

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

the harts gallery

20 Bank Street New Milford CT 06776
thehartsgallery.com



Roberto Diago, *Untitled*, 2014
Mixed media, 39.25 x 39.25 inches

FUTURE ISLAND: Contemporary Art from Cuba

Jairo Alfonso

Belkis Ayón

Roberto Diago

Carlos Quintana

Fernando Rodríguez

Alexandre Arrechea

Tania Bruguera

Carlos Estévez

Sandra Ramos

José Toirac

May 28 – June 25

Opening Reception May 28 5-8pm

June 19 11am: Brunch & live Cuban *son* music with OCHUN (\$30/person RSVP thehartsgallery@gmail.com)

the harts gallery presents a timely exhibition by some of the most iconic and sought after Cuban artists of today. Historically, Cuba has provided a rich backdrop of visual realities and layered identities for its artists. The geopolitical isolation of the island over the past half-century has brought forth many extraordinary talents in today's art world, whose inspiration draws from their immediate surroundings and innate creative forces as well as global currents, to produce works of outstanding caliber and originality. Through a wide array of mediums and even broader range of perspectives, **FUTURE ISLAND** brings together the work of Jairo Alfonso, Alexandre Arrechea, Belkis Ayón, Tania Bruguera, Roberto Diago, Carlos Estévez, Carlos Quintana, Sandra Ramos, Fernando Rodríguez and José Toirac. The artists address diverse themes including global economic

systems, censorship and self-expression, collective memory, cultural identity, religion, materialism and structures of power in both Cuba and the United States. Thawed relations between the U.S. and Cuba are set to have an enormous impact on the future of Cuban art as well as its value to international collectors, and the harts gallery is honored to bring this extraordinary view of new Cuban work to our region, as part of a month-long celebration of Cuba in collaboration with the Washington Arts Association. **FUTURE ISLAND** opens on May 28 from 5-8pm and runs through June 25 at the harts gallery, 20 Bank Street, New Milford, Connecticut. A cocktail brunch and live Cuban *son* performance by NYC-based OCHUN will happen on June 19 at 11am.

Jairo Alfonso (b 1974, Havana) explores material culture from an archaeological perspective. His large-scale watercolor pencil drawings “reflect on the relationship we establish with the objects we create, use, and discard.” He addresses the act of hoarding with his *horror vacui* (fear of empty spaces) works, where every square inch of surface is filled with life-size “objects, devices and accessories from everyday life, piled up, and drawn closely together, so as to flood the pictorial space.” Viewing hoarding as a clear sign of consumerism and anxiety before economic crisis, the title of each work indicates the number of objects in it.

Alexandre Arrechea (b 1970, Trinidad) was a founding member of the Cuban collective Los Carpinteros (1994-2003). As a solo artist, he represented his homeland in the first Cuban Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011. **FUTURE ISLAND** presents works from Arrechea’s project NO LIMITS, a series of rolled-up stainless steel skyscrapers, including many icons of the New York City skyline. Arrechea views this project as a direct act of irreverence to the meaning of verticality in a building, by literally reshaping monumentality into a new reality. His sculptures maintain the façade and recognizable features of the iconic buildings, but also adopt new forms—an elasticity that is foreign to the structure. This can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the challenges of adapting to the new realities we face every day. The buildings are transformed into a tool, snake-like or snail-like shape, as if one could reel these rigid structures in like a hose—expanding and contracting with the rise and fall of the economy. In 2013, NO LIMITS took over the Park Avenue Malls with large-scale versions of the sculptures rolling, winding and spinning their way down Park Avenue, standing 20 feet tall.

Beklis Ayón (1967-1999, Havana) was a Cuban artist and lithographer. Her work drew heavily from Afro-Cuban religion, combining the myth of Sikan and the traditions of the Abakuá, an all-male secret society that originated in Nigeria and was introduced by African slaves to Cuba. Her work was often thought to reflect her personal life as well, addressing themes of silence and mystery, emphasizing the secrecy inherent in Abakuá with distinctive facial traits and the absence of mouths. Since her death, the Cuban government has declared her work a patrimony. She is in the permanent collection of The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Roberto Diago (b 1971, Havana) has exhibited internationally and most recently participated in the 2015 Havana Biennial. He was named one of “Six Contemporary Artists You Need to Know About” by Christies in 2015. Diago’s work addresses issues of racism, the African Diaspora and religion in Cuba. His cultural roots and identity are explored through the use of a variety of materials. The subtly beautiful beige-white canvases with patchwork and braiding are reminiscent of keloid scarring, representing the brutality inflicted on African slaves. His series *Variaciones de Oggun* includes large-scale metal assemblages, alluding to the fragmentation and decomposition of ethnic and religious discourse. They also provide a symbolic tribute to the Abakuá religious figure of Oggun—a warrior and powerful spirit of metalwork. The recycled scraps are intentionally left in their original color and battered state, providing an introspective view of modern day life in Cuba.

Tania Bruguera (b 1968, Havana) is an internationally renowned performance artist and activist. For over 25 years she has created socially-engaged performances and installations that examine the nature of political power structures and their effect on the lives of society's most vulnerable individuals and groups. Her politically engaged works have tackled global issues of power, migration, censorship and repression through participatory works that turn “viewers” into “citizens.” By creating proposals and aesthetic models for others

to use and adapt, she defines herself as an initiator rather than an author. In 2014, she was detained and had her passport confiscated by the Cuban government for attempting to stage a performance about free speech in Havana's Revolution Square. Bruguera has been recognized by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the 100 Leading Global Thinkers, is a 2015 Herb Alpert Award winner, a Hugo Boss Prize finalist, a Yale World Fellow, and the first artist in residence in the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

Carlos Estévez (b 1969, Havana) received the Grand Prize in the First Salon of Contemporary Cuban Art in 1995 and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant for Painters and Sculptors in 2015. "My work is, in essence, the representation of a vision that nurtures itself from a whole lively and reflexive process; assimilating the world in order to reintegrate it once more to itself by means of images that symbolize my marks on the universe." He continues, "I think that works of art transgress words and acts. They are men's supreme effort to conquer the universe, which is the human being itself."

Carlos Quintana (b 1966, Havana) is one of Cuba's most prominent artists. He is an intuitive, temperamental painter who works predominantly in large format, merging Cuban iconography with both contemporary and traditional styles of the East and West, to create a dream-like universe of vivid colors and rich textures from which powerful and poetic figures emerge. Known for his irrepressible energy, Quintana's images are full of metaphoric and humorous gestures, often disturbing, but always seductive. He lived and worked in Madrid for 11 years before returning to Cuba in 2004.

For **Sandra Ramos** (b 1969, Havana), "making art is a way of communication with all human beings and with the future." She considers her work to be a reflection of the particular social reality of Cuba, a fundamental theme being the daily recovery of individual and social memory, tied to the everyday overcoming of difficulties. "My work is highly bound with lost utopian feelings and frustration with the ideal of an emancipation through Socialism," she writes. Much of Ramos' work represents an imaginary aquatic world, where aquariums, water, sea life and sand merge to form another island nation under the sea, reflecting on the experience of the *Balseros*: Cubans who emigrate illegally to neighboring states in self-constructed vessels.

Fernando Rodríguez (b 1970, Matanzas) considers himself a collaborative artist. His partner and muse is a fictional character named Francisco de la Cal: Rodríguez's alter ego, de la Cal is a blind, humble charcoal maker, who like his creator, is an artist, albeit self-taught. Born in 1933, he went blind in 1963 and was unable to continue creating his work. While Francisco belongs to a generation that lived through the Cuban Revolution, Fernando belongs to the generation that was professionally formed 20 years after the triumph. In 1991 they began to collaborate, Francisco dictating Fernando's point of view. Their work comments on the everyday human experience, moving from a biting ironic artistic vision solidly grounded in Cuban political reality to a subtle universal conceptualism.

José Toirac (b 1966, Guantanamo) does work that could easily be defined as a non-official chronicle of Cuban history in the last century. The artist proceeds in the manner of an archaeologist, compiling and processing images of historic events and national personalities, recreating and recontextualizing them to offer new perspectives. **FUTURE ISLAND** features five of Toirac's small gold leaf paintings on found scraps of wood, based on photographs from the book *The Crime of Cuba* taken by Walker Evans in 1933, during the dictator Gerardo Machado's turbulent regime. In gold leaf, these once banned images appear as icons, their original message (poverty, social inequality) subverted; yet the old, splintered bits of wood Toirac has chosen for his ground beckon us to question the very concept of representation. "The first point of reference in my work, logically, is Cuba, but this doesn't mean that the issues I take on are endemic to the island...My work is realist to the extent that I take as an object of study not reality but it's image, the combination of visual habits that condition our comprehension and conception of the world. In this sense I accept Sartre's maxim that what is important is not what we do, but that which we do with what has been done to us."



Headed by filmmakers, photographers and activists Carmen Elsa Lopez and Evan Abramson, **the harts gallery** is an artist-run space and a non-profit organization focused on building community and inspiring transformation through a robust amalgamation of contemporary art exhibitions, workshops and cultural programming. Finding inspiration in Joseph Beuys' concept of Social Sculpture, the gallery functions as a gathering space where community can form around the common values of creativity, vision, sustainability and collaboration. <http://thehartsgallery.com>

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20 Bank Street, New Milford, Connecticut 06776

Thursday-Saturday 12-8pm, Sunday 12-3pm or by appointment

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