

1990s ART FROM

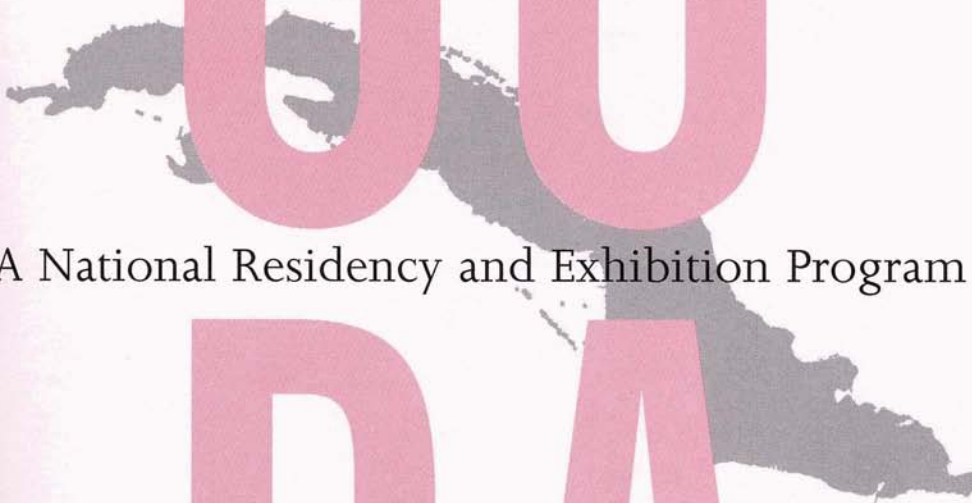
CU

A National Residency and Exhibition Program

BA

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Codirectors

Holly Block and Betti-Sue Hertz

Coordinating Organizations

Art in General, New York City

Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts, New York City

Fundación Ludwig de Cuba, Havana

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Much effort has gone into this project, which paradoxically almost enabled it not to happen, but because of the persistence and strong navigational skills of all of the participants involved, 1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program came to fruition. One's initial reaction to the prospect of working on a project of this scale, however, is often one of trepidation, but in true team spirit we made it through its phases with many conference calls, faxes, and e-mail messages, saying, "Yes, we can."

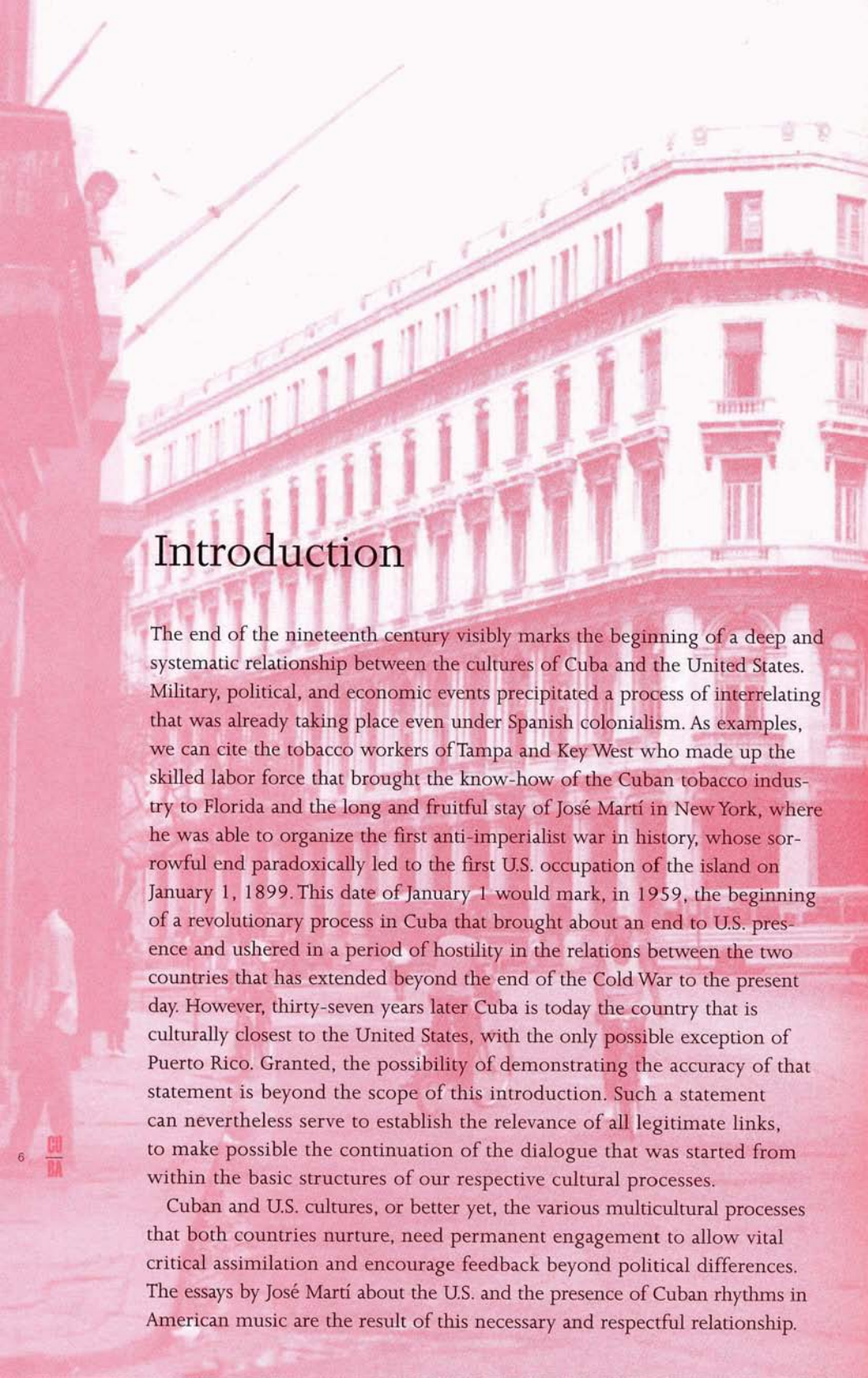
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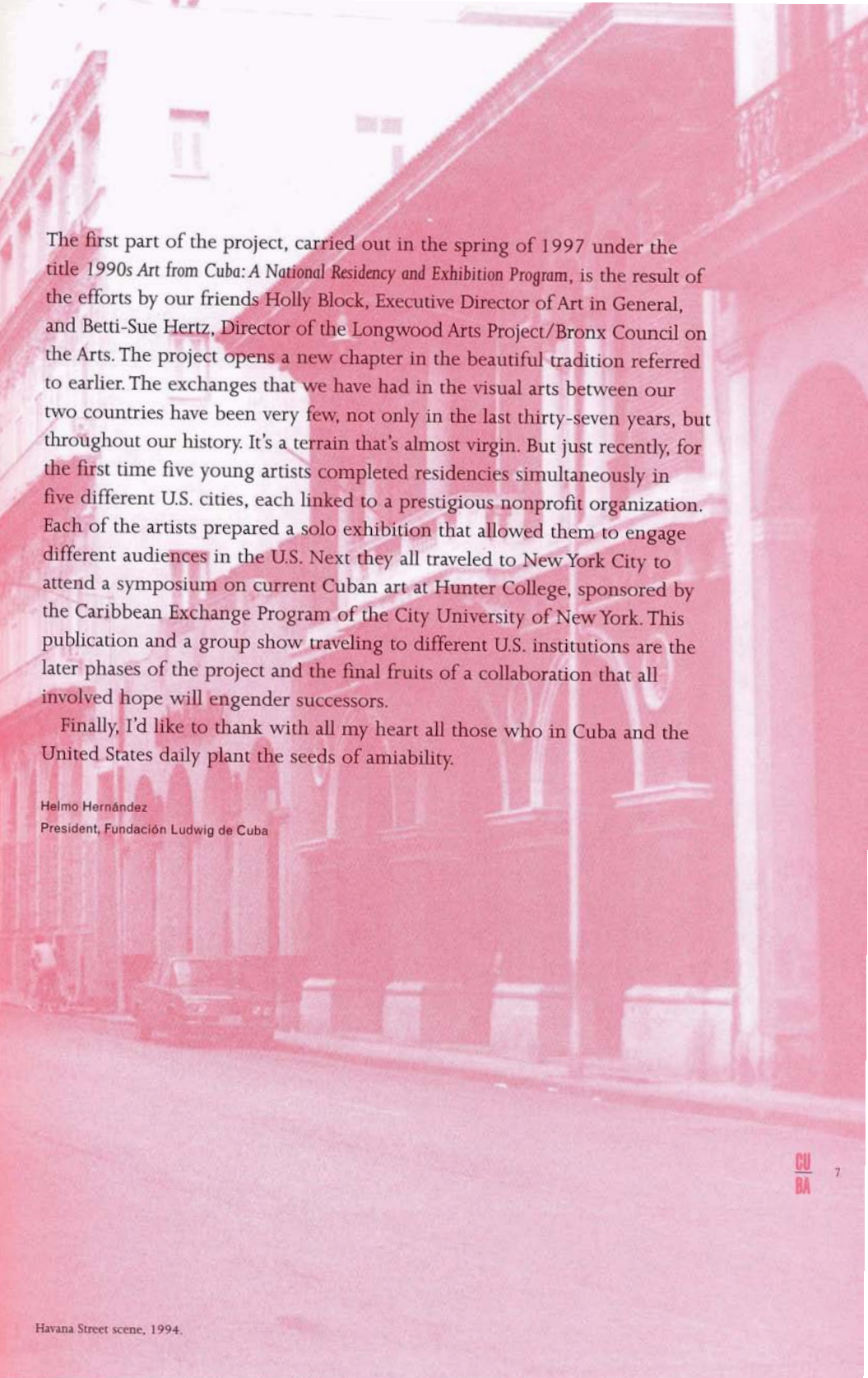
This project succeeded as a collaboration among five artists and six partner sites in five different cities, but it was more than that. It also involved a symposium, a publication, five administrators, and host institutions in New York and Havana, as well as support from three foundations, the Ministry of Culture in Cuba, the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba, and the U.S. Department of State, not to mention a national touring exhibition and publication of 1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program, documentation that reflects the collective effort. This was all realized with true dedication and commitment, very little financial support, and considerable labor by individuals in two countries. Our hope is that this publication will serve as a document for further collaborations between U.S. visual arts venues and their counterparts in other areas of the world.



Introduction

The end of the nineteenth century visibly marks the beginning of a deep and systematic relationship between the cultures of Cuba and the United States. Military, political, and economic events precipitated a process of interrelating that was already taking place even under Spanish colonialism. As examples, we can cite the tobacco workers of Tampa and Key West who made up the skilled labor force that brought the know-how of the Cuban tobacco industry to Florida and the long and fruitful stay of José Martí in New York, where he was able to organize the first anti-imperialist war in history, whose sorrowful end paradoxically led to the first U.S. occupation of the island on January 1, 1899. This date of January 1 would mark, in 1959, the beginning of a revolutionary process in Cuba that brought about an end to U.S. presence and ushered in a period of hostility in the relations between the two countries that has extended beyond the end of the Cold War to the present day. However, thirty-seven years later Cuba is today the country that is culturally closest to the United States, with the only possible exception of Puerto Rico. Granted, the possibility of demonstrating the accuracy of that statement is beyond the scope of this introduction. Such a statement can nevertheless serve to establish the relevance of all legitimate links, to make possible the continuation of the dialogue that was started from within the basic structures of our respective cultural processes.

Cuban and U.S. cultures, or better yet, the various multicultural processes that both countries nurture, need permanent engagement to allow vital critical assimilation and encourage feedback beyond political differences. The essays by José Martí about the U.S. and the presence of Cuban rhythms in American music are the result of this necessary and respectful relationship.



The first part of the project, carried out in the spring of 1997 under the title *1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program*, is the result of the efforts by our friends Holly Block, Executive Director of Art in General, and Betti-Sue Hertz, Director of the Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts. The project opens a new chapter in the beautiful tradition referred to earlier. The exchanges that we have had in the visual arts between our two countries have been very few, not only in the last thirty-seven years, but throughout our history. It's a terrain that's almost virgin. But just recently, for the first time five young artists completed residencies simultaneously in five different U.S. cities, each linked to a prestigious nonprofit organization. Each of the artists prepared a solo exhibition that allowed them to engage different audiences in the U.S. Next they all traveled to New York City to attend a symposium on current Cuban art at Hunter College, sponsored by the Caribbean Exchange Program of the City University of New York. This publication and a group show traveling to different U.S. institutions are the later phases of the project and the final fruits of a collaboration that all involved hope will engender successors.

Finally, I'd like to thank with all my heart all those who in Cuba and the United States daily plant the seeds of amiability.

Helmo Hernández

President, Fundación Ludwig de Cuba



Billboard on highway
outside Havana

Navigating New Terrain:

The Making of a Cultural Exchange Program

Part I

The project's inception took place three years ago, when I organized a trip to Cuba as part of the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO) national conference, held in Miami. I knew of the *Havana Bienal* and decided to organize a delegation from the United States to attend. Upon our arrival we met artists and saw work that we had not seen previously. These artists were from the nineties generation that had not traveled outside Cuba, and certainly, most of them had not visited the U.S. Many of the eighties generation had left Cuba, leaving a temporary gap in the visual art community. Gerardo Mosquera, an art critic and independent curator, dubbed their 1990s successors "The Weeds," as they represented a new generation of artists working that grew quickly after the mass exit from the island by their predecessors. Their work was refreshing, with much of it made from nontraditional materials and with little financial resources. The unique power of their art made a lasting impression on us. Some of the artists had been included in the *V Bienal de Habana*, but others had not; in any event, their impact on us as a group of arts professionals was profound. Upon returning to our home cities, many of us led lectures, symposia, and forums and published articles about our experiences in Havana in May of 1994.

Betti-Sue Hertz, a participant on this trip and Director of the Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts, and myself, Director of Art in General, met regularly, discussing posttrip ideas for the development of an art program for the U.S. and Cuba that made sense for our institutions, our audiences, and for the artists in Cuba. We began planning and organizing around a new concept that wasn't exclusively about artwork exchange. We knew we did not want to

organize just another traditional exhibition, unpacking crates and hanging artwork, as we had so many times before. The goal was to build a cultural exchange program between two misguided countries that had had very little to do with each other over the last thirty-seven years. Furthermore, we wanted to share what we had seen with our U.S. audiences. Our vision was to build a mutual awareness about the visual arts of these two countries and to begin a connection between the artists and the public in both places. How could we develop a new program without ignoring the existing hostilities between the U.S. and Cuba, the politics, the poor communication, the stereotypes, the exile, and the conflict between island Cubans and the mainland? Were we not naive to try to tackle these issues?

As the directors of nonprofit arts organizations in New York City, Betti-Sue and I had both worked on artist residency programs for our own institutions. Each of us had served on the board of NAAO and had developed lasting relationships with exhibition spaces around the country. Together, we enlisted the support of Ernesto Pujol, a friend and a Cuban-American artist who had exhibited on several occasions in Havana and who was familiar with many cultural organizations in Cuba. Pujol joined our team as Project Coordinator. We held several informal discussions, inviting experts in the field who had worked with artists from Cuba and who had experience in organizing previous international exhibitions. We wrote proposals and began speaking with people about supporting the project. Luckily, funding was secured for part of the project, and a research trip enabled the three of us to visit Cuba to make studio visits and meet with curators, critics, and officials from both the U.S. and Cuba. It was apparent we needed everyone's support for this program to succeed. This research trip allowed us to finish formulating the program in its entirety. We made thirty studio visits while in Cuba, and upon our return to New York, we reviewed slides and artists' materials and made the final choices of which artists would be selected to come to the States.

Our curatorial vision was based on the artists' work and what we thought they could create while in residency. They all shared a sense of political awareness about Cuba and its future. Other determining factors aiding us in our final selections were issues of media and technique, a range of concepts, interests, and age, and what the artists could offer and communicate to U.S. audiences. We selected artists based on their potential and their ability to meet a challenge.



V Biental de La Habana
Study Tour on a
Havana street, 1994



Helmo Hernández, and 1990s Art From Cuba VI Bienal de La Habana Tour, May, 1997, on the terrace of the Ludwig Fundación de Cuba.

Bottom right: Abel Barroso at his home/studio in Havana, 1996.

As the curators of the program, we were willing to experiment, too, as part of the process. We made visits around the country and made on-site selections from the artists' work to be shown in the traveling exhibition. The artists and sites included Abel Barroso, whose printmaking and installation were hosted by Centro Cultural de la Raza in San Diego; Tania Bruguera, whose drawing, sculpture, installation, and perfor-

mance were hosted by The School of The Art Institute of Chicago; Sandra Ceballos, whose painting and installation were hosted by Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/BCA in New York City; Manuel Piña, whose photography, video, and installation were hosted by Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo; and Lázaro Savaadra, whose drawing, painting, and installation was hosted by DiverseWorks Art Space in Houston.

All the artists worked closely with Helmo Hernández, President and Wilfredo Benitez, Coordination and Marketing of the Fundación Ludwig de Cuba, our host institution in Havana, to obtain the necessary visas and permissions to leave for their residencies. Simultaneously, we were working in the U.S. with our own officials at the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, also to obtain the necessary visas and permissions. The artists developed project plans for their residencies and were partnered with sites according to their work our goal was to make interesting matches. The contemporary arts organizations that we selected had established residency programs or had previously hosted international artists. Many of our partners had worked closely with other artists of Caribbean or Latin American cultures; however, this project offered them the opportunity to work with artists from Cuba for the first time. We were especially interested in linking communities and working locally within each city. The sites were responsible for building a communications network that functioned within their own institutions while bridging the gap to the outside. We kept in close contact with the sites, discussing what public activities could be generated. We set up a framework, and each space developed its own set of plans. Once the last details for the program were in place and with the additional funding secured, we were finally ready for the artists to arrive.



Part II

The five artists from Cuba arrived in the United States on January 17, 1997. Having flown from Havana through Nassau in the Bahamas, they landed in Miami for an overnight stay before heading out to their separate destinations around the United States. Actually, this was not the way we had planned it. The artists were supposed to go their separate ways from Nassau, but because of some confusion with their airline tickets, they all ended up in Miami. The happy unintended result is that they all spent their first moments in the U.S. together in that most Cuban of cities, Miami.

Eduardo Aparicio, a Miami-based Cuban-American artist, met the artists at the airport, and they all toured the city and the beaches well into the night. The next morning the artists went off to Buffalo, New York City, San Diego, Chicago, and Houston. From this point on, they were to have their own unique experiences, which they could share and compare when reunited in New York for the symposium, held during the final days of the program.

The residency program was now in the hands of the directors and staffs of the host partner sites. All of the artists had prepared project proposals outlining the work that they hoped to complete during their seven-week stay. The host sites were now ready to equip the artists with the resources they needed to complete their projects. They would pave the way by assisting the artists on several levels: helping them adjust to new geographic and social surroundings; by providing studios, and in some cases special workspace arrangements for photography, computer digital imaging, and video, as well as performance rehearsal space or printmaking facilities. Meetings with artists and arts professionals were arranged, as were lecture and slide show opportunities.

Of the artists participating in the project, Tania Bruguera and Manuel Piña had been to the U.S. before, but only briefly; Sandra Ceballos, Abel Barroso, and Lázaro Savaadra had traveled to Europe. Abel, Sandra, and Manuel were able to carry out their project ideas close to their original plans; Lázaro executed two of the components of his original proposal and added one newly conceived installation; and Tania created three new pieces that were part of her ongoing project, also venturing into interactive ensemble performance. The success of the projects was extraordinary, especially considering that the artists were figuring out where they were geographically, culturally, and socially at the same time that they were working out new artistic ideas.

Each site offered the artists a different experience of the U.S., not only because of a diversity of regional characteristics but also because of the way a



Tania Bruguera
at her home/studio
in Havana, 1994.

venue functions within its city. The artists' time was spent between the demands of work, public presentations, studio visits, and lectures and social interaction. A comparison of the artists' experiences is helpful here, as the variety of strategies for artistic production, survival, comfort, and familiarity was dependent on several interacting factors. Tania and Sandra spent much of their social time with Cuban-exile and Cuban-American artists. This community became so important for Tania that some of its members Ricardo Fernandez, Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, and Raquel Mendieta joined her in the culminating performance. Sandra reunited with friends, and Ernesto Pujol introduced her to artists she had heard of in Cuba. She also came to New York with a contact list. These artists and arts professionals provided a basis for important dialogue about the Cuban exile experience. Lázaro also spent time with Cubans. But this was partly a matter of coincidence, as a Cuban couple, Abel Hernández and Olivia Pérez-Tallet, were visiting Houston from Caracas,



Lázaro Savaadra at his home/studio in Havana, 1996.

Venezuela, where they now live, and were working with Surpik Anglini, Professor of Anthropology, on a project at Rice University called *Artists in Trance*. It comprised an exhibition and lecture series on ethnographic strategy in Latin American art that included several Cuban artists.

The hosts were actively introducing their new arrivals to local artists as well. But the relationship between Cubans seems to have had a stronger impact. Manuel also befriended Cubans living in Buffalo, including the scholar Olga Mendel and Leandro Soto, a visual artist. In addition, he spent time with his house host, Craig Centrié, a sociologist at the University of Buffalo and Director of El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera, an alternative exhibition space. Manuel also had casual contact with local artists associated with Hallwalls and CEPA. (CEPA is

another important visual arts space in Buffalo). Abel was in a unique situation within the context of the program, since the Centro Cultural de la Raza has a Latino focus. He was surprised that he didn't have to use his English very much because he found himself in one of the centers of Chicano and Mexican-American cultural life in San Diego. Centro staff introduced him to artists in San Diego, Tijuana, and Los Angeles.

Host-organized presentations at the partner sites, art schools, and universities provided formal and informal contact with local audiences. Slide presentations and lectures offered a vehicle to speak directly to art and university audiences within a new national and cultural context. Oftentimes discussions would turn to the question of Cuban life and politics and the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. Although some were familiar with Cuba, many in the U.S. audiences were not very well informed about life in that country. And indeed, part of the purpose of the residency program was to promote communication among artistic communities, to break-down stereotypes and to make inroads against arbitrary prejudicial thinking. With culminating



Left to Right: Manuel Piña, Abel Barroso, Tania Bruguera, Sandra Ceballos, Dr. Edward J. Sullivan, Lázaro Savaadra. 1990s Art from Cuba Symposium, March 13, 1997, Hunter College, New York City.

projects bearing titles like Lázaro's *Dying Free*, Abel's *Rush for Freeland*, and Tania's *Art in America (The Dream)*, it was evident that the U.S.

experience was already a part of the work that the artists presented.

After seven weeks at the host sites, all of the artists arrived in New York to present their work in a symposium at Hunter College. The symposium was cosponsored by the Caribbean Exchange Program of the City University of New York and drew approximately one hundred artists, Latin Americanists, arts professionals, and friends. Holly and I gave a summary introduction of the inception and structure of the project. Dr. Edward J. Sullivan, Chairman and Professor of the Department of Fine Arts at New York University, provided a contextual summary by outlining the history of modern and contemporary art in Cuba, bringing the audience up to the present. Then the artists presented slide discussions of their work, completing each presentation with slides of the project realized during their residencies. Questions from the audience focused on the artists' presentations and the general state of affairs of Cuban art on the island and in the diaspora. The artists also had an opportunity to visit galleries and museums while they were in New York. They met with curators at The Museum of Modern Art and the Americas Society, attended a reception held at the home of Pat Nick, Director of Vinalhaven Press, and met individually with artists living in New York. Their New York experience completed the residency stage of 1990s Art from Cuba. Abel and Lázaro left for Havana, and Sandra, Tania, and Manuel went on to Vancouver to participate in *New Art from Cuba: Utopian Territories*, an extensive exhibition of artists living in Cuba.



Sandra Ceballos at her studio at Longwood Arts Project, March, 1997.

The national touring exhibition brings together a selection of artwork created during the residencies so that members of each participating community can see the projects of all of the participating artists. This decentralized approach brings the U.S.-Cuba dialogue to smaller as well as larger cities. The artist's view of the U.S. will, it is hoped, be articulated to the arts community in Cuba. The cultural exchange will have taken place at a very individual level, as well as having had an impact in several visual arts communities.

Betti-Sue Hertz, Codirector

1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program

Director, Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts

Introductory Note: Lupe Alvarez's essay is written in a particular style of Cuban art criticism that has its roots in a form of literary prose that combines metaphor and allusion with interpretive and historical writing. It also draws on a form of philosophical questioning, an approach that may be considered a Cuban equivalent to "high theory" art criticism in the United States. Alvarez is one of the most important art scholars writing in Cuba today. We are pleased to highlight her essay, "Accomplice's Probe: Taking the Pulse of 1990s Cuban Art," as only a limited selection of her writings have been translated into English.

Accomplice's Probe: Taking the Pulse of 1990s Cuban Art

I still have fresh in my mind the moment when I perceived a new shake-up in Cuban visual arts. I was visiting an exhibit at a provincial center, and I noticed an unexpected takeoff of metaphorical turns. Conventional formats predominated, and the emerging presence of two-dimensional painting stood out in particular. The languages sustained by those texts alluded, as always, to our conflicting social reality, but they seemed to fold under the weight of the medium, suspended by the force of the trope.

Other events would later confirm my impressions. I tested these ideas with reference to the show *Arte cubano actual* (Current Cuban Art), a collateral exhibition held during the IV Bienal de La Habana (1991). I recognized the retreat of art toward the safety of its traditional spaces, the search for protection in the tenements of artistic autonomy, the relinquishing of aspirations to mobilize or to conquer a space of social meaning, something that was representative of the ideological and aesthetic platform of the eighties.

In early 1993 these observations became evident. *Las metáforas del templo* (Metaphors of the Temple), an eloquent title for an exhibition, based on the notion of the status of art at the time, announced the internalization of a stance that would mark artistic production.

Jugar a una carta (Playing a Card), a kind of programmatic document of this event, proposed, bluntly, the rules of the game. Cultural institutions were not to be "assisted" nor to be denied, but were to be penetrated in spite of themselves, in order to fulfill our goals, in spite of them. These were the terms of a proposed attitude that used conceptual tools and sociocultural know-how earned by the "new Cuban art" of the eighties. From that was born a strategic sense, expert in manipulations and tricks for slipping in subversive meanings.

The causes for this mutation appeared in every discourse. Massive emigration of Cuban artists and intellectuals left a vacuum that was difficult to elude. The heretofore effervescent and combative cultural milieu was now a great abandoned temple, furnished with contractions and silences. Disappointment and uncertainty were feelings that marked attitudes and judgments correlative to the ethical erosion of an aesthetic ideology full of avant-gardism, now reduced to rhetoric.

The "special period" proceeded to strain our physical possibilities of resistance. Resentment surfaced everywhere, and ideological polarization, ever more drastic, stigmatized appraisals from here and from there. There is no clearer picture of this state of things than the frustrated publication of *Memoria de la postguerra* (Memory of the Postwar), a project by Tania Bruguera, whose two issues, before its abrupt closing, gathered all kinds of statements. Its editorial spoke in a defining language: "postwar," "survivors," words that alluded to an end, an imminent change. Along the same lines as *Las metáforas del templo*, and during the same year of 1993, this publication pointed to a new army . . . with the history lessons given. Its pages gathered ethical summonses and reproachfully uncovered cracks, concessions, and spaces of comfort that proliferated.

Artists consecrated in the eighties, with their high-sounding statements and their rowdy poetics, were becoming deflated here because of haphazard information, lacking in subtle nuances.

Ferocious comments arrived from afar; well-known statements, such as "Art has left Cuba," which inflamed people here, damaging their composure when evaluating history. All of this had a noticeable influence on the course of art.

On the other hand, the fall of the Berlin Wall meant bringing the feet to the ground regarding the country's means of support. The economic contraction and the hurried insertion into capitalist relations that it brought about permeated the art world, leading to a search for spaces in which the work could be placed where it would be viewed no longer . . . but for its exchange value.

It was in this environment that was born what came to be known by the polemical title of "The Nineties Generation." Its occupation of public space broke the impasse that followed the diaspora and the institutional silence that eluded a needed debate.

Its first impulses stemmed from a need to provide continuity for an artistic process that had laid the groundwork for its own possibilities of rebirth. Efforts to turn an elitist domain such as the visual arts into a phenomenon of social transcendence would not be in vain. Still remaining were the pedagogical enclave and its vocation for a broad and dynamic education in artistic practice, a discursive deployment of solid conceptual foundations that went beyond the traditional roles of the artist, and a whole legacy of sociocultural knowledge ready to be a tool under very different circumstances. There are plenty of arguments to think that any rupture would always be relative.

Rather, that shift in the attitude toward an art that has promoted characteristic signs as difference was the result of sociocultural coordinates that required a symbolic readjustment.

There were some propelling elements. The pedagogical project by René Francisco Rodríguez titled *Desde una pragmática pedagógica* (From a Pragmatic Pedagogy) leaned toward searching that dodged the riffs of creativity after the debacle of the eighties. His inclination to rummage in the cultural text and to activate less problematic resources in their expressive capacities brought about a way of facing state control over art. His proposals to cleverly conjure up suspicions before a stigmatized artistic focus were the catalysts for some of the events of this “novelty.”

Social recognition of this renovation had institutional despair working in its favor to cloud the luster of combative aesthetics from the eighties and the urgency to banish the splendor of its deserters. It is also important to remember the international attention generated by Cuban art. The impact of *Kuba OK* (1990), together with other projects that aired the conquests of our artistic movement, opened the way and set expectations for what would happen from the time of this premature fracture. This put in place the conditions necessary to make use of the seat that had been won as platform, which would then guarantee a certain space of commercial circulation.

We welcome with excessive enthusiasm the early evidence of a fresh batch of artists. The debate stemming from the incorrect use of the term generation, the continuity or break with an all-too-present recent past, ethical questions about the supposedly hitherto unheard-of cultural production of the nineties, its pragmatism, constituted welcome propellers of energy. The above-mentioned “metaphors” reopened a longed-for critical space. That was when the famous term *mala yerba* (weeds) was coined to refer to the regenerative capacity of a phenomenon that seemed to have been uprooted.

It was the *V Bienal de La Habana* that gave the most overwhelming endorsement of the new proposals. In addition to those included in the official show, the ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte), as always, “showed its colors,” subverting irony itself with its *No valen guayabas verdes* (Green Guavas Won’t Do), yet another point to assert the ideological and aesthetic turns of the time. Negotiation of the social space for art that had been announced at the beginning of the decade had now been completed. A new art, equally polemical, but less disturbing, came to occupy the place of old glories. The number of new artists called to participate in the event, most of them still students at ISA, the massive proposal as a guarantee of a changing of the guard in this institution’s exhibit, raised spirits and amply witnessed the fallacy of a standstill. It was the best time to refresh the international vision of Cuban art and to refocus interest on what was being produced on the island.

Several signs pointed to this turn. In spite of showing its debt to the previous stage, they asserted their differences. These displacements were to be found

mainly in the attitude relating to the cultural role of art and the operating mode for its externalization.

That attitude identified itself with a peculiar kind of pragmatism: to use and manipulate cultural mechanisms as well as languages and media. The signs of this behavior have been baptized with the term cynicism: a mode in opposition to the emancipatory and altruistic effort of the previous platform.

The import of its operating mode has been seen, on the one hand, in the weight of allegorical statements, prone to sleights of hand, the tendency to disguise, duplicity, and all sorts of rhetorical contraptions in order to sharpen the edge of the meanings below the surface, and also, in an intentional thematic disposition, resting on "safe codes" of consumption to be present at the supposed market of symbolic goods.

Both rest on what has been called "the restoration of the aesthetic paradigm," clearly oriented to abandoning the trend for an aesthetic of the event, committed with a place in the praxis of life, which led the way during the second half of the eighties. This "restoration" is revealed and made public as a strategy. To sustain criticism and produce a critical, collectible, or at best salable, art is its creed. The "work" reestablished to function from its aesthetic transcendence preserves specialized art spaces, consumes itself in its tenements, no longer aspires to mobilize or shake-up the social context, and contents itself with small, subjective spaces provided to satisfy a specific taste and a trained eye.

Many emerging forms find their support on platforms that bolster artistic autonomy as the externalization of virtuosity and the reconsideration of traditional genres and morphologies.

The most significant propositions have been extensive in appropriations, quotes, and all kinds of recycling. This direction, fully developed since the eighties, has polished even more displacement strategies, activating iconographies and languages rooted in its historical transcendence in order to balance its ideological uses in the culture with a contradictory present that gives them meaning. The perverse intervention of semantic potentialities in diverse media has expanded the repertory of simulating resources.

The simulacrum, as a privileged mode of producing meaning, has put in evidence the crisis of authenticity that our society is suffering, the recognized and accepted double morality and concealed impostures. That is the sociocultural basis for its proliferation. Our artists have trained themselves to enable complicity and suspicion within the artistic text. The author is relegated to a second plane, his responsibility dissolved in the mask and in all the surfaces that it opposes to certain messages. In an assumption of post-structuralist postulates that are more organic than intellectual, all enunciative force is attributed to the text. The most representative modes of this sleight of hand are the use of heteronyms and a series of rhetorical devices aimed at displacing the speaker, the appropriation of styles that will guarantee historical legitimacy, consummate camouflage based on the intensity of certain resources, among them: the leading role assumed by the display of

"craftsmanship," the utilization of palatable talk in some traditions, work projects that visually attempt their own utopia.

All the rhetorical push of current Cuban art had its origin in an antitranscendental disposition to art that took shape in the poetic eighties. The banishing of any purism, the emancipation of the expressive medium, and the crisis of aesthetic orthodoxies have found a fertile ground in our culture, which is hybrid, carnivalesque, baroque. Irony, parody, and other types of humor, all drawn from our mockery, have been used by infringing discourses to exert critical commentary. This vocation, allied to popular expressions of great signification in the cultural text, have guaranteed the freshness of our art, making it enjoyable to audiences with different expectations.

The new proposals continue to drive areas of meaningful intensity on the social level. Some contents constitute "delirious focus" of discourse: insularity, travel, ideological stereotypes, consumption, varieties of "hustling." It is curious how many of these themes are treated from their implications in the art context. The reincarnations of art, its conflictive renouncement of the eighties utopias, its adaptation to the problematic of the present, its confusion of values all function as allegories for society as a whole. A return to history seems also to be asserting itself. Its rewriting appeals to memory, to forgetting, and to guilty omission. The recovery effort, which looks for new anchors, interrogates the past imprisoned in discourse, broadens its referents, and shields itself in experience and alternative narrative. It is not by pure chance that a space like Aglutinador has placed its attention at the same time on Lázaro Saavedra and Chago Armada, or matched Ernesto Pujol with Manuel Alcaide, all present or excluded, all consecrated or not, without distinction, all exponents of a controversial streak in our history.

Another sign deserves attention: the rise of specific artistic domains, highlighted by their particular expressiveness. This fact seems paradoxical in an artistic context that appeared to have surpassed any guild membership. Such is the case with printmaking and photography, two media that made history by observing their own specificity, but which in the nineties have assumed the conceptual gains and the ideological and aesthetic precepts that were consolidated during the development of the "new Cuban art."

What's paradoxical about this is that these peculiar emancipations of historical tasks have been placed within the art context as claims of such domains. Aside from the use of their resources to consummate an idea, regardless of whether the executor is a printmaker or a photographer as had already been recognized in the tradition of Cuban art these flourishings vie for their own aesthetics, building their discursive logic. Exhibits such as *Vindicación del grabado* (Vindication of Printmaking), *La huella múltiple* (Multiple Traces), and *El voluble rostro de la realidad* (The Voluble Face of Reality) attest to a search for an autonomy seemingly transcended in Cuban art.

Even after pointing to relevant aesthetic and ideological signs in recent production, it is not easy to characterize a phenomenon as diverse and

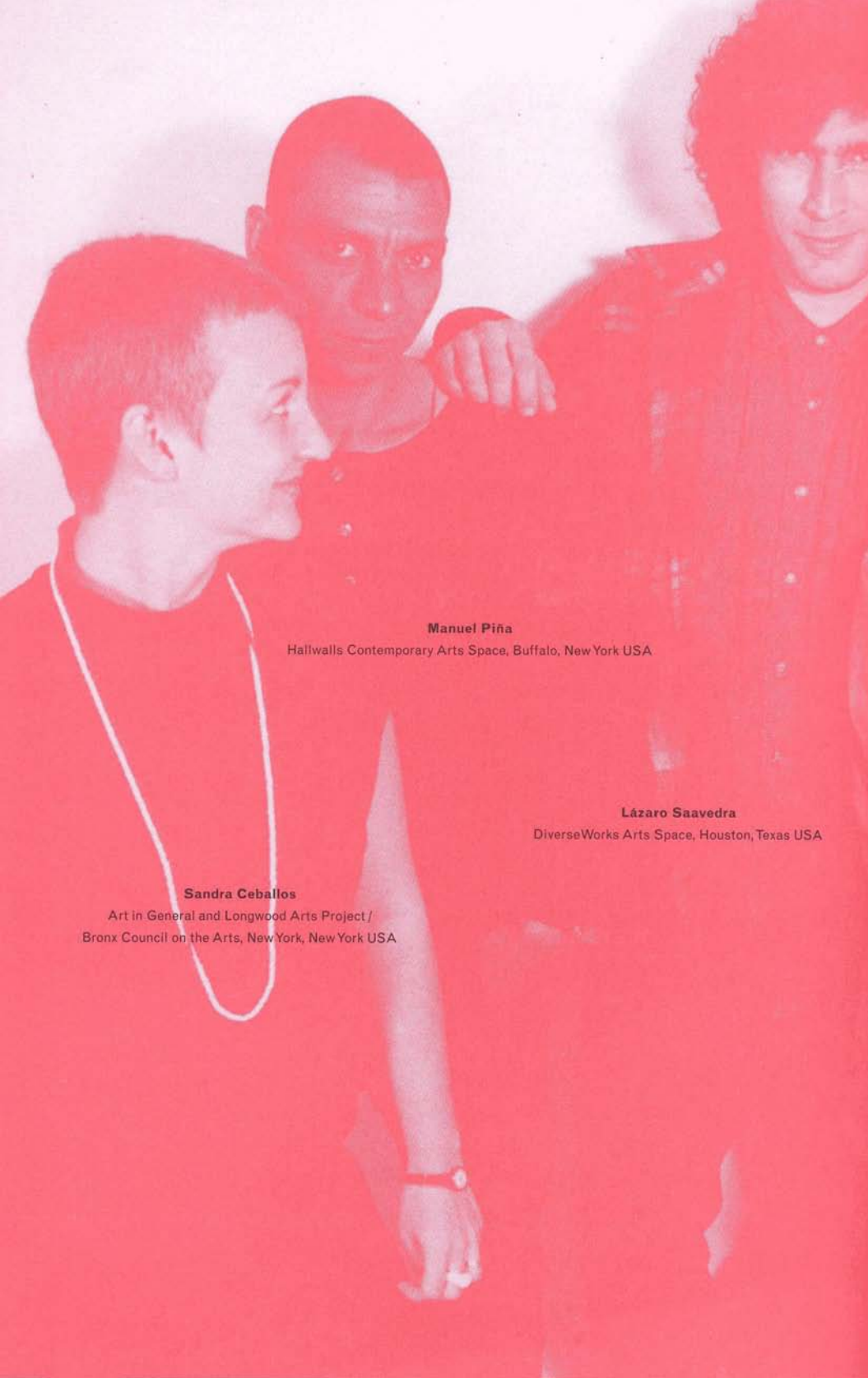
complex. It is true that upon the expansion of the Cuban art context, previous immediate responses to compelling contingencies turn out to be mediated today by the expectations prevalent in those circuits where it has gained entry. The gaze of its creators is framed ever more within arguments that guarantee international recognition. Their aspirations are also geared to placing their work in any market. These circumstances are contributing to the trivialization of investigative objectives, alongside strategies that preserve stereotypes that are complacent with certain discourses on Cuban art.

In spite of these conditions, the strong conceptual streak in our art and the multiple expressive alternatives that have been generated from its creed have given light to a rather recent diversity that resists pigeonholing. Along its process, multiple genealogies have been articulated, acknowledging a presence, deciding on their own destiny.

Farther and farther away from our sight is the possibility, surmised from utopia, that all roads of art would lead to the approach of common objectives. Art of the nineties loses its outline rapidly, with the same speed with which we thought to discover a global art movement in its predecessors.

We still support its temporal definition, but only out of convention. The decade nevertheless flaunts its marks: the need to survive in a space that does not offer it the same guarantees as before, conceptual and avant-garde rubble, a growing acceptance of the requirements from here or from there, and a rushed and precarious cultural statute. Under these tensions everyone takes their places as they decide on the geography for their center of operations, less and less as a question of ethics, but more as a factum imposed on Cubanness.

Lupe Alvarez



Manuel Piña

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Space, Buffalo, New York USA

Lázaro Saavedra

DiverseWorks Arts Space, Houston, Texas USA

Sandra Ceballos

Art in General and Longwood Arts Project /
Bronx Council on the Arts, New York, New York USA



Abel Barroso

Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego, California USA

Tania Bruguera

The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois USA



Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego, California USA

The invitation to the Centro Cultural de La Raza to host a Cuban artist-in-residence as part of the 1990s *Art from Cuba* project was welcomed as an opportunity to learn and share. We wanted to learn, from a Cuban, about the evolution of artistic expression since the Revolution, “the 1980s Cuban Renaissance,” and about life in Cuba and its current economic crisis. And, of course, we wanted to know more about our commonalities and differences as Latinos.

Since 1970 the Centro Cultural has been presenting and promoting the art of Chicanos, Mexicans, and indigenous peoples in the border region. However, as a result of the isolation commonly experienced by Latino artists, whose work has been marginalized, our exhibitions have included work by Latinos from other barrios, in the U.S. and elsewhere in this hemisphere. Consequently, the Centro Cultural and its artists have felt a kinship with Latin American artists, especially in terms of work that addresses issues of identity and sociopolitical commentary. The selection of Abel Barroso was a perfect match for the Centro since his recent work addresses the current Cuban economic policies.

Our dialogue with the artist brought us up to date about art and life in Cuba. We gained respect for the Cuban artists working without the resources we take for granted. His experience with us exposed him to a “Chicano” art center and the philosophical grounding of Chicano artists. We were exposed to the creative and technical processes of an important artist. Most important, we began a relationship with another Latino artist and created an artistic connection to Cuba that will last beyond embargoes and governments.



Centro Cultural de la Raza

Larry Baza, Executive Director, Centro Cultural de La Raza

Holly Block visited San Diego and interviewed artist Abel Barroso on March 9 and 10, 1997, with Luis Stand, Curator of Centro Cultural de la Raza, partner site for Barroso's seven-week residency. She was able to see his project's final exhibition.

Holly Block What made you want to participate in this residency and exhibition program? And why did you want to come to the United States?

Abel Barroso I never had the opportunity to travel to the U.S., only to Mexico and Europe. I have met several people from the U.S. in Cuba, and I've always wanted an experience of my own. My wife's name is America, and I wanted to see some of America, mostly to meet other artists, and I was very curious about the American people. I wanted to make new work in the U.S., and I wanted to see how people react to my work. I was so happy to visit San Diego. I was lucky to come to California during the winter, and many people speak Spanish here.



HB Can you explain the process of getting started on this project, once selected in Cuba, and then the differences you experienced once you arrived in the U.S.?

AB I did sketches for this project in Cuba, which I brought with me. The project was conceived to be much more political when I was in Cuba, more fully developed, leaving nothing open to interpretation; however, once I arrived I decided to alter some of the political content slightly. I allowed it to become more based on one's own conclusion, as opposed to specific information.

HB Please explain further how the project has changed, the materials used, and how you began the project once you arrived in San Diego?

AB In Cuba I had been told that the U.S. was the enemy, and I wanted to play with that kind of political content. I wasn't sure if people would be interested in learning directly from me how life is in Cuba. My project *Rush for Freeland* is an environment which includes sculpture, printmaking¹, and installation, where a series of four hobbyhorses stand as metaphors for the countries outside of Cuba leaving with all of the riches and leaving Cuba with nothing. The island of Cuba and its riches are carved as part of the print, and there are seven corresponding prints per horse, each referring to the future life of Cuba. As part of the installation, the horses are connected to an empty island which is hung on the wall in the gallery. My original intention was to also carve the island; however, once in San Diego, this is where the project changed. I chose not to carve the island. I felt it would be more significant to leave it uncarved, to show how empty I felt about being constantly questioned about Cuba, and that the viewers needed to have their own experience with the work and not be told the full story by me. The horses refer to the outside countries capturing the women, the property, and all of Cuba's riches a group of horses are lined up facing the island, and then the island is empty because the horses are leaving Cuba. . . More important, this project has to do with foreign capital and its relationship with Cuba.

HB Try to describe your working process. How long did it take you to get start-

I Abel Barroso's printmaking technique is a process whereby the block and the print are part of the entire art process, and both are exhibited simultaneously. He is a master printmaker specializing in non-traditional printing techniques and has developed an installation format that includes the woodblock relief and woodcut.

ed with the materials and carving to make the prints and the installation?

AB It took about two weeks for me to get settled. I went to look at all kinds of woods, which are completely different here in the U.S. than in Cuba. The prices are very expensive, but I did find some wood that was affordable and easy to carve. Most of my carving for the print blocks were carved by hand, but on this trip I was able to buy lots of carving tools, and saws, and an electric drill, which I don't have in Cuba, and then I selected the paper to print on. I worked at the Centro with my new tools and carved twenty-eight plates to print. Then I was invited to do a lecture at San Diego State, and I was able to use their print shop and have the students watch and work with me while I was printing. I learned to use the Centro's video camera, and I made a video of my whole trip here. It needs to be edited, but it shows my experience. I took the video camera with me to parties, working, studios, etc. . . . I also did a lecture at the University of California, San Diego. I worked on the installation of my show, and then had the opening. The night of the opening I was very nervous, because at first no one showed up, and then lots of people came, and they asked many questions. They first wanted to know what it all meant, and then they began making their own interpretations. So many people wanted to know about relations in Cuba. They

asked me many questions about my country "How do people live in Cuba?"

HB Are the people from San Diego familiar with Cubans from the island?

AB They really think we have nothing to work with, that we are extremely inventive with materials, and that we are old and starving, which, from looking at me, is obviously not true. So at the opening they were really interested and wanted to find out how different life in Cuba is compared to what they had been told.

HB How are artists here in the U.S. different than in Cuba? How is the content of their work different?

AB The work of artists in Cuba is much more specifically related to Cuba, the island, its mythology, and its future much more nationalistic. As for the artists I visited in San Diego, their work is much more personal, much more focused on their own personal experience. They have much broader selection of materials and diverse ways of working with these materials.

HB What was your most significant experience during your stay?

AB Seeing museum collections and visiting Los Angeles and seeing the art collections in homes, private collections. I have a friend who works for some art collectors. Unfortunately, they were out of town, but I did get to see their home and collection and how the artwork fits into a house and how people select certain works for their collection.

Tania Bruquera



Tania Bruquera,
Nereida Garcia-Ferraz
and Alejandra Piers
in *Art in America*
(*The Dream*), performed
on March 7, 1997
at Gallery 2, The
School of the Art
Institute of Chicago.

It is the arrival at a new and unfamiliar territory that either makes one withdraw in terror or embrace the newness with relentless bravery and agility. I would imagine that Tania Bruguera adapted the feelings of unfamiliarity experienced during her brief residency at the school into a creative experiment. It was one that sought to reconcile the allure of Western capitalist allusion with blatant realism, an adaptation that has earned her generation of artists, "The Weeds," their name.

As if walking down "the yellow brick road," Bruguera, like Dorothy in the classic American film *The Wizard of Oz*, systematically confronted the illusion of American Capitalism. Ready-made and fast food evoked larger questions regarding American society, such as migration/movement, cultural erasure, and breaches of the American dream. Her captivation by homelessness demarked a new avenue for Bruguera's artistic exploration. As in previous work such as *Daedalus, the Empire*, Bruguera recognized parallels between the city's transient community and immigration from her island home. Homelessness for Bruguera became an insightful metaphor for the Cuban experience, the collective ethos of both Cubans living on the island and in America.

She made many visits to the world of lower Wacker Drive in Chicago, which proved a formidable laboratory. It is from this world that Bruguera formulated her performance *Art in America (The Dream)*, a work in progress. From many interactions and dialogues with both transients and immigrants, she composed a chaotic collage of movement and interactions assembled through questions of personal and political exile as well as the arduous journey "home." Her performance took us to the intersection of loss, nostalgia and rootedness, and journeyed through the forest of bureaucratic red tape necessary to enter the Emerald City and called America.

The work itself was an interactive journey for Bruguera that gathered a local Cuban community, including Ricardo Fernandez, Nereida Garcia-Ferraz, Raquel Mendieta, Achy Obejas, Maria Torres, and Teresa Wiltz. Like a modern-day Dorothy, Bruguera, with sheer vision and determination, sought to define the term home. Her work embraces the universality of belonging and a need for placement. It is a pertinent statement in the wake of increased global migration at the advent of the twenty-first century.



The School of
The Art Institute
of Chicago

Tania Bruguera was interviewed on March 8, 1997, by Betti-Sue Hertz. The interview took place at Gallery 2 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, just before the second presentation of the artist's interactive ensemble performance, "Art in America (The Dream)", which was presented at the end of her seven-week residency.

Betti-Sue Hertz When you were in Cuba reading the art magazines, was there any artist in particular, any artists or any period of art that you were especially interested in?

Tania Bruguera I was particularly interested in the conceptual art from the sixties. I was also interested in the social art of the eighties, such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Cindy Sherman. They were dealing with these social things, talking about society, dealing with society, and doing interventions into society, like, for example, Jenny Holzer.

BSH The electronic light boards?

TB And the posters. I very much like art which functions outside the frame of the gallery or museum and functions in real life.

BSH Why were you interested in participating in the cultural exchange program?

TB First, because for me and for many Cubans, America is, in a sense, a dream. I wanted to be in America and to see all the very important art here. I think that America is a point of reference for everything in Cuba, for daily life, politics, and for art.¹ And so it was very important for me to come here and see what is real and unreal in relation to what I thought. And also to have the opportunity to see what was happening in the art scene and how it really functions. Because we have all these idealistic ideas about how art functions in the U.S. art world. And it's very nice to see the real thing.

BSH Did you have much information about Chicago?

TB Not very much.

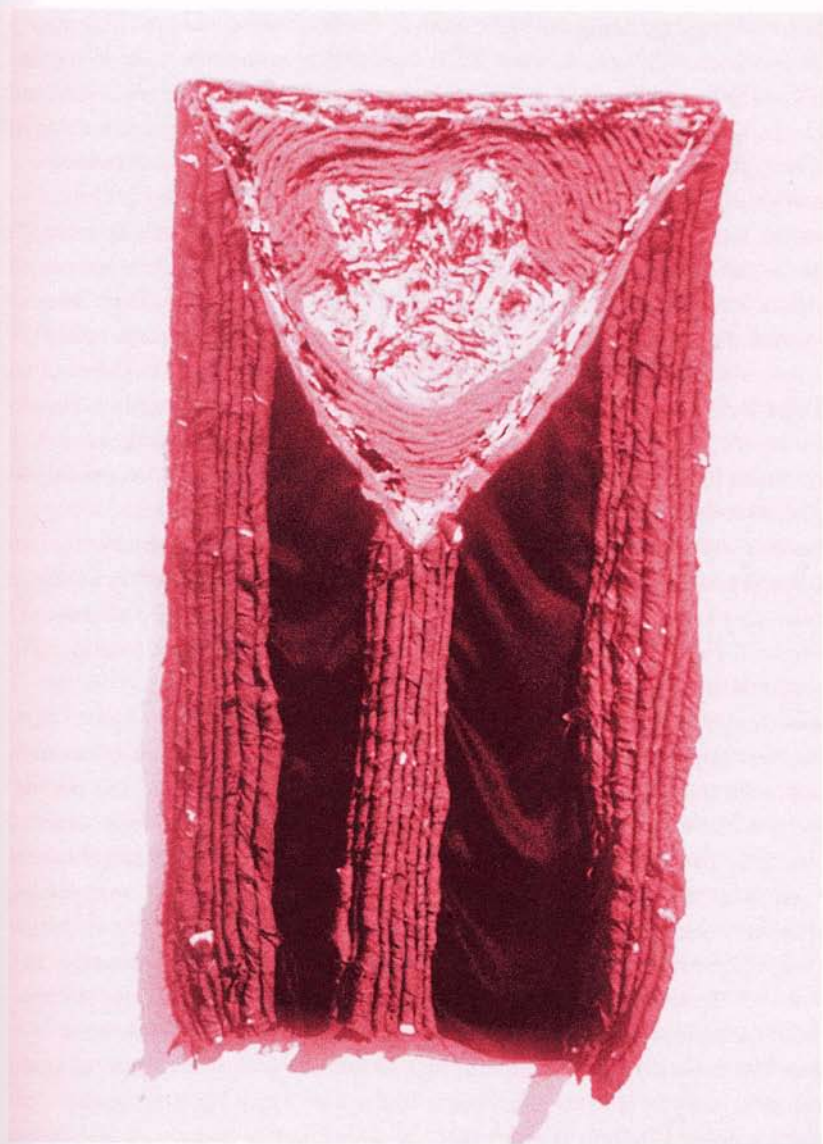
BSH What did you know about Chicago?

TB I knew about the gangsters in the forties. I knew that it was a very important architectural city. I knew that the city had been destroyed in the late nineteenth century and then rebuilt. I knew something about the art that came from here, but not so much.

BSH We asked you to develop a proposal for what you would do here. How has that proposal changed? Please explain your original idea. You could talk about how the ideas changed, and materials possibly in your case, you are doing ensemble performance now, so how did that fit into the original picture?

TB I thought I would make the flying machines as part of a series that I've been working on.

They are prototype objects for Cubans so they can learn how to use machines to fly. After my first week I began to make a few of these machines.



Tania Bruguera,
*Untitled (Memories of the
Post-War Series)*, 1997.

Then everything changed when I met the Cuban community here. This was very important for me, and it was like I was living with them. I went to their houses to eat, we would go to the theater together, to the museum and other places. One day I was talking to them, and I had this idea to create a flag where part of the flag would represent the Cuban people who live here.

BSH Your idea was to create an altered image of the national flag of Cuba?

TB Yes. I had done one in Cuba. When I got here, I understood only one side of the Cuban identity or situation, because I had forgotten to include the people who live here. So I created the other part of the flag with material from the clothes of Cubans who had immigrated to the States. The flag is made out of scraps of fabric. One day we were on a tour which included one of the Frank Lloyd Wright houses and the Sears building, which was the tallest in the world for many years. And this friend of mine was explaining that this city has different levels, including subterranean levels, and she was telling me that people lived underground in tunnels. And then when I discovered these homeless people everything changed, and I stopped doing the objects, and I began to develop the idea for this project. And, also importantly, I was reading a lot of Cuban literature by people who live here. I did all this research about what I wanted to talk about. I spent a lot more time doing research then I spent on the actual performance project.

BSH Can you talk about the research?

TB Every day I went and talked to the homeless people and learned how to approach this kind of society. I read the newspaper that the homeless people publish and tried to ask them about their lives and to understand their society, which is inside another society, and that they have their own rules and have their own way of doing things. I then connected this society to Cuban immigration. Cuban émigrés in the U.S. have similar characteristics. They are part of a group within society who are integrated but at the same time separate. So that's it. The research included living with the Cubans. They talked about Cuba, what their life is like here, and their personal histories. It was very intense.

BSH You did a performance last night, and you are going to do another one tonight, and you have three pieces up at the Base Space.² For the purpose of the interview tape, can you describe the performance?

TB I realized that in Spanish the word for someone who doesn't have a house and the word for homeland, where the home is, were connected. The word for homeland in Cuba is *patria*. Homeless, homeland. Cuban immigrants have problems similar to the homeless people. No one wants to pay attention to them and know about their problems. They have hard lives, and they have to construct everything from the beginning. And so

every night I would go to see the homeless people in the tunnel and observe their attitude and the way they live and their clothes. I also learned about how the Cubans who left Cuba forever, for political reasons, began their lives all over again in the States.

I wanted to create different situations. The first situation is the woman at a desk looking very bureaucratic. Everyone had to give their I.D.s to her to enter the performance space. People had to lose their social identity to come inside. To do this you had only to be a human being not a social person. Next you entered this dark room with low yellow and red lights which created an ambiance similar to the tunnel. All the people who participated as performers were Cuban or émigrés to the States, except for one American, who was one of the interrogators. One of the performers played a homeless person sleeping and looking like an object. In another situation a man had all these boxes, which he obsessively moved from one part of his territory to another, because every character has his own territory. He was trying to construct a house. And every box had written on it, something like "kitchen," "living room," etc., and he was walking with the boxes from one part of the house, for example, "bathroom," "bathroom," "bathroom." like relating the boxes with a part of the house. He did this throughout the performance.

And then there were other characters, played by me and Nereida,³ and we were reading these Spanish cards.⁴ They are like tarot cards. We had a small child with us. When you are in a new society, you bring your culture, your way of life. For example, when you are in Cuba, this religious and mystic attitude towards life is for everyone, and so you come here with that, and you bring that to other people in some way. And I was talking about what happened with our own culture, because you have to translate what you have to say. I was speaking in Spanish, and Nereida was translating for the audience. Americans had to wait for the translation to understand what I was saying.

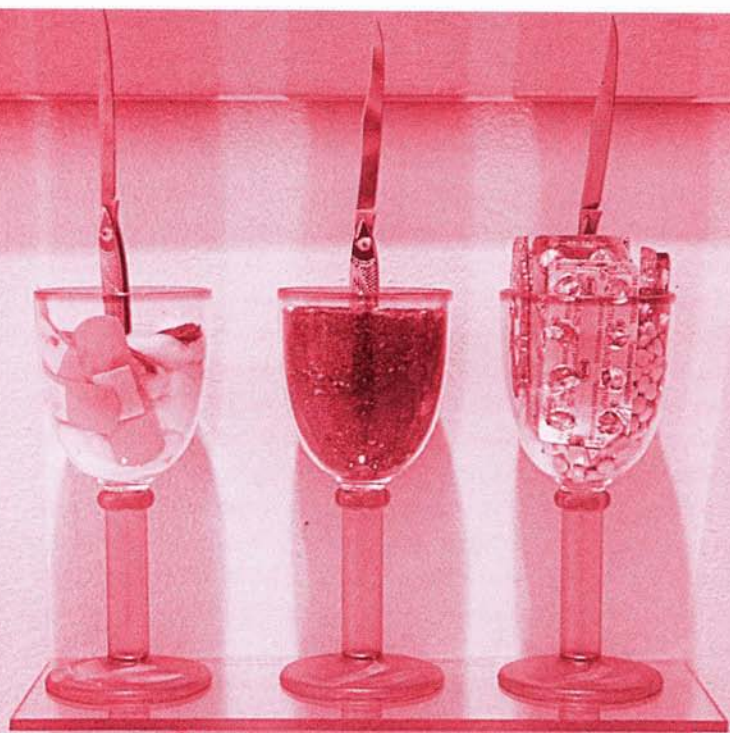
When you finished looking at everything, you went out the back door. And you only got your I.D. back after you answered questions which are from a real list of questions from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The questions included things like singing the national anthem. The performers acted like police. And if audience members answered the question correctly, they could go. It was funny, because if somebody said something which was a socially wrong answer and not a good way to say things, they had to go think of a better answer before they were released. "Oh, I want to get out of here. Give me my I.D." And it was very funny, I'm very happy with the reactions. The audience was very open. The homeless woman was getting very interesting reactions from all the people. The man who was changing boxes all the time, he was absurd.

1. The Cuban artists often use the word "America(n)" in their interviews to reference the United States. In Spanish, when speaking about the U.S., the term *Estados Unidos* (United States), is more commonly used.

2. The Base Space is an informal exhibition space at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is generally used by students to try out artistic ideas.

3. Nereida García-Ferraz is a Cuban-born visual artist who has lived in Chicago for many years.

4. Spanish cards, also known as *Las Cartas Las de Marcellas*, have different symbols, but interpreting them is similar to "reading" Tarot cards.



Sandra Ceballos

Sandra Ceballos,
Detail, *Without
Warning, We
Only Witnessed
Her Passing*, 1997.



Sandra Ceballos arrived at her Brooklyn apartment with a suitcase filled with materials—fabric, fetish objects, beads, and other things she wanted to include in her mixed-media painting/installations. After a period of adjustment, she tentatively moved into her studio at the Longwood Arts Project, using it primarily to construct the larger elements of her project. Her culminating exhibition took place at Art in General, which also provided her office space and assistance in the preparation of the exhibition.

Because of the long travel distance between the studio in the Bronx and the apartment in Brooklyn, Sandra used the comfort and hominess of the apartment as a safe haven from her new and confusing surroundings. It became a very important second studio, where she worked out ideas and developed the smaller components of her painting/photography/object installations. She was particularly interested in finding sources for materials and objects for her project. New York City is a wonderland of materials under any circumstances and proved to offer an overwhelming array of possibilities for this artist, for whom a particular color, texture, or scale of fabric suggests an attitude, mood or association that she is looking for. Many artists graciously showed Sandra around town and introduced her to the best shops to obtain a variety of materials. She was able to locate a variety of medical supplies and found fabrics and small objects on Canal Street, an area known for its vast offering of everything from art supplies to electrical equipment and plastics.

Although New York can be very distracting because of all the wonderful exhibitions, events, and performances, not to mention its intensity, diversity, and scale, Sandra managed to focus on her work with a tremendous determination. She worked with a professional photographer who had aided other Cuban artists the previous year, and she contacted gallerists and art critics to come to view her work. Project Coordinator Ernesto Pujol was extremely helpful in helping Sandra negotiate the complexities of the city. As hosts we identified people in our community who spoke Spanish. To that end we threw a party at the beginning of the residency and invited her to social events with artists and arts professionals. Sandra also had a list of friends and contacts that she had obtained from friends. The residency's ultimate success was due to Sandra's ability to combine her own resources with those that were offered by the host venues.



Longwood Arts Project and Art in General



Sandra opened to the public for several hours her Longwood Arts Project Studio, where she fielded questions about her work and life. She also presented a slide lecture at Art in General about her past work and the gallery that she co-directs in Havana.

Her culminating exhibition, *Clinic of the Angels* exhibited her resourcefulness as an artist who very much wanted to make a body of work in New York.

Holly Block, Executive Director, Art in General

Betti-Sue Hertz, Director, Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts

Sandra Ceballos was interviewed on March 10, 1997, by Ernesto Pujol in Brooklyn, just after completing her seven-week residency at the Longwood Arts Project/BCA and Art in General in New York City.

Ernesto Pujol As a visual artist who is also a curator, I wonder if you have had more experience with U.S. contemporary art and artists than most of your Cuban colleagues.

Sandra Ceballos I do not know what the experience of my Cuban colleagues has been regarding contemporary U.S. art. I confess that, even now, I tend to lead a very solitary life in spite of having been a gallerist for three years. I have always lived and worked as a very independent artist in Cuba. I have tried to do whatever I want with my life in spite of many challenges, both as a woman and as an artist. However, despite many difficulties, I have sought to maintain myself above artistic opportunism, not cashing in on any label. Thus I have never marketed myself nor my work aggressively. I have consistently sustained a rebellious attitude against the cultural establishment. For that reason, and to be even more independent, I created the Espacio Aglutinador.¹

Having my own independent exhibition space allows me to work which ever way I want; it allows me to express my ideas freely. I have not had any U.S. artists exhibit their work in the space so far, but I may give a few of them the chance later this year. However, I feel too tired right now to plan much.

EP Why were you interested in participating in this residency program?

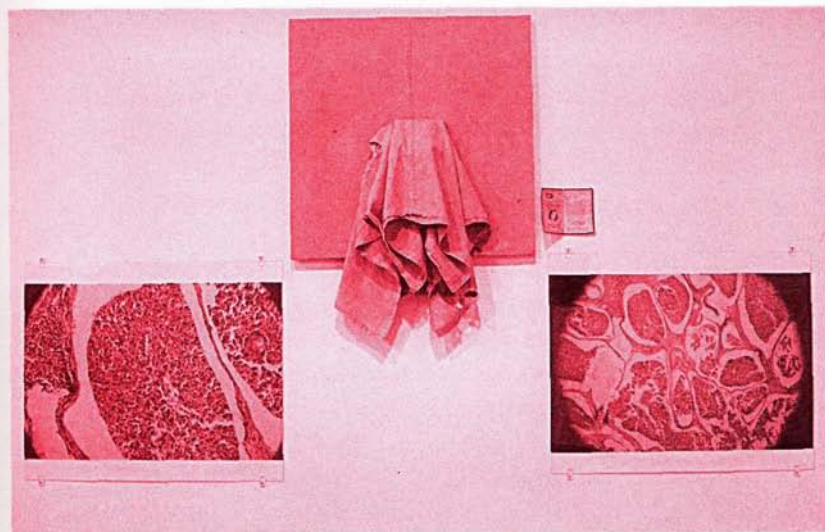
SC I became interested in participating because it is very hard to get access to international projects from within Cuba, and I wanted more information on contemporary art abroad. I was also very interested in visiting New York City as the mecca of the art world, and the program also offered me the opportunity of having a one-person show in New York itself. But being an artist who draws much of my source material from daily life, I also wanted to see how people live their daily lives in such a big city.

1. The Espacio Aglutinador was created in 1994 as an independent exhibition space by artist Sandra Ceballos, with the aid of her partner Ezequiel Suárez, in their small home in the Havana suburb of Vedado. It quickly became Havana's most important gallery, according to Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera. As an independent space without government support, it subsisted partly through the labor of exhibiting artists. Its mission was to fill in the gaps left by official contemporary Cuban art exhibitions. The space has generally exhibited promising young Cuban artists, as well as older, lesser-known Cuban artists. At this time, its future is uncertain.

I do want to point out that I had traveled abroad before. I was awarded the first prize at the *Primer Salon de Pintura Contemporanea Cubana* in 1995. Part of the grand prize, which was funded by Vitol, a Dutch oil company, was a trip to Europe. My partner and I traveled to France, Spain, and Switzerland for several weeks, and we visited many Cuban artist friends who now live abroad.

EP You conceived your project back in Cuba, yet it has undergone a number of changes. Can you describe its process?

SC My current project, which began in 1995, is about illness and the human condition, the dark parts of the human experience. I call it the psychogenic expression. It was conceived as a long-term series consisting of various



Sandra Ceballos,
*Clinic of the
Angels (Clinica los
Ángeles)*, 1997.

exhibitions over a period of several years. My small exhibition in New York, titled *Clinica los ángeles*, is precisely one of the shows from the series. Most of the shows of the cycle are based on autobiographical narratives; that is, my own story, my family's story, and my relationship with art. Much of it is about human conflict, the existential drama as both a personal and a universal theme. I also use photography as part of the work for the first time. To recontextualize all that, here in New York, has been a very interesting challenge.

The first thing that happened when I arrived in New York was to realize that I had left some of my negatives back in Cuba. So there were pieces that I had to redo completely. But I also found new and very interesting materials that I wanted to experiment with. I found the combination of the materials that I brought from Cuba, so few and rustic, with the materials that I found here, so

abundant and sophisticated, to be quite fascinating. So I began to modify the pieces a bit. Essentially, the pieces have remained the same, based on the same ideas, but I have resolved them, materially speaking, in different ways.

I was initially going to present ten works, but because the Art in General fourth-floor special projects gallery space is small, I reduced them to just six. I edited them pragmatically, based on the local materials I found; I edited them based on the materials available, much like I do in Cuba. I added only one completely new piece, based on suicide. It was not in my original plans for the site, but it felt right. It had to do with many of the conflicts that people face here: solitude, desperation, lovelessness.

EP How have the city and the people impacted your work?

SC I do not yet have fully formed ideas for new works based on this great urban experience, but I have an accumulation of very intense emotions. I have been a part of this city, of its many stark contrasts, for seven weeks, and it has been wonderful to live in it. I would do it all over again if I could. I would like to come back to this city; it is like a magnet. I must admit that I do not like dead cities. I like cities that are fully alive, even if they are violent, even if I am the victim of that violence.

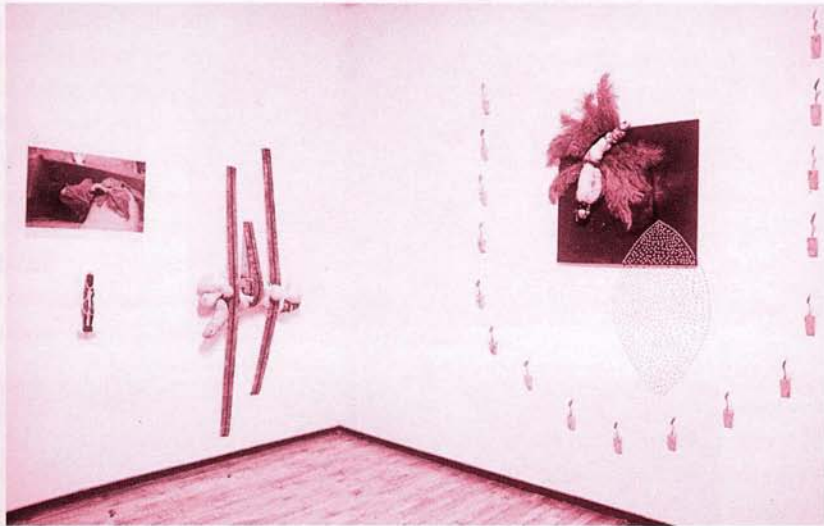
In fact, I recently endured the horrible New York experience of having my portfolio stolen. The portfolio included original slides of all the work I had done over the past few years. I felt as if a part of me had been wrenched away. That terrible experience has recontextualized me all the more in this city. I think that the portfolio must have been stolen by a drug addict, someone who was very self-destructive and, because of that, destructive of others.

Sometimes I feel that, in a certain way, we are freer from certain things in Cuba. Here the Cuban political situation seems to dominate the entire artistic visual discourse. Cuban-American artists here are obsessed by the Cuban political situation, and they are locally forced to take an extreme position within the conflict, which makes them very aggressive. So there is a tendency to see everything and everyone coming from Cuba as negative. Yet we come from Cuba in good faith, open to new experiences, trying to meet the people here.

There are great differences between what is being exhibited here and what is being exhibited in Cuba. The majority of the artists working in Cuba are working at the service of what I call a tropical art market; that is, an international art market that visits us, searching for the exotic. Here, in spite of the market, there is a lot of editing; the scene seems to be much more demanding, the museums seem to maintain higher standards.

EP What was the most significant experience during your stay here?

sc Well, what has impacted me the most is the people, the human contrasts found within the city, the richness of personal attitudes. It is a very strong city, very influential; it has both very aggressive and very depressed people. You can find all sorts of people. Havana is a bit more homogeneous. There are also unhappy or violent people back home, but they are more hidden, less visible. The faces of the people in the subway are so impressive in all their different expressions. I love being in the subway because of this, although I sometimes feel embarrassed because I look at people so intensely. I have spent much of my time in New York alone by choice. My work of the last three years in Havana as a gallerist had recently created in me a deep



Installation view
of the Sandra
Ceballo's solo
exhibition, *Clinic
of the Angels* (Clinica
los Angeles), at
Art in General,
March 5-15, 1997

need for solitude, and I satisfied it in New York. I have truly enjoyed my little apartment in Brooklyn. My solitude here has provided me with a lot of time to think about my next professional stage in life.

I do have a one-person exhibition in Canada immediately following this trip where my partner, Ezequiel Suárez, is going to do a performance within the environment of my installation. He is going to walk into my work and position himself as one of its actors, as a deranged character victimized by his context, alluding to the French writer Antonin Artaud. But to be quite honest, I cannot wait until all this is over and I can travel back home to my family, my pets, and my enclosed garden.

Manuel Piña



Manuel Piña, Public
Art Project 1997
(Mezclar los colores,
mixed colors), 1997.

Installation view
on public bus in
Buffalo.



While in Buffalo in the winter of 1997, Manual Piña used Hallwalls' digital and video facilities and the photography facilities at SUNY at Buffalo and MollyOlga Neighborhood Art Classes to realize digital and photographic works.

These were then presented in three parts, sponsored by CEPA, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, and El Museo Francisco Oller y Diego Rivera.



Hallwalls
Contemporary
Arts Space

Artist residencies have been central to Hallwalls' programming and mission from the beginning. Artists such as Vito Acconci, Charles Simonds (Simonds' residency was cosponsored by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo), and Steina and Woody Vasulka were invited by Charlie Clough and Robert Longo as a part of Hallwalls' first programs and exhibitions. New gallery installations evolved from residencies of Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Frontierizo and Rob Danielson/Therese Agnew. These have brought artists from all over the world to interact with audiences in western New York, provided artists with artistic, technical, and financial support, and resulted in some of the most remarkable and memorable experiences in the arts in Buffalo. Starting with a 1994 residency (funded by the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation) by Philadelphia-based performance and installation artist Jonas dos Santos, residencies and collaborations with other organizations in support of residencies have taken center stage in Hallwalls' annual programming.

Piña's project in Buffalo consists of a gallery exhibition and a series of pieces designed for public spaces. They tell the story of a young Cuban photographer who rediscovers the work of a nineteenth-century Cuban photographer. The artist reedits old romantic images of prostitutes, using contemporary icons of Cuba's recent social and political history. Commenting on what he calls moral prostitution, the artist critiques the ways in which the government manages the country's economic crisis. This includes shifting from a socialist to a free-market economy and transforming the image of Cuba as a socialist paradise into that of an island for sexual adventures. The images also aim their criticism at what he sees as a decline in moral values. The young artist, however, gets caught in his own trap. Having been offered an irresistible sum, he allows his provocative images to be used in a campaign to spur tourism. Thus the piece intends to suggest an ethical approach as the only way for each individual to confront the social and political limitations imposed on him. The public project resembles a publicity campaign. By appropriating visual codes commonly used in publicity, it intends to subvert some stereotypes of race and sex.

Manuel Piña was interviewed on March 1, 1997, by Ernesto Pujol in Buffalo, just before completing his seven-week studio residency and public art project at the city's Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center.

Ernesto Pujol Much has been said about Cuba's cultural isolation. What was your experience with U.S. contemporary art and artists before this residency?

Manuel Piña As you know, I did not receive a formal visual arts training. I was trained as a mechanical engineer and worked as one for seven years. It was not until later that I was drawn to conceptual art. However, I was always interested in art and followed what was taking place outside Cuba as best as I could, like the work of Cindy Sherman and Lorna Simpson. I had some access to information through friends who traveled and through the library at the Wifredo Lam Center in Havana. I met only a couple of U.S. artists over the years, but quite superficially. Prior to this residency, the only U.S. artist I had a real exchange with was Pat Ward Williams, from California, during the *V Bienal de La Habana* in 1994. She participated with a large wall piece entitled *what you look'n at?* that impressed me very much.

EP What drew you to participate in this residency program, besides the opportunity to travel abroad, which we all seek as contemporary artists?

MP I participated in *Photofest* in Houston in 1994. That was my first visit to the U.S. It was a very important experience for me and for all the young Cuban photographers of the 1990s who participated. That formal invitation, coming from the United States, gave us local recognition in Cuba, something we had not yet received in our own country as the next generation of photographers. And my work confronted a U.S. audience for the first time, which was very challenging. So I was drawn to this residency program because of the possibility of repeating that previous experience and the opportunity to visit New York City. I imagined Hallwalls as a place where artists from New York could do things that they were not able to do in the big city because of market constraints. I thought that there would be a lot of freedom to do more experimental things here.

EP You initially conceived your public art project in Cuba, but it has undergone a number of interesting modifications as you have worked on it here. Can you share the reasons for the changes and describe the project as it is now?

MP I think of this project as part two of my billboard project in Cuba. Before coming to the U.S., I thought that my Cuban images would translate perfectly. I thought that I would be able to handle the image of the island just as I do in Cuba. Nevertheless, I arrived and tested my Cuban images on the local people. For example, one of my images shows a woman who is easily "read" in Cuba as a young prostitute. Well, I quickly discovered that she was only perceived as a young African-American woman, with no other social connotations. My work was completely decontextualized here.



Manuel Piña,
Public Art Project 1997
(Cross the border, Aquí
está la luz), 1997.

I also became very concerned with the texts that I was using, with my slogans. As slogans, they are very meaningful in Cuba; back home they had multiple socially critical readings. But how would they be understood here? And how should they be translated? I assumed that I would have to translate them. My most important discussion about all these issues was with Lawrence Broso, the Director of Public Art and Film at CEPA, Buffalo. He suggested that I not translate the slogans but work with a bilingual text. However, the slogans had to change somewhat in the end. They were a bit too ambiguous for our local audiences. They will now have to be slightly more direct.

Currently, I have simplified the project to three images in the form of a triptych. One full triptych is going to be placed in a subway station located in a working-class African-American neighborhood. A second, using the same images, will be placed within the bus system, but it is not yet clear where. And there will be a one-person exhibition of selections from my previous work at a local nonprofit gallery. Unfortunately, all this will happen in the spring, after I am gone. Public art projects take a lot of time to organize and exhibit. And I am also working on two short video spots that I want to include in the exhibition and hopefully take back to Cuba.

EP How do you think that the work will be read by your local audiences in Buffalo? In Buffalo, for the first time, I begin to understand the kind of racism that goes on here, such as the issues facing the Latino community. These are things of which we all hear about in Cuba, but because they come through the official media channels, we do not know what to believe. I did not really begin to

Installation view
of Manuel Piña's
Public Art Project
1997 (*Meclar los
colores, mixed colors*),
1997 at Utica
Station, Buffalo.



understand how this society works until now. It seems very socially polarized. The Latino community in Buffalo is invisible. There are no public signs in Spanish for them anywhere in the city. Yet the Latino community is the second-largest group here. Communities are divided, yet they live side by side. It even happens among the different Latino groups – they are divided among themselves – and all this is completely new social information for me. This is why I am going to use both English and Spanish on the billboards, side by side.

I am a bit suspicious of political art, particularly if it is commercially successful. Are we fighting something successfully or reinforcing the very forces we oppose with our work? When I started the work on prostitutes, I was criticizing both the people who were prostituting themselves and the social situation provoking it. But I was also hungry, literally, and I needed to sell my work. If I truly had been invited to do billboards, as my fictional character was, perhaps I might have done them. So I do not demand personal purity. I only provoke people to think about responding as individuals to a situation in ways that are ethical.

My work has long been concerned with personal responsibility and personal response to critical social issues. We all have problems to solve as individuals, wherever we are, but in a moment of crisis we have to take positions. I want the public to be more ethically responsible. I encourage people to not limit themselves to their jobs, to what they are paid to do.

Being here has made me think a lot about my own society. I have been enriched as a person through this visit.

I have been interested in Cuba's history of the last thirty years. Coming to the United States, coming to Buffalo and looking back at Cuba from this city, a place that is not cosmopolitan New York, has begun to change my views of our problems and how to solve them. But I cannot articulate it yet. The experience has also begun to change my views of what American society is. Back home we all imagine the U.S. as New York, as just one big city filled with tall buildings, and Hollywood.

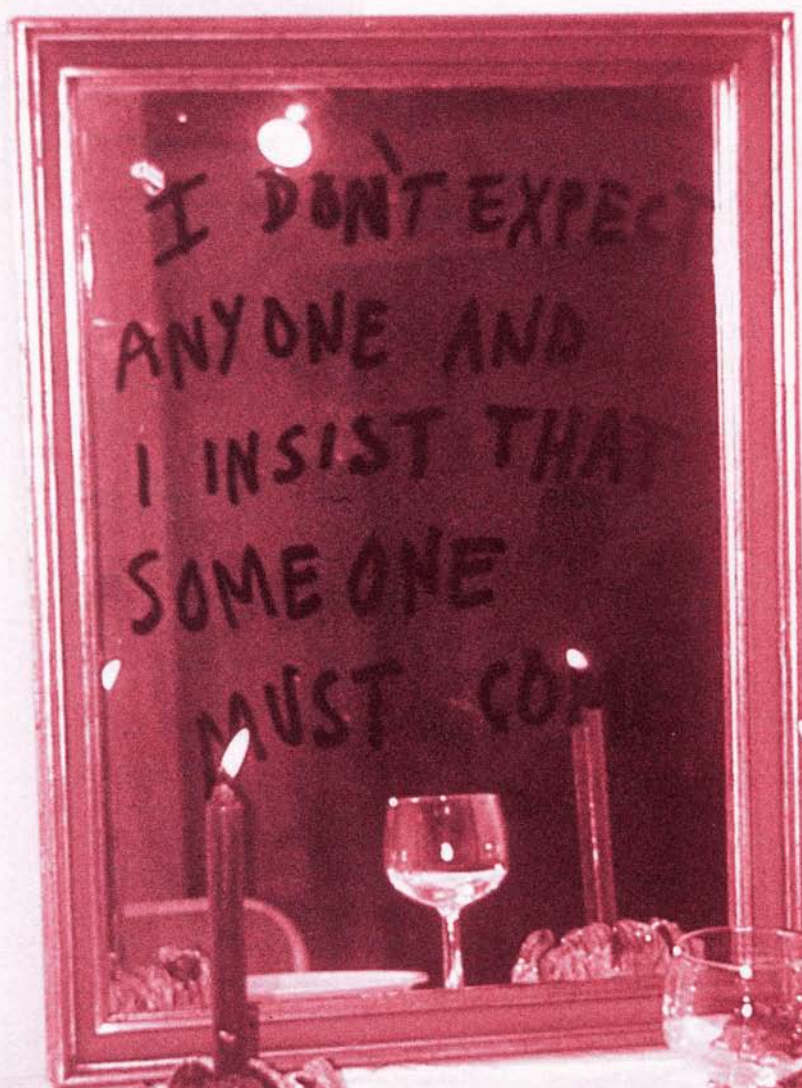
More and more I reach the conclusion that people are just people everywhere. For example, during this visit I have been a guest at the home of a Haitian man living in a working-class African-American neighborhood; as I believe they say here, living on the "wrong side of the tracks." It has been amazing to me how this city is literally divided along racial lines by streets. It has also been very interesting walking to the subway station every morning. The neighborhood guys perceive me as just another African-American, and I enjoy that very much, although sometimes I cannot understand what they are saying. But while I am perceived as an African-American in the neighborhood, I am perceived as a Latino at the local university and as an artist at the art center.

EP What would you say are the most basic similarities and differences between the artists you have met here and artists back in Cuba?

MP The greatest difference between us is one of material resources. Resources are a big issue in photography. I try to use the most advanced technology I can find. I have problems producing my work in Cuba, but I have learned that it is hard for people here, too. Everyone has to find inventive ways of doing things. People in Cuba have very few resources, but they manage to do their work with what they have. In a way, they do not miss what they have never had. They adapted their ideas to what is materially available.

EP I know that you are still in the final stages of producing the work and have not yet had any distance from this experience. In spite of all that, what has been most significant during your visit? What, so far, will you be taking back home?

MP As I was leaving Cuba this last time, I did not feel sure that I would be continuing the work I have been doing. I am not certain if I will continue strictly as a photographer. The experience of being here is not definitive, but it has become an important part of my current growth process, as I redefine myself and the kind of conceptual work that I want to do in the near future. I do not want to do commercially oriented work. I want my work to remain socially critical and to keep renewing itself; that is vital to me.



Lázaro Saavedra



DiverseWorks Arts Space, Houston, Texas USA

Lázaro Saavedra was welcomed to Houston with a studio at the Glassell School of Art of the Museum of Fine Arts thanks to Joe Havel, its director. A furnished apartment was made possible by a grant from the Longwood Arts Center/Bronx Council on the Arts and Art in General. A bicycle was refurbished and lent by Surpik and Paolo Angelini. Trips were made to the grocery store, the camera store, the lumber yard, and the art supply store.

Saavedra arrived with a portfolio of sketches and documentation of works made during a recent fellowship at the Ludwig Foundation in Aachen, Germany. Once he saw the storefront exhibition space at DiverseWorks, Saavedra had a clear idea of the pieces he wished to create. Over the next weeks Saavedra spent much of his time doing research, exploring both new and traditional means, for both his project here and for future projects. He investigated modems, scanners, and software packages as well as burnishing and carving tools and wood.

Serendipity entered into his stay when we discovered that an exhibition of work by Saavedra was scheduled at Rice University's Media Center. This work and a documentary interview (of Saavedra by Abdel Hernández) were part of an anthropological course titled *Artists in Trance: New Methodologies in the Work with the Other in Latin American Work*, organized by Surpik Angelini and Hernández. Saavedra also participated in one session of this course that focused on the artist as shaman and comedian. This enriched the context for the work that would be produced during Saavedra's residency at DiverseWorks and also presented his work to a broader audience.

When the installation at Rice was completed, Saavedra got to work realizing the pieces he wanted to make. He borrowed elements from his corner installation at the university. *Dying Free* and the untitled wall sculpture of headless ducks following the lead duck who carries all their heads were created on site. Each duck was cut from Styrofoam and painted; each marionette was carved, burned, drilled and assembled. Finally, the marionettes were hung from the ceiling. At the opening Saavedra ritually cut the string from which each figure hung. The works exhibited at DW were more poignant than those at Rice and also involved the community as collaborators. If Saavedra were writing this I imagine he would profusely thank Surpik Angelini, Elia Arce, Lesley Farrar, Sam Jones, Bill Shackelford, Elena Cusi Wortham, and others for their assistance in realizing this project.

DiverseWorks was pleased to have Lázaro Saavedra in Houston. This



DiverseWorks
Arts Space

Lázaro Saavedra,
Detail, Untitled
(Table setting for one
with mirror), 1997.

organization has devoted much effort to create extended residencies for artists here, most recently through a program called Diverse Dialogues. Over the past three years, Elia Arce, Waldo Bien, Rhodessa Jones, Tierney Malone and collaborators Dave Darraugh and David McGee, Robbin McCauley, Joyce Pensato, and the team of James Luna, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and Roberto Sifuentes have participated in this program. Through extended residencies in both the performing and visual arts, links have been created between artists and Houston communities and between DiverseWorks and other organizations. We are delighted to include Saavedra's residency in this effort.

Emily Todd, Executive Director
DiverseWorks Arts Space, Houston

Lázaro Savaadra was interviewed on February 24, 1997, by Betti-Sue Hertz at DiverseWorks Arts Space toward the end of his seven-week residency. Elena Cusi Wortham¹ served as translator.

Betti-Sue Hertz How did you find out about U.S. art in Cuba? What was your experience with art from the U.S. before this trip?

Lázaro Savaadra In the seventies there were professors that came from Russia and many Cubans had studied in Russia. These artists introduced Russian methodologies to Cuba. There was a text book called *Humanism in Art* and it was about political art and Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism was considered the highest form of expression in art, and all the other tendencies of modern art were described as decadent.

At the beginning of the eighties, installation art was considered ideological diversionism. It was something that was almost like a revolution. It was subversive to make an installation, and we were breaking away from the traditional norms of art. This new art was attacked by the most conservative and reactionary groups in Cuba because they equated anything other and different as coming mostly from the U.S.

The main venue for this new art was the art school itself. The professors were learning more about international strategies from art magazines such as *Art in America* and *ArtNews*, which started arriving at the school in the eighties. Censorship of this new kind of art was decreasing, and young students were taking these ideas and making them their own within a Cuban context. They started to develop their own ideas. Conceptualism became an important trend within the system of art training, and it started to be taught in a deeper and more meaningful way.

BSH Have you been especially influenced by any particular U.S. artist(s)?

1. Elena Cusi Wortham is an artist who serves on the Artist Advisory Board of DiverseWorks Arts Space.

LS Yes. Jonathan Borofsky was very influential to me. I learned about his work through the art magazines. I liked his characters, dreamwork, and mechanical men.

BSH Now that you say Borofsky I can see the connection and that his work would have influenced you. Why were you interested in participating in this cultural exchange program? This is your first time here, no?

LS Because I was interested in coming to the U.S. First, I was curious to come to the U.S. because of all of the connotations of the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. I was interested in being able to make art during my first visit, because after you go to a foreign place three or four times, your perception of the country changes. But to come here for the first time and do work that was the most important thing.

BSH We asked the artists to submit proposals to us, before they arrived in the U.S., of what they would do during the residency. Since we had met before a couple of times during my previous trips to Cuba, I was familiar with your ideas and process. What happened to your original proposal idea after you arrived in Houston? Were you able to keep to your plan or did it change?

LS The concept that I had of the residency was very idealized. I thought that I would come here and do whatever I wanted, with no limitations. The same thing happened to me in Germany (during a residency in early 1997 at the Ludwig Foundation in Aachen, Germany). When I arrived, I found out that there were limitations in space, in time, in materials, and in money. I had conceptualized a plan for this project in Cuba, but at that time I did not know the measurements of the space. However, because I had gone through the experience in Germany, I had some idea of what to expect. In Cuba I had planned out two possible projects for Houston a bigger one and a smaller one.

BSH What was the bigger one?

LS In the bigger one there were many pieces that were related to each other because I used the Cuban flag. I cut down on the bigger project, and I am only going to do a few.

One piece that I am working on is called *Dying Free*. This is a brand-new piece that developed since I came here to Houston. It consists of ducks flying

Lázaro Savaadra,
*Untitled (Table
setting for one
with mirror)*, 1997.



in formation, and the lead bird is the only one that has a head. The rest are all headless, but the lead bird is holding everyone else's head. They will be made of Styrofoam covered with plaster and will be bas-reliefs on the wall.

One of the ones that I am still going to do from the original plan consists of fifty marionettes. This piece will be completed at a simple performance that will take place at the exhibition opening. I will cut all the threads holding up the puppets so that they fall down onto the floor.

BSH What kind of characters or images are these puppets going to have? Are they specific people?

LS Just human beings.

BSH Are they from any particular tradition? Mexican, for example?

LS No. There is no specific cultural reference. They are just generic human being forms.

The third piece I am going to put in the space consists of a table, chair, and mirror placed in a corner. The table is set for one person and opposite the place setting will be a mirror that says: "I am not waiting for anybody but I insist that somebody should come." The viewer sees this text while he is looking at himself in the mirror.

BSH What has been your experience of the city and people here?

LS The nature of the city does not lend itself to really know it well in a short time. I feel like I have a very superficial knowledge of the city. I have not seen very much here, but I have some ideas about it just from driving around. But remember, this is the first time that I am seeing the U.S.

I know the U.S. through the TV, the screen. I feel in a way like Alice in Wonderland. As she has walked into the inside of the mirror, I have walked into the inside of the TV and have seen real scenes or live scenes of what I have seen in movies on TV.



Installation view of
exhibition of works
produced by Lázaro
Savaadra during
his residency at
DiverseWorks Art
Space, Houston,
March 8-April 12, 1997.

Authors' Note: There have been numerous one-person and group exhibitions of Cuban, Cuban-American, and recently-exiled Cuban artists in the United States during the last two decades. The following is a selective chronology of significant exhibitions of Cuban art between 1981 and 1997, along with relevant historical events since 1959 that have influenced the lives of Cuban artists and the development of contemporary Cuban art.

Chronology: Selected Events in Cuban Art and History Since 1959

1959

January. Triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro assumes power.

1961

Diplomatic Ties Severed. In January U.S. breaks off diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Operation Peter Pan.

From late 1960 through 1962, approximately 15,000 unaccompanied children are sent out of Cuba by their families, fearing that parental authority will be transferred to the Cuban state and spurred by rumors that Cuban children will be sent to the Soviet Union. Twelve-year-old Ana Mendieta, later to become one of Cuba's most important conceptual artists and the first Cuban-American artist to exhibit back in Cuba, is among the children arriving in the U.S. as part of this operation.

1962

U.S. Embargo. The United States imposes a full trade embargo against Cuba in February.

1965-67

UMAP. Cuban artists and writers are among those interned in labor camps known as Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units to Assist Production) for reasons of political dissent or sexual orientation.

1978

Instituto Superior de Arte. The ISA, as it is locally known, is founded in Havana's former exclusive Country Club, offering a syllabus and instruction modeled after MFA programs in New York City to provide students with the best in intensive studio and theoretical visual arts training. Out of this will come the first generation of Cuban visual artists fully trained by the Cuban Revolution, later to be known as the 1980s generation.

1979

Mariposas. Cuban exiles are permitted to visit their families in Cuba. Just as these exiles were pejoratively called *gusanos* (worms) in Cuba during the 1960s, they are now referred to as *mariposas* (butterflies), implying that those who lost all their possessions when they left Cuba now return seemingly wealthy, carrying gifts for their relatives.

1980

Mariel Exodus. On April 1 twelve people seeking political asylum crash through the gate of the Peruvian Embassy in Havana. They are followed by an overflow of thousands seeking asylum. The Cuban government allows Cuban exiles to come down from Miami in their boats to the port of Mariel to pick up relatives wishing to leave. About 125,000 Cubans leave the country. Carlos Alfonzo, one of Cuba's most prominent painters, is among them.

1981

First Look: 10 Young Artists from Today's Cuba. November 3-22, 1981, Westbeth Gallery, New York City. Sponsored by the Center for Cuban Studies and Dore Ashton, Romare Bearden, Christo, Jasper Johns, Lucy Lippard, and Susan Sontag, with the cooperation of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Catalog with introductory essay by Dore Ashton and artists' biographies. Artists exhibiting include José Bedia, Nelson Domínguez, Roberto Fabelo, Ever Fonseca, Flavio Garcíandía, Manuel Mendive, Pedro Pablo Oliva, Gustavo Pérez, Eduardo Roca (Choco), and Tomás Sánchez. Funded by The Ford Foundation, The Samuel Rubin Foundation, and Artists Space, NYC.

1982

Wifredo Lam. Cuba's most recognized modern painter dies in Paris. He became the paradigm for several generations of

Cuban artists, fusing European formalism with Afro-Caribbean heritage in styles that appeal to notions of the tropical, the exotic, and the magical.

1983

Publication of *Exploraciones de la plástica cubana* by Gerardo Mosquera.

Editorial Letras Cubanas, La Habana, issues an anthology of essays by Mosquera surveying Cuban artistic production, including young artists.

Ana Mendieta. *Geo-Imago*, a one-woman exhibition of small works, is shown in Havana in the lobby of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The exhibition is supported by the Cuban Ministry of Culture, which also supports Mendieta's local public arts project, *Esculturas rupestres* (Rupestrian Ruptures) in the caves of Jaruco.

1984

Immigration Accord

Signed. This agreement between the U.S. and Cuba results in suspension by the latter of all U.S. family visits to the island.

1985

Radio Martí. The U.S. government launches Radio Martí to broadcast antirevolution propaganda to Cuba. The Cuban government suspends all family visits to Cuba and the Immigration Accord signed with the U.S. in 1984.

New Art from Cuba, April

2-28, 1985, Amelie Wallace Gallery, State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. Artists José Bedia, Flavio Garcíandía, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey. The exhibition catalog includes essays and interviews with the artists by Benjamin Buchloh, Luis

Camnitzer, and Gerardo Mosquera. It was funded by the Ford Foundation and Dr. Guillermo Pérez Mesa, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture of Cuba. It traveled to North Hall Gallery, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, Mass.; Monserrat School of Visual Art, Beverly, Mass.; The Plaza Gallery, State University of New York, Albany, N.Y., Visual Arts Department Gallery, State University of New York/College at Purchase.

Ana Mendieta dies in New York.

Her conversations with young Cuban artists about U.S. contemporary art and the work she did locally during her visits to Cuba influenced the 1980s generation of Cuban visual artists.

1986

Rectification. The Cuban government, trying to avoid political transformation of glasnost and perestroika sweeping the Soviet Union, enters a period of political purification to maintain the original ideology of the Revolution.

1987

Outside Cuba. This exhibition opens in March at Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. It will also travel to Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Arts, New York, New York; Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio; Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico; Center for the Fine Arts, Miami, Florida; Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, Georgia. The show features works by forty-eight recipients of the Cintas Foundation Fellowship in the Visual Arts, among them Carlos

Alfonzo, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Cundo Bermúdez, Mario Bencomo, and César Trasobares. The catalog contains an introduction by Graciela Cruz-Taura and an essay by Ileana Fuentes-Pérez.

Havana Post-Modern. A video documentary directed by Coco Fusco about the new 1980s generation of Cuban visual artists is censored by Cuban authorities at the Havana Film Festival.

Ana Mendieta *Fuego de Tierra*, a video by Nereida García-Ferraz and Kate Horsfield. This video about Ana Mendieta's life and work would circulate among artists in Cuba and the U.S., extending Mendieta's influence as a symbol of reunion.

1988

Signs of Transition 80s Art from Cuba, January 28, 1988, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA), New York City. This exhibition, curated by Coco Fusco, includes the work of 18 Cuban artists Gustavo Acosta, José Bedia, María Magdalena Campos, Consuelo Castañeda, Humberto Castro, Arturo Cuenca, Juan Francisco Elso, Moisés Finalé, José Franco, Carlos Alberto García, Flavio Garcíandía, Israel León, Marta María Pérez Bravo, Gustavo Pérez, Zaida del Río, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey, Leandro Soto, and Rubén Torres Llorca. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the show is a project of the Center for Cuban Studies with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture of Cuba.

Pipe bomb at the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture in Miami. The

blast shatters the front door of the museum, which now finds itself in the midst of a controversy over whether to show or sell the works of Cuban artists still living in Cuba.

1989

Período Especial. Cuba enters into a long-term deep economic crisis caused by the failure of the sugar cane harvest (the island's main crop), the loss of Soviet aid, and the tightening of the U.S. trade embargo. Artists are increasingly forced to travel and live abroad for short periods of time. Some of the most important Cuban artists of the 1980s generation establish themselves in Mexico City and Monterrey, Mexico, indefinitely.

1990

The Decade Show *Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, May 12-August 19, 1990, at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, The Studio Museum of Harlem, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New York City. This major exhibition of works by artists addressing issues of cultural identity and activism features work by eight Cuban-American artists Carlos Alfonzo, Luis Cruz Azaceta, María Brito, Ana Mendieta, Félix González-Torres (member of Group Material), Andrés Serrano, Lorna Simpson, and Carmelita Tropicana.

Miami's Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture

Bombed. The blast on June 14 causes considerable damage, and the museum finds itself under attack for exhibiting work by artists still living in Cuba.

1991

15 Artistas Cubanos, NINART-Centro Cultural,

Mexico City. A commercial art gallery exhibits work mixing for the first time exiled artists Félix González-Torres, Luis Cruz Azaceta, and César Trasobares, with island artists José Bedia, Consuelo Castañeda, Arturo Cuenca, Israel León, Leandro Soto, Rubén Torres Llorca, Alejandro Aguilera, Adriano Buergo, Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, Ana Albertina Delgado, Glexis Novoa, and Segundo Planes. Only three of the fifteen artists in the exhibition are Cuban-Americans; the remaining twelve island artists are at the time living in Mexico indefinitely, and all eventually go into exile.

The Nearest Edge of the World Art and Cuba Now. Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, and the Bronx Museum of Art, Bronx, New York. The exhibition is organized by Polarities Inc. of Brookline, Massachusetts, and curated by Rachel Weiss and Gerardo Mosquera. A traveling exhibition, it is supported by the New England Foundation for the Arts and coordinated in Cuba by the Ministry of Culture and the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales (Center for the Development of Visual Arts); The catalog includes essays by the two exhibition curators and Luis Camnitzer. Among the participating artists are Alejandro Aguilera, Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, Ana Albertina Delgado, Tomás Esson, Glexis Novoa, Marta María Pérez Bravo, Segundo Planes, Ciro Quintana, and Lázaro Saavedra. Some of the visiting artists later complain that U.S. leftists counseled them not to associate with

Cuban exiles and warned them against traveling to Miami. Eight of the nine artists in the show now live outside Cuba.

1992
Cuban Democracy Act, also known as the Toricelli Act. This legislation receives final approval by Congress. Though the new law calls for tighter restrictions on the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, it also calls for improved, direct telephone communications with the island nation and increased cultural exchanges between the two countries.

1994
Memoria de la Postguerra. Tania Bruguera, an installation and performance artist, launches an alternative art newspaper documenting the local art scene and the increasing exodus of Cuban visual artists. The publication includes contributions by writers and artists living in Cuba and outside. It is shut down by state security authorities after only two issues, following the Bienal de la Habana.

V Bienal de La Habana, Cuba, May-June. A group of North American art administrators, funders, curators, and critics from the National Association of Artists' Organization (NAAO) travels to the Havana Bienal for the first time to look at contemporary Cuban art. The group is hosted locally by Erena Hernández and the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales.

II Taller Internacional de la Imagen Fotográfica. This exhibition is a collateral event of the V Bienal de La Habana, at UPEC (Unión de Periodistas de Cuba), and features a selection of

Fragments de narraciones cubanas (Fragments of Cuban Narrations), by Eduardo Aparicio, a series of portraits and interviews with Cubans living in the United States and people in Cuba with relatives in the U.S.

Espacio Aglutinador. Artists Sandra Ceballos and Ezequiel Suárez launch an alternative exhibition space, in their own studio-home, mainly to exhibit artists left out of the official cultural life on the island, as well as underrecognized older artists and artists in exile.

English Is Broken Here by Coco Fusco. Published by the New Press in New York City, this anthology of essays by Coco Fusco on biculturalism and cultural politics of identity includes the essay "El Diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary," detailing her contacts with Cuban artists and government institutions.

Caribbean Art in New York. Dr. Yolanda Woods, professor of Caribbean art history at the University of Havana, visits New York to research Caribbean art in exile.

1995
Proyecto Memoria. The Getty Foundation gives a small seed grant to four independent Cuban art researchers Cristina Vives, José Veigas, Valia Grazón and Danis Montes de Oca to create an archive of modern and contemporary Cuban art. The foundation will later attempt to publish it as a one-volume index, and it will include artists living on the island and in exile.

Ludwig Foundation. Peter Ludwig purchases an entire

exhibition of contemporary Cuban art entitled *Kuba OK*. He travels to Havana in 1994 to further collect Cuban art and to establish Fundación Ludwig de Cuba to support young Cuban artists. The foundation, under the direction of Helmo Hernández, is launched in 1995 with a large group exhibition entitled *Una de cada clase Arte joven cubano* (One of Each Young Cuban Art).

Los hijos de Pedro Pan (The Children of Peter Pan), Casa de las Américas, Havana, April 5-June 1995. A one-person exhibition of five site-specific installations by Ernesto Pujol dedicated to the memory of Ana Mendieta. It is cohosted by the National Association of Cuban Visual Artists, and it is the first public one-person exhibition by a Cuban-American visual artist since Mendieta's show in 1983. Although planned as a month-long show, it remains open through late June by popular demand.

Cuba La Isla Posible, Centre de Cultura Contemporània, Barcelona, April 1995. A multimedia exhibition, curated by Iván de la Nuez, Juan Pablo Ballester, and María Elena Escalona, includes the work of Alejandro Aguilera, Pedro Ivaréz, Eduardo Aparicio, Juan Pablo Ballester, José Bedia, Tania Bruguera, Carmen María Cabrera, María Magdalena Campos, Carlos Cárdenas, Consuelo Castañeda, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Arturo Cuenca, Antonio Eligio (Tonel), Tomás Esson, Raúl Ferrera-Balanquet, Coco Fusco, Carlos Garaicoa, Ana Mendieta, Oscar Molina, Abelardo Morell, René de la Nuez, Marta María

Pérez, Ernesto Pujol, Fernando Rodríguez y Francisco de la Cal, Severo Sarduy, Andrés Serrano, and Ela Troyano. It is the first important international nonprofit exhibition of contemporary Cuban art to include the work of both exiled and island artists.

Trofeos de la Guerra Fría

(Trophies from the Cold War), Espacio Aglutinador, July 1995, Havana, Cuba. A two-person exhibition of a Cuban-American artist and an artist living in Havana examine the theme of memory and childhood in the works of artists Manuel Alcaide (who studied in the Soviet Union) and Ernesto Pujol (who studied in the U.S.). The catalog essay is by Gerardo Mosquera.

Right Now Contemporary Art of Cuba

November 14–December 17, 1995, University Art Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville. Curated by Cynthia Berman, the show includes the work of seven Cuban artists Sandra Ceballos, Antonio Eligio (Tonel), Luis E. Gómez Armenteros, Douglas D. Pérez, Manuel Piña, Sandra Ramos, and José A. Toirac. It is funded by the Society of Art History Graduate Students, the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida, and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, through the Florida Arts Council. The first show in Florida of Cuban artists still living on the island.

1996

Kcho at Barbara

Gladstone Gallery, New York City, March 23–April 20, 1996. This marks the first major commercial gallery one-person exhibi-

tion by a 1990s Cuban artist still residing in Cuba. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquires one of the pieces for its permanent collection.

Cuba Siglo XX Modernidad y Sincretismo

April 16–June 1996, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Canary Islands.

Curated by Antonio Zaya and María-Lluïsa Borrás, this show is a major survey of modern and contemporary Cuban and Cuban American art. It will travel to Fundación La Caixa, Palma de Gran Canaria, and Centre d'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona. Artists whose work is represented are Alejandro Aguilera, Belkis Ayón, Juan Pablo Ballester, José Bedia, Mario Bencomo, Cundo Bermúdez, Ricardo Brey, María Brito, Agustín Cárdenas, Mario Carreño, Consuelo Castañeda, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Nelson Domínguez, Antonia Eiriz, Juan Francisco Elso, Carlos Enriquez, Tomás Esson, Víctor Manuel García, Flavio Garciandía, Florencio Gelabert, Gory, Kcho, Wifredo Lam, Raúl Martínez, Ana Mendieta, Manuel Mendive, Federico Mialhe, Adrián Morales, Glexis Novoa, Amelia Peláez, Umberto Peña, Marta María Pérez, Manuel Piña, Segundo Planes, Fidelio Ponce, René Portocarrero, Ernesto Pujol, Arturo Rodríguez, Mariano Rodríguez, Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas, Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal, José Ángel Toirac, Antonio Eligio (Tonel), Rubén Torres Llorca, César Trasobares, Ela Troyano, and Osvaldo Yero.

Gerardo Mosquera. In April Cuba's most prominent art critic, at the time a curator at the The New

Museum in New York City, is censored in Miami. Miami's Center for the Fine Arts withdraws an invitation to lecture because Mosquera maintains residence in Havana. The withdrawal of the invitation comes a few days after a group of about 200 protesters hurls insults at concertgoers as they arrive at Miami's Gusman Center for the Performing Arts to see the acclaimed Cuban jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. The musician is at the time living in the Dominican Republic but is believed to have maintained ties with Cuba.

La mesa de Saturno/ Saturn's

Table, June–August 28, 1996, Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales, Havana. A one-person exhibition by Cuban-American artist Ernesto Pujol is cohosted by the Fundación Ludwig de Cuba. The large installation is based on eighteenth-century Spanish painter Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Children*.

Entre Miami y La Habana

(Between Miami and Havana), September 1996, Espacio Aglutinador, Havana. This exhibition of photographic diptychs by Eduardo Aparicio, is the first one-person exhibition on the island by a Cuban photographer living in the U.S. The catalog with text is by Iván de la Nuez.

1997

1990s Art From Cuba:

A National Residency and Exhibition Program, coordinated by Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/ Bronx Council on the Arts, New York. Residencies take place January 21–March 15, 1997 and the touring exhibition takes place 1997–1999. Five

contemporary Cuban artists, Abel Barroso, Tania Bruguera, Sandra Ceballos, Manuel Piña, and Lázaro Saavedra, are awarded seven-week studio fellowships in nonprofit art centers in five different cities across the United States. Each artist has a one-person exhibition at each site, and the program culminates with a symposium at Hunter College in New York City on Cuban art cohosted by the CUNY/Caribbean Exchange Program. The artists are hosted by Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/BCA, New York; Centro Cultural La Raza, San Diego; DiverseWorks, Houston; Hallwalls, Buffalo; and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

VI Bienal de La Habana

Cuba, May 3–June. The theme of the exhibition, "Individual and Collective Memories," aims to "promote reflection on the relationship between the individual and memory as a means to defend identity" (Milton Nascimento). Ernesto Pujol is among those officially invited, his installation piece *El vacío* (Emptiness) marks the first time the Havana Bienal is open to Cuban-Americans. Lázaro Saavedra is among the artists representing Cuba. Sandra Ceballos curates *Una miseria temporal* (A Temporary Misery), a group show held at Espacio Aglutinador to coincide with the Bienal. Tania Bruguera also opens her home to visitors for her performance piece *El peso de la culpa* (The Weight of Guilt) and a performance piece by Coco Fusco titled *El último deseo* (The Last Wish).

Eduardo Aparicio & Ernesto Pujol

Artist Biographies

Abel Barroso was born in 1971 in Pinar del Río, Cuba. He studied at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (1986-90) and graduated from Cuba's Instituto Superior de Arte in 1995. Solo shows include *Las donaciones llagaron ya*, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana (1995); *Para continuar la obra*, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana (1994); and *Grabado cubano altamente reproducible*, Galería Provincial de Pinar de Río (1992). Group exhibitions include: *Ni fresa ni chocolate*, Consejo nacional de las Artes Plásticas, Havana (1996); *Del sitio en que nacimos*, Tecali, Puebla, Mexico (1996); *La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes*, Grafik Museum, Stiftung Schreiner, Bad Steben, Banberg (1995); *Hecho en Cuba*, Centro Cultural Ricardo Palma, Escuela de Bellas Artes, Corrente Alterna, Lima (1995); *Caribbean Art Today*, Documenta Hall, Kassel (1994); *Feria internacional de grabado contemporáneo*, Palacio Velázquez, Madrid (1994); *Décima Bienal de Grabado*, San Juan, Puerto Rico (1993); *Artistas Plásticos*, Universidad de Cuyo, Argentina (1992); and *Cambio de bola*, Galería Habana (1992).

Tania Bruguera was born in 1968 in Havana, Cuba. She studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas San Alejandro (1980-83) and graduated from Cuba's Instituto Superior de Arte in 1992. She has participated in artist-in-residency programs at Gasworks Studios and Slade College of Art, London (1995) and ART/OMI, Hudson, New York (1995) and has taken part in several international biennials, including the Johannesburg Biennial (1997); XXII Bienal de São Paulo (1996); II Bienal del Barro, Venezuela (1995); and V Bienal de La Habana (1994). Solo exhibitions include: *Lágrimas de tránsito*, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana (1996); *Soñando* (with Fernando Rodríguez), Gasworks, London (1995); *Dédalo o el imperio de salvación*, Festival Les Allumées, Nantes, France; *Memoria de la postguerra*, Galería Plaza Vieja, Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales, Havana (1993); and *Ana Mendieta-Tania Bruguera*, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana (1992). Group exhibitions include *Season of Time-Based Performance from South, Central, and Latin America and the U.S. Diaspora*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London (1996); *The Visible and the Invisible Representing the Body in Contemporary Art and Society*, St. Pancras Church, Institute of International Visual Art, London (1996); *Salón internacional de estandartes*, Centro Cultural Tijuana, Tijuana (1996); *La isla posible*, Centro di Cultura Contemporanea, Barcelona (1995), *New Art from Cuba*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1995); *Una brecha entre el cielo y la tierra*, Centro de Artes Plásticas y Diseño, Havana (1994); *La Nube en Pantalones*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (1993); and *Segunda Bienal Internacional del Cartel en México*, Museo José Luis Cuevas, Mexico City (1992). Performances include *Mideo* for the series *Dédalo o el imperio de salvación* at V Bienal de La Habana (1994); *Proyecto de obra*, for the exhibition *Utopia*, Galería Espada, Casa del Joven Creador, Havana (1994); and *Rastros corporales 1982-92* for the exhibition *La Nube en Pantalones*. Bruguera has been a professor of art at Cuba's Instituto Superior de Arte since 1992.

Sandra Ceballos was born in 1961 in Guantánamo, Cuba. She graduated from the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de San Alejandro, Havana, in 1983. Solo exhibitions include: *¿Dónde está Loló?*, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana (1995); *Arte degenerado en la era del mercado*, with Ezequiel Suárez, Espacio Aglutinador, La Habana (1994); and *La bestia y la bestia*, Galería Habana (1991). Group exhibitions include *Premier Salon Nacional de Pintura Contemporánea Juan Francisco Elso*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (1995); *Segundo Bienal de Pintura del Caribe y Centroamérica*, Museo de arte Contemporáneo de República Dominicana (1995); *Premier Bienal Internacional de Gráfica*, Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre (MECC), Maastricht, The Netherlands (1993); *A New Look at the Caribbean*, Galerie Espace Carpeaux, Paris (1992); *Cuarta Bienal de La Habana* (1989); *Young Cuban Artists*, Zpaming Gallery, Torun, Poland (1989); and *Young Cuban Artists*, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston (1988).

Manuel Piña, was born in 1958 in Havana, Cuba. He graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from the Polytechnic Institute of Vladimir, Russia, in 1983. In 1997 he did a printmaking residency at Vinalhaven Press, Maine, and won an Andrew Fellowship from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver in 1996. Solo exhibitions include: *Manipulaciones, verdades y otras ilusiones*, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana (1995); and *Crónicas de la ciudad*, Fototeca de Cuba, Havana (1991). Group exhibitions include *El voluble rostro de la realidad Siete fotógrafos cubanos*, Fototeca de Cuba, Havana (organized by Fundación Ludwig de Cuba); *Cuban Art Now Contemporary Art from Cuba*, University of Florida, Glensdale (1995); *The New Generation Contemporary Photography from Cuba*, Fotofest, Houston (1994); *Nueva fotografía cubana*, Fototeca de Cuba, Havana (1994); *America & Americhi*, Galeria IF, Milan (1992); and *Cuban Photography 1959–92*, New Gallery, Berlin, Germany (1992).

Lázaro Saavedra was born in 1964 in Havana, Cuba. He graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte in 1988 and in 1996 was an artist-in-residence at the Ludwig Foundation in Aachen, Germany. Saavedra also participated in VI Bienal de La Habana in 1997. Solo shows include *Historias para historiadores*, Galeria Luis de Soto, Facultad de Artes y Letras, Universidad de La Habana (1995); and *Una mirada retrospectiva*, Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas y Diseño, Havana (1989). Group exhibitions include *De Juid van De Witte Dame*, Artic Foundation, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (1995); *Vestigios, ego sum, un retrato posible*, Centro Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana (1995); *Arte cubano actual*, Galerie L'UQAM, Montreal (1994); *The Unknown Face of Cuban Art*, Northern Centre of Contemporary Art, England (1992); *La década prodigiosa*, Museo Universitario de Chopo, Mexico (1992); *The Nearest Edge of the World*, Massachussets College of Art, Boston (1990); and *Kuba OK*, State Gallery of Dusseldorf (1990).

Checklist

Abel Barroso

Rush for Freedom, 1997

Woodcut on paper, wood, ink, 4 freestanding wood hobby horse forms, 4 freestanding paper hobby horse forms, one wood map of Cuba, one drawing on paper, total installation variable in dimensions (approx. 12 x 12')

Tania Bruguera

Documentation for Art in America (The Dream), 1997

Nine 11 x 14" black and white photographs, cardboard, clothing, television, flower vase, dimensions variable

Sandra Ceballos

Clinic of the Angels (Clinica los ángeles), 1997

Blue surgical sheet with surgical thread, red ink, clear IV and raw wool, 22 x 22"; two c-prints, 20 x 24" each; vintage health plan I.D. card

Bodies Sleep Meekly, Waiting for Resurrection

(*Mansos duermen los cuerpos esperando resucitar*), 1997

Soft sculpture with elastic bands, one c-print, 20 x 24", and found wooden decorated figurine on shelf

Hope is to Grow Things (Es la esperanza el ser con plumas), 1997

Green surgical sheet, 27 x 29", with soft sculpture and feathers, pills, and rough aluminum spoons in small wooden bases

Without Warning, We Only Witnessed Her Passing (No avisó, vimos sólo su mudanza), 1997

Blood-stained blue surgical sheet 38 1/4 x 35" Surgical cloth, two color photographs, 20 x 24" each with vintage acrylic veins and pins, three green plastic cups with blood-stained cotton, soil, pills and knives on mirror shelf

Manuel Piña

Public Art Project (Machar los colores, Mixed colors), 1997

Laminated computer-generated print, 40 x 60"

Public Art Project (Cross the border, Aquí esta la luz), 1997

Laminated computer-generated print, 40 x 60"

Lázaro Saavedra

Dying Free, 1997

Bass wood, twine, (approx. 38 individual marionettes); total installation 8 x 8 x 12'

Untitled (Ducks), 1997

Styrofoam, twine (10 duck-shaped forms); total wall installation 6 x 6'

Untitled (Table setting for one with mirror), 1997

Table, chair, mirror, place setting, and candle, total installation 2 x 2 x 6'

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