

The Farber Foundation



Cuban art and culture worldwide

Cuban Caricatures & Abstract Art

In Miami, 3 new shows spotlight an influential early figure & emerging Cuban American artists

June 5, 2019

This weekend, two museums at Florida International University in Miami are offering three distinct perspectives on Cuban art and culture internationally.

Opening this Friday, June 7, at the Wolfsonian-FIU, *Cuban Caricature and Culture: The Art of Massaguer* spotlights Conrado Massaguer (1889–1965), the graphic designer, illustrator, caricaturist, and publisher who was a pivotal figure in 20th-century Cuban culture before the revolution.



A self-caricature used by Conrado Massaguer to announce his arrival in New York in the 1920s

Courtesy Wolfsonian-FIU

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Massaguer's magazine, *Social*, was a social and cultural trend-setter, popularizing both an Art Deco aesthetic and an image of women as independent and free-thinking.

Nurturing the careers of younger illustrators and caricaturists in Cuba, Massaguer was also active in New York magazine publishing. Over the decades—especially in his exile in the 1930s, during the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado—Massaguer designed covers and illustrations for magazines like *Vanity Fair*, *Life*, *Collier's*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

A 1929 cover of "Social" magazine popularizing the "new woman" in Cuba

Courtesy Wolfsonian-FIU

Drawn from a new gift of Massaguer materials by collector Vicki Gold Levi, *Cuban Caricature and Culture* features nearly 100 works, including magazine covers, paintings, advertisements, and caricatures of everyone from Albert Einstein to Walt Disney.

Those caricatures also include one that Massaguer drew of himself to announce his arrival on the New York publishing scene. There are also illustrations to promote tourism to Cuba, a longtime professional interest.



Conrado Massaguer, drawing of Walt Disney, c. 1951

Courtesy Wolfsonian-FIU

Curated by Frank Luca, the museum's chief librarian, *Cuban Caricature and Culture* opens with a 7–10 p.m. reception this Friday, June 7. The show runs through February 2 at the Wolfsonian-FIU.

And at the bookstore, look for *Promising Paradise: Cuban Allure American Seduction*, the just-published catalogue for the Wolfsonian's [2016 exhibition of the same title](#). Featuring images from the museum's Vicki Gold Levi collection, the book also includes essays by the show's co-curators, Rosa Lowinger and Frank Luca.

The cover of "Promising Paradise: Cuban Allure American Seduction"

Courtesy Wolfsonian-FIU



On Saturday, the action shifts to the Frost Art Museum-FIU, which celebrates the opening of two exhibitions, both organized by chief curator Amy Galpin.

CUT: Abstraction in the United States, from the 1970s to the Present looks at ways that artists have challenged the painted surface with cuts, carvings, indentations, and other interventions.

The show features a multigenerational roster of more than 15 artists, from established to emerging. Among the younger artists are two born in Cuba.

Clara Varas, "Untitled (Window)," 2016
Courtesy Frost Art Museum-FIU

Trained at the School of Visual Arts, New York, Clara Varas (Havana, 1972) incorporates household items and industrial materials into her art, creating works that are rooted in painterly abstraction but stretch the idea of "painting" in new directions.

"The objects I employ are marred by overuse," Varas has written. "They speak to their history or demise in order to form and shape narratives between early childhood in Cuba and the present."



One of Varas's works in *CUT* is literally cut open; another is done on an irregularly shaped board. "Clara Varas is really playing with forms and with the tradition of painting," said Galpin. "She challenges our preconceived notions of what a painting should be."



Clara Varas, "Crescent (Pink and Yellow)," 2017
Courtesy Frost Art Museum-FIU

María de los Angeles Rodríguez Jimenez (Holguín, 1992), the youngest artist in *CUT*, is currently completing an MFA in painting at Yale.

Rodríguez Jimenez is influenced by Afro-Cuban ritual and tradition, said Galpin, which are reflected in works that meld sculpture and painting. She often incorporates materials like felt or other textiles associated with dress and fashion. "There's this evocation of the physical body," Galpin added.

Rodríguez Jimenez's work in *CUT*, titled *Clean Her Blood (Limpiale la sangre)*, has an organic shape and a textile-like draping of canvas. "It's not a flat, two-dimensional surface," said Galpin. "There's a point at which the canvas pops out. It makes for a really engaging viewing experience."

María de los Ángeles
Rodríguez Jimenez, "Clean
Her Blood (Limpiale la
sangre)," 2018
Courtesy Frost Art
Museum-FIU

The opening reception for both *CUT: Abstraction in the United States, 1970s to the Present* runs 4–7 p.m. this Saturday, June 8, at the Frost Art Museum-FIU.

