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Cuba rising: Los Carpinteros air political views in Mexico City



The renowned art collective Los Carpinteros are the subject of a new solo exhibition at Mexico City's Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC)

'I don't know how, but when we moved out of Cuba we started thinking more about Cuba,' says Dagoberto Rodríguez of Los Carpinteros, the renowned art collective he operates with his fellow Cuban-born, Madrid-based collaborator Marco Castillo. 'People move out of Cuba to forget about Cuba but we moved out to think about it more.'

This obsessive nostalgia is on full display through September in the group's new exhibition at Mexico City's Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC). 'They are mostly political reflections,' says Rodríguez.

The work – comprising drawings, sculptures, and installations — spans the last decade, beginning with *Faro Tumbado*, a 25 foot-long sculptural replica (with the same timed flashes) of a felled lighthouse that stood in the entrance of Havana Harbor. The piece, which the duo completed in Cuba in 2006, is now in the collection of the Tate Modern.

'It's very funny, we did this in 2006, but this year Fidel Castro fell on his knee and that was the beginning of his retirement from politics,' says Rodríguez. 'The lighthouse was kind of a premonition. The revolution used this phallic image to remind you of the power of its ideas, so we wanted to show it on its side, but still lit.'

It lies in opposition to *Candela*, an LED-lit 'revolutionary fire' that invokes the illuminated reliefs of Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución. In addition to these installations are two star-studded works – *Movimiento de liberación nacional*, a series of star-shaped charcoal barbecues; and *17m*, a 17-metre-long clothing rod that holds some 200 black suits shot through with a star-shaped hole – and a reproduction of the 2013 installation *Tomates*, which is comprised of walls bombarded with tomatoes then fitted with porcelain sculptures of the politically-charged fruit. Outside, they have installed 40 contorted human-scaled iron nails for their *Clavos Torcidos*, which mimics the bodies (or 'the beauty of the waste') at the battlefield of Gettysburg.

'The whole show looks very tough,' says Rodríguez, acknowledging that curator Gonzalo Ortega, who originally conceived the exhibition for Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, identified a 'poetic

activism' that tied all the works together. 'But it's not so obvious, we are more focused in the language of the pieces.'

That language comes to life in the video from their controversial Conga Irreversible performance during the 2012 Havana Biennial. The work saw the duo enlist 100 performers and musicians to enact and play the traditional carnival procession known as comparsa – from Havana's famous Paseo del Prado to the Malecón – in reverse: an impossible taunt to an intractable regime. Little could they know then that four years later President Obama would be projecting a way forward for their country by touring these same streets with Raul Castro.



