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## **CUBAN ART COMES TO CHELSEA**

### **Recent works by Mabel Poblet and Ernesto Rancaño**

The Cuban Art Space of the Center for Cuban Studies opens an exhibit by two young Cuban artists, Mabel Poblet and Ernesto Rancaño. Poblet has been shown in two previous shows at the Chelsea Gallery (2006 and 2008), this is Rancaño's first – he is also part of a show of five Cuban artists at the Marlborough Gallery (Chelsea) that opens on May 19, Poblet will be here for the opening reception of the show, tonight, from 6 to 9 pm and will give a gallery talk on Saturday, May 14, at 3 pm. The show and talk are in the gallery, 231 West 29<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

Poblet, at 25, is still a student at Havana's excellent *Instituto Superior de Arte*. She is from Cienfuegos and came to Havana to study at the San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts, from which she graduated with highest honors (Rancaño, 42, also graduated from San Alejandro) She apprenticed in a workshop for a year and a half started by Cuban installation artist Tania Bruguera that brought her together with many known artists. In 2006, she was invited to participate in an important homage to the great Cuban painter Antonia Eirez at Havana's Servando Gallery, the youngest artist in the show.

Her early works were a close examination of her own short life, where she came from (an early series was called *Lugar de Origen / Place of Origin*), her relationships with family, friends and lovers. Mabel's work is intensely personal, even emotional, but it is never sentimental. It is precise and carefully crafted. The process of her art is scarily precise: it is based on silk screen printing on tiny fragments of transparent acetate plates and their subsequent manual assembly using numerous patterns of holes with small nails. .

The eight new works in this show are part of her recent series "Imagen y Palabra," and they are paired with five works from Rancaño's most recent series of works, works that are a huge departure from his early surrealism.

Mabel Poblet's work demonstrates an artist's use of her own body in her art without necessarily making herself the subject. Her body serves as a mirror of sorts into which our own truths, expectations, and frustrations are reflected.

In Poblet's new mixed media works, the shiny layer of acetate squares raised in relief by thousands of tiny nails works in concert with a background of miniature photographic self-portraits on silkscreen and produces an effervescent, translucent, and otherworldly quality. The result reflects Poblet's early influences – Marta Maria

Pérez Bravo, Ana Mendieta, Bruguera -- while appearing undeniably modern and vivacious.

In contrast to Poblet's outspoken, in-your-face work, Rancaño's works are quieter, more subdued. His works may evoke otherworldly feelings by limiting his palette, his subject matter, and by juxtaposing unexpected metallic elements like fish hooks, or pieces of charcoal, as in the three works from his *Abrazos prohibidos*" (Forbidden Embraces) series.

Rancaño and Poblet both limit their color pallet to bright red, black, grey and white, so the pairing is striking. Mabel's face, body and hands are in all of her works, it is personal, looking inward, often in silence. Rancaño, on the other hand, has said that all of his work addresses Cuba, in one way or another—but more as hints than in direct revelations. Both artists have a highly personal visual language system of signs and meanings that seem intentionally impossible to decipher. Mabel Poblet offers the following explanation:

*"La mayoría de mis obras parten de experiencias auto-referenciales, por lo que en algunos casos corro el riesgo de no ser totalmente comprendido por el público promedio. Parto una visión íntima de mis propias experiencias personales. Sin embargo, pienso que como seres humanos que vivimos en una sociedad única, coincidimos en muchas vivencias, y aunque los protagonistas no seamos los mismos, las experiencias cotidianas resultan comunes."* (The majority of my work is born from self-referential experiences, for which reason many run the risk of not being totally understood by the general public. I give life to an intimate vision of my own personal experiences. However, I think that as human beings that live in a unique society, we coincide in many coexistences, and though the protagonist may not be the same, the everyday experiences turn out to be common.)

Her new work deals with the sign language of emotions and abstracts ideas. By transmitting these feelings, she provokes those same feelings within the viewer so as to suggest that everyone is a protagonist in the drama of our separate and collective emotions. Rancaño's work, though apparently subdued, also can be very aggressive. *Ascensión 2006* shows a white ladder with a many thorn-like protrusions that will slow, if not thwart altogether any inclination to ascend. Strangely, viewers are beckoned to climb. When we look at *Abrazos prohibidos*, his series of female figures that are turned away from the viewer and transfigured with jarring elements, he seems to draw viewers in rather than to elicit the kind of repulsion suggested by the title.