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From “Special Period” Aesthetics to Global Relevance
in Cuban Art:

Tania Bruguera, Carlos Garaicoa, Los Carpinteros

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Beth Tamar Rosenblum

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From “Special Period” Aesthetics to Global Relevance in Cuban Art:

Tania Bruguera, Carlos Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros

by

Beth Tamar Rosenblum

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor David M. Kunzle, Chair

This dissertation investigates the impact Cuba’s Special Period (1990s) had on the arts through analyses of artworks by Cuban artists Tania Bruguera, Carlos Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros (Alexandre Arrechea, Marco Castillo, and Dagoberto Rodríguez). In 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and termination of subsidies to Cuba, Cuba entered the “Special Period in a Time of Peace” (Special Period). Throughout the early 1990s Cubans suffered from severe shortages of necessary food and goods, and strict rations were imposed on the island. In 1993, to stabilize the economy, the Cuban government did the unthinkable; it legalized the U.S. dollar as a second form of currency. It established a formal dual economy and by the end of the decade Cuba more aggressively inserted itself into the global capital market.

While Bruguera, Garaicoa and Los Carpinteros work in different media with varying objectives, the alterations to their practices over the course of the decade reveal the greater socio-economic changes occurring at the time. I argue in Chapter Two that during the early 1990s the

artists' student work from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) reflected on the absence and loss prevalent at the time, as well as the role and responsibility of the artist during a national crisis. Then, following the legalization of the dollar (1993) the artists could begin earning the currency for the sale of their work; I contend in Chapter Three that their work displayed at the Fifth Havana Biennial (1994) recorded the transition to the dual economy and *doble moral* (double standard) it created within Cuban society. Finally, in Chapter Four I connect Cuba's reinsertion in the global market to the artists' time spent abroad participating in residencies and exhibitions. I assert the artists assumed the role of shifters, transporting and translating information about Cuba and other locals through their work. Ultimately, I argue that the artworks produced by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros in the 1990s document this turbulent period in Cuba's history from the extreme hardships experienced through the acclimation to a dual economy and acceptance of Cuba's renewed role in the global economy.

The dissertation of Beth Tamar Rosenblum is approved.

George Thomas Baker

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2013

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This dissertation is dedicated to my dad who never got to see its fruition.

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“Flavio Garcíandía: A Man is Not a Brush.” *Art Nexus Magazine*, no. 85 (June-August 2012).

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, amidst the socio-economic crisis of the Special Period, Cuban artists Tania Bruguera, Carlos Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros (Alexandre Arrechea, Marco Castillo, Dagoberto Rodríguez) rose to international recognition, participating in art exhibitions and the Havana Biennials, while still students at the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (ISA), Cuba's only university for the study of plastic arts. The decade began with the worst economic crisis in the country's history, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and termination of Soviet subsidies to Cuba. In 1993 the country began to pull itself from the wreckage and to stabilize the economy the government legalized the United States dollar and allowed artists to earn hard currency for the sale of their work. This resulted in the growth of the Cuban art market, which by the end of the decade had gained global prominence. For such a small country marked by a tumultuous history, the ever-growing role of Cuban art in the international art scene is quite remarkable. The priority given to the arts by the government, in a nation which first established an academy in the early nineteenth century and continued to develop and evolve art education and supportive institutions on the island, has provided the infrastructure to educate and challenge exceptional creators with both domestic Cuban and cosmopolitan ideas and concerns.

This dissertation is the first close study of the work of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros, created during the decade of the 1990s, and traces the artists' transition from their student years to their rise in prominence on a global level. These foundational years of the artists' careers paralleled the socio-economic turmoil of the Special Period, which as this study reveals, their work has come to document. While there are texts on the artists' work and the artists have been the subjects of mid-career retrospectives, much of the literature and many of the exhibitions focus on their more recent production (post-2000). In the instances where their earlier

work undergoes critical examination it often appears in the context of essays that survey the work of a number of Cuban artists at the time. Overall there is relatively little text containing descriptions or formal analyses of Cuban artwork from this period. My study fills in these lacunae by focusing on the artists' formative years and their work produced during the 1990s as it relates to the social, economic, political, physical, and psychological impact of the Special Period. I unpack the artists' work formally and conceptually, arguing that it sheds light on this seminal decade in Cuban history and marks a transition in their practices. The artists move from responding to local concerns to creating work with more global relevance as Cuba simultaneously transitioned from navigating a local economic crisis to its necessary re-entry in the global economy.

Most of the limited exhibitions and literature that discuss Cuban art of the 1990s focus on the themes of patriotism, migration, insularity, dollarization, and tourism through works that contain overt imagery: maps, boats/rafts, islands, dollars, and tourists/hotels. Although in some instances such images appear in the work by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros, the works selected for scrutiny in this dissertation are more complex and require close readings. They reveal a shift from addressing the problems of emigration and the loss of family, friends and colleagues, as well as material loss and scarcity, to navigating life with dollars, the ability to travel and participate in the global (art) market.

Inspired by Fredric Jameson's study of the relationship between economics and aesthetics in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* I examine how the economic changes brought on by the Special Period paralleled transformations in artistic production and exhibition practices within Cuba.¹ The way in which globalization has impacted Cuban artistic

¹ (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

production and distribution is revealed by following the trajectory Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros have taken, from exhibiting locally to globally, and producing work for local and then international audiences. This study examines the artists' work produced first in Cuba and then also while overseas, including that created during residencies in the United States. Their work serves as witness and testimony to this turbulent time on the island and carries more weight than "official" published accounts of the time period. Additionally, the artists' experiences in the United States provide new insight on United States-Cuba relations.

SITUATING THE SPECIAL PERIOD

By the end of the 1980s the relationship between Cuba and the Eastern Bloc was severely strained. The subsequent "Special Period in a Time of Peace," or the Special Period for short, resulted from the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc in Eastern Europe (c.1989) and termination of significant subsidies to and trade with Cuba. This in turn resulted in the implementation of wartime strategies including strict rationing and major cuts in industrial production.² As sociologist Harlodo Dilla has explained, "The special period was primarily designed to guarantee national survival under extremely difficult internal conditions in an international environment that was severely hostile and characterized by persistent North American aggressiveness against Cuban socialism."³ During the early years of the Special Period the strict rationing accounted for severe shortages of basic necessities and daily life became a struggle for survival.

² Officially called the "Special Period in a Time of Peace," "the concept of the special period was first presented at the Confederation of Cuban Workers Congress in January 1990. The idea is similar to a wartime contingency plan based on national survival, rationing, and economic self-sufficiency. Castro was clear, however, in making the distinction between a special period in a time of war and in a time of peace." Rolando Bonachea, "Overview of the 'Special Period,'" in *Cuba's Special Period in a Time of Peace* (Washington D.C.: Cuban American National Foundation, 1990), 9.

³ "Utopia and the World Market," *Latin American Perspectives* (Autumn 1994): 47.

In 1993 the government had no option but to engage in fiscal relationships with their non-socialist allies. To do this they legalized foreign currency on the island with the United States dollar the preferred legal tender. This amounted to the “dollarization” of the island and establishment of an official, legal dual economy. Cubans could earn and use dollars on the island and Cubans were no longer forbidden from shopping in dollar stores. To acquire foreign currency, the government established a Ministry of Tourism in 1994 and began a large-scale renovation of selected areas of Old Havana to lure and accommodate foreign tourists.

By 1995 Cubans began to feel the effects of the dual economy, for better and for worse. Society became split between those who had dollars and those who did not. Artists, many who trained at or were training at ISA, were in a privileged position when the dollar became legalized. They were able to procure the currency legally for the sale of their work. As many of the protagonists of the previous generation had recently emigrated from the island to pursue better economic opportunities abroad, young artists still on the island came to fill the vacancies they left.⁴ Many of these artists were then propelled in the global art world following their participation in the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, where they received international exposure. Although an end date to the Special Period has not officially been given, some date it to the early 2000s while others believe it lasted until Fidel Castro delegated his responsibilities to his brother Raul Castro in 2006. This study concludes at the turn of the 20th to the 21st century.

Rather than discuss Bruguera’s, Garaicoa’s, and Los Carpinteros’ practices independently in separate chapters, I have organized this study into chapters focused around key years of the Special Period during which substantial amendments were made to Cuba’s economic structure. By studying the artists’ work temporally, I identify their differing aesthetic responses to the

⁴ This, of course, was not the case for all artists and a divide was created between those with and without degrees from ISA.

notable changes occurring during the 1990s. The artists' early works have been inadequately explained. By the beginning of the twenty-first century these artists had received a great deal of international attention.

Each chapter opens with a discussion of the socio-economic alterations occurring during the years in discussion to provide the context necessary for understanding the artists' work produced at the time. Chapter One is a background chapter and briefly discusses the arts and art education from the triumph of the Revolution through the period of Rectification (late 1980s) that preceded the Special Period. Chapter Two focuses on the onset of the Special Period, roughly 1989 through 1992, which were the most dire years of the period marked by absence and loss in all aspects of life. Chapter Three is centered on the years of 1993 and 1994, when Cuba legalized the U.S. dollar and hosted the Fifth Havana Biennial. The establishment of the dual economy during this time was mirrored by a more general duality that recognized the inherent contradictory position one was placed in, living in a socialist country introducing a capitalist economy. The divide between the belief in revolutionary ideology and the actual quotidian experience on the island gave Cubans a split identity: a persona public and private. Chapter Four begins in 1995 and discusses work through the turn of the century. At this point the effects of the dollarization and Cuba's re-entry in the world economy became more pronounced. This study ends around 2000, when the artists' work took a more profound global turn and for the most part no longer reflected on Special Period Cuba.

INTRODUCING TANIA BRUGUERA, CARLOS GARAICOA, AND LOS CARPINTEROS (ALEXANDRE ARRECHEA, MARCO CASTILLO, AND DAGOBERTO RODRÍGUEZ)

Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros were selected to be the focus of this study, not because together their artistic production stands as a paradigm of the work produced by Cuban

artists in the 1990s, but rather because their work stood out as formally and conceptually strong and by the turn of the century they were recognized as among the most famous Cuban artists of their time.⁵ Although each produces distinct work, they have the following in common: they studied at ISA, were working simultaneously, and exhibited together from early on in their careers. Yet, each developed a practice focusing on a different aspect of life—the human body; built environment; or decorative arts/design—and worked in different media to contend with the specific shifting socio-economic structure on the island.

Bruguera (b. 1968) is noted for her highly politicized performances that confront issues surrounding emigration, the abuse of power, censorship, and sacrifice/conformity as they relate to Cuba and also the world at large. At first she herself performed, often in the nude, and engaged in actions that caused her physical discomfort. Later she also began hiring others to perform work she conceptualized. Her earliest performances were part of her “Homage to Ana Mendieta” (1986-1996) series that served as her thesis project at ISA in 1992. By re-enacting the works of Mendieta, Bruguera brought the recently deceased Cuban-American artist back to Cuba and re-inscribed her into the country’s history. By doing so she addressed issues of emigration and historical erasure whereby Cuban emigrants are written out of the island’s history. In this study I map Bruguera’s trajectory from early performances included in the Mendieta project, along with other work she recreated by the late artist, through her subsequent series “Postwar Memory” (1992-1997), featured at the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, and that which she produced following her participation in the biennial, often while traveling abroad.

Bruguera’s practice has not been solely performance-based. She has produced sculptures, photographs, a newspaper, and site-specific installations, much of which were composed from

⁵ Art Historian Rachel Weiss calls them “players at the highest level of the international art scene.” *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 218.

ephemeral materials and now only exists in limited documentation. Linking all of her work is a deep connection to the body, not only her body, but that of her collaborators, audience, and the general citizenry, as well. Bruguera connects people through her work and has always intended for them to have a memorable visceral experience, whether it is observing her test the limits of her body through a performance, walking through and participating in a performance/installation, interacting with a sculpture, or corresponding through her newspaper. Bruguera is unique for her approach to art making. Although she inherited a preference for ephemeral work from her mentors, there are not many Cuban performance artists, especially female, working before and around the same time as she. In fact, her work has remained ephemeral despite the new market conditions. Nevertheless she has had a very lucrative career as a professor and her success helps her to receive large grants to underwrite new projects.

Carlos Garaicoa (b. 1967) is more concerned with the built environment than the human body and his work does not provoke a visceral reaction in the same way as Bruguera's. He questions and investigates the relationship between art and social and political space.⁶ He is interested in the specific conditions of the architecture and ornamentation found within a city, and during the first half of the 1990s he was especially focused on Havana, which in part lay in ruins. Years of neglect were amplified during the Special Period when severe shortages mirrored the absence and loss already present in the ruin. Early projects from his student years at ISA reveal his interest in replacing the canvas (and traditional media) with the city. He mounted interventions in Havana that called on the legacy of international contemporary practices from the 1960s and later, which he interpreted on a local level to contend with the shortages and dire socio-economic situation. His work confronted passersby and not typical museum audiences and

⁶ This concept was stated in an email from Carlos Garaicoa's studio "Carlos Garaicoa's Newsletter" (January-February 2012), received by the author January 19, 2013.

he documented them reacting to his work. He then reversed this logic and brought fragments, such as ornaments he removed from ruins and/or replicas he created from them, into the pristine space of the gallery along with documentary photographs of their place of origin. Each relic and replica contains an element of Cuba's history trapped within.

Garaicoa also created projects whereby he assumed the role of an imaginary architect and re-imagined ruins in fantastical ways, emulating and parodying the role of the architect in the renovation of Old Havana for tourism. The works he exhibited during the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, gained him a great deal of attention and he, like Bruguera, began to travel regularly at the request of international institutions. Over time his work reflected the changes to the cityscape of Havana. He first responded to absence and loss that marked the beginning of the decade through works improvised with found materials. Then he turned his attention to the renovations in parts of Old Havana for tourism by renovating and recreating furnishings from the colonial and republican periods. Later he examined the relationship between Havana and global cities through work that was more polished than before with elements coproduced by his studio assistants.

Los Carpinteros, first constituted by Alexandre Arrechea and Dagoberto Rodríguez, until they were joined by Marco Castillo in 1992 and became a trio, do not focus on the corporeal as Bruguera or built environment as Garaicoa, but rather the decorative arts and the divide between the fine arts and artisanal production on the island. Their work confronts the complex social issues that stemmed from the history of artistic production on the island, some of which escalated during the Special Period. Arrechea and Rodríguez's initial collaborations grew out of a project they were involved in at ISA, where they produced work as a form of social reconstruction. They learned carpentry skills that enabled them to produce useful objects and mend others. This project prompted them to reflect on the divide between such artisanal skills and those more

traditionally taught at art schools. Through their work they confronted such arbitrary divides. Once Arrechea and Rodríguez began collaborating with Castillo, they combined their woodworking and his academic painting to comment on the history of the arts on the island and current Special Period socio-economic issues. Their anachronistic aesthetic (of combining colonial style furnishings and painting in the preferred style of that era) emulated that used in the renovations occurring in Havana, where such styles were being resuscitated in the renovation of colonial style buildings to meet tourists' needs. It also reflected on the preferred style of Cuba's upper middle class that emigrated following the Revolution; a social class with which the artists became intrigued. Works created in this style served as their ISA thesis project and were on view during the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994. The trio, working as Equipo MAD (Team MAD), received very positive responses to the work and subsequently began traveling abroad to participate in residencies. By 1994 the name Los Carpinteros was coined.

As Los Carpinteros began to travel their aesthetic changed. They stopped painting and began producing mixed media site-specific work and large-scale, hand-carved and later outsourced industrial sculptures. Traveling to First World capitalist societies, as Cuba strove to emulate them, caused the artists to reflect on the divide between use value and uselessness—when goods are created to fulfill needs and vice versa—which inspired the production of absurd and useless objects/sculptures. The alterations to the artists' production mirrored Cuba's economic situation and their own as well. As they began to lead a more itinerant lifestyle their work took on more global concerns, such as diasporic communities, and began to integrate industrially manufactured and outsourced components.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cuban art from the 1990s, including the work of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros has been the focus of exhibitions and scholarship; however, the abovementioned artists' formative years have not been adequately analyzed. In fact, descriptions and formal analyses of contemporary Cuban artworks are severely lacking in general. My project builds upon and expands on the extant literature to be reviewed below through more thorough examinations of artworks and investigations of the relationship between the works and moments in which they were produced. I have let the artworks guide me and through close readings I am able to challenge some of the sweeping claims other scholars have made on part of the entire generation of artists. My interpretations of artworks often incorporate topics rarely discussed by Cuban critics such as race and socio-economic hierarchies and disadvantages.

The three most regarded scholars of recent Cuban art (1980s and beyond) are Gerardo Mosquera, Luis Camnitzer, and Rachel Weiss. Mosquera's career as a critic evolved alongside the protagonists of the 1980s and 1990s. His exhibition reviews; responses to ISA thesis projects, where he served as a tutor; and exhibitions curated—including the first three Havana Biennials—helped launch the careers of the artists of these generations. He wrote a number of substantial essays that survey art production from this time period, what he termed the “new Cuban art.” In 1993 Mosquera was among the first to acknowledge a new generation of artists and he coined the nickname for the 1990s generation, “*mala yerba*,” or weeds, referring to the artists' ability to flourish and launch constructive social critiques despite extreme shortages and a great deal of suffering.⁷ He later noted that the most significant change from the 1980s to the 1990s was the

⁷ *Las metáforas del templo* (Havana: Hand printed catalogue, 1992), n.p.

appearance of the dollar and art market, which significantly changed the fate of the “weeds.”⁸ Mosquera’s observations encouraged me to examine just how, when, and why the dollarization impacted the artists’ careers. In part it helped me define the temporal parameters for each chapter: moving from the onset of the Special Period to 1993, when the artists were given the name weeds; then to the first couple of years adjusting to the legalization of the dollar; and finally the subsequent years and changes brought by dollarization. Overall Mosquera describes art produced in the 1990s as “post-utopian,” that is “cynical, formal, with veiled discourse to evade censorship.”⁹ Through investigations of Bruguera’s, Garaicoa’s, and Los Carpinteros’ work it becomes evident, if, how, and why the artists produced artwork as Mosquera has described.

Luis Camnitzer, an Uruguayan-American artist and art historian, surveys Cuban art of the 1980s in his *New Art of Cuba* (1994, reissued in 2003) and concludes with work produced in 1991.¹⁰ Camnitzer has traveled regularly to the island and became a very influential figure on young artists during the 1980s and 1990s. His book is very useful studying the 1980s and was an invaluable resource for my background chapter (Chapter One). Camnitzer’s epilogue acknowledges the beginning of the Special Period and the need for a subsequent text that would further investigate work of “controversial artists,” some of who express “well-intended

⁸ “New Cuban Art Y2K,” in *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2001), 13.

⁹ Ibid. By “post-utopian” Mosquera is referring to “new thought that is currently one of the few dynamic spaces for the Latin American left-wing. Contrary to appearances, this new mental panorama is very positive. It shows a lifting of the burden of great schemes and a greater concentration on small horizontal changes. It implies not pessimism but pragmatism.” “Introduction,” in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 12.

¹⁰ Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994, reissued 2003).

hypercriticism [of the ‘Special Period’].”¹¹ Until very recently Camnitzer’s text served as the only compendium of new Cuban art, and my project fills some of lacunae that he identified.

Rachel Weiss’ book, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art* (2011), addresses the 1980s, as Camnitzer has, from a more critical standpoint, and continues where Camnitzer left off, up to 2003.¹² Weiss, a professor of art administration at the University of Chicago, has been traveling to Cuba to study the new Cuban art since the 1980s. She provides a solid historical and cultural context for the emergence of art practices during this time. Her underlying argument is

that there is not a single clean line of development: neither from utopianism to cynicism nor from naïve optimism to pragmatism, much less from fantasy to reality...the new Cuban art grew up in the supercharged and conflicting currents of revolution, sometimes tracking to its optimism and at others scalded by it. But even more that that it was an art with extraordinary relation and relevance to the life of the country across social, domestic, cultural, and psychological registers.¹³

This approach challenges much of the literature on the 1990s that identifies the generation as cynical and pragmatic as opposed to the 1980s, which was more optimistic and interested in evoking actual social change. However, it should be noted that like many other scholars who write about the new Cuban art, she too is much more critical of art from the 1990s and appears disappointed with those artists who succumbed to the international pressures of the market.

Her book is divided into three thematic sections: “Everyday,” “Laughing,” and “Museum,” and follows a rough chronology. Before the “Museum” chapter she includes an interlude where she addresses the Special Period and the theme of “withdrawal.”¹⁴ Her chapters

¹¹ Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, 322.

¹² Weiss, who is a close colleague of Camnitzer’s, states in her book that Camnitzer’s “readings of Cuba have been generally sympathetic.” *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157-58. “In the 1990s a primary mode in the new Cuban art was that of withdrawal. Cuban art’s disenchantments in the 1990s hinged on a complex of adjacent and interconnected factors, encompassing not only

introduce the protagonists of the 1980s and 1990s, and survey a handful of their works. Discussions of artists and artworks are insightful and tie back to the overarching thesis of the section in which they have been placed, however, because her book addresses so many artists each only receives somewhere between six and eleven paragraphs. My dissertation on the other hand provides an in depth look at roughly a decade of Bruguera's, Garaicoa's, and Los Carpinteros' work. Unlike Weiss, I break up my discussion of the Special Period (1990s) into specific years organized chronologically in order to uncover the ways in which specific socio-economic changes influenced the artists. Weiss discusses the Special Period as just that, a period, without making clear distinctions between work produced during the most trying years, prior to the dollarization, and those after. She immediately discusses the influence of the market and jumps around, not making it clear of the implications after dollarization, when artists could legally obtain and use the currency on the island. I integrate a discussion of Weiss' brief interpretations of specific artworks in the instances where we read them differently, as is the case with works by Garaicoa and Los Carpinteros. Additionally Weiss' essay "Performing Revolution: Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, and the Response to the Cuban National Crisis, 1986-1989" and her work on the 1980s generation more generally, has been very useful in broadening my understanding of this decade.¹⁵

economic but also broad ideological, social, geopolitical, historical, pedagogical, and psychological realities...Among the major strains, we could list and abandonment of the public—as site, audience, and aspiration; a retreat from a ethic of collectivism; a defensive restoration of the visual in the visual art; shifting fortunes for the literal and metaphoric, shifting of artists' self-positioning relative to official institutions, and shifting of those institutions' own evolutionary logics...Withdrawals from actuality and from possibility, withdrawals as aggression and as defensive feints, withdrawals that create absences and those that create in absences, even more forceful or threatening presences. 'Activate voids, announce absences,' José Toirac demanded."

¹⁵ In *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 115-164.

Certain authors of journal articles and/or essays written for exhibition catalogues about Cuban art from the 1990s have helped shape my project. In recent years, two anthologies of Cuban art criticism art from the 1980s through the beginning of the 21st century were published in Spanish. The intention was to consolidate the essays, many of which were from journals and exhibition catalogues hard to come by, yet crucial to understanding the art produced during this time in the absence of numerous substantial texts.¹⁶ Most of the essays to be discussed below are included in these anthologies.

Cuban artist and art historian Tonel (Antonio Eligio Fernández), in his essays “Culture and Society in the Works of Cuban Artists,” and “A Tree from Many Shores: Cuban Art in Movement,” like Mosquera, observes the role the art market has played in shaping artistic production, and further remarks on artists’ use of “veiled discourse” or ambiguity.¹⁷ Tonel states that in the 1990s, “the political character of Cuba changed. The new artists favor subtlety and dissimulation...and ambiguity, always a recourse, is now central.”¹⁸ I provide examples of how and why this is the case in the work of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros. Additionally, Tonel notes that by mid-decade the primary art institutions on the island became more pragmatic and less argumentative.¹⁹ In the 1990s artists and art institutions repaired their stressed relationship that had ended the previous decade on a low note. New institutions were established,

¹⁶ *Antología de textos críticos: el nuevo arte cubano*, ed. Magaly Espinosa and Kevin Power (Santa Monica, California: Perceval Press, 2006) includes reprints of Cuban art criticism from the 1980s and 1990s, mostly from exhibition catalogues, and an appendix with primary documents, artists’ manifestos and the like. *Nosotros, los más infieles: narraciones críticas sobre el arte cubano (1993-2005)*, ed. Andrés Isaac Santana (Murcia, Spain: Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo, 2007), is larger and more comprehensive than the aforementioned, covering a later time span. Most of the essays are from exhibition catalogues, Cuban journals, and journals from the United States and Mexico. Both were edited by ex-pats and outside scholars.

¹⁷ Published in Holly Block, ed., *Art Cuba. The New Generation* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2001) and *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 62-73, respectively.

¹⁸ “Culture and Society in the Works of Cuban Artists,” 34.

¹⁹ “A Tree from Many Shores,” 66.

and by the turn of the century, some were commercial enterprises, as is explained throughout my text.

Another important Cuban curator and art critic, Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, compares Cuban art since 1989 to a rumor.²⁰ Rather than emphasizing the role of ambiguity to mount critiques, he compares art of the 1990s to the “black market,” as it retreated from its public, political position. Valdés Figueroa argues that in the early 1990s many of the most interesting art events happened at the margins of actual art institutions, but not on the periphery of society since they were essentially sociological gestures. He believes that this withdrawal from the art scene, as it had been—rife with public interventions in the 1980s— had to do not only with a kind of “cultural secrecy” but also with an

attendant process of alienation that resulted in self-reflection, a critical self-consciousness that directed the locus of art away from the street and toward the studio, from public space toward private space; from the inconsistencies of the fabric and structures of a world in crisis toward a utopian extraterritoriality found in the precarious security of rumor and metaphor.²¹

This was by-and-large due to the “crackdown on political public art” (1989) and the new market opportunities that became available for artists, which prioritized sellable object-based art. His essay clearly influenced Weiss’ theorization of the Special Period as withdrawal and is especially useful in my text in interpreting Garaicoa’s student work. I expand on Valdés Figueroa’s observations and provide clear examples of work where it holds true. Additionally, examples of work are discussed where this theory falls short.

²⁰ “Trajectories of a Rumor: Cuban Art in the Postwar Period,” in Holly Block, ed. *Art Cuba. The New Generation* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2001), 17-24. Cuban art critic Eugenio Valdés Figueroa was co-curator of the Havana Biennial and the international exhibitions of Cuban art “Utopian Territories: New Art from Cuba” organized for the Morris and Helene Belkin Art Gallery; the University of British Columbia; the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; and the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba and “Cuba: Maps of Desire” organized for Kunsthalle Wien. He is currently the Art Education and Research Director of the Daros Latin American Foundation in Rio de Janeiro.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

Art historian Kevin Power attempts to synthesize the existing theories about art from the 1990s in “Cuba: One Story after Another.”²² He sets up his discussion with an overview of the Special Period and then argues that one of the prime distinctions between the 1980s and 1990s “lies in [the] change from the optimistic and critical climate of the mid-1980s, when artists...spoke from collective, participative, and ethical positions, to the more individual and egocentric responses that characterize the restrictive and stressful [Special Period].”²³ This claim is similar to Valdez Figueroa’s analysis, although Power does not compare art to rumors. Power instead argues that the artists during the Special Period

espouse irony rather than radical commitment, laconic observation rather than any with in themselves as elements of change, and their work is more conceptually self-conscious and less immediate than that of artists working in the 1980s: they move comfortably within life’s complexity and contradictions, and they don’t feel responsible for sorting out the mess.²⁴

I by contrast argue that while the artists in the 1990s “espouse laconic observation” they still believed in the power of their work to educate and perhaps even induce social change. Power’s observations serve to mythologize the 1980s and overlook the deeper meanings of the 1990s artists work (easy to do when they achieved immediate market success). The artists in the 1990s were working under a different set of circumstances than those of their predecessors. Their work attests to the social conditions in which they are working that I argue is more complex than “moving comfortably within life’s complexity and contradictions.”

²² In Kevin Power, ed., *While Cuba Waits: Art from the 1990s* (Santa Monica, California: Smart Art Press, 1999), 23-65.

²³ Power, “Cuba: One Story after Another,” 33.

²⁴ Ibid.

Cuban scholar Orlando Hernández shares Power's skepticism of the 1990s. He still lives in Havana and is committed to the study of popular and religious artistic practices.²⁵ While he has written on the *mala yerba* artists, he often draws attention to artists, practices, and issues otherwise rarely mentioned. In "The Pleasure of Reference" he notes certain formal and iconographic changes in the work of the 1990s, crediting the "tumultuous social and cultural atmosphere" as a "more provocative and nourishing subject matter for the work than the usual wellsprings of the subconscious and the individual imagination."²⁶ However, in an essay from 2007, Hernández more generally attacks contemporary Cuban artworks for being

formally impeccable, conceptually intelligent, subtle and ingenious, but spiritually fraudulent and culturally anodyne and useless. They reveal too much frivolity, creative insincerity, commercial astuteness and, worst of all, ethically negligent postures that abstain from the civic and political, and indulge in indecorous compromises with the rules of the game established by the powers that be.²⁷

Without taking such a pessimistic stance I wish to contextualize and historicize specific examples of work that prove that although artists had to play the game with the powers that be in order to circumvent censorship, their work reveals that they do not abstain from the "civic and political"—at least until the turn of the century.

Sociologist Sujatha Fernandes examines "highly critical forms of art and popular culture [that] emerged [in the 1990s] to address issues such as bureaucracy, racial and gender discrimination, and alienation in Cuban society" and she explores why the Cuban state permitted

²⁵ Orlando Hernández is an art critic, a poet, and a researcher of Afro-Cuban ritual art and is currently working on a book on popular art in the Caribbean. Unlike the aforementioned critics, he resides full time in Havana.

²⁶ Orlando Hernández, "The Pleasure of Reference," in *Art Cuba, The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block (New York: Henry N Abrams, 2001), 25.

²⁷ "The Art Victims of Havana," *Parachute* 125 (January-March 2007): 23. He attacks contemporary art "at this ill-fated moment." Exactly which moment he is referring to is unclear. His essay was published in 2007, but elsewhere he implies that he is referring to much of the 1990s through to the moment in which he was writing.

them.²⁸ She argues, “that the ability of political regimes to associate themselves with alternative and oppositional images, values, and ideas matters for their legitimacy.”²⁹ Fernandes focuses short chapters on Cuban film, rap music, and the visual arts and examines “the ways in which socialist ideologies are being contested, reframed, and reincorporated.”³⁰ Significantly she does address the issue of racial inequality as confronted by rappers and a few visual artists, however none of the artists focused on in my study are discussed in this context. She was influenced by Hernández who advised her to “seek to provide an alternative methodology for interpreting the arts”³¹ Fernandes adopts ethnographic methods in her approach, which may or may not be the reason for the oversights and inaccuracies in her descriptions and interpretations of artwork, some of which are corrected in my text. That being said, she is unique in emphasizing “cultural links between Cuban and Third World artists and people and between Cuban artists, Chicano, African American, and Cuban immigrants in the United states.”³² This advantage of travel and participating in the global art world is rarely discussed among scholars of the 1990s who are often only critical of artists falling prey to the demands of the hegemonic art world. I too discuss and expand on these relationships.

Art historian Judith Bettleheim writes about and curates exhibitions of Afro-Cuban art and culture. She identifies AfroCuba [sic.] as “an important field of scholarship” and additionally notes “on a national level, the importance of an AfroCuban contribution to Cuba’s history and

²⁸ *Cuba Represent: Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

³² *Ibid.*, 136.

culture became a part of the official discourse after 1975.”³³ Because this is still a relatively young field, there is an overall shortage of scholarship addressing race and related issues as addressed in the arts, especially in scholarship coming out of the island. Her work has encouraged me to address the topic where appropriate throughout my study.

The literature focused on Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros consists of concise articles, interviews, and essays in exhibition catalogues. The artists have been the subjects of retrospectives, many accompanied by catalogues with impressive reproductions of works, but an overall lack of formal analyses. *Tania Bruguera*, a catalogue published in conjunction with the artist’s participation in the 51st Venice Biennale, 2005, contains notable reproductions of her work and informative interviews conducted by art historian RoseLee Goldberg.³⁴ In 2010 Bruguera was awarded the Roy R. Neuberger Exhibition Prize and an exhibition at the Neuberger Museum of Art, “Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary.” The catalogue, by the same name, includes an introductory essay by curator Helaine Posner, along with essays by Mosquera, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty.³⁵ Mosquera’s essay “Cuba in Tania Bruguera’s Work: The Body is the Social Body,” is particularly insightful for his firsthand reportage of witnessing Bruguera’s performance *The Burden of Guilt* (1997), which I discuss in Chapter Four.

Three exhibition catalogues on Garaicoa’s work have been useful for their images and succinct discussions of artworks and/or featured interviews. A number of his early works were reproduced in the catalogue *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado* (Carlos Garaicoa: The Decapitated Space), produced in conjunction with an exhibition at Centre PasquART in Biel-

³³ *AfroCuba: Works on Paper* (San Francisco State University and University of Washington Press, 2005), 10.

³⁴ (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005).

³⁵ (Milan, Italy: Edizioni Charta, 2009).

Bienne, Switzerland in 1995. *Carlos Garaicoa: la ruina; la utopia* features color reproductions of a number of works; brief, but insightful essays on Garaicoa's work through 2000 by curator José Ignacio Roca and Valdés Figueroa; and reprints of interviews conducted by artist and critic Coco Fusco and curator Virginia Pérez-Ratton.³⁶ *Carlos Garaicoa: Capablanca's Real Passion* contains an informative essay by Adriano Pedrosa and an interview with Lorenzo Fusi, along with eighteen short stories by Hernández based on Garaicoa's work.³⁷ Additional catalogues have been published more recently that are primarily focused on his more current production, some with an impressive number of color reproductions of artworks, yet a lack of useful context and analysis.³⁸

Los Carpinteros, published in 2003 on the occasion of the exhibition "Fluid" at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, during the Eighth Havana Biennial, was the last to focus on Los Carpinteros as a trio.³⁹ The catalogue contains brief essays by curator Corina Matamoros Tuma, Laura Hoptman, and Lilian Tone, and an interview with the artists by curators Margaret Miller and Noel Smith. Many of the works discussed in this dissertation are featured here but none are carefully or closely discussed with the exception of *Transportable City*, which I discuss in Chapter Four. *Los Carpinteros: Handwork—Constructing the World* is the most ambitious catalogue on the artists to date, yet it focuses on work by Castillo and Rodríguez

³⁶ (Bogotá, Columbia: Banco de la República, 2000).

³⁷ (Prato Italy: Gli Ori in conjunction with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2005).

³⁸ Two such catalogues are: *La enmienda que hay en mí* (Havana: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2009) that was produced in conjunction with his exhibition during the Tenth Havana Biennial and includes essays by Mario Coyula and Corina Matamoros Tuma, and *Carlos Garaicoa: Overlapping* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2010) with essays by curator Seán Kissane, Okwui Enwezor and Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy.

³⁹ *Los Carpinteros* (Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003).

(Arrechea left the collective in 2003).⁴⁰ The essays by Paulo Herkenhoff, Helen Molesworth, Rochelle Steiner and Valdés Figueroa survey different aspects of the duo's work and there are some references to their formative years, but nothing in depth. Two additional recent catalogues focus on current work by the artists: *Drama Turquesa* and *Los Carpinteros*.⁴¹ Both contain interviews with the artists, which illuminate the evolution of their collaborative process and the changes to their practice that began around the turn of the century, such as outsourcing, which I address in Chapter Four.

METHODOLOGY

As a social art historian I am interested in what art reveals about the time and place of its production. In this study I am responding to the severe lack of analyses of artworks and attention paid to the trajectory of Bruguera's, Garaicoa's, and Los Carpinteros' careers. In order to successfully interpret the work produced by these artists during the 1990s, I studied the historical period preceding and during which the artists were working. I read primary and secondary sources on the artists, Cuban art, and contemporary practices, as well as art education on the island (with an emphasis on the revolutionary period). My four chapters were in fact drafted before I obtained Weiss' book, which is the most comprehensive social history of Cuban art production of the 1980s and 1990s. While I incorporate a little information obtained from her book, our interpretations quite often diverge.

In addition to textual studies, I traveled to Cuba a number of times, in 2005 and 2006, pre-dissertation, and then again in 2008 and 2009 for the dissertation, to meet with artists and

⁴⁰ Eds. Gudrun Ankele and Daniela Zyman (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, 2010).

⁴¹ Ed. Elena Ochoa Foster (London and Madrid: Ivory Press Art and Books, 2010) and ed. Ian Berry (New York: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2010).

various art professionals and visit ISA, galleries, museums, archives, and libraries. I attended two Havana Biennials (2006, 2009) to better understand the event and its significance. In Cuba I accessed rare materials such as theses by Bruguera and Los Carpinteros and hand printed exhibition catalogues in limited circulation. I also conducted formal analyses of art objects, some seen in person, others through reproductions, generally supplied by the artists. I also traveled to Vancouver to meet with Tonel, with whom I discussed Cuban art of the 1970s through the 1990s; photographer Manuel Piña, who spoke about photography as an art discipline on the island; and artist Osvaldo Yero of the 1990s Generation.

Following my research trips, I selected the specific time periods and related objects to discuss that I felt offered the strongest arguments. This dissertation is in no way a catalogue raisonné of the artists' work from the 1990s, rather it focuses on an assortment of works produced at the time. In this text individual theories are employed in my interpretations of artworks, or in response to historical situations. I use Roland Barthes' concept of the zero position and Michel Foucault's notion of the author function in the second chapter, to refute the often-repeated dictum that the 1990s in Cuban art meant the return to the well-made object to fulfill market needs, which spurred an era of commercial competition between artists. I show that during the early years of the Special Period, the artists under review here worked from an anonymous position and/or collaborated transcending the role of the independent, individual artist. In the third chapter I present Mosquera's idea of dualism and art historian and professor Lupe Álvarez's concept of the *doble moral* to theorize the work produced concurrent with the dollarization of the market and establishment of a dual economy. In the final chapter I use Michel de Certeau's notion of shifters and give it a new application in the arts during the later half of the 1990s in Cuba. Other theorists whose work I use to help analyze the artists'

experiences and works include James Clifford, Nestor García Canclini, Andreas Huyssen, and Fredric Jameson.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

My study begins with Chapter One, “Background on Revolutionary Art and Art Education in Cuba,” an overview of art production and artistic training in revolutionary Cuba. This chapter is structured as a historiography of Cuban art production from 1959-1989. Significantly, just years after the triumph of the Revolution, in 1962, leaders Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro transformed the Havana Country Club into an art school *Escuela Nacional de Arte* (National School of Art, ENA), which acknowledged the significance of art education on the island. In 1976, ISA, a college for the study of art was added to the campus. In this chapter I briefly discuss the pedagogy and curriculum at these art schools as they influenced artistic production beginning in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s. Protagonists of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s are introduced and canonical works are analyzed as examples of trends that occurred during the decade. These influential artists and their artwork will resurface in later chapters, as they were influential on the artists featured in this study.

In this chapter I additionally touch on shifting attitudes held by officials about the form, content, and function of revolutionary art and the formation of revolutionary art-related governmental agencies, with emphasis on the Ministry of Culture and appointment of Armando Hart as minister. Hart’s stance on Cuba as both Western and Third World supported the idea that Cuba has always been a cosmopolitan country, influenced by both Western and non-Western cultures as is reflected in the art.⁴² Hart’s position would stand in opposition to that held by

⁴² The problematic term Third World is commonly used in scholarship on Cuba and was well defined by curator Lilian Llanes to represent “a common interest among countries which, irrespective of their geographical locations,

Castro and other officials beginning in the 1970s and would support artistic exploration and experimentation. The Ministry of Culture was behind the founding of the Havana Biennial, a global art event, introduced in this chapter and discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. This background chapter provides the context necessary to understand the emergence of the 1990s Generation, as the affiliated artists responded to the legacy/mythology of art production that characterized the 1960s through the 1980s, and especially the radical projects that grew out of the end of the 1980s when artists produced work that was censored and/or led to the firing of lenient art officials.

In Chapter Two, “Artistic Formation during the Special Period: Foundational Years at ISA and Early Works,” I begin my discussion of the protagonists of my study: Bruguera, Garaicoa, and the trio that became Los Carpinteros, as well as the Special Period. My emphasis is placed on the artists’ work produced while students at ISA (roughly 1989-1993), which corresponded to the onset and worst years of the Special Period. As students they experienced firsthand the devastating effects of this economic crisis. Shortages and losses abounded. Absence marked every aspect of life; basic food and goods necessary for survival were hard to come by. These shortages were enhanced by the absence of mentors/teachers at ISA who were voluntarily emigrating to pursue better socio-economic opportunities abroad (and more freedom to produce art). I argue that Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros, as young artists who remained on the island, explored themes of absence and loss in their work as it related to the specific conditions of the Special Period. They were aware they were producing art amidst a crisis and wanted to use their production to raise consciousness about what was occurring in a thoughtful (and permissible) way. In 1993, a year after Bruguera graduated and while Garaicoa and Los

their differences in cultural heritage, religion, political systems, economic structures or developmental levels, faced serious problems arising from the system of relations imposed by highly industrialized countries in the aftermath of colonialism.” “La Bienal de la Habana,” *Third Text* (Autumn 1992): 8.

Carpinteros were in their second to last year, Garaicoa co-curated an exhibition of ISA student work “Metaforas del templo” (Metaphors of the Temple). Through this exhibition the young artists, as well as artists and art critics on the island, began to identify the rise of the 1990s Generation of artists.

In Chapter Three, “Dollarization and the *Doble Moral*: Works on View During the Fifth Havana Biennial,” I examine work produced by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros in 1993-1994. Emphasis is placed on their contributions to the Fifth Havana Biennial in 1994. The works produced in these years, and especially those exhibited at the biennial, reflect on the socio-economic changes simultaneously occurring at the time, namely the legalization of the United States dollar on the island and the resulting establishment of a dual economy that impacted all citizens. The duality that defined the economy seeped into all aspects of life on the island, heightening already present contradictions. In this chapter I explain the dollarization and its alteration to aspects of social life on the island and more specifically the arts. Then I examine how the artists’ pieces shed light on the duality of life at this time, informing our understanding of the alterations to their practices and Cuban history at this time.

Chapter Four, “The Artists as Global Shifters: Art Produced Mid-Decade Through the Turn of the Century,” focuses on Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros as they spent time moving between Cuba and other locations, further reflecting on the changing economy on the island and Cuba’s reentrance into the global market. As the socio-economic situation in Cuba continued to transform and Cuba participated in the world economy more aggressively, the artists were exposed to the effects both on the island and abroad (experiencing advanced capitalism first hand) and their methods and techniques changed. This chapter examines the artists’ contributions to a number of exhibitions/residencies on the island and abroad that mark

their transition to the role of the shifter. It additionally confronts some of the more adverse responses their work (and that of their peers) has received and proposes new ways of situating their contributions.

CHAPTER ONE
REVOLUTIONARY ART AND ART EDUCATION ON THE ISLAND

Socialist realism arose upon the formations of the last century. But the realistic art of the nineteenth century is also a class art, more purely capitalist than this decadent art of the twentieth century, which reveals the anguish of alienated people. Why then try to find the only valid prescription for art in the frozen forms of socialist realism? Let us not attempt from the pontifical throne of realism-at-any-cost, to condemn all the art forms which have evolved since the first half of the nineteenth century...What is needed is the development of an ideological-cultural mechanism which permits...free inquiry....¹

-Ernesto “Che” Guevara, 1965

In 1965 Ernesto “Che” Guevara discussed the creation of “an ideological-cultural mechanism that permit[ed] free inquiry” in revolutionary Cuba. He was speaking in response to the preponderance of a mandated Socialist Realist aesthetic in the art of socialist countries worldwide. To meet his revolutionary objective, in part, Che and Fidel Castro orchestrated the transformation of the Havana Country Club into a prestigious art school during the first years of the 1960s. This revealed the leaders’ dedication to art education on the island, which until then had been primarily under the aegis of the conservative San Alejandro Academy (established in 1818 in Havana). Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s art education expanded throughout the island and culminated with the founding of ISA, a university dedicated to the study of the arts. Additionally, the same year that ISA was founded, a Ministry of Culture was established with Armando Hart appointed Minister. He was outspoken in his views of Cuba as both part of the Western world and Third World. His views encouraged artists to continue to look broadly for inspiration in the production of revolutionary Cuban art. He also urged Cuban artists’

¹ Ernesto Guevara, *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto Che Guevara*, ed., annotated and intro. John Gerassi (New York, New York: Macmillian, 1968), 396.

participation in international biennials and supported the creation of the Havana Biennial (1984). This chapter traces the formation of the art schools and related pedagogy and the Ministry of Culture to reveal the prevailing attitudes and approaches to revolutionary artistic production and circulation. The first two decades of the Revolution (1960s and 1970s) are examined in order to establish a foundation for the rise of new Cuban art in the 1980s and later in the 1990s (as discussed in later chapters).

During the 1980s, artists well-trained due to the high level of art education on the island, produced work that was uniquely Cuban and drew on a number of sources for inspiration. Mosquera praised the standard of art education on the island when he stated, “There is a direct influence of the new system of art education which has guaranteed free training for all talents, from elementary to higher education, giving them all facilities throughout the country. This is the only example of such widespread moral and budgetary support in the underdeveloped world.”² In addition to esteemed art schools on the island there were two events that helped launch the careers of the artists referred to as the 1980s Generation: the 1981 exhibition “Volumen Uno” (Volume One) and the Havana Biennial, both discussed in this chapter. The decade, however, ended on a different note with censorship and the firing of art officials when artists pushed the boundaries of the “ideological-cultural mechanism that permits free inquiry.” This led to the emigration of many artists of the 1980s Generation and their predecessors, and increased tension between artists and art institutions on the island. At the end of the 1980s the socioeconomic stability of the island was further flailing and at the turn of the decade Cuba would enter the Special Period. The 1980s Generation was extremely influential on subsequent generations of artists on the islands, as both artists and instructors at the art schools. I contend that to best

² “New Cuban Art: Identity and Popular Culture,” *Made in Havana* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1988), 35.

understand the artistic climate in which Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros were training, a general understanding of art education and production in Revolutionary Cuba, from the 1960s through the 1980s, is essential.

THE FOUNDATION OF REVOLUTIONARY CUBAN ART AND ART EDUCATION

In the decades preceding the 1959 Cuban Revolution, roughly the 1920s through the 1950s, many Cuban artists departed from the French inspired academic training they had received at Havana's San Alejandro Art Academy and instead looked to avant-garde techniques coming out of Europe and revolutionary Mexico.³ These "vanguard" artists used the skills they had acquired at the academy to develop their own unique aesthetics, influenced by both international artistic trends and national motifs. According to Cuban-American Art historian Juan Martínez,

this meant the importation and adaptation of European and Mexican modern art to eradicate the worn-out artistic practices as represented by the San Alejandro Academy of Art. It also implied a universalizing approach to Cuban themes and symbols, whereby, as stated by [Juan] Marinello, artists learned to view the indigenous with the eyes of foreigners and to see the foreign with Cuban eyes.⁴

³ In 1818 the Academia de San Alejandro (San Alejandro Academy) was founded by Alejandro Ramírez, Spanish cultural superintendent in Havana, to "rescue the profession of artists from the black artisans," Jorge Rigol, *Apuntes sobre la pintura y el grabado en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1989), 74. San Alejandro was modeled on the French Academy model and the French protégé of Jacques-Louis David, Juan Bautista Vermay, who was living in Cuba, was appointed its first director. The Academy accepted only Creole males; in 1879 the first Creole females were accepted, and much later Mulattos. Vermay directed the academy following the techniques associated with French neoclassicism. A number of directors succeeded Vermay, and for roughly a century maintained his curriculum. Courses offered were traditional and celebrated mimeticism. They included geometrical drawing, drawing from plaster casts, and drawing from live models. Drawing was prioritized, as it required the fewest materials. However, painting was taught, and in the spirit of neoclassicism, history paintings were the preferred genre. Skill and technique were measured upon the artists' ability to copy accurately. Art institutions similar to San Alejandro were opened in other parts of the country, only much later in the twentieth century; Santiago de Cuba (1935), Matanzas (1941), Santa Clara (1946) and Pinar del Rio (1946). Hortensia Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte y la plástica cubana contemporánea* (Havana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2001), 51.

⁴ *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters, 1927-1950* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994), 93. Well-known "vanguard" artists who graduated from San Alejandro included Eduardo Abela, Antonio Gattorno, Victor Manuel, and Amelia Peláez, and Wifredo Lam, Fidelio Ponce, and Aristides Fernández, attended for brief periods of time. Many of these vanguard painters, including Abela and Gattorno, subsequently

Cuban artists explored local flora and fauna and quotidian and religious traditions through their work, which they interpreted in a multitude of ways culling from the latest international styles and techniques. They formed part of a Cuban vanguard that according to Mosquera, was “a movement of nationalism and social affirmation often clearly in opposition to the neocolonial interference of the United States and linked to political positions of the Left.”⁵

In the 1950s a group of Left leaning artists working in abstraction came together as *Los Once* (The Eleven), 1953-1955; then five continued to work together as *Los Cinco* (1955-1963).⁶ They moved further away from the academicism characteristic of San Alejandro, as well as the modernist and tropicalized tropes of the vanguard artists, in favor of a style that most closely mirrored North American Abstract Expressionism. This shift towards abstraction responded to internal and international artistic influences and socio-political factors. These artists inherited over twenty years of intense exploration of national themes and symbols in art (1927-1950) and lived through one of the country’s worse political crises, which provoked their desire to look for another model of art-making. The United States had a pervasive influence in Cuba in the 1950s. Although Abstract Expressionism has been argued to have been co-opted by the U.S government

participated in Grupo Minorista, a group of intellectuals and artists who shared similar beliefs and ideals, and desired to solve some of Cuba’s pressing social and political issues through artistic, economic and political reform. They staged protests and authored numerous articles and statements, and in 1927 issued a manifesto. Within this proposal they called for “vernacular art, and in general, for new art in its diverse manifestations,” and “the introduction and popularization in Cuba of the latest artistic and scientific doctrines, theories, and practices.” As quoted in Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 39-40.

⁵ “The New Cuban Art,” in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism*, ed. Ales Erjavec (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 210.

⁶ The original participants of *Los Once* included Francisco Antigua, René Ávila, José Ignacio Bermúdez, Agustín Cárdenas, Hugo Consuegra, Fayad Jamis, Guido Llinás, José Antonio Díaz Peláez, Tomás Oliva, Antonio Vidal, Viredo, and Raúl Martínez. By 1955 the group had only five remaining artists and became known as *Los Cinco* (The Five).

as a Cold War strategy, defending free capitalist society, it too was used in Cuba to promote a sense of freedom.

Paintings such as Raúl Martínez's *Abstracción n° 5* (Abstraction n° 5), 1957 (Figure 1.1) made up of forcefully overlapping earth-tone and off-white brushstrokes, bring to mind the aggressive brushstrokes used by Abstract Expressionists such as Willem de Kooning, yet they were intended as a denunciation of dictator Fulgencio Batista (1933-1944; 1952-1959).⁷ The negation of both the figure and any legible subject matter were meant to decry Batista, his relationship to the United States, and his cultural policy. Thus Cuban abstract painters' work was politicized and revolutionary.

The 1959 commencement of the Cuban Revolution did not cause for a rupture in cultural production. The government did not issue strict statutes mandating a particular style for the visual arts, as had been the case at the onset of other socialist revolutions, and artists such as Martínez continued to exhibit abstract work. In fact, the Cuban Revolution has been thought to uphold the "least restrictive cultural policy in the history of the socialist camp."⁸ Fueling this position was the revolutionary government's 1959 inauguration of the Cuban Film Institute (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, ICAIC), which produced avant-garde films and promotional posters, and the cultural center Casa de las Américas, developed to promote the dissemination of Cuban music, art, and literature and to foster socio-cultural relationships with other Caribbean and Latin American countries. In January 1961 the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (National Council of Culture, CNC) was established under the Ministry of Education, which came to "organize, coordinate, and direct all cultural activity nationally and

⁷ Tonel briefly discusses the political leanings of the *Los Once* artists in "Cuban Art: The Key to the Gulf and How to Use It," in *No Man is an Island* (Pori: Pori Art Museum, 1990), 70.

⁸ Mosquera, "The New Cuban Art," 213.

locally, and, most significantly, to rescue national cultural traditions.”⁹ Later that year the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, UNEAC), the writers’ and artists’ union, was founded to stimulate the production of revolutionary Cuban writing and art and promote communication and collaboration among creators and their public.¹⁰

That same year, 1961, “liberty of creation was at the center of conversations.”¹¹ It was in this year that Fidel Castro delivered his famous speech “Words to the Intellectuals” during which he notoriously said, “Dentro la Revolución: todo; contra la Revolución: ningún derecho (nada)” (“Within the Revolution: everything; against the Revolution: no rights (nothing).”¹² Stated while discussing the revolutionary function of artistic production, this edict has been interpreted to mean that as long as artwork has content that is not contrary to the Revolution, it can be expressed in any form. All artists then, regardless of their stylistic preferences, were integrated in the revolutionary process, especially the Left leaning abstract painters. While some artists continued to work in pure abstraction, many combined the formal attributes of abstract art with revolutionary emblems and themes. Even Martínez shifted away from pure abstraction in 1964

⁹ The CNC was established under Armando Hart, then Minister of Education. Hart later became Minister of Culture. The CNC’s leadership consisted of significant writers such as Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima. By 1963 it was given greater autonomy under the *Consejo de Ministros* (Council of Ministries). Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 132-134.

¹⁰ “Membership in the UNEAC is not easy (presentation of potential members by two current members, and eight months waiting for acceptance after a careful evaluation of the candidate’s work), nor is exiting...” Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2003), 193.

¹¹ Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 40.

¹² This speech was in part a response to the censoring of the film *PM* in 1961, which depicted Havana’s night scene. It was deemed an unflattering depiction of the life in Revolutionary Cuba and thus censored. Castro’s famous statement, which has been used to define the parameters of Cuban culture, has often been mistranslated, as Antoni Kapcia has pointed out, by scholars, whereby the word *contra*/against has been translated to “outside” changing the thrust of the meaning from “if you are not against us, you are with us,” to “If you are not with us, you are against us.” Kapcia explains that the correct translation reflects on the actual situation where the revolutionary process has encouraged internal debate “within clear parameters and behind metaphorically closed doors, which has allowed writers, artists, and intellectuals to know and even define the bounds of the acceptable; apart from moments of crisis or of exaggerated internal tensions, exclusion and a ‘hard line’ have tended to be applied only to those publicly going beyond those ‘doors’ and those parameters.” *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 134.

when he realized “that painting didn’t reflect the new changing reality. Society was changing and I realized I wasn’t. Emotionally as a human being I felt there had been some transformation and I was losing interest in abstraction.”¹³ However, this did not result in a return to academic or mimetic painting, instead his works from 1963-64 shared formal characteristics with the “assemblages” of United States artists like Robert Rauschenberg, and Martínez’s works from the years following drew inspiration from Pop art. In Martínez’s mixed media work *26 de Julio* (July 26), 1964 (Figure 1.2), he combined wild brush strokes with nationalist and revolutionary imagery such as the number 26, a photograph of Fidel Castro, and a flier that read “Cuba Si.”¹⁴ Because artists were not mandated to modify the formal properties of their work, Martínez, and others, instead imbued their abstract or Pop-inspired work with the revolutionary fervor characteristic of the time. Much of this effort was put into the production of political posters and billboards displayed throughout the country. As a result many critics reflected on the period fondly. Mosquera recounts the 1960s as “a period of cultural splendor for the island...Pop art, the new figuration, and the dialogue between them set the tone for the visual arts of that time in curious local reinterpretations and embellishments of the ‘internationalist’ tendencies then in vogue—all in the midst of the revolutionary atmosphere.”¹⁵ Artists were experimenting formally, much like artists internationally, yet the content of their work remained committed to revolutionary ideals.

¹³ Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 148.

¹⁴ The 26 stands for July 26, 1953, the date of the Moncada attacks, acknowledged as the beginning of the Revolution. Although similar to Rauschenberg’s collages, Martínez was introduced to collage by a Czech professor Ladislav Vychodil and Cuban artist Antonia Eiriz. Roberto Cobas Amate, “Raúl Martínez: El desafío de los sesenta,” in *Raúl Martínez: El desafío de los sesenta* (Havana: Fondo para el Desarrollo de la Cultura, 1995), 11-12.

¹⁵ Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” 215. Though Mosquera does also reiterate that the decade began with an act of censorship.

Contributing to the “splendor” of the 1960s was the creation of a system of free art education on the island, a luxury for an underdeveloped country. At the onset of the Revolution, San Alejandro stood alone as Havana’s premier art academy. This was until January 1961, when Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, allegedly during a game of golf, decided to convert the existing country club located in Cubanacán, Havana, into the site of an art institute they called *Escuela Nacional de Arte* (ENA) (Figure 1.3, Castro and Guevara playing golf). ENA became Havana’s second high school level institution dedicated to training professional artists, musicians, dancers, and actors, and it changed the manner in which the arts were taught in Cuba.¹⁶ ENA opened in 1962, following on the coattails of Cuba’s revolutionary “year of education” (1961) under the helm of Minister of Education Armando Hart.¹⁷ Castro and Guevara conceived ENA as an “innovative school of the arts,” international in scope, drawing in students from all over the Third World (with scholarships subsidizing the expenses). This was intended to help fulfill their desire to develop “cultural literacy” on the island. According to architectural historian John Loomis in his study of the architecture of ENA, “the political objective of the school would be to educate those artists who would give socialism in both Cuba and the Third

¹⁶In Cuba high school is called *nivel medio*/middle level; middle school is called *nivel elemental*/elementary level; and primary school is called *nivel primario*/primary level. San Alejandro functioned at the *nivel medio*, as did ENA. ENA consisted of schools for modern dance, plastic arts, dramatic arts, music, and ballet. Each school was housed in its own edifice on the grounds and designed by architects Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi. The school buildings were not complete until 1965 and between 1962 and 1965 the classes were held in surrounding homes that were abandoned by Cuba’s upper class. These were later converted into the student dormitories. The buildings were never completed, yet prestige of these innovative buildings contributed greatly to decade’s reputation. The School of Plastic Arts consisted of ten studios, an exhibition space, offices and some classrooms. Students specialized in painting, printmaking, or sculpture. The proximity of all five schools to one another encouraged a multidisciplinary approach in many instances. This was enhanced by the fact that the students all boarded together in converted homes abandoned by Cuba’s middle class.

¹⁷ This was the year of a literacy campaign, the nationalization of private schools, the creation of schools for ballet and for art teachers, in addition to a number of other institutions for the “development of artistic culture.” Dirección de Enseñanza Artística Ministerio de Cultura. *La enseñanza artística en Cuba* (Havana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), 6.

World its aesthetic representation.”¹⁸ Although the enrollment of international artists was extremely small, and the visual arts program of ENA closed in 1996 without ever having reached its full potential, it became a central hub for Cuban artists from all over the island and served as its first and only high school level boarding school of the arts.

With the establishment of ENA, came the induction of well-known Cuban avant-garde artists as teachers. Before this, prominent Cuban artists had been largely absent from teaching and had no direct influence on the younger generations. With the Revolution, attitudes changed and curricular matters became more important. Instructors at ENA changed art education by merging elements of traditional academic training, as had been practiced at San Alejandro, with their own unconventional techniques and perspectives, always with the objective of training revolutionary artists. Prominent Cuban artists and some foreign artists were invited to teach, often without prior teaching experience or pedagogical training.¹⁹

Instructors at ENA taught traditional life drawing but also encouraged their students to develop their own signature styles. The outcome was work that was rarely mimetic, and often quite expressive. Students incorporated elements of Cubism, Expressionism, abstraction, Surrealism, and Pop in their work.²⁰ Since the objective of ENA was to develop socialist consciousness, students’ artwork often incorporated revolutionary themes along with national and regional symbols. ENA became a focus for the arts and many visiting artists and critics in the 1960s guest lectured, curated exhibitions, and taught courses at the prestigious school. By

¹⁸ *Revolution of Forms: Cuba’s Forgotten Art Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁹ See Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 67-69, for a discussion of instructors.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

1968 ENA was recognized for producing the best painters in Cuba.²¹ ENA's curriculum continuously evolved, as students graduated and became professors, bringing their own techniques to the classroom, and served as the model for the other municipal art schools.²²

Although the introduction of free art education in the early 1960s made professional artistic training available to all Cuban citizens and the artistic license allowed for the continued flourishing of avant-garde practices, in the middle of the decade a wave of conservatism threatened the creative freedom so central to discussions in the years prior. In 1965 Military Units of Production Support (UMAP, re-education camps) were established and Cuban males deemed "unfit" were detained. They included homosexuals and religious practitioners, many who were artists (musicians, writers, painters...). Although the camps were closed by 1968, the conservative attitude that led to their creation was emulated during the First Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, which curtailed the artistic experimentation for which the previous decade was known.

THE 1970S—IN AND OUT OF THE "GRAY YEARS"

In 1971 the First Congress of Education and Culture proposed substantial changes directed at art education and production. The proceedings from this conference reveal a conservative stance toward artistic production that paralleled the attitudes held by Cuba's Soviet

²¹ Manuel Vidal, "Jóvenes Pintores Cubanos," *Unión* 4 (December 1968): 208-211. In this article he notes that the English critic Herbert Read declared ENA the best art school in the world. This text was written in the year following the 1967 *Salón de Mayo*, which traveled the annual Parisian exhibition (*Salon de Mai*), featuring international modern artists, to Cuba. ENA students were able to view and discuss the original artworks, which provided them with a rare opportunity and helped them grow. Vidal believed that while other schools in Cuba would produce good painters, the best painting would continue to come from ENA.

²² From 1962 to 1968 pedagogy was still being developed and there did not yet exist a strict schema for the professors to follow. Rather it was fairly open with room for experimentation. In fact it oscillated between a four and five year program. By the 1969-70 academic year the faculty had settled on a four-year program.

counterparts, who were extremely influential at this time.²³ As opposed to the attitudes dominating the previous decades that had put European and Mexican avant-garde production at the forefront, this conference condemned Western Europe and the United States for “degrading and trying to destroy [Cuban] forms of cultural expression so that they would believe we had no traditions of our own.”²⁴ All “bourgeois practices” were confuted and the potential for Cuban art was glorified because it allegedly did not fall prey to the demands of a market. While it was then implied that this allowed for freedom of production unknown in the capitalist world where artists have had to produce for the market, the rhetoric used called for art of “high ideological and technical standards” that could be understood by the masses.²⁵ These principles, along with the shunning of Western production, confused the idea of what was and wasn’t considered acceptable revolutionary art. Freedom of creation in the production of revolutionary art was further challenged when it was proclaimed that

Socialism creates the objective and subjective conditions which make possible real freedom of creation. Thus, all trends are condemnable and inadmissible which are based on apparent ideas of freedom as a disguise for the counterrevolutionary poison of works that conspire against the revolutionary ideology on which the construction of socialism and communism are based, an effort to which our people are firmly committed and in whose spirit the new generations are educated.²⁶

²³ About Cuba’s relationship with the USSR at this time Mosquera explained “The failure of the guerilla movement fostered by Cuba in Latin America and the economic and administrative chaos of the country led the Cuban government to enter the orbit of the Soviet Union after ten years of relative independence within a situation of conflictive intimacy. Until it was overtaken by its own chaos after perestroika, the Soviet Union saved the regime from total chaos with subsidies: They usually advanced two billion dollars per year, in addition to pardoning debts and offering very favorable prices, technical aid, and other concessions. Naturally, they imposed conditions,” “The New Cuban Art,” 216.

²⁴ Cuban National Congress for UNESCO, *First National Congress on Education and Culture* (Havana: Permanent Secretariat and “Urselia Díaz Báez” Cuban Book Institute, July 1971), 16.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cuban National Congress for UNESCO, *First National Congress on Education and Culture*, 14.

Therefore, without imposing Social(ist) Realism as an official style outright, the conference called for an art that shared similar criteria and Castro's new slogan became "Art: A Weapon of the Revolution."²⁷

Following the Congress there was a reform of the Dirección General de Escuelas (General Direction of Schools), overseen by the CNC, who hired Soviet advisors to help structure the system of art education and its teaching methodology.²⁸ Many of the advisors were "anti-ENA" and desired the return to antiquated teaching methods, yet, they ultimately did not alter the teaching methodologies used in the painting, sculpture, and printmaking courses at the school.²⁹ Rather, they were dogmatic in emphasizing the role of the revolutionary artist and echoed the mandate for art of "high ideological and technical standards," as stated at the Congress. They also developed courses in the social sciences, in this case aesthetics, fulfilling the call of the Congress for "education of the highest scientific level."³⁰

Additionally, following the Congress many cultural officials known for their liberal policies lost their positions, and were replaced by members of the military, the most significant being the president of the CNC who was replaced by a captain. Mosquera explained that this led to the marginalization of leading intellectuals for "moral" or "political" reasons.³¹ Not surprisingly, the subsequent influence of the Congress on the artistic realm led to some artists

²⁷ As quoted by Mosquera, "The New Cuban Art," 217.

²⁸ Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 133.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁰ They also added pre-professional training courses and modified the criteria for graduation by including a thesis project and defense, which at ENA included the public display of thesis artworks in an annual salon. For a full recounting of the changes implemented see Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 136-137.

³¹ Mosquera, *The New Cuban Art*, 218.

stopping production all together, while other artists modified their work.³² Portraits of “guerrilla fighters, martyrs, frontline workers, revolutionary leaders, and heroes filled the walls of galleries and museums in Cuba.”³³ They were often painted in a realist style, called by some the most “authentically revolutionary.”³⁴ *Mella*, 1973, by Tomás Sánchez (Figure 1.4) featured a portrait of Julio Antonio Mella, one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party and a revolutionary hero. The creation of mimetic paintings like this, as well as the fact that many artists were persecuted in their pursuit of artistic freedom during the late 1960s into the 1970s, has caused many to refer to the 1970s, and especially the first half of the decade as the “gray years.” Mosquera described the 1970s as “a dark period, supporting an art that was complacent in the face of officialdom and its tide of opportunism and mediocrity.”³⁵

While art of the so-called “gray years” is often associated with work reminiscent of social realism, Tonel corrected this “half-truth” by illuminating the work of artists that went beyond these confines.³⁶ Simultaneous to the overwhelming presence of revolutionary icons filling the walls of galleries, a group of artists were painting Photorealist work that drew from hyperrealism, Social Realism, and academicism, under the tutelage of Cuban pioneer of

³² This included painters Cabrera Moreno, Manuel Mendive, and Tomás Sánchez. Also as a result Antonia Eiriz and Umberto Peña stopped painting as a form of protest. Ibid.

³³ José Veigas, “Chronology,” in *I Insulted Flavio Garciandía in Havana* (Madrid, Turner, 2009), 358.

³⁴ Tonel, “70, 80, 90...Perhaps 100 Impressions of Art in Cuba,” in *Cuba siglo XX: modernidad y sincretismo* (Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno; Barcelona: Fundació “La Caixa”; Centre d’Art Santa Mònica, 1995.), 415. Tonel notes that photo-based painting was “the dominant aesthetic option of those years as ‘authentically revolutionary’: an art steeped in technical resources and the narrative manias of the first, authentically Cuban avant-garde, with the leading role taken by the ‘popular.’”

³⁵ “The New Cuban Art,” 218.

³⁶ “70, 80, 90...Perhaps 100 Impressions of Art in Cuba,” 415. Mosquera is also careful to present both sides of the story in his article “The New Cuban Art.”

photorealism Aldo Menéndez.³⁷ The turn to painting in a realist trope may have stemmed from the Congress's mandates, yet, Tonel observed, "photorealism opened up a space for the lyrical and intimate."³⁸ The most well known example of a painting to do so is Flavio Garciandía's *All you Need is Love*, 1975, (Figure 1.5) a large canvas that depicted the close up of the face of a young woman as she laid horizontally in the grass.³⁹ In 1979 Mosquera wrote, "this transcendentalist painting has been achieved thanks to the synthesis of multiple and occasionally contradictory plastic resources and trends: Photorealism, New Figuration, Surrealism, Pop, and informationalism."⁴⁰ Garciandía attempted to depict the "most remote essence" of the young woman.⁴¹ The painting was named after the famous Beatles' song, as many of the works painted by Garciandía and his peers were titled after international songs at this time, revealing their interest in cosmopolitanism. Tonel viewed works such as this as ideologically charged, while Mosquera later described them as "very refreshing canvases with no explicit references to Cuban culture."⁴² Mosquera also explained that "the appearance of a hyperrealist current meant a deviation from the official lines" and the Photorealists were thus accused of following a nihilistic, dehumanizing, foreign tendency that denigrated the artist's creative role and social responsibility.⁴³

³⁷ Tonel, "70, 80, 90...Perhaps 100 Impressions of Art in Cuba," 415.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Two years prior he had painted his first portrait of this young woman titled *Sontata*. *All you Need is Love* is considered the most emblematic and reproduced portrait of his career, for which he won the second prize in the III National Salon of Professors and Instructors of Art in Cuba, 1975. Jose Veigas, "Chronology," 361.

⁴⁰ Untitled Essay, *Flavio Garciandía. Pintura*. (Havana: Casa de la Cultura de Plaza, 1979). Reprinted in *I Insulted Flavio Garciandía in Havana* (Madrid: Turner, 2009), 303.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mosquera, "New Cuban Art," 219.

⁴³ Ibid.

In 1976, just one year after Garciandía painted *All you Need is Love*, the creation of a Ministry of Culture and appointment of Armando Hart as Minister curtailed the staunch conservatism that dominated the first half of the 1970s, allowing for Garciandía and the other Photorealists to thrive. The Ministry replaced the CNC, in Hart's words, "to coordinate, guide, and serve as a link between the state and other [cultural] agencies, in order to facilitate the coherent application of cultural policy."⁴⁴ Hart, whose background was at the Ministry of Education, oversaw the development and expansion of art education on the island. Under his guidance hundreds of cultural centers were established, artistic pedagogy was integrated into regular school programs, after-school artistic programming was funded, and many new art schools were established, so that by the mid-1980s there was a high school dedicated to the arts in the capitals of each of Cuba's fourteen provinces.

Hart, on behalf the Ministry, was careful to not implement "standards concerning aesthetic forms and taste."⁴⁵ He rehabilitated many intellectuals who had lost their jobs or been otherwise marginalized in the preceding years. Some of the Ministry's employees even published articles about art coming out of Europe.⁴⁶ This was accepted by Hart, who was known for his view of Cuba's position in the Western world. During an interview in 1983, Hart reiterated the claim he had made many times before "...As far as I know, the island of Cuba hasn't moved. We are in the West and our ideological, political and cultural debate takes place in our world, in the West."⁴⁷ However, he continued, artists of the West, "in order to be consistent with their

⁴⁴ Armando Hart Dávalos, *Changing the Rules of the Game* Interview by Luis Baez (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1983), 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁶ This included Mosquera and José Veigas.

⁴⁷ Hart, *Changing the Rules of the Game*, 31.

traditions, must look a little more toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and they must adopt a universal perspective of culture.”⁴⁸ This way of thinking more closely resembled that of the vanguard artists and showed a break from the attitudes governing the reforms made following the Congress. Camnitzer praised Hart and the Ministry by further noting that their “unimpeachable political stance fertilized the ground for the present art.”⁴⁹ By considering Cuba part of the West, as well as acknowledging it as Third World, the Ministry moved away from the anti-imperialist rhetoric directed at Western Europe and the U.S. and broadened the scope of what was permissible at the time—at least culturally speaking. By the mid 1980s the Ministry of Culture began to solicit participation in international biennials again (the first time since the early years of the Revolution) and Havana founded its own biennial in 1984.⁵⁰

The Ministry of Culture under Hart also emphasized the role artistic pedagogy played in educating the masses and devised a system to raise “cultural literacy.” It was not always ideological, rather it was used to teach people that anyone could make art.⁵¹ Under Hart’s guidance the *movimiento de aficionados* (movement of aficionados) was established in 1978 with the goal of spreading art to the masses through a system of *casas de cultura* (cultural houses). While this version of the program only lasted a handful of years, many extracurricular programs that began at this time still exist, and have provided additional training for artists and enthusiasts.

Cuban scholar Hortensia Peramo exalted the Ministry when she summed up the role it played in pulling Cuban art and art education out of the “gray years”:

⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹ Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, 128-129.

⁵⁰ Osvaldo Sánchez, “The Children of Utopia,” *Third Text* (Summer 1989): 35.

⁵¹ Tonel, interview by author, September 24, 2008.

Thanks to the intervention and to the cultured projection of minister Armando Hart, in the exercise and application of our cultural policy, the decade closes with other airs, as much for the art as for its education, what it has been worth a reconsideration on the part of the critics of the period, that I take to reduce the “dark decade” to a “gray quinquennium” that ends with the foundation of this ministry.⁵²

Cuban art historian Osvaldo Sánchez further emphasized the role of the Ministry when he observed, “On too many occasions we forget that the emergence of the 1980s is not only a consequence of the art-education system or the organization of a biennial, but also coincides with a new post-Mariel political strategy: the Ministry of Culture assumes the leadership in promoting a new international image for the country.”⁵³ At the newly minted ISA, the Ministry’s impact would be most felt by students.

ISA is Cuba’s only university dedicated to the study of the arts.⁵⁴ It was founded in Havana in 1976 and overseen by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education (in charge of the artistic methodology utilized throughout the national system of art education).⁵⁵ ISA is located in Cubanacán and until the fine arts program at ENA ceased operation in 1996, the two departments shared the same campus (Figure 1.6). ISA is divided into three departments: visual arts, dramatic arts, and music. Each department oversees a five-year program and at the conclusion, following the successful completion of exams or the defense of a thesis project,

⁵² *La escuela nacional de arte*, 118.

⁵³ “Los últimos modernos (The Last Moderns) in Cuba,” in *La Isla Posible* (Barcelona: Centre de Culture Contemporanea, 1995), 105.

⁵⁴ ISA has satellite campuses in Camagüey and Holguin, but neither have a visual art department.

⁵⁵ In 1976, shortly before the Ministry of Culture replaced the CNC, the CNC had established ISA. After the Ministry took over they inherited the responsibility of overseeing ISA. Hortensia Peramo, email to author, May 25, 2009.

students graduate with their “Licenciado.”⁵⁶ The school “has been instrumental in the development of almost all of the significant artists of the later generations.”⁵⁷

The *Facultad de Artes Plásticas* (Faculty of Plastic Arts) opened in September 1976 under founding director Mario Rodríguez Alemán, who was a Cuban art critic and educator.⁵⁸ Since its inception the school has been extremely prestigious and difficult to enter. Of the hundreds that apply to the visual arts program each year, roughly thirty-six are accepted, approximately twelve in each discipline: painting, printmaking, and sculpture. To earn acceptance students must pass entrance exams, which test both their technical and intellectual capabilities in art history, drawing, and their area of expertise. Almost all who enter the school have already completed seven years of artistic training in middle school and high school.⁵⁹ The curriculum at ISA (at the time of this writing) consists of courses in the following subjects taken over the period of five years: philosophy (Western and non-Western, ancient through the present), aesthetics, Cuban studies, Foreign Language studies in English, semiotics, physical education, studios, art history (ten courses covering a broad variety of topics), critical theory, design, computer graphics, criticism, environmental design, professional practicum, thesis preparation, and optional courses. This is a curriculum that has evolved over time and is still being modified.

⁵⁶ It is a B.A. but similar to European universities they fulfill requirements equivalent to a Master’s degree in the United States.

⁵⁷ Camnitzer, “The Multiple Expressions of Identity in Cuban Art,” unpublished manuscript.

⁵⁸ It started with a course for worker-students. The following year, 1977, the institute admitted day time (full-time) students. Students from all over the island boarded on campus, unless they had family in Havana with whom they resided. Tonel, “70, 80, 90...Perhaps 100 Impressions of Art in Cuba,” 416.

⁵⁹ There are exceptions for those who apply following military duty.

To graduate from the Faculty of Plastic Arts, students must produce work for a thesis exhibition and a text that have to be successfully defended. Each student works closely with a tutor, whom he/she selects to serve as the primary advisor on his/her thesis project. This advisor does not have to teach at the school. He/she helps the student conceptualize their work, and more significantly, theorize it in supporting essays. This system has allowed students to work with artists and critics, who were not faculty, yet had a connection to their work. Students defend their exhibition before their tutor, an opponent, and tribunal composed of three individuals who submit one position (grade). ISA has been known for the spirited and significant discussions resulting from these defenses.

At its inception ISA was much like a continuation of ENA and the two schools shared many teachers, facilities, and activities. The wave of conservatism that struck Cuba in the 1970s affected both ENA and ISA. Many members of the faculty at ISA during its first years in the 1970s were still under the influence of Soviet advisors who stressed the production of work with strong ideological content (it would take some years for Hart's presence and position to be felt). Adding to the conservatism during these formative years was director Rodríguez Alemán's orthodox Marxist convictions, including the defense of Social Realism, and the founding dean Orlando Suárez's attachment to muralism, in the ilk of the Mexican muralists.⁶⁰ Instructors from the Soviet Union and Cubans trained in the Soviet Union taught in a traditional and structured manner. Additionally, the stress placed on the social sciences that dominated the educational

⁶⁰ In the 1980s Orlando Suárez published a book that rethought the Cold War's impact on the arts and defended the idea that the CIA fabricated abstract art. (Eva Cockcroft's seminal article on the subject was circulating around Havana.) Tonel, interview by author, September 25, 2008.

reforms of 1974 transitioned to ISA through courses on aesthetics and art history, which proved to be rich environments for the transmission of ideology.⁶¹

The first group of instructors at ISA also included some established artists, several of whom had been teachers at ENA, but none of whom were college educated, as ISA was the first such program. Together they helped develop the first college level curriculum, attempting to elevate what was taught at the high school level. The curriculum that emerged corresponded in many ways to the requirements of other Cuban universities, however, with the end goal of training creative personalities, proficient in one of the three media (painting, sculpting, or printmaking).⁶² This plan, officially called “Plan de Estudios A” in 1979, is recognized for instituting the traditional division of artistic production, and for a strong influence of Soviet approaches to instruction. Álvarez, one time ISA instructor, described the foundational years of ISA as “tense,” because at the same time a new Cuban art was gestating that broke drastically with ideology being transmitted through the educational system.⁶³ Mosquera noted this significant change in the arts, as it was occurring, later recounting,

By the end of the 70s there was an extraordinary movement in the Cuban plastic arts, and the culture completely renewed itself during the following decade, and has survived until today. This new Cuban art or “Cuban Renaissance” is a simultaneously artistic, cultural and political phenomenon, that established a critical culture in the island.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Álvarez cites the text *Fundamentos de Estetica* by Avner Zis, and a “red” book by the Academy of Sciences in the USSR *La lucha de las ideas en la estetica* as the key texts used to clarify the war between capitalism and socialism as it pertained to art. “Memoria de nubes,” in *Nosotros, los más infieles: narraciones críticas sobre arte cubano (1993-2005)*, ed. Andrés Isaac Santana (Murcia, Spain: Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo, 2007), 273.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 272. While Álvarez reflects on the first 20 or so years of pedagogy at ISA in this text, she notes that she has constructed much of the history herself, as it is not adequately documented nor archived.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Las videncias de Segundo Planes,” *Fumándome el horizonte* (Mexico City: Galería Ramis Barquet, 1993).

The evolution of the college level program in large part accounted for the renaissance of vanguard art in Cuba.

THE 1980S—"VOLUME ONE" AND THE NEW CUBAN ART

The artistic generation of the 1980s has been described as having brought about “an intellectual explosion without precedent in Cuban cultural history.”⁶⁵ This was in large part due to an exhibition, “Volume One” that featured the work of eleven young artists, all born during the Revolution, and among them the first graduates of ISA.⁶⁶ “Volume One” is credited, along with the establishment of the Havana Biennial, as the most significant art event of the early 1980s.⁶⁷ Although “Volume One” was mounted in January 1981, many of the participating artists had begun showing together in the preceding years, while some were students at ISA.⁶⁸ Despite the conservative pedagogical approach at ISA at this time a new vanguard was forming among students and their peers (many of whom they had studied with at San Alejandro or ENA). “Volume One” was installed at the Centro de Arte Internacional (Center of International Art, now Galería Acacia in Central Havana) and featured the work of José Bedia, Juan Francisco Elso, Flavio Garcíandía, Rogelio López Marin (Gory), José Manuel Fors, Israel León, Gustavo Pérez Monzón, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey, Tomás Sánchez, Leandro Soto, and Ruben Torres

⁶⁵ Sánchez, “The Children of Utopia,” 33.

⁶⁶ While this exhibition is almost always associated with ISA, it is important to note that only three of the eleven artists were graduates of ISA. The other artists had received artistic training through high school in Havana. Because Garcíandía exhibited in “Volumen Uno” and would go on to have a profound effect on ISA is likely why the exhibition is often closely related to the school.

⁶⁷ Luis Camnitzer, “The Multiple Expressions of Identity in Cuban Art,” n.p.

⁶⁸ “In truth, “Volumen I” was neither the first nor the most radical of a series of exhibits of the 1980s generation. Six artists of the group had already started planning an exhibit as far back as 1977...The introduction to the catalogue was written by art critic Gerardo Mosquera (October 1977), and an appropriate exhibit space was found for 1978. However, the show never took place.” Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, 1-2.

Llorca. While not a collective, “what bound this group together was a concern about artistic creation as a process of investigation and introspection, cognitive-ethical in nature, that was conceived not within the structures of ‘national art’ or identity, but rather in a more expanded, international field of contemporary practice.”⁶⁹ As seen in documentary photographs from the exhibition, “Volume One” included installation, abstract, and multimedia work (Figures 1.7 and 1.8).

The exhibition drew thousands of visitors, breaking attendance records, signaling a major turning point in the arts. As Tonel explained,

“Volumen I” was dazzling not only for the intrinsic quality of the works, but above all for its curatorial and museographic lucidity, and because the show as a whole gave an almost totally renovated image of what a work of art could be. Persistently turning to installation and three-dimensional works, taking an object again and spattering it with conceptualist and minimalist elegance, as much as with a familiarity from pop trends, the artists managed to make Havana aware of their presence.⁷⁰

Thus began the generation of the 1980s with formal innovation at the center of conceptual artistic investigations. Álvarez noted that the artists who exhibited in “Volume One” reclaimed autonomous expression and produced work that was at once conceptual and intellectual, but also withheld a social function.⁷¹ They were clearly no longer limited by the “stereotyped dogma of national identity” as had been the case in previous decades.⁷² Not surprisingly, this conceptual approach received backlash from the “cultural nationalists” of the 1970s, who thought it revealed the decadence of capitalist art (art for art’s sake).⁷³ However, the Ministry of Culture, under Hart,

⁶⁹ Weiss, “Performing Revolution,” 118-119.

⁷⁰ “70, 80, 90...Perhaps 100 Impressions of Art in Cuba.” 418.

⁷¹ Álvarez, “Memoria de nubes,” 274.

⁷² Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” 220.

⁷³ Sánchez, “The Children of Utopia,” 33.

and the faculty at the university supported these young artists. Sánchez explained, “Only the Ministry of Culture had the political conviction that what was happening was exceptional proof that what the first generation of artists born within the Revolution was after was more than purely artistic.”⁷⁴

In addition to “Volume One,” the Havana Biennial had a transformative effect on the arts in Cuba. The Havana Biennial was the brainchild of the Ministry of Culture in conjunction with the Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center established in Havana in 1983 dedicated to the study and propagation of contemporary art from the Third World. The biennial was envisioned to aid in the fulfillment of the Wifredo Lam Center’s primary objective of disseminating Third World art, especially art forms that had been overlooked by the institutions of fine art in highly industrialized cities, such as applied and popular art. Additionally, the biennial sought to promote the work of Cuban artists and provide workshops and a forum for discussing key issues impacting Third World art production. The Havana Biennial was thus envisioned in opposition to mainstream art systems and as an alternate to the long standing Venice and São Paulo Biennials.⁷⁵

The First Havana Biennial opened in May of 1984 and was called “the most ambitious exhibition of Latin American art ever presented.”⁷⁶ Yet, this was the only Havana Biennial to focus solely on art from Latin America. With its commitment to the Third World, the Center

⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁵ The Venice Biennial, founded in 1895, focuses on displaying the work of well-known European and United States artists, although in recent years it has broadened its scope and is more international. Artwork is displayed in thematic exhibitions organized by international curators or in national pavilions sponsored by the respective country, which allows each participating country to execute control over the way it is represented. The São Paulo Biennial, although located in Latin America, has shared more in common with Venice since its formation in 1951, as it had historically focused on bringing European and United States art to Brazil, before the 1980s when it became a central meeting place for Latin American, and not world wide, Third World artists.

⁷⁶ “Report from Havana: the first biennial of Latin American art.” *Art in America* (December 1984), 41.

broadened the focus and subsequent biennials featured the work of artists from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and ethnic minorities living in the First World, often representing forty to fifty countries.⁷⁷

With a supportive institutional and educational foundation in place, artists of the 1980s worked “without restrictions or impositions, to take advantage of the languages and methodologies developed during the 1960s in the West (especially Conceptual Art), and to be open to the world...”⁷⁸ Artists were receiving information about international art from European, Latin American, and especially North American art magazines, catalogues, and other texts that circulated in short supply within artists’ circles, the National Library, and the small library at ISA. Artist and ISA professor Lázaro Saavedra remembers

the professors were learning about international strategies from art magazines such as *Art in America* and *Art News*, which started arriving at the school in the 1980s. Censorship of this new kind of art was decreasing, and young students were taking those 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.⁷⁹

Moreover artists and scholars from the United States were visiting the island, often as members of delegations, bringing with them texts and first hand information on the arts. Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta was influential on the 1980s Generation. Mendieta, who had emigrated to the United States from Cuba in 1961, as part of “Operation Peter Pan,” returned to Cuba seven

⁷⁷ By the Fourth Havana Biennial in 1991 the event had begun to change—especially following the departure of Mosquera from the curatorial staff—and soon began to resemble the biennial models from which it had set itself apart. The criteria for exhibitors were broadened and well-known international artists were invited to participate.

⁷⁸ Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” 220.

⁷⁹ Betti-Sue Hertz, “Interview with Lázaro Saavedra,” in *1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency Program* (New York: Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts), 46.

times between the years of 1980 and 1983.⁸⁰ During these visits she formed close relationships with many of the artists who participated in “Volume One” and spent time at ISA (Figure 1.9, Mendieta and artists of the 1980s Generation). She brought with her books and information about international art to share with the young artists. In return they introduced her to sites on the island where she produced land art and literally reconnected herself to her birthplace. Most significantly Mendieta exposed many artists to the writings of Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera, whose book *El Monte* (1954) was out of print in Cuba. This text was among the first to document Afro-Cuban traditions and rituals and had a profound impact on the young artists’ work.

Artists working in the early 1980s began to explore their Cuban identity through their conceptual practices, many focusing on African or vernacular aspects of Cuban culture. Thus subsequent production by the “Volume One” artists is often split into two groups: that which explored Afro-Cuban mores, as seen in the work of José Bedia, Ricardo Brey, and Juan Francisco Elso, who were all practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, and that which recontextualized the vernacular or kitsch (called *picuo*), most commonly associated with Garcíandía. Mosquera played a seminal role in categorizing the art of the first half of the 1980s in these two categories. His articles “Africa in the Art of Latin America” and “Bad Taste in Good

⁸⁰ From December 1960 to October 1962, after the Cuban Revolution had been declared socialist, many middle and upper class Cuban families sent their children (ages 6-16) to Miami, under the guardianship of the Catholic diocese, with the intention of joining them as soon as they could leave the country. The United States State Department granted Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, a Catholic priest based in Miami, the authority to approve visa waivers to Cuban children. This came in response to reports that Castro planned to send Cuban youth to the countryside to live and work in state-run facilities in the country where they would be indoctrinated in the Communist ideology and lose their Catholic faith. Olga M. Viso, “The Memory of History,” *Ana Mendieta Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution in association with Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 38-39.

Form” laid the foundation for this discourse.⁸¹ Based on Mosquera’s model, Camnitzer divided his discussion of artists in his text *New Art of Cuba* (1994, reissued 2003) into those focused on Afro-Cubanism, kitsch, nationalism, and the individualists.

Elso combined Afro-Cuban and vernacular forms and materials in the production of his mixed media sculpture *Por América* (For America), 1986 (Figure 1.10). The piece was titled after national hero José Martí’s text “For America,” where he advocated a vision of a unified and peaceful Americas that recognized individuality and difference and respected national, indigenous cultural traditions.⁸² The figure’s face was created to resemble Martí was also a self-portrait of the artist. The sculpture assumed the form of a *santo* (saint) and/or an effigy of Christ, a vernacular form found throughout Latin America. The darts puncturing the figure and the machete it holds were like those found on African power figures—*nkisi* from the kingdom of Kongo. The mud and artist’s blood applied to the surface of the sculpture were similar to the materials found on *Bocio* figures by the Fon in Benin, close to Yoruba and influential in Santería. The blood and mud further referenced *aché* (the Afro-Cuban life force). The materials applied to the surface of the work were done so in a ritualistic way, calling on the artist’s spiritual practice. This sculpture thus reflected on the cultural and spiritual hybridity present on the island. Furthermore it presented Martí and then the artist as martyrs (Elso died of leukemia a couple of years after producing this piece).

Ironically, at the same time Elso and the other abovementioned artists were being lauded, older Afro-Cuban artists, working in more literal tropes and not associated with ISA or

⁸¹ *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 30-38 and *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 54-64, respectively, although both articles have been published in a number of journals. See also “Juan Francisco Elso: Sacralisation and the ‘Other’ Postmodernity in New Cuban Art,” *Third Text* 41 (Winter 1997-98): 75-84.

⁸² Olga Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* (Washington DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in association with Hatje Cantz, 2004), 129.

Conceptualism, were having a much harder time gaining recognition. The members of the Afro-Cuban “cultural movement” Grupo Antillano formed around issues of Afro-Cuba identity and the community’s desire to have a stronger presence in the Havana art scene. Ultimately the group was outshone by the experimental work of the younger artists. By 1983 Grupo Antillano mounted their final exhibition and most of the artists were “virtually written out of contemporary Cuban history.”⁸³

Following their graduation from ISA, the artists who had participated in “Volume One” and their classmates began to teach at ISA or at other art schools on the island. Their progressive approaches to art-making spanned beyond the studio and into the classroom, where they had a profound effect on the pedagogy at ISA, helping to move it away from the Soviet-guided curricula. During the 1983-1984 academic year, ISA shifted to “Plan de Estudios B.” While the department remained divided into the traditional three subcategories (painting, sculpture, and printmaking) the new plan included studio time during the third year of study for the students to pursue expressive exercises.⁸⁴ At this time theory and criticism became a crucial component of the program, mirroring what was happening in art writing and criticism at large on the island.⁸⁵ Because most students entered ISA with strong formal and technical training, emphasis was placed on the formation of conceptual and theoretical projects. Álvarez, who taught aesthetics, recalls her students reading Marcel Duchamp, Gregory Battock [*Idea Art*], Filiberto Meno, Joseph Kosuth, Luis Camnitzer, Umberto Eco, and others.⁸⁶ Therefore, “even when a work is

⁸³ Judith Bettelheim, “Grupo Antillano: A Black Consciousness Movement,” *AfroCuba: Works on Paper, 1968-2003* (San Francisco State University Press, 2005), 37.

⁸⁴ Álvarez, “Memoria de nubes,” 274.

⁸⁵ Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 152.

⁸⁶ Álvarez, “Memoria de nubes,” 275.

found at the opposite pole from Conceptualism, it usually possesses discursive, analytical elements or a reflective dimension: It is an art of ideas, giving rise to the frequent use of texts.”⁸⁷

The artist-professor who had the most profound effect on the pedagogical changes at ISA, and is best known for creating work of *picuo*, was Garciandía, who taught painting from 1980 until he emigrated in 1990. He graduated from ENA in 1973 and enrolled at ISA part-time in the year of its founding, while working as a “specialist in the Division of Fine Arts and Design” at the CNC/Ministry of Culture where he continued to work until 1980.⁸⁸ His artwork questions established artistic canons, along with vernacular, national, and political symbols in order to investigate “a wide spectrum of ethical, aesthetic and socio-political concerns.”⁸⁹ In the 1980s Garciandía began to appropriate work by famous European or Euro American abstract and conceptual painters and “rearticulated modernism’s genealogy of emblems and styles.”⁹⁰ An example is his untitled work from 1988, (Figure 1.11) that juxtaposes the red and black palette and hammer and sickle emblem from Eastern European socialist art to a dripped background reminiscent of U.S. Abstract Expressionist painting. The hammer and sickles are anthropomorphized and hold machetes; silhouettes of tropical plants can be seen throughout the painting. This is one of many of Garciandía’s pieces from the late 1980s/early 1990s that

⁸⁷ Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” 230.

⁸⁸ Garciandía cites his mentor at ENA Antonia Eiriz, who was one of the artists put under fire during the conservative 1970s. He also visited the “accursed professor” Servando Cabrera. In 1974 he met Raúl Martínez who was very influential on him, yet at this time officially viewed as “unfit” because he was homosexual. Garciandía acknowledges that most of his influences were part of the clandestine world and he had to keep his relationships with them hushed to prevent repercussions. Following his graduation from ENA he began his post-graduate social service teaching drawing and painting at the Escuela Provincial de Artes Plásticas de Santa Clara. Catherine Lampert, “A Guy who is Cut in Two Parts,” and Jose Veigas, “Chronology,” in *I Insulted Flavio Garciandía in Havana* (Madrid: Turner Libros, 2009), 346, 358.

⁸⁹ Edward Sullivan, “Flavio Garciandía: Borrowings, Re-creations and Inventions,” in *I Insulted Flavio Garciandía in Havana* (Madrid: Turner Libros, 2009), 123.

⁹⁰ Osvaldo Sánchez, “Flavio Garciandía at the Museum of Tropical Art,” in *I Insulted Flavio Garciandía in Havana* (Madrid: Turner Libros, 2009), 218.

rearticulated socialist symbols; here they are tropicalized, while in others they are sexualized. The socialist symbols are juxtaposed to the drips of Abstract Expressionism, held in the highest regard in the 1950s, except by those who viewed it as a weapon of the Cold War, aggrandized to reveal another form of U.S. freedom in contrast to Soviet driven repression. The incorporation of gold glitter recalls a form of kitsch common to Cuban cultural production, in this case the carnival props from the artist's home town, and is used by Garciandía on numerous occasions. Garciandía's wit, evidenced by this painting, became quite characteristic of the time.

Garciandía self-consciously broke from the academicism that had dominated his artistic training, especially of the late 1970s when Soviet interests dominated. He was keenly aware of international trends in contemporary art, which he cited, noting, "I was always aware that art is not only the local masters; there is a world beyond this world. It was a struggle against localism, the constraint of what it means to be 'local.'"⁹¹ He translated his approach to art-making to the classroom. As explained by Tonel, "Working from the department of painting, Flavio formulated a strategy to convert his own [a]esthetic creed (a mixture of cosmopolitanism, an avidity for information, and critical reception of local culture) into a refined educational practice."⁹²

Garciandía and painter Consuelo Castañeda, with whom he taught, were responsible for broadening the scope of painting as it was taught at ISA. Garciandía prioritized the intellectual approach to art-making and was primarily responsible for the turn to conceptual practices. Castañeda turned to the act of appropriation in her work and "Joseph Kosuth, during his visit to Cuba in 1986 to participate in the Second Havana Biennial, regarded the work of Consuelo Castañeda, based on reappropriations of appropriations from the history of art, as a 'post-

⁹¹ Lampert, "A Guy Who is Cut in Two Parts," 343.

⁹² Tonel, "Tree of Many Beaches: Cuban Art in Motion (1980s-1990s) in *Contemporary Art from Cuba: Irony and Survival on the Utopian Island*, edited by Marilyn A. Zeitlin (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1999), 41.

postmodernism.”⁹³ Most importantly, Garcíandía and Castañeda broadened the scope of the painting department to include performance, process-based work, and installation, although all forms were accepted as long as they communicated a concrete idea.⁹⁴ Subsequently, many students switched to the painting major since it allowed for the most creative freedom.

Garcíandía believed in establishing horizontal relationships between students and teachers. He set a precedent in the classroom by treating his students as equals, alongside whom he worked. This would have a lasting impact on faculty and student relationships at ISA. Garcíandía expanded on his view of the role of art education stating, “In Cuba, the art schools, even with their defects, are designed to form an individual who serves society.”⁹⁵ While he was progressive in his practice, he never shied from his commitment to his students and shaping practices that would inform society.

The most significant article to make its way into the hands of pedagogues at ISA, by way of Garcíandía, and impact the manner in which conceptual art was being “taught” was a 1984 article published in *Artforum* magazine by art historian Thomas McEvilley, “On the Manner of Addressing Clouds.”⁹⁶ In this essay McEvilley traces the history of appropriation in the arts, which was a prominent trend in painting at the time of his writing. In the section “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” McEvilley discusses thirteen different ways meaning is produced in an art object.⁹⁷ While not an exhaustive list, McEvilley found it “essential that we begin to

⁹³ Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” 230.

⁹⁴ Álvarez, “Memoria de nubes,” 275.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Buchloh, “Preface,” in *New Art From Cuba: José Bedia, Flavio Garcíandía, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey* (New York: Amelie Wallace Gallery, SUNY/College at Old Westbury, 1985), 10.

⁹⁶ *Artforum* (Summer 1984): 61-70.

⁹⁷ In June of 1989 Mosquera authored a short piece entitled, “Trece criterios sobre el nuevo arte cubano” (Thirteen Criteria on the New Cuban Art) in *La Gaceta de Cuba*. The format (list) of his essay and the title were reminiscent of McEvilley’s, however, his emphasis was the characteristics of the new Cuban art. Some of the criteria were “The

appreciate the complexity of what we do when we relate to an artwork,” dispelling the notion of a purely formal or Kantian aesthetic experience. He stated, “Content is a complex and demanding event without which no artwork could transpire. It demands our attention since without awareness of these distinctions and levels we do not really know what has happened already in art, and what is happening now for the first time.”⁹⁸ He compares the Alexandrian age to then current post-modernism in the explicit use of appropriation (noting that what is post-modern is not “new” or “unique” as history continues to repeat itself). McEvelley stated that, just as Barthes said, it is not an individual who speaks, but language that speaks through him; the vast image bank of world culture images itself through the individual.⁹⁹ However, within the postmodern use of appropriation “wit functions by a substitution of expectations.”¹⁰⁰ Students and professors were influenced by this article, becoming increasingly conscious of the materials they were working with, works they were citing, scale they were working in, and so on.

Also influential on students and professors at ISA in the 1980s were the artwork, articles, and workshops by Camnitzer. Throughout the 1980s Camnitzer spent a great deal of time in Cuba, among fellow artists. Camnitzer, who had published on the role of art education, brought many of his ideas on the subject to Cuba. He is credited for exposing artists, many of whom were students or faculty at ISA, to conceptual art practices and his theories on art education. This had a lasting effect on artists—both in their personal practices and teaching philosophies. Most of his interactions with artists were informal as he only taught one official workshop at Fototeca in

new Cuban art is Latin American, Third World, and International in natural form, from inside out, “The new Cuban art is the legitimate son of the Cuban Revolution, it is spontaneous, optimistic, happy, anti-rhetorical, full of freshness and enthusiasm.”

⁹⁸ “On the Manner of Addressing Clouds,” 65.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Havana (1989). During these informal meetings he would “demand a rationale for their ‘research,’ what problems [they were] trying to solve, and then look for holes and contradictions.”¹⁰¹ He believes that “art can be taught as a liberating activity, not to create ‘geniuses’ but to form conscious individuals who can affect the socio-cultural complex and generate more conscious individuals.”¹⁰² Therefore he called for an art education that did not only transmit technical skills, but one that helped the student “define what ideas are to be expressed...and what materials might be adequate.”¹⁰³ This could be acquired through questioning, which was precisely how he conducted his encounters with Cuban artists. This intense level of inquiry has been referred to as the “Camnitzer method” by artists who have adapted it for use in their studio classes at ISA.¹⁰⁴

Under the tutelage of Camnitzer, Garciandía, and the “Volume One” artists, painters at ISA broke free of the traditional expectations placed on them. In 1984 five of Garciandía’s students (Adriano Buergo, Ana Albertina Delgado, Ciro Quintana, Saavedra, and Ermy Taño) banded together as Grupo Puré (Group Puree) to produce work that used contemporary forms and media to “express a critical and judgmental view of society and times.”¹⁰⁵ The group turned to postmodern pastiche and appropriation, as had their mentors. Their work was “eclectic, messy, vivid, and immediate, full of games and jokes.”¹⁰⁶ This can be seen in a photograph of their first exhibition that included large messy paintings, each created by individual members of the group

¹⁰¹ Luis Camnitzer, email to author, December 27, 2008.

¹⁰² Luis Camnitzer, “Is Art Education Possible?” *Arte en Columbia* (October-December 1984): 94.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sandra Ramos, interview by author, March 26, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Grupo Puré as quoted by Weiss, *To and From Utopia in New Cuban Art*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Weiss, *To and From Utopia in New Cuban Art*, 48.

(Figure 1.12). Grupo Puré was the first of many groups to form in the middle of the 1980s and believed to be transitional from the “Volume One” generation to the more irreverent practices that mark the latter half of the decade: “Puré’s work opened the way to a more expressly political critique that began about a year or two later, mining the depth charge latent in the registration of Cuban quotidian reality.”¹⁰⁷

As evidenced by the formation of Grupo Puré, the relationship between ISA and the emergence of new artistic practices cannot be overvalued. While this has led to ISAcentrism, and has precluded some artists from receiving due notice simply based on the fact that they did not attend the school, it has at the same time informed many of the most significant artists to emerge since its inception. In 1987 “Plan de Estudios C” was implemented at ISA and accounted for the changes that had already been occurring within the school. As Álvarez outlined, the objectives of the new plan were to maintain the conceptual orientation; to overcome a narrowly defined idea of art and instead open up to all expressive options; to treat artistic pedagogy as an interlocutor, to expand the notion of culture with which the student has dialogue; and to form well-rounded artists who know how to express themselves through the best means possible.¹⁰⁸ The open atmosphere and conceptual slant of the visual arts program paved the way for a number of projects during the latter half of the 1980s, many of which were controversial.

ART AT THE END OF THE 1980S (TESTING THE LIMITS OF REVOLUTIONARY ART)

Between 1986 and 1988 a number of groups formed following Grupo Puré’s lead, and likewise created outrageous projects. One such group was Grupo Provisional (Provisional

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Álvarez, “Memoria de nubes,” 278.

Group), made up of ISA students. Their influences included the Russian revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, Zurich Dada's Cabaret Voltaire, and "punk and *rockero* subcultures."¹⁰⁹ The collective mounted irreverent interventions, often directed at the pretensions of Cuban art institutions. Grupo Provisional's 1988 *Very Good Rauschenberg* (Figure 1.13) took place during Robert Rauschenberg's visit to Havana on the occasion of a large-scale exhibition of his work. During a reception at the museum the artists stormed the auditorium bearing signs that said "Very Good Rauschenberg," which they insisted he autograph. Through this intrusion they mocked both the fanfare mounted for the esteemed North American artist, and the supposed anti-imperialist stance of the Cuban institution.¹¹⁰ This type of performance has come to be referred to as *jodedera*, "a performative extension of the new Cuban art, concerned with public space in the form of a collective being or will."¹¹¹ As a result of such actions Grupo Provisional has been described as "the mischievous ghost in the machine, the undifferentiable substance that seeped into and transformed the whole system of artist-audience-power [in Cuba]."¹¹²

Artist collectives did not only form at ISA. In 1986 young students (between 15 and 18 years old) from the art school 20 de Octubre formed the collective Arte Calle (Street Art). They considered themselves "art terrorists" and often installed or created politically charged work at night in public places, so as not to be caught.¹¹³ In one instance Aldito Menéndez, a member of the group, painted the phrase *Reviva la Revolu* (Revive the Revolu[tion]) on a canvas and

¹⁰⁹ Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 98.

¹¹⁰ Weiss, "Performing Revolution," 128.

¹¹¹ Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 94. The term *jodedera* means to live by your wits, or to do anything to survive (Weiss 275, fn. 43).

¹¹² Weiss, "Performing Revolution," 128.

¹¹³ Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 94.

displayed it on a street alongside a receptacle and a sign asking the public to make contributions to finish the work.¹¹⁴ Arte Calle was also known for disruptive interventions and performances that both critiqued Cuban art institutions and revolutionary rhetoric.

As a result of Grupo Provisional and Arte Calle's transformation of the relationship between the artist, audience, and power in Cuba, collective projects were established that expanded beyond art circles into the community, such as *Proyecto Pílon* (Project Pílon). Between the years 1987 and 1989 artists lived in the small, impoverished town of Pílon for months at a time. Saavedra was there for eight months.¹¹⁵ The objective was to work closely with the town's inhabitants in the production of artwork, to both bring artwork to the neglected hamlet and address serious social issues. The artists first visited for a month to meet the community, learn more about daily life in Pílon, and establish themselves and their project's legitimacy. Together with the community they identified topics that would serve as the base of their project. These were serious themes and included the "contradictions between religions and revolutionary ideology, a distrust toward public institutions, and a lack of understanding of the problems of housing and food distribution."¹¹⁶ The artists then returned to work on their specific projects (Figure 1.14). The artists did not involve the official art institutions in the implementation of their work.¹¹⁷ Therefore this project went beyond the scope of any of the group interventions that involved the public, and is viewed by Weiss as the "most honest collective project."¹¹⁸ While supported by Hart, local party officials terminated the project in 1989.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Mosquera, "The New Cuban Art," 232.

¹¹⁵ Weiss, "Performing Revolution," 143.

¹¹⁶ Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, 197.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Weiss, "Performing Revolution," 142.

Between 1986 and 1989 artistic interventions by collectives became increasingly critical of the art world and Cuban society. Individual artists echoed this sentiment through “humorous” work that was often full of scatological and sexual innuendos as metaphors for the political situation. This was the product of the pedagogy at ISA and a response to the period of Rectification, commenced by Castro in April of 1986. The “process of rectification of errors and negative tendencies” was imagined as “a purification of the Revolution...initially undertaken in order to tighten quality controls and work norms, weed out corrupt administrators, and drive home the work ethic. Cuba was declaring its desire for a Cuban solution to problems arising from the changes taking place in the USSR.”¹²⁰ This came in response to the economic reforms and liberalization of communism associated with *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union. The original objectives of the Cuban Revolution were reiterated and economic reforms were made to position the country as self-sufficient.¹²¹ By the end of the 1980s many of the statutes written during the period of Rectification, under the guise of perfecting the system of art education, went into effect. This included the termination of the elementary level of art

¹¹⁹ Other projects aimed at integrating the arts into other aspects of life were Telearte and Arte en Fábrica (Art in the Factory). Telearte lasted from 1986-1989, overseen by the Ministry, and sent artists to textile factories to design and assist in the production of fabric. The textiles were then exhibited in museums and sold. The project, although short lived, was popular. Tonel, interview by author, September 24, 2008. Arte en Fábrica was initiated in 1983, based on an idea of Garcíandía's, and artists were sent to factories to produce work with available material, normally used for production. The artists collaborated with factory workers in the production of their work. For more information see Camnitzer, “New Art of Cuba,” 116.

¹²⁰ Weiss, “Performing Revolution,” 151.

¹²¹ Cuba's period of Rectification came in response to Soviet reforms including *perestroika* and *glasnost* which broke from their communist leanings. Rather than approving similar changes such as the “introduction of market mechanisms, the restoration of private property, and the adoption of explicit earning differentials based on market values,” they were denounced in Cuba and instead hard line communist rhetoric, reminiscent of the 1960s, was espoused. Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 291.

education.¹²² In response to the social changes implemented during the period of Rectification many artists used their practice to critique the Revolution and reveal its contradictions.

By the end of the decade artistic production took on an even more critical edge, crossing the boundary of what was permissible. This caused a rupture in the relationships between art/artists and institutions. The most notable example came in 1989 when three young artists, working with the National Council for the Plastic Arts, proposed a series of individual exhibitions to showcase many of the practices that emerged in the second half of the 1980s.¹²³ The series was to be installed at the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, a fortress located across the bay from Old Havana. Although the spirit of Rectification purported to support the radical positions many of the artists had taken, this in fact was not the case, and many of the exhibitions that were to be included in this series were censored or shut down. In one case an exhibition featuring the collaborative works of Eduardo Ponjuán and René Francisco Rodríguez, two ISA alumni-cum-professors, was partially censored because two of the works contained the image of Castro. It was not appropriate to use his image in artwork in an ambiguous manner; only political martyrs' images were deemed acceptable when used mimetically in artwork. The proposed exhibition led to the firing of Vice Minister of Culture Marcia Leiseca, who had overseen the emergence of the new Cuban art. In lieu of the exhibition, a group of artists banded together and organized a baseball game in the Círculo Social "José Antonio Echeverría" in Havana. The "performance," now titled *Cuban Art is Dedicated to Baseball* (Figure 1.15), was a symbolic act meant to put

¹²² The Comisión Central de Perfeccionamiento (1985), presided over by Graziella Pogolotti, members of the Ministry of Culture, artists, and others issued a text on August 26, 1986, which addressed changes to art education. The most significant alterations were the termination of the elementary level of art education (which gradually went into effect at the end of the decade) and the formulation of stronger applied art training as professional development. Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte*, 176. Camnitzer explains that primary school teachers had a 5th year of training in aesthetics. This was likely to compensate for this cut. *New Art of Cuba*, 166.

¹²³ The artists responsible were Alexis Somoza, Félix Suazo and Alejandro Aguilera.

forth the idea that if the artists could not produce work, then they would play baseball.¹²⁴ The game also had subtle political underpinnings as a reflection on the censorship experienced at the time. Artist Rubén Torres Llorca was the umpire of the game and deliberately refereed the game in the most arbitrary way possible. Imitating Castro's look by having a beard and wearing a similar cap and glasses he "call[ed] somebody 'out' who was actually safe, and vice versa-so it was the same as how he runs the country."¹²⁵

The following year, 1990, during the opening of an exhibition the "Sculpted Object," artist Angel Delgado defecated on a copy of the official Cuban newspaper, *Granma*, leading to his arrest and imprisonment for six months, and the removal of Beatriz Aulet and the newly minted Visual Art Development Center she directed. Thus the decade most celebrated for the creation of a new art in Cuba extended itself beyond acceptable means, causing for it to end on a dark note.

Cuban art abroad, however, was experiencing a different fate. Following his visit to the 1989 Havana Biennial, Jürgen Harten, director of the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, began to organize an exhibition of recent Cuban art. The exhibition "Kuba O.K.," co-curated by Tonel, brought contemporary Cuban art to a German audience. Chocolate mogul and art collector Peter Ludwig attended the exhibition and subsequently bought two-thirds of the artwork on view. He would subsequently travel to Cuba regularly to purchase work.¹²⁶ Cuban art was becoming increasingly disseminated and collected abroad, unlike the persecution it faced at home. This propelled art into the following decade, marked by a mass emigration of artists, who took advantage of their

¹²⁴ Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, "Art of Negotiation and the Space of the Game," in *Cuba siglo XX: modernidad y sincretismo* (Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno; Barcelona: Fundació "La Caixa"; Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, 1995.), 386.

¹²⁵ Rubén Torre-Llorca, "Interview with Juan Martínez," cited in Weiss, *To and From Utopia in New Cuban Art*, 79.

¹²⁶ Camnitzer, *The Multiple Expressions of Identity in New Cuban Art*, n.p.

success and economic opportunities abroad, and evolution of a younger generation including Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros, influenced by their predecessors, art education, and the socio-economic instability that resulted from the onset of the Special Period.

CHAPTER TWO

ARTISTIC FORMATION DURING THE SPECIAL PERIOD: FOUNDATIONAL YEARS AT ISA AND EARLY WORKS

Because Cuban art does not pause, our system of artistic education guarantees its continuation through a legion of new authors; each year it qualifies the emergence of young talent, and by its remarkable vigor, in the brief term of three years has managed to reorient itself in the artistic-cultural plane, considering the circumstances of a priori inherited from the previous period.¹

-Madelín Izquierdo, 1994

As ISA professor of aesthetics Madelín Izquierdo stated in 1994, “the system of art education guarantees the continuation [of Cuban art],” which held true even during the most troubled times. In the early 1990s it ensured that young artists would continue to study and practice art in light of the rise of the Special Period and artistic diaspora that involved most of the protagonists of the 1980s Generation. Although Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros rose to international prominence following the 1994 Havana Biennial, in this chapter I trace the artists’ formative years, and carefully consider their early and under-documented student work from the years prior.²

Just as art historian Howard Singerman studied Master of Fine Arts programs in the United States looking at “the institutional formation of artists as a way to understand recent art,”

¹ “Las razones del poder y el poder de las razones,” in *Antología de Textos Críticos: El Nuevo Arte Cubano*, ed. Magdaly Espinosa and Kevin Power (Santa Monica: Perceval Press, 2006), 106.

² In 1999 Eugenio Valdés Figueroa commented on the shortage of information about artistic production between the years of 1989 to 1994, “On repeated occasions I have commented with some Cuban artists and critics about the deficiency of precise information on the quinquennium that exists between 1989 and 1994. Sometimes the vagueness of the data that we received about that period in the panorama of the plastic arts within the island is so, that only the resume, some or another catalogue (usually folding) and some images of work from that time (when they have not been lost, leaving the dossiers of the artists incomplete) offer us modest testimonies and the legacy of a crossword plagued by empty space for the future labor of historians.” “Hablando por si mismo: Haciendo memoria desde un interior habanero,” *Arte Cubano* 2 (1999), 64. The purpose of this chapter is to help fill in part of the gap Valdés Figueroa identified a decade ago, which still persists to this day.

in this chapter I too turn to the educational foundation of the artists' practices to help understand their work.³ I look at the institutions that were decisive in their formation, the (art) history they inherited, and revolutionary ideas about art. Concurring with Singerman that schools and pedagogues transmit particular ideologies through the "representations, values, and beliefs woven in and out of course assignments, studio critiques, and modeled roles," my study of the challenges to and perseverance of the pedagogy at ISA when the artists attended is crucial to understanding the formation of these artists' careers and rise of the 1990s Generation that thrived despite great hardships.⁴ During the most critical years of the Special Period (roughly 1990-1993) these artists and their mentors re-envisioned the role of art and art education in a country enduring harsh social and economic conditions, and used their practices to analyze the changes occurring around them.

I begin with a brief examination of the socio-economic crisis of the Special Period before turning to a study of ISA amidst the socio-economic turmoil. This period of the school's history (late 1980s-early 1990s), when artist-students and their mentors developed novel pedagogies, correlates to the evolution of Bruguera's, Garaicoa's, and Los Carpinteros' practices. The influence of the esteemed institution and its faculty on the artists is revealed through an examination of the artists' student work. Finally, the noteworthy exhibition "Las metáforas del templo" (Metaphors of the Temple), organized by Garaicoa and ISA classmate Esterio Segura in 1993, illuminates the work of the 1990s Generation and its relationship with ISA.

³ Howard Singerman, *Arts Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), 5. Singerman took cues from Ernst Gombrich who recommended that a "study of the metaphysics of art should always be supplemented by an analysis of its practice, notably the practice of teaching."

⁴ Ibid. Bruguera attended ISA from 1987-1992, Garaicoa attended ISA from 1989-1994, Alexandre Arrechea attended ISA from 1989-1994, Marco Castillo attended ISA from 1990-1995, and Dagoberto Rodríguez attended ISA from 1989-1994.

This chapter includes a discussion of the artistic and pedagogical influences on the aforementioned artists' work from their years at ISA. I expose the similarities shared by such seemingly distinct artists and show that these commonalities: decentering their role as artist, using the clever strategies of ambiguity or double entendres, and acting as an "archeologist" to uncover Cuba's past, reflect the issues of exile and loss, the city in ruins, and material scarcity specific to the socio-economic situation of the Special Period. I identify these aesthetics as evolving from the specific conditions of the Special Period and argue in future chapters that even as the artists became actively involved in the global art world, their work still denoted concerns specific to Cuba in the final decade of the twentieth century, and can help historicize this critical decade in Cuban history.

BACKGROUND

Special Period in a Time of Peace

Cuba had been closely tied to the Soviet Bloc Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), which accounted for nearly 85 percent of Cuban trade, following the United States' imposition of an economic blockade with Cuba.⁵ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, Cuba was unable to import necessary goods or export goods produced on the island.⁶ Soviet oil imports decreased by almost ninety percent, shipments of consumer goods, grains, and foodstuff declined and imports of raw materials and spare parts essential for Cuban industry ceased.⁷ Between 1990 and 1994 the Cuban economy declined by thirty-five percent.

⁵ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 292-293.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Although free social services (health care and education) continued “their quality was inevitably affected by the lack of resources.”⁸ As a result, the government imposed rationing and cutbacks in an attempt for society to subsist on the limited goods, supplies, and foodstuffs. The minimal amounts of gasoline and fuel oil available curtailed public transportation (bus and train routes were scaled back forty percent and taxi service was diminished). The shortages of oil also caused regular blackouts lasting eight or more hours (this made it difficult to preserve and cook what little food there was, and the lack of radio and television precluded the few forms of entertainment that remained). Over half of Cuba’s factories suspended operations (due to shortages of fuel and parts), and with the lack of imports, there was a greater dearth of goods. Approximately 200 consumer goods were rationed and all food was scarce. Agricultural production was impacted by the lack of fertilizer, animal feed, and machinery. Livestock, poultry, and pig production fell by over two-thirds and milk and egg production declined. Agricultural commodities fell sharply; the sugar harvest in 1993 amounted in less than half of what it had been during the 1980s.⁹ Construction was stopped for a lack of building supplies. The scarcity and halt of production and construction left the island resembling one that had been ravaged by war.

Contributing to the crisis on the island was increased hostility from the United States. In October of 1992 President Bush enacted the Torricelli Act, also known as the Cuba Democracy Act, that strengthened the economic blockade. Subsidiaries of U.S. companies operating in third countries were prohibited from investing in or trading with Cuba. Additionally, ships that entered

⁸ Harold Dilla Alfonso, “The Changing Scenarios of Governability,” *Boundary 2* (Fall 2002): 59. Dilla continues to explain that the first five years of the Special Period were the most difficult economically, but the most open politically, which proved beneficial to the artistic practices that emerged.

⁹ Harsh weather conditions contributed to decreased agricultural production and the overall suffering on the island. In March of 1993 a storm caused over a billion dollars worth of damage.

Cuban waters were denied access to the United States for at least six months and the U.S. government could withhold economic assistance with any country that provided aid to Cuba. The Torricelli Act made it more difficult for Cuba to import medication and foodstuffs, which had accounted for ninety percent of Cuba's trade with foreign subsidiaries.¹⁰ Furthermore, the act prohibited Cuba's ability to build new foreign economic relationships with many countries.

The severe rationing and scarcity had a traumatic effect on the majority of Cubans and "life settled into a grim and unremitting cycle of scarcity, in which shortage beget shortage and where some of the most basic daily needs of daily life in their more ordinary and commonplace form could be satisfied only by Herculean efforts."¹¹ Hunger and many other needs left Cubans with no other option than to participate in the black market.¹² Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost and many Cubans resigned themselves "to a condition of anticipation: waiting for change, waiting for something to happen, waiting for some sign to indicate how they would live the rest of their lives."¹³ Desperation also led to an increase in crime, especially in the form of petty theft. Drug use rose among youth, and the number of abortions and suicides increased. Religion resurfaced as many turned to their faith to guide them through the adversity. In turn, the government renounced atheism as the official creed.¹⁴ The early years of the Special Period are

¹⁰ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 299.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹² The black market has existed in Cuba since the early sixties and has consistently been a significant resource for the procurement of goods and services. Goods that generally enter the black market are either homemade, leftover from rations, from private farms, goods purchased in dollar stores by those with access (foreigners), brought from abroad, or diverted from official systems of distribution. Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Cuba's Second Economy: From Behind the Scenes to Center Stage* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1995), 100. The black market has consistently served as the mean for acquiring hard to get household, construction, and automotive items, however, during the Special Period most goods and food had to be secured this way.

¹³ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 294.

¹⁴ The Cuban constitution was amended in 1992 to provide for freedom on religion. Article 55 now reads: "The State, that recognizes, respects, and guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion, also recognizes, respects,

often referred to as apocalyptic, as the streets were dark and void of automobiles and basic necessities were obsolete.¹⁵

During this period of great scarcity Cubans had to be more resourceful and inventive than ever before in order to meet everyday needs. To keep household, factory, and automotive equipment running, and to repair damaged goods, new uses were found for extant materials. Thus many unusual items circulated on the black market that had been determined useful in new capacities. This ingenuity also penetrated the artistic realm where artists and instructors at art schools worked with what little supplies they could obtain. The scarcity and absence of goods and supplies were reflected not only in artists' use of atypical materials, but also in the subject matter of their work, which brought light to the serious conditions of absence and loss that permeated the psyche of most Cubans.

Cuban Art and Art Education at the Start of the Special Period

At ISA, the halcyon years of the 1980s have been mythologized in terms of the energy and spirit of collaboration. Artists studying and teaching at the time remember these years nostalgically. Artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, who studied at ISA from 1980-1985, and taught there for a year, reminisced that as students at ISA, she and her cohort were “hungry people” who wanted to “consume” as much information as they could.¹⁶ This sense of urgency translated into energy; as artists they wanted to produce work that would make a social

and guarantees the freedom of every citizen to change religious beliefs or not to have any, and to profess, within the confines of the law, the religious worship of his/her preference. The law regulates the relationship of the State with religious institutions.” Virginia Commonwealth University, *Handbook on Religious Liberty Around the World*, <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/rihand/Cuba.html>, accessed January 12, 2013.

¹⁵ Pérez stated the Special Period “evoked signs of an apocalyptic premonition.” *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 295.

¹⁶ Interview by author, February 12, 2009.

difference. By the latter half of the decade this vigor led to the production of socially driven artwork that was considered too radical. Artists were overtly critical of the institutions of art and the process of Rectification. These years saw a rupture in the harmony between art institutions and artists when social critique exceeded what was officially considered permissible, artworks were censored, and various art administrators were removed and artists were imprisoned.

For many artists associated with the 1980s the decade ended on a different note from how it began. The daily struggle of life on the island was overshadowed by the incipient international interest in the new Cuban art whereby many artists were lured by better artistic and economic opportunities abroad. This provoked an artistic diaspora that reached its climax in the early 1990s.¹⁷ The loss of artists, many of whom were also teachers on the island, caused a crisis in the arts and art education. Many of the artists who assumed teaching positions at ISA left them abruptly when better positions presented themselves, or as the conditions became intolerable:

Strained by censorship, over-sensitiveness, and unresolved debates on art and politics, relationships between artists and institutions became precarious. Artists were confronted with a depressed cultural space, in which subsidies were scarce and openness was discouraged, as well as a community of hostile-to-indifferent émigré colleagues whose migration taxed the artistic environment in Cuba.¹⁸

The artistic climate at the turn of the decade (c. 1990) was affected by censorship, material scarcity, and emigration.

¹⁷ Gerardo Mosquera, "The Infinite Island: Introduction to New Cuban Art," in *Contemporary Art from Cuba: Irony and Survival on the Utopian Island*, ed. Marilyn A. Zeitlin (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1999), 28. While the artistic diaspora reached a climax at this time, artists have continuously left the island throughout the years for artistic, ideological, and economic reasons. By the beginning of 1991 Camnitzer had noted the following artists had emigrated: Ruben Torres Llorca, Leandro Soto, Gustavo Pérez Monzón, Consuelo Castañeda, and Segundo Planes to Mexico; María Magdalena Campos [Pons] to Canada/U.S.; Flavio Garcíandía and Marta María Pérez Bravo to Germany [then Mexico]; Ricardo Rodríguez Brey to Belgium; Tomás Esson, Dania del Sol, Ciro Quintana, and Alejandro Aguilera to the United States. Glexis Nova and Carlos Rodríguez Cárdenas were traveling between Mexico, Europe, and the United States. *New Art of Cuba*, 323. Within the subsequent years additional artists left including José Bedía.

¹⁸ Tonel, "A Tree from Many Shores: Cuban Art in Movement," 65.

There were artist-professors who remained on the island and tried to sustain the sort of rigorous program at ISA that had proven so successful in the previous decade. These professors helped shape the following generation, and especially the artists focused on in this study. They include professors of contemporary aesthetics and theory Álvarez, Izquierdo, and Magadaly Espinosa, as well as artist-collaborators Ponjuán and René Francisco Rodríguez (René Francisco), who began teaching printmaking and then painting in the late 1980s.¹⁹ Additions to the faculty in the early 1990s included artists José Toirac (1990), Saavedra (1992) and Bruguera (1992). Many of these artists established their own teaching methods to cope with the socio-economic changes of the early Special Period (1990-1994). They looked to the methods and techniques used by practitioners of *Arte Povera* (Poor Art) in Italy, which inspired new uses for extant materials and debris, which while not new in Cuba, became a necessity referred to as *inventando* (inventing new uses for extant materials).²⁰

The conceptual and multifaceted approaches to art-making derived from McEvilley's article and Camnitzer's and Garcíandía's pedagogies, as discussed in the previous chapter, continued to impact ISA's pedagogy, now for more pragmatic reasons—and they inspired the development of new activities and assignments. Sánchez, who taught art history at ISA from 1988-1990, collaborated with Garcíandía to develop a series of activities for the creation of artwork, “Diez ejercicios cínicos para un pintor escéptico” (Ten Cynical Exercises for a

¹⁹ There were a number of other professors at ISA, many of who had been there since the schools inception. The professors mentioned here are salient to this text.

²⁰ Looking to *Arte Povera* was not new in the 1990s. In the 1980s many Cuban artists looked to practitioners of Italian *Arte Povera*. In the early part of the decade there was a sort of “ennoblement” attached to working with organic and found materials (i.e. Juan Francisco Elso, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey, and José Bedia), while toward the end of the decade it became more “squalid.” Rachel Weiss, “Performing Revolution,” 123. By the end of the decade the use of poor materials was in part the prerogative of the artists and a result of the impending economic disaster when fine art materials were hard to come by.

Skeptical Painter), inspired by McEvelley's article.²¹ The ten propositions included guidelines for the production of artwork such as the reconstruction of a work from the Cuban vanguard of the 1980s; the fetishization of an everyday object, turning it into a readymade; the manipulation of a means of diffusion (video, radio, periodical) for the dispersion of a fictitious fact; the conversion of a cultural symbol into an emblem; the manipulation of the performative "aura" of an artistic activity in favor of a ritual; the manipulation of one's own artistic personality (modern ego) and of one's own proposal by means of a automythification of a self-critical character; and the corruption of the hierarchies of a cultured work of art, privileging its decor.²² Students were encouraged to experiment with what had been done before, both in Cuba and abroad, and to look to their surroundings and the quotidian to help define their practice. They were to question and challenge artistic priorities including originality and authorship.²³ This was in part reflective of ingenuity and in part pragmatic. Sánchez and Garcíandía's activity took on a life of its own, even after they emigrated, and continued to inspire students as evident in the student work of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros.

TANIA BRUGUERA

Bruguera began her formal artistic training in Havana at age twelve at the middle school 20 de Octubre (1980-1983), and continued on to San Alejandro Academy (1983-1987), and then ISA (1987-1992). As the daughter of a Cuban Ambassador, Bruguera developed an interest in

²¹ While Sánchez is often named the sole author of these exercises, Hortensia Peramo noted that he wrote the activity along with Garcíandía. Email to author, July 4, 2009.

²² All ten exercises are included in Yurima Calero Fuente, Tesis de Maestría, Anexo 6. Universidad de la Habana. Peramo, email to author, July 4, 2009.

²³ Álvarez, "Memoria de nubes," 279.

politics and power structures, having been exposed to political upheavals in Lebanon and Panama as a child. Her interest manifested itself in the artwork she produced as a student, her role in student politics, and would continue to develop after graduation, informing her very critical artistic practice. I argue her project, “Homenaje a Ana Mendieta” (Homage to Ana Mendieta; 1986-1996), which served as her thesis project at ISA (1992), exposes the development of her practice imprinted by the socio-political conditions of the Special Period and pedagogy at ISA, reflecting on exile and loss, the ephemerality of art and life, and the decentering of the artist.

Educational Setting

At 20 de Octubre, Bruguera studied under Elso, who had a profound impact on her artistic practice and later her artistic pedagogy. As evidenced in the previous chapter, Elso found inspiration in indigenous- and African-based cultural practices and Marxism and produced artwork that was both ritualistic and political in content. He encouraged his students to work with a variety of resources, including those not common to fine art practices, and taught them how to “charge” organic and found materials, as he had, so that their artworks were imbued with a greater meaning than could be seen. Overall, Elso was very pragmatic and wanted his students to meld their practice with their life.²⁴ Bruguera, from an early age, turned to ephemeral materials and explored political themes through a practice that was both ritualistic and pragmatic. Elso’s belief that “art can just be an expression of yourself, not something to be collected” resonated

²⁴ Tania Bruguera, interview by author, March 17, 2009.

with Bruguera and inspired her to experiment with performance and other non-object based media.²⁵

Following her education at 20 de Octubre, Bruguera studied printmaking at the San Alejandro Academy. Her predilection for this medium was connected to the lessons she learned from Elso, that printmaking need not be a precious or a unique art form, but rather more democratic and ephemeral. At San Alejandro, Bruguera worked alongside a group of irreverent students who were channeling the antagonistic energy that permeated the arts at the time (mid-1980s).²⁶ She applied this energy to her commitment to school politics, which she eventually had to forgo once it impacted her productivity. At this time Bruguera met many of the artists now associated with the 1980s Generation, some of whom she collaborated with in a multidisciplinary group, led by then-ISA professor Helmo Hernández. She was also influenced by artists Garcíandía, Glexis Novoa, Saavedra, and José Ángel Toirac known for their conceptual orientation, experimentation in new media, politicized practices, and critical tone.²⁷ Bruguera's practice evolved as an agglomeration of the mystical and ritualistic influence of Elso and the conceptual and political work of Garcíandía, et al.

Bruguera witnessed firsthand the energy and outpouring of artistic production of the 1980s Generation, and eagerly entered ISA in 1987 awaiting her opportunity to participate in the heated debates and production of caustic work. However, her first few years at ISA were full of disappointments: teachers emigrated from the island and the country's economy spiraled downward. Bruguera had entered ISA as a printmaker, but transferred to the painting department

²⁵ Sarah Bayliss, "Putting on the Lamb," *Art News* 103 (October 2004): 167.

²⁶ Bruguera, interview by author, March 17, 2009.

²⁷ RoseLee Goldberg and Tania Bruguera, "Interview II," *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 29.

in her second year. She was drawn to the conceptual orientation of the program under the direction of Garciandía, who, with Castañeda, encouraged experimentation with various media and the exploration of socio-political concerns.²⁸ Castañeda became extremely influential on Bruguera, especially after Garciandía emigrated.

Castañeda's practice entailed appropriating images from art history, which she collaged together in large-scale paintings and mixed media works. Mosquera has explained the use of appropriation by Cuban artists as a "transgressive strategy performed from positions of dependency, which are very frequent in Latin America because of its own heterogeneous multiplicity. In addition to confiscating whatever it wishes for its own use, appropriation functions as a questioning of the canons and the authority of the central paradigms."²⁹ Appropriation allowed for artists such as Castañeda and Bruguera to question and challenge "canons and central paradigms" thus mounting veiled social and political critiques. Castañeda influenced Bruguera by exposing her to the relationship an artist can have with his or her historical past, including all of art history.³⁰ Bruguera learned that relevant current issues could be addressed through reinterpreting artwork produced by other artists. Additionally, Sánchez was Bruguera's art history instructor at San Alejandro and ISA and encouraged her to recreate the

²⁸ Bruguera, interview by author, March 18, 2009.

²⁹ "The New Cuban Art," 231. He continues... "As Nelly Richard points out, the authoritarian and colonizing premises are thus thrown off balance, with the artist reelaborating meanings and 'deforming...the original (and at least, questioning the dogma of its perfection), dealing in reproductions and degenerating versions in the parodic trance of the copy.' It is not only a material of dismantling totalizations in the postmodern spirit since, in addition, it brings with it the anti-Eurocentric deconstruction of the self-referential nature of the dominant models and, by extension, the deconstruction of any cultural model."

³⁰ Bruguera, interview by author, March 18, 2009.

work of others, especially Cuban artists working in the 1980s, through his activities “Ten Cynical Exercises for a Skeptical Painter.”³¹

Bruguera graduated from ISA in 1992, yet she does not attribute her success to the education she received. I contend that under the tutelage of Castañeda, who served as her mentor in the painting department, and support of Mosquera, who served as a tutor on her thesis project, she managed to develop a very sophisticated project, “Homage to Ana Mendieta.”³² This project allowed her to confront the issue of loss connected to the disappearance of the intellectual artistic community, the loss of her mentor Elso (who died from leukemia in 1988), and the material scarcity precipitated by the Special Period. The work also formed the foundation for her practice that would continue to draw on ephemeral materials, ritual, performance, and self-sacrifice to address personal and political concerns.

“Homage to Ana Mendieta”

Prior to entering ISA, Bruguera had begun conceiving “Homage to Ana Mendieta,” which she continued to work on for a decade (1986-1996). The issues of loss and emigration addressed by the work became increasingly relevant throughout the duration of the project following the rise in the emigration of artists and the onset of the Special Period. For this series Bruguera appropriated and recreated artwork by Cuban-American artist Mendieta. Bruguera had never met Mendieta but had learned about her through catalogue entries, stories from Cuban

³¹ Tania Bruguera, Skype instant message conversation with author, January 16, 2008.

³² Castañeda was Bruguera’s thesis advisor, although she emigrated before the defense. Mosquera is named as Bruguera’s thesis advisor in her filed statement.

artists who knew her, and an exhibition of her work displayed as part of a conference in 1986.³³ It was at this conference that Bruguera first heard about Mendieta's untimely death and was deeply affected by the news.³⁴ She wanted to honor the late Cuban-born artist and metaphorically bring her back:

It seemed unjust that such a powerful body of art should be left incomplete...I wanted to make an homage...I imagined I that I could eliminate the idea of her death if her artwork could continue...³⁵

As a result she wanted to resurrect Mendieta and integrate her and her work into the Cuban cultural realm that was largely unaware of her.³⁶

To Bruguera, Mendieta became a metaphor for the urgent question dominating the consciousness of the period, "can you belong without being there?"³⁷ She stood in for the issue of emigration that was devastating the art community on the island, and society more broadly. In 1961, Mendieta, twelve years old was relocated from Cuba to Florida, and then to Iowa, as part of "Operation Peter Pan." In Iowa, Mendieta suffered feelings of displacement and abandonment, and struggled to live a bi-national life.³⁸ Within her work Mendieta explored what it meant to be a child of Peter Pan: a Cuban woman raised in exile in the United States. She attended an innovative art program, Intermedia, at the University of Iowa (B.A. 1969, M.F.A.

³³ The conference was entitled "Por Encima del Bloqueo, Donación de Artes Plásticas Norteamericanas al Pueblo de Cuba" (Above the Blockade, Donation of North American Plastic Art to the Pueblo of Cuba) held at Casa de la Obra Pía, Havana Cuba, on the occasion of an exhibition from November 26, 1986-January 18, 1987.

³⁴ In September 1985, the artist fell to her death from her 34th floor balcony in Manhattan.

³⁵ Tania Bruguera, "Postwar Memories," in *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys In and Out of Exile*, ed. Maria de los Angeles Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 169.

³⁶ While artists associated with the 1980s Generation knew Mendieta and her work, she had otherwise been largely unknown on the island.

³⁷ Bruguera, "Postwar Memories," 170.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

1972) that prioritized the media of performance and new technologies, and following her graduation she began creating “Siluetas” (silhouettes) (1973-1980). These artworks entailed her laying her naked body, or outlining its contours, in a chosen landscape, so as to become one with the land, metaphorically connecting her to her origins. The “Siluetas” were created by Mendieta to aid in easing her pain of exile. For example Mendieta created the “Silueta” *Image from Yagul*, 1973 (Figure 2.1) in Mexico at a pre-Columbian site to reconnect her body to land affiliated with her Latin American heritage.³⁹

Between the years of 1980 and 1983 Mendieta returned to Cuba to bring artists and scholars from the U.S. to Cuba and reconnect with her motherland, which entailed the production of *Rupestrian Sculptures* (1981) in the caves of Jaruco, Cuba (Figure 2.2).⁴⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Cuba Mendieta met many young artists, with whom she shared information about international artistic practices and to whom she gave art catalogues and magazines unavailable on the island. Mendieta was the only Cuban-born artist living in the United States granted permission to travel between the two countries, a privilege that Bruguera would later share. Significantly, this status allowed Mendieta to “work and exhibit in Cuba, defying the tensions on both sides that hinder[ed] Cuban unity inside and outside the island, dividing [Cubans] according to a bipolar scheme that only serve[d] to perpetuate the status quo.”⁴¹ This flexibility allowed her to maintain friendships with her peers on the island, including Elso.⁴²

³⁹ Mendieta’s work, such as *Image from Yagul*, has been classified as an earthwork, performance, and body work and has been analyzed in terms of its connection to essentialist feminism and goddess theory, an interest in the universal (in accordance with Jungian philosophy and Claude Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism), and for its connection to absence and loss, especially the works that reference or were produced in Cuba.

⁴⁰ For more information see Olga Viso, *Unseen Mendieta* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2008), 229-232.

⁴¹ Mosquera, “Reanimating Ana Mendieta,” 55.

⁴² Tania Bruguera, “Homenaje a Ana Mendieta” (M.A. Thesis, Instituto Superior del Art, Havana, 1992), 14.

Mendieta and Elso shared an interest in indigenous and Afro-Cuban spirituality and rituals. By creating a tribute to Mendieta, Bruguera also honored her late mentor, Elso, and contended with the issues of exile and loss more broadly.

Bruguera's "Homage to Ana Mendieta" originally consisted of recreations of Mendieta's works that she discovered in the 1987 *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective* exhibition catalogue from the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City.⁴³ The pieces that Bruguera appropriated led her to work in various media including photography, performance, and sculpture. Among the sculptures Bruguera reproduced were *Nile Born* (Figure 2.3) and *Untitled* (Figure 2.4), originally created by Mendieta in 1984. These flat floor sculptures of corporeal forms by Mendieta were similar to her "Siluetas," yet they were no longer in the form of her body; they took on "bulbous and vulvular" forms suggestive ancient goddess images from different cultures.⁴⁴ Mendieta had produced these works from soil to which she combined materials charged with personal significance, such as sand she collected in Cuba.⁴⁵ Bruguera reproduced these sculptures (Figure 2.5) also using organic materials she gathered in Havana, that she charged, in the spirit of Mendieta and Elso. Her use of land further referenced the notion of *patria* (mother country) making the work patriotic and political.⁴⁶ Bruguera did not chose to recreate these works by Mendieta for their affiliation with goddesses, as she was not interested in essentialist feminism;

⁴³ Petra Barreras del Rio and John Perreault, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987). Bruguera's project grew over the decade as she was exposed to more of Mendieta's work and additional exhibition catalogues.

⁴⁴ Viso, *Unseen Mendieta*, 201.

⁴⁵ Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*, 118.

⁴⁶ The use of soil in the production of work would resurge during a performance by Bruguera in 1997, *The Burden of Guilt*, discussed in Chapter Four.

rather they were selected from a limited number of sculptures featured in the 1987 New Museum catalogue.⁴⁷

Bruguera viewed her role in the (re)production of Mendieta's works as an archeologist, uncovering and recreating the work of another artist.⁴⁸ Her project served as a cultural gesture, fulfilling her desire to not only resurrect the memory of the late artist but to also bring back "actions" and "gestures" from the history of art, and not only the production of objects.⁴⁹ One of the gestures Bruguera recreated from the photographic documentation found in the New Museum catalogue was Mendieta's *Rastros corporales* (Body Tracks), 1982 (Figure 2.6). In Mendieta's performance she "painted" with her body, using her arms as the paintbrush, which she dipped in red tempera and animal blood and proceeded to drag down a piece of white paper affixed to the wall. She repeated the action three times, on three pieces of paper, leaving behind the "tracks" of her gesture. Mendieta used blood for its organic life-giving properties, and connections to *aché* and the *oricha* (goddess) *Ochún* associated with female sexuality, believed to control rivers and blood. Bruguera shared the interest in organic and ephemeral materials and processes, especially as they related to Afro-Cuban beliefs and practices.⁵⁰ In 1988, Bruguera reenacted *Body Tracks*

⁴⁷ There is an additional sculpture present in the photo documentation of Bruguera's project (Figure 4, on the left) and it is unknown whether this work was created as an imagined collaboration between the two artists, as it is reminiscent, and not an exact replica, of a photograph of Mendieta's cave carving *Rupestrian Sculpture* featured in the 1987 catalogue.

⁴⁸ Bruguera, *Postwar Memories*, 171.

⁴⁹ Yuneikys Villalonga, "Tania Bruguera: Her Place and Her Moment," in *Linda Abdul/Tania Bruguera: Now, Here, Over There* (Metz: Fonds Régional d'art Contemporain de Lorraine, 2006), 80.

⁵⁰ Bruguera's interest in the Afro-Cuban stems from Elso and artists of the 1980s who were exploring Afro-Cuban themes, along with a general interest common to Cubans. There is also a direct correlation between Bruguera's sensitivity to the Cuban diaspora and the African diaspora that had brought many Africans to Cuba. However, unlike Elso and others, Bruguera herself was not a practitioner of an Afro-Cuban religion.

at Fototeca in Havana during the opening of a group exhibition (Figures 2.7 and 2.8).⁵¹ This reenactment metaphorically brought back Mendieta, reconnecting her and her work to Cuba, and was Bruguera's earliest foray into performance art, which she would further explore in later years.

Bruguera's tribute to Mendieta served as her thesis project at ISA (1992) that consisted of an exhibition, "Ana Mendieta—Tania Bruguera," at the Center for the Development of Visual Arts in Old Havana (Figure 2.9, catalogue cover) and an essay. For this exhibition Bruguera exhibited reproductions of Mendieta's work. These included recreations of a selection of earthworks and silhouettes, such as *Nile Born* (Figure 2.3) and *Untitled* (Figure 2.4), as well as black and white photographs of Mendieta's earthworks, rephotographed from the New Museum catalogue and reprinted in their original size. Also on view was *Sin título* (Untitled), 1992 (Figure 2.10), appropriated from Mendieta's *Ñañigo Burial* of 1976 (Figures 2.11 and 2.12) that comprised black candlesticks affixed vertically on the floor in the shape of a body. The candles were lit and as they melted they formed a new silhouette. The term *Ñañigo* in the title was a reference to the Abakuá (all-male Cuban secret society of African origin) and the candles were reminiscent of those lit during Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico, and elsewhere, to honor the deceased. This work resonated with Bruguera as it called on familiar rituals and allowed her to create a memorial dedicated to the late artists.⁵²

Bruguera also produced new works, based on Mendieta's, to suggest collaborations between herself and Mendieta. For one series of drawings Bruguera took inspiration from

⁵¹ The exhibition "No por mucho madrugar amanece mas temprano" was curated by artist Rubén Torres Llorca. Bruguera reenacted part of the gesture on the cover of her thesis exhibition catalogue as seen in Figure 2.9.

⁵² In addition to recreations of Mendieta's work, Bruguera created an installation that contained a fragment of a work by Elso. Bruguera's thesis exhibition thus included work that directly cited from work by both artists. Tania Bruguera, "Ana Mendieta: Tania Bruguera" (Hand printed exhibition catalogue, Havana, 1992).

Mendieta's sculptures of tree trunks that had been bifurcated vertically, carved and burnt with organic shapes (Figure 2.13). Bruguera drew smaller scale, slightly altered versions of the sculptures in ink on paper (Figure 2.14).⁵³ She continued to produce Mendieta's works posthumously, in attempt to keep the artist, or at least her spirit, alive.

Following Bruguera's thesis defense, a debate ensued regarding the issue of authorship and whose work was on view—Bruguera's or Mendieta's.⁵⁴ By using the formal strategy of appropriation, common to Cuban (and international) artistic practices of the 1980s, Bruguera chose to forgo her own artistic personality and to (re)produce Mendieta's work. Bruguera's rejection of the traditional role of the independent artist followed in the footsteps of her predecessors, many of who worked collaboratively and irreverently. However, Bruguera reimagined what it could mean to produce work collectively given the changing circumstances of the Special Period. Following the rupture between art institutions and artists in the late 1980s, and because there was such great suffering on the island, artists in Havana began using more subtle methods to mount social and political critiques in their work. By turning to the strategy of appropriation, lauded at ISA, which functions in the absence of an original, Bruguera drew attention to the absence and loss that marked this period.

Bruguera not only repeatedly reproduced Mendieta's work, but her ritualistic and personal artistic process as well, which had also influenced Elso.⁵⁵ Her appropriation and recreation of the late artists' work pushed beyond the more common photomechanical reproduction that characterized much of the work in appropriation from the 1980s. Through what

⁵³ While these works were not included in Bruguera's thesis exhibition, no documentation of the two pieces imagined as collaborations between the two artists exists. Therefore, this work is meant to serve as an example of how Bruguera continued to produce Mendieta's work.

⁵⁴ Bruguera, interview by author, March 19, 2009.

⁵⁵ "Reanimating Ana Mendieta," 55.

Mosquera has called “artistic consubstantiation,” or the coalescing of the two disparate artists, Bruguera rescued the artists through their works, recovering what had been profound losses in her life.⁵⁶ This is not simply related to the Christian concept of consubstantiation but also possession, more commonly associated with Afro-Cuban religions and the possession of a practitioner by an *oricha*. Through this project Bruguera possessed the spirit and process of the late artist. Similar to the “Siluetas” acting as surrogates for Mendieta, Bruguera’s reproductions of Mendieta’s work in Havana were surrogates for the late artist in her motherland. This was an act through which Bruguera decentered herself as the individual producer.

In discussing the significance of the work, Bruguera commented on the author function,

So the relationship I had with Ana Mendieta, the project I did...the most important aspect is the discussion about authorship...You know, at first you want to be an artist and be known, and be you-you-you, and at the same time you are educated in this place where they say ‘You are not for you, you are for others.’ So in this case, the project that I did was very important, this idea of decentralization of authorship and questioning who is the author. And it’s something that has been along my whole project, my whole production in a way.⁵⁷

Here, as Álvarez has explained more generally in regard to Cuban art production in the 1990s, “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.”⁵⁸ The turn to post-structuralism was in part influenced by the pedagogy at ISA and also a more general retreat from public life to private life as a result of the hardships encountered by artists at the turn of the decade and more generally faced during the Special Period. For Bruguera, the loss of Mendieta

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Francesco Stocchi, “A Presence You Can’t Avoid: An Interview with Tania Bruguera,” *Uovo Magazine* 17 (April-June 2008): 190.

⁵⁸ Lupe Álvarez, “Accomplice’s Probe: Taking the Pulse of 1990s Cuban Art,” in *1990s Art from Cuba* (New York: Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts), 17.

and Elso was compounded with the overall sense of material demise and loss of life, through both emigration and death, felt throughout Havana and Cuba. While she could not do anything directly to improve the social conditions, her homage could ameliorate at least some of the pain that was felt, especially within the artistic community.

Bruguera's decision to resurrect the work of an émigré was a conscious political move. Following the 1959 Revolution, Cubans who defected from the island were generally removed from the official history of the country. Bruguera literally reinscribed Mendieta back into Cuban (art) history, as Mendieta had attempted to do herself when she produced *Rupestrian Sculptures*. Thus Bruguera's project varied from other remembrances of the late artist. U.S.-based artist Nancy Spero reenacted Mendieta's *Body Tracks* in 1991, 1993, and 1995 to honor her late friend. It was common for feminist artists to pay homage to a "female cultural forbearer," in this instance Spero was remembering a younger compatriot with whom she had collaborated artistically and shared a commitment to feminist politics.⁵⁹ Bruguera's project was not intended to show reverence for her "female cultural forbearer," but rather to directly engage with the issue of loss as it pertained to the Cuban situation.⁶⁰ By resurrecting the art of an emigrant she subtly confronted the effect the Revolution had on Cuba's population, tearing apart families and communities, which was as pertinent at the turn of the decade, as it had been at the start of the Revolution when Mendieta was sent abroad. Bruguera not only metaphorically brought Mendieta

⁵⁹ Joanna S. Walker, "The Body is Present Even if in Disguise: Tracing the Trace in the artwork of Nancy Spero and Ana Mendieta." *Tate Papers*, Issue 11 2009. http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09spring/joanna-walker.shtm#_ednref36, accessed December 28, 2009. Walker continues to analyze Spero's practice in relationship to Mendieta's to shed new light on both artists and their use of their bodies, or lack thereof, to assert their subjectivity as women and artists.

⁶⁰ Bruguera never looked to Mendieta as a feminist role model, but felt a connection based on their shared Cuban heritage and some similar artistic interests. More recently Bruguera has admitted that many people have told her that that had she known Mendieta, she would not have likely produced the homage. Bruguera, Skype instant message conversation with author, January 16, 2008.

back to Cuba through the recreation of her work, “rewriting” her back into Cuban history, but by focusing on loss and emigration, she was also recording sentiments of this period in a manner that the official media could not. Her work thus filled a void in the documentation of this period, as it was produced on the island concurrent with the escalating crisis.

Bruguera continued to work on “Homage to Ana Mendieta” after her graduation from ISA. She concluded the project in 1996 after learning that two students at the University of Havana focused their undergraduate theses on the work of the late artist. Bruguera recognized her project as successful in bringing awareness to the work of the Cuban-born artist to the island. She subsequently destroyed the majority of works she had (re)produced in the series.⁶¹

Although Bruguera recounts her time at ISA as grim due to the exodus of instructors and shortages, I contend that the innovative exercises and open atmosphere of the painting department gave her the space to vent her angst into a very meaningful project, one that would continue to impact her practice.⁶² Bruguera would develop her use of ephemeral materials, ritual-based work, and performance to explore political themes of emigration and loss, power, and censorship in the next body of work she began following her graduation, which she exhibited at the Fifth Havana Biennial (1994), as I discuss in the following chapter.

⁶¹ Additionally “controversy ballooned when the Estate of Ana Mendieta initially opposed *Tribute* [sic] to *Ana Mendieta* as an intervention into its own recuperation program. In 1996, Bruguera destroyed all vestiges of the series after the final performance at the Institute of International Visual Art in London, quieting conflict and emphasizing the ephemerality and immateriality of her conceptual work.” Tania Bruguera, “Tribute to Ana Mendieta,” <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/495-0-Tibute+to+Ana+Mendieta.htm>, accessed January 25, 2013.

⁶² Bruguera, interview by author, March 18, 2009.

CARLOS GARAICOA

Garaicoa enrolled in the painting department at ISA two years after Bruguera, in 1989, following four years of service in the Cuban army.⁶³ This was the beginning of his formal art education, which was concurrent with the escalating artistic diaspora.⁶⁴ Garaicoa, like Bruguera, remembers his first few years at ISA being marked by change; he entered the painting department during Garcíandía's final year of teaching and never had the opportunity to work closely with the esteemed instructor and artist, or any of his temporary replacements. He recalled being assigned the McEvelley-inspired exercises during his first year.⁶⁵ These activities encouraged Garaicoa and his colleagues to focus their energy on the theoretical concepts and the meanings behind their projects. Since Garaicoa was an avid reader, especially of Cuban literature and postmodern theory, he connected immediately to the theoretical investigations being conducted in the aesthetic courses taught by professors, including Izquierdo, which were amenable to the McEvelley-inspired exercises.⁶⁶ Garaicoa's theoretical interests, especially the writings of Barthes, inspired him to discover the language of the city, which led to his site-specific innovations and removals throughout Havana. I assert that Garaicoa's innovative and

⁶³ Garaicoa was denied the opportunity to present and defend his thesis after he was drafted back to the army and refused to reenlist. He has since been offered an honorary degree from ISA, which he has refused. It was a difficult situation for him at the time, but looking back he believes that it did not have a lasting impact on his career. Carlos Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

⁶⁴ Garaicoa was a self-taught writer and painter, and had been formally educated in thermal dynamics. He decided to pursue an art education after his mandatory enrollment in the army. His only prior artistic instruction had come from his involvement in a Casa de la Cultura in Havana, where he painted and participated in collective exhibitions. Carlos Garaicoa, "Carlos Garaicoa Manzo," in *Tu numero de suerte*, (Havana: hand printed catalogue, 1992), n.p.

⁶⁵ Garaicoa referred to the first year program as the "Camnitzer program" and mentioned McEvelley's article and Sánchez's exercises that stemmed from it. Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

⁶⁶ In subsequent years Toirac and Saavedra would join the faculty and even though Garaicoa did not study under them he became a close colleague and attributes his entropic practice to Saavedra and Abdel Hernández. Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

exceedingly theoretical approach to creating artwork during the years of 1990-1993 allowed him to document the devastating impact the Special Period had on the built environment of Havana.

Educational Setting

The open atmosphere of ISA's painting department and its conceptual thrust encouraged Garaicoa to explore the escalating social crisis of the Special Period, drawing on many of the texts he was reading. For these early works, he did not concentrate on painting, or any one artistic media, which he found too limiting. He stated,

As artists, we must be either sculptors, or painters, or writers. Ever since I started going to art school I sensed the limit, the restriction in those definitions. I studied painting, though I was mostly self-taught, and I was immediately oppressed by the term...I would ask myself how one could be free to express oneself, how one could work on the meaning of an object if the language, the media and the definition used to describe it are so restrictive.⁶⁷

He therefore worked in site-specific installations, photography, and artistic interventions—with the city of Havana replacing his canvas.

Garaicoa identified the street as the ideal place for his philosophical explorations: “Initially my work started from an interest in the city and the search for a new language, for a possible way of escaping from the stale traditional mechanisms of artistic practice...”⁶⁸ He devised situations as alternatives to those found in galleries and other formal art institutions out of the desire to engage with a different type of spectator and new forms of artistic communication. Garaicoa's turn to the city was not entirely new in Cuba. Projects like Pílon at the end of the 1980s turned attention away from the gallery to the street and to the community. I

⁶⁷ Lorenzo Fusi and Carlos Garaicoa, “A Conversation with Carlos Garaicoa,” in *Carlos Garaicoa: Capablanca's Real Passion* (Prato, Italy: Gli Ori, 2005), 101.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Garaicoa's interest in urban spaces has been attributed to Barthes and the article “Semiology and the Urban,” in *The City and the Sign: an Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, edited by Mark Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

show, however, how his engagement with the city took on a different focus than the abovementioned project, conditioned by the new social and economic conditions of the Special Period.

Early Artistic Interventions throughout Havana

Garaicoa's earliest interventions in Havana involved the modification of his immediate surroundings, including his apartment building and other structures in his neighborhood, from an anonymous position, calling on Barthes' and Foucault's writings on the function of the author.⁶⁹ These early site-specific installations were Garaicoa's first incursions into the city and would serve as the foundation of his practice. For these projects Garaicoa altered his surroundings artistically, late at night, photo-documenting his artistic process and then the public as they later discovered and engaged with his piece. This sort of guerrilla tactic—manipulating public spaces in the middle of the night—was similar to the practices of Cuban artist collectives in the mid-to-late 1980s, however, his investigations were more subtle and conceptual. They addressed broader social issues than those of the earlier collectives, who were primarily reactionary to art institutions.

Suceso en Aguiar 609 (Happening at Aguiar 609), 1990, was Garaicoa's first artistic intervention in Havana. For this project, he posted announcements on the doors to his apartment complex on a Thursday that read in Spanish "Dear Resident: this next Sunday this building will become a different one, your life will also change" (Figure 2.15).⁷⁰ Three days later, on Sunday,

⁶⁹ Garaicoa was reading texts such as Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977) and *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. José V. Harari, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

⁷⁰ Garaicoa further mentioned that he had sent information to residents in his neighborhood. Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

just before dawn, he added strips of nylon to the open courtyard of his building, and separated one story from the next (Figures 2.16 and 2.17). Signage was posted that included the hours of the installation (until 9:45 a.m.) and asked for opinions of the project to be recorded and deposited in a nearby mailbox (Figure 2.18). Garaicoa, unbeknownst to the spectators, photo-documented them discovering and inspecting the temporary changes to the building.

The work was titled a “happening,” and like the artistic happenings that emerged in international art circles in the 1950s and 1960s it broke down the barrier between artist and spectator, and was dependent on the spectators’ involvement. However, since Garaicoa concealed himself as the artist, and because this artistic intervention was left open to whoever accessed the building, it differed from its precursors, which often featured a performance by an artist and targeted an art world audience and/or a conventional place of display. Garaicoa’s use of non-traditional found materials was also reminiscent of happenings, as well as reflective of the shortage of fine art materials and *inventando* common during the Special Period.

By adding the strips of nylon to his apartment building, Garaicoa subtly interfered with his place of residence, in turn altering the life of his neighbors, if only in the slightest way. This small act had larger repercussions and was as much as study of the artistic act as it was a look into the role of the author/artist. Staging his work from an anonymous position reflected on both Barthes’ and Foucault’s theorization of the relationship of the author to their writing as increasingly marked by absence. Barthes had earlier theorized this absence as the “degree zero” position:

Writing has reached our time a last metamorphosis, absence: in those neutral modes of writing, called here ‘the zero degree of writing’ we can easily discern a negative momentum, and an inability to maintain it within time’s flow, as if literature having tended for a hundred years now to transmute its surface into a form with no antecedents, could no longer find purity anywhere but in the absence

of all signs, finally proposing the realization of this Orphean dream: a writer without Literature.⁷¹

But what did this mean for the visual arts, or a practice such as Garaicoa's? Garaicoa called attention to his action and requested responses from his viewers in written form, which he solicited through signage and interviews. However, he and his intentions were never revealed. By articulating the work from an anonymous position, Garaicoa gave full agency to the viewer, in accordance with Barthes, who stated (reflecting on poetry, another kind of artistic act),

The word is no longer guided in advance by the general intention of a socialized discourse, the consumer of poetry, deprived of the guide of selective connections, encounters the word frontally, and receives it as an absolute quantity, accompanied by all its possible associations...reduced to a sort of zero degree, pregnant with all past and future speculations.⁷²

Garaicoa's installation activated individual and social expectations.⁷³ Those who came in contact with the signs announcing a forthcoming change speculated as to what it was and who was responsible. Similar to the act of waiting and contemplating what would happen next, as was common daily during the Special Period, this piece engaged spectators' imaginations. They anticipated the foreshadowed change, only to realize that it was a subtle alteration to the courtyard of the building. Later, viewers articulated their opinions and feelings on the project, which were purportedly varied. Some recognized the work as an artistic intervention, while others saw it as an "arbitrary invasion."⁷⁴ Garaicoa broke down the traditional hierarchies that exist in the art world, bringing his work to a broader audience, in their lived environment, rather than a specialized audience in the space of the gallery. His project was thereby not only artistic in

⁷¹ *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷³ Madelín Izquierdo, *Tu numero de suerte: Carlos Garaicoa* (Havana: Hand printed catalogue, 1992), n.p.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

scope but drew on social concerns as well. The absence of the artist and emphasis on the subjective responses of the viewers during a critical moment in Cuba's history propelled the work into the realm of rumor.⁷⁵

Rumors took on an increased significance in revolutionary Cuba, as they supplemented the official government-sanctioned information.⁷⁶ During periods of heightened tension between official and extra-official institutions, as was the case at the onset of the Special Period, especially in the realm of artistic production and exhibitions, rumors carried greater weight and functioned similar to an “underground economy.”⁷⁷ Garaicoa's project relied on rumors as an informal network of communication, which paralleled the logic of the time. Rumors provided a safe space for the exchange of ideas, in both everyday life and the realm of the arts. Garaicoa discussed his interest in exposing the gossip and secrets of the city when he stated,

Many times I thought of the history that has not been written, but this one is contained within the streets that daily we cross and in the objects that inhabit it, in the lines that it draws on everyone of us. To take the secrets of the city and put them on view is one of the objectives of my work. Even more, to restore that secret like the critical speech of contemporary society, has converted the necessity to give it body and make it exist between this fiction and the emptiness of our fragmented memory.⁷⁸

Secrets/rumors provided a level of nuance and ambiguity that allowed for projects such as Garaicoa's to mount veiled social critiques. Just as the logic of the rumor present in the work mirrored typical social interactions, exposing the “secrets of the city,” so too did the logic of the absence of the artist mirror the absence and loss that preoccupied so many of Cuba's citizens

⁷⁵ Ibid. Izquierdo introduces the notion of rumor in this essay. In 2000 Eugenio Valdés Figueroa elaborated on the concept in “Trajectories of a Rumor.”

⁷⁶ Valdés Figueroa, “Trajectories of a Rumor,” 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *II Salón de arte cubano contemporáneo*, (Havana: Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, 1998), 57.

during this period of socioeconomic devastation. I posit that by positioning himself anonymously, Garaicoa emphasized the sense of absence, or loss, closely related to the demise of goods, services, and citizens at this precarious time in Cuba's history. Here the artist's act can be decoded as an allegory for social strife at this moment.

Another of Garaicoa's public interventions, *39* (1991), consisted of the number 39 written in bold black text on a small rectangular wooden paddle, affixed to a column in Old Havana (Figures 2.19 and 2.20). Nearby was a sign that contained a photograph of the paddle and a text explaining the relevance of the number. A list of possible meanings was provided for the otherwise empty sign including: a lucky number, a biblical reference to peace and truth (chapter 39 in the book of Isaiah), songs ("39" by Queen), the trinity, and relevant dates (such as the beginning of WWII in 1939). The text concluded "the 39 may appear before you as a strange/foreign object, but it is not."

As in *Happening at Aguiar 609*, Garaicoa never revealed himself as the originator of the work and it was left open to interpretation by unsuspecting viewers. In this semiological exercise he took apart the sign and provided the viewer with a list of possible significations for the 39. Through his intervention Garaicoa drew attention to the seemingly empty city that was actually full of signs and information, those that bystanders often receive passively—especially when they do not appear to carry significance upon first sight. This held a political undertone, as the population was expected to receive and process messages without questioning or challenging them. Garaicoa's subtle alteration to the cityscape generated and facilitated the spread of rumors and the revealing of secrets by its spectators.

Unlike the previously discussed work, *Happening at Aguiar 609*, *39* contained a signpost with a photograph of the paddle and discussed text. While Garaicoa used photography in the

Aguiar piece to document his neighbors reading the signs and the modifications to the building, here the photograph of the paddle is presented as part of the piece. This is reminiscent of early tautological conceptual art practices, like that of Joseph Kosuth.⁷⁹ Garaicoa has reflected on his generation's relationship to the sixties,

Even as students at the Instituto Superior de Arte, we joked about this legacy from the previous generation and we said, with nostalgia and also with sarcasm, that our graduating class had been born plagued by inversions and contradictions—we were the 60s seen upside-down, and this we were condemned to experience everything from an inverted perspective, making us the lightweight hippies of the 90s.⁸⁰

Garaicoa was not only referencing the difference between his generation and that of the early sixties in Cuba, whose art reflected on nationalist themes and celebrated the victory of the Revolution, but also international art practices of the sixties, such as happenings and early conceptual investigations. Yet, as Garaicoa stated, he and his generation experienced everything from an inverted position. Thus his works directly confronted the severity of the Special Period and the contradictions it presented, which can be viewed as the inverse of the sixties in Cuba and abroad.

In Garaicoa's better-known work *Homenaje al seis* (Homage to the Six), 1991-92, he painted a large number six twice on a column and once on the asphalt beneath it in Old Havana (Figure 2.21). The two sixes on the column were hurriedly composed and appeared as graffiti. The application of the numbers melded well with the ruinous state of the column, with its peeling paint and cracks. The six on the ground was located next to a painted line that extended from the base of column into the street. Garaicoa mounted a plaster plaque to the column that was painted

⁷⁹ Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, "The Mirror of Desire: Some Considerations Regarding the Work of Carlos Garaicoa," in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 102.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

to resemble the modified site (Figures 2.22 and 2.23). Like the sign present in 39, this plaque was tautological. Speculations stirred surrounding the origin and purpose of the sixes. This piece was more opaque than the two previously discussed works. This piece did not include a statement to its viewers or an explanatory text.⁸¹ Fiction spread as a result and the piece functioned again as a “street rumor.”⁸²

When discussing his early works, such as the three presented above, Garaicoa stated that he was “inserting, with the traces of a unique gesture in the ‘writings’ of urban design...an experiment in ‘this magic instant of Lezama, in which I place the unsuspecting spectator inside my own game, based on the possibilities of the *imago*.”⁸³ According to Cuban poet José Lezama Lima, the *imago* is an image of the world. It is a pictorial idea or metaphor that becomes something real, as an object in the world. By subtly manipulating elements of the city, using the language of the city, Garaicoa presented unsuspecting viewers images that became real and part of their lives. He thereby lured in spectators and subjected them to his “game.” By subtly altering the language of the city, through his conceptual investigations, he could raise awareness to the specificity of the condition of life at the moment and bring the community together.

Valdés Figueroa has written about the response to the “marks” made by Garaicoa insisting that viewers became obsessed with his “empty presence, as if the materialization of ‘nothingness’ could counteract generalized indifference.”⁸⁴ This supports my contention that

⁸¹ Although the presence of three 6s can’t be helped but read as 666, which is both an “abundant number” (the sum of the first 36 numbers) and also “the number of the beast.”

⁸² Valdés Figueroa, “The Mirror of Desire,” 102.

⁸³ Ibid. According to Cuban poet José Lezama Lima, the *imago* is an image of the world. It is a pictorial idea or metaphor that becomes something real, as an object in the world. By subtly manipulating elements of the city, using the language of the city, Garaicoa presents unsuspecting viewers images that become as real any other object in the world.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Garaicoa's early works responded directly to the social conditions of this period when the city was literally empty and absence was felt from the loss of goods to the loss of family and friends who went into self-exile. Garaicoa commented specifically on how this was felt within the art community when he stated,

...The city was silent, double exile was evident...an almost absolute vacuum appeared, an existential vacuum...For all of us the lack of debate and a feeling of apathy created an uncertainty that was as unhealthful (sic.) as the absence of the principal protagonists of another period.⁸⁵

This absence was not exclusive to artists in Havana, it permeated the city and all of its inhabitants. The game he played with unsuspecting pedestrians on one hand disrupted their "generalized indifference," by giving them something to talk about; on the other hand it brought attention to the absence, loss, and apathy experienced at the time.

Garaicoa took numerous photographs of pedestrians responding to his pieces (Figures 2.24 and 2.25), as he was very interested in the documentary process.⁸⁶ The act of recording the progression of making his work and then the bystanders interacting with it would preserve its history in response to what he has called "the emptiness of our fragmented memory." This concern can account for his obsession with documentation more generally, which in this instance allowed for him to record images and experiences of the city in ruins.

Garaicoa's interest in documentary photography is closely related to its history on the island, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. It played a supportive role in propagating revolutionary ideology, as art historian Cristina Vives has explained,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ He had friends and colleagues develop the film for him, as he was not trained to do so. The quality of the prints was very poor as materials were scarce. Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

Photography was judged to be the most direct and convincing medium of ‘reality;’ and by contrast, art—meaning all other known artistic manifestations—was necessary but carefully sifted, given its frequent role in the conscience. Photography and art therefore took separate paths. The former became the image of the Revolution, published full-page in the main dailies, shown widely in movie theaters, manipulated by the mobilized political graphic arts, promoted in commemorative traveling exhibitions...⁸⁷

Images of bearded guerrilla fighters in the Sierra Madre and the iconic photographs of Guevara and Castro circulated with such frequency that images of them are conjured when one references the Cuban Revolution. Political speeches, rallies, and parades were regularly documented, as well, and with them the celebratory fervor that surrounded these events was strategically constructed by photographers and disseminated. This was the manner in which photography existed on the island from the 1960s through the beginning of 1980s, when artists began experimenting with the medium. Garaicoa returned to documentary photography, however, he used the medium to document the current state of the city in ruins, which also parodied the medium and its role on the island. Documenting cities and urban and rural spaces more generally remains a consistent and unifying aspect of Garaicoa’s work.

When displayed in a gallery the photographs and signs/plaques exist as documentation of events that had already occurred, and are therefore “deactivated.”⁸⁸ An entirely new audience is addressed and the projects are exhibited as art pieces, as evidence of, but not the actual, sociological and conceptual investigations. Garaicoa’s next group of artistic investigations reversed the process used in the making of the aforementioned pieces, as he removed elements from the urban fabric of Havana for display in a gallery.

⁸⁷ “Cuban Photography: A Personal History,” in *Shifting Tides: Cuban Photography after the Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum Associates, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Merrell Publishers, 2001), 96.

⁸⁸ Izquierdo, *Tu numero de suerte: Carlos Garaicoa*, n.p.

Restorative Installations

For his restorative installations (as he calls them) Garaicoa acted as an urban archeologist, mining Havana's abandoned, ruinous buildings for remnants of their décor. Rather than adding an element to the city—to its fiction, as he had been—he now detached or replicated (readymade) objects, which were then brought into the gallery. In *El juego de decapitaciones* (Decapitation Game), 1993 (Figure 2.26), Garaicoa removed a circular relief encasing a bust from the façade of a colonial building left in shambles.⁸⁹ He photo-documented the object in its original context and again after its removal. These black and white photographs were intended for display together with the actual “removal.” Here Garaicoa again documented and exposed Havana's cityscape during a critical moment in the city's history. Garaicoa has described his removal work as an art of restoration and recycling in which he inserted objects into a new dialogue, to refetishize or to uncover their “lost sweetness.”⁹⁰ Garaicoa's strategy was reminiscent of Sánchez and Garcíandía's call to produce readymades by fetishizing an everyday object, however, it was also Garaicoa's way of restoring signs of a sweeter time in Cuba's history. As an urban archeologist Garaicoa uncovered evidence of more lucrative and stable times by selecting sites with ornate architecture and decorative elements still visible amidst the rubble. He then “rescued” these decorative elements from the ruin in part as an act of nostalgia. As Andreas Huyssen has posited, “The architectural ruin is an example of the indissoluble combination of spatial and temporal desires that trigger nostalgia. In the body of the ruin the past is both present in its residues and yet no longer accessible, making the ruin an especially

⁸⁹ The title of the work is named after “El juego de las decapitaciones,” a short story by José Lezama Lima.

⁹⁰ *Las metáforas del templo* (Havana: Hand printed catalogue, 1992), n.p.

powerful trigger for nostalgia.”⁹¹ Garaicoa has remarked that he has a sentimental connection to the objects he removes, and still has the majority of them in his possession; for the most part he only sells the photographs he takes of them.⁹² This emotional connection to the idea of Havana, and resuscitating what it once was, stood in opposition to the actual city, which was marked by loss and absence. Huyssen explained, “In the case of ruins that which is allegedly present and transparent whenever authenticity is claimed is present only as an absence; it is the imagined present of a past that can now only be grasped in its decay.”⁹³ Similar to Garaicoa’s earlier projects that called on the absence of the creator to stimulate a discussion about the language of the city, in turn drawing attention to absence and indifference more broadly, the significance of this project is marked through absence.

La casa del brillante (House of Diamonds), 1992 (Figure 2.27), another of Garaicoa’s restorative installations, was composed in a different manner than *Decapitation Game*. Rather than removing an element from Havana’s ruinous cityscape, he replicated and recontextualized a found plaque that marked a one-time jewelry and watch store that had long been closed and remained dilapidated. Garaicoa photo-documented his process of discovering, documenting, and casting the plaque. He chose not to remove the plaque and instead he replicated it. He appropriated a found object and displayed it along with his documentary photographs. Not only was Garaicoa drawn to the plaque as an urban sign, but also his selection of one designating jewelry store was significant at the time. This was a time of crisis and severe shortages of

⁹¹ “Nostalgia for Ruins,” *Grey Room* 23 (Spring 2006): 7.

⁹² Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

⁹³ “Nostalgia for Ruins,” 12.

material goods on the island. The found plaque, marking a former jewelry store stood as a reminder of the materialism that once existed and the Revolution thwarted.

Just a few years before Garaicoa created this piece *casas de oro* and *casas de plata* (houses of gold and houses of silver) were established by the government where citizens were encouraged to sell their heirlooms in exchange for cash and access to otherwise restricted dollar stores (access was limited to foreign ambassadors and the like). Cubans lined up to trade valuable heirlooms for access to cheap electronics, clothing, and other goods that were hard to come by. Garaicoa's selection of a plaque from a jewelry store was also a reference to the *casas de oro y plata* and a reminder of the fate of these goods. In 1988 the Cuban collective Arte Calle staged a performative piece *Easy Shopping* as a critique of the *casas*: "In Arte Calle's view [the presence of the *casas*] amounted to the return of Hernán Cortés: 'The Spaniards come with their little mirrors, the Indians hand over the gold.'"⁹⁴ The young members of Arte Calle contested the *casas* by painting their bodies gold and silver and leading a procession through Old Havana to the harbor where they jumped into the polluted ocean. Cuban artist Glexis Novoa compared their act to that of suicide in defense of ethics.⁹⁵ Garaicoa similarly produced a work that referenced jewelry, yet his approach and emphasis differed greatly from Arte Calle. Arte Calle's work was performative and required an audience. It was disruptive, dramatic, and critical of government's hypocritical stance on materialism. The collective compared the goal of the *casas* to that of the Spanish colonizers and their subjectification of Cubans. While Garaicoa likewise staged his project in Old Havana, his project was subtler. He did not desire to attract a crowd and only worked with a couple of people. He was interested in what remained of the jewelry store and

⁹⁴ Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 97.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

what the plaque signified—a more prosperous Havana that now only existed in memories and as fiction.

Garaicoa's works from this period were not entirely sentimental; "romantic longing seems to mix, at times to clash, with an almost sardonic deadpan commentary on the current state of collapse of the city."⁹⁶ There was a game present in the work and Garaicoa went as far as to identify it in the title *Decapitation Game*. The work was therefore both a sociological project, dealing with the space of the city in ruins, drawing on the themes of absence and loss, as before, and a semiological game that removed signs from the built environment, transplanting them in the space of the gallery or artists' studio.⁹⁷ The combination of a sociological and theoretical investigation, authored by an absent and then fictive creator, that is object based and plays a game with its viewer, became emblematic of the work of Garaicoa, as I demonstrate in the following chapter.

BEFORE THEY WERE LOS CARPINTEROS (ALEXANDRE ARRECHEA, MARCO CASTILLO, AND DAGOBERTO RODRÍGUEZ)

In 1990, roommates at ISA, Arrechea and Rodríguez, hand-carved a wooden cabinet in the shape of a hand, *La mano creadora* (The Creative Hand, Figure 2.28). This was their first collaboration following their involvement in a pedagogical project as freshman printmakers at ISA (1989-1990) led by artist and professor René Francisco. Their involvement in this workshop taught them the significance of the collaborative process and turning to the quotidian, in this case furniture, for inspiration. *The Creative Hand* was reflexive of the process of its making, as the title and subject matter mirrored the technique of manufacture. Additionally, it was created as a

⁹⁶ Edward Sullivan, "Urban Mythologist," in *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado* (Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 7.

⁹⁷ This piece was in Garaicoa's studio in winter 2008, as observed by the author.

tribute to Elso who had created a work by the same name. I propose that not only did this piece reference the creative process and honor the loss of a great artist, but the empty drawers of this “cabinet” critiqued the economic devastation the island was facing, specifically the lack of the basic goods, clothing, and foodstuffs, that one would expect to find in a piece of furniture with drawers.

By 1992, two years after the production of *The Creative Hand*, Marco Castillo, painter and fellow ISA student, began collaborating with Arrechea and Rodríguez and the three worked as Equipo MAD until the name Los Carpinteros was officially coined in 1994.⁹⁸ The three artists divided the tasks of woodworking and painting, which would mark their process for the first four years of their collaboration (roughly 1992-1995). As seen with Bruguera and Garaicoa, the work produced by this trio mounted subtle critiques of the socio-economic turmoil of the Special Period. The artists confronted the issue of loss and material scarcity as evidenced in *The Creative Hand*. Their work continued to be self-reflective and made from materials and creative methods directly impacted by the Special Period and the changing responsibilities of the artist and artwork. By working collectively they too decentered the role of the individual artist.

Educational Setting

Arrechea, Castillo, and Rodríguez met as students at ENA in the mid-1980s, and had witnessed its “bohemian” atmosphere first hand.⁹⁹ They admired the politically driven collaborative projects of Ponjuán and René Francisco and the other collectives working at the

⁹⁸ Many of the artists’ friends and colleagues had already started referring to them as Los Carpinteros soon after they began collaborating, however, they authored their thesis statement in 1994, MAD, an acronym created from their first initials. Arrechea said that they started using the title themselves following the publications of an article by U.S. curator Dan Cameron, in which he referred to them as Los Carpinteros, interview by author, March 23, 2009. The collective will be referred to as Los Carpinteros throughout the text for consistency.

⁹⁹ Alexandre Arrechea, interview by author, March 23, 2009.

end of the decade. Arrechea recalled the energy these artists and their peers emanated as creators and how he and his classmates felt the need to recapture their spirit when many emigrated at the end of the decade.¹⁰⁰ Arrechea attributed the quick maturation of many young artists to the demand for something new following the artistic diaspora of the late 1980s through the early 1990s. The professors who remained at ISA helped facilitate the young artists' development.

Arrechea and Rodríguez's participation in René Francisco's experimental pedagogical project that lasted the duration of the 1989-1990 academic year taught them and their classmates how to find opportunities in the social changes occurring around them. The project provided a method for coping with the more serious social and economic effects brought on by the Special Period through the production of art that functioned as "social reconstruction."¹⁰¹ René Francisco believed that one not only created work, but one's own person too. He taught in a way that would allow for the students to reflect on their reality and their experiences, which was especially critical during this year, as the economic crisis escalated. Although the boundary between teacher and student had already been blurred with instructors such as Garcíandía, René Francisco developed the student-teacher relationship as a kind of "communion or coexistence."¹⁰² Together he and his students engaged in projects governed by the specific conditions of everyday life. Thus they left the traditional structure of the classroom to work in less formal academic settings, such as René Francisco's home, the beach, and *solars* (tenement houses), where they could

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ René Francisco Rodríguez has referred to his project *La casa nacional* as a "political work of social reconstruction" that links art and society. "Primera pragmática pedagogía: 1989-1990" (unpublished document), n.p.

¹⁰² Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, "Horizontal Interactions: Pedagogy and Art in Contemporary Cuba," *Parachute* 125 (January 2007), 72. Rodríguez believes that pedagogy is basically the transmission of knowledge. Since university paradigms are designed in the West and spread around the world vertically, he understands pedagogy, as a kind of transaction capable of subverting this verticality through interpersonal relations, which go beyond academic hierarchies. He therefore worked with and learned alongside his students.

observe and question what had been happening, not only in the arts, but society at large. René Francisco took his cue from earlier projects such as *Project Pílon*, which brought art to a very poor community with little resources, and the pedagogy practiced by Elso, who conducted his courses outside of the classroom. The name of René Francisco's project/collective became "Desde Una Pragmática Pedagógica" (From a Pedagogical Pragmatism) and later "Galería DUPP," taken from the name's acronym.¹⁰³

La casa nacional (The National House), also referred to by René Francisco as "La universidad de la calle" (University of the Street), was a cycle of projects that began in January 1990 when Arrechea and Rodríguez, and four of their classmates, lived with the residents of a *solar* in Old Havana (Figure 2.29).¹⁰⁴ Over the course of a month the students tended to daily chores for the tenants including laundry, cleaning the house, and making food—tasks that were not easily accomplished during a period of material scarcity. They additionally produced artwork per their hosts' requests. In many cases they were asked to paint walls or embellish furniture, in turn renovating the dilapidated "apartments" and their contents. Collectively the students refurbished the common areas of the building.

The very name of the project, *The National House*, was selected because the colors and imagery selected by the tenants for the renovations were tied to national symbols and religious icons. As René Francisco explained "the requests demonstrated essential aspects of the psychosocial body and value systems during this period."¹⁰⁵ Requests included subject matter and/or formal properties associated with particular religious beliefs, such as altars for the placement of

¹⁰³ There were three versions of this project. The first pragmatics occurred from 1989-1990, the second from 1991-1992, and the third from 1997 to 2000. By the third, the collective had adopted the name Galería DUPP.

¹⁰⁴ René Francisco Rodríguez, interview by author, February 5, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Valdés Figueroa, "Horizontal Interactions: Pedagogy and Art in Contemporary Cuba," 74.

saints, paintings of the Virgen de Caridad del Cobre (the patron saint of Cuba) or paint colors selected based on the attributes of an *oricha* (Figure 2.30). Following *The National House* students collectively participated in a number of similar activities, including the renovation of additional homes and participation in religious activities that were no longer clandestine during the Special Period.

The students involved in *The National House* not only used the techniques they had learned during their fine art training in Cuba, but they acquired new skills required for the repair of buildings, furniture, and other household items. In Cuba such artisanal work had been considered menial, and manual labor was historically left to those of the lower classes. This not only had a socio-economic underpinning, but a racial one as well. Artisans in Cuba were almost always of African descent. With the founding of the San Alejandro Academy in the early nineteenth century a clear division was drawn between artist and artisan, as well as who could and could not be an artist; Cubans of African decent were not allowed to enter the Academy for decades. The students who participated in René Francisco's project were taught to blur the boundaries between artistic and artisanal production and use their collective and individual practices as social action to serve others, while challenging the status quo by confronting the history of art on the island. This played a very pragmatic role during this time of need and exposed the young artists to new ideas and techniques.

The engagement with the everyday, the experience of restoring parts of the solar and creating functional work that collapsed the boundaries between fine art and artisanal production, and working collectively—as if part of an artisanal guild—inspired Arrechea and Rodríguez. They assisted in the creation of a short-term carpentry course at ISA, led by a local carpenter, which broadened their skill set and allowed them to continue producing work in this manner. As

a result they made woodworking, and specifically cabinetry/furniture, their concentration (Figure 2.31).

Through woodworking Arrechea and Rodríguez created functional pieces, such as tables and kiosks for the display of their work and that produced by their colleagues, and conceptual projects to explore the nature of the pedagogical project they were involved in. Their piece *La silla* (The Chair), 1990 (Figures 2.32, 2.33, 2.34), was a sculpture of a student's chair with a built in desk from which a small blackboard extended vertically. The idea for the work was first fleshed out in a series of drawings produced by the artists that served as a form of "epistolary correspondence," similar to techniques René Francisco had implemented during *The National House*.¹⁰⁶ Originally the students exchanged handwritten letters with each other and René Francisco to express their ideas and emotional responses to the project. Arrechea and Rodríguez translated this process to a series of drawings they exchanged back and forth as a method of communication and collaboration.

The Chair was designed to collapse the space of the teacher, implied through the blackboard, with that of the student, shown through the desk. This was an endorsement of René Francisco's pedagogy. The student/teacher relationship was only one of traditional hierarchal relationships they destabilized through this sculpture. The work invited the spectator to sit on the chair, further breaking up the space between art and receiver, art and life, and object and subject.¹⁰⁷ Like *The Creative Hand*, *The Chair* was a self-reflexive gesture on the part of the two collaborators, who were very conscious of their artistic process, and in this case, the influence of their mentor and his pedagogical project. Both Arrechea and Rodríguez's work and their

¹⁰⁶ René Francisco, "Primera pragmática pedagogía: 1989-1990," n.p.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

collaborative process called into question social and artistic hierarchies, including the individual artist competing with others for recognition, and carpentry as artisanal labor. The two artists worked together in the spirit of carpenters, whose trade they were reviving to explore the social conditions of the early 1990s.

Early Collaborations—Arrechea and Rodríguez

Following their yearlong involvement in the collective project of René Francisco, Arrechea and Rodríguez continued to work together. While they did not produce work to fulfill the specific needs of others, they meditated on certain art-related issues raised during *The National House*. They produced works that appeared both functional and dysfunctional, like *The Creative Hand*, which in actuality functioned as a sculpture since it was produced at a time when there were not any goods to put inside of its drawers. In producing such work they blurred the boundaries between sculpture and furniture and artistic and artisanal production, and “by claiming the craft skills of the working people on the island, they were able to reclaim their place in the daily living culture of their country...the[ir] work [was] accessible to a ‘popular’ sensibility, and project[ed] an honest intention to communicate at many levels to diverse groups of viewers.”¹⁰⁸ For the creation of both *The Chair* and *The Creative Hand*, the young collaborators used their woodworking abilities to question what it meant to be artists amidst an impending socio-economic crisis.

Arrechea and Rodríguez’s interest in blurring the boundaries of artistic and artisanal production expanded beyond their experimentation in carpentry. Through an artistic intervention, *Para usted* (For You) in the Partagás Cigar Factory in Havana, 1991, they raised additional

¹⁰⁸ Jorge Reynoso Pohlenz, “Los Carpinteros: Utopian Model Makers,” *Afterall* (Spring/Summer 2004): 66.

questions regarding the role of the arts in Special Period Cuba. In *For You* Arrechea and Rodríguez acted as *lectores de tabaquería* (readers of the cigar factory). However, rather than reading aloud from a newspaper or book, as was the common role of the readers, Arrechea and Rodríguez took the opportunity to express their gratitude and debt to the union of tobacco workers.¹⁰⁹ In preparation of their performance they studied the history and practice of cigar making in Cuba. They titled their performance *For You* after a text they found on an old cigar box label. Arrechea noted that although the term “for you” commonly refers to the act of gifting a cigar, in this instance, the artists bestowed their gratitude to the manufacturers of the luxury items.¹¹⁰

To announce the event the artists produced a black and white postcard-sized print (Figure 2.35). The top register contained the text “Para usted” bordered by decorative patterns. Along the left side appeared the date 28-1-91 (with the 9 printed backwards) and location, Partagás (Cigar Factory), when and where the performance was to be staged. To the right of the date were two scenes. In the scene on the left, two male figures interact; they wear top hats and coats, typical of bourgeois dress during the colonial period. The figure on the right addresses the figure on the left and their conversation is printed below them. In the scene on the right, two women in colonial dress flank an oval labeled “Real Arte Expo.” Palm trees adorn the interior of the oval and background. The imagery was reminiscent of that found on colonial cigar box labels, however, here it has been personalized by Arrechea and Rodríguez. They have included information about their performance and their first initials are printed between the two male figures. The text below the figures reads, in Spanish, “Ale, I have lost everything in the game. What? Everything minus

¹⁰⁹ Valdés Figueroa and Los Carpinteros, “Hablando por si mismo,” 67.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

one thing. What? The desire to return to play/gamble.” This passage was copied from a cigar box and alluded to addiction, perhaps gambling, as the verb *jugar* can mean to play or to gamble.

By borrowing the language of anachronistic colonial cigar boxes, Arrechea and Rodríguez could mount a subtle social critique that was closely related to artisanal production on the island. The history of cigar making was specific to Cuba and shared a complicated history fraught with racism and poverty on behalf of the producers and wealth and excess on behalf of the consumers.¹¹¹ Arrechea explained, “There we pretended to be tobacconists, not precisely to make cigars, rather to create an object that symbolically alluded to this old Cuban tradition that constituted an aspect of the basic formation of our culture.”¹¹² During the Special Period these young artists critically interpreted the history of artistic production on the island and modeled their practice after the cigar makers, in a sort of homage to their practice. They were interested in capturing the sentiment that accompanied the production of cigars, honoring the artisans who had historically been denigrated.¹¹³ This was especially relevant at the time when Cuba’s Afro-Cuban population suffered greatly.¹¹⁴ Although race is a taboo topic, as it was purportedly erased with the Revolution, this project allowed the young artists to broach the issue in a subtle way.

For You was a performance staged in a factory and not a gallery and did not result in the production of a unique object, yet it greatly impacted the artists’ subsequent work.¹¹⁵ Arrechea identified the role this intervention had on their practice,

¹¹¹ Even during the Special Period cigar factories struggled to continue producing cigars for export to consumers in capitalist countries. These rare luxury items were the ultimate oxymoron during a material crisis.

¹¹² Valdés Figueroa and Los Carpinteros, “Hablando por si mismo,” 67.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See Marc Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005.

¹¹⁵ Their original objective was to produce a video of their performance, however, it was never realized. Valdés Figueroa and Los Carpinteros, “Hablando por si mismo,” 67.

[This is] from where we extracted, definitively, a type for the production of our art: we offered it in the quality of work, which we learned from the tobacco industry, their union activity, the condensation in a single object of the artisanal work of many individuals, the finitude of the product in the hand of consumers (tobacco), [and] its provisional character.¹¹⁶

Thus, the young artists' ongoing commitment to producing artisanal work of the highest quality, collaborating in its making, and understanding its finite condition, can be in part attributed to their experience in the cigar factory.

Arrechea and Rodríguez's performance in the cigar factory also inspired them to use tobacco leaves in the production of a series of "small souvenirs" that they decorated with nationalist symbols, such as a hammer and sickle or image of José Martí.¹¹⁷ The small pieces combined Cuban nationalist iconography and goods often consumed by tourists. They pointed to the influence of *perestroika* on Cuba and the resurrection of a strong nationalist sentiment during the previous period of Rectification. These "small souvenirs" were displayed along with *The Creative Hand* for the first time in an exhibition "Arte-Sano" (1992) that featured the work of Arrechea and Rodríguez, along with that of their colleague, Fernando Rodríguez.¹¹⁸ The title of the exhibition was a play on the word *artesano* (artisan) and by dividing the word into two the meaning changed to "Arte-Sano" (Healthy-Art). The featured artists turned to woodworking (and creating "souvenirs") to make works that mounted critiques of the social climate and even foreshadowed the rise in tourism and crafts produced for their consumption. *The Creative Hand* was considered a "redeeming" object in light of the cynicism of the smaller works and it

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 66. Photo-documentation of these works does not exist. José Martí is a Cuban national hero and an important figure in Latin American literature. He was a poet, journalist, revolutionary philosopher, professor, and a political theorist. He died in the fight Cuba's independence against Spain and was opposed to United States involvement in Cuba.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

highlighted a change in art-making. The artists felt that nationalist iconography, expected during the process of Rectification was no longer representative of the Special Period.¹¹⁹

Equipo MAD—Marco, Alexandre, Dagoberto—to Los Carpinteros

Around the time they participated in “Arte-Sano” Arrechea and Rodríguez began to “interchange services” with Marco Castillo, a painter and their neighbor in the dormitory.¹²⁰ They made easels, crates, and frames for Castillo and in return he would photo-document their production of these objects. Later Castillo would paint scenes taken from these photographs.¹²¹ Eventually the wooden objects (produced by Arrechea and Rodríguez) and paintings (executed by Castillo) would come together in the form of art pieces that I argue reflected on art historical questions, the artistic process, and social and economic issues.

Pintura de caballete (Easel Painting), 1992 (Figure 2.36), addressed the role of the artist and artistic production amidst a socio-economic crisis, building off ideas previously explored by Arrechea and Rodríguez. This oil painting propped on an easel featured photorealistic renderings of Arrechea and Rodríguez sitting naked on a bricked surface, examining woodworking tools. The easel was labeled with the name Marco, carved out of wood and placed along the edge where the painting rested, thus identifying Castillo as the painter of the work. This work was self-referential; Castillo photographed his collaborators in the initial stage of constructing the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Previous to his involvement with Arrechea and Rodríguez, Castillo painted versions of large earthworks by U.S. artists. The artists’ collaborations began as the result of a project at ISA called “The Other, The Same” that Arrechea and Rodríguez participated in during their third year whereby the artists were asked to collaborate with “The Other.” It was supposed to be a one-time event but evolved into a lasting relationship between the two artists and Castillo. Ian Berry, “Parables: A Dialogue with Los Carpinteros,” in *Los Carpinteros*, ed. Ian Berry (Saratoga Springs, New York: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College), 8.

easel, a scene he then painted. The two artists he painted were seated on the recognizable brick roof of ISA that was built by Afro-Cuban laborers (Figure 2.37). Given the economic devastation at the time the artists resolved to start from nothing and work with basic tools, as are depicted before the naked artists. As Mexican art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina commented, “their pictures unfold/reveal an exact humor about the situation of the evolutionary backward movement that is today lived on the island, and sometimes threatens a return to a Neolithic Cuban.”¹²² In fact, to execute this easel the artists had to chop down a mahogany tree (a rare and luxurious material), located on the campus, to procure the wood.

Within *Easel Painting* the artists juxtaposed artisanal woodworking to academic painting. This conservative painting style, reminiscent of Cuban hyperrealist work of the 1970s and earlier academic trends, veiled their critique. In this way the artists were sensitive to the suffering experienced at the time, so that unlike their predecessors in the late-1980s, who were disruptive and used guerrilla tactics to launch social and cultural critiques, they were no longer brash or disrespectful during a time of great hardship. This piece reflected its own making and further analysis reveals the evolution of a practice that would push beyond tautological studies and come to slyly record the complexity of the Special Period with attention focused on the role and responsibility of the artist.

The three artists displayed this piece along with *Dos pesos* (Two Pesos), 1992 (Figure 2.38), on the occasion of their first exhibition as a trio, “Pintura de Caballete” (Easel Painting), at a small, but significant, non-commercial gallery “23 y 12” located in Havana. *Two Pesos* was a rectangular wooden sculpture/frame in the shape of an imagined “two-peso” monetary bill. The

¹²² “Lo real Habana: La Quinta Bienal,” reprinted in *Nosotros, los más infieles: narraciones críticas sobre arte cubano (1993-2005)*, ed. Andrés Isaac Santana (Murcia, Spain: Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo, 2007), 354.

central oval contained a painting concealed behind two wooden doors, as did the circles containing the 2s in the four corners of the work. The paintings depicted the process of chopping down and transporting the mahogany tree that was used to produce the frame of this work and the easel in the aforementioned work.

Two Pesos was conceptualized in response to one of their earlier works, *Un peso* (One Peso), 1990 (Figure 2.39). Arrechea and Rodríguez created *One Peso* from wood in the shape of a one-peso bill that featured the bust of Martí, similar to that found on the actual Cuban currency. Just as the artists had featured nationalist imagery on their small souvenirs, *One Peso* incorporated iconography more relevant to the previous period of Rectification. The later work, *Two Pesos*, was an invented currency with the nationalist imagery typical of Cuban currency supplanted by paintings of the artists engaged in excruciating backbreaking labor, trying to procure resources in spite of great shortages. The artists were shown bent over and their flexed muscles revealed the difficulty of moving the tree trunk. Rodríguez has explained *Two Pesos* as a confrontation between Martí and Sisyphus.¹²³ This could be interpreted as the clash of the dreams and ideals of the Revolution and the struggle for survival during the Special Period.¹²⁴ A social change had taken place that required (re)new(ed) approaches to art-making through new forms.

Cuban curator Tuma noted the significance of resuscitating the art of furniture making in precious materials (mahogany) during a time of great scarcity, when the materials were no longer available and the skills were vanishing.¹²⁵ The three artists turned away from nationalist

¹²³ Valdés Figueroa and Los Carpinteros, “Hablando por si mismo,” 66.

¹²⁴ Corina Matamoros Tuma, “Arte Contemporáneo: Los Carpinteros,” in *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Habana, Cuba: Colección de Arte Cubano* (Palma de Mallorca: Sa Nostra, 2001), 266.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

iconography, which they did not believe was appropriate to their moment. Rather they embraced an anachronistic artisanal practice tied to a particular race and class, that they combined with mimetic painting to produce hybrid forms, both representational and conceptual that dissolved the arbitrary bifurcations of the arts.¹²⁶

Los Carpinteros' collaborative process and many of their works from this period were ideally socialist since they broke down various hierarchies and incorporated national symbols. Yet, pieces like *Two Pesos* reflected on the shortage of materials and goods that came as a result of the Special Period. The use of currency in this work also foreshadowed the economic changes that were to occur in the following year, which would present new opportunities to artists. The trio's work responded to their personal situation directly, as testimony to being an artist during a moment marked by hardship. The trio's work made in the following years would confront the novice art market and rise in art tourism, as I demonstrate in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced through the investigations of the student work by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros there was a shift in artistic production that followed the onset of the Special Period, as artists were deeply impacted by the socio-economic changes occurring. In 1992 Carlos Garaicoa began to theorize what had changed, focusing on the work of his cohort at ISA. His ideas came together on the occasion of an exhibition, "The Metaphors of the Temple" that he curated together with his classmate Segura (Figure 2.40, installation view). "The Metaphors of the Temple" opened in February 1993 at the Center for the Development of the Visual Arts in

¹²⁶ See Nestor García Canclini for a discussion of the arbitrary division between the arts and artisanal, "The Staging of the Popular," *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 145-183.

Old Havana and was the first significant art event to occur following the onset of the Special Period. The title “The Metaphors of the Temple” alluded to the art objects on display as metaphors, which René Francisco explained as important at the time for “thwarting prohibitions” and in “transforming a crisis situation into an effective space for producing and being inspired.”¹²⁷ The exhibition space itself was likened to a temple, however one that had been abandoned and remained to be refilled with a new discourse.¹²⁸ This called on the immediate situation: the departure of artists and teachers who were succeeded by professors and students who developed their own methodologies and discourses, despite great travail.

“The Metaphors of the Temple” featured the work of twelve ISA students, all male, in their second through fourth year of study.¹²⁹ The pieces on view included works on paper, paintings, sculptures, photography, and mixed media installations. The exhibition highlighted a very mature body of art being produced within ISA that was paradoxically charged by the challenges faced within the arts and society at large. The new work coming out of ISA, such as that explored in this chapter, exposed the socio-economic culture of the period and the influence of the loss experienced by the absence of the principal protagonists of previous decades and also the innovative pedagogy of those who stayed. Garaicoa and Segura noted the commonalities shared by the exhibited artists when they stated,

That what unites these artists under the same title is justified by two things, on one hand, a formation under similar circumstances, not only historical, but that responds to pedagogical concepts inherited by artists and aesthetes that have been marked by the promotion of young Cuban artists, and on the other hand, the emergence of certain tones within their proposals that not only demonstrate a

¹²⁷ Valdés Figueroa, “Horizontal Interactions: Pedagogy and Art in Contemporary Cuba,” 77.

¹²⁸ Peramo, *La escuela nacional de arte y la plastica cubana contemporanea*, 192.

¹²⁹ The artists included Abel Barroso, Los Carpinteros, Alberto Casado, Carlos Garaicoa, Ernesto Garcia, Jorge Luis Marrero, Douglas Perez, Fernando Rodriguez, Ernesto Segura, and Osvaldo Yero. Bruguera had already graduated and was an instructor in the painting department by this time.

readjustment within the field of positions and themes of Cuban artistic space, but of a new attitude towards the same language, marked without doubts, by this period of contractions and silences.¹³⁰

Here the artists/curators acknowledged the influence of the pedagogy at ISA and artists of previous generation, but also the need to move in their own direction, in order to address the issues relevant to their moment.

In an essay Garaicoa authored in the previous year, in anticipation of the exhibition, he addressed some of the common methods and themes found in the work coming out of ISA, with little discussion of the specific art objects.¹³¹ The first he discussed was the artist's use of a pseudonym or anonymity to express him/herself, as a method of critiquing an aspect of society. Second, Garaicoa explained that the works signaled a return to object-based practices, or, “[una] regresión de la obra al ‘Buen Hacer’” (a regression to the “well-made” work). However, as noted by Garaicoa, these were not traditional objects. In many instances the artists reflected on the fetishistic quality of the work, playing games with the viewer who may miss the point or be deceived by the polished quality of the work. This was a method used to veil critique, as the final point that Garaicoa articulated was that in most cases the objects displayed were produced to speak to something else, to more serious, pressing issues. These issues are never explained in any sort of detail in art historical writing from Cuba, they are simply alluded to, in order to prevent censorship of the work. Like Bruguera's, Garaicoa's, and Los Carpinteros' artworks analyzed in this chapter, the works on view played games with the viewer using appropriation, metaphor, and double entendres.

¹³⁰ *Las metáforas del templo*, (Havana: Hand printed catalogue, 1993) n.p. It should be noted that Garaicoa authored another catalogue of the same name in 1992 on the occasion of the exhibition. See footnote 90.

¹³¹ Garaicoa, *Las metáforas del templo* (1992), n.p.

A short text by Izquierdo and another by Mosquera from the exhibition catalogue concurred that there was “a new wave” within the arts.¹³² Although these practices were loosely connected to the art of previous decades, they were marked by new objectives and traits. In his essay, Mosquera famously first referred to the new artists as *la mala yerba* (weeds) for their ability to grow and thrive during volatile times. He concluded, “the cultural energy seems to be one of the final things in undoing, and this emphasizes the capacity of culture to resist—and even grow stronger—during difficult situations.”¹³³ The sentiment he expressed in this essay was then reiterated numerous times in his subsequent texts on the 1990s Generation.

A colloquium organized in conjunction with “The Metaphors of the Temple” stimulated discussions about the changes occurring at ISA and in the arts more broadly. Mosquera, Izquierdo, and Álvarez were invited along with artists and scholars from other art historical moments. Critic David Mateo cited this event as important for bringing in the additional voices of Felix Suazo and Abdel Hernández, who discussed the dilemmas faced by artists at the time including the “transactions between the world of culture and marketing” and the “rate of change within Cuba: the conditions for artistic production and cultural mobilization, local references, and the interaction with the Latin American and international art scenes.”¹³⁴ Mateo also noted the exhibition and accompanying forum as significant for restoring the “legitimizing mechanism of the institution and renewing the complementary link to art criticism and theory.”¹³⁵ This was the

¹³² Mosquera, “Crece la yerba,” in *Las metáforas del templo* (1993), n.p.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Cuban Art in the 1990s,” http://cubaabsolutely.com/articles2008/Cuba_art.html, accessed August 28, 2009.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

first major event to reunite artists and institutions following the turmoil of 1989.¹³⁶ These discussions reignited some of the fire and energy that had been missing in the prior years. The artists who had worked through a period of great adversity were finally ready to exhibit and critically analyze their own work and that of their peers.

The astute observations about the emerging 1990s Generation that resulted from “The Metaphors of the Temple,” can be further analyzed and expanded upon in relationship to the formative practices of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros. I propose that all three artists generated work from a position other than that of the “individual genius,” they took their cues from post-structuralist theory and intentionally decentered the position of the artist. Bruguera (re)produced the work of another artist as an imagined collaboration; Garaicoa mounted his interventions from an anonymous position; and Arrechea, Castillo, and Rodríguez collaborated as Equipo MAD and then Los Carpinteros and shared their work in a style similar to a carpenters’ union. In addition to performances and interventions, they all produced objects, many of which could be displayed and some of which were later sold, which was not often the case at the close of the previous decade.¹³⁷ Finally, “transvestism and parody [took] the place of the romantic impulses of the previous decade.”¹³⁸ Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros all produced work that was conceptual and intentionally ambiguous in order to address challenging topics such as exile and loss, material scarcity, and the city in ruins, all a reflection of the Special

¹³⁶ Although the fourth Havana Biennial occurred in 1991, it was deemed “unorganized” and a poor exhibition by Garaicoa, and is rarely discussed in the context of the 1990s Generation. Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

¹³⁷ Bruguera eventually destroyed much of the work included in *Homage to Ana Mendieta* to deliberately circumvent its commodity status.

¹³⁸ Valdés Figueroa, “Art of Negotiation and the Space of the Game,” 388. Not only did the artists conceal their individual identities in the production of work, but the use of metaphor and double entendres works in much of the same was as transvestism, concealing the true identity and intentions of the work. The term transvestism is often used by Cuban scholars to discuss the work at this time.

Period. They veiled their critiques to prevent the censorship of their work, which had been a serious issue in previous years.

Furthermore, to supplement the aforementioned observations I argue these artists additionally acted as “archeologists,” excavating the social, political, and historical nature of artistic production in and about Cuba, in addition to excavating the city of Havana itself.¹³⁹ By alluding to earlier artists’ and artisans’ practices they were able to confront what they perceived as a more unified and productive time. Bruguera excavated Mendieta’s practice and further removed soil and other organic materials to produce the work. Garaicoa first altered and added elements to his city and then mined it for treasures. Los Carpinteros uncovered the historical relationship between artisanal and artistic production revealing social tensions.

Finally they each identified and contended with voids that were more pronounced than before. Bruguera focused on the loss of artists including her mentor Elso, and also Mendieta as surrogate for emigrants; Garaicoa focused on the absences of colleagues and goods throughout the city, in addition to ruins; and Los Carpinteros’ work considered the lack of goods and necessities in Cuba, as well as the role and function of art in the time of great shortages. Their acts of homage, nostalgia, and recuperation, in response to great loss, were staged on the cusp of even greater change about to occur on the island. In 1993, the year of “The Metaphors of the Temple,” the U.S. dollar was legalized to facilitate tourism and trade. The subsequent presence of a dual economy—pesos for Cubans and dollars for foreigners—and renovations to the colonial center of Old Havana to lure visitors caused many artists to turn back and try to preserve their idea(lization) of pre-Special Period Cuba.

¹³⁹ Valdés Figueroa uses similar terminology when discussing Garaicoa’s practice, “he recovers a fragment of the city with photographic evidence of this archeological ‘excavation’ in the city ruins.” *Ibid.*, 387.

At the same time, plans were already in place for the Fifth Havana Biennial, to open in March of 1994. “The Metaphors of the Temple” coincided with the curators’ selection of Cuban participants for the international exhibition. As many of the previous participants were no longer residing on the island, the young ISA students, in addition to their instructors and peers, were in a privileged position and were selected for inclusion in the prestigious exhibition. As will be seen in the following chapter, the Fifth Havana Biennial in 1994 played a large role in the growth of the Cuban art market, which in large part accounted for the rise to prominence of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros.

CHAPTER THREE
DOLLARIZATION AND THE *DOBLE MORAL*: WORKS ON VIEW DURING THE FIFTH
HAVANA BIENNIAL

“Art critics have emphasized the differences between the generations of the ‘80s and the ‘90s. However, the main difference has not been stressed: the dollar.”¹

-Gerardo Mosquera

Being an artist was “a vehicle for leaving Cuba [in the eighties] and in the nineties a reason for staying there.”² Following the legalization of the dollar in 1993 artists obtained “mobility, a certain margin of tolerance, status, and cash” which made staying in Cuba a desirable option.³ The dollarization was the result of the Cuban government passing new and previously unimaginable Law-Decrees, beginning in 1993, to try to ameliorate the Cuban economy from the socio-economic devastation of the Special Period. These new Law-Decrees allowed Cubans to legally possess and use foreign currency and to be self-employed in many trades, including the arts. Artists were newly able to sell their work for foreign currency on the island, which in turn facilitated the sale of contemporary Cuban art in the international art market. In this chapter I investigate these changes to the Cuban economy and the immediate impact they had on society and on the arts. I explore artworks produced by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros during the transitional years of 1993-1994, when the new Law-Decrees were first put into effect. I primarily focus on the artists’ contributions to the Fifth Havana Biennial in 1994. This biennial brought a large international audience to the island and as a result many young Cuban artists were subsequently propelled into the international art market.

¹ “New Cuban Art Y2K,” 13.

² Power, “Cuba: One Story after Another,” 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

The work created by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros on view at the biennial reflected on emigration, loss, sacrifice, and ruin, as in the previous years, but now also alluded to the changes beginning to occur in the socio-economic sphere including the restoration of Old Havana for tourism, the burgeoning art market, and social and racial inequities escalated by dollarization. The artists began to engage more aggressively than in previous decades with tourists, collectors, and artists no longer living on the island, bridging Cuba with the outside world, especially exile communities and U.S. citizens. Their work served to fill the voids as they reinscribed the memory of émigrés, artisans, and edifices on the island.

I argue that the artists were self-consciously trying to reconcile the precarious position they were entering; their work reflected the strife experienced on the island, yet they were newly afforded certain economic privileges that improved their quality of life. I analyze the contradictory position artists were placed in as reflected in their work by building off of Mosquera's discussion of the dualism that emerged during this period in Cuba, further described by Álvarez and Tonel as a *doble moral* (double standard). The works discussed in this chapter exposed the artists' subtle and critical reflections concurrent with the changes occurring within Cuba.

BACKGROUND

The Dollarization of the Cuban Economy

On July 26, 1993 during what should have been a celebratory speech marking the fortieth anniversary of the Moncada attacks—widely accepted as the beginning of the Revolution—Castro recognized the precarious state of the Cuban economy. He stated, “Now life, reality, and the dramatic situation the world is experiencing...oblige us to do what we would never have

done otherwise if we had the capital and technology to do so.”⁴ Subsequently, on August 13, 1993 Law-Decree 140 was passed legalizing the possession and use of foreign currency by Cuban citizens. Although the Law-Decree legalized all foreign currency, the U.S. dollar became the official second form of legal tender in use on the island. This dollarization of the Cuban economy reversed the prohibition of ownership and circulation of the currency that had been in place since the onset of the Revolution (although it had been in use on the black market at an inflated rate).⁵ By legalizing the dollar and creating more opportunities to spend it at state operated dollar stores, in restaurants, and for services, dollars that would have otherwise been spent in the informal economy could now be recuperated by the government.⁶ Additionally, the legalization of the dollar enabled Cuba to (re)enter the global economy.

Further alterations to Cuba’s socio-economic structure gave Cubans more access to dollars. In December 1993 Law-Decree 141 ended state control of employment, production, and distribution and instead authorized self-employment (*trabajo por cuenta propia*) in more than one hundred trades and services, establishing a form of free enterprise.⁷ Reforms in agriculture allowed farmers to sell their surplus production at free markets, increasing food supplies to urban

⁴ Fidel Castro as quoted by Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 305.

⁵ Archibald R. M. Ritter and Nicholas Rowe, “Dollarization and Dedollarization,” in *The Dollarization Debate*, ed. Dominick Salvatore, James W. Dean, and Thomas D. Willett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 427.

⁶ “Between 1992 and 1993, the black market exchange rate increased from 10 pesos to the dollar to more than 100 pesos. By the end of the 1990s, and into the early years of the twenty-first century, the exchange rate stabilized between 20 and 25 pesos to the dollar...The dollar increasingly became the medium of exchange and served to drive the economy, both officially and unofficially. In fact, very few people indeed lived entirely off their monthly salaries of pesos, as vast numbers of Cubans engaged in one form or another of clandestine economic transaction as a means of survival.” Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 310. There was additionally a third currency in use, a convertible peso, equivalent to the dollar, which replaced the dollar in 2003.

⁷ “Under the provisions of the new self-employment law, automobile mechanics, carpenters, gardeners, taxi drivers, photographers, hairdressers, carpenters, cooks, and computer programmers, among others, were authorized to operate businesses and offer their services to the public at large at competitive prices...By the mid-1990s, more than 200,000 individuals had obtained self-employment licenses in more than 160 government approved activities.” Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 306.

areas.⁸ These new employment opportunities allowed many Cubans to earn a better salary, as they could charge in both pesos and dollars for goods and services. Additionally, the government increased the amount of remittance money one could receive from abroad. This provided many families with a surplus income and changed the relationship between Cubans and those who had emigrated to the United States. Cuban émigrés once considered *gusanos* (worms) or traitors became *mariposas* (butterflies) or saviors.⁹

To foster the relationship between *mariposas* and their Cuban relatives, the government sponsored an emigration-focused conference, “The Nation and Emigration,” in the spring of 1994. This event brought together “members of the government’s cultural apparatus and mostly U.S.-based artists and intellectuals from the so-called one-and-a-half generation (those who left Cuba as children).”¹⁰ During this conference Abel Prieto, then UNEAC’s president and three years later the Minister of Culture, “acknowledged that culture was what was common to all Cubans, and therefore the arena where the nation could meet its emigrants.”¹¹ Yet, Cuban emigrants were excluded from participating in the cultural arena and Havana Biennial. The conferences were thus contradictory in nature and seemed more geared toward the recuperation of remittances.

The decriminalization of the dollar was also intended to stimulate the growth of tourism and further bring much-needed foreign currency to the island. In 1993 the Office of the Historian, under the directorship of the Historian of the City of Havana Eusebio Leal, was

⁸ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 306 and Fernandes, *Cuba Represent*, 38.

⁹ Ruth Behar, “After the Bridges,” in *The Portable Island: Cubans at Home in the World*, ed. Ruth Behar and Lucía M. Suárez (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 4.

¹⁰ Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, “Multicubanidad,” in *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s*, ed. Ariana Hernandez-Reguant (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 75-76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

appointed to renovate the historic center of Old Havana to help attract tourists. In October 1993 Law-Decree 143 proclaimed the historic center of Old Havana “a priority zone for preservation.”¹² In order to conserve much of the city, the Office was encouraged to establish joint-venture relationships with domestic and international businesses.¹³ A tourist agency, *Habaguanex*, was established to “develop and exploit the hotel, extra-hotel, and commercial potential of the Historic Center [Old Havana].”¹⁴ In 1994 a Ministry of Tourism was established. Following these changes, the influx of tourists more than quadrupled from 340,300 in 1990 to 1.7 million in 1999.¹⁵ Within the decade, tourism shifted from “being an incidental source of income to becoming a structural factor in the Cuban economy.”¹⁶

The legalization of the dollar produced an official dual economy, pesos for all Cubans and dollars for tourists and Cubans involved in the tourist industry, black market, and/or recipients of remittances from family in the United States.¹⁷ To procure dollars many Cubans left their established professions to try to find low-level, but better paid work in the tourist industry

¹² Office of the historian of the city of Havana, *Challenge to Utopia: A Comprehensive Strategy to Manage the Safeguarding of Old Havana* (Havana and Pamplona: Ciudad/City, 1999). 58.

¹³ As Pérez explained “Joint venture projects expanded all through the 1990s...The most extensive joint venture enterprises were negotiated in the tourist section...foreign capital and managerial personnel, principally from Spain, Canada, and Mexico, entered into joint venture projects with the Cuban government to develop new tourist facilities and improve existing ones. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 307-308. In 1995 Law 77 updated a 1982 law giving over 49% ownership to foreign companies engaged in joint ventures with the Cuban government. Saney, *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*, 180-183.

¹⁴ Office of the historian of the city of Havana, *Challenge to Utopia*, 58.

¹⁵ Esther Whitfield, *Cuban Currency: the Dollar and Special Period Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 7. “The 1997 Cuban Economic Resolution spells out the necessity to develop hard currency-earning sectors of the economy to finance other important activities, making explicit the role tourism could play in the country’s economic future. To achieve this, it set a goal: to attract more than two million tourists to the country by the year 2000 and earn more than \$2,600 million from the tourist trade.” Orlando Gutiérrez Castillo and Nédia Gancedo Gaspar, “Tourism Development for the Cuban Economy,” *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Winter 2002), <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/58>, accessed September 1, 2011.

¹⁶ Orlando Gutiérrez Castillo and Nédia Gancedo Gaspar, “Tourism Development for the Cuban Economy,” <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/58>, accessed September 1, 2011.

¹⁷ Between 1992 and 1996 remittances increased by 242% from exiles in the U.S. Whitfield, *Cuban Currency*, 6.

or in black market dealings. Dollars allowed one to establish a business, access necessities such as medicine and food, in addition to clothing, electronics, and other imported luxuries, and in some cases helped Cubans buy their way to a lucrative position in the tourist industry. Ultimately the Cuban population was divided between those who had access to dollars and those who did not.

Cuba's (Re)Entry into the International (Capitalist) Art Market

The dollarization of Special Period Cuba had extreme effects on Cuban artistic production and the circulation and distribution of art. Following the legalization of the dollar and establishment of legal self-employment, artists could sell their work directly to clients, both Cuban and foreign, earning pesos or foreign currency. Cuban artists quickly gained access to dollars and by the end of the century a few became among the wealthiest citizens on the island. Previous to the legitimization of the dollar, artists lived modestly off of their salaries as teachers, designers, etc., since their work was primarily bought and retained or sold by the state.¹⁸ Now that artists could legally earn dollars, there was no longer a monetary incentive for artists to move abroad. Lucrative economic opportunities for artists within Cuba inhibited the flow of emigration. Artists could also more easily obtain visas to travel to participate in residencies and art exhibitions, which gave them more access to patrons and hard currency.¹⁹ Yet, for many artists the dollarization did not simply bring opportunity and wealth. Much of their work, that was to enter the burgeoning art market, was produced partly in homage to those who continued

¹⁸ Mosquera, "New Cuban Art Y2K," 13.

¹⁹ "Intellectuals have wrested a somewhat greater social, cultural, and political space, as evidenced by greater possibilities of travel, extended stays abroad, and the May 1992 National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists' (UNEAC) documents revealing a more critical posture toward the regime." J. Richard Planas, "Political Changes and Social Attitudes," in *Cuba and the Future*, ed. Donald E. Schulz (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 85.

to suffer during this period and/or acknowledged the more negative effects of these socio-economic changes. The social commitment of artists, evidenced in the previous chapter, was not sacrificed for potential monetary gains.

The controversial content of the work served as testimony of the lived experience on the island during this difficult period and was actually attractive to many collectors. These works documented this transitional period in Cuba's history in a manner that is cynical, yet not entirely dismal, expressing some confidence in a much-needed change for Cuba's future. Patrons were drawn to the work of Cuban artists for both its formal expertise and critical content. The ability to earn dollars for the sale of artwork resulted in a growing art market and fueled international interest in Cuban art. The art market was a (re)new(ed) occurrence on the island.²⁰ As scholars Lissette Monzón Paz and Darys J Vázquez Aguiar observed,

²⁰ Previously, the only other incipient commercial market had emerged in the 1950s, yet, it faded shortly thereafter with the emigration of its clientele following the victory of the Revolution. However, an art market, not always commercial in nature, has existed in some form on the island since the 1950s. Over time this market evolved into a "cultural market" (late 1970s through the early 1980s) then a "speculative market" (mid-to-late 1980s through the early 1990s) and finally a "new market situation" (mid-1990s). While the art gallery *Galería Habana* was established in 1962, its primary function was the dissemination of art, as opposed to the sale of art. Following the 1971 First National Congress of Education and Culture, art was no longer to be treated as merchandise and thus "art removed from commercialization was to play a new 'vital praxis,' and would have a new social function: to prioritize the masses' aesthetic and political education." However, by the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, in 1975, there was an interest in compensating artistic creation monetarily to assure quality, which led to the eventual establishment of the *Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales* (Cuban Fund of Cultural Goods, FCBC) in 1978.²⁰ This organization was the sole sales outlet for the visual arts and crafts within the island and abroad. Representatives attended international events and art fairs on behalf of Cuban artists. It was also responsible for all sales; artists were paid a small commission for their work and profits were reinvested into the fund. The creation of the FCBC was an attempt to design a market structure where cultural and aesthetic values took precedence over the monetary value of the work, as was appropriate for a socialist society. This "cultural market" was entirely ideological and thus produced an idealized scenario in the 1980s that supposedly enabled artists to produce without the pressure of having to sell their work.²⁰ In 1981 *Galería Habana* was reinaugurated, as was *Galería Acacia*, under the *Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales*. At this point they catered to a local audience and charged in pesos, but few paintings and sculptures sold. The "cultural market" lasted until the mid-to-late 1980s when a "speculative market" evolved. In 1988 Law-Decree Number 106 on the Labor Condition and the Commercialization of Works by Plastic and Applied Arts Creators provided more commercial opportunities for artists. On the cusp of the Special Period it transformed the status of the artist allowing him/her to work and earn independently of institutions like the FCBC. Artists gained more autonomy than before which helped facilitate the entry into a commercial, or "new market situation," when the opportunity to earn dollars for the sale of their work presented themselves in the mid-1990s. Lissette Monzón Paz and Darys J Vázquez Aguiar, "The Art Market on the Fringes of Ideology and Reality (Notes for approaching the new market situation of contemporary Cuban plastic arts of the 1990s)," *Arte Cubano* 3 (2001): 63-69. This article is based on a section of the authors' B.A. Thesis "The Art Market on the Fringes of

If during the eighties cultural institutions were agents controlling artistic circulation and production, in the nineties the market became a heterogeneous instance regulating the new strategies for the circulation of the national plastic arts. With the new-type market relations, our creators established a more direct dialogue with the international market.²¹

Although Cuban artists were given more independence in the late 1980s, and a fortunate few obtained permission to participate in residencies abroad giving them exposure to the international (capitalist) art market, they could not legally possess or spend dollars on the island.²² Yet in 1993, concurrent with the dollarization of the island, a burgeoning “new market situation” was forming. Cuban artists could produce, exhibit, and sell internationally, particularly to collectors from Europe (such as Ludwig), the United States, and Mexico.

The new market situation was in part fueled by the legalization of the importation, sale, and ownership of contemporary Cuban artwork in the United States. In June of 1990 Cuban drawings, paintings, and sculptures in the United States were classified as art/information and exempt from the embargo. U.S.-based art dealers and collectors were able to import Cuban art into the United States for the first time since the enactment of the embargo. In 1994 President Bill Clinton signed the Free Trade in Ideas Act, which allowed for nontraditional artistic media such as electronic media and performance art to be exempted as well. This, coupled with the artists’ ability to legally earn and spend dollars on the island, fostered a base of collectors in the Cuban-American exile community and among U.S. collectors.

Galleries specializing in contemporary Cuban art began to open internationally around this time. Cuban-born Nina Menocal, in Mexico City, was among the first to open a gallery in

Ideology and Reality,” Faculty of Arts and Philology, Havana University, 2001. Tutor: Dannys Montes de Oca. This is one of the few published essays addressing the art market in Cuba.

²¹ Ibid., 67.

²² Camnitzer discusses “Volume One” artists traveling in the mid 1980s and being exposed to the capitalist art market for the first time in “The Multiple expressions of Identity in Cuban Art,” n.p.

the 1990s and to facilitate residencies for Cuban artists from the 1980s and 1990s Generations and Galería Nina Menocal functioned as “a sort of Cuba cultural ministry in exile.”²³ Other galleries followed in its wake such as Galería Ramis Barquet in Monterrey, Mexico. A few new galleries did open in Cuba, and others already present, such as Galería Habana, returned to catering primarily to an international audience and charged in dollars. A national art market never formed on the island because very few Cubans could afford to purchase artwork.

1994 Havana Biennial

A steady base of international collectors of contemporary Cuban art grew during the mid-1990s and many were drawn to the island around this time to meet the artists and purchase work. This was especially true during the Havana Biennial. The artists participating in the Fifth Havana Biennial (May 6- June 30, 1994), as well as subsequent biennials, benefitted greatly from the legalization of the sale of artwork for dollars. The third (1989) and fourth (1991) biennials had been fiscally impacted by the economic crisis of the Special Period and had to make do with very few resources. The 1994 biennial was in part planned during the worst years of the Special Period, but the organizers changed the event’s format in order to attract external support from international foundations, corporate sponsors, and art patrons and tourists, gaining the support of Ludwig who became the largest financial backer of this biennial. The scope of the event was altered from an atypical Third World biennial, to one that more closely resembled the Venice and São Paulo biennials to which collectors were more accustomed. The event was professionalized

²³ Coco Fusco, “Bridge over Troubled Waters,” in *The Bodies that were not ours and Other Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 160. Fusco further explains that in 1993 the “Cuban government was exerting pressure on Mexico to force most of the better-known Cuban artists residing there to leave, which resulted in their being compelled to request political asylum in the US.”

and thematic exhibitions featured “fine” art forms that replaced the “popular” forms the event had a reputation for exhibiting.

The biennial was themed “Art, Society, Reflection” and divided into five subthemes: Fragmented Spaces—Art, Power, and Marginalization; The Other Shore—Migrations; Appropriations and Crossovers—Hybridizations, Cultural Mixtures; Surroundings and Circumstances—Ecology, Conditions of Life; and Art and the Individual on the periphery of Postmodernity. Of the Cuban artists invited to participate, there was a great deal of overlap with those who were included in the exhibition “Metaphors of the Temple” from the previous year. The curatorial team of the Fifth Havana Biennial had visited the student-organized exhibition in 1993 and selected nearly all who had exhibited to participate. Previously, only the most well-known and well-established Cuban artists, and on occasion a few emerging artists who were already exhibiting internationally, were included. This changed in 1994, when following the departure of several well-known artists, many talented ISA students (or recent graduates) were featured alongside prominent artists from the 1980s who still resided on the island.²⁴

The new format of the event proved successful and it was reviewed as follows,

This year’s Havana Biennial V (May 6-June 30 [1994]) generated more attention in the U.S. and Europe than any previous one. Given Latin America’s new high-powered commercial galleries, sophisticated contemporary art museums and big-budget art collectors, and given the continuing economic recession in the European and U.S. art markets, Latin American artists have gained unprecedented international stature in the last few years. As a result, the Havana Biennial, a showcase of current Latin American art, the first look at a new generation of Cuban artists, and the most important gathering of artists of the Third World, has become an important event for the First World art scene.²⁵

²⁴ Of the twelve young Cuban artists featured at the biennial, eight had been included in “Metáforas del Templo,” Abel Barroso, Alexandre Arrechea, Marco Castillo, Dagoberto Rodríguez, Carlos Garaicoa, Fernando Rodríguez, Ernesto Segura, and Osvaldo Yero. In addition two female graduates of ISA, Tania Bruguera and Sandra Ramos, and two artists who had stopped their formal artistic education after high school, Kcho and Pedro Álvarez were included.

²⁵ Kurt Hollander, “Art, emigration and tourism.” *Art in America* (October 1994): 41.

This biennial was the first to be international and include artists and collectors from the United States. It was a truly global event “and made Havana one of the favorite destinations for increasing numbers of cultural tourists coming from the globalized world.”²⁶ Although visitors to the biennial expressed their dismay with the severity of the poverty on the island, they were eager to purchase the work of Cuban artists, and especially that which reflected on the economic hardship. Artists recount biennial patrons visiting their homes and/or studios and buying anything they could, including very preliminary sketches.²⁷ Relationships were fostered between the artists and many of these tourists, some of who were important international curators, dealers, and collectors. Additionally, the Cuban government took advantage of this interest by allowing the FCBC to sell work for a greater profit:

Thanks in part to the Havana Biennale, the global art market paid attention to the peripheral artists. In turn, starting with the Cubans, they became aware of this and used the Biennale as a marketing niche. The cultural institutions in the country (as a result of the new economic policies in place) found in the Biennale a useful way to retrieve economic gains. ‘State art sales rose to over half a million dollars last year (1993) from little more than \$20,200 a decade ago according to the Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales, the body handling the transactions.’²⁸

It is important to note, however, “The commercialization and touristization of the Biennial was not lost on the event’s organizers or the participating artists. In fact, all were painfully aware of the cultural contradictions inherent in the theory and practice of the event.”²⁹ As stated, Cuban

²⁶ Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, “Cultural Maps, Networks, and Flows: The History and Impact of the Havana Biennale 1984 to the present” (PhD diss., Doctoral University of Pittsburgh, 2009), xxix.

²⁷ Artist and ISA graduate (1994) Abel Barroso, interview by author, January 23, 2008.

²⁸ Rojas-Sotelo, “Cultural Maps, Networks, and Flows,” 323. In Lilian Llanes’ introductory remarks to the catalogue her “stance toward the global market for art is strongly critical. Llanes denounces its voracity and inconvenience when establishing new readings of contemporary art and art history narratives,” *ibid.*, 275.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

artists' work from the period continued to reflect on the loss experienced at the time—from emigration to material scarcity— or it satirized the very dollarization from which they were beginning to benefit.

Doble moral

Many of the artists working on the island in the early 1990s altered their practices to produce object-based work that could be sold during the biennial. This was a drastic change from the conceptual and often performative projects that dominated Cuban artistic production at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. In the mid-1990s the serious themes addressed in the work, even when presented through humor or irony, seemed somewhat contradictory to the increasingly commercial intention of the work. The dual nature of Cuban artwork, as both an aesthetic and social object, and also as part of both an ideological and commercial apparatus, mirrored the new position of Cuban artists.³⁰ Cuban artists could now express their reality whilst earning a living on the island. Mosquera has described this predicament,

All this [the dollarization and subsequent changes] has created something like two economies, two sets of morals, and even two parallel worlds. It is a double structure that involves all aspects of life in Cuba: people do not subsist from their principal occupation but from the other one, secondary but decisive; they say one thing and think the opposite; they think in one way and live in another. There is a schizophrenia and cynicism at bottom that match the young artists' situation.³¹

The artists, like other Cuban citizens, had to confront their new reality that was full of astounding contradictions between the socialist rhetoric and dollarized reality. Álvarez used the term *doble moral* (double morality/double standard) to explain this predicament when she stated, in

³⁰ The dual function of Cuban art as ideo-aesthetic and a commercial object would come to the foreground of a seminal exhibition curated by Dannys Montes de Oca “*El Oficio del Arte*” (The Trade of Art) in November 1995.

³¹ “New Cuban Art Y2K,” 15.

response to the presence of Cuban artists turning to the strategy of appropriation and simulation, “The simulacrum, as a privileged means 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.”³² Tonel went on to further explain the position of the *doble moral*,

These works [by artists of the nineties] tend to be ambiguous, with one foot in the critical tradition of the eighties, which the artists refrain from renouncing completely, in part because aligning themselves with this tradition reinforces their artistic legitimacy. But they are also rooted in the demands of the market—in an increasingly dollarized economy of international galleries and collectors, as well as multicultural or postcolonial curators and critics whose often touristic mentality contributes to the fixing of stereotypes in those peripheral areas that benefit from their periodic safaris. To their credit, contemporary Cuban artists have learned to negotiate this double demand in their favor.

This dualism/*doble moral* that dominated the daily life of Cuba’s inhabitants and the Cuban art community is evident in the work produced by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros in 1993 through 1994 and exhibited at the Fifth Havana Biennial in 1994.

TANIA BRUGUERA

Following her graduation from ISA in spring 1992, Bruguera assumed the role of instructor at the esteemed institution where her pedagogy and artwork were informed by the McEvilley-inspired activities created by Sánchez and Garcíandía. On alternate days she also instructed art classes at a correctional school for youth “Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante,” as part of a short-lived program established by painter Tomás Sánchez. There she used art as a “tool” to provide students with “freedom, calm, or a language to express their traumas.”³³

³²Álvarez, “Accomplice’s Probe: Taking the Pulse of 1990s Cuban Art,” 17.

³³ Valdés Figueroa, “Horizontal Interactions: Pedagogy and Art in Contemporary Cuba,” 66.

Bruguera recognized ISA as a “world of representation and privilege,” the world where she felt she belonged, even though the correctional school was “more real.”³⁴ Her experience teaching art as a tool to express one’s traumas, as well as the conceptualism encouraged at ISA, influenced the form and content of her subsequent projects.

In 1992 Bruguera began to work on a project simultaneously to “Homage to Ana Mendieta” entitled “Memoria de la postguerra” (Postwar Memory, 1992- c.1997).³⁵ By working on the two projects concurrently Bruguera was able to reflect on similar themes in differing ways. As I previously discussed, Bruguera became Mendieta’s surrogate and focused on her as a metaphor for the condition of exile and loss, as it related to Cuba’s artistic community and the conditions of the Special Period. In the “Postwar Memory” works Bruguera concentrated on herself, her colleagues, and Cubans living on the island and abroad, to broaden her exploration of emigration and loss. She worked on both series around the same time that the government was organizing conferences aimed at restoring relations with Cuban emigrants in the United States. While these conferences functioned on an official government-sanctioned level, other non-government organized projects, such as Bruguera’s, exposed the contradictions between what the aims of the government and the actual treatment of the emigrant communities. These conflicting situations are further indicative of the transitional years of the Special Period and are exemplary of the dual structure of life (to say one thing and do another) in Special Period Cuba. While the government attempted to repair the relationship with the exile community, in the “Postwar Memory” series Bruguera reached out to emigrants in a very personal and affective way. By

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bruguera’s projects overlapped as she had the desire to produce her own original work in addition to recreating that of Mendieta. Interview by author, March 22, 2009. The series “Memoria de la postguerra” is translated as both “Postwar Memory” and “Memory of the Postwar,” I use the translation “Postwar Memory.”

branching out to form a network with self-exiled artists and additionally honoring all Cubans who left the island during the Special Period, Bruguera began to fill the void left by those now gone. She committed the memory of these communities to Cuba's historical record.

Postwar Memory: a Newspaper

Components of "Postwar Memory" were first exhibited in November of 1993, and again, modified, at the 1994 biennial. Although "Postwar Memory" continued beyond the 1994 biennial, the pieces exhibited in "The Other Shore" segment of this biennial are the primary focus here, as they are indicative of the transition occurring on the island and within the artist's practice. Included at the biennial were the works *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory [a newspaper]), 1993 (Figure 3.1), *El viaje* (The Trip), 1993 (Figure 3.2, on the right), *Tabla de salvación* (Table of Salvation), 1994 (Figure 3.2, on the left), and *Miedo* (Fear), 1994 (Figure 3.2, in the back center).³⁶ These works demonstrate how and why Bruguera continued her exploration of the Cuban diaspora, related to the biennial theme of "The Other Shore." I maintain that she filled the void the émigrés' absence left by forming a network between Cubans on the island and living abroad. She documented the opinions and experiences of both communities as they addressed the effects of emigration on the arts in Cuba and memorialized those who perished in trying to emigrate. Furthermore, in light of the emergent market her practice became even more ephemeral, in part a rejection of the growing demand for collectable objects.

The works from the "Postwar Memory" project paid tribute to the transitional years of 1993 and 1994 in Cuban history from the artist's perspective. In titling the piece "Postwar

³⁶ She also curated an exhibition of work by Cuban women focused on the theme of feminine identity (Jacqueline Brito, Sandra Ceballos, Ines Garrido, Lidzie Alvisa Jimenez, Aimee Garcia) at the Centro Provincial de Artes Plasticas y Diseno in Old Havana concurrent with the biennial.

Memory” Bruguera alluded to the aftermath of a war and the changes occurring on the island set in place to redeem Cuba from its wartime status. Furthermore, Bruguera compared the Cuban art world, following the artistic diaspora and the rupture in relationships between artists and institutions that had ended the previous decade, to the aftermath of a war. Bruguera explained,

What we were left with looked like a landscape of trenches devastated by war, in which many of us who remained were exhausted, beaten or disillusioned and changed our outlook or picked ourselves up in a more personal, private way. It seemed to be very much what I’d heard described as a postwar situation, except that in this case it had been a war of ideas.³⁷

Bruguera became invested in this series just as the legalization of the dollar began to alter the economic and social conditions on the island, especially for artists.³⁸ Artists who remained in Cuba, many young, were still trying to cope with the loss of their colleagues and material scarcity, while confronting the new opportunities presented with the dollarization of Cuba and rising art market.

The centerpiece of the “Postwar Memory” project was a newspaper, bearing the same name, which featured articles and reproductions of artwork by Bruguera’s Cuban colleagues (artists, curators, and critics) living on the island and abroad. Her impetus for creating the *Postwar Memory* newspaper was in part to capture the consciousness of the Cuban art community as it continued losing integral members and to connect artists still on the island with émigrés. Bruguera explained,

I discovered that the legacy of the artists who had left now belonged exclusively to the realm of memory and oral history. There were few tangible signs of what they had done...I thought I could assume the post of the artist as witness who

³⁷ Octavio Zaya, “Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya,” *Cuba: Los Mapas del Deseo/Landkarteiten der Sehnsucht/Maps of Desire* (Wien: Folio Verlag Wien-Bozen, 1999), 241.

³⁸ The Special Period was officially called “A Special Time in a Time of Peace” referring to Cuba using wartime precautions and rations during a time of peace due to the economic devastation.

would leave a record of the social upheavals of the era, trying to put to the test the theory of art as agent of change of reality.³⁹

Bruguera served as a witness to the loss suffered within the art community and “social upheavals” more generally. She desired for her work to serve as an agent of change, bringing awareness to the suffering of many and preserving the memory of those who left, especially as a new generation was rising to take their place. She used her “Postwar Memory” series, and especially her newspapers, to bridge the Cuban art community on the island and abroad, an act that the government purported to support. She also used the project to visualize reactions to the socio-economic changes more broadly as they were occurring.

Two editions of the newspaper were produced. The first, published in November 1993 (13.4 x 8.4 in.; Figure 3.1, cover), contained articles that addressed the “postwar” condition of the Cuban art world. The second, published in June 1994 (12.2 x 8.2 in.; Figure 3.3, cover), focused on emigration more broadly. Bruguera financed and directed the creation of the newspapers by collaborating with artists and colleagues for its content, design, and production. She authored a brief essay in the first edition that serves as an introduction to the project. The other essays were written by artists or critics she invited “to write typical sections on sports or agriculture, as a metaphor of the political and artistic situation in Cuba at the time.”⁴⁰ The newspaper format represented a cheap and familiar democratic form. Bruguera’s friends, who were printers and had access to government owned equipment, clandestinely printed both editions of the newspaper in black ink on newsprint, during the middle of the night. While the project is always referred to as a newspaper and it was produced using the layout and materials of a newspaper, it assumed the format of a small journal, center folded, with twelve (1993) and

³⁹ Bruguera, “Postwar Memories,” 171.

⁴⁰ Goldberg and Bruguera, “Interview,” 18.

then twenty-eight (1994) pages. Fifteen hundred copies of each edition were published—quite a remarkable feat given the paper shortage.

The first edition was included in Bruguera's 1993 "Postwar Memory" exhibition and it was distributed to international patrons at the 1994 biennial. The second was produced in June 1994. The papers were given out and not sold intentionally to counteract the growing market driven practices of her cohort. Additional newspapers were planned, but the publication was censored in 1994 and ceased publication.⁴¹ Although only the first issue managed to circulate at the biennial, despite censorship, both editions are analyzed here together.

The first publication, centered on the topic of the postwar period, was divided into brief sections by topic: Agriculture, Architecture, Health, News from the Airport, Culture, Events, News Articles, and Correspondence (Table of Contents, Figure 3.1, on the right). Many essayists directly attended to the postwar condition of Cuba, while others alluded to it in their contributions. Bruguera's editorial statement outlined the use of the term, "'Postwar,' for its resemblance to the physical condition of the city, the interior state of the people, the social nature of art."⁴² Artist and critic Rafael López Ramos' fictional essay "La guerra ha terminado afirma joven artista cubana" (The War Has Ended Affirms Young Cuban Artist) included military jargon for the "war" waged by artists that peaked in 1989 and was determined to have ended "although an armistice ha[d] not been signed." Here a young artist acknowledged the Cuban art world on the verge of change. Curator and critic Nelson Herrera Ysla opened his article "De frente y luchando" (From the Front and Fighting), "La Habana, Octubre 19, 1993. La guerra ha

⁴¹ A call for solicitations for a subsequent issue on nationalism was included in the second volume, however, other sources cite the theme for this unrealized version as reconciliation. Additionally this third volume was reportedly going to be distributed through networks of gossip and rumor, as opposed to a print version. Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, fn. 117, 302. A third version of the newspaper was eventually published as a brochure in conjunction with Bruguera's 2003 exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

⁴² Valdés Figueroa, "Trajectories of a Rumor," 19.

terminado” (October 19, 1993. The war has ended). He too used military terminology and described the aftermath of a war with a figure emerging from the rubble, alluding to the rise of the new generation of artists. Herrera Ysla discussed art as having born witness to what happened economically and as a form of new life that persevered, albeit with limited resources.⁴³

Market pressures were also addressed in the newspaper. An imaginary company, “Eighties,” created by a collective of artists that called themselves Eighties S.A., advertised the sale of artwork as “take away art” (Figure 3.4).⁴⁴ The company purported to aid in the export of work from the 1980s, along with souvenirs and books to help one familiarize oneself with the principle exponents of the period. This alluded to the growing number of art tourists to the island who traveled to discover artists and purchase work for reasonable sums and also the artists of the 1980s who emigrated to pursue better economic opportunities abroad.

Artists associated with the 1980s and 1990s Generations submitted reproductions of their artwork for inclusion in the newspaper, related (often somewhat loosely) to the postwar topic. Tonel, of the 1980s Generation, contributed a drawing of the island floating in a bucket of water (Figure 3.5) that resonated with the insularity experienced by residents of the island. Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado), of the 1990s Generation, drew a palm tree morphing into an oar on a letter from the Swiss Embassy and American Interest Section denying his request for a visa (Figure 3.6). The reproduction of this work addressed the means by which many emigrated from the island, by boat and oar, when their application for a visa was denied. The work also

⁴³ Abelardo Mena, in his text “Mas a la bien y el mar” (Beyond the Good and the Sea), also acknowledged the use of wartime rhetoric in Special Period Cuba to address the power struggles waged in the arts. He additionally referenced both the hardships encountered at the time, such as the lack of necessary transportation, and also the new privileges allotted to the emergent “mala hierba” [sic] generation, whose work was being heavily promoted. Although his essay maintained a critical tone, he retained the belief that Cuban art education and projects for socio-cultural insertion prevented artists from altering their practice under market pressure.

⁴⁴ The members of Eighties S.A. were Omar Copperi, Max Delgado, Roberto Diago Durruthy, Félix Ernesto Pérez, and Eric Rojas.

foreshadowed the impending *balsero* (rafter) crisis that Kcho and Bruguera, among others, confronted through their work.

The newspaper also contained texts that exposed the attitudes held toward Cuban émigrés on the cusp of the government's attempt to bridge the two communities. "Noticias del aeropuerto" (Airport News) discussed Mosquera's return from two and a half months in the United States, where upon his arrival in Cuba customs officers confiscated the articles and information he had collected about Cuban emigrants as "enemy propaganda." On the backside of the newspaper was a list of over one hundred Cuban artists who had emigrated between 1990 and 1993, the media they worked in, and where they then resided (figure 3.7). This made available inaccessible information for which there was a great deal of official denial, making the newspaper extremely controversial. The document confirmed the severity of the artistic diaspora and acknowledged those who left.

The second edition of *Postwar Memory* featured its name on the front page in a font reminiscent of dripping blood (Figure 3.3), not unlike Bruguera's recreation of Mendieta's *Blood Tracks*. Unlike the bubble letters used in the first edition, the dripping blood-like font was likely a response to the censorship of the first edition and to the increase in lives lost in the process of emigrating. Cuban artists, art historians, and poets in exile, who more broadly confronted the issue of emigration, authored many of the articles and illustrations published in this edition. The volume was divided into the sections: Letters to the Editor, History, Classified, Music, News, Nation, Correspondents, Patriots, Theater, Poetry, Artistic Vocabulary, and Comics (Table of Contents, Figure 3.8).

Some contributors reflected personally on emigration, others took a more historical stance, while a few wrote a series of notes or ideas on the topic. An article by artist José Ramón

Alonso included a succinct history of emigration from Cuba. Mosquera authored an essay that explained the differences between the emigration of Cuban artists before the Revolution, when they often shuttled between Paris and Havana, and the more recent diaspora where artists moved more internationally. In this essay Mosquera famously noted that “art in Cuba is like a machine that continues to function after the motor has stopped.”⁴⁵ He commended artists within Cuba for not giving up following a period of great adversity. Álvarez, in her contribution “Reflexión desde un encuentro” (Reflections after an Encounter), likewise recalled the events that led to the artistic diaspora and accounted for the new generation.

Artist Douglas Pérez’s witty “Vocabulario artístico: manual de terminos” (Artistic Vocabulary: Manual of Terms) reflected on emigration as it impacted the arts at that moment. The terms he defined included: “arte de los ochenta” (art of the 1980s), “balseiro” (rafter), “extranjero que viene a comprar” (foreigner who comes to buy), “Gerardo Mosquera,” “Mala Hierba [sic.],” “Mercado,”... calling on the most significant concepts and people that came to define art of the late 1980s into the 1990s. Attention was paid to the generational differences and especially the role of the dollar. An advertisement for the faux company “Eighties,” again by Eighties S.A., echoed this sentiment by announcing services such as laminating passports and photocopying documents to facilitate the process of emigrating (Figure 3.9). This ad addressed both the departure of the previous generation who left for monetary reasons and also the entrepreneurial mentality of the time where Cubans devised many ways of earning dollars. Eighties S.A. also advertised their exhibition that was to be staged during the Fifth Biennial “A falta de pan: camellos. Un oasis en el camino de la necesidad al mercado” (In a pinch: camels.

⁴⁵ *Postwar Memory* 1994, 11-12.

An oasis on the path to necessity to the market) during which they mocked Cuba's reentry in the global market and its immediate impact on the arts (Figure 3.10).⁴⁶

Reproductions of artworks that addressed emigration were also included in the newspaper. Manuel Piña's photograph of a boy jumping off Havana's *malecón* (sea wall) into the vast ocean from his *Water Wasteland* series (Figure 3.11) symbolized the wall as both a diving board and an obstacle. A boy jumping into the sea represented a moment of joy and play or trepidation and risk. Garaicoa contributed a drawing, *Proyecto acerca de la realidad y los puentes (proyecto necesario, apuntado en La Habana 1993)* (Project About Reality and Bridges: A Necessary Project, suggested in Havana 1993) (Figure 3.12). His architecturally-inspired rendering of a space-age looking bridge with a glass orb standing on legs that would help traverse the ocean was imagined to connect Cuba to the United States to facilitate emigration or avoid it altogether by means of an actual bridge that would allow residents to move between the two countries.

The contributions to the newspapers were not edited or altered by Bruguera preceding their publication. Within the articles and artworks the authors did not glorify or try to justify what was occurring during that particular historical moment, as was customary within Cuban mass media. Rather Bruguera "tried to begin a discussion and leave a record about matters that [she] felt were at that moment blurred in public opinion at the same time that they were themes or places of coincidence in the investigations of various artists or theorists."⁴⁷ The newspapers consolidated the voices of artists and scholars who were already expressing their opinions on the state of the arts in Cuba at the turn of the decade. The two published issues included articles and

⁴⁶ The exhibition included fake money that featured images of artists from the 1980s both still on the island and those who emigrated (with those enjoying more lucrative careers appearing on the higher denominations).

⁴⁷ Bruguera, "Postwar Memories," 173.

artwork that chastised censorship, mourned the loss of colleagues, and heralded the perseverance of and new opportunities afforded to those who remained on the island. Thus, the newspapers served as testimonial space and recorded candid responses to the dualism and contradictions that underscored this critical period in Cuban history and especially the arts.⁴⁸

It was observed that when Bruguera was working on her newspapers collectivity was being abandoned for the “glamorous lights of the art market, international curators, and galleries.”⁴⁹ Bruguera’s work was instead a collaborative effort and a way for the international Cuban art community to come together despite all of the changes that often compel artists to compete with one another. She explained her newspaper as “ow[ing] a debt to its place of origin, Cuba, and to the moment that it lived within Cuban culture. One of its main objectives was not to exclude anyone from either side of the sea, but rather to be a bridge, a neutral space for coming together.”⁵⁰ Through this piece Bruguera orchestrated a continuum in the production of Cuban art reconciling those outside and inside more successfully than the biennial or the government. Camnitzer described its success, “*Memoria de la postguerra*, in its first two issues, has become an essential source of documentation for anyone wishing to learn about Cuban culture at these critical times on the island.”⁵¹

While the contents of the two editions addressed and/or mocked the transitions occurring in the art world and the politics involved, the very act of clandestinely directing the production of

⁴⁸ “*Postwar Memory*...appears as a newspaper, because one can see in it a testimonial space that presents notes rather than theses in its commentaries; because it is a point of reference for opinions; because of its assembled character, and because of the immediacy of its need for self-expression.” Ibid.,” 172.

⁴⁹ Kevin Power, “Tania Bruguera: Art as a gesture,” in *The Real Royal Trip*, (New York: PS.1./MOMA, 2003), <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/502-0-The+Real+Royal+Trip.htm>.

⁵⁰ Bruguera, “Postwar Memories,” 174.

⁵¹ “*Memoria de la Postguerra*” (Book Review), *Art Nexus* 15 (Jan-March 1995): 28, 30.

a newspaper, especially one that was determined to preserve the memory of emigrants, was a deliberate political act. When the first edition fell into the wrong hands it was censored and copies were confiscated. This was allegedly because Bruguera broke a number of laws in the production of the papers. She did not secure permission to use the equipment to print the papers, intentionally employing this guerrilla tactic to circumvent censorship. While the illegality of the work's production was the explanation used to confiscate and censor the newspapers, it was in actuality more likely because they contained controversial articles that acknowledged the severity of the artistic diaspora and emigration, in addition to the hardships faced at the time. As Mosquera has explained, "In a country without free press, to publish an underground newspaper with critical content was and is a radical action to undertake."⁵² As a result Bruguera's collaborator who printed the papers was detained. The director of Cuba's National Council for Visual Arts interrogated Bruguera and she ceased production on the work.⁵³ The censorship of this piece divested Bruguera of her desire to collaborate on works that would put others at risk of arrest. While she did continue to produce objects, she turned inward and focused instead on performance and installation art.

The Trip, Table of Salvation, Fear

Along with the newspapers, an installation, *El Viaje* (The Trip; Figure 3.13), was assembled for the "Postwar Memory" exhibition in 1993 and again at the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994. Like the newspapers, *The Trip* dealt with the issue of emigration, however, in this piece Bruguera confronted her personal experience with the emigration of a loved one, which enabled

⁵² Gerardo Mosquera, "Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work: The Body is the Social Body," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2009), 29.

⁵³ Nicole Bass, "Biography," in *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2009): 129.

her to contend with her personal loss and to explore the more general implications of self-exile. Following the unexpected emigration of Bruguera's partner of six years, the two corresponded through letters for nearly twenty months. To produce *The Trip* Bruguera packed the letters from her ex, along with objects from her past including drawings, letters, and clothing, into brown paper bags that she sealed with twine making them appear as parcels that could be carried or shipped.⁵⁴ The first time Bruguera exhibited the work, in 1993, she stacked the parcels to form a barricade (Figure 3.13). When she reexhibited them months later at the biennial the parcels were organized to form the shape of Cuba (Figure 13.2, on the right) in order to expand the meaning of the work beyond the personal. For Bruguera, "Cuba has always been a place where personal issues play out collectively."⁵⁵ Thus, she wanted her work not only to serve as her individual testimony, but also to speak to the collective experiences of her fellow Cuban citizens who had to contend with the emigration of loved ones. It was not about her personal pain but that of Cubans more generally.

By packing up the components of her life, Bruguera simulated the emigrant experience. Emigrating meant cutting all strings, leaving nearly everything behind except memories. Cuban-American cultural anthropologist Ruth Behar has called Cuba a "portable island," explaining "wherever we Cubans go, we take the island with us, lugging it along in our memory and dreams."⁵⁶ This work enabled Bruguera to pack up and part with many personal items, putting closure on her relationship and ridding herself of objects from her past, relegating them to the realm of memory. She tried to tap into the mentality of the emigrant, and to reflect on the

⁵⁴ Bruguera, "Postwar Memories, 174.

⁵⁵ Zaya, "Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya," 241.

⁵⁶ Behar, "After the Bridges," 3.

concept that “displacement has an emotional impact not only on those who leave, but also those who stay.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, packing up her belongings was ritualistic and enabled the artist to make a fresh start. This was symbolic not only of the transitions occurring to Cuba’s socio-economic structure but also the changes that were to unfold in her own practice.

Bruguera’s penchant for working in ephemeral materials countered the object-based practices taken up by many of her peers who were being lured by the prospect of a sale. Few of Bruguera’s works from this series were marketable. *The Trip*, like many of the works included in “Postwar Memory,” was composed from found or ephemeral materials. This stemmed from Bruguera’s training with Elso and was in part born of necessity, as traditional fine art materials were hard to come by during the Special Period. On the fringes of the art market, when some artists were furiously producing as much work as they could to keep up with the demands of collectors, she was destroying her work and producing the unsellable. Bruguera eventually destroyed the parcels and their contents precluding their sale to eager art tourists during the biennial.

Bruguera more directly confronted emigration and the impending *balsero* crisis through a sculpture, *The Table of Salvation*, and a performance, *Fear*, produced as part of the “Postwar Memory” project and her submission to the biennial. The Special Period caused an increase in *balseros* who built or found makeshift vessels to attempt to sail from Cuba to Florida.⁵⁸ Although drastic measures were taken during the mid-1990s to try to stabilize the Cuban economy and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Cuban *balseros* who reached U.S. shores safely were granted automatic asylum. In the summer of 1994 the *balsero* situation escalated into a crisis following the sinking of a hijacked tugboat on July 15 by Cuban government boats seven miles outside of Havana. Subsequently many more boats were illegally seized, which resulted in violence and led to a riot in Havana on August 5. The Cuban regime did not impede these illegal attempts to leave the island until the U.S. signed an agreement providing for safe immigration between the two countries. Consequently a number of makeshift boats and rafts were produced as Cuban tempted their fate.

provide Cuban citizens with more opportunities to earn income from entrepreneurial endeavors, the majority of the population continued to suffer. As a result many felt their only hope for betterment was to leave. Somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 Cubans made it safely to Florida, although no one knows how many lost their life at sea (estimates are one in five died trying).

Bruguera created *Table of Salvation* (Figure 3.2, on the left, and Figure 3.14) as a cenotaph to those who lost their lives trying to reach the shores of Florida.⁵⁹ It consisted of five black marble “planks” the height of the average Cuban citizen, roughly five and a half feet. Projecting out from the space between each marble slab was a piece of wood molded in the shape of a hull. The wood was reflected in the marble, thus completing the form of the boat. Cotton was placed in between the marble slabs. Marble, typically used in monuments to honor those who lost their lives in war, was juxtaposed to the cotton, a material used to make bandages. The planks did not include an inscription, just the illusion of a boat. Bruguera’s sculpture was powerful for its large scale and subtle homage to the *balseros*. It acknowledged the risk involved in emigrating from Cuba. As in other of her works she incorporated organic materials. Unlike “Homage to Ana Mendieta” and the other works included in “Postwar Memory”, however, this piece was not ephemeral. The work needed to be permanent, a memorial to those who perished at sea.

Bruguera incorporated *The Trip* and *Table of Salvation* in her performance *Fear* enacted at the biennial. This was her first performance aside from her reenactments of those originally created by Mendieta. In *Fear* she picked up one of the bundles from *The Trip*, and opened it to remove cotton. She held the cotton while approaching *Table of Salvation* and then used it to

⁵⁹ Listed in biennial catalogue under the title *Table of Salvation* and in the recent Neuberger catalogue. She refers to it as *Life Raft* in her text “Postwar Memories.”

symbolically caulk the wooden planks of the “boat.” Next, she walked toward a boat that she had retrieved from a dockyard, decrepit and rendered useless (Figure 3.2, in the background and Figure 3.15). Bruguera placed the remaining cotton from her bag and a bottle into the boat.⁶⁰ She then laid herself, wearing all white, in the boat, and closed her eyes (Figure 3.16). She remained in the boat for hours.⁶¹

The act of submission she enacted by placing her body into the boat recalled that of the *balseiros*; the broken boat Bruguera attempted to repair with cotton was reminiscent of their makeshift floating vessels. Throughout the performance the cotton was used emblematically as caulk for the boat, but it also resembled gauze, an implement that could be used to bandage injured Cuban citizens. The bottle Bruguera placed by her side may have been intended to carry water, to sustain her during her trip, or libations to be given as an offering to an *oricha* for protection during the journey. Her all white garments symbolized purity, as worn during Afro-Cuban rituals. The performance was both ritualistic and a deliberate political act, drawing attention to the suffering and the desperate maneuvers that Cubans were willing to subject themselves to at this time. Her body was intended to stand in for all Cubans.

Her body laying in the boat was also reminiscent of Mendieta’s silhouettes, however, here Bruguera performed (clothed) for an interval of time. This performance was a hybrid of body art and performance art; it was a meditation on risk and endurance—what the body is capable of during times of adversity. It was a quiet and personal act, very different from the

⁶⁰ The description of this performance is largely based on her discussion in “Postwar Memories,” 177.

⁶¹ Juan Antonio Molina, “Entre la ida y el regreso: La experiencia del otro en la memoria”, 23 Bienal de São Paulo (Havana: Consejo de las Artes Plásticas, 1996), <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/422-0-Between+Coming+and+Going+The+Experience+of+the+Other+in+the+Memory.htm>.

guerilla-style actions that dominated performance art in the previous decade. Performing solo in an installation of her own making was one strategy that she would continue to explore.

Bruguera's tribute to Cuban emigrants and those who perished trying to emigrate was her attempt to memorialize them at the same time that the government was organizing conferences to bridge the emigrant and Cuban populations. The inclusion of such work at the Havana Biennial was especially crucial considering that Cuban emigrants were intentionally excluded from participating in the biennial for political reasons. This was not the case for émigrés from other countries who were invited to represent their adopted countries. The omission of Cuban emigrants reinforced the point that once one left Cuba, whatever the reason, one was written out of history. Bruguera's work additionally documented the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s Generation and rise of the art market. As Cuba began to shift to a dual economy, the dualism began to permeate the lived experience of artists on the island, who, as evidenced by their contributions to the newspapers, expressed their skepticism, but would later benefit from this change, as will become further evident in the following chapter.

CARLOS GARAICOA

Following his participation in the 1993 exhibition "Metaphors of the Temple," Garaicoa continued to explore Havana as an urban archeologist making work from ornamental architectural elements that he scavenged. Subsequent to the exhibition, Garaicoa began to receive international attention and was invited to be an artist in residence at the Paul Pozozza Museum in Düsseldorf, Germany (1993). This was his first trip outside of Cuba, and it provided him the opportunity to expand his conceptual explorations of architecture and urban space. He recalled that in Cuba at this moment there were many discussions about the emerging market and artists

producing numerous art objects to sell for hard currency. He had not been producing traditional object-based work and while in Germany he recognized that he could maintain his more conceptual approach and did not need to alter his practice.⁶² Although Garaicoa's projects had already included architectural references, his subsequent projects featured in the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, entailed photo-documenting and refurbishing dilapidated elements found among architectural ruins or were inspired by them.

Garaicoa's works exhibited at the 1994 biennial were included in the "Surroundings and Circumstances" component and featured *Decapitation Game*, 1993 (Figure 2.26) and *House of Diamonds*, 1992 (Figure 2.27), analyzed in the previous chapter, and another restorative installation *Rivoli; o de las maneras de sostener un ángel y un rostro con las manos*, (Rivoli; Or the Ways to Sustain an Angel and a Face with Hands), 1994 (Figure 3.17), along with the installations *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior), 1994 (Figure 3.18) and *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream*, 1993-1995 (Figure 3.19).⁶³ Garaicoa's inclusion in the biennial was fitting as all of his exhibited works were in a direct dialogue with their ruinous Havana surroundings. Yet, his works, especially those produced from 1993 on, also responded to the changing conditions within the city and especially the renovations occurring in the historic old city. I argue that the works on view were revelatory of the early effects dollarization had on the transformation of the city, which was viewed imaginatively, if not skeptically, by the artist. These pieces were produced during the mid-1990s and exposed the duality that Cubans, and especially Cuban

⁶² Carlos Garaicoa, interview by author, April 3, 2009.

⁶³ *Sólo Cristo salva* (Only Christ Saves) was also exhibited at the biennial, however, the documentation received from the artist was of a photograph taken in 1996 and exhibited in 2003. Figure 3.19 of *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* was taken in 1995 and not at the Havana Biennial in 1994.

artists, experienced on a daily basis. The objects he restored/recreated filled the voids he addressed in his previous works.

Havana Interior and Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream

In both of Garaicoa's installations exhibited at the biennial he recreated interior spaces from Havana of earlier eras in response to the renovations occurring throughout Old Havana. The installation *Havana Interior*, 1994, featured objects composed from remnants of furniture and household items Garaicoa discovered in or near the remains of ruinous residences in Havana. He turned to artisanal craft to restore the found furniture, similar to Los Carpinteros and those Cubans being trained in anachronistic architectural decoration to help restore furniture and buildings for tourism.⁶⁴ Garaicoa also photo-documented his process of discovering, recovering, and restoring the domestic fragments he salvaged from Havana. One such photograph revealed the found condition of what was originally a headboard, reduced to fragments (Figure 3.20).⁶⁵ Garaicoa refurbished this headboard as part of *Havana Interior*.

The installation displayed at the Havana Biennial included a door, armchairs, a coffee table, side table, a post, and a bed frame made of wood in the colonial style, still found in Cuban homes. The furniture was assembled to appear as it would in the living room of an affluent Havana residence (Figure 3.18). On the walls of the installation were black and white photographs, a photo-drawing (discussed below), and a bust. One photograph was of an ornate door stripped of paint, propped up in the corner of decrepit room with chipped paint, missing

⁶⁴ This aspect of Garaicoa's practice is overlooked by Weiss who comments, "Garaicoa's Havana may have been crumbling, but Los Carpinteros' city was a brand-new theme park. Their production of luxuriously crafted furniture pointed to a bourgeois, neobaroque space, part of the heritage then actively being resuscitated in the restoration program in the capital." *To and From Utopia in Cuban Art*, 213. I argue that Garaicoa, like Los Carpinteros, resuscitated the art of handcrafting furniture, albeit the artists did so in different ways.

⁶⁵ This photograph was not exhibited at the Fifth Havana Biennial.

floorboards, and holes in the wall (Figure 3.21). The actual door that Garaicoa had removed was mounted on an adjacent wall. Garaicoa had refurbished and painted it white, with inlays of clear and blue glass (Figure 3.22).

Havana Interior, similar to Garaicoa's other restorative installations, contained items rescued from oblivion. However, in Garaicoa's earlier work the objects he took, or replicated in exactitude, from the streets functioned as readymades; they did not require repair and were not restored. In the works that followed, the objects were in a state of disrepair and needed attention. Garaicoa's refurbishment of the items revealed the *inventando* common on the island, whereby citizens breathed new life into found objects. While some have argued that by restoring the damaged objects, Garaicoa's work moved beyond the nostalgia associated with ruins to hope, I contend that the act of reconstructing fragments from the past was timely and reflective of the transformation occurring in touristic Old Havana.⁶⁶ Garaicoa's projects were emblematic of the renovations occurring throughout the city and through them he could fill the voids left while also subtly addressing the problems that accompanied this historic restoration.

Garaicoa created *Havana Interior* around the same time that the Office of the Historian began renovating of specific areas in Old Havana in order to attract and accommodate tourists. The primary objective of the restoration was to preserve many of the historic colonial buildings and furnishings within the oldest quarter of the city and at the same time do so in an accurate and tasteful way to prevent "Cancúnization."⁶⁷ The evolution of Garaicoa's process mirrored the restructuring of the Cuban economy and Old Havana. For *Havana Interior* Garaicoa "salvage[d] from the ruins an exceptional element and restore[d] it. It is as if he were curing the city, creating

⁶⁶ Whitfield, *Cuban Currency*, 134.

⁶⁷ D. Medina Lasansky, "Tourist Geographies: Remapping Old Havana," in *Architecture and Tourism*, ed. D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2004), 170.

‘sign-posts’ that announce the urgency of preventing Havana from completely falling apart, and even more so, of respecting and reconstructing the past.”⁶⁸ Garaicoa rescued and reconstructed aspects from the past and subtly drew attention to alterations to the city as they were taking place. His work was restorative and reminiscent of the situation at hand, yet there was a darker side to what was occurring to which his work drew attention.

The renovations to the city—colonial buildings converted into hotels, restaurants, bars, and sites of entertainment for tourists—sat among rubble and ruins:

For many who remembered prerevolutionary times, the new tourism revived unpleasant memory of the old tourism, when Cubans were routinely denied access to beaches, resorts, and hotels. Among the most notable early achievements of the revolution was the return of public use places of recreation, vacation, and entertainment. The demand of ‘Cuba for Cubans’ that had registered in the early 1960s rang hollow in the early 1990s.⁶⁹

While the modifications to the city would improve aspects of the built environment that had worsened during the Special Period, there were many negative associations as well. The restoration transformed private spaces made public during the revolutionary period into those once again private. Cubans were granted minimal, if any, access to these spaces and certain sectors of the population were at greater disadvantage than others.

Many Cubans wanted to inhabit the renovated spaces and take advantage of the prospects they afforded to earn tourists’ dollars. Yet this contradicted the socialist lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. Many were split between their former professions and lifestyle (or at least what remained of them) and the new opportunities introduced by dollars. They began to live a life full of contradictions. Garaicoa’s use of ruins and found furniture suggested the potential they withheld for new possibilities.

⁶⁸ Gerardo Mosquera, “Carlos Garaicoa,” *Poliester* 5 no. 15 (Spring 1996): 44.

⁶⁹ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 309-310.

The installation *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* (1993-95), also on view during the biennial, was comprised of found relics from a bar in Havana that were recreated by the artist (Figure 3.19).⁷⁰ Sloppy Joe's Bar had been a dining and drinking establishment opened in the 1920s by Spaniard José Abeal, named for Abeal's moniker "Sloppy Joe." The bar was prominently located in a neocolonial building in Old Havana on the corner of Obispo (the main thoroughfare) and Zulueta (Figure 3.23) and was best known for retaining the world's longest mahogany bar and a well-stocked liquor cabinet with rum bottled on the premises (Figure 3.24). During the republican period Sloppy Joe's Bar was popular among wealthy Cubans and North American tourists, especially during Prohibition when tourists regularly visited the island, taking with them souvenir photographs from their visit (Figure 3.25).⁷¹ In the early 1960s the owners of the bar fled from the island and their business. The revolutionary government never repurposed the bar and with time it dilapidated.

For his project Garaicoa photo-documented what remained of Sloppy Joe's Bar in the early 1990s. He photographed the columns that lined the façade of the building, so that the detail of the tile work in its extant rough state could be seen, along with a photograph of José Abeal, Sloppy Joe, adorning a column (Figure 3.26). Garaicoa also photographed the interior of Sloppy Joe's Bar with the long mahogany bar and liquor cabinets as they stood. Rather than remove the components of the bar, or resurrect the interior, which he could not do for logistical and legal reasons, he created his own version of the mahogany bar and accompanying memorabilia. *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* contained old documentary photographs of the actual bar's one time clientele, displayed along with a jukebox, Garaicoa's scaled down version of the bar, empty alcohol bottles

⁷⁰ Garaicoa has continued to work on this piece and in 1999 and 2000 he made some additions, which included original accounting books and photographs. Interview by author, April 3, 2009.

⁷¹ It was also a favorite of Ernest Hemingway's, as seen in the film "Our Man of Havana."

with labels featuring a photograph of its proprietor, juxtaposed to Garaicoa's photographs of the bar in its decrepit state (Figure 3.27). *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* remained a work in progress after the Havana Biennial.⁷² Garaicoa drew attention to the establishment's neglected state, which raised broader issues.

As in *Havana Interior* Garaicoa revived furnishings he had uncovered from Havana's past. He juxtaposed his reconceived objects to the photographs he had taken of them in their found state. While reminding one of the destruction and loss endured, this project again paralleled the restoration initiated by the government to stabilize the Cuban economy. However, *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* differs from *Havana Interior* in that this particular site had a history independent of Cuba's official narrative.

Colonial structures and furnishings such as those included in *Havana Interior* were selected for renovation because they were "ideologically safe" and buildings executed or repurposed during the 1920s through the 1950s were avoided because they were from a period when Havana "was a city of bourgeois excess, a popular destination for honeymooning, gambling, drinking and prostitution."⁷³ Thus, the official renovations overseen by the Office of the Historian intentionally "erase[d] the era of North American domination" and Sloppy Joe's Bar was omitted from the restoration plans.⁷⁴ In fact the tourist maps produced by the Office of the Historian only designated the sites of the projects they oversaw, while ignoring all others. Garaicoa had included a reproduction of such a map (Figure 3.28) in his 1995 exhibition catalogue *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*. Although the Revolution put an end to the

⁷² In 1995, during a residency in Switzerland, Garaicoa hand painted tiles to match those seen on the column outside of the bar (Figure 24), which he used to further embellish the mahogany bar he created.

⁷³ Medina Lasansky, "Tourist Geographies: Remapping Old Havana," 173.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

leisure activities that brought many North Americans to the island, the newfound dependency on tourism would reinstitute some of them. This contradiction again resonates with the dualism that came to permeate life at the time.

In an essay by Tonel, in which he discussed *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream*, without providing a description of the work, he attested to it referencing the past and future of Cuba, yet he did not comment on the present and the work's relationship to the renovations of the city occurring simultaneous to its production. He stated, "an apparent nostalgia for a faded past [is] exemplified by the splendor of Sloppy Joe's, the famous Havana bar of the forties, even as it ironically comments on the future. Only in that fictional past would Havana be redeemed from its tragic contradictions, its stench, and its plagues."⁷⁵ Through *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* I assert that Garaicoa, like Bruguera, reinscribed aspects of Cuba's history into the master narrative by exhibiting work that addressed controversial themes. Garaicoa's work acknowledged the pretensions and major omissions in the renovation plans for the city. The exhibition of *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* also brought to light the contradictions inherent in the Cuban governments' relationship to emigrants living in the United States. At the same time the government was allegedly improving their relationship with these emigrants through conferences, they were erasing the record of their prior relationships with North Americans.

Photo-drawings

Also exhibited at the biennial was one of Garaicoa's "photo-drawings."⁷⁶ In 1993, following his residency in Germany, Garaicoa began to simulate the work of an architect to

⁷⁵ Tonel, "A Tree from Many Shores: Cuban Art in Movement," 68.

⁷⁶ The focus here is the photo drawing exhibited at the Fifth Havana Biennial as part of *Havana Interior*, however, Garaicoa has produced numerous different photo drawings.

produce symbolic drawings in which he reimagined the dilapidated buildings that he had photo-documented. Garaicoa revealed the potential of these ruined spaces by redrawing and transforming them, as if he himself was an architect. Yet his drawings were metaphoric and not architectural plans of actual buildings to be erected. I contend that he used the photo-drawing medium at this time to comment on the changing landscape of Havana, especially the transformation of ruins into recreational sites for tourists.

The installation *Havana Interior* included four framed photographs of an intersection in Havana, along with a photo-drawing of the same site. The photos document what had been a two-story building, now mostly rubble, with segments of a few remaining walls, in the process of being further demolished (Figure 3.29). Garaicoa had taken each of the photographs from roughly the same vantage point, but at different times, so that each depicted the second story in a different stage of being razed. The photographs had an apocalyptic undertone, yet, they were more than a meditation on ruins and loss. The photographs were accompanied by a photo-drawing of an architectural rendering of the same intersection seen in the photograph (Figure 3.30). In it two high-rise structures and a smaller pyramidal building at their base emerged from the remnants of the dilapidated building. The drawing was labeled “Proyecto acerca de cómo después de destruido el Hotel ‘La Esfera,’ un día de lluvia, en su lugar apareció otro” (Project about how after the destruction of Hotel “La Esfera,” another appeared in its place on a rainy day) and is signed by Garaicoa and dated October 1993.

In the drawing, modern buildings arose from the detritus. They appeared following a storm. Here the imagined rain cleansed the area to allow something new to flourish. This was especially relevant as the site documented was at one time a hotel. With tourism on the rise for the first time since 1959, Garaicoa acknowledged the role hotels would come to play in

facilitating the trade and changing the cityscape. Yet, the new structure drawn by the artist did not resemble the construction occurring in the old city, which was primarily dedicated to repairing buildings and furnishings from the colonial period; it was a postmodern skyscraper. Although contemporary-style hotels would be built in Havana, such as the Spanish and Cuban run Hotel Melía Cohiba in Vedado (a wealthier section of Havana), this structure appeared quite inappropriate to the location in which it was imagined. It symbolized the First World and certain luxuries tourists would demand.

As stated, Garaicoa's photo-drawings were not intended to replicate the work of architect, or replace the plans for the rebuilding of Havana. Similar to other of Garaicoa's projects they added fiction and drama to the history of the city. Valdés Figueroa described the photo-drawings as "sketches...that are architecturally and urbanistically absurd, lacking any logical bases for their practical execution..."⁷⁷ This was in fact true, more so in other examples of photo-drawings in which Garaicoa reimagined scaffolding as tireless human telamones, symbolic of human strength and the willpower to survive despite great obstacles, or filled the ground with giant hallucinogenic mushrooms in the place of once standing columns to imply that Cuba hallucinated that socialism worked.⁷⁸ I read Garaicoa's photo-drawings as signifying the *doble moral* present at the time that resulted from socialism's confrontation with tourism and capitalism. Cubans were confronted with both devastation and loss, but also the potential for change through the new law-decrees that enabled them to better their situation, even if it meant

⁷⁷ Valdés Figueroa, "The Mirror of Desire," 103.

⁷⁸ The works described are *Acerca de esos incansables atlantes que sostienen día por día nuestro presente* (About These Untiring Atlantes that Sustain Our Present Day by Day), 1994-1995) and *Primer sembrado de hongos alucinógenos en La Habana* (The first planting of hallucinogenic mushrooms in Havana), 1997.

turning to capitalist enterprise. This even went as far as to impact the formal aspects of Garaicoa's work:

In his photographs and installations, Carlos Garaicoa, for instance, traverses the ruins of Old Havana—at first glance as a compassionate archeologist but on close inspection with something of the *doble moral* (double morality) that Lupe Álvarez has identified. The heartrending testimony that is initially so moving in his work becomes less poignant as his framed images of physical and social decay grow increasingly photogenic.⁷⁹

Garaicoa's own photo-drawings aestheticized ruins in a similar vein to the actual construction occurring in the city. He was both critical of the socio-economic changes and compliant with them.

Garaicoa's artwork included in the Havana Biennial documented and (re)constructed or (re)imagined ruinous aspects of Havana. While there was overlap with his student work that focused on absence and loss indicative of the socio-economic conditions of the early Special Period, these works reflected the potential of the ruins to acquire new meaning. Garaicoa has said about this work,

I would present myself as an 'architect' who, on encountering fragments of ruins while roaming around in Havana, would reinvent the city...these works aimed at constructing an utopian project for the future amid a city inhabited by frustration, human and urban decay. The fragmentation of the city would become a metaphor for a 'possible' physical and ideological reconstruction by means of first-world alternatives related to notions of luxury and comfort foreign to Cuba, at least in the last 40 years.⁸⁰

Garaicoa described his project as geared toward the future. He (re)invented fragments in the face of decay. He both documented the ruins, to commit them to Cuba's history, but also proposed "possible" solutions, looking to certain comforts common to the First World. These were

⁷⁹ Tonel, "A Tree from Many Shores: Cuban Art in Movement," 68.

⁸⁰ Holly Block and Carlos Garaicoa, "Carlos Garaicoa," *Bomb Magazine* (Winter 2003), <http://bombsite.com/issues/82/articles/2523>.

luxuries that had not been available in Cuba for some time, however, many would be reintroduced for tourists, such as hotels with modern amenities. Garaicoa's reconceptualization of remains paralleled the changes to Havana at the time. The works were intentionally ambiguous and both documented the ruins, while also proposing imaginative solutions to the city's problems. They further emphasized the contradictory sentiments that underscored the renewed reliance on tourism. In the years that followed, Garaicoa would expand on his work as a fictional architect perusing cities other than Havana and proposing "solutions" to their problems as seen in the next chapter.

LOS CARPINTEROS

In May of 1994 Los Carpinteros (still working as Equipo MAD) successfully defended their ISA thesis project, "Interior habanero" (Havana Interior), which consisted of five works created between 1993 and 1994. The five pieces were executed using the same collaborative process as *Easel Painting* (Figure 2.36) and *Two Pesos* (Figure 2.38), discussed in the previous chapter, where Arrechea and Rodríguez carved wooden sculptural frames to encase Castillo's paintings. All five works were collectively produced and mounted subtle social critiques addressing the Special Period. In creating the works the artists continued to work as archeologists mining the history of art production on the island to uncover issues of race and class associated with artisanal versus fine art production and consumption. I posit that the five pieces included in "Havana Interior" juxtaposed the material shortage and loss on the island to aspects of upper class Cuban life from the late 1950s, with origins during the colonial period, paralleling the contradictory mentality that resulted from the newly formed dual economy. Los Carpinteros attempted to understand opulence from a position of poverty, as many Cubans—and

especially artists—would begin to do during the mid-1990s. This was especially relevant during the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, when the objects included in “Havana Interior” were on view as part of the biennial subtheme “Individual Reflections, Collective Obsessions.”⁸¹ This biennial signaled the return of interest from members of the social class whose once-opulent Cuban lifestyle was addressed by the artists. Los Carpinteros focused their thesis defense on the attention they received from Miami-based Cuban collectors during the biennial and prospects for earning money for the sale of their work.

“Havana Interior”

“Havana Interior” included the pieces *Vaníte* (Vanitas), 1994 (Figure 3.31), *Quemando árboles* (Burning Trees), 1993 (Figure 3.32), *Marquilla cigarrera cubana* (Cuban Cigar Label), 1993 (Figure 3.33), *Ventana holandesa* (Dutch Window), 1994 (Figure 3.34), and *Havana Country Club*, 1994, (Figure 3.35). For their thesis defense the artists presented the five pieces along with a letter from a fictional collector in Miami they invented, that Arrechea read out loud. Arrechea explained that their idea behind the “collector” stemmed from the interest they were receiving from international collectors and curators in Havana on the occasion of the Fifth Havana Biennial, with some from Miami. Arrechea stated, “When we developed our thesis project for graduation, we took advantage of this interest. We created a fake letter from a collector in Miami, who wrote why he loved our work and wanted to buy it.”⁸²

⁸¹ The five pieces that constituted Los Carpinteros’ thesis project “Havana Interior” were exhibited at the Education Museum in the Cathedral Plaza, also the site of their thesis defense. Alexandre Arrechea, email to author, September 23, 2011.

⁸² Ibid.

The five pieces were made from a combination of oil painting on canvas and hand-carved wooden elements, and were referred to by Rodríguez as “pieces of furniture.”⁸³ The wood used in this project did not originate from a mahogany tree chopped down on campus, as was the case in *Easel Painting* and *Two Pesos*; rather it was removed from local mansions that had been vacated by their upper class owners in the late 1950s/early 1960s. The palatial homes were conveniently located in the same neighborhood as ISA, Cubanacán. Some of the “found” wood was already elaborately carved and the rest the artists carved to resemble colonial-style furnishings and frames. Their handwork resembled the nearly forgotten craft of hand carving fine wood, which was concurrently being resuscitated at the time for the renovation of the city. Scavenging from vacated mansions, like their earlier act of cutting down the mahogany tree, was done out of necessity, in order to obtain materials during a period of scarcity. However, it was also strategic, enabling the artists to incorporate design features from the homes once occupied by wealthy Cubans of European descent and U.S. businessmen and their families, made by artisans of lower castes. This juxtaposition allowed the artists to subtly critique the history of artistic production on the island and related class and race issues.

Castillo’s oil paintings were representational, with an emphasis on brushwork and light, demonstrative of the preferred aesthetic of the one-time bourgeoisie. In this series Los Carpinteros attempted to put aside the revolutionary history of the previous forty years. The specific subject matter of each work exposed the condition of daily life in Cuba of the early to mid-1990s contrasted to aspects of life from the colonial and neocolonial periods. The pieces were created with Cuban expatriates in mind and the desire to communicate to them various

⁸³ Margaret Miller, Noel Smith and Los Carpinteros, “Conversation/Interview with Los Carpinteros,” in *Los Carpinteros* (Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003), 122.

aspects of Cuban life and history. Los Carpinteros were reaching out to Cuban émigrés and especially those who were expressing interest in their work.

A lavish hand-carved dressing table was the focus of *Vanitas* (Figure 3.31). The table top of the vanity was covered in marble removed from a nearby mansion. Three small faux drawers lined each of the legs; at the base were hand-carved animal paws, very baroque in their eccentricity. In place of the mirror was a painting. Within the painting of the three artists, by Castillo, Arrechea is portrayed holding a candle illuminating the otherwise dark scene, while Rodríguez is engaged in the act of gouging the collective's initials, MAD, into the back of Castillo who stands before him. This was an initiation rite and alluded to Castillo joining the collective and sacrificing his individuality for the sake of the trio's collaboration. Above the figures appears the word *VANITE*, alluding to vanitas, the still-life paintings popular in the Netherlands in the 17th century, and brought to the New World, focused on themes of death and the fleeting nature of life. The somber message contained within the vanitas meant to instill their viewer with the strength to avoid vanity and sensuousness. Candles and skulls commonly appeared in the vanitas to resemble the ephemerality of life; in this painting Arrechea is depicted holding the candle, with his vulnerable body in place of the skull. The word *vaníte* then assumes a double meaning in this work, as it was both a vanity and a vanitas painting.

Rather than using the vanity to groom themselves, the artists engaged in an act of mutilation. There was an intentional parallel between the carving of the wood to produce the vanity and the act of incising into Castillo's body. The work was self-reflexive; it reflected on the self-sacrifices the artists had to make for their art: years of art school, the laborious task of procuring materials, survival in Cuba during a period of scarcity, in addition to the looming sacrifice of revolutionary/socialist morals when selling their work for hard currency. The artists'

initials/insignia that was being incised in Castillo's back was also seen at the top of the frame/vanity.

The vanity (dressing table) was exemplary of the luxury items found within the mansions that surrounded ISA and alluded to the pre-revolutionary lifestyle of the Cuban middle and upper classes. This extravagant piece of furniture was juxtaposed to the vanitas-style painting, which intended to warn one against vanity and hedonism by reminding one of the fragility of life; similar to the values of the Revolution. The vanity (adj.) of the middle and upper classes led to their departure of the island, and great loss of their homes, communities, and culture. This work was created just as members of these social classes were expressing interest in contemporary Cuban art. The work was therefore ironic as it mocked the vanity associated with pre-revolutionary life, although as artists they would be earning money and embracing it soon enough.⁸⁴

The vanity associated with Cuba's departed elite was again referenced in *Burning Trees* (Figure 3.32), a hand carved mahogany fireplace modeled after a marble fireplace located in the onetime lobby of a Victorian hotel, now part of ISA's campus. Within the hearth was a painting of Arrechea and Rodríguez, each naked, dancing around a bonfire on the beach with the moon's reflection seen on the ripples of the ocean. Upon initial inspection, this pairing of frame and image was very literal: a painting of a fire set within a fireplace. However, the naked, "primal" bodies of the artists were intended to reference the idea of origins, of starting from nothing, similar to the bonfire they were shown alongside, which they ignited with wood they had collected. This very basic human activity of making fire, necessary for survival, was contrasted to the fireplace, symbolic of luxury décor. It was at the same time ironic that the artists produced

⁸⁴ It is additionally ironic that this piece is part of the Farber Collection, a North American collection of contemporary Cuban art. It mocks its very clientele.

a fireplace from wood, as it would burn to cinders should a fire actually be ignited. This reflected on the frivolity of a fireplace on the temperate island and it was also a lesson in futility, perhaps a metaphor for some of the revolutionary rhetoric.

Within Castillo's painting the disparity between the lifestyle the fireplace suggested and the painting of the naked (Neolithic) artists conjured up the social hierarchy that was in part returning with the legalization of the dollar. Cuban society was divided between those who had access to the currency and those who did not. This hierarchy, believed to have dissipated with the Revolution and the expatriation of most of the middle and upper classes, was paradoxically being restored beginning in the mid-1990s. At this time the two social groups were brought closer together not only conceptually through the subject matter of the work, but also quite literally as expatriates began to collect the artists' work.

Additionally, race-related issues that came to the foreground during the Special Period were subtly addressed through this work, as literally embodied in Arrechea. The dual economy resulted not only in the restoration of some of the social inequality that the Revolution had attempted to overcome but also the racial inequity.⁸⁵ Although discrimination on the basis of race, sex, or gender was and is illegal on the island, racial prejudice resurged during the Special Period. Much of this injustice resulted from the disparity in remittances received from upper or upper middle class émigrés of the 1950s/1960s. It has been estimated that thirty to forty percent of the Cuban population of European descent received remittances in comparison to five to ten percent of the Afro-Cuban community.⁸⁶ Other means of procuring dollars, namely employment

⁸⁵ "The economic crisis of the 1990s has, after an interregnum of thirty years, reintroduced into Cuban society forces that generate inequity and inequality in their wake, and the most disturbing development of the Special Period is the racial dimension of the inequality." Saney, *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*, 108.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

in tourism or joint enterprises have also been marked by inequity. In many instances foreign companies confined Afro-Cubans to menial positions or the entertainment sector. While often left with few other options “blacks are perceived to have a greater preponderance in and predilection for hustling, crime, and prostitution.”⁸⁷ This resulted in the rise of *jineterismo* (jockeying/hustling) when young men and women, primarily of Afro-Cuban descent, befriend and “date” tourists in order to receive gifts and/or earn dollars.⁸⁸ Subsequently Afro-Cubans believed to be *jineteros* have experienced increased harassment by the police, especially in areas frequented by tourists. Los Carpinteros focused on an Afro-Cuban body in their paintings to draw attention to this sector of the population, as it was experiencing discrimination.

Arrechea was again prominently featured in *Cuban Cigar Label*, 1993 (Figure 3.33), which took cues from cigar box labels from the colonial period that commonly contained witty social and racial commentary. In the painting Arrechea and Rodríguez are depicted standing naked in a museum gallery with barrel-vaulted ceilings, large columns, chandeliers, and paintings hung on the walls. Arrechea stands in the foreground smoking a cigar; Rodríguez is positioned in the background facing a painting with his arms stretched outward, expressing his bafflement. On the right of the wooden frame is a crest containing two hammers and a paintbrush, an imaginary emblem of Los Carpinteros’ “guild,” and a monogram of the artists’ initials. The bottom of the frame contains the same text found on the postcard for *For You* (Figure 2.35), translated to “Sir, we have lost everything in the game. Everything? Everything minus one thing. What? The desire to return to play/gamble.”

⁸⁷ Ibid., 110. This sentiment is echoed in Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba*, 113-114.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of *jineterismo* see Coco Fusco, “Hustling for Dollars: *Jineteras* in Cuba,” in *The Bodies that Were Not Ours* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 137-153.

In this painting an ornate interior, such as that implied by the dressing table of *Vanitas* and fireplace of *Burning Trees*, was more overtly depicted. The naked bodies of the two artists inhabited the space of fine art as opposed to a barren beach as seen in the previously discussed work. The walls of the gallery depicted were covered with academic-style paintings. Yet, the crest located on the frame was reminiscent of those associated with workers' guilds, such as cigar manufactures or carpenters. The artists appeared to be out of place as they identified themselves as part of a guild. They aligned themselves with the cigar makers through the inclusion of the crest, cigar, and title. The artists' 1991 performance "For You," at the Partagás Cigar Factory in Havana, challenged the division between the fine arts and artisanal production. During the creation of *Cuban Cigar Label*, Castillo at first composed a painting that had a more literal relationship to the cigar-box text, but following discussions at ISA the trio decided to complicate the relationship between image and text.

Through this work the artists dissolved the dichotomies that structure artistic production and stratify class society. Arrechea was depicted smoking a cigar, made by the hands of artisans. Consuming the product of his implied labor presented contradictions in the work. Did he occupy the space of both artist and artisan, artist/artisan and patron, and producer and receiver, thus collapsing inherent boundaries, also seen in the sculpture *Chair* (Figures 2.32, 2.33, and 2.34)? Were the artists then critiquing fine art practices by reviving the work of a carpenter, yet embracing them through Castillo's anachronistic academic painting style? Were they reaching out to different audiences—those impacted by the scarcity of the Special Period and also Cuban émigrés, who were their potential clients? Were they acknowledging the position they were starting to occupy within Cuban society, as both critics of the Special Period but also as the

recipients of the benefits that it presented to artists who could earn dollars for the sale of their work? Was the presence of these contradictions the game they referred to in the inscription?

Valdés Figueroa has addressed the “game” more broadly, stating,

A polyfunctional code exists which adapts itself skillfully to the different factors involved in the game: the state and cultural institutions, the general public and the budding art market. In this way a tacit link is established between the artist and these factors can swing between negotiation and complicity, between exhibitionism and simulation, within a “flexible” margin of permissiveness in which all those involved know what they are talking about: unstated boundaries which are common knowledge.⁸⁹

The artists intentionally played the game to complicate a straightforward reading of *Cuban Cigar Label* and nuanced their critique. This enabled them to slyly comment on the changing economy and related racial issues.

In this work Arrechea was naked, seen from the waist up, smoking a cigar. His image further complicated the reading of the work. Was he the producer and the consumer of the cigar? Traditionally it was the hands of Afro-Cubans that rolled cigars, as they were responsible for artisanal production on the island. Although there was a resurgence of artisanal handiwork during the mid-1990s as part of the renovation of the city for tourism, the Afro-Cuban population suffered greatly at this time. The artists’ intentionally featured Arrechea’s black body to write the experience of the Afro-Cuban community back into the history of this period.

Furthermore the artists’ out of place naked figures physically occupy a space that once belonged to the economic and social elite. They reflected on a taboo topic—the return of the elite classes in Cuba—in a veiled manner, out of a curiosity born of living within the neighborhood vacated by this elite social class. However, their own economic standing was about to change dramatically following the exposure they received during the Fifth Havana Biennial. They would

⁸⁹ “Art of Negotiation and the Space of the Game,” 385.

soon come into money and comforts. Produced on the cusp of the evolution of the Cuban art market, the work was self-consciously reflecting, again, on artists' own conflicting positions within the arts and society.

In *Dutch Window* (Figure 3.34), Castillo painted an anachronistic Cuban landscape—similar to those preferred during the colonial and republican periods by the Cuban bourgeoisie—to tease out the relationship between colonialism and social and racial issues prevalent in the arts and society at the time. The frame of *Dutch Window* was carved to resemble an ornate window with embellished shutters. The landscape was rather dark, “realized with the light of Vienna, as if a traveler had done it during passage by our island in the XIX century.”⁹⁰ This innocuous-looking painting allowed the artists to confront the manner in which Cuba had captured the colonial imagination. European travelers to the Caribbean islands often brought back images of idyllic landscapes, rife with swaying palm trees and the crystal blue ocean, overlooking the poverty colonialism inflicted on many. This painting however moved away from the picturesque to the sublime. It was darker and more sinister than the paintings of the tropics commonly associated with tourism and advertising. The artists used their work to “explain the past from the present and vice versa.”⁹¹ This painting enabled the artists to relate the colonial history of artistic production on the island to prejudices still in play at the time of the work's production.

In the most well known work from this series, *Havana Country Club*, (Figure 3.35) the three artists depicted themselves on the lawn of ISA—the golf course of the one-time country club—assuming their position as art students and also members of the former country club. In 1962, during the legendary golf match played by Castro and Guevara at the Havana Country

⁹⁰ Valdés Figueroa, “Hablando por si mismo,” 68.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Club, the two decided to convert the Club to an art school, ENA, where ISA was founded in 1976. This painting referenced the famous photographs of Castro and Guevara playing golf, (Figure 1.3) however, the artists sand on the over-grown grass of the golf course. Rodríguez is depicted swinging a stick, instead of a golf club, while Castillo and Arrechea look on. All three are dressed in conservative athletic attire. The clubhouse of the country club, turned into offices and classrooms for the music school of ISA, is seen in the background. The painting is encased in a rectangular frame that had the year of its making, 1994, on the top, and the name “Havana Country Club” on the bottom, in English, carved from cedar and mahogany.

Havana Country Club, like the other pieces in the series “Havana Interior,” served as a dialogue between what had been occurring in early 1990s, at the time of its production, and an earlier period; in this instance, the late 1950s/early 1960s when much of the upper and middle class fled the country. The artists depicted themselves simulating a game of golf, embodying the position of the absent social group. This was similar to *Cuban Cigar Label*, when the artists placed themselves in an ornate museum gallery, yet in this painting the artists were no longer naked. Here they communicated the changes endured by the country club since the beginning of the Revolution by depicting the course overgrown and the basic equipment unavailable. About this series Rodríguez stated, “That we could manipulate with our art the tastes and obsessions that defined the ‘country club lifestyle’ of those people was a very attractive proposition...we were not only recycling wood. We recycled a conception of the past in Cuba.”⁹² In the imaginary letter the artists presented as their thesis statement they explained that “the interested buyer” of *Havana Country Club* was the daughter of ex-dictator Fulgencio Batista, who liked the piece for historical reasons.

⁹² Miller, Smith, and Los Carpinteros, “Conversation/Interview with Los Carpinteros,” 121.

The artists approached “Havana Interior” as ethnographers and anthropologists. Castillo recounted, “we were much more interested in the habits and objects that characterized that period of our society. We felt like anthropologists digging up the lifestyle of Cuba’s former middle class.”⁹³ In a playful manner they reenvisioned the past taking into account the reality of their present. The Revolution caused the disappearance of social groups and their preferred activities, which compounded with the economic devastation of the Special Period, made the works ironic, and even comical. As Castillo commented, “So how [did] we make work that would be aggressive in that socialist climate? Quite simply, we decided to make pieces that appeared conservative.”⁹⁴ They relied on conventional artistic styles in order to mount subtle critiques. Additionally, they used the strategies of self-portraiture, self-referentiality, voyeurism, simulation, and transvestism.⁹⁵ By focusing on themselves and their experiences they softened their criticism of class and race inequity on the island.

Through this series the artists desired to rescue the memory of a disappeared social group. They recreated the aesthetic preferences of this social class as reflected in the formal properties of the work and the subject matter. However, this served a dual purpose, it was intended to reinsert and “rememorialize” the disappeared group into the history of the island and to appeal to the “nostalgic émigré.”⁹⁶ They used this project both to fill in the void created by the

⁹³ Ibid., 122.

⁹⁴ Rosa Lowinger and Los Carpinteros, “The Object as Protagonist: an Interview with Los Carpinteros (Alexandre Arrechea, Marco Castillo, and Dagoberto Rodríguez),” *Sculpture Magazine* (December 1999), <http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag99/dec99/carp/carp.shtml>, accessed January 10, 2011.

⁹⁵ Valdés Figueroa, “Hablando por si mismo,” 68.

⁹⁶ The letter addressed the artists’ desire to rescue the memory of a disappeared social group, the hybrid nature of the work, and the artists chronicling the presence of the Afro-Cuban. The letter ends by transitioning to the collector, discussing his conversations with specialists in the field regarding the high prices the artists could earn for their work.

absence of the émigrés and as a means to communicate with them directly. Furthermore, as a commentary on the 1990s in Cuba, race was also a significant component of the work, rarely commented on by critics, especially those in Cuba.

Los Carpinteros' project enabled them to reconceptualize the past through the eyes of their present. They played a game with what was, what is, and what will be. While the revolutionary government sought to rid Cuba of luxury and hierarchies, by the mid-1990s it was reliant on tourist dollars and was transforming the city in order to attract more tourist dollars. This work is then both a game and subtle critique. Had the upper/middle class stayed, is this what their life would have looked like? Did the Revolution cause the end of one way of life, in exchange for destitution in the early 1990s, only to have to summon back the rich? The pieces included in "Havana Interior" both functioned as an anthropological project and a contemporary statement. The inclusion of heterogeneous and often contradictory media, styles, techniques, and subject matter allowed the artists to play a game within their work and both commemorate and question Cuban society of the 1950s/1960s and 1990s, as it was moving into a dual economy/*doble moral*.

It is significant that the artists continued working as carpenters during this transitional period in Cuban history. As Cuba reentered the capitalist world market where everything is outsourced and people no longer know where and how objects are made, Los Carpinteros' practice revived the modes of production from the past. This was especially salient in the face of capitalism on the island, where these outmoded practices were revived under the Historian of the City to produce furnishings used to simulate colonial environments to attract tourists. Los Carpinteros' work both critiques and reinforces this reality. As will be seen in the following

chapter, the collective's practice is later influenced by the modes of production under late capitalism.

CONCLUSION

From 1993 through 1994 Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros continued to draw on the formal and theoretical strategies that they had employed in the previous years as students at ISA, as evidenced by the works on view at or around the time of the Fifth Havana Biennial. Yet, their work evolved to reflect on the socio-economic changes resulting from the advent of the dual economy and *doble moral*. The artists self-consciously reflected on the implications of an art market, yet none of them altered their practice to assume the role of the individual genius. Bruguera orchestrated the collective production of newspapers (and was still working on the imagined collaborations between herself and Mendieta). She additionally authored work from a personal position, with the intention of her featured body to stand in for all Cubans. Garaicoa no longer altered the city from an anonymous position as he had before, but rather as a fictional architect who was imagining the potential for the renovation of Havana and in some instances renovating and recreating ornaments/furniture from the city. Los Carpinteros continued to produce work as a trio despite the temptation to produce and sell work as individuals.

All of the artists did continue to produce some object-based work, although for the most part it was not for sale. This was intentional even though dollars were entering the island, especially on the occasion of the Havana Biennial. Bruguera dispersed her newspapers without charging for them and she destroyed the bundles used in *The Trip*. She additionally did not document her performance *Fear* to preclude producing sellable objects. The boat she used in that performance is still in her possession. Similarly, many of the objects Garaicoa refurbished are

still in his possession. Yet, he has sold his documentary photographs and photo-drawings. Los Carpinteros did eventually sell the pieces included in their thesis exhibition, and even had to recreate *Burning Trees*, after it was severely damaged in transport. During the biennial, however, when their pieces had not been sold, Camnitzer's review of the Fifth Havana Biennial for *Third Text* reported that all of their works had been purchased, and all who read the review believed this false information.⁹⁷

Each of the artists continued to use clever strategies to mount critiques or broach taboo topics through their work. Bruguera addressed the impact emigration had on the island, as the absence of friends, family, and colleagues not only impacted the art community, but society at large. She used her practice to attempt to bridge the two communities by having Cuban art expats contribute articles and artwork to her newspapers, and also commemorated those who emigrated and those who lost their lives trying to do so. Garaicoa breathed new life into furnishings and edifices that he had found in ruinous states throughout the city to mirror what was occurring in spaces designated for tourists and reveal the implications of such renovations. Los Carpinteros tried to explain opulence from a position of poverty. They emulated the aesthetic preferences of a disappeared social class to strategically paint self-portraits designed to tease out the social and racial implications of the Special Period—both in the absences and loss of material goods and then the subsequent rise of a dual economy, which privileged some and not others.

Duality and the *doble moral* during the mid-1990s was not only a marker of the dual economy, but came to occupy the imagination of many, including Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros. Each of the works they produced reflected critically on the social implications of the Special Period and changes that were occurring to economy, even as it came to positively affect

⁹⁷ "The Fifth Biennial of Havana," *Third Text* (Autumn-Winter 1994): 150.

many artists. Evidence of the suffering and loss that had (pre)occupied the artists in their work of the previous years still appears in the work discussed here alongside indications of a transition and new opportunities for Cubans.

Additionally, each of the artists reinserted information into historical narrative as a way of filling in the voids addressed in the previous chapter. Bruguera documented the whereabouts of the artists that had left Cuba, reinscribing them into the history of the island. She also created a marble cenotaph to memorialize those who lost their lives at sea in pursuit of a better life. Garaicoa discovered and recreated Sloppy Joe's Bar that had been frequented by the middle and upper classes (mostly U.S. tourists) during the republican era, which the renovation of Havana seemed to ignore. By remaking this bar he committed part of Havana's history to Cuba's historical narrative as it was being rewritten. Los Carpinteros reflected on an absent social group by depicting themselves physically occupying the spaces they had left.

The pieces discussed in this chapter were on view during the Fifth Havana Biennial, the exhibition responsible for bringing foreign curators, collectors, and artists to the island in greater numbers than previous years. As a result the young artists were introduced to art cognoscenti with whom they formed significant relationships. Additionally, a selection of the work on view at the Fifth Havana Biennial toured to the Ludwig Forum in Aachen, Germany in winter 1994 and included the work by Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros. In the years that followed, the artists were all invited to participate in residencies and exhibitions throughout the globe. Eventually each would establish dual residencies—in Cuba and Europe or the United States—living a more extreme double life than they had in Cuba.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE ARTISTS AS GLOBAL SHIFTERS: ART PRODUCED MID-DECADE THROUGH
THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Can I use the same model inside Cuba as outside Cuba?¹

-Tania Bruguera

This question posed by Bruguera, once she began traveling and producing art abroad, guides much of the discussion of the artworks in this chapter. In the years that followed the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, young Cuban artists including Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros were subsequently invited to participate in exhibitions and residency programs abroad. Their travel, in addition to Cuba's more aggressive reinsertion into the global economy and the reestablishment of an art market with international clientele, further bridged the distance between Cuban artists and the global art world. By the Sixth Havana Biennial, 1997, Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros had participated in residency programs and altered the scope of their practice. Having been in direct dialogue with artists, curators, immigrants, and citizens from elsewhere in the world (transcending the position of insularity at one time central to their work), many of their projects expanded on previous themes, becoming more global in scope. This paralleled the globalization and multiculturalism taking a central position in the art world. The artists' concerns evolved beyond establishing themselves solely as Cuban or Latin American artists, but rather expanding their practice to account for global concerns.

Historian James Clifford has convincingly explained, "*travel* emerged as an increasingly complex range of experiences: practices of crossing and interaction that troubled the localism of

¹ Goldberg and Bruguera, "Interview," 15.

many common assumptions about culture.”² He questioned the idea that “roots always precede routes” and has proposed a more complicated understanding of the relationship between one’s local experience in their place of birth and that gained through travel. Through their work, Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros confronted their experiences in new cities, which they attempted to reconcile with their knowledge of Cuba. As seen in the previous chapters the artists in discussion had acted as urban archeologists uncovering aspects of Cuba’s history. Once they began traveling they similarly unveiled the history of the locations they were visiting and extracted the similarities between these countries and Cuba. Yet, as cultural anthropologist Nestor García Canclini has discussed, travelers, such as these artists, project a fiction onto a city:

First of all, we should think about the city as simultaneously a place to inhabit and a place to be imagined. Cities are made of houses and parks, streets and highways, and traffic signals. But, they are also made of images. These images include the maps that invent and give order to the city. But novels, songs, films, print media, radio, and television also imagine the sense of urban life. The city attains a certain destiny as it is filled with these heterogeneous fantasies. The city, programmed to function, and designed in a grid, exceeds its boundaries and multiplies itself through individual as well as collective fictions.³

To García Canclini’s list of “novels, songs, films, print media, radio, and television,” we can add works of art. Simultaneous to Cuba’s reentry in the global market, Cuban artists entered the global art market and traveled and worked between locations. They mapped and translated their experiences, acting as “shifters.”

² *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

³ Nestor García Canclini, “What is a City?”, *City/Art: The Urban Scene in Latin America*, ed. Rebecca E. Biron (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 43.

BACKGROUND

The dollarization of Cuba that began in 1993 helped the country emerge from the “apocalyptic phase of the Special Period” and living conditions gradually improved.⁴ By 1995 the economy began to grow for the first time in a lustrum. In 1996 authorities reported twenty percent more spending in dollar stores; the number of blackouts decreased; there was an increase in the quantity of automobiles, gasoline, and traffic; a greater number of imports entered the island; labor production amplified, as did housing construction; new jobs were created; and food production rebounded.⁵ Joint venture enterprises continued to build hotels throughout Havana to accommodate the increased number of tourists to the island and renovations of historic sites throughout Old Havana helped facilitate tourist operations. In 1995, *paladares*, private restaurants operated within Cuban homes, were legalized with a maximum of twelve seats. During 1996 and 1997 private taxis were again permitted, as was the rental of rooms within private homes, or *casas particulares*.⁶ Cubans, who had large enough homes with extra space or connections to taxi companies, were in a privileged position and could earn much-desired dollars through these new enterprises.⁷ The revenue generated by tourism was fifty percent greater in 1996 than 1995 and in 1996 it surpassed sugar as Cuba’s major revenue generator earning 1.38

⁴ Pérez, *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*, 320.

⁵ Saney, *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*, 30-33.

⁶ Although running a *paladar* or *casa particular* was lucrative, the owners of the home had to register their business and pay a large tax to the government.

⁷ Few Afro-Cubans have benefitted from the institution of *paladares* and *casa particulares* since the majority do not live in large enough homes to establish as restaurant or rent extra rooms. Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba*, 121. Dilla further observed “No balance sheet of the current situation can overlook the fact that the dominant factor behind this increased diversification had been the extremely rapid colonization of social relations and everyday life by the market, and consequently, the process of social re-stratification determined in the last instance by the relations of persons to different types of property, economic areas, and consumer circuits. In the wake of globalization, Cubans are beginning to experience the displeasures and pleasures of now being actually, and not only symbolically, Latin Americans.” “The Changing Scenarios of Governability,” 65.

billion dollars. By 1999 the tourist industry earned 2 billion.⁸ Between 1996 and 2004 seventy museums opened in Havana, with the objective of selectively telling aspects Cuba's history to tourists.⁹ The city of Havana became a museum that was refashioning itself not only physically through rebuilding, but historically as well, as much of the information made available benefitted from selective memory.¹⁰

In April of 1997 finance minister José Luis Rodríguez explained the objectives of Cuba's new economic program, "...first, we have to resist the impact of the crisis and second, Cuba must reenter the world economy. It must become competitive and penetrate international markets. External trade must be changed and to do that we need foreign investment, that is our instrument."¹¹ By 2001 Cuba had trading relationships with 166 countries (44% European, 39% American, 15% Asian, 1% African/Oceanic).¹² Tourism was bringing global citizens to Cuba and international trade fostered relations between foreign corporations and Cuban government-run companies and the import and export of goods. The resulting improvements to the economy "gave the political class a chance to overcome its own perplexity and embark on a complex balancing act between its social commitments and the exigencies of an economy determined now, both in its public and private dimensions, by its relation with foreign capital and the world market."¹³ Although the Cuban government had no other choice but to rejoin the world market,

⁸ Saney, *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*, 28.

⁹ Weiss, *To and from Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, 172.

¹⁰ This is Weiss' interpretation of Havana at this time. For an expanded discussion see *To and from Utopia in the New Cuban Art*, Chapter 3, "Museum," 167-249.

¹¹ As quoted by Ana Julia Jatar-Hausmann in *The Cuban Way: Capitalism, Communism and Confrontation* (Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1999), 119.

¹² Saney, *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*, 30.

¹³ Dilla, "Cuba: The Changing Scenarios of Governability," 64.

their capital gains allowed them to continue to provide socialized healthcare, education, and social security to all citizens of the island, maintaining the social programs central to the goals of the Revolution. However, this came at the great(er) cost of exposing the greater population to the capitalist market.

Consumer capitalism penetrated the arts in Cuba, not just in the rise of sales of work, but also the modes of production utilized by the artists. This is similar to what Fredric Jameson has observed in regards to cultural production in the developed world:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.¹⁴

There were two primary effects of late capitalism on the artists in discussion: the first was a deliberate rejection of this logic and the continued determination to use ephemeral products and create from hand (Bruguera), and the second was the embrace and move away from hand-making to incorporating mass produced industrial objects and outsourcing the production of work (Garaicoa and Los Carpinteros).

Further Implications for the Arts

In the years following the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, the government relaxed the provisions on travel and allowed artists to participate in residencies and exhibitions abroad with greater ease than in prior years. The exportation of art and artists was strategic on the part of the government. It enabled them to prove that artistic freedom was still very much alive on the island, where it was acceptable for artists to produce critical work and that the arts continued to

¹⁴ *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 4.

flourish despite economic hardship and the artistic diaspora. Participating in the global art world helped enable Cuba to build alliances abroad in order to strengthen foreign investments.

Within Cuba changes were occurring to accommodate international artists and scholars on the island and to establish relationships with art institutions abroad. In 1995 Peter and Irene Ludwig founded the Fundación Ludwig (Ludwig Foundation of Cuba) as a private enterprise (a self-proclaimed non-governmental, non-profit institution, which only became possible after the onset of the Special Period). The Ludwig Foundation was established to host exhibitions of contemporary Cuban art (with an emphasis on new media); host residency programs in Cuba and abroad; and collaborate with universities, museums, and other international institutions in a number of capacities. In May of 2000 the American Friends of the Ludwig Foundation was established as a non-profit to bring American art to Cuba and Cuban art to the U.S.¹⁵

The year prior to the opening of the Ludwig Foundation, 1994, in response to the Havana Biennial and quickly escalating commercialization of the arts, artists Sandra Ceballos and Ezekiel Suarez established an art gallery, Espacio Aglutinador, in their home. Their mission statement declares their commitment to artists overlooked by the biennial and official exhibition channels on the island. This included artists who were not graduates of ISA, elder Cuban artists, and artists who had emigrated. It also exhibited the works of young emerging artists including Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Arrechea (of Los Carpinteros). Often the work exhibited was too controversial for exhibition in state run galleries and museums and on occasion Espacio Aglutinador received threats and/or was mandated to close down temporarily due to the exhibition of contentious work. Espacio Aglutinador has remained Havana's only alternative

¹⁵ President of the American Friends of the Ludwig Foundation and avid collector of contemporary Cuban art, Alex Rosenberg, has since published two books on appraising art in Cuba.

space dedicated to the exhibition of nontraditional Cuban art (and on occasion international art) and serves as an important counterpart to the museums, galleries, and biennials in the city.

The Havana Biennial continued to have a substantial influence on the Cuban art market as prominent international artists, museum curators, and collectors traveled to the island in even greater numbers than previous years. This was facilitated by increased collaborations between joint venture hotels, tour operators, and the biennial coordinators. The danger of the commercialization of the biennial did not go unnoticed by the event's organizers. Llanes, who managed the second through fifth biennial, did not want the event to become one that solely catered to the market and at one point stated that she did not want to organize a sixth biennial "if it is to become a store."¹⁶ Yet, a Sixth Havana Biennial was organized in 1997 and catered to the desires of the international art patrons visiting the island.

The Seventh Havana Biennial, 2000, brought even more international art tourists to the island, with many from the U.S. The volume of Cuban artwork purchased increased as well. This had a lasting impact on the arts, as artist and critic Coco Fusco has explained,

The Cuban art scene has been restructured around foreign patronage. That new reality rang loud and clear at the Havana Biennial in November 2000. Planeloads of American and European curators arrived in search of a new Kcho, though few had any history of interest in Cuba or Latin American art...None of the Cuban artists who are known internationally for making work about social and political conditions on the island were part of the official Biennial...and a panel discussion on the current context of Cuban art that was proposed by a respected Cuban critic was forbidden.¹⁷

Collectors had to take it upon themselves to find corollary exhibitions of Cuban art to observe works with content that interrogated social and political life on the island. In the following year the events of September 11, 2001 and President George Bush's travel ban made it exceedingly

¹⁶ Camnitzer, "The Fifth Biennial of Havana," 151.

¹⁷ Fusco, "Bridge over Troubled Waters," 156. Kcho is an artist of the 1990s Generation.

difficult for Americans to travel to Cuba and those artists who participated in subsequent biennials did not see the same financial payoff.¹⁸

The increase in tourists to Cuba during the late 1990s through 2001 included those traveling with museum groups and on their own to meet artists and purchase work. The greatest number of tourists traveled during the Havana Biennials. During the Seventh Havana Biennial, 2000, Minister of Culture Abel Prieto and other officials observed money exchanging hands between artists and collectors in hotel lobbies. They recognized that the government was losing out on potential profits and thus desired to create an entity that would control sales. They wanted to preclude artists from selling work from their studios and only allow them to do so through galleries, which they would oversee. Artists protested because the galleries were selective and only a few artists could show at one time. The artists prevailed and the government backed down. However, Génesis Galerías de Arte was founded enabling the government to play a role in overseeing the galleries and their sale of Cuban art on the island and abroad (from participation in international art fairs).¹⁹ Artists still continued to sell directly from their home studios and some gained representation from independent curators on the island who operated unofficial galleries.

¹⁸ Darrel Couturier, interview with the author, October 7, 2010.

¹⁹ Its responsibilities include operating fine art galleries (Galería La Acacia, Galería Habana, Centro de Arte La Casona, which includes galleries Diago and La Casona) and a silkscreen studio (Taller de Serigrafía René Portocarrero), and the production of crates and frames for exhibiting and shipping artwork. Génesis is operated out of a gallery, La Casona, located in Plaza Vieja, a restored plaza in Old Havana, where additional exhibition spaces are located (Fototeca and Desarrollo de Artes Plásticas). In 2004 Galería Habana was detached and began operating as an independent space, overseen by the National Council of Fine Arts (CNAP).

Shifters

Many young Cuban artists including Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros spent the latter half of the 1990s traveling and producing work abroad while participating in residency programs and exhibitions. They translated their practices to accommodate the new environments and audiences they were exposed to, yet they never completely veered from their roots. As Mosquera famously said, “the artists, by virtue of a situation somewhat less restrictive for traveling and selling have been inclined to work and exhibit on the outside while maintaining their residences in Cuba. They are like fishermen: They make their living offshore, but always return to port.”²⁰ In the case of Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Arrechea of Los Carpinteros this eventually resulted in the artists’ establishment of dual residency (Bruguera in Chicago and then New York City, Garaicoa and Arrechea in Madrid).

Because of the liminal position these artists began to assume in the 1990s, I propose a useful way of analyzing them is as shifters, a term coined by de Certeau. Although his theorization relates to speakers/speech, it can be applied to another form of communicators/communication: artists/the visual arts and especially Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros. In defining a shifter, de Certeau states,

We should like to associate these mediator/intermediaries with shifters who can identify information that can be memorized in its general form, who retain it, and then retransmit it in a particularized translation that is set to a specific situation according to the requirements of the interlocutor, the circumstances, and the context of transmission. In this sense, these cultural intermediaries are first of all translators who decode and recode fragments of knowledge, link them, transform them by generalization, convey them from one case to another through analogy or extrapolation, treat every conjuncture of events by comparison with a preceding experience, and, in accord with their own style, shape a juridical logic of the general and the particular, of norms, and of qualities of action and time...they are in fact linking agents, who have become that through an obscure co-optation,

²⁰ Mosquera, “New Cuban Art,” 240.

itself dependent on professional luck, history, or temperament. Alert and lucid members of a local community whose dilemmas they can perceive and whose necessities they understand, they distinguish themselves by the very particular interest and razor sharp attention that they bring to the slightest issues of life, to the myriad incidents that punctuate everyday life and labor...These “go-betweeners” are endowed with an aura of limited influence...here there is no “universal language” but translations from one dialect to another.²¹

Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros were among the few privileged artists selected to participate in residencies and exhibitions abroad.²² They were newly able to travel and return to the island and unbeknownst assumed the responsibility of “decod[ing] and recod[ing] fragments of knowledge, link[ing] them, transform[ing] them by generalization, convey[ing] them from one case to another through analogy or extrapolation,” as evidenced through their work. They are artists who work in and translate the experiences of the “contact zones,” as curator Okwui Enwezor has further discerned,

To be an artist today is to work in a world of borrowed traditions, in a polyglot mix of creoles, pidgins, and half-articulated sentences...Creole dialects emerge specifically from productive processes in a “contact zone,” which usually designates ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations.’...According to Latin American literature scholar Mary Louise Pratt, ‘transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone;’ it is a traveling term, a portmanteau of dialects and idiolects that speak more to the nature of cultural transactions today than the negotiation between the ‘metropolitan modes of representation and peripheral appropriation.’²³

As explained in the text to follow, Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros first shifted between Cuba and various other locations and were concerned with conveying information about Cuba to

²¹ “Operators,” in *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 117-118.

²² This was due to the strength of their work and also the result of being at ISA at the turn of the century (1980s-1990s) when they came to fill the vacancies left by artists-professors and also their participation in the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, where they met international curators, scholars, etc.

²³ “The Diasporic Imagination: The Memory Works of María Magdalena Campos-Pons,” in *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water*, ed. Lisa D. Freiman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2007), 81.

foreign communities and relating their experiences abroad to Cubans. As they continued to travel and live abroad for periods at a time they become more comfortable exploring the specificities of the place without feeling the need to link it to their specific experiences as a Cuban. By the turn of the 20th to the 21st century the artists become more vigorously involved in the art market (a result no doubt of their increased international exposure) and their work took a turn toward focusing on issues less concerned with Cuba, which is where our study ends. As García Canclini has explained, “It is above all the art market that declassifies national artist, or at least subordinates the local connotations of the work, converting them into secondary folkloric references of an international, homogenized discourse.”²⁴ These artists are representative of the multicultural age “for whom ‘their place is not within any particular culture, but in the interstices between them, in transit.’”²⁵ They are global shifters.

Assuming the role of a shifter was not universal among contemporary Cuban artists. In fact the few artists who have been granted this privileged position have received a great deal of condemnation. Hernández considers these artists to be “global” and not Cuban and has written about the “art victims” in Havana—those who have not been offered the same opportunities as Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros.²⁶ He does not entirely blame the artists but also the

‘expert’ institutions and persons who set the criteria and make the decisions within our local system of art...It seems as they are all thrilled, seduced, hypnotized by the value judgments driven by the capitalist markets, by the satisfied moods of the great art collectors, by the dictates of the curators of art fairs and biennials, by the apparently ‘universal’ ideas produced by the fashionable Western intelligentsia.²⁷

²⁴ García Canclini, “Remaking Passports: Visual Thought in the Debate on Multiculturalism,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 375.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 377.

²⁶ Orlando Hernández, interview by author, March 19, 2009.

²⁷ Hernández, “The Art Victims of Havana,” 24.

He recognizes that the systems that train and support young artists in Cuba are predominately influenced by Western institutions, artists, pedagogues, and ultimately the market. He believes that the more authentic “Cuban” artists are those that are relegated to the periphery who do not meet the criteria of contemporary art:

In comparison with this new ‘vanguard’ [contemporary] art—whose head office does not seem to be based in Europe or North America as before, but in the ‘global’ metaterritory—all other forms of art have come to be seen as native, vernacular, traditional practices. As such they are not worthy of being ‘contemporary,’ since this term has suddenly been transformed and no longer denotes a simple, temporal, or chronological condition but a category of prestige and reputation...²⁸

Tonel made a similar observation when discussing the artists of the 1980s Generation who emigrated to pursue better economic opportunities abroad and made alterations to their practices to meet market demands:

The attempt to infiltrate the Mexican art market was ultimately disappointing for most émigré artists. If Cuban artists introduced changes into their work geared to their new market demands, they placed themselves at the center of a paradox. They were expected to reject the vernacular, unpolished, cerebral qualities that had initially made them sought-after to attain the status of artist (a status they had been awarded in Cuba soon after the end of puberty).²⁹

The paradox that Tonel identified is one that many Cuban artists have had to contend with once they received gallery representation. There are pressures and demands from dealers and collectors and there are consequences artists must face once they alter their practices. Mosquera commented on this fact more generally when he stated,

The exclusionist legitimation of the “international language” is a catch 22 that tends to regard with suspicions of illegitimacy art from the peripheries that endeavors to speak the ‘international language.’ When it speaks properly, it is

²⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁹ “A Tree from Many Shores: Cuban Art in Movement,” 65.

usually accused of being derivative; when it speaks with an accent it is disqualified to its lack of propriety toward the canon.³⁰

The criticism received by contemporary Cuban artists, such as Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros, has come from both the “center,” as noted by Mosquera, and the “periphery” as evidenced by Hernández and Tonel.

In questioning the success of certain Cuban artists Hernández further asks,

is this a question of real progress or a matter of greater visibility or acceptance in international exhibition circuits and especially the market?...Has this notoriety or success been deduced symptomatically from the rise in value achieved lately in galleries, fairs, and auctions? Or could it be that Cuban art is becoming more interesting because it has become a more global and less local product, that is, less Cuban?

I would not respond to Hernández’s final query with a resounding “yes,” and would defend the position that Cuban artists’ work does not stop being interesting once it takes on a broader context. In some sense Cuban art has always been global and has revealed the hybridity on the island—with influences from Europe, the United States, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Furthermore, Cuban artists’ travel wasn’t solely to Europe and the U.S., they traveled to Africa and Latin America, and eventually Asia.

While it is true that many artists in Cuba have not been provided the same opportunities as those who graduated from ISA (as is the case in most parts of the world where students with graduate degrees in studio art find themselves better positioned to make it in the art world), there is a market for work by these “peripheral” artists—to use Hernández’s term.³¹ In fact, the desire

³⁰ “Alien-Own/Own-Alien: Globalization and Cultural Difference,” *Boundary 2* (Fall 2002), 165.

³¹ Hernández divides Havana into “two or three ‘central’ or ‘hegemonic’ Havanas, and a bunch of ‘peripheral’ or ‘subaltern’ ones.” He further explains “There are two or three clean, well-groomed Havanas made up for the tourists’ camera flashes, and on the other hand, the ill-tended, grimy Havanas only witnessed by their oppressed residents.” “The Art Victims of Havana,” 21-22.

to collect artwork that does not appear influenced by mainstream pressures had in turn caused for another surge of artistic production in Cuba

that reifies the exotic features of non-Western cultures for market consumption and provides the basis for the emergence of new kinds of identities. For instance, Afro-Cuban themes, previously marginalized in cultural discourse, have become more visible as a result of the global market's appetite for everything it sees as "different." Afro-Cuban culture is being packaged for sale to tourists and commodified for global audiences.³²

Mosquera observed yet another consequence of collectors' desire for that which is "different" and exotic: artists taking advantage of "the opportunism of playing with social and political criticism [that] appears as fashionable themes and even as a trait of a Cuban style, satisfying clichéd expectations."³³ Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros have intentionally worked against these models of production. Their artworks are more complex in their explorations of difficult subject matter tied to race, class, religion, and the struggles of quotidian life on the island and abroad; they are not exoticized, tropicalized, or derivative of other artists' practices. Their work is conceptual and the media utilized and themes addressed arose from the very specific conditions of the Special Period. In order to exhibit on the island and abroad they have had to play the game with the powers that be, meaning they have had to produce work that is not too overly critical, which the government could export as exemplary of contemporary culture. This is what Coco Fusco has admonishingly termed "Havana Lite": work that addresses difficult situations but is palatable. Mosquera redeemed the artists of this generation when he stated,

The artists react to the collapse of a dream, but are at the same time part of it. Here we live in the ruins of past glories, among the rubble of the city and the utopia. They, battered by contradictions, constantly wrestling with power, have

³² Fernandes, *Cuba Represent*, 11.

³³ Mosquera, "The New Cuban Art," 242.

maintained in all ways the plastic arts as a site of social discussion in a country where such sites otherwise do not exist.³⁴

The value of contemporary Cuban artists' work in Cuba and abroad cannot be overestimated.

TANIA BRUGUERA

Bruguera began to participate in residencies abroad shortly after the Fifth Havana Biennial. While overseas she became aware of the fortunate position she was in whereby she had permission to travel and many of her fellow Cubans did not. Her "Homage to Ana Mendieta" (1986-1996) and "Postwar Memory" (1992-c.1997) series had explored the absence and loss that emigration had produced on the island and they had served as antidotes. Now she was spending time abroad, which allowed her to experience what it meant to travel away from the island. Subsequently her work oscillated between focusing on the loss of the emigrant to the experience of the immigrant. Her travel and artistic practice allowed her to work in between these two positions, as a shifter. In 1998 Bruguera enrolled in the MFA program at the University of Chicago to study performance (a genre not taught in Cuba) and she split her time more officially between the United States and Cuba.

During the period of the mid-to-late 1990s Bruguera focused increasingly on envisioning gestural and performative works, so that she would be culpable for her actions. This was a turn away from collaborative work, like her newspapers, for which a collaborator was persecuted. Although she was often the protagonist of her work, the participation of the audience became increasingly important. She desired spectators to relate to her work on a personal level and to engage with it in an active manner.³⁵ She did not stop producing objects when she focused on

³⁴ Ibid., 245.

³⁵ Tania Bruguera, interview by author, March 22, 2009.

performance; rather her object-based and performance-based work influenced each other and ultimately worked to explore the similar themes.

London: Daedalus or the Empire of Salvation

The first residency program that Bruguera participated in was a two-month stay in London, hosted by Gasworks. During her sojourn she often thought about her students back at home; many were creating pieces influenced by the artists whose original artwork she had the opportunity to see in museums. She longed to share her experience with these students. To explore the impossibility of this desire she produced prototypes of imagined flying contraptions under the title “Daedalus, or Empire of Salvation.” These sculptures were envisioned to assist in the transport of her students, and Cubans more generally, to London or elsewhere off the island. While it can be argued that Bruguera was producing work to aid in the process of emigration that until now she had met with skepticism and pain, I contend that these works enabled her to explore the liminal position she was in as a shifter where her travel from the island did not preclude her return and enabled her to communicate to an international/British audience her position as a Cuban artist working abroad.

Bruguera is not the first artist to create a flying contraption. In the 16th century Leonardo da Vinci was taken by the idea of flight and designed numerous flying machines, none of which actually flew. In the 1930s Vladimir Tatlin designed three different flying devices, each called *Letatlin*. His interest in flight has been linked to both “the poetic ideal of a flying sculpture; as an ‘escape vehicle,’ like Velimir Khlebnikov’s experimental language of the birds, stars and gods, *Zaum*; as an anarchist instrument for the liberation of the individual; and in material terms, as the

technological challenge of inventing a practical, useful air bicycle.”³⁶ Bruguera shared the Soviet artist’s poetic ideal of the flying sculpture. Yet Bruguera’s flying devices were not as calculated and were never intended to fly. They were void of the utopian idealism present in Tatlin’s *Letatlin*, which he “intended to be a ‘flying bicycle’ for everyone to use.”³⁷ She stated, “They are prototypes which I would have loved—although it is utopia—to have reproduced to distribute among the Cuban people.”³⁸ Like Tatlin, Bruguera desired to produce objects for widespread distribution, but recognized the impossibility of the task from the beginning.

Bruguera’s sculptures were assembled from found materials, some gathered from the streets of London.³⁹ She applied the Cuban strategy of *inventando* when producing work abroad and again used found materials and refuse. Although the pieces were exhibited as sculpture, in order for their meaning to be revealed they had to be activated. Bruguera explained,

They are aesthetic objects when hung on the wall, but when one uses them they get charged with function...When a person puts it on, the mechanism starts to work, and the way the person has to move and do things to operate the mechanism is the key to understanding, which are the existing ways to get out of Cuba without renouncing it, without leaving for ever.⁴⁰

The gestures enacted imbued the kinetic sculptures with political meaning that stemmed from her desire for all Cubans to be able to travel and move freely from and back to the island.

One of the devices, *Absolución* (Absolution), 1995 (Figure 4.1), was made primarily from royal palm fronds. The use of a patriotic symbol to compose a flying device was intentionally

³⁶ Roland Wetzels, “*Letatlin-A Utopian Work?*” in *Tatlin: New Art for a New World* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz in conjunction with the Museum Tinguely, Basel, 2012), 148.

³⁷ Wetzels, “*Letatlin-A Utopian Work?*”, 146.

³⁸ Johannes Birringer, “Art in America (The Dream): A Conversation with Tania Bruguera,” *Performance Research* (Spring 1998): 28.

³⁹ Maite Lorés, “The Art of Cuba, Art Line International,” *ARTnews* (Autumn 1995), 18-20.

⁴⁰ Birringer, “Art in America (The Dream),” 28.

ironic, but also reinforced the idea that the contraption was not being used to emigrate, rather to fly to and from the island, similar to the position in which Bruguera found herself. To activate *Absolution* viewers enacted a “movement that is like a palm tree, a kind of submissive bowing.”⁴¹ Enacting a gesture of submission stemmed from Bruguera’s personal experience with censorship and the personal choices and changes she had to implement to maintain her practice on the island. While demonstrating her allegiance to Cuba, she reflected on the sacrifices she had to make to prove her loyalty, namely submission and conformity. Ascribing to the game and conforming to a certain extent, by making her work more conceptual than it had been, enabled Bruguera travel as a representative of Cuba. She had to maintain this position once abroad and could not produce work that was overly critical of the situation at home.

Another of the flying prototypes, *Ilusión* (Illusion), 1995 (Figure 4.2), was comprised of bicycle parts that were oddly assembled and covered in paper and a mattress. The use of the bicycle was reminiscent of Tatlin’s devices, referred to as “air bicycles.”⁴² Additionally, bicycles imported from China came to replace motorized vehicles during the Special Period, to compensate for the lack of gasoline available, and represented material scarcity and the determination to survive under dire circumstances. Bicycles maintained a very specific meaning for Cubans during this time, yet are more or less universally understood as a symbol of mobility, especially for those who cannot afford automobiles. The pedals of the bike in the flying contraption were positioned so that they could only be moved with arms raised and fists folded

⁴¹ Bruguera quoted in “Cuban Performance Artist on a Mission of Cultural Healing” (*Chicago Tribune Tempo*, March 20, 1997), 4.

⁴² Wetzel, “*Letatlin*-A Utopian Work?”, 148.

over the pedals clenched in a posture like that of protest.⁴³ Again a national symbol was manipulated and transformed into a political gesture.

Another of the flying devices, *Sin título* (Untitled), 1995 (Figure 4.3), consisted of a metallic corset that was to be worn by the viewer with long paper wings that emerged from the sides. The wings moved when another participant manipulated two gloves at the base. The collaborative effort between two spectator participants simulated flying. This was the most bird-like of the contraptions, not unlike Tatlin who derived the forms of his *Letatlines* from the study of avian flight and bird skeletons.⁴⁴ Bruguera's imagined flying apparatus conjured the image of the wings Daedalus created for him and Icarus to escape the labyrinth, as referenced in the title of the series of the work. Unfortunately, the wings were not indestructible, Icarus' melted mid-flight, and he, like the wings, perished. This drew a parallel to many of the rafts that Cubans attempted to emigrate on; some withstood the long journey, while others decomposed in transit. Bruguera's apparatuses were not built to withstand an actual flight. By not fulfilling their intended purpose, they stood to represent the reality of the situation for her compatriots who were not granted permission to travel to and from the island and also those Cubans who took a leap of faith and attempted to emigrate on vessels that were not viable.

The flying contraptions were exhibited at Gasworks in an exhibition titled "De lo posible" (About the Possible). The title alluded to the possibility of flying for travel, a privilege she was allotted as an artist, but not possible for the majority of Cubans. Artists' travel gave clout to Cuba. The exportation of art and artists brought attention to Cuba and aided in the formation of economic relationships. The "Daedalus, or Empire of Salvation" flying contraptions

⁴³ Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, "The Mask: Utopia and Ideology," *Flash Art* (January-February 1997), 54.

⁴⁴ Wetzel, "Letatlin-A Utopian Work?", 145.

were Bruguera's initial foray into producing work about travel, while abroad, inverting the position from which she had previously worked. She no longer created projects to bridge Cubans on the island to those abroad as she had with her newspaper. Rather, she used her flexible position to produce work that would transfer information and ideas to and from the island. She assumed the position of shifter and worked between various countries.

Transition to a Performance-Based Practice (Ephemeral Actions/Gestures)

By the summer of 1996 Bruguera had established a reputation abroad, as well as on the island, and was the subject of a solo exhibition "Lagrimas de transito" (Tears of Transit) at the Wifredo Lam Center. For the exhibition she created new installations that provided a direct experience for the spectator. This followed in line with her flying prototypes, which were created for the audience's engagement. Yet, in this instance she staged environments to be experienced in real time. She wanted the viewers to be actively engaged with the work, for it to penetrate their senses and psyche. According to the artist,

I want my work to be transformed and remembered by the audience as an experienced emotion. I want the audience to access the piece as an experience, sometimes a physical experience and carry the 'documentation' of it with them as their own lived memory. I would like my work not to be seen but to be remembered.⁴⁵

Little documentation of these installations exists, as Bruguera's intention was not for her works to live as fetishized objects, but rather as memories.⁴⁶

Within one of the installations, *Estudio de taller* (Studio Study), 1996 (Figure 4.4), Bruguera stood on a tall white pedestal, against the wall and hunched under the ceiling,

⁴⁵ Goldberg, "Being Cuban," 17.

⁴⁶ At the time of writing the author had not seen any documentary photographs of these installations other than what is discussed below.

supported by horizontal black metal bars covering her forehead, mouth, breasts, vagina, and feet, intermittently, for hours at a time. Cotton was placed between the bars and Bruguera's body and in her hands she held an animal heart. Bruguera's gesture was very personal, but resonated on a broader level. She enacted self-censorship in response to her first-hand experience with the censorship of her newspaper, but she also recognized that this was an issue that affected all Cuban citizens. The bars that held her body in place resembled the black bars used to censor text and images. Her covered mouth reinforced the silence of the piece, although her gesture spoke loudly. Bruguera's act was one of great endurance. Her work revealed the sacrifices she has made as a politicized creator within a panoptic society, where one must be obedient.

The cotton like that seen previously in *Table of Salvation* (Figure 3.14) and *Fear* (Figures 3.15 and 3.16) was used here as padding to protect Bruguera's body from the metal bars, revealing her vulnerability. In her 1994 performance *Fear* she laid clothed in a dilapidated boat for hours; here she stood naked on a narrow platform for hours. She acted as a caryatid, bearing the weight of the room on her back—a metaphor for bearing the burden of having to alter, and at times self-censor her work—and an assertion of how one has to precariously go about living one's life. Furthermore, viewers had to look up at her, as she loomed over them; her presence was unavoidable and powerful. She and her viewers were placed in an uncomfortable position as the use of her naked body evoked a visceral reaction. Bruguera has explained her work as “a bridge between historical elements, as a witness to the moment we're experiencing in Cuba, and as my own way of resolving the conflicts that these things bring up on a personal level.”⁴⁷ Although the piece had stemmed from a very personal place it took on a greater meaning as

⁴⁷ Zaya, “Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya,” 241.

Bruguera's body stood in for all Cubans who had suffered from censorship in one way or another.

The animal heart Bruguera held had many spiritual evocations. A heart as an offering invoked the Catholic Sacred Heart and Pre-Columbian heart-sacrifice practices, again paralleling the sacrifices she made. In Afro-Cuban spiritual practices the heart, like blood, is associated with *aché*, the life force. Mendieta had incorporated blood and animal hearts in her performances and earthworks for their indigenous and Afro-Cuban associations, which were influential on Bruguera. Art historian Jane Blocker has compared Mendieta's practice, and especially the use of blood in her performances and earthworks, to *aché*.⁴⁸ Art making and performing as *aché*, a life force, is relevant to Bruguera as well, especially as her practice evolved. The heart therefore served a both a symbol of sacrifice, but also life force and the ability to persevere despite dire circumstances.

Bruguera's exhibition at the Wifredo Lam Center garnered her a great deal of attention and she was selected to headline Cuba's pavilion during the 1996 São Paulo biennial. *Studio Study* was the focus of this exhibition. The work received more international spectators and publicity. Censorship and the resulting silence focused on in this piece related not only to Bruguera's suffering or that endured by all Cubans, but that suffered on a global scale as well. Her body stood in as a surrogate for all who had encountered similar tragedies to her own. This was especially relevant in Brazil, where most of the population had suffered under a military dictatorship. Here again Bruguera fulfilled the role of a shifter, as a mediator who transmitted and translated information and experiences relevant in Cuba to a broader audience.

⁴⁸ *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), 114.

When *Studio Study* was exhibited in both Cuba and Brazil, Bruguera did not stay behind the metal bars the entire time the work was exhibited. There were periods of time when she was absent from her post and the audience was left to make sense of the work. Cotton that had fallen to the ground when she left her post served as evidence that she had been there (Figure 4.5). Bruguera did this intentionally to confuse the different genres (performance, installation, sculpture) with which she was working.

Residency in the United States: Art in America (The Dream)

In January of 1997 Bruguera and four of her colleagues were invited to participate in a seven-week residency program in the United States organized by Holly Block of Art in General and Betti-Sue Hertz of the Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts, New York City. Block and Hertz had attended the Fifth Havana Biennial and afterward organized a cultural exchange program in lieu of a traditional exhibition of contemporary Cuban art. Different institutions throughout the U.S. accommodated each of the artists and at the end of the residency, the participants all returned to New York for a roundtable discussion. Bruguera was hosted by The Art Institute of Chicago.

When Bruguera first arrived in Chicago she continued to work on the “Daedalus, or Empire of Salvation” flying prototypes. Yet, her project changed drastically after she began spending time with Cuban ex-patriots. Rather than create additional flying contraptions, Bruguera collaborated with the local Cuban-American community to produce a new variation of *Estadísticas* (Statistics, Figure 4.7), a sculpture of a funerary flag she had originally created in Cuba (1996), and an interactive performance *Art in America (The Dream)* (Figure 4.8) to address her experience with the Cuban immigrant community in the United States.

Statistics, on which Bruguera based her Chicago made sculpture, was a twelve-foot sculpture reminiscent of a funerary flag that was produced in Cuba as part of the “Postwar Memory” project. The work closely resembled the Cuban flag, but it was made from human hair rolled and tied together with strips of cloth and white, red, and olive green thread, similar to the white, red, and blue found on the actual flag, with the blue replaced by the green of army fatigues. Bruguera chose to reference the Cuban flag, a nationalist symbol, to confront the issue of emigration. Over a period of five months roughly 2,000 Cubans donated their hair for the project. Many African and Afro-Cuban religions believe that giving someone the responsibility of hair is “an act of trust.”⁴⁹ By donating their hair to Bruguera, the Cuban participants contributed to a large-scale piece that symbolized the strength and power of Cuba’s inhabitants in light of difficult times, exacerbated by emigration and economic devastation. The flag was created and hung in memory of those who emigrated and those who lost their lives trying. The act of creating the flag was ritualistic; it took Bruguera and her collaborators months to roll the hair. This was reminiscent of colonial sewing circles, as it was an act of solidarity and collaboration.

In Chicago an alternate version of *Statistics* was produced using scraps of cloth given to the artist by Cuban immigrants (Figure 4.7). Bruguera explained, “When I got here I only understood 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...”⁵⁰ The new flag was intended as a symbol of the cohesive Cuban-American community in Chicago. The work acknowledged the

⁴⁹ Niangi Batulukisi, “Hair in African Art and Cultures,” *Hair in African Art and Culture* (New York: The Museum for African Art and Prestel, 2000), 25.

⁵⁰ Valerie Cassel and Betti-Sue Hertz, “Tania Bruguera,” in *1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program* (New York: Art in General and Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts, 1997), 30.

local colloquialism of giving one the shirt off your back, which again was an act of trust, support, and solidarity. This work explored the relationship between the Cuban population on the island and in the U.S. from the U.S. perspective. As a shifter Bruguera was able to move between the two Cuban communities and effectively communicate with and on behalf of the two.

Bruguera further explored parallels between the Cuban-American population and a segment of U.S. citizenry after encountering Chicago's Lower Wacker homeless population. She engaged directly with the mostly African-American homeless to learn about their daily struggle for survival. Bruguera drew a correlation between those who were living away from Cuba and the homeless; both suffered from the loss of their *patria* (homeland; home) and have had to "convert their nomadic existence into a way of life."⁵¹ Bruguera further noted, "both groups suffer from internal strife, sudden change, the need to assimilate quickly to new conditions, and the nearly fatal knowledge that it is practically impossible to change their situation."⁵² The homelessness that Bruguera witnessed countered her preconceived notions about life in the United States. It was the opposite of the American dream, a troubling reality and not what she expected to confront during her stay in Chicago. Each Cuban immigrant had taken a risk in leaving Cuba for a better life abroad, which as Bruguera witnessed was a continuous struggle. As a shifter she navigated and translated the experiences of these communities.

Bruguera straddled the position of Cuban citizen and immigrant in the resulting interactive installation and performance *Art in America (The Dream)* (Figure 4.8, documentary photograph from the performance) that challenged the notion of the American Dream associated with living and exhibiting in the United States. For this work, Bruguera collaborated with

⁵¹ Bruguera, "Postwar Memories," 187.

⁵² Ibid.

Chicago's Cuban community, which included friends and colleagues. The work was performed in March 1997 at The University of Chicago's Two Gallery. The gallery was converted to a dark set with the exception of a few bright lights meant to simulate the appearance of a tunnel. In order to enter the "tunnel," each member of the audience had to hand over a form of identification to an actor, standing in as an officer. The "officer" retained the identification card until the end of the performance and only returned it after one successfully passed an examination given by actors playing Immigration and Naturalization Service Officers who used the actual INS "Citizenship Questions" one would have to answer to receive citizenship. Within the set a performer slept motionless on the floor; another moved around cardboard boxes labeled "kitchen," "living room," etc., enacting the constant process of setting up a "home," never in stasis for the homeless; and a small girl begged for food. Bruguera and Cuban-American Nereida García-Ferraz solicited donations then read aloud from cards similar to tarot that contained ideas taken from Afro-Cuban rituals (Figure 4.8).⁵³ Bruguera read the text in Spanish and García-Ferraz translated it to English.

Art in America (The Dream) allowed Bruguera to explore the position of the emigrant from another perspective and broaden the scope of her work on the topic. Bruguera stated,

Just as Ana wanted to return, conscientiously, to discover a part of her history that was not entirely accessible to her, and took her body as the measure of the world. So have I turned this stay abroad, this process, into a way of entering the life dynamics of a Cuban leaving Cuba; and I have taken my situation as a reference point, searching from the personal for a more complete vision and being more ready to understand Cubans, as we are, in two parts.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bruguera became close to artists Achy Objeas and Nereida García-Ferraz, the latter who had produced an impressionable documentary on Mendieta and introduced Bruguera to the late artist's relatives.

⁵⁴ Bruguera, "Postwar Memories," 189.

Previously, through her recreations of Mendieta's work in her "Homage to Mendieta" project she explored the loss of the artist and impact of emigration on Cubans. Her "Postwar Memory" series enabled her to bridge the two Cuban communities, while still residing on the island, and honor those who risked their life trying to leave.

The work further expounded on her experience living among the exile community in Chicago. The loss of food and goods necessary for survival was familiar to her during the Special Period, although not what she associated with America. The act of begging and depending on the sympathy and kindness of others was therefore reenacted in the performance. Bruguera had additionally witnessed first hand the difficulty of the process of assimilation. She addressed this through the incorporation of the tarot cards, lending to the idea that immigrants brought with them their spirituality, and often it was all they had. She was interested in how the U.S. audience (mis)interpreted these beliefs and more generally how immigrant communities are (mis)understood. Bruguera better understood the suffering on the part of the immigrant and the lengths they went to in trying to retain elements of their culture. Her work no longer only focused on the suffering on the island. This rounded out her understanding of what it meant to be Cuban, which was especially relevant in the age of globalization.

As an interactive performance, *Art in America (The Dream)* again necessitated the audience's engagement. Spectators became actively engaged in the work. They were confronted with the strife of the immigrant and homeless populations and were made to feel uneasy. They had to turn over their proof of identity/legitimacy, only to receive their documentation back after an interrogation; they were solicited for money and food; they were left puzzled as Bruguera addressed them in her foreign tongue and they had to wait for a translation. Following the conclusion of the performance the piece continued to live on as an experience committed to the

audience members' memories and as a narrative they would tell. Bruguera once again sought to blur the boundary between art and life, to make them inseparable and invoke real change.⁵⁵

Performing the Social Body

In May of 1997, following her return to Havana after her residency in Chicago, Bruguera performed a piece in the courtyard of her home that explored the psychological impact of censorship's aftermath (conformity) and also painful experiences of guilt. She returned to themes influenced by her experiences on the island and continued to expand her performance-based work inspired by her experience in Chicago. *El peso de la culpa* (The Burden of Guilt; Figure 4.9) was performed during a corollary event to the Sixth Havana Biennial. Bruguera stood in a simple white shirt and shorts before *Statistic*, the funerary flag produced in Havana, with a decapitated, skinned, and gutted lamb hung from her neck. She spent approximately forty-five minutes mixing and consuming Cuban soil and salt water (in lieu of tears) from two small bowls placed before her.

The lamb carcass bore deliberate religious connotations of sacrifice and obedience and simultaneously shielded her and made her submissive.⁵⁶ The act of eating dirt recalled the suffering during the most treacherous years of the Special Period when people literally had nothing to eat, which was still the case for many. Moreover, in Cuba the phrase *comer tierra* (to eat dirt) indicates a personal crisis. The act was not only an allusion to the pain and suffering endured during the Special Period but also a form of suicide allegedly practiced by Cuba's

⁵⁵ At the conclusion of the residency she went to the University of British Columbia's Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver to participate in a large exhibition of Cuban art from the 1980s and 1990s, "Utopian Territories." In 1997 she also completed a residency at The Western Front, Vancouver where she began to incorporate video and documentation into her work.

⁵⁶ Although the incorporation of an animal carcass in Bruguera's performance is reminiscent of the Viennese Actionists, her interest incorporation of the lamb carcass bore a closer relationship to animal sacrifice, such as that commonly practiced in various Afro-Cuban religions.

indigenous population during Spanish colonization. Suicide, or “self-erasure” correlated to the issue of self-censorship and silencing in addition to self-exile. The Cuban soil Bruguera ate directly referenced land and the notion of *patria*, as did the flag she performed before.

The sacrifices alluded to in the work include assimilation and conformity, that to which many Cubans subjected themselves when remaining on the island or when acculturating in their adoptive country. Bruguera explained that this work is one “in which the idea of punishment (in this case, self-punishment by ‘suicide’ and the ‘erasing’ of one’s self) converges with the causes of guilt (submission, passivity). The punishment is for being submissive, but that passivity is also a way to survive, and that kind of salvation is a slow death.”⁵⁷ Bruguera’s extremely visceral performance illuminated the fact that conformity, such as self-censorship, on the island caused part of one’s self to die, while the alternatives were not much better—to inflict your own death (suicide), to emigrate, or suffer the consequences of breaking the law (imprisonment, torture). Thus she decided to live shifting between these positions.

Bruguera first performed *The Burden of Guilt* before international biennial visitors along with unassuming Cubans, many of who were just passing by her home, which is located on a busy street in Old Havana.⁵⁸ For the performance she opened a rarely used large door onto her courtyard, allowing passersby to see in, conflating her private space with that of the street. She privileged the experience of the audience and not the production of an object or the documentation of the piece. The work had a profound effect on Mosquera, who in 2010 recalled observing the performance:

⁵⁷ Zaya, “Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya,” 245.

⁵⁸ Artists were discouraged from exhibiting in their homes. When Bruguera finished her performance the police visited her. She had anticipated this occurrence and secured the necessary permit to have a celebration. Gerardo Mosquera, <http://universe-in-universe.de/car/havana/opinion/e-mosqu.htm>, accessed January 14, 2007.

The gesture of this young Cuban woman eating Cuban dirt in Old Havana for forty-five minutes, introducing the Cuban soil, the Cuban land, into her organism at a critical time, feeding on it or poisoning herself with it, was so candid, so disarmingly immediate, heartbreaking, and poignantly rich in meanings and feelings that it was impossible to divide it from a living piece of reality. The artist's body was her own subjective body, but it was simultaneously ritualized into a social body.⁵⁹

Mosquera attested first hand to the poignancy of Bruguera's action as he experienced a range of emotions and likewise observed his compatriots doing the same. The gesture was powerful. Bruguera noted that Cubans understood the work, as "it comes out of an everyday and familiar experience," but that foreigners in Cuba saw it as "dangerous and alarming." The following year, when performed again, naked, in Caracas, Venezuela (Figure 4.10) it functioned as a very "intense and risky image."⁶⁰

Bruguera took on the issue of censorship more overtly during her performance *El cuerpo del silencio* (The Body of Silence; Figure 4.11), enacted in 1998 in Copenhagen, Denmark and then in Havana at the Casa de las Americas (a state run institution). During this solo performance she sat naked in a box covered with raw lamb's meat. She held an official Cuban history textbook in her hands, where in its prose rhetoric took precedence over reality. With a pen she corrected the inaccuracies in the text. Knowing that she was committing an illegal act she proceeded to censor herself. She ripped out the edited pages and consumed them, preventing her version of history from circulating and being susceptible to government censorship or arrest. During her performance she broke the law and inflicted her own punishment. She again silenced herself to enforce the idea that freedom of speech was not a reality on the island; if one in fact went against the official history the consequences suffered would be far worse than swallowing

⁵⁹ Mosquera, "Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work: The Body is the Social Body," 24.

⁶⁰ Zaya, "Tania Bruguera in Conversation with Octavio Zaya," 251.

one's words. The lamb's meat again signified sacrifice and performing naked again made the work provocative and evoked a visceral response.

In 1998 Bruguera was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.⁶¹ Later that year she returned to Chicago to pursue a MFA in performance at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She had the rare privilege of pursuing a degree in the United States without emigrating. Rather she split her time between Chicago and Havana

and has divided her year between the two countries, cultures and ideologies, 'between past and future,' she has said. This to and fro between continent and island, interspersed with extensive international travel as well, has sharpened Bruguera's understanding of what it means to "be Cuban" and what it takes to make work that is relevant both locally and internationally.⁶²

Her dual citizenship allowed her to continue shifting between time and place and reflect on issues relevant on the island and abroad. While studying performance she continued to mostly act as the protagonist of her work.⁶³

Turn of the Century

By the turn of the century Bruguera applied a new logic to the creation of work that was inspired by her travels and studies abroad. Rather than her work emerging largely from a Cuban context and being performed locally and/or abroad, she broadened her approach so that she could

⁶¹ Often characterized as "midcareer" awards, Guggenheim Fellowships are intended for men and women who have already demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts. 1800 have been granted to men and women from Latin America and the Caribbean. <http://www.gf.org/about-the-foundation/the-fellowship/>, accessed October 12, 2011.

⁶² Goldberg and Bruguera, "Interview II," 35.

⁶³ The period of her practice that included performance pieces centered on her performing alone, often naked, lasted roughly from 1996-1999. Supporters of her work were interested in the extremes she confronted and wanted to know what she would do next. This caused her to reevaluate what she had been doing. Ultimately, Bruguera viewed these performances as a "failed period." They brought her a great deal of attention, but did not blur the boundary between art and life—they were too artistic. Lucrezia Cippitelli, "To Have Done with Aesthetic Judgments: Life, Useful Art, Civil Society, and the Diasporic Gaze," in *Tania Bruguera* (Milan: Postmedia Books, 2010), 21.

apply the same general logic to the creation of a work, yet it became specific to the location where it was realized. This is evident in her *Sin título (place, date)* (Untitled) series that began in 2000. In order to confront the preconceived notions one holds about a particular place, its mythology and politics, Bruguera manipulated potent political symbols. This stemmed from her experience traveling and confronting the different (mis)conceptions held about Cuba. She translated this strategy to identifying misconceptions held of other places. She responded to the specific sociopolitical situation within the country each manifestation of the work resided and the misperceptions held about the particular history of the place. The work was intentionally left untitled to allow the spectator to have his or her own experience not mediated or directed by the artist.

Bruguera began this series in Cuba and then took it global. *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* (Figure 4.12) was an interactive installation with live performers, created for the Seventh Havana Biennial, 2000. It was staged in a former military prison located in La Cabaña (the colonial military fortress that has been the primary site of the Havana Biennial since 1991). The space was left dark and the ground was covered with *bagazo*, cut and milled stalks of sugar cane. One walked through the long dark space on the fermenting cane, which emitted a pungent scent. Viewers were drawn to a light projected from a black and white television monitor hung from the ceiling. Once close enough to the screen the audience could make out well-known clips from Castro's life. In one clip he unbuttoned his shirt to prove that he wasn't wearing a bulletproof vest, revealing his vulnerability. Within the space were four naked males performing mundane gestures (bending over and/or rubbing or slapping their body). As the viewers' eyes adjusted to the low light they began to make out these figures. Bruguera did not perform. Based on her

dissatisfaction with her earlier performances that were too focused on herself, she removed herself from the work and hired Cuban men to perform.

The sugarcane placed on the ground of the installation produced an uncomfortable environment for biennial patrons both conceptually and physically. Sugar has stood as a symbol of Cuba since the colonial period irrespective of the crop's tumultuous history. It was the onetime economic backbone of Cuba fueled by slavery that had more recently been replaced by tourism. Moreover, combined with the imagery of Castro, the cane recalled his failed ten million pound harvest from 1970.

The installation engaged all of the participants' senses in unexpected ways. The cane was redolent of fermenting sugar, a pungent odor that assaulted viewers' sense of smell. The darkness countered the traditional visual encounter with a work of art and made spectators more aware of their other sensations. Darkness also held a particular relevance in Havana where rolling blackouts still occurred. While one had a hard time making out the bodies of the male performers, they could hear their repeated actions, along with the squish of the cane and murmurs of other spectators.

Untitled (Havana, 2000) was produced for the international audience attending the biennial with the intention of confronting and challenging many of the preconceived notions one held about the island. The theme of the biennial was "One Closer to Another" and Bruguera sought to compare Castro to fellow Cuban males. With the limited light viewers had a hard time distinguishing the male performers; metaphorically, this resonated with the blind faith many held in communism and their inability to distinguish the day-to-day hardships encountered by Cuba's inhabitants. The juxtaposition of Castro to the average man likewise exposed the leftist fantasies projected by many on Cuba through the figure of Castro and their difficulty in understanding the

realities of the common citizens.⁶⁴ For some it confirmed their notions of struggle under the regime/during the Special Period.

The piece was closed after the opening night of the biennial, purportedly because it contained nudity and not because it included imagery of Castro. However, artwork containing the image of Castro is almost always censored. Prior to its closure/censorship the work was titled *Ingenieros de alma* (Engineers of the Soul); this was a reference to Stalin who in 1932 appropriated Lenin's verbiage "engineers" of the soul to describe intellectuals who used ideas to transform their subjects and advance the Revolution.⁶⁵ The artist inferred a direct correlation between Stalin and Castro as engineers of the soul. After the work was censored Bruguera reconceptualized the project and left the work and future versions untitled.

Untitled (Kassel, 2002), of the same series as *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*, was created on the occasion of "Documenta 11" (Figure 4.13). Bruguera explained her logic in the creation of this piece,

I'm trying to see how different pieces hold up to being in one place or another. For example, the piece I did in Documenta *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* was a translation of *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* the piece I did in the fortress. It was not a formal translation but the translation of the theme: what we see and what we don't want to see.⁶⁶

This interactive installation, staged in an old ammunition factory from World War II, contained forty 750-watt lights, mounted on stands at eye-level, lining the corridor. The lights turned on and off, temporarily blinding the audience and then plunging it into total darkness. Behind the scene performers routinely loaded guns and marched on scaffolding to produce a rhythmic

⁶⁴ Tania Bruguera, "Untitled (Havana, 2000)," <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/146-0-Untitled+Havana+2000.htm>, accessed August 3, 2011.

⁶⁵ Rosa Martínez, "Tania the Guerrillera," (unpublished, 2001), "<http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/450-0-Tania+the+Guerrillera.htm>, accessed August 3, 2011.

⁶⁶ Goldberg and Bruguera, "Interview II," 35.

sound. Like *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* the experience was phenomenological and spectators were made to feel uneasy; one proceeded through the space with caution. When the spectator regained his/her vision he/she saw a projected list of the sites where political massacres have occurred since World War II, along with footage of people running.

Untitled (Kassel, 2002) addressed the holocaust in an unexpected way; it confronted the emotions of fear and terror rather than showing victims or their possessions. Everyone became subjected to the lights and their blinding effects. Again the idea of turning a blind eye emerged, this time in response to political massacres. Many live their life numb and immune to the struggles regularly being faced by groups of people.

This work has been described as Bruguera's first work "as an international artist without an explicit Cuban context."⁶⁷ To this effect Bruguera has stated,

I am working with Cuban subjects and feelings but I am doing so in a mainstream language. Or maybe it is an 'international language' that comes from what they call an 'international artist.' I find myself at a crossroads, and I'm having a lot of trouble with this. Why? Because I've seen a lot of people who are not born in Europe or mainstream art centers like New York or London. They are viewed as 'local' artists, as 'original artists' and then, after one or two international events, they start becoming "international" artists. I think it is a very dangerous transition because many people become formalists, in a way. When you are talking about your own 'local' environment, I mean you are reacting to everything around you. But then, you need to translate those reactions into a language that everybody understands and in the process you lose a lot of detail. You start talking so broadly that you end up not saying anything at all.⁶⁸

By the turn of the century Bruguera became worldly enough to apply her methods to the investigation of another place's history, but always from the position of a shifter.

⁶⁷ Bass, "Biography," 130.

⁶⁸ Goldberg and Bruguera, "Interview II," 21.

CARLOS GARAICOA

Like Bruguera, the exposure Garaicoa received during the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994, gained him invitations to participate in residencies and exhibitions abroad. Just as his work commented on the changing landscape of Havana in anticipation of tourism, he became a traveler/tourist himself and worked from the position of a shifter translating and transmitting information to and from Havana. While first abroad he often continued working on projects that he had begun in Havana; the culture shock proved not to be conducive to creating new work. With time, and exposure to multiple cities, such as Manhattan, he came to explore the similarities between the foreign country he was visiting and Cuba. Finally, near the end of the century he began working/living between two countries, Spain and Cuba, a position he still maintains, and used his practice to address globalization. Like Bruguera, Garaicoa's shift in his approach to art making paralleled Cuba's more rigorous position in the global economy.

Early Travels Abroad: When Desire Resembles Nothing

During one of his earliest trips abroad, to Switzerland, Garaicoa found it difficult to produce new work. Trying to create in what he called an aseptic urban environment impelled him to continue working on *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream*. In Biel-Bienne, Switzerland, he and his wife hand painted tiles to match those still extant at the site in Havana (seen in Figure 3.19). Garaicoa commented on the grave differences between working in Havana and Switzerland when he stated,

I've always thought that, although my source was the city—Havana—there was no reason I should not work somewhere else, on a different city. In fact, I started traveling quite early... in 1995 I had a chance to live in Switzerland for a while: even though in that precise moment I didn't find it possible to work on such an

aseptic urban context, I used the experience to learn more about other urban realities.⁶⁹

Traveling and experiencing life in other cities would have a multifaceted impact on Garaicoa. One effect was that contact with a pristine environment, such as he experienced in Switzerland, amplified the state of decay in which a good deal of Havana existed.⁷⁰ This dichotomy is evident when comparing Garaicoa's observations in Switzerland to a performance Suarez staged in an exhibition of Garaicoa's photographs and photo-drawings, "Inside Havana," at Espacio Aglutinador (Figure 4.14), the same year as Garaicoa's residency in Biel-Bienne. Large scaffolding was installed in the space to prohibit spectators from being able to freely move around the "gallery." As Mosquera recounted "During the opening Ezequiel climbed the scaffold and with an iron bar destroyed part of the ceiling of his own home, its pieces falling on the public. It was a violent performance, a cry of solidarity with the city being destroyed and with the victims of the frequent collapses, which usually affect the poorest areas."⁷¹ Suarez emphasized the destruction and deterioration in Havana, a topic often addressed in Garaicoa's work. This performance, inspired by Garaicoa's work, emphasized the hardships and struggles living within Havana.

In 1996 Garaicoa participated in a residency and solo exhibition at Art in General in New York City, where he did not run into difficulty generating work. Block, then director of Art in General, who would also co-organize the residency program that Bruguera participated in (1997), first met Garaicoa in 1994 when she was in Havana for the Biennial. In New York, Garaicoa had intended to continue to work on projects that explored the built environment of

⁶⁹ Fusi and Garaicoa, "A Conversation with Carlos Garaicoa," 106.

⁷⁰ Also in 1995 his work was exhibited in the Johannesburg Biennial (*Una pelea cubana*) and included in exhibitions in Barcelona and Bilbao, Spain.

⁷¹ "Carlos Garaicoa," 47.

Havana. However, while perusing the streets of Manhattan he recognized many literal and conceptual similarities between the built environments of the two cities; not only did he find parallels in the architecture and division of space into ethnic enclaves, but also the fictions emanating from each city and its inhabitants. The resulting installations, photographs, and drawings exhibited in “*Cuando el deseo se parece a nada*,” (When Desire Resembles Nothing), 1996, mapped the relationship between New York City and Havana.

Many of the exhibited works featured objects brought from Havana or found in New York. They, like the artist, shifted between the island of Havana and the island of Manhattan. The objects selected for inclusion in this project were no longer in need of refurbishment and varied from Garaicoa’s restorative projects and photo-drawings. Here the objects were recontextualized in documentary photographs and/or installations that delineated a new dialogue between the cities whose troubled history had regularly precluded such efforts. The pieces unpacked the similarities between early twentieth-century buildings like the Flatiron in Manhattan and a similar structure in Havana (*Declaración/Declaration*, Figure 4.15) and the division of the city into ethnic neighborhoods, such as Chinatowns. Yet, the most striking pieces addressed Manhattan as symbol of late capitalism and Cuba’s relationship to this economic system as Cuba was more aggressively entering the world economy.

The installations *Abraham Lincoln and Saint Juan Bosco or The Maps of Desire*, 1996 (Figure 4.16), and *Cuando el deseo se parece a nada* (When a Desire Represents Nothing), 1996 (Figure 4.17), confronted Garaicoa’s expanded notion of the map of desire. Garaicoa used maps as an approach to his work focused on Havana and Manhattan, but thought of in a broader sense, as he explained,

the map of dreams, of the imagination; the map of desire; and then the physical maps, the maps of encounter. It’s about how an object can represent you, how that

object can inhabit you, how that object becomes part of you, how it dictates to you, like the city being tattooed on you—these maps are defining.⁷²

Garaicoa's use of mapping was deliberate; his interest in the map was literal—as a diagram of the physical layout of the city—and conceptual—as a way of connecting, and explicating the relationships between places.

Garaicoa's intrigue with maps further reveals the influence of literature. The novel *Invisible Cities*, by Italo Calvino (born in Cuba, raised in Italy), features an alternative approach to thinking and writing about cities.⁷³ Through imaginative discussions between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, in which Polo is describing his journeys through cities in the Khan's domain, each city is described vividly, albeit succinctly, and activate the imagination. Calvino's text is divided into sections with titles such as "Cities and Signs," "Cities and Memory," and "Cities and Desire," and clearly impacted Garaicoa's expanded concept of the map. Moreover, I demonstrate that through the lens of Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping these projects further connect Havana and New York through global capitalism.

The installation *Abraham Lincoln and Saint Juan Bosco or The Maps of Desire* (Figure 4.16) mapped Garaicoa's personal experience with capital in New York to its broader, global, implications. During his residency Garaicoa received a stipend, yet he ran out of money before his trip concluded. As a result he had to sell one of his drawings, for which he was only able to procure one hundred dollars. He then took twenty of the hundred dollars and traded it with a beggar for his coffee cup of pennies and bronze bust of Saint Bosco. Garaicoa photo-documented the items as he originally found them (Figure 4.16, on the left) and later installed the photograph along with the bust and the pennies affixed to the wall emanating from it, as a halo (Figure 4.16,

⁷² Coco Fusco and Carlos Garaicoa, "When Desire Resembles Nothing," in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 112.

⁷³ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

on the right). Garaicoa added to the pennies that he originally acquired in the coffee cup so that there were roughly 1,500. He additionally featured wall text in the installation.⁷⁴

Like Bruguera, Garaicoa observed firsthand the disparity between the American dream and lived reality. He desired to achieve success through monetary gains while in New York, as did most artists:

I think the money tells something about my arrival to New York, the great aspiration... It's the great aspiration of any immigrant, of anyone who comes to make money in New York, any artist -the dream, the myth. It's how the city is really represented in the eyes of many people. And this primary experience of arriving and really finding the opposite, of having to sell a drawing of mine for practically nothing.⁷⁵

Placed in a position where he had no other option than to sell his painting for whatever money he could earn, he identified with the beggar, psychologically, as one willing to collect any available monies.

Rather than relate to the homeless man as a foreigner removed from a proper home/homeland as Bruguera had, Garaicoa mapped the relationship between desire and money to their implications that spanned from Cuba to the United States. By purchasing the cup with pennies and bust of Saint Bosco, he “cognitively map[ped] [his] individual social relationship to local, national and international class realities.”⁷⁶ He had succumbed to selling his work for less than it was valued because he desperately needed money for survival. He in turn applied this

⁷⁴ The wall text read: “When I arrived in New York for the first time, I planned to conquer the city in just three weeks. Later, days before I was to leave, I discovered that my limited funds were gone, and I had to sell my drawings for only 100 dollars. Later, as I was walking downtown, I met a man with a glass full of pennies and a religious image. I bought the image and the glass for 20 of my 100 dollars. Later I understood that reality and desire are sometimes irreconcilable opposites.” Carlos Garaicoa, “Texts for the Different Works,” in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 111.

⁷⁵ Fusco and Garaicoa, “When Desire Resembles Nothing,” 113.

⁷⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 52.

logic to the homeless gentleman who sold Garaicoa his possessions for twenty dollars because he desperately needed the money for survival.

Furthermore, the pennies held a specific significance for Garaicoa as icons within American culture. He observed them in jars in Americans' homes and noticed them left in the street. Pennies were valueless unless they were manifold. Garaicoa was not in a position to adopt the spendthrift attitude held by many Americans. He arrived in New York with lofty ambitions for himself and his work. Once confronted with reality he gained a new perspective on his place within New York society and an advanced capitalist country. He was privileged in Havana, where he could earn dollars for the sale of his work and live comfortably, but that comfort did not yet translate to the First World.

Abraham Lincoln and Saint Juan Bosco or The Maps of Desire can further be read as a critique of capitalism. Through his installation Garaicoa exposed the disconnection between his labor and the actual value of the money. He painstakingly affixed roughly 1,500 pennies to the wall in a circular pattern, emanating from the bust of the saint. His effort was presumably worth more than fifteen dollars. Yet, there was also a symbolic value that the completed work is later appraised at. Furthermore, the placement of the saint in the center of a circle of pennies read as a shrine to money, to capital. St. Bosco, the patron saint of the homeless, is surrounded by money and the greed of capitalism replaces the asceticism of religion. Within an advanced capitalist country faith is often supplanted by desire and greed. Garaicoa was therefore somewhat sympathetic, giving the beggar twenty dollars, worth more than the pennies and statue. Yet, by purchasing the items from the homeless man, to in turn modify them and make them much more valuable as art objects, he asserted his superior position and reflected on the notion that everything is for sale.

Another installation from the same series, *When a Desire Represents Nothing*, (Figure 4.17), bore the namesake of the exhibition and further confronted the built environment of Manhattan as symbolic of capitalism. The installation contained three photographs, objects, and wall text.⁷⁷ One of the photographs was of a young Cuban male (the artist Jorge Luis Morrero) seen from below, looking up, removing the left sleeve of his shirt to expose a cursory tattoo on his arm of two high-rise buildings (presumably housing structures in Havana) and the phrase “In my soul.” He was photographed before two high-rise buildings seen in the background. The other two photographs featured the World Trade Center twin towers, still standing at the time, and a woman undergoing a procedure, possibly having her eyebrows tattooed. The objects displayed included the tools used to create home-produced tattoos: “soap and sewing needles, pencil, [and] melted toothpaste.”⁷⁸

The twin towers of the World Trade Center, once occupied by brokerage firms, were a physical marker for the more abstract principles of advanced late capitalism. Vehement feelings against capitalism made the towers a target in 2001. In 1996 Garaicoa photographed the twin towers of the World Trade Center. He related these edifices and the pervasive nature of their symbolism to similar buildings in Havana, including those that his friend had tattooed on his arm. Displayed together the photographs exposed the relationship between the built environment, the body, and desire.

⁷⁷ The wall text read: “I got into a discussion about the genesis of desire with one of my friends. It dealt with the fact of carrying ‘the world’ along with you, of an image of ‘the world’ engraved upon your body./ ‘Sometimes desire and imagination,’ he told me, ‘become gag, an indelible torture that doesn’t allow us to see the scalpel or rivulets of blood that begin to drip from our shoulders.’/ ‘So why is this recurring image, like the one you carry with you?’/ ‘Cities and idea we have about them are often composed of clichés, of simple view on postcards. So, why not?’” Garaicoa, “Texts for the Different Works,” 111.

⁷⁸ Fusco and Garaicoa, “When Desire Resembles Nothing,” 113.

This project was a meditation on the symbolism of the World Trade Center and how a structure or what it symbolizes can become a desire that evolves into an obsession, so much that it possesses one's body quite literally as a tattoo. As Garaicoa explained,

When I refer to maps of desire, I'm thinking of a map on the body, a map of the face. It's a desire as limit, desire as torture. ...It's the grandiloquence of an external discourse directed at oneself, how space can penetrate you, can come inside of you...until it becomes an obsession, a torture, a total limit to seeing reality.⁷⁹

A tattoo physically alters one's body with imagery symbolic of a desire or obsession. In the photographs the high rises are related to the tattooed towers as parallel structures resembling parallel desires. The young man desired what the twin towers symbolized, yet he stood before his reality. Garaicoa's work in New York drew out the connections between places. Relics and photographs from both cities were installed together and in discussion with one another. His subsequent work would examine another aspect of the city, the garden, in relationship to the built environment and ruins.

Landscapes and Gardens as Respite?

Garaicoa's connection to urban space, and space more generally, including landscapes and gardens, was impacted by his travels and contention with Cuba's role in world politics. In 1996-1997 Garaicoa spent time in Africa, in Angola and then South Africa, where his work confronted Cuba's engagement in the Angolan Civil War. His experience in Africa was very different from that of New York. In Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, where a decisive battle against Apartheid had been fought, Garaicoa participated in a program for two weeks, called "Memorias

⁷⁹ Ibid.

íntimas, marcas” (Intimate Memories, Traces). He, along with artists from Angola and South Africa, had the opportunity to “organize performances, installations, and videos in a town rebuilt upon its own ruins after successive wars.”⁸⁰ The work produced was exhibited in Angola, South Africa, and Portugal. Garaicoa completed a number of projects moving between Africa and Cuba to address Cuba’s involvement in the Angolan Civil War, a significant historical event considered a taboo topic and not discussed on the island.

Hierba del verano (Summer Grass), 1997, a site-specific intervention, involved seven days of digging holes in the ground and leaving small mounds of dirt alongside each hole (Figure 4.18). Garaicoa video documented the monotonous and repetitious act of digging holes, which he exhibited on seven monitors; each monitor displayed one day’s activity (Figure 4.19).⁸¹ Alongside the video monitors he displayed a haiku by a 17th century Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho, “In the summer grass/ There is boredom now./ Glorious dreams of ancient warriors.” The barren land in which he dug had been the site of bloodshed and was still littered with landmines. Valdés-Figueroa, who accompanied Garaicoa to Africa, recounted that in Cuito Cuanavale “everywhere poverty, disease, helplessness and death hit us full in the face.”⁸² Garaicoa’s work drew attention to the precarious nature of the landscape still littered with incinerated trucks, tanks, helicopters and artillery, with fragments repurposed as homes. Garaicoa symbolically tilled the land, as one would prepare a garden, yet his intent was not to provide sustenance. Rather, the small mounds Garaicoa created were sculptural and their conical shape was like the roof of huts found throughout Africa. His act took on a more metaphorical meaning.

⁸⁰ Valdés Figueroa, “The Mirror of Desire,” 105.

⁸¹ This was Garaicoa’s first video piece.

⁸² Valdés Figueroa, “The Mirror of Desire,” 105.

Between the years of 1998 and 2000 Hernández composed prose inspired by Garaicoa's Africa work in which he addressed and added to their metaphorical meaning. Hernández contemplated the act of digging, first comparing Garaicoa to a gravedigger, but noted that all of the dead had already been buried. Then he suggested that Garaicoa was a farmer preparing to sow his seeds, but then asked who would want to eat the harvest from the ground soaked in blood? Next he proposed Garaicoa as an explorer/archeologist who did not appear to be looking for anything. He concluded Garaicoa's act was meditative:

What he is looking for is no longer under the ground. Or is it buried in another place. In many other places. And at a depth where the archeologist's shovel cannot reach. Although it is perhaps because of this that he has decided to dig precisely here, as soon as the sun rises and for seven days. So that each hole is made within himself. So that his shovel doesn't dig into the earth but directly into the depths of his consciousness, his spirit...⁸³

The act enabled the artist to ruminate on the significance of land and the Angolan war. What Garaicoa had confronted as an empty field, had been laden with symbolism for the Soviet Union and United States, who supported the opposing parties' participation in the civil war, a Cold War surrogate. Angola became a pawn in the fight for global power and was forced to divide itself into warring pro and anti-communist factions. Cuba's participation alongside the USSR eventually led to victory against the U.S., South Africa, and the Jonas Savimbi alliance and, in part, Apartheid; yet, Cuba's involvement in Angola is rarely discussed and is part of a greater historical amnesia on the island. Here Garaicoa quite literally "dug up the past."

Historical amnesia in Cuba concerning its involvement in Angola was captured in additional works produced as part of the project "Intimate Memories, Traces." The installation *Instrumento para diluir la memoria* (Instrument to Dilute Memory), 1997 (Figure 4.20), took it

⁸³ Orlando Hernández, "Texts: A Strange Instrument," in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 109.

on quite directly. A photograph of an outstretched arm holding out a long pointed stick penetrating the shadow of a tree was juxtaposed to a site-specific wall painting of a similar image. However, the black contour painting of the outstretched arm holding a stick did not puncture a tree, but instead the visible brain of a grotesque flayed human head. The stick had been transformed into an instrument used to perform a lobotomy. Accompanying the imagery was wall text stating “An instrument to dilute memory.” This project was the result of Garaicoa’s experience in Cuito Cuanavale and also an earlier experience he had in Italy when he found an object of interest that had the name *Surviva* on it and a date.⁸⁴ He tried to obtain information about the name and date and was unable to find explanation. Garaicoa thought the name and date could have been a reference battle that no one remembered. He cogitated on the fact that the human brain purifies itself of troubled memories, just as it amplifies pleasant memories.⁸⁵ He correlated this to Cuba’s relationship to its involvement in the Angolan civil war. Cubans do not clearly understand the reason for Cuba’s participation or discuss those who lost their lives in the fight against South Africa. Garaicoa’s photograph and painting shift the focus from the brain’s capacity to strategically forget information to the human intervention and involvement in selecting what information is forgotten within Cuba. The Cuban government controls what topics are permissible to discuss, hoping that with time certain issues and events would eventually be forgotten. Garaicoa’s project addresses the deliberate erasure of certain historical events from the official history. In relationship to his Angolan work the artist has asked: “Does art have the possibility to intervene in history, in the reinvention of a country’s collective memory?”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Erena Hernández, “Carlos Garaicoa y Manuel Piña,” in *América Fotolatina* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Museo de las Artes de la Universidad de Guadalajara, 2000), 42.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Virginia Pérez-Ratton, “Carlos Garaicoa: Projecting a Landscape,” in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 116.

Garaicoa created another installation piece, *Cuatro cubanos* (Four Cubans) (Figure 4.21, stills from two of the four monitors), back in Cuba, to raise awareness both to Cuba's involvement in the Angolan civil war and also the government's intentional silencing of the fact.⁸⁷ Although it was not exhibited in Africa and Portugal with the aforementioned works, the piece was created as a companion to the project "Intimate Memories, Traces." Garaicoa shifted between Africa and Cuba and was able to disseminate information about Cuba while in Angola and similarly acquired knowledge from his experiences abroad. *Four Cubans* encompassed four projections, each of a Cuban male who had fought in Angola standing before a ruinous building in Havana. The videos were silent and played for several minutes. They were often installed opposite a large photograph of the landscape of Cuito Cuanavale titled, "Surviva."⁸⁸ One assumed that the men were filmed imparting their testimony, yet the silence of the piece reiterated the silence the subject receives in Havana. When installed across from a photograph of Cuito Cuanavale a specific context was given and who the men were became clearer. However, when stripped of this context, the four Cubans appeared to be citizens standing before a crumbling façade. Their silence could be interpreted as the more general reluctance of Cubans to speak their minds for fear of being censored or facing worse consequences.

Four Cubans prompted Hernández's text *Four Interviews Without...*, a compilation of fragments reminiscent of sound bites from an interview with a soldier. Hernández attempted to give the men featured in Garaicoa's videos voices; yet, in his text he omitted specific sites, dates, and names, making the references vague at best. This imitated the typical interview with a Cuban

⁸⁷ This work is inaccurately explained in *Cuba Represent* by Fernandes. She conflates Garaicoa's projects with Hernández's texts, crediting Garaicoa with both. This causes her to misread the work and overemphasize the role of the text, which was actually a separate project by Hernández. Additionally, this work is rarely discussed, as well as *Instrument to Dilute Memory*. *Summer Grass* has received the most attention in regards to Garaicoa's Africa themed work.

⁸⁸ Hernández, "Carlos Garaicoa y Manuel Piña," 46.

who always carefully monitors what he or she says. In this way Hernández's piece was obtuse as opposed to testimonial. Hernández concluded his piece "...Because the silence is much worse...if you like, turn that off and you will see that it's enough with only...they will understand it very well like this without..."⁸⁹ Was the reader to assume that the interviewed was asking for the video camera or recording device to be turned off so that they could speak freely? Hernández's text heightened the experience of Garaicoa's work and reinforced the issue of historical amnesia in Cuba with regard to its involvement in Angola.

Garaicoa's time spent in Africa impacted his practice and especially his thinking about land and gardens and their relationship to power, patriotism, and territoriality. For the Sixth Havana Biennial, 1997, Garaicoa created two disparate works to contemplate the role of the garden within an urban context. Traditionally, within an urban context gardens function as antidotes to the harsh, inorganic, built environment. They should be lush and verdant, places in which man can execute control over nature and tame plants for his enjoyment and/or sustenance. In contemplating the city of Havana, Garaicoa produced an ironic garden, *Jardín cubano* (Cuban Garden), 1997 (Figures 4.23, 4.24, and 4.25), in a ruin, as an interrogation of the garden as idyllic space.⁹⁰ He approached the Cuban garden as "a caesura" explaining that the garden in contemporary society "represents a cut, a place to escape."⁹¹ As he stated, "I come from a harsh reality, an intense, strictly "urban" city. There is no escape. Part of my obsession with gardens may stem from this...we try pathetically to recreate our idyll, with our flowerpots on our window

⁸⁹ "Texts: Cuatro entrevistas sin..." in *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca (Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 109.

⁹⁰ Pérez-Ratton, "Carlos Garaicoa: Projecting a Landscape," 115.

⁹¹ Fusi and Garaicoa, "A Conversation with Carlos Garaicoa," 104.

sills, our tiny gardens.”⁹² He also created a companion piece to his Cuban Garden that was a site for meditation, and again revealed his interest in Japanese culture. It was a Japanese garden, *Jardín japonés*, 1997 (Figure 4.26), a rock garden installed in the Wifredo Lam Center.

Garaicoa’s *Cuban Garden* was situated in the remains of colonial structures in Old Havana. Within the selected space, Garaicoa fastened color photographs of the ruin to the very locations where he had taken them. Rather than mount his photographs of ruins in a gallery, and/or remove or restore objects from a chosen site, he installed his work directly in the ruin. This tautological gesture recalled his first incursions in the city, where he modified the urban landscape by installing objects alongside photographs of the same objects. However, unlike his earlier works he did not remain anonymous. He invited spectators to his garden, and unlike *Happening in Aguiar 609* (Figures 2.15, 2.16, 2.17, and 2.18), they were not his neighbors, as the installation was not mounted in his own neighborhood. Rather, the majority of invited guests were strangers who were in Havana to attend the Sixth Havana Biennial (Figures 4.24 and 4.25). In fact, Garaicoa’s project was conceived with the biennial patrons in mind. It was no longer a reflection on absence and loss and the circulation of rumor, nor was it restorative, rather it was intended to bring the biennial patrons out of the safe and clean space of the gallery and into the ruin.

Once in the ruin, art tourists and Cubans alike had to climb over the detritus, humus, and fragments of the building that once stood, in order to view the photographs. The effects of time and nature on man’s creations when they go unattended were then revealed, rather than a garden brimming with life and beauty. Although Garaicoa transformed a ruin into a space in which one could contemplate art, it was precarious, if not dangerous (at the very least adventurous). Spectators had to leave the galleries and fortress where the majority of biennial artworks were

⁹² Ibid.,105.

exhibited and confront the harshness of the city. As a biennial patron it was easy to keep the struggle of life in the city at arm's length and observe it from a safe distance. Garaicoa lured these spectators and local patrons as well into a public space that had not been sanitized for tourists. He brought them into the ruin and forced them to confront how the city existed for many Cubans. As Garaicoa explained, “[*Jardín cubano*] was a confrontation with a no-frills city, without a single stone moved; the encounter with the *habanera* reality simply happened though inviting the sophisticated audience of the Havana biennial to look at the photos, hanging from the walls, of the ruins of some buildings at Havana.”⁹³ The space was an inversion of the traditional garden. In an ironic twist, this space was not idyllic or peaceful, not a place to escape the bustle of the city, but the opposite, a site where you have to confront the reality of the city and its history.⁹⁴

Cuban Garden was conceptualized along with *Japanese Garden* (Figure 4.26). Garaicoa's Japanese-inspired garden, installed in a gallery at the Centro Wifredo Lam, consisting of a sunken bed of gravel, raked to simulate a zen garden, surrounded by a wooden deck. Atop the rocks Garaicoa laid fragments of capitals of Corinthian columns that he excavated from Havana's ruins and on the gallery walls surrounding the “garden” he hung framed photographs from his *Cuban Garden* of ruinous buildings, and also vinyl text.⁹⁵ Japanese screen doors were placed in the doorways of the galleries, closing them off, making the rooms partially private. The

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ This event was site specific and temporary- a happening. Future exhibitions would display the documentary photographs he took of the event.

⁹⁵ The wall text read: “On the second day we have forgotten the essential. / On the second day we could remember the future. / I belong to a defeated generation. / Stone without light, on the side of the road. / A dark light subverts the world's transparency. / My past and my country, the vicissitudes I suffer. / Humble guillotine that flagellates my neck. / To wake invigorated in a city in ruins. / Before I was a fragment, I was a city. / Before I was a city, sand. / But before everything else, / The wisdom of some alien desire. / Memory, Hidden filigree / Where we have been deceived. / The certainty / Of inhabiting / A world of tears.” Garaicoa, “Texts for the Different Works,” 111.

remains of the city and accompanying documentary photographs were removed from their place of origin and converted, within the context of a rock garden, to a site for meditation. The Corinthian columns assumed the place of large rocks within the bed of raked gravel. The raking of the rocks was a meditative act, similar to the digging of holes in Angola.

Japanese Garden aestheticized the ruin, making it accessible to the international spectator as a place for contemplation, which marked a shift in Garaicoa's practice:

Until the moment I made [*Jardín japonés*], my work mainly looked toward the outside world, there was no introspection, there was a search for a relationship, I was interested in capturing the reaction of the audience. The *Jardín japonés* was conceived as a meditative act. In this fragmentation of the public space, albeit a space re-read from a sociological (if not even historical) viewpoint, the reclusion within urban ruin converts those ruins into a private space for meditation, almost a residential space.⁹⁶

Garaicoa's *Japanese Garden* was liminal space between ruin and garden and public and private space. While his work had confronted the cityscape of New York and landscape of Cuito Cuanavale, it was always in relationship to Havana and stemmed from a very deep and sentimental place. I argue that more than marking a transition from work that was public and intended to evoke a specific type of reaction for the artist, to one that was more private and withdrawn, *Japanese Garden* aestheticized and neutralized the ruin more than ever before. Did the ruins exhibited in *Japanese Garden* still communicate loss, nostalgia, and local history? Did the Corinthian columns remind one of numerous fallen civilizations? Were the photographs of Havana's ruins neutralized in the benign setting? From this point forward Garaicoa's work was less about Havana and his daily encounters in the city—not necessarily in its content, but in its form. It became more polished and his practice more studio-based. As he became a key player in the international art world his approach changed—his work was less gritty, documentary, etc.

⁹⁶ Fusi and Garaicoa, "A Conversation with Carlos Garaicoa," 104.

Working on and off the Island: the World Viewed from a Tabletop

Toward the end of the century Garaicoa established dual citizenship and studios in Madrid and Havana, where he continues to manage teams of assistants. He shifts between the two cities often bringing supplies back and forth and creates work in each one that would not be feasible in the other. His works, like himself, function between two countries/two realities. By 1997 Garaicoa appeared to have internalized advice that he would formally receive in 2002, on the occasion of his participation in Documenta 11, “to move beyond probing Havana’s urban decline.”⁹⁷ In 2002 Garaicoa explained his altered approach to art making, “For over five years my work has been focusing on phenomena pertaining to a Cuban context, its cities and social expectations. But at the same time it also attempts to trace broad paths, so my thoughts are able to circulate and encounter the ideal spectator, the *global spectator*.”⁹⁸

Following Garaicoa’s creation of his *Japanese Garden* his work became more professionalized and generalized; it was still born from his relationship to Havana, but spoke more generally. His previous removals and drawings were more about the city of Havana (or New York, Cuito Cuanavale, etc.) than the gallery and emphasized communal/public space. The newer works (models, books, statuettes, etc.) were produced in the studio for display in a gallery. He related the gallery, as a private space, to domestic space/ private space, a place for meditation and contemplation, a small microcosm of the world. In fact a number of works produced at the end of the 1990s into the following decade displayed objects on a tabletop similar to an architectural model set atop a dining room table.

In 1998 Garaicoa translated his garden-based work into a project, *Jardín* (Garden) for a tabletop as part of the series “Ciudad vista desde la mesa de la casa” (City View from the Table

⁹⁷ Marc Spiegler, “City Lights,” *Art News* (March 2005): 98.

⁹⁸ Block and Garaicoa, “Carlos Garaicoa,” <http://bombsite.com/issues/82/articles/2523>.

of My House, Figure 4.27). This piece stripped the urban context and ruin from his previous gardens and brought a more literal and generic garden into the gallery. On a tabletop Garaicoa planted grass and at one end a bonsai tree. At the other end of the table a small monitor played video footage of a real landscape.⁹⁹ The scale and style of this piece was reminiscent of an architectural rendering. However, rather than modeling buildings, or even a garden or a park, Garaicoa planted grass, a tree, and a monitor. The bonsai tree featured in *Garden* again recalled the artist's interest in Japanese culture; the grass was reminiscent of that referenced in his Africa-based work. Yet, mounted on a tabletop they were void of such associations. Here a garden was cultivated on a domestic object, a table, and brought inside a gallery for contemplation.

Other tabletop sculptures in the series "City View from the Table of My House," 1998-2000, included *City View from the Table of My House*, 1998 (Figure 4.28), a tabletop covered with an assortment of glass objects, mostly domestic: bottles, crystal ornaments from chandeliers, bowls, salt and pepper shakers, and a fishbowl containing a fighter fish. This was a model city, made from found household objects. Like the components of an architectural model the items could be moved:

Everything was turned into a *city*—a city in which you could easily move a building if you wanted to, change the location of everything according to your will, and all this with the simple gesture of extending your hands from the table of your house. The city as a *labyrinth*—a childhood playground where you can decide to make real what you're imagining, where you can jump from the real to the fictitious and vice versa.¹⁰⁰

This model of a city symbolized the intersection of private and public space. The items were domestic and found in many homes, yet they were transparent and fragile, if not potentially

⁹⁹ Helen Pheby, "Garden, from the series A City View from the Table of My House," in Carlos Garaicoa: Cities, Gardens, Memory (Yorkshire Sculpture Garden, 2005), n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Dieter Roelstraete and Carlos Garaicoa, "Interview with Carlos Garaicoa," in *Sonsbeek 9. Locus/Focus* (Arnhem, Holland: Stichting Sonsbeek, 2001), 301.

dangerous. Being translucent they could be seen in their entirety, with nothing to hide (transparency is a dream; everyone has a public identity and a private one). The artist's interest and exploration of public and private space dated back to his student work. In the case of this sculpture the relationship to Havana was not overt. The piece could be read more generally as an imagined cityscape on a tabletop. I argue that as a shifter, Garaicoa translated his earlier inquiries into the space of the city, to appeal to a different audience, a more international audience, albeit an art going one. In relationship to this work Garaicoa has commented, "If at times my work has referred to concrete cities—Havana, New York, Luanda, and others, this installation tries to speak of the total, universal city, a city which can be observed as with Borges' Aleph, waiting for any story in any history on any corner of the world to be revealed to us."¹⁰¹ These tabletops moreover "utilize the structure of the table as a precise geography that takes us back to our domestic surroundings. The garden and the city as labyrinths, as extensions of our imagination, as microworlds, which we can enter with a single glance."¹⁰²

Garaicoa also used the tabletop to install an illuminated, yet generic, cityscape *Nuevas arquitecturas o una rara insistencia para entender la noche* (New Architectures or the Rare Instance to Understand the Night), 2000 (Figure 4.29), as part of his series "New Architecture." Building off the notion of the total, universal city, Garaicoa produced a nocturnal cityscape composed of structures made from rice paper and metal wire that were outfitted with light bulbs, similar to Japanese lamps. His lamps emulated high-rise edifices, smaller rectangular structures, long tunnels, and bridges; they were geometric, simplified, and generic. Light boxes featuring photographs of Bogotá, Havana, and Cuito Cuanavale at night were mounted on the walls

¹⁰¹ Pérez-Ratton, "Carlos Garaicoa: Projecting a Landscape," 115.

¹⁰² Ibid.

accompanying the tabletop cityscape. In the photographs one could make out the geometric outlines of buildings, illuminated windows, and the landscape. Traveling through a multitude of cities allowed Garaicoa to observe their similitude at night. He asked, “What is Havana, New York, Arnhem, or Cuito Cuanavale? At night everywhere it all looks alike, yet many different things can happen. At night we are living in a big, continuous city, without borders and distances. A place to be entertained, and a place to dream.”¹⁰³ In this inversion, the delicate, domestic rice paper lamps were transformed to mark the strength and permanence of architecture. Garaicoa has produced numerous versions of these lamps and has alternated the way they are installed. They are more general meditations on cities and not Special Period Havana. This project, like the others from the turn of the century, stemmed from Garaicoa’s ability to travel and translate his experiences to a larger international audience.

LOS CARPINTEROS

The exhibition of Los Carpinteros’ thesis project during the Fifth Havana Biennial made a lasting impression on art cognoscenti who were in Havana for the event. Following their success in the Havana Biennial, Los Carpinteros were invited to participate in a residency in Santa Cruz de Mudela in Valdepeñas, Spain (December 1994), which was their first opportunity to travel. Their residency in Spain was followed by a visit to London in February 1995 where, along with Bruguera, they participated in the “New Art from Cuba” exhibition at the Whitechapel gallery. In the following years they spent time in the United States, as well as many other countries. Traveling exposed the artists to different climates, artistic practices, and media. Their experiences abroad initiated a significant change to their artistic practice. In 1995 they

¹⁰³ Roelstraete and Garaicoa, “Interview with Carlos Garaicoa,” 303.

stopped oil painting and concentrated on drawing and sculpting. Eventually they moved away from hand-making their sculptures to including store bought items and outsourcing their production. As Cuba entered the global economy and the art market evolved, Los Carpinteros' practice reflected these changes. Spending time abroad was not conducive to spending three or four months on a piece. It was too time consuming and prevented the artists from keeping up with collectors' demands for new work.

A More Cohesive Collaboration

During Los Carpinteros' 1994 residency in Spain the artists suffered from both the cold climate and culture shock, especially in regard to the available modern amenities. They had a difficult time producing new work and at the last minute composed a piece by drawing directly on the wall.¹⁰⁴ This was the collective's first departure from combining woodworking and painting and it was indicative of a larger alteration to their production process. Oil painting soon vanished from their repertoire all together and they no longer depicted themselves within their work. Castillo explained their rationale for modifying the manner in which they worked:

One of the reasons we stopped painting is because of the question of authorship. The painting documented how we made our art. There were always two of us in the piece and the third was the viewer who painted. Working as a collective of three was a conceptual declaration. By eliminating painting we stopped being three and became one author. Another reason was the inherent discourse within the object.¹⁰⁵

The artists shifted their focus from portraying themselves within their paintings to the production of objects similar to those that they had produced to frame/accompany their paintings.

¹⁰⁴ Alexandre Arrechea, interview with the author, March 23, 2009. No details were given about this first drawing.

¹⁰⁵ Trinie Dalton and Los Carpinteros, "Los Carpinteros," *Bomb Magazine* (Winter 2002), <http://bombsite.com/issues/78/articles/2441>.

By focusing on objects they could broaden their scope and use their work, as Rodríguez explained, “as a kind of reflection upon the new spaces and objects with which we were interacting... We were most interested in the functionality of things, and man’s capacity to adapt the visual element of objects to different circumstances.”¹⁰⁶ While overseas they recognized that if they wanted more people to understand their art, they would have to “go beyond the mere representations of local situations.”¹⁰⁷ They did not want their work to only function as a “social chronicle of the country.”¹⁰⁸ The artists were interested in exploring the layers of meaning/significations inherent to objects/referents. They therefore manipulated the traditional representations of things. Through these objects loaded with multiple referents they could veil social critiques. Their interest in working with quotidian objects stems from the readymade and Marcel Duchamp, as Arrechea has said, “We love Marcel Duchamp... it is almost impossible for any artist to stay away from Duchamp. He is studied in school and everyone, at some point, has to go to him as a source.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, their approach to the object differed greatly: “It is inconceivable... that Duchamp would present a bottle rack altered so that it might allude to something beyond its dual identities as object and art; it is equally inconceivable that Los Carpinteros would present a bottle rack, or for that matter, a drawing of it, without allusive alteration.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Miller, Smith, and Los Carpinteros, “Conversation/Interview with Los Carpinteros,” 125.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁸ Lowinger and Los Carpinteros, “The Object as Protagonist: an Interview with Los Carpinteros,” [//www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag99/dec99/carp/carp.shtml](http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag99/dec99/carp/carp.shtml).

¹⁰⁹ Dalton and Los Carpinteros, “Los Carpinteros,” <http://bombsite.com/issues/78/articles/2441>.

¹¹⁰ Laura Hoptman, “Working Drawing,” in *Los Carpinteros* (University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003), 36.

By December 1996 the artists' interest in the discourse of an object was evidenced in their exhibition "Todo ha sido reducido a la mitad original" (Everything Has Been Reduced to the Original Half) on view in Havana in the colonial fortress Castillo de los Tres Reyes del Morro. The works on view were sculptures and installations described as "giv[ing] the sensation of continuation and rupture," in relationship to their previous work.¹¹¹ The artists combined woodworking, wall drawings, and readymade objects, both continuing their carpentry work, while also experimenting with new forms to deliver social criticism in a more conceptual manner than their paintings had allowed. The works on view were also exhibited the following year as part of corollary exhibitions to the Sixth Havana Biennial, 1997.

Café, 1996 (Figure 4.30), a site-specific installation, resulted from the artists' unsuccessful attempt to try to secure the permits necessary to build and operate an artists' café on their roof. They channeled this desire into the production of an installation that incorporated the gallery walls. Their original intention had been to build a utilitarian space, but what resulted in its wake was an artwork that was not functional. While an exercise in futility, following their dealings with state bureaucracy, the work can also be analyzed in terms of the construction occurring throughout Havana at the time and in relationship to Constructivist motives. Just as they (and Garaicoa) had recuperated anachronistic techniques similar to those being used to renovate the colonial buildings and furnishings in Old Havana, here they depicted a figure in the process of constructing a café.

Within *Café* the contour of a life-sized male figure in overalls and a hardhat was drawn directly on the wall, along with the outline of a building (the café). Both the figure and the building contained measurements in centimeters, so that they were drawn in elevation. Three-

¹¹¹ Jorge Fernández Torres, "Todo ha sido reducido a la representación," *Arte Cubano* (1998): 69.

dimensional items including a shovel, bricks, a rope, and a wooden wheelbarrow further embellished the drawings. These items mirrored those used in construction in Cuba: they were relatively basic, low tech, and generally inexpensive. By incorporating contemporary materials in real space to produce work that focused on the construction of a utilitarian space, Los Carpinteros aligned themselves with the Constructivists. To further reveal this point, the artists drew a protractor projected from the eye of the male figure similar to that seen in El Lissitzky's photomontage (with drawing and watercolor) *Tatlin at Work on the Monument of the Third International*, 1922 (Figure 4.31).¹¹² In Lissitzky's work the protractor was set at a 65-degree angle at which the spine of the Tower was imagined to rise.¹¹³ Tatlin's tower was never realized, similar to the café, and has come to symbolize modernist revolutionary and utopian construction. Café similarly represented Los Carpinteros' desire to create an ideal gathering space.

This installation evidenced the change in Los Carpinteros' process; no longer did Castillo paint and Arrechea and Rodríguez carve the wooden components. It was unclear as to who was responsible for what part of the work, an indication of their more cohesive collaboration. The figure was a construction worker and a parallel was drawn between the labor of the builder and that of the carpenter, as the artists had positioned themselves. Furthermore, there was a relationship between the builder and the artist, especially in relationship to Constructivism and the desire to use art to literally and figuratively build a better world.

Los Carpinteros' proposal for the café was rejected on the grounds of security issues. It was a utilitarian and idyllic plan for an artists' space that corresponded to revolutionary ideals, yet it was never approved. Therefore the installation itself was of an unfinished and unrealized

¹¹² For more information on Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, 1919-1920, see Norbert Lynton, *Tatlin's Tower: Monument to Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 177.

café. Again the clash between rhetoric and reality was reinforced through this work. It further revealed a shift away from Soviet/socialist ideology.

The site-specific installation, *Colibrí* (Hummingbird), 1996 (Figure 4.32), exhibited on the occasion of “Everything has been Reduced the to Original Half” and corollary exhibitions of the Sixth Havana Biennial was a fifteen by twenty foot contour line drawing of a hummingbird composed directly on the wall.¹¹⁴ The head of the hummingbird was created in double to indicate movement; one version of the head was metal-plated and the other was drawn on the wall. The wings were filled in with hand-carved wood and canvas accordion bellows affixed directly to the wall. Two more bellows were placed within the tail, elongated with feather-like tips similar to the fletchings of arrows; all of the nozzles of the bellows pointed north.

In Cuba the hummingbird signifies regeneration, for its role in spreading pollen, and has been a long cherished indigenous symbol. Cuba is home to the bee hummingbird, the world’s smallest known bird, at roughly five to six centimeters. The artists enlarged the size of the hummingbird, so that it is larger than human scale (almost three times). The bellows, with long pointed nozzles were a symbol of luxury on the island as they were used to blow air into a fireplace to reignite a fire, a sumptuous and unnecessary item on the temperate island. The large-scale hummingbird composed of bellows juxtaposed an indigenous icon to colonial-era style objects, originally of import from Europe and oriented toward the north. It is unclear whether the intent was to push away the north/U.S. or ignite/expand the relationship between the two countries. The prior would explain the large-scale of the hummingbird (placing emphasis on an indigenous Cuban symbol), the latter corresponds to the subsequent influences U.S. curator Dan

¹¹⁴ This was also recreated in 1998 at the Ludwig-Stiftung für Kunst und Internationale Verständigung in Aachen, Germany on the occasion of a solo exhibition of Los Carpinteros’ work.

Cameron and the artists' time in the United States would have on their practice, as explored below.

Critique of Objects

In addition to site-specific installations that featured wall drawings and carved objects, Los Carpinteros created large-scale, hand-carved sculptures that combined their interest in furniture making with the exploration of objects, including national symbols. *Archivo de Indias* (Archive of the Indies), 1996 (Figure 4.33) was a hand carved sculpture in the form of a royal palm tree that stood over fifteen feet tall.¹¹⁵ The trunk of the palm tree was carved to contain drawers, suggesting that the tree was also a piece of furniture. As the title of the piece, *Archive of the Indies*, further implied, this cabinet was specifically created to contain records of Cuba's history. Yet, the drawers remained empty.

The royal palm is the national tree of Cuba; it stands between fifty and seventy feet and has a canopy spread of up to twenty-five feet. While this sculpture was not as grand in scale as the actual palm tree, it was larger than human scale and was a laborious undertaking for the artists. The palm tree holds significance in both Afro-Cuban and Christian religions on the island and can be noted for its synchronicity. In this sculpture the royal palm, a national and religious symbol, was constructed to metaphorically contain records from Cuba's colonial period. The actual General Archive of the Indies, for which the sculpture has been named, is located in Seville, Spain and contains documentation of Cuba's colonial history including the burgeoning sugar industry and related slave trade that provided its workforce. The documentation of this

¹¹⁵ It was exhibited *Everything Has Been Reduced to the Original Half*, as well as a corollary exhibition "Viejos metodos para nuevas deudas" (Old Methods for New Debts) at San Francisco de Asis during the Sixth Havana Biennial (1997).

dark period is not on the island and perhaps justified much of the official denial of its continued repercussions present on the island.

The sculpture again displayed the artists' carpentry skills and it was self-referential—a tree carved from wood. It existed somewhere in between a file cabinet and a palm tree; the drawers implied a function, however, they were left empty and therefore their use was conceptual and artistic. This “archive” imbued a cherished national and religious symbol with an allusion to exploitative history that made Cuba what it is today. The artists again confronted colonialism and its repercussions. Like their work *Dutch Window*, they emphasized an element of the Caribbean landscape that is often exoticized or tropicalized and recontextualized it in relationship to a darker, more dismal aspect of Cuba's history.

Archive of the Indies further complicated the commonly held belief that Los Carpinteros' shift to an object based practice was to exploit the new market conditions on the island in order to procure dollars. This work is more complex. Works such as this demanded a great deal of time and manual labor to create and the artists' collective approach served a pragmatic function as well as one more ideological. In contemplating the possibility of earning large sums for the sale of their work, they thought about the use value of art. They produced work that in theory could function as furniture, however, they knew that it would be consumed as sculpture for aesthetic contemplation (symbolic value). Here they marked the shift in the Cuban economy by no longer using their skill set to produce work for social reconstruction, but to think through the implications of the capital market on art production on the island. The hard work and incredible time commitment that were invested in the object merited the sum it would collect (exchange value), to be split by the artists.

In *Paraguas* (Umbrella), 1997 (Figure 4.34), a mixed media sculpture also exhibited at an exhibition corollary to the Sixth Havana Biennial, the artists again transformed an innocuous quotidian object into one full of meaning.¹¹⁶ This large-scale (roughly six and a half by five and a half foot) hand-carved wood umbrella was inverted and outfitted with a motor. As opposed to being a lightweight and portable umbrella, to keep one dry during a rainstorm, it was changed into a boat that would ideally keep passengers safe and dry during an ocean voyage. It became a makeshift-floating vessel reminiscent of those used by the *balseros*. Although the *balsero* crisis peaked in 1994, Cubans continued to risk their lives in the years that followed and their struggles continued to capture the imaginations of artists. Like many of the *balseros*' floating devices *Umbrella* would not make it safely to the United States. Again their sculpture explored the boundary between usefulness and uselessness. Here its suggested use had an inherent social and political message.

By 1999 the artists focused their efforts on the production of architectural and furniture-based work (which still began as studies, often watercolors, that also served as correspondence between the artists). Over time the artists' interest in functionality turned into an obsession and led to the rendering of sculptures that further questioned the useful and useless nature of the medium and the roles and responsibilities of the artist. This interest was born on the island, when as students the artists observed luxurious home décor in the neighborhood surrounding ISA. As explained in relationship to the artists' "Havana Interior" series, luxury items, such as fireplaces, that were unnecessary on the island, intrigued them. This was again seen with the bellows included in their installation *Hummingbird*. As Cubans, they grew up in a society where new functions were found for items such as fireplaces and bellows to fulfill needs. However, the artists' fascination with the utilitarian nature of items was no doubt also fostered by their

¹¹⁶ This piece was featured in the exhibition "Old Methods for New Debts" at San Francisco de Asis.

increase in travel and exposure to other cultures, especially in First World capitalist societies such as in the United States. The artists became increasingly interested in how humans create needs through goods in a capitalist society, as opposed to modify extant goods to meet needs, as was the case in (Special Period) Cuba.

In 1999 they started producing a series of sculptures “Aparatos absurdos” (Absurd Apparatuses) that were less about a Cuban context than a reflection on the global market and consumption. Their role as cultural shifters enabled them to explore this position. One hand-carved wood sculpture, *Estuche* (Jewelry Box), 1999 (Figure 4.35), was a seven-foot tall “jewelry box” shaped like a grenade that contained many small drawers. It was technically very difficult to execute and took the trio four months to complete. This work ruptured the signifier and signified, as it was not functional as a grenade or a jewelry box. It was large-scale and the excessive amount of drawers made it frivolous. Arrechea commented that this work was intentionally more aggressive than other of their sculptures and arose from their critique of objects.¹¹⁷

The empty drawers, as seen in many of their other sculptures, referred to the continued shortage of goods at the time. Yet, there was a difference in that by 1999 a jewelry box was once again of relevance. For some Cubans the dollarization of Cuba brought materialism and consumerism back into their lives. The artists questioned the need for such luxury items and through the iconography of the grenade asked at what cost does one procure such items? They again were interested in objects and their functions, which they inverted as a reaction to capitalism and an ironic turn away from Constructivist/socialist leanings in art production.

¹¹⁷ Dalton and Los Carpinteros, “Los Carpinteros,” <http://bombsite.com/issues/78/articles/2441>.

Working on the Island and Abroad

In 1998, the year before they began creating their “Absurd Apparatuses,” Los Carpinteros were invited by Cameron of the New Museum in New York City to participate in a three-month residency and exhibition at the museum. Cameron had met the artists in Havana in 1994, during the Fifth Havana Biennial, and they remained in contact. This was not their first trip to Manhattan. They participated in the exhibition “Domestic Partnerships: New Impulses in Decorative Arts from the Americas” at Art in General in 1996 and were able to extend their visit by a month with income received for the sale of their work.¹¹⁸ Back in New York the trio was inspired by the city and the availability of industrially produced commercial and residential goods and supplies in the Bowery, near where they were staying.¹¹⁹ They purchased items, such as stainless steel lidded pots and aluminum basins, and used them in the production of sculptures and site-specific installations. They divested these objects of their intended functions, and converted them into art objects. Again they manipulated these objects to imbue them with new meanings. The logic of incorporating industrially produced goods mirrored the logic of the capitalist economy they were participating in and that Cuba was reentering at the time. As shifters the artists rearticulated their approach to art making while abroad in order to confront similar concerns from new angles.

Molino de viento (Windmill), 1998 (Figure 4.36), was made of nine stainless steel lidded pots stacked vertically, diminishing size as they ascended, tethered together with steel cable. The top was capped with fan blades acting as sails that were supported by a contraption made of

¹¹⁸ Holly Block and Yasmin Ramirez, curators of the Art in General exhibition met the artists during the Fifth Havana Biennial (1994) and brought the work *Burning Trees* to New York (which fell apart and needed to be reconstructed). The artists produced an additional fireplace for the Italian Ambassador, which financed their one-month stay in New York. Alexandre Arrechea, interview by author, March, 23, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

metal rods. The statue stood almost twelve feet tall. The artists intentionally and ironically used materials indicative of a later model of capitalism (products likely manufactured overseas and imported) to compose a sculpture of a windmill, a symbol of the industrial revolution (and the rise of market capitalism) that was largely outmoded with the establishment of steam-powered factories. The inclusion of fan blades in place of sails was also a reference to the significance of fans within Cuba, which are not only ubiquitous on the island for their cooling function but their parts are often repurposed to serve other needs. In New York the artists participated in the capitalist market by consuming items to be assembled into artworks. They further explored the social and economic dimensions of art production from their new position in the United States.

Store-bought aluminum half basins appeared affixed to the base of a wall in *Faro, escalera, torre* (Lighthouse, Stairs, Tower), 1998 (Figure 4.37). Large-scale vertical contour drawings of a lighthouse, spiral staircase, and watchtower emerged from the basins. The readymade here was accompanied by a site-specific wall drawing. The structures drawn were selected for their height and verticality and are forms that appear many times in the artists' oeuvre. The lighthouse as a symbol of Cuba was intimately tied to Cuba's history of colonization; lighthouses were first installed by the Spanish to illuminate safe passage into Havana's harbor. They are also used to illuminate the island and harbors at night as a form of surveillance. The tower drawn on the wall referenced the numerous viewing stations on the island also used for observation. Connected to the idea of surveillance, this staircase is abruptly cut off and does not enable one to complete their ascension. Ultimately it implied that there is nowhere to go and nowhere to hide. One is always exposed and being watched. The wall drawings emerged from the basins as if they were contained and transported within the containers. They could easily be transported and mapped from one city to another.

In 2000, Los Carpinteros' most ambitious work, *Ciudad transportable* (Transportable City, Figure 4.38), was exhibited at the Seventh Havana Biennial; later it toured the globe, and was featured in New York at the Museum of Modern Art's satellite P.S.1. This site-specific installation consisted of ten portable tents, each in the form of a different edifice found in Cuba. Although there was a specific origin for the form of each building they were simplified in order to represent a type of building found in nearly all European and colonized large (coastal) cities. The simple off-white nylon canvas, mesh, zipper, and galvanized steel pipe structures were manufactured in the form of a church, a lighthouse, a jail, a domed capitol, a factory, an apartment building, a hospital, a military outpost, a university, and a warehouse (in some instances the entrance to a marketplace was exhibited in place of the university). Each tent stood between six and fifteen feet tall, intentionally sized to emulate the relationship between the human body and camping tents.

The buildings created in tent form were symbolic of the power structures and imposed systems (beliefs, discipline, education, etc.) present in Havana and many other cities. Together they symbolized the basic infrastructure the artists identified as necessary for a functioning city. The artists had conceptualized *Transportable City* over a period time and many of the tent forms were based on other sculptures and works on paper they had previously produced. In 1998 the artists created cursory sketches for the tent forms that would be exhibited in 2000. A large-scale (4'2") untitled watercolor (Figure 4.39) included renderings of nine structures similar to those that were eventually built. Many more works on paper contained sketches of the tents. These works on paper were made in Havana and evidence of the artists' hands in the creation process; this is in stark contrast to the tents themselves, which were outsourced.

The artists' desire to produce tents stemmed from their interest in architecture and camping technology. They began producing tent sculptures in 1996, however, they encountered difficulty procuring the necessary materials in Havana. Most of the sculptures they produced in Cuba were made from wood because it was an accessible material. Once they began traveling and exhibiting abroad with some frequency, they were able to better navigate the production of the tents. Also, because each of the three artists often had different ideas of how a project should be realized, they often executed similar forms or structures in different materials (some of the buildings realized as tents in *Transportable City* were also carved from wood as cabinets with many small drawers). The tent forms included in *Transportable City* were produced in Los Angeles and overseen by the artists' friend Rosa Lowinger (a conservationist based in L.A.). With respect to outsourcing their work Castillo commented, "We live in Cuba, but we manage the production in other places, like the U.S. It is legal, but complicated." In 2010 Rodríguez stated, "It's not ideal, but we can do it. It's better to control every inch of your work because it's your thing... We have a very good carpenter in Tampa and a great metal worker in Cuba. We fabricated our first pieces ourselves, but we don't do it much now because of time, money, and space."¹²⁰

Already in 1996 Los Carpinteros had begun work on *Casa de Campaña (Iglesia)* (Tent, Church; Figure 4.40), a multi-colored tent modeled after a church with a steeple and cross. This portable church evoked the history of Catholicism on the island and the conversion that accompanied conquest. Los Carpinteros considered the architecture of the church and the didactic function art played in the conversion process. Furthermore, creating a sculpture in the form of a holy structure was especially relevant, as religious practices became more open during

¹²⁰ Ian Berry, Marco Castillo, and Dagoberto Rodríguez, "Parables: A Dialogue with Los Carpinteros," in *Los Carpinteros*, ed. Ian Berry (Germany: Cantz in association with The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, 2010), 11.

the Special Period. Similar to *Tent, Church* the aforementioned untitled study for *Transportable City*, included a church painted with a cross and steeple. Yet, the tent that was executed as part of *Transportable City* did not include these details; the structure was pared down and made more generic, a symbolic space where believers of all religions could worship. The structure no longer solely attested to Cuba's history and colonization; it was modified to account for diverse audiences in different locations, who were practitioners of divergent religions.

The lighthouse tent included in *Transportable City* was reminiscent of an earlier tent produced by Los Carpinteros, *Faro (Lighthouse)*, 1997 (Figure 4.41). The lighthouse is a potent symbol of Cuba's colonization and the continued surveillance of the coast. A lighthouse appeared a number of times in the artists' work. Here it functioned to call on the purpose of the lighthouse in a coastal city more generally. It could refer to Havana or any other coastline.

The prison tent (Figure 4.38, on the left) was modeled after the five structures found at Presidio Modelo, on the Cuban island Isla de Juventud, where Castro was imprisoned from 1953-55 following the Moncada Attack. The five circular panoptic structures located at Presidio Modelo were built under President Gerardo Machado in the 1920s. They permanently closed in 1967 and currently house a museum and serve as monuments. By including a rounded prison tent Los Carpinteros alluded to Cuba's Republican period when the Presidio Modelo was actively used. More significantly, the panopticon is a symbol of methods used to maintain control in prison structures found in many societies.

Another of the tents resembled Havana's *El Capitolio* (Figure 4.38, center), the capitol building also built in the 1920s during Machado's presidency. The domed edifice is reminiscent of the U.S. capitol building, even though the architects of the Cuban structure claimed their inspiration was the Pantheon in Paris. The building of the capitol was overseen by a U.S.

company and elements were built in the U.S. At the time of its execution the Cuban government was tangled with U.S. government and business interests. This building is symbolic of the tenuous relationship between the two countries, but further evidence that the built environment of Havana is cosmopolitan.

The factory tent (Figure 4.38, front center) was modeled after a generic building type with a smoke stack and was accompanied by a warehouse tent with angled roof panels (Figure 4.38, back center). The factory structures and warehouses that served as prototypes are nondescript and used to conceal the labor, manufacture, and storage that occur within their walls. They are a symbol of late-capitalism as they stand as a barrier between the production of goods and their consumer. While the factory is a sign of an industrialized society, it further references outsourcing and the increased establishment of factories in foreign countries during the 1990s following neoliberal trade institutions rulings such as the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA). The artists incorporated factories in their model city, perhaps ironically, because they are not necessary in most cities where goods are imported from border towns and overseas. Yet, to be self-sufficient and transient one must be able to produce the goods one needs for survival. The additional tents include a six-story apartment building (shelter), a hospital in the shape of a cross to reference the Red Cross (health), a military outpost (defense), a university (education), and in some installations the entrance to a market (procure/trade foodstuffs).

The tents were first installed outdoors in Havana (Figure 4.38) where they were in direct dialogue with the city, making them tautological. The work of Los Carpinteros was prone to reference itself, but in creating a mini-Havana in tent form the collective highlighted the official institutional infrastructure on the island and at the same time the continued Cuban diaspora. Moreover, I posit that this work was symbolic of the artists' position as shifters. *Transportable*

City was envisioned as a model tent city that could travel from place to place along with itinerant populations, so that they could establish temporary societies. Since nearly all of *Transportable City* was implicitly modeled on specific buildings in Havana, the work enabled the artists to travel with aspects of their city to evade issues of loss and nostalgia. The work was then “at home” in Havana and also in cities abroad, similar to the artists’ condition. As art historian Miwon Kwon has stated in relationship to contemporary site-specific works, “While site-specific art once defied commodification by insisting on immobility, it now seems to espouse fluid mobility and nomadism for the same purpose. Curiously, however, the nomadic principle also defines capital and power in our times...since the late 1980s there have been increasing numbers of traveling site specific works.”¹²¹ The mobilization of the artist was parallel to this. When mounted in other cities throughout the world, including New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu, and Shanghai (Figure 4.42), the tents more broadly confronted the global issue of emigration and diaspora, as the artists explained, “It’s global reflection...we use Havana to speak of general problems, that don’t necessarily have to do with Havana, but that people have all over the world. We really use Havana to speak of other things.”¹²²

The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu wrote in their press release for the exhibition of *Transportable City* that the “installation seeks to underscore the often diasporic, itinerant nature of the modern world in which larger phenomena such as war or natural disaster sometimes force the displacement of cultural groups or entire populations.”¹²³ Yet these tents were “not the

¹²¹ *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge and Long: MIT Press, 2002), 31.

¹²² University of South Florida, “Los Carpinteros: Inventing the World, April 8-July 15, 2005,” Press Release.

¹²³ The Contemporary Museum Honolulu, “Los Carpinteros: Transportable City, April 7- June 2, 2002,” Press Release.

shabby tents of a refugee camp.”¹²⁴ They were clean, nearly pristine, art objects, and at most prototypes for an itinerant society. They were ideas and idealized. The tents were not functional and existed somewhere between the idea of useful and that of useless, like the artists’ other works. While visitors were encouraged to enter the tents and engage with the work, they were not habitable. This was unlike Rikrit Tiravanija’s *Untitled* relational work from 1999 that recreated his East Village (Manhattan) apartment in a gallery and allowed visitors to inhabit it for the duration of the exhibition. Los Carpinteros simply invited visitors to walk through their tents. The tents were akin to guarded sculptures as installed by artists and an institution. The audience’s interaction was fleeting and amplified the nomadism and transience of which the work is symbolic. Within Los Carpinteros’ work, such as *Transportable City*, there remained a trace of utilitarianism; however the artists’ recognized the limited capabilities of their work and exaggerated its uselessness. They focused on aesthetic possibilities and combined referents to produce new meanings that reflected on their new socio-economic position as shifters.

CONCLUSION

Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros took advantage of opportunities to travel and participate in residencies and exhibitions overseas in the wake of dollarization. Because their work relied on metaphor and ambiguity, the government could allow the artists to participate in exhibitions and programs abroad, exporting the idea that cultural production was flourishing on the ever-resilient island, despite the fact that the artists’ work was often critical. The influence of these experiences in new contact zones amounted in substantial changes to the materials and techniques used in the production of their work, as well as some of the themes addressed.

¹²⁴ Kelly Cogswell, “The Transportable Cuban City,”
http://www.thegully.com/essays/cuba/010530art_carpinteros.html.

Bruguera continued to work with found and ephemeral materials in the production of sculptures, installations, and props for performances while traveling to and from the island. Following the censorship of her *Postwar Memory* newspaper and time spent in the United States she developed her performance-based practice. She collaborated with the Cuban-American community in Chicago for her performance *Art in America (The Dream)* and performed solo when back in Havana and abroad to preclude others from being accountable for her work, should it be deemed unacceptable. She did not arrange for much documentation of her performances and installations, as she preferred for them to live as memories and not as photographs and videos with commercial value. By the turn of the century she felt that performing alone, even though she intended for her body to stand for the social body of Cuba and elsewhere, was too focused on her and did not provide a memorable experience for her audience. She later conceptualized and staged performances with hired actors in place of herself. Garaicoa continued to photo-document his environment, while in Havana or abroad, from which he often created imaginative photo-drawings, however, by the end of the decade his sculptural work became more polished. Rather than create site-specific public work he modified the scale of his installations so that they would fit on a tabletop and be easily portable from one gallery to the next. He also established two studios, one in Havana and another in Madrid, and hired staff to assist in the production of work to meet market demands. Los Carpinteros abandoned oil painting from their repertoire to produce works more uniformly (rather than dividing the work by medium) and realized once abroad that they did not have the time or resources necessary to complete large-scale hand carved sculptures. They began composing site-specific wall drawings and installations and later purchased items to integrate into such works. They also began outsourcing their work to increase their productivity.

While abroad not only did the conditions of travel impact the form of the artists' work but also the content. The artists first addressed the relationship between Havana and the cities they found themselves in which included Chicago, Cuito Cuanavale, London, New York City, São Paulo, and Valdepeñas. The artists acted as global shifters and used their practices to successfully explore local concerns on a global scale. The artists focused on the topic of travel as it related to their being tourists and other Cubans becoming emigrants. In London, in 1995, Bruguera composed prototypes for flying contraptions "Daedalus, or the Empire of Salvation" that were never intended to fly, which in turn allowed Bruguera to contend with the privileged position she was in as she could travel, unlike most Cubans, who once they left the island could never return. Los Carpinteros produced *Transportable City* in 2000 that enabled them to travel with a portable version of their hometown while also exploring the theme of diaspora and itinerate communities more generally.

Another theme the artists explored while abroad was the global economy; this paralleled Cuba's reentry more generally. Both Bruguera and Garaicoa found themselves relating to victims of capitalism, the homeless, while in the United States. Time spent in Chicago enabled Bruguera to recognize and contend with the relationship between the homeless population and Cuban-American immigrant community, both of whom were without their true home(land). As opposed to producing work focused on the emigration of Cubans, she now resided among the Cuban-American community and through a collaborative sculpture and interactive performance attempted to understand the position of the immigrant. In New York City, in 1996, Garaicoa found himself penniless and subjected to selling a work for less than he had expected. He then related this experience to the homeless by offering a beggar twenty dollars for his cup of pennies and bust of Saint Bosco from which he created an installation, *Abraham Lincoln and Saint Juan*

Bosco or the Maps of Desire. Garaicoa additionally explored the opposite extreme through the economic symbolism of the iconic twin towers of World Trade Center, and the impact they had on Americans and Cubans alike in *When a Desire Represents Nothing*. Los Carpinteros participated in the global economy by selecting and purchasing mass-produced consumer items from which to construct their sculpture *Windmill* and site-specific installation *Lighthouse, Stairs, Tower* first featured at the New Museum in New York in 1998. Their encounter with thriving capitalist markets further encouraged them to consider the use value of objects and consider the ways in which “needs” were produced by consumer items. In Cuba, especially during the early years of the Special Period, items were recycled and repurposed to fulfill actual needs and even when consumer items were available they were limited and over-priced. Their early student work attempted to fulfill needs, while their later works were intentionally useless and absurd.

The artists were not only traveling to Europe and the United States. Their early travels additionally brought them to Latin America and Africa. Bruguera’s *Studio Study* first enacted in Havana and then again during the São Paulo Biennial, both in 1996, included her performing naked, albeit behind black bars simulating those used to censor text and images, in a very visceral performance. This came in response to her first hand experience with censorship and the topic would come to dominate a good deal of her performances in the years that followed, as did the theme of conformity, and what one must do to evade censorship. Although her interest in the topic stemmed from a personal experience it did resonate on a broader scale, as censorship is a prevailing issue, in one way or another, throughout the world and especially countries such as Brazil. She additionally performed *Burden of Guilt*, contending with the conformity and concessions one must make to live safely in Cuba. She performed first in the courtyard of her home in Havana (clothed) and later in Venezuela (naked) eliciting a much more provocative

response in the latter locale. Garaicoa's travel to Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, in 1996-1997, steered him and his work in a different direction where he engaged directly with the land as opposed to the built environment. He literally and metaphorically dug up the controversial history of Cuba's role in the Angolan Civil War in his works *Summer Grass*, *Instrument to Dilute Memory*, and *Four Cubans*. His encounter with the landscape and land as related to issues of patriotism, territory, and power, also influenced a number of projects composed back in Cuba that meditated on the garden.

As shifters the artists produced work abroad, as well as on the island, in some instances traveling to install or perform the same work in different locations, as evidenced above with Bruguera and Garaicoa. Los Carpinteros' *Café* and *Hummingbird* combined drawing directly on the wall with the integration of hand carved and found objects. *Café* resulted from their experience of unsuccessfully securing permits to build an artists' café on the roof of their building. *Hummingbird* addressed Cuba's relationship with the north. Both works explored deep social and political issues on the island. In Cuba the artists also continued to create sculptures from wood, now they were large-scale, and eventually outsourced. By the turn of the century all of the artists were producing work that did not altogether veer from their previous work, but was less connected to Havana/Cuba as a point of origin.

CONCLUSION

In 2008 Cuban gallery dealer Luis Miret named Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros “artists of the system,” within the pages of *Arte Cubano* magazine, in an issue focused on the evolving art market on the island.¹ He stated,

In my opinion, there are very few examples [of people who] could be defined as artists of the system, less than five: they could be Carlos Garaicoa, Los Carpinteros, Tania Bruguera...the rest have galleries at a different level; they still have not been called to those big galleries. The names I mentioned are present in biennials, not only representing their country, but attending to central concepts, or they are in solo shows in first-rank museums or became part of the collections of very important museums like Thyssen-Bornemisza, MoMA, etc., or are represented by galleries of great prestige in fairs like Basel, Miami, Zurich, London or Armory Show.²

Miret observed that Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros are represented by multiple well-known international galleries and participate in large art fairs worldwide. He noted that they do not only represent their country but also “attend to central concepts.” By this he was referring to the artists’ ability to address global concerns. This dissertation focused on the foundational years of these same individuals’ artistic careers to account for how and why they became “artists of the system.” It identified what in particular about their work was so appealing to foreigners and how their more local concerns were explored successfully on a broader scale once they began traveling and participating in global art events.

Although being considered an artist “of the system” can hold negative connotations, it also attests to the artists’ ability to act as shifters, as I proposed in Chapter Four, “The Artists as Global Shifters: Art Produced Mid-Decade through the Turn of the Century.” Building off of de

¹ Isabel Pérez, “The Art Market in Cuba: A Project in its Early Stages. An Interview with Luis Miret,” *Arte Cubano* no.1 (2008): 62. Although Arrechea was not part of Los Carpinteros when this comment was made, Miret would likely still include him in this list.

² Ibid.

Certeau's idea of the shifter, I argue that these artists were able to successfully move between Havana and other international cities and through their work translate and transmit information about Cuba abroad while also processing information from foreign locations and making it accessible to Cuban audiences and international ones as well. Bruguera's, Garaicoa's, and Los Carpinteros' chief concerns: those that affect the human body—emigration, conformity, suffering, and death; those that impact the built environment—neglect, disrepair, renovation, and transformation; and those that pertain to the arts and artisanal production—utilitarianism, aesthetics, hierarchies, and race and class, have taken on both local and global dimensions in their work. In order to argue the position of the shifter it was first necessary to understand the evolution of the artists' practices. The local themes addressed and materials and techniques used in their early works paved the way for their later, more global work. This also served to document the turbulent period of the 1990s on island, where the artists were based for most of the decade.

As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, "Artistic Formation during the Special Period: Foundational Years at ISA and Early Works," Bruguera, Garaicoa, and Los Carpinteros all responded to the economic devastation of the Special Period in the form and content of their work, primarily produced between 1990 and 1993, while students at ISA. The pieces discussed reflected on absence and loss: of colleagues due to emigration, material shortages, and the city in ruins. The young artists worked under pseudonyms, anonymity, or collaboratively to reject the idea of the individual artistic genius, drawing from Barthes' concept of the zero position and Foucault's discussion of the author function. This was especially relevant during a time of economic suffering and personal loss. The subject matter of their work from this period had nostalgic undertones and drew on references to more stable and prosperous times in Cuban

history and/or confronted the hardships that resulted from the failed economy and role of art and its potential to alleviate the situation. In 1993, Garaicoa, along with artist Esterio Segura, curated “Metaphors of the Temple” that featured fellow classmates and became the most significant art event to occur following the onset of the Special Period; it was the first to coalesce the work of the 1990s Generation coming out of ISA.

In her “Homage to Ana Mendieta” series Bruguera “collaborated” with her late artistic forbearers/mentors, the late Cuba-American artist Mendieta, and Elso of the 1980s Generation who was Bruguera’s art teacher in middle school and a friend of Mendieta’s. Through the recreations of Mendieta’s work, Bruguera attempted to combat the unfortunate reality that once Cubans emigrate from the island they are written out of history. By identifying the loss of Mendieta, first as an émigré and then as deceased, Bruguera could contend with loss and absence as it was mirrored in every aspect of social life on the island during the Special Period.

Garaicoa began his art training at ISA in 1989, following military service. He was well read and without a strong formal background in art-making, he pursued a theoretical conceptual practice. For his early projects/student work he turned to the urban landscape of Havana as his canvas. He intervened and made subtle alterations to buildings and structures and subsequently instigated a number of rumors and secrets passed to unassuming passersby who engaged with his work. He worked anonymously, removing himself from the project and empowering his “audience” to make sense of the work themselves. This engagement with the city penetrated the system of rumors and secrets that functioned as a form of survival and signified the underground “black” market and other informal economies that emerged in response to the crisis. His perusing of the city also led him to rescue or recreate found decorative ornaments from buildings that

were destroyed or in a state of disrepair, another sign of the devastation and loss that culminated with the Special Period.

Artists Arrechea, Castillo, and Rodríguez met as students at ENA. All three continued their studies at ISA and eventually began collaborating. The alliance began following Arrechea and Rodríguez's participation, as freshmen printmakers (1989-1990), in artist and professor Rene Francisco's pedagogical project "From a Pedagogical Pragmatism." During the course of the academic year the two artists and their classmates participated in a number of projects that forced them to leave the confines of the school and engage with their community. Art-making was just one of the services the artists provided for a community very much in need. They obtained various skills, such as carpentry, that enabled them to better serve society. They rethought their role as artists, and through their subsequent collaborations (which Castillo contributed to beginning the following year) they challenged hierarchies that permeated art-making such as the divide between mentor and mentee; artist and artisan; and producer and consumer. The social/racial inequities that accompanied these seemingly arbitrary divisions were also confronted by the artists in their collective projects that included sculpture, printmaking, performance, and most significantly projects that combined Arrechea and Rodríguez's woodworking with Castillo's hyperreal painting. They would work collectively as Equipo MAD until they became Los Carpinteros in 1994.

In Chapter Three, "Dollarization and the *Doble Moral*: Works on View during the Fifth Havana Biennial," I argued that the years of 1993 and 1994 marked a transitional period in Cuba following the legalization of the United States dollar and ability for artists to work and earn hard currency as independent entrepreneurs/contractors. As a result artwork took on more marketable forms in some instances, yet it continued to explore the hardships that resulted during the

ongoing Special Period including continued emigration and the *balseiro* crisis and also the alterations to the city and its historical narrative to attract tourists. It reflected the contradictory nature of life, or *doble moral*, heightened on the island with the establishment of the dual economy. The works evaluated were created around the time of and some specifically for exhibition during the Fifth Havana Biennial in 1994. This exhibition was notable for introducing artists, including those in discussion, to curators, gallery dealers, and critics from all over the world.

In 1992 Bruguera began another long-term project, "Postwar Memory." In this series she continued to work through issues of loss and absence related to emigration from the island. She staged collaborative projects (a newspaper), installations, and performances as a self-conscious rejection of the growing market demands and resulting competition between individual artists. She used her project to bridge the Cuban community on the island and abroad as a response to the conferences the government was organizing to bring Cuban emigrants back to the island for the first time since the 1970s, but appeared to be more of an empty gesture. Her project was especially timely with the imminent *balseiro* epidemic. Part of her project was censored which would cause significant changes in the years to follow.

Garaicoa proceeded to work within the changing landscape of Old Havana. Duality was becoming visible in the physical landscape where areas designated for tourists in Old Havana were being renovated while much of the city traversed by citizens was desperately in need of repair. Garaicoa's projects unveiled the controversial aspects of this strategic restoration as he imagined his own transformation of the city and repaired and recreated found items. He additionally assumed the position of a fictional architect and drew imaginative restorative plans for the city based on photographs he took of buildings in ruin. When unpacked his work revealed

the history of tourism on the island and the negative aspects of the revitalization of Havana, including tourist apartheid whereby most Cubans were prohibited from accessing the restored areas.

Los Carpinteros further investigated the role of the artist and artisan during a time of crisis and significant renovation of Havana. They continued to reveal the racism and social inequity on the island, with their roots in the colonial period, especially as they impacted the arts and also resurfaced with the dual economy. This is seen in the five pieces they created as part of “Havana Interior” on the occasion of their thesis exhibition at ISA, which were also exhibited during the Fifth Havana Biennial, 1994. For the production of these works they continued to combine their painting and woodworking skills and used material (wood, marble, hardware) that they removed from vacated mansions surrounding the art school. They lived among the ghosts of this now missing elite social group and addressed it in these works by recreating luxury items that on one hand seemed more obscure and useless than ever before, but on the other hand referenced their new patrons who were introduced to the artists during the Fifth Havana Biennial.

In Chapter Four the international exposure the artists received from their participation in the Fifth Havana Biennial was clear whereby they were subsequently presented with many opportunities to travel and participate in residencies and exhibitions abroad. Their experiences overseas led to the investigation of Cuba’s relationship to foreign lands and also the experimentation with new media. They were in a unique situation where they were provided the opportunity to travel that most Cubans were not, and translated and transmitted information and ideas from their experiences abroad back to a local audience and brought abroad unique and authentic perspectives on being Cuban. Although the artists have received criticism for

broadening the scope of their practices, I argued that the artists acted as global shifters and used their practices to successfully explore local concerns on a global scale.

In this chapter Bruguera's experience as a traveler was first explored through the flying prototypes she created in London made from found materials, many with symbolic meanings, and relied on the audience's participation for the enactment of political gestures. The sculptures were not actually able to fly, of course, but allowed the artist to contend with her ability to travel to and from the island. Following the creation of these works the audience's participation took on a greater role in her production. Her subsequent work would include interactive installations and performances that primarily featured her as protagonist, but required spectators' participation. These projects focused on immigration, censorship, abuses of power, and the guilt and sacrifices associated with conformity. Many were installed and/or performed in both Havana and abroad and enabled Bruguera to contend with such issues on a global scale. In 1998 Bruguera returned to Chicago, where during her residency at The Art Institute of Chicago during the previous year she explored the relationship between the homeless and immigrant communities. In 1998, as an art student, she pursued a formal education in performance art—not available in Havana. By the turn of the century she was creating work abroad that followed the same logic used in Havana, but applied to the local history to produce work “without an explicit Cuban context.”³

Garaicoa had difficulty producing work during an early trip to Switzerland in 1995, as he found the environment too aseptic. This was not the case when he participated in a residency in New York City the following year. There he traversed the city as he had in Havana and created work that explored the similarities between Havana and New York, two seemingly disparate cities. He mapped the similarities through photographs he took of objects he collected from

³ Bass, “Chronology,” 130.

comparable architecture and ethnic enclaves. His New York work also reflected on global capitalism and the varying ways in which it impacted the urban landscape of New York—from pennies in a beggar’s cup to the twin towers of the World Trade Center—which connected to Havana as it was reentering the global economy. His subsequent experience in Angola took his work in a different direction where he focused on a barren and decrepit landscape that was the site of civil war. His interest in the land would expand to work focused on gardens and he eventually moved his gardens from site-specific locations to the top of the table. His garden tabletop work was one of many portable land/cityscapes that Garaicoa exhibited in Havana and abroad that spoke to the universality of landscapes and cities.

Los Carpinteros’ approach to art-making changed drastically as the artists started traveling and did not have the time or the materials necessary to continue working as before. They also desired to speak more broadly, so that universal audiences could better understand their work. They began producing site-specific wall drawings while abroad and continued to work in this mode when back in Havana. However, they never veered far from their interest in what they have called the “discourse of objects.” They no longer worked in oil painting, but did continue producing large-scale wooden sculptures with many empty drawers (when time would permit) to reflect on the status of the art object and they reevaluated national symbols to mount subtle critiques. Their interest in the status of the object and its use value changed after they traveled to New York City where they began to integrate store bought items into their wall drawings and compose large-scale sculptures from them. The artists strayed from their hand-carved aesthetic and produced sculptures from readymade items and they also began outsourcing their work. They continued to produce work in this ilk when in Havana. Additionally, their time

traveling as nomadic artists (or shifters, as I propose) encouraged their sculpture *Transportable City*.

The artists, in differing ways, strategically negotiated their position as shifter to bring attention to different concerns. As Mosquera observed in a recent essay on Bruguera's work,

Interestingly, Bruguera is very far from being any sort of street artist or social or political militant. She is as concerned with the social aspect of her work as she is with the legitimization of her career by the mainstream art world. She is as eager to participate in biennials or to have museum exhibitions, as she is to devote herself to the *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*. In a way, she bridges both side and makes them empower each other....⁴

Bruguera rarely sells the documentation of her projects and instead her reputation has enabled her to successfully receive large grants to pursue long-term "useful art" projects.⁵ More recently she has also changed the manner in which she performs. At the turn of the century she began hiring performers to enact her work, as seen in *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* and she has continued to produce work this way. In the instances where she herself performs, it is not done so in a traditional way. Rather, as she explained in 2005,

Right now I am not performing anymore, at least not in that way. My new performances are done when I travel in a plane or when I present lectures. The lectures are about different aspects of performance.

Bruguera is also a dedicated teacher and is invited by universities and art institutions worldwide to deliver lectures.

⁴ Cuba in Tania Bruguera's Work, 15. *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* "is the first performance and time based art studies program in Cuba. This project is being hosted by the Instituto Superior de Arte, internationally recognized as Cuba's finest art school and the only university-level art educational center in the island. The project made its debut during Fall 2002." www.taniabruquera.com/arteconductaintro.html, accessed January 4, 2013.

⁵ Useful art is described by Bruguera as "a way of working with aesthetic experiences that focus on the implementation of art in society where art's function is no longer to be a space for 'signaling' problems, but the place from which to create the proposal and implementation of possible solutions." "Introduction on Useful ArtPolitical," A conversation on Useful Art, Immigrant Movement International, April 23, 2011. New York, Corona, Queens, United States. <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm>, accessed January 3, 2012.

Garaicoa maintains studios in Havana and Madrid and regularly participates in international exhibitions, including those in Brazil and Beijing. He also curates Open Studio exhibitions in his Madrid studio where he culls together artists who share similar interests to his own. Garaicoa has never strayed too far from his commitment to the city of Havana, even when encouraged to move beyond. He continues to work from documentary photographs of buildings and cities and imagine new possibilities for existing cityscapes through more polished studio-based work. More recently he has mounted and laminated his photographs and then pierced them with pins that he connects with fragile string to superimpose new structures or signage. He also creates maquettes, in different media, of existing cities and structures to which he adds his own fiction, and he finds new functions for the tools used by the architect.

Los Carpinteros and Arrechea enjoy lucrative careers and exhibit widely most especially in the United States where they have maintained close relationships with galleries and curators. They continue to work from their interest in objects and their use value and have expanded their practice to produce environments that explore aspects of power and control and its opposite, chaos. Although the following observation was made in relationship to Los Carpinteros' work, it is fitting to Arrechea's as well, "Regardless of the form that their works take, the artists place art, conceptual approaches, and their works in the weft of discussions about corporative capitalism and situate them in the passage between the material and immaterial production. Their critical question is: what place does art occupy in this process."⁶ This is seen in Arrechea's recent commissions for Park Avenue in Manhattan, New York, "No Limits" that consists of ten massive

⁶ Paulo Herkenhoff, "Dismantling the World," in *Los Carpinteros: Handwork—Constructing the World* (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, 2010), 22.

sculptures based on iconic buildings from Manhattan's skyline.⁷ Standing up to twenty feet tall each building has been stretched, rolled, twisted or flattened to comment on the ever-changing nature of the city. Although the actual buildings stand tall, it is what they symbolize and the business conducted within their walls that determines the success and failures of a company, city, and/or person. Therefore Arrechea's Citigroup sculpture is installed on a brightly colored top that can be rotated by spectators, to display the unstable nature of the banking industry.

Although Park Avenue is a long way from Havana, and especially Cuba during the Special Period, where Arrechea, along with Castillo and Rodríguez, handmade work to comment on the escalating socio-economic crisis, Arrechea's current work shows a continued interest in veiling critique aimed at the economy and power structures through humor and playfulness. There is a direct line back from his current work to his earliest production at ISA, as is the case with recent work by Los Carpinteros, Bruguera, and Garaicoa. All of the artists may be "artists of the system" and no longer use their practices to document the specificities of Cuban life and history, but their current approaches and concerns are still conditioned by their formative years of art making on the island.

⁷ Arrechea's works are on view March- June 2013. "The Park Avenue malls provide a unique opportunity to display works of art. Exhibitions are presented by The Sculpture Committee of The Fund for Park Avenue and the Public Art Program of the City of New York's Department of Parks & Recreation in collaboration with arts organizations and artists." <http://fundforparkavenue.org/fund-for-park-avenue-sculpture.htm>, accessed January 30, 2013.

Figure 1.1
Raúl Martínez, *Abstracción n° 5* (Abstraction n° 5), 1957
Oil on canvas; 127.5 x 102 cm
Collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Havana
Source: *Arte de Cuba* (São Paulo: Centro Cultural Banco de Brazil, 2005), 69.

Figure 1.2
Raúl Martínez, *26 de Julio* (July 26), 1964
Oil, wood and collage on masonite; 119 x 159 cm
Collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Havana
Source: *Museo de Bellas Artes, Guía de Arte Cubano* (Sevilla: Escandón Impresores, 2002), 209.

Figure 1.3
Korda (Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez), *Fidel Golfing*, 1960
Black and white photograph
Source: <http://rebekahjacobgallery.com/alberto-korda>, accessed January 9, 2013.

Figure 1.4
Tomás Sánchez, *Mella*, 1973
Oil on canvas; 116.5 x 96 cm
Collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Havana
Source: Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 11.

Figure 1.5
Flavio Garciandía, *All You Need is Love*, 1975
Oil on canvas; 150 x 250 cm
Collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Havana
Source: Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), color plate.

Figure 1.6

Ricardo Porro, *School of Plastic Arts, Aerial View*, 1965

Black and white documentary photograph

Photograph taken by Paolo Gasparini

Source: John Loomis, *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 59.

Figure 1.7
Opening of “Volume One” exhibition, 1981
Installation by Gustavo Pérez Monzón
Photograph by José M. Fors
Source: Source: Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 2.

Figure 1.8
Opening of “Volume One” exhibition, 1981
Installation by Leandro Soto
Photograph by José M. Fors
Source: Source: Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 3.

Figure 1.9
“Volume One” artists with Ana Mendieta (Standing: José Bedia, unidentified woman, Lucy Lippard, Ana Mendieta, Ricardo Brey, Leandro Soto, Juan Francisco Elso, and Flavio Garcíandía. Keeling: Gustavo Pérez Monzón and Rubén Torres Llorca), 1981.
Photograph by Gory (Rogelio López Marín)
Source: Rachel Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 7.

Figure 1.10
Juan Francisco Elso, *Por América* (For America), 1986
Mixed media; 150 x 100 x 100 cm
Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.
Photograph by Gerardo Sutter
Source: Rachel Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*
(Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 62.

Figure 1.11
Flavio Garciandía, *Untitled*, 1988
Acrylic and glitter on canvas; four panels: 200 x 147 cm each
Collection of Claire and Phillipe Coutin, Madrid
Source: Rachel Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*
(Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 40.

Figure 1.12
Grupo Puré, Partial view of “Puré Expone” exhibition, 1986
Collection José Veigas Archive, Havana
Source: *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century*
(Los Angeles: California/International Arts Foundation, 2002), 201.

Figure 1.13
Grupo Provisional, *Very Good Rauschenberg*, 1988
Intervention

Photograph by Adalberto Roque

Source: *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 128.

Figure 1.14
Proyecto Pilón (Project Pilón), 1989
Photograph by Félix Suazo
Source: *Antología de textos críticos: el nuevo arte cubano*, eds. Magaly Espinosa and Kevin Power
(Santa Monica, CA: Perceval Press, 2006), 286.

Figure 1.15
Cuban Art Dedicates itself to Baseball, September 24, 1989
Art event

Photograph by José A. Figueroa

Source: Source: *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 139.

Figure 2.1

Ana Mendieta, *Image from Yagul*, 1973

Lifetime color photograph, original documentation: 35 mm slide; 20 x 13 1/4 in.

Source: *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985*, ed. Olga Viso
(Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 53.

Figure 2.2

Ana Mendieta, *Itiba Cahubaba, Old Mother Blood (Rupestrian Sculpture)*, 1981
Black and white photograph of carved cave wall at the Cueva del Aguila, Jaruco, Havana, Cuba; 53 ¼ x 40 ¾ in.
Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*
(New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 25.

Figure 2.3

Ana Mendieta, *Nile Born*, 1984
Sand and binder on wood; 61 ½ x 19 ½ x 2 ½ in.
Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault
Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective (New York: The New
Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 74.

Figure 2.4

Ana Mendieta, *Untitled*, 1984
Earth and binder on wood; 39 x 34 x 1 ½ and 36 x 34 x 1 ½ in.
Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault
Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective (New York: The New
Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 82.

Figure 2.5
Tania Bruguera, *Sin título* (Untitled), *Homage to Ana Mendieta*, c. 1992
Mixed media; various dimensions
Source: Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 326.

Figure 2.6

Ana Mendieta, *Rastros corporales* (Body Tracks), 1982

Photograph taken during a performance at Franklin Furnace, New York City

Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*
(New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 35.

Figures 2.7 (left) and 2.8 (right)

Tania Bruguera, *Rastros corporales* (Body Tracks), 1988

Performance

Source: <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/495-0-Tribute+to+Ana+Mendieta.htm>, accessed September 20, 2012

Figure 2.9

Tania Bruguera, *Ana Mendieta; Tania Bruguera* (thesis exhibition catalogue cover), 1992

Silkscreen on cardboard

Source: Archive of José Veigas, Havana

Figure 2.10
Tania Bruguera, *Sin título* (Untitled), 1992
Mixed media installation at Center for the Development of the Visual Arts in Old Havana
Source: Gerardo Mosquera, "Reanimating Ana Mendieta," *Poliester* 4, no. 11 (Winter 1995): 53.

Figures 2.11 and 2.12
Ana Mendieta, *Ñañigo Burial*, 1976
Mixed media installation at 112 Green Street Gallery, New York
Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*
(New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 12, 15.

Figure 2.13
Ana Mendieta, *Untitled*, 1985
Tree trunk carved and burnt with gun powder
79 ¼ x 25 in.
Source: Petro Barreras del Rio and John Perrault, *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*
(New York: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 63.

Figure 2.14
Tania Bruguera, *Sin título* (Untitled) [Sketches for trunks burnt with gun powder], c. 1992
Ink on paper; sizes variable
Source: Gerardo Mosquera, "Reanimating Ana Mendieta,"
Poliester 4, no. 11 (Winter 1995), 55.

Figure 2.15
Carlos Garaicoa, *Suceso en Aguiar 609* (Happening at Aguiar 609), 1990
Photographic documentation of an intervention in a building in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 2.16
Carlos Garaicoa, *Suceso en Aguiar 609* (Happening at Aguiar 609), 1990
Photographic documentation of an intervention in a building in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 2.17
Carlos Garaicoa, *Suceso en Aguiar 609* (Happening at Aguiar 609), 1990
Photographic documentation of an intervention in a building in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

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Photographic documentation of an intervention in a building in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

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Photographic documentation of an installation in a public space in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 2.21
Carlos Garaicoa, *Homenaje al seis* (Homage to the Six), 1991-92
Photographic documentation of an installation in a public space in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figures 2.22 and 2.23
Carlos Garaicoa, *Homenaje al seis* (Homage to the Six), 1991-92
Photographic documentation of an installation in a public space in Havana
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

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Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 2.27
Carlos Garaicoa, *La casa del brillante* (House of Diamonds), 1992
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Collection of the Museo de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Havana
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: La ruina; la utopia*, ed. José Ignacio Roca
(Bogotá: Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 2000), 42.

Figure 2.28
Alexandre Arrechea and Dagoberto Rodríguez
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Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

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Documentary photograph
Source: John A. Loomis, *A Revolution in Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools*
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Figure 2.38

Los Carpinteros, *Dos Pesos* (Two Pesos), 1992
Oil, canvas, wood; 25.5 x 73.5 x 3.5 in.

Source: *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Habana, Cuba: Colección de Arte Cubano*
(Palma de Mallorca: Sa Nostra, 2001), 267.

Figure 2.39

Los Carpinteros, *Un Peso* (One Peso), 1991
Wood and metal; 17 1/8 x 39 7/8 x 2 1/4 in.

Collection of Howard and Patricia Farber
Source: <http://farbercollection.com>, accessed August 16, 2012.

Figure 2.40
Installation photograph of “Las metáforas del templo” (Metaphors of the Temple), 1993
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Source: *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 165.

Figure 3.1
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1993
Offset print on newsprint; 13.4 x 8.4 in.
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 93.

Figure 3.2
Tania Bruguera, “Memoria de la postguerra” (Postwar Memory), 1994
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Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art,
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Figure 3.3
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1994
Offset print on newsprint; 12.2 x 8.2 in.
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 63.

Figure 3.4
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1993
Offset print on newsprint; 13.4 x 8.4 in.
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 94.

Figure 3.5
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail [Tonel], 1993
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 98.

Figure 3.6
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail [Kcho], 1993
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 98.

Figure 3.7
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1993
Offset print on newsprint; 13.4 x 8.4 in.
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 104.

Figure 3.8
Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1994
Offset print on newsprint; 13.4 x 8.4 in.
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 64.

Figure 3.9

Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1994
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 67.

Figure 3.10

Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail, 1994
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 66.

Figure 3.11

Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail [Manuel Piña], 1994
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 84.

Figure 3.12

Tania Bruguera, *Memoria de la postguerra* (Postwar Memory) [Newspaper], detail [Carlos Garaicoa], 1994
Source: *Tania Bruguera* (Chicago: Lowitz & Sons, 2005), 79.

Figure 3.13

Tania Bruguera, *El viaje* (The Trip), 1993

Mixed media installation

Source: Tania Bruguera, "Postwar Memory," in *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys In and Out of Exile*, ed. Maria de los Angeles Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 174.

Figure 3.14

Tania Bruguera, *Tabla de salvación* (Table of Salvation), 1994

Marble, wood, cotton

Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 57.

Figure 3.15
Tania Bruguera, *Miedo* (Fear), 1994
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Source: Jana Cazalla, "Quinta Bienal de La Habana: Encuentros en la periferia"
Lápiz (Octubre-Diciembre 1994).

Figure 3.16
Tania Bruguera, *Miedo* (Fear), 1994
Performance during the Fifth Havana Biennial
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Source: Johannes Birringer, "Art in America (The Dream): A Conversation with Tania Bruguera,"
Performance Research (Spring 1998): 28.

Figure 3.17
Carlos Garaicoa, *Rivoli; o de las maneras de sostener un ángel y un rostro con las manos*
(Rivoli; Or the Ways to Sustain an Angel and a Face with Hands), 1994
Wood object, three photographs; photographs: 7 x 9.3 in. each
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

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Carlos Garaicoa, *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior), 1994
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 3.19
Carlos Garaicoa, *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream*, 1993-1995
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 3.20
Carlos Garaicoa, *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior) [detail], 1993-1994
Color photograph
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 16.

Figure 3.21
Carlos Garaicoa, *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior) [detail], 1993-1994
Photograph
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 14.

Figure 3.22
Carlos Garaicoa, *Interior Habanero* (Havana Interior) [detail], 1993-1994
Mixed media installation
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 15.

Figure 3.23
Sloppy Joe's Bar, 1930s
Documentary photograph

Source: <http://cruiselinehistory.com/legendary-sloppy-joes-and-a-video-featuring-old-havana-cuba-during-the-1930s>, accessed August 2, 2011.

Figure 3.24
Sloppy Joe's Bar, c. 1930
Souvenir postcard

Source: <http://cruiselinehistory.com/legendary-sloppy-joes-and-a-video-featuring-old-havana-cuba-during-the-1930s>, accessed August 2, 2011.

Figure 3.25
Sloppy Joe's Bar, 1948
Souvenir photograph

Source: <http://cruiselinehistory.com/legendary-sloppy-joes-and-a-video-featuring-old-havana-cuba-during-the-1930s>, accessed August 2, 2011.

Figure 3.26
Carlos Garaicoa, *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* [detail], 1993-1995
Photograph

Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 32.

Figure 3.27
Carlos Garaicoa, *Sloppy Joe's Bar: Dream* [detail], 1993-1995
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Tourist map of Havana, 1993-1995
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
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Figure 3.29
Carlos Garaicoa, *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior) [detail], 1993-1994
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Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 18.

Figure 3.30
Carlos Garaicoa, “Proyecto acerca de cómo después de destruido el Hotel ‘La Esfera,’ un día de lluvia, en su lugar apareció otro” (Project about how after the destruction of Hotel “La Esfera,” another appeared in its place on a rainy day), *Interior habanero* (Havana Interior) [detail], 1993
Watercolor and ink on paper; 19.5 x 27.5 in.
Source: *Carlos Garaicoa: el espacio decapitado*
(Biel-Bienne: Centre PasquART, 1995), 19.

Figure 3.31
Los Carpinteros, *Vanite* (Vanitas), 1994
Wood, oil, canvas, marble, metal; 78.5 x 67 x 37.3 in.
Source: Alexandre Arrechea

Figure 3.32
Los Carpinteros, *Quemando árboles* (Burning Trees), 1993
Wood, oil, canvas; 98.3 x 55.5 x 21.5 in.
Source: *Arte, sociedad, reflexión: Quinta Bienal de La Habana* (Madrid: Tabapress, 1994).

Figure 3.33
Los Carpinteros, *Marquilla cigarrera cubana* (Cuban Cigar Label), 1993
Wood, oil, canvas; 65.7 x 84 x 3.1 in.
Collection Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
Source: *Los Carpinteros*
(Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003), 91.

Figure 3.34
Los Carpinteros, *Ventana holandesa*, (Dutch Window), 1994
Wood, oil, canvas; 59 x 51.2 x 19.5 in.
Source: Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, "Hablando por si mismo: Haciendo memoria desde un interior habanero,"
Arte Cubano 2 (1999): 67.

Figure 3.35
Los Carpinteros, *Havana Country Club*, 1994
Oil, canvas, wood; 55.1 x 55.1 in.
Source: *Los Carpinteros*
(Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003), 90.

Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 (clockwise)
Tania Bruguera, *Absolución* (Absolution); *Ilusión* (Illusion); *Sin título* (Untitled)
from “Daedalus or the Empire of Salvation” series, 1995
Mixed media,; sizes variable

Source: Tania Bruguera, “Postwar Memories,” *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women’s Journeys In and Out of Exile*, ed. Maria de los Angeles Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 183-185.

Figure 4.4 (top), 4.5 (bottom)
Tania Bruguera, *Estudio de Taller* (Studio Study), 1996
Mixed media installation and performance
Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
(Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 62-63.

Figure 4.6
Tania Bruguera, *Estadística* (Statistics) [Havana], 1996
Human hair, thread, and fabric; 11 4/5 x 5 3/5 feet
Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
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Figure 4.7

Tania Bruguera, *Estadística* (Statistics) [Chicago], 1997

Mixed media

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

(New York: Art in General and Bronx, New York: Longwood Arts Project/Bronx Council on the Arts), 29.

Figure 4.8
Tania Bruguera, *Art in America: The Dream*, 1997
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Source: *1990s Art from Cuba: A National Residency and Exhibition Program*
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Figure 4.9

Tania Bruguera, *El peso de la culpa* (The Burden of Guilt), 1997
Performance, Havana, Cuba

Source: http://universes-in-universe.de/car/havanna/szene/e_tania.htm

Figure 4.10

Tania Bruguera, *El peso de la culpa* (The Burden of Guilt), 1998
Performance, Caracas, Venezuela

Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
(Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 65.

Figure 4.11
Tania Bruguera, *El cuerpo de silencio* (Body of Silence), 1997-98
Performance
Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
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Figure 4.12
Tania Bruguera, *Sin Título (Habana, 2000)* (Untitled, Havana, 2000), 2000
Performance in an installation
Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
(Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 78.

Figure 4.13
Tania Bruguera, *Sin Título (Kassel, 2002)* (Untitled, Kassel, 2002), 2002
Performance in an installation
Source: *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*
(Milan: Edizioni Charta and the Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009), 83.

Figure 4.14
Carlos Garaicoa, Installation at Espacio Aglutinador [Ezequiel Suarez performing] 1995
Source: *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block
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Figure 4.15
Carlos Garaicoa, *Declaración* (Declaration), 1996
Color photographs
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.16
Carlos Garaicoa, *Abraham Lincoln and Saint Juan Bosco or the Maps of Desire*, 1996
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.17
Carlos Garaicoa, *Cuando el deseo se parece a nada* (When a Desire Resembles Nothing), 1996
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.18 (top) and 4.19 (bottom)
Carlos Garaicoa, *Hierba del verano* (Summer Grass), 1997
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Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.20
Carlos Garaicoa, *Instrumento para diluir la memoria* (Instrument to Dilute Memory), 1996
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figures 4.21 and 4.22
Carlos Garaicoa, *Cuatro cubanos* (Four Cubans), 1997
Installation of Hi 8 Video transferred to VHS
Source: Sujatha Fernandes, *Cuba Represent*
(Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 174-175.

Figures 4.23, 4.24, and 4.25 (from top to bottom)
Carlos Garaicoa, *Jardin cubano* (Cuban Garden), 1997
Documentation of a site-specific installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.26
Carlos Garaicoa, *Jardín japonés* (Japanese Garden), 1997
Mixed media installation
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.27
Carlos Garaicoa, *Jardín* (Garden), 1998
Mixed media
Source: Carlos Garaicoa Studio

Figure 4.28
Carlos Garaicoa, *Ciudad vista desde la mesa de casa* (City View from the Table of My House), 1998-2000
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Source: *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 78.

Figure 4.29
Carlos Garaicoa, *Nuevas arquitecturas o una rara insistencia para entender la noche* (New Architecture or the Rare Instance to Understand the Night), 2000
Source: *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 79.

Figure 4.30
Los Carpinteros, *Café*, 1996
Mixed media installation
Source: *Los Carpinteros*
(Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 2003), 122.

Figure 4.31
El Lissitzky, *Tatlin at Work on the Monument of the Third International*, 1922
Collage
Source: Norbert Lynton, *Tatlin's Tower: Monument to Revolution*
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Figure 4.32
Los Carpinteros, *Colibrí* (Hummingbird), 1996
Mixed media installation; 15 x 20 ft.
Collection Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany
Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

Figure 4.33

Los Carpinteros, *Archivo de Indias* (Archive of the Indies), 1996
Wood; 189 x 55.1 x 55.1 in.

Collection Fundación ARCO, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo, Galicia, Spain
Source: *Los Carpinteros: Provisorische utopien*
(Aachen, Germany: Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst, 1998), 14.

Figure 4.34

Los Carpinteros, *Paraguas* (Umbrella), 1997
Mixed media

Source: http://universes-in-universe.de/car/havanna/szene/e_carp.htm

Figure 4.35
Los Carpinteros, *Estuche* (Jewelry Box), 1999
Wood; 88.6 x 51.1 x 51.1 in.
Collection Frankie Diago, New York
Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

Figure 4.36
Los Carpinteros, *Molino de viento* (Windmill), 1998
Mixed media installation; 142 x 25 x 57 in.
Source: <http://alexandrearrechea.com/category/archives>

Figure 4.37
Los Carpinteros, *Faro, escalera, torre* (Lighthouse, Stairs, Tower), 1998
Mixed media installation
Source: http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/5108

Figure 4.38
Los Carpinteros, *Ciudad transportable* (Transportable City), 2000
Mixed media installation, Havana
Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

Figure 4.39
Los Carpinteros, *Sin título* (Untitled), 1998
Watercolor on paper, 130 x 185 cm
Collection Dean Valentine, Los Angeles
Source: *Art Cuba: The New Generation*, ed. Holly Block
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 56.

Figure 4.40
Los Carpinteros, *Casa de campaña (Iglesia)* (Tent, Church), 1996
Mixed media
Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

Figure 4.41
Los Carpinteros, *Faro* (Lighthouse), 1997
Source: *Los Carpinteros: Provisorische utopien*
(Aachen, Germany: Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst, 1998), 19.

Figure 4.42
Los Carpinteros, *Ciudad transportable* (Transportable City), 2001
Mixed media installation, Shanghai
Source: Los Carpinteros Studio

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