

# TRANSACTIONS OF THE EYE



The works in the main gallery exhibition, “Transactions of the Eye,” act as a bridge between featured artist Harold Coego’s two home countries: Cuba, where historical and cultural heroes surrounded him, and Canada, where new characters and new human interactions shape a different life.

In Canada, Harold Coego has been able to investigate his relationship with his home country and rediscover himself as a visual artist. Coego’s collage work, incorporating figures from Cuban currency, draws upon the historical “characters” which were received by the artist in a non-critical way when he was a child. Now, thirty years later, Coego gives these characters the chance to break through their own historical frame and wander free as commodities in an abstract world of ink and irony. The resulting images look like they’ve come out of an abstract cinematographic kaleidoscope that blurs the boundaries of nations with the power of imagination.

## Transactions of the Eye Photos

**Harold Coego** was educated in Cuba, where he was born. He holds a Certificate (1995) from the National Center Museum of Conservation and Restoration in Havana. From 1999-2002, he was script writer, set designer, and in charge of storyboards at the International School of Cinema and Television in Havana, Cuba. He also worked as an editor’s assistant, and between 1995 and 2000 he was light designer, set designer, and trainer at The Obstacle Theatre. He also was involved in the conservation of art in caves and mansions in Cuba, including copying and making reproductions of First Nations’ drawings/artworks. In 2002, Coego moved from Cuba to Vancouver, BC. Currently, he works as a cameraman and editor for video works by the internationally acclaimed artist Rebecca Belmore.

Cubafest Opening at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, Kingston

Cubafest Grand Opening Reception: Sunday 3 May 2009 @ 2pm at the Grand Theatre

Gallery Tour and Reception at Modern Fuel: Sunday 3 May from 3pm-6pm.

With two Cuba-related exhibitions in its space, Modern Fuel is proud to be a participant in Cubafest, a celebration of Cuban culture taking place at various locations in Kingston from May 1-9, 2009. (Check out <http://cubafestkingston.ca> for more information on other CubaFest events.)

## Exhibition Essay

By **Francisco García González**

When it was proposed that I write an introductory text for the artist Harold Coego's exhibition, I accepted without the slightest hesitation, even though I had not yet seen his pieces, nor did I know anything about him. It was enough for me to accept that Harold and I are united by having frequented, at different times, common spaces, apart from the place where we were born: Cuba.

Upon seeing the images of his works, the first sensation was one of absolute surprise. Harold has emigrated; he has lived several years outside of his country, which means that he carries Cuba within himself. Some assert that the Island follows us everywhere we go, like a spirit of the dead that we cannot get rid of. I would like for it not to be so. However, both his artistic projection and his way of seeing the complexities of the world are universal in this regard.

His work *Windmill of Dreams* holds expansive and ambiguous meaning for Cubans. Martí, perhaps the biggest myth of the Cuban imaginary, charged with the burden of all his symbols, spins like an absurd windmill of five wings, for both benefit and harm of the Island's inhabitants. It spins surrounded by Phrygian caps and black birds.

In *Voltus-Voluntarios*, an exquisitely made painting with certain supposed ingenuity, the image of Che becomes a powerful war machine. Harold appropriates maybe the most relevant icon of the universal revolutionary imaginary in order to recreate it with childish assumptions. Doubt creeps in us: if Che had had superpowers, just like Voltus-Voluntarios, what would have happened then?

The Caribbean does not escape Harold's sight either. In *Caribbean Murder*, the artist appeals to devices of a certain naive graphical art in order to travel down a worrisome path: the Caribbean could be something else apart from its beaches, its sun, and its delicious cocktails. The Caribbean also has its dark side, this was a known fact to Carpentier, Novas Calvo, Aimee Cesaire.... And Harold reminds us of this from his personal perspective.

Finally, Harold's work transcends the Island and the Caribbean to reveal to us his ideas about History, the History with a capital H.... According to Harold's paintings, History is a metaphysical projection in which nothing appears to face a dialectical progression. History (with a capital H) and its myths are recycled and spun around in an immense all-devouring carousel. History (with a capital H) is reached in a magnificent airplane after a 1000 kilometres flight or after an infinite walk.

The way to History, the great History, is the exact same way as the one taken by Harold's life and work. Nurtured from his Cuban experience Harold Coego has matured. That maturity, added to a prudent and healthy distance, has allowed him to express, through art, a sceptical philosophy, sometimes of frank cynicism--if cynicism can be frank--which explores realities and obsessions.

Finally, Harold's work is interesting because it compares unequal universes. Universes whose body cannot be stolen by man, it does not matter if he is Cuban, Canadian, Maltese, or Angolan.

**Kingston 8/April/2009**

*Translated by Andrés Rabinovich*

**FRANCISCO GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ** (Havana, 1963) has a degree in History from Havana University. He is a writer, editor, and screenwriter. His short story collections include *Juegos permitidos* [Games allowed] (1994), *Color*

local [Local color] (1999) and ¿Qué quieren las mujeres? [What do women want?] (2003). He has also published a historical essay, Presidio Modelo, temas escondidos [Model prison, hidden agendas] (2002), and Historia sexual de la nación (2006). With Enrique del Risco Arrocha he published Leve Historia De Cuba/ Cuba Lite. His stories have appeared in anthologies in Cuba, Spain, and the U.S. He won Cuba's Hemingway Short Story Prize in 1999, and has served as editor of the cultural journal Habáname. His articles have appeared in periodicals in Cuba, Mexico, Chile and the U.S. He is the author of many film scripts.