

Hemispheric Institute

Selected Pages

In sequined paintings and intricate paper doll dioramas, Cuban artist Gertrudis Rivalta uses the magazines of her youth to comment on the lived experiences of Black women in Cuban society.

47 Orchard Street, New York City

Dates: March 16, 2022 – April 24, 2022

Opening Party: Wed, March 16, 2022, 6 – 8pm



Cheerleaders, 2009
Mujeres Muchacha Series
57" W x 77.9" H
Sequins and oil on canvas
Image courtesy of the artist and Thomas Nickles Project

New York, NY – Thomas Nickles Project in collaboration with the Hemispheric Institute are proud to announce the first New York solo show of Gertrudis Rivalta, Black Cuban artist acclaimed for her depictions of silenced identities and their impact on everyday life. The exhibition features intertwined series inspired by *Mujeres* and *Muchacha*, magazines with which the artist grew up in Cuba.

Rivalta's five large renderings of covers, painted in oil and bejeweled with sequins, challenge the publications' representations of beauty and morality. In her puppet theaters, featured in the back of the gallery, she turns to the magazines' final pages, to the popular paper dolls that children could cut out and play with.

Working with drawing and watercolor on photocopied paper and canvas layered in birch wood boxes, Rivalta creates six meticulously-crafted dioramas, adorned with imagery from different periods in history, including visual propaganda of Cuban socialist culture. They are populated with an array of characters, some of whom converse in speech bubbles, using a cacophony of words and phrases that seem devoid of meaning. Yet, the figures of Cuquita and the Black Cuban matryoshka, ongoing in the artist's work, clearly embody legacies of national and transatlantic racial and class tensions.

Like Rivalta, who lives in Havana and Alicante, the figures that reside in her universe straddle continents. It becomes apparent that this body of work is as much about those precise entities as it is about the artist's own search for her place in the world.

Born in 1971 in Santa Clara, Cuba, Gertrudis Rivalta is a multi-disciplinary artist whose trajectory includes drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, video and performance. A graduate of the Instituto Superior de Arte de la Habana (Havana) in 1996, Rivalta has exhibited her work in some of the most important Cuban galleries and museums, such as the Centro Wifredo Lam, the Fototeca of Cuba, the 23rd and 12th Gallery, the Cuban National Museum of Fine Arts, the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, as well as in international spaces such as the Art Museum of Ponce (Ponce, Puerto Rico), the Cultural Center (Manila, The Philippines), the Iber-American Museum of Contemporary Art (Badajoz, Spain), Track 16 Gallery (LA, California), Gallery Adhoc (Vigo, Spain), and Espace Croix-Baragnon (Toulouse, France). Many of these were curated in collaboration with British art critic, Kevin Power, who pioneered Rivalta's work. Among her most acclaimed solo shows is *Evans or not Evans* (1998, University of Alicante) that revisited the work of the North American photographer Walker Evans in Cuba. Her oeuvre formed part of the 1997 group show *Queloides*, the first-ever exhibit in Cuba focusing on race and the place that Black people occupy in Cuban society. A recipient of numerous awards, Rivalta explores racial inheritance, the construction of identity, and the Soviet presence in Cuba at length in exhibitions such as the *2005 Fnimaniev* at the Aural Gallery (Alicante, Spain). Rivalta participated in the Valencia/Sao Paulo Biennial (2008) with curators Ticio Escobar and Kevin Power and in collateral exhibitions of diverse editions of the Havana Biennial. In 2009, she participated in the itinerant exhibition, *Creators of the 20th Century*, curated by Marisa Oropesa, which included some of the most important female artists of the 20th century as Frida Kahlo, Eva Lootz, Candida Hofer, Méret Oppenheim, and Yoko Ono. She has lectured at the Cervantes Institute in Berlin, the University of Alicante, the University of Jaén, Casa de las Américas, the University of Connecticut, and Trinity College (Hartford, Connecticut, USA). Her essays and artworks have appeared in *Caviar with Rum* (ed. Jacqueline Loss and José Manuel Prieto), *Art Cuba: The New Generation* (ed. Holly Block), and *Nosotros los más infieles: Narraciones críticas del arte cubano 1993–2005* (ed. Andrés Santana), among other publications. Her work is held in collections in Cuba, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Thomas Nickles Project was founded in 2016 by Kristen Thomas and John Nickles to provide a platform for emerging and under-represented Cuban artists in New York City. The project thrives on organic collaboration and strives to present a program that is both fresh and inspiring.

The Hemispheric Institute (NYU) gathers artists, scholars, writers, learners, and activists from across the Americas. We focus on social justice and research politically engaged culture and performance.

As part of this exhibition, we are pleased to announce a roundtable discussion at New York University's Hemispheric Institute of Performance & Politics on Friday, March 25, 2022 from 5:30 – 7 pm at the Hemispheric Institute (20 Cooper Sq, 5th FL) with the artist and María Antonia Cabrera Arús (NYU), Ana Dopico (NYU), Dantae Elliott (NYU), Jacqueline Loss (University of Connecticut) and Kristen Thomas (Director of Thomas Nickles Project). This conversation will be transmitted in English and Spanish.

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Additional images available upon request.

Hours: Wed – Sun 11am – 6pm, Thurs 11am – 7pm.