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## HAVANA

# Biennial

**T**he Sixth Havana Biennial proved an impressive, politically charged display of talent, particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some 179 artists were exhibited in 17 locales honeycombed throughout the city, notably in the cavernous spaces of two historic bayside fortresses, the Castillo del Morro and the Forteleza de la Cabana.

The theme was "The Individual and Memory," and Cuban artists, 19 in all, provided some of the strongest offerings. Rising 27-year-old superstar Kcho was represented by one of his boat construc-

**Pepon Osorio, *Don't Cry for Me in the Barbershop*, 1997, mixed media and video installation, dimensions variable. Havana Biennial.**



tions, a 20-foot-high sculpture cobbled together from frayed maritime equipment, suitcases, old furniture—a calculatedly ambiguous reference to the country's current boat emigrations. Carlos Garaicoa created a Zen rock garden using fragments of Havana cornices resembling Mayan ruins. And Lazaro Saavedra created a kind of meditative graveyard at the back of one fortress-site. Following a path, the visitor entered a long vault, in which the makeshift grave sites continued. Further back toward a pyramid shape was a pile of gravel with what looked like bloody arms and legs sticking out and a shovel nearby. Both fortresses had functioned for years as prisons under both Castro and Batista. The context also supplied a carefully fashioned ambiguity.

Painting and sculpture, in any traditional sense, were in short supply. There was plenty of photo-based, body, and gender-related art, all of which managed to address the theme of memory. Mexico's Tatiana Parcero created a series of large-scale, transparent photos of feet, hands, or other body parts superimposed over medieval illuminated manuscripts, giving the illusion of colorful tattoos. Suzann Victor, from Singapore, hung an iron bed from a ceiling and draped it with a "bedspread," which turned out to be composed of small glass slides containing the artist's blood mixed with that of the Cuban family who were her hosts—a commentary, she said in the exhibition's notes, on the conjoined fates of colonized peoples. Such a theme could not have been distasteful to the Havana Biennial's organizers.

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