



William Cordova. *Untitled*, 2016. Peruvian cacao on paper. 11 1/8 x 9 1/8 in. (28.3 x 23.2 cm). Collection of the artist. Courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

video titled *Ch'u Mayaa* (2017) in jaguar print bodysuit enacting a kind of ritual or ceremonial performance throughout the

Hollyhock House and environs. Merging both culture (Hollyhock House) and nature (gardens), the female jaguar signifier shifts the narrative beyond that of neutral backdrop as the jaguar was a Mesoamerican zoomorphic deity par excellence. There is a sense of cultural reclamation and patriarchal subversion as the dancer stealthily engages the space and animates it with a gendered presence. What rounded out the exhibition was another architecturally-based artwork. Mixing genres of installation, design, sculpture and the built environment, relational aesthetics and art as social practice, was Jorge González's site-specific work titled *Ayacuabo Guarocoel* (2018).

Jorge González's *gesamkunstwerk*-like architectural installation drew from Puerto Rican and Taino vernacular and underscores how indigenous cultures were, in one sense, anthropologically spearheading in antiquity what has been called today as the "educational turn" in contemporary art. This new context for art eschews the Western

historical concept of art as one of static, formal contemplation rooted in Enlightenment period aesthetics that would later be cast as an early Modernist art-for-art's-sake credo. It's true that there is an artistic dimension to *Ayacuabo Guarocoel*, and yes it was shown in a museum. But Jorge González's project was more than what Rosalind Krauss termed in her important essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979). *Ayacuabo Guarocoel* was first and foremost a community in which the artwork became catalyst, mediator, or channel for a myriad of encompassing social activities far afield from the museum's original mandate. *Ayacuabo Guarocoel* and the Whitney exhibition that presented indigeneity and contemporary art without clichés and stereotypes, reminds us of the two options museums face today: to remain vital as a more inclusive institution for the common good, or become obsolete and irrelevant as a just another luxury item for the elite.

RAÚL ZAMUDIO

Lydia Cabrera and Édouard Glissant: Trembling Thinking

Americas Society, New York

"From imperative opacity to public manifestation" could be an alternative title for *Trembling Thinking*, the group exhibition organized by the Americas Society in honor of two towering Caribbean intellectuals whose prestige has done nothing but grow over the decades: Cuban ethnologist, writer, and artist Lydia Cabrera and Martinican writer Édouard Glissant. The cura-

tors run interesting—and, precisely for the same reason, significant—risks. The decentralizing archipelago as a model for thought is at the base of Glissant's critical and creative practice, so that the notion of *trembling thinking* is connected to his activities, even though his books are printed in the format of traditional philosophical books. Cabrera, meanwhile, is anchored to modernity

with her encyclopedic pioneering drive, which can almost be described as avant-garde. The notes in her notebooks possess the anxiety of the immediate, of eyewitness testimony, which gives them an ineffable freshness. Her drawings are the nerves of a unique birth in Cuban visual culture.

The exhibition is organized in three groups distributed in the same number of galleries, and the intention is to balance the selection of original works by artists from many latitudes and generations, with archival materials focused on Cabrera and Glissant, which serve to expand and multiply the associations between the signs as an extensive network of relationships projected in many different directions. One could think here of a "total curatorship" in the sense that Fernando del Paso was after a total novel, exploiting every possibility offered by the narrative art. Devoid of a center and of entry or exit points, this organization follows the open structure of the rhizome, which is indebted to the theory of the archipelago.

Mestre Didi (Deoscoredes Maximiliano dos Santos). *EJO AWURU-Serpente da madrugada* (EJO AWURU - Dawn's Serpent), 1980s. Palm frond, painted leather, shells, and beads. 11 3/4 x 22 3/4 x 5 7/8 in. (30 x 68 x 15 cm). Photo: Andrew Kemp. Courtesy of Almeida & Dale Galeria de Arte.



Nevertheless, there are key points of reference in each gallery. In the first one, there is a first-edition copy of Cabrera's *El monte* (The Mountain), a treatise on Afro-Cuban religious practices, and a documentary about *The Right to Opacity*, an essential concept in Glissant's thought. *El monte* reveals an up to then little-known universe of folk religiosity, in response to the folkloristic approaches that had shaped Cuban intellectual production in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. It was this book that situated Cabrera as a key figure in the ethnological study of national culture in Cuba, at a time when the conflict between its Spanish and African veins was rather acute. For its part, Glissant's opacity, a concept developed in Paris in the second half of the century, acquires a highly politicized character, almost like an alternative to the Enlightenment-driven gaze of the *Negritude* movement and to the psychoanalytic studies propounded by Frantz Fanon. With his defense of the black subject's right to opacity—a subject that is only visible to the repression and criminalization apparatuses—Glissant gains even greater currency in today's culture, with the obsession with transparency that characterizes hypermodern society.

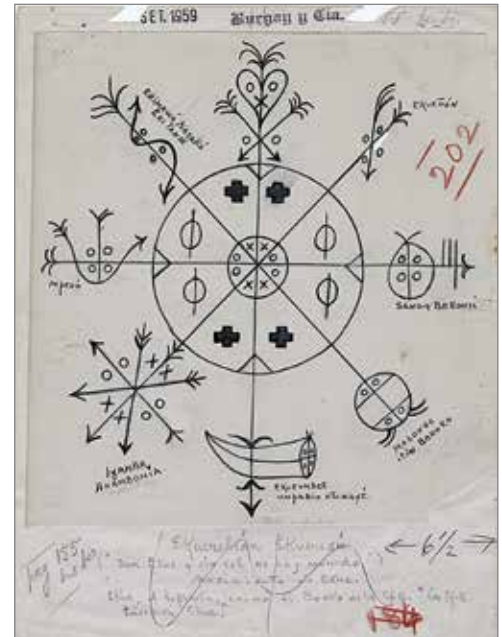
It is not by chance that this introductory gallery presents visitors with works that are hybrid in character, like the artist's book *Homage To Édouard Glissant*, by Lebanese-American poet Etel Adnan, an accordion of simple vertical forms in earthen tones and black, hermetic gestures. Or the series *Sketches for Atópolis*, by American



Lydia Cabrera. Drawing, 1959. Drawing. 9 ¹⁷/₃₂ x 6 ¹/₂ in. (24.2 x 16.5 cm). Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

artist Jack Whitten, a polyptych of twelve acrylic-on-paper paintings in an abstract-expressionist language. On his part, Melvin Edwards contrasts the physical weight and the lightness of design with his use of soldering in sculptural compositions of relative complexity and compact mass in *End of Century*. Opacity here takes the shape of a protective shell, as loaded with meaning as it is hermetic.

The second gallery is dominated by a set of display cases in which original works of art alternate with publications both in print and in



Lydia Cabrera. Drawing, 1959. Drawing. 9 ⁵⁹/₆₄ x 7 ¹/₁₆ in. (25.2 x 19.2 cm). Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

digital format. The distribution of these forces on the viewer a trajectory that to a large degree resembles the zigzagging motion of currents between Caribbean islands. This recourse is evidently based on the same sense of decentralization suggested by the idea of the *archipelago*. Motion makes it possible to highlight unexpected visual associations. For example, Syrian artist Simone Fattal's white ceramic works (*Wall I* and *Wall II*) with their two perforated walls, in front of a painting by Cuba's Amelia Peláez featuring a mouthless female figure at its center, surrounded

Simone Fattal. *Wall I*, 2009. Glazed stoneware. 7 x 11 ¹/₂ x 6 ³/₄ in. (17.8 x 29.2 x 17.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Kaufmann Repetto.



Tania Bruguera. *Destierro* (Displacement), 1998 (2005 version). Cuban earth, glue, wood, nails, and textile. Variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.





Amelia Peláez. *Mujer con pez* (Woman with Fish), 1948. Oil on canvas. 51 ³/₄ x 40 in. (131.4 x 101.6 cm). Isaac and Betty Rudman Trust.

Diamond Stingily. *Entryways* (Entradas), 2018. Door with locks, aluminum bat. 200 x 94 x 15 cm (79 x 37 x 6 in). Collection of Peter Lund.



Kader Attia. *Héroes heridos* (Wounded Heroes), 2018. Video; color, sound. 47'12". Produced for the exhibition *Scars Remind Us That Our Past Is Real* to mark the sixth edition of the Joan Miró Prize, jointly granted by the Fundació Joan Miró Barcelona and Obra Social "la Caixa". Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin.

by lacework, brocades, and other designs of frankly Baroque stylization. Similarly, the images in Lydia Cabrera's own drawings—at some point exhibited by the artist and written about by her under the pretension that the author was a male artist, her heteronym Armando Córdova—dialog with Roberto Matta's surrealist figures.

A selection of original drawings by Cabrera feature exquisite representations of animals. The animals appear sometimes alone and sometimes in columns, whimsically mounted on the head of a human figure, or on the back of another animal. These are sketches of illustrations for allegorical stories from the Afro-Cuban universe that Cabrera studied and occasionally wrote down, be it as a record of her informants' testimony or her own narratives. On loan from Miami's Lowe Art Museum, these drawings accompany the extraordinary sculpture *Ejo Awuru, Dawn's Serpent*, by Brazilian artist Mestre Didi. Using palm leaves, leather, snail shells, and beads, the sculpture resembles a serpent tied in a knot to form two circles that intersect perpendicularly. The detail of the leather head gives the work an interesting vivacity, which in Cabrera's drawings translates into a nervous line. Echoes of these vivacious shapes can be found in the animal drawings presented by Peruvian artist Elena Tejada-Herrera. Some of the digital-format publications include pleasurable surprises, like Cabrera's *Arere Marekén, A Black Tale*, with illustrations by Russian avant-

garde artist Alexandra Exter, both Cabrera's and Amelia Peláez's teacher in Paris.

In the final gallery, our attention is diverted from the semi-private realm of Cabrera's and Glissant's publications to works with a markedly political and social intent. In his sculpture *Entryways* Diamond Stingily uses the ready-made of a door with evidence of violence and a security bar with a leaning aluminum bat. Placing this work against the wall the gallery is transformed into a domestic, phobic space, awaiting menaces. On her part, Tania Bruguera presents her installation *Destierro* (Displacement), an imposing wardrobe recreated from the clothes she used in her performance *Nkisi*, which consisted in her walking around Old Havana dresses in an outfit weighted with dirt and nails, in ways described by Cabrera in *El Monte*. The performance took place in the Havana Biennial, where later Bruguera's work would be censored. Meanwhile, de Kader Attia's video *Héroes heridos* (Wounded Heroes) is a documentary focused on political mobilization, with images of activists intent on defending the tights of undocumented immigrants with an occupation of the Barcelona School of Art, where Attia was a student. Although less evidently connected to Cabrera and Glissant, these artists are without a doubt part of a new crop of critical, destabilizing thought that has both of them as models.

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