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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS GENERATING NEW HORIZONS

TRIBUTE TO THE WIFREDO LAM CENTER AND THE HAVANA BIENNIAL.

Although some find it hard to understand, we islanders have a peculiar way of understanding and imagining the World. We live in our private insular micro and macro cosmos in connection and dialogue with the world, equally evidencing that it is possible from these small-large universes to generate projects that open new horizons for that world. This is the image that best defines to me the brave effort, work intensity, commitment and conviction of a work team -that of the Wifredo Lam Center- that along twenty-five years now has made it possible and turned into reality what might seem or be a miracle to believers: to generate, create and consolidate one of the most unique, relevant and significant international con-temporary artistic events of today's world scenario. An event, an international meeting point of inevitable reference, created from a space and territory with ample difficulties in the toughest aspects of economic production that are overcome with tremendous effort, commitment and collective imagination from the organization of the Havana Biennial itself, and that we all know are the result of macro political situations, contexts and conjunctures which has not been an obstacle to continue ahead with this very meritorious and incredible project.

Orlando Britto Jinorio

ANNEXES

THE CONCERN FOR BECOMING UPDATED. THE CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICA ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE TENTH BIENNIAL

By Yudelsy Fundora Martínez

Curator José Manuel Noceda, from the Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center , researcher and member of the International Association of Critics (AICA), evaluates the most recent art of Central America, the Caribbean and the Canary Islands –a region he has been in charge of for the last two years– and comments on their presence at the Tenth Havana Biennial.

In your article “Sailing the Basin of the Contemporary Caribbean”, published in the electronic magazine *Arteamérica* , you state, based on the perception the world has of the Caribbean, that “(...) it is hard for the Caribbean to find its place among the shapes of the contemporary cultural map”. In what way does this phenomenon challenge the artistic creation of the region?

That article was written right after the Seventh Havana Biennial for the magazine *Artecubano* and was published in 2001. In it I referred to the disadvantages of a region as peripheral as the Caribbean in the face of the inevitable challenges that the contemporary world imposes today, and to how to take positions in that environment of economic, technological, social and cultural nature. The Caribbean is being regarded as a services zone, particularly since the replacement of what Antonio Benítez Rojo called the plantation machine and of the historical economic structures by the economy of tourism; it is also perceived from a very stagnant outlook and from the cliché that it is only color, folklore and landscape. That has made Nobel Literature Prize Derek Walcott (St. Lucia) ironically define the Caribbean as a large blue swimming pool plied by transatlantic vessels, cruisers and tourists who sing the contagious popular Caribbean music. Only like that: a showcase behind which the earnest problems still unsolved of that vast and diverse geo-cultural environment are hidden.

I think the contemporary art of the Caribbean is assuming the most significant aspects of the region as problems, becoming conscious of its hybrid identities, ethnic issues, marginality, zones of social conflict existing in its countries, and is broaching pyramidal elements of culture and society from a standpoint that favors reflection.

How does Caribbean art face centuries of cultural imposition and colonialism?

It faces them with a non-submissive glance, filtered by the critical examination of the historical alibis that created both that imposition and exclusion.

Does Cuban art stand out within Caribbean art?

I think it does, I think it has its peculiarities. Cuban art holds a very special position within the Caribbean visual forms. Cuba is one of the Caribbean insular countries with certain stability in its visual tradition, whose dominos it can move profitably beyond its own *hinterland* thanks to the communicational efficiency resulting from that tradition and the expectations created by the Cuban case.

Since the '80s, visual arts in Cuba have been displaying a great plurality of conceptual interests and language proposals, which have stimulated along all these years a development tinged with segments of ruptures and continuities as a result of the logical contradictions of every evolution. Over the years, this movement has become known internationally as “new art from Cuba ” alluding the most innovative and vanguard artistic practices that characterize it inside the island.

One of the questions that has defined that visual language since then is its morphological polyphony, with the gradual expansion toward new fields and strategies of representation, since the traditional expressions of painting, drawing, sculpture and engraving are accompanied by an evident will to “be updated” and work with installation, object art, performance, video, creation in electronic supports, proposals of social insertion and relational aesthetics. If years ago the community of interests and criteria among sectors of Cuban art enabled the rather precise identification of more or less coherent blocks of post-conceptual trend in the '80s, and later of recovery of the “aesthetic paradigm”, today it could be said that this scene has visibly changed its ideo-aesthetic postulates to a diversity of interests in which everything is possible.

In general, that visual language contributes to create spaces of social reflection with artists that have been working in a considerable number of cases with a sense of proposal, acute, problem-making.

From your work experience in art biennials and your close relation to Central American and Caribbean art in the search, valuation and selection of your proposals, what are the common aspects in the works of each one of them?

These two zones that share their location in the Caribbean basin also share the concern for becoming updated, for leaving behind the imbalances that influenced production and the updating of their languages, their aesthetics. In Central America , for instance, there exists great passion for video art and for the

incorporation of the technological support and the aesthetics of video games to the field of art in order to express other contents. In scarcely ten to twelve years they went from being a scene dominated by painting, drawing, sculpture, to the preponderance of the new three-dimensionality, and from there to the field of video with exorbitant speed. But above all, they are examining their contexts from the standpoints of today's world.

Quite many artists in the Caribbean are reviewing the historical memory; just like in Central America they take interest in the archives of the war period. The art of the Caribbean takes to pieces the fraud of progress based on the economy of tourism. The Central American artist is questioning the “bananalization” of the isthmus (I am borrowing here an invention of Nicaraguan Raúl Quintanilla).

Unlike other regions that joined later, the Caribbean and Central America have taken part in the Havana Biennials since their first edition. What is your appraisal of the presence of both regions in the history of the biennials?

I think it is a very positive one. To a great extent, all that is good and valuable in these countries has participated in the Havana Biennials. First, some of their most famous figures were here. I wish to highlight both contemporary artists with consolidated and acknowledged proposals, among which I could mention photographers of the height of Luis González Palma (Guatemala), Antonio Martorell (Puerto Rico), Pepón Osorio (Puerto Rico-United States), David Boxer (Jamaica), Ernest Breleur (Martinique), Peter Minshall (Trinidad and Tobago; someone who has caused a revolution in the tradition of the Trinitarian carnival with his multi-cultural shows called *Mas*) and less known creators who have begun to appear in recent years; I refer to artists like Annalee Davis, Ras Akyem, Ras Ishi (Barbados), Marcos Lora, Belkis Ramírez, Jorge Pineda and Raúl Recio (the Dominican Republic), Christopher Cozier (Trinidad and Tobago), Elvis López, Osaira Muyale, Gelga Heiliger and Alida Martínez (Aruba), Yubi Kirindongo (Curacao), Thierry Alet (Guadaloupe), Edouard Duval-Carrié, Mario Benjamín (Haiti), Petrona Morrison, Laura Facey, Albert Chong and Nary Ward (Jamaica), Marc Latamie and Alex Burke (Martinique), Remy Jungerman, Suriname. In Central America, Darío Escobar (Guatemala), Joaquín Rodríguez del Paso, Priscilla Monge, Sila Chanto, Manuel Zumbado, Federico Herrero (Costa Rica), Patricia Belli (Nicaragua), Humberto Vélez (Panama) or Yasser Musa (Belize), only to mention a few examples.

Shall we see the most contemporary of Central American and Caribbean art at the Tenth Biennial?

Yes. It should be recalled that in an event of this nature every participation is reduced as to number, and not everyone who deserves it can be invited; but

without any doubt there will be artists present from both the Caribbean and the Central American region with very contemporary proposals.

What leading role or responsibility is exerted by the Havana Biennials in the exhibition in our country of the art from those regions?

We would have to say that the Havana Biennial emerges in 1984 among the great international exhibitions as a third-world alternative to the central world circuits for the circulation of art. It's totally atypical profile in those days very soon had an echo in the global perception of the South's visual productions and favored a change that was unusual until that moment in the projection of the arts and artists from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Central American participation in the Havana event was affected by the situation gone through by the region until the late '90s, i.e., by the political restlessness and mistakenly called low intensity conflicts with which the cold war period shook some of its countries. That caused the presence in Havana of artists from that origin to be reduced during that cycle, and the relevance of the Havana Biennial in the dissemination of contemporary art in the region to be lower. The acknowledgment enjoyed by Central American contemporary art in the region and beyond is due to the joint efforts of institutions, critics and curators, who have made a great effort to launch it internationally.

However, the history in relation with Caribbean art is a different one. I would not call it leading role, but the Biennial certainly has been a platform that has granted great visibility to the art from the Caribbean. The Havana Biennial emerges at a moment when this art was only being promoted within its own geographical limits. In this regard, that promotion has been significant particularly in the international projection of an emerging generation since the Fourth Havana Biennial in 1991, which at the time I described as a new image of the Caribbean and whose proposals were turning points of languages and themes in favor of a renewed image, displayed in inter-textual terms, of hybridization of contents and forms with a problem-making frame of mind, an attitude of recovery of the critical sense of art.

Is the expansion of your work contents to the Canary Islands accidental or does their insular condition relate them to the area you are normally in charge of?

What you call expansion in truth relates to the present moment. The Canary presence in Havana is due to the efforts of the Spanish critic and curator of Canary origin Orlando Britto Jinorio, who has made a huge effort to approach the Canary Islands to the event and to Havana's cultural context, with the determinant support of the Canary Government. They are related by their insular

condition, indeed, as well as by the peripheral condition they both share. For instance, Orlando himself regards the Canary Islands as Europe's "ultra-periphery". He, too, was commenting to me that in his visit to the islands a relevant scholar of Caribbean culture had found in them a great resemblance to the Caribbean space. I have visited the Canary Islands twice, sent by the Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center in study trips or curatorship for the Havana Biennial, and I have verified the similar sides, the points of intersection in our cultures. We cannot forget the strong Canary migrations to territories of the New World like Cuba, Puerto Rico or Venezuela. To me, they are like an extension of the Caribbean, only on the other side of the Atlantic.

Quality of the Canary artists chosen to participate in this event

A first level quality, just like all Canary participation in the Biennial up to the present. In 2003 there participated Néstor Torrens and the Martín and Sicilia duet; later, in 2006 the Biennial was attended by the Pérez duet and Joel, Javier Camarasa and Sergio Britto. Four artists have been invited to the Tenth Biennial: Pedro Déniz, Rafael Hierro, Pipo Hernández and Paco Guillén. They all work on very contemporary supports among which prevail installation and video.