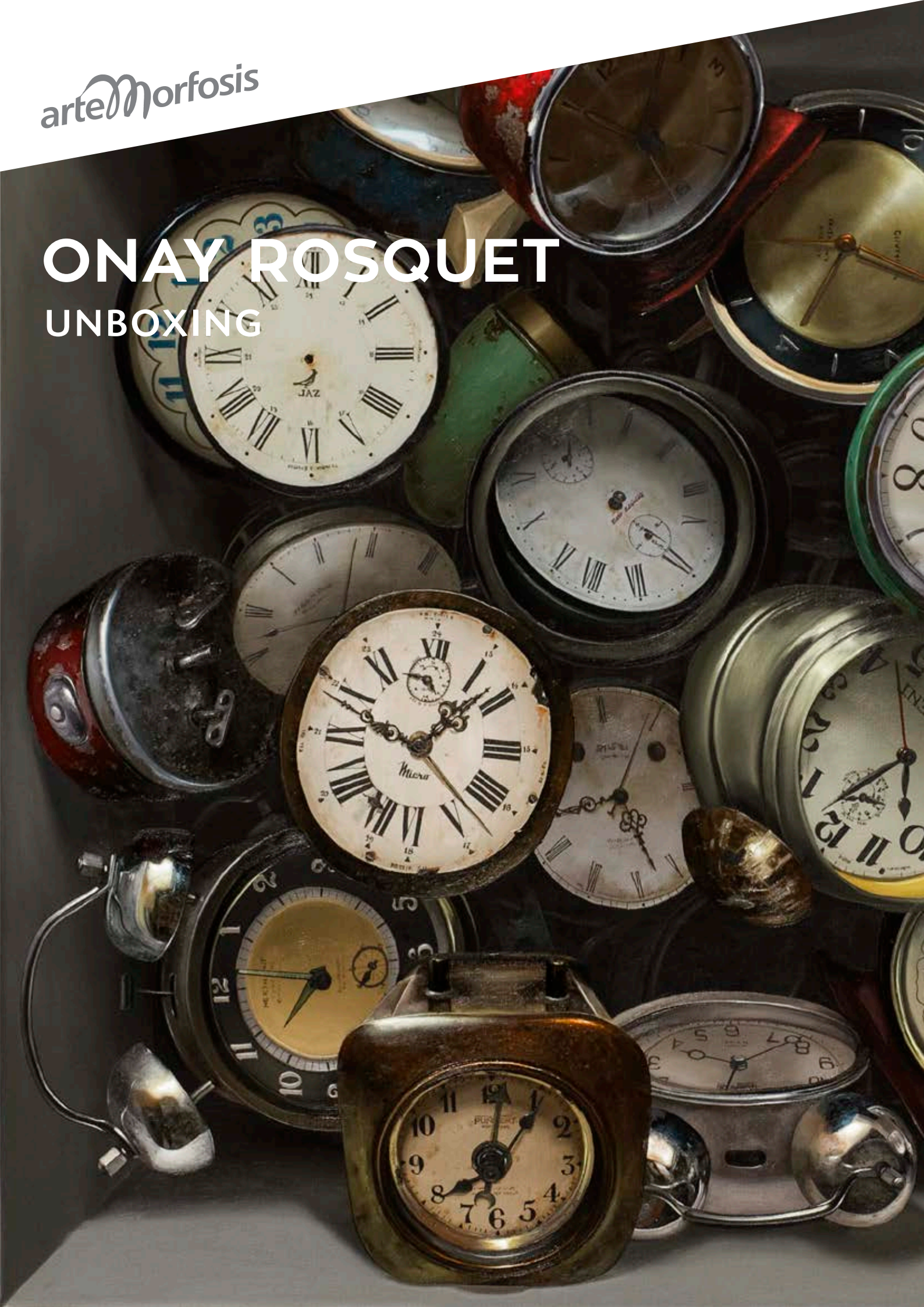


arteMorfosis

ONAY ROSQUET

UNBOXING



On cover, fragment of *El inconsciente II*
(The Thoughtless II, displayed on page 22)

ONAY ROSQUET

UNBOXING

March - April 2017

ArteMorfosis - Galería de Arte Cubano

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Interview by Virginia Alberdi

Havana, December 2016

ONAY ROSQUET

SELF PORTRAIT

Young people have an outstanding position in contemporary Cuban art; they are the vanguard in the different ways of expressing art and tend to participate in all sorts of trends. Onay Rosquet's work – which initially focused on characters and later on objects carefully reproduced in his drawings and paintings – attracts attention in an extraordinary way. In his first series on objects they appeared lonely, abandoned, but loaded with nostalgia

that revealed much about them. At present, the young painter, by portraying accumulations of objects, constructs stories by arranging the objects into a new context. These collections are not coincidental; they are the result of a sensual and intellectual selection process of his affective memory.

The artist neither follows groups or trends, nor does he conform to preconceived guidelines or obeys art market decrees and he does not comply with the preferences of sectors that set the course of the artistic activity. Onay does not produce, he creates, and the results of these creations distinguish him from his peers. He goes as far as to articulate a fable, transmit a state of mind, evoke a moment, while obliquely referring to social tensions and events. A laudable merit of his is to glance at a world of elements that speaks by itself from its silent presence. All accomplished by careful implementation because he spares no rigor when reproducing that world which he transfers to the canvas and transforms it into refined art.

How did he bring about such a proposition? How did he gradually find a voice of his own that allows him to communicate what he wanted? This recent interview offers some valuable clarifications.

How did your vocation for drawing and painting emerge?

As a child I liked to draw; I tried to copy objects and persons, things that surrounded me. I also liked it when others drew, particularly when they did it to amuse me. I was definitely more attracted to drawing than other children. In my case, with the passing of time, it ceased to be a hobby and turned into a need. I felt so compelled to drawing and painting that it became part of my personal identity. Then, little by little, through my work and other elements that influenced my education, it gradually became a profession. I do have artistic references in the family, but not in the context of visual arts. My family did not engage in the world of painting, and, as I mentioned before, I chose drawing and painting because it thrilled me. Of course, my family always supported me and approved my decisions; that is very important in the life of an artist, particularly at the outset, when in most cases almost everything is very difficult.

What were your first professional experiences in art?

I started by painting portraits, influenced by the 17th century Dutch school. Rembrandt was the artist that most attracted my attention, his palette was very gray and dark, my knowledge of the history of art was very incomplete at the time. My life received a turn when I started working in the Taller de Gráfica Contemporánea (Studio of Contemporary Graphics), since I was a self-taught artist. There I had – for the first time – the possibility to learn the different engraving techniques such as serigraphy, lithography, collagraphy, and calcography. It was also my first opportunity to become acquainted with people who shared my interests. I made very good friends; we were constantly discussing how to achieve a colour shade or about taking part in group exhibitions. We often debated on the contemporary art events and I felt that I belonged in a place like that. As a result of it I gradually became interested in the work of several already established Cuban artists who are still active, like Roberto Fabelo because of his exceptional drawing and Tomás Sánchez, particularly in his series *Basureros* (Rubbish Dumps); the latter was to have a particular influence in my work. From then on I began to organize myself and work in series, as a discipline. In that period I made my first exhibition, entitled *Casting*, and a second one, *Oros viejos* (Old Golds), whilst continuing working at the studio. In the evenings I painted at home and was not tired or overwhelmed because I liked what I was doing.

What themes have interested you in art? In your case, could we speak of an evolution since your first exhibition?

Casting was a portrait gallery; in it I recreated figures from the media, musicians, TV presenters, people that the public could recognize. My idea was to present them in oil paintings like characters from another century, using clothes from that period and, of course, the atmosphere of paintings from previous centuries. Seen altogether, the work seemed to be a sequence from a play, and I truly liked the result. Then, at one point, portrait no longer fulfilled my expectations I had in painting, so I decided to explore the theme of objects. This idea gave birth to *Oros viejos* (Old Golds), an exhibition in which I portrayed large-sized objects deteriorated by time, rusty and ill-treated but worthy, with the purpose of recalling their earlier usefulness. One of the pieces, *Llaves sobre el lienzo* (Keys on the Canvas), was out of place there, but it



led me to another theme: The accumulation of objects. I spent a long time, almost two years, painting and organizing my ideas, before I embarked on another project. *Como el que no quiere las cosas* (Feigning Indifference) emerged in 2016, a showcase in which I acknowledged my artistic vocation and in which I presented the accumulations of objects in a more concrete and at the same time more extensive and detailed manner. In this exhibition – in addition to oil paintings – I also ventured into the world of installations for the first time, something that would have been impossible ten years earlier because of the way I thought at the time.

When I look back at the roads I have followed to achieve what I am doing today I do not regret anything. On the contrary, I feel that I always did what I should and could. I see in myself an evolution that in no way has been imposed by the fashionable trends that come and go, nor by the temptations of the market. I think it has thus happened partially because of the way I am and my constant search of stimulus for my creation. Unfortunately I did not have a mentor to follow who could have guided me to starting points. I often found my teachers and influences in books or museums, and upon those I gradually built my own identity.

To what extent is your obsession with objects a nostalgic evocation? How do you assume the passing of time as a subject for paintings?

Feeling nostalgic in the face of each one of the objects I paint is inevitable, they act as models and help me greatly to compose and represent what I want. One can say they contain a great deal of expression in themselves. If these coffee machines, old hangers, washers and fans could speak, we would spend a long time listening to them. The nostalgic and evocative atmosphere that surrounds such objects makes people standing still before them, identify themselves with them and start a kind of dialogue with their memory, reconstructing their own stories that are not necessarily the ones I have tried to show. This is something very positive for me.

What audience do you identify with? Do you take the viewer into consideration when you paint?

I think the art form in my work is accessible to very diverse audiences, Cubans and non-Cubans, men and women, adults and young persons. I did not invent the accumulation of objects; many Cuban artists I admire at some point or in some of their works handled the theme; for instance Pedro Pablo Oliva, Nelson Domínguez and Tomás Sánchez. In other words, the theme is not far from my roots. But one thing is to be influenced and another to be a copyist. I think I have succeeded in delimiting those spaces. Without feeling tied to a story I have been working towards creating my own seal as an artist. There is an additional source of inspiration to be taken into consideration. As the 21st century advances, consumerism has become stronger, so has the loss of memory. To paint objects that were useful to us is a form of reclaiming the awareness of the passing of time, of knowing what we were in order to know what we are. It is a theme that transcends the visual arts.

Tell me about the inner aspects of the creative process. Where does drawing stand in your work?

Drawing has always been the foundation of painting. I begin a new painting by visualising a new idea – the composition and objects I'll be using – in my head, in the next step I draw. This process cannot be rushed, it takes the time it needs. Any mistake in this first phase will be difficult to hide, that is why I dedicate much attention to it. After completing the drawing on canvas, I know what the work will look like in its real size and I can sleep peacefully.

The next step is painting. The oil technique is the one I have always worked with and with which I feel most comfortable. I think the magic and warmth of oil remains unachievable by any other technique; whereas – as always – one has to use good materials and know how to use them. I paint almost every day, from morning until late afternoon, sometimes until night, but after two or more hours of painting I like to step back and look at the painting from a distance, I take my time to observe and think. On occasions I stop painting and forget about the piece, and at night, when I see it, I notice things I hadn't seen before and fix them because the colours are still fresh on the palette; that is only possible with oil painting. I think my love affair with oil cannot be broken.

What are similarities or differences between you and other artists of your generation?

Young art has characterized itself for wanting to be avant-garde, an art in full effervescence. It is almost always the young people like us who want to make the most exhibitions to show what we are capable of saying or doing. We have hot blood. Of course, that is my personal viewpoint and does not contradict the precepts I have followed. I am devoted to good performances, to the aesthetically impeccable, to precious detail. I don't know if that perception sets me apart from my contemporaries or if I just think differently with regard to the paintings I make. Perhaps some of them think that my work is more conservative because of the value I grant to the drawing and painting craft. That is how I am, and I enjoy it very much. One should do what one wants and feels; for example, right now I could make an abstract or conceptual work and I would surely feel a void, as if I were fooling myself. Perhaps in five or ten years that might change. No one remains static. So I don't have to worry as long as I do what I like. If people identify with my work and appreciate it, it's okay with me.

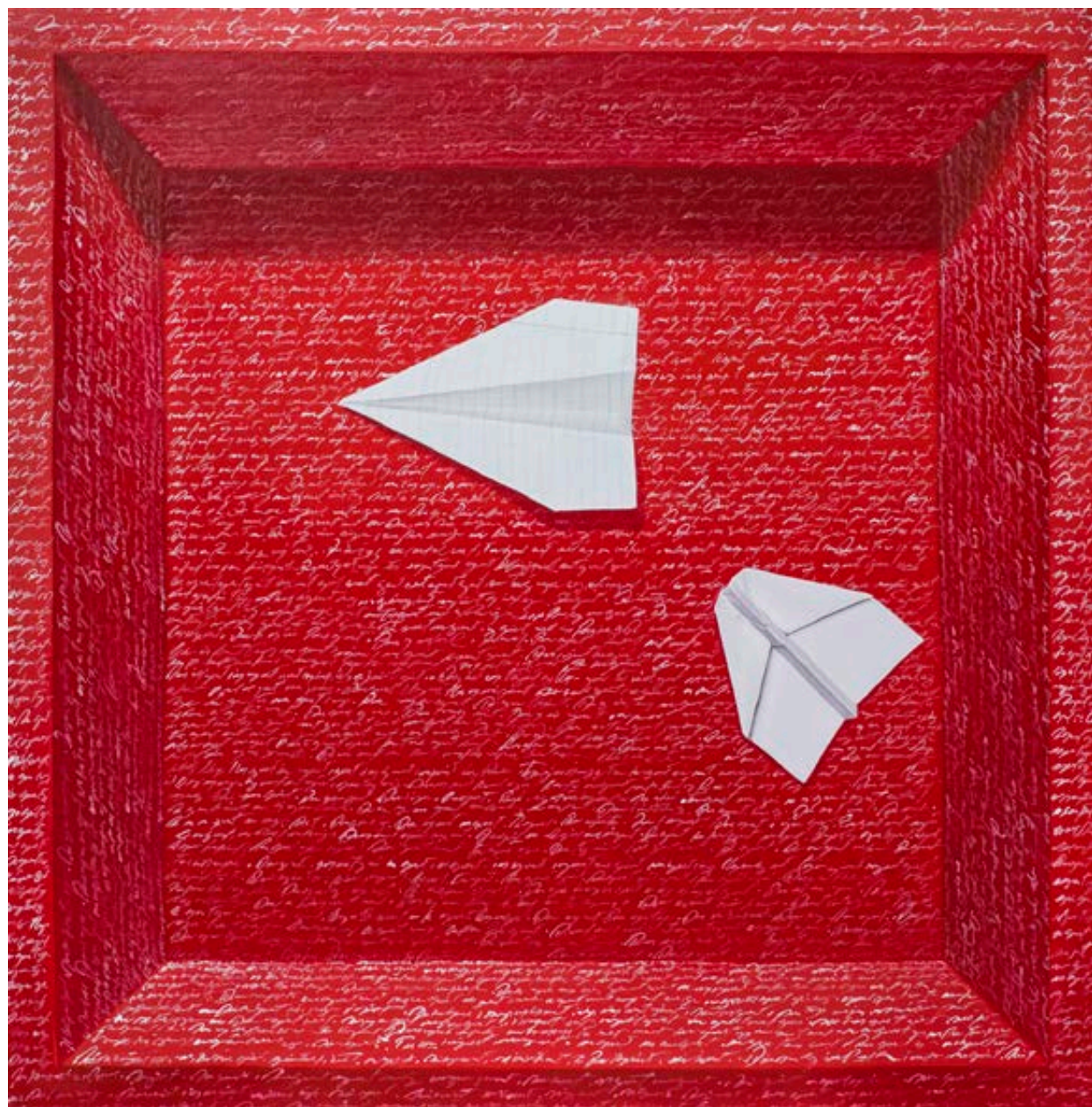
How do you see your future work? Anything you can anticipate?

Regarding my future creations, I know there will be many roads still to follow, and I will stick to my principles. Each piece – which has always been the case – will have to speak for itself. Thematically there is no exhaustion in painting objects so far, but I imagine that it will not remain like that. I cannot picture myself repeating my work. The way in which an artist works or creates depends to a great extent on his character and the atmosphere in which he develops. New motifs will come, turns will be noticeable, but the essence does not have to change. I have always intended to make my work collectable, distinctive, that people who hang one of my paintings on their wall do not do it just to fill an empty space, that they see the artist's work reflected in it, that they appreciate the great effort I put into it before signing it and last but not least that they connect with its meaning. I have always wished that my work is acknowledged in my country – what gift could be better than that? – but this can only be achieved through hard work, so I continue relentlessly. At an international level, it is the dream of every artist that his work goes around the world and obtains good reviews. But there is no point in dreaming all the time, either. One should set one foot in the clouds and the other on the ground, but as long as one works and remains motivated, creating and doing what one likes to do, nothing is impossible.



Como el que más | *Like Anyone Else*
2016, Oil on canvas
103 x 113 cm





Volando a Zürich | *Flying to Zurich*
2016, Oil on canvas
80 x 80 cm



THE ACCUMULATION OF IMAGES is part of the era we live in, the emergence of social networks has multiplied this phenomenon to unsuspected levels... In Cuba, soberness and synthesis were imposed upon our ways of seeing and creating, although superposition and juxtaposition continuously floated over the western maxims... Onay Rosquet relies on them in search of the personal, familial and at times social memory, which day after day identifies and moulds our attitudes. Being a very young creator, he already acknowledges the role of past, individual and collective legacies in the creation of the system of cultural symbols and signs shared by all of us. He installs himself and gloats over their meanings as origin of many things in life.

What once in our lives filled a far-reaching space or one of total insignificance is brought by him into the present with the force of hyperrealism, to the point that he fools the trained eye and seduces us with the doubt of every legitimate aesthetic expression. Good painting disturbs knowledge, the apparent and the real in an endless game of mirrors. Onay knows that, and therefore takes the road of returning to the starting point, the way Borges deduced of every human creation, not just the literary. Amazing and delicate hands are those of this painter, since they breathe life into the recreation of a reality that seemed forgotten and dead. The hyperrealism of the '70s and '80s is back, as if photography inspired in him an approach that differed from digital or analogue, just as Andrew Wyeth and Tomás Sánchez have taught us. Painting, Onay wants to tell us, is one step beyond photography in its struggle to reflect the reality of dear objects. Painting can still reach farther in that regard, and he shows it with astonishing earnestness.

Nelson Herrera Ysla

Fragment of text on the occasion of the exhibition *Como el que no quiere las cosas* (Feigning Indifference). Havana, Cuba, July 2016

HE PLACES OBJECTS ONE NEXT TO THE OTHER. He puts them together until he creates small or large groups related among each other but which, on occasions, are only meant to create a specific set. Each box, painted with excellent, delicate drawing, contains memories of a past that one never wants to erase, of its own identity shared with whoever observes it, and of an individual imagery that becomes collective.

Each viewer is astonished by what he sees at first sight; his eyes must stop two and three times to capture each detail on the canvas. The objects are part of the artist's reality, one that is presented to us so that we may reflect on the passing of time and the evolution of contemporary society. Nothing is there in excess; everything is where it belongs. Onay Rosquet, a self-taught artist, knows that each object bears very diverse meanings.

Daniel G. Alfonso

Fragment of text published in the magazine *Arte al Límite*. Santiago de Chile, Chile, 2016

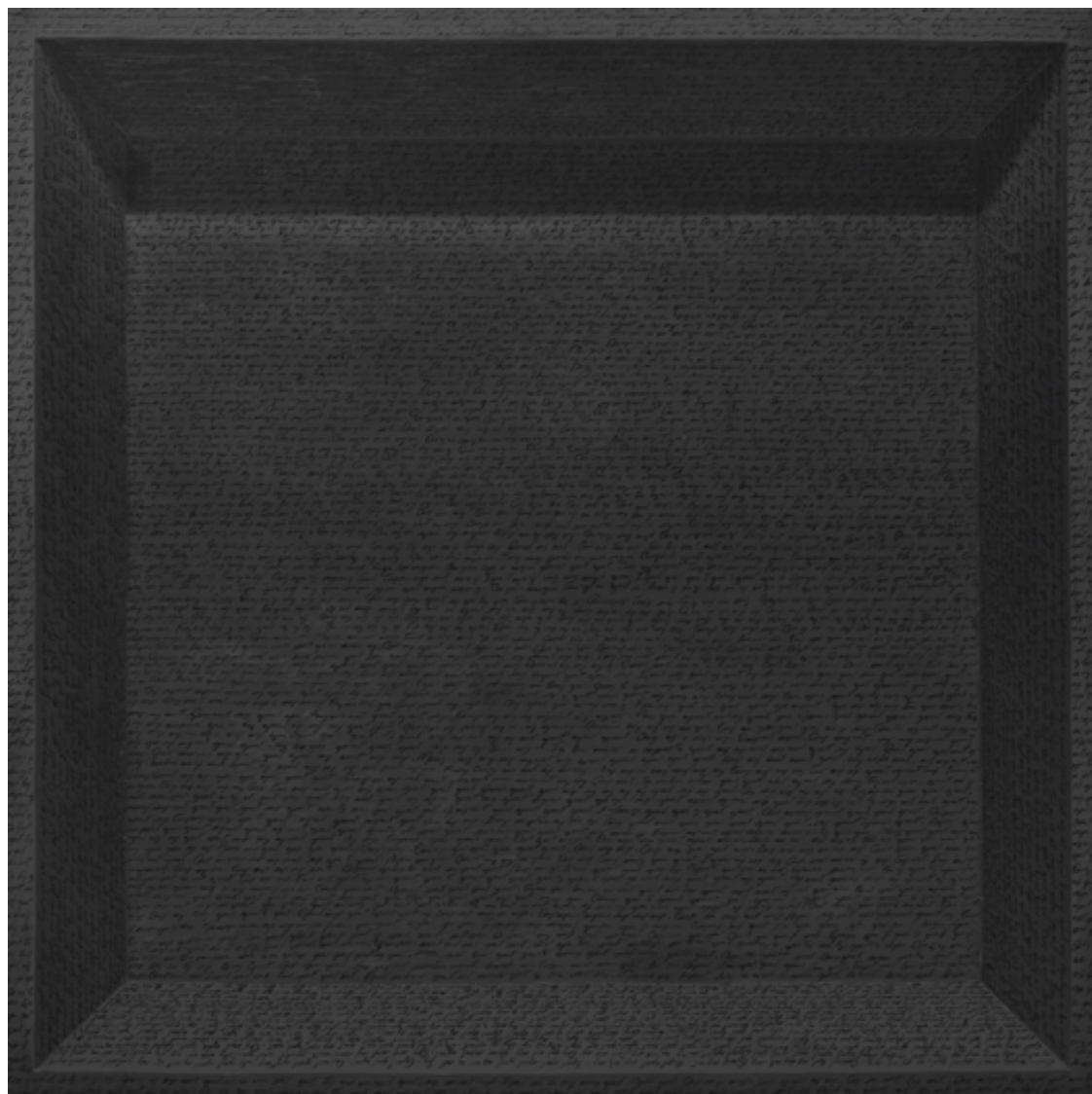
ROSQUET'S STYLE REMITS TO HYPERREALISM, but does not in the least resemble the shining cars of U.S. American Don Eddy, the icy and metallic urban landscapes of his fellowman Richard Estes or the fascination for fast food of Dutch Tjalf Sparnaay. Onay casts his glance on the intimacy, on the affective memory, even though at some point, as in *La nota discordante* (The Discordant Note, page 10), a surface heaped with well-conserved stationery apparently distances itself from the nostalgic content when he inserts a brilliant orange post-it adhesive rectangle, also painted, and in such a way that it can almost be touched!

The artist has handled each one of these pieces with such extreme rigor that when they become part of the whole, they cease to be fragments and integrate a kind of poetic suite of familiar echoes. More than a reading of the past, he ventures to trace the coordinates of a present that cannot be separated from a deep sense of belonging. Additionally, an attentive eye will notice the warmth of the human element. Quite distant from certain objectifying trends very much in vogue in the European art and literature of mid 20th century, his aesthetic perception trusts the capacity of affective relations. And, finally, he carries the weight of the island in the atmosphere of each one of his representations.

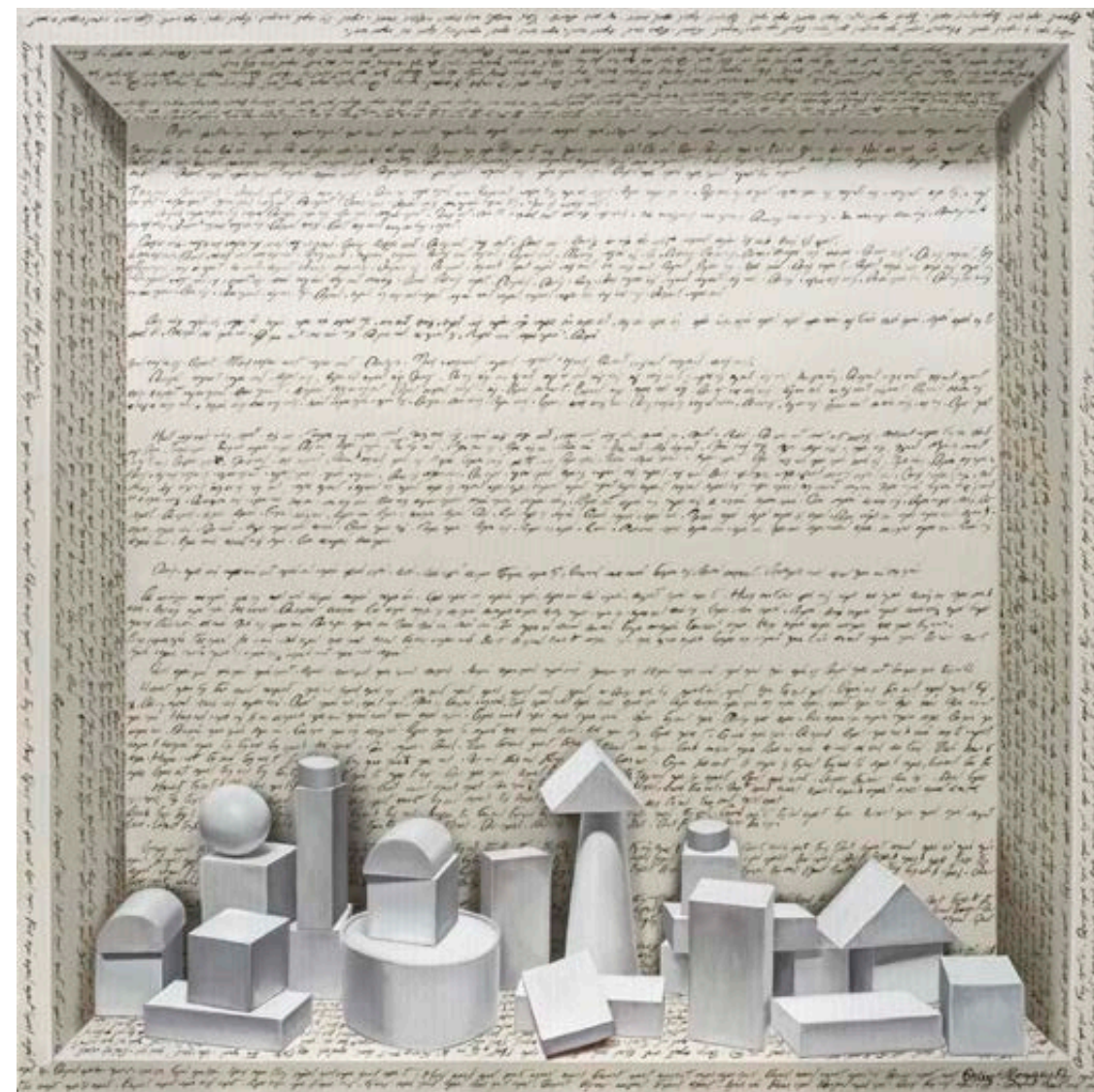
Virginia Alberdi

Fragment of text on the occasion of the exhibition *Oros viejos* (Old Golds). Havana, Cuba, March 2014





La caja fuerte | *The Strong, Dark Box*
2016, Oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



Dicen por ahí | *Rumor Has It*
2017, Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm





La nota discordante | *The Discordant Note*
2016, Oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



Environment
2017, Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm





Estampida | Stampede
2016, Installation
Variable dimensions







El pez indiferente | *The Indifferent Fish*
2016, Oil on canvas
85 x 100 cm



Otro pez | *Another Fish*
2016, Oil on canvas
85 x 100 cm





Neceser | Toilet Bag
2015, Oil on canvas
142 x 142 cm



Asamblea de herramientas | Assembly of Tools
2014, Oil on canvas
142 x 142 cm





Vajilla de verano | Summer Crockery
2016, Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm



La caja de mi abuela | My Grandmother's Box
2016, Oil on canvas
163 x 150 cm





El inconsciente II | The Thoughtless II
2016, Oil on canvas
80 x 80 cm



ONAY ROSQUET

Havana, 1987

Lives and works in Havana. He has moved from works with fine arts influence to a personal style of hyperrealism. In 2000-2001 he participated in the workshop conducted by José Pérez Olivares at the "Antonia Eiriz" Studio-Workshop. From 2010 to 2014 he worked in the Contemporary Graphics Workshop. At present he is a freelance artist.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017** *Unboxing*. ArteMorfosis Gallery. Zurich, Switzerland
- 2016** *Dibujo de dos* (Drawings of Two) Onay Rosquet and Bryan Romero. Hotel Parque Central, Havana, Cuba
Como el que no quiere las cosas (Feigning Indifference). Galiano Gallery, Havana, Cuba
- 2014** *Oros Viejos* (Old Golds). Servando Cabrera Moreno Gallery, Havana, Cuba
- 2013** *Casting*. Juanito Hernández Gallery, Havana, Cuba

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017** *Estampida II* (Stampede II). Fábrica de Arte Cubano (FAC), Havana, Cuba
- 2016** *ACUBA: Un nuevo amanecer* (ACUBA: A New Dawn). Godel Gallery, New York, U.S.A.
Estampida (Stampede). Fábrica de Arte Cubano (FAC), Havana, Cuba
Cuadros de una exposición (Paintings of an Exhibition). Fábrica de Arte Cubano (FAC), Havana, Cuba
Senderos de deseos (Paths of Wishes). Fábrica de Arte Cubano, (FAC), Havana, Cuba
- 2015** *Zona Franca*. 13th Havana Biennial. Collateral exhibition
No le temas a los colores estridentes (Do Not Fear Strident Colors). Morro-Cabaña Historical-Military Park, Havana, Cuba
Arte Joven Project. Ambassadors' Hall, Hotel Habana Libre, Havana, Cuba
Post it 3. Expo-Sale of Contemporary Cuban Art. Collage Gallery, Havana, Cuba
- 2014** *Post it 2*. Expo-Sale of Contemporary Cuban Art. Collage Gallery, Havana, Cuba
Enlace compartido (Shared Link). Development Center for Visual Arts, Havana, Cuba
- 2013** *Panorámica* (Outlook). Mariano Rodríguez Gallery, Villa Panamericana, Havana, Cuba
- 2012** *Divertimentos*. Los Oficios Gallery, Havana, Cuba
Arte y amistad (Art and Friendship). Provincial Council for Visual Arts, Las Tunas, Cuba
Privado (Private). 11th Havana Biennial, Collateral Exhibition. Mariano Rodríguez Gallery, Villa Panamericana, Havana, Cuba
Panorama (Outlook). Mariano Rodríguez Gallery, Villa Panamericana, Havana, Cuba
- 2011** *Decodificado* (Decoded). Mariano Rodríguez Gallery, Havana, Cuba
- 2010** *Panorama* (Outlook). Mariano Rodríguez Gallery, Villa Panamericana, Havana, Cuba
- 2000** *Antonia Eiriz Studio-Workshop*. Fayad Jamís Gallery, Havana, Cuba

PUBLICATIONS

Portal of Visual Arts. Arte Cubano Publishing House / *CdeCuba Magazine*. Spain. Editions 19, 20 and 21 from 2016 / *Granma* newspaper. Digital edition, July 16, 2016 / *Granma* newspaper. Printed edition, July 27, 2016 / *Tribuna de La Habana* newspaper. Digital edition, July 26, 2016 / *Tribuna de La Habana* newspaper. Printed edition, July 31, 2016 / *Magazine Arte al Límite*. Chile. July 5, 2016 / *Vistar Magazine*. Digital edition, July 20, 2016 / *Portal CubaSi*. September 6, 2016 / *CubaWhat'sOn*. August 15, 2016

COLLECTIONS

His works are in private collections in the United States, Colombia, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Cuba.



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 focused on well-established Cuban artists, with proven international track records, but who remain yet to be discovered in the German-speaking part of Europe. Since 2017 the gallery is additionally focussing on presenting emerging and mid-career artists.

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, and at times too many paintings hanging on the walls 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. The name “ArteMorfosis” symbolizes 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 - Garcia Negrin (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. Since 2002 he has been operating a classifieds portal (www.cubisima.com), which ranks amongst the most used websites in Cuba. Idalmys and Johann married in 2002 and their son was born in 2005.

THE GALLERY

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Exhibit hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.



ONAY ROSQUET. UNBOXING
The present artist file is published on the occasion of the exhibition of the same title that is presented from March 17 to April 8, 2017 at the Cuban Art Gallery ArteMorfosis, Zurich.

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Publications of previous exhibitions at ArteMorfosis - Galería de Arte Cubano

FLORA FONG	ART: ELIXIR OF LIFE	APRIL - JUNE 2015
ERNESTO GARCÍA PEÑA	ISLAND LYRICS	AUGUST - OCTOBER 2015
GILBERTO FRÓMETA	TROPICAL LIGHT	NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2015
ALICIA LEAL	SYMBOLE, MYSTERIEN UND LEBEN	MAY - JUNE 2016
PEDRO PABLO OLIVA	GESICHTER EINER INSEL	AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2016
EDUARDO ROCA «CHOCO»	EQUILIBRIO HUMANO	NOVEMBER 2016
LI D FONG	JOURNEY RECOLLECTIONS	JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2017



"I felt so compelled to drawing and painting that it became part of my personal identity. Then, little by little, through my work and other elements that influenced my education, it gradually became a profession.

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Onay Rosquet lives and works in Havana, Cuba, where he was born in 1987. A self-taught artist, he has moved from works with fine arts influence to a personal style of hyperrealism.

His works are part of various collections in the United States, Colombia, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Cuba; and have been published in various specialized magazines and websites in Cuba and abroad.

This artist's pieces have inspired Cuban art critic Nelson Herrera Ysla to write: "Amazing and delicate hands are those of this painter for a recreation of reality that seemed forgotten and dead, since they breathe life into them. Painting, Onay wants to tell us, is one step beyond photography in its struggle to reflect the reality of dear objects."

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