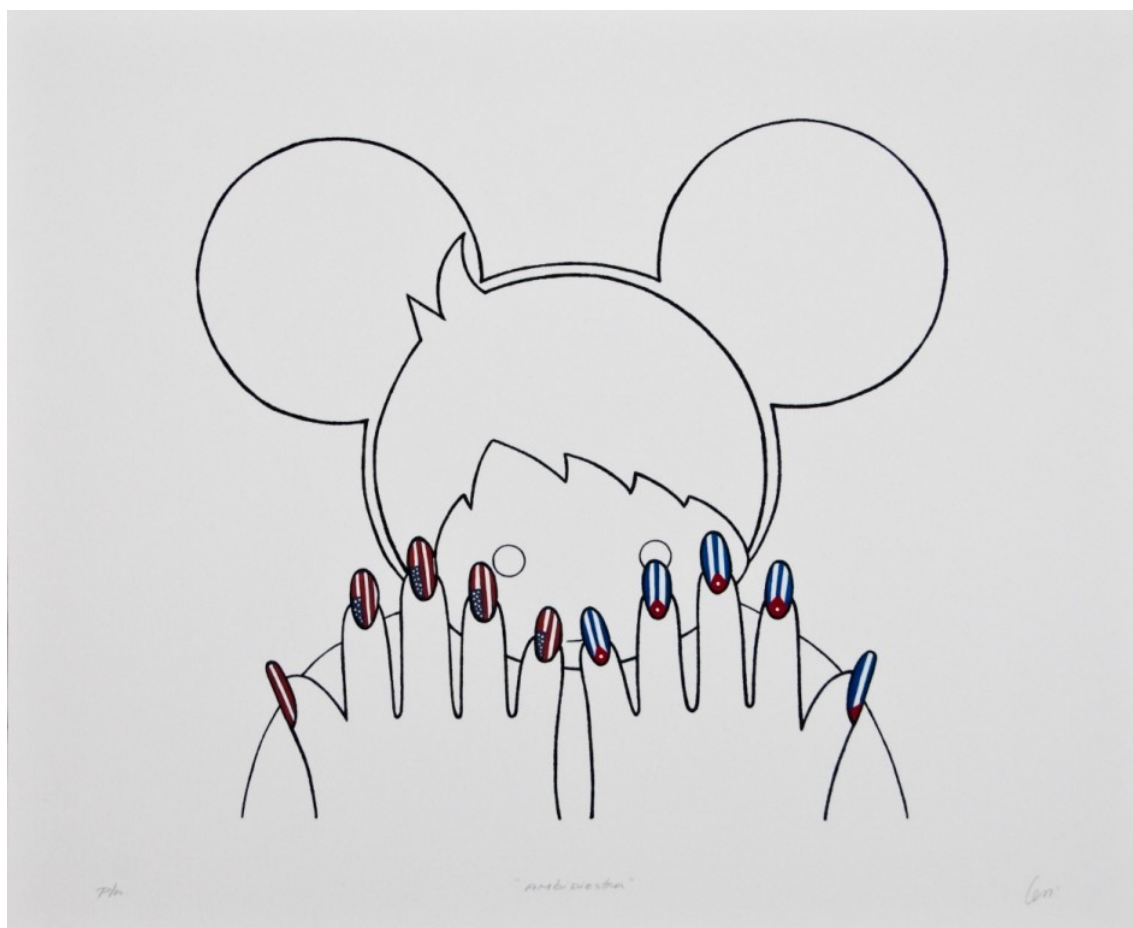


¡PRESENTE! Contemporary Art from Cuba

RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS



This education pack is supported by National Union of Teachers

Exhibition dates

6 – 29 October 2016 At GX Gallery, 43 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RS

www.gxgallery.com

Image: Adislen Reyes Pino: Ambidextrous

www.presentecubanart.org

Notes for Educators

This pack is intended as an introduction to the exhibition *PRESENTE! Contemporary Art from Cuba*, which has brought the work of 30 Cuban artists from different generations to the UK. It has been made possible due to support from the National Union of Teachers and others. The pack includes a selection of ideas and points for discussion. The activities are suitable for all ages and can be adapted to your needs.

The title

The title 'Presente!' is a Spanish word used in Cuba which translates as "I'm here" ie. Announcing one is physically present, and it also can mean current or right now. This exhibition aims to present a diverse selection of 2D artworks by a range of Cuban artists of different generations – giving them a rare opportunity to be seen in Britain and also to give a snapshot of the current Cuban art scene – the ideas, viewpoints and preoccupations.

Themes

The discussion points and project ideas aim to give the opportunity for students to explore relevant key themes relating to each artist. Works by 6 of the artists are explored here.

There are a number of recurring themes, for example:

- **The self portrait** –who am I? what am I like? What do I feel? What do I think about myself? How do I fit in? The everyday life of me – and the gap between how we see ourselves and the way others see us. Memories from my past.
- **Island nation – Water, the sea and journeys** – Cuba is an island surrounded by seas, like Britain. The sea can be a barrier to travel and to communication, while it also offers new beginnings, the possibility of a journey to the unknown. The sea can also offer a view of 'the sublime' in its endless and unknown depths, and at the same time, threaten death. With its tropical climate Cuba is also subjected to hurricanes every year with severe rain, wind and floods, which can destroy housing and crops.
- **Pop art /Cartoons/ superheroes** – popular icons adapted to say something about the artists' thoughts, worries and those of their own society. Getting across your message often by making people laugh or smile.

Further resources

At the back of the pack there is a page of resources – where to look for more information about these artists and about Cuban art and culture, plus a short background history of Cuba.

LISANDRA ISABEL GARCIA



The artist and the artwork

Lisandra Isabel Garcia (born Havana, 1989) is a young Cuban woman artist (27) who has created a lot of works related to her experience of being a teenager. Her works are self portraits.

She says: "I create it from my own life experience and my personal universe. In that world I change fragments of my body and ordinary everyday situations and objects. I turn them into something filled with a personal meaning."

Discussion points

1. What is the woman in the painting doing? What emotions do you think she is feeling in each image?
2. This work is a triptych (three panels placed next to each other). Is it a sequence of events? Why do you think the artist made it like that?
3. Lisandra uses a range of different materials or media in her work. How do you think she created the background to these paintings? Why do you think she made the background like this? Why do you think the artist used the line drawing technique for the figures?

4. Why did the artist choose these 3 events? What else could she have shown?
5. The artist says she "takes refuge in objects that have meanings or memories for her - I do it from my life story, my experience, and my own universe". What does she mean by this?

Project idea 1

- What are your routine activities before going out to a party or to school? What is your mood while you do those things? Ask your friend to act out doing one of their routine activities (eg: brushing their hair, tying laces, cleaning their teeth) and make 6 quick line drawings of the shapes that their body creates. Change over and now you pose and they draw. Can you show a mood with your body language, not just your face?
- Now create a background of your own having looked at the work by Lisandra – think about your favourite pattern or colours or textures of your favourite clothes. You could paint the background or use fabric or make a collage. Choose three of the drawings of you by your friend and stick it onto the special background... what do you think?

Project idea 2

- Using a mirror, draw your face using a pencil on paper (or on an ipad or tablet) in one continuous line, without taking your pencil off the paper. Try it 5 times. Try using different expressions or feelings.
- Create a background of your own inspired by your favourite or remembered colours/patterns of clothes. Trace your drawings onto the background. You can choose a different background for each drawing. What do you think? Ask others what it says about you.

LUIS ENRIQUE CAMEJO VENTO



The artist and the artwork

Luis Camejo (born Pinar del Rio, 1971) has been painting since he was 12. He has always been fascinated with light and movement, the outdoors and our relationship with it. A huge number of his paintings feature his home city Havana and its sea wall, where the sea often crashes over onto the main road which follows the coast. Cuba is an island the same length as Britain, with the Atlantic Ocean and the USA to the north and the Caribbean sea and other much smaller Caribbean islands, and South America, in the south. Havana city is on the north coast and is only 90 miles from Florida in the USA, with a stretch of shark infested ocean between them. Havana's seawall is called the Malecón and is nearly 5 miles long. Everyone who lives in Cuba or visits Cuba knows the Malecón. In stories and films, characters often go there to be on their own and think while they look out to sea or to meet friends and have fun. It has appeared so much, that the Malecón has become a character itself.

The artist's portrayal of waves breaking over the wall captures the physical movement of the wind and rain, reminiscent of works like British artist JMW Turner's *Snow Storm* (1842), an artist who Camejo greatly admires.

He describes his images as lacking a defined beginning or end, just like a single frame in a sequence of a film. Camejo captures everyday life in the urban environment in paintings that suggest a still frame from a film. He uses light and tones of a single colour to emphasise a world seen through the lens of a camera.

The artist has said:

"I'd walk the street or I drive. I have the camera in my car and I take a photograph. I take anything - people walking on the Malecón or a car passing by. I do not make sketches at that point. I see the photo on my computer and then I use the image, I print the image. Only after I have made the painting do I make sketches, so there is the possibility of having more ends, rather than just one end."

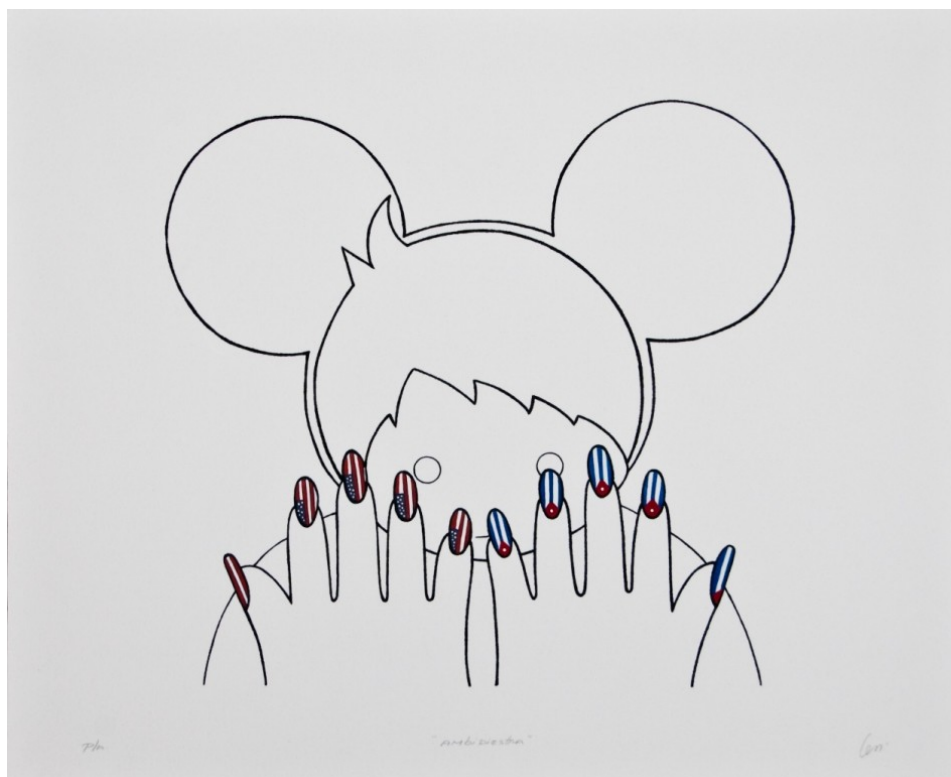
Discussion points

1. In tropical Cuba and especially in Havana, there are often extremes of weather. The sun can be very hot – over 30 degrees and then there can be a sudden rainstorm which causes the roads to be flooded. What do you think is happening in this picture? What does it make you feel?
2. Camejo starts his process of making his artworks by choosing a photograph he has taken of his city. They almost always involve the sea along the seawall or rain. Inspired by the photo he uses paint to make his final work. Why do you think he chooses to use watercolour paint to create this scene?
3. Compare and contrast this picture with works by British artists who painted the weather such as JMW Turner's 'snowstorm' or 'Rain, steam, speed' (1844) or Peter Lanyon's 'Thermal' (1960).

Project ideas

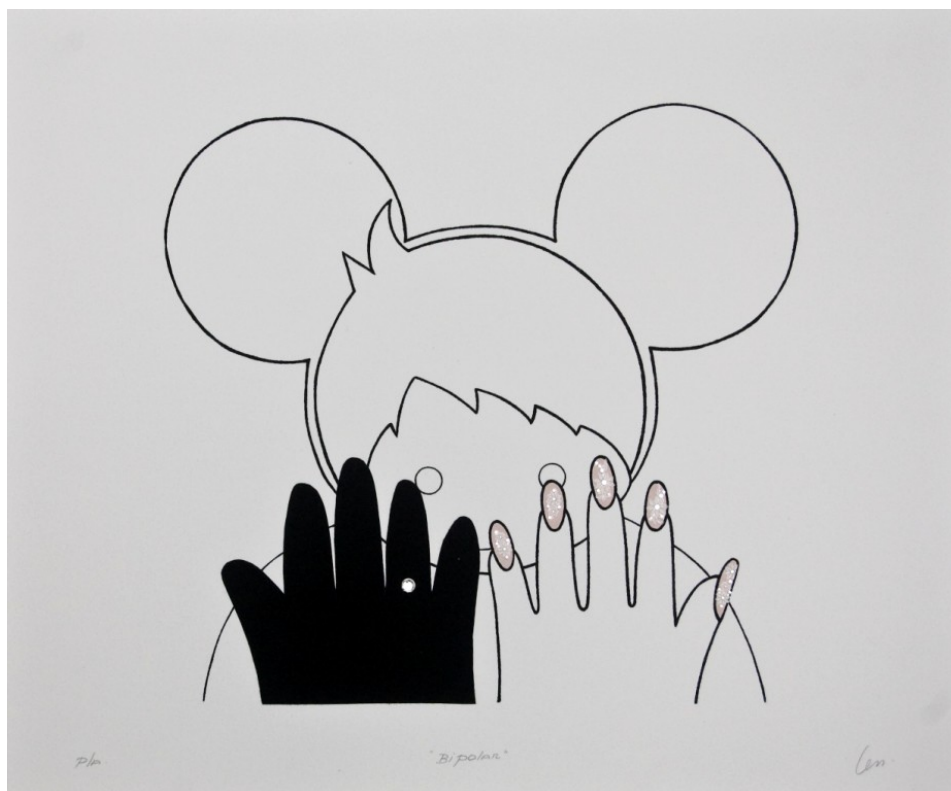
1. Using a camera or tablet, take a photograph of a street scene in your area when the weather is quite extreme (you can take a picture out the window), or find a photograph of a street scene with people where the weather is extreme.
2. Once you have your photo of a street scene – how many ways can you think of to change aspects of your original photograph using painting or drawing techniques to express more of the experience of being there at that moment. Was it cold, hot, wet, dusty, foggy, windy? How can you show the effects of the weather in this scene through painting or drawing? Choose a colour and use different tones of the same colour.
3. Write a short story using Camejo's painting as the starting point. Who is the narrator? Who are the other characters? Where are they going?

ADISLEN REYES PINO



**Adislen Reyes
Pino:**

Ambidextrous,
from series
'Therapy' 2015,
Prints on paper



Adislen Reyes

Pino: Bipolar,
from series
'Therapy' 2015,
Prints on paper

ADISLEN REYES PINO

About the artist and the artwork

Adislen Reyes (born Havana, 1984) is a young artist (now aged 32). She uses printmaking techniques to make her work, often using very minimal line drawings, like cartoons, to present something much more complicated and ambiguous. She is described as 'a smart young feminist influenced by contemporary media culture, plying the waters of relationships and identity with wit, humour and more than a little kitsch'. Each work created by Reyes has a story to tell and she challenges the viewer to look beyond the playful humour she uses to reflect on the deeper relationships expressed in each work. She is interested in showing her own conflicts about making art and about being a young woman and what is expected of her in Cuba and the attitudes of her contemporaries.

Discussion points

1. Look carefully at these three images – how are they similar, how are they different? What do the images remind you of? Why are they holding up their hands?
2. What do you think is going on in these pictures?
3. Are they self portraits? What is the artist Adislen trying to say to us about her feelings? Why is she using this style of image?

Project ideas

1. Draw the same shape as one of the pictures onto an ipad or tablet, using colour and effects make it in your own style. What does it say about you?
2. Writing: Describe in three sentences what is important to you and your friends, that you think older people can't understand.
3. Research and create: Look at magazines, google images, TV images, adverts, logos and collect the ones representing of heads of people then choose **one** to use as a simple outline head, draw it and make 3 different versions. Think about how to express what is important to you and your friends in the pictures, without using words.

REYNERIO TAMAYO



Reynerio Tamayo: Liberty, 2015. silkscreen on paper 70 x 50cm

The artist and the artwork

Reynerio Tamayo (born 1968, Niquero, Eastern Cuba) uses humour to express his concerns, creating works which he believes have a universal message. He loves baseball.

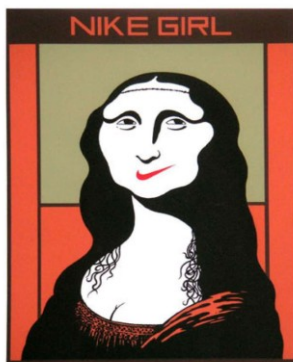
He says:

"In the world of art I have no prejudice against using whatever ideas I find interesting. My work is very heterogeneous and humour acts as a bridge of communication whether in a subtle form, ironic, cynical, or provocative depending on the idea I'm realizing. I use the traditional techniques of painting and in some works I experiment with three dimensional objects. What I like about the creative act is the variety of possibilities that art offers me to express my feelings in the world in which I live, and to interact with the viewer via my work...My position is from and for the human being. For me the most important thing is life and the people who form part of it, where family and friends are the essentials for the development of my work."

In the picture, Tamayo has drawn the Statue of Liberty, which stands at the entrance to New York, and which has strong symbolic meaning for people in and outside the USA. This type of 'I love something' slogan is used in many ways. It has become a design icon in itself. It is a joke – the US does not love Cuba, it has maintained an embargo against the island since the early 60s. But by making it a joke it asks: What if?

Discussion Points

1. What draws us to his visual language and why? Why do you think Tamayo has used these icons in his art?
2. Here are some other examples of Tamayo's work. Do you recognize the icons and symbols?



Project ideas

1. Look at Tamayo's work using the popular icon Superman. Who is Satchel Paige? Why is he so significant to Reynerio? Using an example from popular culture who would be your superman/superwoman? How would you portray your superhero?
2. Research other artists that use examples from popular culture through various mediums to express their social concerns.

ALEXIS LEYVA MACHADO (KCHO)



Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho): Untitled, 2007, mixed media on card, 204 x 150cm

The artist and the artwork

Today considered to be one of Cuba's most well-known visual artists. He was born in 1970 on a tiny island off the south coast of Cuba called the Isle of Youth. He now lives in Havana where he makes his art – sculptures, installations and drawings, and helps his local community to make art too.

He loves drawing but his work is also symbolic and conceptual, often using objects or fragments that have been thrown away or maybe washed up by the sea to make his sculptures, bringing different meanings and references to his artwork.

Kcho has said about his work:

"our island emerges from a rock that comes from the sea, the first plants came by sea, the aboriginals arrived on canoe, the Virgin of Charity appeared in a bay, the

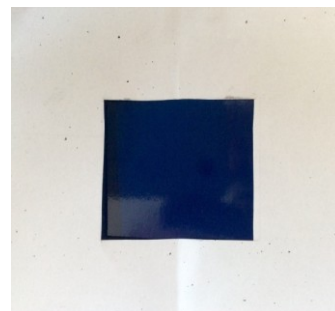
slaves also came from Africa on ships, the Granma yacht, immigration... it all has to do with the sea that surrounds us."

Discussion points

1. This picture is untitled – what title would you give it?
2. Look carefully at the picture - how many objects can you see that you recognise and how many people are there? Why does he just use the colour blue?
3. How do you think the people are feeling? Are they calm, anxious, happy, scared?
4. Have you ever travelled on a journey and you didn't know where you were going? What happened? Looking back at Kcho's image, what do you think may happen next and why?

Project ideas

1. Use a viewfinder to choose one part of the picture and then draw it yourself. Use a single colour just as Kcho did. Do you like your image and why? (You can make a viewfinder by cutting a square hole in a piece of paper.)
2. Make a picture of the middle or end of the journey.
3. Write a short story as if you are one of the people in the picture going on a journey and you don't know what is going to happen.



EDUARDO ROCA SALAZAR (CHOCO)



Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco): Caribbean Dream, 2011, collograph, 66 x 69cm

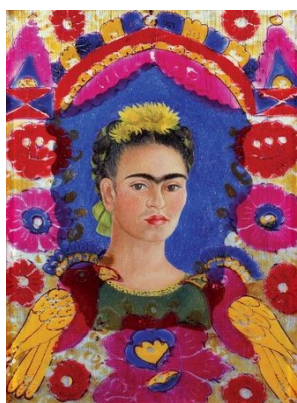
EDUARDO ROCA SALAZAR (CHOCO)

Known as Choco, this artist was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1949.

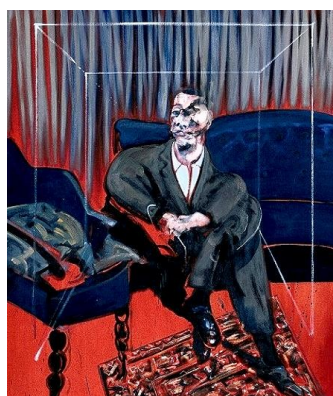
In 1970 he graduated from the Escuela Nacional de Arte (ENA) also taught printmaking and went on to shape how it was taught in Cuba. Choco's work focuses on the faces and figures of Afro-Cuban men and women. Although he is not a practitioner of Santeria, a religion initially brought to Cuba by African peoples forced into slavery, its rituals and symbols are central to his work. He makes complex lines through the vigour of his strokes and textures – which help create emotion in the picture. In this work he also uses the confines of the frame. "My themes have changed but something that has never shifted is that they arise from Cuba, from the Cuban people, from the daylight and our Afro-Cuban religion," he says.

Discussion ideas

1. Choco describes his figures as representing 'universal man'. What do you think he means by that?
2. Explore how other artists have used the image of a figure inside a frame. Look at the pictures by Frida Kahlo and Francis Bacon below. They both emphasize the framing of the person, but they make you feel something different. Do they make you feel as if the figure is enclosed as much as Choco's work? Why?



Frida Kahlo: The Frame, 1938



Francis Bacon: The seated figure, 1961

Project ideas

1. Choco's artwork uses a technique called Collography. It is a print made from a collage which results in a highly textured surface. Collect items with different textures and surfaces eg: paper, material, buttons, pencil shavings, card, to create a collage. You can paint the surface in colours of your choice to create a similar effect as Choco.
2. Take a big sheet of paper and draw or paint your friend from the shoulders up like in Choco's picture, so that their body reaches all the edges of the paper. Make another drawing much smaller with lots of decorated space around them. What are the different effects the two approaches have?

RESOURCES

For more information about the artists and other works in the exhibition, see the catalogue and the website www.presentecubanart.org
PLUS

Lisandra Isabel Garcia

Video: <http://havana-cultura.com/en/visual-arts/fragil-lisandra-isabel-garcia-lopez>

Interview: <http://www.cubanartnews.org/news/in-conversation-lisandra-isabel-garcia>

Luis Enrique Camejo Vento

More images at <http://havana-cultura.com/en/visual-arts/luis-enrique-camejo>

Adislen Reyes Pino

Watch video by HavanaCultura about the artist <https://youtu.be/oUJUvjKHtA>

Reynerio Tamayo

Artist's own website <http://www.artamayo.com/en/>

Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho)

Artist's own website <http://www.kchoestudio.com/>

Kcho Studio Art Romerillo laboratory - non-profit social project set up by Kcho providing children's workshops, a museum, a playground, a graphic studio, a 70-seat community theatre and a public library plus free wifi.

Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco)

Watch video of the artist at work <http://havana-cultura.com/en/visual-arts/choco>

News from Cuba about Cuban art and culture in English

<http://www.cubarte.cult.cu/en>

www.cuba50.org

News from the US about Cuban art: www.cubanartnews.org

Interviews with other Cuban artists and cultural figures www.havanacultura.com

Glossary of Art Terms

<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary>

A short history of Cuba

Cuba is an island in the Caribbean the length of Britain with a population of under 12 million people. It is only 90 miles from USA's Florida to the north west and even nearer to Jamaica and Haiti to the south and east. Cuban culture is a very rich mix of Caribbean, Spanish, African, North American, Jamaican, Haitian cultures and much more.

Until 1902 it was a colony of Spain, which is why the national language is Spanish. From the 1600s, the Spanish took slaves from West Africa to Cuba to put them to work on sugar plantations. By the mid 1800s Cuba was producing a third of the world's sugar and due to its geographical location and climate an important part of the international slave trade. After a long war against Spain, Cuba won independence in 1902 with help from the US, but at a price –becoming almost a colony of the USA until 1959.

Through the 1950s there was a long campaign led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara to overthrow the president supported by people across the country, which succeeded in 1959. Although slavery had been abolished long ago, most of the rural and black population lived in extreme poverty. The new revolutionary government aimed to bring free health care, free education, welfare, subsidised housing, sports, arts and culture accessible to all, to eliminate racism and to create a more equal society.

One of the first things they did was to launch a national literacy campaign in 1960 designed to educate those that up until then had been neglected, by sending almost 100,000 young volunteers all over the country, into remote mountain areas, to teach adults to read and write. Illiteracy fell from 42% to 4% in a year. Literacy is now 97-99%. It is free to train to become a doctor in Cuba. There are now 23 medical schools, up from only 3 before 1959. According to World Bank figures, Cuba spends more as a proportion of its GDP on education than any other country in the world. Between 2009-2013 it spent 12.9% compared to 6% in Britain and 5.4% in the US.

Until 1959 most of the companies and factories in Cuba producing fruit, sugar, tobacco, metals and so on were owned by Americans, not Cubans. After 1959 the revolutionary government nationalised those industries and carried out land reform. The US government started imposing economic, commercial, and financial restrictions on Cuba in October 1960 as a reaction to this and aimed to eventually topple the revolutionary government.

What has become known as the US blockade of Cuba is a collection of US laws and legislation which restricts Cuba's ability to have trade and normal relations with the US, and in some cases other countries too as some of the laws apply to foreign companies trading with Cuba. In February 1962 the blockade was extended to include almost all imports. Further legislation in the 1990s further strengthened and codified the blockade into US law, meaning that it can only be fully lifted by an act of the US Congress (parliament).

Although the economic aspect is central, the effects of the blockade are wide-reaching encompassing health, education, access to basic provisions as well as sports and culture. Cuba is forced by the blockade to spend vast sums of additional money to import food and other goods from countries other than the US and other countries keen to avoid fines by the US government. Cuba estimates that the cost of the blockade since its introduction is now over \$831 billion.

In October 2015, the United Nations General Assembly voted for the 24th consecutive year on a resolution calling for an end to this illegal blockade of Cuba. 191 countries - the largest number in the vote's history - voted for an end to the blockade with just the US and Israel in support.

Following statements by Cuba (President Raul Castro) and the US (President Barack Obama) on 17 December 2014, that the two countries would work to normalise relations, despite embassies opening in Washington and Havana in summer 2015, the blockade is still very much in place. It continues to inhibit Cuba's ability to trade normally with other countries and to obtain the resources it needs. Talks between the US and Cuban governments continue.

Another legacy of the 1959 revolution is the importance given to culture and the arts. Cuba has a world class cross-discipline art education system, free to anyone with talent, beginning in secondary school and continuing to post-graduate level. This formal system is accompanied by local community art centres across the country enable everyone to join in some cultural activity at no cost. Additionally, many national institutions such as the film institute (ICAIC), the Union of artists and writers, the Casa de las Americas and others have helped shape attitudes to culture.

¡PRESENTE! Contemporary Art from Cuba is a unique exhibition of paintings, works on paper and photography by 30 Cuban artists on the island. From internationally respected artists to emerging young stars.

About the exhibition www.presentecubanart.org

From 7-15 October there is a programme of events at the gallery and in other venues. See the website for details or contact presentecubanart@gmail.com

The exhibition takes place 6-29 October 2016 at GX Gallery, 43 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RS gxgallery.com Opening hours: Mon/Tue/Wed/Sat 9.30am-6.00pm Thu/Fri 9.30am-7.00pm Closed on Sundays

All of the artworks will be for sale, to raise funds for materials for arts education materials and projects across Cuba.

¡PRESENTE! is a project of the [Music Fund for Cuba](#), a UK charity working with the Cuban Ministry of Culture and the Collage Habana/Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales and [GX Gallery, London](#).



G X GALLERY



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This pack has been produced by Trish Meehan together with Carole Regan, Sarah Veitch, Josune Iriando, David Willetts.

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