

No. 113 | JULIO - SEPTIEMBRE 2019

ArtNexus

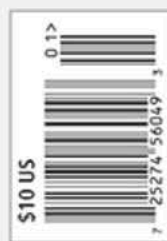


Erika Verzutti

Carlos Urroz | Loló Soldevilla | Lotty Rosenfeld | Ricardo Lanzarini

Yoshua Okón | XIII Bienal de La Habana | Un museo portátil

Zilia Sánchez | Antonio Dias | Mapa Teatro





Jose Dávila. *Los Límites de lo Posible* (The Limits of the Possible), 2019. Installation. *Detrás del Muro* (Behind the Wall), 13th Havana Biennial. Variable dimensions

13th Havana Biennial

TATIANA FLORES

The 13th Havana Biennial, held from April 12 to May 12, 2019, opened under the shadow of Decree 349, a censorship measure established in December 2018. Widely decried by artists and intellectuals, the decree curtails artistic independence by forbidding gatherings and exhibitions without a permit and criminalizing uses of certain content, among others. Under these circumstances, it was somewhat ironic that the theme of the biennial was “The Construction of the Possible.” Although the curatorial concept related to how to respond to contemporary global precarity under conditions of violence, social inequality, and environmental vulnerability, the theme also spoke to how to continue to operate under the latent threat posed by the Cuban regime.

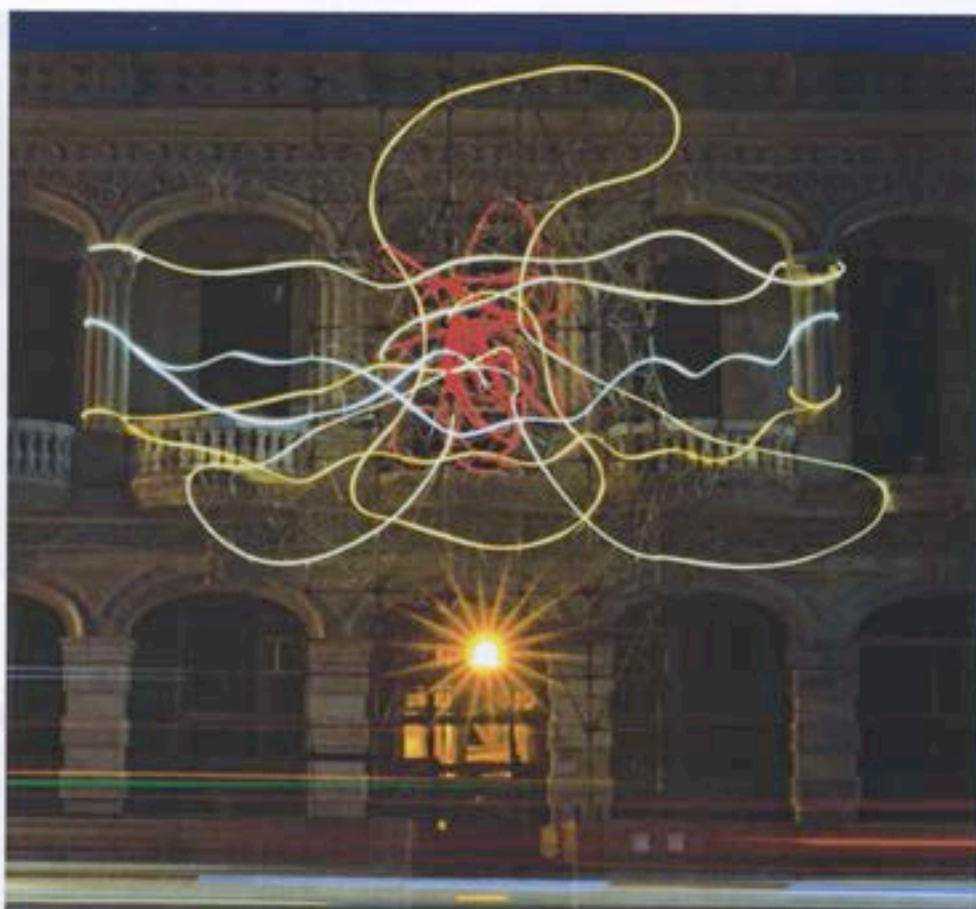
The biennial’s curatorial team consisted of Margarita González Lorente, Nelson Herrera Ysla, Margarita Sánchez Prieto, José Manuel Noceda Fernández, José Fernández Portal, Ibis Hernández Abascal, and Lisset Alonso Compte. The exhibi-

tions were spread over multiple venues, the main ones being the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, the Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales, Fototeca de Cuba, Casa Oswaldo Guayasamín, Casa México, and Pabellón Cuba. Indeed, the multiple locales made the experience of visiting the biennial unwieldy. The website of the event listed forty-four exhibition spaces, not counting the collateral shows, which numbered 133 on the official map. In all, it was next to impossible for any visitor to view the entire biennial in Havana. In addition, the cities of Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiritus, and Camagüey also featured parallel exhibitions as part of the program.

The point of departure for the biennial was the Centro Lam. Here, visitors were treated to a tightly curated selection of works—an auspicious beginning. In the courtyard, Alexia Miranda’s *Tejido colectivo* (Collective Weave, 2013-19) welcomed the spectator. These cylindrical weavings in white cotton hung suspended from hoops, forming multiple intricate patterns as three-dimensional sculptures



Adonis Flores. Estratosfera (Stratosphere), 2019. Project



Grimanesa Amorós. Mariposa dorada (Golden Butterfly), 2019. Light sculpture. Variable dimensions

by Pompidou's curator Ilaria Conti, "By shifting between macro-and micro-scale, the artist has induced a glitch in our expectations, allowing us to observe the pre-constructed forms of interpretation that guide our thinking."

Closer to the center of the action, *Detrás del Muro* (Behind the Wall), a public art exhibition around Havana's iconic Malecón seaside boulevard, held its third edition. Curated by Juan Delgado Calzadilla, the event included thirty Cuban artists and fourteen international ones. Some of the artists were repeated attendees, including Carlos Martiel and Arlés del Río, and Cuban-Americans Emilio Pérez, Antonia Wright, and Enrique Martínez Celaya. International artists included Grimanesa Amorós, with a striking neon light sculpture on the façade of a building, and José Dávila, with large rocks resting on concrete slabs. William Córdova, who presented a concrete pyramidal structure composed of blocks which were casts of boomboxes, and Marcos Lutyens, with a textured walkway, meant to be experi-

enced while blindfolded to activate the sense of touch through the feet, were also featured. Overall, the presentation of this outdoor work created communal spaces and engaged inhabitants and visitors of the city who would not otherwise visit the biennial's exhibitions. It was the most central and visible of all.

Shortly, following the closure of the biennial, President Trump's announced new restrictions on traveling to the island from the United States, eliminating the people-to-people group travel category. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the cultural life of the island and the next biennial. Although this edition was maddeningly dispersed, it was clearly a labor of love for the curators, artists, and cultural workers who made it possible. For visitors, it was inevitable to avoid the sense of having missed much of it, but this was counterbalanced by certain encounters with remarkable works of art.

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