

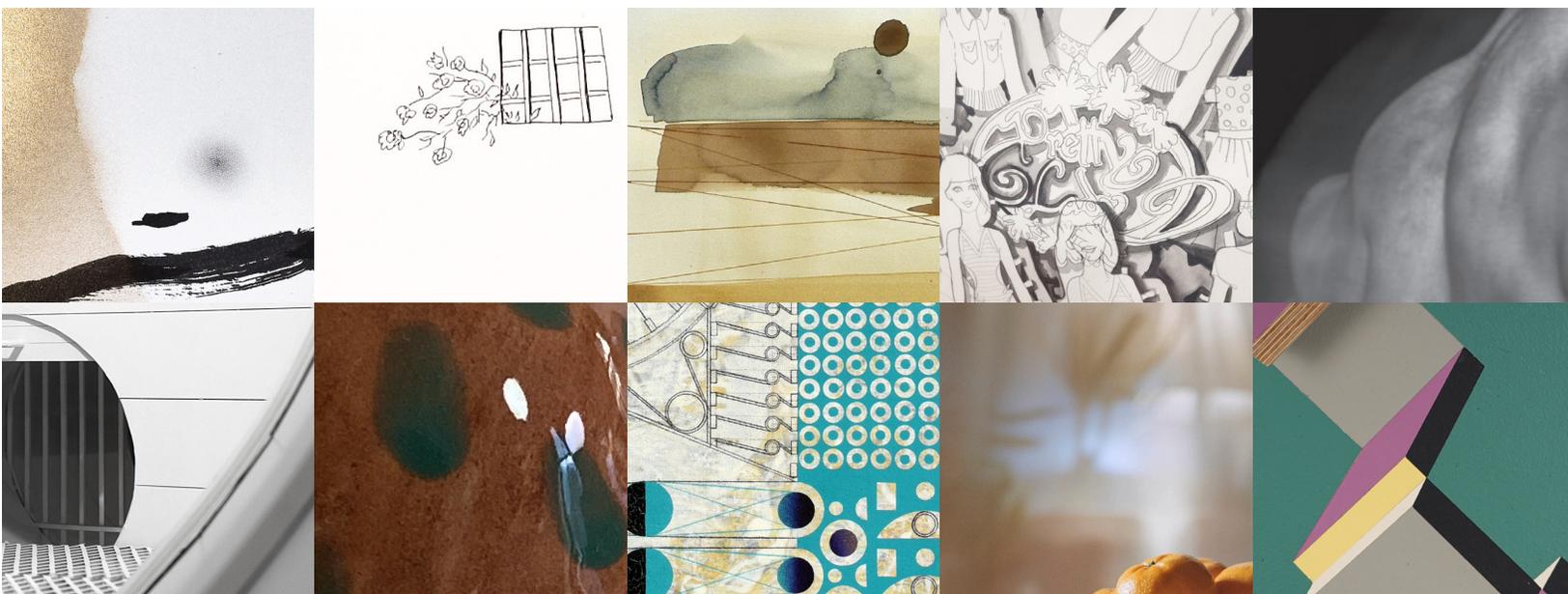
THOMAS
NICKLES
PROJECT

For immediate release

THE SHAPE OF ELSEWHERE

Arien Chang Castán | Carlos Estévez | Elsa Mora | Ernesto García Sánchez | Gertrudis Rivalta |
Linnet Sánchez | Luis Alberto Álvarez López | Paola Fiterre | Rocío García | Samuel Riera

47 Orchard Street, New York City
On View From July 9, 2025



From left to right, top to bottom: Details of Luis Alberto Álvarez López, *Series No. 11, No. 13* | Rocío García, *Tributo* | Samuel Riera, *Evolving Natura Drawing No. 5* | Gertrudis Rivalta, *Mil Ideas* | Arien Chang Castán, *Image No. T3* | Linnet Sánchez, *Untitled #10* | Elsa Mora, *Something To Give* | Carlos Estévez, *Faro eólico (Wind Lighthouse)* | Paola Fiterre, *An Early 2020 Story series* | Ernesto García Sánchez, *Geometry at 40 Degrees series*. Images courtesy of the artists and Thomas Nickles Project.

What might “elsewhere” look like if you could see it?

Is it a memory of a place you left behind, a dream of someplace new, or the quiet reconciliation of carrying many worlds inside you?

New York – *The Shape of Elsewhere*, on view this summer at Thomas Nickles Project, invites you to wander through these questions alongside ten Cuban-born artists. Each draws on photography, painting, sculpture, or performance to give form—through bodies, rituals, imagined spaces, and spiritual searches—to visions of “elsewhere” that resist any singular definition. They offer glimpses into facets of society and personal experience that dominant narratives often ignore or flatten, reminding us that what might seem distant or abstract is often woven into how we navigate memory, identity, and our shared desires for kinship and peace.

Some works turn outward, documenting overlooked corners of social life. Arien Chang's stark black-and-white photographs focus on Havana's bodybuilding subculture, transforming torsos into near-abstract meditations on strength and vulnerability. Gertrudis Rivalta's intricate pieces unravel the intersecting forces of race, gender, and ideology in Cuban society, reimagining who gets represented and how histories are told. In vivid, cinematic drawings, Rocío García stages charged scenes that echo the undercurrents of political unrest and personal search.

Other artists turn inward, building spaces of memory and reflection. Linet Sánchez meticulously constructs miniature, fictional interiors from recollections of once-tangible places, sites of gathering and connection that now live on as fragile, dreamlike photographs. Luis Alberto Álvarez López's delicate abstractions, balancing sharp edges with soft gradients, draw on everyday realities in Cienfuegos to create moments of respite and quiet gestures of hope. Paola Fiterre uses her own body to explore migration and the layered experience of womanhood, transforming intimate spaces into signs of confrontation and resilience.

Together, these artists lean into the spiritual searching that threads throughout the exhibition. Carlos Estévez's luminous lighthouse becomes a metaphorical guide, pointing beyond the visible toward a deeper human spirituality. Elsa Mora's poetic sculptures explore dualities of the seen and unseen, offering intimate encounters that invite us to question reality and embrace uncertainty. Samuel Riera's drawings, made from wildflowers and vegetable dyes, emerge from his studio's mission to foster community-rooted practices grounded in resilience, ecological awareness, and collective hope. Ernesto García Sánchez, now based in Mérida, Mexico, weaves his life between Havana and Mérida into abstract constructions that trace a personal map of movement and belonging.

The Shape of Elsewhere does not seek to define a place nor to present a single narrative. Instead, it gathers rich expressions of life that unfold across borders, identities, and temporalities, opening new ways of seeing that expand what we think we know about a place, each other, and ourselves. It reminds us that all of us, in some way, carry our own "elsewhere," shaped by the lives, dreams, and rituals reshaping how we understand ourselves and the worlds we share.

Press Inquiries

Kristen Thomas
kt@thomasnickles.com
917-902-6682

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ARIEN CHANG CÁSTAN (b. 1979, Havana, Cuba) is a self-taught photographer whose work intimately captures the complexities of daily life across Cuba's urban and rural landscapes. Emerging from a distinctly Cuban tradition of documentary photography shaped by revolutionary history and economic upheaval, Chang's images shift the focus to overlooked individual stories and subcultures, including the rodeo, gay culture, and bodybuilding, revealing underexplored facets of Cuban society. His photographs have been exhibited worldwide alongside artists like Stephen Dupone and Alan Harvey, published in National Geographic, Smithsonian Journeys, and Burn Magazine, and are held in collections across Europe, the Americas, and Asia. A recipient of awards such as the Red Gate Residency in China, Chang has also taught workshops internationally and now lives and works in New York City.

CARLOS ESTÉVEZ (b. 1969, Havana, Cuba) is a Cuban-born artist whose paintings, drawings, sculptures, and installations are animated by a deep interest in human spirituality, aiming to unveil the invisible realm beneath the visible through what he describes as an alchemical transformation of mystery into knowledge. The dreamlike imagery, featuring marionettes, automatons, fantastical architectures, cosmic geometries, and chimerical beings, reflects this metaphysical quest. A recipient of awards from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, Cintas Foundation, and The Ellies, Estévez has exhibited widely, with solo shows at institutions like Havana's National Museum of Fine Arts and Miami's Frost Art Museum, and his work is held in major collections including the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and Pérez Art Museum Miami. He has participated in residencies across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, and now lives and works in Miami, Florida.

ELSA MORA (b. 1971, Holguín, Cuba) is an artist and curator whose work contemplates identity, connectivity, and survival, exploring philosophical questions of isolation, the invisible, and the drive to bring order to chaos. Often using humble materials like paper and clay—an apt metaphor for the mind's transformative potential—she creates works deeply inspired by her autistic son, Diego. Mora's art has been exhibited internationally and is held in the permanent collections of institutions such as the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Long Beach Museum of Art, and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. A recipient of the UNESCO-Aschberg Bursaries for Artists, she has taught at numerous institutions including the Art Institute of Chicago. Mora is also a founding member of ArtYard, a contemporary art center in Frenchtown, New Jersey.

ERNESTO GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ (b. 1989, Havana, Cuba) focuses on deconstructing and reconstructing the elements of painting to investigate the form itself. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of San Alejandro, and later at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana, Cuba. Inspired by architecture, design, and forms observed in the physical world, García Sánchez's approach does not use art as a narrative tool. Instead, his work is an introspective inquiry into the essence of painting by highlighting its fundamental components. Through this way, he challenges painting's traditional flat perspectives, inviting new ways of engagement. García Sánchez has exhibited in group and solo shows worldwide, including Cuba, Mexico, Denmark, and the United States.

GERTRUDIS RIVALTA (b. 1971, Santa Clara, Cuba) is a multidisciplinary Afro-Cuban artist who meticulously reconstructs and reimagines hegemonic narratives of history. A graduate of Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte, Rivalta subjects Cuban society from the colonial period to the present to a vision as playful and joyous as it is embittered and cutting, often insisting on Cuba's deep connections to broader global movements of discovery, forced migration, conflict, and cultural exchange. Even in her renderings of flowers, clothing, or utility objects, power dynamics are laid bare, exposing how perception itself is shaped. Her work has been exhibited in leading Cuban institutions such as the Centro Wifredo Lam and the Cuban National Museum of Fine Arts, as well as internationally from the Art Museum of Ponce to Track 16 Gallery in Los Angeles. Rivalta's oeuvre is widely acclaimed for its virtuosity and technical assurance, offering layered, multidimensional universes that probe race, identity, and belonging with intellectual rigor and poetic force.

LINET SÁNCHEZ (b. 1989, Santa Clara, Cuba) is a Havana-based artist whose work explores memory, architecture, and the shifting nature of truth through meticulously hand-built miniature models. By transforming fictional spaces into photographs that blur the line between reality and imagination, she questions how we remember and construct the past. Her work has been widely exhibited across Cuba, the U.S., Mexico, Belgium, and Sweden, and is part of numerous public and private collections. Sánchez has received awards and residencies from institutions including FotoFest, Flora ars+natura, and Havana Club International. Her recent series was developed during a residency at El Espacio 23 in Miami, reflecting her ongoing inquiry into the fragile boundaries between personal history and collective meaning.

LUIS ALBERTO ÁLVAREZ LÓPEZ (b. 1993, Cienfuegos, Cuba) is a Cuban artist whose practice moves fluidly between photorealistic figuration and abstract expression. A graduate of the Benny Moré Art Academy in Cienfuegos, Álvarez invents his own tools and techniques to expand the expressive possibilities of painting. His work—ranging from detailed portraits to ethereal, gestural abstractions inspired by everything from Franz Kline to Japanese calligraphy—offers a visual mapping of his conscious and subconscious mind. Álvarez has exhibited in Cuba, Chile, Germany, and the United States, and his works are held in private collections worldwide, including in Spain, Italy, the UAE, and Malaysia. He lives and works in Cienfuegos, where his explorations continue to blur the boundaries between realism and the infinite realm of abstraction.

PAOLA FITERRE (b. 1992, Havana, Cuba) explores expanded photographic and performative practices centered on representations of the female subject shaped by migration. She studied at Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) until 2017 and graduated from the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York in 2019, receiving both the ICP Director's Fellowship and New Media Fellowship. Fiterre was awarded the Cintas Foundation Sondra Gilman Gonzalez-Falla Fellowship in Photography (2023–24) and previously received The Reed Foundation Fellowship for Cuban artists at the Vermont Studio Center (2022), the En Foco Photography Fellowship (2022), and the ICP x Tory Burch Artists Fellowship (2021). Her work is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She lives and works in New York.

ROCÍO GARCÍA (b. 1955, Santa Clara, Cuba) is a defining figure of contemporary Cuban art whose vibrant, narrative paintings explore power, eroticism, ambiguity, and the theatrical complexity of human relationships. Trained at Havana's San Alejandro Academy and later at the Repin Institute of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Russia, García blends Cuban and Russian academic traditions with influences from comics, cinema, and literature. Her expressive use of color and metaphorical characters like sailors, policemen, and geishas, delve into life's performances and hidden desires. A teacher, she founded the influential Cátedra Los Nuevas Fieras, nurturing a generation of Cuban painters. García's art has been widely exhibited across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, and is held in prominent collections worldwide. In 2023, she expanded her practice with a residency at Residency Unlimited in New York. She lives and works in Havana.

SAMUEL RIERA (b. 1978, Havana, Cuba) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work, spanning graphic arts, painting, video, cinema, and installation, embraces error as a vital catalyst that transforms reality into art. He views art as a perpetual pursuit, one that probes the margins of perception and dismantles hierarchies between disciplines and social realms. A graduate of San Alejandro and Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), where he also taught engraving, Riera explores his surroundings relentlessly, demanding that art be a constant endeavor. In 2012, he founded RIERA STUDIO to foster dialogue around alternative discourses in Cuban art, followed by Art Brut Project Cuba in 2013 to support and promote outsider artists across the island. His work has been exhibited internationally and is held in collections including NYU and the First Museum of Cuban Art in Vienna. Riera lives and works in Havana.