
Casa de las Américas Hosts Virgin Islands Artists and Academics

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Havana, May 22 (RHC)-- Casa de las Americas, Cuba's best-known and most prestigious cultural institution, is featuring the work and words of a delegation of Virgin Islands artists and scholars from May 22nd until Friday, the 26th.

A full day of events, screenings and exhibitions during the institution's sixth edition of its International Colloquium on Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean is devoted to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This year's colloquium, entitled "Memory and Border Conflicts," is particularly concerned with the centennials of two events in the Caribbean region: the transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States, and the passage of the Jones Act which gave Puerto Ricans United States citizenship. Both events occurred in 1917.

"Both events are of crucial importance not only in the geopolitical map of their time, but to the cultural and social reconfiguration of territories and communities," said Camila Valdés León, director of the Center for Caribbean Studies at Casa de las Americas. "Thinking about these historical moments today involves understanding them in their multiple dimensions, including the present."

A third historical event to be discussed during the five day colloquium is the eightieth anniversary of the 1937 massacre at the Haitian-Dominican border. According to Valdés León: "It will prompt us to think about the impact of this event on the collective memory of the region."

The U.S. Virgin Islands has been represented at the past two international colloquiums at Casa de las Americas in 2013 and 2015, but this is the first time that a complete section of the program is dedicated to the territory.

"We are very excited about the program and look forward to welcoming the delegation from the Virgin Islands of the United States on the centennial of such an important event, for them and for the whole Caribbean," said Valdés León.

As in previous years, the colloquium is expected to attract an international crowd of Caribbean Studies specialists, artists, musicians, performers, students, and people interested in the subjects to be addressed. All events are free and open to the public, including musical concerts, art exhibits and performances.

On Monday, an exhibition of work by seven practicing contemporary artists on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix opened at Casa de Las Americas, located in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana.

The exhibition is entitled "My Islands Do Not Make a Nation" after a line from a poem by St. Thomian writer Tiphonie Yanique. It features works by La Vaughn Belle, David Berg, Shansi Miller, Sigi Torinus, Cooper Penn, Janet Cook-Rutnik, and Jon Euwema. The exhibition is curated by St. John-based curatorial team The Gri Gri Project, consisting of Priscilla Hintz Rivera Knight and David Knight Jr.

According to the curators, the exhibition hopes to capture "how some contemporary artists in the territory react to the ambivalent cosmopolitanism of life in one of the world's last non-self-governing territories, an unincorporated territory of the United States."

The show also features an epilogue of carnival photos taken by Cuban-born V.I. artist, publisher and author Mario Picayo.

On Monday, former V.I. Government Representative for External Affairs Dr. Carlyle Corbin inaugurated the conference portion of the event along with Sergio Valdés Bernal of the University of Havana.

The day featured a panel entitled "Roots/Crossroutes: Migration and Memory in the Virgin Islands Diaspora" featuring University of the Virgin Islands professors Vincent Cooper, Alscess Lewis Brown and Chenzira Davis-Kahina.

A second panel on the last 100 years in the Virgin Islands featured Amrey Mathunin from the University of Pennsylvania, and Hadiya Sewer, a PhD candidate at Brown University.

A third panel on arts and cultural education included Picayo, Hintz Rivera Knight, Knight Jr. and participating artists in "My Islands Do Not Make a Nation."

The day also featured a Mocko Jumbie performance by Penn and two movie screenings: "We the People, a Transfer Day Perspective" directed by Erik Miles, and "Jamesie, King of Scratch," directed by Andrea Leland.

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