

CANVASS

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<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery/>

hours: Mon. – Fri., 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM; Sat., noon – 5 PM

an institution of Mennonite Church Canada

located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University

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(204) 888 6781; Ray Dirks, curator, rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

memories of Cuba

Visas, tickets... action! It has been a crazy day, including last minute scrambling regarding visas and tickets for two visiting artists from Cuba. It is two full days, including working late last evening, since I sat down to start this newsletter. It has been at the top of my "to do" list. At 5:00 PM of the second day I'm beginning. It has been an adventure.

Much of what has filled my time today confirms that this gallery is different. I've interacted with Hutterites, people overseas and in the US, brainstormed about an exhibit including an artist from India in 2010, had exchanges with various media people, church leaders and teachers, kept chugging along on several upcoming exhibits for this year and next. I've typed nearly 50 e-mails and answered far too many phone calls on a day I intended to devote to the newsletter. Manju Lodha and I did a run through of her lovely presentation she'll be giving in the gallery tomorrow about her recent journey to her roots in India.

And, there is Cuba.

I think back to a lovely March afternoon when Manuel Baldrich, Jairo Alfonso, MC Mario and I decided to have our meeting about the upcoming exhibition on the beach east of Havana. No e-mail there. No phone calls. The chaos of the past two days fades a bit.

Mario was along to act as translator. An added bonus was his launching into freestyle raps about Cuba and Winnipeg. We discussed the exhibit, Cuban art, Jairo and Manuel's proposed trip to Winnipeg. We got to know each other.

I also spent time in each of their homes, including in MC Mario's tiny two room apartment. He sat on his bed, his wife and baby beside him, and began to rap. His one year old instinctively bobbed back and forth with the beat. We all laughed. Eventually, Manuel — Manolo to his friends — entered the home. He clapped and cheered.

There is a community spirit in Cuba that is infectious. Sure, there are problems and concerns, trials and troubles. But Cuba is so much more.

Including its art.

Cuban art is exciting. Artistic training is top notch and artists are, typically, extremely serious and dedicated.

Jairo is an accomplished young artist with a growing international reputation. He has traveled to Spain and Switzerland, recently to Mozambique. He flies to Madrid from

memories & parachutes...

contemporary art from Cuba

community, abstraction/realization, roosters &...

Jairo Alfonso Castellanos

Manuel Mario Díaz Baldrich

Dalvis Tuya Valido

Jorge Jacinto Rodríguez de la Paz

Francisco Núñez Martínez

Carlos Ernesto Reyna Alonso

OPENING: Thursday, June 19, 7:30PM

welcome Jairo Alfonso Castellanos &

Manuel Mario Díaz Baldrich to Winnipeg

June 19 – July 26, 2008

Winnipeg to take up a residency.

Jairo lives in Havana but his soul exists in his country upbringing. It comes through in much of his coffee and charcoal art featured in our exhibit.

Coffee? Yes, he paints with coffee. Come to the exhibit opening and to the Cuban evening the following week. Talk to Jairo about painting with coffee, about his memories and dreams.

Talk to Manolo about his art, about his work as artistic director of the Muraleando community arts project. He leads a group of volunteer artists who have helped transform a Havana neighbourhood. MC Mario is a young man Manolo and Muraleando rescued from a life headed in the wrong direction.

Jairo and Manolo will be in Winnipeg for most of the month of June. They will work with schools, visit artists, go into the country for a weekend, and more. I am pleased they can be here to represent their fellow artists from the exhibit. I am equally pleased that Winnipeggers will have the opportunity to meet two humble men of great integrity.

Come and greet them warmly. Show them that Winnipeg can be as welcoming as sitting under an umbrella on a Cuban beach. *Ray Dirks*

exhibit details

Memories & Parachutes would not be happening without Rose Plett's contacts and passion. She set the wheels rolling on this exhibition.

Besides Jairo's and Manolo's paintings, the exhibit will include Jairo's installation and video work. Dalvis Tuya Valido adds provocative charcoal on canvas pieces. He, too, has a growing international reputation. Jorge Jacinto Rodríguez de la Paz contributes richly hued metal sculptures of roosters. Francisco Núñez Martínez's portraits combine beautiful rendering with slashing abstraction. Carlos Ernesto Reyna Alonso was Rose's first contact. Several of his acrylic paintings are included.

Proposals?

Artists, please, submit your proposals to us! The gallery hosts exhibits in approximate two month blocks throughout the year.

Mailing list

To receive **CANVASS**, invitations to all exhibitions and other gallery updates contact Connie Wiebe, cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca.

Contact

Ray Dirks, MHC Gallery, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB Canada R3P 0M4. Ph: (204) 888-6781. E-mail: rdirks@mennonitechurch.ca

Thanks

Bill and Margaret Fast, Herb and Erna Buller, Frank and Agnes DeFehr, The Winnipeg Foundation, Friesens, Herb Peters and Donna Peters-Small, Ted and Mary Paetkau, other donors

events

**OPENING: Thursday, June 19,
7:30PM**

welcome Jairo Alfonso Castellanos & Manuel Mario Díaz Baldrich to Winnipeg

**an evening in Cuba: Wednesday,
June 25, 7:30PM**

a multimedia presentation by Ray Dirks taking us to the artists' homes, neighbourhoods and studios with live commentary from Jairo, Manolo and Rose. An opportunity to see inside Cuba and Cuban art.

**informal tours: Wednesday, July 9,
3, 4 and 5PM**

Ray Dirks and Rose Plett will lead informal tours of the exhibit, including a brief look into church life, coinciding with the national gathering of Mennonite Church Canada on the campus of CMU.

thanks in Canada

Red River Valley Mutual Insurance; Friesens Book Division; Bonaventure Travel, Ruth Wiebe, Rose Szczepanik; Marlene Plett; Marlene Falk; Imy Rempel; Kenneth Neil; City Press, Ken Giesbrecht

in Cuba

José Enrique Rodríguez González, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Cabana, Meyken Barreto, José Manuel Martín García, Regla María Díaz Rodríguez, Mayra Arango López, Damaris Hernández Fernández, Alina Alfonso García, Yulien, MC Mario

next

Deb Danelley's *unprovoked deliberation* opens on Thursday, July 31

donations

Help us get through the summer, typically a dry spell for donations. The gallery exists almost exclusively through donations. If you enjoy the varied and dynamic programming, appreciate the work we do in schools, the community, in churches, please, give. Donations are tax deductible.

concerts

Chic Gamine, four wonderful female voices and a male percussionist, including my daughter Alexa, are performing at the Jazz Festival and Folk Festival. Go to the Winnipeg Jazz Festival website for information regarding tickets for Chic Gamine's June 20 and 21 shows. The Cuban artists will be there on the 21st. For an audio preview, Google Chic Gamine and go to their MySpace page. Their first CD, recorded in Quebec, will also be released in June. Feel free to contact me for more information.

CANVASS

My Journey to Cuba's Art, a Human Adventure

by Rosemarie Plett

"Jesus Christ for me," was what I was confronted with by a Cuban artist selling his art at a street fair on the Calle Prado, a street famous for artists who set up their stalls there, hoping to sell their works on Saturday afternoons. I had stopped long enough while strolling through the many small exhibits to look like I might be a serious customer. The artists were not wasting any time in trying to interact with anyone they considered to be potential clients. This artist chose to reveal his personal faith in a very direct, honest way.

Carlos Reyna proudly showed me his Bible, his trophy, and opened it to reveal to me that it actually was scripture, written in Spanish of course. From this encounter grew a friendship which blossomed into a multi-tudinous network of contacts, friendships and "family" style relationships.

I entered many homes as their first Canadian visitor. I ended up meeting young artists of international stature. I also met a variety of doctors, teachers, taxi drivers and ordinary laborers. All the artists and all the other Cubans I met were, without exception, quality people; genuine, honest and pure of heart.

In one home, on New Year's Day, I was seated as a newly invited guest in a living room chair, while mother, father, children and grandmother all looked at me as if I were a rare find. Soon Michel, the son, started yanking for something from between his legs underneath the sagging couch. He finally pulled out a bowl of pork rinds, a New Year's day delicacy, and thrust the bowl in front of me as a good-will offering. I couldn't contain myself and burst out laughing, which broke the ice. Soon everyone was laughing and the father promptly ran to the fridge to quickly open a bottle of Cuban "coke", which spewed every which way, causing more laughter. From this simple introductory visit, there now exists a close, committed connection, part of my "family" from abroad.

The Cubans I met were naturally curious, inquisitive and eager to learn about life, faith and community in Canada. Though they admired our standard of living, including the quality of health care and education; they were proud of their country and the opportunities it afforded them. Their innate sense of community, of nurture and support for each other, was what impressed me.

Many dichotomies, some common to both our countries, made the distance between Cuba and Canada seem to shrink as I became familiar with how the similarity of struggles to achieve and aspirations for a better life mirror what we dream of and work toward here as well.

The common bond of love, respect and community was what knit my heart and mind with the Cuban spirit.



José Enrique Rodríguez González, Rose Plett and Manuel Mario Díaz Baldrich at the Havana airport

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(left) Jairo Alfonso Castellanos, Ray Dirks and Dalvis Tuya; (above) by Jairo Alfonso Castellanos



Jairo Alfonso Castellanos (above), Dalvis Tuya (below)



Carlos Reyna





Manuel Díaz Baldrich



Dalvis Tuya



Francisco Núñez



Jorge Rodríguez



Jairo Alfonso Castellanos

