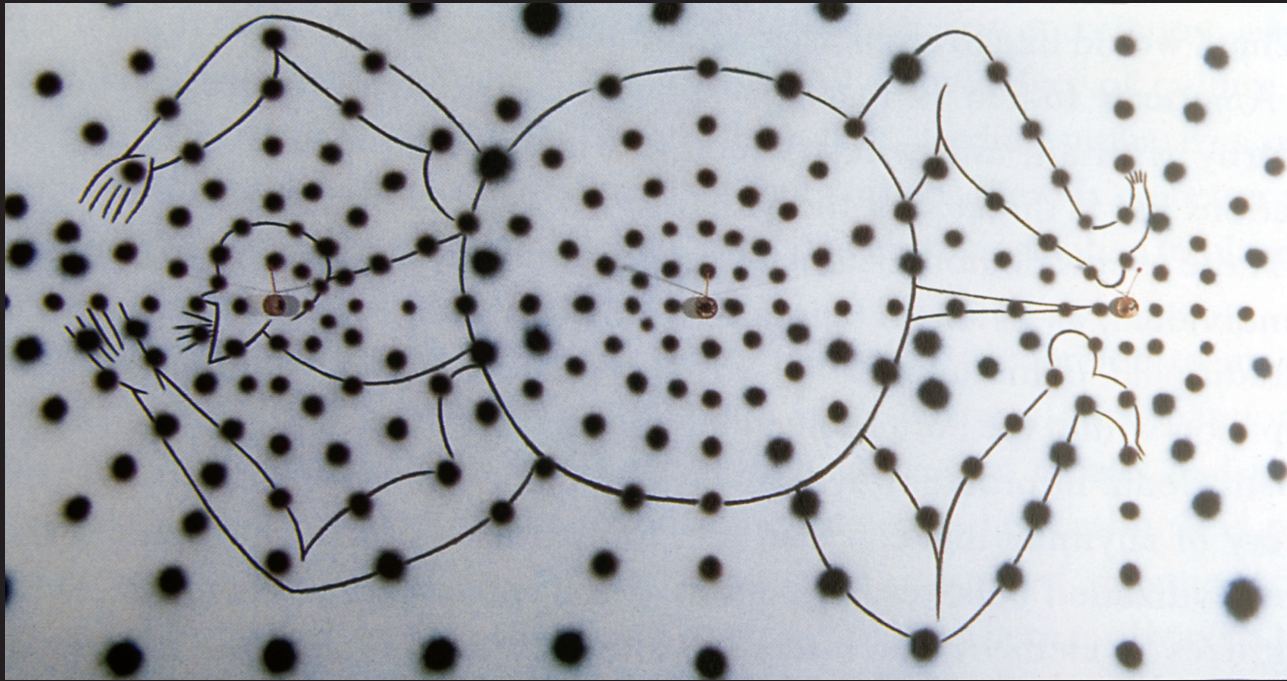
EXHIBITIONS 2009

JUAN CARLOS ALOM
SANDRA RAMOS
RENÉ FRANCISCO
ÁNGEL RICARDO RÍOS
SANTIAGO RODRÍGUEZ OLAZABAL
DANIA FLEITES
ALEXANDER ARRECHEA (JACA)
LUIS ENRIQUE CAMEJO
EDUARDO ABELA



G A L E R Í A
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José Bedia:

OUR OBLIGATION OF GOING CROSS-CULTURAL

ORLANDO
HERNÁNDEZ

JOSE BEDIA HAS NEVER BEEN PROPERLY AN ARTIST. HE'S never wanted to be. Either way, he's always been trying to avoid it, to escape from art just like any hounded animal in peril would do. Just as much as one of those deer or foxes splayed in his paintings that find themselves trapped inside the modern city's maze, cornered by ruthless hunters, pushed away from their natural environments by the technological invasion and only showing their wild animal character through harsh howls or leaving their tooth marks on their pursuers' necks. Because Art –let's now call it by its big name, with a capital A– is what has always tracked down and boxed in other objects and cultural and esthetic practices, and at the same time has rejected and excluded quite an assortment of creators. I'm well aware of the fact that an accusation like this is going to take lots of arguments. But before carrying on, I'd like to point out that among the visual artists I know, Jose Bedia has been one of the few –and maybe one of the first ones, too– to figure out this exact danger and come up with a serious and responsible methodology to fight it back.

The Slow Spreading of Sound, 1992
Very short Story of the Destruction of the Indies, Carrillo Gil, México

Unlike artists whose esthetics have been more or less centripetal –that is, art-centric, directed toward the historic vortex of the Western culture– Jose Bedia’s has proved to be, on the contrary, completely fugitive and centrifugal. And since this centrifugal trend can only be pushed to the edges, toward the margins, his esthetics has always pointed to the so-called –from the center– peripheral cultures that, in our particular case as Cuban, Caribbean and Latin American, might as well be called “our cultures.” And even though it’s true that a good deal of what we call our cultures has long belonged to the modern West, another part of it has refused to enter that realm. Their ties to that modern West are barely slight, ornamental and external. And it’s above all that resistant, stubborn, nonnegotiable part of our cultures what this article is referred to. And what of those parts has Bedia’s esthetics focused on? Probably on all of them, but mainly on those hailing from Africa and America. As far as America is concerned, there’s no need to make a distinction among the North, Central or South, with the Caribbean floating in the middle like somewhat autonomous or independent fragments –the way nationalism’s political geography has taught us to look at them. Aside from their undisputed local particularities, there’s a sort of common denominator among all of them that allows for comprehension of them as a whole. Anyone might think that common denominator has to do with such issues as magic, religion or cosmos-centric visions that many of these cultures share, or with the respectful and harmonious character of their approach to nature, or with a particular thinking –and language– of mythical and symbolic character that differs from the logical and rational ones that prevail in the Western and westernized modern cultures. All this much is true. Yet it provides us with an incomplete, insufficient vision of the phenomenon. A vision that tends to be idyllic, non-problematic and therefore discreetly misleading. The joy of discovering and making visible equivalents, kinships or “family resemblances” among elements from these cultures, sometimes geographically distant –which has been one of Jose Bedia’s great artistic and intellectual

achievements– could be involuntarily covering up other truths; somewhat bitter and painful truths.

In our judgment, this “grand unit” lies mostly in the fact that these cultures are the results of the same colonial ruling process. These are the cultures that the European capitalism first and the U.S. capitalism later have been building step by step since 1492 by destroying or altering their original structures, and that the disciplines that got involved in spreading those cultures, their interpretation and study afterwards have called with different names, most of the time accepting denominations hailing from the vocabulary of missionaries, colonizers, slavers and more recently ethnologists and anthropologists: “wild”, “primitive”, “tribal”, “aboriginal”, “original”, “ethnic”, “traditional”, “pre-modern” cultures; and in other cases as “popular”, “indigenous”, “African-American.” The list of those denominations has been long and keeps growing, but each and every one of them has pursued the main goal of telling these cultures apart from those that have always been conceived as the one and only Culture and that today runs by the inaccurate moniker of global culture. The point is these other cultures have been and still are being construed not only as different, but also as inferior, shortfall-laden and lagging way behind when stacked up against the apparently higher ones that have empowered themselves with the authority of giving the others as many names as they see fit. It was not enough –it couldn’t be– to simply call them by their own names: Huichol, Aimara, Quechua, Shipibo, Uitoto, Cashinahua, Lakota, Yoruba, Bakongo, because there was widespread uncertainty not only on whether these societies had a culture, an art, a science or a philosophy of their own, but rather if they were human beings after all entitled to hold such an important nominal insignia. Instead of giving them proper nouns, they received generic tags or imaginative ethnic names that still make the rounds without further academic comments in the scholastic world, let alone the dishonor of being labeled as “black” cultures, a term that was applied to the undifferentiated cluster of African Sub-Saharan cultures, though many of their

members were brought as slaves to the American colonies. The sad part in all this, the inadmissible thing indeed, is that a large chunk of these allegedly scientific conceptions and terminologies still remain in place and continue to uphold those old doubts and scornfulness, even serving efficiently as the very discriminatory and exclusion tools that have been in use over the past five hundred years. Jose Bedia’s artistic work cannot be comprehended –it shouldn’t be– away or separated from this situation of cultural conflict that has been sketched out here.

Maybe it’ll be worthwhile to go over this situation briefly. The Art that Bedia has been trying to flee from and that we have generically labeled as something dangerous or threatening, has always been conceived as an autonomous product or self-generated by the “cultivated” European society of the Renaissance, a commodity that all “discovered” and colonized societies presumably lacked. This is the part of the history –or the myth– that we all have learned and that we’re perhaps bound to unlearn. This alleged absence of true art –as a true science or a true religion– has been and continues to be one of the many demonstrative arguments of the inferiority of the colonized peoples, an assumption that has permitted the justification of old and new cruelties and impositions in the name of progress, civilization and modernity.¹

Indeed, the Western art is not an intrinsically European product inherited from the classic Greece, but rather a consequence of a long confrontation between certain esthetic practices within the European society’s homogeneous sector and all the cultural, esthetic, symbolic and magical practices that belonged to those societies that Europe

¹ On the collection of problems related to the Modernity/Colonization/Decolonization topic, turn to texts by Argentinean-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, and Argentinean-American cultural theoretician Walter Mignolo, as well as to scholars Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfogel, Edgardo Lander, among others, who even though they don’t address the esthetic issue particularly, they do provide a very coherent and updated theoretical panorama about these issues in Latin America.



was discovering and naming along the way as part of its colonial campaign. In this sense, art is not much of a new object in the human being's horizon of material and spiritual creation, but quite the end result of that conceptual, ideological, philosophical struggle for power, for supremacy, for hegemony that Europe had already attained in the military and economic fields, and that needed to be successfully extended onto the esthetic, religious and scientific fields. No less just another way of setting up echelons that could make a difference. In the field of visual creations, this rift pitted canvas painting against body paints; marble or bronze sculptures against woodcarvings and

works made with feathers or beads; the "eternal" against the "ephemeral"; the "beautiful" against the merely "useful"; the "individual genius" against the simple "anonymous" skill of the "community" or the collective individualities. This squabble also found a battlefield in the creative expressions of popular or lower sectors within the very European society. Its greatest achievement –still imagined as provisional- was the cleaving of that great gap between Art on the one hand, and "craftworks" on the other hand. The collection of these exclusions grew to become a universal taxonomic truth with the emergence of known disciplines as Aesthetics, Art History and Art Criticism in the late

18th century, that eventually wound up putting Western art on the pinnacle of all esthetical practices. This unjust hierarchical division has clung to almost the same dogmatic unyielding attitude of the early going, as a majority of today's cultural and educational institutions –museums, colleges, publishing houses and so forth- continues stressing and reproducing it unwaveringly, even in our own countries.

In our opinion –far more than inside the course of art history with its sequence of trends, currents, styles and fashions- Jose Bedia's works must be placed right in the middle of this five-century-old intercultural conflict or





Nayery, 2004
Acrylic on cloth, 18,5 x 90 cm
Coll. Orlando Hernandez

THROUGH HIS WORK, JOSE BEDIA HAS DENIED THAT FALSELY LAYERED, PROGRESSIVE TREND OF THE WESTERN ART, EVEN FOREWARNING ABOUT ITS RECKLESS DISREGARDS, OMISSIONS, EXCLUSIONS AND CULPABILITIES

Munanseke Bacheche, 2004
Acrylic on cloth, 18,5 x 90 cm
Coll. Orlando Hernandez



civilization clash. And not exactly with one foot on each side of the fence –as many people might usually think- but standing with both feet on only one side. Lessening or downplaying Bedia's well-defined leaning to the lower pole, the popular, traditional and indigenous side –you name it- based on the argument of his professional formation, educated as an artist in the modern Western tradition or pointing at his use of undisputedly artistic materials and techniques –painting on canvas and others- or his relationship with art-oriented institutions like galleries and museums, is a bad case of confusion and distortion of things. For over 30 years, Bedia has been moving –so to speak- with might and main on the op-

posite side of the Western art's historic path that, as we know all along, has been or has tried to keep a steady rectilinear movement teeming with cracks and detours, yet allegedly progressive and upward. Through his work, Jose Bedia has denied that falsely layered, progressive trend of the Western art, even forewarning about its reckless disregards, omissions, exclusions and culpabilities. That's why whenever he's been able to, he's tried to put art at his back, in the rear, letting it lag into a long shadow –so unfortunately inevitable- that stands behind its fast-racing character. We know for sure that artists hardly ever escape from art; they go after it instead, they worship it and serve it. As a last resort, they attempt

to transform it, breach one of its old-timed rules to make it move ahead, to “streamline” it, though I don’t believe that’s been his true intention after all. In the strict sense of the word, it’s not the traditional Western art what his works have tried to drive, promote and enlarge, but his many cultural and esthetical practices that cater to ways of living and thinking quite different to those that Western modernity has intended to entrench as “the right thing to do” for all societies around the globe. However, in this course of action, Jose Bedia has been obliged to turn to the language of art as just another resource or technology. This is not about throwing the art away, but rather taking that high echelon down a couple of pegs. Our failure to include in the artistic realm those esthetic practices that some people call “interwoven” (Estela Ocampo)² for being jam-packed not only with esthetic contents, but also with cosmological, sacred and utilitarian matters, or our doing so in a metaphorical and condescending way, reflects quite well the miserable state of the issue. But truth is that when it comes to Western art, Bedia’s stance has been deliberately dissident, rebellious and subversive.

Nevertheless, Bedia has not exactly been a revolutionary –as someone might call a modernist or an avant-garde artist- but rather a very rare spe-

cies of retrograde, a traditionalist. And that calls for an immediate explanation to prevent anybody from making an interpretation of something negative or even reactionary. Even though his works makes a beeline into the future, the fact of the matter is that Jose Bedia has spent most of his life looking back, looking to the past, to traditions as old as the hills, traditions that still have a lot of contributions to make to our unbalanced and incomplete contemporariness. Or just to be more exact, looking back and to the sides since a great amount of that past is still a part of the present for many a society. In keeping with his confession, his entire work has been an attempt to pick up the pieces of those destructions and oversights that have fallen by the wayside in an effort to out put them all back together, as if it were a huge jigsaw, and come up with the new, recycled image of wisdom, creativity and beauty of all those peoples and cultures.³ Saying so, his esthetics could be graphically summed up by one of the best-known symbols (adin-kras) from the Akan culture –Ghana’s Ashanti population- that represents a bird called sankofa that looks back as it flies straight ahead. This summarizes the respect that, in our course down the life, all of us must proffer for the past, for the work of our ancestors. A past, also to put it this way, which is definitely selective because we’re not

THE ART ALWAYS ENDS UP FIGHTING BACK AGGRESSIONS AND DISCONFORMITIES, TURNING THEM INTO POWERFUL ANTIBODIES. ALL MODERN WESTERN CULTURE –AND THE ART AS ONE OF ITS BEST FINISHED FORMS- HAS BEEN SHORED UP BY THIS SMART DEFENSE MECHANISM

² Estela Ocampo: Apollo and the Mask. Western Esthetic versus Other Cultures’ Artistic Practices, Icaria editorial, Barcelona, 1984.

Open Nkuto (Your eyes) Young Man, 1989
Riverside Studios, London, England

³ Jose Bedia: *Oral history interview with Jose Bedia*, by Juan Martinez, February 13, 1998. Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Bedia in Yarinacocha, Pucallpa, Peru,
Photo by O.H.





the children of “anybody” or of “everybody”, but of a particular family, a particular people and a particular culture. In the case of Bedia, we know too well who are part of his lineage and who the true defaulters really are.

Not even at the onset of his career – it commenced by fits and starts as he thought it was something else- Bedia stopped standing up for himself, resisting, being unfriendly, slippery and unsociable with respect to the “spectacle” of the Western culture, the Western art. We might say he always preferred the “pre-modern” staged from the West, the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age when the West wasn’t yet the West, and Europe wasn’t yet Europe. Since then, he’s been involved in a never-ending scrambling for sloughing off the privileged condition of a creator of “artworks,” a role model he’s never been completely

at ease with. That explains why his attitude toward many artistic trends and schools, either ancient or modern, as well as toward their most celebrated leading artists and masters, has been very moderate, sometimes distrustful and many times radically sullen and scornful. It was not that he tried to be a crackpot or an iconoclast –the overall attitude of many avant-gardes whose many negations and destructions have generally offered nothing better than the negated and destroyed object- but chiefly for some kind of grudge, anger, resentment that cannot be explained solely from an esthetic perspective. The reasons behind his rejection have always been far broader, much deeper because those have been historic, ethical, philosophical, political and, also, esthetic reasons.

In one of Bedia’s early statements –I never stop quoting it- he insisted in la-

beling himself as an artist of Western formation who consciously and voluntarily lets himself get carried away with the “autochthonous”, original, primary –as Robert Farris Thompson calls them- cultures, letting them in addition bring about a cross-cultural change in him. We must notice this is a radical reversal in the traditional course we have always understood these cross-cultural processes. A personal attitude, by the way, pretty close to the one that triggered the ethno-genetic mutation in Spanish sailor Gonzalo Guerrero in the 16th century, who eventually became a full-fledged member of the Mayan civilization, as accounted for by Chilean sage Alejandro Lipschutz.⁴ Bedia’s idea, however, is not to propose an abrupt return to the pre-Arcadia, nor to achieve the ridiculous status of a good Rousseanian wild savage because those two words –wild and savage- are the ones Bedia has been denying, criti-

cizing and questioning, but simply a chance to experiment at a personal, subjective, psychological and also corporal and sensorial level, as both a creator and an artist, all those things that were unfairly disqualified and ruled out by the West. I guess this self-decolonizing attitude that Bedia has been developing in a natural manner, on his own, could play a major role in the esthetic thinking of Latin America, Africa and Asia, let alone quite a good lesson for European and North American creators to cash in on. Indeed, I've never read a more lucid and well-contextualized statement on the necessary decolonization process of our thinking, our preferences, our knowledge and disciplines which, as we all know, are still spoiled by Euro-centrism.

One of the most useful stances in this decolonization, de-westernization or de-modernization process Jose Bedia's work can be inscribed in has been his personal involvement in what I would qualify *Unitarian cultural experiences*, usually linked to rituals and collective festivities, but also to an endless array of activities and daily occupations so commonplace to our indigenous, popular, traditional societies in which, as we also know by now, there's no such thing as fragmentation or hierarchical differentiation of knowledge and learning about the world that marked today's West. And in which "nature" and "culture", for instance, are not conceived as separate and independent worlds. As part of this vast learning process or cross-cultural training, Bedia has signed up for a long list of experiences and his artistic work is full of firsthand testimonies.

I've always thought that Bedia should write or speak more frequently about these personal experiences as a major part of his own artistic project and without taking the chance of being charged with didacticism. He must make more explicit the genuine character of his relationship with the members of those societies and cultural groups, with the individuals, with their places, with their stories, their objects, their rituals because in many cases these relationships have hinged more on direct friendship, trustiness, familiarity or ritual commitment, rather than on book-



Ox on the Loose, 2004
Mixed technique on wall, variable sizes
Coll. Bedia Family

⁴ Alejandro Lipschutz: *A profile of Indo America in our times, Anthology, 1937-1962*, Ciencias Sociales Publishing House, Cuba's Book, Institute, Havana, 1972, pages 229-251.

ish approximations. He must also make far more visible –and intelligible- the ways whereby these approaches have been transforming his own conception of the world, his knowledge system, his creative methods, his thoughts, his feelings. Regardless of what the modern West mentality has tried to come by in terms of disciplines and learning –unfortunately artistic and literary creation has never been totally considered a part of that learning process- artists are also makers of knowledge, theories and not just “hands that paint” or make objects. I believe that by leaving his theories exclusively in the hands of “visualization”, of “objectivity,” that is, an artistic work, Bedia is running the risk of losing control on the meaningfulness and general intension of his work. Thus, he lets it all at the mercy of what critics, curators and interpreters can dig out, and they not always count on all the information required. We can also make them take a detour or make them see what’s in our best interests.

The important thing, however, is that this esthetic, epistemological, ethical and political position by Jose Bedia has dragged us little by little into the need of going cross-cultural and doing it in that same “reversal” course. His work has helped us shake off quite a number of Western –colonial- heavy burdens that used to blur our way of seeing, thinking, assessing esthetic practices –that we had not only taken down as normal, natural ways, but also the higher forms- and incorporating judgments and sensitivity elements that always belonged to us and had been purposively ignored, scuffed out, and chucked out. Unlike many other Latin American artists and from other colonial regions, his artistic program has not only added thematic references or symbolic allusions –the most sought-after resources from the still unclosing times of the picturesque “localists” that abound in “indigenism” and “Afrogrism”- but it has respectfully acquired creative methodologies, techniques, materials, supports, formats, all of them in charge of bringing on profound cultural meanings capable of expressing all by themselves a wide array of historic, cosmological, philosophical, ritual knowledge. Thus through his works, Jose Bedia has exerted a tre-

mendous pressure on those disciplines aimed at studying art –especially art criticism- forcing them to steer away from their old orthodoxy and become affiliates of Anthropology or those new branches called Aesthetic Anthropology and Transcultural Aesthetics, which in turn can be considered –in the face of the absence of the inevitable forms of knowledge that should arise from our own cultural systems that have broken free from Euro-centrism- a great step forward as compared to the superficial, scornful or condescending heed that Art History, Art Criticism and Aesthetics have always paid to these matters. All of us who have had something to do with Bedia, with the study of his work and with some of those experiences must be grateful for these benefits.

But let’s be sincere. Though Jose Bedia has never been what we properly call an artist, he’s never ceased being one either. Luckily for some or unfortunately in our own view, his effort has been to no avail. Up to now, he hasn’t made it. Following many years of wise maneuvering and extremely subtle skirmishes, all of his attempts for being recognized something other than an *artist* in the westernized sense of the word have backfired. Jose Bedia has panned out to be one of the most important artists in Cuba and Latin America. Thus, Art has proved to be twice as much stronger. Just like those malign cells that can modify their own genetic blueprint when threatened by a particular medication, like antibiotics, and merge into their own receptive organism in a bid to find shelter and preserve their integrity, the Art always ends up fighting back aggressions and disconformities, turning them into powerful antibodies. All modern Western culture –and the Art as one of its best finished forms- has been shored up by this smart defense mechanism, but let’s not forget that they have also relied on an ample variety of offensive mechanisms to clinch their continuity and supremacy, as anyone interested in colonialism studies might find out.

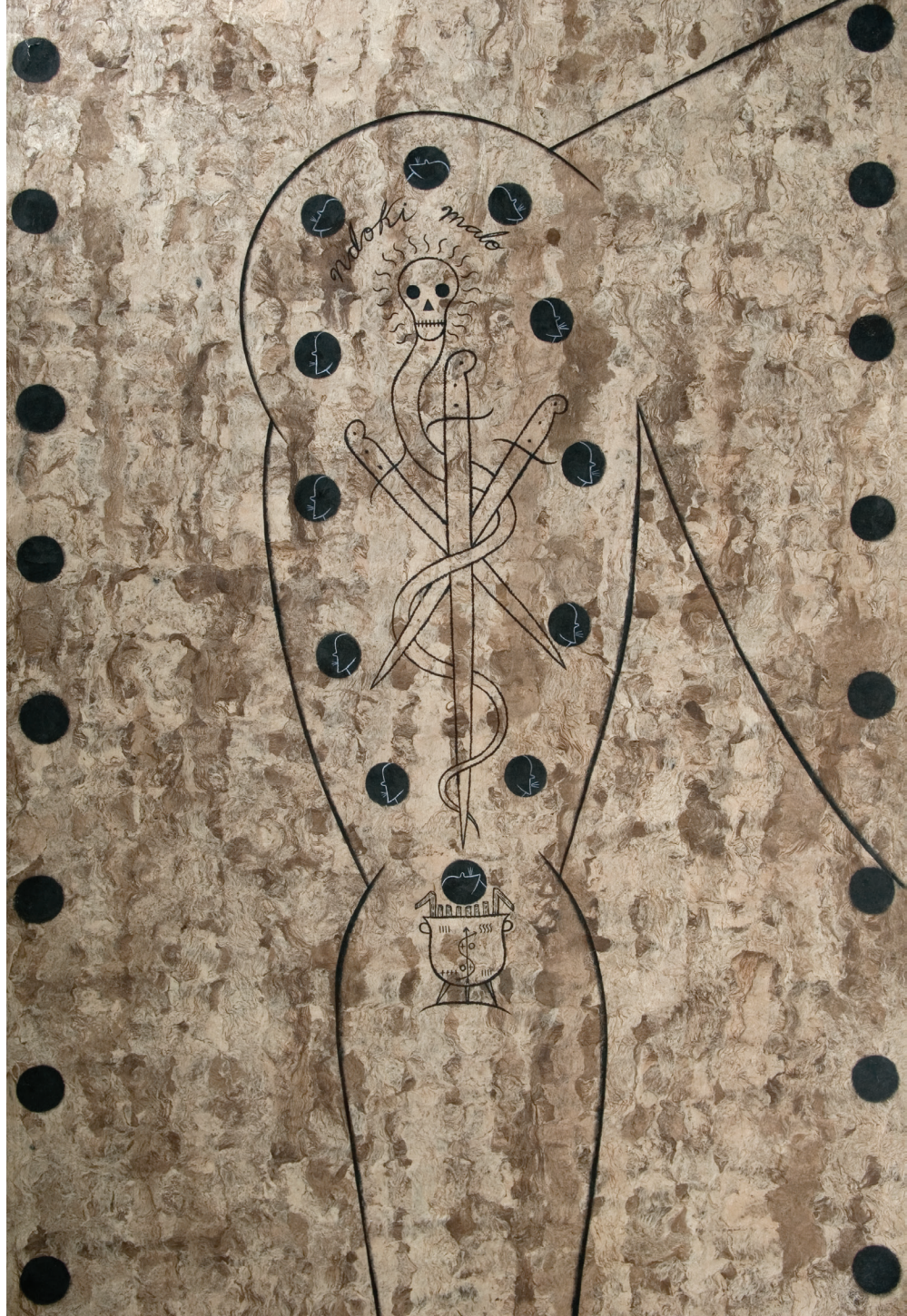
This kind of two-pronged condition – imposed membership on one hand and desired non-membership on the other hand- has probably dragged the creator into a conflictive situation that has al-

ways remained discreetly under wraps, but it’s no secret to anybody. For many years, Bedia has found himself in a nagging, perhaps dramatic crossroad that has been the result of this bifurcation or Catch-22 between his most profound ethical, esthetic and cultural ideals and the real destiny of this work inside the capitalist market. The market has given him, of course, a number of material or economic rewards, and has indirectly helped put his artworks on the world map, as well as the contents they convey. But it has also barred –or helped to bar- those ideals from being a part of or interacting within a more tangible, more specific cultural project. I think Jose Bedia lives –though he sometimes tries to forget about it- under tremendous spiritual strain. On the one hand, the profane, materialistic, practical side: he’s a successful contemporary artist who sells his artworks in the market –it’s worth underscoring that he has never turned down the traditional barter deals, the gifts, the trading or payments in kind. But on the other hand, he’s the same person who makes those artworks for a very different purpose: to learn, to transform, to try to become someone who’s spiritually a better person. The capitalist art market has unavoidably pushed Bedia’s work away from its “natural” recipients, those for whom his messages could turn out to be useful, those who can generate or drum up profound, positive shakeups. And I’m not only talking about his separation from Cuba, where his works have barely been watched, but also in general about his disconnection from the cultural environments he’s been touching base with and for whose members his artworks are nearly nonexistent, especially because they are a part of that system of galleries, museums and marketplaces they can’t have access to or because those are simply circuits they are either not used to or don’t know a thing about them. Suffice it to say that this mostly elitist circulation is something quite consubstantial to the art system, but in the case of Bedia, the consequences of this lack of communication are far more regrettable. Since he’s at the mercy of these mechanisms, his extraordinary work targets a “global” public or that rare “tribe” or cultural community formed

Ndoki Malo, 1991, acrylic on matte paper
242 x 120 cm, Coll. Orlando Hernandez

by collectors, curators, critics, scholars, the other artists who even though they can honestly become interested in trying to comprehend and decipher many of his contents, as well as revel in their beauty, there might be times when they are exclusively interested in the value of the “investment” or the object of intellectual speculation his work guarantees. It’s even possible that this breed of spectators and consumers could also ignore, undervalue or rebuff these cultures and, at the same time, their legitimate creators. This could be one of the perils we mentioned at the top of this article. But it’s not the only one.

Every time Bedia deploys his skills as an artist and through the quality of his work, he moves up “higher” in the Western art’s social and cultural ladder as his cross-cultural esthetic, his other esthetics –ours- weakens. Every time his works unwittingly encourage the exotic passion for the “indigenous”, the “African”, the “African-Cuban”, the “magic”, the “ritual”, allowing such elements to be construed –or misconstrued- as ethnographic curiosities, that is, not only different but also lower cultural elements –and probably not even ethnographic- his positive esthetic intention wanes and loses its zip. Every time Bedia splays in his works all that wealth of knowledge and those traditional cultural and esthetic experienc-



es, he’s involuntarily playing ball with the artificial reanimation of the Western art, with its symbolic resuscitation and making its weakness with respect to the vitality and coherence of these non-Western esthetic practices his artworks started from less notorious.

Either way, what actually allows Bedia to stick to his positive and upbeat spirit, regardless of those conflicts and dilemmas, is the confidence that one day we’ll stop being the Others to become the Us. Not to become the new owners of the Center, but rather to win back at

least the space we deservedly belong to within the endless assortment of world cultures. In this effort, Bedia’s work must be seen as an advanced, premature species of the arts that will surely be able to make the memberships of those societies and cultural groups that we now call –as if they belonged to a different world separated from ours- indigenous, native, vernacular, popular, traditional, and whose alleged “immobility” and “traditionalism” we have also helped feed with our overblown interest in esthetics, with our “ethnographic,” “folkloric” intrusions and

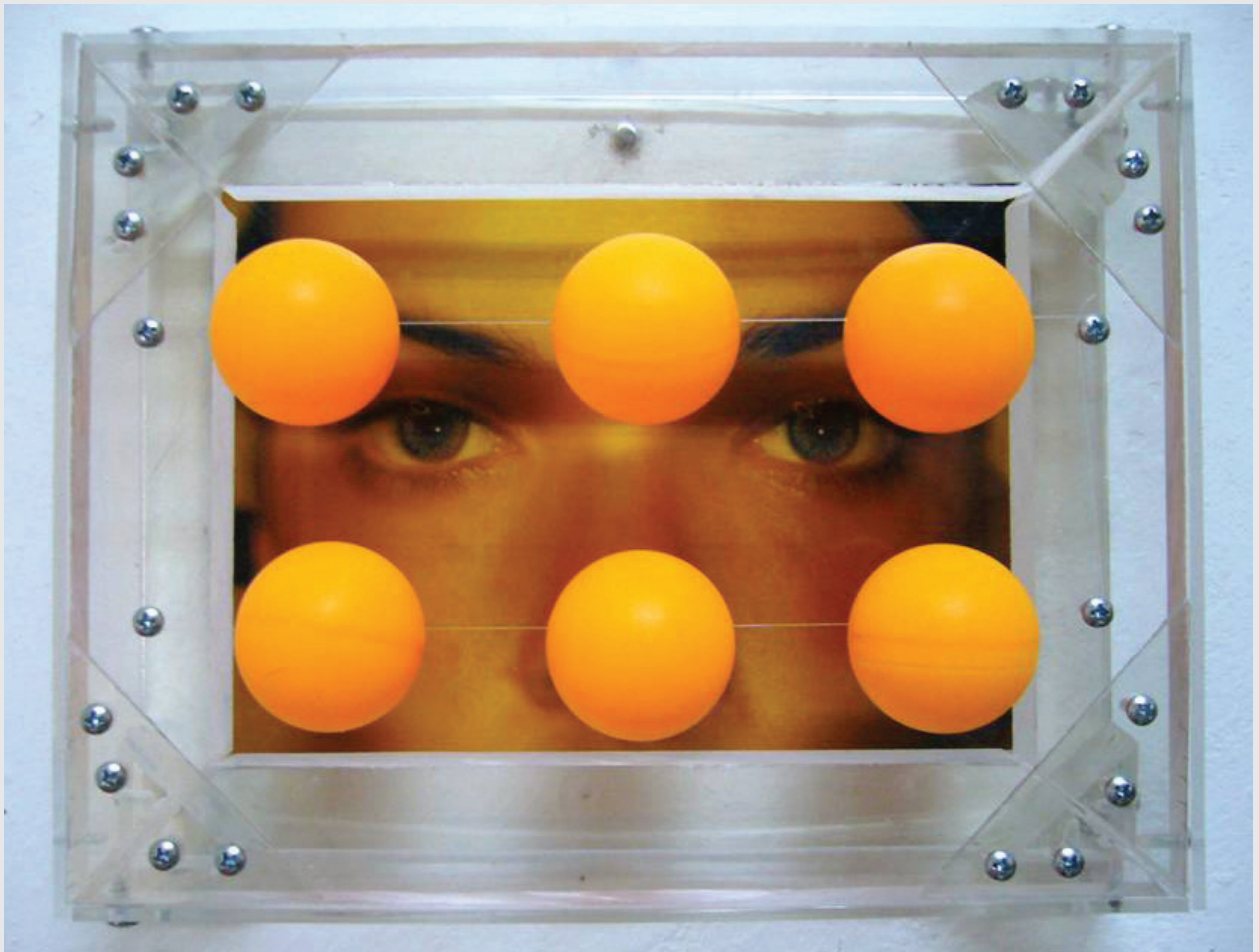
interferences. And that in the face of their threat we have probably reacted in a pretended, subsided way, behaving in unnecessarily conservative, protectionist, stereotypical and opportunistic ways before the monetary incentives coming from the tourist market. In the best-case scenario, these intrusions have hampered or held back the development of our own modernity –they were not exactly needed- by introducing perhaps undesired changes and modifications. Maybe this explains why I like to imagine Bedia's work not only as the product of an individual, the upshot of an individual subjectivity, of a contemporary artist, but the work of an advanced member of this cross-cultural society of the future that many of us picture in our minds completely decheloned, egalitarian and with great respect for differences.

Havana, November 2008.



Fire Spirit, 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, coll. Orlando Hernandez

MABEL POBLET



Not everything we see is real, 2006, Mixed technique, installation, 25 x 19 X 6 cm

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RUFO CABALLERO'S
EXPIATION WATERS

Rafael Acosta de Arriba

*Thinking feels a kind of fruition
very similar to that of loving
when it touches the naked
body of an idea.*

ORTEGA Y GASSET

Many a work has been written and published about the Cuban art of recent years, so many that it seems as if the great boom that our artistic creation enjoyed all throughout the 1990s were still alive and kicking. Nonetheless, after the effervescence ebbed away and the thrill of the Cuban art died down in all major international artistic circles, it appears so curious –better yet welcome- to see in Cuba quite an increase in the publication of researches, studies and critical approaches on this issue.

Here comes now *Holy Water: Review of Cuban Art (1987-2007)* by Rufo Caballero, an author with a dozen books written over the past 15 years, a college professor and one of the most recognized critics on the turf and overseas in topics that range from the visual arts to films and contemporary culture in the broadest sense of the word.

Thinking of art is the heart of the matter in this book, a com-

pilation of essays published – all of them but three have been put out- in specialized magazines, plus a number of major awards and prizes they have grabbed in literary contests. The reflection about works, artists, exhibits, events and moments of the Cuban art embraces a wide spectrum that goes from the 20th-century avant-garde maestros to the youngest artists that now stand out in the island nation's cultural life.

Clustered in four thematic blocks that contain historiographic issues, poetic interpretations, accurate reviews and post-critical sets, the texts all go by suggestive titles that lay bare the author's quality as an excellent title-maker –quite a scarce commodity in the national literary guild.

Among the basic keys that sustain this humongous critical volume of over 400 pages, there's one that strikes anybody's attention from the first to the last essay: the elegance of a language whose inspiration and gracefulness result in the most exquisite prose of Cuba's literary tradition. The book is free of historic loose ends, senseless attributive usage and the recurrent mania of flaunting the vast culture and education of the writer at the expense of his or her own judgments – problems that affect heavily a considerable chunk of the local critics, especially the fledgling writers.

Caballero wields wittily the codes of essays as artistic literary prose per se, combining the cultivated language with the colloquial expressions, hooking up the theoretical knowledge with the most genuine Cuban slang, bridging the speculative imagination with information derived from a scholastic formation. The result is a strategic art of writing that does pay off and reaches its pinnacle by the hand of strength and slenderness.

In one of his previous books, the author owned up the credo that nourishes this form of essay-writing. According to his

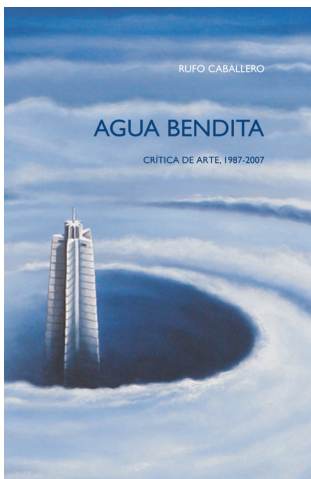
confessions, he disbelieves objectivity –though it might seem otherwise- because it looks false and naïve. “Only in the way I take on my own subjectivity, as long as I'm sincere in each and every word, then I could perhaps be objective.”

Rufo Caballero blandishes the ductile hybridity of the essay in which arguments and metaphors stand in the same breath, and so do post-critical exercises as the inspired prose –in the densest tradition of the genre- breathes some Ortegian life into it, so consubstantial in the region's literature. He writes from the seeds of certainty he has been sowing for years during the tryout of his critique tools, one of which has to do with his own challenge in representing art exegesis and the need to put across his ideas with passion and articulateness. As he acknowledges that “fertile, juicy speculation is one of the least alienating tasks of review,” he's taking us to just another certainty –this one from Borges- that above all, critics have to be good essayists.

The other basic key I'd like to highlight –complementary to the abovementioned one- is the huge appetite for knowledge he boasts, a desire that allows for geometric multiplication of his wisdom about the Cuban art and the arts in general.

Thus, he creates breathtaking analogies, crosses referent boundaries, introduces wise and timely quotations, makes use of a rich combination of different conjugations and builds a true delight for the reader, the architecture of reasoning to make good on hypotheses and theoretical premises.

If we pay heed to professors Lazara Menendez –author of the book's substantial forewords- and Maria de los Angeles Pereira, responsible for the far-reaching and expressive back cover notes, the book deals with timely artistic review by a creator in which, in this particular case, the critic's interpretation reaches



high-pitch notes. I'd say it's all about the skills and depth of the fresh view getting trained time and again in the appraisal of an artwork's virtues and shortcomings, of a particular poetry. It's worth mentioning at this point something equally significant about the book and the author's style: his self-assurance and spontaneity, his pluckiness and honesty in getting involved in the risk and taking the genuine chances of a profession in which the well-known "theory of hitting the nail on the head," that is, everything's okay as long as you don't come messing around with me, not even with the kindest words from your lips, is always out there. The depth of knowledge and the authority this wisdom provides come in extremely handy for this book's author to get the job done.

Through his eyes, the book features a parade of some of our most outstanding artists, from the avant-gardes of the 20th century to today's young guns: Carlos Enriquez, Marcelo Pogolotti, Mariano Rodriguez, Raul Martinez, Antonia Eiriz, Servando Cabrera Moreno, Nelson Dominguez, Pepe Franco, Moises Finale, Rocio Garcia, Juan Roberto Diago, Jose Toirac, Franklin Alvarez, Agustin Bejarrano, Ruben Rodriguez, Reineiro Tamayo, Cutty, Kadir Lopez, Aisar Jalil and, quite particularly, Arturo Montoto, targeted in four of his texts. Other essays touch on certain moments and stages of the arts, as well as topics on the country's cultural sociology.

Eyed as a whole, this archipelago of texts –as put by Dr. Lazara Menendez– comes up as a multidisciplinary critical code on Cuban art and in which, fortunately, the academic criteria gave way to enlightenment and the sparkle of good art reading.

In this selection, the ancestry of finesse shows, and I'll even dare say something virtually nobody accepts: liking and good taste do not hinge on will, at least not completely. In it – either as an integrator or an in-

fluencer– the readings and the shades of the information as they whip thought preferences into shape –the sensuality of the whole thing– come together as one.

I won't fall into the temptation of mentioning those texts that lured more than others. This compilation shows off a balance of qualities, and each essay longs for the same interrelation with the reader on equal footing. As readers may find out during their trip through the pages of *Holy Water*, this book blends the substantial academic insight – something art students will definitely appreciate– with a variety of approaches: semiological, epistemological, anthropology, cultural studies and, last but not least, esthetical.

Armed with the method of the hammering pun –as Cuban writer Alberto Garrandes would have said– the essayist's judgments pierce into both the art matter and the socio-historic context where that art thrives. Such analyses are stripped of the stiffness or predispositions of side-taking and partiality; they come down from intelligence, and that prevents us from resorting to the kind of fetishism and gullibility political judgments or the sociology of culture usually fall pray of. The contextual and artistic assessments emerge as the outcomes of painstaking research and an assortment of sources that make room for the mature, autonomous praising of the author.

The assertion that language is thoughts, let alone a resourceful spring of symbols, is easily appreciated in Rufo Caballero's prose. The author hones the phrase, studies the linkages of images, extols the words he's about to use, never sacrifices form and leaves the essence of his speech intact. In his most recent books and in this volume in particular –despite its being a compilation that culls works from over a decade of good writing– the author's construction of a language style is clearly seen. There's rationality galore in this graceful prose and plenty of

sensuality in the structure of the ideas. Rufo shows his mastery of a language that's still unfinished, precisely and solely thanks to his persistence in subjecting it to nonstop renovation and the strain of perfectionism.

I harbor no doubts whatsoever that *Holy Water* will enter the scene of the Cuban book with flying colors, or as Dr. Maria de los Angeles Pereira writes, "it'll be a major publishing development." I can say more; I bode recognition, a reading with gusto, upcoming prizes and, of course, the biggest prize of all: the polemics it will earn among critics. Better yet, I'm confident it will bring about new ways to interpret art reviews in the country. On the long road of learning and unlearning the Cuban art is paved with since it's been under the microscope of scholars and critics, a book like this is fundamental to contribute to its unsung history.

I cherish the innermost satisfaction of having read this book with the conviction that *Holy Water* stands for a major contribution to the national essay and all at once to the gestation of a thought about Cuban visual arts that continues to grow, yet it requires endeavors from intellectuals of that caliber.

Havana, October 2008

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*VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE,
 A CLEARING IN THE WOODS*
Luis Lorente

As I read on *Visible and Invisible*, I imagine the exceptional hand of Pedro de Oraa –the hand of a painter and author, making sure this appraisal doesn't lean solely to one side– assisted by profound thinking and abundant reflexive power.

It's all about a revealing text teeming with insightful observations that shed light on the wide horizon of Cuba's fine arts; a compilation of ideas backed up by his condition as a sheer creator, an essential witness and stakeholder. Therefore, its value is unfathomable.

The compilation of essays, articles and brief notes that makes up this volume points to a sort of grand tour with mandatory stops at developments, epochs and artists whose significance has called for the inevitable comments by Pedro de Oraa in due time.

This book serves not only as a bridge for communication among people closely linked to the realm of arts; its inflection reaches out to those boundaries and beyond to cater to a more general readership interested in the intricate workings of the fine arts and, at the same time, in need of assistance for their comprehension.

Such a book is like a ship built to sally forth into a journey around some zones of the Cuban art, starting out on the genesis of the things with brief notes on such forerunners as Jose Nicolas de la Escalera –the first Cuban painter and author of the murals at the Santa Maria del Rosario Church. On he goes with the carving harbingers like Vermay, Miahle, Laplanche, all foreigners whose vision –somewhat limited, we might say– barred them from grasping the grandeur of our environment. That's how Pedro de Oraa deals with Landaluze, the cynic; with the foundation of the great San Alejandro School



back in 1818, and with Chartrand, one of those painters who never managed to fully cotton on to the mysteries of the island nation's landscape – despite his subtle approaches to the Cuban environment.

On the go and with a few pauses along the way, art and painting break free from the rest of the content and get a hold on new spaces in which the jittery paintbrush leaves behind the academy with its canons and orthodoxy. The author stops on year 1927 to comment on that modern wave that carries such names on its crest as Aristides Fernandez and Victor Manuel, among others. And then he gets to Eduardo Abela and his Free Painting and Sculpture Studio, Mariano and Portocarrero. Thus, Pedro de Oraa is unintentionally capable of making a synthetic approach to a vast panorama in the history of Cuba's fine arts.

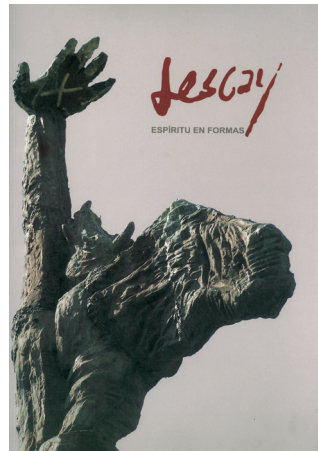
Among the book's highlights, I'd like to underscore –from the top and bottom sections– some essayistic texts like “Entry into Cuban Painting”, “The Affinities of Origins”, “The Course of the Eleven”, “A Plastic Experience: The Ten Concrete Painters” and “Commentaries on the Color-Luz Gallery”, a highly testimonial piece. In this text, Pedro looks into the importance and functions of art galleries, something he calls “philanthropic and creative” institutions, in particular the Color-Luz Gallery founded in Havana in 1957 for the promotion and sale of Cuban avant-garde artworks and opened by poet Jose Lezama Lima who in his speech –as Pedro writes– labeled the place as “a bamboo palisade of images”.

In section two of the book –home to the briefest writs and perennially critical of the latest contemporariness– quite a standout is the unmistakable nature of the poem entitled “El Onomante” that leads off the “Aisar and the Human Comedy text”: *let us go back to the feast / nothing fateful, nothing definite / the island sails on and the weather clears*. This article shatters the traditional body of

critique only to take on a different language for its speech because Pedro's has the gift of capturing –as well as discovering and describing– the poetic reflection of the fine artworks.

Visible and Invisible is a book that readers will appreciate. The doors it goes through, from assorted standpoints, remain open with everything set to let the word out on its quest for new clearings in the woods.

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TO SEE THE SPIRIT Antonio Desquীরó

I ignore whether curating a book –organize it, be responsible for all its images and vignettes, for all texts both critical and informative– may hamper someone from writing a review about it. I wonder so because that's exactly what I'm doing right now and I don't think it might be suitable to put an undeserved racket on this lovely volume. Since I believe the book came out right and I don't dislike recalling everything we did –from a Cuban inland city– to piece together in a harmonious and logical publishing space the useful vision of the work by a writer who is alive and working restlessly, I'll dare do this and let the chips fall where they may.

Right out of the printing press of Mexico's Santiago de Querétaro, “Lescay: Spirit in Forms”

carries 177 pages that take readers on a grand tour around the work of Cuban fine artist Alberto Lescay Merencio. As we all know, Lescay's artworks are committed to the discovery –and exposure– of the human being's spiritual reality immersed in its materiality. It may sound somewhat gibberish if I put it like this, yet I just can't find a better way to describe the relationship between This and The Other Side of people, things and historic processes. It's just as if the Caribbean historical, political and cultural dialectics, as construed in this artist's work, contained far more elements than those that are usually taken for granted, as if the spiritual mettle of each and every human individualities that there have been and there will be, will always remain in the foreground.

A few years ago, I myself believed that Lescay's works have departed from three initial moments –magic, Eros and flight– to stretch out later on down a path that no one else other than the creator himself defined when he said, “I see the spirit and I try to show it.” That's what this is all about: making it visible. And I say visible, something that can be pointed at with a finger, something colorful that can be described. In addition to his themes focused on the Conga-rooted spirituality of Cuban culture, Alberto Lescay Merencio's works showcase personalized stylistic watermarks.

Conceived in five parts and two addenda, the volume puts by a section devoted to critical texts, plus four more on artistic disciplines Lescay has tried his hand at. “I conceive sculpture based on total space”: sculpture with black-and-white images of all his monuments and some of his environmental and small-scale pieces, as well as his technical blueprint. Perhaps sculpture can sum up better than any other expression what we outlined in the previous paragraph: from the commemorated homeland heroes to emerging bodies that claim their spots in space; “Terracotta, ceramic, the noblest things”: ceramic, colorful ima-

ges and technical blueprint. The hand passes its living impulse onto the clay and maybe that explains why all ceramic must be considered as sacred; “Always draw, either mentally or on any material”: drawings, with black-and-white or colorful images with different techniques and materials used by the artist. In my own view, drawing lays bare a different Lescay whipped into shape by the subtleness of the inks, the knowledge of the materials and, above all, with a full-fledged mastery of the line; “Painting is the most uncomplaining divertimento I've ever known”: painting, a journey throughout his most outstanding pictorial works, built on the basis of vast strokes, a blend of techniques, mostly earthy and warm colors, formal and composing freedom and a style some people simplify by calling it “abstract impressionism”, I think, but it includes both recognizable objects and persons, as well as spaces and motions I don't hesitate to label as mysterious. The sixth part embraces “An Illustrated Chronology of the Artist” (1950–2007); footnoted sepia and color pictures at the end of the chronology illustrate some milestones in Lescay's lifetime. And last but not least, there are “References on the Artist” featuring passive and active bibliography; illustrations, photographs and covers with some of the artist's works splayed on them, original graphic publicity, authors' forewords for catalogs, works by or about Lescay in other materials.

It's unfair to wrap up this review without mentioning the delicate vignettes Lescay himself created for this book. Even though it's true it'll take way too long to make a list of all the professionals and other collaborators who joined hands in “Lescay: Spirit in Forms”, it's worth highlighting the effort of photographers, designers and printers who put together their creativeness, technical expertise and imagination.

To top it all off, I think Cuba's contemporary art must be grateful of Mr. Jose Oleszczowski Wasserteil from Mexico for

playing such a leading role in making this lovely and timely book on a local creator from the island of Cuba –and from the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba- a dream come true. Pulling off an efficient and attractive volume –in addition to the experience Havana publishing houses have put under their belts- could mean to be an interesting trailblazer for Cuban art books.

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VANITIES AND RHIZOMES Píter Ortega Núñez

El Observatorio de Línea (Ediciones Union, 2008) is an anti-academic book. I guess it's the most bohemian book I've ever read and that enralls me. I can't help it. Elvia Rosa Castro gives herself all the green lights in the world: plenty of neologisms, digressions that delve way too deep into her personal life in a whimsical and arbitrary fashion, self-centered overstatements.

Elvia scoffs at the affected academicism-oriented stances brimming with hackneyed pigeonholing and deceitfulness. She blows tons of mocking raspberries at critical standoffishness, at that writing asepsis that in the name of austerity and good sense is leading our criterion-wielding praxis down a long path littered with lethargy, mediocrity, and cowardliness. She seems to be telling us every step of the way that we must drop the ethnicity sham, that

this "tiny little world" belongs to vicious beasts, tight-knit circles and cenacles, social ambitions and frivolities. A showbiz world in which shrewdness and personal relationships are better off than intelligence and talent. A minefield in which it takes some megalomania to come out of it safe and sound. "What's the use in writing? I believe we're being propped up by sheer and personalized vanity (...), she writes. That sounds absolutely superb to me, just unlimitedly genuine.

Of course, behind all this nerve and tongue-in-cheek speech lie interpreting harshness and a philosophical density that calls for "crying over spilled milk." The author shows off jaw-dropping ability to knock down the semantic outreach of poems and works, not to mention an amazing skill for cultural association, for setting and crisscrossing meanings. Only someone deeply imbued with the boons of theory and diehard thinking can actually manage to organically conjugate the high-tone *recherché* with purely colloquial, inner-city quirks that verge on earthiness and vulgarity. The end result is a prose armed with such a personality of its own that blows the readers' minds, it destabilizes them, it rips them apart. But it also arouses unrelated envies, sound and mean. Elvia boasts a style that makes her an oddity within the insular framework, and that cannot be forgiven. It's neither forgiven nor tolerated.

It's a rich prose that can be enjoyed dearly. The author –this *author* thing is giving me the creeps right now. I don't know but it seems to me I'm falling into the same frigidity I blasted at the top of this piece. No more *authors*. Just Elvia plain and simple, God damn it, who, as a matter of fact, is my friend –uses short sentences most of the time, without clause excesses, without the shortcoming of unnecessary and worthless attributive uses –so commonplace in our context. And that's something the readership is grateful for, as well as that delicious, functional, subtle yet

effective sense of humor her writings ooze out. Irreverence. Most of all, irreverence. Rufo put it that way in his traditional wittiness: "Elvia is the Uma Thurman of that Kill Bill the Cuban fine arts are crying for."

She's afraid of no one. To her, there's no such thing as myths or untouchable authorities. With the cat-of-nine-tails in her hand, she understands nothing about concessions and that surely takes some spine-chilling nerve. Even when there's no room for the lashing, never mind. What this is all about is the nerve to put the sentence in black and white.

She's not spooked by hyperbole either. In fact, she wallows in categorical, absolutely quasi-fascist judgments, like the one related to Adonis Flores's drawing from the "Arañados" series (the toilet seats) that, by the way, she brags from the very onset with having it at home. This is how this judgment goes:

This very piece was turned down at the Third Hall of Cuban Contemporary Art, in that section thought out for the Cuba Photographic Library, "The Sketched Idea." You can rest assured this one beats all of them to a frazzle, absolutely all of the pieces that were displayed there.

Read 'em and weep, you mouth-pieces of moderation!

This doesn't mean Elvia's texts are stripped of rigor. Not at all. She's rigorous as she craps on the rhetoric of *rigor, moderation, sobriety*, aware of the fact that the heftiness of the interpretation and the quality of the prose are really all that matters.

The assessment of Adonis's artworks is crystal-clear and mind-boggling. Her reading of the piece entitled "The Visionary", for instance, in which she ties it up to Michel Foucault's panoptic theory, is absolutely revealing. Then she goes on:

Paradigms either mutate or lay back. Destiny brews in the ritual of gambling and the

complicity of bars, not in the solemn councils where hypocrisy falls in bucketfuls. To the poses, the Basque wink; to the apparent mildness, the clanking of chains and the sadomasochist pain/pleasure of the whip. These are, in sum, the metaphors of our lives: the rebellion behind the mask of acceptance and the defense of individualism behind Max Weber's "iron cage", behind the general-social yoke.

The above is the last but one paragraph of the essay –it is fair and square- entitled "Rocio Garcia: A Project for a Sincere Exorcism of the Nation." And it's also one of the finest things I've ever read about the artist, written with fabulous literary beauty. So, keep a stiff upper lip, Elvia. There are no reasons to cry.

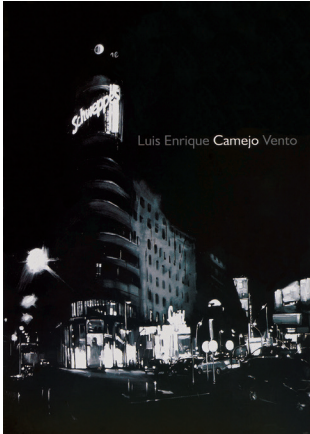
Another feature commonly seen throughout the book is her post-critical encouragement. Elvia is always beating around the bush. Her approaches are slink, overshooting and off-key. They never make a head-on clash. To her, critique is a game, a jam session full of anecdotes, literary storytelling, gossiping, digressions and all kind of frolicking. We must say she takes her study targets as mere pretexts or forced punch lines to flaunt her writing roots. And to become an agent provocateur, of course. In her text on Ernesto Benitez, you read the piece out and the artist is seldom mentioned. The interpretation is shrouded, camouflaged. The fact of the matter is this is someone who, in addition to being a heck of a good writer, knows a lot about philosophy, history, anthropology and theory of culture. But we do learn about Benitez's works. Let's not be so unfair, for crying out loud!

The remaining essays are equally for cult and worship, chiefly "Stark Speculations", "Return to Utopia ..." and "Mariano Rodriguez: The Coming and Going of Forms and the Firmness of his Paintings." The latter is so valuable that deserves to have grabbed a prize at the Guy Perez Cisneros 2008 Awards. The fact that it didn't even nab a

mention is absolutely ridiculous. Perhaps because it's not about learning based on coarse, oversimplified and unbending didacticism. Elvia's learning is the painstaking type that takes far more brains. Definitely the kind I actually like the most.

Saturday, Nov. 22, 2008

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TRAVELING WITH CAMEJO Caridad Blanco de la Cruz

A city vision, in which the light draws the full scope of the night, is the image that serves as backdrop for this book entitled "Luis Enrique Camejo Vento." The nature of this proposal and the concept it renders in are the very first signals we pick up to reach out to that city that time and again turns into Camejo's painting. The monochromatic view of Madrid splayed on the cover singles out the desire to talk to and relate with the Spanish burg where PrinterMan Industrias Graficas stands –the printing location in 2008 of the book that had been in the works then.

This volume we're looking at from the cover recreates a peculiar way of shedding light on darkness, that particular way that white brushstrokes achieve as they pass through the glass walls, of writing neon signs on the air and the restless glimmering of the city lights, suggesting motions and –also- a closer approach to

what's going on in the streets; the many exchanges that come to pass on the pavement.

Thus, the book takes us by the hand of Camejo on a grand tour around the urban landscape, and riding on that lighting course, a text by Antonio Eligio Fernandez (Tonel) picks us up for detailed glimpses and reflections into the innards of the process itself, its evolvement and innermost motivations. In consequence, Tonel's analysis –"Cities that Are Cities: Painting and Urban Space in the Work of Luis Enrique Camejo"– is indeed a singular tour that makes Havana an essential context where everything starts for the artist, a definitive city and yet aloof from the tourist stereotypes that give it a name. A Havana –as I could find out later on a step-by-step basis– "built" from its dwellers' own crossroads, once and many times at a time: in atmospheres, space senses, time.

After this early going has been channeled, Tonel takes notice of the earnestness –and the commitment– Camejo fulfills in his painting, going into the details of what he calls the "ritual" of indispensable actions and taking notice on what's going down in himself as "manual-looking actions (...) that measure up to the intellectual scope of the painting" and to what the artistic guild defines as trade.

This respectful and inclusive vision provided by Tonel, in keeping with the different expressive means of contemporary arts, makes a stop even at the meaningfulness of the place where the paintings of Luis Enrique Camejo come into being, but above all, it sheds abundant light on the ins and out of the process construed as a whole. His conversational narration allows us to make out what he discerns as the artist's priciest proceedings, some of them whose origins –based on the assessment and the practical experience, too– goes over the watercolor technical principles, excelled in practice by Camejo's mastery of other

means and their basics. What Tonel underscores is a very meaningful detail of Camejo's painting, responsible for the qualities that light reaches in his artworks and also for the transparencies, the contrasts, the wash drawings. It's the key to how he manages to paint the fickle ascents –and descents– to how he captures the vibes of the hot summer days, the torrential downpours, the tropical murkiness of the winters, the shades of impatience, the wait, the running of the two of them.

The 145 color images in the book turns it into a sort of gallery, thus wrapping up a span of time that stretches out from 2005 to date. Such a volume of Camejo artworks favors, on the one hand, the study of a work that zeroes in on urban landscape or city themes – either way– and on the other hand, it kindles contemplative delight.

Even though the book is no doubt balanced, the presentation of the works lets the possible chronological registry fall by the wayside and homes in on a peculiar chromatic order marked by the title pages and the color details on the page upper corners. The tonalities set the beat, the piece successions, even though the swaying intensity of a particular tone is not highlighted. The sober design by Eduardo Molto conveys what the artist himself thought up: a feeling of motion that even let the reader be a part of it in this chromatic journey the different segments embark on.

The grey hue kicks off what we may call the graphic chapters, and that's clearly seen in the piece entitled "Crossing 26th". It puts us in the middle of the avenue, on the trail of moving cars and their stops at the pump stations. There come several waiting moments before crossing the road under the heavy rain, the cohabitation in the street of both commuters and pedestrians. On that same course, a few views of the Malecon and the different Havana tunnels pop up. The cars –their

ghostly prominence actually strikes the attention– make way for city slickers. The progression of the *Dream* series and other untitled pieces give full account of this.

The city seen through the eyes of Luis Enrique Camejo can be green and shows off its progress toward turquoise in shades that inspire a weird sympathy. The glamour lights up the shop windows and the light reaches in to the meeting grounds where some vague figures flaunt their solvency, while others show their disappointment. An odd gleam is tacked on each and every daytime trip, as well as on the discreet workings of the night.

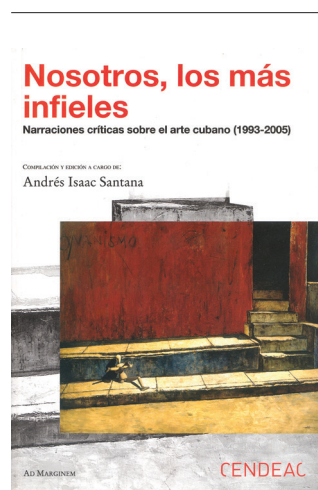
The dark blue provides an episode of its own. In it, he makes a similar description of a street view from inside a gallery and the *Panama* series. No matter the highlights on any other part of this Camejo city, that are cities, as Tonel puts it, a concept that goes way beyond it as the statement of a one-and-only space because it comes up to us as a larger-than-life fact, as something more than just a mere compilation of places.

The last chapter of this singular book, following 154 pages of continuous displacements, is nearly two dozen watercolors and a small sample of pieces dealing with his railroads. As a conclusion, they stress that gift for contrasting and narrating in the value of Camejo, either with oil or acrylics, or the combination of the two of them and other techniques. The watercolors let us peek at the flow of his cities of "water and smoke," speaking to us from the least permanent things, the fleeting traffic, the crossing. Equally important are the helplessly contextual atmospheres the artist achieves when those streets of ours have leaned to apprehension, routes of the contradictory and the convulsiveness of these times.

The book "Luis Enrique Camejo Vento" manages to convey, in a crystal-clear fashion, a cohe-

rent artistic personality and, as we speak, is a valuable reference on the artist. In a different sense, it lets a timely reflection on painting flow into the watercourse of the Cuban arts, banking on a trip that the book itself and each city made out in it provide, let alone the yarn-spinning stories they tell us.

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WE, THE MOST UNFAITHFUL Luis Francisco Pérez

Let's begin with a common, equally necessary place to lodge ourselves in the point we want to get to. Any compilation is, in its most natural essence, a say-it-to-yourself, an action which is not stripped of a certain dose of *white violence* that the compiler infringes on his own intelligence as a demonstration of a certain faith and indispensable honesty to make the defined theses of the very compiling action believable in an outer environment that's both vague and necessary. It's likewise important the urgency of displacing that say-it-to-yourself need onto the land of denunciation rather than critique that also, of course, like the need to show and demonstrate rather than "orchestrate" –that's definitely what any compilation is all about– a series of documents written and theorized by others that

implies a gesture which is not simple at all: that of taking issue, of committing oneself.

As Didi-Huberman writes in a magnificent essay on Brecht, *When Images Take Position*, taking issue or position is putting oneself at least twice on the two fronts, a move that leads to the action of facing off a certain reality because any elective action is deadly relative. In effect, it all boils down to facing something, yet we also need to count on all those things we detach from, the unselected, the offside call that's standing right behind us, that maybe we deny but that is right there playing a major role in conditioning our moves, therefore our position and, last but not least, our "balance." That explains the perils of any compilation: putting the action doer on a tight rope from which we peek, in the productive abyss of the doubt, both success and failure.

We, the most unfaithful is a compilation of critical and theoretical texts about Cuban art in the course of the past fifteen years culled by Andres Isaac Santana whose subtitle carries the important –we'll explain later on why it's so important– and clarifying phrase "Critical Narrations" on artistic creation on the island nation and by Cubans living abroad.

Both the fortunate title –it underscores the *fictional* quality of any cultural document– and the off-key acceptance of its being "critical narrations" indeed –something that whets the desire because compilations should never abandon their "artistic" quality, or better yet the effort of living up to the notion that any "scientific truth", spinning around the both treacherous and gaudy metaphysics of art theory that owes its own truth to the fatal subjectivity of narration or storytelling– come together to outline a map of knowledge, a cartography in which "passion" and "truth" merge to come up with a theoretical testimony, a critical narration indeed of Cuba's artistic creation (inside

and outside the island) during a historical period that begins with the verification that the Berlin Wall had crumbled down for good (1993) and the first signals (2005) that the triumphant economic capitalism –in its brutal voracity and selfishness– was devouring itself, throwing mercilessly millions of workers into poverty, just as we've been able to see now three years after those initial signals. Indeed, the most beautiful and valuable thing about "critical narrations" and "moral stories" is that nothing is fortuitous –though it seems to be– and nothing is left to chance. As a matter of fact, "chance" is one of the many monikers that the "art truth's enhanced idea" really has. There'd be no "historic truth" unvested of the preceding drive of a "cultural truth," of a suspicion, of a clue, of the least enlightening element. Never before a compilation of theoretical texts about art was unintentionally so dialectically historic, so critical of a certain moment in time that even though we all were in the know of "what it was" (1993), it needed the arts to peep at "what would unavoidably be coming (2005)."

We, the most unfaithful –a thousand pages crammed with information and without a single concession to the grateful vision of the works we're so used to– culls nearly a hundred theoretical texts grouped in eight long chapters in which Andres Isaac Santana opens up new pathways to put this humongous theoretical magma on the right tracks that are both subjective and necessary, indispensable and passionate, rigorous and whimsical, scientific and hazardous, so fictitiously real as examples of a conjured truth. I think it'll be far more suitable to delve into the isolated details of some concepts wielded by the compiler than quoting the exact titles of each and every chapter, even though the syntagms we're going to mention below stand up for those "critical narrations" whose importance has been underlined at

the top of this article. Having said this, in the mentioned chapters we hit on the fact that the situation projects a "maze entrance," "a cartographic speculation," "an autonomy as a mirage," "discursive signals, sentences and stories," "reviews of the myth," "voices and subjectivities on the sidelines," "heterotopic displacements" featuring deviations in "insularities and memories," or just "representation and language off-centering." Though most of the texts are written no less by Cuban critics and theoreticians, there are also a few visions from "overseas", yet the very finest articles were penned by experts from the turf. From the magnificent forewords written by Rufo Caballero all the way to the lucid and painstaking essays by some of the island nation's critical heavyweights, or by the Cuban Diaspora scattered all around the globe, the compilation is really something. Good cases in point are the works by Lupe Alvarez, Gerardo Mosquera, Magali Espinosa, Danny Montes de Oca, or Rufo Caballero himself, authors of extraordinary approaches to Cuba's artistic reality with some well-known texts that are nevertheless greatly admirable for a second reading. And though the aforesaid names are all pretty well known in Spain for those of us who keep tabs on the Cuban arts and artistic creation, it wouldn't be less appropriate –no matter how unknown or unexpected they might be– to read lots of other contributions that engross the vast panorama put together by Andres Isaac Santana, chiefly when on this side of the Atlantic Ocean what we know of Cuban art is just what comes down the pike –institutionally directed or not– and goes abroad, and not even always with the best intentions nor with the same level of honesty. The case of those Cuban artists living in other parts of the world, though, is a completely different ballgame.

Fernando Castro and I had the honor of presenting *We, the Most Unfaithful* at the Queen Sophia Bookstore in Madrid and

my very first impression from the ambition essay –it’s virtually a huge essay rather than an adequate and wise compilation– was envy. There’s nothing like it in Spain, not at all, something that could paint a good picture of Spain’s artistic creation during that same period of time, a period of emblematic and decisive years. Such a book here could help knock down the shaky pedestals that remain untouched in the dimwitted bourgeois comfort that still rules Spain’s contemporary artistic, theoretical and critical scene.

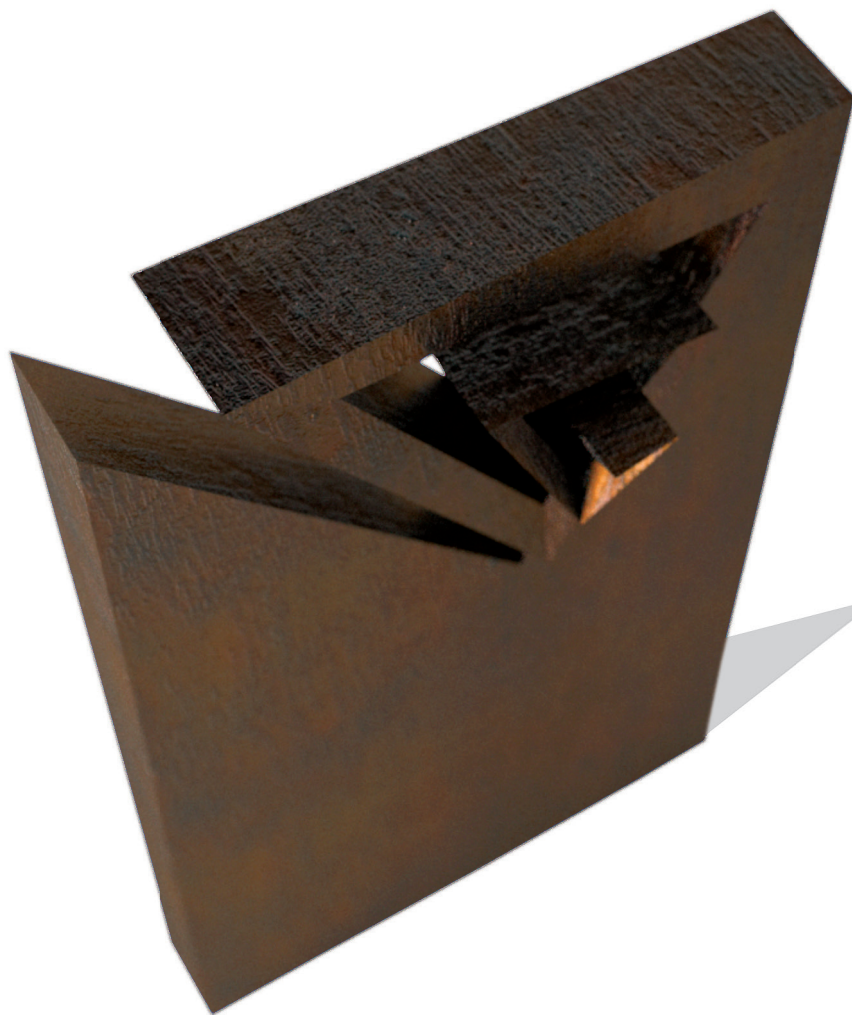
Rufo Caballero writes these words in the prologue, “We...

makes fun at the hopes of hegemony at any level. In fact, it mocks with wittiness and wisdom at far more things. For instance, at the poor fallacy of assuming the fact –from the First World- that we do know a lot over here. I’d say we pick up quite a lot from common wisdom about everything going on outside our boundaries. Just another lie from the many that make us up. Our ignorance is as arrogant as blatant and lethal. A thorough reading of We... will humbly make us realize of that. We also feel humbly glad that a book so decisive to understand and size up the Cuban art over the past

fifteen years has been put out by a small Spanish publishing house.”

Madrid, November 2008

Luis Francisco Perez (Spain)
Art critic and Curator
luisfran2121@terra.es



JOSÉ VILLA SOBERÓN

From the *Spiral* series, 2008. Steel sculpture, 2 x 1.20 x 1 m

2008 National Fine Arts Prize Winner • josevilla@cubarte.cult.cu • www.villasoberon.com

EXCELENCIAS GALLERY

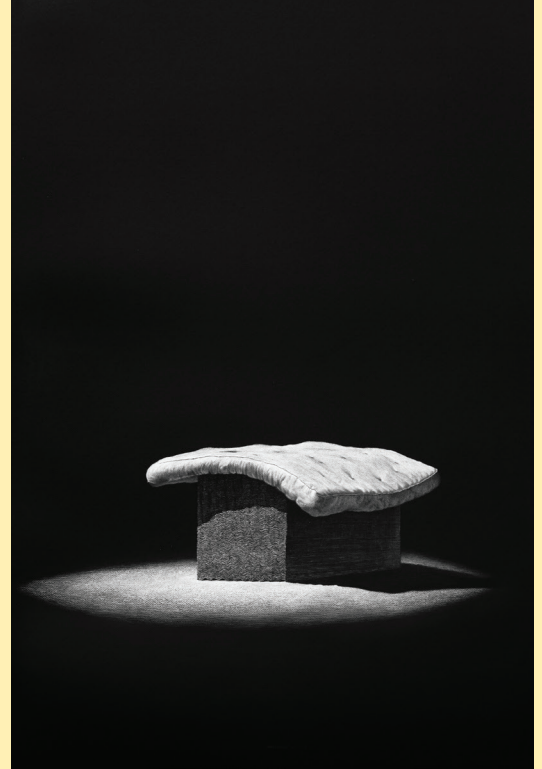
A new space in Madrid
for the Contemporary Art



ÁNGEL RAMÍREZ
Untitled, 2008, mixed technique on card, 38 x 56,5 cm



ERNESTO JAVIER FERNANDEZ ZALACAIN
Storming of Havana II, 2007
Digital printing / Luster Epson 3x paper 89,5 x 89,5 cm. Ed. P.A



JORGE LOPEZ PARDO
New Project No. 1, 2008
Graphite chalk on card, 120 x 80 cm

The Excelencias Gallery, a space devoted to the promotion, exhibition and sale of contemporary art, will swing its gates wide open to showcase the most representative artworks within the main fine arts trends from the Americas and the Caribbean.

The gallery will have its grand opening with "Art and Solidarity," a charitable exposition with works by over a hundred artists who have expressed their support to the victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike in Cuba. The funds raised in the sale of these pieces will be fully sent in the form of aid to those affected by the abovementioned tropical storms.

The exhibit will be possible thanks to the support provided by the Excelencias Group, the Foundation for Human Development in the Americas and the Caribbean (FUCADHU), Iberia, the Club de Leon and Ayuda en Accion, that have joined hands with the "Galeria Solidaridad con Cuba Hoy" (Solidarity with Cuba Today Gallery) organized by the Cuban League of Writers and Artists (UNEAC).

The Excelencias Gallery is located on 8 Magdalena Street on the corner of Tirso de Molina Square, between the Apollo Theater and the National Library, in the vicinity of the Barrio de las Letras neighborhood. This initiative seeks to be a part of the city hall's efforts in enhancing Madrid's cultural environment.

The gallery belongs to the Excelencias Cultural Project for the promotion of the contemporary art through exhibitions, lectures, workshops and other actions that also include the publication of the *Art by Excelencias* magazine, the opening of a virtual cyberspace (www.galeriaexcelencias.com), and the posting of an online newspaper (www.arexnews.com) with a view to publish about the main trends, developments and news on contemporary arts in the Americas and the Caribbean.

the archivist

BY JOSÉ VEIGAS

(Cuba). Researcher
monte@cubarte.cult.cu

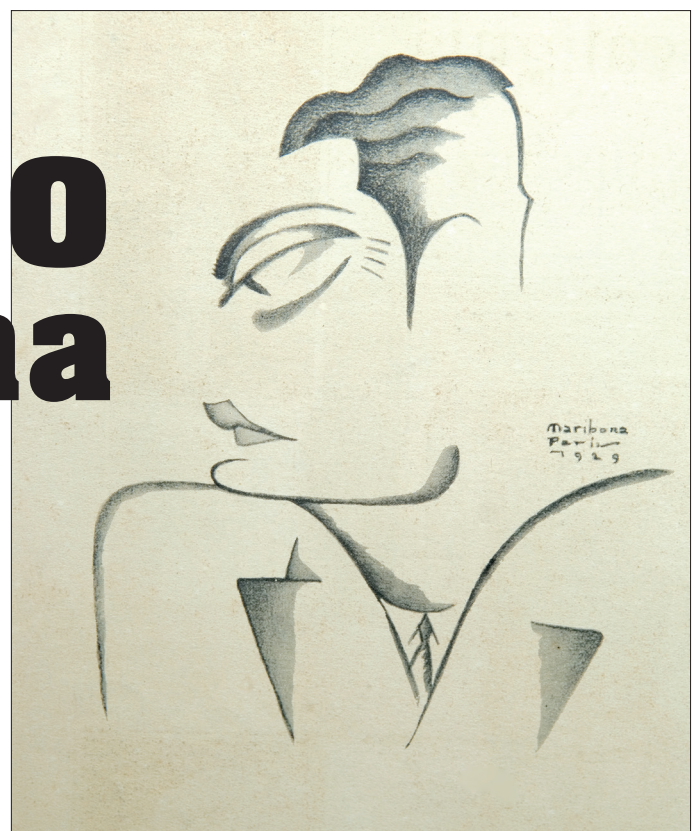
This globetrotter, sculptor, painter, drawer, carver, photographer, poet and bohemian lived and worked in Havana back in 1936, and later on from 1942 to 1944. His stays in Havana coincided with peak cultural moments that paved legit ways for the history of Cuban arts and culture. In his second visit, Max Jimenez found a city in which artistic creation was at its best: turning-point exhibits; painters in full swing like Mariano, Portocarrero, Cundo and Diago; a top-of-the-line sculptural movement; the presence of artists from different nationalities, such as Siqueiros, Reder, McNeil, Lerner and Hidalgo de Caviedes, let alone publications and institutions like the Lyceum, the Fine Arts Trust and the National Society of Fine Arts that were engaged in nonstop cultural creation. In one his texts, the artist somehow described this ambience: “Havana boasts a luxurious bevy of fantastic painters, so many and so good that this itself brings on some kind of devaluation. I don't name them because their subtleness is hair-raising and they just can't be boxed in altogether.”

Under these favorable conditions, his first personal exhibit was organized at the Lyceum & Lawn Tennis Club gallery, where he unveiled a dozen paintings that, among other things, broached a number of topics such as black and mulatto characters that, as author Salarrue put it, their eyes reflect “the indigenous sorrow” and that he called “Negroes with the gloomy soul of the Indians.” This exhibition struck the attention of the critics and the Havana public. Perez Cisneros includes it in his imaginary “Friendship Hall” and contrasts this much open attitude toward the visitor with the one caused by the exhibit he put on a few years later in San Jose and that went virtually unnoticed. In his text on Max Jimenez's great exposition at the National Museum in 2002, researcher Ramon Vazquez wrote: “Few artistic traditions owe so much to a single artist as Costa Rica's owe to Max Jimenez.” However, the reality of that country's artistic realm –so orthodox and hardly ever leaning to accepting artistic avant-gardism- could not take in the artworks of such a dissatisfied, restless and heterodox creator.

*Portrait of Max Jimenez by Maribona, 1929
Social Magazine, Havana, Feb. 1930*

A tico in Havana

If archives were not to be delved into and were scorned as simply useless and lugubrious places, we'll be taking the risk of letting boldface names like Max Jimenez Huete (1900-1947) fall into oblivion in their own country –despite his being one of Costa Rica's most outstanding artists in both the fine arts and literature.



In Cuba, though, the situation was quite different. Since the 1920s, avant-gardes have seized a "position" of their own without knocking down the "foe" walls. A certain balance kept the situation in a sort of "quarrelsome peace". Academics and modernists shared the institutions, the halls, the publications and even the prizes. In our environment, Max Jimenez huddled with such members of the intelligentsia as Guy Perez Cisneros, Jose Gomez Sicre, Enrique Labrador Ruiz, Ramon Guirao and Jorge Mañach. Of course, all of them were on the insurgent side.

Barely a decade ago, his works have been reconsidered by critics and experts following a longstanding stay in the realm of oblivion and indifference. Scholars like Alfonso Chase, Bernal Herrera, Luis Ferrero and Ana Mercedes Gonzalez have contributed to rescue the memory of an artist who deserves recognition and a definitive entry in the record books of Latin American arts.

In the meantime, we treasure the MAX JIMENEZ HUETE file in box 24 / Foreign Artist Files / Letter J. We hope to open it up again pretty soon in the face of information requests or just to add new data on the artist.

November 2008

José Veigas (Cuba). Researcher
monte@cubarte.cult.cu



MAX JIMENEZ
On the pit's brink, ca. 1940-1941
Oil on cloth 76 x 61 cm, Coll. Jimenez-Odio

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my paintings are
a theatrical metaphor of life



The prophet's scepter. acrylic / canvas, 120 x 80 cm. 2006

perrier



AGUA NATURAL FRANCESA DE MES

KADIR LÓPEZ NIEVES

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kadir@kadirlopez.com

Natural water, 2008

Mixed technique on metal, 103 x 75 cm

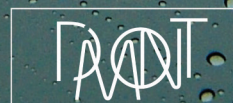
José Luis Díaz Montero

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www.diamontarte.com

Duel, 2007

From the *Shadows and Reflections* series, UV on printing paper, 112 x 87,5 cm



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JOSÉ MANUEL NOCEDA
**Contemporary
art
IN NICARAGUA**

I REMEMBER THAT A FEW YEARS AGO information on Central America's artistic scene was scarce and misleading. On nations like Nicaragua, it used to be far more disappointing. No wonder one of the exhibits that tried to scour certain zones of the isthmus was entitled Land of Storms. New Art in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua (1994-1996), not exactly in reference to wicked weather conditions, but to the tribulations of those countries that fell prey of the so-called "low-intensity" conflicts that eventually hit them hard. Undoubtedly, this instability ate away dramatically at the international outreach of Central American arts, especially in Nicaragua.

PATRICIA BELLI
Tattooed, 2007
Sculpture, variable sizes

The situation that steered the curatorial reins of that project is not the same anymore. However, I don't believe this is one of the most visible enclaves in Central America. Nicaragua is penciled in as a nation of poets and writers, based on a literary tradition inherited from such leading figures as Ruben Dario and more contemporary ones as Ernesto Cardenal, Sergio Ramirez or Gioconda Belli. But the country also boasts some tradition in the field of the fine arts with the likes of Rodrigo Peñalba, Armando Morales, the Praxis Group and Alejandro Arostegui—as a matter of fact, he was one of the three founders of the Praxis Group— at the helm.

When this list of names runs out, information becomes scarcer and more fragmented, with only a handful of standouts. When it comes to contemporary art there, a hard-to-pass-up reference goes to Raul Quintanilla, a sharp-minded artist and thinker who led Artefacto—made up also of David Ocon, Denis Nuñez, Aparicio Arthola and Patricia Belli— an alternative group with an active life from 1992 thru 2002, a complete stranger to the handling of the art institution and with aggressive creation of multidisciplinary roots that made quite a splash in Nicaragua's intelligentsia. Its publishing platform was the ArteFacto magazine, equally iconoclastic and troublemaking. Today, Raul is the editor of the Estragos magazine.

Another reference is Patricia Belli, a creator interested in putting strain between the genre policies and the self-referential character, featuring a resourceful use of materials and poetry. Patricia is also going the extra mile to take up the slack of her country's meager art teaching. She's the soul and mastermind of Espira / La Espora, a promising project inscribed within the realm of alternative teaching actions—similar to such Cuban initiatives as Galeria DUPP of Rene Francisco Rodriguez or Catedra de Arte de Conducta of Tania Bruguera. La Espora is bankrolled by foreign sponsorships, it nourishes on the collaborations chipped in by local and foreign artists, curators and critics, and is now widely accepted all across the isthmus. Its alumni feature students not only from Nicaragua, but also from Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Furthermore, Nicaragua is home to a national biennial sponsored by the Ortiz-Gurdian Foundation. Against all odds, the biennials—showcases or not, demonized or praised— continue to be useful platforms to review certain areas of the contemporary visual creation. Perhaps they could work a whole lot better within a strictly national framework—as in this particular case— in which it's possible to gauge and sound out a specific and well-limited artistic scene in the same breath.

That was my view as a juror when the Sixth Biennial of Nicaragua's Visual Arts had its grand opening last November, a peerless opportunity to take a closer look at this context and a good indicator of the country's contemporary creation. As many as 76 artworks from 39 artists entered the contest. Since the registration process, we noticed some of the snags that Nicaragua's fine arts are hitting, such as limitations

THE NICARAGUAN BIENNIAL IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING A LAUNCHING PAD FOR EMERGING FIGURES

in the formation of artists, ignorance of the basics of résumé-making, work presentations, project descriptions and their rationales, the selection of contesting pieces and their presentation later on, or the ability to truly size up an event of this nature, just to name but a few.

At the end of the day, 17 artists and 29 artworks were handpicked. The two prizes went to Wilbert Carmona (First Prize) and Cristina Cuadra, while Ricardo Miranda Huezo, Rossana Lacayo, Marcos Agudelo and Zenelia Roiz grabbed all honorable mentions. This event is part of a well-articulated circuit of national biennials, so these six artists must be by now getting their works ready to represent Nicaragua at the Central America Arts Biennial in Tegucigalpa in November this year.

It was so encouraging to find such a diverse panorama, with a massive turnout of young artists interested in building a new fire under the nation's cultural

fabric. A quick glance at what actually occurred there provided an update in terms of languages and means that are all the rage now. Even though paintings and drawings made it to the biennial, other artistic typologies set the tone with emphasis on installations, object art, video, video installation, documentaries or works related to Web Art and information technology. There were interesting proposals only in terms of language; others were interactive, while the largest chunk of the pieces hovered around acute problems of the local reality from the critical perspective of the arts.

As an appreciative add-on that goes beyond the contest and the exhibit, the biennial paved the way for more profound contacts with other particularities of the Nicaraguan scene, such as parallel expositions. First of all, the opening of the personal exhibit by Orlando Sobalvarro, *Amerrisque en vuelo*, at the Palace of Culture, one of Nicaragua's art maestros the event honored this time around. Other highlights were *Tres + una...Cuatro*, a collective exhibition by artists Ricardo Miranda Huezo, Rodrigo Peñalba, Gabriel Serra and Laura Baumeister at the Galleries of the Managua Cultural Center; Patricia Belli's personal exhibit entitled *Estructuras y superficies y Metaforas del contexto*, as well as one put on by a bunch of La Espora students, both at the Latin American Hall of the National Palace of Culture.

The Nicaraguan biennial is increasingly becoming a launching pad for emerging figures. Out of previous editions, artists like Ernesto Salmeron—with a certain level of regional exposé and a guest at the upcoming Venice Biennial—have come up. Thus, the event can be considered a significant mechanism to gauge the complex Nicaraguan contemporariness, appraise the achievements and limitations of this scenario, and additionally propel it into a gathering ground for the rickety circuit of artistic promotion, circulation and consumption in the Central American region, as long as other institutions joined hands with it and gave it the heed it deserves. For the time being, this is now a space to update the rest of the country and one of the means to bridge it with its own environment.

Beyond the storms that still pound the country, Nicaragua is showcasing a slight uptick in the visualization of the nation. The spread of mixed means and the newest artistic practice, or the preoccupations on global culture, the peripheral cultural conditions, the identity problems, violence, marginalization, history, cultural hybridism, trans-territoriality, the projections towards the public space and the city as scenarios, or the new cartography outlined by our civilization, are by and large some of the creative and thinking trends that have exerted influence and now function as keys to understanding this resurgence.

Jose Manuel Noceda Fernandez (Cuba).
Researcher, Curator and Art Critic



CRISTINA CUADRA
Mombacho swing, 2007
Photograph-installation
Variable sizes

WILBERT CARMONA
Gift, 2007
Video-installation
Variable sizes



MARCOS AGUDELO
Disintegration 0.1, 2007
Mixed technique
Variable sizes

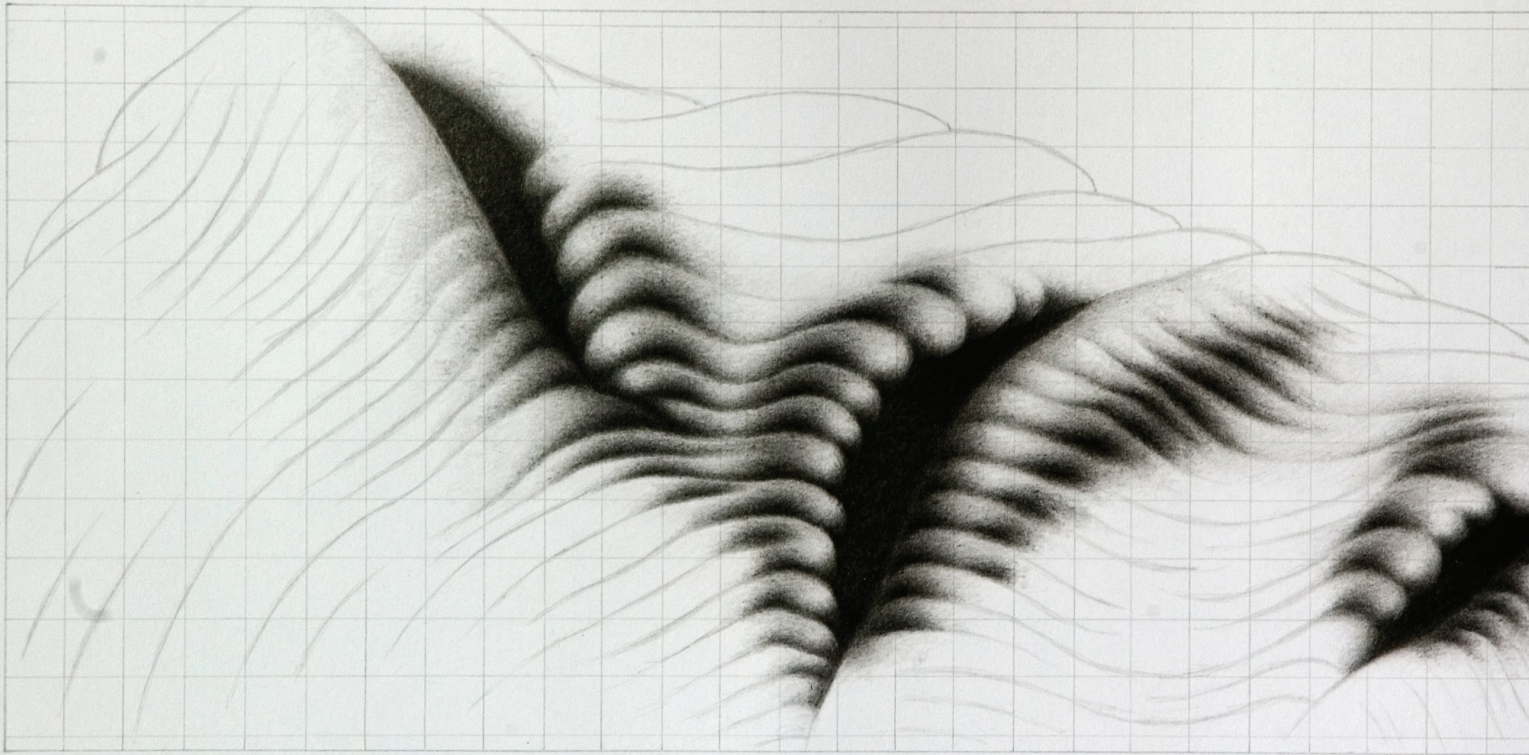


ADRIANA ALMADA

elusive Paraguay

Notes of an Exhibit

THE INVISIBILITY OF PARAGUAY'S ARTS IN THE WORLD SCENE is not under discussion; it's a fact. A shroud of silence wraps the country's cultural creation. Even in the South Cone, Paraguay is still draped under a heavy haze, barely known for the literature of Augusto Roa Bastos and the brutality of Alfredo Stroessner.¹

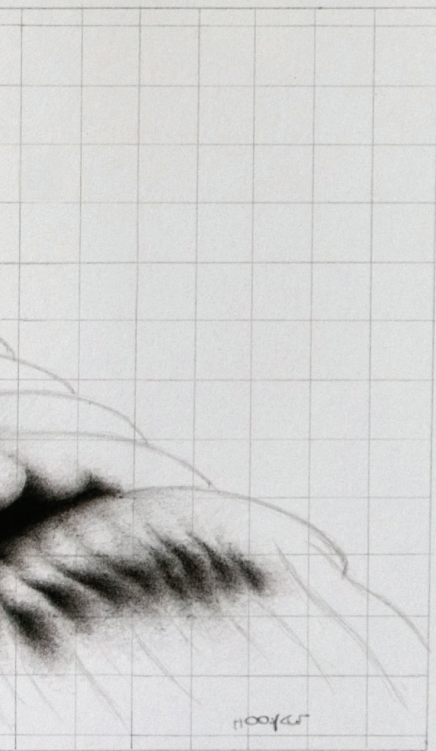


roquet II.

When Argentinean critic Victoria Verlichak suggested me to present an exhibit of Paraguayan contemporary art in Buenos Aires, we both knew we had to fight not only against ignorance, but also against generalized biased feelings among Argentines who relate Paraguayans only to a handful of folkloric expressions and a marginal population mainly consisting of housewives and construction workers.²

¹ Paraguay's cultural creation has a longstanding history of invisibility, the result of successive wars and dictatorships. In the second half of the 19th century, Paraguay endured "the big war" against Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. The country was left in a shambles and the population was decimated, leaving mostly women and children alive. In the 20th century, the Chaco War against Bolivia came to pass. The first big dictatorship was led by Gaspar Rodriguez of France (1817-1840) and the last one by Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989). Both the wars and the dictatorships have been and remain targets for the works of several contemporary artists.

² The plentiful Paraguayan population that settled down in Buenos Aires as a result of an economic exile –as many as 2.5 million inhabitants in all- bears this out. Paraguay has a population of nearly 6 million inhabitants.



The exposition was held in late 2007 at the Recoleta Cultural Center, the meeting grounds of Argentina's artistic movement, under the title of Elusive Paraguay and an traveling exhibition cycle is about to kick off around some South American capitals. Artworks from Bettina Brizuela, Fredi Casco, Sara Hooper, Carlo Spatuzza, Angel Yegros and Marite Zaldivar let the public take a firsthand look at both the elusive and seductive condition of a country that has always been "nobody's dream."³

Privadísimo

Perched on a narrow borderline that divides –rather links- the public and the private, Bettina Brizuela's works revolve around a nitty-gritty matter: the symbolic reconsideration of the memory that sways between the socio-cultural creation and the intimate personal beats. Exploration, mummification, excavations: the same procedure that, through different stages, digs out memories, makes it stand still and projects it. *Privadísimo* (Extremely Private) showcases the footprints of history itself by developing the archeology of intimacy, a concept that might as well be applied to other works by this author. By means of straightforward impression of personal belongings and items deployed over plaster planks, Brizuela makes an inventory of contemporary habits: the daily rituals of an ordinary world that makes no distinction between humdrum and heroism, or it rather merges them in the inanity of serial creation. These inane outlines –so many times hurt by the force of openhandedness- are precisely the ones that define the identity of things, articulating and re-ordering the sequences of a story that acquires amazing poetic intensity.

PARAGUAY IS STILL DRAPED UNDER A HEAVY HAZE, BARELY KNOWN FOR THE LITERATURE OF AUGUSTO ROA BASTOS AND THE BRUTALITY OF ALFREDO STROESSNER

³ An expression coined by Paraguayan political scientist Lina Bareiro.

SARA HOOPER, From the Projects series, 2007
30 x 45 cm. Graphite on paper

The Return of the Sorcerers

For a number of years, Fredi Casco has been working on the slight displacement of representations in an easy-going fashion. From his early Polaroid tryouts in the late 1990s –when he used to shoot the aura of Baroque-Guarani religious carvings, taking the sacred meaningfulness away and dragging them into the realm of video- to the latest installations that arouse disconcertment from minimal gesturing, the artist has pocked cracks in the traditional blueprint of the world.

The work displayed in Buenos Aires is entitled *The Return of the Sorcerers Vol. I: The Cold War Disasters* and was welcome news at the Porto Alegre Biennial in 2005 and the Valencia Biennial in 2007. Banking on pictures bought at the flea markets in Asuncion, Casco recomposes a Paraguay tamed by 35 years of "peace and progress." These are documents that, stripped of any historic significance, shed light on the diplomatic activity under the Stroessner rule, a blurry and dull activity that used to grab headlines in the daily press either with deference or resignation. Casco enlarges the images – they had been originally taken in small-scale format- and tampers with them digitally. Based on brief yet accurate humorous touches, this series boasts abundant sarcasm and encourages the viewers to explore the essential sideline ramification of the last dictatorship whose violence has been apparently wiped out, but whose trite gestures in the protocol of power have remained unchanged until quite recently.

Projects

Sara Hooper walks down conventional pathways to reach odd and even wicked places. Featuring quasi-Renaissance technique and Japanese style with the palette, her work has been construed in the cloister of the very divagations and fears. *Projects* is a series of pencil drawings aimed at pictorial creation that appeals to the subjectivity of the body entrails. Visceral fragments fold and unfold like ghostly entities that take the form of societies and individuals. This Argentine-born artist with over three decades of residence in Pa-

Paraguay, has always remained “outside the walls.” Hooper is yet to join the local artistic circle and her inclusion in this exhibit has been a testimonial statement to the inscrutability of a country that opens or closes randomly. Her solo work –warped inside a city that lacks public spaces and shows a reluctant cultural life– clearly accounts for inadaptability, but it also speaks volumes of a resistance stance in the face of a Paraguay that sways between hospitality and hostility toward foreigners.

Spatuzza Purse Maker

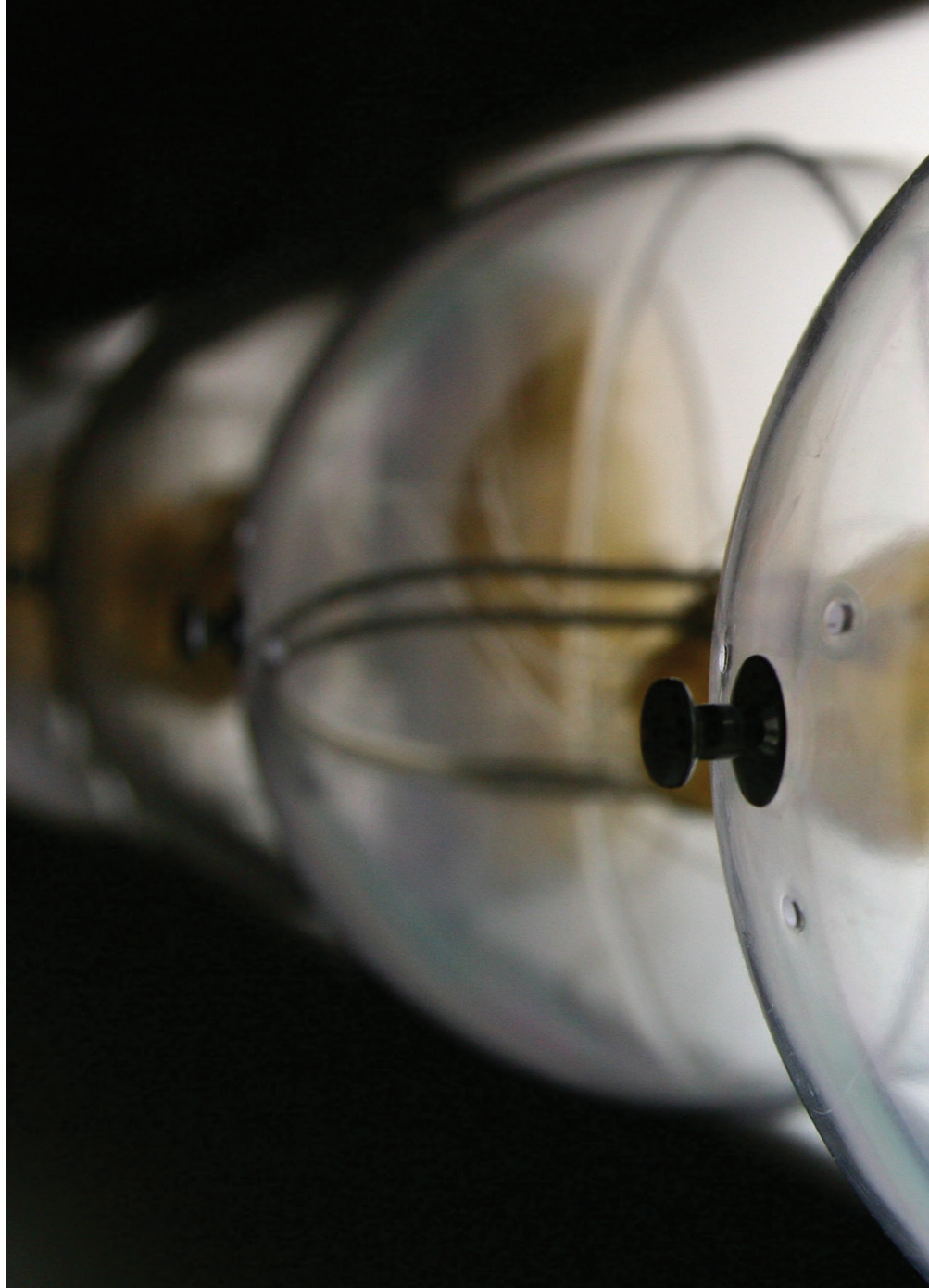
Under see-through acrylic bells, Carlos Spatuzza deploys strange and suggestive women’s purses made of pig bladder and ancient iron fittings. They lie on run-down metal tables –like the ones used to sell roast meat in Paraguay’s street markets– but with the inventory codes of the big-time fashion stores tagged on them. By the hand of this lampooning device, he paints a “social picture” with the help of “accompanying objects,” as the artist calls them. Just like persons, each and every one of these purses has a name and smell, skin and memory. The labels –written in Guarani– provide well-encrypted keys to approaching the mesh of conflicts and tensions the pieces bring to mind.

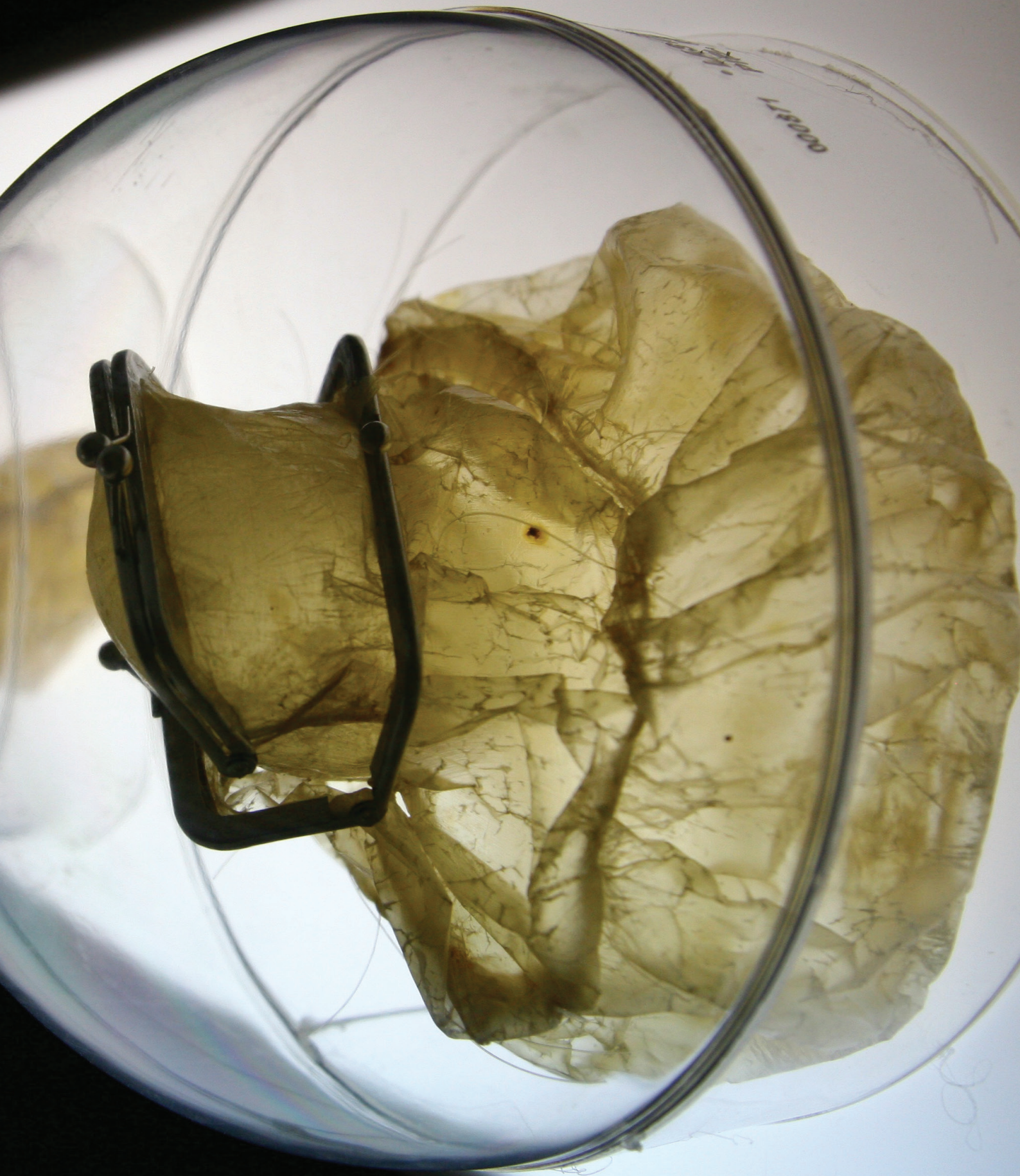
When submitted to long chemical treatments, the material in these pieces acquires poetic refinement rather than visual and tactile smoothness. The thin animal tissue marks the limit between the inside and the outside, configuring a borderline space on which the developments occur. Surface and organ, the skin –a superb scent fixative– is the element that retains the evanescent. Thus, these translucent bodies egg on to devour veiled stories, those typically found in conservative societies.

Requiem

Since his early going back in the 1960s, Angel Yegros’ visual narrative has been branded by his seduction for debris. Even though in those times he used to include elements of diverse origins in his works –from dregs of street billboards to human nails and hair– in the 1980s he found himself captivated by the poetry of Tinguely. His language

CARLOS SPATUZZA. From *the Spatuzza Purse Maker* series, 2005, women’s purses made of cow bladder, acrylic, metal, glue and fluorescent light. Variable sizes







Interview with Lourdes Fernández

ARCOmadrid 2009 Director

In your view, what were the main achievements of ARCOmadrid 08 and what influence did they exert in the conception of the 2009 edition?

The main achievement of last year's edition was its strengthening as one of the leading international fairs and its trend of raising sales, jacking up the number of participating national and foreign collectors, and the increasingly larger presence of galleries from Asia and Latin America.

How badly has the ongoing economic crisis hit the fair in terms of participating exhibitors and countries?

In view of how things are going in the financial front, we really need to be on the lookout. I hope that culture, in the broadest sense of the word, won't be pounded that hard by the crisis and the situation will go back on an even keel. I'm also confident of contemporary art as an excellent value-refuge because its revalorization doesn't hinge on financial fluctuations since it's got a dynamics of its own. Just like other tangible assets, like antiques, wines or precious gems, artworks are physical assets with a value of their own. And it's in times of economic recession when they put on their best faces in churning out benefits. A great artwork by a renowned artist will never lose its value.

What world regions and countries have the largest representations?

Quality is the name of the game for ARCOmadrid, and that goes way beyond the nationality of participating artists or galleries. However, we are indeed reporting an ever-growing turnout of halls from emerging markets, especially out of Asia, with major art galleries from China, Korea and Japan, in addition to India as the special guest nation this time around. In the same breath, the bonds between ARCOmadrid and Hispanic America are getting stronger because one of the main goals we've always pursued is to make

it serve as a bridge in the promotion of Latin American galleries and artists in Europe. Together with them, we have the attendance of prestigious Spanish, European and U.S. galleries that round out quite an ample sample of today's fine arts in the world scene.

How well have the Latin American and Caribbean arts been represented in the previous editions of ARCOmadrid and what are the expectations this time up?

Latin America has always been one of our identity tokens. The presence of Brazil as a guest country last year symbolizes the effort to buttress the leading role of Hispanic America in the fair. In the wake of this, we hope this presence to go stronger with each passing year, not only of Brazilian galleries, but also from all around Hispanic America, just as we will see in this upcoming edition in which the public will find countless halls hailing from Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico and Peru.

What's the role that ARCOmadrid gives to marketing effort? How have you managed to reconcile this with the cultural and artistic values that support the Fair?

ARCOmadrid is a commercial fair. Therefore, to us sales and marketing are basic and, in this sense, national and international collections are quite another strength for this fair. Making top-of-the-line collectors visit Madrid, encouraging the purchase of Spanish and international artworks, and fostering young collectors and collections are key elements in our work on a basis of top-quality cultural and artistic values that can meet the demand of collectors and art lovers alike.

PERFORMING ARCO and EXPANDED BOX will also be major sections in the 2009 edition. Why were they included? Do they help in updating the new trends of the contemporary arts?

Each and every one of these exposition spaces has a history of their own within ARCOmadrid. Expanded Box is the evolution of the program devoted to the application of cutting-edge technologies in artistic creation that was originally called The Black Box four years ago. Performing ARCO is one of the fair's latest contributions to showcase a less frequent discipline in the commercial circles that, nonetheless, comes up with esthetic challenges and statements worth bearing in mind when it comes to these new trends.

SOLO PROJECTS is a section designed for the projects of individual artists. What principles the selection of participating artists were based on? Has a sense of representation based on trends and regions been taken into account?

These artists have been handpicked by a group of prestigious international organizers: Moacir dos Anjos, Colin Chinnery, Maria Ines Rodriguez, Virginia Perez-Ratton, Susanne Neubauer, Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, David G. Torres and Alistair Hicks. Even though this selection clinches a geographical diversity that covers virtually all continents, the regional criterion has not been the main key to choosing them, but rather the artistic quality that moves far beyond borderlines and nationalities.

How do you assess the ranking position of the ARCOmadrid fair among the contemporary art events worldwide? What development perspective do you foresee for ARCOmadrid?

ARCOmadrid has managed to strengthen throughout these years as one of the world's most prestigious contemporary art shows. The challenge now is to keep up that ranking spot. Our perspectives are to make it grow further in terms of quality, to go at great lengths to continue promoting our collections, and work on a few changes in a bid to give ARCOmadrid a personality of its own.

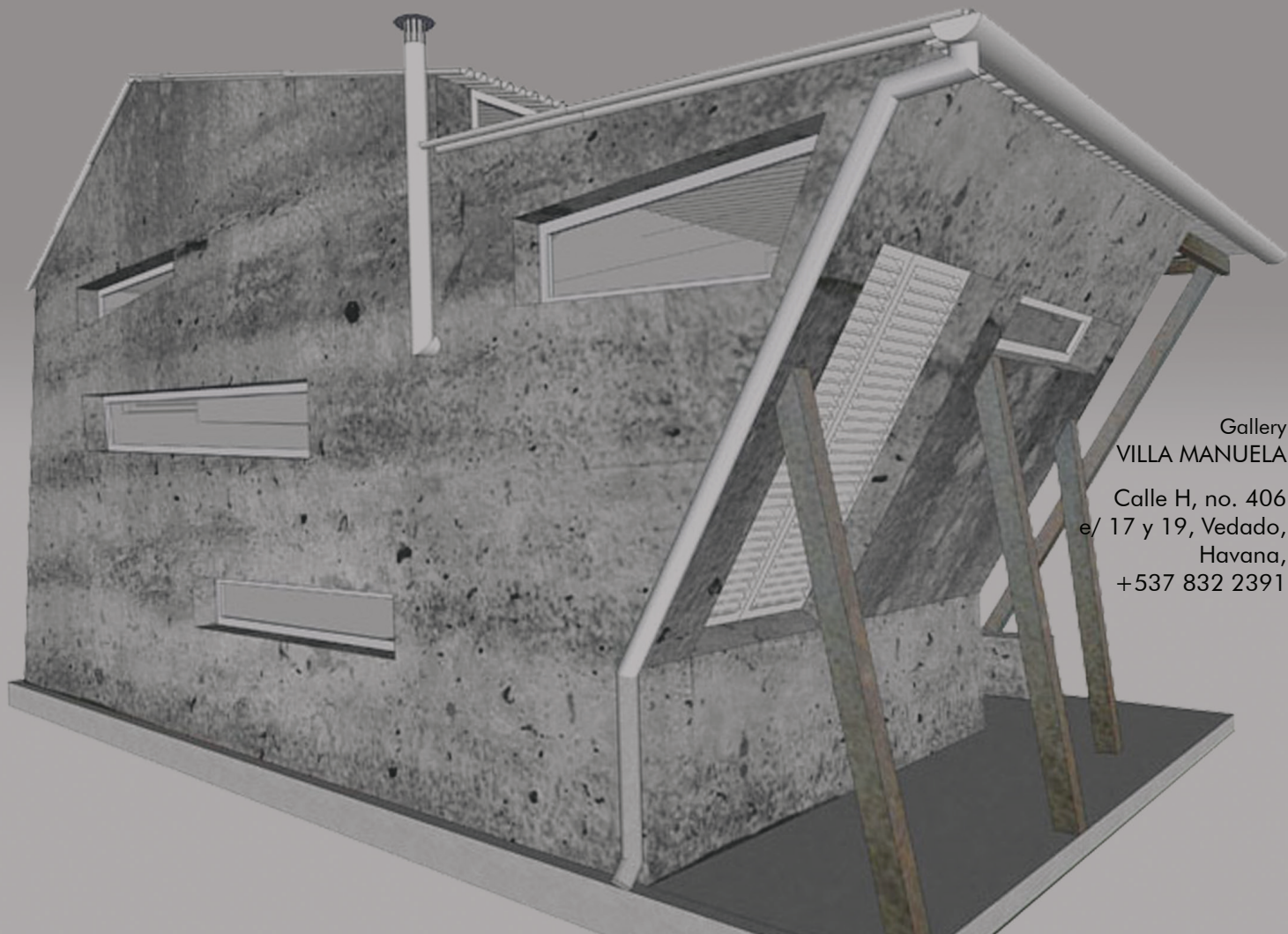


RENÉ FRANCISCO

PER FORMER

New works in the Buena Vista neighborhood
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March 27 / April 27



Gallery
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+537 832 2391



altos parlantes - Cohiba

Los Carpinteros La Habana 2007

LOS CARPINTEROS

Loudspeaker - Cohiba (diptych), 2007
WC/paper, 153 x 112 cm

www.loscarpinteros.net

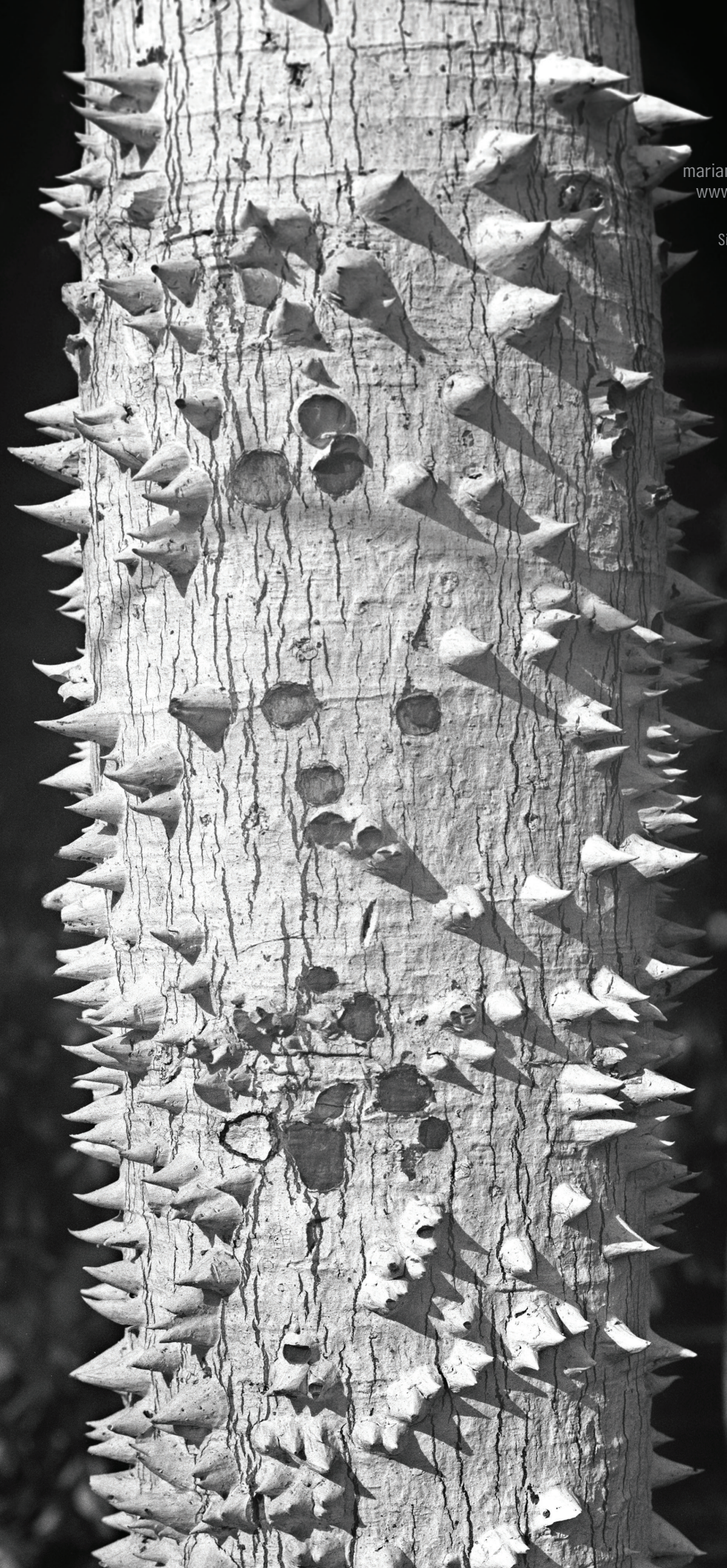
loscarpinteros@cubarte.cult.cu

JUAN CARLOS

ALOM

marianalomj@hotmail.com
www.juancarlosalom.com

The Ceiba, 2008
Silver on gelatin, 37 x 37 cm





RENÉ PEÑA

ellisale@yahoo.com

Minerva, 2007
From the Untitled Album series
Digital printing, 100 x 134 cm
5-issue edition

Arte cubano

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Crist



Cristobal Reinoso was born in 1946 in Santa Fe, Argentina. He started making cartoons for TV shows, but he soon went head-on into graphic humor. Since 1973, he publishes daily in Buenos Aires's Clarin newspaper. He also collaborates with publications in Argentina and overseas devoted to that particular genre. He has put out several books that compile his work in those publications and has won countless awards in graphic humor halls.

PROGRAMA GENERAL. 1900*2000 PARÍS. AD HOC VIGO. AICON GALLERY LONDRES. AKINCI AMSTERDAM. ALEXANDER AND BONIN NUEVA YORK. ALFONSO ARTIACO NÁPOLES. ALTXERRI SAN SEBASTIÁN. ALVARO ALCÁZAR MADRID. ANDRÉ SIMOENS, KNOKKE. ANGELS BARCELONA BARCELONA. ANTHONY REYNOLDS GALLERY LONDRES. ARARIO GALLERY SEÚL. ARNDT & PARTNER BERLÍN. BARBARA GROSS GALERIE MUNICH. BARBARA THUMM BERLÍN. BRBEL GRSSLIN FRANKFURT. BEAUMONTPUBLIC LUXEMBURGO. BERND KLÜSER MUNICH. BERND KUGLER INNSBRUCK. BRITO CIMINO SAO PAULO. CÁNEM CASTELLÓN. CARLES TACHÉ BARCELONA. CARLIER / GEBAUER BERLÍN. CARLOS CARVALHO - ARTE CONTEMPORANEA LISBOA. CAROLINA NITSCH NUEVA YORK. CARRERAS MÚGICA BILBAO. CATHERINE PUTMAN PARÍS. CHARIM GALERIE VIENA. CHARLOTTE LUND ESTOCOLMO. CHRISTOPHER GRIMES SANTA MÓNICA. CONRADS DUSSELDORF. CRISTINA GUERRA CONTEMPORARY ART LISBOA. DAN GALERIA SAO PAULO. DEEVER, OTEGEM. DISTRITO CUATRO MADRID. DNA DIE NEUE AKTIONS GALERIE BERLÍN. EDWARD TYLER NAHEM FINE ART NUEVA YORK. ELBA BENÍTEZ MADRID. 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