



LIGHT HOUSE STUDIO

KADIR LÓPEZ

By: Israel Castellanos León

Kadir López never stops surprising or even throwing off those of us who have followed with some attention his artistic career. In a little more than five years -to refer only more recent times- this creator has gone from installations and objects to paintings of fishermen influenced by impressionism, from human themes and those related to the sea to architectural ones, and from these to graphic design. Is his an ever-changing poetic? Is it a disarticulated visual production? Not in the least is it that simple. His is a creative endeavor with lots of in and outs. The paths followed by Kadir -once known as Kdir- are partially based on experimental exploration, a continuous playfulness, the search for a more solid expression, and artistic inquisitiveness and risk-taking, revisiting...

If I return to 1994 when Kadir was still studying at the Instituto Superior de Arte (Higher Art Institute) in Cuba, I can remember his appropriations of posters addressing the former socialist world paradigm -the now-extinct Soviet Union- that were given new meaning in his large-format paintings. Kadirs most recent exhibit at La Acacia shows his new approach to informational design. This time, he saturated his images with the pages of periodical publications and store-front businesses from neocolonial and capitalist Cuba. The artist utilized commercial advertisements from U.S. and Cuban companies and superimposed these on snapshots from the period that mainly show the built-up areas around Havana.

“All the works are created on original advertising posters (from the 1920s to 1959), with all the historic relevance that this implies, Kadir told me. “I have meticulously

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researched the location of each of the buildings in the city, or at the very least, of elements found in them that are meaningful. I have found photographic material to aid me in reconstructing the Havana that appears in the posters, as old stories reclaim their place in them”.

Thus, architecture and the seascape made their way back to López's work. Post-modern appropriation, perfected by Pop Art with parodic doses of professed neutrality, also did not completely abandon the artist's poetic. Born in 1972, López was required to perform archeological research in order to find documentary representations of a physical and social reality that he never experienced, not only because he was born several years after 1959, but also because he was born and grew up in a city (Las Tunas) far from the Cuban capital. Now, in the scrupulous collages he created with the help of a collaborator, Kadir appropriates a reality that, in my opinion, has not been lived by the artist or his peers only to a certain extent.

Those who live in Havana or visit the city can still appreciate the vintage automobiles of several U.S. car brands that appear more likely to belong to a museum; these cars can also be appreciated in Kadir's works. These currently obsolete vehicle rentals can be observed running (with their original, but many times reconditioned shells) through the same streets and urban areas that they have been crossing for many years now. These large cacharros run across the same eclectic architectural landscape seen in the images by Kadir.

These are cars and buildings deteriorated by the action of time, indifference, and/or economic insolvency. In the images created by Kadir these appear as they should: eroded by the years; by photochemical reactions, and by the handling over time of the photographic support. This is the impression sought by the artist as he took advantage of the effect conferred by the patina and the metallic corrosion to highlight a chronological distance, thus also eliciting a reflexive one. By respecting the



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polished surfaces that characterized these steel posters enameled with porcelain, and through his intervention, which achieved a variety of compositional solutions, Kadir was able to maximize his aesthetic approach.

The brand names of distributors of petroleum and its by-products to which the artist refers have been discontinued in Cuba; but the demand for gasoline and places that supply it is very much the same, although the names of the companies have changed. The buildings and urban spaces that remain manifest changes in their original colors, carpentry, or internal distribution, but they seldom exhibit radical or irreversible modifications. Old signboards have disappeared or have been replaced by newer ones. In any case, those chosen by Kadir are devoid of their original functions: while continuing to be used, advertisement products are no longer produced or sold in Cuba. As artistic artifacts, they have taken on symbolic roles and have sometimes acquired the form of utilitarian objects. They have been recycled, precisely as has taken place with certain themes and forms of expression in the work of Kadir, who has not altogether renounced the installation format.

Signs, as it turned out, was indeed an appropriate title for his exhibit. In both the English and Spanish languages, signs are unities of significant and significances. They have equal numbers of denotative and connotative functions. They are equivalent to indicators of objects or phenomenon. In English, they are very closely related with signs, posters, and street signs, which are recurrent elements of this exhibit. In it, the artist demonstrated a visual and cultural documentation that was erected as a reality, through superimposed and integrated strata that are latent “remnants” of this society.

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