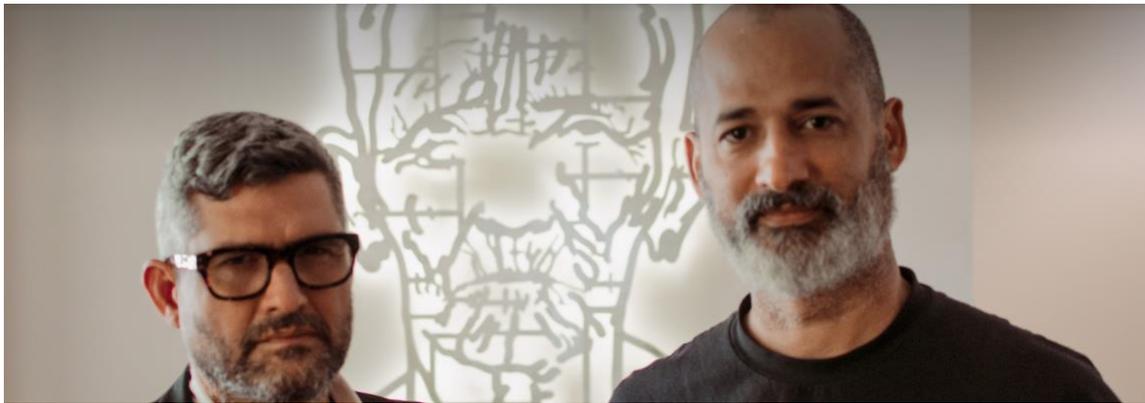


# SEANKELLY

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The Farber Foundation



## One More Time: Los Carpinteros on Their New Exhibition in Washington DC

*Disbanded last year, the artmaking duo returns for "Cuba Va!" at the Phillips Collection*

Last summer, Dagoberto Rodríguez and Marco Castillo—the acclaimed artmaking duo Los Carpinteros—announced the dissolution of the group. Since then, both artists have pursued solo careers.

But last month, Los Carpinteros returned with *Cuba Va!*, an exhibition at the [Phillips Collection](#) in Washington DC.

In a pair of email interviews, Rodríguez and Castillo talked about Los Carpinteros and its future, *Cuba Va!*, and their own recent and upcoming projects. Here are their responses, combined into one document and edited for length.

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*Los Caprinteros, "Cachita," 2013 (c) Los Carpinteros, courtesy the Phillips Collection*

*How did Cuba Va! come about? A little over a year ago, Los Carpinteros announced their dissolution, but this is a Los Carpinteros exhibition.*

**Dagoberto Rodríguez:** Los Carpinteros has had 26 years of collaboration, with a lot of works that are barely known.

**Marco Castillo:** The legacy of our collective will continue to be exhibited and published, like that of many artists who are no longer around. For our part, we have every intention of continuing to defend this valuable heritage, which we built in our best years. We already have invitations to participate in upcoming projects in highly reputable and worthy institutions.

**DR:** This exhibition was organized before 2018, and it's been great to see it become a reality. I would like to publicly thank Phillips curator Vesela Sretenovic for her perseverance, and gallery owner Peter Kilchmann for supporting this project. I also want to thank Sean Kelly Gallery for making this show possible.

Dagoberto Rodríguez and Marco Castillo in "Cuba Va!" at the Phillips Collection; behind them, Los Carpinteros, "It's Not Che, It's Felicia," 2017  
Photo: Carl Maynard, courtesy the Phillips Collection

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*Dagoberto Rodríguez and Marco Castillo in “Cuba Va!” at the Phillips Collection; behind them, Los Carpinteros, “It’s Not Che, It’s Felicia,” 2017; Photo: Carl Maynard, courtesy the Phillips Collection*

*Tell us about Cuba Va!*

**MC:** The curator of *Cuba Va!*, Vesela Sretenovic, is originally from the former Republic of Yugoslavia, so she has a background similar to ours with respect to socialist issues. We started from the fact that this was an exhibition for Washington, a city full of monuments. This somehow established a relationship with the place the curator comes from, a country that’s also full of monuments.

We in turn come from a country that has some very defined characteristics in this field.

In these explorations, an idea came to light that we’d been pursuing timidly: to transform and manipulate the monuments of Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos in the Plaza de la Revolución.

**DR:** The exhibition consists of seven portraits made with the backlight technique, similar to the spectral portraits in the Plaza de la Revolución—with the detail that the heroes are different.

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Los Carpinteros, "It's Not Che, It's René," 2018  
© Los Carpinteros. Photo: Carl Maynard, courtesy the Phillips Collection

The exhibition uses the propaganda resources and imagery of the revolution. It focuses on the generation that has carried the load of daily life in Cuba during the last 60 years. It's a kind of tribute, combined with the political landscape that this generation has lived through.

**MC:** These sculptures are made from a technique inherited from American Pop and consumer culture, in which a drawing is at the same time a monument. It's a practical way of making a monument, with minimal resources and maximum expression. Using a backlit, illuminated line, anyone who is portrayed is exalted. In fact, the Plaza has an aura that makes it a kind of mecca, a sanctuary of the Latin American left.

We tried to use a process similar to that of Enrique Ávila, who created the portraits in the Plaza. The series *It's not Che , It's \_\_\_\_\_* is a work that questions, through the misappropriation of monumental representations of history, the aging of a political project that today is at the point of breaking. The New Man, the fundamental entity of the revolution and the protagonist of the construction of a bright future for all, has grown old.

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**DR:** The video pieces were made for one of our last exhibitions together at the KOW gallery in Berlin in 2018. The two videos approach Cuban reality from two different points of view.

*Comodato* (2018) talks about life in Cuba today through a single camera shot.

**MC:** It talks about the idea of equality in socialism that became the great slogan of the revolution. Many of our parents and grandparents renounced other freedoms because of that utopian idea of class equality.



A frame from the video "Comodato," 2018, by Los Carpinteros  
© Los Carpinteros courtesy KOW, Berlin, and the Phillips Collection

[Through a continuous, dissolving camera shot showing different living spaces,] *Comodato* is a profound consideration of all the social classes that we have been able to detect in Cuba.

We define 17, but possibly there are many more, starting with the great economic and political hierarchies and ending with the most disadvantaged classes, where help is barely present.

The work becomes a monument to inequality, to the Cuban reality, to hypocrisy, and to the paradox presented by this type of society.

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Frame from the video "Comodato," 2018, by Los Carpinteros  
© Los Carpinteros courtesy KOW, Berlin, and the Phillips Collection

**DR:** The other video, *Retráctil*, brings to light a dark episode in Cuban history: the self-accusation of poet Heberto Padilla in 1971.

**MC:** Over the years, this theme became one of the great monuments of the Cuban revolution. Due to the lack of freedom, this gesture acquired a monumental connotation among intellectuals.

**DR:** The words are the same that Padilla spoke [in his public self-accusation], spoken by someone else in another setting [a meat slaughterhouse] in the Cuba of today.



Frame from the video "Retráctil," 2018, by Los Carpinteros  
© Los Carpinteros courtesy KOW, Berlin, and the Phillips Collection

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Throughout the exhibition the roles have been reversed. Those of us who have been monitored and punished are now the speakers.

*Why these themes, at this particular point in time?*

**DR:** It is always a good time to talk about the last 60 years of the revolution. The process is still active, and artists have a social mission. From art, we can ask ourselves questions about what it has been, the nature of the process, and what it will be.

**MC:** This show has been gestating a long time, and has that flavor of what we think of as the “old” Cold War. It makes reference to the idea of the monument, the figure of the hero, and ideological disparities.



Frame from the video “Retráctil,” 2018, by Los Carpinteros  
© Los Carpinteros courtesy KOW, Berlin, and the Phillips Collection

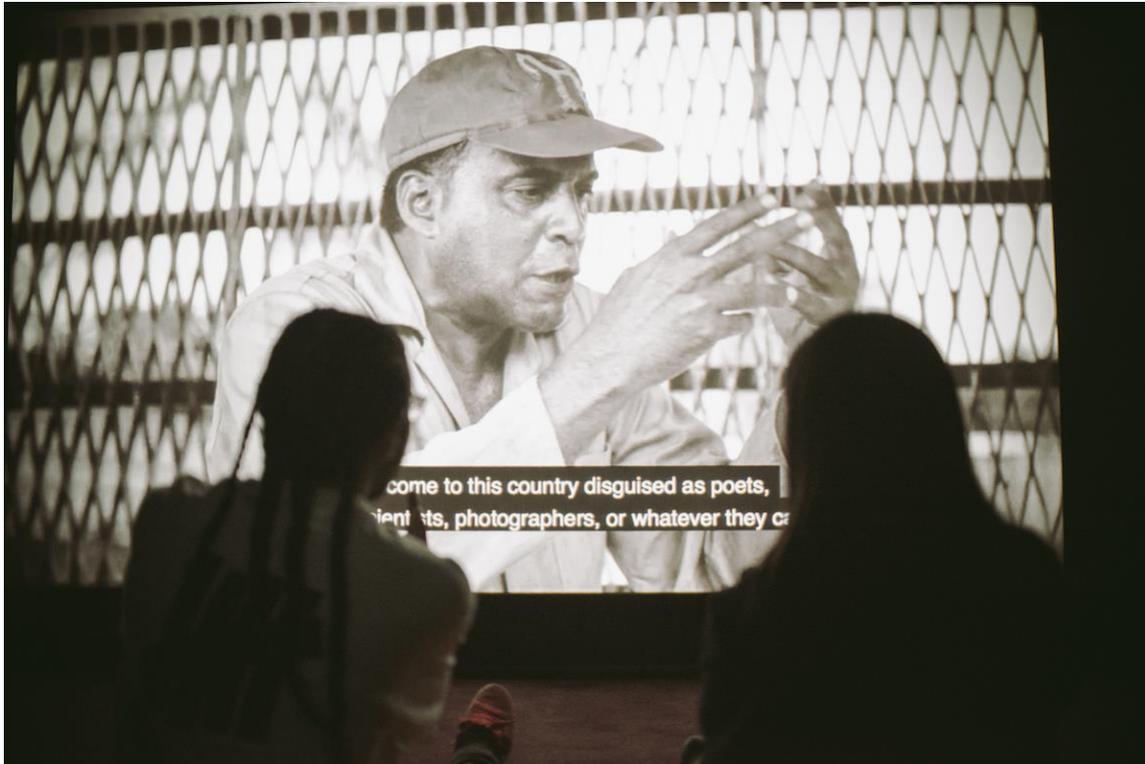
This phenomenon is happening again, but now it is concentrated in the US and the Middle East, with a nuance that Putin adds from Eastern Europe.

We are facing a very complex moment, where both the economic repression that comes from the United States and the internal repression and blockade have caused the Cuban population to confront many types of deprivations: civil liberties, economic freedoms, and a pathetic dependence of the population on the government.

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This is the context surrounding the exhibition. There is enormous tension on all fronts, and a return to another type of Cold War. Everyone participates but no bullets are used—it is an ideological and economic war.

*Cuba Va!* reflects on situations that originated during the Cold War era, but establishes a temporary link with the present, where there is a regression to all these conflicts. For us, it is a great opportunity to speak from art, especially in Washington.



Installation view of the video "Retráctil," 2018, by Los Carpinteros  
© Los Carpinteros courtesy KOW, Berlin. Photo: Carl Maynard, courtesy the Phillips Collection

*Dago, you currently have two solo exhibitions in Europe, at IvoryPress in Madrid and Galerie Peter Kilchmann in Zürich, and you'll present a major exhibition at CAAM Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Las Palmas, Gran Canaria in 2020. Can you give us an idea of the themes you're exploring right now in your solo career, and which media you're working in?*

**DR:** The CAAM exhibition is getting a lot of attention now—keeping in mind that it will be my first solo show in an institution. The exhibition, with the title of *La guerra interior* (The Inner War), explores the art-war relationship or tension. It is being curated by Andrea Pacheco and Orlando Jinorio, and will be accompanied by a catalogue of my most recent work.

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Installation view of "Dagoberto Rodríguez. Tus manos están bien" at IvoryPress, Madrid  
Courtesy IvoryPress

I am very much interested in artisanal work, like mosaic and ceramics. I consider myself a craftsman who tells stories through that language. In that sense I am very interested in Arabic tiles. Part of this work is on view in the IvoryPress exhibition in Madrid, and will also be at CAAM next year.

At this moment I'm also working on an exhibition at the Madrid studio that pays tribute to Félix González-Torres, opening in late February.

*Marco, tell us about what you've been working on. Is your main studio also in Spain?*

**MC:** I've been working on my own projects now for less than a year, and still haven't learned to speak of myself in the singular. Even now it feels a little egocentric to say 'I'.

Thinking about it, I feel that I have the opportunity to be an emerging artist again. One isn't always that lucky—to be thrown again into the lack of commitments, the experimentation and adventure of pure creation, with a new identity.

I've been working in three fundamental directions and so far I've done three personal exhibitions.

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The first, *Noches Blancas* [White Nights], at the Arsenal Habana gallery in Havana, was a sort of initiation rite, in which I reflected on the relationship with the past and future of my own work. It consisted of ten canvases painted with water, accompanied by a video documenting the entire process.



Marco Castillo painting with water in “Noches blancas” at the Arsenal Habana gallery in Havana, 2018  
Courtesy Diario Las Américas

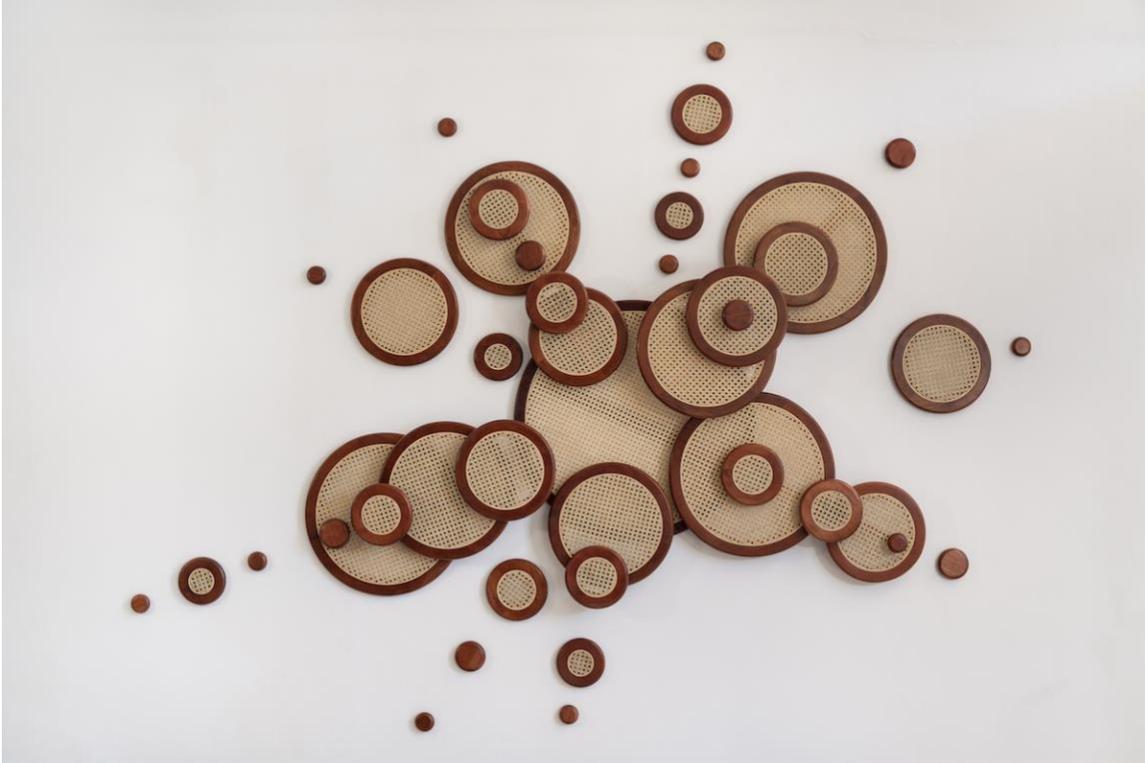
It’s a series that also reflects on the paradox of making art in the politicized Cuban context. It explores how to create works with a minimum of visual effect and a maximum of psychological result.

Then, during the 13th Havana Biennial, I presented *La casa del Decorador*. That was the result of an investigation based on the entire arsenal of design, interior design, and architecture that accompanied the Cuban revolution in the early years. It was totally abandoned in the late 1970s, especially because of the misunderstanding of institutions that stigmatized “bourgeois taste.”

I’m working on a survey of this knowledge and heritage, with the idea of then translating that language and converting it into a system of work.

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This exhibition had a second part, with some variations, that was presented at UTA Artist Space in Los Angeles. [See [Marco's Cuban Art News interview](#) about the exhibition.]



Marco Castillo, "María Victoria," 2019, installed in "The Decorator's House" at UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles; Photo: Jeff McLane, courtesy UTA Artist Space

I've also been working on a series that has to do with the Cuban underground economy and how these exchange relations work on the edge of legality. I find myself immersed in the conception of a new piece that has to do with economic issues and goes back to the idea of monuments, but I can't say much about it because I'm just beginning.

Next year I will present an exhibition at the Turku Art Museum, Finland.

I was also invited to participate in several group exhibitions, such as *Intersecciones* at Factoría Habana during the Biennial, *Adolescence* at German Kunstverein Hase 29 next year, and an exhibition at the Opelvillen Russelsheim Museum in Germany.

For Arco, Madrid 2020 with the KOW gallery, Berlin, I am working on a proposal made specifically for the booth, and something similar or Frieze, New York. With the Nara Roesler gallery, we are preparing a project with the new work I am doing.

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I have my studio in Havana and I will always keep this close relationship with Cuba. It will always be an inspiring site for me.

*Los Carpinteros: Cuba Va!* is on view at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, through January 12.