

VISUAL WORKS
by Cuban Artists

SECCA

SOUTHEASTERN CENTER
FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

JUNE 7th – NOVEMBER 4th

**CLUB
ANS**
POSTTRUTH PLEASURE AND PAIN

A large, stylized graphic on the right side of the page. The words 'CLUB' and 'ANS' are rendered in a bold, 3D, blocky font. 'CLUB' is in red with a blue shadow, and 'ANS' is in blue with a red shadow. Below 'ANS', the words 'POSTTRUTH', 'PLEASURE', and 'AND PAIN' are written in a smaller, red, sans-serif font, each positioned under a corresponding letter of 'ANS'.

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CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Cuba has more artists than population. Gerardo Mosquera, well-known curator and art critic, joked that artists grow like weeds on the island. In reality, the propagation of artists in Cuba began with the creation of the National School of Arts in 1961, followed by the Instituto Superior de Arte (The University of Arts of Cuba) in 1976. Today, all Cuban provinces have colleges for art teachers and cultural organizations that guarantee young artists' formal development to the highest level of their education. These programs include all genres - dance, including ballet; music; theater; the visual arts that came to represent the avant-garde in the 1980's. Coined the "Cuban Renaissance" or "New Cuban Art" by renowned artist and critic Luis Camnitzer (who currently resides in New York), the visual arts movement critiqued various paradigms and models: identity and heroism, the overarching official narratives of the time, and the corruptive practices within socialism. During this period, Cuban artists lived in a kind of utopia, believing in art's transformative power.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, came the "The Special Economic Period in Times of Peace", in 1992, marked by crisis and dire economic hardship for Cubans. Many Cuban avant-garde artists emigrated, initiating an era of indirect and criticism based on rhetorical figures, including a loss of faith in their former utopic projects.

Artists in Cuba focused on three objectives: (1) to maintain the previous generation's critical stance but elude official censorship; (2) to make a mutually opportunistic pact with the official institutions; and (3) to adapt to the new commercial art market that began to grow with the internationalization of Cuban art and the dollar decriminalization. Artists in Cuba focused on three objectives: (1) to maintain the previous generation's critical stance but elude official censorship; (2) to make a mutually opportunistic pact with the official institutions; and (3) to adapt to the new commercial art market that began to grow.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition features 19 recognized and successful artists of different generations from the seventies, the so-called Cuban Renaissance of the eighties, and today's emerging artists. This exhibition is a compendium of works by Cuban visual artists today, no matter where they live. The artists share two main characteristics: (1) they have been educated on the Island, (2) they are intentional and serious in their artistic approach. The works of art in this exhibition criticize every type of fundamental political power, and questions notions of gender, race, censorship, emigration, fragmentation and the authority of official history. The artists' post-conceptual affiliation, cultural and religious references, political posturing and introspective discourses characterize this exhibition, giving it an irrefutable anthropological value that contributes to understanding Cuban culture and history.

The work of the Cuban artists attracts viewers not only with its formal mastery, but also because it brings to light peculiar and intense cultural and social discourses, displayed with an ample dose of ethical responsibility. They are contemporary, layered, and reactivated references of Cuba that don't fall into identity stereotypes or false traditionalism.

Exhibitions of Cuban artists have taken place for years in the United States (with one of the first at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944) but recently this wave of exhibitions has gained momentum. After 58 years of the "frozen bridge" between Cuba and the US, American interest in Cuba has increased considerably, and the cultural exchange between both countries has aided in this "thawing". Since 2014, when Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro declared the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, Cuba and its culture have been in the US spotlight more than ever. In 2017, surprisingly, we witnessed a setback and serious political impasse and, again, the bridge to diplomacy froze up;

auspiciously, art transcended the freeze because art has always been at the center of this already classic "eternal love".

Post-1959 Cuba is a modern and totalitarian Cuba. Under these circumstances, Cubans have inherited all the modern myths of social progress, equality, emancipation; the master narrative of the Great Subject and the Great Nation, and simultaneously, the traditional discourses of the Caribbean and the periphery. Cuba has lived, and continues to survive in a sort of tautological and tyrannical Matrix, where the combination modernism and totalitarianism - with all the fanfare of legitimizing slogans - prevails.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, twenty-first-century Cuba has used up all formulas for survival and has irreversibly veered off course. That Cuba, a little more informed, thanks to the Wi-Fi hotspots in parks and the weekly internet "packets" (passed around on flash drives), has suffered an ethical collapse. The Island has experienced a displacement of the utopic and the collective ideal and moved toward pragmatism and the individualized vision. Cubans now cling to a sensibility that doesn't believe in slogans, or leaders, or epics, or absolute truths. And they experience this disenchantment in the only way they can; by facing this fractured ideology and replacing the most gut-wrenching pain with the most cynical pleasure. Some of the escape valves have been to enjoy the "gozadera" (a kind of Bacchanal), and to take refuge in historical memory and spirituality. In this logic, art is included.

As a result of field research in Cuba and the United States, these works come to SECCA directly from the artists' studios.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

JOSÉ BEDIA

Babalú Ayé, 2016

Triptych

Acrylic, strings of beads, and fabric on burlap

17.5 x 76 | 17.5 x 23.5 | 17.5 x 76 inches

José Bedia's artwork constitutes a meeting point between two often separate but not mutually exclusive systems: Western culture and so-called primitive cultures (also labeled subordinate or marginal cultures). The artist's physical and mental journeys, his creative trustworthiness, and his vital immersion in religious practices of African origin fundamentally free him from the typically frustrated role of 20th-century anthropologists. Bedia intellectually fuses ancestral knowledge with contemporary and postcolonial thought, in works that express a decolonization of the mind.

Bedia's signature style, which borrows influences from different cultures including the art of the Dakota Sioux tribe, is seen here in texts that resemble pictographs—the archetypical Palo Monte (an Afro-Cuban religion) drawings—“found” materials from research expeditions, and a sketch executed with great mastery.

Bedia's work is based on pataki, or legend, that Babalú Ayé lived a disobedient and promiscuous life among the Yoruba of Africa and, as a result, contracted contagious diseases and was loathed by his people. He decided to explore other lands. Ife Changó accepted him into his territory and assured him that he would be loved and venerated in another land if he performed an ebbo (a Santería ritual using beans) and always kept a dog by his side as a companion. Grateful to Ife Changó, Babalú Ayé continued his journey. In the Dahomey Kingdom in Africa (located

in the land of the Arara) he was venerated, and at Changó's request, the god Olofi consecrated him and created a great rain shower to wash off his sins and made an opening in the earth beneath him to bury them. Babalú Ayé, always accompanied by dogs, is miraculous and pious but also merciless toward those who don't fulfill their promises; he instills fear in everyone.

Against the background of this legend, Bedia's work is about the idea of pilgrimage, whether cultural, existential, or physical, and asks human beings, wherever they may be, not to lose sight of their duties as citizens and believers. He also encourages loyalty and integrity, maintained by keeping one's word.

Santería: A system of beliefs that merges aspects of the Yoruba religion brought to the New World by enslaved Yoruba people from Africa along with Christianity and the religions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Changó: In the syncretic Afro-Cuban religion, Chango is also the Catholic Saint Barbara, the orisha, or god of justice, thunder, and fire. His color is red, and his day, December 4.

Babalú Ayé: His name means “Father of the World”. In the syncretic Afro-Cuban religion, he is also the Catholic Saint Lazarus. He represents skin afflictions and contagious diseases, especially venereal diseases and epidemics. His color is deep purple, and his day, December 17.

ARTISTS

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JOSÉ BEDIA

Step by Step, We Go Far, 2018

Site specific installation

Acrylic on canvas, branches, fabric, rope, chains and clay

139 x 192 inches



“Piango Piango Llega Lejos” (*Step by Step, We Go Far*) is a Palo Monte proverb in the Kongo language. These words of wisdom call for knowledge with prudence and speak of patience and good judgment as a basic requirement for success. The words can also refer to a long journey.

The artist paints the entire piece without paint brushes; he uses only his hands to depict Babalú Ayé’s journeys. Bedia upends the concepts of perspective and vanishing point, which first emerged during the Renaissance in Western visual art. Instead, the artist reconnects the symmetry of traditional cultures as an attractive and legitimate resource. The composition contains several references to the religious ritual and initiation rites of Palo Monte or “Trees of the Sacred Forest”. Marks, in the form of an “S” or a cross, sketched on the canvas represent fine “cuts” on the initiate’s skin; graphic symbols called signatures or “firmas” allude to a system of cosmograms; and the small branches propped against the canvas are “palos” (which refer to the wooden sticks used in religious ceremonies).

Palo Monte: A complex system of shamanistic beliefs and practices of Bantu origin that has evolved in Cuba since the introduction of slavery. This magical cult is based on an intense interaction between its practitioners and the spirits in nature who rule all things. Palo Monte practice is based on establishing relationships with the dead.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ARIEL CABRERA

Babalú Ayé, 2016 (next page)
Triptych
Acrylic, strings of beads, and fabric on burlap
17.5 x 76 | 17.5 x 23.5 | 17.5 x 76 inches

Starting in art school Ariel Cabrera has had constant interaction with collectibles, artwork, and documents relating to the collection of a historical memory of Cuba. These material testimonies have become strange and truthful fonts of information that differ with the narrative promoted by the official institutions of Cuba, concerning the history of the struggle for independence, which has remained unchanged as the official history of a unilateral doctrine.

Cabrera's works of art are a contrasting revision of this official history, and the "act of painting" constitutes in and of itself, the rescue of a record that has legitimized certain representations of men, their customs and doctrines. This becomes a new historiography which subjects history to scrutiny.

In his work, Cabrera selects images taken from archival materials to represent little-known aspects of Cuban history, and refers to early photography and its forms of dialogue with painting. His work presents military events from the struggles for the independence of Cuba during 1868-1878 and 1895-1898, creating a big collage of simultaneous events and supposed dialogues. "Tregua Fecunda", is the name given by Jose Martí, the Cuban "National Hero", to the period between wars, from 1878 to 1895. During these years the Cuban population had time to create the conditions needed to carry on the Big War

of 1895. The Cuban population, of course, increased. Cabrera assumes the role of the voyeur and magnifies, with some sarcasm, the sexual excesses in this interval of peace, appropriating the myth that Cubans are the most fun-loving and sexual beings on earth. Preparing for the war of 1895 also meant something less solemn as having fun, such as indulging in pleasures, violating and procreating.

Sarcasm, erotic burlesque and playfulness are present in his works, either in romantic struggles or intimate scenes shaped as a campaign notes and short stories. Cabrera presents an ideological deconstruction of the almost sacred images of the solemn heroes (known as mambises) of the war of independence whose symbolism recurs in each stage of the battle; where the paradox is implicit, and the historical discourse is as an open approach between the truth and simulation.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ARIEL CABRERA



ARTISTS

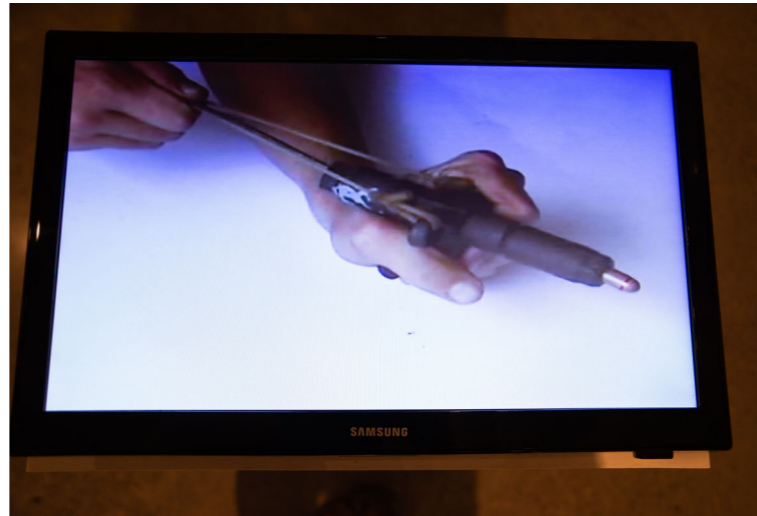
Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

CELIA & YUNIOR

Puzzle, 2006
Video 0'48"

Documentation and meticulous recording are at the core of Celia & Yunior's work. Their videos and installations utilize a methodology that always tries to show the gap between state-regulated use of goods and materials versus how they are actually used. Thousands of people operate in this fissure, however, in a pragmatic and illegal way, in order to survive in rough conditions. "We are very interested in institutions and administration systems, and how often an individual uses them according to their intended purposed," says Yunior.

In *Puzzle*, someone anonymously assembles pipes fragments in order to make a weapon. These homemade objects, known on the Island as "injectors," supplement the absence of firearms within the population; in Cuba the sale and possession of weapons is prohibited. *Puzzle*, which looks like a playful visual haiku, not only shows the ingenuity of many people who have almost nothing, but reveals a crack in which people can "border the illicit", which is often faster than abiding by the rules of the establishment. It also reveals some hidden violence.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ALEJANDRO FIGUEREDO

Dissonance / Disonancia, 2015
TV monitors, headphones and kneeling pads

In this two-channel video and audio work, the voices of Assata Shakur and Tania Bruguera reveal how activists are implicated in the complexity of Cuba's new political situation after the announcement in December 2014 of the normalization of diplomatic relations with the USA.

Bruguera is a Cuban performance artist whose works challenge the Island's government. This has caused her activity within her home country to be strictly limited. Shakur was leader of the Black Liberation Army and a member of the former Black Panther Party. She fled the U.S. in 1984 to live in political asylum in Cuba. Shakur embraces the freedom that she finds in Cuba, a freedom that is now threatened by the new relations between the countries. Conversely, Bruguera exposes the inequities and lack of freedom in Cuba.

Dissonance incorporates audio from two sources: a phone call Bruguera made to her sister in January 2015, after Bruguera was arrested and banned from performing a piece where she intended to place a microphone in Havana's Revolutionary Square; and Shakur's reading of her letter written to the Pope in 1998.

In May 2013, the F.B.I. made Shakur the first woman on its list of Most Wanted Terrorists, causing her to "drop out of sight" in Cuba since then. Both Bruguera and Shakur have been hailed as freedom fighters but, by their respective country's definition, they are political dissidents.

Dissonance invites the audience to be a participant in the conversation of these two activists and simultaneously attempts to involve the viewer in unraveling the political contradictions buried between the lines of both statements against a "certain power."



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

RAFAEL DOMENECH FEAT. ERNESTO OROZA

Collaborative System, 2017-2018 (next page)
Mixed media installations, indoor and outdoor sculptures
and table with books

Untitled, 2015
Collage and wood
Variable dimensions
Private Collection, NY

Lately, Rafael Domenech has been seduced by the idea of space not only as an exhibition place but as an active entity of thinking and process. Collaboration is also a key notion of his current work. That's why he is interested in inviting Ernesto Oroza to exhibit, as a way to incorporate ideas about partnering, sharing, and community.

These works revolve around ideas of standardization, information, reuse, contamination, sedimentation, language, and means of production. Memory continues to occupy a preponderant place in his work. The sculptures, collages, and books contain information and materials gathered from the different urban contexts. Overlapping, the city is present as well. The shape of the table, for example, in which the viewer is involved in a more interactive process, questions the protocols between work, spectator, and institution and creates a new geography. This idea was inspired by "The Naked City", a project by Guy Debord and his concept of drift.

As a result, all these works of abstract visuality enter into an engaging quarrel with the sociological and anthropological information contained in the pieces. They are abstract archives, depots of superposed cultures. These metaphors can summarize his work.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

RAFAEL DOMENECH FEAT. ERNESTO OROZA



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

AIMÉE GARCÍA

From the series Repression, 2018
Oil on wood, fabric and thread fibers

It is possible that Aimée García is the most prolific Cuban self-portrait artist. In Cuba the use of the self-portrait is almost a political gesture. On the Island, everyone is taught the idea of the collective and the masses are surrounded by a discourse that nullifies any semblance of the self or individual initiative. García's artwork goes against that doctrine. García proposes a new type of humanism, situating herself as the protagonist and the center of racial, domestic, historical, identity and social contradictions.

With this series García returns to her "old" habit of installing the painting, using distinctive collage in her work. Here, she speaks of a strong existential asphyxia produced by the gags of censorship and daily life that exists on the Island. She denounces repression as well as resistance in a phallogocentric and military context. García's whole creation is an enigma. Her eye-catching works paradoxically show an immense nervousness and a curious tension between meekness and pitilessness, brittleness and robustness.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ROCÍO GARCÍA

White magic. From the series The return of Jack the punisher
2012
Oil on canvas
78.7 x 85.4 inches

Rocío García's works, from A to Z, constitute an essay on the tyranny of the norm, the fascist binaries and phallogentric totalitarianism that have governed the West. Power and pretense are her great obsessions.

In this series, García radicalizes the military horse-breaker and the intrigue of The Thriller. She underscores the omnipresence of power and its astute capacity to fragment into multiple personalities. The little rabbit appears throughout this whole series and is her symbol for freedom and inner peace. It is a mental projection that is the visual space of the "I," ungovernable.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

ROCÍO GARCÍA

Sequence shot 12. Like the last blues. From the series The Thriller, 2006 (detail)
Oil on canvas
47.2 x 55.11 inches each

Homoerotic passages, the sadomasochism in some scenes, and the abusive transactions between characters and systems are common elements in all of her productions. Micro-scale pretexts comment on major schemes: totalitarian misogyny and the absolute control of power. This behavior, no matter how irrational or libertine it seems, is methodically documented by García to the most minute degree. No other Cuban artist, past or present, has even tangentially approached the topic of the homoerotic, while García has rendered it systematically and with brutal honesty and courage. This topic is only one of her platforms for discussion to deal with broader themes.

In this series García goes beyond static painting, appealing to the screenplay and the cinematographic sequence. Film Noir's intrigue, mistrust, and violence are reflected in the works' titles in plots loaded with details. This work was exhibited at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

MANUEL MENDIVE

The landscape and its owner, 2010
Installation of acrylic on canvas, painted gourds, cowrie shells, fabric and metal
Variable dimensions | Dimensiones variables
Artist collection | Colección del artista

The work of Mendive is heavily influenced by the cults and the imaginary worlds of Afro-Cuban religions, especially the Yoruba people who came as slaves from West Africa to Cuba and other places. His paintings, installations, and sculptures are a fusion of patakías (legends), memory, pain, and beauty. The recreation of all this generates a work where the metamorphosis of the living beings, of nature, and the decor of naïf appearance, warn of the pantheistic vocation of the artist, hence his favorite colors are green (vegetation), blue (sky and water), and earth colors. Of his work, Mendive stated: "The elements of Afro-Cuban culture are the stimulus and nourishment to build my discourse, the death, the life and everything that exists in them, the good, the evil and the most beautiful moments. To know everything that is in us is important to me. I live with my ancestors and with my gods. Long life to the world! ASHÉ."

In this installation, the peacock transformed in the sky personifies Oshun, the deity of the rivers, which represents the sublime and beautiful. The Sun is the owner of the landscape. The gourds "receive" the water that metaphorically emanates from the work. El Paisaje y su Dueño showcases the artist's skill as well as his interest in artisan and organic elements. An element often found in Mendive's work is the use of cowrie shells, an object used by Santeros in their divinations.

Oshun (Ochun): Syncretized with Our Lady of El Cobre (Blessed Virgin Mary), patron saint of Cuba. The deity of the rivers and fresh water, personifies the love, the flattery, and fertility. Color: Yellow. Day: September 8.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

MANUEL MENDIVE

I can dream, 2009
Acrylic on canvas, cowrie shells and metal
94 x 80 inches

In this work, Mendive underlines the spiritual power of dreams and the vital impulse that they contain. The presence of the cowrie shells and larger-than-life figures refers to the symbiosis between man and nature. The bird stretching its wings stands anchored on the head of a sleeping figure. This image represents a paradoxical duality: dreams are connected to the spiritual and material world, and this union is the one that allows a human being to transcend.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

CARLOS MONTES DE ORCA

Trance, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
78.7 x 118.1 inches

Shapeless essence No.1, 2016-2017
Acrylic on canvas
56.4 x 47.3 inches

Dressed as context and leaping out into the unknown
2016-2017 (next page)
Acrylic on canvas
76.8 x 72.5 inches

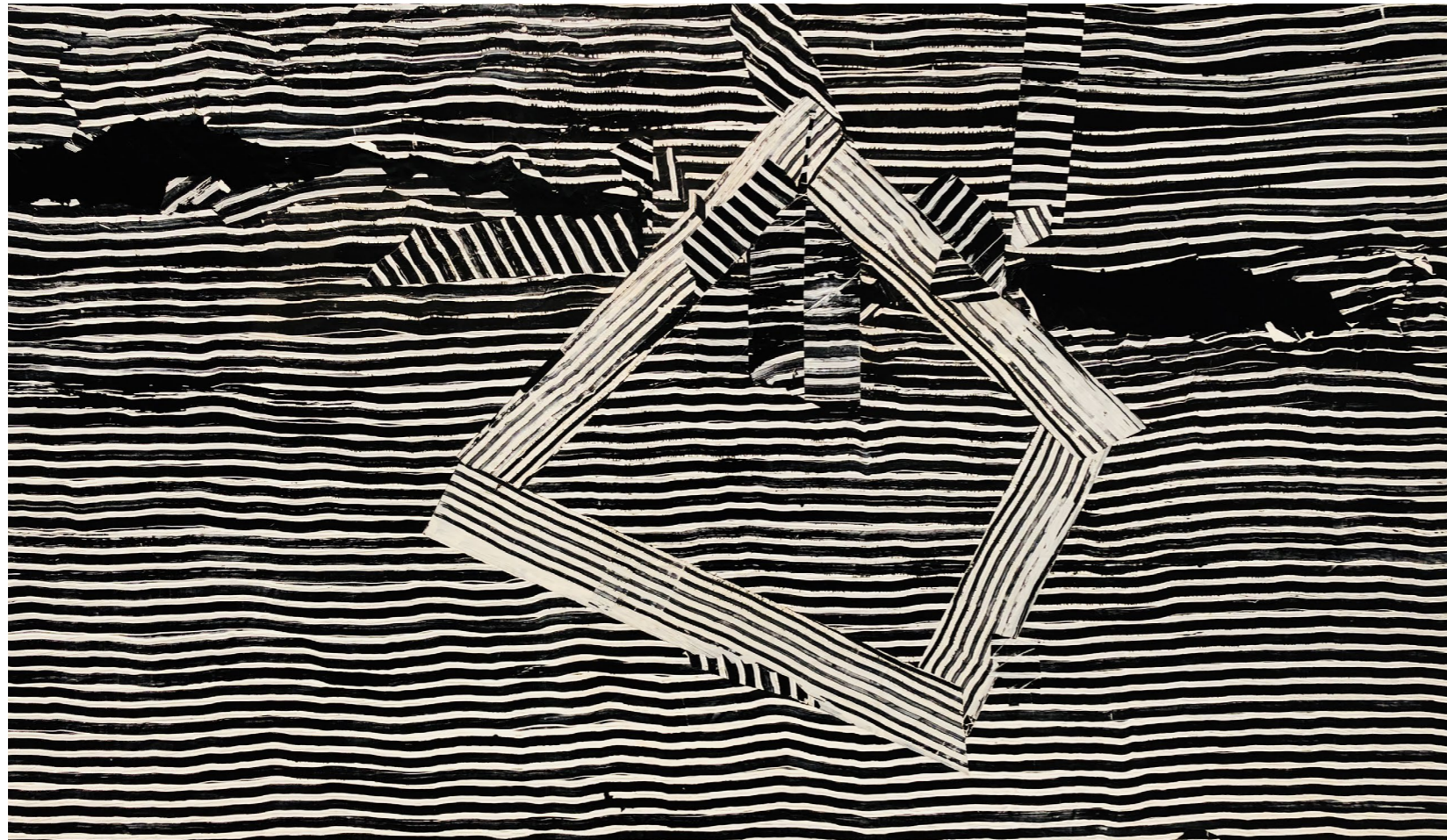
Carlos Montes de Oca is one of the most cerebral and versatile artists in the visual arts scene in Cuba. As a key exponent of what the artist calls expanded drawing he does not discard any media: video, painting, installation, photography. All his works are of very conceptual nature and visually attractive. In the current phase of his work, dominated by abstract painting, Montes de Oca wanted to prioritize a methodology based on random control as an expression of desired freedom. So, he invented a whole practice that grants a handmade and process-driven tint to the painting. The paintings presented here belong to this series of works. To achieve this result, Montes de Oca "paints" first on a nylon that transfers to the canvas, creating a kind of permeable work. With this process, he does not have to be too careful. He can work with accidents (cracks, pleats, etc.) and recombination, generating these textures. The nylon, removed at the end, works as varnish, skin, or sticker during the process. In these pieces, the artist tries to recreate the aerial views of crops, similar to those found in the visually graphic works of some pre-Columbian cultures.

For Carlos Montes de Oca "a finished painting is like a dead animal. In this case the finished and dry layer can be detached from the nylon and is moldable, as part of a process that only 'ends' when you want (...) it's the closest thing to freedom I know."

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

CARLOS MONTES DE ORCA



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

GEANDY PAVÓN

Vae Victis Vanitas, 2015-2016 (next page)
Digital Print | C-Print from a scanned negative
Printed Area: 24 x 24 inches each

Vae Victis Vanitas is an ongoing project. These are portraits of former Cuban political prisoners who are currently living in exile in the United States. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, the revolutionary government of Cuba jailed over 35.000 of its citizens as political prisoners. Some of them had ties to the dictatorship of General Fulgencio Batista, who was overthrown by the rebels led by Fidel Castro. Nevertheless, many members of the revolutionary army soon fell in disgrace and were also imprisoned, along with civil activists, previously identified with the tenets of the Revolution. Some of them were involved in counterrevolutionary activities that, sometimes recurred to violence. However, others were simply peacefully critical of the government's leaders but were imprisoned as well. Upon their release, they were forced to leave their homeland and most of them migrated to the United States.

Contrary to the success stories of Cuban American exiles, these are portraits of deception, of loss and frustration, but also of pride and perseverance as these individuals continued to nurture a Utopian Cuba, in spite of their harsh fortunes. Rather than pursuing the American Dream, like most immigrants do, they placed their hopes and aspirations in the restoration of a myriad of romanticized versions of Cuba, which aged and faded along with their lives.

Vanitas refers to the Baroque notion of the inevitability of death, and the transience and vanity of earthly achievements, including the noblest ones. These political actors embody the idea of futile resistance against the backdrop of their own mortality. In this sense, every photograph is taken having in mind not only the traditional genre of the documentary portrait but also the symbolic simplicity of a *Vanitas* still life. These political prisoners were representative of a cross-section of the Cuban society of the period. They came from a wide ideological and social spectrum, and they also were demographically diverse. Nowadays, they meet every Tuesday at the Unión de Ex-Presos Políticos Cubanos, at the heart of the Cuban community in Union City, New Jersey.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

GEANDY PAVÓN



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

RENÉ PEÑA

White hands of shame, 2015 (next page)
Pigment inkjet print
24 x 31.4 inches
Edition 3/10

Black Shoes. From the series Untitled Album, 2007
Pigment inkjet print
31.4 x 31.4 inches

Solitaire. From the series The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover, 1994
Pigment inkjet print
24 x 31.4 inches
Edition 1/10

Untitled. From the series Untitled Album, 2007
Pigment inkjet print
24 x 31.4 inches
Artist proof

Untitled. From the series Untitled Album, 2007
Pigment inkjet print
24 x 31.4 inches

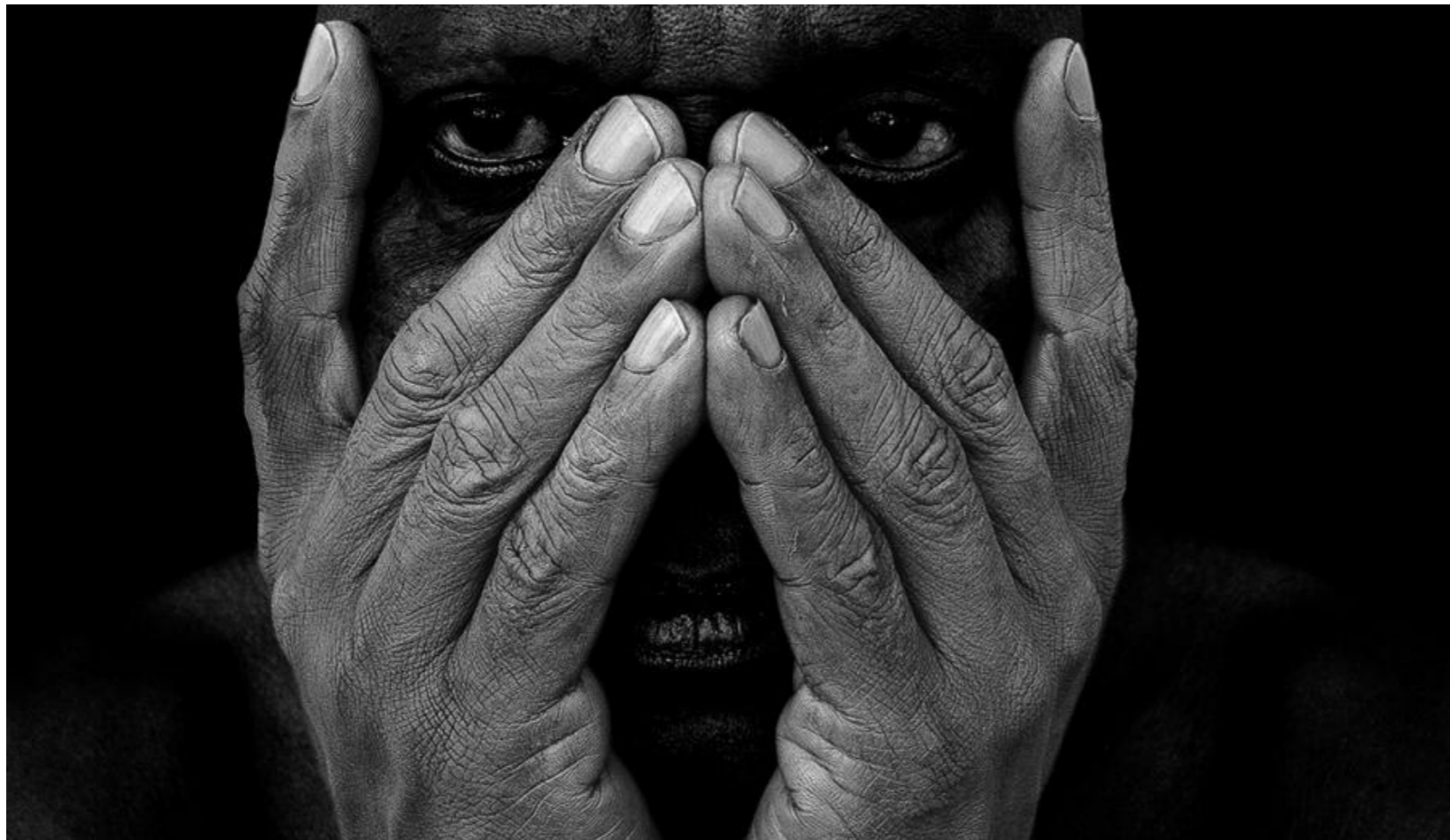
Black and white, the concept of duality, and his own body are vital components of the photographs of René Peña. His body functions as an aesthetic and autobiographical device to talk about racial and gender issues, about taboos, marginalization, and clichés. The body also operates as a unifying element and as a path of knowledge. Whether with a minimalist treatment or with a carefully narrative scene as in *Solitaire*, his photos contain a strong theatrical touch.

Peña says, “My work is basically about the relationship between individuals and a particular social group –how the individual keeps trying to have his own identity even though he can’t escape his social group and society in general. We all have our institutions –family, religious, athletic, whatever –and they carry their own ideologies with them. We can’t escape them. We’re all institutionalized but we all think we’re individuals. This duality is what motivates my work.”

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

RENÉ PEÑA



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

CARLOS QUINTANA

Untitled, 2010 (right)
Oil on canvas
86 x 71 inches

Deer and white super casserole, 2011
Oil on canvas
79 x 98 inches
Private Collection, NY

Untitled / Sin título, 2010
Oil on canvas | Óleo sobre lienzo
68 x 59 inches

For Quintana, painting is an act of faith. His works have a big dose of frenetic intuition and art critics always affirm that the topic of his work is the painting itself. But, rooted in an excellent drawing style, his pieces show his interest in Afro-Cuban and Eastern religions, from which he is influenced, and also of not accepting the binary logic of the modern thinking. There are hybrids and androgynous characters in all of his works. Many scholars emphasize his unorthodox way of painting, through spitting, urinating, and pouring beer on the canvas. His technique is evident in each painting: intense, vital, very physical, performative, and vigorous.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

SANDRA RAMOS

Seawall / Malecón, 2013
Video, 4'18"

Havana has always been a cosmopolitan and megalomaniacal city. Transitory celebrities from all over the world have passed through since colonial times. *Seawall* is a picturesque summary, bringing together Ramos' stock characters to speak to the passing spectacle: Columbus, Uncle Sam, Jose Martí, comic book and comic strip characters, Alice in Wonderland... Havana's seawall welcomes multitudes of all races and creeds, and it's also one of Cuba's borders.

Ramos speaks of the ideological fricassee that is today's Cuba and the passing of the baton from one generation to another in relation to the Cuban revolution.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

SANDRA RAMOS

Relay Race, 2010
Diptych
Etching and aquatint on paper
7.5 x 19.01 inches each

Cutting the Cake, 2010
Etching and aquatint on paper
19.6 x 23.6 inches

Trojan Horse, 2017
Etching
19.6 x 35.4 inches

Leviathan, 2017
Etching
19.6 x 35.4 inches

Sandra Ramos' artwork is a coherent set of engravings, installations, paintings, objects, and videos. She addresses themes of insularity, emigration, the absence of freedom, political isolation, power transition in Cuba, and her own autobiography through a range of characters and stereotypes that have permeated Cuba's visual imagery for the last hundred years. Her alter-ego fuses self-portrait as a child, a Dutch princess, and Alice in Wonderland, one of the artist's favorites. She's a dreamer, a lover of freedom, and a believer in good causes. The characters Fool and Liborio (see below for definitions) are also systematically woven into this insular apocalypse. Ramos reuses and redefines these distinctive and symbolic caricatures from Cuba's pre-1959 Republic in order to critique the current Cuban reality. The characters contribute an apparent sincerity and naiveté to Ramos' universe.

Bobo de Abela (Abela's Fool): In 1926, the painter Eduardo Abela created this androgynous character whose face is shaped like the female buttocks. An icon of Cuban caricature, Bobo appeared in the Cuban press until around 1936, when Gerardo Machado's dictatorship imposed repression and censorship. Abela's Bobo denounced the excesses of that period, "playing the fool" by "speaking without speaking," making "innocent" comments, and pretending not to understand.

Liborio: Attributed to Ricardo Torriente, this thin, bearded man represents the Cuban people. He circulated in the Cuban press from the first decade of the twentieth century until 1931. Sad, cunning, nationalist, and anti-imperialist, he carries a machete and is always ready to excoriate successful political figures. Liborio is "the embodiment of the national frustration and impotence."

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

SANDRA RAMOS

Perpetual Movement of the Gusano between Two Shores
2018

Installation comprised of rotating platform, light box, digital print, and large duffel bag

Perpetual Movement of the Gusano between Two Shores reflects the continuous and commonplace practice of trafficking and exchanging consumer products among Cubans who live on the island and abroad and travel back and forth. The term *gusano* literally means worm and was used by officials to slur Cubans who fled the revolution. More recently, Cubans call large duffel bags — lightweight but with huge capacity — *gusanos*. Given the perpetual scarcity of essential household goods, Cubans who can travel between Cuba and foreign shores purchase, transport, and import all kinds of products — televisions, washing machines, toys, clothes, and the most basic hygiene products like soap, toothpaste, sanitary napkins in bulk — for personal and family consumption and/or to sell on the black market. The sheer bulk of consumer goods forces Cubans to use this oddly-shaped baggage. Hence, the giant duffel bags, boxes, plastic-wrapped bundles, and oversized suitcases are iconic of a complex burden, especially in contrast to the frugal carry-on luggage average travelers take on most flights.

One of Ramos' pivotal themes has always been the question of emigration, and she uses her artwork to define and symbolize its symptoms and mutations. For example, she exposes the semantic interpretations of the *gusano* as Cuban defector and luggage-mutated-into-lifeline. Paradoxically, in recent years, many Cuban "defectors" have returned to deliver large amounts

of consumer goods to the Cuban people; both kinds of *gusanos* are well received on the island.

Ramos' installation rotates in perpetual motion, like an airport baggage carousel, revealing the trip, the shortfalls, and the phenomenon of the neverending.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

SANDRA RAMOS

Heavens, 2015
Book
Print on paper and mirror
17.7 x 29.72 inches

Humans have always been curious about what exists after death. *Heavens* is a book dedicated to the mystery of death and the hope that something neverending exists beyond it. Ramos' piece alludes to Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven*, in which the bird reveals itself as the Messenger of Death, croaking "Nevermore". Other references to Franz Kafka and *The Gospels* seek to express the mystery that remains within us, as human beings — a parallel universe of material nonexistence. Ramos invokes art, literature, and human thought as a means to achieve transcendence and, on some level, temporal immortality.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

GRETHELL RASÚA

About Permanence and Other Necessities, 2014
Video, 6'01"

Grethell Rasua's work can be defined as the beauty of the scatological and the scatology of beauty. Her performance, installation and video works essentially lead us to somatic and immediate reflections, imbued with complex discursive constructions about love, eroticism, beauty, pain, femininity, and political or intimate spaces. In many of her pieces, for example, – *About Permanence and Other Necessities* –, her own body is the best argument, a kind of presence that both perceives and enunciates at the same.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

YALI ROMAGOZA

Monument of the Great Living Artist, 2018

Closing Performance

Artist body, magazine clippings, paper, tape, gold acrylic, pedestal, garment, music, speakers

Monument of the Great Living Artist is a performance inspired by the essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) by US art historian Linda Nochlin. In the text, Nochlin explores the institutional obstacles that have prevented women in the West from succeeding in the arts.

In the performance, Romagoza appears as her alter-ego "Cuquita, the Cuban doll." Cuquita poses for the audience while reciting with her Cuban accent fragments of Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" that she recorded along with songs by Cuban singer La Lupe. At the end of the performance, she will read: "American Feminism as it stands is a white middle-class movement," (Anna Mendieta). "The Choice is yours. Say it but with an accent" (Cuquita, the Cuban doll).

In the current political and social turbulence, the topic of feminism has been brought to light in the mainstream media by celebrities, politicians and journalists exposing the disadvantages and oppression of women in a patriarchal society. However, there are still social groups excluded from the discussion, or not sufficiently represented. In Romagoza's piece, she interacts with Nochlin's essay as a Cuban female artist in the US, which adds more layers of complexity for women in the arts.

Based on her experience as an immigrant, Romagoza seeks to rebuild a cultural home in New York and Havana while she positions herself within the art scene in the US in which she

doesn't often feel represented. The performance explores what it means to achieve greatness for the so-called "minority artist." Entities of power like museums, institutions, academia and the art market play an essential role in categorizing artist into tidy boxes. "Cuquita, the Cuban doll" as a character dismantles the notion of singular Cuban identity, and it overturns the stereotypes of Cuban art and artists, that are placed on Cubans by Western supremacy.



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

VIDEO GROUP

DIANA FONSECA

Pastime / Pasatiempo, 2004 (next page)
Video, 4'46"

CELIA & YUNIOR

The body speaks in the past tense, 2007
Video, 3'35"

JUAN-SÍ GONZÁLEZ

Mental landscape, 2009
Video, 2'38"

LUIS GÁRCIGA

Possible destinations, 2009
Video, 10'05"

The use of video art in Cuba emerged during the early nineties. In spite of its short history, we can trace some tendencies and qualities:

Cuban video art does not follow a specific canon because, among other reasons, a department of video art did not exist at the Superior Institute of Art or peer institutions. Only recently, thanks to the personal initiative of artists Luis Gómez and

Antonio Margolles, did the art school create a teaching post in new technologies.

Within the visual arts, making videos is seen as an extension of individual expression, not a separate medium, or a legitimate independent field of study. "Videastas" (Cuban video artists) are not filmmakers in strict sense, they are painters, printmakers or sculptors, even art critics, who also create videos clearly linked to their body of work and often included in their major exhibitions.

The island's video artists prioritize content over form and the actual making of the video. In many cases, the works are defective and of low quality and suffer from a mono soundtrack, in part due to the technological precariousness of the early nineties — and even today— along with the penchant of Cubans to emphasize meaning over technology: the so-called "the good form of the bad forms."

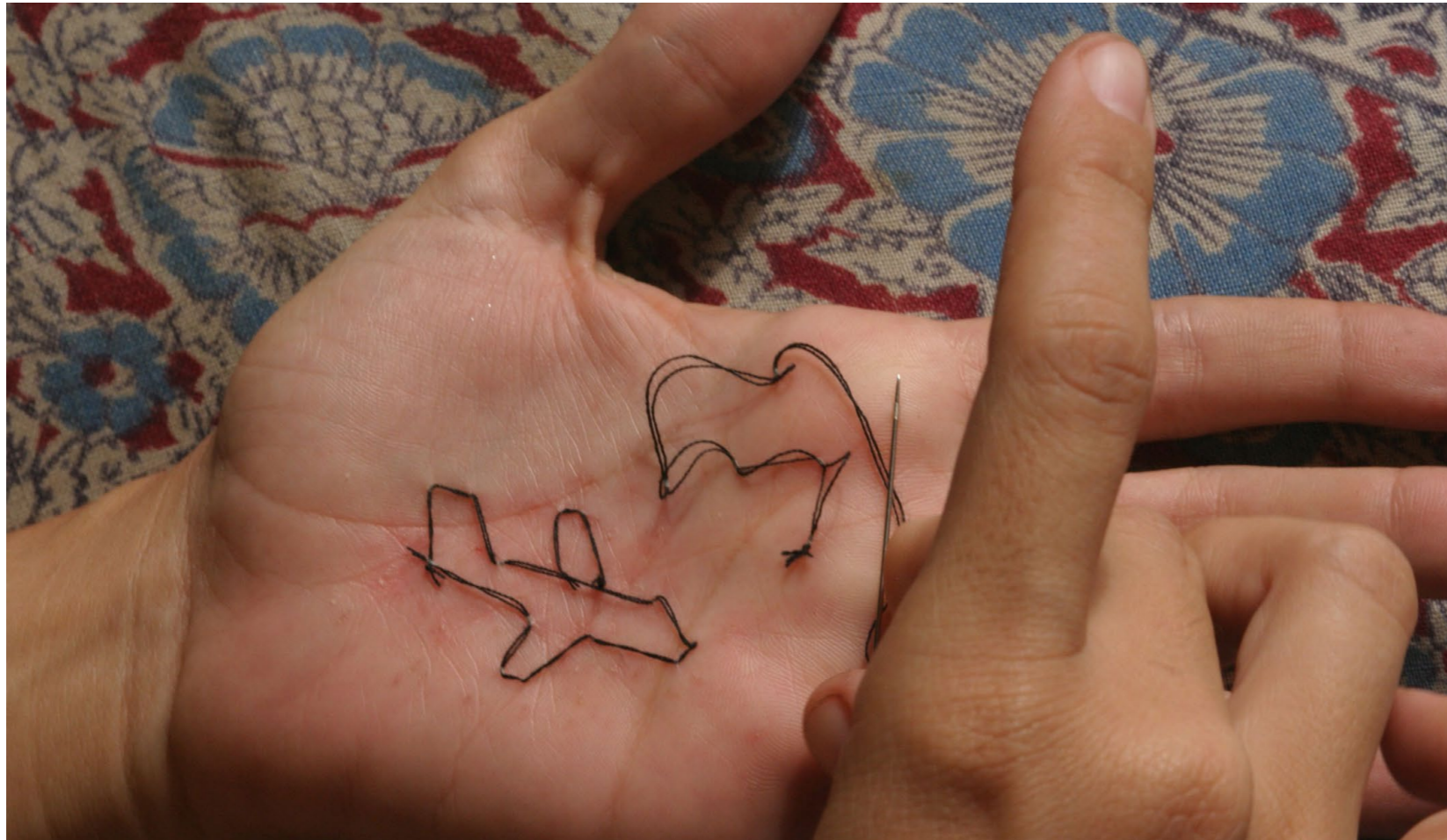
One of Cuban video art's strongest traits is the aestheticization of documentation; that is, documentation understood as depicting, almost pure reality or with a high percentage of veracity. It has become a useful tool when collective memory loss prevails. Often these works have strong sociological characteristics.

These videos were chosen because they illustrate some of the subject matter explored by the artist of video creations in Cuba: memories, dreams, the exile experience, the nonsense of life, the deconstruction of the figure of the leader, and the absence of viable projects for most Cubans are some of them.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

VIDEO GROUP



ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

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Collaborative System, 2017-2018

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

This exhibition was made possible by Marley Drug

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Elvia Rosa Castro Martín

Elvia Rosa Castro Martín (Sancti Spíritus, 1968). Castro obtained her Philosophy Degree and a Masters in Art History at the University of Havana, Cuba. She is currently an independent art curator, art critic and editor. Castro is also the CEO of the art blog Señor Corchea, the first independent blog created in Cuba to promote Cuban artists and exhibitions. She has been awarded two Calendario Prizes in Essay (both in 1997), as well as the Juan Francisco Elso Fellowship (2000), National Prize of Curatorship (2005), the Grant de IFA-RAVE Foundation, (2007) in Germany, and the National Prize of Art Critique Guy Pérez Cisneros, 2011. Her texts have been published in several art journals and she has published six books as the solo author: *La conjura de los fieles* (Ed. Abril, 1998), *El mundo como ilusión y apariencia* (Ed. Abril, 1998), *Erizando las crines* (Ed. Matanzas y aldabón, 2001), *El observatorio de Línea. Repasos al arte cubano* (Ed. Unión, 1998), *Aterrizaje. Después de la crítica de la razón cínica* (Editorial Luminaria, 2011) and *Los colores del ánimo* (Detrás del Muro Ediciones, 2015).

Elvia Rosa Castro has curated and co-curated big exhibitions at prestigious locations such as *Moving fast. European Media Art Festival*, Osnabrueck, Germany, 2007; *Arboleda. El cuerpo es cuerpos*, León, Guanajuato, 2008; *Reality Show. Confluencias Inside II*, Hispanic Cultural Center, Albuquerque, 2009; *Glamour de Occidente. Algunos homenajes a Michel Foucault*, Bienal de La Habana, 2009; *Portugal Arte10*, 2010; *Ya sé leer. Imagen y texto en el arte latinoamericano*. Centro Wifredo Lam, 2011; *Escapando con el paisaje*, Bienal de La Habana 2012; *Tócate. Jóvenes fotógrafos*. Galería Habana, 2013; *Libros sin*

dominio, Bienal de La Habana, 2015. She has been co-curator of *Detrás del Muro* (Behind the Wall) Project in its two editions at the Havana Biennial.

She has lectured at Wisconsin University; Wake Forest University, NC; Otterbein University, Ohio; Institut für Romanistik, Potsdam Universität; Lateinamerika-Institut, Freie Universität, Berlin; Institut für Romanistik, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin; Kunsthøgskolen, Bergen, Noruega; Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet, Trondheim, Noruega; Instituto de Arte, Guadalajara, México; Universidad Veritas, Costa Rica; Centro de Teoría y Arte Teórica, Costa Rica; Higher Institute of Art, Havana; Tania Bruguera Art Behavior Workshop, Havana. As adjunct professor at the University of Havana, she taught several courses at the Faculty of Arts and Philology and has advised many theses at the University of Havana and at the Higher Institute of Art.

Gretel Acosta

Gretel Acosta (Havana, 1989) is graduated from the University of Havana in Art History (2014). She has been awarded with the *Remake*, Curatorial Grant Issued by the Center for Development of Visual Arts of Cuba for her collateral collective show *NANO* at the Twelfth Biennale of Havana, and recently, she receives the UNCG Inclusiveness Award to study the Master of Arts in Languages, Literatures, and Cultures in this University.

ARTISTS

Elvia Rosa Castro and Gretel Acosta

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