



Flora Fong

ART: ELIXIR OF LIFE

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April - June 2015

ArteMorfosis - Galería de Arte Cubano

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On cover, fragment of *Diez minutos de descanso*
(Ten-Minute Break, displayed on page 17)

Short Break on the Road toward New Horizons



DOLORES DENARO
Art Historian and Curator

Diez minutos de descanso (Ten-Minute Break, displayed on page 17) is the title of a painting by Cuban artist Flora Fong. Four stylized royal palms, the gigantic native plant of the Caribbean, support a huge coffee filter on top of a jar. The latter, in turn, stands above an also stylized flame, while water runs across the coffee powder. From the coffee pouring into the container rises the aroma. On the left, a person with a hat is seated on the floor with legs drawn together. Leaning against the huge filter base, the man looks out of the painting. In his hands, resting on his knees, he holds a long flat object from which smoke also rises to the filter. The fine smoke, initially white and then darkening upwards, makes one think of an over-dimensioned Cuban cigar. The stranger makes a pause outside a city hinted toward the back with a few strokes. In full calm he takes a break.

The painting's background surrounding the palms, as well as the funnel and jar are reddish brown, while the palm trunks are bluish and the spaces remain white. Due to the ordering of colors and forms, the painting might be interpreted as an abstraction of the Cuban national flag in vertical position. But this is not Flora Fong's intention. She rather wishes to convey the joy of living, symbolized by the Cuban elixirs of life: coffee and tobacco. Given that the artist has chosen *Diez minutos de descanso* as the central image of her first exhibition with catalogue in Switzerland, this becomes a parable. Her message to the inhabitants of the restless western world is to stop, become conscious of life and enjoy it. The modification of the typical Cuban coffee filter equals a broad synthesis of art as elixir of life.

The painting's language fully corresponds to the artist's previous work. Both the royal palm and the distinctive black line are repeatedly present in Flora Fong's paintings. The Cuban national tree is represented in most cases ideographically reduced and suggests her Caribbean fatherland. The dominant black trace of the brush, in turn, visually recalls Chinese ink painting, with which she alludes to her Chinese origin. The theme of migration is frequently found in her works: after having studied Chinese calligraphy in the Academy in Havana, Flora Fong carried out extensive studies in 1989 during a trip to China, her father's fatherland. In *Diez minutos de descanso* she merges both countries of origin and achieves a unity: the Cuban royal palm as Chinese calligraphy.

FORERUNNER OF TODAY'S CUBAN ART SCENE

Flora Fong is one of the best-known Cuban female artists and one of the first women who finished art studies in post-revolutionary Cuba¹ and developed a professional career as an artist. Active in art since 1970, she assumed a forerunner role as a woman on the Cuban art scene. All this happened at the time Cuba became a socialist State after the 1959 revolution under the direction of Fidel and Raúl Castro,

- 4 Camilo Cienfuegos and Argentinean Che Guevara. The political transformation brought about the corresponding consequences. Culture – music, visual arts, literature and dance – was promoted explicitly as a propaganda poster of the revolution. During approximately 50 years, the Cuban art scene developed in a closed society in which the artists of one generation trained those of the next.

LIMITED SOURCES OF INFORMATION

It was only thanks to the National Museum of Fine Arts, founded in 1913 in Havana, that Cubans could learn about the history of European art. Here are works of old Dutch, German, English, Flemish, French, Italian and Spanish masters, next to South American works of art.

For a long time, it was only possible to travel legally outside of Cuba by following a complicated procedure of approval that conveyed high costs and also required an invitation from abroad. With the long-awaited 2013 reform, the bureaucratic obstacles were greatly reduced and the departure authorization was eliminated. The new, internationally appreciated regulations on travel represent a clear opening towards the world. Artists can in principle travel freely; however, in practice only a few can afford it.

Internet and information coming from abroad continue to be controlled by the State. Thus, for example, in Cuba one cannot buy foreign magazines or newspapers. The normalization of diplomatic relations announced in 2014 by the heads of State Barack Obama and Raúl Castro will start moving many things in this field.

The fact is that up to now the Cuban art scene has developed shielded from the international world of art and, to a great extent, with its own dynamics. "Among icons of the revolution and marked by insular obsessions, works and projects that show with great force and capacity of improvisation the complex dynamics of a tattered existence are emerging in the studios of Havana."²

Even today the Internet is not a reliable source of information. Not only due to the censure but also to the technical level in the Caribbean island State. Internet surfing with broad band such as we know it in Switzerland is not known in Cuba. Generally the Internet is accessed with 57 kb/s modems, as was the norm in Switzerland in 1998. Nevertheless, a few artists have installed a web site for themselves, to allow

for international visibility. Also universities and academies are increasingly – with limitations – putting Internet at the disposal of their students. 5

CONSEQUENCES OF THE POLITICAL THAW

Gallery owners and collectors from the near-by United States of America increasingly tour the studios of Cuban artists since the U.S. started normalizing its diplomatic relations with Cuba. Indeed, the U.S. embargo did not restrict commerce with art, literature or music from Cuba, which could be imported and traded freely. On the other hand, U.S. citizens could barely travel to Cuba (and Cubans, if ever, to the U.S.). Thus, no real cultural exchange was possible. The curiosity of European galleries is now being awakened, and it is only a matter of time that the interest of the international art scene will focus increasingly on Cuba.³ The hitherto isolated cases of cultural exchange with the island State are now possible at a larger scale. Cuba will be a growing theme in art fairs and biennials.

So it is only natural for a new gallery to open in Switzerland dedicated to Cuban art, which will initially focus on the Caribbean island's well-established artists; on those who paved the way for the younger generations. There is a need to catch up with the presentation of Cuban artists outside their country, and with cultural exchanges abroad. The present atmosphere of political transformation with an opening towards the western world hints at an interesting and dynamic phase that will enable Cuban art, for the first time, to reach new shores. On these new paths, to take a ten-minute break (*Diez minutos de descanso*) over and over again, is a wise advice from artist Flora Fong.

¹ Graduated from the National School of Art of Havana.

² Ines Anselmi and Eugenio Valdes Figueroa (editors), *Neue Kunst aus Kuba. Art actuel de Cuba. Arte cubano contemporáneo, La dirección de la mirada*, Edition Voldemeer Zürich, 1999. Neuere Literatur zur Entwicklung der bildenden Kunst in Kuba, see Joseph Kiblitky / Barbara Thiemann, *Kunst aus Kuba*, Palace Editions, 2002. Nathalie Bondil, *Cuba: Art and History from 1868 to Today*, Prestel, 2009.

³ See Cash 03.01.2015: *Kuba als nächster heisser Kunstmarkt* (Cuba as Next Hot Market for Art), www.cash.ch: "Up to the present, the Cuban art market has remained on the fringes of the international public. After U.S.A. suddenly changed the course toward reconciliation, the threat of a mass avalanche of art collectors appears".

The Hurricane and the Palm: Landscape with Flora

VIRGINIA ALBERDI
Art Specialist



1.

Along more than half a century of artistic experience – starting from the years of academic learning in the sixties up to the present – the coherence in the search and construction of an identity in her style has been the alpha and omega of Flora Fong’s vital career.

A first glance suffices to note her distinctive mark. In a group exhibition, in the midst of the most diverse repertoire of images, Flora is herself, unique and unyielding. It is not necessary to be an expert on her work, not even an expert on currents, styles and trends to state, or at least sense, in the face of any of her works, be it from one period or another, that that painting, that drawing, that engraving, that stained-glass work... is Flora’s.

In the end, artists of her kind do not create for groups of initiates, but seek to create a bi-univocal, reciprocally enriching relation between what they have to offer and the sensitivity of those who receive the work.

Her creation is accessible but not exempt from encoded keys resulting from the mystery of creation. Her images are sustained by a communicative vocation, which does not turn them into primary equations.

Interesting in her case is the fact that she has succeeded without concessions or moulds. There are artists who find a kind of gold mine and freeze their expression; others soon exhaust thematic sources and technical procedures. Flora places herself on the extremes of both phases. Today she is obviously not the one she was initially; she has developed, her language has evolved, she has even explored unsuspected meanders in daily challenges, but at the same time she has remained faithful to her origin, loyal to her glance, consubstantial with her lineage. Although it may seem commonplace to say, Flora has never ceased to be Flora, she has evolved without losing her best creative and human conditions.

About this quality, the outstanding essayist and art critic Graziella Pogolotti declared: “Her proposal transcends the form of doing, implies having defined a perspective and the self-acknowledgment of a personal identity, having assumed a heritage that is not only esthetic but cultural in the broadest sense of the word”.

2.

An approach to Flora’s work must take into consideration both the context in which she was educated and began to develop her work and the saga of her individual growth.

The Camagüey where she was born in 1949 – one of the first villages founded by the Spanish colonizers in the vast plain that precedes the eastern region of Cuba – had not ceased to be the “region of shepherds and hats” sung by Nicolás Guillén, major poet of the city and the country. The traces of the colonial past coexisted with the stagnation existing during the republic set up in 1902; this did not prevent the emergence of certain cultural impulses that, with the political and social transformations that began to take place in the island in 1959, received institutional support.

Land of poets and troubadours more than of painters at the time – even though Fidelio Ponce de León, migrating, tormented and transgressor creator belonging to the vanguard is recognized today as one of its icons – the existence of the Provincial School of Plastic Arts in the early sixties channeled the artist’s original vocation.

She arrived at the school still as a child because of the ability shown in making a plaster mask. There were no formal artistic antecedents in the Fong family – as there weren’t either in the majority of the colleagues of her generation who throughout the island had the possibility to enter the first centers of artistic education opened as part of a new democratization process of culture – but there was indeed the trace of an exceptional sensitivity: that of her father.

Francisco was the Spanish name given to her father once he had established himself in Cuba. He came from Canton, from the Taishan-Xié district, and was part of the migration from that vast Asian country that looked for work opportunities in the Caribbean island with

the purpose of helping the relatives who remained in China and, if all went well, return home. In Cuba, Francisco, after a stay in Holguín, settled in Camagüey, entered the trading business and founded a Cuban family.

Flora recalls the exquisite manual ability of her father, who as a hobby fabricated kites that were true works of art, a fine display of imagination, made in a very careful way. Francisco never returned to China but kept in contact with his relatives.

In the school in Camagüey, Flora developed particularly her aptitude for drawing and her dominion of the principles of composition under the influence of a teaching staff that included Molné, Juan Vázquez Martín and Raúl Santos Serpa.

The inborn talent and education enabled the young girl to enter the National School of Art, the most important art teaching center of the 1960s. They were years of hard exercising and learning of the craft according to the personal expressive requirements and of growing in the work sessions with Espinosa Dueñas in engraving; Fernando Luis, who transmitted to her the secrets of color, and of the notable poet and painter Fayad Jamís.

8 Flora graduated from the ENA in 1970 and immediately started teaching at the San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy in Havana, the oldest in the country, where she remained almost twenty years, until 1989, an experience that marked her for her lifetime. It was not easy to alternate the rigors of teaching with the development of her personal work, overcoming material difficulties with ingeniousness and creativity, forming a family – in that period her children Liang and Li, both artists, were born –, organizing exhibitions and participating in salons. But the artist surmounted these challenges and in those very years began to make herself known as one of the creators with the greatest recognition and relevance in the art scene of the island and international renown.

3.

Flora Fong's first solo show took place in 1973 at Galería Galiano of Havana, but the second, scarcely two years later, revealed a line of great interest for her future work. In fact, it was a bi-personal exhibition: Manuel Mendive and Flora, with twenty works from each one of the artists. It was presented in Bucharest and Prague and then was lost when sent to Africa because of lack of insurance.

Nevertheless, the presence of her work next to that of Manuel Mendive gained a symbolical relevance that cannot escape notice. Mendive started from the African heritage, from the Yoruba mythology trans-cultured in Cuba, from the mysteries of the woods. In painting he descended from the work of Wifredo Lam and Roberto Diago.

Flora represented the face that complemented the island's identity, but she never did it in a topical manner. Hers is not a superficial Cuban-ness, but one from her roots. If in Mendive one hears drums, claves and *chekerés*, in Flora it is background music that flows in the complex harmony of the tunes accompanied by lutes and guitars. She is related somehow, rather obliquely, to Carlos Enríquez and Amelia Peláez, although at certain moments the contacts with abstractionism and the expressionistic stamp of Antonia Eiriz are filtered.

Art critic and teacher Adelaida de Juan summarized the artist's career, from her initiation up to maturity, as follows: "Flora has worked untiringly creating worlds that evoke her immediate surroundings. Unlike Amelia, who found plenitude in her family world, Flora looks outside from her interior: from the near and daily figures she moves to the landscape, first to the one inhabited by palms and malanga plants that portray the happiness existing in the gardens still surrounding her, and later to the woods and mountains, the forces of nature shaken by cyclones and darkened by storm clouds, until reaching the sea that surrounds the island".

But it would also be necessary to say that, unlike not only Amelia but certain esthetic approaches that are common to the Cuban vanguards of the 20th century who sought to

validate identity with modern discourses, Flora has gradually stripped herself of gestures and references associated with the essential evolutionary line of Cuban painting.

With his customary sharpness, in the eighties, critic Alejandro G. Alonso already defined that characteristic of Flora's: "Since she does not copy or describe, but neither is she on the sidelines of the roads marked by international trends, so she freely takes advantage of the resources that find an echo deep in her way of understanding painting. Hence, she does not leap into the void; rather we witness the logical development that connects with previous whirlpools and cyclones, to give definitive steps toward her affirmation as a creator". An affirmation that overflows the borders of painting, drawing and engraving and shows also in murals, stained-glass works, volumetric constructions and sculptures, like the ones set up at the University of Computer Sciences in the outskirts of Havana and in the courtyard of the National Museum of Fine Arts.

In her work it is impossible to establish dividing lines between lyrical content and dramatic reason, nor between iconic and narrative. This does not mean that conflicts are absent, but these are solved by means of an amazing power of synthesis, an ability that distinguishes her among contemporary Cuban creators.

That long and consciously cultivated virtue is what accounts for the unrepeatable wealth of her thematic variations; gardens and coffee sieves, tobacco leaves and landscapes, sunflowers and storms, seashores and banana plantations. All of it conceived under the prism of a very precise spatial distribution, a strict chromatic display and an admirable dynamic balance, which remit us to two dominant elements in her iconography: the hurricane and the palm tree.

4.

A portrait of Flora is not complete if one ignores the creative line that remits her to her fatherly ancestors. The influence of her Chinese origins was present, as we have already mentioned, since the initiation times, but were definitely substantiated in the mid eighties, when she researched on the art of her father's country, and much more when the artist traveled to China for the first time in 1989 and met her relatives.

The universe of calligraphy and ideogram construction nourished her esthetic experience. This last element becomes perceivable in the conception of the landscape, the use of color and the projection of the structure in the composition. Something that powerfully drew her attention was the way in which in China the study of painting goes from the parts to the whole, whereas in the West it goes from the whole to the parts.

In her work presented at the 1st Havana Biennial one appreciated the calligraphic gesture, which reappeared in many other later works and which are part of private and institutional collections and of environmental decorations of public places. During the 2nd Havana Biennial she conducted a workshop on kite construction together with two Chinese specialists.

But more than calligraphy, the Chinese heritage reflects on the spirituality that emerges from Flora's work. A spirituality, however, that is not deprived of passions or tensions.

Poet Miguel Barnet noticed it when he wrote: "In the face of a work by Flora Fong one may perceive multiple sensations: the intricate nature of a woodland scene, the presence of ancestral elves trapped by the green of gigantic leaves, the white that balances the strong shades and grants a perspective of infiniteness, so familiar in her lineage. The truth as personal experience appears in this painting in the fashion of Eastern tradition. It is an ineffably suggested truth. The keys lie in nature and not in the philosophical language of signs. The Tao without words and the good offices of Elegua mix in this succession of images to form a whole that reveals the poetic grace".

East and West in Flora's work are not a dichotomy. Nor are they a complementary couple. It is an organic fusion, intrinsically articulated, in its creative individuality and live transit. Because before and after everything, in the crossing of realities and dreams that amalgamate in her visions, this Flora of universal scope is substantially Cuban.

The Sensible Cuban-ness of Flora Fong

YOLANDA WOOD
Doctor in Art Sciences



Combined evocations emerge from this collection of works by Cuban artist Flora Fong. In her images one perceives a tropical insularity that emerges from her palette full of shades and from her subtle handling of the sculpting material to capture – in art – certain essences of what made Cuba an emblem of identity and perpetuate from art certain “elixirs of national life”. Some of those keys come together in her work, established and mature, to convey in value, with her own personal expression, what an island of tobacco, coffee and many coasts in its extended geography recalls by tradition.

The painting surface in that ancestral leaf becomes tactile to the universe of beliefs of the peoples who inhabited the Antillean islands when the continent was still not called America; it’s an ochre figure because of its color and old because of its history, described by the most ancient chroniclers, and throughout time expert hands extended its image and use to a culture of pleasure throughout the world. In Flora Fong’s artistic space that leaf shows all its nervures, and superimposed on that framework, with painted motifs and velaturas, the artist suggests a “tobacco zone” in which a rural and peasant universe of palm leaf huts and straw hats continues to exist.

A fragrance of Cuban dawn is sensed in its steaming and fragrant coffee makers. Coffee makers that are unlike today’s French press or electric coffee makers, but of fabric sieves mounted on a metal or wooden base that recall, not just the time of grandmothers and great grandmothers, but a popular practice both in countryside and urban island homes. What a beautiful object, almost already inexistent, also recreated in three-dimensional bronze! From the moment the water started boiling, the coffee was inhaled before it was even tasted, and knowledge was required to control the amounts of coffee powder and water to reach the desired point in its texture and flavor. Those objects, already curiosities in our days, revive the time of memory in the artist’s work, who does it, in addition, with such creativeness and originality in forms and colors that the theme has become an essential part of Flora’s visual universe in contemporary Cuban art. In some of her coffee makers the observer will appreciate that palms make up part of the structure supporting the sieve and the burning liquid; like an act of magic, other palms or abstract landscapist evocations emerge above the surface of the boiling “potion”.

The palm is a national attribute on the island, a cultural sign that has found a fertile place in Flora Fong’s artistic work. With the palm she not only establishes that allegorical figure of the island’s nature but with the painted image vindicates her own Chinese-Cuban identity, her mixed origins, conceiving them through black lines that take as reference the delicate writing of the Asian country, its ways of representing and its so distinctive graphics.

With its crest, the palm announces the intensity and directions of the wind, and its erect image is imbued with dignity even if the thinness of its long trunk grants it a fragile appearance. With the blow of air that ruffles her, the palm also sways, moves, to always be and return to its place. That’s how Carlos Enríquez saw it in his voluptuous Cuban landscapes; so does it live in Flora Fong’s painting, where it receives a profound expressive load. In some of her pieces, the black strokes that outline the palm create the limits of a painting space in which a fragment of an island appears – painted. Those precise borders are cut out in the background as if separating from the whole to turn that place into another island. In her piece *Chino en América* (Chinese in America), the concept of person, represented by the calligraphic ideogram, inhabits that territory created by the artist as an autobiographical allegory, or in *El pez dormido* (The Sleeping Fish) where it is distinguished as a memorable and silent emblem.

These contrasts make up the work of Flora Fong, who was born in the center of the island, where the border to the north and south consists of blue coasts with saltpeter fragrance carried by the winds to let us know that the limit is already near; where one listens and feels the sea. Flora’s intense seas are beautiful. Something lovely is discovered in her drawings with fish and small boats, something childish but not in the least naïve. We imagine that the vessels, anchored in near-by territorial waters, have sailed around the island and toured its long and narrow immensity. They have sailed, they have left, they return, to always be in safe port, that of the sensitive Cuban-ness of their creator, Flora Fong.



Mares del Mariel (The Seas of Mariel)
2013, mixed/canvas
172.5 x 215 cm



El camino del manantial (The Path of the Spring)
2015, mixed/canvas
110 x 131 cm



Chino en las américas (Chinese in America)
 2010, mixed/canvas
 116.8 x 91 cm



Entre mar y tierra (Between Sea and Land)
 2010, mixed/canvas
 176 x 130 cm



Café en el campo (Coffee in the Countryside)
2014, mixed/canvas
56 x 38.5 cm



Diez minutos de descanso (Ten-Minute Break)
2014, mixed/canvas
81.5 x 65 cm



Cubano mirando al otro lado del mundo (Cuban Looking at the Other Side of the World)
2015, mixed/canvas
130 x 176 cm



I Love Shanghai
2015, mixed/canvas
130 x 176 cm



La sombra de la palma (The Palm Tree Shadow)
2008, bronze
36.5 x 41.3 x 38 cm



Maizal (Corn Field)
2007, bronze
29 x 18 x 12 cm



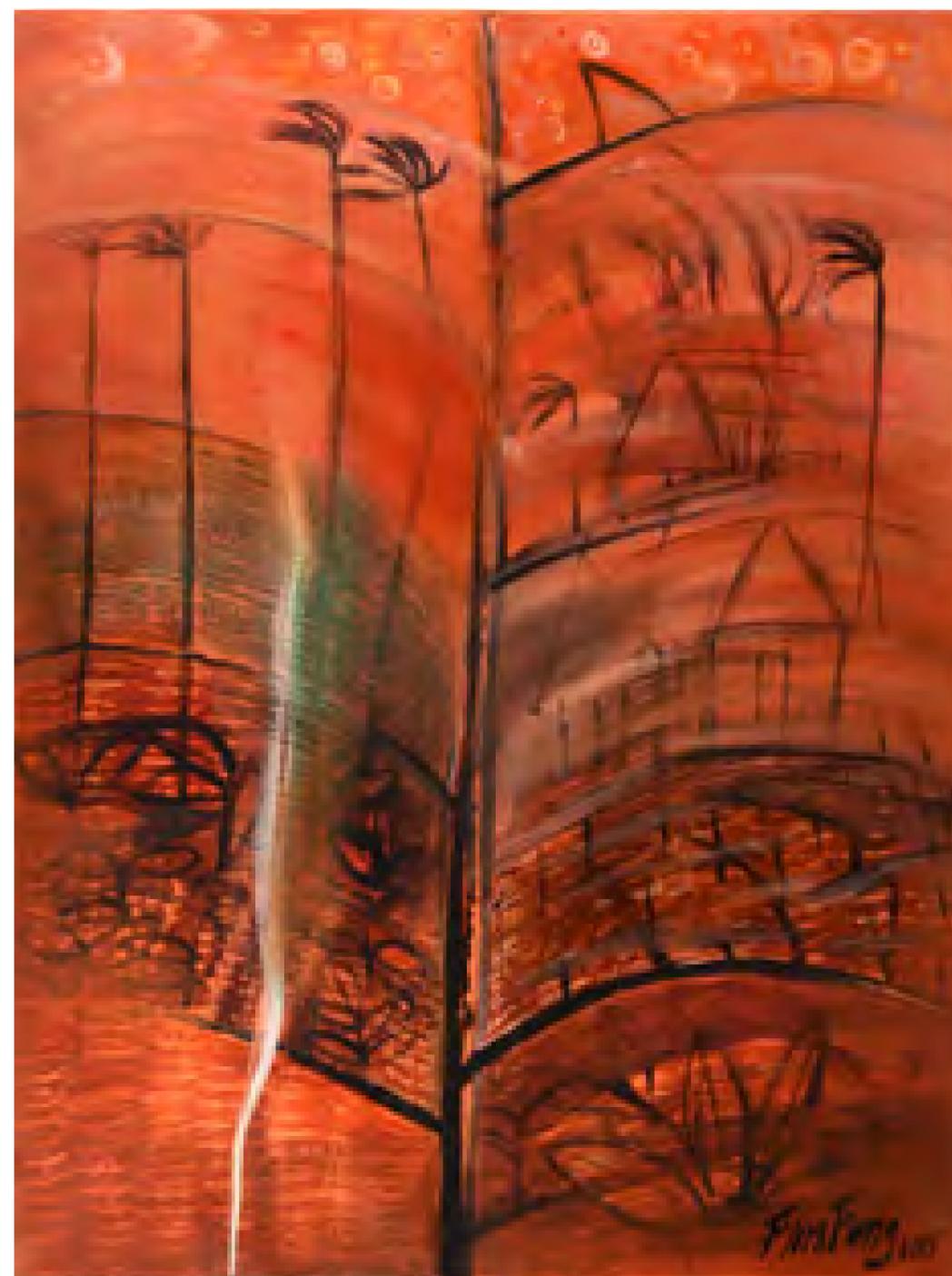
El pez dormido (The Sleeping Fish)
2009, bronze
29.5 x 27 x 13 cm



Colando café (Making Coffee)
2009, bronze/details in copper
32 x 20 x 25.5 cm



Hoja de tabaco (Tobacco Leaf)
2014, mixed/canvas
73 x 60 cm



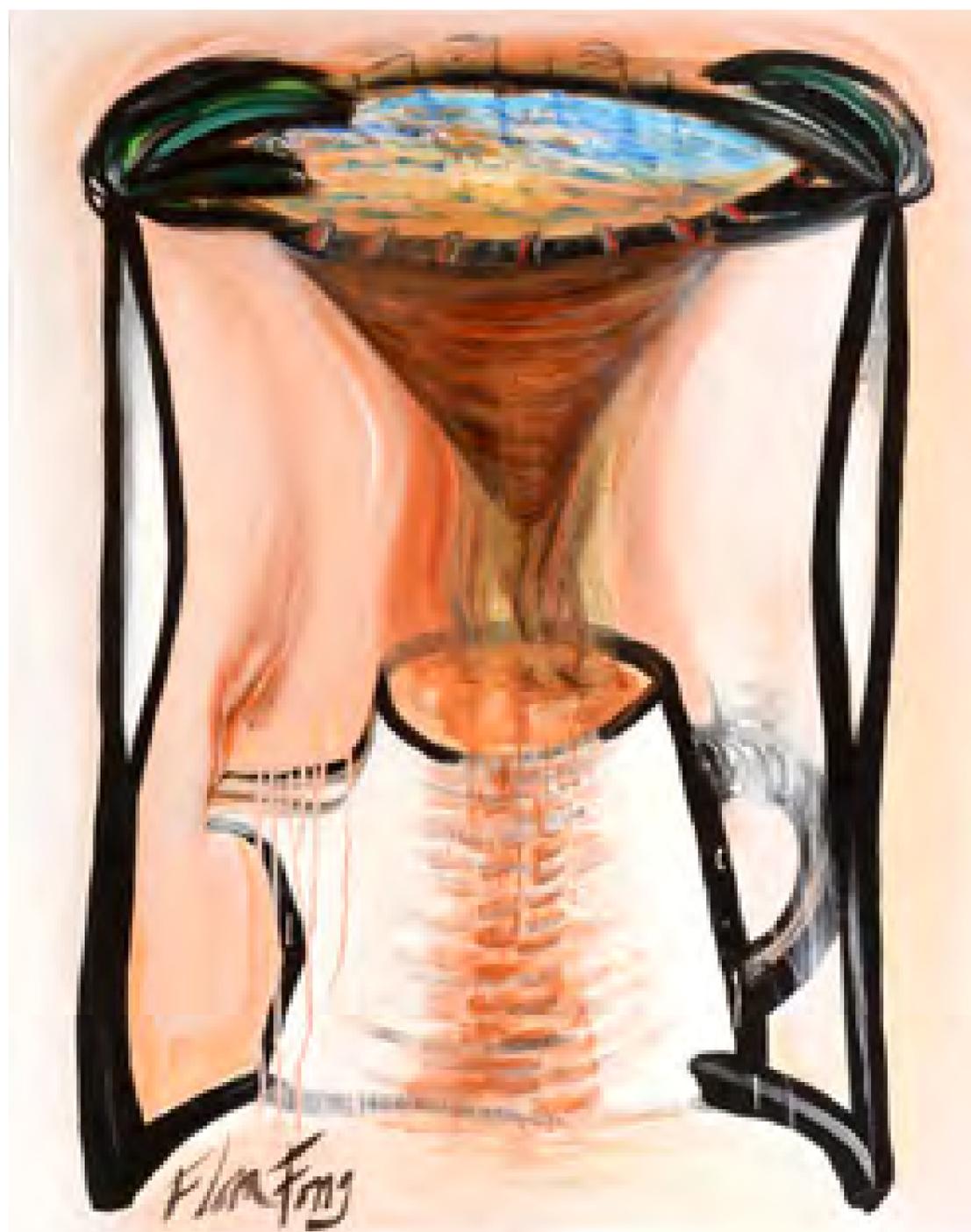
Del tabaco cubano (About Cuban Tobacco)
2015, mixed/canvas
120 x 90 cm



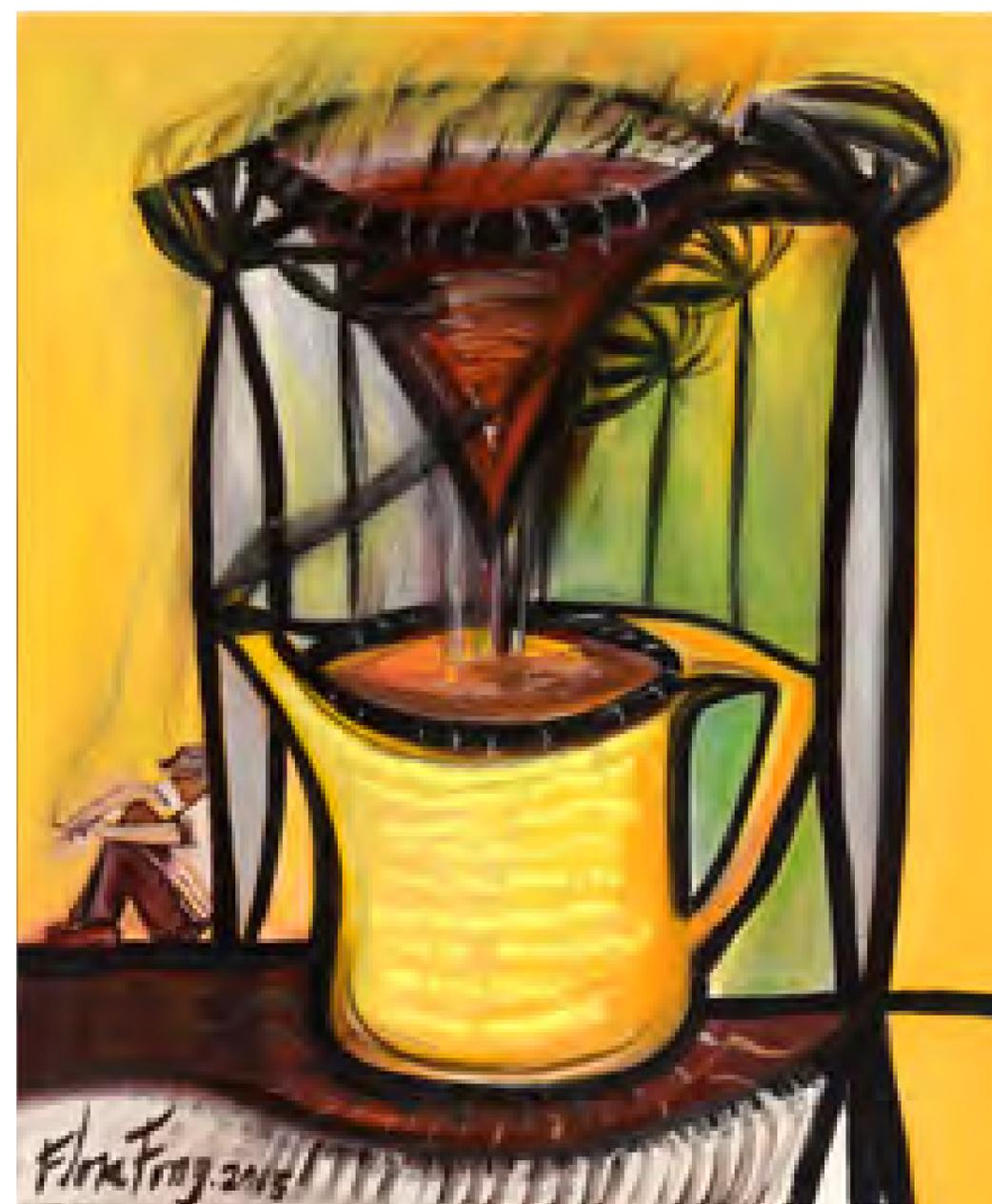
Zona tabacalera (Tobacco Zone)
2015, mixed/canvas
120 x 100 cm



La ranita platanera (The Tiny Frog in the Banana Plantation)
2014, mixed/canvas
130 x 110 cm



Cafetera blanca (White Coffee Maker)
2014, mixed/canvas
100 x 80 cm



Mi espacio con humo (My Space with Smoke)
2015, mixed/canvas
73 x 60 cm



Todo es posible (Everything Is Possible)
2015, mixed/canvas
54 x 54 cm



Festín (Feast)
2013, mixed/canvas
110 x 100 cm



De la serie *Contra viento y marea* (From the series: Against all Odds)
2015, mixed/canvas
110 x 145 cm



La pecera tropical (Tropical Fishbowl)
2013, mixed/canvas
130 x 176 cm



Vacaciones (Holidays)
2014, mixed/canvas
50 x 81.5 cm



Tres girasoles (Three Sunflowers)
2012, mixed/canvas
91 x 73 cm

FLORA FONG GARCÍA

Camagüey, November 8, 1949

Having concluded studies at the Provincial School of Plastic Arts of Camagüey, she graduated from the National School of Art of Havana in 1970 and was a teacher at San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts until 1989. Member of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and of the International Association of Plastic Artists (AIAP).

She has engaged in painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, stained-glass technique, fabric design and traditional Chinese kite crafting. In 1988 she received a study grant from the Italian government. She traveled to China in a cultural exchange mission in 1989 and in 1997 presented a solo show at the Workers' Palace of Culture in Beijing. Her works have been exhibited in the United States of America, Malaysia, Germany, Russia, Spain, Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, Portugal, Italy, France, Japan and South Korea, among other countries.

She has been awarded numerous prizes and distinctions because of the quality of her work since 1970, year of her graduation, up to the present.

The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba granted her the Distinction for National Culture in 1988. In 1989 she received the distinction "23 de Agosto" granted by the Federation of Cuban Women and in 1999 the distinction "Illustrious Daughter of the City of Camagüey", as well as the acknowledgment "Espejo de Paciencia" from the Provincial Authority of Culture in Camagüey. In 2002 she received the Diploma for Artistic Merit from the Higher Institute of Art. In 2005 she obtained the distinction "Gitana Tropical", which is granted by the Provincial Authority of Culture in Havana, and in 2006 the Giral-dilla of Havana from the Provincial Government. In 2007 the Higher Institute of Art (ISA) granted her the Special Teaching Category of Consultant Professor.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014** *Homenaje a mi ciudad* (Tribute to My City). Visual Arts Provincial Center, Camagüey, Cuba.
Grabados en el tiempo (Engravings in Time). House of the City Conserver, Sancti Spiritus, Cuba.
Grabados en el tiempo (Engravings in Time). "Eduardo Abela" Visual Arts Provincial Center, San Antonio de los Baños, province of Artemisa, Cuba.
- 2010** *Hacia todas partes* (Toward All Sides). Los Oficios Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
Flora Fong & Li Domínguez Fong. La Madre, El Hijo: Dos Artistas, Una Pasión. (Flora Fong & Li Domínguez Fong. The Mother, the Son: Two Artists, One Passion). Cernuda Arte Gallery, Florida, U.S.A.
Flora Fong Paintings. Bellarte Gallery, Seoul, South Korea.
- 2009** *De China al Caribe* (From China to the Caribbean). José Martí Memorial, Havana, Cuba.
- 2008** *Flora Fong. Una nueva dimensión* (Flora Fong. A New Dimension). National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
- 2007** *Manifestation d'Art Nouveau International et Forum (MANIF).* Hall of the Great Masters, Seoul, South Korea.
- 2005** *Out of Cuba.* Gulf Coast Art Museum, Tampa, U.S.A.
- 2004** *Manifestation d'Art Nouveau International et Forum (MANIF).* Seoul, South Korea.
Tribute to the 490th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Village of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe. Ignacio Agramonte Provincial Museum, Camagüey, Cuba.
- 2002** *Flora de Playa* (Beach Flora). Municipal Museum of Playa, Havana, Cuba.
- 2001** *Los motivos de la Patria* (The Motifs of the Fatherland). Cernuda Arte Gallery, Miami, U.S.A.
Entre décadas (Between Decades). La Acacia Gallery, Havana.
- 1998** *Pinturas y dibujos* (Paintings and Drawings). 1, 2, 3, 4 Gallery, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.
- 1997** *Pinturas y dibujos. Flora Fong* (Paintings and Drawings. Flora Fong). Workers' Palace of Culture, Forbidden City, Beijing, China.
Pinturas y dibujos. Flora Fong (Paintings and Drawings. Flora Fong), Zeit-Foto Salon, Tokyo.
Pinturas Flora Fong. (Flora Fong Paintings). Municipal Library of Vila Franca De Xira, Portugal.
Pinturas Flora Fong (Flora Fong Paintings). Artela Gallery, Lisbon, Portugal.
Homenaje 150 años de la presencia china en Cuba (Tribute to 150 Years of Chinese Presence in Cuba). Acacia Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1995** *Pinturas y dibujos* (Paintings and Drawings). Arte A. C. Cultural Center, Monterrey, Mexico.
Florasol (Florasol). Espacio Abierto Gallery, magazine *Revolución y Cultura*, Havana, Cuba.
- 1993** *Serie Epifanía del trópico* (Series Epiphany of the Tropics). La Florida Gallery, Caracas, Venezuela.
Pinturas Flora Fong (Flora Fong Paintings). Ateneo Los Teques, Valencia, Venezuela.
- 1992** Exhibition of Serigraphs. San Agustín Club, Monterrey, Mexico.
El Caribe. Obra reciente (The Caribbean. Recent Works). Hotel Fiesta Americana, Cancun, Mexico.

- 1991** *Flora Fong y Nérida López.* Pinturas (Flora Fong and Nérida López. Paintings). La Acacia Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1990** *Nube de otoño.* Pintura, dibujos e instalaciones (Autumn Cloud. Paintings, Drawings and Installations). Provincial Center for Plastic Arts and Design, Havana, Cuba.
- 1986** *Jardines... y algo más* (Gardens... and Something More). Servando Cabrera Moreno Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1985** *Pinturas y dibujos 1983-1985* (Paintings and Drawings 1983-1985). Habana Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1984** *Pinturas y dibujos* (Paintings and Drawings). Atlapa Gallery, Panama City, Panama.
- 1981** International Meeting of Young Artists. Trinidad, Cuba.
Flora Fong y Nelson Domínguez. Pinturas y dibujos (Flora Fong and Nelson Domínguez. Paintings and Drawings). House of Culture of Guanabacoa, Havana, Cuba.
- 1978** International Meeting of Painters. Lithuania.
- 1975** *Manuel Mendive y Flora Fong* (Manuel Mendive and Flora Fong). Vystauni sin Vlov, Prague, Czechoslovakia.
- 1974** *Manuel Mendive y Flora Fong* (Manuel Mendive and Flora Fong). Ateneului Roman Hall, Bucharest, Rumania.
- 1973** *Dibujos y pinturas* (Drawings and Paintings). Galiano Gallery, Havana, Cuba.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015** *Dos siglos de arte 20 y 21* (Two Centuries of Art 20 and 21). Cernuda Arte Gallery, Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
- 2014** *Rodando se encuentran* (Rolling, They Meet). Traveling exhibition. Museum of Architecture und Town Planning, Shanghai, National Museum of Fuzhou, Fujian; Museum of Art of Changshu, Jiangsu, China.
- 2013** 16th Beijing Art Expo. Latin-American Pavilion, Beijing, China.
Houston Fine Art Fair. Houston, Texas, U.S.A.
Istanbul Art Fair. Istanbul, Turkey.
- 2012** 9th Havana Biennial. *China in Blood.* Museum House of Asia and House of Chinese Arts and Traditions, Havana, Cuba.
Ciudades creativas (Creative Cities). London Barbican Center. London, United Kingdom.
- 2011** Naples Art Fair. Naples International Pavilion, Florida, U.S.A.
ArtHamptons. The International Fine Art Fair, New York, U.S.A.
- 2010** SOAF 2010. Coex, Seoul, South Korea.
KIAF. Seoul, South Korea.
Art Fair of Shanghai. Shanghai, China.
- 2009** Latin American Painting Now. Naples Museum of Art in Naples, Florida, U.S.A.
- 2008** Cuban Artists in the Assembly of the Republic. Lisbon, Portugal.
Christie's Auction. New York, U.S.A.
- 2007** MANIF Art Fair. Salon of Great Masters. Seoul Art Center, South Korea.
Monstruos devoradores de energía (Energy Devouring Monsters). Casa de América, Madrid, Spain; Triennial of Milan, Italy, and Grand Palais, Paris, France.
Three Leading Cuban Artists. Square One Gallery, London, United Kingdom.
- 2006** *Auge o decadencia del arte cubano* (Rise or Decadence of Cuban Art). Flavio Garciandía. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
CIRCA, Puerto Rico 2006. International Art Fair of the Caribbean. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Korea International Art Fair (KIAF). Seoul, South Korea.
Art off the Main. The Puck Building, New York, U.S.A.
Confluencias Inside. Palacio Clavijero, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico.
- 2005** *Conexión cuatro* (Connection Four). Villa Manuela Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 2004** Los Angeles Art Show. Los Angeles, U.S.A.
Grandes maestros cubanos (Great Cuban Masters). Museum of Cuenca, Ecuador.
Trece pintores cubanos de hoy (Thirteen Cuban Painters from Today). Mediterránea Gallery, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.
Arte contemporáneo cubano (Contemporary Cuban Art). Malaysia National Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- 2003** Art Fair. Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
Pintura cubana de hoy (Cuban Painting from Today). Guayasamín Foundation, Quito, Ecuador.
Christie's Auction. New York, U.S.A.

- 2002** 75th Art Salon of Lyon, France.
- 2001** International Biennial of Florence, Italy.
- 2000** *Calentando motores* (Heating Engines). Cernuda Arte Gallery, Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
- 1999** *Pintores cubanos* (Cuban Painters). Pyreus Gallery, Greece. Cultural Center of the Government, island of Cephalonia, Greece.
Arte cubano (Cuban Art). Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, United Arab Emirates.
Más allá del papel (Beyond Paper). Conde Duque Cultural Center, Madrid, Spain.
- 1998** *Arte contemporáneo de Cuba* (Contemporary Art from Cuba). Urasoe Museum Okinawa, Hillside Forum Daikanyama Tokyo, Iwaki City Cultural Hall, Japan.
Cuba, cuatro artistas contemporáneos (Cuba, Four Contemporary Artists). Zeit-Foto Salon, Tokyo.
Artistas cubanos contemporáneos (Contemporary Cuban Artists). National Museum of Fine Arts, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
- 1997** Arte BA Fair. Buenos Aires, Argentina.
1st Biennial of Alentejo. Portugal.
Hidden Art of the Contemporary Revolution. Cuban Art, Toronto, Canada.
- 1996** *Pintura cubana* (Cuban Painting). La Sorce, PTT, Orleans, Post Bank of France.
- 1995** *La naturaleza, el hombre y los dioses* (Nature, the Human Being and the Gods). Novecento Cubano. Royal Palace, Milan Comune, Italy.
13 Salon Artistique. Circle Jean Macé, Ingre Loitet, France.
Primer Salón de Arte Contemporáneo (First Salon of Contemporary Art). National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
Arte contemporáneo cubano (Contemporary Cuban Art). Museum of Modern Art, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.
- 1994** *Cuba, los últimos 60 años* (Cuba, the Last 60 Years). Pan American Gallery, Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.
5th Havana Biennial. Provincial Center for Plastic Arts and Design, Havana, Cuba.
- 1993** *Ritos y paisajes del Caribe. Arte cubano contemporáneo* (Rites and Landscapes from the Caribbean. Contemporary Cuban Art). Iztapalapa Art Gallery, Autonomous Metropolitan University, Mexico City, Mexico.
- 1992** *Pintura cubana* (Cuban Painting). Puerta de Toledo, Madrid, Spain.
Panorama de la pintura cubana (Overview of Cuban Painting). Cultural Center of the State of Palestine, Tunisia.
- 1991** *18 pintores de Cuba* (18 Painters from Cuba). Federation of Val-d'Oise, L'Humanité, Paris, France.
Third International Painting Biennial. Cuenca, Ecuador.
- 1990** UNEAC Salon. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
7th Plastic Arts Salon. Alyssa Gallery, Tunisia.
Nueve artistas cubanos. Pintura cubana actual (Nine Cuban Artists. Cuban Painting Today). Almirante Gallery, Madrid, Spain.
- 1989** Painting Exhibition. Alla Torre Gallery, Commune of Faenza, Italy.
- 1988** *Paz interior, paz en el mundo* (Inner Peace, World Peace). Milan, Italy.
Pintura cubana actual (Cuban Painting Today). G.S.A. Gallery, Jaume Guasch Foundation, Barcelona, Spain.
Exhibition of Drawings. Denmark.
- 1987** 1st Jaume Guasch Biennial. Barcelona, Spain.
- 1986** Traveling exhibition *El arte con la sonrisa* (Art with a Smile). Italy.
2nd Havana Biennial. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
- 1985** UNEAC Salon. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
Traveling exhibition *Japan International Artists Society* (JIAS). Prefecture Museum of Yamaguchi; Municipal Hall Hakodate, Hokkaido; Urazoe City Hall, Okinawa; Central Museum, Tokyo and Prefecture Museum of Miyagi, Japan.
- 1984** 1st Havana Biennial. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
International Painting Festival. Cannes-sur-mer, Paris, France.
Pintura cubana contemporánea (Contemporary Cuban Painting). Moscow, USSR.
- 1983** Playa'83 Salon. Servando Cabrera Moreno Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1982** *Dibujo y gráfica de Cuba* (Drawings and Graphic Art from Cuba). Lalit Kala Gallery, New Delhi, India.
- 1981** *Posters, Drawings & Graphics from Cuba*. Lalit Kala Akademi, Nueva Delhi, India.
- 1980** "Carlos Enríquez" National Painting Salon. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
- 1979** UNEAC Salon. Havana, Cuba.
- 1978** International Drawing Contest. Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona, Spain.
- 1977** National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts. Havana, Cuba.

- 1976** 26th of July Contest. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts. Havana, Cuba.
Permanent Salon of Young Artists. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
Plástica cubana actual (Cuban Painting Today). Museum of Modern Art La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia.
- 1975** *Panorama del arte cubano, de la Colonia a nuestros días* (Outlook of Cuban Art from the Colony to Our Days). Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City, Mexico.
National Salon of Teachers of Plastic Arts. Habana Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1974** 4th National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts. Havana, Cuba.
2nd National Salon of Teachers of Plastic Arts. ENA, Havana, Cuba.
- 1973** 1st National Salon of Teachers of Plastic Arts. Havana, Cuba.
- 1972** 2nd National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts. National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba.
- 1971** Exhibition in celebration of Women's International Day. Habana Gallery, Havana, Cuba.
- 1970** Drawing contest *Tribute to Lenin*, Havana, Cuba.

PRIZES AND MENTIONS

- 1990** Mention in Painting. UNEAC Salon, Havana.
- 1988** Study grant of the Italian Government.
- 1987** Group prize to the Cuban ensemble. First Jaume Guasch Biennial, Barcelona.
- 1985** Prize of the International Association for Plastic Arts (AIAP), UNEAC Salon, Havana.
- 1983** Mention. Playa'83 Salon, Servando Cabrera Moreno Gallery, Havana.
- 1980** Mention in painting. Carlos Enríquez National Salon, National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana.
- 1977** First prize in drawing. National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts, Havana.
- 1976** Mention in painting. 26 of July Contest, Havana, Cuba.
Mention in drawing. National Juvenile Salon of Plastic Arts, Havana.
- 1975** First prize in drawing. National Salon of Plastic Arts Professors, Havana.
- 1974** Mention in Painting. 4th National Juvenile Salon and Provincial Salon of Plastic Arts, Havana.
- 1970** First mention in drawing. Lenin Contest, Havana.

COLLECTIONS

National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba; Provincial Museum of Camagüey, Cuba; Casa Real, Madrid, Spain; Museum of the Americas, Managua, Nicaragua; National Parliament, Beijing, China; France Liberté Foundation, Paris, France; World Industrial Property Organization (WIPO), Geneva, Switzerland; Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art, Kyongju, South Korea; Royal Museum of Ontario, Toronto, Canada; Museum of Cuenca, Ecuador.

In addition, her works are part of numerous important private collections in Cuba, Spain, the Netherlands, China, the United States of America, Portugal, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Chile, South Korea, Panama, Germany, Italy, Greece, Trinidad and Tobago and Japan.

ARTEMORFOSIS - GALERÍA DE ARTE CUBANO

ArteMorfosis is a gallery for Cuban art in Zurich. Its aim is to make the work of contemporary Cuban artists accessible to an interested audience. ArteMorfosis initially focuses on well-established Cuban artists, with proven international track records, but who remain yet to be discovered in the German-speaking part of Europe.

The gallery is a piece of Cuba in Zurich; it irradiates Cuban warmth and transmits Cuba's carefree nature, joy of living and wealth of improvisation to the visitor. Strong coffee, a drink of rum, music, walls painted in light yellow, at times too many paintings hanging on the walls, and an added "mezzanine" create an atmosphere like the one you also find in Cuban private galleries. While it highlights distinctive Cuban characteristics, the Gallery finds ever-new paths of its own: ArteMorfosis is self-confidently different, and is aimed at like-minded visitors.

38 The name "ArteMorfosis" and the butterfly in its logo symbolize the gallery owners' understanding of the creative process. The metamorphosis of a butterfly – from larva to cocoon to butterfly, to laying eggs and again to larva – is an eternal biological development cycle. A comparable cycle exists in art: an artist, inspired by his culture, his environment, experiences and intuitions, creates a work of art with paints and a canvas, presents it to the public, sells it and uses the proceeds for his next work. The gallery is dedicated to the part of the cycle in which art is presented and sold.

Participating in a cultural development cycle that still has no name, the gallery owners without further ado named this cycle and named their gallery, "ArteMorfosis".

The gallery considers itself as ambassador of Cuban art in Switzerland and a meeting place between art creators and collectors. Its first priority is to promote the lively, creative work of Cuban artists, since Cuba is (still) today a little-known art market. The country's transformation and opening provide vast opportunities for the discovery of - in Switzerland hitherto unknown - art treasures.

THE GALLERY OWNERS

Idalmys Burkhard - García Negrín (1967) was born in Cuba. She grew up in a culturally interested family; her father was a founding member of the Cuban National Chorus and throughout her working life her mother was involved in different activities connected with the theater. Thus, performing artists were frequent house guests. As a nurse working at higher level art schools for many years, she was able to stay in touch with the artistic community. She lives in Switzerland since 2002.

Johann Burkhard (1961) is a Swiss Internet pioneer. As co-founder of the Swiss Internet comparison website, www.comparis.ch, he quickly embraced the potential of the new media and was one of the few who achieved commercial success. For the last 13 years he has operated a classifieds portal (www.cubisima.com), which ranks amongst the most used websites in Cuba. Johann will contribute his experience of the digital media, new technologies and decision-making to ArteMorfosis. Idalmys and Johann have been married for 13 years and have a 9-year old son.

THE GALLERY

ArteMorfosis - Galería de Arte Cubano Weinbergstrasse 15, 8001 Zürich
+41 44 252 41 41 - info@artemorfofos.com - www.artemorfofos.com
Exhibit hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

THE AUTHORS

Dolores Denaro Dolores Denaro, born in 1971, read Modern Art History, Architectural History, and Monument Preservation as well as Religious Studies at the University of Bern. She holds an MA in Cultural Management from the University of Basel. Until 2001 she was freelance publicist and curator as well as research assistant at the Paul-Klee-Stiftung and later the Johannes-Ippen-Stiftung at Kunstmuseum Bern. From 1999 until 2001 director and curator at Kunsthau Grenchen. From 2002 until the end of 2011 (ten years) director and curator at Kunsthau CentrePasquArt in Biel. From 2012 until 2013 external expert consultant for the Julius Bar Kunstsammlung (art collection). Since 2012, president of the Swiss national Kiefer Hablitzel Preis für bildende Kunst (fine arts award). Since 2013, freelance curator and publicist. Numerous exhibitions and publications with the focus on contemporary art as well as board member of various art foundations and jury member on several panels. 39

Virginia Alberdi Benítez (Havana, 1947) Graduate from the Higher Pedagogic Institute Enrique José Varona, 1970. Art critic, editor of *Artecubano* ediciones. During more than twenty years she was a Specialist in Promotion at the National Council for Plastic Arts (CNAP). During five years she was a senior specialist at the gallery Pequeño Espacio, at CNAP. She has curated numerous solo and group exhibitions. Her texts appear as collaborations in *La Jiribilla*, *Granma* newspaper, the tabloid *Noticias de Arte Cubano*, the magazines *Artecubano*, *On Cuba*, *Acuarela*. She has written texts for catalogues of different artists.

Yolanda Wood Pujols (1950) Doctor in Art Sciences, Full Professor, Consultant Professor of the History of Art Department of the University of Havana. In 1985 she founded the History of Caribbean Art Chair. She is Director of the Center of Studies on the Caribbean at Casa de las Américas. She has published specialized articles, texts for catalogues and for book-catalogues of international exhibitions. Her most recent book, *Islas del Caribe: naturaleza-arte-sociedad* (Caribbean Islands: Nature-Art-Society), publishing house of the University of Havana and CLACSO, 2012, obtained the National Prize of the Artistic and Literary Critique in 2013. She has lectured in numerous institutions and participated in events of her specialty.

FLORA FONG. ART: ELIXIR OF LIFE

The present catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition of the same name that will be presented from April 17 to June 19, 2015 at the Cuban Art Gallery ArteMorfosis, Zurich.

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Flora Fong, ArteMorfosis - Galería de Arte Cubano. ArteMorfosis is a gallery of cubisima.com AG.

WORKS OF ART REPRODUCED:

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GRAPHIC DESIGN:

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PRINTING:

Selvi Artes Gráficas, Valencia, Spain

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Flora Fong, Pilar Vázquez, Kristin Hartmann, Peter Ender

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ISBN 978-3-9524478-0-2

Flora Fong and the ArteMorfosis Gallery thank all the authors for the valuable texts they contributed, as well as Pepe Menéndez and Laura Llópiz for the layout and all those who, with their support, have made this catalogue possible.



The blood that runs through Flora Fong's veins marked her painting before she made the journey that took her to the land of her grandparents, the Taoist China of the lotus root and the imperial jade.

As with Wifredo Lam, the fine and firm trace granted personality to her work and placed her right from the start among the most outstanding artists of her graduating class. Her style had developed from a tradition; it did not emerge as a discovery or a divine miracle. Her style was in her roots and in the way in which she, perhaps unwittingly, exploited its characteristics. I have always connected her work with her person, which is completely inevitable in the case of an artist of such authenticity. However, in that comparison I find a contradiction that always puzzles me. The delicacy of her person, her sweet behavior, of profound and laconic tenderness, contrasts with the strong stroke, like an explosion of her brush. The canvas seems to be the only target in the world to receive the violence of her temperament. A feminine violence, transgressor of prejudices and sharp as a shriek.

Fragment of the text by Miguel Barnet



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