

JANUARY 12 to
MARCH 3, 2018

•••••

USFCAM

CLIMATE CHANGE CUBA/USA

This exhibition invites Cuban and Cuban-American artists to reflect on the consequences of the recent fluctuations in the relationship between the two countries. Artists Glexis Novoa, Celia y Yunior, Antonio Fernández “Tonel,” and Javier Castro have produced new works, in sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, and video, that consider the changes—or “no changes”—that the political and diplomatic developments have wrought in their personal lives and in Cuban society. Curated by Noel Smith; organized by the USF Contemporary Art Museum.

A LEARNING GUIDE

A BEAUTIFUL DIVINATION RITUAL:

Tirando los cocos (throwing coconuts)

The art of *Tirando Los Cocos* actually originated in Africa within the traditional *Yoruba* religion and its assorted New World lineages, such as *Santería*. Four hundred years ago, when the Spanish brought African slaves to Cuba, this diaspora brought one of the most familiar tools for divination: the oracle of *Obí*. *Obí* divination answers “yes” or “no” to questions concerning: queries about a person’s life, if ceremonies can proceed, or whether offerings are accepted by the *Orishas* (one of many spirits reflecting manifestations of the supreme divinity).

Typically, this African style of ritual employs kola nuts, but in the Americas, *Obí* readers use either four pieces of coconut or four cut cowrie shells. Within contemporary practice, both initiates and gifted non-initiates use *Obí* in order to find answers. To divine one’s fate, the psychic reader holds a set of four coconut shells in his or her hand, prays over the question, and then tosses the shells onto the ground or onto a mat. Coconut pieces fall with either white meat side up, or dark skin side up. Mathematically, the toss will generate one of sixteen conceivable combinations, which are grouped into five potential nuanced answers.

FACT

Obí means “kola nut” in the West African *Yoruba* language.



Javier Castro, still from *Cocos*, one part of *Cuatro Cosas Básicas/Four Basic Things*, 2018. Video installation, four digital videos; 6:30 min. each. USFCAM Commission 2018

ARCHITECTURE OF POWER:

A Story About Cuban Marble

Cuban marble has a rich and eclectic heritage that mirrors the country's social and political past. Cities such as Havana were built following the 1573 Ordinance of Spanish King Philip II that required a Spanish style cathedral, administrative buildings, and a governor's palace to line the central plaza. The Cuban builders and craftsman infused the classical Spanish architecture with regional designs and used local marble from the renowned quarries formed by Cuba's unique geological structure.

During the 19th century, Cuban architecture followed earlier colonial styles and although Cuban marble was used, Italian Carrera marble was also imported. The presence of the Spanish design and European marble was becoming an outward symbol of repression. Toward the end of the 19th century the combination of Spanish tyranny, Creole rivalry, taxation, and the growth of Cuban nationalism resulted in the Ten Years' War (1868–78). This war failed to win Cuba's independence but a second war (1895–98) and the increasingly strained relations between Spain and the United States prompted Americans to enter the conflict in 1898. America was concerned about its economic interests in Cuba and in 1898, the U.S. emerged triumphant in the Spanish-American War, thereby ensuring the expulsion of Spain, but in return the U.S. demanded control of Cuban affairs.

U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs, the collapse of Haiti as a sugar-producing colony, the ingenuity of Cuba's Creole business class, and the accelerated importation of African slaves created a sugar revolution that transformed Cuba into the largest and richest global sugar producer. A new elite emerged and large estates squeezed out smaller ones. Cuba's marble was mined at

FACT

There were two Cuban-Spanish wars, the **Ten Years' War** (1868–78) and the **Cuban War of Independence** (1895–98).



Glexis Novoa, *Timba*, 2017. Graphite on Carrara marble (marble recovered from Havana), 14 x 16 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami Beach, FL.

unprecedented rates to build the latest Neo-Baroque and Art Deco mansions, immense sculptures, decorative facades, lavish social clubs, and elaborate hotels. By the mid 20th century Cuba was famous worldwide for its marble and architects featured Cuban marble on newly styled buildings that blended modernist, neo-gothic, and art nouveau architectural styles.

In 1959, following the triumph of the Revolution, relations between America and Cuba declined. The Castro regime seized U.S. properties and investments and the Soviets provided a new protective umbrella. Cuba's post revolution architecture followed a more utilitarian path, with new buildings designed to be practical and economical. In opposition to colonial styles, the architecture after 1959 created a distinctive landmark, resembling Soviet designs featuring rectangular buildings constructed with concrete blocks and Cuban marble used for flooring.

Eventually, the collapse of communism in the late 1980s had a profound effect on Cuba and its marble. Soviet financial aid ended and without the support, Cuba was submerged into an economic crisis in what became known as the "The Special Period in Time of Peace". Like other sectors of the Cuban economy, the island's marble industry was badly hit by the collapse of Soviet support and the sudden loss of clients. Today marble and mining production is only 2% of what it was in the late 1980s and some quarries have been totally abandoned or are barely functioning.

Much of Havana's eclectic architectural history is currently tumbling down, forever lost. Experts say a combination of age, decay, climate conditions, lack of finances, and changes to political priorities endanger the neoclassical villas, colonial mansions, Art Deco palaces, and modernist structures. Yet, on the other hand, perhaps the half-century of communist rule saved the capital's eclectic marble heritage from malevolent developers and represents the legacy of Cuba's social and political complexity.



The *Museo de la Revolución*, in Havana, Cuba; formerly the Presidential Palace. Built between 1913–1920.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF CLASSES:

A Story About Ybor City, Cuba and Cigars

Cuba played an important role in the development of 19th century Tampa and the 1880s dramatically altered Tampa's future. In 1886, Spanish born Vicente Martínez Ybor chose Tampa as the site of a cigar-manufacturing center in what is now a section of Tampa called Ybor City. Thousands of Cuban and Spanish immigrants followed to produce hand-rolled cigars and a passionate Latin culture was born.

Ybor City earned a richly deserved reputation for labor unrest and revolutionary politics. Spaniards, Cubans, and Sicilians each brought a heightened sense of class consciousness to Ybor City and in the 1890s one cause dominated political debate: *Cuba Libre* (Free Cuba)—Cuba's independence from Spain. Immigrants established an intricate institutional network to foster Cuban independence. Trade union activity practically ceased in respect to the cause and newspapers, schools, debating clubs, and patriotic organizations also embraced *Cuba Libre*.

No institution symbolized the intellectual passions of the cigar makers or catalyzed the workforce more than *el Lector* (the reader). *Lectores* read novels, as well as items from the radical and labor union news. Cigar workers decided which readers were chosen, how they were paid, and selected what would be read. Workers listened to *el Lector's* accounts of Cuba's war for independence while crowds gathered outside in front of the factories to hear news of the revolution. As such, readers served as a conduit for the labor movement and figured prominently in protest for *Cuba Libre*.

In 1891, exiled Cuban leader Jose Martí was invited to Tampa, which he visited over twenty times until his death in 1895 during a battle in Cuba. Martí was instrumental in unifying issues such as

economic oppression, racial injustice, and the Spanish colonialism. In 1892 Martí helped to organize the Cuban Revolutionary Party and cigar makers financed the movement. Allegedly, incendiary orders were written in Tampa, then rolled into cigars and smuggled into Cuba. Because of these activities, Martí is called the “Apostle of Cuban liberty”.

Tampa remained “Cigar City,” an economy dependent upon the popularity of cigars. But the success of Cuban liberation was both an end and a beginning for the cigar makers in Ybor City who had supported the Cuban War of Independence. New corporate interests began to control Tampa's cigar factories with a strengthened forcefulness toward the workforce and in response, ferocious strikes developed. In 1899, Latin cigar makers declared a strike when owners installed scales, thereby challenging the integrity of the workers. A four-month strike ensued, resulting in the deportation of union leaders, mass evictions, and new levels of violence. Large numbers of Cubans left Tampa during the months of *la huelga de la pesa* (the weight strike) whereas other cigar workers organized *La Resistencia*, an activist union. The tensions between cigar maker and factory owner escalated and during the 1910 strike Tampa vigilantes hanged two workers as a warning to strikers.

Despite the opposition, the hand-rolled cigar industry flourished until the economy collapsed in the 1930s. Symbolizing the demise of cigar manufacturing was the abolition of the *Lectores* in 1931. Machines began to replace the skilled cigar makers, and eventually the U.S. government's embargo against Cuban tobacco in 1961 crippled the Tampa-Cuba tobacco connection and Ybor City's cigar industry.

FACT

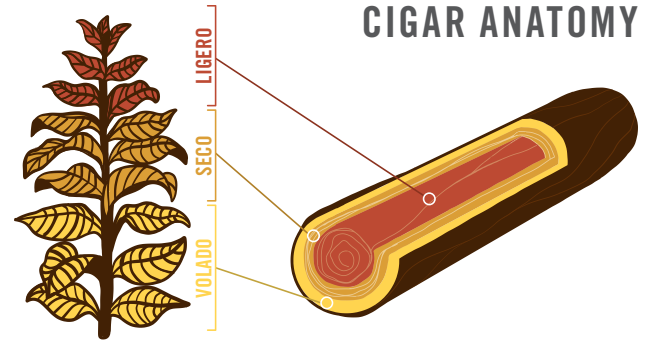
Gum tragacanth is a type of natural glue from the sap of a tree grown in Iran.

CRAFTING CIGARS IN YBOR CITY

The Cigar workers in Ybor City were artisans, and the goal was to produce perfect handcrafted cigars. The first step in cigar manufacturing was to age the tobacco filler, binder, and wrapper leaves under controlled climate conditions. Next, the tobacco was prepared for blending with various tobacco types to create different flavors.

Workers called “strippers” selected and stripped leaves from the tobacco plant and then piled the leaves beside each worker. Small or broken leaves are used as fillers, large leaves are used for the inner wrappings, and the finest leaves are used for the outer wrapper. The cigar maker would choose several leaves and lay each one on the palm of their hand until the artisan sensed that there was just the right amount for a cigar. Each leaf had to be oriented in the right direction so that the cigar would burn evenly and hold its ash once lit. These “filler” leaves were then wrapped with a binder to form a “bunch”. Next, a “wrapper” leaf was placed on a wooden board and trimmed. The “bunch” was placed on top of the wrapper leaf, the cigar was rolled in one smooth, flowing motion and sealed with a dab of *gum tragacanth*. Lastly the cigar maker trimmed the finished cigar with his blade and the cigar was ready to be seasoned (up to 3 years) before it was considered aged enough to be sold.

After aging, “pickers” sorted the finished cigars according to color, size and shade to ensure that all cigars in a box looked unified. “Banders” then placed a paper ring on each cigar and “packers” put them into beautiful, handcrafted cigar boxes to be shipped and sold.



Large tobacco leaves drying.

TRUTH + REASON

The Culture Industry

Walter Benjamin was a German-Jewish philosopher, cultural critic, and author. Benjamin is a significant intellectual whose profound philosophical writings and illuminating ideas revolutionized culture through discourse about cultural theory, art, and literature. His best-known works are “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) and “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940).

In 1932, during the turmoil preceding Adolf Hitler’s rise to Chancellor, Benjamin left Germany for the Spanish island of Ibiza, moved to Nice then eventually Paris in 1933. Once in Paris, Benjamin encountered and collaborated with many of the most influential contemporary French authors and philosophers. But by 1939 the Nazi regime had stripped German Jews of their German citizenship. Benjamin was arrested by the French government and incarcerated for three months in a prison camp.

A day before the invading Nazi forces entered Paris and shortly after Benjamin’s incarceration, he and his sister fled to the town of Lourdes. There, Benjamin received a travel visa to America, and would depart from neutral Portugal. To begin his journey to Lisbon, he crossed the French-Spanish border and reached Portbou in Catalonia, northeastern Spain. However, the Franco government had canceled all transit visas and the Spanish police announced that all such travellers, including Jewish refugees, were to be deported back to Paris. Rather than suffer deportation, Benjamin, at the age of 48, committed suicide by swallowing morphine tablets.



In a simple line drawing depicting a pile of fiery books, Tonel’s *Iluminaciones (Illuminations)* evokes complex questions surrounding the distortion of truth that fascism and principally Nazism played in the tragic death of Benjamin and millions of others during WWII. Although Benjamin did not receive international acclaim during his lifetime, he achieved posthumous renown in the decades following his death. Benjamin is a significant and celebrated intellectual whose profound writings and illuminating ideas continue to resonate in contemporary thought and discourses about art and philosophy.

FACT

Benjamin’s uncle William Stern was the prominent German child psychologist who developed the intelligence quotient (IQ)

U.S. - CUBA RELATIONS

1926: Fidel Castro born August 13, Birán, Holguin Province, Cuba

1960: Castro nationalizes all foreign assets in Cuba, hikes taxes on U.S. imports + establishes trade deals with the Soviet Union. President Eisenhower retaliates by slashing the import quota for Cuban sugar, freezing Cuban assets in the United States, imposing a near-full trade embargo, and cutting off diplomatic ties with the Castro government.

OCT. 1962: CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS - U.S. discovers that Cuba has nuclear missiles on the island. In response, Kennedy demands they be removed and orders a naval quarantine of Cuba, igniting a 13-day standoff.

1992: President George H.W. Bush signs the Cuban Democracy Act, which increases U.S. economic sanctions on Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1994-5: The U.S. + Cuba pass accords on immigration, including **"Wet Foot, Dry Foot."** Cubans intercepted by U.S. authorities at sea are sent home while those who make landfall in the United States are allowed to remain and pursue permanent residency after one year.

2008: Castro steps down due to health issues and hands over the presidency to his brother and second-in-command Raúl.

2016: Fidel Castro dies on November 25th at the age of 90.

2017: Trump Reinstates Travel & Business Restrictions

1996: HELMS-BURTON ACT Tightened + codified the U.S. embargo, several weeks after the Cuban military shot down two U.S. civilian planes over waters off of Florida.

1991: The Soviet Union collapses.

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010

2018

1953: MONCADA ATTACK - Castro leads unsuccessful coup with a militant group he formed (The Movement) against a military garrison under dictator Fulgencio Batista. Sentenced to 15 years in prison.

1955: Batista grants Castro and accomplices amnesty. Later, Castro, his brother Raúl, and several other comrades fled to Mexico in response to extreme government suppression.

1956: Fidel buys a decrepit yacht, the *Granma*, and sets sail to the eastern coast of Cuba with 81 armed revolutionaries, launching a guerrilla war in Sierra Maestra.

1959: Castro overthrows Batista and establishes a revolutionary socialist state in Cuba.

FEB. 1962: U.S. imposes a full embargo, banning all trade with Cuba.

1966: U.S. opens borders to Cubans seeking asylum.

1982: President Reagan designates Cuba as state sponsor of terrorism, censuring the Castro government for providing support to militant communist groups in several African and Latin American countries.

1977: President Jimmy Carter reaches an agreement with Castro to resume a limited diplomatic exchange, allowing officials from the two countries to communicate.

2000: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez signs an agreement with Castro allowing Venezuela to send oil to Cuba at a heavy discount in return for support in education, health care, science, and technology.

1985: U.S. radio service - Radio Martí - begins broadcasting news and other programming to Cuba from studios in the United States. Fidel calls it as propaganda, jamming broadcasts.

2011-13: The Cuban government approves a slew of economic reforms in May 2011, allowing citizens to buy and sell residential real estate and automobiles, increasing bank lending, and expanding self employment.

2015: The State Dept. under President Obama removes Cuba from its list of states who sponsor terrorism, and later reopens U.S. + Cuban embassies.

SOURCES:

The Economist, economist.com
Council on Foreign Relations, cfr.org/timeline/us-cuba-relations

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN ART

University of South Florida
4202 East Fowler Avenue, CAM101
Tampa, FL 33620-7360 USA

Hours: M–F 10am–5pm, Thurs. 10am–8pm, Sat. 1–4pm
Closed Sundays and USF Holidays

cam.usf.edu |  USFCAMFan |  @irausf | # usfcam
813-974-4133 | info: 813-974-2849 | caminfo@admin.usf.edu



Hillsborough
County Florida



Climate Change: Cuba/USA exhibition and events are supported in part by USF World, USF Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean (ISLAC), CAM Club, USF Cuban American Student Association (CASA), and in memory of Janet G. Root. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is recognized by the State of Florida as a major cultural institution and receives funding through the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, Board of County Commissioners. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.