Visualizing Cuba
UGS 302
Difficult Dialogues First-Year Seminar Fall 2021

TTh 9:30-11:00  UTC 3.120
Writing Component/Global Cultures
Unique Number 62185
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Office Hrs: T-Th 11-12:30 BEN 3.140 or by Zoom

Description:
The only communist country in the Western Hemisphere, Cuba has exerted a great visual fascination among North Americans and the world in general. Cuba has provided the world with many of the most iconic images and figures we have of the Caribbean region, the Third World and its people, and the history of the Cold War. These images have been artistic, journalistic, political, racial, gendered, commercial, or propagandistic in some measure.

The global visual attention that Cuba commands is even greater today given the recent, visually arresting confrontations between state officials, security details, dissident “artivist” groups (such as the Movimiento San Isidro), and growing sectors of civil society in times of extreme material scarcity and international isolation recalling those of the 1990s. Because of a greater yet still very contested access to digital networks and devices by citizens on the ground, videos of massive protests such as those that occurred across the island on July 11, 2021—as well as the ensuing repression and arrest of “protest leaders”—can be quickly transmitted and disseminated via cellphone and alternative media throughout the island and abroad. Images of Cuban uncertainty and instability have thus grown more dramatic and impactful under the current Biden administration than under the previous, when, just after the death of Fidel Castro in November 2016 and during the presidential transition from his brother Raúl to Miguel Díaz-Canel, Trump officials suspended the process of diplomatic and economic normalization between Cuba and the United States begun by Barack Obama in 2014.

Because of the 60-year U.S.-led economic embargo and the sustained political animosity of exile groups, the images of Cuba available around the world tend to be very polarized and stereotypical, painted either in bright colors or in dark grey. We continue to visualize Cuba alternatively as a tropical paradise, as a tyrannical dictatorship, as a racially integrated island, as a landscape of ruins, as an ideal for a possible socialist utopia, or as a Caribbean gulag.

This course is meant to have you see Cuba, its history and affairs not as foreign pundits see it, but as Cuban and other artists have seen it by way of the country’s unique visual culture and image politics. We will consider the esthetic, social, political, and economic dimensions of several examples of Cuban painting, photography, graphics, art installations, film, documentaries, urban design, monumental architecture and sculpture, performance, and visual narrative throughout its 62 years of Revolution and beyond, starting with the country’s struggles for prosperity, sovereignty, abolition, freedom of expression, and independence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

We will consider how much visual culture in the Cuban archipelago and beyond, both government-friendly and oppositional, has contributed to this complex, contradictory picture. Theoretical debates about dissident vs. state-sponsored art, commitment vs. contestation, avant-garde experimentation vs. social realism, freedom of expression vs. censorship, and the visual role of race, gender, and sexuality will be reviewed. Our focus will be on how painters, filmmakers, photographers, performers, and other visual actors in or from Cuba and its diaspora respond, contribute, or object to the global power of political and cultural icons before, during, and after the Cold War.
This course will help students understand better a neighboring country that has often been misrepresented and demonized because of a history fraught with political antagonism and intransigence. By studying some key pieces in Cuban art, film, and literature, students will understand how much overlap there is or not between Cuban and U.S. peoples, cultures, and historical processes. This is a course about interrogating positive and negative stereotypes and images about an "enemy country" by using its print, visual, film, and media history and culture to explore antagonistic points-of-view.

Requirements (with Writing Flag):

1. **Class attendance, participation, and presence in special events: 20%**
   Students are expected to participate in class discussion. In at least two occasions the class will meet in other locales on campus, outside class time, to learn how to take advantages of unique UT Gems research resources. We'll have special guided visit to the Benson Latin American Collection to check its bibliographical resources about Cuba and to the Blanton Art Museum to see its holdings of prints and paintings by contemporary Cuban artists. UGS students are encouraged to attend one of the University Lecture Series, place and time to be announced. We hope you get involved in the vibrant intellectual life of the university, including events about urgent current issues. Finally, we count on having at least one special guest speaker in class, either a noted Cuban Studies scholar or a visual artist.

2. **Two class presentations: 12%**
   At some point you will be asked to pair up to present the work of a visual artist to the entire class. At a later point you will use the outline for your research paper (see point 4) to make a 10-minute presentation to your fellow students for constructive feedback.

3. **Three short analytical reviews on a Cuban visual piece: 33%**
   Each 3-page essay should focus on a different medium: a. a pre-1902 print, photograph, painting, or cartoon; b. a work of Cuban avant-garde art; 3. film or graphic novel scene

4. **One 10-12 page research paper: 35%**
   This is an open-topic research project on a state-sponsored or independent artist, artwork, film production, performance or exhibit in Cuba or abroad that would consider how different media forms inform or influence each other in Cuban expression. The steps for this assignment--selection of topic; search, consultation and summation of references; outline with main arguments; first draft and revisions; final submission--are scheduled throughout the second half of the course in accordance to the Information Literacy guidelines for Signature Courses. For this paper you need to follow the following 5 steps:
   - Propose an appropriate topic for approval by the professor (5%)
   - Put together a commented bibliography with 5 good sources as part of a research plan (5%)
   - Provide an outline that sketches the main argument, identifies your method or strategy of analysis, summarizes the main sources, and begins analyzing the materials. Present and explain your outline to a peer group. (See Point 3 above)
   - Turn in an early draft with an introduction; a body of research findings, analysis, and argumentation (5%)
   - Turn in the final paper after incorporating final revisions suggested by the instructor and your peers (20%)

Course Materials:
Many of the class sources are available free online to you through the UT Library System. Two books should be bought at the COOP or via Amazon. Other materials will be available as pdfs from our Canvas webpage or other sites on the Internet.

Works of scholarship available online at the UT Library Website:
1. *Gale Cuba Encyclopedia*. Editors, Alan West-Durán, Victor Fowler-Calzada, Marel García Perez, Louis A. Perez Jr., César A. Salgado, María de los Angeles Torres
3. Louis Perez, *Cuba in the American Imagination*
4. Emilio Bejel, *Jose Martí: Images of Memory and Mourning*

**Book for purchase at the Co-op or online:**
Anna Veltfort, *Goodbye, my Havana: The Life and Times of a Gringa in Revolutionary Cuba*

**Films and documentaries to be seen on your own online or screened in class**
2. *I Am Cuba* (Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964)
4. *Improper Conduct* (Orlando Jiménez Leal and Nestor Almendros, 1984)
5. *Bitter Sugar* (León Ichaso, 1996)
7. *Cuba Transition* (Ernesto Fundora, 2019)

**Book resources to be consulted throughout the course (selections available on Canvas Files)**
Alan West-Durán, *Cuba: A Cultural History*
Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*
Jorge Duany, ed. *Picturing Cuba: Art, Culture, and Identity on the Island and in its Diaspora*
Rachel Weiss, *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art*
Yoani Sánchez, *Havana Real*
Rachel Price, *Planet/Cuba. Art, Culture, and the Future of the Island*

**Class Schedule**

**Week 1. Visual Culture and Image Politics in Cuba: An Introduction**
Aug 26  Introduction to the course
Read: Alan West-Durán, Introduction and conclusion to *Cuba: A Cultural History*

**Week 2 Cuban Landscape and Society in 18th and 19th Century Prints and Paintings**
Aug 31  Vistas of Havana and plantation oversight in Serres, Miahle, and Laplante
Read:
2. Emilio Cueto, “Cuban Colonial Prints: Constructing Our National Identity” (Canvas Files)
4. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "On Oversight. The Ordering of Slavery" (Canvas Files)
   *Gale Cuba* entry (optional): "Havana: Atlantic Center of Shipping, Commerce, and Building" (online)

Sept 2  Nationalizing the Cuban landscape: Chartrand and Collazo. Racializing Cuba in the works of Landaluze.
Read:
1. E. Carmen Ramos, “Víctor Patricio de Landaluze’s Paintings during the Ten Years’ War in Cuba (1868-1878)” (Canvas)
2. (Canvas Files) *Gale Cuba* entry: “Día de Reyes en la Habana (V. P. de Landaluze)” (online)
3. Jill Lane, "Smoking Habaneras" (Canvas Files)

**Week 3 José Martí as Icon in Photography, Monuments, and Urban Public Space**
Sept 7  José Martí, Cuba’s "Apostle," in Photography
Read:
2. Emilio Bejel, *Jose Martí: Images of Memory and Mourning*, p. 1-2, 17-43 (Canvas Files)
3. *Gale Cuba* entry: "José Martí: Political Essays" (online)
Sept 9  José Martí in Urban Public Space in Cuba and abroad  
Read:  
1. Emilio Bejel, *Jose Martí: Images of Memory* [...] p. 45-66 (Canvas Files)  
2. *Gale Cuba* entry: "José Martí: Exile in New York" (online)  

**Week 4**  
The Spanish American War of 1898: Media War in Pictures, Prints & Cartoons  
Sept 14  Concocting Images of Cuba in United States' "Yellow Journalism"  
Read:  
From Louis Perez, *Cuba in the American Imagination*:  
2. "Chapter Two: Imagining Self Interest," p. 25-94 (Canvas Files)  

Sept 16  Ruling through images: Visualizing the new possessions after 1898  
Read:  
Lanny Thompson, "Representation and Rule in the Imperial Archipelago" (Canvas Files)  

Sept 17  3-page paper on pre-1902 print, painting, photograph, or monument due by 5pm  

**Week 5**  
After 1902: The "Plattist" Republic, Art Deco Design, and the 1933 Revolution  
Sept 21  Tropical Glamour and the "Dance of the Millions" in Conrado Massaguer’s *Social*  
Read:  
2. L. Lobo Montalvo & Z. Lapique Becali, "The Years of Social" (Canvas Files)  

Sept 23  Reporting Dictatorship and Revolt Through Photography: Walker Evans in Havana  
Read:  
1. José Quiroga, "A Cuban Love Affair with The Image" (Canvas Files)  

Tentative online tour of the Blanton Latin American Collection with Caribbean Studies Librarian  
Adrian Johnson  

**Week 6**  
The Avant-Garde in Cuba’s Visual Arts from the 1930s to the 1950s  
Sept 28  The Avant-Garde in Cuban Painting during the 1930s and 1940s  
Read:  
3. Ramón Cernuda, “The Cuban Avant-Garde and the International Art Community” (Canvas Files)  
4. *Gale Cuba* entry: “Visual Arts: Republican Period” (online)  

Team presentation on the following *Gale Cuba* entry: “*Gitana tropical* (Víctor Manuel)”  
Sept 30  Vernacular Avant-Garde works in Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s  
Team presentations on the following *Gale Cuba* entries (class should read them all):  
"*El triunfo de la rumba* (Eduardo Abela)”; "*El rapto de las mulatas*” (Carlos Enríquez)”  
"*Gallo amarillo* (Mariano Rodríguez)”; “The Art of René Portocarrero”; “Mario Carreño, *La zafra*”  
“The Still-Lives of Amelia Peláez”; “*La Jungla* and the Artistic Development of W. Lam”  

**Week 7**  
The Cuban Revolution as Global Spectacle  
Oct 5  Fulgencio Batista vs. Fidel Castro on the World Stage (1953-1961)  
Read:  

Watch:  
*Fidel Castro*, a documentary by Adriana Bosch, first half  

Oct 7  Shooting/Filming the Cuban Revolution  
Read:  
1. *Gale Cuba* entry: “Film: 1959-1989” (online)  
2. Charlie Nafus, Program Notes on *I am Cuba*  
Watch:  *I Am Cuba*, first and third episodes (Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964)

Oct 8  **3-page paper on an art deco or avant-garde artist, work, or photograph due by 5PM**

**Week 8 Filming the Cuban Revolution (Continued)**

Oct 12  Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and ICAIC Film Adaptation in 1960s Cuba

Read *Gale Cuba* entries online:

1. “*Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomas Gutiérrez Alea)”
2. "Bay of Pigs Invasion: 1961"
3. "Cuban Missile Crisis"


Oct 14  Discussion and analysis of *I am Cuba* and *Memories*.

Read:

1. EDMUNDO DESNOES, script for *Memories of Underdevelopment*, translated by Michael Chanan (Canvas Files)
2. Essays and interviews about the film (Canvas Files)

**Week 9 The “Prodigious Decade” as Graphic Novel: Anna Velfort’s *Goodbye, My Havana***

Oct 19  Background on Anne Veltfort in Cuba

Read:

1. Frances Negrón-Montaner & Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “In Search of Lourdes Casal’s Ana Veldford” (Canvas Files)
2. Anna Veltfort, *Goodbye, My Havana*, Chapters 1 to 4: “Havana Bay,” “The University of Havana,” “The Sierra Maestra,” “Morgan” & the Malecón” (Co-op)

Oct 21  What’s graphic in a graphic novel? Revolution, Sexuality, and Visual Archive in Velfort’s *Goodbye, Havana*

Read:

2. *Gale Cuba* entry: “Sexuality: The UMAP Camps” (online)
3. Maria A. Cabrera Arús, “Fashioning and Contesting the Olive-Green Imaginary in Cuban Visual Arts” (Canvas Files)

**Week 10 Repression and Expression during the “Grey Years” in the 1970s, the Mariel Exodus, and the 1980s Arts Explosion***

One-on-one meetings will be scheduled online or during office hours to discuss possible paper research topic through the last week of October

Oct 26  Intellectual and Sexual Persecution in Cuba During the “Grey Years”

Read:

1. Ted Henken, *Cuba: A Global Handbook* skim 130-143, read 143-154 (Canvas Files)
2. *Gale Cuba* entries: “Peruvian Embassy, Mariel Boatlift”; "Sexuality: Gay and Lesbian Representation in Cuban Art, Film, and Literature" (online)

Watch:  *Improper Conduct (Conducta impropia)*, first part

Oct 28  After Mariel, Mendieta and More: New Cuban Art takes off in the 1980s

Read:

1. *Gale Cuba* entry: “Visual Arts: Revolutionary Period” (online)
2. *Gale Cuba* entry: “Esculturas Rupestres and Other Works by Ana Mendieta” (online)

**Week 11 Cuba’s Special Period on Film and Page (1991-2006)**

Nov 2  Viewing the “Special Period” from Without: Exile Filmmaker León Ichaso

Read:

3. César A. Salgado, "Re-viewing Bitter Sugar Twenty Years After" (online) [https://cubacounterpoints.com/archives/2091.html](https://cubacounterpoints.com/archives/2091.html) (Links to an external site.)

Watch: **Bitter Sugar** (León Ichaso, 1996)

Nov 4 View the ruins from within: Antonio José Ponte and Fernando Pérez’s Duelling Visions

Read:
1. **Gale Cuba** entries: “Suite Habana (Fernando Pérez)”; “Film: 1989-2010” (online)
2. Ana Dopico, “Picturing Havana” (Canvas Files)
3. Lucia M. Suárez, "Ruin Memory - Havana Beyond the Revolution" (Canvas files)

Watch: Clips from *An Art of Making Ruins* (Florian Borchmeyer 2006) and *Suite Habana* (Fernando Pérez, 2003)

**Week 12 Afro-Cuban and Diaspora Art Before and During the Special Period**

Nov 9 Afro-Cuban Art after the Cuban Revolution

Read:
2. Alejandro de la Fuente, “*Queloides*: Race and Racism in Cuban Contemporary Art” (Canvas Files)
3. Odette Casamayor-Cisneros, “Elusive Faces: Representations of Blacks & Blackness in Contemporary Cuban Art” (Canvas Files)

Nov 11 **Special visit to the Blanton Collection: Details to be announced**

Read: Andrea O’Reilly, “Cuban Art in the Diaspora: Chaos of Difference and Repetition” (Canvas Files)

**Week 13 Dissident Artists in Cuba: Tania Bruguera, Yoani Sánchez, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and the Movimiento San Isidro**

Nov 16 Post-Soviet Performance Art and Dissident Journalism in Cuba: Tania Bruguera and Yoani Sánchez

Read:
1. **Gale Cuba** entries on “Visual Arts: Special Period”; “Performing Arts: Performance Art”; “The Works of Tania Bruguera” (online source)
2. Yoani Sánchez, selections from *Havana Real* (Canvas Files)

Nov 18 Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and the San Isidro Movement

Watch: Episode of Documentary Series *Cuba Transition* (Ernesto Fundora)

Read: Links to online articles about *Movimiento San Isidro* and L. M. Otero Alcántara (to be announced)

**Week 14**

Nov 23 **Class presentations and submission of preliminary outlines for final papers**

**Week 15** **July 11 and its Aftermaths: Cuba Today, Cuba Tomorrow?**

Nov 30 New Cuban trends, works, and artists, and the neoliberal global art markets

Read: Rachel Price, Introduction to *Planet/Cuba* (Canvas Files)

Dec 2 Planet Cuba/New Trends, continued.

**Course evaluations. Draft with comments returned.**

Read: Selections from Rachel Price, *Planet/Cuba* (Canvas Files)

**Final Paper Due** on Friday 10 at 5PM
Grading Policy: This course will be graded on the Plus/Minus system. There is no written final exam for this course. Late assignments will be deducted by half a grade for each day past the due date.

Laptop and Electronics Use Policy: Classroom Laptop use is for taking notes and consulting material, images, and related to this course only. Other Electronic Devices (Cell phone, Blackberry, I-Phone, etc.) must be turned off during class. Any use of these devices will lead to dismissal marked as an absence for that day. Class attendance policy. You are expected to attend every meeting unless you have a medical emergency. Total class attendance is calculated as 10% of your grade.

Plagiarism: There will be no tolerance for plagiarism in this course. Failure to submit properly original work for assignments could lead to dismissal from the course and worse. For UT policy about plagiarism consult http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_plagiarism.php

Religious Holidays – Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss an examination, work assignment, or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence. It is the policy of The University of Texas at Austin that you must notify each of your instructors at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

Students with Disabilities: The instructors will make himself available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations for students with a disability. These students may be required to provide documentation from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Service for Students with Disabilities (471-6259). Emergency Evacuation Policy: Occupants of buildings at the UT Austin campus are required to evaluation buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. For more policy details see: http://www.utexas.edu/emergency.

University Lecture Series. For details about the Spring 2021 University Lecture Series on Oct 10 and 11 consult http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/uls

Your professor supports Gun Free UT but believes it is his responsibility to teach, evaluate, and advise all responsible students fairly and in equal terms whatever their positions or opinions.

Classroom Safety and COVID-19

To help preserve our in person learning environment, the university recommends the following.

- Adhere to university mask guidance
- Vaccinations are widely available, free and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated.
- Proactive Community Testing remains an important part of the university’s efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free.
- Visit utexas.edu for more information