

LÁZARO SAAVEDRA

Pensamiento Visual

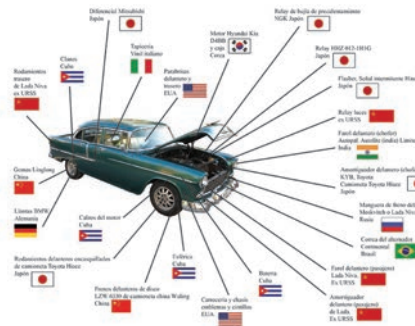
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Lázaro Saavedra (born in 1964 in Havana), has surfed and transcended every art wave in Cuba since the 1980s, and yet, it still looks like his career has just begun. His oeuvre demonstrates as much the casualness of a student who just graduated, as the maturity of an experienced artist; the chronicler's responsibility as much as the irreverent iconoclasm; the comic's cleverness as much as the reflection of the urban or popular philosopher, as some critiques from his generation like to call him.



El que no sabe
2006



Chevrolet 1955 (Escultura social)
2016

For his Bachelor's dissertation, Saavedra wrote: "I live in two spatial dimensions: one is the street, the other is the art world. I've always fought, both conceptually and formally, to find the street in art, and the art in the street." The artist's work constantly questions the ethics of the artistic practice, as well as the contradictions of the Cuban social and political context. Lázaro Saavedra finds pleasure in giving shape to his subversive and ironic thoughts, in order to trigger, through art's autonomy, a collective awareness.

Saavedra studied the visual arts for 12 consecutive years - an academic path followed by most Cuban artists - from his admittance, in 1976 and at the elementary level, in the art school "20 de Octubre", until his graduation from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA). When he was a student, Saavedra was a member of Grupo Puré (1986-1987), an art collective that dealt, through the appropriation of images and the assimilation of the international artistic language codes, with sensitive topics in regards to the Cuban political context, for instance the hedonist adhesion to painting which characterised this generation and the instrumentalisation of culture by some sectors of the State.

During his first solo show, *Pintar lo que pienso y pensar lo que pinto* [Painting what I think and thinking what I paint], the «hombrecitos», caricatured human figures with big eyes, made their first appearance, and have been directly identified with Saavedra's work for decades now. These strange and sarcastic «hombrecitos» scrutinize every work and situation, and even anticipate the visitors' reaction facing Saavedra's own works. This first exhibition became the context of origin for the work *ST* (1998), a still life below a sign reading *El arte arma de lucha* [Art as a weapon of struggle], inspired by the visual contradiction triggered by Magritte's work *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1929). A painting like an instruction that presented itself as an assertion, but creeps into the viewer's mind as a negation. Saavedra is a master operating from visual constructions and known references, a kind of ready-maker of ideas who ineffably puts his finger on the problem.

His trajectory was marked by important and transgressive solo shows, even in terms of curatorship, as was the case with *Una mirada retrospectiva* [A retrospective outlook] (1989), in collaboration with



Relación Profesional
2008

OPENING

Thursday 19 May
6:00 pm / 9:00 pm

20 May

10 July 2016

**CHOICES
PARIS**

Collectors Weekend
21-22 mai 2016

Palais de Tokyo
commissaires :
Laurent Le Bon
&
Emilie Bouvard

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artist Rubén Torres Llorca, in which the works were presented as vestiges of an ancient culture, to a public supposedly from the year 2188. Works in this exhibition included the iconic *Detector de ideologías* [Detector of ideologies], or the famous altar to Joseph Beuys with prayers from Cuban artists to Saint Pigment.

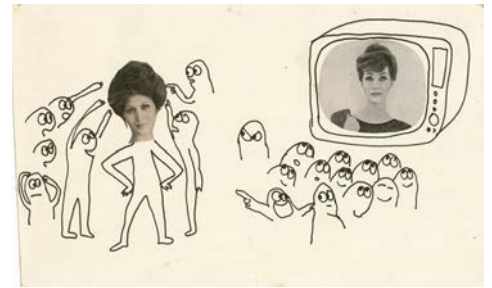
In 2000, with a group of students from the ISA, Saavedra founded the collective *ENEMA*, whose work positioned itself as one of the most singular “re-enactment” practices of Latin America. *ENEMA* collectively recreated historical performances from Abramovic and Ulay, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, or Dennis Oppenheim, while exploring the communicational capacity of performance as a space for social interaction.



Interiores del Cerro
2005

Another turning point was the creation of the I-MEIL gallery in 2006, an electronic activism project of newsletters with witty illustrations inspired by the current circumstances and vicissitudes of the Cuban society, and which visually originated in comic strip illustrations from the Series *Añejo 27*. The «hombrecitos» were featured again as protagonists in some of these reflections.

Behind the apparent fickleness of some of his works, one may find a complex apparatus of semantic subtleties and nuances, even when under the form of oil paint applied on gigantic canvases occupying the entire space of a gallery, from floor to ceiling. I am referring to his project *Sponsor*, exhibited at the Servando gallery, where Saavedra returned to painting to represent the logos of companies which financially contributed to the production of the exhibition. Beyond an opportunistic



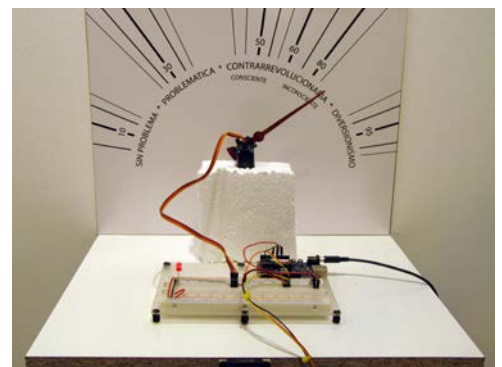
Untitled
(From the series *Añejo 27*)
Approx. 1988

comment on the growing intertwining between money and artistic production in Cuba, this project uses the global context of the Tenth Havana Biennial to make these relations explicit. They are not paintings, they are the exhibition itself.

Another facet of his poetics is the way the artist expresses his ideas without compromising, like when the artist is facing himself, and going through a disenchantment phase towards art, or when he confesses to his other ‘self’ that he never sold a single work to the MOMA, nor did he participate in the Venice Biennial, in the video *Relación profesional* [Professional Relation] (2008). The irony lies in the fact that this video was shot five years before his participation to the Cuban Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennial.

Pensamiento Visual is not only Lázaro Saavedra’s first solo show in a French gallery, but also the first time that so many major works from the artist are presented outside Cuba. This exhibition shows the genius’ creative process of one of Cuba’s most indispensable artists.

Direlia Lazo
(Cuban curator)
(Translation: Anais Lavigne)



Detector de Ideologías
2010

UPCOMING

JEAN TINGUELY
'60s

9 September

4 November 2016