

Arts



Cuban Artists "Kill Time" At Exhibit In Hell's Kitchen

May 15, 2007

Censored Cuban artists find a voice at a major exhibition of contemporary Cuban art in Hell's Kitchen. NY1's Stephanie Simon filed the following report.

At a new exhibit of contemporary Cuban art at Exit Art, curator and artist Glexis Novoa is expecting a visit from "Fidel Castro," as part of a performance piece.

"We invite him, and he is going to come and see the show and talk about the show with me," says Novoa.

An actor will of course be playing Castro, but the government's interest in what artists are doing in Cuba is no exaggeration.

"You cannot work with the flag; you cannot work with the issue of Castro or Fidel or Raul or Che Guevara," says Novoa.

Novoa came to the U.S. from Cuba in 1995. The new show showcases works by some 80 Cubans living on the island and around the world. Many of the artists faced censorship by the Cuban government, but often the politics of dissent can be playful and subtle like in this performance piece.

"They were tied together in these blue jeans, and they spent 15 days together – sleeping, using the bathroom together – like a sense of living in socialism," says Novoa.

The exhibit's title, "Killing Time," is appropriate for artist Joel Rojas. He killed time by making these drawings, during the year that he waited to be granted political asylum in the U.S., after he was forbidden by the Cuban government to make his art.

"Fidel in Cuba is revered and mythologized, where as his work took a very critical look at him," says Rojas, through a translator.

When it comes to art and politics in Cuba, at least some of the artwork here shows that to survive, sometimes you have to learn how to play ball.

"We cannot express our thoughts, so we're going to play baseball; this is our response to the censorship," says Novoa.

Artist Cesar Trasobares looks at this history of brave women in his family – from the revolution through today.

"So it's my aunt, the tobacco smuggler," says Trasobares. "Because a lot of people, especially in the past few years, have been smuggling cigars out of Cuba, as well as documents and photographs. Some of the documents because they hope to recuperate the properties that were confiscated by Castro."

Trasobares says this show is so daring it may offend both the Cuban government and anti-Castro groups here in the U.S. Only time will tell.

- Stephanie Simon