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FLOWERS, LIES AND REVOLUTION: CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

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FLOWERS, LIES AND REVOLUTION

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART



MAY 21 THROUGH JULY 18, 2010

SHELDON MUSEUM OF ART • UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



Kcho, *Sin título*, 2003, oil and charcoal on canvas, 37 x 52 inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

Cover Julio Larraz, *Study for Venus*, 1994, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches
Collection Karen and Robert Duncan

FLOWERS, LIES AND REVOLUTION

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Flowers, Lies and Revolution surveys some themes that emerge in contemporary Cuban art, as revealed in three private collections in Lincoln, Nebraska. What a landlocked state and a seelocked nation share are the desires, comforts, and complexities of the other. This exhibition celebrates the transnational scope and vision witnessed in the breadth and focus of the three local collections: those of Karen and Robert Duncan, Kathy and Marc LeBaron, and Lisa and Tom Smith.

The collections represent the dominant trends of a new generation of Cuban artists that emerged in the last 30 years. Their work continues a tradition of testing the limits of artistic freedom in Cuban society—a critical practice consistent with the Cuban Revolution in 1959, but which fell under intense state scrutiny in the 1970s.

In recent decades artists have worked with increasing self-reflection in responding to life in Cuba. They have explored new representational strategies with which to frame their aesthetical

and conceptual responses. The art they produce is less concerned with the standpoint of the collective—an earlier, revolutionary interest—than with the individual's response to the collective—a later, laissez faire interest. The island's contemporary art reveals an increasing sensitivity to individualism in its critical responses to Cuban society.

The words "flowers" and "lies" in the title allude to the duality that many Cubans experience living in post-revolutionary Cuban culture. Flowers may symbolize the idealized beauty and natural splendor of the island—a lure the island still has for many outsiders. Flowers also symbolize hope, as, for example, in the development of a new society or an expectation of growth and health—a blossoming. Political realities, however, tend to mitigate hope and idealism. Reality gives the lie to false or exaggerated expectations, in this case Cuba. The hope for a revolutionary ideal society, an island Utopia, never materialized as such.



Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura Image of Castle Courtyard in Bedroom*, 2000, gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 inches
 NAA-Gift in memory of Jean Dickinson Ames

“Revolution” refers to the 1959 change in government led by Fidel Castro, but also to the current economic transformation: the ongoing implementation of social and economic reform by the Cuban government. Cubans have a double economy. They purchase goods in government-sanctioned markets, but in order to have a wider selection of products, they resort to black market exchanges. Many Cubans have two jobs: one that pays in pesos and one in dollars. Others receive money from families abroad.

Cuban artists also live this duality, and it surfaces in their work. They have witnessed many changes in Cuba. In the 1960s the social atmosphere was more liberal than in the 1970s when artists began to feel restricted in their pursuits of artistic freedom. This state scrutiny resulted in a silent revolt by artists. In the 1980s Cuban art began to receive positive press internationally, but this attention led to increased government censorship.



Yoan Capote, *The Kiss*, 1999, bronze, cotton, perfume
 3 1/2 x 2 x 2 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan

Many of the artists included in this exhibition currently live in Cuba, periodically traveling and working in other countries, including the United States. Most live in the capital city of Havana for its available resources and its institutions of formal education. Their mobility in terms of place and influence lends their work a transnational dimension.



Lidzie Alvisa, *Girsoles de Van Gogh (Sunflowers After Van Gogh)*, 2005, digital print, 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{16}$ inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Esterio Segura, *Pinocho y Napoleón cuentan la historia (Pinocchio and Napoleón tell the story)* 2006
cast bronze, approximately 40 inches
Collection Karen and Robert Duncan

Lidzie Alvisa's sunflower photographs titled *Girasoles de Van Gogh (Sunflowers after Van Gogh)* capture the transnational influence and play of duality, as symbolized in the living and dying sunflowers. Vincent van Gogh famously mutilated himself to prove his love—a sacrifice for an ideal. The art historical reference has current relevance to Cuban politics. Dying sunflowers, for example, offer a *memento mori* to the life of social ideals, as well as prompting another set of dualities: objects fresh and decaying, soft and hardening, healthy and injured, youthful and declining.



Rocio García, *De la serie: El triller: En el reservado aun (from the series: The Thriller: In the booth, even)*, 2006,
oil on canvas, 55 x 47 inches
Collection Karen and Robert Duncan

Aimée García also symbolizes the duality of Cuban life in *Promesa (Promise)*, a painting that depicts the artist with an open palm by candle light, but revealing a shadow of the same hand with fingers crossed—a manifest gesture of transparency, hiding a secret desire or hope—two economies of symbolism.

García's painting titled *Engaño (Deceit)* takes us from the theme of duality to its consequence, duplicity. Many of the works in the exhibition contain the suggestion of a lurking duplicity. Some works express it directly, such as Rocio García's *De la serie: El triller: En el reservado aun* (from the series: *The thriller: in the booth, even.*) In Esterio Segura's *Pinocho y Napoleón cuentan la historia (Pinocchio and Napoleón*



Aimée García, *Promesa (Promise)*, 2007, oil on canvas, 39 x 47 inches
Collection Lisa and Tom Smith

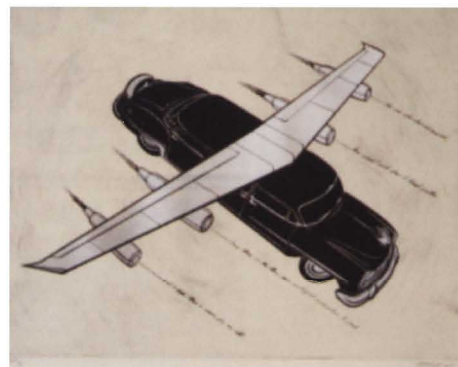


Douglas Argüelles, *De la serie: Velo No. 004* (from the series: *Veil No. 004*), 2008, oil on canvas, 78¹/₂ x 98³/₈ inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

tell the story), for instance, Pinocchio stands on a stack of history books, suggesting to us that history is told by figures who perpetuate little white lies by standing on the narratives of political empire. The books we read to build ourselves up, it suggests, make little Pinocchios of us all.

In this vein of admonishing us to become aware of what deceives us, Douglas Argüelles offers a work titled *De la serie: Velo No. 004* (From the Series: Veil No. 004). The painting contains a sentence affirming Frederick Nietzsche's lament that we need "to shatter people's ears so that they may hear with their eyes" (from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)—a harsh image denouncing complacency of the masses as a form of internalized duplicity.

Exodus and flight continue to weigh heavily on the Cuban imagination. The boat—a smallish vehicle of questionable seaworthiness—has become a classic icon of Cuban frustration. We find it the works of Ernesto Pujol and Kcho. Esterio Segura's *De la serie: Todos quieren volar: Híbrido de Chrysler* (from the series: *Everyone Wants to Fly: Chrysler Hybrid*) and Alain de la Cruz González's *Un tranvía llamada deseo* (A Street Car Named Desire) take that desire of exodus and flight to new imaginative and hybridized depictions—composite pictures that are the stuff of dream images.



Esterio Segura, *De la serie: Todos quieren volar: Híbrido de Chrysler* (from the series: *Everyone Wants to Fly: Chrysler Hybrid*), 2007 serigraph, 30 x 37 inches
Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Frank Martínez, *Sin título (Untitled)*, 2006 mixed media, charcoal and serigraph, 43 x 31 inches
Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Alain Pino, *Escape*, 2007- 2009, digital print, 23⁷/₈ x 39⁷/₈ inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

Also dreamlike are Frank Martinez's prints combining images of ideal flight-attendant service with overlays of graphics suggesting subjects in servitude. Katuska Saavedra's *La muerte del héroe es como una puesta de sol* (*Death of the hero is like a sunset*) and *Asfalto* (*Asphalt*) both depict a dead hummingbird—the promise and the impossibility of flight. Alain Pino's *Escape III*, captures perhaps the ultimate expression of the will to escape. When rafts, boats, and flotillas no longer suffice, the body exercises its will in the water.



Katuska Saavedra, *Asfalto* (*Asphalt*), 2007
light jet print, 12 x 17 inches
Courtesy of Galería Nina Menocal, Mexico City, Mexico

The body in contemporary Cuban art has become an important symbol for the individual in solitude and isolation, the locus of desire and frustration, and the site of love and betrayal. The body as locus of desire appears in several artists' work, including Duvier del Dago's *De la serie: Iconografía política: MININT* (from the series: *Political Iconography: MINISTRY OF INTERIOR*) and Yoan Capote's *Racional* (*Rational*). Both are ironic plays on the infiltration of erotic desire in matters state bureaucracy and human reason.



Humberto Diaz, *De la serie: Objeto del deseo* (from the series: *Object of Desire*), 2001, color print, 47 x 31 inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

The body as both marker of desire and site of isolation is represented disturbingly in Humberto Diaz's depiction of nude figures bound and trapped by sheets of saran wrap—one pointed titled *De la serie: Objeto del*



Sandra Ramos, *Ser cultos para ser libres (Be Educated to be Free)*
2005, pastel on paper, engraving, 15 1/4 x 19 7/16 inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Mendieta draped in fabric, Cuilapan Church, Oaxaca, Mexico)*, about 1973, black and white print, 9 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches
UNL-Robert E. Schweser and Fern Beardsley Schweser Acquisition Fund, through the University of Nebraska Foundation

deseo (from the series: *Object of Desire*), the other *Injerto (Graft)*. In a less graphic yet more symbolic way, Julio Larraz's painting of a calla lily does something similar. Titled *Study for Venus* the work moves us from a symbol for beauty and eroticism to one of isolation, reiterating both in the image of the solitary stamen. The calla lily becomes an island in a black sea. Images of isolation abound in the exhibition.

Sandra Ramos's *Ser cultos para ser libres (Be Educated to be Free)* depicts a young woman in the shape of the island of Cuba, here, too, in a black sea, but with a row of pencils like prison bars to underscore the sense of isolation. We get a sense of the burden of Cuba's isolation from the sheer solitariness of figures depicted in contemporary Cuban art. We find it in Sandra Ramos' island-shaped young woman, who reappears in another work, titled *De la serie: Mar de lágrimas: Cristo en la escalera* (from the series: *Sea of Tears: Christ on Staircase*); in Rodolfo Peraza's *Estadios (Stadium)* series, Teresa Ayuso / Juan Luis Morales' *Segundo sexo (Second Sex)* series; Agustin Bejarano's lonely traveler in *De regreso (Toward Home)*; and in Aimée García's dark self-portraits, among many other works in the exhibition.

We see in the exhibition evidence of an increasing self-reflection and self-irony among

Cuban artists in responding to life in Cuba. One senses from these works the feelings of solitude and isolation, the struggle with duality and duplicity, and the competing forces of desire and exodus.

A work that perhaps captures best the Cuban ambivalence about fidelity to nation and people is René Francisco's *Filigrana (Filigree)*—

suggesting a delicate line or entanglement. It conveys the story of the artist's dual affairs, where love of one is betrayal of another, and fidelity falls to compromise and question. It is as well the story of internal struggle for Cuban artists with their complex love and betrayal of nation and ideals.

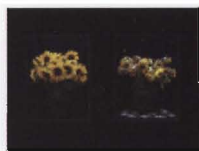
Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Director
Sharon L. Kennedy, Curator of Cultural & Civic Engagement
Britt-Marie Varisco, Curatorial Intern



René Francisco, *Filigrana (Filigree)*, 2004, oil on canvas, projector, slides, 83 x 59 inches
Collection Karen and Robert Duncan

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Lidzie Alvisa
 Girasoles de Van Gogh (Sunflowers After
 Van Gogh), 2005
 digital print
 27¹/₂ x 19⁵/₈ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Lidzie Alvisa
 Las Trampas (The Traps), 2008
 paper, pins
 28¹/₂ x 18¹/₂ inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Lidzie Alvisa
 Las Trampas del Interior (Traps Inside), 2008
 photography, pins, acrylic
 19¹/₂ x 10 x 1¹/₈ inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Lidzie Alvisa
 Sinfonia (Symphony), 2001
 paper, pins, 22 x 28 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Douglas Argüelles
 De la serie: Velo No. 004 (From the Series:
 Veil No. 004), 2008
 oil on canvas, 78¹/₂ x 98⁷/₈ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Abel Barreto
 Implosión (Implosion), 2007
 charcoal and pastel on cardboard
 27¹/₂ x 27¹/₂ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



José Bedia
 Kindembo Arriero, 2000
 acrylic on canvas
 94 x 116 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Agustín Bejarano
 De la serie: Las coquetas I (From the series
 The Coquettes I), 1998
 engraving, 29 x 44 inches
 Courtesy of Galería Nina Menocal
 Mexico City, Mexico



Agustín Bejarano
 De regreso (Toward Home), 2006
 dry point on cardboard
 28¹/₂ x 35⁵/₈ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Agustín Bejarano
 El muro de las contemplaciones (The Wall
 of Contemplations), 2008
 mixed media resins, 11 inches (diameter)
 Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Agustín Bejarano
Tejedora de mano III (Handloom III), 2003
 etching on paper, 30³/₈ x 23 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Ivan Capote
Relax, 2003
 metal, leather, shells
 8.26 x 7.87 x 3.34 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Yoan Capote
Madness, 2004
 patina on wood
 16.53 x 10.23 x 3.93 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Yoan Capote
Racional (Rational), 2005
 metal engraving, 27.6 x 19.7 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Yoan Capote
Racional (Rational), 2008
 bronze, 30³/₈ x 13¹/₈ x 18¹/₈ inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Yoan Capote
Summertime, 2005
 metal engraving, 15.7 x 19.7 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Yoan Capote
The Kiss, 1999
 bronze, cotton, perfume
 3¹/₂ x 2 x 2 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Enrique Martínez Celaya
Winter and Silk Flowers, 1998
 gelatin silver print, 15³/₈ x 15³/₈ inches
 UNL-Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust



Alain de la Cruz González
Un tranvía llamada deseo (A Street Car Named Desire), 2008
 oil on canvas, 78¹/₂ x 50¹/₄ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Duvier del Dago
De la serie: Iconografía política: MININT (from the series: Political Iconography: MINISTRY OF INTERIOR), 2008
 oil on canvas, 57¹/₈ x 32¹/₈ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Duvier del Dago
De la serie: Teoría y práctica (from the series: Theory and Practice), 2008
 ink on cardboard, 27¹/₈ x 39⁷/₈ inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Duvier del Dago
De la serie: Teoría y práctica: paisaje urbano, New York (from the series: Theory and Practice: Urban Landscape, New York)
 2008, oil on canvas, 41 x 73 inches
 Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Angel Delgado
*Serie pespunte gris oscuro (Dark Gray
 Stitching Series)*, 2000
 pen, color pencil, cold cream on
 handkerchief, 14.96 x 14.96 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Humberto Díaz
*De la serie: Objeto del deseo (from the
 series: Object of Desire)*, 2001
 color print, 47 x 31 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Humberto Díaz
Injerto (Graft), 2003
 lambda print, 39.4 x 24 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



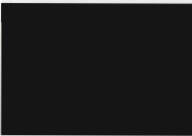
Roberto Fabelo
Sirena pájaro (Bird Siren), 2004
 oil on canvas, 62 x 46 1/2 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Diana Fonseca
*De la serie: Los amantes (from the series:
 The Lovers)*, 2008
 lambda print, 23 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Diana Fonseca
*De la serie: Los amantes (from the series:
 The Lovers)*, 2008
 lambda print, 23 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Diana Fonseca
Pasatiempo (Pastime), 2008
 lambda print, 11 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



René Francisco
Filigrana (Filigree), 2004
 oil on canvas, projector, slides
 83 x 59 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



René Francisco
Reproducción (Reproduction), 2001
 dental cream tubes, linen, Scloss Moyland
 Museum Bag, 27 x 14 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



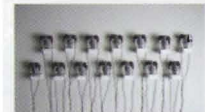
Aimée García
Engaño (Deceit), 2007
 digital print on PVC, 27 x 20 inches
 Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Aimée García
Promesa (Promise), 2007
 oil on canvas, 39 x 47 inches
 Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Aimée García
Sin título (Untitled), 2003
 lead, wood, headphones
 83 x 59 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Rocio García
De la serie: El triller: En el reservado aun
(from the series: The Thriller: In the booth,
even), 2006
 oil on canvas, 55 x 47 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Teresa Ayuso / Juan Luis Morales
De la serie: Segundo sexo: Yezabel (from
the series: Second Sex: Yezabel), 2008
 digital print, 23 x 59 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Kcho
Sin título (Untitled), 2003
 oil and charcoal on canvas
 37 x 52 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Julio Larraz
Study for Venus, 1994
 oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Frank Martínez
Blanco y negro (Black and White), 2008
 mixed media on canvas, 56 x 72 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron



Frank Martínez
Sin título (Untitled), 2006
 mixed media, charcoal and serigraph
 43 x 31 inches
 Collection Lisa and Tom Smith



Frank Martínez
Sin título (Untitled), 2006
 mixed media, charcoal and serigraph
 39 x 27 inches
 Courtesy of Galería Nina Menocal
 Mexico City, Mexico



Ana Mendieta
Silueta Series: Tumba #2, 1977
 color print, 13 1/2 x 20 inches
 UNL-Robert E. Schweser and Fern Beardsley
 Schweser Acquisition Fund, through the University
 of Nebraska Foundation



Ana Mendieta
Untitled (Mendieta draped in fabric,
Cuilapan Church, Oaxaca, Mexico)
 about 1973, black and white print
 9 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches
 UNL-Robert E. Schweser and Fern Beardsley
 Schweser Acquisition Fund, through the University
 of Nebraska Foundation



Fichú Menocal
Gallo fino (Rooster), 2007
 colored pencil on paper
 25 5/8 x 19 5/8 inches
 Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

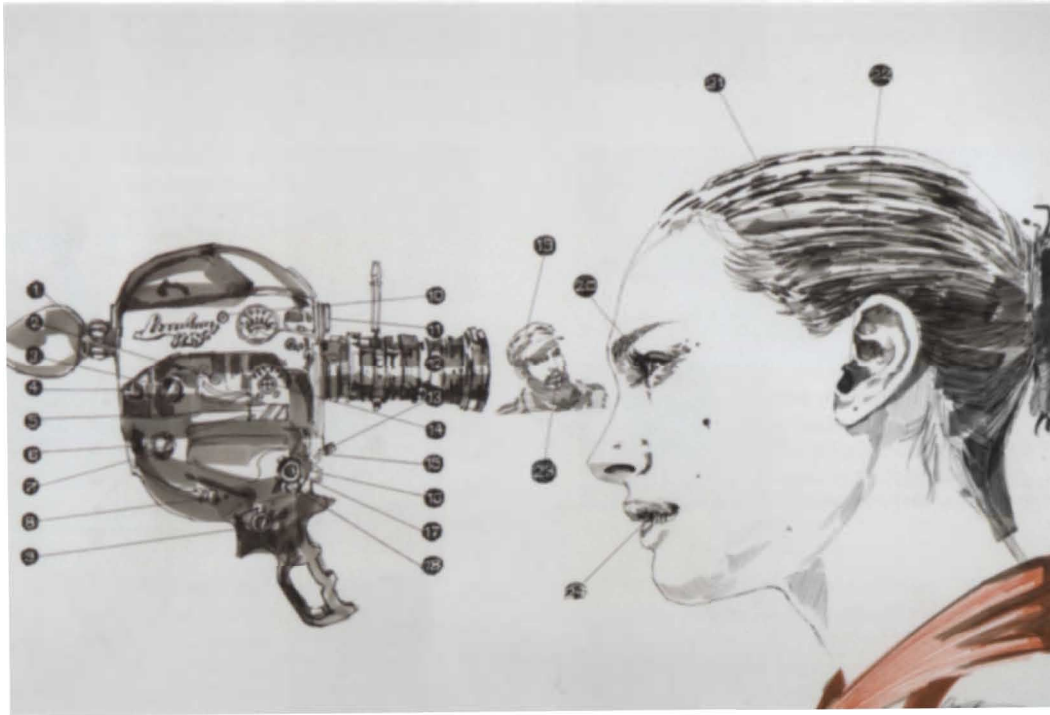


Fichú Menocal
La silla de Lam (Lam's Chair), 2004
 watercolor on paper, wood chair
 41 x 32 inches
 Collection Karen and Robert Duncan



Narciso Montero
Black Rain, 2007
 recycled upholstery materials
 Courtesy of the Artist





Duvier del Dago, *De la serie: Teoría y práctica* (from the series *Theory and Practice*), 2008, ink on cardboard, 27¹/₂ x 39¹/₈ inches
Collection Kathy and Marc LeBaron

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