

# Wallpaper\*

**From Cuba with love: history and poetry meet at the 12th edition of the Havana Biennial**

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The Havana Biennial may be celebrating its 12th edition this year, but the world's interest in Cuban art (and life) has never been greater. Poised at the threshold of cultural thaw and international commerce, the city of Havana has been transformed into a public exhibition space for the duration of 2015 Biennial, which is now ongoing until 22nd June.

Eschewing a centralised exhibition venue, this year's Biennial permeates Havana's many neighbourhoods, with shows popping up in Old Havana's crumbling 18th century residences, along the Malecón esplanade that traces Havana's waterfront and taking

over La Cabaña, a raised fortress built by the Spanish in 1763 to protect Havana from British conquests, amongst others.

'The theme of this year's Biennial is based on a way of thinking and of working with specific communities [in Havana], places that are central to the city and places that might seem separated' says Jorge Fernandez Torres, the Havana Biennial's director. 'It's a transdisciplinary approach that considers the idea and experience of integrating Cuban culture into the art works. Art is not meant to be seen as part of an exhibition, it's about selling it as life.'

While trying to locate and reach the various sites may be challenging to new guests to Havana, these journeys through different parts of the city engulfs visitors like a tight embrace and provides a deeper understanding to the works on arrival. At La Cabaña, a notorious government torture prison that has since been turned into a historical park, arching brick chambers have been installed with paintings and sculptures that comment on contemporary Cuba and its people's state of mind.

In one, the emerging artist Enrique Báster presents mixed media works on canvas that depict aerial views of Havana's topography and landscape, using found construction materials, paper and even currency to add layers of meaning to each piece. In another chamber, Ariamna Contino and Alex Hernandez Dueñas have collaborated to produce a series of intricate paper works entitled 'Camino Al Eden' that comment on the Latin American drug trade. Ranging from drug market statistics and intricately cut depictions of these countries' landscapes, to painted, layered glass works that breakdown the ways that drugs are trafficked, these large scale art pieces carefully consider Cuba's positioning in the surrounding narcotics network.

This year's Biennial also inaugurated a pioneering cultural exchange programme between Cuban artists and a group of Cuban-American artists from Miami. Supported by the Knight Foundation and the Miami-based art collector Jorge Pérez, the year-long program of studio visits and panel discussions intends to create new perspectives on art between Cuba and Miami that go way beyond the ideas of nationality and diaspora.