

ALEJANDRO CAMPINS

GABRIEL CISNEROS

ZONA PÚBLICA

09.11.24 - 01.02.25

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Galleria Continua is pleased to present the exhibition *Zona Pública*, by Cuban artists Alejandro Campins and Gabriel Cisneros. The exhibition raises several questions about the role of the monument in its relationship with the public space. This debate takes a critical look at history, identity, memory and concepts such as heroism, leadership and power. The dialogue is articulated through a group of sculptural pieces by Gabriel Cisneros inspired by classic Cuban commemorative statuary from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and paintings and photographs by Alejandro Campins from the series *Declaración Pública*.

When we approach **Gabriel Cisneros'** sculptures, they evoke the image of the public monument, which was the genre responsible for creating the iconography that, on an urban scale, configured the visual imagery of the beginning of the last century. Made in resin and according to the codes of the most traditional aesthetics, human figures in the form of busts, column bases, pedestals, sculptural groups are scattered throughout the gallery space creating a sense of estrangement in the viewer given the way in which they are presented. Away from the majestic and solemn air that distinguishes them in the public space for their usual function of honoring personalities or feats of historical significance, the pieces acquire a more intimate, personal, introspective character. Gabriel has altered their physiognomy, their usual posture, sometimes through very simple gestures, giving them a new life, as if they were carrying more day-to-day and earthly problems.

At the entrance of the exhibition, a bust of a man in an upright pose holds his head in his arms, and further on a column supports a torso turned and in a leaning

position. In some cases, as in "Olympia", the artist has only altered the position of the figure, leaning his head against the wall, giving it a certain nostalgic and melancholic tone. At the same time, two male busts on columns rest on the floor superimposed as if these men were kissing, while another male torso on the floor of the stage observes from below a group of bodies sectioned at waist level. In all cases, these are anonymous representations; what interests Gabriel is the symbolic commentary. By creating this type of situation he generates a questioning not only of the function and the relationship we establish with the public monument, but also of the correlation with its surroundings.

Surrounding the sculptures, as if to offer them a home, the gallery walls are occupied by a group of paintings and photographs by **Alejandro Campins** under the title *Declaración Pública*, a series he started in 2006 and recently returned to for this exhibition. As usual in his work, Campins takes us to natural settings that hold a great symbolic load, challenging our perception of space and time. He is interested in spaces that have been altered by man, where they have been modified over time, and where our perception of them has been transformed.

The series *Declaración Pública* focuses on recording through photography and recreating through painting numerous tribunes and open-air amphitheatres, which years ago fulfilled a mainly cultural and political function in Cuba and which, in many cases, are places in disuse today. These landscapes not only evoke the architectural transformation of the city, but also the symbolic transformation implied by absence and emptiness. As stated by Laura Salas, in the book *Viajes de Retorno*, these paintings "give the sensation that something is going to happen and break

that calm at any moment, precisely because of that apparent serenity that disturbs us and makes us question everything we see”¹. Further on, she suggests: “The images of empty platforms tell a story where apparently nothing happens, but in reality we are in front of disturbing allegories of the present. Devoid of human presence and the notion of time, they disturb us and attract our attention. Curiosity takes hold of us and makes us wonder why there is no one in these metaphysical scenes.”²

Zona Pública involves the combination of both contexts, that of the monument and that of the public space. It would seem that the sculptures could inhabit that place, or that perhaps they belonged to it in the past. These are anonymous figures, which could well be associated with classical sculpture in many parts of the world, and on the other hand, spaces that are not easily identifiable, rather because of their common appearance. Therefore, the general commentary on the monument and the public space transcends the limits of the local to become a debate of great relevance on a larger scale. As both are carriers of a symbolic value for any community or group of people, both their presence and their absence will always be accompanied by multiple readings.

1 Salas Redondo, Laura: Declaración Pública: horizontes entrópicos de Cuba hoy, in: Alejandro Campins. Viajes de Retorno. Ed. Hatje Cantz, 2024, p. 43.

2 Ibidem

Gabriel Cisneros (Las Tunas, Cuba, 1990) lives and works in Havana. He is a graduate from the Professional Academy of Plastic Arts of Las Tunas and the University of the Arts (ISA) (2015). He has developed a career in the field of sculpture. He has participated in more than twenty group exhibitions in his home country, Panama and the United States. His work has been presented independently in exhibition spaces in Cuba such as Galiano Gallery, Ludwing Foundation and Servando Gallery, as well as in the Panamanian NG Art Gallery. His works are part of the collections of the Pérez Art Museum (USA), the Carbonell Foundation (Panama) and the Museo del Caribe (Colombia). His

public works have been placed in Havana, Washington D.C., Belize, Barranquilla and Santiago de Chile.

Alejandro Campins Fleita (Manzanillo, Cuba 1981), lives and works between Havana and Madrid. He studied at Professional Academy of Fine Arts in Holguín (2000) and graduated from the University of the Arts (ISA) in Havana (2009). In 2019, his work was part of the Cuban Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale and the 13th Havana Biennial. Some of his most important personal exhibitions are: *Sucedáneos*, Galleria Continua, Paris (2024); *Memoria oculta*, Fondation Brownstone, Paris, France (2023); *Distancia interna*, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy (2022); *Perpetuate-dislocate-perpetuate*, Fondazione Giuliani, Italy (2021); *Miedo a la muerte es miedo a la verdad*, Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Centre, Havana, Cuba (2019); among others. Some of his recent group exhibitions include: *Time for Change: Art and Social Unrest* in the Jorge M. Pérez Collection, Tampa Museum of Art (2023); *You Know Who You Are: Recent Acquisitions of Cuban Art* from the Jorge M. Pérez Collection, El Espacio 23, Miami (2023); *Art as a thoroughfare*, Wuhan Biennale, Wuhan (2022); *In the Mind's Eye*, Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, Miami (2022), *La Brèche*, Galleria Continua, Paris (2021); *Time for change: Art and social Unrest* in the Jorge Perez Collection, El Espacio 23, Miami, Florida (2019); *Buena Vista*, Fondation Clément, Martinique, Martinique (2018); among others. His work is part of public and private collections, among them: *Fondazione Giuliani*, Italia; *National Museum of Fine Arts*, Havana; *Voorlinden Museum*, Wassenaar, Holanda; *Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP)*, Paris; *Pizzuti Collection*, Columbus, Ohio, USA; *Daros Latinamerica Collection*, Zurich; *Ella Cisneros Fontanals Collection*; *AMA Foundations*. Chile; *Jorge Pérez Collection*, Miami.

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