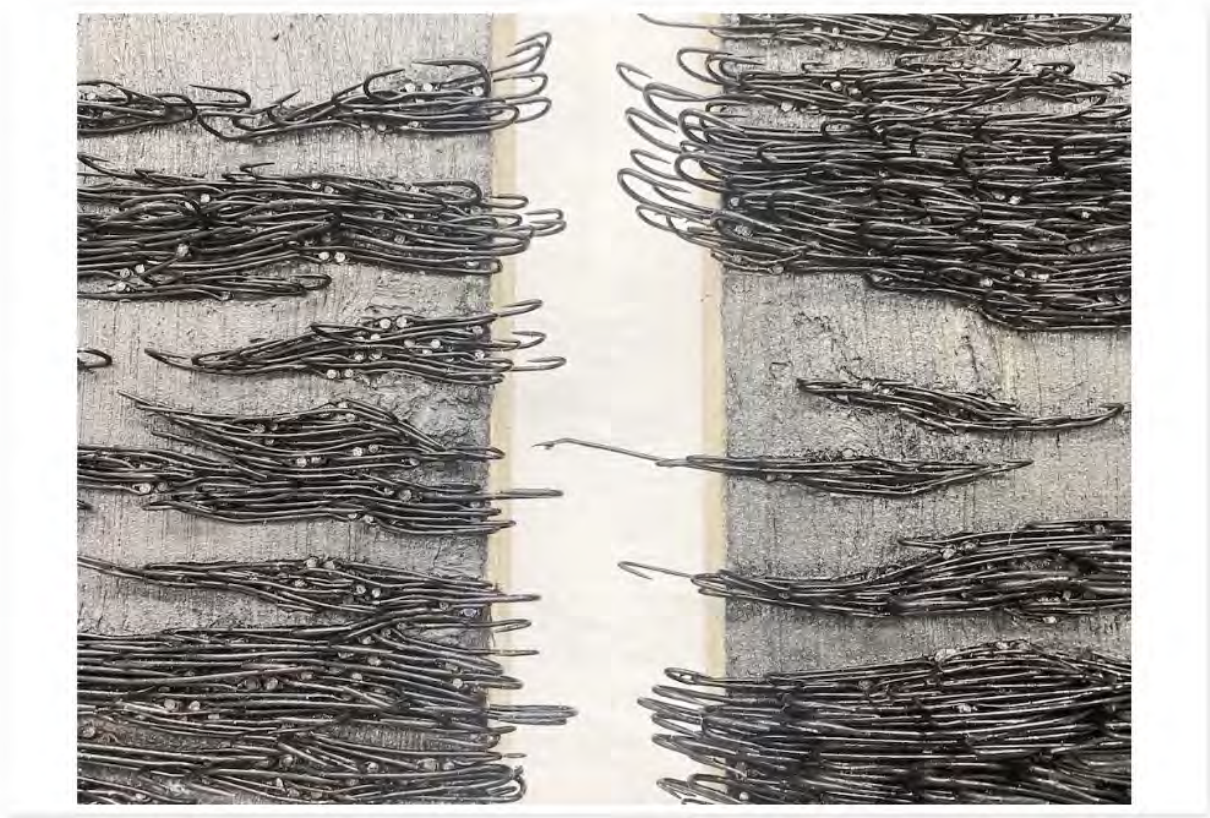
WIDEWALLS

Life as an Invitation – Yoan Capote Solo Exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery

Exhibition Reviews



The deification of tools, consciously or subconsciously, brings out tremendous cultural affiliations. Chopsticks are preferred in Eastern countries because they are very much related to the desired quality of indirectness and modesty. Firearms are difficult to be limited in the United States, possibly due to their demonstration of American directness, individualism, and an absolute display of power. In a nation whose 500 years of history are precariously affiliated with the word "affiliation" itself, fishhook might just be the perfect representative. Ever since its discovery, **Cuba has been a nation of affliction**, first to the Spaniards, briefly to the US, and later to the Soviets. In understanding Cuban

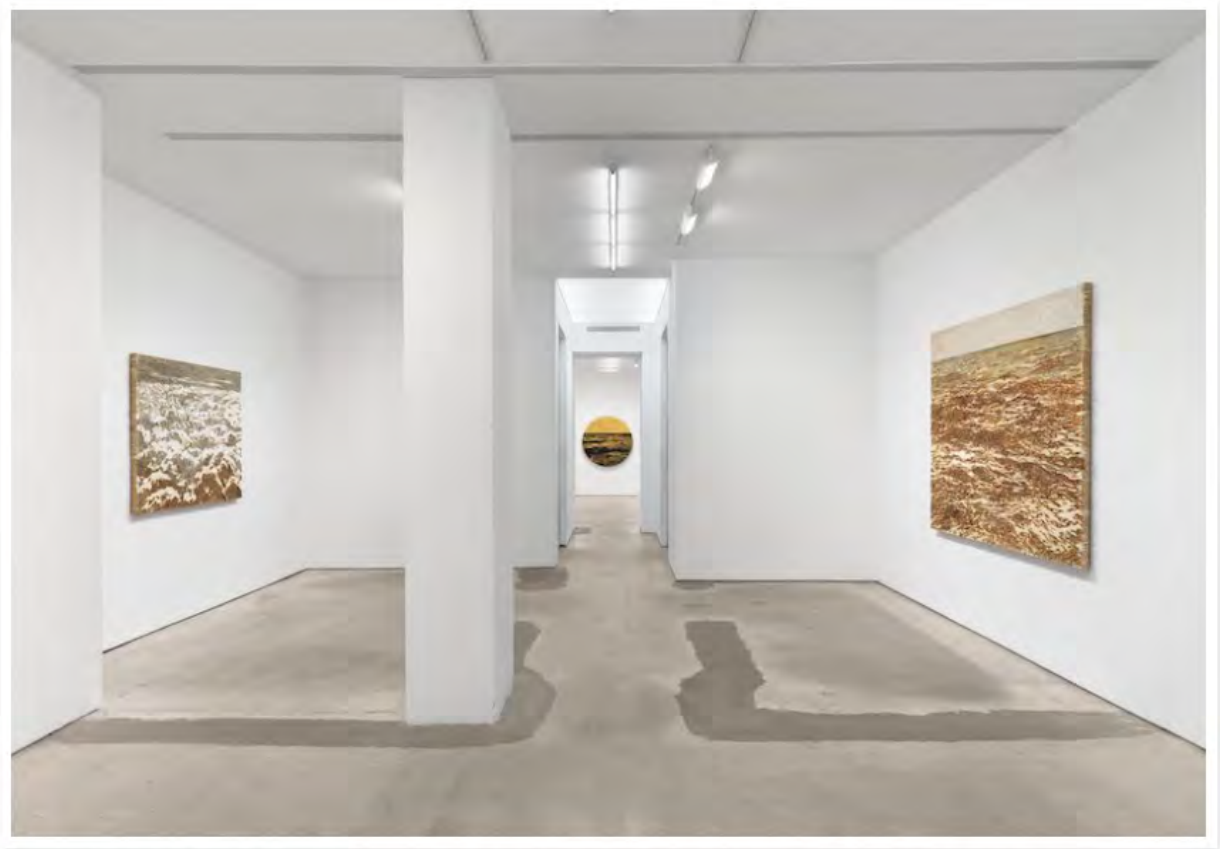
artists, rather than superficially treating this relationship as a subordinate one, it is essential to value affiliation as the very subject of Cuba's core culture itself. The unique identity coming out of a culture that is originated and nurtured by a sense of affiliation is as indigenous, original, and cherishable as any cultures that had reached out as the dominators. Thanks to this, for example, we are finally seeing the great Cuban artists such as Wifredo Lam recognized and understood individually, out of the shadow of Pablo Picasso.

Yoan Capote is a stand-out Cuban contemporary artist who shows a profound understanding of his culture as well as how it can be vitalized into true international artistic narratives. His two-part solo exhibition *Requiem* and *Purification* at Jack Shainman's two gallery spaces demonstrates with full power that the most important cultural heritage to be preserved in the process of translating local identities to the international contemporary art landscape is not "how the locals appear," but "how the locals think."

Yoan Capote - Purificación (Desplazados), 2022. Plaster, wires and recycled metal elements on jute panel mounted on plywood; 37.4 x 37.4 x 1.97 inches (95 x 95 x 5 cm). © Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Fishhooks

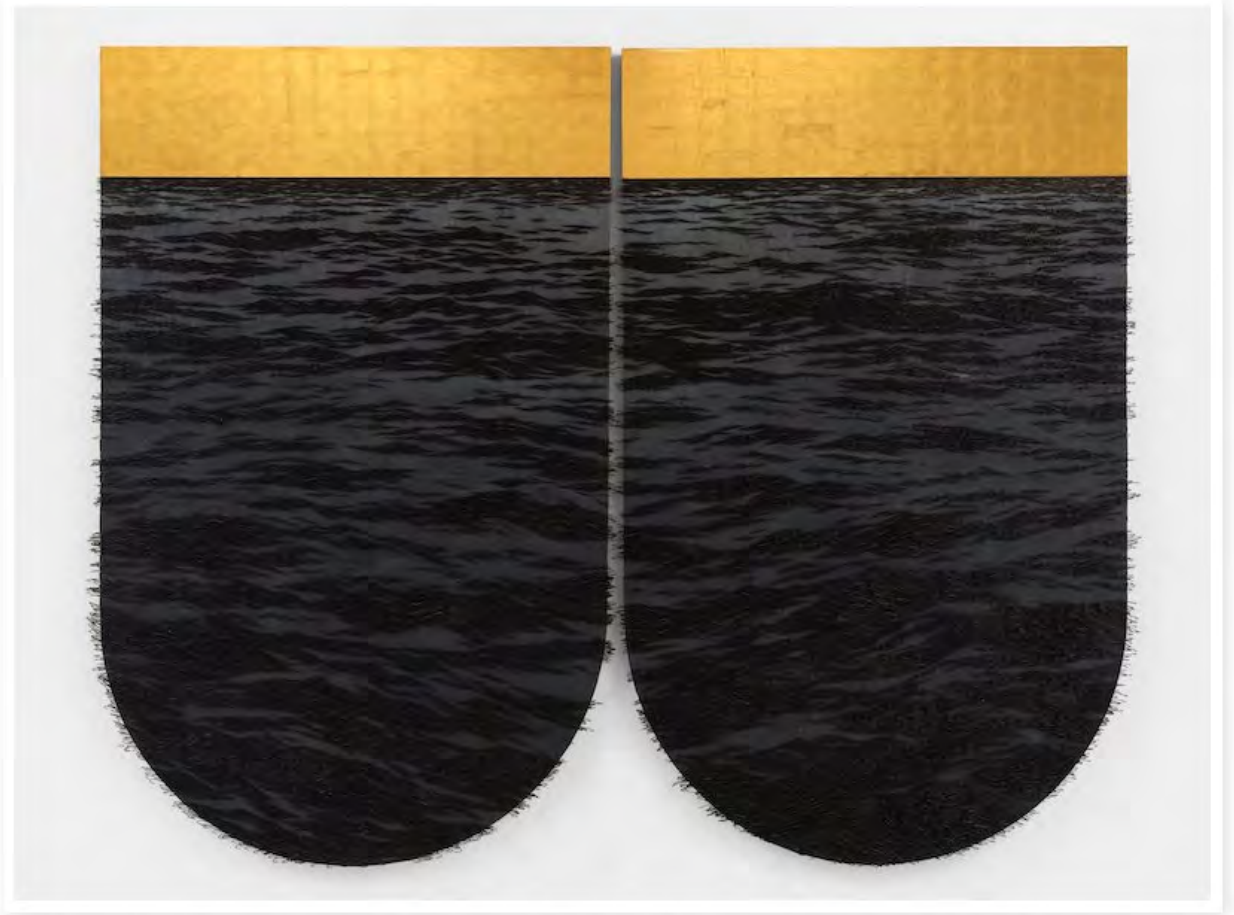
The artistic value of fishhooks, one of the oldest tools invented by mankind, lies in the fact that it is ultimately an invitation. Despite the obvious consequences of risk, pain, and death, the invitation is deemed irresistible. It is more humble than a spear, an arrow, or a cannon when the end goal is to penetrate and destroy - a hook has its rounded end facing out, which doesn't present an immediate threat. Its goal is more complicated as it asks to be attached and retrieved. This presents an interesting epistemological interpretation where arguably, a fishhook is **a visual representation of how we obtain knowledge** - we attach, and then we merge. Yoan Capote has always been a "concept before medium" artist since his Instituto Superior de Arte times. In poignantly identifying the substantial cultural and philosophical association with a fishhook, he developed both the *Requiem* and *Purification* series and proposes: Each fishhook represents each individual and each line of thought in our society.



Installation view, Yoan Capote, Purification, 2022. Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 W 24th Street, New York. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica.

The "One" and the "Mass"

The theme of Capote's practice has always centered around the relationship between the "one" and the "mass." The display of both the *Requiem* and *Purification* series at the gallery's two locations adequately **demonstrates this relationship in a Mise-en-scène fashion**, with every single fishhook as one player, actor, or basic element. In the examples of *Purificación (Cortina de Hierro)* and *Purificación (Peso de Conciencia)*, each individual first congregates into a cluster, depicted as separate "waves" and "clouds," but ultimately merges into the "ocean" and the "sky," very much reminiscent of how our society functions. Sometimes the hooks would aim toward one direction, indicating a social routine of humankind or an agreement in certain political views, while sometimes, they aim towards two completely opposite directions, disagreeing with one another. Some hooks are bigger and more robust compared to others, showing the nature of inequality in how voices are heard.

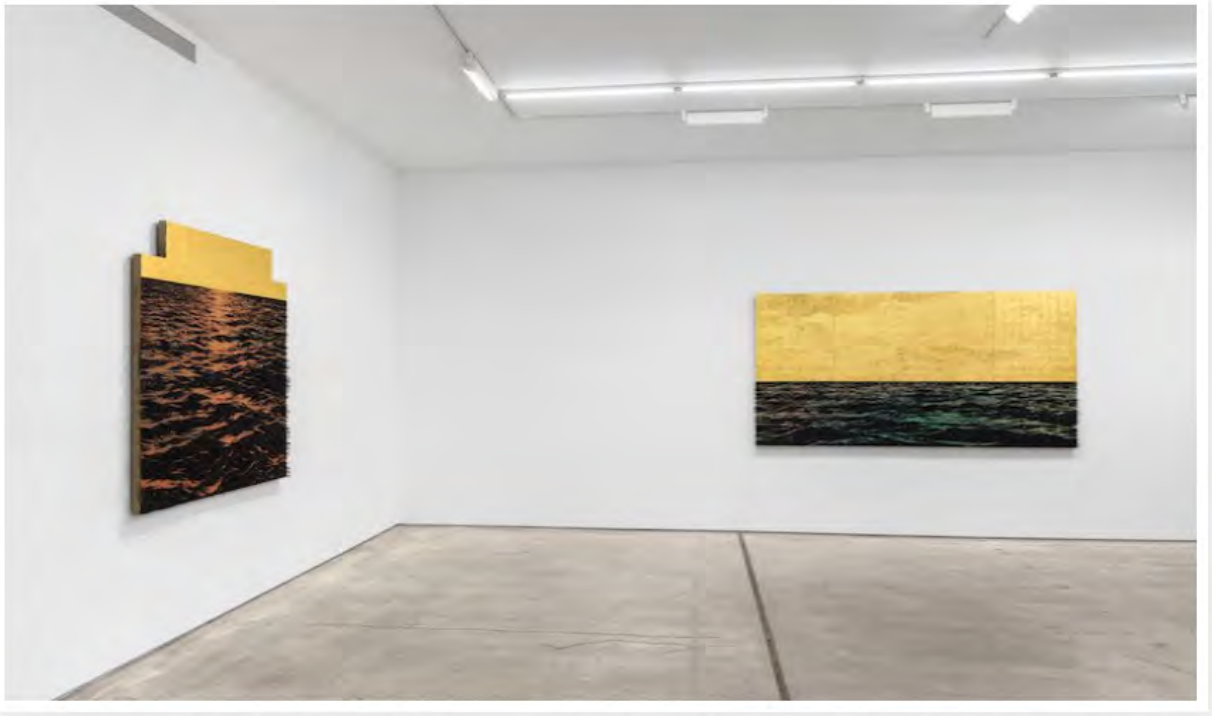


Yoan Capote - Requiem (Tears), 2021-2022 (Detail). Oil, gold leaf, nails, and fishhooks on canvas mounted on a panel in two parts; 89 3/4 x 111 x 5 1/8 inches overall. Photo: Phil Cai.

Fishhooks Outreaching

How Capote treats the edges is particularly interesting, as most of the works have a decent amount of hooks spilling over to the outside of the baseboard. Mid-air and weakly supported, these hooks on the edges don't quite gel with the rest of the society as do their peers, but they seem to be the most adventurous of their kind. Compared to the ones that are sitting comfortably at the center of the work among hundreds of others doing the exact same thing, these are **the outlaws, the groundbreakers, and the opinionated advocates**. *Requiem (Tears)* is the strongest in this sense, where the two panels are only inches apart, where the hooks from the edges of each panel fight for a stronger invitation for the other side to compromise. The shape of the two panels configures a gap that only comes further apart towards the bottom. What is also intriguing about this diptyque, as

well as a few non-rectangularly shaped works such as *Requiem (Aura)*, is that the shapes of these panels are artificially round or angled, making the uncontrolled edges appear very much in control when looked at from afar. Perhaps the most adventurous explorers and groundbreakers are inevitably subject to social disciplines.



Installation view, Yoan Capote, Purification, 2022. Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 W 24th Street, New York. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica.

New Altars

Inspired by middle ages altar paintings, Yoan Capote incorporated 24k gold leaves into his most recent *Equirem* series. In these works, we see a visual dichotomy of gold and black, although the proportions of the two are distinct in each piece. At a glance, replacing skyscapes with gold, visual proximity to the color of dawn and dusk seems to be a mundane idea despite an uptick in holiness. However, upon further inspection, Capote's deep understanding of the relationship between the "one" and the "mass" reveals itself with this updated method of division: Previously, the hooks playing skyscapes and the ones playing seascapes were divided in a similar manner. Here, however, the equal application of gold leaves in the upper part of the panels suggests an alternative of how the "mass" can re-congregate more seamlessly into a true "one." On the other hand, when these works are to be compared with true historical altarpieces in a religious setting, biblical stories are now replaced with an ocean of fishhooks. Capote vigorously pronounces that it is the humans and human thoughts, via the objectification of fishhooks,

that are **to be made divine and celebrated**, regardless of how insufferable the human lives are and how dark the human thoughts can be. If the concept of the Divine Trinity is one of our first attempts at breaking the conceptual barriers surrounding the "one" and the "three" on the god's level, then Capote's *Requiem* series endows this very right for the "one" and "mass" to cross over into each other on the human level. In Capote's mind, the assemblage of a Catholic mass might only be made possible by the "mass" of the people to begin with.

Yoan Capote - Purificación (still), single channel digital video with sound, 11 minutes. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Humans as Medium

While "24k gold leaf", "fishhook," and "canvas" are his professionally listed medium(s), Capote's true medium has always been "human" and "human labor." Compared to many artists who go to assistants' labor only for efficiency, it is almost essential for Capote's works for them to be made not just by himself but by an assemblage of workers. They ARE the fishhooks. Every single fishhook joins together to form a Platonic "Fishhook." Albeit body type, tech-savviness, artsiness, and handiness, each worker comes together to form the "Yoan Capote." The gallery shows a great understanding of this by displaying the video *Purificación* at both its locations with sound on, documenting how the pieces in the show were made. Throughout the 11-minute video, the faces of the workers are almost entirely absent. This is not because their individual identity is unimportant; this is because **what joint identity can represent is all that matters**.

WIDEWALLS

Installation view, Yoan Capote, Requiem, 2022. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W 20th Street, New York. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Phil Cai

Invitation to Exit

If I am to identify one true altarpiece from all of Capote's altarpieces in the show, it is *Requiem (Altarpiece)*, which is placed at the very rear of the main gallery space. With 25 feet in length and a real-sized door half-opened in the middle, it is more of a set design than an actual collectible. Throughout the entire exhibition, viewers are challenged to alter between **the minuteness of the fishhooks on a micro level and the depiction of Cuban seascapes on a macro level**. However, the exhibition comes to a finale here when one is invited to enter the door or, if you may, dive into the ocean. A destination has presented itself. The invitation extended by each little fishhook now comes together as a grand invitation that is perfectly human-sized. By the end of the day, what is behind this door is not important because it is by itself the biggest hook in the ocean.

Exhibitions *Requiem* and *Purification* are on view at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York until **August 5th, 2022**.

TIMES UNION

PREVIEW // ART + EXHIBITS

Kinderhook exhibit is smartly, not reactively, inclusive

William Jaeger

July 26, 2022

13 of 20

Yoan Capote, Nostalgia, 2014-2016. Suitcase, bricks, cement. Photo Wm Jaeger

William Jaeger

With nearly 200 artworks by thirty artists from all over the world and in every discipline, “Stressed World” makes diversity normal. Luckily, the show doesn’t parade its works from every corner of the racial, gender, and sexual universe. It is inclusive by instinct. It walks the walk.

For those who don’t know Ghanian artist El Anatsui’s work, which had a beautiful showing at the Clark Art Institute in 2011, there are several different aspects to his output here. It is centered around one of his large wall-hung works, the titular “Stressed World,” which is

something like a post-industrial quilt using discarded aluminum scraps woven together with copper wire.

In another room, Anatsui's large hanging orb "Womb of Time," using the same kinds of materials, is disarming as the faceted surface slowly rotates, suspended. Both of these works flaunt a formal ingenuity alongside an ecological and social sensitivity. A series of smaller, earlier, rough-hewn sculptures made of manganese further expand our appreciation of the Anatsui's range.

Many of the the artists here have multiple works on view, often showing their evolution over time, so the show has a matrix-like sturdiness as you bob in and out of rooms and discover—and better grasp—further works by artists seen earlier. So we can take in "Status Quo" by Cuban artist Yoan Capote, an oversized balance scale in the entry gallery, and then discover his "Nostalgia," a suitcase filled with Manhattan bricks, later on. Both works play against cliches and expectations with critical wit.

The many color photographs by Irish artist Jackie Nickerson range from creepy, off-color still lifes or glimpses of strange interiors, to a wall of eight large, staged studio "portraits" where figures are obscured, draped or encased in different kinds of plastics. These are dark, perplexing works, and they might try too hard, but they expand the larger palette of the show.

The sculptures by Hawaiian beekeeper Garnett Puett push a single fabulous idea—beeswax hives created, by bees (with some interference from Puett) around irregular armatures. These collaborative objects are weirdly modernist and yet unclassifiable, not to mention beautiful in material, formal terms.

The many figural bronze sculptures by Claudette Schreuders, with some companion works on paper, create a growing, cohesive presence throughout the building. Their stoic, enduring demeanors make you pause, and you wonder slightly what they are thinking, and if they might know more than you do.

There are some stalwarts included: a few Andy Warhol photographs each made of four repeated images, and some colorful and overtly decorative color images by Gordon Parks. These photographs are complemented by some brand new, multi-image works by Carrie Mae Weems that go cosmic—one is literally a series of pictures in rounded frames of, apparently, the North Star. More grounded, and more disturbing, are fifteen circular photographic images by Deborah Luster showing crime scenes, penetrating in their frank detachment.

You'd be correct if you saw the curation here as finding a way to create an eclectic show of dissimilar works under a very loose rubric. It helps that the art is beautifully conceived, thoughtfully sourced and finished with care. Ditto for the installation itself in the converted school, maximizing the peculiar spaces, nooks, cavernous rooms, and walls facing big windows.

The Jack Shainman Gallery represents a vast array of artists who don't naturally fall under one parasol. But in "Stressed World" there is a sharp eye for internal currents that make the show gel, including declarations of cultural nuance, and some observations, however fuzzy, about resisting miscomprehension and adversity.

And so the show ends up representing all of us.

artnet

Art World

Editors' Picks: 12 Events for Your Art Calendar This Week, From the Watermill Gala to a Puppet Show Operated by a Crane

Plus, check out an interactive musical performance on the High Line.

Sarah Cascone, July 25, 2022

Through Friday, August 5

"Yoan Capote: Requiem | Purification" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

artnet

9. "Yoan Capote: Requiem, Purification" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Cuban artist Yoan Capote takes over both of Jack Shainman's Chelsea locations with pieces from two series that expand upon his seascape works. For Cuban migrants, the sea can mean both death and rebirth, a barrier and a route to freedom. The artist incorporates recycled fishhooks, deconstructed barbed wire, gold leaf, and plaster into his mixed-media work. Capote's series "Requiem," on view at 20th Street, is inspired by the art he saw in museums and churches during a recent trip to Italy, a destination for migrants attempting to traverse the Mediterranean Sea. What surfaced were parallels to his own deeply complicated relationship with the sea. The resulting paintings are adorned with gold leaf recalling historic religion icons, contrasting with the chains, barbed wire fencing, and other metal detritus that make up the "Purification" works at 24th Street.

Location: Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 West 24th Street, and 513 West 20th Street, New York
Price: Free
Time: Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

—Sarah Cascone

Art

10 Cuban Artists Who Are Shaping Contemporary Art

Salomé Gómez-Upegui

Jul 6, 2022 10:51PM

Yoan Capote

B. 1977, Havana, Cuba. Lives and works in Havana.

Havana-based artist and Guggenheim fellow Yoan Capote works across sculpture, painting, photography, installation, and video to explore subjects of migration and geopolitics. His layered works also examine human psychology and its relationship to the past.

For example, Capote's immense painting *Requiem (Plegaria)* (2019–21), shown this year at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney, at first looks like a melancholic seascape drenched in mesmerizing gold. A closer glimpse, however, reveals that the waves are made from thousands of hand-wrought fish hooks. The unconventional material turns the sea into an ominous symbol of political and geographic imprisonment. In *Isla (in memoriam)* (2007), Capote similarly used hand-wrought fish hooks to depict a dramatic seascape. He also painted the plywood support with his own blood, evoking the pain, brutality, and isolation that Cuban nationals often experience.

Yoan Capote, "Requiem" and "Purification" 5
View Slideshow

"Requiem" and "Purification," two new series that expand on Capote's celebrated seascapes, will be on view at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York from June 30th to August 5th.

AnOther

Protest, Death and Utility: Your Art Basel 2022 Cheat Sheet

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / ANOTHER LIST

From climate anxieties to subversive monuments and the resurgence of religious icons, here's what stood out at this year's iteration of the Basel art fair

JUNE 24, 2022
TEXT Thom Waite

The temperature in Basel reached a sweltering 37°C last weekend. In the rolling countryside outside the city, the sun beat down on herds of Swiss cows, and swarms of midges buzzed in the long grass. In Basel itself, visitors and residents alike took solace in the city's most popular summer sport – drifting down the Rhine, buoyed by waterproof bags filled with their belongings – or else in Messe Basel, the (air-conditioned) exhibition site that hosts its eponymous art fair. Often, talk turned to fears about the weather: this June may have recorded record-breaking temperatures, but could it also be the coolest June of the rest of our lives?

Unsurprisingly, these anxieties also filtered through to the art itself, with an emphasis on ecological narratives and sustainable practices cropping up across the 289 gallery booths at Art Basel 2022 (plus the site-specific works that spill out into the city, in the fair's Parcours sector). That isn't to say, of course, that Art Basel was without its excesses, having returned to its normal schedule after two years of pandemic-related disruptions.

On the first day alone, Hauser & Wirth sold a 1996 version of Louise Bourgeois' iconic Spider sculpture for $40 million, a record sale for the late artist's work that puts her in the top two most expensive female artists of all time. A series of seven photographs that Wolfgang Tillmans took of a Concorde jet also reportedly went for $1 million, while dealers themselves forked out hundreds of thousands just to exhibit monumental installations – from both established and emerging artists – in the Unlimited showcase. Apparently a looming recession means very little in the art world.

Looking past the extortionate sums of money changing hands, though, some more interesting themes began to emerge, from climate-conscious waterworks, to celebrations of collective activism, and art that's actually … useful? Here, we've outlined five of the fair's most prominent themes.

AnOther

Joan Capote, Isla (elegía) (2019-2022) Galleria Continua

Water, water, everywhere

Maybe it was the heat that made us acutely aware of the closest water source, or maybe rising sea levels have simply made artists and galleries more in tune with ocean. Either way, there seemed to be a flood of aquatic artworks, from Yoan Capote's *Isla (elegia)* (2019-2022) – a large-scale meditation on the sea's beauty and boundaries in oil paint and fish hooks – to another outsized painting by abstract artist Zhou Li, *Landscape of nowhere: Water and dreams No.1* (2022).

10 must-see art exhibitions in Hong Kong in May 2019

In addition to spotlights on Lalan at Sotheby's, an homage to abstract serenity and wacky, vibrant scenes tinged with colonial history — it's also our last chance to see many of the landmark exhibitions that opened during Art Week in March. Here are the best exhibitions to see in Hong Kong this month.

4. Yoan Capote: Territorial Waters

Growing up on the island that is Cuba, Yoan Capote's art is fuelled by an obsession with the sea and the world beyond. At his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong, Capote's iconic "fishhook paintings" will dress the walls -- at once slightly menacing, with thousands of tiny fishhooks puncturing each canvas, yet mesmerising with the landscapes of rhythmic waters and dusky hues. Two suspended curved canvases help to create a 360-degree immersive seascape. (Image courtesy the artist and Ben Brown Fine Arts)

VANITY FAIR

CAPOTE IN CUBA

Portrait of an Artist: Yoan Capote

Life in Cuba—and all it entails—is key to an understanding of Yoan Capote's art, as Fabien Fryns discovered on a visit to the island and the artist's studio.

by FABIEN FRYNS

ON ART 2018

A art scene took over, and I remembered a character I had met in New York at an opening at Acquavella Gallery. Hemingway could not have invented him: a Havana-based Spanish adventurer occupied with "recovering national heritage" from the sea, and a major patron of the Cuban art scene.

I was soon discovering fascinating work in a sprawling mansion in the middle of Havana. Besides the colourful erotic paintings by and of his artist wife which adorned the sweeping central staircase, one work caught my eye: a set of forged steel bars of the sort that protect the windows of Cuban houses. Four of the bars had been shaped to create profiles of faces, at once human and yet faceless in their inhumanity —a portrait of today's surveillance culture and the intrusion of the state—any state— into the private life of the individual. Paranoia was my first encounter with the work of **Yoan Capote**, and it was love at first sight.

A meeting was quickly arranged. Capote's studio struck me as very orderly, efficient and well arranged. Although his work comments on the political situation in Cuba, this is far from being "underground". Much of his oeuvre addresses oppression, and the restrictions on the freedoms of speech and movement. Even his seascapes describe a sinister reality, fashioned from fish hooks hand-sewn onto the canvas— medium and subject combining as a metaphor for the island as prison with the hostile ocean as its perimeter fence.

One work is more powerful than anything I had seen since **Ai Weiwei's** Sunflower Seeds. Entitled *Stress*, it was created over seven years, during which Capote collected 6,000 human teeth from dentists, hospitals, archaeological sites, his friends and his own mouth. These were arranged to suggest an aerial view of a large crowd, on which rocked a shaped concrete block weighing 500kg. As well as the visual and kinetic impact of the work, it was accompanied by an aural dimension: the sounds of thousands of human teeth grinding, as if afflicted by a mass outbreak of bruxism.

Despite Capote's increasing international success, he remains adamant on keeping his base in Havana. "My works are the result of a constant intent for translating into a physical experience our psychological or inner conflicts," he says. "Art for me is a form of psychological analysis and a guarantee of sanity." It is perhaps the challenging conditions and paradoxes of life in Cuba that lead not to despair but instead to the expansion of his being and his artistic practice.

Yoan Capote's work is currently on show at the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea.

BLOUIN
ARTINFO

Group Exhibition "Cuba Mi Amor" at Galleria Continua, Les Moulins

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | MARCH 27, 2018

"Transición," 2016, by Iván and Yoan Capote, Clement, dimensions variables

Galleria Continua, Les Moulins, is hosting a group exhibition titled "Cuba Mi Amor."

The show runs through April 2018

This collective exhibition of 16 artists from Cuba celebrates the spirit of artistic exchange and creation of new dialogues with Cuban artists. It also marks the 10th anniversary of the Moulins space in France. The display looks at the great formal variety of contemporary Cuban production. The selections of work are directly linked to the context of their own creation. Yet, they can create a dialogue with artworks by other international artists, all within the industrial space of the old Moulins factory. The gallery's ambition to establish a living discourse among the arts, cultures, and continents has developed through the years. In 2015, with the opening of a new space in the heart of Havana, Cuba, it organized a regular flow of exchanges among artists of the five continents. The artists participating in the exhibition include Alejandro Campins, Ivan Capote, Yoan Capote, and Carlos Garaicoa among others.

"Cuba Mi Amor" runs through April 22, 2018, at Galleria Continua, 46 rue de la Ferté Gaucher, 77169 Boissy-le-Châtel (seine-et-Marne).

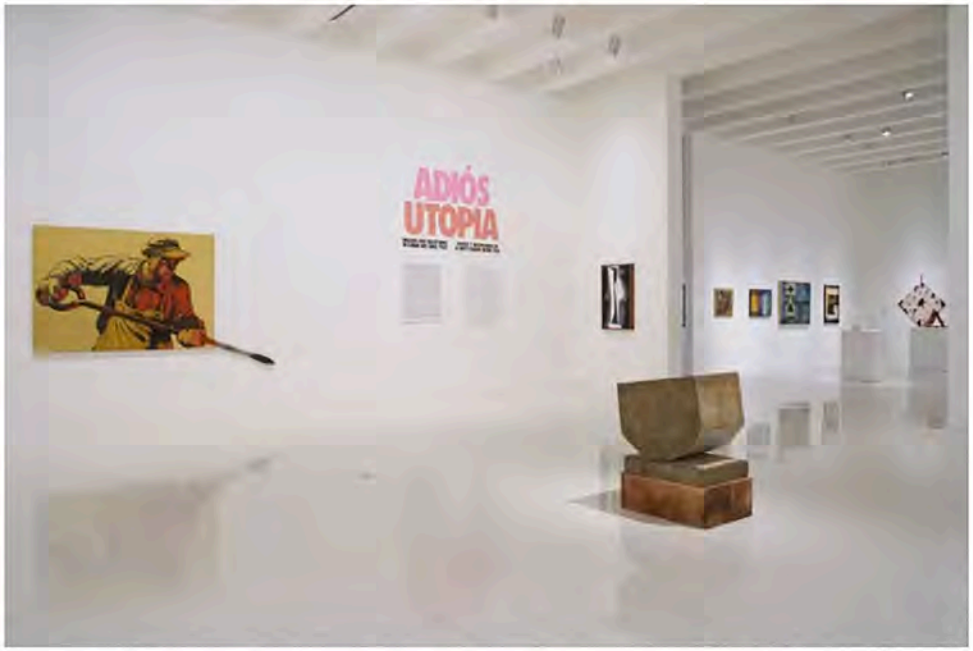
HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Looking to Cuba's Past to Fabricate Tomorrow's Utopia

Adiós Utopia memorializes the driving utopian conceit of contemporary Cuban art, its galleries a testament to the credulity of this dream.

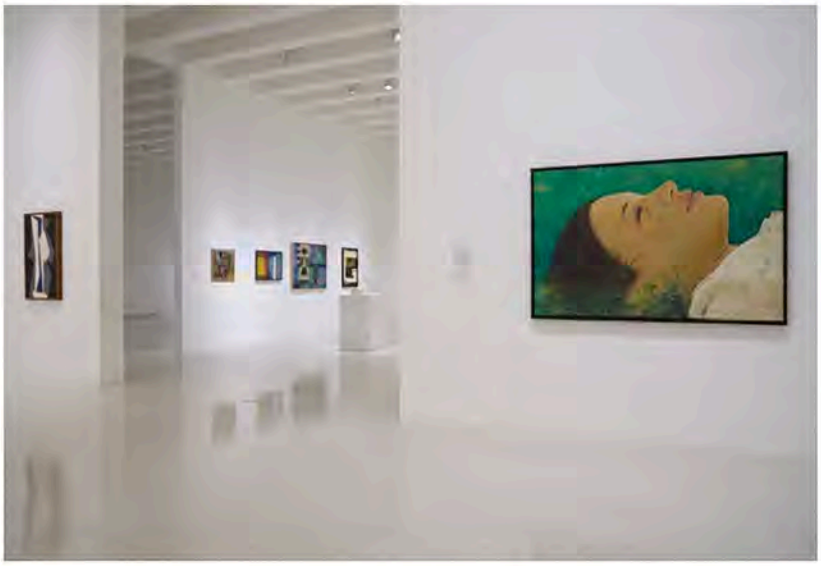
Abigail McEwen 3 days ago



Installation view *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950* "Productivismo" (Productivism), 1992. Eduardo Ponjuan, Rene Francisco; "Stress (in memoriam)", 2004-2012, Yoan Capote; (all photos by Dylan Nelson for Walker Art Center unless otherwise noted)

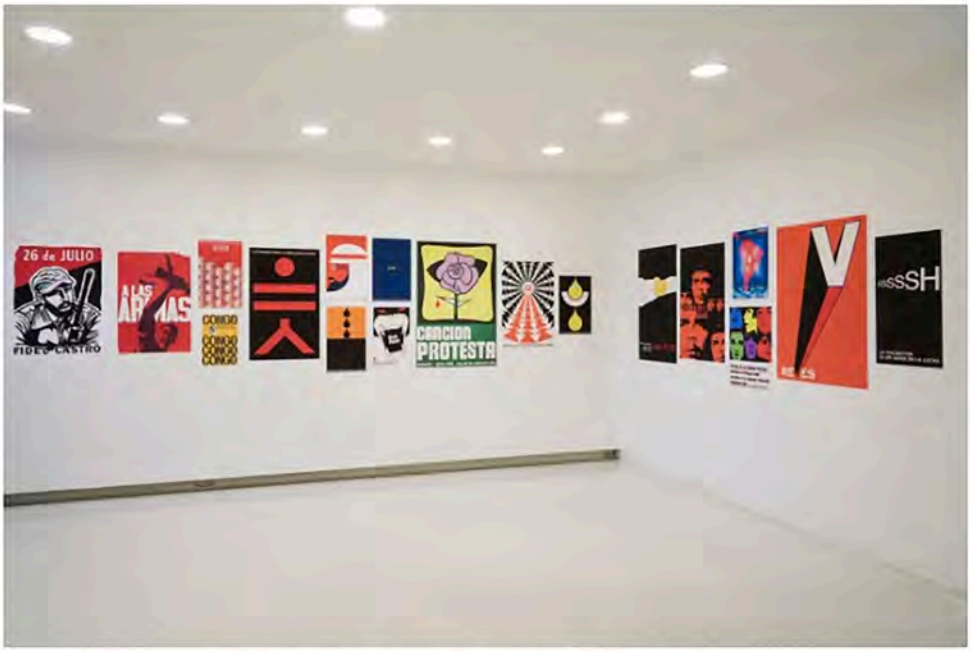
MINNEAPOLIS — "We must continue dreaming, with the hope that the better world will become a reality — as it will, if we keep struggling," reasoned Fidel Castro in a 1992 interview with Tomás Borge recounted in the book *Face to Face with Fidel Castro*. "Humanity should never renounce its dreams, its utopias," he went on; "struggling for utopia means, in part, building it." The fabrication of utopia, if ever forward looking, has, at least since the 1990s, looked searchingly to Cuba's revolutionary past. The ways in which has history has abetted, or even absolved, the revolution hang in the balance of the landmark exhibition *Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*, which opened at the Walker Art Center in November and was on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston last spring. The show was conceived by the Cisneros Fontanals Fundación Para Las Artes (CIFO Europa) and the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO USA) and draws mostly from CIFO collections. It was organized by the artist René Francisco, critic and curator Gerardo Mosquera, and curator Elsa Vega with museum advisors Olga Viso and Mari Carmen Ramírez at the Walker and the MFAH, respectively.

The cultural production of utopia, from the salad days of the 1950s to Cuba's Special Period, to the present day serves as the exhibition's through line. Eschewing chronological and generational frames, the curators have explicitly sought to keep history at bay — neither staging an ideological exhibition nor instrumentalizing art in a storytelling function — and ask us to assess the art *per se*. This apolitical approach to richly and frankly political art marks a path far less traveled in exhibitions of Cuban art, as the organizers of *Adiós Utopia* are well aware. In their selection of one hundred works by more than fifty Cuban artists across a range of media — painting, photography, installation, film, graphic design — they present a thematic (not, they acknowledge, an exhaustive) overview of sixty-five years of artistic production. The conceptual labor of utopia serves as a curatorial leitmotif, introduced in the exhibition's anteroom in the parodic "Productivism" (1992), by René Francisco and Eduardo Ponjuán, in which a worker — plucked from Soviet social realism — wields a paintbrush.



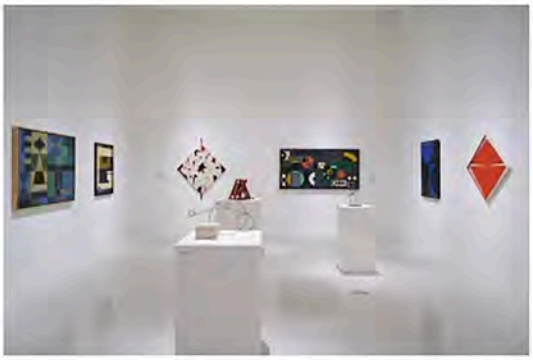
Installation views *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*; work by Flavio Garciandia

Adiós Utopia proceeds in six synergetic constellations: The Utopia of Concrete Art; Cult and Destruction of the Revolutionary Nation; The Imposition of Words: Discourse, Rhetoric, and Media Controls; A Generation of Silenced Artists; Sea, Borders, Exile; and Inverted Utopias, Lost Illusions. Also included, though spatially and dialogically detached from the main galleries, is a terrific collection of the posters produced by OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America). Conceptually elastic and intergenerational, with the partial exception of the opening presentation of concrete art, the galleries seek to tell, as Mosquera explained during the press preview, the "untold narrative" of those artists who stayed in Cuba after 1959 (before later diasporic and exilic turns) and those who matured during the revolution. The selections largely hew to that standard with a few outliers, for example Mario Carreño and Carmen Herrera, who kept their distance from the revolution. Any caviling would question not the artists included, but rather the omission of certain others, for instance Tomás Sánchez and Manuel Mendive, no less the "utopia" of Afro-Cuba at large.



Installation views *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*; reproductions of political posters line the walls in lower Bazinet Lobby.

The art of the 1950s, a polarizing decade often held up as the embodiment of pre-revolutionary Cuba for better and for worse, has until recently been absent from studies and shows of Cuban art. The paradigm began to shift around the turn of the millennium, as geometric abstraction across Latin America gained new visibility and the market eventually reached Havana. The exhibition *Concrete Cuba*, at David Zwirner (London, 2015; New York, 2016), bestowed a crowning touch. The opening gallery, The Utopia of Concrete Art, elegantly recuperates the work of the concretos (Los Diez Pintores Concretos), who advanced concrete art — non-referential and geometric — as a new (ideal) reality. A prelude to the rest of the exhibition, the gallery defines utopia as an abstraction *ab initio*, its fall effectively preordained. If its idealism is elsewhere debunked, the essentializing terms of this concrete utopia are nevertheless stunning, from the tonal resonances of paintings by Carreño and Rafael Soriano to the dynamic line and color that animate Sandú Darié's gridded constructions.



Installation views *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*; featured works by Sandú Darié, Pedro de Oraá, Carmen Herrera, José Mijares, Loló Soldevilla, Rafael Soriano

The dystopian road emerges plainly, and poignantly, in Cult and Deconstruction of the Revolutionary Nation, the exhibition's largest and most incisive constellation. "In one way or another, we are all Orwellian," critic Iván de la Nuez muses in the exhibition's catalogue, and the galleries document a collective experience of disillusion, outrage, and melancholia. The iconography is familiarly national and symbolic, from Alberto Korda's classic photograph of

Che Guevara (1960) to Juan Francisco Elso's "Pan America (José Martí)" (1986), but also parodied (Alejandro Aguilera's "Che and Carlos Santana" [2006]) and debased (Tomás Esson's scatological "Cuban Flag" [1990]). These works are emphatically corporeal — the figure, earlier repressed, returns with vengeance — and communal, as in Tania Bruguera's "Statistics" (1995-2000) from the series *Postwar Memory*, in which rolled bundles of donated, anonymous hair are sewn together to form a staggering funerary flag in the design of the Cuban flag. The estranged (dis)embodiments of dystopia are elsewhere monumentalized: Esterio Segura Mora's "Right Hand" (1990), implicitly "of God," clutches a hammer; Flavio Garciandía's hyperrealist painting "She is in Another Day" (1975), a companion to "All You Need Is Love" (1975) at the MNBA, suggests ironic escapism. Arturo Cuenca's "Science and Ideology: Che" (1987-88) exposes the emptiness of revolutionary propaganda in a billboard shot from behind, its subject demystified and its text ("A revolutionary must be an indefatigable worker") supplemented with the artist's handwritten addition: "A revolutionary is not a portrait, but a landscape."

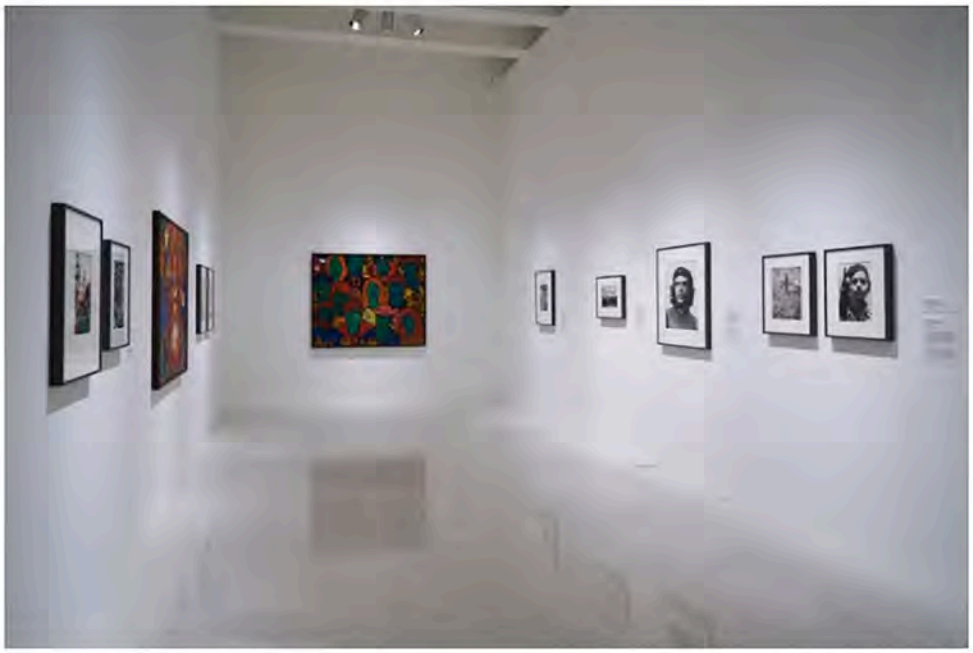
Tania Bruguera, "Estadística [Statistics]," (1995–2000) cardboard, human hair, fabric, (image courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston © Tania Bruguera)

The conceptual inflections of language come under further scrutiny in the following sections, The Imposition of Words and A Generation of Silenced Artists. To create "Nine Laws" (2014) from the series *The Weight of History*, Reynier Leyva Novo calibrated the area, volume, and weight of the ink used to print seminal pieces of Cuban legislation. Thus quantified, the texts are distilled into nine corresponding rectangles of black pigment that solemnly render and obscure revolutionary history. A riposte to Kazimir Malevich's "Black Square" (1915) — a forerunning totem of utopia — "Nine Laws" discerns no transcendence in the nothingness of its black fields; the work looks backward not forward, its temporality recuperative and reflective. A similar deconstruction of meaning unfolds in José Ángel Toirac's "Opus" (2005), a remix of Castro's speeches in which the spoken numbers — data, statistics — are extracted and merged into a continuous audiovisual projection, white numerals flickering vacantly on a black ground. The asphyxiation of speech becomes visceral in works by Eiriz and Umberto Peña, who (with the cartoonist Chago) comprise A Generation of Silenced Artists, the smallest and least realized of the galleries. Peña's paired, onomatopoetic Pop paintings "He Goes Puf" and "You Go Plaff" (1967) grotesquely metabolize utopia, hemorrhaged from bowels into bulging toilets.

The final constellations are dominated by work from the past twenty-five years, from the Special Period to the post-ideological present. Two signal exceptions date from the 1960s, both in the Sea, Borders, Exile section: José A. Figueroa's rending photograph "Olga" (1967), in which the separation of exile is telescoped in the distance between hands waving farewell at Havana's airport; and Luis Martínez Pedro's untitled paintings (1963) from the *Territorial Waters* series, which transfigure concrete aesthetics into geopolitical premonition. The geographical circumscription of Cuba preoccupies this gallery, specifically in regard to the exodus of the 1990s (earlier-generation exiles are absent, and in places missed). "Utopia was over," quips de la Nuez in the exhibition's catalogue. "Diaspora began." A raft formed by textbooks, Kcho's "Selected Works" (1994) nourishes the *balsero*'s mind (not his body). The dramatic "Felled Lighthouse" (2006), by Los Carpinteros, allegorizes the fall of power.

Installation view of "Faro Tumbado (Felled Lighthouse)" (2006), by the collective Los Carpinteros; Marco Antonio Castillo Valdez and Dagoberto Rodriguez; part of *Adios Utopia*

Inverted Utopia, Lost Illusions suggests no closure to Cuba's utopian dream but instead leaves us interminably *in medias res*. We are trapped in tautologies of surveillance, as for example in Lázaro Saavedra's four-channel video, "Suspicion Syndrome" (2006), and futility, as the engraved text revealed in Iván Capote's sculpture "Dyslexia" (2003) acknowledges: "life is a text that we learn to read too late." The crisis of communication (and censorship) is further hypostatized in Yoan Capote's daunting sculpture "Stress (in memoriam)" (2004–12), composed of human teeth wedged between concrete slabs, and in the wryly phallic tongue of Esson's painting, "The Ball/Gossip or the Speech" (1989). In "Born on the First of January" (2013), Alejandro Campins's apocalyptic landscape, the romance of the ruin — here, a camp in Minas de Frío (Sierra Maestra), a recruitment ground for the army — is awful and sublime; a palimpsest of the past, its atmospheric colors are those of the revolution, faded and metaphysical.



Installation views *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*; work by Raúl Martínez, and Mario García Joya (Mayito), Raúl Corral Forna (Raúl Corrales), Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez (Alberto Korda)

The relentless wrangling over utopia remains relevant for Cuba's many contemporary artists who choose to remain on the island — even as, or perhaps because their markets are global — and for whose work the revolution remains a touchstone. Their approach is often reconstructive and agnostic rather than political or ideological: for example, Carlos Garaicoa's imagined architectural restoration, "On the Construction of the Real Tower of Babel" (1994-95) and the inclusion of the Foreign Investment Law (2014) in Leyva Novo's "Nine Laws." *Adiós Utopia* is similarly equivocal. As declared in the gallery wall text, the exhibition declines to "illustrat[e] a historical narrative" and rather presents "important works that address crucial questions, and that can establish a dialogue visually and conceptually in the space." It succeeds, and brilliantly, on these terms. A milestone exhibition, it stitches together an unprecedented panorama of revolutionary art, canonizing artists and — not least — presenting them to audiences in the United States, where contemporary Cuban art has with few exceptions found scarce institutional support. The accompanying catalogue, with a useful chronology and essays by the curatorial team as well as Antonio Eligio (Tonel), Rachel Weiss, and de la Nuez, is an essential and richly illustrated sourcebook.

Installation views *Adios Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950*; Jose Papiol, Faustino Perez, Ernesto Padron, offset lithograph, "Tenth Anniversary of the Triumph of the Rebellion," located in the Target Project Space in Esker Grove

The persuasive eloquence of the art notwithstanding, the exhibition's abstention from narrative comes at the cost of meaning, that is, of history and its incumbent judgment. "History will absolve me," Castro declared in 1953, in defense of the attack he led on the Moncada Barracks that marked the opening volley of the revolution. History did effectively legitimize the revolution, providing its early moral imperative — redressing the imperialist depredations of the republic — and it endures, *mutatis mutandis*, as a marker of collective, national identity. Later exhibitions will doubtless adjudicate upon revolutionary (art) history. *Adiós Utopia* meanwhile memorializes the driving utopian conceit of contemporary Cuban art, its galleries a testament to the credulity of its dream, long dismantled and yet perpetually present.

Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art Since 1950 *continues at the Walker Art Center, (725 Vineland Place, Minneapolis, MN) through March 18.*

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

March 1, 2017

INCONVERSATION

YOAN CAPOTE
with Laila Pedro

Yoan Capote is a Cuban artist living in Havana who brings a powerful conceptual focus, a profound grounding in art history, and a multilayered, tactile execution to a body of work that spans installation, sculpture, and painting. Cerebral and deeply psychological, Capote's work displays a compelling individual vocabulary of materials and themes that is as distinctively situated in a contemporary Cuban vernacular as it is universally evocative. Before the opening of his third solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, *Palangre* (February 2 – March 11, 2017), he spoke with Laila Pedro about interpreting the ocean, the need for both classical and unconventional materials, and finding Louise Bourgeois.

Laila Pedro (Rail): You've worked in a variety of media, notably installation and sculpture. This is your first show of all paintings in the United States. What's behind this series, "Palangre"?

Yoan Capote: The series began around the notion of the island, and its meaning is precisely that: isolation, being always surrounded by water; being impossibly distant from other spaces. They are all variations on seascapes, and my intention was that they be hung along a unified singular datum: a shared horizon line.

Yoan Capote, *New Man* (detail), 2014. Handcuffs, bronze, stainless steel. 87 1/4 × 24 1/16 × 18 1/16 inches. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

On a conceptual level, what really underlies the series is something I realized during my years as a student. Reading about the Cold War and the communist countries and the historical origins of all these divisions and political conflicts between left and right, I was reflecting, with a close friend, about the term "Iron Curtain." I remember thinking, *In Cuba we don't need a wall—our iron curtain is the sea.*

Since then, I've been interested in doing this series with the fishing hooks. The hook is a symbol of seduction; it's also perhaps the most primal trap humanity devised, going back to our earliest days hunting and fishing. From afar, I wanted the viewer to be lured, drawn in, seduced by the hooks. Once the viewer comes close, the material force of the object makes itself felt. I'm interested in the art historical trope of the seascape; I've been interested in it and studying it for a very long time.

Rail: Did you begin to study it while you were at the National Art School [the Instituto Superior de Arte, (ISA)]?

Capote: This was before ISA. My training at ISA was highly experimental; that's the school's pedagogy. A lot of conceptual experimentation, a focus on social-practice art, on interactive art, and on performance. At the time I was there, there were still certain taboos around painting for a lot of artists, both professors and students.

Rail: And this was the early '90s, the beginning of what is known as the Special Period.

Capote: There was a bit of a critical backlash to the analytical rigidity of the '80s, but there was always a division between the painters and the conceptual artists, who tended to marginalize or undervalue painting. Of course, in Cuba in the '80s there were still great artists who painted, like Segundo Planes, or [José] Bedia, but the primary focus was on the experimental and conceptual practice. And I don't complain about that; for me, it developed a habit of fully developing ideas, of thinking things through. So at that time I focused more on sculpture. Plus, it was expensive for me to buy the fishing hooks; so I kept the idea of these paintings for the future.

Rail: How did you finally manage to get the hooks?

Capote: I was friends with antiques dealers in Havana, and I began to investigate where I could find the old machinery that fishermen use to make the hooks. Through some of those fishermen, I was able to buy these ancient machines. Cuban fishermen use these to create *palangres*, tools made out of many, many hooks, used for large-scale fishing.

So I began to work on interpreting those into seascapes. I began to study Cuban artists who had worked on seascapes, or around the theme of the sea, and I noticed a certain lack, an absence. Perhaps this was due to what I mentioned earlier: the sea can be a fraught and overworked theme, both in terms of its place in art history, and particularly in Cuba, with its kitsch omnipresence on postcards and posters and all the tourist stuff. So I faced a challenge there: how to get from the tradition of art history to a work that was powerfully tactile, how to valorize painting in a way that was consonant with the work I was already doing with objects. I am classically trained as a painter.

Rail: That's a really fascinating dimension of your work. When I first came to know it, I think what caught my attention was the *Thinker* (2014) sculpture; or maybe the spine of *New Man* (2014). They are these dense, fraught, intense things made out of metal, often bronze.

Capote: Heavy things, yes. But my training is classical painting. I've always been drawn to a challenge. I'm very respectful of the history of art, and there is a danger for conceptual artists, a tendency to become too iconoclastic. There can be a tendency to mock or overlook art history, but I have a tremendous respect for its importance. In some of my work, you can see it. This particular painting is called *Isla (After Böcklin)* (2016). Böcklin's painting is in a mythic register, with the theme of Charon and of crossing the water to the island of death. So this work, from a completely different artist in a completely different time period and context and style, has a strong thematic connection, in my own work here, to all the people who have perished in the waters around Cuba.

Rail: Those who have died attempting to get away *from* the island, in our own time, but also those who perished on the journey *to* the island in the long history of the Middle Passage.

Capote: Exactly. It's always there throughout the island's history. In many ways, around Cuba, the ocean is freighted with death. So that painting of Böcklin's inspired this, and this work is the only one in my series that has this connection with that Symbolist artwork. Nonetheless, in front of my work we appreciate only the sea, there is not an Island on it, since it is intended to represent the metaphor that the viewer is already standing on Böcklin's island. They're not Caribbean-sea tonalities, they're tonalities from a classical painting of the 1800s. I'm interested in bringing these historical things to bear; in evoking these reminiscences or affinities with the broader genre of painting, applied to my own local, particular lens.

Rail: Who are some of these people with whom you feel affinities? And where do you diverge from them?

Capote: There are many painters that interest me, like Luc Tuymans or Anselm Kiefer, and I think you can also feel my connection to them here. But a difference with them is that there is a more artisanal quality to what I do. Something important about this series is that I worked with many, many people on the pieces. So the collective experience of working together, obsessively focused on the ocean, has a powerful symbolic force in a place where that sense of isolation—of feeling fenced in by a steel barrier, of being up against a wall—is everywhere. These are intense shared emotional states that all empty into the sea. At first I used to work alone; then, for practical reasons, I needed to find assistants. Even though it's a normal and accepted practice for many contemporary artists to employ assistants as sort of hidden technicians, for me the *presence* of all those human beings, their mark, is an important element of the work. It creates an interesting balance that opposes an obsessive collective craft process to the liberty of painting, and to my individual gesture.

Rail: That sense of the collective is evident in a lot of your work, and it has a strong literary and psychoanalytic underpinning, in particular an interest in the Jungian collective unconscious.

Capote: Yes, and my brother Iván's work is more literally literary in that way, whereas in mine I try to move towards representation and the challenges of genre and convention. It's true that ideas are incredibly important in my work: for me, the mediums and methods depend strongly on the idea. For that reason, artists like Chris Burden or Bruce Nauman are also significant to me. I am interested in artists who cannot be reduced to a single category. When an artist identifies, for example, solely as a photographer, he might have a great idea that may be best expressed in sculpture; but, because he is tied to the notion that he *is* a photographer, the idea never attains its best expression. The freedom to let the idea dictate the medium is essential. Once you feel that an idea has developed, you have the freedom to pursue the best method to bring it to fruition. It is always the idea first.

When I first had the idea for this series, it was all about genre. We used to have a tradition of painting seascapes in Cuba. The freedom to work in this genre, in this medium, has helped me manifest this idea, and bring it to this final result.

Yoan Capote, *Palangre (Ultramar)*, 2016. Oil, nails, and fish hooks on linen mounted on panel. 70 7/16 × 10 5/8 × 4 5/16 inches. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Rail: *Palangre (Despedida)* (2016) is interesting, because it's a more familiar "sunset" palate that one might more readily associate with 19th-century seascapes.

Capote: When you look at the series all together, you see it more as a progression towards abstraction. That work is at one point in that process of moving towards abstraction. This one here is completely white—it's moved totally towards abstraction—you're past the sea; the sea is left behind in oblivion, in amnesia. If this appeared in a group show, isolated from the rest of the series, it wouldn't suggest the ocean at all. I was interested in something like what Mondrian did: beginning with landscapes and ending up at abstraction. In going from the most classically grounded point to the further extremes of abstraction, to resolve this theme and this lineage.

Rail: So you felt you arrived at a solution?

Capote: In this case, yes. Often, I'd have a piece stored away for several years, because there is a better solution at which I have yet to arrive. It's important to be meticulous about when and how a work is presented, and to understand when you've arrived at the best possible solution. In order to have this freedom, one must be the primary curator of one's own work.

Rail: Your last show here at Jack Shainman Gallery (*Collective Unconscious*, May 28 – July 24, 2015) focused more on the conceptual and sculptural work, including pieces like *New Man* (2014), which is very striking, very visceral.

Capote: Yes, this concept was very popular in Cuba in the '60s, and in communist Europe: the notion of a new man who would be perfect. This piece is highly ironic, obviously: it's a spine made out of handcuffs and bronze, and all the vertebrae are the handcuffs. Only via control, via the abuse of power, is the invention of such a new man possible. When the bronze is cast, it squeezes and clings to the handcuffs, holding the shape of the spine together. They're all real handcuffs. I am interested in the spine: it controls all movement, all feelings, our full nervous system, everything. In this case, it suggests an acquired immobility, an enforced rigidity of the nervous system. And it's a universally legible piece: you can take it into any political system because the abuse of power is part of every political system. The only thing is that, in the communist system, the prohibitions are more literal, more evident and explicit.

Rail: *The Absence (Listening to the Void)* (2011), was also in that last show: where *New Man* is in some ways more about a global political moment, and about the universal truths behind power dynamics, *The Absence* is extremely specific to the particular historical reality—and attendant folklores—of Cuba.

Capote: The idea for this piece came from a statistic I read about how in nearly every home in Cuba there is an empty closet or an empty bedroom, because someone has left the country. It's a space for absence in every home. So I made this steel closet; the hangers are in the shape of the island itself. That was a densely sculptural show. In the past two years I've finally been able to make enough of the fishhook pieces to have a fully realized painting show. And in this show, I'm interested in showing the progression, showing the works in relation to each other. I'm fascinated by the process of painting. When you face this series, you can feel the rich, tactile pleasure of the layers of paint, the texture, the shadows the brushstrokes produce against the steel of the hooks over the canvas beneath. In my painting *Isla (Pérdida)* (2016) at the *Palangre* exhibition there is a single dab of a potent, heavily symbolic red floating in the water—succumbing, drowning. It could be anything: it could be the shreds of an ideology, or the remnants of a boat, or a body.

But on a level of pure color, what inspired me here is Edward Hopper's *Soir Bleu* (1914). It has the blue tones and the red of the character's face. I am always in dialogue with tradition, with history; I don't believe that in order to be rigorously conceptual, one needs to set oneself in opposition to tradition. That's a very antiquated, outdated aspect of conceptualism. I believe that the most significant works reach an equilibrium between sublime experience—achieved through process, medium, and technique—and conceptual framework. I've met Beaux Arts students who have very little technical training. But I think it's important to have both, and not create a dictatorship of conceptualist opinion. Many of my teachers wanted me to use resins, or other newer materials, rather than the materials of classical sculpture that I was interested in, like bronze or marble, because that was their ideological grounding. But for me, the priority has always been that the material convey, enhance, and undergird the power of your experience standing before the work.

And then there are some things you can't accomplish with sculpture. There are poetic potentialities that only painting can open up. Colors have emotional, psychological repercussions. My colors are not particularly realist; they are concerned with poetic resonance and emotional charge. And that is what gives certain works an atemporal, universal character. That doesn't mean I consider myself a reactionary. I take and learn from everywhere. I was very fortunate in that ISA received a large donation of books while I was there; and I was able to educate myself in that way too.

Rail: Which teachers have been important to you?

Capote: I was in René Francisco's project, Galería DUPP. Among all my teachers, among the artists doing pedagogical work, René has been one of the most open. I learned about Louise Bourgeois from René's bookshelf, where one day I was lucky to come across one of her catalogues. And what struck me was that, even though she was already very old, she was a powerful, crucial link among many significant currents. I immediately felt, upon seeing her work, that it had the richness of combining Minimalist, contemporary concerns with technical solutions, whose value is atemporal. When you have a strong connection to art, you respond powerfully, emotionally, to the ways in which an artist resolves problems of material and space. You understand the layers; you begin to grasp at what's behind it. Later I began to understand more about her concerns with psychology and symbolism. Even though I was not going to make the same *kind* of work—because my individual human concerns, and my historical moment, have different strictures, context, and constraints—there is something there where you understand a connection.

Rail: With the installation of this show, as we mentioned, you wanted all the seascapes hung with the horizon lines level. This generates an interesting perceptual and somatic experience, because most of the paintings are not the same size. You intuit there is some sort of unifying geometry, but spatially it's difficult to orient yourself in relation to it.

Capote: I understood this show as an installation of paintings, as a single piece in itself, connected by the same horizon, and I was pleased with this strategy for hanging them, because it gives the dynamic effect of the moving ocean—the levels in height can suggest an undulation, or a seasickness; they give a sense of motion even though, as with the ocean itself, the horizon line remains fixed. They are also like windows, so it gives the viewer the effect of being surrounded by the sea. And the picture window itself is, of course, significant throughout the history of art.

Rail: There is one piece in this show, *Palangre (Ultramar)* (2016), that verges into the sculptural. Can you tell me about this work?

Capote: If you saw this piece by itself, apart from the series, you would not associate it with the theme of landscape (or seascape) that is the core of this body of work. It is moving nearly into abstraction—as you say, it is also more sculptural. It's nearly a pure object—I moved away from working solely with the surface of the paint, and it's also the only one that is set away from the wall, highlighting its object-ness. It gives a sense of balance, equilibrium, to a body of work that might otherwise tend too much
toward narrative.

Reducing the sea to a straight and narrow path is impossible—the probability of surviving or succeeding in the journey is very narrow, very compressed. I'm concerned with the idea of magnetic north, of trying to seek a universal point of guidance while surrounded by the sea. That speaks to the experience of friends of mine who have tried to make the crossing between Cuba and the United States. Many, many people embark on that journey, and very few succeed. It's a powerful experience, an overwhelming experience, to be surrounded on all sides by the sea and to try to find your own way.

artspeak

March 10, 2017

Yoan Capote

Palangre
Jack Shainman Gallery
New York, 513 West 20th Street

Yoan Capote's third solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery introduces two new bodies of work, *Isla* and *Palangre*, for which the artist meticulously employs fish hooks to illustrate seascapes during periods of the day. This unexpected medium stands out to depict the wavy surface of the sea, while labor and risk associated with thin sharp-edged hooks convey strong political and social narratives. Artpseak editor Osman Can Yerebakan interviewed Capote about his current exhibition and visual and thematic threads of his work.

Osman Can Yerebakan: The viewing ritual is an important component of your work. You ask the audience to slowly approach the work to realize its unexpected medium and again examine it in slow pace. How do you consider this intimate ritual between the work and the audience?
Yoan Capote: I've always had interest about the relation between the viewer and the artwork. When I conceive a piece, I try to analyze the possible interaction of the work with the audience from symbolical perspectives, and the way the work could show something different in a second or closer sight. In the case of these fishhook paintings, I was interested in merging different technical solutions. So, in the distant they could look like graphic images, where each

fishhook is bent and is used like a line in an etching, creating tones and shadows. When the viewer comes closer, they can detect the brushstrokes and the texture of the oil painting, appreciating the free gesture opposed to crafted accumulation of fishhooks. But, in a very close intimate view, it is all about the object and its three dimensional aggressiveness. This together reinforces meanings and metaphors, and my interest of moving the viewer from a visual pleasant image of the sea to a real and tactile dangerous surface.

OCY: Sea, horizon, and water in general perpetuate hope and positivity. Later, you shatter these notions with fishhooks that protrude from the surface with their sharp ends. Although fish hook is not a foreign material as we speak of the sea, its sharpness and potential for damage contradict with positive aspects of water. What does sea mean in your work and how does this contrast between the subject and the medium influence you?

YC: In the same way that Romantic painters of XIX century find associations among natural occurrences and human emotions, I consider that the sea itself is a permanent mental reference for people that live on an Island, and its horizon is a constant image that could evoke hope, fantasy, isolation, and frustration. We can feel that when we read the famous poem of Virgilio Piñera entitled *La Isla en Peso*, published in 1943, where the fact of being surrounded by the sea is also described like a sort of temporal fatalism. But after the Cuban revolution, thepopulation had to face a more dramatic relation with the sea, connected to our history and maintained in our recent political landscape (total isolation, migration, death and decades of political division).

Actually my first idea for that painting emerged studying a term used during the Cold War: the iron curtain. Of course, I was very inspired by personal experiences too, and I can say that in contrast with the colorful touristic image that foreigners have of our Caribbean environment, there is a different emotional landscape inside every Cuban. Then I was trying to make paintings that could represent those interior collective feelings, where the sea is interpreted as an iron curtain, as a political border, as a trap, as a metal fence, as a wall, as hope, as an exit. The fishhooks are a direct allegory of the water, but also an allegory of a trap, of seduction, pain or death. So, it was a challenge for me to materialize this idea, combining these objects to the painting surface and its representational possibilities.

OCY: In relation to the previous question, the world has been witnessing images of people risking

or losing their lives traveling across seas in order to survive a war. Although such images are nothing new, the Syrian Civil War definitely has had impact on raising attention towards unsafe methods of immigration. As a Cuban artist, what is your perception on recent events and displacement in general?

YC: I think all human beings have experiences in common and face similar conflicts, despite the differences of their contexts. Then art helps us to think of the human essence of such experiences and help us to meditate on that universal level. So, I like this association you are making because it expands the meanings and interpretations of the work to deeper human reflections.

OCY: In your paintings, you capture the shift from morning into the night and vice versa. The common perception for day is that it's hopeful, while night time signals despair and isolation. How do you attribute metaphorical connotations to night or day?

YC: It is true that in these paintings I find very interesting connections among the light, the psychological possibilities of color, and its emotional allegories. So I get a lot of inspiration in paintings of Eduard Munch, in the way he used the expressive connotations of color and also in the impressionist studies of light. I'm thinking now of Claude Monet and his color variations on the same subject, like the Ruan cathedral paintings. The light and the shape of the sea change infinitively; every day and every minute we can appreciate a totally different piece of water and this encouraged me to experiment in different directions.

OCY" The element of risk is so vivid in your landscapes that even as the audience one feels alarmed and tends to step back. Can you talk about your process for a typical painting?

YC:I don't know exactly, and it is impossible to calculate how many thousands of Cubans died and disappeared in the sea trying to escape or looking for a different reality. So each fishhook in these paintings could be counted as one of those people. I was a silent witness of those years and I wanted this series of work to embody that risk and that frustration; the risk of dying in the water, the frustration of accepting that geography and politics decide the limits of the individual liberty, in the same way fences and walls define the space of a jail. So, I liked the idea of opposing the action of paint, the liberty of the artist gesture, the controlled craft, and collective process of hammering the fishhooks areas. But also for me the fact of making this piece in collaboration with a lot of assistants underlines its meanings as a shared expression about a collective situation.

The Farber Foundation
CUBAN art news
Cuban art and culture worldwide

February 2, 2017

Fish Hook as Metaphor: Yoan Capote's *Palangre*

The artist takes us on a preview of his solo show opening tonight in New York

Earlier this week, we dropped in on the installation of *Yoan Capote: Palangre*, an exhibition of recent paintings embedded with thousands of fish hooks. The show features two series: *Isla*, a series of seascapes, and the more abstract *Palangre*—the Spanish term for a trawl line hung with hundreds of fish hooks. Capote walked through the show with us, in a conversation that ranged from Romantic painters to Cubans' relationship to the sea.

Yoan Capote, *Isla (Pérdida)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

You've been doing these fish hook paintings for a while. When did you start?

I think it was around 2006. I did the [first] major pieces in 2010. But the idea of working with fish hooks and making paintings of the sea—all of that was very old, from the time I was a student.

How would you describe these works? Are they paintings? Hanging sculptures?

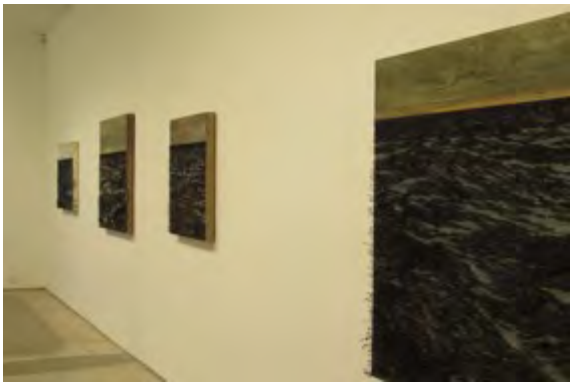
Both. In this kind of works I combine knowledge and solutions of both painting and sculpture, and even printmaking. It's painting when you get near and see the brush strokes and the oil paint, but from a distance it looks like a graphic image. I'm inspired by the graphic images of the sea that I do. Then, in certain moments as you get nearer, it's like a sculpture.

Close-up detail of Yoan Capote, *Isla (Pérdida)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

The sensorial experience, in front of the metal elements, is important, since these series are inspired by the term "iron curtain." For Cubans, the sea is a kind of wall.

This is your third show at Jack Shainman Gallery.

This is the show that I always wanted to make with Jack. The thing is, to make all the paintings needs a lot of time.



A view of the exhibition, with *Isla (Preludio)* in foreground at right
Photo: Cuban Art News

All the horizon lines are at the same height. It's like each painting represents a moment in a day—a moment of light, and an emotional moment too. The sea is very connected to the emotions.

There are references here from symbolism and 19th-century painters and the way they try to relate the representation of landscape and nature itself with human psychological or emotional experience.In this series I go more deeply into art history, generally of the seascape. I see it connecting not only with the Cuban experience but with art history itself. Some of the paintings are inspired by Caspar David Friedrich and J. M. W. Turner.

Yoan Capote, *Isla (After Böcklin)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

The works have subtitles, always. This piece is named *Isla (After Böcklin)*. Böcklin was a major Symbolist painter, who did an iconic work called *Isle of the Dead.* He actually did a lot of versions of that painting. It's about bringing spirits to the Island of the Dead. A very mystical painting.

In my work, you see only the sea. It's as if the spectator is situated on Böcklin's island. All the death and drama are connected in symbolic ways, as an allegory of the Cuban experience—all the people who die [on the water]. The fish hooks are symbols of seduction and traps

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Yoan Capote, *Isla (Futuro Luminoso)*, 2016 Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

There wasn't much color in the earlier fish hook paintings, but it seems to be an important element here.

The previous ones were more about the experience of the object itself. I think the first ones were conceived more as sculptures. I realized that oil painting had other kinds of possibilities. Color itself has a lot of psychological possibilities.

Yoan Capote, *Palangre (Rojo Permanente)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

Like this one that's almost abstract. I call it *Palangre (Rojo Permanente)* (Permanent Red). "Permanent Red" is the name of the color, but when I call it Permanent Red, it's about the permanence of the blood and the permanence of the drama that is still in the water for Cubans.

It's an all-over painting. What I like in this exhibition is that I could show some of the pieces from the *Palangre* series that move to abstraction. I recall Mondrian's transition from figuration to abstraction: his deconstruction of the tree inspired me to explore the possibilities of going from classical representation of the sea to abstract solutions.

Yoan Capote, *Isla (Crudo)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

In this painting, I used no color. Just the fish hooks and the raw canvas, which I cut here [near the top]. I call it *Isla (Crudo)* (Raw). This is about the feeling of sadness, of the rawness, the destruction. Every piece transmits a different emotion.

Yoan Capote, *Isla (El camino)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

This is a seascape too, but it has a very different feeling. Even the fish hooks are different.

Each painting in this series has its own identity. This is the only one where I used the tin-plated fish hooks. Normally the fish hooks come tin-plated or nickel-plated in the store. So in this case, I was thinking they would represent the opposite—the light. It's like light on the water. I call it *Isla (El Camino)* (The Way). The fish hooks are just marking the way that a lot of people take. And the risk. It's like moonlight.

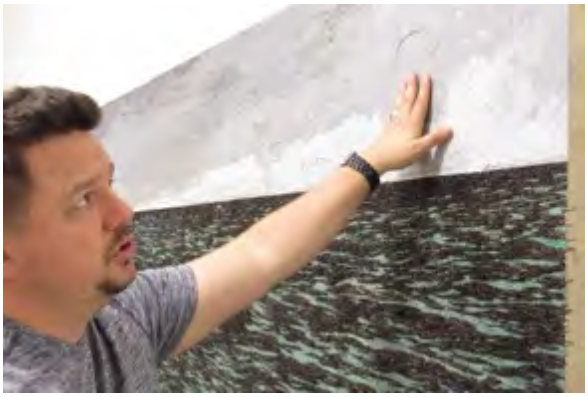
Yoan Capote, *Palangre (Ultramar)*, 2016
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

This one is more of an object, because here I'm moving the fish hooks around in a physical way. It's totally abstract. I call it *Palangre (Ultramar).* "Ultramar" is the color I use, but also the narrow shape of the panel is like the narrow passage marked by magnetic north, which also marks the narrow possibilities of Cuban migrants reaching their dream.

At the same time I like to experiment with the experience of a piece that's abstract, too. If you put this piece in another context, in a group show, for example, many people would not associate it with a seascape. But when you see it in this show, you can feel it.

What about the large-scale painting on the next wall, Isla (Tierra Prometida)?

I have assistants for the process of placing the fish hooks. But the process of conceiving the artwork, designing the color, is very personal. And of course, this is something I like—the freedom that exists in painting, as opposed to the fish-hook process. That is a craft, and very obsessive. Here, you have a freedom—the painting itself—in opposition to the analytical part of the fish hooks, and the craft process.



Yoan Capote with *Isla (Tierra Prometida)*, 2016
Photo: Cuban Art News

Another thing—when I work on this, I like the symbolical fact of working with people, with assistants. In this series specifically, when I work with people, the works are charged with a more social experience. This is a work about isolation, about being surrounded by water—about the border, about the limit, about the risk. This is a collective experience in Cuba.

So when I work with people, and they leave their energy in these works, together with my painting, it's a collaboration that gives more social background to the work. More social meaning.

Has the process of making these paintings changed your way of working?

I don't have a specific way of working. I just maintain different fronts of work. Right now, I'm making concrete sculptures in Cuba, and I'm making pieces in bronze. I'm preparing another exhibition, called *Inside Poetry*, about visual poetry. I have on my desk five agendas—it's like being five or seven artists at the same time.

But when I go to this series, I do what a painter would do with it. I'm thinking like a painter. In another exhibition, I would be thinking more like a conceptual artist, so I would be working more with the process. But when you move inside the tradition of painting, you behave in a different way. In painting, the relation between the artwork and the artist is more direct, more intimate.

For me, every solo exhibition is like a new artwork. I consider it one piece. That's why, if I have a solo show next year, I would consider it a new project. I like this challenge of moving from one place to the other.

Yoan Capote: Palangre *opens tonight at the Jack Shainman Gallery space on West 24th Street, with a reception at 6 p.m. The show runs through March 11.*

Forbes

February 5, 2017

One Cuban Artist's Depiction Of The Sea As A Deadly 'Iron Curtain'

Yoan Capote, Isla Mas Allá, 2016. Oil, nails and fish hooks on linen mounted on panel. ©Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

With one week left in his presidency, Barack Obama ended a policy that allowed Cuban migrants who'd survived the perilous, often fatal 90-mile journey to the United States to stay, even without the necessary papers, while those who were apprehended at sea would be sent back. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the news was celebrated in Cuba.

The so-called "wet foot, dry foot" policy was enacted in 1995 during President Clinton's first term and, like the equally controversial "don't ask, don't tell" policy that allowed LGBQ people to serve in the armed forces as long as they didn't talk about their sexuality, seemed like a reasonably liberal policy at the time. But "wet foot, dry foot" also encouraged extraordinarily dangerous attempts to flea Cuba for a better life to the north, and for more than 20 years, the island's 11 million residents endured tales of friends and family perishing at sea.

Yoan Capote, who lives outside Havana, didn't anticipate Obama's executive action -- which was planned for months but announced abruptly to prevent any desperate, last-minute crossings -- but the artist's latest work, on display now at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea, couldn't have been better timed. The show, titled *Palangre*, Spanish for a fishing line with hooks, is comprised of multiple works that function simultaneously as paintings and sculptures.

Viewed straight-on and from a distance, they appear as traditional, if stormy, seascapes; from up-close or the side, they become even more ominous: The dark portions of the water aren't paint, but fishhooks, aggressively protruding from the canvas as if to warn viewers to stand back. In Cuba, Capote says, "the sea is a symbol for hope, but it's also a symbol for a trap, for tragedy."

Yoan Capote, Isla (After Bocklin), Detail, 2016. Oil, nails and fish hooks on linen mounted on panel. 42 1/8 x 74 7/16 x 5 1/8 inches. ©Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

apote, who was born in 1977, says the show represents the psychological and emotional reality of his countrymen and women, for whom the sea is a kind of "iron curtain" no less formidable than the Berlin Wall. "In Cuba, we understand the sea as a kind of metal barrier," he says. "Also the sand is like a trap, where a lot of people die trying to escape." The fishhook is a trap too, he adds, and "can also be understood as an allegory for difficulty and all the people who die trying to escape from Cuba and get hooked, get caught."

The symbolism doesn't stop there: Capote fashions the fishhooks himself, using a machine built in the 19th Century, and nails them to the canvases with the help of locals he employs as his assistants. It's an arduous, tedious process, and isolating. "It's symbolic of myself as an artist," he says, "but also a condition of the whole of [Cuban] society."

Palangre also refuses the romantic Western view of Cuba as a bright and colorful place, or the Caribbean as a placid body of water beneath a benevolent sun. Capote says his intention is to depict the interiority of the Cuban people: "These paintings are the interior sea of every human being, the psychological seascape the every person in Cuba has," he says. Unlike the tourist who visits the island and sees a land of pinks and blues, greens and yellows, Capote adds, the people who live there, isolated from the world and beset with the country's long and dramatic history, "don't see that light."

Yoan Capote, 2016. Oil, nails and fish hooks on linen mounted on panel. ©Yoan Capote. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

HYPERALLERGIC

STREET

All Is Not as It Seems in Art Basel Miami Beach's Sculpture Park

Many of the works in the mega-fair's public art sector mess with visitors' expectations of what outdoor sculptures and monuments should be and can do.

Benjamin Sutton | December 1, 2016

Glenn Kaino's "Invisible Man" (2016) in the Public sector of Art Basel Miami Beach 2016 (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

MIAMI BEACH — Conventional wisdom suggests that public art ought to be easily legible, its image, message, or intent coming across clearly and quickly as one encounters it. Many of the works in *Ground Control*, Art Basel Miami Beach's 2016 public art installation, mess with this expectation — though they do fulfill outdated expectations of gender disparity: only five of the 20 featured artists are female, a sharp reversal from 2014's women-dominated exhibition. Curated once again by Nicholas Baume, the director and chief curator of New York's Public Art Fund, the outdoor installation in Collins Park is full of works that are discreet to the point of disappearing, confounding in their fusion of materials and imagery, or that shape-shift as visitors move around them.

The show's most powerful work and exceedingly photogenic centerpiece, Glenn Kaino's "Invisible Man" (2016), illustrates this theme of trickery perfectly. From one side, the aluminum figure of a man with his arms raised is full of textural detail; from the other, it is a perfectly flat and mirrored surface. Installed high on a concrete plinth, the work is a clear reference to the killing of Michael Brown by a Ferguson police officer in 2014, which made the phrase "Hands up, don't shoot" a rallying cry during protests. Other works in *Ground Control* are fairly apolitical, save perhaps Cuban sculptor Yoan Capote's "Naturaleza Urbana" (2012), which consists of a giant pair of handcuffs clipped onto a tree trunk and a nearby sapling. Its title, Spanish for "Urban Nature," suggests not only the ways that nature is controlled in urban environments, but also the overpolicing of "urban" residents.

Yoan Capote, “Naturaleza Urbana” (2012) in the Public sector of Art Basel Miami Beach 2016

The exhibition’s predominant forms of trickery are improbable fusions of materials — like Eric Baudart’s “Atomsphère” (2016), a working fan inside a Plexiglas container full of canola oil; things that are not made of what they look like — Tony Matelli’s “Jesus” (2016), for instance, is a seemingly decrepit statue made of cast concrete with about a dozen avocado halves (rendered in bronze) perched upon it like absurdist pigeons; and sculptures that appear truncated or doubled — like Jean-Marie Appriou’s mirrored dromedaries in “Mirage” (2016). Others only reveal their true natures at certain times, like Wagner Malta Tavares’s glow-in-the-dark lamppost “Malpertuis” (2016), which shines a lunar yellow-green at night, or Rob Pruitt’s modified limousine “Stretch, Grill and Chill” (2016), which has a grill instead of a motor and whose trunk was converted into a cooler so that it serves as a de facto party car (whenever the BBQ master is on duty).

A different subversion of expectations is at work in Ugo Rondinone’s “Miami Mountain” (2016), which is part of *Ground Control* but also a recent acquisition by the adjacent Bass Museum of Art that will remain on view after the rest of the art leaves. The 42-foot-tall work is made of five stacked

boulders, each painted a saturated neon hue. Its materials and proportions are distinctly land art, but its palette is more Pop. In many ways, Rondinone's cheerful stack of stones is the polar opposite of Kaino's protest figure, but both offer a twist on conventional forms of public sculpture.

Reverse view of Glenn Kaino's "Invisible Man" (2016) in the Public sector of Art Basel Miami Beach 2016, with Sylvie Fleury's "Eternity Now" (2015) on the Bass Museum of Art façade in the background

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

YOAN CAPOTE
Collective Unconscious

by Ann McCoy, July 3, 2015

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | MAY 28 – JULY 24, 2015

The Cuban artist Yoan Capote is an embodiment of the archetypal Hephaestus, the Olympian god of the hammer and forge, so undervalued in today's art making. Capote builds much of his work using classical sculptural techniques, and represents the best of a Communist worker tradition. Capote is part of the revolution's second generation. His father, Jesús, is a mechanic who helped make *Apertura* (2014 – 2015), a pair of hand-filed scissors in the shape of Florida and Cuba. Jesús Capote was part of a generation that was sacrificed to the revolution, while Yoan's free education has allowed him to learn techniques like lost-wax casting, clay modeling, and drawing, and to build on his father's legacy of craftsmanship. Capote is a diarist of Cuba's psychological condition and uses his sculptural skills to describe Cuba's complex revolutionary history.

Yoan Capote, *Immanence*, 2015. Mixed media including hinges, wood doors, metal armature, 120 × 180 × 180 ". © Yoan Capote. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman.

Capote's second solo exhibition at Jack Shainman references Carl Jung's collective unconscious, but also the unconscious of the "collective," Cuba's Communist population. *Laboratorio* (2012), a work housed in two vitrines, opens the exhibition. For this, the artist collected discarded Russian glassware from sugar-plantation laboratories. He then printed a collection of photographs of ordinary Cubans by anonymous photographers onto the beakers with gelatin silver emulsion. Cuba was a laboratory for Communism in the Americas; glass vessels, for Jung, were symbolic of alchemical processes that related to psychological processes. Here we see the Cuban experience as it is put through the processes of mutation and transformation, the "raw matter" being the populace. As Capote says, "I prefer the

psychological analysis of the collective experience. I analyze my personality from the collective that surrounds me."

The artist also tackles archetypes, like the hero, in the form of a monumental Castro head, while other works, like *Visceral* (2015), seem more grounded in Freud's preoccupation with the body and instincts. Capote's concept of the body extends to the "body politic." The ribs in *Visceral* are made in the shape of the island of Cuba; this island rib cage contains a visceral emotional history. In this piece, Cubans are presented as enclosed psychologically, politically, bodily, and geographically.

Capote built *Visceral*, along with *Immanence* (2015), and *Pride* (2015), at the Modern Art Foundry in Queens, where Louise Bourgeois cast her work. Capote met Bourgeois on one of his first trips to the United States, where she encouraged him not to abandon classical techniques like bronze casting and stone carving. This meeting with Bourgeois was pivotal; she encouraged Capote's psychological direction and emphasis on the body. Like Bourgeois, Capote uses body parts in many of his works. Some are direct casts, like the hands of ordinary people used to spell out the "word liberty" in *Abstinencia (Libertad)* (2014).

Yoan Capote, *Laboratorio*, 2012. Mixed media including gelatin silver prints on glass vessels, scientific equipment in vitrine, dimensions variable. © Yoan Capote. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman.

Hephaestus's anvil is very present in the most disturbing work in the exhibition, *Pride*. At the foundry, Capote fashioned a bronze anvil; it takes the place of the heart on a reclining figure made of bronze veins and arteries stretched out on the floor. *Pride* is an interactive piece, where the viewer may take a sledgehammer and strike the anvil/heart of the sculpture. Hephaestus, the blacksmith of Olympus, was the husband of Aphrodite, the goddess of the heart. This piece portrays a marriage from hell, with the anvil of Hephaestus pulverizing the heart of Aphrodite. This act of interactive vandalism similarly strikes at the heart of the participant and is a mixed commentary on the human condition, whether in Cuba or in Chelsea. *Pride* celebrates the resistance of Cuban people, in spite of psychological trauma they have endured.

In many ways, Capote represents one of the things Castro got right. Capote and his brother were among the children from poor families who took exams to enter special schools for

gifted children in the visual arts, music, sports, and ballet. Yoan first entered as a wrestler and boxer while his brother Ivan studied art. Later, both attended the Escuela Nacional de Arte along with luminaries like the ballet dancer Carlos Acosta.

Yoan Capote, *Visceral*, 2015. Bronze, 22 × 15˝ (diameter). © Yoan Capote. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman.

The most powerful work in the exhibition is *Immanence* (2015), a monumental head of Castro made from rusted hinges welded together (the hinges were traded for new ones around Havana). During his military obligation, Capote worked as a graphic artist and could knock out images of Castro from every angle. *Immanence* reminds us of the bearded *Head of a Philosopher* (ca. 5th century B.C.) rescued from the sea at Porticello, or perhaps the rusted hull of a shipwreck. Here, Castro is part icon and part dry-docked ship of state; his impenetrable position never changes. The rusted hinges are fixed, but unlike the sculpture, the future of Cuba rests on its ability to flex, and hinge to the outer world. The eyes of the sculpture are empty so the viewer looks into Castro, but can also walk behind to view the world through Castro's eyes. Castro was the subject of many CIA assassination attempts, embargos, and invasions like the Bay of Pigs and survived United States interventionism through his alliance with the Soviets. We also see ourselves through his eyes, and this multiple perspective adds to the power of the piece. Even from his geriatric reclusion, Castro still speaks to us, continuing to inspire people in the Americas.

The exhibition, displayed in both of Shainman Gallery's Chelsea locations, brings together more than thirty pieces in total and is a mini-retrospective of sorts. Some of the newer works, like *Immanence* and *Pride*, show hints of a greater level of psychological complexity in this relatively young artist's work. Capote's works are inspired by observations and quick jottings in notebooks. Many of his earlier works seemed to come from one idea; the newer ones are much more complex—they conceptually represent chapters instead of sentences. It is Capote's homage to Hephaestus, and his ability to build on the legacy of his father Jesus, that moves this work into a space that stretches from the personal into the archetypal. A hands-on approach beginning with the "base metals" is a great place to start the process. This exhibition represents even more promise to come.

Sitting alone in the dark room watching the video, I felt moved and pleased by the sweetly awkward syntax Snow employs: “Also, there are many other interesting works in this exhibition. This is just one of many. It is kind of special, though.” A distinct voice, mischievous and friendly, emerges in the cadence and stilted choice of the words (Snow carefully timed each word’s appearance and duration on the screen). Snow tells us what this work is literally (pixelated light, words strung together by an artist), but he shows us something else too. “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” wrote wry René. “Ceci n’est pas, évidemment, une pipe,” says an even wryer Snow in this video. This is not, *obviously*, a pipe. With the addition of a single word, Snow suggests the opposite of Magritte’s famous statement. Rather than undermine the idea of pictorial realism, he implies that the image of the pipe *is* in fact a pipe. The sign is the same as the referent. Art is what it is made of—paint on a canvas, light on a wall, light captured on film—but it is also many other things too: emotion, beauty, the thing it represents, specialness.

MODERN PAINTERS
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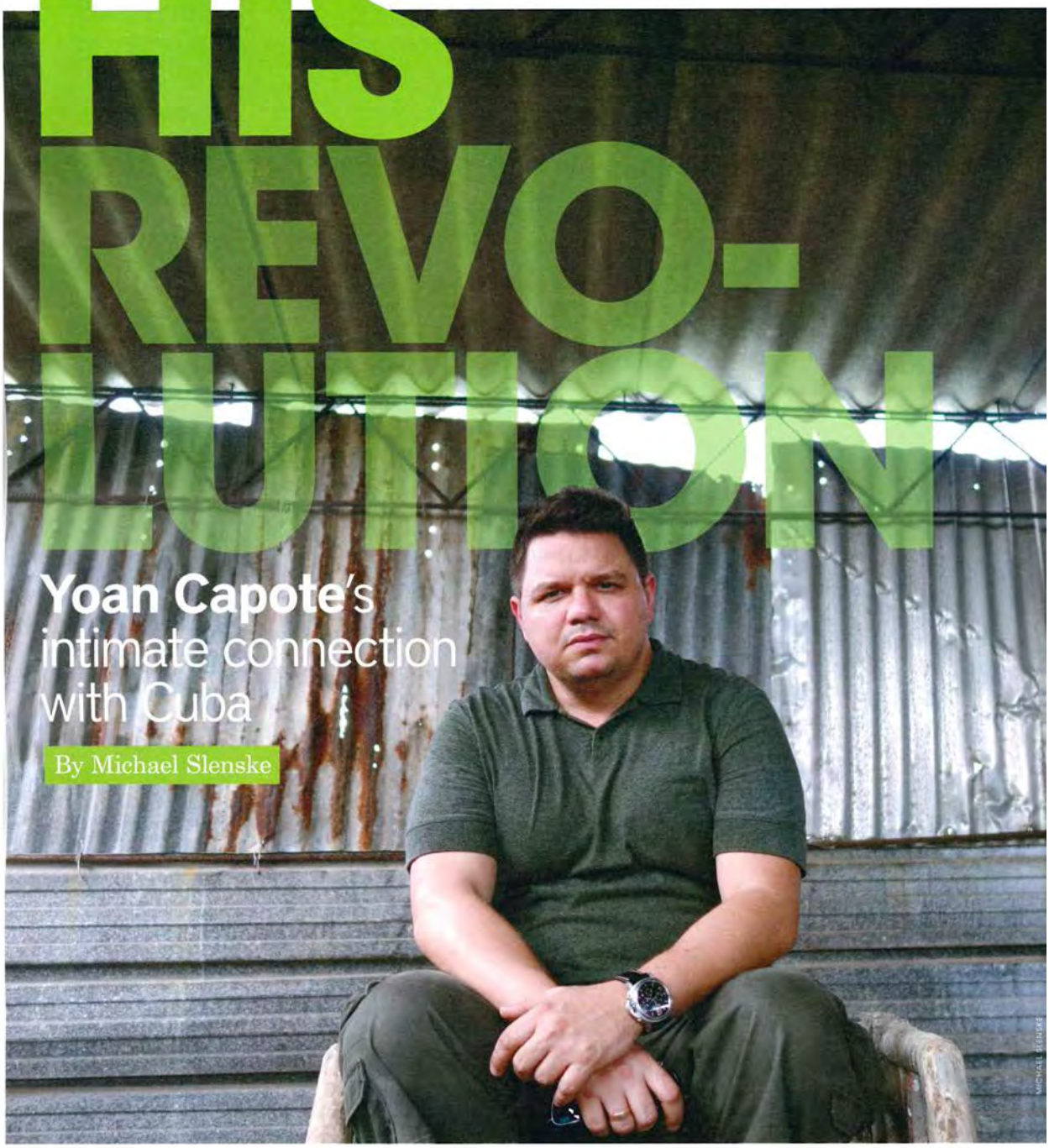
June 2015

HIS REVO-LUTION



Yoan Capote's intimate connection with Cuba

By Michael Slenske

Yoan Capote in Cuba, 2015.

"I want to do the piece of Fidel here," says Yoan Capote,

pointing across his rain-sheeted windshield as we drive by the marker for *kilometro* 27 off Havana's Carretera Central. One could practically detail a car with the city's recent afternoon microbursts, which is serendipitous for Capote because his wife has been asking him to clean his mud-caked SUV for weeks. According to a cartoonish concrete sign, we've just crossed over into the small agriculture and artists enclave of Bauta—40 minutes southwest of the capital—to visit the overgrown farm Capote has purchased just a few miles past the town of Punta Brava, where Fidel Castro once had a finca. It's early March, and there are just two months left before the 12th edition of the Havana Biennial gets under way—it now occurs every three years, despite the name—not to mention Capote's second solo show, "Collective Unconscious," at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery (on view through July 10). He's also preparing his first major monograph, with Skira Rizzoli, and mapping out a fall exhibition for the Hong Kong outpost of his London dealer, Ben Brown Fine Arts. The nonstop deadlines have the 38-year-old Cuban artist caught in a perpetual loop between the Queens-based Modern Art Foundry (where his idol, Louise Bourgeois, cast her pieces), his studios in Havana's centrally located Vedado neighborhood, and this new venture at the farm, which he's calling either La Base KM27, as a nod to the nearby military base, or Open Work, after the Umberto Eco book.

"When I'm dead, this could be an institution, a foundation, or maybe an art center like Storm King, though my real reference is Chinati," says Capote, invoking Donald Judd's live-work space in Marfa, Texas. If all goes according to plan—meaning the government approves his blueprints and the two-venue show with Shainman sells well—in a year or two he'll have an Alvar Aalto–inspired studio of his own design on the property, featuring two naves where he and his brother, Iván, can cast large works and store materials that are currently overcrowding

the city locales. (The brothers share another studio called El Nukleo just across the street from El Bunker, Capote's primary space, which he carved out of a white 1940s industrial building and fortified with custom iron doors and gates.)

For now, the farm is just a wildly untamed folly, with knee-high thatch that puts off a sauna-worthy heat after a downpour. Capote is dressed for the affair in work boots, green cargo pants, and a green polo shirt. As we exit the SUV, a small pack of dogs greets us, joined by a chorus of pigs from a series of makeshift pens, and a prickly rooster. His mother-in-law is giving her husband a haircut under a sheet-metal veranda, next to a small cinder block home where they reside while overseeing Capote's property. Across from the house, beside a derelict aboveground concrete swimming pool, is a heavily patinated space loosely constructed from corrugated aluminum panels. It is here the artist is planning to create an epic Fidel sculpture, which he has talked about showing behind a veil, spotlit from the floor, projecting Platonic allegories of the revolutionary leader at Shainman's 20th Street space in Chelsea. When completed, the piece will rise like a giant rusted Erector set from a steel stand as the visage of the octogenarian former dictator—whose likeness was taken from a bust made by the Russian sculptor Lev Kerbel in the early 1980s—rotates in respectful if interrogative reflection.

Dubbed *Inmanencia*, the work is meant to be the exhibition's pièce de résistance, constructed from some 3,000 welded hinges that were donated or exchanged from old Havana homes. (It will even be shown with photos that document his assistants changing out the old hardware.) But right now those hinges are

in Vedado, piled high in five-gallon paint buckets in the foyer of the El Bunker studio on Calle 23. "It could be seen as a very political piece, but I felt I had to do it because it deals with life before and after Fidel," says Capote of this post-détente crossroads where Cubans and Americans are both at a hinge moment, trying to assess which foreign-relations moves come next. "The hinge is a symbol of mobility, but Fidel can't be removed from Cuban history. The Cuban revolution created a new independent country but at the same time divided society in two different groups, so the image of a revolutionary who proposes unchangeable ideas is an interesting paradox."

It's certainly a fraught sculpture at a fraught time in Cuba's history. However, it's just one of 25 challenging works that Capote will show with Shainman. As the exhibition title suggests, each piece taps into Jungian psychology, international relations, and the sociopolitical divide between those who've stayed and those who've fled the island since the revolution. Like the majority of his oeuvre, the work filters the lingua franca of Minimalism, Surrealism, and geopolitics through the symbols and signifiers unique to the Cuban experience that Capote has mined for the past two decades via politically charged icons—microphones, podiums, handcuffs, the sea, islands, speakers, nails binding crowbars (in a Cuban hat tip to Günther Uecker), fishhooks, human remains—and a mix of high and low materials including oil, bronze, concrete, marble, steel, fire, even thousands of human teeth (collected from clinics and battlefields over years for his seminal concrete-and-wood sculpture *Stress*, 2004–12).

To tease out these highly conceptual works Capote starts by writing a single command, sketches a form, then crafts a sculpture around that imperative. "I prefer to maintain myself as a worker and as a person connected to society, so when I walk in the street, I can analyze not just what is going on with

Abstinencia (Política), 2011. Bronze, etching on paper. Dimensions variable.

OPPOSITE: Detail of *The Thinker*, 2014–15. Bronze.

Cubans but all of human society," says Capote. "I prefer the psychological analysis of the collective experience. I analyze my personality from the collective that surrounds me."

For a new work, *The Thinker*, Capote is fabricating a pile of bronze dumbbells and kettlebells with brains attached to the handles—all forged from old Russian shell casings. "I always call attention to the fact that all human behavior is influenced by the body. That's why I'm interested in Louise Bourgeois and Robert Gober, but Gober is so private. In my case, it's the opposite," says Capote, who previously fashioned a brain in place of a scrotum on a sculpted torso called *Racional*, 2004, and for the 2009 Biennial, created a sandbox version (inside Havana's Morro Castle) of his as yet unrealized underground maze-in-the-shape-of-a-brain project, *Open Mind*. Last fall, he re-created the work in Toronto with police barricades that formed an overhead vivisection of a brain. For Shainman, Capote is also producing a series of six *Link* paintings (black canvases with white Play buttons in the middle whose titles are actual URLs to videos, blogs, and web pages questioning the official versions of historical events, espousing conspiracy theories, or simply dead websites that function as "a threshold to the investigation of something evocative"). He'll show works called *Cold Memorie* (massive Cold War–era landscapes from his "Temperatura" series, made by scratching reliefs into a "canvas" of functional A/C compressors that will frost over in areas to tease out formal depths and political metaphors), *Skepticism* (a bronze microphone that functions as a torch), and more of his now iconic impasto-laden "Isla" paintings of seascapes punctuated by thousands of fishhooks nailed to the panels. In his previous show with Shainman, 2010's "Mental States," Capote also employed these symbols of seduction in his "American Appeal" series of postcard landscapes, including one of the Manhattan skyline illuminating the barbed obsessions of the immigrant experience.

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS. OPPOSITE, LEFT: MICHAEL SLENSKE

"NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT ME IN CUBA."

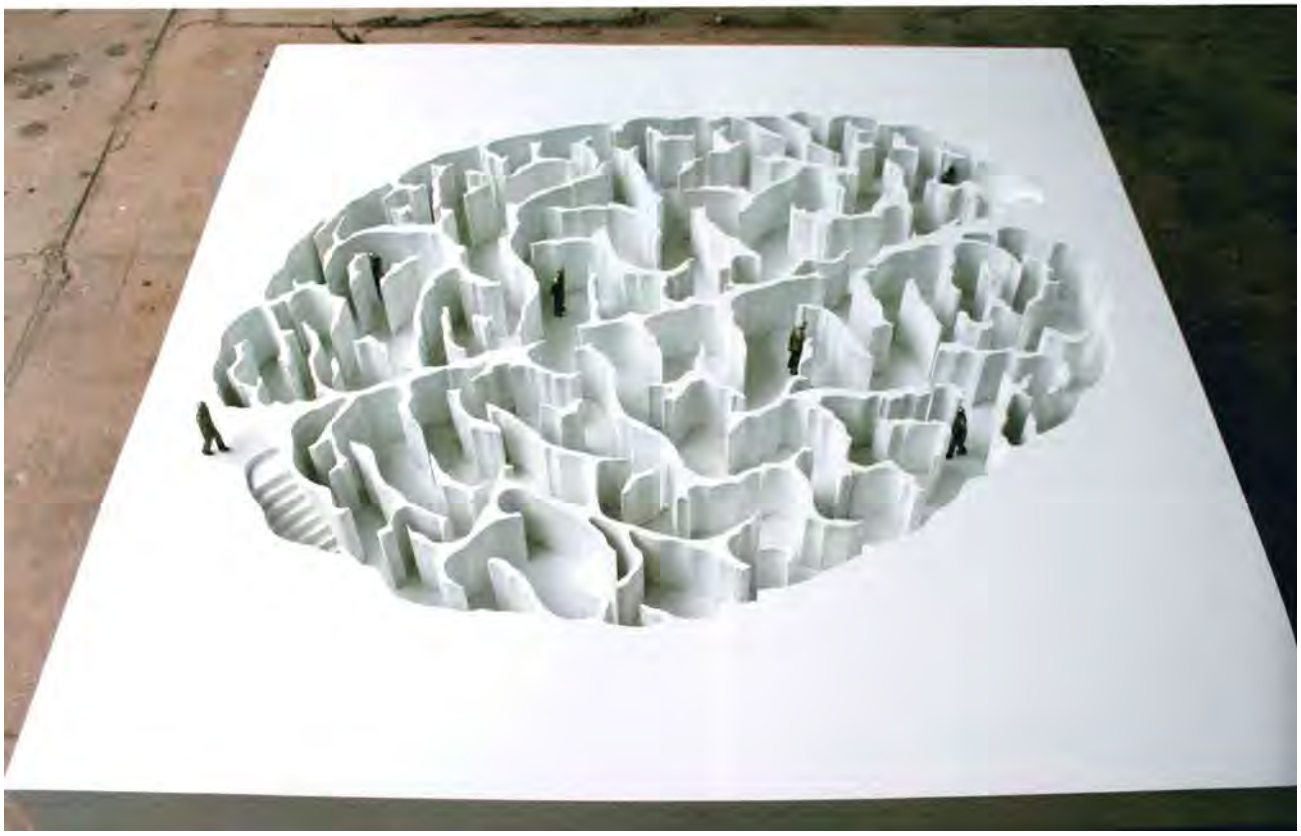
"The fishhook is one of those ancient objects that never changed its design and function, and I'm interested in its direct relation with the water and as a metaphor with the seascape, which represents a political limit and the place where a lot of Cubans died," says Capote, who plans to show 15 of these paintings, along with sculptures and works on paper, in Hong Kong with Ben Brown. The salon-style hang will feature different-size panels in varying color schemes (including one red version to represent the island's period of Russian occupation) whose waves will align around the gallery to form a single, continuous horizon. "I like the idea of surrounding the gallery with water so you feel isolated by these metal structures," says Capote. "You're surrounded by water; you have the sense there's no exit and you are the island."

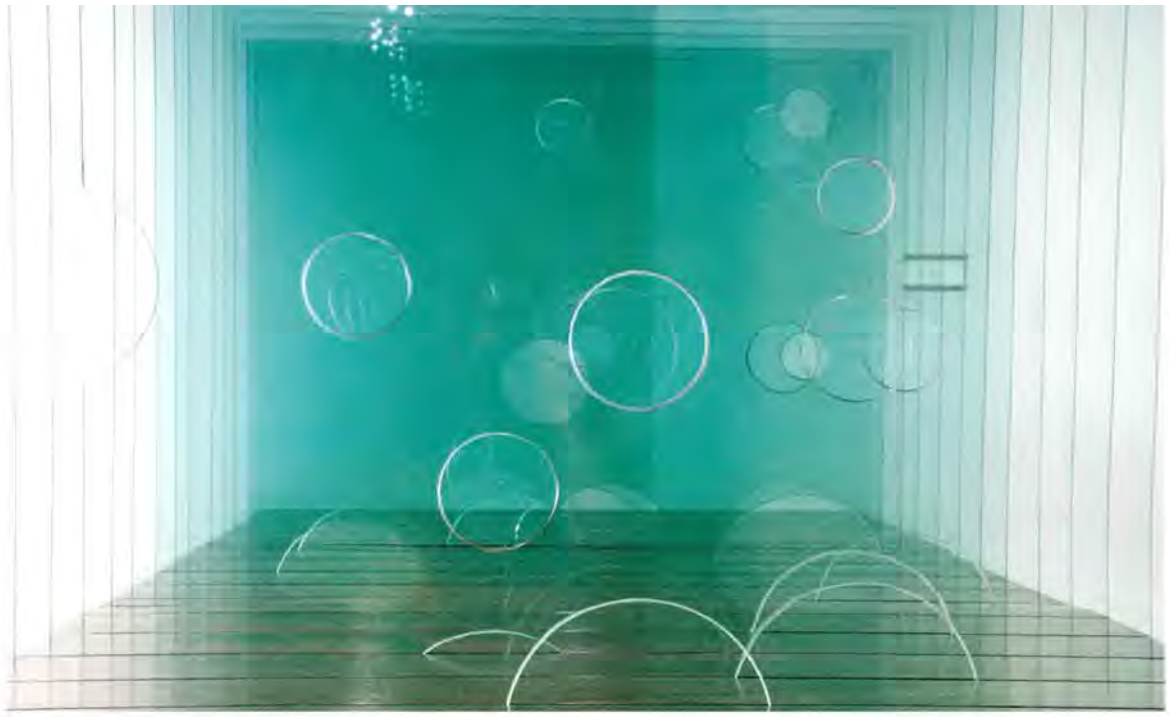
While Capote's star has been rising for some time, his practice is just one piece of the miasmic puzzle that is the contemporary Cuban art scene. When it debuted in 1984, La Bienal de la Habana was basically a market-free curatorial effort, with programming dedicated to Latin American and Caribbean artists (opening up to undeveloped African and Asian countries by its second iteration). May's Biennial is still very much on track to be the city's most international art affair to date, with talents such as Robin Rhode, Carlos Amorales, and Tino Sehgal on the official lineup. In February, nearly all Havana hotels, casas, and flights were sold out, according to tour operators. Some artists I met during my stay were even calling it *la última Bienal*, or the last real Cuban Biennial before all the moneyed international interests come in and turn it into the type of spectacle that pervades every other fair-hosting metropolis on the planet. All this despite the barrage of headlines over the imprisonment of Cuban-born expat artist Tania Bruguera for staging an unsanctioned reprise of a 2009 performance piece. While some equate her predicament with that of Ai Weiwei, other collectors and curators with deep ties to the Cuban scene summarized Bruguera's efforts as "grandstanding" and "beyond art." When asked about it, Capote simply says "no comment." Of course, Ai's status didn't slow the market. "I feel the market is going to embrace Cuban art more and more as it opens up," says Brown. "I think there's potential for a mini-China moment waiting to happen in Cuba."

During the Biennial, Capote's studio will take on the air of an embassy, with his laser pointer–driven slide-show presentations attended by a steady stream of collectors from trustees of the Tate to the American Friends of the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba (AFLFC). The Foundation's namesake practically invented the contemporary collector craze for Cuban art by opening a branch in Havana in the mid '90s.

"I think Yoan is a strong supporter of his community and an advocate for Cuba," says Carole Rosenberg, president of the AFLFC. Rosenberg and her husband, Alex, first became acquainted with Capote's work when they saw a concrete bench he'd made on the terrace of the foundation in 2001. She now calls his practice "the finest example of Conceptual art in Cuba during the last 50 years."

"He's doing such good work, and he somehow has a better life in Cuba than he would in New York," says Shainman, who first





met Capote during the 2009 Biennial (after seeing photos of his work on the cell phone of an American critic). The next day, he bought a challenging sculptural self-portrait, *Autorretrato*, rendered from three Judd-like concrete blocks supported by bronze casts of human bones. "He's an artist's artist—who is working every day. That's what he does. He's so serious and so bright."

To achieve this, Capote often acts as an island unto himself. At the moment, he is "on sabbatical from human relationships," he says, adding, "nobody knows anything about me in Cuba. All people know is that I'm working hard. I'm always in my studio."

In fact, if Ezequiel Suarez's declaration—*El arte cubano son muchas mafias* ("Cuban art is many mafias")—is true, then the Los Capotes mafia is one of the tighter cliques in Havana. Aside from a handful of assistants and his wife and two daughters, Capote now limits his interactions to his self-described "community of three people," which consists of his brother, Iván, and his mechanic father, Jesus, who helps him create prototypes—such as a pair of hand-filed scissors with shears in the shapes of Florida and Cuba for a piece called *Surgery*. "He's an artist, a craftsman, and he makes his own tools," says Capote, showing me a crossbow his father crafted from tires, a symbol of an unfulfilled dream to go hunting with his sons. "In Cuba there is nobody doing that. Everyone is doing everything by laser cut, but this is all done by hand, and the energy of the works done by him is totally different, you can feel the human touch. Everything will be super-polished chrome when it's finished, but you will always see the traces of his file."

"I would like to help with the art until I'm 100," says Jesus.

At 41, Iván Capote, the quieter sibling, is considered by many to be the more introspective artist, while Yoan plays the part of the affable, if brooding, front man. I first met Iván at the El Nukleo workspace, a blue exterior, blue-glass Art Deco affair that the renowned architect Emilio Vasconcelos built for himself in 1938. During the Biennial it will serve as a white-walled gallery for the brothers before they get down to the business of renovating it into a functional studio, and perhaps a stand-alone gallery for their work. Iván, who maintains a jolly mob boss air with his whispery voice and hefty frame, enjoys talking about the issues of (metaphorical, political, and art-world) value his works call into question—like a striped Op Art canvas made from the shavings of coins that reveals the words "Powder Is Power" from a distance—yet he was more than happy to have Yoan finish half of his sentences and expound on each of his text-based pieces. Expound he did, for both spaces are brimming with Iván's work, including a piece called *Origami*, composed of four steel plates that have been folded (and unfolded) with the creases left to form the letters f-a-t-e, and another called *Mantra occidental* hewn from metal letters made by Jesus that spell *own* and *om*. "It sits on incense and then falls down," Capote explains. "It's a spiritual work about the temporality of material things."

Detail of *Burocrático*, 2006–11. Wooden office desk and glass, 40 x 41 x 71 in.

OPPOSITE: *Open Mind*, 2008. PVC, bronze, metal, and glass, 36 x 49½ x 49½ in.

DAROS LATINAMERICA COLLECTION, ZURICH. OPPOSITE: YOAN CAPOTE AND KADIST ART FOUNDATION, PARIS AND SAN FRANCISCO

Raising their kids in a very poor section of Pinar del Río,

the rural tobacco farming province of western Cuba, Capote's parents realized it would ease their financial hardships—and benefit their children—if their boys were chosen for secondary school. "In that time, the Cuban government had an incredibly good education system in arts and sports, and those schools supported the students with clothes, good food, and health care," recalls Capote, who trained in Greco-Roman wrestling and swimming while Iván studied art. Students had to apply to pursue the course of their choice. "I wanted to follow Iván because he and his teachers encouraged me," Capote says. "They said, if you can do a presentation of 100 works of art, you can

Migrants, 2013. Bronze, 3¼ x 6½ x 11¾ ft.

OPPOSITE: *Stress (in memoriam)*, 2004–12. Concrete, wood, and human teeth, 33½ x 25½ x 20¾ in.

apply to the national school in Havana. So I got obsessed and did it. I remember it was classical things like portraits, still lifes, nudes, and landscapes. It took two years."

Getting selected, however, was only half the battle. Before going to the Instituto Superior de Arte, Capote completed a year of military service, which for him meant painting political propaganda around the country. "By the end of that year, I could paint Fidel's face by memory," he jokes. To make ends meet at ISA, he was involved in what he calls diverse activities, which included helping masons and blacksmiths with construction work, sourcing decorative-art pieces and vintage furniture for antiques dealers, and "et cetera" (a common Cuban refrain for questionably legal street enterprises). Capote has a great photo from that time taken by Stephen Wilkes, who captured the brothers at a pivotal moment, dressed in black: Iván looking svelte with dark flowing locks, while Yoan, now built more like a retired rugby player, has the countenance of a chiseled street thug with a shaved head and eyes radiating the intensity of a boxer. "I had to cut my hair like that because to make a living like I did, I had to look tough. I'm not a tough person, but in the street during that time it was tough," says Capote, who claims the construction work "inspired me to use concrete and fences in my art."

It definitely kept him scrappy. At ISA, he was part of the revered collective Galería DUPP (Desde Una Pragmática Pedagógica, or "based on pedagogic pragmatics") with Wilfredo Prieto, Glenda León, his brother, and 10 others. Enlisted by the renowned professor and Cuban artist René Francisco, DUPP was invited to present a group project at the 2000 Biennial titled *1, 2, 3, Testing*, which grew out of an idea of Capote's to have 100 cast-iron microphones on the city's border walls, facing and opposing the sea. For his thesis, Capote went rogue. He wanted to craft a bench from aluminum, *Forbidden Park*, in the form of a woman on bended knees. However, at the time he had only $100 for materials, so he pilfered aluminum scrap and old cracked plaster molds from foundries, and then bribed a factory worker to let him fire the piece after hours. "People thought I was crazy," says Capote.

The scheme paid off, though, and the work was noticed by an American collector who offered to sponsor Capote's 2002 fellowship at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson. En route to the institution, he stopped off at a flea market and found some suitcases that inspired him to create another bench, which he made by casting concrete forms of the luggage. The sculpture, *In tran/sit*, was later accepted for the 2004 "Benchmark" exhibition at LongHouse Foundation in East Hampton, New York. Last year, after the Rosenbergs introduced him to Modern Art Foundry, Capote created a bronze version of the work. The Rosenbergs have since assumed the role of Capote's American family; he even named his oldest daughter after Carole. In fact, they introduced him to Bourgeois in 2002.

"Louise was very polite and gave me good advice on classical training. When I went to school it was a very anti-object time, so I told her that Conceptualists tried to force you to abandon all classical training. Before I met her, I was very conflicted because nobody was using bronze in the Cuban art scene, except official artists who created monuments for the government," Capote recalls en route to ISA. There, he shows me around his old studio, a skylit red brick dome where he first aspired to become "the Agustín Cárdenas of this moment," referring to Cuba's mid-century analogue to Henry Moore and Constantin Brancusi. In the studio at ISA, Capote once saw the preeminent Cuban art star Kcho prepare for a solo show and met Leonardo DiCaprio. "He was preparing for a role as an artist, and he says, 'Hi, I'm Leonardo DiCaprio.' And I said, 'Hi, I'm Leonardo da Vinci.' He was so happy I didn't know who he was that he invited me out that night," recalls Capote. "But I didn't have a phone at the time for him to call me."

GAP POWELL-EVANS AND BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

JOAN CAPOTE AND THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

Back at Capote's office in the back of the El Bunker studio,

he's showing me old photos of him and Iván, and with various heroes like Ilya Kabakov, Bourgeois, and Ai Weiwei (holding a copy of the monograph for the brothers' back-to-back shows—"Fonemas" and "Morfemas"—at Galería Habana in 2011). There's a carved wood Kcho sculpture of sharks circling one another, which he obtained from a collector in a trade. "No matter his political position, he is a real artist," says Capote, while handling a piece of his own, a functional gold-leafed door closer in the shape of a Soviet hammer and sickle—which he plans either to install inside a glass box at Jack Shainman or on a door suspended from the ceiling—and a prototype for a steel cube cut with reliefs that would project silhouettes of the Cuban flag around the Chelsea gallery.

During the course of my trip, various people in the jet-setting *farándula* scene, all of whom were inquisitive about and somewhat mystified by the fact that I was doing a story on the elusive Capote, had asked me hypothetically whether I thought his work would be as powerful if he hadn't remained in Cuba. "I think part of the charm is that it feels extremely genuine and extremely Cuban, and if he moved abroad, I don't know if he would lose some of his power, but I think at the moment his work is very powerful and he's getting better and better," says Brown. "I think the power comes from the fact that he's a genuine man, who has this innate ability to make work that comes from his heart, that has surprisingly subtle, humorous political overtones." In his office, Capote and I speculate about what might have happened had he stayed on in New York or Miami after his fellowship in Vermont, and how different his art might be today as a result.

"If I had stayed in the U.S., I would never have been an artist. You know why? Because I didn't have any friends or any family there. I didn't have anyone who really wanted me or loved me, and I realized I would have had to rely on several jobs to survive," says Capote, who talked to the Rosenbergs toward the end of that inaugural trip to the U.S. They were interested in the bench he'd made in Vermont and offered him $9,000 for it. Capote told them he didn't want their money but instead wanted advice. They urged him to return to Cuba because, despite his talent, he was too young and ill equipped to handle life as a New York artist.

The decision to stay—as is the case with any Cuban-based artist—has not made his work with international partners any easier. Brown met Capote in 2011, offered him a show, and asked him when he would be ready. "He said 'one year,'" the dealer recalls. "Two years later we opened." But when they did, with Capote's 2013 London debut, "Emotional Objects," the show featured some of the artist's finest work to date, including *Abstinencia*, casts of bronze hands spelling out emotionally and politically charged words; *Consensus (Collective Feeling)*, poetic strands of stethoscopes leading to one earpiece; and *Casados*, pairs of lovers' leather shoes grafted into one another. "It was really powerful and emotional, and you felt it the minute you walked into the room," says Brown. "It's really hot, that work; there's no way a Scandinavian could have made it."

"In Cuba, I find my confirmation about myself," Capote explains. "I go to my roots, to the people. The history [between the U.S. and Cuba] is not my fault. I love my country, and it's not my fault I have a responsibility in my context. It's like the decision to have a family. There are several moments that push you in search of duality, or into the middle of a question, like: To be or not to be? And you have to decide what you want for yourself, what do you want from your art, why are you doing what you do? This is a life decision. One day, a friend of mine said, 'Art is not a profession, it's a way of living—it's an attitude.' This is a very pure way of thinking because you have a responsibility.

"My first responsibility is to my family, and I want to be good at what I do in order to help them, help my mother, my father, my kids. But also, my other responsibility is to my country, my history. I always said to myself that when time passed I would like my art first to be a good testimony for a moment in this country and, second, a timeless, meaningful object about human essence and human behavior."

Should you ever find yourself wandering the subterranean tunnels of a brain-shaped maze off *kilometro* 27 in Bauta, you'll know Capote fulfilled those responsibilities. MP

artnet®

ART WORLD

David Ebony's Top Ten New York Gallery Shows for June

David Ebony, Friday, June 26, 2015

Yoan Capote, *Immanence*, 2015.
Photo: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

3. Yoan Capote at Jack Shainman Gallery, through July 10

Cuban artist Yoan Capote has received a great deal of international attention in recent years, and this excellent two-part show of recent sculptures, installations, and works on paper, filling both of the gallery's Chelsea venues, helps explain why. Many of the pieces address Cuban society and political issues, and they often incorporate iconic imagery directly related to Cuba. Capote's is a balanced assessment of his homeland, constituting a keen observation of a nation in transition. For instance, one poignant piece features a tall armoire simply filled with metal hangers in the shape of the island nation, indicating the beginning of a new journey.

One outstanding installation, *Immanence* (2015), features a ten-foot-tall portrait bust of Fidel Castro, rendered with rusted door hinges and set atop a pile of discarded antique doors, rescued from the streets of Havana. It's an ironic piece, suggesting on some level the decrepitude of the Castro regime, but it is not at all irreverent as a contemplation of Castro's legacy.

this is tomorrow
Contemporary Art Magazine

Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th St. & 524 West 24th St, NY 10011

Yoan Capote: Collective Unconscious

Title : Yoan Capote, Collective Unconscious, installation view at Jack Shainman Gallery, 2015
Credit : Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Yoan Capote: Collective Unconscious
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
28 May - July 10 2015
Review by Shana Beth Mason

The art of visualising the metaphor has been practiced even before the Surrealists, before video art, and before the rise of the Internet meme. Rarely, though, does an artist convey their native environment in such a manner as to inspire dread, fascination, and empathy all at once. Born, raised, and still working in Havana, Yoan Capote has delivered the beautiful idiosyncrasies of and within Cuba to a general audience. He capably fuses objects that seemingly have no inherent relationship to one another in order to fit a psychological construct that cannot be fully imparted with speech or language. In his solo exhibition at Jack Shainman

Gallery, entitled ‘Collective Unconscious’, Capote’s communicative methods are active, actualised, and ardently democratic.

Capote has already received ample recognition for his work in the contemporary arts sphere: an International Fellowship Grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, and a UNESCO Prize were awarded to him within a six-year span. In 2011, he participated alongside Alexandre Arrechea, Duvier Del Dago, and Eduardo Ponjuán (in collaboration with five additional artists) in ‘Cuba Mon Amour’, a collateral exhibition within the 54th Venice Biennale.

His solo show at Shainman retains an interest in migration, disorientation, and socio-political conflict. The exhibition is spread out over two spaces in Chelsea (one on West 20th Street and one on West 24th Street), giving Capote the opportunity to place each work in its own, self-contained “bubble”, while maintaining a coherent dialogue with other works nearby. Arguably, the strongest works in the show deal with traces of the human body and how it responds to external, often hostile, stimuli. All of the works are made from bronze, either partially or, in most cases, exclusively. ‘Paranoia (Homenaje Anonimo II)’ is the simplest of Capote’s gestures: realised as a prison bar grate, they bear the imprints of human hands that had seemingly gripped them so tightly, the metal is completely indented. A more complex, but tragic work called ‘New Man’ is the first a viewer encounters at the 20th Street space: a human spinal column dangles from an invisible wire on a stand, with each vertebral step fashioned from a pair of handcuffs. A series of hands are fastened to a nearby wall, with each hand displaying a letter from the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet spelling the Spanish word “Libertad” (meaning “Liberty”). Each hand is coloured by a different patina, suggesting that the while the word is spelled out in a single language, its significance and the pursuit of the ideal is universal. The human body itself is as much of a prison as the one Capote illustrates in the guise of Cuba, but the artist’s imagination is unbounded and uncensored in this guise. His work is a double-defection, divorced from an oppressive national ideology and the physical place, as well.

Capote’s sculptures are meditations that surely resonate profoundly with his countrymen, as the ageing body of Communism continues to fracture and creak under the pressure of the introduction of Postmodern technology to the island and recurrent, political interventions both foreign and domestic. If ‘Collective Unconscious’ has a failing as an exhibition, it is that some of the works are too specific to Capote’s own mind (informed by past and present), and untangling that complex web would be impossible in a single viewing. The spread between two spaces, also, may prove a bit tiresome to those braving the wilds of Chelsea. To those who do dare, however, the rewards are stunningly profound.

VISIONAIRE

YOAN CAPOTE'S COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

By Naomi Barling

Exploring the history and distinctive ways in which communal social experiences influence an individual is the inspiration for Collective Unconscious the new solo exhibition by Yoan Capote. The exhibition will be the artists second at the Jack Shainman Gallery and will be running from May 28, 2015 to July 10, 2015.

Yoan Capote was born in Pinar del Rio, 1977 he lives and works in Havana, Cuba. In 1991 he left the Provincial School of Art and went on to graduate from the National School of Art (ENA) Havana, Cuba in 1995 before attending the Higher Institute of Art (ISA) till 2001. He then worked as a Professor of Visual Art at the Higher Institute of Art (ISA) till 2003.

The idea of the past as a tightly wound narrative is a reused theme in Capote's work. Laboratorio shown in 2012 became a realization when the artist began collecting photographs of large crowds gathering at political events. He became intrigued by the subjectivity of photography and how each image is a fabricated ideal of history.

Drawing on psychiatrist Carl Jung's claim that a person's behavior and thoughts uphold an unconscious link with their past and its standards, Capote explores his Cuban nationality. In these recent works, he investigates cultural symbols, exposing their fractures and their inherent contradictions, asking the viewer to reconsider the acceptance of history as absolute truth.

Dismantling history in order to understand and reinvent it is also one of the concepts in Capote's work titled Immanencia, 2015. This was a giant bust of Fidel Castro constructed from thousands of door hinges, originally sourced from Havana buildings. The work is a monumental consideration of Cuba's political past.

This installation features flasks and petri dishes placed on a table with a variety of other chemistry equipment, representing a determined science experiment that has been abandoned and long forgotten. Upon close examination, images are visible across the glass surfaces where photographs documenting political events have strategically been printed. In Capote's work, history is often expressed as a process, just like any other, laced with manipulation, error, and control.

Many of the works in the exhibition highlight how those in power have overwhelmingly shaped history, however Capote does leave space for optimism. Like with the door hinges in Immanencia and Cuba's political past, what was once closed can be opened. Collective Unconscious aim to give hope, because if history is an impressionable concept, then it is up to us as individuals to delve into the collective and rescue the story and our own history going forward.

Jack Shainman Gallery as will be showing these works from May 28, 2015 to July 10, 2015.

The Economist

Contemporary art

Seize the day

Interest in Cuban art is taking off

Nov 28th 2015 | HAVANA | From the print edition

THE dingy back alleys of Havana are a far cry from the city's middle-class Vedado district and its Hotel Nacional, and an unlikely home for a hip international art gallery. But on November 27th Galleria Continua, an avant-garde group from San Gimignano in Tuscany that shows Anish Kapoor and Michelangelo Pistoletto and has offshoots in Beijing and Boissy-le-Châtel, an hour's drive south of Paris, opened its newest space in the renovated Águila de Oro

cinema. The chunky Soviet-era projectors have been left in place on the top floor, and the detritus of film canisters and decaying seats has been whipped into a floor-to-ceiling hurricane installation by José Yaque, a young Cuban artist.

Continua's opening is just the latest sign that the global art world—which, on December 3rd, will gather at Art Basel Miami Beach, America's buzziest art fair—is on to Cuba. Collectors, dealers and museum curators have been flocking to Havana. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties between America and the Caribbean island in earlier this year mean that interest in Cuban art can only grow.

Many of the better-known Cuban artists of the 20th century, among them Wifredo Lam, Ana Mendieta and Félix González-Torres, were born on the island but, for various different reasons, ended up working abroad. They are more associated with modernist painting, performance art and queer art, respectively, than with their homeland.

The 1959 revolution and the ensuing embargo isolated Cuba. But its rich national art school in Havana, the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), continued to produce artists of talent, who were admired for their technical skill and background. Tomás Sánchez, a realist painter, for example (the third-bestselling Cuban artist according to the Artnet, an auction database), cites Andrew Wyeth as an influence, but also two Russian realists, Isaak Levitan and Ivan Shishkin.

Incidents of censorship occurred, as when an offending exhibition was shut down in 1989, leading to a famous performance piece called "La Plástica Cubana se Dedica al Béisbol" (Cuban fine arts dedicate themselves to baseball) in which artists and critics played baseball since they could not visit the show. But such incidents were rare. It was the need for money, not a reaction to politics, wrote Luis Camnitzer in his book "New Art of Cuba" (1994), that led many artists to leave the country during its "special period" after the Soviet Union broke up and its economic support fell away, leaving Cuba impoverished.

During this time the Havana Biennial, established by the Ministry of Culture and the Wifredo Lam Centre of Contemporary Art in 1984, abandoned its roots as a bastion of non-Western art, and became a high street for collecting tourists. Within less than a decade, Mr Camnitzer estimates, as many as 10,000 Americans (able to get around the embargo thanks to an exemption that classified art as "information materials") were visiting the Biennial.

Cuba's art studios have long had a dedicated following among collectors. These include trustees on trips organised by their museums—last month Alice Walton's Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, paid a record $7.7m for an important work by González-Torres, "Untitled (L.A.)". Peter and Irene Ludwig, well-known German collectors, wanted to create a museum in Havana in the special period, but found conditions inhospitable.

Instead their foundation gives grants to Cuban artists and has been instrumental in connecting those who grew up in the special period with the outside world. Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, whose family fled Cuba when she was a teenager and who is now known for her foundation in Miami, also takes groups of collectors to Havana.

Some collectors, such as Howard Farber, buy Cuban art in anticipation of a payday. In 2007 he put up for auction at Philips in London a collection of Chinese contemporary art, which he had assembled cheaply from the late 1980s onwards. The sale made $20m; one piece went for 64 times the price he paid for it. Mr Farber started collecting Cuban art in 2001 in a similar way. “I see the same thing happening with Cuban contemporary art,” he said of the art boom that followed China’s opening up. “Only I see it a little bigger because it’s closer to the United States.” He has even started a website Cuban Art News to promote the cause.

Today’s leading artists came of age in the special period and are clued up about the international market. Carlos Garaicoa reinterprets Cuba’s unique architecture through installations, photographs and drawings. Yoan Capote makes ambitious sculptures with Cuban twists, most recently a series of seascapes that use thousands of fish hooks instead of paint. Their work is now said to sell for around $80,000.

The ones who stand out are shown in New York. Since 2010 Mr Capote has been with the Jack Shainman Gallery. Another New York dealer, Sean Kelly, points out that the ISA has long turned out artists of great technical ability; with the opening up of Cuba, the most successful will be those who also use their skills conceptually to project a unique voice. Mr Kelly will show Diana Fonseca Quiñones in January and Alejandro Campins in February. For the past decade he has represented an energetic group, Los Carpinteros, who make humorous odes to Cuban shoddiness with installations, sculptures and drawings.

Earlier this month an auction of Latin American art at Christie’s in New York produced three new records for Cuban artists: José Angel Rosabal, Rubén Alpízar and Roberto Fabelo. Fourteen Cuban artists will be featured at Art Basel Miami Beach, up from two last year, among them Los Carpinteros, Mr Capote and Mr Garaicoa. There will also be a film by Mendieta and a lecture on the “New Role for Art in Cuba” with Mr Garaicoa. Galerie Nathalie Obadia will show photos by Agnès Varda taken in Cuba between 1962 and 1963. Work by Jorge Pardo, an architect and sculptor, will be at the Petzel Gallery. Luis Miret Pérez, of Galería Habana—one of Cuba’s top galleries—described this year’s Havana Biennial as a “hurricane” of buying. Strap in, then, because the storm seems only to be picking up.

Art in America

Yoan Capote

at Jack Shainman,
through Jul. 10
513 West 20th and 524 West 24th Street

A close look at the vitrine crowded with chemistry lab equipment in the 20th Street location of Yoan Capote's exhibition "Collective Unconscious" reveals that the motley assortment of glass beakers, petri dishes and microscopes are printed with photos of crowds gathering at political events. Laboratorio is not the only piece that incorporates historical photography into sculptural installations; Charge (Miraculous Static), at the gallery's 24th Street location, features photos similar to those in Laboratorio, this time wrapped around concrete sticks of dynamite. This elaborate, finely crafted exhibition includes work from the past four years of the Cuban artist's career, spanning subtler objects, like white plastic cutting boards etched with landscapes and rubbed with blood, to Immanence, a large-scale bust of Fidel Castro made of rusty hinges Capote scavenged from old buildings in Havana.

Pictured: Yoan Capote, Laboratorio, 2012, mixed media including gelatin silver prints on glass vessels and scientific equipment in vitrine, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Artist José Parlá on the Havana Biennial and How Cuba is Changing

by Laura Itzkowitz June 12, 2015

This is an exciting time for José Parlá. The Brooklyn-based artist known for his vibrant, abstract works inspired by the city recently unveiled a monumental mural in One World Trade Center, had a solo exhibition at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and is currently preparing for a show at both Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery in Chelsea, set to open in September. And somehow the Miami-born Cuban-American had time to participate in the Havana Biennial. We caught up with him and got his take on it.

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What's the art scene like there now?

There's not much of a gallery scene there. It's more about the artists themselves creating their scene. In Cuba, the artists create studios and educate children. A lot of times artists receive guests in their studios since there aren't many galleries.

The Cuban art scene is not limited to Cuba itself—it's made up of the diaspora. There are tons of people who have left and spread to Miami, London, Paris, Tokyo. I've seen some of the best Cuban art in other cities around the world because that's where the diaspora has formed because of political exile.

One of my favorite artists is Yoan Capote, and he has an exhibition now in New York atJack Shainman Gallery. At the same time, there's the Cuban-American artist Teresita Fernández from Miami and she has a massive installation at Madison Square Park that just opened. So those two artists, who each have an extremely different style and circumstances, are great examples of figures in the Cuban art scene.

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

DAILY AD

CUBAN ARTIST YOAN CAPOTE CONSIDERS CENSORSHIP AND OPPRESSION IN A NEW EXHIBITION

Text by Alexa Lawrence | Photography courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery | June 11, 2015

Immanencia, 2015, Yoan Capote.

In a provocative show filling both of Jack Shainman Gallery's Chelsea locations, Cuban artist Yoan Capote investigates collective experiences and the way they shape individuals, drawing on sources ranging from Carl Jung to his own personal life, steeped in the politics of his home country.

For Capote, nothing has the potential to reveal history like the human body, and in his anatomy-related works, signs of suppression are clear—a curving spine is composed of metal handcuffs, bronze-cast hands spell out the word *libertad,* or freedom, in sign language, and a uvula dangles impotently inside a double-sided megaphone.

Door Closer (Legacy), 2014–15.

In *Immanencia* (2015), the iconic face of Fidel Castro, constructed entirely from rusty hinges collected from dilapidated buildings in Havana, appears haggard and disintegrating. The bare hangers in the empty closet of *La Ausencia (Escuchando el Vacío),* 2011, depict the southern coastline of Cuba. And in *Laboratorio* (2012), murky beakers and petri dishes display images of political events from the past decades, subject, like all photography, to strategic, even scientific, manipulation. While many of Capote's pieces relate to a specifically Cuban experience, the larger themes—censorship and brutality, but also neglect, abandonment, and oppression—are universal.

Through July 10 at Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, New York; jackshainman.com

CUBAN art news
Cuban art and culture worldwide

Tuesday June 9, 2015

Exhibition Close-Up: Yoan Capote, *Collective Unconscious*

Published: June 09, 2015

On Carl Jung, the contemporary Cuban experience, and his new show in Chelsea

Yoan Capote, Laboratorio (detail), 2012
Photo: Cuban Art News

“I always start by analyzing the surroundings,” Yoan Capote tells the crowd gathered for a pre-opening talk at Jack Shainman Gallery. “And normally writing titles. I start with titles and readings, so the piece has a background.”

Opening late last month, Capote’s second show at Jack Shainman Gallery fills both of the gallery’s Chelsea locations, with works that probe the individual’s relationship to his or her society.

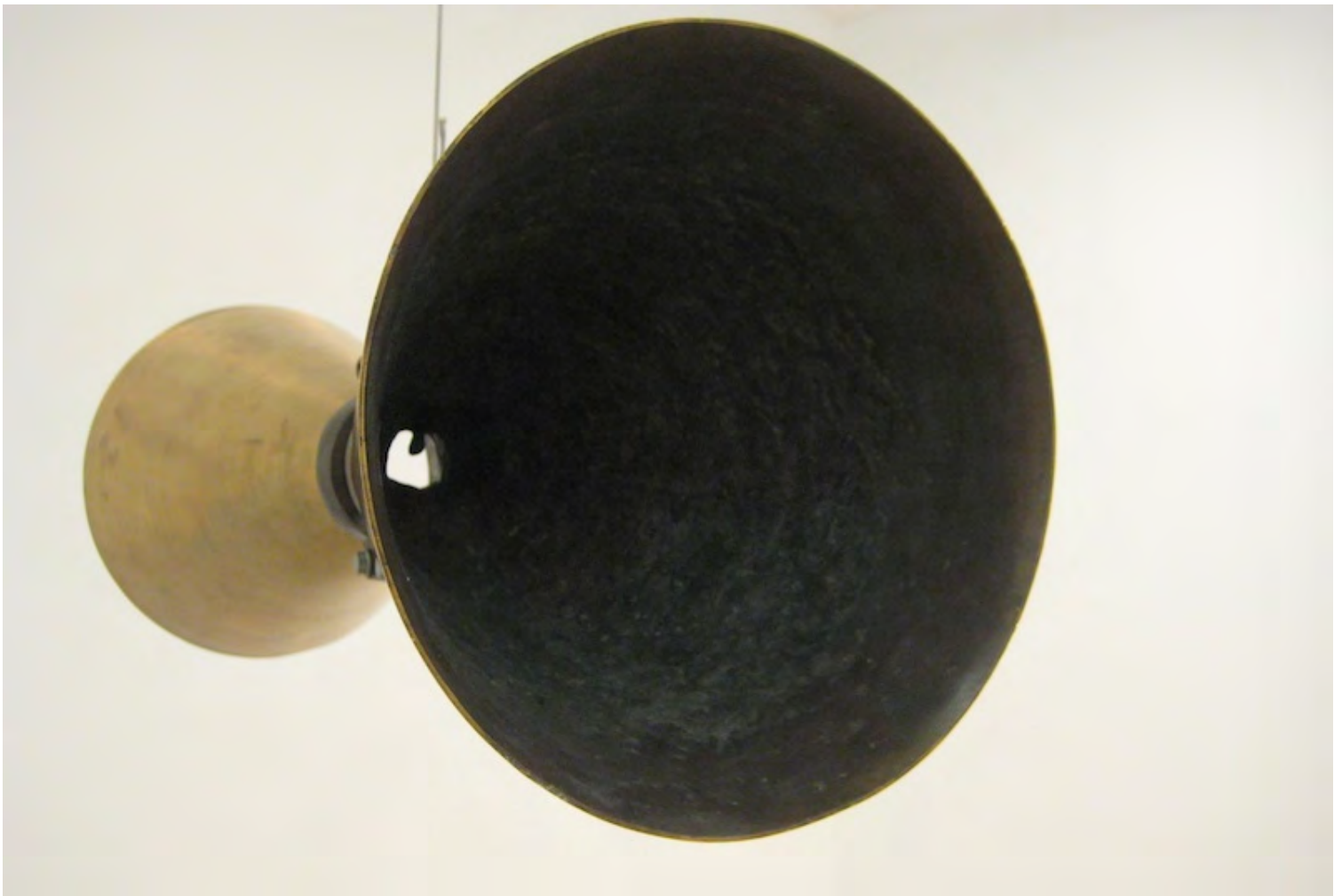
While his perspective is Cuban, Capote’s influences are international. He decided to title the show Collective Unconscious—a term coined by Carl Jung to describe a part of the mind shared by all human beings—as a tribute to the Swiss psychologist. “I was very influenced by Carl Jung, after I started to investigate his writings,” Capote told the group. “I found a lot of inspiration in his texts.”

Here are several of the works in the show, with Capote’s comments.

Yoan Capote, Abuse of Power, 2013

Photo: Cuban Art News

Of Abuse of Power, 2013, Capote remarked, “I like to do an intervention, putting a handcuff on a tree. The tree is one of the more pure, spiritual elements in nature. The Afro-Cuban religion of Palo Monte thinks that trees have entities of the soul. I was talking to friends who are Palo Monte, and I decided to do this action. I made a mold of this branch, and in the lost wax process I had the opportunity to submit this tree that was so strong. I use the cast bronze as a metaphor about indoctrination and manipulation.”



Yoan Capote, Dialogusfobia (Un Nudo en la Garganta), 2011
Photo: Cuban Art News

“The title of this piece, Dialogusfobia, is a term I invented. I saw there were so many phobias, and I said, What about the phobia of people having no communication? In Cuba and other countries, you have so many people with the fear of expressing what they really think.

“So I took that idea, and also The Scream by Edvard Munch. I was thinking about the scream that some people have, which is silent—this fear of expression. So inside this minimal object I put a human throat. It’s minimal and organic and essentially about Edvard Munch and my own representation of this tension.”

Yoan Capote, La aucencia (escuchando el vacío), 2011
Photo: Cuban Art News

“This is La ausencia (escuchando el vacío). One day, in a magazine, I read a sociologist saying that almost every Cuban family has an empty closet from someone who left the country. And I was sad about that, remembering that my mother had family that she never saw again. So I made an empty closet—very heavy, like a Richard Serra, in steel, and attached it to the wall.

Yoan Capote, La aucencia (escuchando el vacío) (detail), 2011
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

When you look closely inside, you see that the hangers have the shape of Cuba. I made them in bronze, because that's very heavy too. This piece is about sadness and loneliness. When you see an empty hanger in a closet, in a hotel or anywhere, it's talking about absence. But it's a presence, too."

Installation view, Yoan Capote, Laboratorio, 2012
Photo: Cuban Art News

About Laboratorio, 2012, Capote said: “Since I was a kid, I used to go to collective events—it was part of the schedule for school. I took a lot of pictures, and that started me collecting the negatives of anonymous photographers—different moments of people together, from the Cuban Revolution until now. You can see people smiling, people happy, people sad.

Yoan Capote, Laboratorio (detail), 2012
Photo: Cuban Art News

All of them are in glass flasks that I collected from abandoned factories and sugar cane factories. And from them I created a laboratory experiment," which he has frequently likened to a failed social experiment.

Yoan Capote, Imanencia (Immanence), 2015

Photo: Cuban Art News

Of Imanencia (Immanence), 2015, Capote said: “I understood that I had to do a piece that could have more meanings and be more controversial—as controversial as Fidel himself. He is a symbol of duality and of mobility. So I was thinking to do a piece that is a representation of society and could be interpreted in different ways.

“I went to different houses in Cuba and brought new hinges that I bought, and asked the people in the houses to give me one old hinge in exchange for a new one. This was a symbolic process, and I wanted to show it. So I did it on film.

“I did this with about 2,000 houses. After that, I started to receive donations. With about 3,000 hinges I was ready to make a piece: a portrait of Fidel Castro that was created, from the hinges of Cuban society.

“This is a very open-to-interpretation piece. As a Cuban artist living nowadays, I realized that what was interesting for me was to do a piece that could have different interpretations. One of them, of course, is about this direct relationship of the leader and society, and how the leader is created by society and the society’s way of life.

“Of course, I was working on this piece with the idea of “collective unconscious.” And Fidel is the main archetype of Cuba. Wherever I go, I get into a taxi, and it’s ‘Cuban! Fidel Castro! What is going to happen?’

“I started to think: Let me do a piece that talks about this axis, this needle point, this limbo that Cuba is living in right now. Because the Fidel image is, for Cuba still—from my point of view—the beginning and the end. It’s the middle point. It’s an axis.

Installation view of Yoan Capote, Immanence, 2015
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

“The first title of the piece was Archetype. After I did the piece, I gave it a title that was more poetic.

“When you come from the idea to the object, the object is never-ending. Because a lot of thinking has already been done. That’s why, when I start with the title and the readings, the object can offer so many solutions. The materials I work with depend on the term I’m using or the feeling I want to express.

“That’s the way I work. First is the idea, the feeling I want to express. And after that, the object.”

For more image*s* of the show, see the photo album (https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.863352897053269.1073741986.161562193899013&type=1) on the Cuban Art News Faceboo*k* page.

Yoan Capote: Collective Unconscious i*s* on view at two Ja*ck* Shainman Galler*y* location*s* in Chelsea through July 10.

— Cuban Art News (/?ACT=19&result_path=news/authors&mbr=13)

PAPER

art crawl

"IT'S A SMALL ART WORLD, AFTER ALL"- EVERYTHING WE SAW AND HEARD AT LAST NIGHT'S ART OPENINGS

text and photos by Kate Messinger

Yoan Capote at Jack Shainman

The NYC art world sometime feels like a very well-lit Bio-Dome, filled with a bunch of boozed-up wealthy people and boozed-up artists unaware we are existing in a contained, irrelevant, and very small environment. It's hard to see the big picture when you're so close up. In Chelsea last night, the must-see openings all bubbled on the same block, creating a regurgitation of the same crowd at each gallery and making us wonder if we had done this all before. At least the work was distinguishable as it's own entity, each artist highlighting a world outside the art world. At Jack Shainman Gallery, patrons gathered around a collection of chemistry equipment that looked burned from a meth fire, but at closer look, were printed with images of people at a festival in Cuba. Yoan Capote's work, like a giant head of Fidel Castro made of door hinges, explores the Collective Unconscious (also the name of the exhibition) and more specifically, the way people of his home country of Cuba experience history individually and as a cultural unit.

THIS STORY WAS PUBLISHED ON MAY 29, 2015 2:30 PM

NEW YORK OBSERVER

8 Things to Do in New York's Art World Before May 29

By **Paul Laster** | 05/25/15 11:55am

Yoan Capote, *Laboratorio*, 2012. (Photo: Jack Shainman Gallery)

THURSDAY, MAY 28

Opening: "Yoan Capote: Collective Unconscious," at Jack Shainman Gallery
With stories about the United States' changing relationship with Cuba regularly on the nightly news, what better time to look at the work of a Cuban artist dealing with history? Drawing on Carl Jung's assertion that a person's behavior and thoughts maintain an unconscious link with the past and its archetypes, Yoan Capote delves into his Cuban nationality while speaking to a more universal experience. We're excited to see Mr. Capote's giant bust of Fidel Castro constructed from thousands of door hinges that came from Havana buildings and a laboratory embedded with photographs of large crowds gathering at political events. Why travel to Cuba when the art is here!

Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, 6-8 p.m.

ARTNEWS

FEATURES — MAY 2015

FORGING A SEA OF IRON: YOAN CAPOTE EXPLORES THE CUBAN OBSESSION WITH AMERICA

BY ***Hilarie M. Sheets*** POSTED **06/03/15 1:30 PM**

Tear Duct, 2001, a drinking fountain replaced with a stainless-steel mold of the face of one of Capote's classmates, who had to support herself through prostitution.

"The sea, for me and for a lot of Cubans, was like a wall, more an image of isolation than a beautiful place," said Yoan Capote. The 38-year-old Havana-based conceptual artist was in New York preparing for his current show at Jack Shainman Gallery. "I grew up with a frustration about the limitation and an obsession about crossing the sea," he explained. When he had his first chance to travel to the United States in 2002, for a residency at the Vermont Studio Center facilitated by the American Friends of the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba in New York, he fully intended to immigrate.

"It was my opportunity to stay in the United States," said Capote, who during his residency made *In tran/sit*, a cluster of eight flea-

"It was my opportunity to stay in the United States," said Capote, who during his residency made *In tran/sit*, a cluster of eight flea-market suitcases cast in solid concrete. Positioned to form a bench, they symbolize the weighty baggage associated with the immigrant experience. During his extended visit to Vermont and New York, he met two people who would influence what became his change of heart. One was Carole Rosenberg, president of the Ludwig Foundation's American Friends, who guided him around the New York art world. She ultimately advised him to return to his homeland, pointing out that he could use the difficult situation there as a springboard for developing work from his very particular point of view. The other pivotal figure was Louise Bourgeois, who had inspired Capote through her use of classical materials like marble and bronze to express interior states of mind. Capote attended two of her Sunday soirees, through the help of Rosenberg, where the artists exchanged drawings.

"Louise Bourgeois gave me a lot of encouragement to continue in the psychological direction," said Capote. "I went back to Cuba with another view of my role in the society. I tried to transform and take advantage of what had been very bad for me."

Capote approaches his art making as a kind of therapeutic process, a way of exploring conflicts plaguing human beings, both individually and collectively. He likes to start with words describing emotional states, which he collects in notebooks and then figures out the best way to represent them, often through surreal juxtapositions. For *Stress (monumental)*, 2010, his own experience as a tooth grinder led him to collect thousands of teeth from Cuban society by posting advertisements at clinics and medical schools. He cast all the real teeth, including his own wisdom teeth, in bronze and spread them out in layers, which he set between four 500-pound blocks of concrete stacked in a modernist-style monolith.

Stress (monumental), 2010, collects thousands of bronze-cast teeth, originally sourced from Cuban clinics and medical schools, between four blocks of concrete.

"It's this material metaphor for the difficulty of speaking out against some improbable pressure," said Jen Mergel, senior curator of contemporary art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, "whether frustration with the limits of expression in a governmental structure or just being unable to speak about a frustration with any personal situation. Using very concise metaphors, Yoan gets to bigger issues of the individual in connection to the social or the civic in really direct ways."

Mergel, who is contributing an essay to Capote's first monograph to be published later this year by Skira, included his two-channel

video *Afterwords/Epílogo* (2011) in her exhibition "Permission to be Global," drawn from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection and on view in Boston last year. On side-by-side screens, a younger and an elderly man hold plungers to their ears, as though trying to extract something. Political lies? Family secrets? "Over the past 15 years, Yoan's been addressing conditions of self-expression within the context of the Cuban political situation," Mergel said. "But he's a humanist at heart and wants anything he is creating to be legible to people more broadly."

Capote has made many pieces over the course of his career that specifically involve ears, mouths, or hands—primary vehicles for communication. "Collective Unconscious," his second solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery, on view May 28 through July 10, features work from Capote's ongoing "Abstinencia" series, in which he uses bronze casts of hands forming letters in sign language that spell out words such as "liberty," "religion," and "economy." As with collecting the teeth of the masses, he likes to pull in passersby from the busy central avenue where his studio is located and make plaster molds of their hands. "Together I make the hands spell 'democracy' but the people don't have any real idea about what democracy is," said Capote, who views his manipulation of their hands as mirroring how the Cuban people are always being manipulated, consciously or unconsciously. "And if they have an idea, they don't have any real voice in those issues."

For another piece in the show, titled *Laboratorio* (2012), Capote collected photographs of crowds dating from the beginnings of the Cuban Revolution to now. He printed these images of smiling people on antique beakers and Petri dishes using silver emulsion, and displays them in dense configurations on laboratory tables. "A lot of mistakes happen when I'm printing because of the chemistry or the light," said Capote, describing how his process distorts the images. "They're focused in some areas and in others look like ghosts. It becomes a metaphor for a failed social experiment." He also salvaged hundreds of rusted hinges from dilapidated doors on buildings in Cuba (and installed brand new hinges in their places). The old hinges will be welded into an oversize bust of Fidel Castro, titled *Inmanencia*, transforming the joints from something flexible to something static and monolithic.

Capote, who grew up amid tobacco plantations in Pinar del Río, works comfortably across a spectrum of mediums. His father, a mechanic who restores old cars, took advantage of the strong educational opportunities offered by the Communist government by enrolling Capote at age eleven, along with his older brother Ivan (also an artist working in Havana), at the Provincial School of Art in Pinar del Río. "The government supported schools for sports and for arts because it needed to export the image of a nice cultural country," said Capote, who received a classical education in painting, sculpture, and drawing, and proved adept at reproducing any style of art.

In 1991, he came to Havana to continue at the National School of Art, as Cuba was plunging into an economic crisis declared a "special period" by the government. "At the same time I was changing schools, my country was changing," recalled Capote, who, while attending university at the Higher Institute of Art in Havana from 1996 to 2001, often went to bed without eating because of severe food shortages. During this time, he sketched the idea for a sculpture titled *Self-Portrait (each one of us)*, which he realized in 2008. It consists of skeletal leg bones, cast in bronze, that support more than 400 pounds of concrete in three stacked cubes. "It's talking about Cuban resistance but also existentialism," explained Capote, who discovered through artists like Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman, Maurizio Cattelan, and Tom Friedman that art had the capacity to communicate what he was seeing and feeling. "I always try to find the point between the local and the universal."

Capote and DUPP's collaboration, 1, 2, 3, Testing (2000) placed 100 microphones, set in alternating directions, around the perimeter of the El Morro fortress.

Capote received public attention for his work while still a student in 2000 at the 7th Havana Biennial. He was invited to do an installation with the artists' collective DUPP, which executed his idea. For *1, 2, 3 Testing*, they cast in iron 100 oversize microphones—the kind used by politicians to address the people—which Capote installed in alternating directions around the perimeter of El Morro

fortress at the edge of Havana along the sea. "The piece is about listening to what's coming from inside and breaking the direction of the dialogue," said Capote. It won the UNESCO prize.

Capote always tries to draw a connection between the spectator and his art, whether by casting his sculptures from the body parts of real people or by inviting viewers to physically interact with works that take the form of furniture or functional objects. In *Tear Duct* (2001), he replaced the top of a drinking fountain with a stainless-steel mold of the face of a classmate who had to support herself through prostitution, a prevalent social problem in Cuba at the time. When viewers put a coin in the slot of the fountain, red wine spouts from her mouth. People drinking from the fountain are put physically and psychologically into the position of her customers, watching the wine and their saliva drain through her eyes. Viewers might experience similar discomfort or uncertainty about whether to climb *Will of Power* (2006–13), a ladder balanced on rockers, or to sit on *Dogma* (2011), a school chair with one leg bent and attached to another with police handcuffs. Both precarious-looking pieces are bronze and, in fact, stable.

Open Mind (barricades), 2014. Capote wanted to create a place of encounter and meditation akin to Stonehenge.

Last year, Capote was able to realize a large-scale version of *Open Mind*, an ambitious public-art project first conceived in 2006. He originally built a model of a maze designed to look like a brain. He envisioned it as a public park to be excavated from the earth that would bring together people of all races and backgrounds. He exhibited a larger maquette of the proposed work in 2009 at the 10th Havana Biennial, but the expense of executing it proved daunting. Invited last fall to contribute to Toronto's contemporary-art festival Nuit Blanche, Capote was inspired by the widespread presence in the city of barricades used for crowd control. In Canoe Landing Park, which is surrounded by office buildings, he "drew" the labyrinth of *Open Mind* using barricades raised up on poles; they cast a matrix of shadows. "To lift them and welcome people in is very symbolic," Capote said. He wanted to create a place of encounter and meditation, akin to Stonehenge. Visitors had the sensation that they were entering an architectural space, but "they didn't know they were walking inside the human brain, like neurons interacting," he added. Only those with a bird's-eye view in adjacent buildings could tell what the barricades defined.

Only through a bird's-eye view from the adjacent buildings to Canoe Landing Park could Open Mind (barricades), be recognized as representing the structure of a human brain.

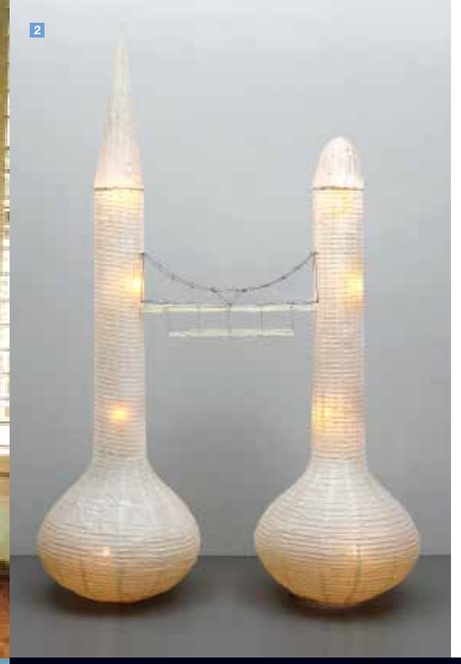
Capote's freedom to travel to the United States has fluctuated depending on the administration in power. While President Clinton expanded access to travel licenses in 1999, President Bush tightened it in 2003 and Capote was unable to get a visa after receiving a Guggenheim fellowship in 2006. Under the Obama administration he retrieved the fellowship money several years later, which helped him produce his first show at Shainman in 2010.

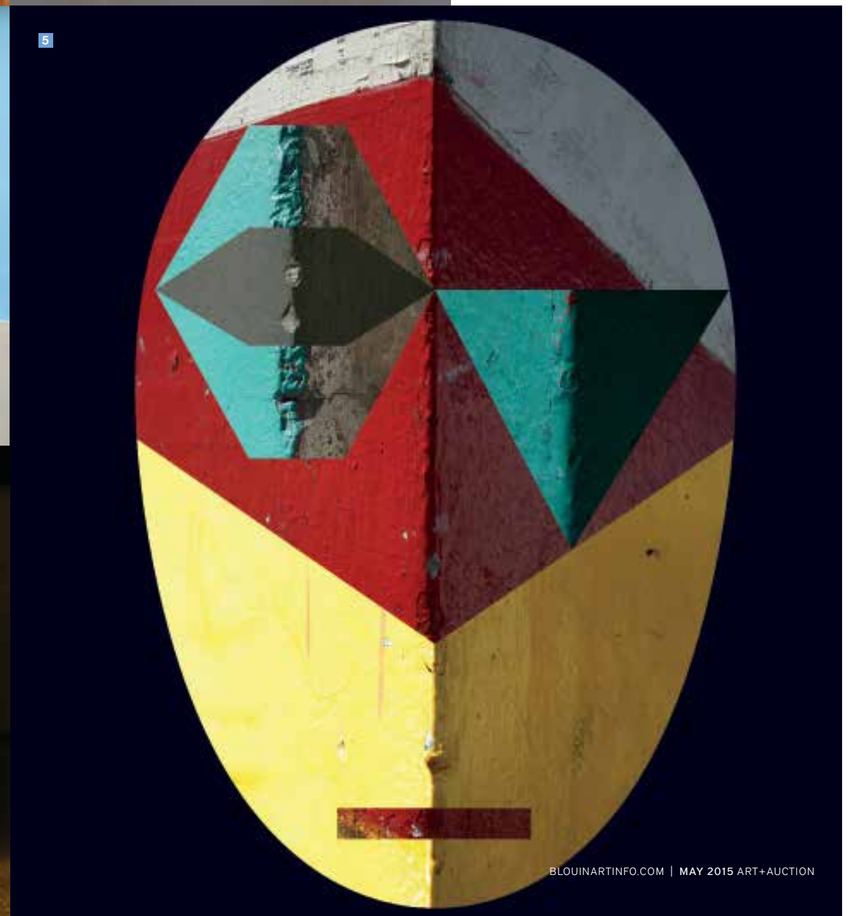
In that exhibition, titled "Mental States," Capote exhibited monumental canvases of the sea and horizon. Up close, the choppy gray surface of the water revealed itself to be composed of thousands of fishhooks in waves and clusters hammered into canvases backed by wood panels. "The sea is our iron curtain, this aggressive fence," said Capote, many of whose friends have died trying to reach America by boat. "Even now, there's still an obsession within the society about leaving." The process of affixing each hook to the painted backdrop was so laborious that he started paying volunteers by the square meter, with up to a dozen people hammering simultaneously. "It's a social piece, talking about a social situation," he said.

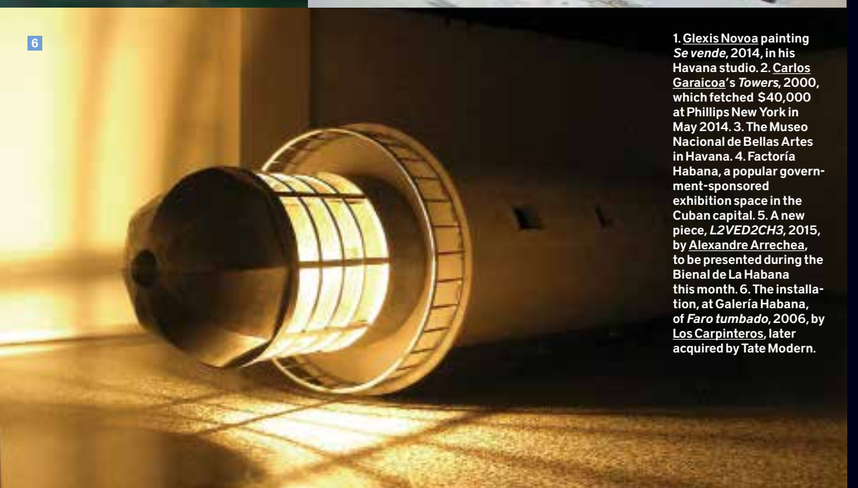
For another series in the exhibition, titled "American Appeal," Capote used the same materials and method to re-create images appropriated from postcards of New York at grand scale. "The stereotype of America is New York, a place for opportunities," said Capote, who, after seeing paintings of New York by Edward Hopper, Joseph Stella, and Georgia O'Keeffe during his first visit, wanted to make his own images of the city as an outsider. "It is a symbol of seduction."
New York remains an attraction for him. Capote now visits more frequently given the lifting of travel restrictions, and he works with a foundry in Queens, where he produced sculptures for a 2013 exhibition at LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton. But he no longer feels the desire to emigrate. "My roots go too deep already in Cuba," said Capote, who is married with young children. "My country is changing and I'm more optimistic about the future."

Hilarie M. Sheets is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

A version of this story originally appeared in the May 2015 issue of *ARTnews* on page 70 under the title "Forging a Sea of Iron."







1. Glexis Novoa painting *Se vende*, 2014, in his Havana studio. 2. Carlos Garaicoa's *Towers*, 2000, which fetched $40,000 at Phillips New York in May 2014. 3. The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana. 4. Factoría Habana, a popular government-sponsored exhibition space in the Cuban capital. 5. A new piece, *L2VED2CH3*, 2015, by Alexandre Arrechea, to be presented during the Bienal de La Habana this month. 6. The installation, at Galería Habana, of *Faro tumbado*, 2006, by Los Carpinteros, later acquired by Tate Modern.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ADALBERTO RODUE; PHILLIPS; ALEXANDRE ARRECHEA; LOS CARPINTEROS; FACTORIA HABANA; WIKICOMMONS

WARMING TREND

CUBA'S UNIQUE ART SCENE HAS LONG BEEN UNDER-RECOGNIZED BY THE REST OF THE WORLD, AND THE MARKET STANDS TO BLOSSOM IN THE POLITICAL THAW

BY SUSAN DELSON

ast December's announcement of talks to restore diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba after more than 50 years was a historic moment for both countries. For the art world, though, this month may prove a more interesting milestone, with the May 22 opening of the 12th Bienal de La Habana and the first round of Latin American auctions in New York since the normalization talks began.

The Bienal is expected to draw a record number of visitors, especially from the United States, as seasoned collectors and newcomers alike race to beat the "stampede" (as the *Wall Street Journal* put it) for Cuban art beyond the well-known names—Wifredo Lam, Ana Mendieta, Felix Gonzalez-Torres—who have made their mark on the global art consciousness in the past few decades. Those making the pilgrimage will be impressed by "the quality and the ingenuity of Cuban artists," says Alberto Magnan of New York's Magnan Metz Gallery, which has represented leading Cuban names since its 2005 opening. Visitors to Cuba will also find a well-developed art scene that, despite the recent media glare, remains only superficially examined by outsiders—and is primed to develop quickly if the volume of foreign visitors rises as predicted.

With the Bienal—which, contrary to its name, sometimes appears every three years—the Havana art scene shifts into overdrive, with open studios, informal exhibitions, and ambitious collateral projects vying with the official program for attention. The current edition will likely be more frenzied than usual. "When I went in 1994, there were 100 people from the United States," recalls Holly Block, executive director of the Bronx Museum of the Arts and one of the first American curators to focus on contemporary Cuban art. "In 2000, there were more than 3,000." This time, she says, "you'll have many more." The Bienal is also a key commercial period for artists. The most recent edition in 2012 was, in one curator's wry assessment, "the $10K biennial," with seemingly few of the artworks sold amid the festivities going for less. Though a considerable uptick from previous years, that price point is still a bargain by global art-market standards, and this year's influx of buyers could make it a distant memory.

Although the Bienal's immediate impact is considerable, its long-term effect on the international art market may be more profound. Says Laura González, director of Latin American art for Phillips in New York, "Institutions like the Havana biennial are going to be increasingly important for attracting new audiences to the island and for seeing Cuba as a destination for contemporary art, a destination that can be taken seriously, the way Brazil is, the way Mexico is. And that will benefit the artists, ultimately."

THE MOTHER OF **INVENTION**

"Every Cuban is a mechanic," a popular saying goes. Indeed, a knack for dealing with the unpredictable limitations of an economy in transition and the ability to make the most of resources are essential for Cuban artists. That said, art has long occupied a special status, not only in the eyes of the people, proud of their rich cultural heritage, but also in the eyes of the state, and even the U.S. government. Until the December 17 announcement by President Obama, U.S. regulations strictly limited what Americans could bring back from Cuba. Rum and cigars were off the table, but books, posters, CDs, and art—classified as "informational materials"—were approved. On the Cuban side, regulations concerning cultural patrimony govern the export of older artworks and antiques. The result: a thriving market for contemporary Cuban art among foreign visitors, especially from the United States.

Art's importance as a source of prestige is borne out by the rigorous schooling that Cuban artists receive in the state-run educational system. At the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, the Higher Institute of Art (ISA), and other institutions, students are classically trained in painting, drawing, printmaking, and other techniques, and immersed in critical and art-historical discourses. "Cuban art has always been concerned with global culture," says artist Yoan Capote, who attended ISA and taught there from 2001 to 2003. "Maybe the fact of being an island motivates intellectuals to be concerned about what's happening beyond the horizon." At the same time, successive generations of students who go on to become artists and teachers lend continuity to the creative dialogue.

This also lends a certain continuity to the art. Largely figurative, with a fine-grained sense of subtext honed over decades of shifting sociopolitical tides, contemporary Cuban art is often allusive, metaphorical, and layered with meaning. Many artists incorporate references to Cuban history, tweaked by a mordant and occasionally earthy wit. Some of the best-known artists outside of Cuba include the Madrid- and Havana-based duo Los Carpinteros (Marco Castillo and Dagoberto Rodríguez), who do architecturally inspired sculpture, installations, drawings, and videos, often with a humorous edge; their former partner Alexandre Arrechea, who divides his time between Spain, the U.S., and Havana and is best known for *No Limits*, 2013, his sculpture project on Park Avenue in New York that riffs on the city's famous skyscrapers; and Carlos Garaicoa, who, like many artists working in Havana, is inspired by the eloquent cityscape, a dynamic architectural mix spanning centuries, much of it in need of repair. Garaicoa's *Fin de silencio*, 2010, for instance, transposes the old terrazzo pavements of Havana's 1940s shopping district into a series of lush carpets, rendering them in near-photographic detail—down to the cracks, shadows, and chewing-gum stains—and teasing the old department store names with added words and meanings. (There are other names often associated with Cuban contemporary art—such as photographer Abelardo Morell and multimedia artist María Magdalena Campos Pons, both born in Cuba but today living in Boston, and the Brooklyn-based sculptor Teresita Fernández, born in Florida to Cuban parents—but this article will consider primarily those who remain in Cuba at least part-time.)

There's a strong streak of conceptual art, at times interlaced with media and performance, in projects produced on the island. In *Sala discontinua*, their 2014 project shown at the Center for the Development of the Visual Arts (CDAV), the duo Celia y Yunior (Celia González y Yunior Aguiar), collaborating with Ricardo Miguel Hernández, assembled old family photos, personal documents, and other "fragments of microhistory," as they described them, into an exhibition illuminated only by handheld lamps commonly used during power cuts—a reflection, they explained, of "the way we relate to these pieces of our history, referencing the fragmentation, the micro, and the scarcity of light."

Despite the island's well-publicized lack of connectivity, younger artists, like their international peers, are employing the Internet as a creative medium. For an invitation-only exhibition organized last year by CDAV, the Havana-based media artist Nestor Siré created *Enlace compartido*, 2014, turning his invitation into a

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SANDRA CEBALLOS; ROBERTO DIAGO AND MAGNAN METZ GALLERY, NEW YORK; ESTUDIO 7MA Y 60, HAVANA

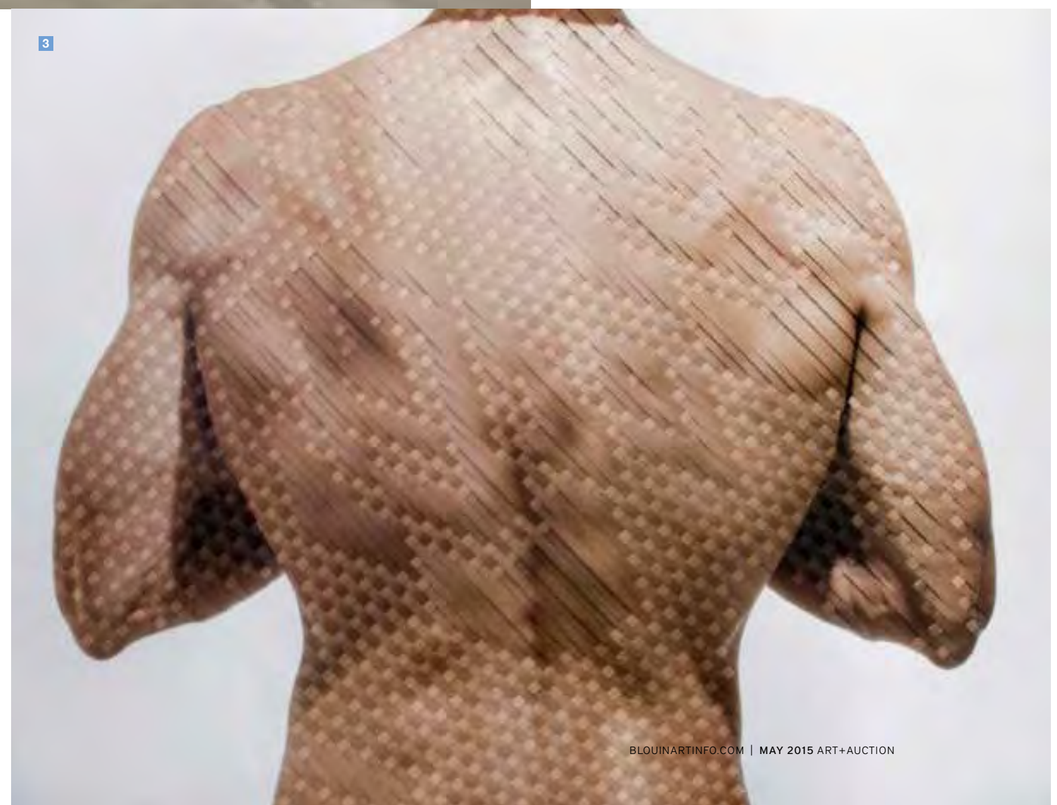
1. Artist Sandra Ceballos, who cofounded the pioneering Espacio Aglutinador, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. 2. Studio 7ma y 60 is an exhibition space run by a collective of women artists in Havana's Miramar neighborhood. 3. Roberto Diago's mixed media on canvas *Tu luz en la noche II*, 2012, from the series "Entre Lineas."

1. *Isla (Seescape)*, 2010, and *Old Speech*, 2010–11, were shown at the Upstate space The School, in Kinderhook, New York. Both works are by Yoan Capote, one of the relatively few contemporary Cuban artists to have international gallery representation.

2. Glenda León installing a show at Galería Senda in Barcelona. 3. Jorge Otero's woven-photograph *Lomo*, 2013, from the series "War Hero," which drew a crowd of 350 to its opening at Galería Habana. 4. A still from Marlon Portales's video *De la serie pensamiento democrático: El regurgitador*, 2013, recently presented at Havana's Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art.

web-based competition, open to Cuban artists around the world, to share his spot in the show.

Though Internet access remains a scarce commodity—the most widely cited statistic puts access at roughly 25 percent of the population—video is a surprisingly popular medium. Relatively inexpensive to produce, short videos can circulate easily via USB flash drives and external hard drives—an informal distribution channel in Cuba for everything from Mexican soap operas to Siré's announcement for *Enlace compartido*. As part of CDAV's 2014 contemporary art salon, the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art hosted "Las otras narraciones: Una década de animación independiente," a video exhibition showcasing the work of more than 40 production teams



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: YOAN CAPOTE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; MARLON PORTALES; JORGE OTERO AND GALERIA HABANA; GALERIA SENDA, BARCELONA

working in every genre, from animation to music videos. Among the participants were established midcareer artists like Sandra Ramos, Lázaro Saavedra, the duo Meira Marrero and José Angel Toirac, and Glenda León, whose five-channel video installation, *Cada respiro*, 2015, recently ended a three-month run at the Spanish art space Matadero Madrid.

A DUAL **MARKET**

Reflecting the communist government's cautious approach to private enterprise, the island's evolving mix of spaces combine art, entrepreneurship, and government support in different ways. The government is an active presence in the art market; commercial galleries are managed by state entities or companies belonging to them, as are most noncommercial *Kunsthalles*. Most official spaces are overseen by the Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales, established by the Ministry of Culture in 1978; the most prestigious commercial gallery, Galería Habana, dates from 1962. Other long-established venues include Galería La Acacia, which opened in 1981, and Galería Servando, established in 2003.

In the past, new galleries have debuted at a leisurely pace, but two have opened in recent months: Galería Artis 718, a contemporary gallery in the Miramar district, which opened last September, and Arte-Facto, a design gallery in the Vedado neighborhood, which opened in February. Non-selling exhibition spaces like Galería Villa Manuela, the Wifredo Lam Center, Factoría Habana, and CDAV—perhaps the most important incubator for emerging art—round out the state-sanctioned circuit. One of the earliest and longest-running independents is the pioneering Espacio Aglutinador in Vedado—the studio of artist Sandra Ceballos, who also curates shows of under-recognized and self-trained artists alongside more established names. It recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Also in Vedado is Fábrica de Arte Cubano, or FAC, a hipster hot spot housed in an old cooking-oil factory, created by musician-producer X Alfonso with support from the Ministry of Culture, the first venture of its kind. Offering art, music, performance, and film, the five-year-old FAC recently unveiled Lo Cura, a space devoted to dialogue and curatorship, with the show "El Juguete Rabioso," or "The Rabid Toy," featuring a dozen young and emerging artists.

Unlike art dealers elsewhere, Havana's state-run galleries aren't driven to differentiate themselves through their exhibition programs, nor do they attempt to claim exclusivity—it's not uncommon for younger artists to show at more than one. The galleries provide exposure, credentials, and some income, but direct sales to collectors are also a significant source of revenue. "It's a dual system," Magnan explains. "If an artist shows in a gallery, he may also opt to keep his studio open to visitors," and most do. Like Cubans running the private restaurants called *paladares*, artists are considered small-business entrepreneurs and have been entitled to payment for foreign sales in convertible currency since 1993. Such studio sales are paid in foreign currency or CUCs, the Cuban money that can be converted to hard currency (as opposed to the national currency, or peso, which most Cubans receive for their work).

With the economic reforms of recent years, that practice has expanded. "Even those artists who sell only a few works per year in hard currency could easily make more than professionals working in other areas of the Cuban economy who make their salaries in pesos," says Harvard economist and historian Alejandro de la Fuente, author of *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. That positioning confers a striking advantage: "In Cuba, artists can be full-time artists," Magnan points out. "Once they become slightly successful, they can live on that. They can have a studio, they can have gallery assistants and just concentrate solely on their artwork—which I think makes an incredible difference in the quality of the work."

BIENNIAL HIGHLIGHTS

This year's Bienal, curated by a team led by Jorge Fernández of the Wifredo Lam Center, is taking a deliberately decentralized approach, sending visitors to parts of the city not usually on the art radar and emphasizing performances and events over formal exhibitions.

One venue that will present exhibitions is the National Museum of Fine Arts. "The Map of Silence," a solo show by Alexandre Arrechea, debuts a body of work in which he takes a hyperlocal approach—collaging African-style masks from photos of buildings in Havana, suturing their geographies into what he calls the "recognizable face of a neighborhood," then reinterpreting them as oversize tapestries.

Another show at the museum, "Wild Noise," features more than 100 works by U.S. artists from the Bronx Museum of the Arts, kicking off a two-year institutional collaboration that includes artist residencies and youth programs, and brings a show from the National Museum's collection to the Bronx Museum in 2016.

Among the most anticipated of the biennial's collateral projects is "Behind the Wall: In the Middle of Nothing." Produced by art entrepreneur Juan Delgado with independent curator Elvia Rosa Castro, it's the sequel to one of the 2012 Bienal's biggest hits. As before, the 2015 version of "Behind the Wall" is expected to bring approximately 50 public artworks by Cuban and international artists to a considerable stretch of the Malecón, Havana's seawall promenade.

Group travel has been popular for Americans seeking to connect directly with Cuban artists; the studios of Abel Barroso, Roberto Diago, and Kcho, for instance, are on the trip itineraries of more than one travel company, including the nonprofit Center for Cuban Studies in New York, as well as private tours led by Magnan. Although U.S. passport holders must still travel under one of 12 criteria, such as family visits or educational activities, as of January no additional license is required, making individual travel easier and cheaper. Robert Borlenghi, president of Miami's Pan American Art Projects gallery and a travel organization, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, has been bringing groups to Cuba since October 2012. "One of the primary functions of our trips," he notes, "is to facilitate the meeting between would-be collectors and artists." When dealing with individuals rather than tour groups, artists may choose to limit their availability for the sake of productivity; however, studio visits still represent such an important avenue of income and exposure that for the moment most artists welcome visitors, even if they prefer to let others handle the actual sales. "We like the dialogue with interesting people, the smart questions they ask, and the feedback we receive," says Yoan Capote, who shares his studio and showroom with his brother Iván, also an artist. "But in the end, we always ask interested collectors to contact the galleries that represent our work."

If there is one element that is largely missing from the Havana art scene, it's local collectors. There are a handful, but unlike collectors elsewhere in the world, they tend to shun the spotlight, as collecting has been seen as an elitist activity in a supposedly classless society. A recent article in the Spanish art publication *Arteinformado* identified the 15 biggest collectors of Cuban art internationally. Along with well-known U.S.-based collectors like Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, Howard and Patricia Farber, and Ron and Ann Pizzuti, the list included four collectors in Havana—Christian Gundín, José Busto, Luciano Méndez, and Jean Marc Ville—who focus on contemporary art.

1. Capote's evocative bronze sculpture *Migrant*, 2010, shown at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. 2. *Ladrillo de ladrillos*, 2014, a terra-cotta piece by Los Carpin teros. 3. León's *Growing*, 2014, from "Hacia el Silencio" at Galería Senda.

LOS CARPINTEROS. OPPOSITE: YOAN CAPOTE AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY; GLENDA LEON AND GALERIA SENDA

GOING **GLOBAL**

While artists in previous decades tended either to remain on the island or leave altogether, the past few years have seen Cuban artists going abroad temporarily for exhibitions, residencies, and projects, as well as Cuban-born artists who make their homes elsewhere returning to the island for stretches of time. After a lengthy absence, the Cuban national pavilion was reintroduced at the Venice Biennale in 2011, and individual artists have participated in recent biennials from São Paulo to Sharjah. Despite the U.S. embargo and limited digital connectivity, artists and curators find ways to keep abreast of international art news, and Cuban art is increasingly outward facing. "There's a generation of artists who have gone beyond the politics of their situation and are much more poetic in their discourse," says González, citing Reynier Leyva Novo, an artist in his early 30s working in video, sculpture, and other media, as one example. "And that is really interesting for a foreign audience."

A number of Cuban artists are already established on the international gallery circuit, and others are gaining momentum. In addition to Galería Habana, Capote is represented by Ben Brown Fine Arts in London and Hong Kong and in New York by Jack Shainman Gallery, where his show "Collective Unconscious" opens May 28. Los Carpinteros is represented by Sean Kelly in New York, Ivorypress in Spain, Galerie Peter Kilchmann in Switzerland, Galeria Fortes Vilaça in Brazil, and Edouard Malingue in Hong Kong. Garaicoa shows with the multinational Galleria Continua, Galería Elba Benítez in Madrid, and Galeria Luisa Strina in São Paulo; Arrechea is represented by Galería Casado Santapau in Madrid and by Magnan Metz in New York, which also represents León and Diago. The artist who has grabbed the most headlines in recent months, however, is Tania Bruguera, an acclaimed activist-artist whose work frequently questions existing power structures. At press time she was confined to Havana while awaiting charges stemming from her December attempt to restage a 2009 performance work, *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, as an open-mike event in the fraught space of the Plaza de la Revolución, *(continued on page 114)*

ARTISTS TO WATCH

Cuba has dozens of accomplished artists with solid reputations at home but limited exposure abroad, especially in the United States. Here are a few to look for.

LAZARO SAAVEDRA, b. 1964

With mediums of choice that include painting, drawing, performance, installation, and video, Saavedra won the National Visual Arts Award, the country's highest honor, last year. Thanks to inclusion in a few group exhibitions at museums—notably "Permission to Be Global/Prácticas Globales: Latin American Art from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection" at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, last year—his witty, incisive work is starting to become known in the United States.

EDUARDO PONJUAN, b. 1956

The 2013 winner of the National Visual Arts Award, Ponjuán, like Saavedra, has been part of museum group shows abroad, but is not otherwise well known. He also works in a range of media, including painting and installation. "Bésame mucho," a well-received solo show that closed in February at Havana's National Museum of Fine Arts, received plaudits for its large-scale installation pieces and starkly composed, hyperrealist canvases.

SANDRA RAMOS, b. 1969

Ramos explores the contradictions of Cuban life and the disjuncture of emigration, often through an avatar of herself as a young schoolgirl. Working in printmaking, collage, installation, and video, she's had substantial exposure abroad but remains relatively little known in the United States.

CELIA Y YUNIOR, b. 1985 and 1984

Among younger artists, this duo is known for rigorous conceptual works that link personal and national narratives and articulate the social and bureaucratic structures underpinning daily life on the island. Combining performance, video, installation, and at times meticulous record-keeping, their work is grounded in Cuban realities but resonates well beyond.

ELIZABET CERVINO, b. 1986

In paintings, sculpture, performance, and installation work, Cerviño explores the connection between art and nature with a poetic appreciation of the ephemeral. Look for her work at the women-run artists' cooperative Studio 7ma y 60 in Miramar and at galleries and noncommercial art spaces around Havana.

Cuba *(continued from page 99)*

the Havana square that is the political center of the island.

According to Phillips's González, a rare Bruguera earth sculpture, *Destierro*, 1998–2003 (est. $40–60,000) will be "an unquestionable highlight" of that house's Latin American art auction in New York on May 26. Despite recent attention to the island's artists from such institutions as New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Museum of Arts and Design, by and large the secondary market for Cuban art has been slow to catch fire. There are only a handful of Cuban artists whose work has cracked six figures at auction. The modernist Wifredo Lam stands apart, with a stratospheric $4.56 million record reached in a 2012 auction at Sotheby's New York. Among contemporary names, Miami transplant Julio Larraz and Miami- and Costa Rica–based Tomás Sánchez, painters with active collector bases, frequently achieve robust six-figure sales. With those exceptions, says González, the price level for contemporary Cuban art "is usually focused in the lower range, under $100,000." Even artists who do well at auction turn in prices "remarkably lower than what they're fetching in private sales," she says. From her perspective, that's a plus: "The fact that contemporary Cuban art is so much lower in value means that more collectors can acquire it. It can enter the important collections that in 30 years are going to be representative of this period."

Contemporary Cuban art is included in virtually all Latin American sales at the major New York auction houses, but in 2013 Phillips presented a curated selection of 27 contemporary Cuban lots as a special section of its Latin American sale. The sell-through hit a resounding 100 percent, netting $257,000 total. González credits the demand for contemporary Cuban art to a combination of factors: the increased economic impact of Latin America as a region, a greater international focus on Latin American art, the economic changes on the island, and the fact that "you can still get A-plus material in Cuba without having to spend millions of dollars."

Who does González think is poised for a breakthrough? "Carlos Garaicoa is building quite a lot," she says. "He's managed to get extremely respected international galleries that have developed his market quite sustainably. It's the same with Los Carpinteros," she adds, especially their sculpture and installation pieces, which rarely come up at auction. The May 26 Phillips auction includes work by both Garaicoa and Los Carpinteros.

Whether working from the island or abroad, most Cuban artists, despite their unique patrimony, see themselves as cosmopolitan participants in an international creative discourse. Among those abroad, some return to Havana rarely or never; others maintain residences and studios there even as they spend time elsewhere. And some are navigating what curator Elizabeth Cerejido has called "two opposing yet increasingly intersecting contexts: Miami and Havana." Emblematic of this trend is Miami-based Glexis Novoa, who, after an absence of 20 years, set up a studio in Havana last summer, reexamining a body of work—a series of paintings called "La etapa práctica"—that had been interrupted by his departure. Though painted on the island, the resulting canvases debuted last October at Juan Ruiz Gallery in Miami, where there's an established audience and market for his art. At the same time, Novoa's Havana studio is open to visitors year round, and he continues to spend time there—the flight from Miami, he notes, takes only about 45 minutes. "It's interesting to have the opportunity to exist in these two contexts," says Novoa. "It enriches my experience as an artist. I can feel that in both cities there's more harmony, more of a sense of being in sync. That's something we're all enjoying, here and there."

As relations ease and more U.S. collectors find their way to Havana, the distance between island and mainland is, for the art world, beginning to look smaller and smaller. ⊞

SUSAN DELSON IS THE NEW YORK EDITOR OF CUBAN ART NEWS, A NONPROFIT BILINGUAL WEBSITE COVERING CUBAN ART AND CULTURE WORLDWIDE. SHE IS THE EDITOR OF *AI WEIWEI: CIRCLE OF ANIMALS* (PRESTEL, 2011) AND A FORMER EDITOR AT FORBES, INC. AND LOUISE BLOUIN MEDIA.

Brothers in Law *(continued from page 67)*

In Kismet's case, we quickly noted that her all-risk policy wasn't all-risk enough: Section 12 had a so-called "dishonest acts" exclusion, which clearly stated that it would not cover consignment agreements and losses stemming from entrustment. This meant the insurer would not pay if a consignee failed to return the lithographs or the proceeds from their sale.

"So what law can the museum rely on to protect itself going forward when consigning works to a gallery?" Kismet asked.

Although no statute can prevent the legal mayhem that inevitably ensues when a dealer runs off with works of art, the drafters of the Uniform Commercial Code (adopted in all 50 states) did specifically provide ways for an owner to protect his or her interest in the consignment of an artwork against a dealer's creditors. Under Article 2 of the UCC, the owner can file a financing statement with the state in which the gallery is located. This puts the world on public notice of the owner's interest in the work. By properly filing this notice, the owner becomes a "secured creditor" whose interest in the work is superior to that of other creditors or claimants.

As bad luck would have it, Kismet's legal problems were not confined to the stolen lithographs. Her museum was also wrestling with an entirely different insurance claim—this one regarding a Roman bust owned by the museum that had been damaged when shipped to an exhibition in Las Vegas.

"Fortunately, we had wall-to-wall insurance," said Kismet. "Unfortunately, the insurer is trying to deny our claim because the bust might actually have been looted from Italy years before we bought it."

"*Mamma mia*," we said.

We explained that usually insurance is available only when the insured has a so-called insurable interest in the artwork—most often meaning the insured derives a financial or other benefit from it and, typically, owns it. The reason for an insurable interest requirement is that insurance policies indemnify for loss, and insured parties cannot incur a loss if they don't have an actual interest in the damaged property. To take one example, no insurance company would let us carry insurance on, say, the *Mona Lisa* in the hope that we could profit from anything bad happening to it down the line.

The insurable interest requirement also figured prominently in the *Zurich v. Grimberg* decision. That court decided that the Botero painting delivered to the dealer was not insured because "the seller's insurable interest in goods usually ends with their delivery to the buyer no later than the time of delivery."

"But even if our museum didn't actually own the Roman bust, we had it in our possession," said Kismet. "Isn't that sufficient to have an insurable interest?"

"Nope," said we.

"But we bought the piece innocently without knowing it was stolen, so we must have some sort of insurable interest, right?" Kismet persisted.

"Sadly, no," we said. In the famous 1993 Nebraska Supreme Court case *Howard v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company*, the court held for an insurer that denied coverage on a Corvette that was destroyed in a fire because the insured, Robert Howard, had purchased the car from scam artists who did not give him actual title, thus classifying the purchase as having occurred under "other than innocent circumstances." This legal principle would mean that if the southern museum's bust were to be proved stolen, coverage could be denied.

"I guess our position would be no better if our museum had reason to believe the piece was stolen when we bought it," observed Kismet.

"It would be worse," we observed, "since only an innocent, lawful purchaser may have an insurable interest."

"Just my dumb luck," sighed Kismet. ⊞

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HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Cuba Arts Journal: Island in Flux

Posted: 02/01/2015 10:45 am EST | Updated: 02/01/2015 12:59 pm EST

Regina Weinreich

Author, 'Kerouac's Spontaneous Poetics'

The parting shot as we left Miami for Cuba last week was NBC's Brian Williams reporting from Havana. Talks were under way, and news crews were on it. Andrea Mitchell was spotted crossing the Hotel Nacional's grand lobby. Everyone wanted to know how President Obama's move to finesse diplomacy would land. Already the word was out: while he welcomed an accord with the Americans, Fidel Castro (88), was not going to budge on the values he enforced over the decades of his rule, no matter what. What this means was a subject for discovery, anyone's guess, as many Cubans must petition for permission to travel, a Kafkaesque process.

Meantime a vibrant culture is poised for its next great moment: music, art, food, already explored by international and American tourists lucky enough to get there, is in the ready for the world stage. Personal destiny may be sacrificed for the national good, but those values visibly erode as artists make progress in commerce, a fear for onetime revolutionaries, and emblematic of the future. Welcoming visitors into their studios, artists as diverse as Jose Fuster (his home and studio are called Fusterlandia) and Kcho (who calls his space Laboratorio de arte), sell their work, and transform their barrios decorating the streets.

Teams of artists share space, aesthetically renovated with on trend lighting and exposed rafters, in juxtaposition with the time warp -- '50's winged Chevies and Studebakers -- outside their picture windows. Buildings, magnificent ruins with columns bespeaking a prior glory, make the Malecon look like a bombed out city. Squatters occupy this squalid real estate. Rentals are negotiated on the boulevard. By contrast, some studios we visited could have as easily been in New York's meatpacking. All this exists in a country where Internet is not accessible.

At night, young women in killer heels kick back at clubs. At la Zorra y el Cuervo jazz club, Oscar Valdez & Diakara performed for six or seven tables of tourists. The next night in the basilica at San Francisco square we heard a program of composers, Mendelssohn, Handel, and Bach, all German because a German group had sponsored an installation of peace in the form of large bears painted for each country in the square outside. The most popular for photo ops was the U.S., represented by a mint green Statue of Liberty. Another night at Teatro Berthold Brecht we heard David Torrens. He brought Kelvis Ochoa to the stage. The crowded club was the place to be.

Another night at a supper club called The Magic Flute, a signature salad of greens dripped with white and dark chocolate was divine, as was the music. Carlos Varela was in the audience, and it was a big deal. Everyone seemed on a sweet mohito sugar rush. Dinners at Starbein and Rio Mar, were most memorable. Lunch at Ristorante Corte del Principe, even as heavy rain pelted the tin roof and we had to catch droplets in glasses, was exceptional with grilled crayfish and capresse.

Artist Yoan Capote, a Guggenheim fellow, with representation at New York's Jack Schainman Gallery in Chelsea, says his mother, influenced by the Soviets, spelled his name with a Y. We heard a lot of that. The Capote part was the same as that adopted by Breakfast at Tiffany author Truman, taken from his migrant worker stepfather in New Orleans. The painter and installation artist said at "el Bunker," the studio he shares with his brother: he too would have been a migrant worker, if not for the good advice of Americans Carole and Alex Rosenberg, and the interest of The Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, a cultural organization focused on "promoting and protecting Cuban contemporary experimentation in the field of arts and culture," celebrating its 20th anniversary the week we were there. Did Capote think the opening of trade with the United States would ruin Cuba, bringing in the worst of capitalism? "Cubans are uncertain," he said, "but I am optimistic. I believe in God."

A version of this post also appears on Gossip Central (http://www.gossipcentral.com/) .

MORE: **Andrea** Mitchell , **Brian** Williams , **Carlos** Varela, **Carole and Alex** Rosenberg , **David** Torrens , Fidel Castro , **Jose** Fuster , **Kelvis Ochoa, Barack Obama , Oscar Valdez &** Diakara , **The Ludwig Foundation of** Cuba, **Yoan Capote, Kcho**

artnet®

in brief

Is Cuba the Next Art-World Hot Spot?

David Ebony, Friday, December 19, 2014

Yoan Capote, *Married,* mixed media on canvas, 2004. photo: courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman

In the aftermath of president Obama's bombshell announcement this week that the U.S. and Cuba would be diplomatically reunited, a wide array of American mega-corporations, from banks and telecommunications companies to fast-food chains and retail conglomerates, lined up to make bids to do business with the Caribbean island nation of 11 million. The art world, too, has been focused on developments this week, weighing in on all sorts of prospects for the future of the art and artists of Cuba.

As noted in a recent report in the *Wall Street Journal,* the art world already has a head start in the inevitable surge in economic and cultural interaction between the U.S.and its neighbor. U.S. collectors have been engaged with Cuban art for years due to a little-known loophole in the

U.S. trade embargo with Cuba that allowed the import and export of "cultural assets," a category in which art works found a safe haven. Cuban artists also have been insulated from the embargo and have enjoyed relative freedom of movement (see "How Will the New U.S.-Cuba Ties Affect the Art World?").

Artists and artist teams, such as Kcho, Los Carpinteros, Yoan Capote, and Wilfredo Prieto, have received a great deal of international attention in recent years, and travel abroad frequently. Prices for their works are steadily on the rise. Works by Cuban masters, such as Wilfredo Lam, generate sizable sums at auction. In 2012, Lam's 1944 canvas *Idol* sold at Sotheby's in New York, for $4.6 million, a record auction price for the artist. Since its inauguration in 1984, the Habana Biennial has become a must on the international art-world circuit draw for Cuba; the exhibition is routinely included on many critics' lists of the world's most important international art biennials (see "World's Top 20 Bienials, Triennials anmd Miscennials"). Will we soon see Art Basel Havana? What about NADA Habana?

ISLA (Seescape), Yoan Capote, 2010.

Island Roots

Cuban artists attract global collectors while maintaining native ties.

By Margery Gordon

While collectors have long coveted the modern masterpieces of Cuba's Vanguardia and contemporary works by Cuban Americans, artists currently working on the island have remained below the international radar until recently.

"It's still the best-kept secret," says Howard Farber, a resident of New York and Miami who has been collecting art for 40 years with his wife, Patricia. Since 2001, they have amassed about 250 works by artists who began their careers in Cuba. "Serious collectors are starting to collect Cuban art," he says. "The future looks very bright for Cuban contemporary art."

The allure of the exotic factors into that increasing interest. "There may be an attraction because it is the forbidden island, a complicated island," admits Luis Miret Pérez, director of Galería Habana, representing the country's foremost contemporary artists. But the bottom line is the work itself, not the artist's nationality.

"There's so much quality in the work out of Cuba," says Farber, who launched Cuban Art News online five years ago and is inaugurating the Cuban Art Awards. "It's really a shame that because of politics, many people don't know much about it."

Ella Fontanals-Cisneros has intensified her patronage in the homeland she left as a young child. In the last two years alone, she has acquired about 300 pieces of Cuban art made from the 1950s to the present, as well as a private archive with an estimated 4 million objects documenting exhibitions and artists dating back to the 1600s. The Archivo Veigas will be accessible online and housed at the art library she aims to open by 2016 in Old Havana, near the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

Lately, Fontanals-Cisneros has been filling a gap in institutional collections in which the 1980s watershed in Cuban art, marked by formal experimentation and friction with the government, is underrepresented. "It's time to show this generation of artists what was happening 30 years ago," she says.

During the 12th edition of the Havana Biennial next spring, Fontanals-Cisneros will present at the MNBA more than 150 works that Gustavo Pérez Monzón created from 1978 to 1991. "Instead of political work, he was doing something different with the universe, numerology, and Kabbalah," she says, "so he was a very avant-garde artist in his culture and environment." Monzón, who shifted to curating and educating other artists after moving to Mexico in 1990, is encouraged "that the time has passed when young art focused on a direct relationship of acceptance or rejection of the immediate situation in the country."

Politically correct, Wilfredo Prieto, 2009.

Fantastical motifs trending on the island were exposed to American audiences last spring at LaCa Projects in Charlotte, North Carolina. Abelardo G. Mena Chicuri, curator of the Farber Collection and Havana editor for Cuban Art News, exported 30 works by Juan Carlos Verdial, Alicia de la Campa, Alexander González, and Vicente Hernández that

PHOTOGRAPHY © YOAN CAPOTE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK (CAPOTE); DIRK PAUWELS, COURTESY OF NOGUERAS BLANCHARD, BARCELONA/MADRID (PRIETO); OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY OF THE FARBER COLLECTION

"freely reinterpret symbols of the Cuban culture, of its geography and history, Catholic and African popular religions...." These escapist tendencies, Mena Chicuri writes, "undoubtedly stem from the rupture with a troublesome and uncertain social landscape."

The political and economic pressures on Cuban artists surface subtly now in multilayered critiques or nonliteral narratives. Yoan Capote translates personal experiences into universal expressions of the human condition by rendering psychological states with relatable symbols, like the vast, impassable ocean of *Isla (Seascape)*, exhibited in New York at Jack Shainman Gallery, which is showing Capote's work at Art Basel in Miami Beach and next May in Chelsea. Hundreds of fishhooks punctuate impasto flourishes of oil paint in this vigorous 2010 example of the inventive manipulation of unconventional materials that distinguishes much Cuban art.

The resourcefulness necessary for subsistence extends to creative practices, even after artists develop international careers and set up secondary studios in diasporic epicenters like Madrid, Mexico City, Miami, and New York—places offering foundries, print shops, and other fabricators nonexistent in Cuba, where basic art supplies are still scarce and prohibitively pricey.

Deprivation remains a contextual reference. "We grew up in very strict austerity," says Marco Antonio Castillo Valdes. "We became artists and were in university during the 'special period,' when the Soviet Union collapsed. We became a guild fascinated by labor and fabrication." Their use of woodworking as both medium and homage at Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte branded the collective Los Carpinteros.

The persistent dearth of industrial production and man-made goods in Cuba and the contrasting vibrancy of material culture surrounding their studio in Madrid inspire Los Carpinteros' oversize installations. Their beachfront bar for Art Basel in Miami Beach 2012 (and its model, which will be exhibited in Sean Kelly's booth again this year) was a latticed oval cocoon in the shape of and named after a ubiquitous Afro-Cuban percussion instrument carved from Caribbean gourds, the *güiro* (also Cuban slang for "party").

Double entendre and visual analogy are key tools wielded by Los Carpinteros to envelop wry commentary in infectious whimsy, as their Oldenburg-scale screwdriver heads conflate the quotidian and sublime by resembling spires. *Catedrales*, the last work standing from the MNBA's 2005 exhibition of transient outdoor sculpture, is being rebuilt with better bricks in time for the biennial. "Cuba is a damaged place, a hard country, but it's very exciting at the same time," says Castillo Valdes. Adds Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez, the collective's other remaining member, "This is our natural scene. It is important to spread our ideas there."

Younger compatriot Wilfredo Prieto will craft new pieces in situ and restage seminal installations outside and inside the MNBA from May 22 to August 22. "Speaking Badly About Stones" is a "mutable" summary of 15 years with iterations tailored to its three venues, starting at S.M.A.K. in Ghent last summer and traveling to Kunstverein Braunschweig, December 6 to February 14. Prieto's first public interventions and conceptual arrangements on the ISA campus in the late 1990s nurtured plants and produce, persistent aesthetic tropes in his minimalist and pointedly absurdist juxtapositions of pedestrian, often perishable, objects.

Cuba's iconic crumbling colonials, utilitarian towers, and avant-garde experiments make the incongruities of urban design a recurring theme among homegrown artists. The architectural proposals of Carlos Garaicoa bridge Castro's utopic illusions with the European Union's capitalist monoliths (reflecting his dual residence in Havana and Madrid)—a span surveyed at CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo in Madrid and the Botín Foundation in Santander until early March 2015. His first solo show in Miami, opening December 1 at Ideobox Artspace in Wynwood and continuing into February, debuts a cityscape of marble game-pieces surrounded by hand-cut prints and wire wall drawings. More of Garaicoa's compositions will be displayed inside the Convention Center at Galería Elba Benítez of Madrid and Galleria Continua, based in San Gimignano, Italy.

The site-specific interactions will be amplified and decentralized for the 12th Havana Biennial, from May 22 to June 22, with an interdisciplinary approach encapsulated by the 2015 theme, "Between the Idea and Experience." Penetrating outlying neighborhoods will "implicate different social groups," explains Jorge Fernandez Torres, returning director of the biennial and Havana's Wilfredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art. Visitors and artists from abroad "will have the opportunity to live and feel the contradictions and the richness of our reality." **ABMB**

En Construcción (III), Carlos Garaicoa, 2013

"Serious collectors are starting to collect Cuban art. The future looks very bright for Cuban contemporary art." —*HOWARD FARBER*

16 m., Los Carpinteros, 2010 (installation view).

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF GALERÍA ELBA BENÍTEZ (GARAICOA); © LOS CARPINTEROS, COURTESY OF DAROS LATINAMERICA COLLECTION (LOS CARPINTEROS)

CUBAN art news
Cuban art and culture worldwide

Yoan Capote: A Conversation at CUNY

The artist speaks at CUNY's Bildner Center in Manhattan

Published: August 29, 2013

Open Mind, 2008
Courtesy The Farber Collection

Earlier this month, the Cuba Project of the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies invited artist Yoan Capote (b. 1977, Pinar del Rio, Cuba) to speak about his work to an audience of academics and students. Mauricio A. Font, director of both the Cuba Project and the Bildner Center, welcomed the group, noting that the Cuba Project often works with other academic and policy-oriented programs and institutions to promote a broader dialogue. One such group is the American Friends of the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, whose president, Carole Rosenberg, proposed inviting Capote to speak. Rosenberg herself introduced Yoan to the audience. Years ago, the Ludwig Foundation in Havana had selected the artist—then a student at ISA, the Instituto Superior de Artes—to participate in its program for the professional development of young Cuban artists. This year, the foundation arranged for Capote to create four sculptures, on view at Long Island's LongHouse Reserve art center through October 12.

Covert, Nadine. "Yoan Capote: A Conversation at CUNY." *Cuban Art News*, 29 August 2013. Online. <http://www.cubanartnews.org/news/yoan-capote-a-conversation-at-cuny/3038>.

Stress (monumental), 2010
Courtesy Yoan Capote

Yoan opened his presentation by noting that the challenge for Cuban artists is to deal with Cuban reality but at the same time to make art that can be universally appreciated. By way of example, he cited his sculpture *Stress* (2004), which features rows of molded bronze teeth supporting heavy concrete blocks. The work was inspired by the artist's own experience of grinding his teeth as a result of stress. For the sculpture, each row of teeth supports the weight of a 500-pound concrete block, which for the artist represents social pressures.

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Racional, 2004
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

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Images of the brain find their way into several of Capote's sculptures. *Racional* (2004, 2006, 2007 versions) "embodies the dichotomy between pleasure and fear, thought and desire, instinct and reason." In *Locura / Madness* (2004), the silhouette of a human head rests on an unstable base—an upside-down brain that's become detached from the head. In *Open Mind* (2008), the image of the brain becomes a maze, conceived as a meditative space open to all.

Migrant, 2010
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Other works reference the experience of immigrants. For the original version of *Nostalgia* (2004), the artist filled the suitcase he had brought from Havana with bricks from Manhattan, representing the conflict of traveling to a new country and the burdens we carry with us. The original work was destroyed but later re-created in bronze. In *Migrant* (2010–2013), two trees are transformed into long human legs, evoking the growth that can result from being uprooted. For *Tran/Sit* (2002–2013), well-worn suitcases are arranged to form a bench, becoming a "symbol of the psychological conflicts of those people who must learn to survive far from their homeland." (It's featured in the LongHouse exhibition this summer, along with versions of*Nostalgia* and *Migrant*.) Another work in Yoan's presentation, *La ausencia (escuchando el vacío)* /*The absence (listening to the void)* (2011), depicts a closet with empty clothes hangers—a poignant evocation of the emptiness felt when loved ones leave their homes and homelands.

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Paranoia, 2006
Courtesy The Farber Collection

Other sculptural works imply subtle social commentary. The window grille of *Paranoia* (2006) is transformed into silhouettes of faces drawn from shadows cast on a wall. Like a window with no exit, this work "gives us the sensation of desperation…or the experience that we are prisoners within ourselves or that we are imprisoned by those who surround us." For *Maleable / Malleable* (2008), the artist took photos of political acts in Cuba and pasted them on a Rubik's cube as a commentary on societal manipulation and disorientation. *Retrato de la Masa / Mass Portrait* (2007-2008) consists of a grouping of stone blocks with only an ear carved into each. The subjects of these "portraits" have no faces and no voices: they can only listen and cannot speak. According to Yoan, *Mass Portrait* was inspired by the work of Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930).

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In a discussion with the audience, Capote remarked that this was the first time he had visited the U.S. and had not considered emigrating. Asked if this was due to Cuba lifting travel restrictions for its citizens, he agreed. He is happy to belong to Cuba and appreciates the education he received there. Since 2000, he said, Cuba has become more open, and artists of his generation are more aware of how to adapt their work to other contexts. Some are learning to function in the international art market, but, he adds, there is still a need for more galleries on the island.

As his work has developed, Yoan has assembled a team of 30 people to help with his projects. He is also establishing a foundry in Havana to manufacture sculptures. He explained that he tries to spend at least an hour a day just thinking up new ideas for projects. One such idea exists only as a drawing: *Ida y Vuelta (la Habana) / Round Trip (Havana)* (2000), which imagines a series of luggage-shaped buoys connecting Havana and Florida.

Round Trip (Havana), 2000
Courtesy Yoan Capote

The Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies is an "interdisciplinary forum for scholars, policy makers, and civil society leaders working on contemporary issues in the Americas." It is affiliated with the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). The Cuba Project is a "collaborative effort to study changes in Cuban politics, economics, culture, and society," focusing on developments in Cuba in an international context.

— Nadine Covert

Covert, Nadine. "Yoan Capote: A Conversation at CUNY." *Cuban Art News*, 29 August 2013. Online. <http://www.cubanartnews.org/news/yoan-capote-a-conversation-at-cuny/3038>.

CUBAN art news
Cuban art and culture worldwide

Update: Summer Shows in Havana, Santa Fe, the Hamptons and Medellín

Published: August 08, 2013

Yoan Capote, *Abuso de Poder* (Abuse of Power), 2013
Courtesy Yoan Capote and Jack Shainman Gallery

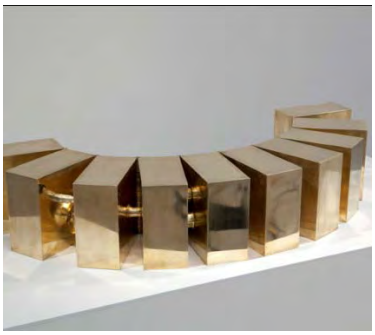
Yoan Capote in the Hamptons. At the Longhouse Reserve art center and gardens in Easthampton, this past weekend saw the opening of a sculpture installation by Yoan Capote. According to sources at Jack Shainman Gallery, Capote's New York dealer, four bronzes will be on view—not only the two mentioned on the Longhouse website—including a new work, *Abuse of Power* (2013), depicting a handcuffed tree, that just made it out of the foundry in time for the show. The other pieces include*TranSit*, a set of concrete suitcases that form a bench, which has been borrowed from a private collection; and two new iterations, in bronze, of sculptural themes that Capote previously explored in other media or other dimensions. The installation at the Longhouse Reserve runs through October 12.

ARTINFO

POSTWAR & CONTEMPORARY ART
October 22, 2010

The "Mental States" of America: A Q&A with Yoan Capote

NEW YORK— Cuban artist Yoan Capote's current show, "Mental States," up through November 13 at **Jack Shainman Gallery**, is an exploration of sex, oversized sculpture, banal views, and fishhooks. (The last are used as a medium in labor-intensive, epic canvases on which hundreds of hooks combine to form images of the sea, or the New York skyline.) **ARTINFO** discussed with Capote how he continues to "contaminate the Minimalist sensibility" while challenging the way we think about materials.



I'm very curious about your use of fishhooks as a material to create two-dimensional images that have a certain depth. How do the fishhooks allow you to accomplish what would be impossible if you were working with ink, or with black paint?

When I decided to use fishhooks, I was interested in the symbolism of the object itself as well as the meaning attached to it as a medium. As my work focuses on human psychology, it was important that it represented me personally — the fishhooks are tied to my experience of fishing in Cuba. I decided to use fishhooks in this series because I wanted to create a tension between beauty and seduction and danger and entrapment. These concepts represent collective obsessions and desires associated with the subjects of the paintings. When you view these works from a distance, the perception of a representational image is created. But viewed up close, it becomes sculptural — a sensorial and tactile experience. In this solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, I am finally able to showcase this series within the context of my body of work. "Mental States" is mainly inspired by my cultural experiences with America. I am presenting "Isla (Seescape)" as one of the major pieces in the exhibition. The sea is an obsession for any island population, but at the same time, this is the first image I had of "America." When I was a child, I looked to the horizon and would imagine the world beyond. The sea represents the seductiveness of these dreams, but at the same time danger and isolation.

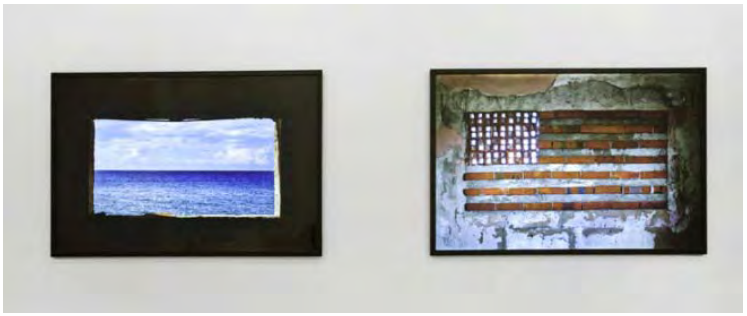
In "American Appeal (Postcard)," you've chosen to represent a purposefully banal image: the New York City skyline. What comment are you making on this view, which is already so over-represented?

The first fishhook painting I made, "American Appeal," is based on the image adorning the first postcards I was ever sent from New York. It is also inspired by my first trip to this city. When I returned to Cuba, I wondered how to accurately represent the difficulty I had leaving my dreams behind to go back home. In this painting, New York is portrayed as a manifestation of these seductive, ensnaring dreams, so it is only fitting to use such a common image of the city. The piece also serves as a metaphor for the obsessive creative process. Not only is the American Dream an intoxicating illusion for people all over the world, but in order to create this piece I needed multiple assistants. We

were all people working toward the same obsessive goal. Over-representation is not an issue for me, it's actually a characteristic of pop culture that I'm intrigued by. In my case, I consider my use of iconic images a sort of Neuro-Pop, because my approach to the images is conceptual first and foremost. The common thread in all my work is that it is weighted in the condition of the human psyche; specifically, these fishhook paintings are based on the lure of myths and illusions.

Sculpturally, you seem drawn to very particular materials and forms. "Beautiful People," for instance, is an arc of rectangular shapes connected to each other. It reminds me a bit of "Stress," which you made in 2004 and also involves very minimal, rectangular shapes. Are you inspired by Minimalism? What sculptural forms and shapes and materials excite you most?

I like to contaminate the Minimalist sensibility with basic human concerns. I decided to use the Minimalist format to reinforce the conceptual aspect of my work. For example, in "Stress," I was interested in the verticality of modern architecture. The repetition of the concrete blocks mimicked the structure of a skyscraper and the monotony of its stories. As the title suggests, the piece is, in essence, about stress, which is a prominent condition of contemporary urban life. In the case of "Beautiful People," when the piece is closed it becomes a minimal work in it's rectangularity. This pure, clean shape is a metaphor for the way political correctness stifles human behavior. I was inspired to make this piece by an experience I had leaving an art opening. I had just left the fairly formal business interactions of the night, only to be confronted by a sex shop near the gallery. What is minimal about this piece is only the exterior of the sculpture. By opening the piece, these hidden sexual activities are revealed in complete opposition. It is a Freudian display of the contradiction between social norms and innate behaviors and tendencies. Somebody once said that this piece is minimal when it is closed and maximal when it is opened.



The work "In and Out" juxtaposes an image of a hole in the wall (through which we see the ocean) and what appears to be an American flag constructed of bricks. Can you explain in more detail what we are looking at, and what questions you are raising by putting these two images next to each other?

This work is one in a series based on a construction I made in an abandoned building in Havana. The building's window was facing north and had a clear view to the sea. I closed that window by inlaying bricks in the formation of the U.S. flag as a metaphor for the distance and the blocked communication between Cuba and the U.S. Of course, there is a reference to **Jasper Johns**'s flags, and I like the idea that this is done from a Povera perspective, showing a view of America from inside and outside. I sought to deconstruct the myth of the American Dream that was born after WWII and cemented by Pop art. The companion piece to "The Window" is a diptych video installation entitled "Historical Fatalism." This piece is a bit more optimistic than the first in that one of the screens depicts a person gently dismantling the wall to once again reveal the idyllic seascape.

How would you characterize the contemporary art scene in Cuba at the moment? Which of your peers in Cuba should Americans be paying close attention to in the coming years?

An art critic in Havana once said that artists in Cuba grow like weeds, and it's true! To be an artist there is a privilege for several reasons. One is because we have a very strong and historically rich culture, and another is because we have the opportunity to creatively disseminate important issues to an international audience. It's hard to name just a few artists to look out for, because there are countless talents, but one artist who has been a great inspiration to me is my brother Ivan Capote. He has always been there to support me, both emotionally and artistically. Cuba is a place where American collectors can always find new ideas.

★Cuban Art News

Yoan Capote: Fish Hooks, Minimalism, and the American Dream

The Cuban Art News Interview – 10/14/10

"Painted" with fish hooks: Yoan Capote, *American Appeal* (detail), 2010 Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

This past week, *Cuban Art News* caught up with Yoan Capote, in New York for the installation of his exhibition, *Mental States*, opening tonight at Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea. Following up on last week's short video interview with documentarist Ketty Mora, here Capote talks in greater detail about works in the show, and what it's like to be an international artist based in Cuba.

To begin, maybe you could give us an overview of the show and the themes you're exploring in these pieces.

Mental States is a compilation of works and ideas that came to mind after my first encounter with American culture. That was in 2002, when I came here for the first time. I was writing several ideas and concentrating on the psychological issues of that. In this case I was attracted to and interested in the relationship with fantasies, obsessions, and seduction.

The show includes three large pieces that were 'painted,' so to speak, with fish hooks. How did those come about?

After my experience in America, I was analyzing objects that have some relationship to this theme. And it happens that one of them is an ancient object, very common in Cuba, and that's the fish hook. It's a symbol of seduction and attraction, the trap. In the first work in that series, called *American Appeal*, I reproduced the first postcard I received from New York.

It's made with a thousand fish hooks. The process of creation is very, very obsessive. It's very meticulous work. And there's an interesting relationship with the energy of the painting, because it's painted with a lot of impasto, a lot of thick oil, and the brush strokes have a lot of energy. And in opposition, you have these fish hooks attached by hammering nails one by one, in a very mechanical and craftsmanlike way. From a distance the fish hooks look like the lines of a drawing or an etching—I was inspired by all the prints and photographs of New York in the 1930s. From a distance it could be like a drawing, but close up, it's like a sculpture or a painting.

I'm also very interested in how I had to use people to produce that piece. A lot of assistants—like, twenty people—were working with me. And this gives another content to the piece, because [in this show] I'm talking about collective obsessions—like migration, like the American Dream, the myth of American real life. That's why I consider this exhibition to be a site-specific project, because it's meant to be shown in America. In that context, of course, it could be that there are pieces that are more universal, in the same way that a Hollywood film could be universal.

These are really big pieces.

In my case, scale is usually a conceptual element. I decided to use this scale [for *American Appeal*], because it related to the megalomania of the city. The same with another piece I did, called *Isla*. *Island*. It's the biggest piece in the show, eight meters—big, huge scale. Because the first image that Cubans have of America is the sea. They look at the sea and imagine what is beyond. With obsession. Some with the obsession of escape, some just with [the obsession of] knowing.

There's an analogy, a connection between the sea and the fish hook. But in this case, it's the sea that traps people. It's the drama of people, the risk of people who cross the Caribbean Sea. And you look at that surface—it's a dangerous surface. And yet from a distance, it's ancient.

Other artists, like Vija Celmins and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, have used the image of the sea, of water. But in this case, I'm giving a more tactile and more multisensorial experience to that representation.

There's another piece in the show, called Beautiful People After Party*, that goes in a different direction.*

Yes, it was inspired by another of the discoveries that I made in this society, and that's the industry of sex and sexuality. It's about the contradiction behind the minimalism of a piece that is very polished and very finished. For me, minimalism is the symbol of social control, social stereotypes of good taste, social stereotypes of high art, of everything that is clean and perfect.

And when you open the piece, you access all the mutations and changes that are happening with sexual behavior in contemporary life. It's like a big orgy, with a lot of elements that, from a sculptural point of view, are interesting. But also was inspired by all this sex-shop industry. When you open the piece, it's like this—penetrations, one part of the piece to the other, fingers, other parts of the body. It's a work that Louise Bourgeois could have done, could do maybe if she had another… (laughs) you know… Because it is the new perspective of sexuality in contemporary life.

I did a piece like this before, called *Love After Brancusi*. But here, it is extreme. All this complicated new world of sexuality is expressed in this piece. When it's closed, it's very, very minimal. Very, very correct. It's is done to be shown closed.

Closed?

People could open it, yeah. But if a collector or museum has it, it must be closed.

Quite a temptation...But let's shift now to a broader perspective. What do you see as the most interesting challenges for Cuban artists of your generation?

I belong to a generation of young artists in Cuba that have a big challenge [to negotiate] between local concerns and an international perspective. [It's important to] recognize that in the future, maybe the political exoticism of Cuba is going to disappear, but art is forever. That's why every time we do a piece of art, we try to create multi-layers. It means [making] work that can remain after all the interest in Cuba is finished. And of course, every piece of art must be understood in its historical and geographical context.

In my point of view, the big challenge of Cuban art is to create art that is deeper in the human sense. That's why I decided to [focus on] the neuronal or psychological analysis. I'm talking about, or talking from, an international language of the body, an international language of the human experience. Jorge Luis Borges said that what is important to one human being is important to all.

What's it like to be an international artist based in Cuba these days?

I belong to this group of artists in Cuba, as I say, this new generation that doesn't consider leaving Cuba as the only solution. I am one of those artists who [put] all their effort and budget into having a good—how would you say—command post in Havana, because it's the place that I learned to live in and handle.

Some other people, some other artists who emigrated, I think did this because they came from the 1980s, in a different society. And when the 1990s arrived, it was a very special period, very very difficult. They couldn't support it. But I grew up in this Special Period. I learned how to survive, how to handle myself in this context. And I have my friends, I have my family [in Havana]. I don't think that in contemporary life, you have to live in only one place. Life today, the world, the internet… If you have a gallery representing your work in different countries, you don't need to live in one place. But in my case it is there [in Havana] that I have the best solution to the production of my works.

Artists right now have a lot of liberty [in Cuba]—about opinions and about mobility. It is a privilege. In 2010 I went to Lisbon, I went to Spain, I went to Rome, I went to different places this year. And other years, too. I have been moving around a lot. Although I am an artist who doesn't… I am very close to my studio, because my work needs a lot of craft, and a lot of physical attention. That's why I don't consider myself an artist who travels a lot. I just go to the opening, or I just go, like now, in the moment that I have the exhibition. But most of the year I am in my studio in Cuba. I have been constructing that studio for four years. It is a good space for doing any kind of work.

Mental States *is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery through November 13.*

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

INsight

U.S. WELCOMES CUBAN ARTISTS

When nations do battle, the arts suffer. The ongoing embargo and travel restrictions between the United States and Cuba have for years made cultural exchange extremely difficult. But under the Obama administration, frosty relations have begun to thaw, and the border has become more porous. Among those Cuban nationals recently issued visas to enter the U.S. are nine visual artists, eight of whom were to begin residencies in mid-September [shortly after this issue went to press] at the **Mattress Factory** in Pittsburgh, where they are creating site-specific installations for the exhibition "Queloides/Keloids: Race and Racism in Cuban Contemporary Art" [Oct. 15, 2010-Feb. 27, 2011]. The ninth artist, Yoan Capote, is traveling to New York for his first U.S. solo show, at **Jack Shainman Gallery** [Oct. 14-Nov. 13]. In 2006, Capote received a Guggenheim fellowship but was barred from entering the U.S. to accept the award. Now, four years later, he has been granted an extended visa allowing him to stay in the U.S. to undertake the fellowship.

The lifting of travel restrictions is part of the Obama administration's plan to expand U.S.-Cuba exchange opportunities for artists, academics and other cultural ambassadors, which is in keeping with the People to People Program established by President Eisenhower in 1956 as an international tool of cultural diplomacy. The recent policy change (essentially in effect but not officially announced at this writing) follows upon Havana's agreement in July to free 52 political prisoners, a deal that was brokered by the Catholic Church with the stipulation that the prisoners would be exiled to Spain. By late August, 32 of the inmates had agreed to the terms and were freed by authorities.

Above, Rene Peña, Untitled, 2010, inkjet print, 40 by 52 inches, in "Queloides/Keloids" at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh.

Left, Yoan Capote, *American Appeal*, 2010, on view this month at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

People exchanges with Cuba, which President Clinton expanded in 1999 with an increase in travel licenses and the introduction of direct passenger flights to the island, was intended to promote good will through culture, despite the ongoing U.S.-imposed trade embargo. In 2003, travel restrictions were again tightened under President Bush in response to the arrest of 72 Cuban dissidents; that December, the U.S. stopped issuing Cuban people-to-people travel licenses.

According to University of Pittsburgh professor **Alejandro de la Fuente**, who co-organized "Queloides/Keloids" with Cuban artist **Elio Rodríguez Valdés** (also in the show), "the policy has been changing in practice under Obama. In fact, several Cuban artists and intellectuals have been allowed into the U.S. recently, including some very visible ones like [songwriter] Silvio Rodríguez in June. That was unthinkable just a few years ago."

The political atmosphere today is vastly different than in 2004, when 10 Cuban artists—including René Francisco, Glenda León, Sandra Ramos and José Toirac—were denied visas to travel to Pittsburgh to complete museum residencies and to create an exhibition of site-specific installations at the Mattress Factory. In response, the works were produced by the museum's staff following instructions sent from Cuba via fax, e-mail and mail. As a gesture of protest and to ironically signal the absence of the artists, the Mattress Factory retained the original exhibition title, "New Installations, Artists in Residence: Cuba."

"Queloides/Keloids" premiered at the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art in Havana last spring [Apr. 10-May 30] with works by Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Alexis Esquivel and Marta María Pérez Bravo, among others. The show's title is a reference to scar tissue that forms from a deep wound, a metaphor for issues of racism and social injustice in Cuba. The subject of racism is a politically sensitive one for Cuban authorities, and de la Fuente's role in bringing the contro- ▷

Left and inset, Yoan Capote, *Stressful*, concrete and bronze, at the 2010 Portugal Art Biennale, Lisbon.

Below, Juan Roberto Diago, *Ciudad en ascenso*, 2010, in "Queloides/Keloids" at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh.

▷ versial topic to public attention may have led to his being denied entry into the country in June. The exhibition was greeted with official silence by Cuba's state-run newspapers.

Although the Obama policy would allow an increased number of artists into the U.S., the lack of cargo transports between the two nations—which precludes Cuban artists from shipping work directly to the U.S.—often requires that artwork be routed through a third country, typically Mexico or Canada. U.S. embargo regulations are complicated, and even if a commercial gallery is able to obtain a license from the U.S. Treasury Department to purchase and import art from Cuba, a dealer cannot commission a new work of art or finance future projects by artists living on the island.

When asked about the difficulties of shipping new work to the U.S. for his Shainman show, Capote responded by e-mail from France, "I moved to Europe for the summer because from here I can make better crates, use the foundries and ship the work directly to the U.S. Complications are normal for me. I always try to find an innovative way to overcome obstacles." Quoting Cuban writer and poet Jose Lezama Lima, Capote added, *"Solo lo difícil es estimulante,"* meaning, "Only that which is difficult is stimulating." —*Charmaine Picard*

FLAUNT

A Present Tense Rememberence of Portugal Arte 10*

Submitted by mwilliams on Fri, 09/10/2010 - 18:50

There are no more than two flights out of Lisbon to the States a day, a fact I unhappily learn when my passport comes up missing from previous night's surf and turf (and gulps of port) feast at the tiny upstairs restaurant in the Barrio Alto neighborhood of the Portuguese capital. I report back to my boss in Los Angeles that Murphy's Law had struck, and there aren't any open seats back to the US for two more days… But, well, to be truthful, Lisbon's not so bad a place to be "stuck" in. Plus, it gives me a chance to reexamine the real reason I am here: a press junket to Portugal Arte 10, billed as Lisbon's first art biennale (shouldn't something not get called a "biennale" until it's been done once every two years?), and something of a quagmire for the state of contemporary art in this part of Iberia.

To be fair to the Portugal Arte 10 Artistic Director Stefan Simchovitz, there are many positive aspects to the exhibition. The public art portion of the "biennale," backdropped by the charming squares and ornate architecture befitting one of the oldest cities in the world, is made predominantly by young people. This means the work is, to the casual observer, quite unusual, and from my observations is being met with curiosity by locals and tourists—which is the most important things these large scale exhibitions can do: open a discourse within a city to art, exposing the population to something extraordinary through art. Sterling Ruby's massive Judd-like "Bronze Cannon" and twin orange Serra-evoking "Aluminum Box" works—paired with one of his signature Lincoln Log-esque modular stacks in the main square in Barrio Alto—create quite a cognitively dissonant hardcore minimalist tic-tac-toe with the decorative monuments of 16th century poets in Camoes Square. It's quite striking under a sliver of moonlight.

Wandering to another square up the street, I happen upon a group of young Portuguese women take drunken photos around a cluster of sardonic Rodins ("The Burghers of Calais" with animal masks modified onto the heads) by Los Angeles provocateur Nathan Mabry. Whether or not they understand these are Rodin-subversions is one matter, but the enjoyment of the silly pieces cannot be taken away. I wander further and notice that a "melee of Robert Melee's" (as a fellow journalist who attended the press junket put it) drippy "It" sculptures seem to turn up everywhere. And the collapsed plaster igloo that is Brooklyn streetstyle duo Faile's "Temple," which is still having the finishing touches put on it during our tour, pleases the tourists to no end (street art, for some reason, has become the unpretentious symbol of "good art" by the international masses—perhaps its graphic qualities are ingrained virus-like into us by the ubiquity of graffiti all over the world).

Yoan Capote's stacked gold teeth

Outside the main exhibition, I meet with Cuban artist Yoan Capote, who's gargantuan sculpture of concrete and gold teeth ("The biggest grill I've ever seen," quips a journalist) hunkers below the swooping entranceway to the Portugal Pavilion. Cubans play a large role in Portugal Arte 10, their ever-political art tucked into a first floor gallery. Capote gives big hugs to journalists, and seems pleased to meet an American. We traded stories about the Howard Farber, an American collector of Cuban art, who I had interviewed several years prior. "Farber," says Capote, "is great." It's all he'll say, even when I press him about Farber's history of losing interest in a country's art and

selling the works he procures at auction (Farber liquidated an entire major collection of Chinese art several years ago). Perhaps years of not being able to say anything bad about the government has made it difficult to speak about critical issues in public. Either way, the Cuban exhibition is interesting despite the monotony of the political statements ("this is the worker" here and "here is the pressure" there). The experiments with techniques are worth the look alone, and Capote's sculptures, as well as a silver hippo in the middle of a park in the nearby town of Grandola, are spectacular aesthetically.

The show itself is hit-or-miss, which is usually the case with every ambitious biennial. Laid out in sub-exhibitions throughout the building, the most interesting curation prize goes to Johannes VanDerBeek, who brought along young artists Aaron King and Devon Costello (who are great fun) to install the broadest reaching and most eclectic mix of artists and ideas on the ground floor of the roomy and unnavigable Alvaro Siza Vieira-designed Portugal Pavilion. The co-founder of defunct gallery Guild & Greyshkul and an artist in his own right, VanDerBeek had the novel idea of including Portuguese artists into his "Personal Freedom" show, a conspicuous absence from the rest of the exhibition.

Upstairs, sub-exhibitions blur together: it's hard to tell where "California Dreamin'," curated by Fred Hoffman and Paul Young, and "Insider/Outsider," curated by Malmo's Galerie Loyal folks Martin Lilja and Amy Giunta, start and begin, though once you're subsumed in the respective wholes, the parts start to separate themselves. Hoffman and Young have taken the art world's recent obsession with California and turned it on its head—the exhibition isn't strictly California artists; rather, it's the concept of the lazing, lolling, groovy state as conceived by international artists such as Till Gerhard and Michael Phelan. Paul Young was in charge of the videos and he brought in classic works from California artists like Mike Kelley and Jim Drain, as well as pieces such as Julika Rudelius' video of preteen girls trashing a dressing room that obsess over California's decadence and celebrity. Once inside "Insider/Outsider," one recognizes the graphic/ artists often included in Loyal's intermittently circulated art 'zine (many of whom are also repped by the gallery), such as Misaki Kawai, Katherine Bernhardt, and Michael Mahalchick.

Outside the exhibition, Simchowitz and Lisbon officials treat the journalists to dinners and mirth while the seams bulge… Simchowitz disseminates the idea amongst the journalists that he plans to brand the project and take it to former Portugal colony Angola the next time the biennial comes around (which, according to all accounts, this one took an extra year to bring to fruition, so biennial may turn into trienniale may turn into…). The website is a mess and until the day the exhibition opened, it still contained the name of a curator who had previously dropped out of the project. But these are art world gripes, gossips—the sort of behind-the-scenes backstabbing that goes on at every biennial (there are tales of near-murder out there, folks). What can Simchowitz do, as a relative outsider (his parents are famous collectors, but Simchowitz has, until recently, mostly worked in film)? He convinced Lisbon to let him present the Lisbon to the world as a contemporary art voice. Or is it that he presented contemporary art to the Lisbon population? And therein lies the problem. To whom was this exhibition aimed?

**Portugal Arte 10 ran from July 16th - August 15th, 2010. This article, or some version of it, was going to run in the magazine, but for reasons, I decided not to. I was going to write about the right and wrong way to do a biennial, but I'm not sure there is one!*

Flash Art
Jan/Feb 2011

YOAN CAPOTE

JACK SHAINMAN - NEW YORK

Above: YOAN CAPOTE, The Window, 2010. Brick, cement, plywood, 190 x 93 cm. Left: YOAN CAPOTE, Migrant, 2010. Bronze, 360 x 100 x 100 cm. All courtesy Jack Shainman, New York.

Yoan Capote, a stand-out artist in the Havana scene, explained in a recent interview that he wants his work to remain relevant after the 'political exoticism' of Cuban art (fashionable since the mid '90s) dies down. In the meantime, his recent subject matter — the allures and disillusionment of migration — and his tendency towards often blunt, sometimes profound statements are the hallmarks of stereotypical Cuban style. Despite the feeling of déjà vu that this show evokes, Capote makes his mark by implicating everyone — us, himself, and Cubans in general — in the complex pleasures and pains of cross-cultural longing.

Capote opens the show with *Isla (Seescape)* (2010) a literal bait-and-switch — a majestically vast (over ten meters long) and gorgeously deserted seascape that turns out on closer inspection to be an intimidating composition made from thousands of fish hooks attached to the picture's surface. An equally enticing sea view crops up again in a nearby video in which we watch a waterfront window being bricked in with the pattern of a US flag (*The Window*, 2010) in a claustrophobic ritual that replaces the imagined but unattainable reality of foreign lands beyond the horizon with a barricade both symbolic and literal.

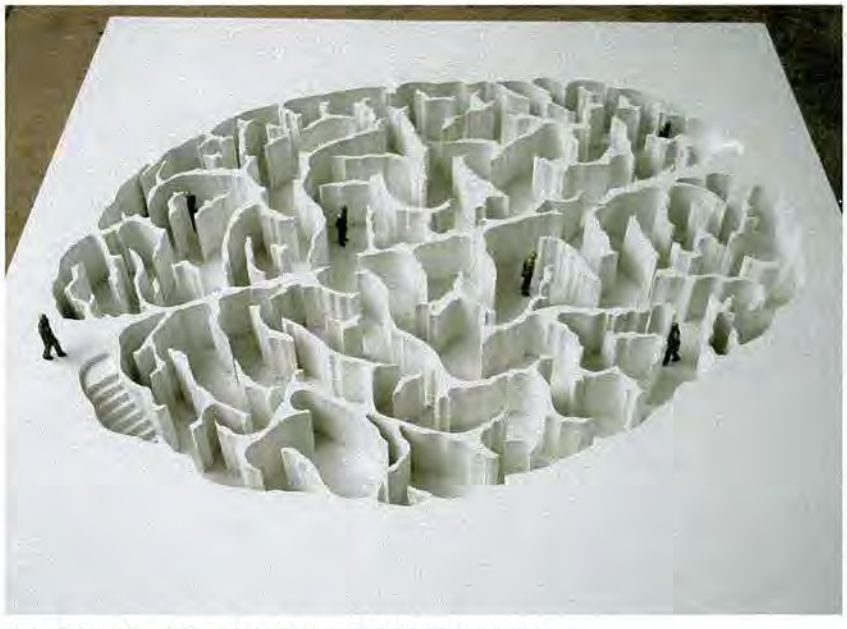
Surprise menace and repressive restriction create an uneasy mood but leave room for personally inflected interpretation. More heavy-handed pieces kill the spirit of enquiry, as with a room-sized bronze set of scales titled *Status Quo (Reality and Idealism)* (2010) that leaves no doubt about how privilege tips in favor of the already powerful. In a series titled "Coitus (Dollar and Ruble)" (2010), human silhouettes cut from dollar bills, pesos, rubles and yuan play the one-dimensional role of symbolic aggressor or victim.

But in pieces like *Migrant* (2010), in which two feet joined to tree trunk legs end in a complex network of roots, Capote pointedly testifies to the personal cost of up-rootedness. Laid low on the gallery floor, roots echoing brain synapses make the poignant argument that when it comes to the linguistic, social or cultural nourishment of your native culture, you can't take it with you.

Merrily Kerr

Polaridad Complementaria
Recent Works from Cuba

Adonis Flores, *Tamiz,* 2005, digital print



Yoan Capote, *Mente Abierte/Open Mind,* 2006-2008, PVC and bronze

Polaridad Complementaria: Recent Works from Cuba is a major exhibition developed by the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, offering audiences the opportunity to become acquainted with the island's current artistic production. The exhibition includes more than 50 works including painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video, and installation art by more than 20 artists. *Polaridad Complementaria* attests to the aesthetic and conceptual level that characterizes Cuban art today. The participants are mainly young artists who have attained international acknowledgment; the majority of them have taken part in biennials and art fairs in Europe and Latin America. Several have exhibited in the the United States, among them René Peña, Abel Barroso, Aimeé García, Yoan Capote, and Roberto Fabelo. All artists in the exhibition were selected for the Havana Biennal in 2009.

Diverse in medium and ideology, the artists featured understand their art encompasses power to address a wide range of social issues. Often compared to American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, René Peña explores the relationship between individuals within society and the struggle for their own identity. Abel Barroso carves three-dimensional pieces using wood

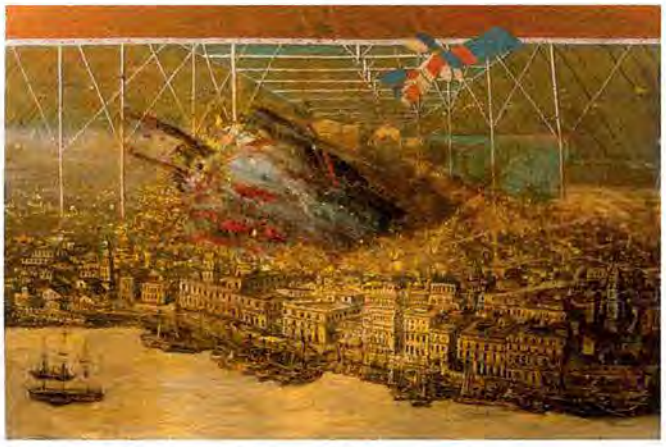
Polaridad Complementaria
Recent Works from Cuba

and various printing methods to create a conversation about technology and the developing world. From Zulueta, Cuba, Duvier del Dago takes it one step further combining drawing with handmade 3D design examining the unattainable, whether it be the material or the ideal. Sandra Ramos incorporates themes into her paintings such as racism, mass migration, freedom and liberties to illustrate living within a communist government. Other artists in *Polaridad Complementaria* include Juan Carlos Alom, Lidzie Alvisa, Augustin Bejarano, Luis Enrique Camejo, Ricardo Elías, Adonis Flores, Aimée García, Glenda León, Frank Martínez, Douglas Pérez, Fernando Rodríguez, Ángel Ramírez, Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal, Lázaro Saavedra, Ludmila Velasco, Nelson Arellano, and Reinerio Tamayo. From simplistic to intricately fabricated, these artists create a narrative of Cuba today.

Polaridad Complementaria was developed by curators Margarita Sánchez and Jorge Rodriguez at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana. The Center is a cultural institution dedicated to the study, research and promotion of contemporary visual arts from developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean.

Polaridad Complementaria illustrates the features that have defined Cuban art in recent years, and pays particular attention to the works that illustrate the creators' capacity to connect the local reality to global concerns and universal human issues. This exhibition also aims to create a dialogue by examining and comparing the political, historical and common cultural links with the United States, while keeping in mind the lens in which the work will be viewed.

Duvier del Dago, *ADN*, 2008, cotton and polyester thread, resin, wood, and metal



Douglas Pérez, From the series *Pictopias*, 2008, oil on canvas

Douglas Pérez, From the series *Pictopias*, 2008, oil on canvas

yoan capote razones de los

Reasons of the Senses

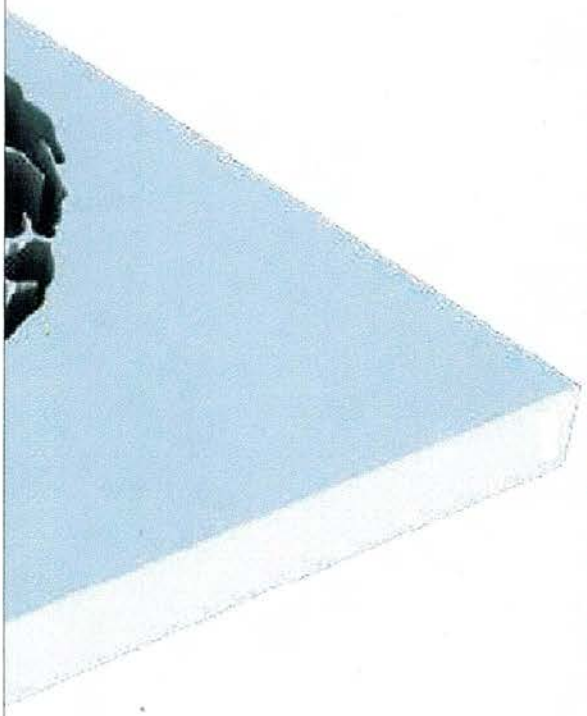
CORINA MATAMOROS

¿ACASO NO ACABARÁ NUNCA LA LECCIÓN DUCHAMP? Cuando menos se la espera, entra por un lugar imprevisto –una ventana, por ejemplo– "otra vuelta de tuerca" de esa inspiración prácticamente infinita para el arte desde hace un siglo. Así, se ha establecido en escena un joven escultor con formación de pintor y de práctica artística versátil, procedente de la región más occidental de la isla de Cuba.

Su camino parecía seguir la misma sensibilidad de Los Carpinteros. Pero en cuanto tuvo su primera maduración de poética, fue evidente que Yoan Capote se afiliaba, entre otras cosas, a un sensualismo que el famoso dúo no contemplaba como necesidad expresiva. Su trayectoria de una década ha estado atenta a las lecciones de Dadá, del Surrealismo, del Pop y del Minimalismo, aderezado todo ello por un fortísimo instinto de los materiales y una vocación de estirpe

WILL DUCHAMP'S LESSON NEVER END? IT ALWAYS sneaks in through an unexpected place –a window, for example– when nobody expects it, just another twist on that virtually endless inspiration for art over the last hundred years. This is how a young sculptor has settled on the limelight, a young painting graduate of versatile artistic practice hailing from Cuba's westernmost region.

His path appeared to have the same sensitivity of Los Carpinteros (The Carpenters). But as soon as he yielded his first poetic maturation, there was no doubt that Yoan Capote was clinging, among other things, to a sensuality the famous duo didn't appraise as an expressive need. His decade-long stay down the road has paid close heed to Dada's lessons, to surrealism, pop and minimalism, all that much sprinkled with a mighty strong instinct for materials and a concept-oriented



conceptual. Un cubano típico, se diría, por la apertura desinhibida hacia muy variadas fuentes.

Capote comienza a trabajar a finales de los noventa y sus obras comparten ciertas cualidades comunes a algunos creadores ya establecidos en esos años y a otros que la crítica actual está llamando "generación 00".[1] Me refiero, particularmente a que Capote blande un tranquilo desentendimiento sobre los asuntos de la identidad y la pertenencia, las que han sido, sin lugar

[1] Término utilizado por la crítica Yuneikys Villalonga.

cation. A traditional Cuban guy, some eople might say, given his uninhibited en-minded attitude toward a variety sources.

apote started working in the late 990s and his pieces share certain ualities common to some renowned eators from that period of time and hers that today's reviews call Generaon 00.[1] What I'm referring to is that apote quietly brandishes the sword of evil-may-care bickering over topics of entity and pertaining, two elements at have been no doubt extremely imrtant to the island nation's culture. e hasn't even cared about reacting amatically in the face of identity. e's rather preferred to look askance it, with a curious and condescending ance. Therefore, he drags no sense guilt. Capote may crash a pad somehere tonight, he'll manage to commucate in any language and will let his harm of perseverant *bavard* flow out.

typical creator formed in the hardips of the 1990s' Cuba, this artist asts, at this point in time, a cosopolitism and global character that oks like easy jokes to crack. The anet is his nation; the human spees is his race. And he's taken issue ith these topics under certain level boldness, yet with composure and anquility.

is game is quite similar to Gabriel Oroz-'s: you never know for sure where the Mexican or the universal features really are. Perhaps he doesn't care for that at all. That's typically found, we might say, in those "new peoples" –as Ticio Escobar would put it– that can turn the pages of the age-old ascendancies and shatter the discreet little volume in which familiar genealogy fits. Capote has left the genealogical tree alone. He looks at it as a bonsai, small and beautiful, but just on a shelf at home.

The key Capote intends to open the doors and seduce the world with is sensuality. A sculptor of immense sensorial instinct, his works cannot only be watched, but also touched, listened to, tasted and even smelled. Sometimes we relate with them directly, by means of one of the senses, and some other times through a mechanism of synesthesia. But in most cases, his works are designed to stir up several senses at the same time. That's commonplace in his exhibits, words that demand to be heard, the mysterious shape of a surface that's rough to the touch, a particular aroma that inexorably whets our sense of smell, or an assortment of wines that's offered to our palates. Trapped in vital mechanisms, we are at the mercy of his sybaritic intentions.

And despite both the recurrence and depth these features are deployed in his artworks, Capote is a phony epicurean. No matter how much he tempts us, no matter how much it might seem that everything is worked out in the perceptible senses, in the quenching of the desires; no matter how vehemently he attempts to show the inventiveness and splendor of his *métier* and how much he can seduce us with his skills, this sculptor finds his genuine roots in the analysis of men's frames of mind.

A concealed Epicureanism is Capote's exercise because, as a matter of fact, he always makes sure that he never reduces his interpretation of the world

[1] Term used by critic Yuneikys Villalonga.

FORMADO EN LA DUREZA DE LOS AÑOS NOVENTA CUBANOS, HACE GALA DE COSMOPOLITISMO, Y LA GLOBALIDAD, A ESTAS ALTURAS, LE VA PARECIENDO UN CHISTE CONFORTABLE

A TRADITIONAL CREATOR FORGED OUT OF CUBA'S 1990S HARDSHIPS WHO EXCELS IN COSMOPOLITISM AND GLOBAL CHARACTER THAT, AT THIS POINT, LOOKS CLOSER TO A COMFORTABLE JOKE TO HIM

In love (after Brancusi), 2004
Madera y bisagra / Wood and hinge
30 x 30 x 30 cm
Colección Collection Beth DeWoody, New York

a dudas, notablemente importantes para la cultura insular. Ni siquiera se ha tomado el trabajo de reaccionar dramáticamente hacia la identidad; ha preferido mirarla de soslayo, curioso y condescendiente. No arrastra, por tanto, ningún complejo de culpa. Capote dormirá esta noche en cualquier sitio, se las arreglará para comunicarse en no importa qué lengua, y derrochará su encanto de *bavard* perseverante.

Típico creador formado en la dureza de los años noventa cubanos, este artista hace gala de cosmopolitismo, y la globalidad, a estas alturas, le va pareciendo un chiste confortable. Su nación es el planeta; su identidad, la especie humana. Y lo ha decidido con cierto atrevimiento pero también con aplomo y tranquilidad.

Practica, de esta suerte, un juego similar al de Gabriel Orozco: no se sabe, a ciencia cierta, dónde está lo mexicano y dónde lo universal. O acaso no interesa en absoluto. Típico también, digamos, de esa soltura con que los "pueblos nuevos" –al decir de Ticio Escobar– pueden doblar la página de las sempiternas ascendencias y romper el discretísimo tomito donde cabe la genealogía familiar. Capote ha dejado tranquilo el árbol genealógico; lo tiene como un bonsái, diminuto y bello, en una repisa de su casa.

La llave con que Capote abre las puertas y pretende seducir al mundo es la del sensualismo. Escultor de inmenso instinto sensorial, sus obras pueden no sólo verse, sino tocarse, oírse, degustarse y hasta olerse. A veces nos relacionamos con ellas directamente, mediante un solo sentido, y otras muchas por mecanismos de sinestesia. Pero en la mayoría de los casos las obras están diseñadas para excitar varios sentidos a la vez. Son sucesos cotidianos en sus exposiciones, unas palabras que exigen

to what are senses are briefed about. On the contrary, the artist gets involved in thoroughly relating the many sensations with specific psychological states by giving them a concrete symbolic scope. His sculptures speak of obsession, fear, violence, paranoia, lack of communication, desire, love, longing for power, neurosis...

There are times when he takes us straight to concepts that are especially provided by the titles of their pieces. Thus, "Stress" is the shaft of a concrete pilaster in which bruxism is portrayed as the living incarnation of the human strain. He does so by underscoring the habit of gritting or grinding the teeth, just as we mortals do when we sleep during certain nights of agony. Mounted between the sections of each of the five concrete portions, whose weight resembles the rigors of life, there are four horizontal rows of human dentures cast in bronze, copies of genuine sets of teeth the artist picked up in a local dental clinic. On this square-base, sober and nearly minimal pillar, the result of some sort of collective bruxism, lies the efficient image of extreme overload, of the supportable limits, of a balance about to be broken. There's a peculiar way of delivering both the intimate notion of stress and its many concrete expressions in just one standing piece. The fusion of these two planes –the sensorial and the conceptual– clinches the strength of this sculpture.

The most important moment in his works is when Capote projects a frame of mind in an object; the time to incarnate passion, to render a particular state of the psyche onto the concrete-sensitive plane. That's the time when all the ingenuity of his symbolization is laid bare, his intelligence to find the key to the concept, let alone the tremendous witticism of his vision. Because, regardless of his scouring into the psyche –a common ground for introspection painting or, as seen from a different angle, the space taken by the surrealists during the exploration of the subconscious– there's no such thing as dramatic character in his "Insanity," "Stress," or "Paranoia."

Passions trigger neither torments nor romanticisms. They rather draw a glimpse of pent-up emotions that blend with an analytical going, roughly flummoxing, like that of someone who can dissect about a specific topic and even make his doing fun.

It seems as if Capote somewhat modifies the surrealist tradition. Like the kid who plays with an artifact and takes it apart until it's worthless, curious of how that gadget actually works, this artist appears to unravel the devices of an obsession or any frame of mind. He needs to know how emotions are triggered; what hormones, for instance, are released during fear or sexual arousal; what touching sensation leads us to a particular taste or what the psychophysical mechanisms of a particular form of stress are actually like. A sustained biological character present in his observation of human emotions is what really generates the neutrality of his eyesight.

Next to these sculptures, the body stands tall. Or parts of the body, prints and emanations of the body, or just the upshot of his actions: a brain in "Open Mind;" a head in "Insanity;" women on their knees in "Forbidden Park;" genitals in "Rational;" noses in "The Kiss;" hormones and neurotransmitters in "Pheromones, Endorphin," and "Dopamine." The body as a reflection of culture, with its own biological, psychological and social answers. The body with its physical and ethical experiences. The human body as a social body. The human body ("Mac Luhano") with its prolongations toward the objects. Amazing sculptural anthropomorphism in the age of video!

ser escuchadas, la forma misteriosa de una superficie que se ofrece al tacto, un aroma particular que despierta imperiosamente nuestro olfato, o un surtidor de vino que se concede al paladar. Atrapados en mecanismos vitales, quedamos a merced de sus sibaríticas intenciones.

Y a pesar de la recurrencia y profundidad con que esta característica se despliega en sus trabajos, Capote es un falso epicúreo. Por mucho que nos tiente, por mucho que parezca que todo se resuelve allí en el sensorio perceptible, en la satisfacción de los deseos; por más que nos muestre toda la inventiva y el esplendor de su *métier* y nos seduzca con sus habilidades, este escultor halla su verdadero sustento en el análisis de los estados emocionales del hombre. Un epicureísmo encubridor es el ejercido por Capote porque, en realidad, siempre deja claro que no reduce la interpretación del mundo a lo que nos informan los sentidos. Muy por el contrario, el artista se ocupa de relacionar meticulosamente muchas sensaciones con estados sicológicos específicos, confiriéndoles a éstos una dimensión simbólica concreta. Sus esculturas hablan de la obsesión, el miedo, la violencia, la paranoia, la incomunicación, el deseo, el amor, las ansias de poder, la neurosis...

En otras ocasiones, nos remite directamente a conceptos que son suministrados, principalmente, por los títulos con que designa sus piezas. Así, "Stress", es el fuste de una pilastra exenta hecha de concreto donde el bruxismo es escogido como encarnación máxima de las tensiones humanas. Lo hace subrayando el acto de apretar mandíbula contra mandíbula, diente contra diente, tal y como hacemos los mortales durante el sueño en ciertas noches de agonía. Entre las secciones de cada uno de los cinco tramos de concreto que con su peso simulan los rigores de la vida, están engastadas cuatro líneas horizontales de dentaduras humanas fundidas en bronce, copias de las verdaderas que el artista recopilara en una clínica dental. En esta columna de base cuadrada, sobria, casi *minimal*, resultado de un bruxismo poco menos que colectivo, se condensa una eficiente imagen de sobrecarga extrema, de límite de lo soportable, de equilibrio a punto de ceder. Hay una peculiar manera de ofrecer tanto la noción misma de *stress* como sus manifestaciones concretas en una única pieza. La fusión de esos dos planos, sensorial y conceptual, asegura la fuerza de la escultura.

El momento más importante en sus obras es aquel en que Capote proyecta en un objeto un estado mental; la hora de encarnar una pasión, de traducir al plano de lo concreto-sensible una estación de la siquis. En ese momento se pone al descubierto toda la ingeniosidad de su simbolización, la inteligencia para hallar la clave del concepto, así como la tremenda humorada que su visión sostiene. Porque, a pesar de incursionar en la siquis –ámbito tradicional de la pintura de introspección o, en otra vertiente, espacio asumido por los surrealistas en la exploración del subconsciente–, no hay excesos de dramatismo en su "Locura", ni en su "Stress", ni en su "Paranoia". Las pasiones no le provocan martirios ni romanticismos. Más bien le suscitan una mirada de emociones contenidas que se combinan con una operatoria analítica, casi perpleja, como de alguien que disecciona un asunto y puede encontrarlo incluso ocurrente.

Parecería que Capote modificara en cierto grado la tradición surrealista. Como el niño que juega con un artefacto y lo desarma hasta romperlo, curioso de su mecanismo de funcionamiento, así este artista parece querer desentrañar los dispositivos de una obsesión o

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HIS SCULPTURES SPEAK OF OBSESSION, FEAR, VIOLENCE, PARANOIA, LACK OF COMMUNICATION, DESIRE, LOVE, THIRST FOR POWER, NEUROSIS

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pecie de homenaje al gran clásico de la escultura. Sin embargo, deambulando por las salas de arte colonial del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, en La Habana, Capote repara en un interesante cuadro de Víctor Patricio Landaluze[2] fechado hacia el último cuarto del siglo XIX. En una pequeña pintura, un esclavo doméstico negro se inclina, plumero en mano y en la soledad de la habitación de los amos, para besar la cabeza esculpida de una dama blanca. Este episodio, común en el costumbrismo del pintor vasco y derivado de sus convicciones esclavistas, hace reflexionar a Capote sobre las connotaciones sociales y raciales del acto de besar. Lo que al principio era una mirada hacia el impresionismo de Rodin se amplía con nuevos puntos de vista procedente de la tradición pictórica cubana y, particularmente, con un análisis de posibles implicaciones sociales, raciales, antropométricas, fisiológicas y culturales del beso.

Capote se lanza entonces a una carrera de razonamientos y experiencias que densifican su proyecto original. Estudia, por ejemplo, la anatomía de negros, asiáticos, nativos americanos, caucásicos, etc. para obtener un repertorio de narices que se va expandiendo hacia toda raza. Se asombra, asimismo, al acercarse a los experimentos nazis, en su demente búsqueda a todo trance de patrones antropométricos que sustentaran la existencia de seres superiores. Estas observaciones lo hicieron reconducir su idea hacia la fundición de narices de disímiles tipologías humanas. Quería que públicos también diversos se acercaran y olieran las fragancias escondidas en ocultas esponjas, y ensayaran un beso sinestésico acercándose a la nariz que les pareciera más apetecible o a la promiscuidad de todos los besos prometidos por el conjunto.

piece, he looks back to what the possible contact points with certain former poetic forms could be. By doing so, the artist manages to forge a historic and conceptual affiliation for the proper interpretation of his artworks. This intention adds up subtly to the piece's own headings, which can therefore knit ties with such remarkable sculptures as the ones made by Brancusi, Louise Bourgeois, or Cuba's Teodoro Ramos Blanco, Kcho or Landaluze.

Racional, 2004-2007
Bronce fundido / Cast bronze

[2] Caricaturista y pintor nacido en Bilbao en 1830 y radicado en La Habana desde 1850 aproximadamente. Se dedicó a la pintura de tipos y costumbres, y fue un activo caricaturista en periódicos satíricos de la época. El Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes conserva una importante colección de su producción artística.

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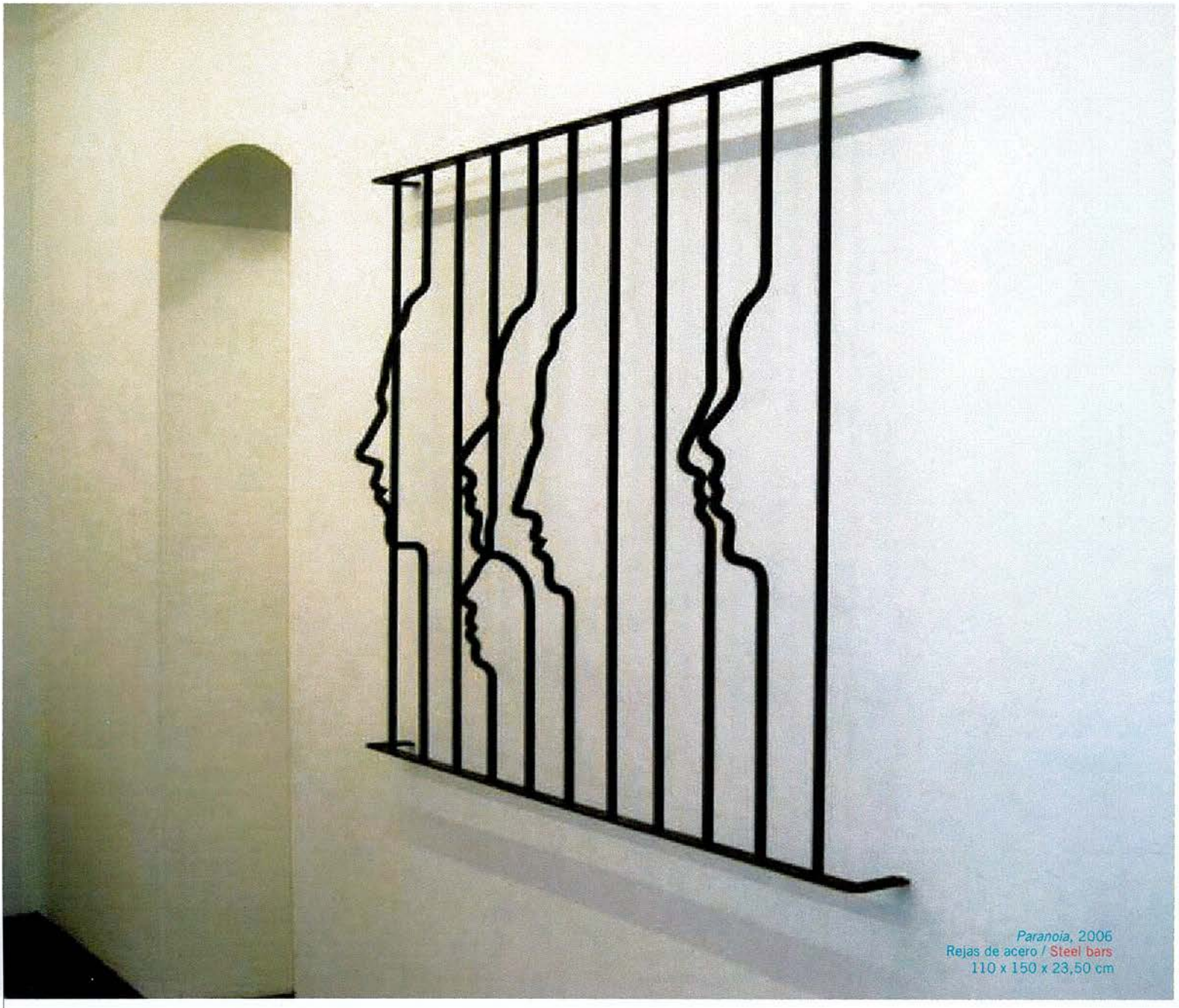

Paranoia, 2006
Rejas de acero / Steel bars
110 x 150 x 23,50 cm

ni barco, ni hombre, ni bandera. De cerca, los cielos son pinceladas poderosas, empastadas, yuxtapuestas, mezcladoras de luces, sabias en sus texturas como las de un Francesco Guardi:[4] de cerca los cielos son alucinantes. De lejos el mar es oscuro, acerado, pautado de olas pequeñas. Pero de cerca el mar es un tenebroso mundo de anzuelos. Cientos de anzuelos, miles de anzuelos hacen las aguas, imitan su vaivén, duplican su peso vibrante e incalculable. Cuando comenzamos a

[4] Véase, por ejemplo, la bella *vedutta* de Guardi, "Escena veneciana: Lagunas frente a la Fondamenta Nouve", en la colección del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, La Habana.

in the sea. Something that would make us feel isolated and willing to peek into the distance.

The piece is designed to make us feel the seduction of the sea. Far in the distance you make out the landscape of the sky and the sea in the horizon. There's nothing else in these paintings: no vessels, no people, no flags. Up close, the skies show powerful paintbrush touches, pasted and juxtaposed, light-blending and wise in their textures like the ones in a Francesco Guardi:[4] the skies are hallucinating when looked at closely. In the distance the sea is steely and dark, teeming with small waves. But get closer and you'll see a tenebrous choppy sea made up of fishing hooks. Hundreds, thousands of hooks that make up the waters, that imitate their waving, that duplicate their vibrant and unfathomable weight. When we start realizing that this is sea is a genuine mistake, that no artist is entitled to make a fool of us like that by drawing waves with iron hooks, we then start feeling the smell of the sea. The hooks have brought the illusion of

[4] See, for instance, Guardi's beautiful vedutta, "Venetian Scenes: Ponds in front of the Fondamenta Nouve", in the collection at Havana's National Museum of Fine Arts.

darnos cuenta de que este mar es un verdadero equívoco, que ningún artista tiene derecho a engañarnos de ese modo dibujando olas con ganchos de hierro, empezamos a sentir el olor del mar. Los anzuelos han traído la ilusión de la sal y, al mirarlos detenidamente, han empezado a desatar sus historias particulares de agonías, migraciones e impedimentos. Estamos solos sitiados por el mar y los anzuelos están ensangrentados. Miles de anzuelos afilados, dolorosos ya en nuestra carne, nos aterran en la inmensa superficie acuosa y despoblada. El cielo pastoso, contumaz y denso, se cierne sobre nuestras cabezas como colofón de soledad. La pieza está hecha para sentir la seducción del mar y de sus veleidades. La forma en que Capote ha torturado los materiales, aplastando el acero de los garfios por sobre el soporte de madera, realza una gestualidad a la vez escultórica y performática. El espectador debe rozar estos anzuelos ensangrentados, oprimirlos levemente tal vez, sentir lo que sería si...

Entre el arte público, el *performance* y la intervención del espectador se debaten la mayoría de las obras de Yoan Capote. Curiosa mezcla para un escultor-instalador-dibujante-pintor. Hay un manifiesto interés por reconstruir colectivamente la experiencia privada del artista, de salir del cerco individual y sentir con los otros. También de analizar las reacciones grupales y nutrirse de ellas. Porque es parte de ese interés en lo social que ha renacido en Cuba luego de algunos años de repliegue. Y por esta vez el centro se ha desplazado de la crítica social –que fuera el eje de gran parte del arte cubano contemporáneo– hacia la experimentación sobre la nueva escucha de voces. Voces que hablan en pluralidad de tonos y lenguas, voces que representan irrepresentados,

the salt and as you pause for a longer look they start untying their own stories of agony, migrations and impediments. We're just under siege by the sea and the blood-dripping hooks. Thousands of sharp hooks, painfully piercing our flesh and frightening us in that gargantuan watery and inhabited surface. The pasty, recalcitrant and dense sky looms over our heads as the perfect closer for our solitude. The piece is made to make us feel the seduction of the sea and its follies. The way in which Capote has tortured the materials by crushing the steel of the hooks over the wooden bracket underlies a sculptural and performance-like gesturing. The viewer must rub these bloody hooks, perhaps press them slightly, to feel what it would feel like if...

Around the public art, the performance and the spectator's intervention revolve most of Yoan Capote's works. A curious mixture for a sculptor-installer-drawer-

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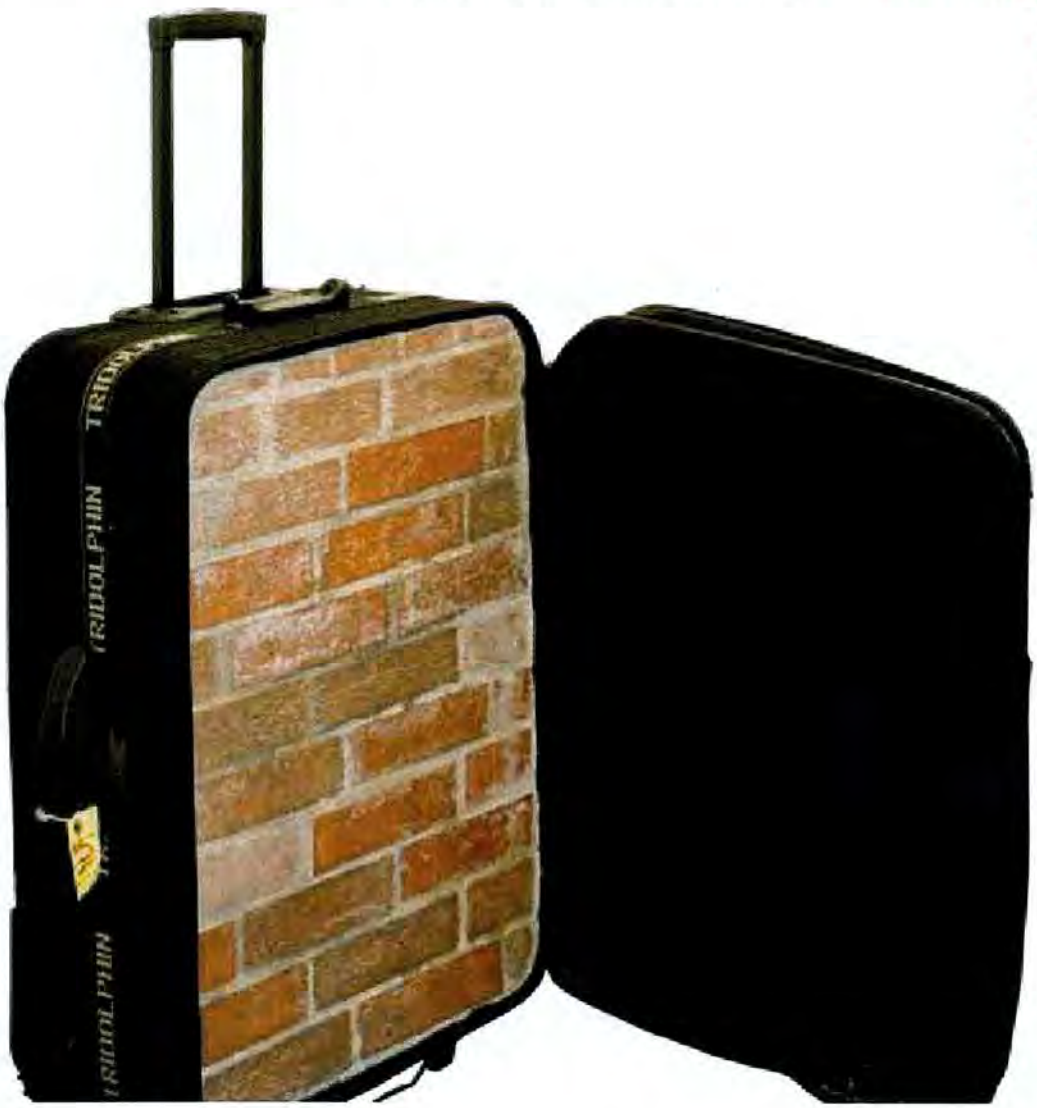

Seducido él mismo por la riqueza de la escultura, devorador hedonista de materiales clásicos, admirador y estudioso de la pintura tradicional, constructor de probada ingeniosidad, Capote está obligado a actuar en la inteligencia del contexto artístico cubano. Y ha escogido para abrir su brecha, entre el sendero del género humano, aquel que reúne en un todo la extraña y siempre asombrosa mezcla de siquis y biología, esa mezcla que iguala a los hombres de todas las razas y todas las lenguas. La universalidad de su obra garantizada en nuestra consistente unidad sicobiológica.

Pero Capote no puede explayarse en un nuevo romanticismo o en clasicismos insostenibles y practicar ese arte de la tradición que tanto admira. No serán ciertamente las marinas de Romañach las que vengan a presagiar los mares de esta tarde, ni los besos con sabor costumbrista de Landaluze quienes traigan los comentarios raciales de actualidad. Capote tiene que demostrar que domina esa tradición, que puede con ella, que logra colocarla subliminalmente en sus piezas o convertirla en reservorio de ligerísimas insolencias. Capote tiene, además, que contar con el espectador haciendo su experiencia hacia afuera. Porque es la experiencia y la voz del espectador quien ha subido de rango en la Isla de hoy. Y quién sabe si en el mundo, y el artista confía mucho en su fuerza para dirigirse a todos, en mostrarles su *Mente abierta*, u ofrecerles un nuevo retablo del *Jardín de las delicias*, donde –¡esta vez sí!– prometemos racionalmente no dejarnos seducir por las trampas que nos tiendan los sentidos.

La Habana, julio 2008

years in the making. And this time around, the center has displaced from social reviews –the crux of a considerable chunk of Cuba's contemporary art– to the experimentation of new voice-hearing, voices that speak of plurality in tones and tongues, voices that stand for the interpreted, voices that trumpet contingencies that had been unpronounceable up to now.

Seduced by the wealth of sculpturing, a hedonist devourer of classic materials, an admirer and researcher of traditional painting, builder of renowned industriousness, Capote is bound to act within the intelligence boundaries of Cuba's artistic framework. And for driving a wedge of his own into the human pathways a road that comprises the odd and always stunning blend of psyche and biology, that blend that puts men of all races and of all tongues on equal footing. The universality of his artworks is guaranteed in our conscious psycho-biological unit.

But Capote cannot speak out at length on a new form of romanticism or in unsustainable classicisms, and practice that traditional art he looks up at so much. There won't be for sure Romañach's seascapes the heralds of today's racial comments. Capote must prove he masters that tradition, he can put up with it, place it subliminally in his pieces or turn them into reservoirs of slight insolences. Moreover, Capote must also count on the viewers, turning his experience inside out. Because that experiences and the spectator's voice are the ones that have raised the artistic bar in today's Cuba. The artist does trust a good deal in his strength to address everybody, to show people his Open Mind or give them a new redo of *The Garden of Delights* in which –this time up is for sure– we rationally pledge not to get carried away with the traps our senses set us up with.

Havana, July 2008

Yoan Capote

George Adams Gallery

Yoan Capote's artistic propositions are often forceful. At his first show at New York's George Adams Gallery, I was impressed by the degree of maturity his work has reached. Yoan is a young sculptor who assimilates the best modern and contemporary sculpture and creates works that imply more than the formal mastery and craftsmanship required by bronze, marble, and wood; the concept behind each of his sculptures is fully validated by the concerns that move contemporary artists.

Yoan Capote. *In Love*, 2004. Wood, brass. 11,8 x 17, 8 x 11, 8 in (30 x 45,2 x 30 cm.).

Capote studied at Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte, where he was part of a group of students working under the mentorship of René Francisco, which came to be known as DUPP, for "Desde una pragmática pedagógica" ("From a pedagogical pragmatics".) Undoubtedly, the conceptual education that characterized this group influenced the way in which the aesthetic of each one of its members developed later and the way in which their work is conceived. Imbibed in the latest contemporary art and guided by one of the smartest Cuban artists of the 1980s, Yoan and his brother, Iván, began creating collaborative pieces where, in a way, one brother's proposal complemented the other's: the worked simultaneously on a single topic, each dealing with one aspect of it.

Yoan Capote first personal show was *Tracc Bakk Track*, at Havana's Centro de Arte 23 y 12 —to which I was closely associated— gathered works built to function like slot machines, bologna dispensers, or beverage vending units, made with discarded materials. Besides the interplay it proposed with the machines as such, setting up these kinds of artifacts in Havana in the late 1990s, with products inside to boot, was in itself a provocative proposition. By creating functioning machines, Yoan invited the public to interact with his work, exploring values that lie beyond the intrinsically visual, such as taste, smell, and sound.

Much more solid today but still developing the same discourse, Capote shows a series of pieces that speak of his concerns as an artist, a man, and a Cuban citizen. In the center of the gallery, his piece *Stress* comprises four blocks joined through a cord or zipper. *Stress*' impressive representational strength establishes an equivalence between its own precise outline and a mood or state of mind. One can't remain indifferent to this piece, feeling through it the state in which stress leaves us, the heaviness that falls on the body, the forceful and even unconscious grinding of teeth.

Another work of extraordinary expressive force is *In-Love*, inspired in the work of Brancusi. Done in wood, it comprises two cubes connected by a trunk that represents a penis. The piece, conceived to open and close, sows very poetically a fertile act of love. In this two abstraction-imbued pieces, capote displays great visual elegance, reinforced by his use of materials such as wood.

Casados alludes to marriage, symbolized by two shoes, a man's and a woman's, that are conjoined, lose temporarily their individual shape, and reach a common point. *Casados* speaks of the couple's unity, of the mutual identification its two members achieve, of the two individual "I"s that are lost in order to become one. A version of the same work shows two man's shoes, shifting the topic to homosexual relationships.

With works like *Racional* and *Nostalgia*, Capote reasserts himself as a master of form and concept. The former is a perfectly sculpted male torso, where the center of the composition is occupied by a brain, replacing the penis, toying with the somewhat feminist idea that men think with their genitals. Both the torso and the brain display Capote's formal mastery. *Nostalgia*, on its part, explore the feelings of the migrant, of those who carry their life and their home inside a suitcase. Yoan used hi own travel bag for this piece, and inside, as a symbol of home, he placed a brick wall. With great economy of means, Capote shows that he can achieve great conceptual density with just a few elements.

Undoubtedly, Yoan Capote's work uses particulars that border on and play with the field of form and intellect, in order to revalue the concept of sculpture.

Marisol Martell

Yoan Capote at George Adams

Yoan Capote, a young Cuban artist who came to international notice in the 2001 Havana Biennale, creates paradoxical images with political and psychological overtones. In sculptures and beautifully crafted academic drawings (all 2004), he merges human organs with inanimate objects, rearranges the human body and reinvents the purposes of everyday things.

Most poignant here was a sculpture titled *Nostalgia* and an accompanying drawing. Both present an ordinary suitcase unzipped to reveal a wall of bricks. The metaphor is clear—wanderlust thwarted by insurmountable barriers. But there is also a secondary reading, suggesting that we carry our impediments with us.

The other works are similarly multilayered. *In Love* presents a pair of identical, foot-high, polished-wood boxes fanning open at an angle. In a manner reminiscent of Brancusi's *Kiss*, the somewhat autoerotic nature of their association is enhanced by a carved wooden cord that joins them. It resembles the tissue that connected the original Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng, but here also carries a suggestion of sexual penetration.

The phallus reappears in *Racional*, a classically sculpted male torso (presented both as an approximately 2-foot-high plaster sculpture and a 60-by-40-inch drawing) in which the genital area sprouts a human brain. The title seems ironic, perhaps referring to the oft-cited notion that a man's sexual organ has a mind of its own. On the other hand, one might also read it as a commentary on the tempering of irrational urges, or the hard won battle of the mind over animal instinct.

Another kind of battle is suggested by *Casados*. This sculpture contains three elements: a man's brown leather wingtip shoe, a woman's brown leather sandal and a strange conflation of the two in which a wingtip and a sandal appear to have been joined at the toes and then stretched apart so that the span between them resembles a piece of pulled taffy. The conjunction suggests forced inseparability or perhaps the tug of war between the sexes.

Capote's work is both thought-provoking and humorous. He brings to mind the absurdist impossibilities of René Magritte, overlaid with a sense of nostalgia for physical experience in an increasingly digital world.

—Eleanor Heartney

Yoan Capote: *Nostalgia*, 2004, suitcase, bricks, cement, 40 by 41½ by 10½ inches; at George Adams.