



Iniva presents States of Exchange: Artists from Cuba

At Rivington Place, London, UK
23 January – 22 March 2008

Iniva (Institute of International
Visual Arts), Rivington Place,
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Artists in Exhibition: Iván Capote, Yoan Capote, Jeanette Chávez, Diana Fonseca, Wilfredo Prieto, Lázaro Saavedra

Artists in Screenings: Raychel Carrión, Javier Castro, Alexis de la O Joya, Laimir Fano, Adonis Flores, Alex Hernández, Jesús Hernández, Luis o Miguel, Gustavo Pérez, Renier Quer, Alina Rodríguez, Lázaro Saavedra, Asori Soto and Manuel Zayas.

Curated by: Gerardo Mosquera and Cylena Simonds

November 2007, London: **States of Exchange: Artists from Cuba**, Iniva's first major exhibition at Rivington Place, provides a dynamic and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of economic and information exchange in contemporary Cuba.

At a time when borderless communication is assumed to be the global standard and economic powers no longer adhere to old boundaries of East and West, Cuba is a country caught in flux. With two legal currencies (the Cuban Peso and Cuban convertible Peso) and growing divisions between those who have access to resources from beyond the island and those who don't, the residents of Cuba have become experts at negotiating exchange between each other as well as with the rest of the world.

Curated by Cylena Simonds (Iniva) and prominent Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera, the group show focuses on six artists living and working in Cuba today: **Iván Capote, Yoan Capote, Jeanette Chávez, Diana Fonseca, Wilfredo Prieto** and **Lázaro Saavedra**. The artworks span sculpture to performance as well as video installations. Accompanying the exhibition there is a **full-colour illustrated catalogue** and a **video screening**



programme featuring artist's shorts and experimental documentaries, including works never before seen in Europe. There is also an **education programme** and **events programme** including music, talks by the curators' and discussions with artists such as Lázaro Saavedra and Jeanette Chávez.

Gerardo Mosquera says of the exhibition and programme:

'States of Exchange aims to show how artists in Cuba discuss contradictions, ambiguities and social negotiations in Cuban life, leading a critical culture that prevails in the country since the mid 80s. They use the semantic powers of art to create complex works whose impact goes far beyond the local context. So this is not a general show of Cuban art but a thematic exhibition on issues particular to Cuba. It includes both emerging artists that are beginning to be known internationally and more established ones.'

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Cuba's complex system of economic exchange is summarised in **Yoan Capote's** work *Dinero Bilingüe* (*Bilingual Money*, 2002), which splices together a peso with a US quarter – rendering both coins defunct. The piece has become an iconic statement of the situation in Cuba today. In **Wilfredo Prieto's** *Untitled (Pea)*, (2001) a single pea is painted as a globe. What is striking in both of these works is the minimal and almost imperceptible way they are as objects, in contrast with the significance of the meaning that they carry. Wilfredo Prieto's *One Million Dollars* (2002) humorously reflects a fantasy of unlimited wealth - creating an illusion that a single dollar is reproduced to infinity. An elusive grasp of currency is also key to the video *Pasatiempo (Dinero)* (*Pastime (Money)*, 2005) by **Diana Fonseca** in which two peso coins suddenly vanish leaving a dark stain on the artist's hands – her instrument of practice. The alchemical conversion of labour into value is the subject of **Iván Capote's** *Móvil Perpetuo* (*Perpetual Mobile*, 2001). A vial containing the artist's sweat produced as he filed a US quarter into metal shavings sits beside photographs documenting the process.



Yoan Capote, *Dinero Bilingüe*, 2002,
Image courtesy of the artist



Themes of censorship are explored in **Jeannette Chávez's** video performance, *Autocensura* (*Self-censorship*, 2006), she painfully ties thread around her tongue and closes her lips, her self-inflicted silence becoming invisible. In *Secreter* (2000/7) Iván and Yoan Capote collaborate to create a means to share secrets via a giant rudimentary telephone reminiscent of a handmade children's toy. In Prieto's installation *Speech* (1999) we see rolls of toilet paper made entirely from Cuba's official newspaper, *Granma*.



Wilfredo Prieto, *Speech*, 1999, Image courtesy of the artist

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Using red beans to represent people, **Lázaro Saavedra's** video animations *La gloria borra la memoria* (*Glory erases memory*, 2006) and *El que no sabe es como el que no ve* (*Not knowing is like not seeing*, 2006) succinctly dramatise the tension between the official representations of life in Cuba and the actual experiences of Cubans. *A veces prefiero callar* (*Sometimes I'd rather shut up*, 2006) humorously dramatises the artist's arguments with himself as he veers between the futility of art practice and his compulsion to persevere with such gestures. Iván Capote is equally dubious regarding the reliability of historical chronicles. *Historia* (*History*, 2001) is a mechanical sculpture, with a pen attached to one circling arm and an eraser attached to the other. As one arm marks the glass, the other arm all too quickly erases – suggesting lessons in history that have not been learnt.



Jeanette Chávez, *Cambio de Estado*, 2006, Image courtesy of the artist

A sense of dreaming and longing is evoked in *Cambio de Estado* (*Change of State*, 2006) in which Chávez covers a ceiling with starred military epaulettes



to create constellations reflecting the night sky of the area in which the work is displayed. The vast 6 x 3 meter panel work by Yoan Capote entitled *Is/a* (*Island* 2006/7) portrays the ocean that physically separates Cuba from the rest of the world and on closer inspection the waves reveal themselves to be made up of treacherous fish hooks. The US claims that thousands of Cubans attempt to cross the 145-kilometre expanse of water between Cuba and Florida each year and it has become symbolic of the dangerous and fragile links between not only Cuba and the US but also Cuba and the world.

Exhibition Listings Information

States of Exchange: Artists from Cuba exhibition

23 January – 22 March 2008

Rivington Place, London, EC2A 3BA

Public opening hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 11am–6pm

Late Thursdays: 11am–9pm (Last admission 8.30pm) Saturday: 12noon–6pm

Sunday, Monday: Closed

Admission: Free

Nearest tubes: Old Street & Liverpool Street

Rivington Place is fully accessible in all public areas

For parking & wheelchair facilities or further information about Rivington Place

+44 (0) 20 7749 1240, info@rivingtonplace.org, www.rivingtonplace.org

Exhibition Catalogue

Accompanying *States of Exchange* is a full-colour, bilingual (English – Spanish) illustrated catalogue of the same title. This Iniva publication includes a broader body of recent work by the Cuba-based artists featured in *States of Exchange* and explores the exhibition themes. It includes texts on each artist, an essay by **Gerardo Mosquera** introducing the history and context of current art practice in Cuba and an essay by **Cylena Simonds** on economic and communication exchange in relation to the exhibiting artists. In addition, an essay by curator and critic **Mailyn Machado** explores contemporary video practice illustrated with stills of video works. Other contributors include **Alessio Antonioli, Elvis Fuentes, Erena Hernández, Orlando Hernández, Direlia Lazo and Yuneikys Villalonga.**

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Video Screening Programme

States of Exchange video screening programme features artists' shorts and experimental documentaries. From the moment video arrived in Cuba it became an alternative mode of communication exchange – it provided artists with a new means of creative freedom and rewrote the terms of the art-institutions relationship in Cuba. During the period of liberalisation in 1990s video equipment became more readily available and the medium became popular. It not only had the advantage of being self sufficient it was also low cost and offered new means of circulation and exhibiting. Artists' video work created in Cuba is particularly distinctive due to its collaborative bent and is often characterised by low-tech aesthetics. Video art is not often exhibited in Cuban galleries, possibly due to what Machado describes as its 'merciless account of reality'. However word is spread through the grapevine and the works are showcased in 'pop up' galleries off the official circuit – spreading the realities of Cuban life into places far and wide.

Artist short videos include: *Eran 47 de Memoria (They Were 47 Years from Memory)* by **Raychel Carrión**, *Reconstruyendo al Héroe (Reconstructing the Hero)* by **Javier Castro**, *Cuba Baila (Cuba Dances)* by **Alexis de la O Joya**, *Zona Afectada (Affected Zone)* by **Alex Hernández and Asori Soto**, *Informes de Hechos Vividos (Report on Lived Events)* by **Jesús Hernández**, *Polémica (Controversy)* and *Aiki* by **Luis o Miguel**, *A veces prefiero callar (Sometimes I'd rather shut up)* by **Lazáro Saavedra**, *Búnker (Bunker)* by **Renier Quer**, *Espíritu (al servicio de todos) (Spirit (at everyone's service))* by **Adonis Flores**.

Experimental documentaries include: *Café con leche (White Coffee)* by **Manuel Zayas**, *Model Town* by **Laimir Fano**, *Buscándote Havana (Looking for You, Havana)* by **Alina Rodríguez** and *Despertando a Quan Tri (Waking Quan Tri)* by **Gustavo Pérez**. Further information and listings will be found on www.iniva.org



Events and Education

The accompanying programme of events will include music, talks by the curators' and discussions with artists such as Lázaro Saavedra and Jeanette Chávez. There will also be an Education programme. Further details will be listed on www.iniva.org

The Stuart Hall Library and Iniva Archive

The Stuart Hall Library in Rivington Place will have a display of books relevant to the *States of Exchange* programme as well as texts and visuals from the rich Iniva Archive. Iniva has a long standing history of working with artists in Cuba. In 1995 Iniva published *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, which was edited by Gerardo Mosquera. Details of this publication and the library's recommended reading list will be on www.iniva.org

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Iniva Online

Visit www.iniva.org to find in-depth and lively content about the States of Exchange programme as well as listings, online book shop and venue information. It will also include links and information about contemporary art from Cuba and current exhibitions on the Island.

Editors Notes

Background summary – economic and information exchange in Cuba

Cuba has survived more than 40 years of US trade sanctions designed to bring down the government of Fidel Castro. After the fall of the US-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, Cuba became a one-party state led by Castro. Strict rationing of energy, food and consumer goods has been in place since the early 60's and President Castro is able to control almost every aspect of Cuban life through the Communist Party, the government bureaucracy and the state security apparatus, which not only repress any dissent but also impede the existence of civil society. Exploiting the US-Soviet Cold War, for decades Castro was able to rely on strong Soviet backing, including annual subsidies worth \$4–5 billion. With the help of this aid he succeeded in building reputable health and education systems, but he failed to diversify the economy. After the collapse of the USSR, Cuba faced an economic collapse that forced the government to open up to market and foreign businesses, although in a restricted and controlled way that hampered economic boost.

The economy which today includes exports of nickel, sugar, tobacco, shellfish, medical products, citrus and coffee has been helped by tourism and Canadian, European and Latin American investments. In the 1990s, a more liberal approach permitted companies to import and export without permission and a number of free trade zones opened up. More recently however, some of these economic reforms have been rolled back, with



President Castro denouncing the 'new rich'. In the meantime, whilst Cuba has forged closer economic ties with China and Venezuela, the money sent home from Cubans living abroad, and particularly in the US, is still crucial to the economy. Economic hardships have led to an increase in the black market, prostitution and corruption and many inhabitants have taken desperate measures in order to escape the island and seek out a better life.

Cuba has fallen foul of international bodies, including the UK's top human rights forum, over alleged rights abuses. The UN's envoy has urged Havana to release imprisoned dissidents and to allow freedom of expression. The Cuban media are tightly controlled by the government. Journalists must operate within the confines of laws against anti government propaganda and the insulting of officials, which carry penalties of up to three years in prison. Foreign news agencies must hire local journalists through government offices. The US tries to reach Cuban listeners and viewers by beaming programmes from high-powered transmitters but private ownership of electronic media is prohibited by the constitution and less than 2% of the population in Cuba is online.

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States of Exchange: Artists from Cuba is an Iniva exhibition at Rivington Place in Barclays Project Space and Project Space 2. It has an accompanying catalogue, film and event programme which has been realised with thanks to Arts Council England.

Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) creates exhibitions, publications, multimedia, education and research projects designed to bring the work of artists from culturally-diverse backgrounds to the attention of the widest possible public. (www.iniva.org)

Rivington Place is Iniva and Autograph ABP's new contemporary visual arts space and the UK's first permanent public space dedicated to culturally-diverse visual arts and photography. The building has been realised with thanks to funding from the Arts Council England Lottery Capital 2 Programme and Barclays, the Rivington Place founding Corporate Partner. Barclays' £1.1m contribution is part of a much wider programme of community support, which last year totalled over £45 million - one of the most substantial in the UK.

The Rivington Place project also gives thanks to London Development Agency, City Fringe Partnership, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Hackney Council and The City Bridge Trust for their support as well as The Foyle Foundation and the Garfield Weston Foundation. Thanks also to Brodksy Centre and Clifford Chance for their in-kind support.
(www.rivingtonplace.org)

The press view will be taking place on 21 January from 10am-1pm to attend please RSVP to josie@iniva.org

Further information including artists' biographies, review copies of the catalogue, reading lists and images please contact josie@iniva.org, +44 020 7729 9616