

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS



Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco), *Ginguindo*, 2012, Linograph, 66cm x 56cm

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Exhibition dates

23 April - 28 April 2012

Gallery 27, Cork Street, Mayfair London W1S 3NG

7 May - 13 May 2012

The Lighthouse, 11 Mitchell Lane, Glasgow G1 3NU

Notes for Educators

This pack is intended as an introduction to the exhibition *Beyond the Frame: Contemporary Cuban Art*, which has brought the work of 26 Cuban artists to the UK. It has been made possible due to an award by Creative Scotland. The pack includes a selection of ideas and points for discussion. The activities are suitable for all ages and can be adapted to your needs.

Introduction

The title 'Beyond the Frame' can be interpreted in several different ways:

- Where the important part of an artwork is what is outside the picture frame - when you look at the picture it makes you think of things not in the picture - feelings you have had or events that have happened or may be about to happen.
- The visionary artist is one who creates their own world in their pictures, completely from their imagination.
- Where the artist challenges traditional and historical forms of representation, for example by working in mediums and materials such as re-cycled objects, rather than conventional oils and watercolours.
- Challenging preconceptions of what Cuban art is like which may range from rich, colourful artworks produced on a Caribbean island to socialist realism.
- Challenging the frame of cultural or social boundaries imposed on us or others such as unfair stereotypes or expectations.

Beyond the Frame

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Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho) *Untitled*, 2007



Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho), *Untitled*, 2007
Drawing with crayon on card, 204cm x 150cm

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Work in focus:

Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho)

Untitled, 2007

Method

Alexis Leyva Machado, known as Kcho (pronounced 'catch-o') was born in 1970. He graduated from the Escuela de Nacional de Arte de Cuba in 1990 specialising in drawing and painting. Considered the most well-known and internationally recognised Cuban artist, he was given the prestigious Distinction for National Culture award in 1998.

Cuba is the largest island of the Caribbean. The sea plays a significant role in Cuba's history and all aspects of culture. The sea promises adventure, but also takes lives. Ernest Hemingway wrote his famous novel 'The Old Man and the Sea' while living on the coast of Cuba. It tells the story of how a young boy and an old man face the fears of ocean fishing in a tiny boat. The capital city Havana lies only 90 miles from the US city of Miami, across the sea. Many wealthier Cubans emigrated to the US in 1959 after the revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara which challenged social inequality. In the early 1990s Cuba's economy almost completely collapsed when their special economic relationship with the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries fell apart. It was a very uncertain time for Cubans and with daily shortages of food and fuel. Some people, encouraged by reports in the US media, attempted to travel to the US by small boats across the straits.

*'our island emerges from a rock that comes from the sea, the first plants came by sea, the aboriginals arrived on canoe, the Virgin of Charity appeared in a bay, the slaves also came from Africa on ships, the Granma yacht, immigration... it all has to do with the sea that surrounds us.'*¹

Beyond the Frame

This work shows people waiting to go to sea on an important journey into the unknown. It raises the issue of migration, leaving loved ones behind. The picture is crowded with no horizon. All the equipment, the propeller of an engine, upturned boat, oil can and oars, is ready to go but contrast with the faceless hooded people who sit very still. There is an air of unease and foreboding. What is important is what is about to happen, which we cannot see.

Activities

1. Choose an event or a journey, real or imaginary, of great importance and make a list of the feelings and emotions you might have just before embarking on the journey.
2. Draw or collect images of the objects and people you would leave behind and those you would take with you.
3. Look at other art works that deal with journeys, for example 'The Last of England' by Ford Madox Brown.
4. Using a simple medium such as charcoal on card, produce a series of images that depict your emotions at the moment before departure.

¹ Alexis Leyva Machado, interviewed by Estrella Díaz García, 1 April 2012, on <http://www.oncubamagazine.com/en/content/kcho-between-two-islands>

Beyond the Frame

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Manuel Mendive Hoyos, *Untitled*, 2011



Manuel Mendive Hoyos, *Untitled*, 2011
Oil on canvas, 44cm x 50cm

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Work in focus:

Manuel Mendive Hoyos

Untitled, 2011

Method

Manuel Mendive Hoyos was born in 1944. He graduated from the Academia de Bellas Artes San Alejandro in 1962. He also studied Ethnology and Folklore in the Cuban Academy of Sciences, and History of Art at the University of Havana. Mendive was awarded the National Visual Arts prize Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas in 2001.

Mendive is an expert on African traditions and myths that arrived in Cuba with the slave trade. In the 17th and 18th centuries slaves transported from West Africa by Spanish rulers preserved their animist religious beliefs under cover of Catholicism, linking saints to their *orisha* gods, which gave rise to the Santería religion. Practitioners believe in there being *ache* (spiritual power or life) in all nature. Mendive's art confirms the powerful presence of Africa within Cuban national culture. He paints on canvas but also creates elaborate performances, painting images on the bodies of participants.

*'The artistic language that I use in my work for me is eternal. I've always had this idea, this message, that in the big stage that is nature, we're a part of it, but we are not alone. We accompany the uplifting force and energy of our ancestors, our gods and dreams, everything together.'*²

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Mendive depicts the world beyond the immediately visible - where the mystery and inner power of a person, animal, landscape can be clearly seen.

Activities

1. Take photographs of a person, animal or landscape you are familiar with - think about what special qualities they have that aren't physically visible. Paint or draw over the photograph or photocopy or manipulate the photograph digitally so that those inner qualities are made visible.
2. Investigate the Cuban religion of Santería or Regla de Ocha. Find out about the colours, images and characteristics related to the different 'orishas' or saints.
3. Create a painting that depicts a gathering of people and animals and their relationship to each other, making use of symbolic markings that reveal the inner qualities of each character.
4. Look at English visionary painter and poet William Blake's work. Compare it to Mendive's work.

² Manuel Mendive Hoyos, interviewed by artist and photographer Ernesto Lozano Rivero, 27 January 2011, on <http://tuyomasyo.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/manuel-mendive-hoyo-entre-la-luz-y-la.html>

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CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

René de Jesús Peña González *Wardrobe*, 2007



René de Jesús Peña González, *Wardrobe* (2 of 5 of a series of 5), 2007
Photograph, 50cm x 60cm

Beyond the Frame

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Work in focus:

René de Jesús Peña González

Wardrobe (2 of 5 of a series of 5), 2007

Method

René de Jesús Peña González was born in 1957. After graduating with a degree in English Language he took up photography in the 1980s. He has been at the forefront of new trends in fine art photography in Cuba since the 1990s. Using his own body as a subject, he explores through self-portraits themes such as black identity, sexual ambiguity and the influence of consumerism.

'My work is basically about the relationship between individuals and a particular social group - how the individual keeps trying to have his own identity even though he can't escape his social group and society in general. We all have our institutions - family, religious, athletic, whatever - and they carry their own ideologies with them. We can't escape them. We're all institutionalised but we all think we're individuals. This duality is what motivates my work.'

Beyond the Frame

This image aims to make us think again about our assumptions of beauty, adornment and identity. It tries to take us beyond the frame of our prejudices. The image is ambiguous as to whether the gold cuffs are jewellery, a weapon or a remnant of the use of chains and manacles to exert control over African slaves, from whom the majority of Cubans are descended.

Activities

1. Discuss why the artist has chosen to use the body to create art.
2. Make jewellery or adornment for someone you know that attempts to reveal a story of the person who is wearing it.
3. Discuss how artists working in different mediums make self-portraits. Examples could include Frida Kahlo and Cindy Sherman.
4. Make your own self-portrait using items that say something about you.

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Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy, *Día / Day*, 2011



Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy, *Día / Day*, 2011
Mixed media, 80 cm x 60 cm

Beyond the Frame

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Work in focus:

Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy

Día/ Day, 2011

Method

Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy was born in 1971 and is the grandson of the Cuban painter Urfé. He graduated from the Academia de Bellas Artes San Alejandro in 1991 and is one of Cuba's most important contemporary artists. He has represented Cuba at the Venice Biennale.

Diago Durruthy's paintings are distinguished by their highly conceptual nature. He often uses found objects that he re-cycles. One of the constant themes in his work is slavery and its legacy. He sometimes uses jute rather than canvas as the base for his artworks. Jute is a material associated with sugar and, by association, with slavery.

*'(During the 1990s) we didn't have the materials you need to paint like we were taught in school, so we had to adapt our art to what we could find. Now I can afford to buy good paper and oil paints, but that no longer interests me. The symbolic weight of my materials has become a characteristic of my work.'*³

Beyond the Frame

The simple outline of a face lacks the physical features that usually express feelings. Without these, the calm, pain and isolation are conveyed conceptually through the materials of the picture. These are sometimes thought to be the faces of people who are not allowed to say what they want to say. The dividing line running down the face has also been interpreted as representing a broken life.

Activities

1. Think about the meaning in particular materials. Gather natural and manmade materials with different textures and colours, for example fabrics, string, wool, plastic, metal, cardboard, wood. What are their scientific physical properties, what cultural significance do they have in our society?
2. Make a self portrait collage/mixed media image using different materials – colours, textures, uses, connotations which suggest feelings and ideas you have.
3. Look at this work by Diago Durruthy and the piece by Peña González. Compare and discuss how the two artists explore identity through the use of materials and symbols.

³ Interview with exhibition organisers in Havana, November 2011

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Luis Enrique Camejo Vento, *Untitled*, 2007



Luis Enrique Camejo Vento, *Untitled*, 2007
Oil on canvas, 112cm x 137cm

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Work in focus:

Luis Enrique Camejo Vento

Untitled, 2007

Method

Luis Camejo Vento was born in Pinar del Rio in 1971 and graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana in 1996.

He explores the relations between humans and their environment in his cityscapes, like this one of Havana. The car is typical of the older vehicles seen on the streets of Havana and is here used by the artist to represent a traditional view of the city. The young Cuban people in the picture in contrast represent contemporary Cuban society. Camejo captures the dynamics of the urban environment in paintings that suggest a still frame from a film. He uses light and tones of a single colour to emphasise a world seen through the lens of a camera. This painting is in shades of green which Camejo describes as the 'colour of hope'.

'I walk the street or I drive. I have the camera in my car and I take a photograph. I take anything - people walking on the Malecón or a car passing by. I do not make sketches at that point. I see the photo on my computer and then I use the image, I print the image. Only after I have made the painting do I make sketches, so there is the possibility of having more ends, rather than just one end'.⁴

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The artist describes his images as lacking a defined beginning or end, just like a single shot taken from a series that makes up a sequence in a film. What the viewer does not see but is left to consider are the events that may have happened before or after this shot.

Activities

1. Discuss how images in film or photography differ from those made with paints. How do they impact on the way an artist conveys what is in an image? Is one more 'real' than the other?
2. Write a short story about what is going on in the picture, creating a dialogue between the people in it.
3. Create a storyboard of images to go with the dialogue. Make a number of different endings.
4. Investigate other artists who work in paints but reference photography. For example the Parisian scenes created by Impressionist painters Edouard Manet and Camille Pissarro suggest a fleeting glimpse of the city.

⁴ Interview with exhibition organisers, Havana, November 2011

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CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco), *Sueño caribeño / Caribbean dream*, 2011



Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco), *Sueño caribeño / Caribbean dream*, 2011
Collograph, 66cm x 69cm

Beyond the Frame

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN ART

Work in focus:

Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco)

Sueño caribeño / Caribbean dream, 2011

Method

Eduardo Roca Salazar, known as Choco, was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1949. He graduated from the Escuela Nacional de Arte de Cuba in 1970. Choco is an eminent painter, engraver and draughtsman whose highly crafted collograph prints have made a particular contribution to his international reputation.

The peasant worker, which Choco describes as having a social context, appears in many of his artworks. He is influenced by African traditions and his work is considered emblematic of Cuban cultural identity. Choco describes the figures as representing 'universal man', rather than a particular race or nationality.

*'This is part of a series I have been working on dedicated to silence, to loneliness. And always with the human figure, as you see it is made in a closed place. Every one of us has been feeling these conditions at a specific moment in our life.'*⁵

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The human figure is a constant feature in Choco's art. In this work the figure is constrained within the restraints of the frame which can be interpreted as reflecting other boundaries in society.

Activities

1. Make a sketch of a figure enclosed in a space. Write some notes about why a person's movements may be restricted.
2. Explore how other artists present a figure within a frame. One example could be the work of the twentieth century painter, Francis Bacon.
3. A collograph is a print made from a collage which results in a highly textured surface. Collect items with different textures to create a collage – fabrics, papers, found items. Then paint the surface in different colours and make a collograph. Use a paintbrush to finish the artwork.

⁵ Interview with exhibition organisers, Havana, November 2011

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Other sources of information

<http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/magazine/countries>
<http://www.africanaonline.com/>
<http://www.blackhistory4schools.com/slavetrade/>
<http://www.recoveredhistories.org/>
<http://www.understandingslavery.com/teachingslavetrade/>
<http://www.cnap.cult.cu>
<http://www.cubarte-english.cult.cu>
<http://www.galeriacubarte.cult.cu>
<http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/miami5/index.asp>
<http://www.cuba50.org>
<http://www.cubaldn.com> (culture section)

Notes

Beyond the Frame: Contemporary Cuban Art is being organised in collaboration with the National Council of Visual Arts, Havana and Cuba Solidarity Campaign. All contributing artists are donating their artworks to raise funds to support the campaign for justice for the Miami Five, a case supported by human rights campaigners across the world including Amnesty International, the UN Commission on Human Rights and prominent individuals including eleven Nobel Prize winners.

Contact details

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