

Half a century of visual arts in Cuba

ADELAIDA DE JUAN

THE FOUNDATION of two cultural institutions a few months after the revolutionary triumph in January 1959 would have a remarkable impact on the future of visual arts in Cuba, which already boasted significant movements and names. The Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC in the Spanish acronym) and Casa das Americas, established in March and April, respectively, were of great importance as they provided new scenarios in which established forms of expressions flourished and new productions emerged, particularly in the field of graphic design. Thus, there was an opening both within the country and with the outside world, promoted especially by the initiatives of the aforementioned institutions. Additionally, the National Museum of Fine Arts (NMFA) gained new impetus, and exhibition galleries were established not only in the capital but in other cities countrywide as well.

The Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC in the Spanish acronym) was created in 1961, initially under the leadership of the painter Mariano (1912-1990). In 1963 Cuba hosted, in Havana, the Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA). To that end, the Cuba Pavilion, which would become the venue of important exhibitions, was built in the Vedado district, and the sidewalks of the main avenue, known as La Rampa, were repaired. These sidewalks showcased slabs designed by the most important Cuban artists in activity at the time, such as Wifredo Lam (1902-1982), Amelia Peláez (1896-1968), Mariano, René Portocarrero (1912-1985), Luis Martínez Pedro (1910-1989), and Sandú Darié (1908-1991).

The following year Casa das Americas, whose visual arts department was directed by Mariano, hosted the Latin American Engraving Competition, which would be held annually until 1971, when it became Latin American Meetings of Visual Arts; four of such meetings were held during the 1970s. These are the main meetings held regularly in the field of visual arts at Casa das Americas which, in parallel, organizes individual and collective exhibitions of artists from Latin America and the Caribbean in its Latin American Gallery. Many of these competitions and exhibitions are accompanied by theoretical events on the past and future of the arts in our America. Casa das Americas has also played an important role in another area by hosting, in 1965, the first major interdisciplinary exhibition in the country. The First Exhibition of Cuban Culture brought together in the Pavilion architects, painters, designers, sculptors and theoreticians for the purpose of ensuring a unitary work in which each voice could have its

own sound, while taking part in a choir concert. This initiative reached its apex in 1968, when the Cultural Congress of Havana was held in January. At that time, an interdisciplinary team which included writers, filmmakers and musicians as well as various other artists, organized the Third World Exhibition at the Cuba Pavilion. To celebrate the iconic date of July 26, another interdisciplinary team consisting of designers, sculptors, musicians and lighting technicians used the pathway between the Pavilion and Revolution Square in Havana to showcase drawings and texts depicting the “One Hundred years of struggle.” At the Square, macrodesigns served as background for music and light effects. Also in the city of Santa Clara, in the central region of the Island, another interdisciplinary activity was organized at the Square, as well as at the monument to the armored train that captured Che Guevara during the fight against dictatorship.

A somewhat interdisciplinary event took place at La Rampa in July 1967. As a result of Wifredo Lam’s decisive initiative, the Paris May Exhibition was transferred to Havana. Not only the works (paintings, engravings and sculptures), but also many of the French artists and critics. A large collective mural in the shape of a spiral cut into square spaces, in which French and Cuban artists and writers worked together was organized in Havana. As expected, the central segment of the spiral was under the responsibility of Wifredo Lam, who designed its characteristic rhomboid shapes that resemble the *íremes*¹ of African-Cuban religions. Artists worked overnight on suspended scaffolds to complete the outdoors mural at La Rampa. Dancers from the famous Tropicana cabaret, popular musicians and people in general admired and stimulated the development of the collective work.



René Portocarrero



Mariano Rodríguez

It was almost dawn when the finished mural was taken to the Cuba Pavilion, where it was exhibited together with the works of the May Exhibition.

The aforementioned artists continued their personal work. Mariano, for example, developed a thematic technique over a decade until the mid-1970s, which he called *Frutas y realidad*. In it the author combines the two references of the title (fruits and reality), favoring the size of tropical fruits in contrast with the “reality” from various sources, while the vibrant color ensures unity to the composition. Shortly after this series the author produced another two: *Masas* and *Fiesta del amor*. Martínez Pedro, in the same period, turned to his abstract exercise in several series inspired by *Aguas territoriales* and *Otros signos del mar*. With various tones of blue, leading to mauve, the painter addressed a relatively poor theme in Cuban painting. Martínez Pedro shifted his theme again in the mid-1970 to exercise his excellent designer skills in giant and lonely paintings of Cuban flowers, working on a flower with a remarkable level of detail on each canvas. His cotemporary René Portocarrero, who received the Samba Award at the Biennial of São Paulo in 1964, developed new versions of a theme he had worked on in the previous decade, *Ciudad*, to take it, starting in 1962, from a sober, nearly abstract scheme to a splendid landscape of baroque inspiration, in which we can recognize, among narrow streets, buildings and monuments, the silhouette of the iconic colonial sculpture of the capital.



Amelia Peláez



Wifredo Lam



René Portocarrero. Diablito, 1945.



Amelia Peláez Angel, 1945.

Until his death, Portocarrero worked on many themes that were always overflowing with floral elements and birds, taken to the canvas with a rich gamut of colors. This is how he painted, particularly, *Cabeza ornamentada*, *Flora* and *Carnival*.

Servando Cabrera Moreno (1923-1981) introduced in the early 1960s the peasant and militia theme, often in free drawings. He soon moved on to large oil paintings depicting recent historical facts such as “La batalla de Santa Clara.” A few years later he shifted to the series of erotic, sometimes monochromatic paintings, such as *Torsos*, a trend which he maintained until his last exhibition: *Habanera tú*. In turn, Raúl Martínez (1927-1995), a multifaceted artist from a younger generation showed a significant shift in his work. Martínez, who during the 1950s had participated in “Los Once” group of abstract artists among whom was Antonio Vidal (1928-), developed in the mid-1960s a kind of Cuban Pop Art.

Leveraging his talents as a painter, designer and photographer, he produced iconic works portraying prominent names in Cuban history such as José Martí. Treading a similar path, though independent of that of the American Rauschenberg, Raúl Martínez’s images are rhythmically repeated, combining known icons with popular figures that he photographed in the city streets. In 1969 he organized a first exhibition of his pictorial work, which he significant named *Nosotros*, later *La gran familia*.



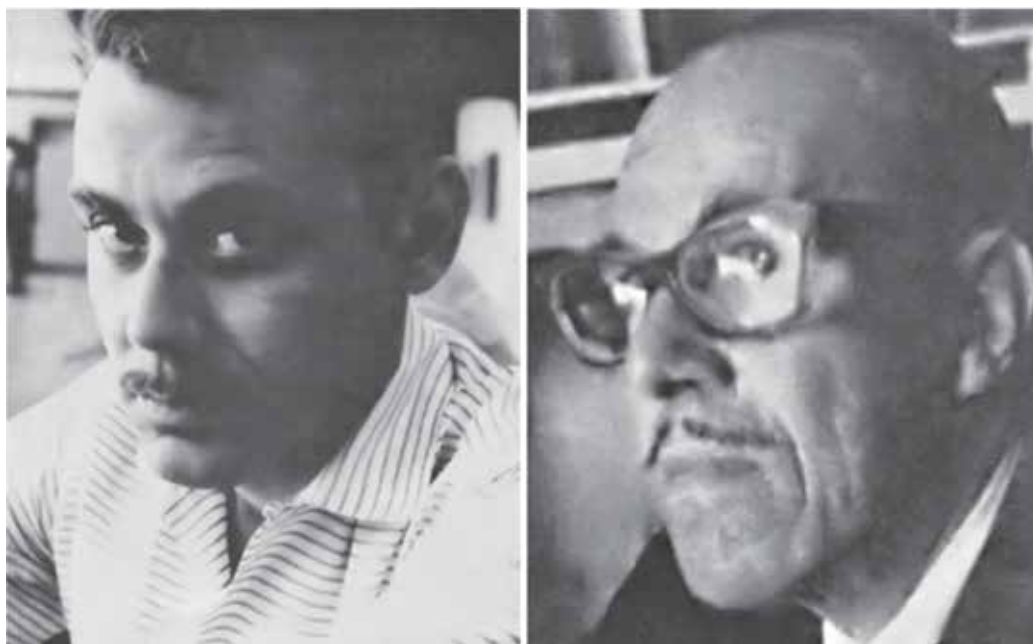
Servando Cabrera Moreno



Raúl Martínez

In contrast to these productions, the work of Antonia Eiriz (1929-1995) represents what I called, after her first personal exhibition in 1964, “the tremendous in Cuban painting.” Eiriz depicted scenes and figures in which the black stroke is slightly softened by some pastel zones (the artist confessed that she admired the celestial colors seen in Giotto). Her iconic painting *La anunciación*, from 1964, starts from the biblical scene to then move on to everyday reality through an expressionist distortion that gives it an undisputed reflective power. The entire work of Eiriz is marked by this force, which at times led her to burn the painting and produce what we could consider an attempt to installation through pieces which she termed *ensamblajes*. Eiriz also painted several “Tributes” dedicated to important names in Cuban culture such as José Lezama Lima, Amelia Peláez and, on two occasions, Santiago Armada, artistically known as Chago (1937-1995), a designer who was an original caricaturist. He created a character named *Salomón*, who was the spokesman of philosophical concerns and social criticism.

Chago’s work contrasts sharply with that of a very popular caricaturist from the 1950s, René de la Nuez (1937-) who created a character, *El loquito*, who fought tyranny. Since 1959 *El loquito* has given way to *Barbudos* and other characters created by René de la Nuez. Manuel Hernández (1943-) began to publish his caricatures in 1966 and in the late 1980s became the most tenacious commentator of Cuban daily life. He was a stellar name in the DDT publication, which gathered several comedians from those years. A technique such as pottery, with a relatively short history in Cuba, found notable examples in some murals painted by Amelia Peláez and René Portocarrero. However, the artist who de-



Antonio Vidal Fernández

Lorenzo Romero Arciaga



Wifredo Lam. Huracán, 1945.



Mariano Rodríguez. Las comadres, 1943.

voted himself to experimenting with and producing a wide variety of items in the so-called sculptural pottery was Alfredo Sosabravo (1930-). His creative work has been constant in both Cuba and other countries since the mid-1960s.

In sculpture, some artists enjoyed the possibility to produce large format works. Sculptures by Agustín Cárdenas (1921-2001) are seen in several cities in Europe and Asia. For the NMFA he produced *La ventana*, in 1967, in which he reveals his loyalty to certain principles that led him to take part originally in “Los Once” group. On the other hand, Rita Longa (1912-2000) worked on various environmental themes. In her work *La aldea taína* (1961-1964), located in the tourist site of Guamá, she depicts remarkably well the role of the townspeople and their activities. Subsequently, with a language derived from the principles of abstraction, the author produced *Bosque de los héroes* (1973), located in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba.

In Havana, Sandú Darié produced various pieces as a result of his exercise in the optical and kinetic art, as in *El árbol rojo*, from 1981, a tributary work of *Penetrables* by the Venezuelan Soto, and large reliefs seen at Ameijeiras Hospital. For his part, Thomas Oliva (1930-1996) produced the iconic character of the popular ice cream parlor Coppelía, at the beginning of La Rampa, in 1968. In a completely different way, Oliva produced the tribute to the victims of the sabotage to the ship La Coubre in 1969. For that sculpture, Oliva used pieces of twisted iron from the wrecked ship to achieve a work of strong expressionism in its abstract form. Precisely at the funeral of the victims of that sabotage, the photojournalist Alberto Korda (1928-2001) took the iconic photo of Che Guevara. The photographer, who already had a rich study experience, captured the image of Che’s face in a vision that is ineffable for its expressive power. The photo, popularized a few years later in Europe, created an icon that was reiterated in multiple media by generations of admirers of that heroic deed of the Argentine-Cuban revolutionary. Photojournalism reached its zenith during the 1960s, when events of great importance were engraved in history. Among the most active names of that time is Raúl Corrales (1925-2006), who stands out for his unique depiction of what is known as an epic phase of Cuban photography.

There is no doubt, however, that the most original event in visual arts from that decade was the emergence of graphic design as an organic expression from the early 1960s. The cultural institutions played an important role in the undertaking, notably ICAIC. Discarding the practice of using the advertising images that were imported along with the film, ICAIC postulated the creation of posters that ignored the custom of enhancing the so-called star system, in search of an image that followed the conceptual essence of the film. These concepts remained as guidance, along with the natural requirements of the various aspects of graphic design, and the production of political themes was the slowest in its practice. At that time, works of great visual and conceptual impact were produced, which were established internationally as an outstanding Cuban school of design.

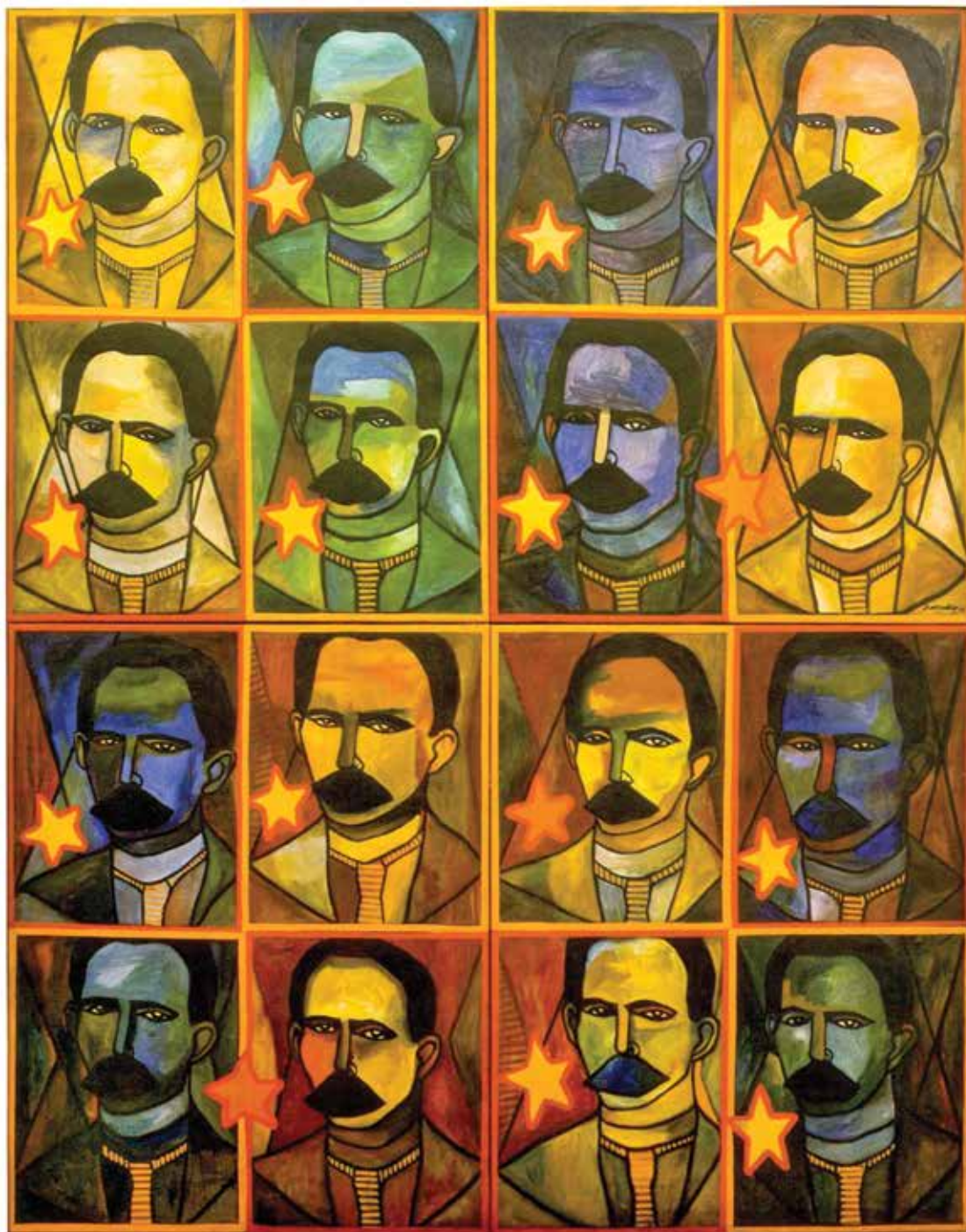
Artists like Eduardo Muñoz Bachs (1937-2001), who often resorted to humorous illustrations without neglecting the conceptual provocation, worked for ICAIC with regularity and personal style. An example of that is found in the drawings for the movie *Los tres mosqueteros* which, through an image with three pairs of boots provokes a reminiscent interpretation of the original work; or his piece for the documentary *Missing children*, a tragedy synthesized by a small ball abandoned in a corner of a dark poster. Very different is the work of René Azcuy (1939-), who uses enlarged details of black and white photographs, with some significant touch of color (*Besos robados*). For the international Protest Song event organized by Casa de las Americas in 1967, Alfredo Rostgaard (1943-2004) produced the iconic poster of the visual arts of the Cuban Revolution. Rostgaard avoided the primary allusion of the guitar used by most musicians in that musical genre, and drew upon a conceptual metaphor with bright flat colors: a rose with a bloody stem.

For over 20 years, from the mid-1960s the designer of the publications of Casa das Américas was Umberto Peña (1937-). Casa de las Américas magazine and the books it published always had a unique and diverse aspect thanks to Peña's incessant creative imagination. The posters depicting social and political themes also achieved a considerable aesthetic level after 1965. Félix Beltrán (1938-), for example, produced a drawing that was exemplary for its communication impact and power of synthesis during the campaign to save oil (1968-1969). The onomatopoeic word 'Click' appears lonely and clearly over a wide area of flat, dark color, a technique that proved highly effective.

The 1970 exhibition at the NMFA stood out as the setting for the works of the first graduates of the National School of Art made possible by the Culture Directorate. Also in 1970 Manuel Mendive (1944-), a painter who became known outside the Island, won an international award. As Lam's work before him, Mendive's work is based on the imaginary of African-Cuban beliefs, in his case "*santería*" or "Regla de Ocha." Far from abjuring his family, which believed in and practiced ancestral rites, Mendive takes them first to wood compositions and then to canvases of various shapes. Thus, the artist portrays in his works of the 1970s a life-death, joy-sorrow dichotomy (often personified in *eleggua*), while alluding to historical facts ranging from the colonial slavery era to the revolutionary liberation. From "Barco negrero" and "El palenque" to "Martí, el Che y Oya" (owner of the cemetery in the Yoruba pantheon), Mendive draws a vast scenario of the reality experienced by the Cuban people, intertwined with "*santería*" deities or *orishas*.



Servando Cabrera Moreno. Saludos eternos para Sevilla, 1970.



Raúl Martínez. Martí y La estrella, 1966.

In the second Biennial of Havana, in 1986, Mendive received an award for what was perhaps the first large-scale performance on the Island. In it, Mendive worked hard with the so-called body art by painting the bodies of models and symbolic animals (turtles and doves). After that, he started his foray into music and dance, which he continued until he had visited several nearby streets, while passersby gathered and joined the music and dance. Mendive insisted in that production line until the 1990s, during which he devoted himself to soft sculpture and then to paintings depicting esoteric and greater intimacy figures in a context of pastel colors.

From the 1970s, as already mentioned, we have the emergence of several groups of young artists who reinvigorated visual arts production on the Island, among them artists who developed various forms of expression over several decades. Nelson Domínguez (1948-) and Flora Fong (1949-) have been working from painting in other techniques and recently experimented with different sculpture and installation techniques. Eduardo Roca (Chocho) (1948-) re-contextualized themes from African-Cuban religions, favoring in recent years the colography technique. Pedro Pablo Oliva (1949-), in turn, refers to popular sayings and quotes to build scenes emphasizing his drawing and the color gamut he uses.

In the middle of that decade and for some years onwards a side of the so-called hyperrealism or photorealism became popular, in which names such as Tomás Sánchez (1948-) and Flavio Garcíandía (1954-) stood out. Before shifting to a more ironic painting, with kitsch elements, and then with greater conceptual abstraction, Garcíandía produced several memorable portraits, which he significantly named after The Beatles' songs: *Todo lo que usted necesita es amor* (All you need is love) with the image of his schoolmate at ENA, the imaginative designer and painter Zaida del Río (1955-) and particularly *Nada personal* (Nothing personal), a magnificent portrait of his master Antonia Eiriz, in which he handles with a considerable visual impact a flat yellow zone that covers part of the canvas next to the seated figure of Eiriz.

Another variant of this trend, to which a mark of media and conceptual breath is added, is that developed by Tomás Sánchez. In 1980 one of his drawings received the International Joan Miró Award; from that moment on, in addition to his *Basureros* (Garbage Men), *Crucifixiones* and other works marked by formal expressionism, Sánchez has dedicated himself to landscapes, in which he often includes a small human figure. This technique, which adds significant elements to the painting, depicts the silhouette with its back to the viewer, who thus identifies himself with the act of contemplation, meditation, and plunges into the natural landscape. *Palmar acechando al soñador del charco* (1980) is one of the painter's most remarkable works, which converses with the nineteenth century works from the Hudson River Landscaping school, thus promoting a mystical attitude before the landscape.

The foundation of the Ministry of Culture in 1976 led to the creation of the Higher Art Institute (ISA) as a further refinement step after ENA, which had been in operation since 1959, and offered an even more experimental and conceptual scenario to the artists. In 1981 Havana hosted an exhibition that marked a before and an after in the artistic future of the Island. It was called "Volumen 1" by the exhibitors, who took on the curatorship and organization of the exhibition. With personal styles, the young artists (among them Garcíandía and Sánchez) opened to the scenario of Cuban art a new expressive space, but attentive to the international trends of the moment, such as the variants of postmodernism and conceptualism. They began, moreover, to favor installations and performances, a practice that continues to this date, with a frequent inter-relationship between painting, sculpture and photography.

In 1981 Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) worked in Cuba, in the pits of Bocas de Jaruco, near Havana; her artistic conceptions were an influence to young artists. Mendieta represented, to some extent, direct contact with mainstream productions, mainly body art, land art, performance and photography, in an eager desire to return to the roots. The Havana Biennial began in 1984, originally with a strong insistence on the artistic production of the so-called Third World. Many of the aforementioned artists had a key role in the biennials, together with others like Eligio Fernández (Tonel) (1958-), who favored the drawing originating in caricatures and installations; Moisés Finalé (1957-), who in 2009 had an exhibition in Havana in which he expressed through symbolic paintings and objects the purpose of witnessing the balance of what he calls "The 80s"; Consuelo Castañeda (1958-) re-contextualized some quotes by renowned names of Western art in works of great impact; Lázaro Saavedra (1964-) introduced humor through the perspective of the "chiste callejero" ("street joke"); José Bedia (1959-) emphasized in his work the anthropological interest that led him to live with indigenous communities, especially a U.S. community. Bedia manufactured instruments mimicking their originals, while producing works that became installations, based on large drawings.

Roberto Fabelo (1950-) followed a personal line and received an award in the first Biennial in 1984. An excellent designer, Fabelo experimented with several forms of expression, going as far as tearing the paper on which he used to draw, to then draw Fragments on the exhibition walls. With a markedly expressionist force, Fabelo has addressed, since the 1980s, several themes in which he reveals his creativity through an intentionally precise line. His most recent show at the NMFA in 2009 named *Mundos* (Worlds), revealed the change he has been gone through since *Fragmentos*. Fabelo worked with huge objects, whose strong realism highlights the dramatic imagination of a sizeable drawing titled: "Soñando como Goya." The expressionist force of Fabelo carries his existential meditations, which led him in 2010 to install on the facade of the Museum where a collective exhibition was being held, several giant cockroaches that formed part of his previous work *Mundo* and that had "survived".



THE CREATOR AND THE CREATURE: Alberto Korda (1928-2001) holds a reproduction of his famous photograph of Ernesto Che Guevara (1928-1967).

Some artists who graduated from ISA have produced remarkable works since the late 1980s. A relevant name not only as an artist but also as a professor is René Francisco Rodríguez (1960-). From 1988 to 1996 René Francisco worked with his disciple Eduardo Ponjuán (1956-), both of them interested in outlining new expressive paths from those postulated in Volumen I. Between 1990 and 1997 René Francisco worked with his students in several communities in what he called “From a Pedagogical Pragmatics”. In his personal work the artist expresses reality in his own way through paintings, ensembles, engravings and videotapes. *Los carpinteros* is a group originated in the early 1990s at ISA, under the leadership of René Francisco, formed by Dagoberto Rodríguez (1969-), Marco Castillo (1971-) and until 2003 Alexander Arrechea (1970-). The distinctive mark of René Francisco is found in the use of perfectly developed objects, which project improbable ideas (such as the installation “Turquoise drama” shown in Madrid in 2010). A recurrent theme is that explored by Abel Barroso (1971-) who, with an effective combination of woodcuts, acrylics and sculptures offers several conceptual inducements, often under the title *Muros reales, muros virtuales* (in exhibitions in France and Cuba, 2010). In the field of humorous design, the highlight since 1984 has been the work of Aristides Hernández (Ares) (1963-), who created strong expressionist figures whose grace requires the viewer to decipher them.

After the migration of artists due to different reasons – political but especially economic – some artists who had studied in the then Soviet Union became known in the 1990s. They have in common the careful technical exercise in the execution of the work, though with a considerable variation in themes. Their works are shown in Cuba where, despite the economic crisis, cultural institutions open their doors to both national and international events, adapting to the situation affecting the country. Important names in this group include Arturo Montoto (1953-), Cosme Proenza (1955-) and Rocío García (1955-). Montoto explores a realism marked by the careful depiction of a lone fruit on architectural fragments, while the light falls defiantly on the scene. Cosme Proenza was once considered a “post-medieval Cuban” for his allusive themes and careful execution. Rocío García, in turn, explores the homoerotic theme in her *Geishas* and *Marineros*. Recently, in 2008, she exhibited at the NMFA a series entitled *Thriller*, which could be seen successively and/or by fragments. In the field of sculpture, particularly environmental sculpturing, the highlights are the work of Alexis Leyva (Kcho) (1970-), who received an award in an international competition in 1995. He works with large sculptures and uses the image of ships, in an allusion to migration. His sculptures usually are named after popular sayings, such the metal sculpture located since 2000 at Puerto de la Habana Avenue: *Nunca pongas dos clavos en la misma línea*.

Another significant event of the 1990s is the emergence of women in the use of various techniques. Belkis Ayón (1967-1999) used the colography

technique as a means of multiple reproductions that enabled adding different materials to the engraving, like in collages; her original theme refers to myths of African-Cuban beliefs of the *abakuás*. Her work focuses on the saga of Sikán, a woman sentenced to death for having discovered the fish that carried the power. Ayón, in almost entirely black-and-white compositions, depicts the tragic fate of Sikán in scenes of remarkable expressive force. For her part, Marta María Pérez (1959-) specialized in black-and-white analog self-portrait, alluding to rites and quotes from African-Cuban "*santería*". Sandra Ramos (1969-) and Tania Bru-gueras (1968-) privilege installations and performances relating to migration, a recurrent theme in the works of several artists of that generation.

From the 1980s to the present, the creation of environmental sculpture projects gained strength. In 1980 Sergio Martínez (1930-1988), who had participated in the Latin American Visual Arts meetings at Casa de las Américas and in the organization of the interdisciplinary exhibition held at that time, installed in a park in central Havana an equestrian figure of the "Quijote de América". Cast in metal, the Knight of the Sad Countenance is shown naked, holding a big sword. The sculpture, which for its expressionist strength caused a certain discomfort among those walking through the district, ultimately merged with the daily view of the park, now popularly known as "Quijote" park. In 1981 Sandú Darié produced for the Palace of the pioneering children at Lenin Park, on the outskirts of Havana, *El árbol rojo*, a large kinetic figure similar to the *Penetrables* of the Venezuelan Soto. The following year the artist produced two considerably large sculptures in the waiting room of Soto Hospital. Also in 1981, José Villa (1950-) sculpted, in a language that uses some symbolism attached to recurrent images, a monument to Che Guevara in the said Palace. From the iconic photograph of Che taken by Korda two decades earlier, Villa used the star on Guevara's beret as a symbol of his figure; through a series of metal plates depicting the star, the author placed the work at an appropriate level for the children. It should be pointed out that Villa is a sculptor of varied production, ranging from abstraction to the most demanding figuration (one of his most popular works is the statue of John Lennon built in El Vedado park in 2000).

Throughout these decades, monumental sculptures have continued to be built in the public squares of various cities. The statue of Che was the object of a multitude of similar works, among which one of the best known is the one in the Mausoleum dedicated to Che and his comrades in arms, built in Santa Clara, in 1989, by José Delarra (1938-2003). More recently, Alberto Lescay (1950-) produced a remarkable set of pieces in honor of one of the most significant heroes of our fights for independence, Antonio Maceo, popularly known as "The Bronze Titan". This sculptural ensemble is located in the city of Santiago de Cuba. The treatment given by Lescay to the hero's image represents, as in the case of Villa, the variety of styles in which the artist works. Lescay used a symbolic language close to abstraction by building in another park in El Vedado

a statue in tribute to Wifredo Lam, which subtly alludes to the images used by the painter.

Other artists, notably René Peña (1957-) and Cirenaica Moreira (1969-) have dedicated themselves to photography, focusing on their own image in a wide range of experiential situations. Cirenaica is currently one of the artists with the richest themes, with a remarkable variety to emphasize the attributes that qualify her black-and-white photographs. In an exhibition in 2006, she started a new phase with colorful strokes on large canvases.

In more recent years of this century, we have observed a tendency towards the exploitation of new media such as video art, which currently coexists with the many technical procedures already mentioned. A reemergence of plastic design is also integrated into the production of twenty-first century artists. Young designers graduating from the Higher Institute of Industrial Design (ISDI) have begun their foray into the areas of design, with special emphasis on the continuous work of Pepe Menéndez (1966-), a designer with Casa de las Américas. A new generation of young designers can already be devised: Nelson Ponce (1975-), Giselle Monzón (1979 -) and Raúl Valdés (Raupa) (1980-).

In a necessarily synthetic scenario like today's, the mandatory and strict choice of artists leads to the absence of quite a few other artists and collective movements. Thus, a more comprehensive and fair account of the environment of constant experimentation that marks the Cuban contribution to the contemporary world of visual arts should be the subject of a longer text.

Note

- 1 *Íreme* is a character from the Abakuá culture expressed in Cuba through dance. It comes from the region of Calabar, between the current Republic of Nigeria and part of Cameroon. *Íreme* is popularly known as "diablito" and is already part of the Cuban cultural imaginary in festivities such as Carnival or in performances typical of the Island. (TN)

Abstract – During recent decades, several trends have emerged in the Cuban visual arts, e.g., abstraction, photorealism, neoexpressionism and conceptualism, among others, without losing sight of certain themes and characters based on Afro-Cuban cultures. To the manifestations of a national heritage should be added, as an organic expression, graphic design, which is becoming a school with unique features. Today, we have a proliferation of performances and installations, often of interdisciplinary nature, as is the case of video art.

Keywords: Painting, Sculpture, Graphic design, Photography.

Adelaida de Juan is a consultant in History of Art and professor emeritus at the University of Havana. She is the founding president of the Cuban Chapter of the International Association of Art Critics (IAAC). @ – robade@casa.cult.cu.

The original in Spanish – “Medio siglo de artes plásticas en Cuba” – is available to readers for reference at the IEA-USPP.

Received on 16 February 2011 and accepted on 10 March 2011.