

"Through" Africa... and Without Masks

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The National Museum of Fine Arts welcomes what probably is the most important exhibition of Afro-Cuban art of all the times. Important creators converge in an anthological exhibition.

Not every day one has the chance to attend an exhibition this important. Three wards of the Cuban Art Building of the National Museum of Fine Arts welcome the exhibition **Without Masks** that until October 2nd exhibits works of dissimilar techniques, formats and styles, but they have something in common: the look to the African legacy in Cuban culture.

This is something important, if we keep in mind that the entire Africa is also native mother of this nation. Trying to distinguish in its absolute purity our African roots is a mayor, and probably useless task. Cuban identity is since long time ago an absolute fusion. We are, definitively, a mixed country. But Africa has marked the work of many Cuban artists, with the same strength with which it marks the expressions of our popular culture.

"Those who don't have a speck of Congo, has it of Carabali" – goes the saying. Of course, the features are not always so evident. Now the presence is undeniable, to the point that the "Afro-Cuban" term has been coined. Since it was thought, **Without Masks** is supported on what organizers call "contemporary Afro-Cuban art". The borders can be quite flexible, as any visitor will be able to appreciate.

The works belong to The von Christerson Collection, owned by the South Africans Chris and Marina Christerson. In the catalog, Chris says:

"My wife Marina and I visited Cuba for the first time in 2007. We were immediately attracted by its African rhythms and colors... we discover an art that not only reflected the ancestral influences of Africa in the Cuban religion and culture, but also the problems and challenges they have in common with that continent."

He is completely right: no one can expect to find easy folkloric approaches here. Most of the works speak with the

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context, and not always from the quietness of what's "politically correct".

It's difficult, of course, to find a purely formal backbone: we are speaking of four dozens of artists: some easily distinguishable, others emergent. The curator Orlando Hernández thinks that "what distinguishes and grants a relatively special or exceptional character to the collection... is the fact of having been able to bring together for the first time a large and varied group of Cuban artists as well as works dedicated to explore with depth and originality two large thematic lines that generally have been considered in an isolated or independent way: that of cultural and religious traditions of African origin in Cuba and that of the multiple problems and conflicts related with the so-called "racial matter".

Versions of this exhibit were opened in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2010; and four years later in Vancouver, Canada. The big success with the public encouraged organizers: we have to present it in Cuba. Now it's already a reality. It is not enough a single visit to appreciate all the proposals fully. This is one of the most interesting adventures in the cultural summer of Havana. We have to return to **Without Masks**.

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