



Yuniel Delgado Castillo

Yuniel Delgado Castillo has been compared with Pablo Picasso for his expressionistic painting gestures and the large scale, monochromatic palette, and the force of *Guernica* (1937), with Diego Rivera in terms of monumental wall paintings with socio-political themes, and with the makers of cave art for his direct and gestural images of documenting human primal needs. I see similarities in Yuniel's ideas and style with Modernist German Expressionist artist Max Beckmann who created scathing visual social critiques through intensive and narrative art which juxtaposed figurative images from reality, myths, fables, symbols, and dreams in the tumultuous intra war and post-World War II periods.

In his rapidly rising, 10-year, post college-trajectory, Yuniel has traveled extensively and has been influenced and transformed by places he has visited, artwork he has seen firsthand, and by people he has met. He is well-versed in Art History which is emphasized in Cuban art schools. But before the global travel, the artist residencies, the numerous exhibition opportunities, Yuniel did not have to wander too far as a young man growing up in Havana during the mid-1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s to make observations of his material world. He had a ring-side seat for

viewing significant political, economic, and cultural changes in Cuba. Through his father, a member of the Cuban Military, he gained insight into government actions, especially with the Soviet Union pullout in 1991, which in turn plummeted Cuba into what was known as the “Special Period”. He also witnessed astounding cultural shifts for artists. In the 1980s, artists fled from Cuba for personal freedom to establish professional practices in various parts of the world. Included in that group were artists who had been the university professors of the celebrated 1990s Generation of artists who were able to stay in Cuba, make art, leave almost at will, and sell their work in capitalist/consumerist economies. They would pay taxes on their sales which the weakened Cuban government needed and welcomed by overlooking extant enforcement policies.

Yuniel also had access to Cuba’s Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts) and Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam (Contemporary Art Center Wifredo Lam) which house large collections of Cuban, African, Asian, and art from other Latin American countries. There are works to view, react to, and digest by pre-Revolution artists, such as Carlos Enriquez and Wifredo Lam, as well as post-Revolution artists like José Bedia and others. While not suggesting a direct influence on Yuniel, I do recognize stylistic and themes from works of Enriquez, Lam, and Bedia which I enjoy in his work: fluid lines of joyfully applied paint, dynamic figure compositions, human and animal figures which transform and become anthropomorphic figures, the use of symbols, pointed critiques of socio-political issues, sexuality and eroticism, storytelling, vibrant colors, and monumental, enveloping installations.

Enriquez and Bedia were alumni of the 200+-year old San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest and arguably the most prestigious fine arts school in Cuba where Yuniel would later enroll and graduate from. At the Academy, Delgado Castillo made pointed and unsettling work about the Cuban Government which his professors became increasingly alarmed about showing outside the Academy. This galvanized Yuniel to seek universal truths about humans, examining the past, present, and envisioning the future, and to use his visual voice for speaking out loud about them. His works hit hard due to their expressionistic, often black, hand-ground charcoal marks and imagery. They cause some to look away, not wanting to be reminded about the themes and messages Delgado gives voice to: acts of humanity and inhumanity towards others, the fragile

balance between humans and the Earth, not learning from History and therefore repeating it, economic and social inequities, and hope... yes, especially hope...for humankind in these days of plague, teetering economies, natural and human disasters, struggle for political power, anger, fear, and divisiveness, but also human acts of kindness and evidence of love and concern.

On a list of words that Yuniel uses to describe his core values, we find expressions of hope like Perseverance, Discipline, Faith, Love, Difference, Success, Constancy, Feelings, Sacrifice, and, of course, Art. In the five years that I have known and closely followed the career trajectory of Yuniel Delgado Castillo, I have observed each of these words manifested in a man with steadfast convictions and an unwavering commitment to diligence in the pursuit of a noteworthy, forthright, and successful artistic practice. He works in the studio everyday – painting, sculpting, printmaking, researching, sketching ideas, and making videos which capture his process.

Yuniel Delgado Castillo was born in Havana, Cuba in 1984. Besides maintaining his home and studio in Havana, Yuniel has lived in Boston, New Jersey, Miami, and is currently living and working with his family in Madrid during the COVID19 pandemic while preparing for a solo art exhibit there in August, 2021. His trajectory as an artist has been impressive since his graduation from San Alejandro in 2011, with exhibitions and artist residencies in Cuba, the United States, and in various countries in Europe, including Italy, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

Ted G. Decker
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