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Herriman, Kat. "In Chelsea, a Trio of Galleries Bring Cuba Stateside," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, January 19, 2016.



In Chelsea, a Trio of Galleries Bring Cuba Stateside



This season, several exhibitions in New York feature the work of Cuban artists. Clockwise from left: Luis Martínez Pedro's painting "Aguas territoriales (Territorial Waters)," 1963, on view at David Zwirner; a detail of Diana Fonseca Quiñones's "Puente (English version)," 2015, on view at Sean Kelly; a still from Coco Fusco's film "La confesión," 2015, on view at Alexander Gray. Credit Clockwise from left: Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner; photo by Jason Wyche, courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly; courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray.

When the U.S. loosened travel restrictions to Cuba in 2014, Havana jumped to the top of everyone's cultural bucket list. And the New York art scene has caught the fever: A rash of exhibitions this winter are devoted to the island's art community. A timely follow-up to last spring's contemporary-focused "Cuba Libre!" exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, David Zwirner's "Concrete Cuba" offers one of the first looks at the island's pre-revolutionary art, with a comprehensive show of the sculptures and paintings of Los Diez Pintores Concretos (the Ten Concrete Painters), a group of geometrically inclined artists that operated under that collective moniker for a brief moment between 1959 to 1961. Taking up the second story of the gallery's 20th Street tower, the historical work has a pleasingly human scale. A celebration of medium and color rather than content, the concretist compositions share more conceptual similarities with the process-based artists of today than with the abstract expressionists who were working in Europe and the U.S. at that time.

A more contemporary point of view can be found a few blocks up at Alexander Gray Associates, where the Cuban artist Coco Fusco's solo presentation fills the white cube. The show includes Fusco's most recent film, "La Confesión," which debuted at the 56th Venice Biennale last year and examines political oppression through the case of the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla. Fusco's exploration of Padilla's plight continues with "Confidencial, Autores Firmantes," a collection of facsimiles that Fusco made from official documents found in the archive of the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

Farther uptown, Sean Kelly Gallery presents the first international solo show of the equally outspoken Diana Fonseca Quiñones, who looks at Cuban culture through the symbology of everyday objects. Her methods vary: Sculptures, videos and paintings fill the gallery. Patchy canvases collaged from paint fragments stripped from the facades of Old Havana hang in the same space as sculptures made from books and thread — everyday objects that help Quiñones reframe larger social issues through metaphor. And in her videos, an act as simple as striking a match can take on new symbolic resonance.

Proof that the trend shows no signs of abating: After Quiñones's exhibition, another Cuban artist, Alejandro Campins, will move into Sean Kelly's space.

"Concrete Cuba" is on view through Feb. 20 at David Zwirner Gallery, 537 West 20th Street, New York, davidzwirner.com. "Coco Fusco" is on view through Feb. 6 at Alexander Gray Associates, 510 West 26th Street, New York, alexandergray.com. "Diana Fonseca Quiñones" is on view through Feb. 6 at Sean Kelly Gallery, 475 10th Avenue, New York, seankelly.com.