

Artistic Exchange:
The Cuban Migration to Tampa and its Effect on Art in the Area

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Abstract-

This project attempts to identify the relationship between Tampa, Florida and Cuba through examples of their respective works of art. Three episodes of migration of Cubans into Florida are used to illustrate the effects of the influx of immigrants on the art community of Tampa over time. For each of these three waves of migration, six images are used to depict the relationship between the two countries. Three images will represent Cuban examples of art while the following three images represent art from Florida. The results of this research show that there is a strong artistic and cultural connection between the two areas. Many similar themes in subject matter, composition, and style are transferred from Cuba to Tampa.

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The relationship between Cuba and the United States has been tenuous in the best of times. The exchange of ideas between the two nations, however, cannot be denied. The forbidden nature of the relationship often ignites an even more intense trade than might be expected. Many areas of life have been affected by the complex relationship between these two countries. The American state most affected by this is Florida due to its proximity to the island. Certain areas of Florida, in turn, have more intensely concentrated cultural displays of the continued contact with Cuba. Miami is usually the first city in Florida thought of in relation to Cuba. Key West is also deeply ingrained with a mixture of American and Cuban culture. Another city not as often thought of is Tampa. This city was virtually built by Cuban exiles and became one of the largest export communities in the country. Tampa has been changed economically and culturally throughout the years due to Cuban influence. The art of Tampa illustrates this process particularly well.

The many migrations of Cubans from their homeland to Tampa and back again have deeply changed the face of art in the area. Three particular phases of migration, each shaped by unique circumstances, have shaped the art community in Tampa. The first wave of Cubans effectively built the city in the years prior to 1959. The second wave of migration from Cuba occurred during America's open-door policy years from 1959 to 1992. The third and most recent migration phase into Tampa occurred from 1992 to the present and has also had a great impact on Tampa Art. This project attempts to examine the influential relationship of Cuba and Tampa as reflected in their respective works of art. Sample pieces will be used to demonstrate the influx of ideas and cultural traits from Cuba to Tampa during over a century of migration.

First Wave of Migration- *Prior to 1959*

This first wave of Cuban immigrants into Tampa, Florida built the foundation of the city on the skilled trade of cigar manufacturing. The area developed a distinct industry and workforce that was different than any other area of the country. This area of South Florida remained basically uninhabited during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. The United States Government began the development of South Florida in 1824 with the construction of the military complex, Fort Brooke. During this time the area was populated mostly by military personnel, with one third of all the citizens as slaves (Mormino 44). After the Civil War, Tampa had fewer than 800 inhabitants (Mormino 46). The institution of the railroad system by Henry B. Plant in the 1880s dramatically increased the possibilities for Tampa. In that time, over three million dollars worth of railway was constructed throughout the state, linking rural areas that had previously been inaccessible (Mormino 47).

The first Cubans to migrate to America during this time headed for Key West. This chain of islands, located on the Southern most tip of Florida, was the perfect location for immigrants seeking work opportunities. The port of Key West offered a direct path to Tampa based on its location. Inspiration for the move to Tampa was provided by Bernardino Gargol, who frequently traveled the West Coast of Florida in search of fruit resources at this time. As the story is told, Bernardino returned to Key West and told Vincente Ybor, a local Cuban business man, about the location (Mormino 64). Tampa seemed to be the perfect place to relocate and re-establish Ybor's cigar company. H.B. Plant's railroads would provide the needed transportation and the natural humidity of Tampa would act as a humidifier for the tobacco leaves. Ybor purchased a forty acre tract of land in the outlying area of Tampa for five thousand dollars (Mormino 65). An urban plan was eventually developed for these forty acres plus another seventy acres purchased later in

the decade. The city was to be named after Vincente Ybor, Ybor City. The plan consisted of a mixture of all of the different cultures involved. The streets were laid out in a grid pattern that was strictly American in its design. The brick cigar factories with immense courtyards recalled a Havana sense of architecture. The use of wrought iron and extensive balconies was directly influenced by Spain while, finally, the shotgun cottages built for the workers mixed Southern and African heritages (Mormino 66).

By May of 1886, the city was built and ready to accept the first Cuban immigrants. The S.S. Hutchinson made tri-weekly trips to retrieve more Cuban workers (Mormino 66). There were many reasons for the average Cuban worker to be attracted to Tampa. Inexpensive homes that were unheard of in Havana and Key West were offered to those who came. In 1886, a house built by any given cigar company cost about seven-hundred fifty dollars at the expense of five dollars per week with no interest added. The average cigar worker was making six-hundred seventy-three dollars a year (Mormino 235). There was also a series of fires in Key West between 1886 and 1896 that threatened to shut down the entire city (Mormino 67). The unique atmosphere and make-up of the workforce was also enticing. The urban environment was composed almost entirely of Italians, Cubans, and Spaniards. There was no competition from other immigrant workers. Ybor City was clearly becoming very residential and all Latin (Mormino 51).

The growth of Tampa coincided with the popularity of the cigar industry. By 1900, Tampa was producing ten million dollars in cigar exports out of three million dollars of tobacco imports. The skilled workers of this industry were the highest paid in the state of Florida (Mormino 68). The industry did not peak until 1919 at a production rate of four-hundred ten million cigars per year (Mormino 69).

The migration to Tampa was not limited to Cubans, the move was definitely led by the Cuban people. The different immigrant groups worked mostly in harmony with each other, as they did in few other areas, because everyone grew up with each other in a tight knit community (Mormino 79). Most of the immigrants had faced similar issues prior to coming to Tampa, allowing for the opportunity to bond through related experiences. Foreigners and those outside of the cigar community tolerated the mixing of cultures because of what the industry did for the area and the country (Mormino 92). As long as the culture stayed in Ybor City, it was simply ignored. The cigar trade was one of the few places that blacks, immigrants, and women were all allowed to work side by side (Mormino 101).

A strict hierarchy within the factories still kept different ethnic groups at specific status levels. El Lector, or the reader, was regarded as the highest in the chain of command. This person, always a man, read to the workers from a raised platform somewhere inside the factory (Mormino 102). This practice was reinstated in Tampa after a long hiatus in Cuba. The Lector was selected by the cigar rollers and paid a hefty salary for his talent. Veteran lectors were revered in the community and provided much more than entertainment for the workers. The readings, also selected by the workers, often consisted of radical material from specific newspapers or journals. Thus information spread into the community from the lector's readings, and families would often discuss them over dinner (Mormino 104).

Cubans were inspired by the information from the readings. Many bonded with each other by supporting the Revolution that was tearing through their homeland. For many, the move to Tampa was a temporary one. The Cubans helped the cause through financial support, rallies, and protests. Even Jose Martí, symbolic father of the revolution visited the area in 1891 (Mormino 79). The era of exile ended as the Cubans organized against the U.S. control over the

island. The founding fathers of Ybor City began to perish during this time as well, allowing a new generation to step into power (Mormino 81). Many exiled Cubans took this opportunity to return to their native birthplace. The return was difficult however and few jobs were available. The skilled artisans that were paid so well and revered so highly in Tampa had returned to a homeland that could not support them. Many returned to Tampa and to the way of life that they had grown accustomed to while in exile.

Art of the First Wave of Migration- Prior to 1959

Many types of art emerged during this time period in both Cuba and America. Certain trends and styles moved between the two areas along with the thousands of immigrants. Antonio Gattorno's painting, *Women by the River (Mujeres junto al rio)* (1927: Museo Nacional de Cuba, Havana), is an excellent representation of art work from Cuba during this era. The three women are placed in a tropical setting with palm leaves and traditional Cuban fruit. The two women pictured in the foreground are Cuban in appearance. The one woman in the background appears to be an Afro-Cuban slave. The woman in the foreground facing the viewer seems to typify beauty for this period. Her body is painted in an exaggerated, mannerist style that is very often seen in early Cuban art. The setting, the figures, and the style are all typically Cuban.

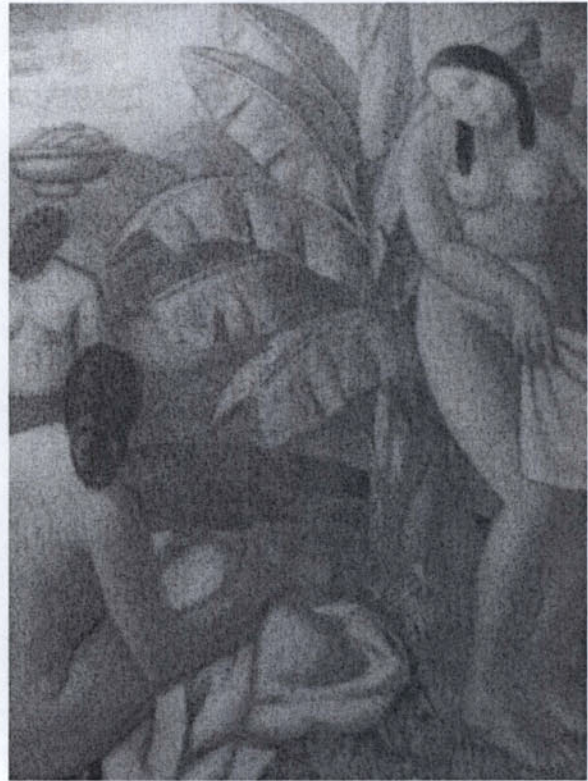


Figure 1- (Martinez 8) Antonio Gattorno. *Mujeres junto al rio (Women by the River)*, 1927. Oil on canvas. 76 by 46 inches. Museo Nacional de Cuba, Havana.

The Jaguey Tree (El jaguey) by Domingo Ravenet (1938: Museum of Modern Art, New York), is another example of the Cuban approach to art at this time. The setting is calming and the lines are full of movement. The image is relaxing and simple. The woman with her child is shown outside of a simple house and is surrounded by trees and flowing lines. The woman and child are faceless and so could be a reference to the Madonna and child that is used so frequently in Catholic religious art. The image seems to show a more peaceful time in Cuba that the artist has drawn from memory and painted in an idealized and impressionistic manner.

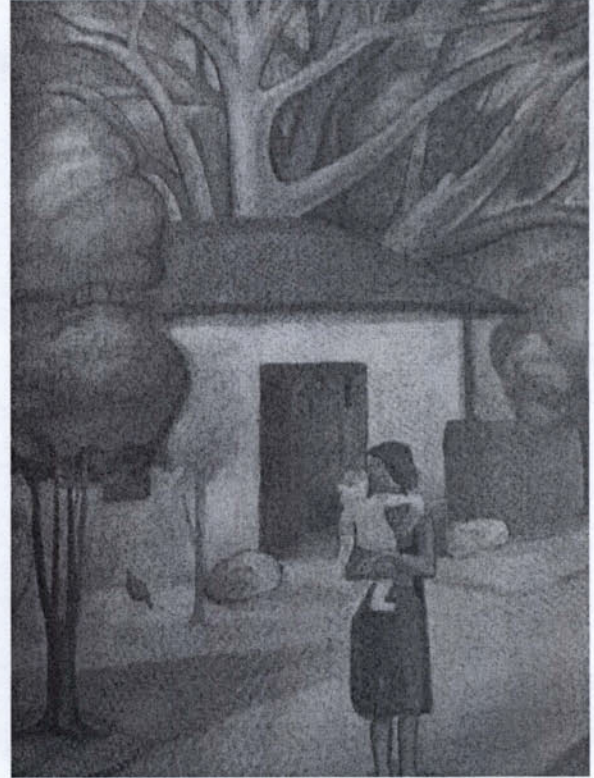


Figure 2- (Martinez 57) Domingo Ravenet. *El jaguey (The Jaguey Tree)*, 1938. Oil on Canvas. 29 7/8 by 24 inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

A different type of artistic expression could be found in commercial art. The labels of many tobacco products went far to entice the consumer. Cigar lithographs became a popular form of art associate with Cuba. This *Valle de la Magdalena* cigarette lithograph produced by La Honradez (Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba, Havana), exemplifies the beauty and detail in the production of these items. Along with displaying important information, the label shows a picturesque Havana beach with palm trees and crashing waves in the center. This is inset above another scene of the Cuban coast. The central image is flanked on either side by women in different forms. A profile of the woman on the left seems to be very regal and stately. The woman on the right is shown in full body length. The label in its entirety is very official in appearance and attractive to the consumer as a work of art.



Figure 3- (Martinez 53) Valle de la Magdalena, cigarette lithograph, La Honradez, n.d. Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba, Havana.

Cuban-American art in Tampa began to show some of these same characteristics during the time of the first migration. Amelia Peláez painted *Hibiscus (Mar Pacifico)* in 1943 (Museum of Modern Art of Latin America). Her image used many of the same bright colors that are so common in pieces of the works from the tropics. Her choice of subject matter itself is very Cuban as the Hibiscus is a tropical flower. The image is more abstract and seems to be drawn from the memory or impression of a flower. The background is loaded with native designs and lines. The picture is compressed, a little cluttered, and full of life, as many Cuban prints are.



Figure 4- (Fuentes-Perez 42) Amelia Pelaez Hibiscus (Mar Pacifico), 1943. Oil on canvas 45 1/2 by 35 inches. Museum of Modern Art of Latin America, Washington D.C.

Another example of art from this time in Florida is *Landscape with Figures* (*Paisaje con figuras*) (1938: Museum of Arts and Sciences, Daytona Beach, Florida) by Víctor Manuel. This piece is also a landscape depicting the simpler moments of the Cuban lifestyle. Figures are shown lying on a grassy area in front of a pond or a lake. The people are surrounded by tropical looking trees and huts with thatched roofs. Here again, the bright tropical colors are reminiscent of Cuban style. The entire image seems slightly out of focus because the painting is done in a somewhat impressionistic style. The work seems to be from memory or a vision from the artist's past. This suggests a return to the pleasant times in Cuba when revolution was not ripping the country apart. Many displaced artists used this method to depict their home as a coping strategy to help them deal with the loss of their mother country.

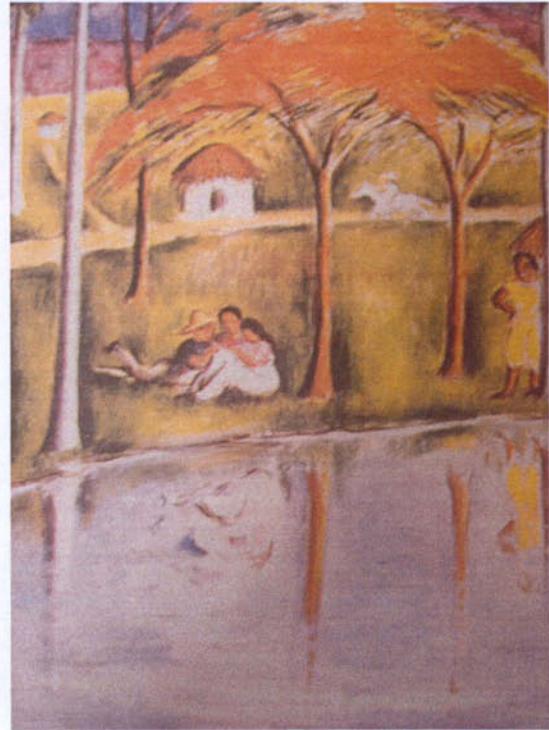


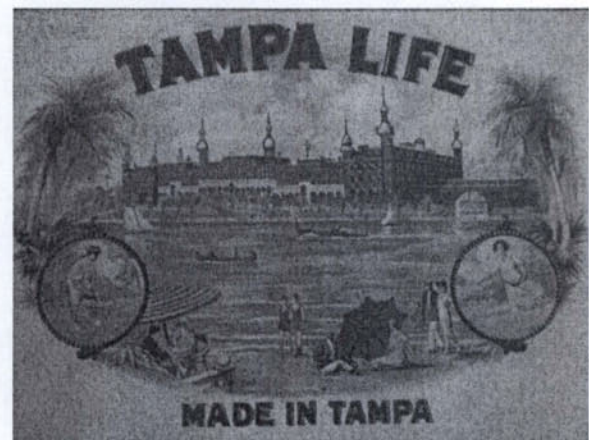
Figure 5- (Fuentes-Perez 64) Víctor Manuel, Landscape with Figures (*Paisaje con figuras*) 1950. Oil on Canvas, 17 by 22 inches. Museum of Arts and Sciences, Daytona Beach, Florida.

Tobacco label art also spread north to Tampa. The style and use of the label transplanted itself nearly identically in the exiles' new home. Thousands of labels were produced in the old Havana style that had been used for generations. The Tampa Life Cigar Company in particular developed a label very similar to early Cuban labels (Special Collections, University of South Florida Library). The label shows a beach scene in Tampa where people are enjoying themselves. The Tampa Hotel is shown centrally in the background. The scene has

Second Wave of Migration- 1959-1991

palm trees on either side with two inset images below the trees. The inset on the left is a man enjoying a round of golf. The woman on the right is playing tennis. Both are experiencing the "Tampa Life," that these cigars seem to promise.

Figure 6- (Mormino 145) Special Collections, University of South Florida Library



During the second wave of migration, between 1959 and 1992, hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles moved to the United States to escape the new revolution that threatened their homeland. The United States practiced an "Open Door" policy at this time which allowed any refugee to safely immigrate to the states to gain political asylum. The policy was instituted by President Eisenhower in 1961 in an attempt to embarrass Fidel Castro and destabilize his regime by drawing in Cuba's human resources (Masud-Piloto 2). That was a dangerous tactic however, as the influx of communist ideas into the U.S. was a concern, and many feared Cuba might act as a gateway for communism to enter the United States.

The reasons for migration during this second wave were almost entirely political. As in the first wave, Florida became the catch-all for Cuban exiles simply because of its location near the island. Most of the exiled citizens were planning on a short stay in the country. Those refugees from the middle and working classes especially thought that they would return home one day (Masud-Piloto 7).

The first group that came during this time period consisted of mid to upper-class people with professional training with their families. The Nation of Cuba lost fifty percent of its entire population of doctors and teachers in the first two years of heavy migration (Masud-Piloto 33).

The first major attempt to return Cuban exiles to their home occurred in 1961 under the guidance of President Kennedy. The operation that was later known as the Bay of Pigs was put into effect on April 17, 1961. The date seemed to be perfectly timed: the economic situation of Cuba was poor because of the break with U.S. industry and the political climate was unstable because Castro's power was not yet solidified (Masud-Piloto 46). A fifteen hundred man exile task force invaded the land and was defeated in less than seventy-two hours. This defeat was not only an embarrassment to the Kennedy Administration but it also solidified Castro's power and this ultimately meant that Cuban exiles would remain in the country for much longer than expected (Masud-Piloto 47).

The next key interaction between the U.S. and Cuba occurred during the Camarioca Boatlift and Airlift between 1965 and 1973. On September 28, 1965, Castro announced that any Cubans with family in the U.S. would be allowed to leave. This was at least in part propaganda to show that he was sensitive to the concerns of the Cuban people and did not want them drowning in boats en route to the States (Masud-Piloto 57). The Cuban Government offered two free flights daily from Havana to Miami. This created an overnight refugee crisis for the United

States (Masud-Piloto 58). But Castro had three other reasons for offering these flights. First, he wanted to open talks with the U.S. Government. Secondly, he wanted to ease the internal strife in Cuba by releasing non-productive Cuban citizens (people who could not be replaced or men between the ages of 14 and 27 were not allowed to leave). Finally, he used the migration as a safety valve for releasing dissidents to the U.S. (Masud-Piloto 60). The U.S. government accepted these refugees under a formal agreement with Cuba. The U.S. allowed airlifts and “freedom flights” to continue but still isolated Cuba economically (Masud-Piloto 64). During the first year of these airlifts, forty-five thousand exiled Cubans landed on Florida soil (Masud-Piloto 65). Nixon inherited the airlifts in 1969 and continued the operation until April 6, 1973. In this period, 3,049 flights brought 260,561 Cubans to the United States. This became the largest airborne refugee removal in American history (Masud-Piloto 68).

On January 20, 1977, the U.S. received another wave of refugees from Cuba in the Mariel Boatlift. This time, Fidel Castro freed many of his political prisoners in an attempt to open talks with exiled Cubans and the U.S. Government. This migration was declared illegal by the U.S. but many Cubans in Florida still rented boats from Key West in order to pick up relatives on the island (Masud-Piloto 84). A State of Emergency was declared in Florida because of the thousands of homeless Cubans arriving in the “Freedom Flotilla” (Masud-Piloto 85). More than eighty thousand illegal Cuban immigrants came to Florida. Many known criminals and mentally ill people were also released under the direction of Castro. The label “Marielito” was used to identify all those who came over during the Mariel Boatlift. It stigmatized all of these immigrants as criminals or misfits. By the end of the crisis, one hundred twenty-five thousand new Cuban exiles had arrived in America (Masud-Piloto 94). Eighty percent of these refugees were still unemployed three months after the boatlift had ended. In August of 1980, six

commercial flights were hijacked to Cuba by Mariel refugees who were trying to return home (Masud-Piloto 96). These hijackings only reinforced the criminal image of those that participated in the Mariel Boatlift.

One final major conflict occurred between Cuba and America during this second wave of migration. On May 20, 1985, President Reagan sponsored a radio program called *Radio Martí* to express U.S. opinions on Cuba airwaves. Cuba responded by suspending all emigration proceedings that had been in effect, suspended all trips to the island by Cuban citizens living in the U.S., and reserved the right to broadcast back to the U.S. (Masud-Piloto 104). This had a huge impact on the refugees who were scheduled to return to Cuba and on the political prisoners who were scheduled to return to the U.S. These exiled citizens were caught in a legal limbo between the two countries (Masud-Piloto 105).

Art of the Second Wave of Migration- 1959-1992

Many artists in Cuba and Tampa were influenced by the circumstances surrounding the second wave of migration from Cuba to Florida. Certain pieces in Cuba reflect the political and social climate of the time. *Family Portrait (Retrato de familia)* (Collection of the Artist: 1983) by César Leal shows the importance of the family in Cuban life. During such turbulent times, Cuban citizens often had to call upon the support of their extended family. This was often reflected in the subject of many paintings and art works. The hectic life of this family is shown clearly in this work. All seems to be in constant motion, as if they did not even have enough time to sit for the portrait. The composition is jumbled and congested. This may be a comment on the artist's feelings about his family life at the time the piece was created. The figures are depicted in an exaggerated manner as well. This painting is an excellent example of the

importance of the family in Cuban culture however unstable it may have appeared at times.



Figure 7- (Camnitzer 13) Cesar Leal, *Retrato de Familia (Family Portrait)*, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 150 by 190 centimeters. Collection of the Artist.

Many types of art had socially conscience messages. An image by Marta María Pérez Bravo, *Prejudices (Prejuicios)* (Collection of the Artist: 1987), brilliantly depicts the artist's feelings about prejudices in society. The woman in the picture sleeps with a brick on the side of her head. The brick symbolizes prejudices that are bearing down on the sleeping woman. The image seeks to convey the effects of prejudices on individuals. This type of thinking could be directly connected to the conflicts continuing between the U.S. and Cuba during this time. The prejudicial attitudes encountered by Cubans in both countries would have ultimately had an effect on the people themselves. This type of socially and politically conscious art work began developing in Cuba during this time and spread throughout the Tampa area along with the immigrants.



Figure 8- (Camnitzer 218) Marta Maria Perez Bravo, *Prejuicios (Prejudices)*, 1987, silver gelatin photograph, 24 by 30 centimeters. Collection of the artist.

The social messages developed by artista such as mentioned above ultimately graduated into politically based works. *In the Sea of America (En el mar de América)* (Collection of the Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales, Havana: 1988) by Alejandro Aguilera, shows a more overtly political specifically directed at American politics. This sculpture installation shows five free-standing figures. These figures are all central to the controversy involving the two countries during 1988. Che Guevara, a Cuban revolutionary, is displayed as the prominent figure. All of the figures are shown with rings circling their heads that resemble the halo in Catholic religious art. The artist consciously refers to this type of art work for inspiration. The figures, however, do retain a human quality and are shown semi-realistically. This interest in the human as a person is an important theme in Cuban art that has been consistent

throughout many forms of artistic expression.



Figure 9- (Camnitzer 262) Alejandro Aguilera, *En el mar de America (In the Sea of America)*, 1988, wood carving. Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales, Havana.

Art in Florida and in Tampa explored many of the same themes as Cuban art from this time period. *The Juggler* (private collection: 1989) by Maria Brito is one example. The central theme of the painting is the mother of the family juggling the household and children. Because of the amount of migration, many women were left to support and manage households by themselves. Men were often absent looking for work or remaining back in Cuba. The image has strong religious connotations with a background full of angels and Christian idols. The woman's hand position is one frequently seen in Catholic art. Her direct gaze toward the audience is also typical of religious inspired art. The picture clearly represents the artist's feelings about the disturbed family life of Cuban immigrants to the United States. Just as the image discussed earlier showed a hectic and disturbed family life in Cuba, this image

explores the theme in the U.S. as well.



Figure 10- (Bosch 29) Maria Brito, *The Juggler*, 1989, acrylic on wood, 31 by 31 inches. Private collection.

Broken Man II (private collection: 1971) by Baruj Salinas continues the theme of a disjointed existence. Because of the many migratory movements of Cuban exiles, their lives were continually disturbed and disrupted. The calm certainty of life left behind in Cuba was rarely known to them in the U.S. The image of the broken man in this picture is more abstract than most of the paintings discussed thus far. The painting seems to portray the raw emotions of the artist. The paint application is splotchy and mottled on the paper. The feelings evoked by the scene would have to be similar to the feelings of the creator of the work. The title itself suggests the emotional state of the artist. This type of emotional expression about the social and cultural situation of the Cuban exiles can be seen throughout art of this time.

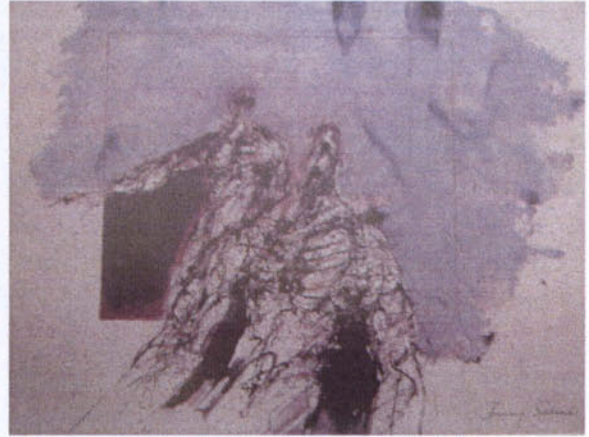


Figure 11- (Bosch 45) Baruj Salinas, *Broken Man II*, 1971, acrylic on paper, 24 by 30 inches. Private collection.

Another example of art in Florida that was shaped by the Cuban migration is *The Pope and the Pauper* (private collection: 1989) by Ramón Guerrero. This image contains a jail cell filled with plaster saints laid under an image of the Pope laid on top of an image of a pauper and has strong political meaning. This work toys with thoughts on propaganda and Catholicism in regards to the politics of the time. The idea expressed suggests that religion and politics override the individual human being in this case. The religious inspiration is a theme that has been discussed frequently in Cuban inspired art.

The Third Wave of Migration- 1992-Present

Because of many of the events that occurred during the second wave of migration, President Clinton ended the "Open Door" Policy on May 2, 1995 by denying Cubans unlimited access to the U.S. for the purpose of political asylum (Masud-Piloto 128).

In the summer of 1994, violent hijackings and boat thefts became common because of the onset of the worst economic situation that Cuba had ever seen (Masud-Piloto 137). Many thought that this would be the end of Fidel Castro, and many Cubans began leaving the island on homemade rafts called balsas. The refugees were driven away from their homes because of the

This work relates directly to politically motivated work that was being produced around the same time. It is apparent that the migration of Cuban culture to Florida succeeded in penetrating the art world as well.

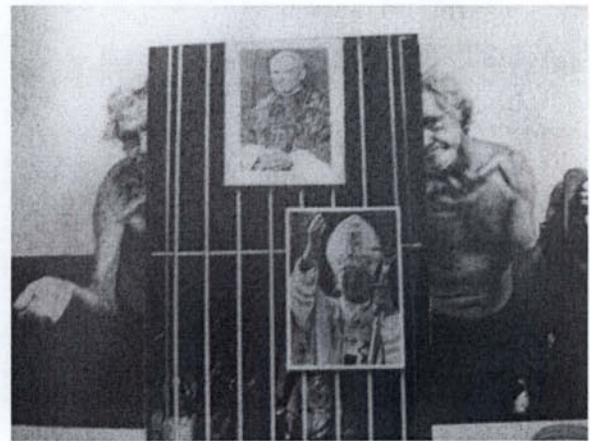


Figure 12- (Bosch 83) Ramon Guerrero, *The Pope and the Pauper*, 1989, gelatin silver print, 18 by 24 inches. Private Collection.

poor economy in Cuba and toward the U.S. because of the historical promise of sanctuary that had always been available to them. The popular opinion in Cuba was that this was the second Mariel Boatlift. Castro, however, refused to control the flow of people out of his country. He explained that he would not stop people from leaving if the U.S. wanted them so badly (Masud-Piloto 139). This migration did turn out to be quite different from Mariel because the number of refugees had the potential to be much higher, Clinton would not let all of them into the country, and many of those rescued at sea were detained indefinitely.

After negotiations with Cuba, Clinton severely restricted visits to Cuba. Those refugees that attempted to enter the States illegally were intercepted and taken to a new form of concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. More than 20,000 refugees were detained indefinitely at this military camp (Masud-Piloto 141). This action did not deter rafters immediately however. Cuba was forced to use “peaceful persuasion” in order to get people to stay in Cuba. This agreement marked the first time that the U.S. and Cuba had truly worked together in order to stop migration. On September 1, 1994, the two governments met to discuss only this issue (Masud-Piloto 141). As a result of a subsequent agreement, the detained refugees were allowed to return home, the U.S. agreed to accept 20,000 new immigrants per year, and Cuba agreed to stop any future exodus to Florida (Masud-Piloto 142). Many Cubans still remain in exile in Tampa, Florida, and many other areas of the country. Visitation is continually limited and illegal migration still occurs across Cuba/U.S. Borders.

Art of the Third Wave of Migration- 1992-Present

Just as in the first two episodes of migration, the art of the third era echoed the political and cultural climate of the time. The works became increasingly political, social, and personal for the Cuban people. An installation by Alexis Leyva Machado seems to exemplify this new time in Cuban contemporary art. *Speaking of the Obvious Was never a Pleasure for Us* (*Hablar sobre lo obvio nunca fue placer para nosotros*) (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: 1997) shows a worn down boat surrounded by personal objects. The piece seems to incorporate many of the constant themes in Cuban art. The image reflects powerfully on the situation of the immigrants headed to the U.S. The boat itself could symbolize the journey away from one's homeland to a strange new country in search of a better life. A strong comment is made about the reality of this migration. It is not possible to transport all of the aspects of life with an

immigrant to the new country. All of the personal things and ideals cannot be transported in one rickety boat across the sea. The political and social message about the crises facing refugees is very clear and strongly stated. The fact that people lose much of who they are when they leave their homes is not often thought of by the politicians who make the decisions for these exiled peoples. To comment on the situation of an artist's own people through their work is a very common approach for Cuban artists.



Figure 13- (Block 92) Alexis Leyva Machado, *Hablar sobre lo obvio nunca fue placer para nosotros* (Speaking of the Obvious Was Never a Pleasure for Us), 1997, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Another political piece by a Cuban artist during this time is *The Damned Circumstance of Water Everywhere* (*La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes*) (Collection Alina Roche Menocal, New York: 1993) by Sandra Ramos. The title of the image itself seems to capture the feelings of the artist clearly. The emotions of feeling trapped by the island itself are easily comprehensible. This is yet another social-political message sent out to the audience by an artist. The island of Cuba is shown in the shape of a woman's body. The palms are exaggerated, just as it has been in previous paintings reviewed here. Emotions relating to being trapped by political bargaining and being away from friends and family are conveyed once again by the work. The woman's face is pointing north toward the United States. Perhaps the artist longed to be in contact with a loved one that had moved to Florida years before. The geographic

location of Cuba comes into play as a reason for many issues facing the island.



Figure 14- (Block 125) Sandra Ramos, *La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes* (*The Damned Circumstance of Water Everywhere*), 1993, Etching on paper. 19 1/2 by 31 1/2. Private collection.

Another image created by Cuban artists during this time is a throw-back to the cigar industry that helped to build Cuba and eventually Tampa, Florida. *Cuban Cigar Label (Marquilla Cigarrera Cubana)* (Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver: 1994) shows how much of art is inspired by past events or trends. The carving by three artists called Los Carpinteros, combines wood and oil on canvas to create a revival image linked to the strong tobacco industry past of Havana. The picture is composed in a similar fashion to earlier cigar labels. The central image is surrounded by a crest and design on either side. The figure in the middle is smoking a long cigar in an elegant surrounding. The association with Cuban cigars and “the good life” is perpetuated here. Another figure is strolling in the background completely nude. The human figure is again used as a powerful theme. The work is at once a social statement on the current situation of Cuba

and a self-portrait of two of the artists involved.



Figure 15- (Block 21) Los Carpinteros, Marquilla Cigarrera Cubana (Cuban Cigar Label), 1994, Wood, oil on canvas, 65 5/8 by 84 inches. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver.

The mood of the art world in Florida and Tampa during this time strongly reflected the ideas and influences of Cuban Art. Again, many similar themes and emotions evolve from the paintings. Arturo Rodríguez's painting, *The Boat* (private collection: 1990-1991), combines many Cuban elements. The picture is painted in an impressionistic and slightly abstract manner. The figures are not completely realistic and are jumbled together in a familiar and hectic scene. The piece focuses on the rafters coming to America from Havana. The people seem to be caught in a turbulent storm with no end in sight. The figures have no direction or organization and are floating in despair. All people are represented including mothers, children, fathers and the elderly. Individuals attempt to rescue each other from the tumultuous sea. The image is a direct comment on the situation of the Cuban rafters and their exodus to the U.S.



Figure 16- (Bosch 96) Arturo Rodríguez, *The Boat*, 1990-1, oil on linen, 68 by 86 inches. Private collection.

Yet another social editorial came in the form of the work *Dead Rafter II* (The Cuban Collection, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida: 1994) by Luis Cruz Azaceta. This image of a man's head floating in a round raft with a single paddle shows the strife of the exiled Cubans with great simplicity. It is obvious at this point that the immigrants, illegal or not, must be helped. This painting, created by an individual living in the U.S., makes a strong statement. The link to Cuba and the politics involving the country are inextricably connected by this artist and image. The traditional bright Cuban colors and intense movement are still used in the work even when displaying a lost member of the Cuban immigrant community that found themselves without a place to call home.

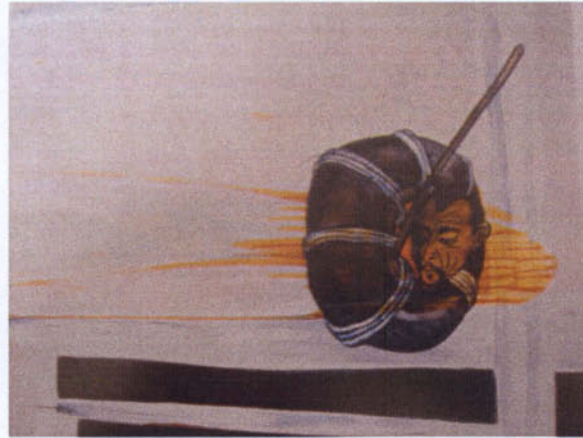


Figure 17- (Bosch 147) Luis Cruz Azaceta, *Dead Rafter II*, 1994, mixed media on canvas, 70 by 60 inches. Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Self-Portrait as a Swan (Private collection Miami, Florida: 2001) by Maria Brito continues the themes of confusion and trepidation. This picture shows a swan trapped in a box that is prevented from moving by a hand. The swan is squawking to be let free. This symbolic subject matter can easily be linked to the feelings of many Cuban refugees. The feeling of being trapped by the island or by the politics that dictate the movements of the immigrants is the same theme that was seen earlier in a Cuban piece from this episode of migration. Although explored in ways individual to the creators, similar feelings are being displayed in both areas during this time.



Figure 18- (Bosch 17) Maria Brito, Self Portrait as a Swan, 2001, oil on wood, 30 by 37 inches. Private collection Miami, Florida.

The final image used to illustrate the connection between Tampa and Cuba was created by Ferdie Pacheco. *To Tell the World: The Lector* (private collection: 1993) again emphasizes how inspiration in art comes full circle. The thoughts of Old Tampa and simpler times inspired many pieces during the chaotic third migration. Traditional images were often created as an escape from the brutal reality of U.S./Cuban relations. The painting shown here uses a very traditional Cuban approach to composition, subject matter, and theme. The characters are crowded together in a scene at a local factory in the heart of Tampa. The workers are not entirely realistic as they

gather together to listen to the words of the famous Lector. The colors are brilliant and bright. An emphasis on family and community life is apparent as well. The theme of tobacco and Cuban migration to Tampa is again portrayed with vibrancy and life.



Figure 19- (Pacheco 7) Ferdie Pacheco, *To Tell the World: The Lector*, 1993, Oil on canvas, 48 by 54 inches. Private collection.

Conclusion

The influence of the Cuban migrations to Tampa, Florida has had undeniable effects on the art of the area. Many of the same themes, styles, and compositions crossed the boundaries of the two countries. The political, social, and cultural exchange of ideas and opinions shaped the art of Tampa, Florida and forever changed the scene of American Art. The art community will be continually shaped by this influx of immigrants over the past centuries.

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