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ills he has consistently been, sharp protagonist of critical art in Cuba and a leading member of New Cuban Art.²

For this exhibition, which established a more sensorial connection with its audience (without fully setting aside Saavedra's verbalizations), the artist selected more than twenty works including drawings, sculpture objects, paintings, and installations, mostly created in recent years, as well as variations of previous editions of his work. In the latter set, the protagonist was *Detector de ideologías* (electronic). It didn't work due to the lack of parts, a comment on a circumstance of material deprivation. On the other hand, a chess set made in 1987—now presented in wood—and the plaster bust of Saavedra's well-known portrait of Karl Marx, were included in the series titled *Del siglo XX al XXI*.

Special mention must be made of *Se va conmigo a la tumba*, a series of drawings on the wall clearly concerned with aesthetic considerations, and *Software cubano*, an algorithm that summarized the society's cybernetic behavior. Other standouts, although in a different sense, were *Palimpsesto*, *Naturaleza muerta*, and *Expresionismo*, alongside a small aside of small-format drawings. The installation *Mima*, which closed the exhibition, was, more than a portrait of the artist's mother, the condensed expression of many lives given to society. The biography suggested by specific photographs and numerous diplomas of recognition—pieces of paper that do not express the everyday sacrifices of several generations of Cubans—was a historical projection of the individuals upon whom utopia was built.

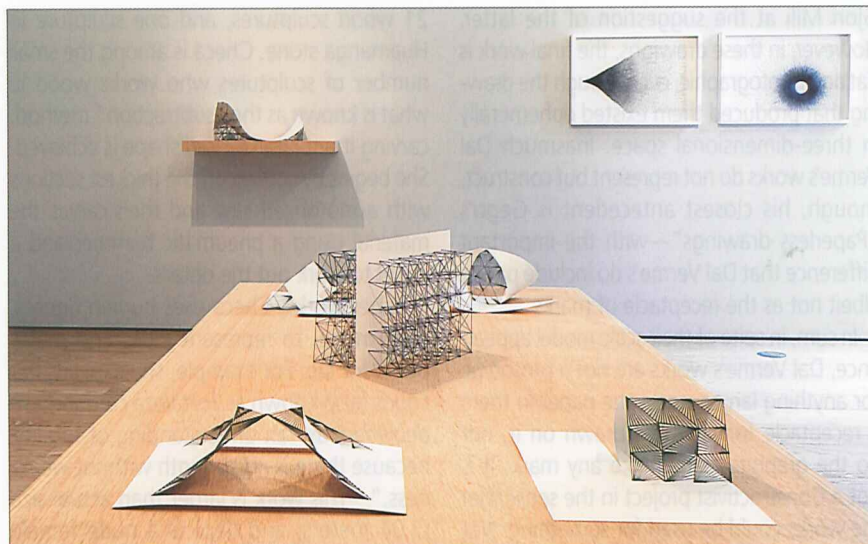
The work of Lázaro Saavedra constitutes an analytic space that subjects art, politics, and society, as well as human nature, to profound revision. In a general sense, he moves from the contextual to the universal, from the analytical to the gestural, without having his cultivated spirit shirk from popular elements and his art cease to interrogate reality.

NOTES

1. *Artista contemplativo* was shown for the first time in Cuba as part of *Arte Rupestre*, Lázaro Saavedra's exhibition at the Museo de Arte de Pinar del Río (MAPRI). There, it was a stand-alone drawing within the graphic expression that used the museum walls as its support.

2. *Nuevo Arte Cubano*, a concept used by critic Gerardo Mosquera to define the movement of artistic renewal that began in the early 1980s.

Caridad Blanco de la Cruz



Mariano Dal Verme. *On Drawing*, 2013. Installation view. Photo: Logan Sebastian Beck.

HOUSTON / TEXAS

Mariano Dal Verme

Sicardi Gallery

In English the word "drawing" has many more meanings than its Spanish equivalent "dibujo." But the meaning that the title of Mariano Dal Verme's exhibit at Sicardi gallery contradicts is the one most commonly used: "a picture or diagram made with a pencil, pen, or crayon rather than paint." Like its Spanish equivalent, that meaning of "drawing" is familiar to us since childhood and it is very precise. That is why we are surprised when Dal Verme introduces his tri-dimensional works as drawings. In Spanish, we traced the origin of the word "dibujo" to a 12th century adoption of the French word "déboissier." At that time the French term was more encompassing than its Spanish or English equivalents for it included "polishing," "sketching," "to sculpting," and other artistic activities. It is this broader and more archaic meaning that validates the claim of Dal Verme's works to be drawings.

Dal Verme is one of those artists whose works need not be large. His works are about the size of an oversize art book. The meticulous fastidiousness of his works recalls those of Gabriel de la Mora or Marco Maggi and they aim for the exquisiteness of a small format piece. Dal Verme's materials are just two: paper and graphite in the form of leads for mechanical pencils. It is with leads that Dal Verme meticulously builds the frameworks that often evoke the geodesic constructions

of Buckminster Fuller. In spite of these resemblances Dal Verme has shown no apparent inclination to get rid of paper (board) in his works or to increase their size.

In a few works paper takes on the triangular shape drawn by the lead rods, and it is framed by them. In these works paper plays a different role than mere support for the lead rods. Lead rods and paper are thus indispensable materials in this project of Dal Verme, whose works often resemble architectural scale models. Whether in fact they will one day become the prototypes of larger works is something that cannot be predicted. By the way, since all of Dal Verme's works are "untitled," reference to specific works is extremely difficult.

It is a remarkable fact that Dal Verme uses pencil leads as construction material rather than as a tool for representation. Its normal use—making marks—is congruent with the purpose for which they were produced, but not the use Dal Verme makes of them. Even when Dal Verme appears to be using the leads to represent a radiant sun (with dark rays), they are not making marks in the traditional sense, but being themselves representation of rays. More than represent, they substitute for marks that represent.

There are a couple of precedents for the idea that drawings can leave a flat surface and enter into tri-dimensionality. The "Paperless drawings" that Gego made in the mid-eighties are one. In said drawings the "marks" are wire, steel rods, plastic tubes, etc. Another precedent is the light drawings Picasso made in 1949 with photographer

Gjon Mili at the suggestion of the latter. However, in these drawings, the final work is flat and photographic, even though the drawing that produced them existed ephemerally in three-dimensional space. Inasmuch Dal Verme's works do not represent but construct, though, his closest antecedent is Gego's "Paperless drawings"—with the important difference that Dal Verme's do include paper, albeit not as the receptacle of marks.

In sum, in spite of their scale model appearance, Dal Verme's works are not a prototype for anything larger, nor is the paper in them a receptacle for anything drawn on it, nor do the graphite leads make any mark. It is not a Constructivist project in the sense that the works could be used for something. Not doing what is expected may sometimes be a virtue in art. His works invite us to notice what he is not doing, but the *raison d'être* of his works is to just be objects of aesthetic contemplation.

Fernando Castro R.

LIMA / PERÚ

Margarita Checa

Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano

Anthological Exhibition 1972-2013, a Margarita Checa retrospective covering the Peruvian sculptor's work since her student years to the present, is open to the public. The exhibition was curated by art historian, independent curator and critic Luis Eduardo Wuffarden. Margarita Checa is a sculptor who works primarily with wood and bronze; this retrospective features 55 items in total, including two prints, four drawings, 27 small- and medium-format bronze sculptures,

21 wood sculptures, and one sculpture in Huamanga stone. Checa is among the small number of sculptors who work wood in what is known as the "subtraction" method, carving it until the desired shape is achieved. She begins by cutting off the thickest sections with a motorized saw and then carves the material using a pneumatic hammer and a chisel to work out the details.

In her works, Checa uses human figures, often nude, to represent ideas and metaphors for life. For example, she explains her *Logos* (also known as *Fortaleza cargando su debilidad*) as "an understanding of totality, because there is no strength without weakness."¹ This work is larger than actual size (2.04 meters) and depicts a nude female figure carrying in her arms another nude woman; the latter figure's head rests on the shoulder of the former, her falling arm resembling the Christ figure in Michelangelo's *Pietà*. The same posture of the arm is found in Jacques Louis David's *The Death of Marat*, but in Checa's work the woman is not dead, as in these precedents, but in a moment of weakness. The arms were made independently and later attached to the sculpture. The arms were first made in clay, later in plaster, and only when the artist had found the shape she was after were they carved in wood and added to the work. The figures represent two states of the soul of a single individual: anxiety and weakness. Thus, the two figures are made in distinct species of wood: one in traditional, light-hued olive-wood, the other in the darker *Yacushapana* wood, a variant found in Peru. Two states of the soul, two ages, represented both through the size of the figures and through the attitudes they assume. "Rigorously distilling materials taken from the realm of

magic, myth, and dreams, her works propose unsettling metaphors of existence and the human condition."²

Río infinito is a boat, 2.10 meters long, with two women, one man, and three children on board. One of the women sits at the front of the boat, with the man sitting with his back to her. The other woman and the three children sit towards the stern. The man, covered by a shawl, is asleep. Checa says, "the man is in a state of abandon, trusting the journey itself; the key to his life is to trust, to let himself go with the flow."³ All the characters are nude because "nudity is for me something entirely natural, we arrive naked into the world and naked we leave, carrying only our energy."⁴ Being nude, the figures appear more natural, more innocent, devoid of malice in their lives. Their skulls are all elongated, representing the earliest stages of civilization, our origins. Checa uses this as a metaphor for life. She says, "for me it is the course of life, the path that each of us takes will define its trajectory; we are basically water, we come from water, we are born in water, and we end in water as well."⁵ There are no oars in this boat. The boat is carried by the current but we create our own course.

NOTES

1. Interview with the artist, October 2013
2. From the exhibition catalog.
- 3, 4, 5 Interview with the artist, October 2013

Augusto Chimpen

Gilda Mantilla

Galería Revólver

To reflect about the work by Gilda Mantilla (Los Angeles, 1967) is to enter into one of the most mesmerizing artistic trajectories in the local art scene of Peru. Since the late 1980s, Mantilla has used painting and drawing as seismographs for contemporary life. Her first works attempted horizontal dialogues with the popular aesthetics and visual resources found on the streets, as she explored the ways in which these changeable visual manifestations shaped subjectivity and desire day to day. It was unavoidable to perceive in her painting certain autobiographical elements that always pointed to deep-rooted social issues: religious tradition in the national culture, the commercialization of beauty, popular advertisement and street painting, among others. Mantilla's paintings made no concessions when it came to introduce compelling

Margarita Checa. *Infinite River*, 2010. Olive and cedar wood. 35 1/5 x 82 1/5 x 21 1/5 in. (90 x 210 x 54 cm.).

