



Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art Collection Celebrates 10th Anniversary with Exhibition at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana, Cuba

On View: July 28 – October 2, 2017

July 5, 2017 (Havana, Cuba) – The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) and the Watch Hill Foundation are pleased to announce the opening of “Without Masks,” on view July 28 - October 2, 2017 at the MNBA. Following successful exhibitions in Johannesburg, South Africa and Vancouver, Canada, the third exhibition in Havana commemorates the 10th anniversary of the von Christerson Collection of contemporary Afro-Cuban art.

Curated by eminent Cuban art critic, curator and researcher in Afro-Cuban ritual arts Orlando Hernández, the exhibition is comprised of 149 works by 40 Cuban artists from the last three decades, showcasing a diverse range of media from painting and drawing to sculpture, photography, and more. The artists include Wifredo Lam, Bernardo Sarría Almogoea, Belkis Ayón Manso, Manuel Mendive Hoyo, José Bedia Valdés, Juan Carlos Alom, Elio Rodríguez, Roberto Diago Durruthy, Andres Montalván, and Douglas Pérez Castro.



José Bedia Valdés, “Kindembo Sarabanda Malongo Yaya Arriba Ntoto” 2009.

Acrylic on canvas, 182 x 464 cm.

“What distinguishes the collection and renders it exceptional is that it assembles for the first time such a numerous and varied group of Cuban artists and works devoted to exploring two great themes that hitherto have been regarded separately,” said Hernández, “namely cultural and religious traditions of Africa in Cuba, and the multiple problems and conflicts related to race.”

These two major themes are supplemented by the artistic portrayal of Cuba’s presence in the Angolan Civil War and by portraits of Angolan women, as Hernández deems it important to include not only the presence of Africa in Cuba, but also the presence of Cuba in Africa.

As part of the MNBA exhibition, a series of 29 historic photographs by Cuban photographer Roberto Salas will be shown for the first time. Photographed during the early days of the Cuban Revolution, the series captures ethnographically significant moments of Afro-Cuban religious processions and candid moments of daily Cuban life from this period.

The opening week of “Without Masks“ will be accompanied by a program of events including lectures, artist talks, documentary viewings and conversations. Among the highlights of the program will be lectures delivered by four renowned academics, expert in the fields of African, Afro-American and Afro-Cuban art, namely:

- Professor Robert Farris Thompson, Professor of History of Art, Yale University.
- Professor Henry John Drewal, Head of Department of Art History and Afro-American Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Professor Charles Daniel Dawson, Head of the Institute for Research in African American Studies, Columbia University.
- Professor Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, Leverhulme Fellow in African Studies, Oxford University.

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About Orlando Hernández

(b. Cuba, 1953) Hernández is an art historian, art critic, poet and researcher of popular culture and Afro-Cuban ritual art. His essays have been published extensively in books, magazines and catalogues in Cuba and abroad. He is a member of AICA and UNEAC. He lives in La Habana.

About Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana

Founded in 1913, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Museum of Fine Arts) in Havana houses the most important artistic heritage of Cuba. It preserves, studies, and promotes the largest collection of Cuban art and foreign collections from classical times to the present from every continent. The museum's collection comprises of more than 48,000 art works with some 2000 works on display in its permanent exhibition halls.

About the von Christierson Collection

The collection began in 2007 by Chris von Christierson, a South African collector and businessman in collaboration with curator Orlando Hernández and the Watch Hill Foundation, a UK charity of the von Christierson family. The collection's objective is to educate on the strong cultural ties between Africa and Cuba, and to expose the realities of this connection that are richly portrayed in Afro-Cuban art. The collection is intended to be internationally exhibited as a contribution towards bridging cultural differences, exposing truths, and promoting tolerance through honest expression and understanding.