

Los Carpinteros: Inventing the World / Inventar el mundo, La plaza : el agua : la casa is the first mid-career survey and large-scale museum show in the United States of the artists' collective, Los Carpinteros. The artists live and work in Havana, Cuba.

Marco Castillo, Dagoberto Rodriguez, and until 2003 Alexandre Arrechea, began working together as students in the early 1990s at Havana's prestigious Superior Institute of Art (ISA). Their fellow students dubbed them *Los Carpinteros* — the carpenters — because they often worked in wood. Los Carpinteros use playful irony and poetic metaphor combined with superior craftsmanship to produce objects that redefine the boundaries between art and design.

Many established artists left Cuba in the late 1980s and their departure created opportunities for young artists, including Los Carpinteros, to show in prominent venues. The Havana Bienal, one of a number of global exhibitions designed to broaden representation of artists from Latin America and soften the distinctions between center and periphery, gave them entrée to an international stage from which to participate in contemporary art discourse.

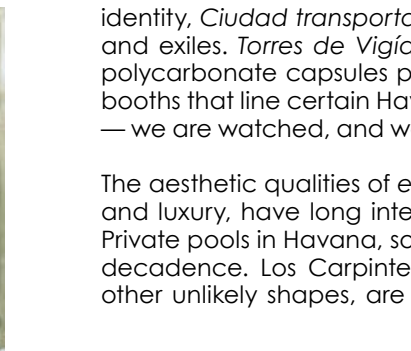
Los Carpinteros: Inventing the World includes 30 works — drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures and installations — created from the mid 1990s to 2005. We, Margaret Miller and Noel Smith, with Corina Matamoros from the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, served as the curatorial team. The exhibition was organized around a three-part taxonomy that reflects on the idea of 'inventing the world', or providing basic needs for organized human existence. *La plaza* refers to architecture and accoutrements of the city, vital for communal, public life; *el agua* to works with water, the essence that flows between public and private; and *la casa* to domestic objects that furnish the home for private life. Corina Matamoros notes, "They are making shrewd commentary about our lives through the utensils, architecture, engineering and crafts that define and denote us."⁽¹⁾

In designing for *la plaza*, Los Carpinteros challenge and juggle many of our basic assumptions about the nature of culture and recent thinking about globalization. They explore their Cuban roots, and the rhythm and structure of the city as they reinvent and recast features of the urban landscape of Havana. "We really use Havana to speak of other things."⁽²⁾

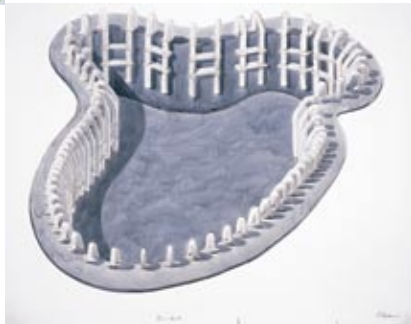
The exhibition includes two groupings of sculptures installed outside of the museum. *Ciudad transportable* (Transportable City) is composed of ten tents that resemble landmark buildings in Havana, and constitute the basic structures of city life — the capitol, a hospital, church, apartment, etc. Made of weatherproof canvas and aluminum pipe, they have a spare elegance and utilitarian purpose. First pitched in Havana during the 2000 Bienal, the tent city has since risen in distant places including Shanghai and New York City, and now Tampa. As a poetic stratagem for an unknown emergency, and a way of carrying along a geographic



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identity, *Ciudad transportable* transcends the local to be truly global in its implications of disasters, refugees and exiles. *Torres de Vigía* (Watchtowers) is composed of three 25 foot tall towers with clear, water-green polycarbonate capsules poised on aluminum legs with accompanying ladders. Sleek versions of the police booths that line certain Havana streets, they are emblematic of the surveillance society we inhabit worldwide — we are watched, and we watch back.

The aesthetic qualities of *el agua*, and the social implications arising from its dual status of absolute necessity and luxury, have long interested Los Carpinteros. Their water sculptures are embodied as swimming pools. Private pools in Havana, so numerous pre-revolution, have been banned since 1959 as products of bourgeois decadence. Los Carpinteros' drawings of pools, visualized as pistols, aircraft carriers, athletic shoes and other unlikely shapes, are exemplified in the fabricated sculpture, *Olympic Pool*. Characteristically playing with language and form, the artists conflate a billiards, or pool, table with a competitive swimming pool, and add a freezer unit that transforms the pool into a skating rink. *Olympic Pool* is an object made of several components, all rendered useless and whose purpose puzzles.

In designing for *la casa*, Los Carpinteros find fertile ground in the alteration or redesign of furniture or other utilitarian objects. These works range from a filing cabinet with an overlarge drawer, to a sofa with stove burners in the seat, to a five foot tall wooden jewelry box in the shape of a hand grenade. Their exploration of the perverse aspects of domestic items reaches its zenith in *Panera*, a ten-foot long wooden missile constructed of breadboxes, one of several works resulting from the artists' residency at USF's Graphicstudio. *Panera* is a parody of the design technology of the U.S. cold war era, and its superbly crafted maple echoes the famed cabinetry of colonial Cuba's anonymous *carpinteros*.

We are grateful to the many private collectors and museums noted in the checklist, and to the Anthony Grant Gallery for lending their precious works to this exhibition. Corina Matamoros is thanked for her contributions to realizing this exhibition and particularly for her knowledge of the history of contemporary art in Cuba. The faculty and staff of the Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio have assisted with loans, grants, shipping, publication design and the installation. Without the generous support of Robert Franzblau and the Victory Foundation, this project could not have been realized. Most of all we thank the artists, Marco Castillo and Dagoberto Rodriguez, and their studio assistants in Havana, who have collaborated on every detail of the exhibition and accompanying catalogue.

Margaret A. Miller, *Director, Institute for Research in Art*

Noel Smith, *Curator of Education*

- (1) Corina Matamoros, "Inventar el mundo," *Los Carpinteros*, USF 2003.
 (2) Noel Smith, unpublished interview with Dagoberto Rodriguez, March 2004, University of South Florida.



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above: Dagoberto Rodriguez working at USF Graphicstudio.
 below: Marco Castillo working with Eric Vontillus at USF Graphicstudio.
 photos: Will Lytch

Exhibition Checklist

- 1) Biblioteca II / Library II**, 2001
Edition of two
Tape measure, paint
Variable dimensions
Collection of the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, KS
- 2) Caja / Box**, 2001
Watercolor on paper
81 x 102 inches
Collection of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA. Purchased with funds provided by the Curatorial Discretionary Fund and Samuel H. Schwartz
- 3) Ciudad transportable / Transportable City**, 2000
Capitolio, Edificio por departamentos, Iglesia, Fábrica, Faro, Presidio, Hospital, Edificio militar, Almacén, Universidad / Capitol Building, Apartment Building, Church, Factory, Lighthouse, Prison, Hospital, Military Building, Warehouse, University
Aluminum, cloth
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 4) Coco Solo**, 2004
Edition of 20: ATP
Color lithograph, woodcut
42 x 74 1/2 inches
Published by Graphicstudio
Courtesy of Graphicstudio
- 5) Edificio Jerez / Jerez Building**, 2003
Solid cedar, solid cedar plywood
27 1/2 X 136 1/4 X 131 inches
Collection of The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY
- 6) El Muro #18 / Wall #18**, 2001
Watercolor on paper
81 x 102 inches
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 7) Embajada Rusa / Russian Embassy**, 2002
Watercolor, pencil on paper
93 5/8 x 60 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Fortes Vilaca Gallery, São Paulo, Brazil
- 8) Escalera / Staircase**, 2001
Powder coated steel
36 1/4 x 30 x 54 inches
Collection of Martin Z. Margulies, Miami, FL
- 9) Estuche / Jewelry Case**, 1999
Wood
88 5/8 x 51 1/8 x 51 1/8 inches
Collection of Frankie Diago, New York
- 10) Fluido / Fluid**, 2004
Edition of 3: 1/3; 2/3
Nylon, vinyl, plywood
Variable dimensions
Published by Graphicstudio
Courtesy of Graphicstudio
- 11) Foso / Moat**, 2003
Watercolor, pencil on paper
59 x 92 inches
Collection of June and Edmond Freeman, Little Rock, AR
- 12) Gavetón / Big Drawer**, 2001
Metal, wood
36 3/4 x 30 x 54 inches
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 13) Havana Country Club**, 1994
Oil, canvas, wood
72 x 80 1/2 inches
Collection of Diana and Moisés Berezdivin, Puerto Rico
- 14) Jugando con el límite / Pushing the Limit**, 2000
Watercolor on paper
29 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches
Collection of Jacob and Ruth Bloom, Marina del Rey, CA
- 15) Mano Creadora / Creative Hand**, 2000
Wood
41 x 33 x 2 1/2 inches
Collection of Polly and Mark Addison, Boulder, CO
- 16) Marquilla cigarera cubana / Cuban Cigar Label**, 1993
Wood, oil, canvas
66 x 84 x 3 1/4 inches
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
- 17) Panera / Breadbox**, 2004
Edition of 5: USF Proof
Maple wood
39 1/4 x 57 1/4 x 123 inches
Published by Graphicstudio
Collection of the University of South Florida, Tampa
photo: Will Lytch
- 18) Pared nivelada / Leveled Wall**, 2000
Watercolor, graphite on paper
29 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches
Courtesy Private Collection, New York
- 19) Piscina-Bloque / Swimming Pool Block**, 2002
Watercolor on paper
29 1/2 x 41 3/4 inches
The Farber Collection, New York
- 20) Piscina llena / Filled Pool**, 2001
Watercolor on paper
81 x 102 inches
Collection of Alice and Marvin Kosmin, New York
- 21) Piscina olímpica / Olympic Pool**, 2004
Cast resin, electrical components, water
Approximately 4 x 3 x 4 feet
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 22) Plantación / Plantation**, 2001
Watercolor on paper
29 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches
Collection of Diane L. Ackerman and Kelly L. Ackerman, New York
- 23) Proyecto de acumulación de materiales / Project of Accumulation of Materials**, 1999
Watercolor, pencil on paper
46 1/4 x 138 1/8 inches
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York
Purchased with funds provided by Sylvia de Cuevas, Leila and Melville Straus, and the Contemporary Arts Council of the Museum of Modern Art
- 24) Proyecto para una escultura... / Project for a Sculpture...**, 2002
Watercolor on paper
51 1/4 x 78 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 25) Radio Metropolitana / Metropolitan Radio**, 2003
Mixed media, cardboard
117 x 51 inches
The Farber Collection, New York
- 26) Río / River**, 2003
Watercolor, graphite on paper
54 1/2 x 78 inches
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York
- 27) Sandalia / Sandal**, 2004
Edition of 60: XXX: GS Proof, USF Proof, HC
Cast rubber
12 3/4 x 5 3/4 x 2 1/2 inches (each)
Published by Graphicstudio
Courtesy of Graphicstudio
photo: Will Lytch
- 28) Proyecto sandalia / Sandal Project**, 2003
Watercolor on paper
48 x 76 inches
Collection of the University of South Florida, Tampa
- 29) Sofá caliente / Hot Sofa**, 2001
Powder coated steel
33 x 78 x 32 inches
Collection of David and Tia Hoberman, Santa Monica, CA
- 30) Torres de Vigía / Watchtowers**, 2002
Aluminum, polycarbonate
Variable dimensions, approximately 25 x 11 x 11 feet (each)
Courtesy of the Artists and Anthony Grant, Inc., New York



USF Contemporary Art Museum

Tampa, FL
April 8 – July 15, 2005

Chicago Cultural Center

Chicago, IL
January 21 – April 2, 2006

Contemporary Arts Center

Cincinnati, OH
May 6 – July 30, 2006



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The USF Contemporary Art Museum is recognized by the State of Florida as a major cultural institution and receives funding through the Florida Department of State, the Florida Arts Council and the Division of Cultural Affairs. USFCAM is accredited by the American Association of Museums. *Los Carpinteros* is supported by the Members and Corporate Partners of USFCAM, with generous support from Victory Foundation, Inc., the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, Board of County Commissioners, the Florida Department of State, the Florida Arts Council and the Division of Cultural Affairs, Nooners Refrigeration, and Posey Power Batteries.



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