

teorii a příbuzné zóny
Sešit pro umění, Notebook for art,
(XII)
zones and related theory

Black Face with a Crown: The Autonomous Artistic Work of Cuban Graphic Designer Tony Évora in the Context of Czechoslovak-Cuban Cultural Relations in the 1960s¹

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- 1 This on-line content is the English translation of an article published in the print journal *Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones*. The original was published as: Darina ZAVADILOVÁ, „Černá tvář s korunou. Volná tvorba Tonyho Évory v kontextu československo-kubánských vztahů“, *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny / Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones*, Vol. 19, 202, No. 38, pp. 16–59. Translated from the Czech by Phil Jones.

This case study examines the only surviving work from the 1965 exhibition of the young Cuban graphic designer Tony Évora at the House of Cuban Culture in Prague, which marked the conclusion of his three-year study stay in Czechoslovakia. The expressive portrait of a man-child with distinctly African features and a crown on his head stands in stark contrast to Évora's graphic production of the period, while the exhibition catalog text departs from the expected rhetoric of contemporary propaganda.

Through close interpretation and contextualization of the circumstances surrounding the work's creation, the study

explores Évora's Afro-Cuban identity and the complexities of artistic freedom in 1960s Cuba. It also sheds light on the still underexamined cultural exchanges between Czechoslovakia and Cuba, focusing on the historical, social, and political dynamics of the Prague–Havana–Paris triangle (and, by extension, New York). By situating Évora's work within the broader context of global decolonization and the struggle for racial equality, the study draws connections to other 20th-century artists, including Wifredo Lam, and contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of Global South perspectives in shaping 20th-century geopolitical conflicts and cultural narratives.

Keywords:

Tony Évora – Heberto Padilla – Wifredo Lam – Cuban revolution – Czechoslovakia – decolonization – transculturation – OSPAAAL – state socialism – 1960s

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On 14 June 1965, an exhibition of works by the Cuban graphic designer Tony Évora (1937–2017) opened at the House of Cuban Culture in Prague. It was the artist's first solo exhibition and marked the conclusion of his three-year study stay in Czechoslovakia. Instead of the anticipated ideologically charged posters in vibrant colors, examples of avant-garde typography, or faithfully realistic magazine illustrations corresponding to Évora's production at the time, the exhibition featured a series of black-and-white portraits. Of these, only a small reproduction on the cover of the exhibition catalog has survived. The image depicts a portrait of a man-child wearing a crown, rendered most likely in pencil and tempera. Its individual elements are markedly reduced, dissolving and re-emerging amidst expressive, almost gestural strokes. The face looks directly at the viewer with an empty, absent gaze. Beneath a distorted nose protrude large, fleshy lips. A slender, unnaturally elongated neck extends from a pointed chin. The aggressively jagged crown, studded with stones, contrasts with the overall composition, which oscillates between expressions of fear and determination.

Even the brief introductory text in the exhibition catalog departed from the optimistic rhetoric of propaganda that, in the first half of the 1960s, primarily sought to defend and celebrate the successes of Czechoslovak–Cuban cooperation.² The author of the text, the then prominent Cuban poet Heberto Padilla, described Évora's exhibited work as follows:

The abundance of colors, the Cuban charm and sensuality that prevailed in his early paintings were abruptly replaced by new colors—harsh and aggressive. [...] The faces are black, and black is here the decisive psychological element [...]. These faces always express a feeling of fear. It is the multifaceted face of today's anxieties that Tony Évora paints so wildly [...] in very particular moments of his existence, guided, however, by a dominant experience—the encounter with the contemporary European world.³

Through this exhibition, the present study opens up the topic of the still insufficiently explored cultural exchanges between Czechoslovakia and Cuba and seeks to clarify selected historical, social, and political contexts within the geographic triangle of Prague–Havana–Paris (and, by extension, New York). It focuses on the only surviving work from the exhibition—more precisely, its small reproduction—which serves as a fragment through which to situate Évora's autonomous artistic production more broadly: the Afro-Cuban roots of his culture; the question of race; and the standing of the individual within the cultural politics of the countries under consideration during the 1960s.

Methodologically, the study is inspired by the prism of New Cold War History,⁴ which understands the Cold War as a complex, multilayered process, acknowledges a degree of permeability across the Iron Curtain, and emphasizes the importance of the perspectives not only of state actors but also of non-state and smaller agents. In the field

2 Cf. Hana BORTLOVÁ, *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959–1962*, Praha: FF UK 2011, p. 155.

3 Heberto PADILLA, *Tony Évora* (exh. cat.), Praha: Dům kubánské kultury 1965, n.p.

4 See Robert J. McMAHON (ed.), *The Cold War in the Third World*, New York: Oxford University Press 2013; Odd Arne WESTAD, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005; John Lewis GADDIS, *Cold War: A New History*, New York: The Penguin Press 2005.

of art history, it loosely draws on Piotr Piotrowski's concept of horizontal art history and takes into account recent scholarship on race, internationalism, and cultural exchange, including publications by Quinn Slobodian⁵ and Claude Cernuschi.⁶

The study is grounded in archival research conducted at the National Archives of the Czech Republic, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Archive of the National Gallery in Prague, and the Security Services Archive, as well as in an analysis of the contemporary Czechoslovak and Cuban press, the last, among others, through the private Havana-based Archivo CIFO-Veigas. Given Évora's sudden emigration from Cuba via Czechoslovakia to Western Europe following Castro's support for the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968,⁷ and the associated loss of his personal archive and the subsequent tabooization of his person in Cuba—some sources are scarce, and certain information is available only through oral history.

Czechoslovak-Cuban Context and Relations

Shortly after the victory of the Cuban Revolution (1953–59), Czechoslovakia established markedly above-standard relations with Cuba. As the westernmost country of the Eastern Bloc, it served the Soviet Union as an important intermediary—a kind of extended arm⁸—in the expansion of its influence in Cuba and further into the South American continent. The establishment and expansion of ties in the fields of culture and education formed an important component of this strategy. Within the Eastern Bloc, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic possessed the most favorable conditions for such engagement thanks to its industrial and cultural sophistication, traditionally known and respected in this part of the world.⁹ As historian Hana Bortlová observes, “cultural exchange and the granting of educational scholarships represented functional and proven instruments of political and ideological propaganda,”¹⁰ aimed at “paralyzing the influence” of the United States, as well as China and certain Western European states, in Latin America, and at supporting the Cuban Revolution's alignment with socialism. Socialist cultural propaganda was to be directed through Cuba toward other states, particularly those sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution (Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, among others). This strategy unfolded in parallel with U.S. policy, which since the 1940s had used exhibitions of modern art—especially Abstract Expressionism—organized in cooperation with the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) as an instrument of cultural propaganda in the Cold War competition.¹¹

The Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Cuba, signed in December 1960 as the first of its kind following the victory of the Cuban Revolution,

5 Quinn SLOBODIAN (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015.

6 Claude CERNUSCHI, *Race, Anthropology, and Politics in the Work of Wifredo Lam*, New York: Routledge 2019, e-book.

7 Tony Évora happened to be on vacation in Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

8 BORTLOVÁ, *Československo a Kuba*, pp. 35–49, here p. 49.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–26.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–56, here p. 55.

11 See David CRAVEN, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period*, Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press 1999; Eva COCKCROFT, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” in: Francis FRASCINA (ed.), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, London – New York: Routledge 2000, pp. 147–154.

testifies in many respects to the exceptionally privileged cultural relations between the two countries.¹² The specific implementation plans of the agreement—whose structure reveals a prevailing asymmetry—were to be prepared on an annual basis. Particularly in the early 1960s, cultural cooperation was subject to a Soviet directive to accommodate all Cuban requests,¹³ at times even at the expense of Czechoslovakia's own cultural activities.¹⁴ Over the course of the decade, its further development largely mirrored the general trajectory of political events. A cooling of cultural relations is evident after the October Crisis of 1962 (the Cuban Missile Crisis), when Cuba began to face economic difficulties. As ideological divergences between the two states intensified in the second half of the 1960s, the previously intensive cultural and educational exchanges had, by the period preceding August 1968, nearly ceased. In 1966–67, for example, Cuban students were recalled en masse from Czechoslovak universities so as not to acquire “harmful petty-bourgeois habits,”¹⁵ and the dissemination of Czechoslovak culture in Cuba—such as the screening of contemporary Czechoslovak films—was effectively prohibited.¹⁶ Following Castro's support for the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, cultural relations between the two countries were officially rehabilitated, even though the invasion was condemned by broad segments of the public in both Czechoslovakia and Cuba.

Among the states of the Eastern Bloc, a gradual specialization emerged in particular artistic fields in which sustained support was to be provided to Cuba. The areas of focus were determined by the Cuban side according to the level achieved in a given field,¹⁷ and Czechoslovakia was assigned technically demanding disciplines such as theater,¹⁸ film,¹⁹ and printing and publishing technologies. In the field of graphic design, some of the most significant activities on the Cuban art scene were likely organized by Poland (especially after 1965).²⁰ Continuous support took the form of artistic mobility, primarily through

- 12 National Archives, MŠK fonds – Zahraniční styky s Kubou (unprocessed), box 44, Dohoda o kulturní spolupráci mezi Československou socialistickou republikou a Kubánskou republikou.
- 13 Cf. National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Odbor pro styk se zahraničím, box 44, Kuba – plán kulturně propagační práce 1960, 2 May 1960.
- 14 For example, the equipping of Cuban schools, invitations to Cuban cultural workers to Prague, and the organization of an exhibition in Havana on socialism in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1960 were financed, inter alia, from the budget for the Czechoslovak exhibition at the Triennale di Milano. Cf. *Ibid.*
- 15 National Archives, ÚV KŠČ fonds – mez. odd. (unprocessed) KUBA 1967–1969, Informace o studentech z Kuby, 23 October 1967, cited in: BORTLOVÁ, *Československo a Kuba*, pp. 152–153.
- 16 Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, TO-Tajné fonds, Kuba 1965–1969, box 1, Souhrnná informativní zpráva o současném stavu styků Kuby se socialistickými zeměmi, March 19, 1968, p. 7.
- 17 Cf. National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Odbor pro styk se zahraničím, box 44, Tendence ve vývoji kulturních styků ČSSR a ZST s Kubou, 3 June 1964.
- 18 Cf. Darina ZAVADILOVÁ, “Národ sobě a Kubě,” in: Magdaléna NOVÁ – Elena BABICH (eds.), *Nevidíme, co nevíme. Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní konference studentů doktorských studijních programů*, Praha: KTF UK 2018, pp. 309–317.
- 19 Cf. Magda MATUŠKOVÁ, “La contribución checoslovaca a la naciente industria cinematográfica nacional cubana,” in: Josef OPATRŇÝ (ed.), *Las relaciones entre Europa Central y América Latina. Contextos históricos*, Praha: Karolinum Press 2018, 149–160; Vladimír Alexander SMITH MESA, *KinoCuban: The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas for the Cuban Moving Image* [dissertation], London: University College 2011.
- 20 Cf. Héctor VILLAYERDE, “El entorno del diseño gráfico en los sesenta: realidades, debates, críticas e influencias,” in: Héctor VILLAYERDE (ed.), *Testimonios del diseño gráfico Cubano 1959–1974*, La Habana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau 2010, pp. 42–53, esp. p. 44.

the stays of Czechoslovak instructors and technical specialists in Cuba, or through scholarships granted to Cuban artists for study periods in Czechoslovakia. The experience thus acquired—not only artistic but also technical, along with knowledge of educational systems and the structures of professional associations in individual artistic disciplines—was expected to be brought back to Cuba and disseminated through the recipients' pedagogical or institutional work,²¹ sometimes even at the expense of their own artistic careers.²²

Teaching graphic design was, moreover, expected of Tony Évora upon his return from Prague.²³ He was the first Cuban to study the arts at university level in Czechoslovakia and, more broadly, one of the very few Cuban graphic designers in the 1960s to have acquired academic training in a socialist country.²⁴ Yet despite the fact that later on, following his emigration, teaching became Évora's primary professional occupation (during the 1970s and 1980s he taught graphic design and printmaking techniques at several British institutions, including Oxford Brookes University, where from 1985 onward he served as Head of the Department of Art and Design), he never taught in Cuba. At the same time, he was critical of the lack of deeper disciplinary knowledge in his home country and was acutely aware of both the professional commitment and the difficult working conditions faced by Cuban practitioners, the majority of whom were self-taught. Until 1970, there was no formal educational program in graphic design in Cuba.²⁵ In Évora's view, Cuban production thus remained, even at the end of the 1960s, "superficial and lacking method or a conscious effort in addressing graphic problems."²⁶

The House of Cuban Culture

Beginning in May 1962, Czechoslovakia became the first foreign country to establish a permanent cultural representation in Cuba in the form of the House of Czechoslovak Culture (Dům československé kultury – DČK).²⁷ Reciprocally, the House of Cuban Culture (Dům kubánské kultury – DKK) in Prague, opened in September of the following year, was the first Cuban cultural center abroad and at the same time the first—and only—cultural representation of Latin America in Czechoslovakia. The mission of both institutions was conceived primarily as educational and outreach-oriented. Through a wide range of cultural activities—art exhibitions, conferences, film screenings, and concerts—the DČK was to represent Czechoslovak culture and disseminate socialist ideology, with Czechoslovak socialist art intended to “replace the Western culture previously imported

21 See, for example, ZAVADILOVÁ, “Národ sobě a Kubě,” Darina ZAVADILOVÁ, “Č. kat. 9/29 (Dimitrij Kadrnožka, Viva la república),” in: Milena BARTLOVÁ – Jindřich VYBÍRAL (eds.), *Budování státu: reprezentace Československa v umění, architektuře a designu*, Praha: Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová 2015, p. 318.

22 Author's interview with Cuban sculptor Juan Quintanilla, Havana, 25 January 2019.

23 Cf. “Tony Evora: de regreso a sus raíces,” *La Gaceta de Cuba*, October 1965, no. 55.

24 Apart from Tony Évora, the only other artists from the Eastern Bloc to study graphic design in the 1960s were probably Esteban Ayala (Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig, 1962–65) and César Mazola Álvarez (Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, 1964–65), and later in the 1970s Rolando de Oraá and Héctor Villaverde (Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw).

25 Cf. Silvia FERNÁNDEZ, “The Origins of Design Education in Latin America: From the hfg in Ulm to Globalization,” *Design Issues*, Vol. 22, Winter 2006, No. 1, pp. 3–19.

26 VILLAVERDE, “El entorno del diseño gráfico en los sesenta,” p. 46.

27 See Darina ZAVADILOVÁ, “Č. kat. 9/27 (Zdeněk Pokorný, Dům československé kultury v Havaně),” in: BARTLOVÁ – VYBÍRAL, *Budování státu*, p. 316.

to Cuba.”²⁸ The task of the DKK, by contrast, was “to present the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution and to serve as a mediator of information and encounters with cultural life in Cuba.”²⁹ The political significance of both centers—particularly in the case of the DČK—is evidenced by the strict observance of protocol at major events, including the participation of high-ranking officials, formal speeches, the playing of national anthems, and extensive media coverage.³⁰

In Prague, the House of Cuban Culture was generously allocated the premises of a former record store at a prominent address on the corner of Národní Avenue and Na Perštýně Street. Though modest in size, the ground-floor space was functionally organized and comprised a retail area, a library with a reading room for books and periodicals (which also served as a conference hall), a small exhibition gallery with adjoining café, and the director’s office. The architectural design was created by Zdeněk Pokorný, who also designed the premises of the DČK in Havana.³¹ The interior design was developed in part by the painter and graphic artist Salvador Corratgé—later appointed cultural attaché at the Cuban diplomatic mission in Prague—and the sculptor Tomáš Oliva,³² whose abstract metal sculpture dominated the retail space. In addition to several other works by Cuban artists and prominently displayed shop windows featuring examples of folkloric and Afro-Cuban popular art, musical instruments, and carnival masks,³³ the entire interior furnishing was provided by the Prague-based Central Office of Arts and Crafts and the state enterprise Výstavnictví (Exhibition Management).³⁴ The furniture, too, was supplied by the Czechoslovak side—as in the case of the DČK in Havana the previous year—owing to an acute shortage of production materials in Cuba.³⁵ During the 1970s, at the request of the Cuban side, the DKK underwent renovation and expansion.³⁶

Tony Évora in Prague

Tony Évora, born Antonio Évora García, arrived in Prague in October 1962, shortly before the outbreak of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He soon enrolled at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (then Vysoká škola umělecko-průmyslová – VŠUP), entering the studio of book and magazine illustration led by Karel Svolinský. He later also attended the studio of book design and poster art directed by František Muzika, although he did

28 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Kuba 35, Zřízení kulturně informačního střediska v Havaně – předložení návrhu. Zpráva k návrhu vládního usnesení o zřízení kulturně informačního střediska v Havaně, 28 February 1961.

29 Pavel ŠTĚPÁNEK, “Umění v domě kubánské kultury,” *Latinská Amerika*, Vol. 3, 1964, No. 5, pp. 51–53, here p. 51.

30 Cf. National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Zahraniční styky s Kubou, box 47, Zpráva o oslavách 9. května na Kubě, 4 June 1963, pp. 1–6.

31 See Karel STORCH, “Čs. kulturní středisko v Havaně – Kubánské kulturní středisko v Praze,” *Architektura ČSSR*, Vol. 23, 1964, No. 8, pp. 557–561.

32 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Zahraniční styky s Kubou, box 47, Pozvání ze zahraničí. Přijetí dvou kubánských architektů k dokončení prací spojených s úpravou Domu kubánské kultury v Praze, 5 July 1963.

33 Cf. ŠTĚPÁNEK, “Umění v Domě kubánské kultury,” 51; (LH), “Dům kubánské kultury v Praze,” *Rudé právo*, Vol. 43, 1963, No. 247, p. 1.

34 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Zahraniční styky s Kubou, box 47, Záznám z porady o kubánském kulturním středisku v Praze, 16 July 1963.

35 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Zahraniční styky s Kubou, box 46, Zpráva č. 3 o přípravách k otevření Domu čs. kultury v Havaně, 14 February 1962, p. 1.

36 Cf. National Archives, MK fonds (unprocessed) – Praha, box 258, various documents.

not formally complete his studies.³⁷ Already at that time, barely twenty-five years old, he ranked among the recognized figures of the emerging revolutionary art scene in Cuba.³⁸

Likely owing to Évora's position as artistic director of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, his study stay was approved at the direct request of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs,³⁹ which ensured him special treatment in Prague, both administratively and, apparently, financially. Unlike other foreign students, Évora was not required to pass an entrance aptitude examination for admission to an art academy, nor did he have to complete the otherwise mandatory one-year language course,⁴⁰ which since 1961 had also included a political orientation component specifically for Cuban students.⁴¹ The Ministry even offered to provide him with an English- or French-speaking tutor.⁴² Moreover, during the first half of the 1960s the Cuban embassy in Prague routinely supplied Cuban students with Tuzex vouchers for clothing purchases.⁴³

Testimonies of contemporaries,⁴⁴ as well as surviving photographs,⁴⁵ indicate that Tony Évora actively engaged in student life, especially in Svolinský's studio (throughout his stay he resided at the Komenský Dormitory in Prague's Střešovice district). His warm regard for Professor Muzika is evident from several postcards preserved in Muzika's estate.⁴⁶ This correspondence provides a valuable record of Évora's travel itinerary, including his immediate impressions of the places he visited. During his three-year stay he became acquainted with a number of Western European capitals (at the very least Paris, London twice, as well as Florence and Venice), with each trip lasting several weeks. The texts also reveal his linguistic competence in the form of a basic command of written English. Additional sources suggest that he traveled within Eastern Europe as well.⁴⁷

An important source of financial support for his foreign travels may have been his collaboration with the International Union of Students (IUS), for which he designed dozens

37 In the register of students at the University of 17 November, Évora was listed only as a student of Karel Svolinský's studio on a one-year internship. The circumstances of its extension are unknown.

38 In the summer of 1962, the Cuban cultural magazine *La gaceta de Cuba* published an article celebrating Tony Évora's departure for a study stay in Prague, praising his professional achievements and contributions to the Cuban graphic arts industry. See "Evora en órbita," *La gaceta de Cuba*, July 1962, Nos. 6–7.

39 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Kuba 35, Kuba – Přijetí stážistů, 15 September 1962.

40 Cf. Marta Edith HOLEČKOVÁ, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity. Univerzita 17. listopadu (1961–1974) a její místo v československém vzdělávacím systému a společnosti*, Praha: FF UK 2019, p. 117.

41 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Kuba 35, Kuba – Záznám z porady na MZV – projednání kulturní dohody a návrh plánu ke kulturní dohodě.

42 National Archives, MŠK fonds (unprocessed) – Kuba 35, Kuba – Přijetí stážistů, 15 September 1962.

43 BORTLOVÁ, *Československo a Kuba*, p. 51.

44 Author's interviews with Cuban scenographer and Prague scholarship holder Salvador Fernández (Havana, 29 January 2019), Czech art historian Pavel Štěpánek (Prague, 8 February 2020), and British graphic designer Richard Hollis (London, 15 November 2023).

45 E.g. the personal photographic archive of painter and graphic artist Václav Zeman, a graduate of Karel Svolinský's studio.

46 Archive of the National Gallery in Prague, František Muzika (1900–1974) collection. Osobní fond, Pohlednice 1963–1965.

47 E.g. Karen GOLD, "Art Man from Havana" (Higher Education Supplement), *The Times*, 1 November 1985, No. 678, 12; "Tony Evora: de regreso a sus raíces," *La Gaceta de Cuba*, October 1965, No. 55.

of posters between 1963 and 1966 featuring themes of solidarity with countries of the Global South. At the time, the position of artistic director of the IUS was held by the Chilean graphic designer Sergio Núñez,⁴⁸ also a graduate at VŠUP. Évora shared with Núñez not only a Latin American background but also a similar graphic language that combined drawing and photography with bold typography. The high frequency of travel to Western European countries constituted another point of connection between the two artists—Núñez traveled as an IUS fellow⁴⁹ and it is possible that Évora obtained travel authorization in the same manner. In any case, the relatively secure financial circumstances and opportunities for travel available to foreign students were frequent sources of tension between them and local students in Czechoslovakia,⁵⁰ which Évora also felt to some extent in the form of a certain distance from his fellow students at VŠUP (at least in Muzika's studio).⁵¹

Tony Évora had experience with poster design even before arriving in Prague. In Cuba he produced poster designs for the government agency Intercomunicaciones. He belonged to the rising generation of graphic designers active in the country during the first post-revolutionary years, who introduced into poster design advertising principles and visual features characteristic of the North American advertising industry, where many of them had previously been trained in numerous American agencies—Évora specifically at the Havana branch of McCann Erickson. The formal dimension of posters during this period was to a large extent technologically determined. After the imposition of the U.S. economic embargo, silkscreen printing became the only available technique, resulting, for example, in the use of large monochrome areas and the reduction of fine detail. For the sake of clarity for the illiterate segment of the population, and at the same time to avoid ideological vulnerability, designers developed their works with maximal simplification of the message, frequently employing single-word slogans or even just numerals. In Cuba, the poster represented a crucial and the most widespread form of mass communication, and the volume of commissions—which graphic designers were not in a position to refuse—was particularly high during the early post-revolutionary years. Given that few experienced graphic designers and typographers remained in the country, they were subject to extreme workloads.⁵² All of this, together with the absence of a commercial market,⁵³ contributed to the formation of a distinctive visual language of the Cuban poster and fostered its artistic quality, which reached its peak at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.

Évora's Exhibition at the House of Cuban Culture

Tony Évora appears to have begun developing his autonomous artistic practice more substantially only during his stay in Czechoslovakia,⁵⁴ as suggested by Heberto Padilla's text

48 See Michal ZOUŘEK, *Czechoslovakia and the Cono Sur 1949–1989. Relaciones políticas, económicas y culturales durante la Guerra Fría*, Praha: Karolinum 2014, pp. 186, 227.

49 Security Services Archive, Sergio Henriquez Fernando Núñez, Volume No. 807031.

50 Cf. HOLEČKOVÁ, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity*, p. 122.

51 Email correspondence between the author and Czech graphic designer Jan Solpera, 3 March 2019.

52 Cf. Luis CAMNITZER, *New Art of Cuba*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2003, p. 110.

53 *Ibid.*, 110; Susan SONTAG, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity," in: Donald STERMER (ed.), *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba 1959–1970*, New York: Pall Mall Press 1970.

54 Padilla writes of the gradual development of "a kind of slow enjoyment that is characteristic of painters" and which began to appear in Évora's graphic work over the previous five

in the catalog of his Prague exhibition. His work drew on a longstanding interest in portraiture. Alongside Western art, which he encountered during his travels abroad,⁵⁵ he was undoubtedly influenced by the artistic environment of VŠUP, particularly the folkloric motifs in Karel Svoboda's draftsmanship, as well as the Surrealist paintings of František Muzika, which he saw at the Venice Biennale in 1964.⁵⁶ The traditional folk art of Eastern Europe, in particular, represented something entirely new and unfamiliar for Cuban artists, whose domestic scene had until then been strongly shaped by American trends.⁵⁷

Cuban folk motifs, including Afro-Cuban iconography, thus gradually began to assert themselves in Évora's paintings. This is evidenced, for example, by a small reproduction of one of his works shown at the exhibition of foreign students from Prague's art academies, held in November 1964 at the Youth Friendship Club.⁵⁸ The markedly schematic black-and-white graphic work entitled *Motivos populares* (Folk Motifs) depicts two figures wearing hats, one of whom holds a nest with a hen in their hands. The image may represent an ordinary rural scene within an agricultural environment, but could also symbolize a traditional ritual offering in Afro-Cuban spiritual ceremonies. It is likewise striking that each figure is rendered with a different skin tone, which may allude to the ethnic hybridity of Cuban culture.

This tendency may have culminated in Tony Évora's solo exhibition at the House of Cuban Culture in Prague. The face reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalog—and presumably the other works in the exhibited series—bears distinctly African features. Although the specific racial identity of the depicted face is not explicitly stated in the text—the catalog contains no list of exhibited works from which the subjects might be inferred—it can be deduced from the verbal description (“the faces are black”)⁵⁹ and from the stereotypical physiological features in the image (full lips, broad nostrils, and the like). The text further indicates that the exhibited works belonged to a series of portraits; the remaining works would therefore have corresponded in character to the image reproduced on the cover.⁶⁰

Equally crucial, however, is the motif of the crown. The portrait may represent one of the Orishas, the spirits of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, which syncretically combines Christianity with the religious traditions of the West African Yoruba people, whose members were sold into slavery in the Caribbean from the 16th century onward. Given the markedly childlike face, the figure might specifically be Elegua, whom Tony Évora regarded as “the embodiment of Cuba's complex destiny.”⁶¹ Elegua is associated with life

years. Although Évora reportedly considered himself a graphic artist rather than a painter, according to Padilla, his Prague works definitively prove the possibility of the coexistence of both forms of expression and at the same time represent a fundamental departure from his previous autonomous artistic works. Cf. PADILLA, *Tony Évora*.

55 In Paris, Évora visited the Louvre, the Musée Rodin and the Musée d'Orsay, but also took in the city's architecture, including a visit to the Notre Dame Cathedral. Cf. Archive of the National Gallery in Prague, František Muzika (1900–1974) collection, Osobní fond, Pohlednice 1963–1965, Paříž, 28 December 1963.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Cf. GOLD, “Art Man from Havana,” p. 12.

58 The work was reproduced in a short article about the exhibition in the magazine *Juventud Checoslovaca*, published by the Czechoslovak representative office in Havana. Jiří HANUŠ, *Juventud Checoslovaca*, 1965, No. 1.

59 PADILLA, *Tony Évora*.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Luis Manuel GARCÍA MÉNDEZ, “Eleguá y el destino cubano. Entrevista a Tony

paths and crossroads, unlocks doors, and is syncretized, among other figures, with the Infant Jesus of Prague.⁶² Although Évora himself did not have direct Afro-Cuban ancestry, he was convinced of the deep roots of Yoruba mythology in contemporary Cuban society and culture. He compared its richness to that of Greek mythology,⁶³ an argument he later elaborated on in numerous scholarly texts and publications on the history of Cuban music.⁶⁴

Afro-Cuban Legacy and Decolonization

Évora most likely encountered Afro-Cuban culture through his own practice of playing percussion instruments, which are intrinsically connected to the rituals of Santería. He deepened his knowledge through reading the works of the Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera and the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz.⁶⁵ Ortiz's concept of transculturation,⁶⁶ formulated in the 1940s as a multilayered, dynamic process resulting in the emergence of an entirely new cultural phenomenon through the active participation of all interacting cultures, in Évora's view perfectly captured the essence of Cuban music. In his words, it is there that the "loves (and sometimes heartbreaks) of the Spanish guitar and the African drums" reach their culmination.⁶⁷

During the first half of the 20th century, Ortiz stood at the center of an intense intellectual debate surrounding the concept of Cuban national identity—*Cubanidad*—which built upon earlier emancipatory ideals dating back to Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain. In seeking to articulate the specific hybridity of Cuban culture, comprising syncretic elements of European, African, and residual Indigenous traditions, Ortiz consciously contrasted transculturation with the notion of acculturation, a term used by anthropologists particularly in reference to the Indigenous peoples of North America and one he regarded as describing a largely one-directional process of passive acceptance. His theses gained renewed urgency after 1945, when the struggle of colonized nations for self-determination intensified globally, and disillusionment with the presumed unequivocal superiority of Euro-American civilization became fully manifest.⁶⁸ According to Markéta Křížová, however, Ortiz's strong emphasis on the agency of the subordinated culture—in this case, the culture of enslaved Africans brought to Cuba—and on its efforts to preserve its specificity, motivated by his desire to acknowledge its contribution,⁶⁹ also

Évora, periodista, profesor, animador cultural, artista plástico, diseñador y musicólogo," *Cubaencuentro*, 25 August 2011, <https://www.cubaencuentro.com/entrevistas/articulos/elegua-y-el-destino-cubano-267406> (accessed 10 October 2023).

62 See Migene GONZÁLEZ-WIPPLER, *Santería: The Religion*, St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications 2004, esp. pp. 4 and 28–33.

63 Tony ÉVORA, *Orígenes de la música cubana: Los amores de las cuerdas y el tambor*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial 1997, p. 139.

64 E.g. *Ibid.*; also Tony ÉVORA, *Música cubana: Los últimos 50 años*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial 2003; Tony ÉVORA, *El negro de América Latina, su música y sus creencias*, Valencia: Aduana Vieja 2014. Also numerous articles published in the magazine of Cuban exiles *Encuentro de la cultura cubana*, published in Madrid.

65 Cf. GARCÍA MÉNDEZ, "Eleguá y el destino cubano."

66 Cf. Markéta KRÍŽOVÁ, "Transkultura: Možnosti využití a rozšíření konceptu," *Český Lid. Etnologický časopis*, Vol. 95, 2008, No. 1, p. 15–35.

67 ÉVORA, *Orígenes de la música cubana*, p. 14.

68 Cf. KRÍŽOVÁ, "Transkultura," pp. 19–20.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

contributed to the problematic application of the concept of transculturation and to the early need for its revision. Nevertheless, the term anticipated the subsequent development of postcolonial theory in the decades that followed.

“Something very important is the Musée de l’Homme,”⁷⁰ Tony Évora confided urgently to Professor Muzika in a postcard sent from Paris in December 1963. The extensive colonial collections of the former Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro to which Évora referred—particularly African sculptures and masks—had already captivated avant-garde artists at the beginning of the 20th century and contributed to the development of Cubism and so-called Primitivism (leaving aside the problematic nature of that term).⁷¹ Pablo Picasso introduced the same permanent exhibition to Wifredo Lam in the late 1930s. Lam, also a Cuban artist, immersed himself there in the study of African art under the guidance of the ethnographer and Surrealist writer Michel Leiris. However, whereas Picasso appropriated the visual language of African objects largely on a formal level, without a deeper knowledge of or interest in their spiritual functions,⁷² Lam—who came from colonized Cuba, was of mixed Afro-Chinese descent, and had grown up in an environment shaped by Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies (although he himself was an atheist)—found in this experience a means of rediscovering his own long-suppressed cultural identity.⁷³ Surrealism subsequently provided him with both a formal and political framework that enabled him to foreground anti-colonial themes and an engagement with non-Western cultures.

According to Claude Cernuschi, it was precisely within Surrealism that Lam, during the 1940s, found a response to his earlier sense of “in-betweenness”⁷⁴ and a space in which he “synthesized Western and non-Western art and ideologies into a new hybrid style.”⁷⁵ His disillusionment with the manner in which African art was displayed in European museums, thereby further deepening its physical and cultural uprooting, together with his impressions from visiting his native Cuba, which in the 1940s was marked by pronounced racism, gradually transformed his artistic approach. References to non-Western, particularly Afro-Cuban, cultural belongings began to permeate Lam’s canvases (originally Cubist and inspired by Western European formal models), but now situated within their own landscapes and contexts. Lam later described this process in an interview with Gerardo Mosquera as his own “act of decolonization,”⁷⁶ reflecting on Cuba’s problematic history of slavery under Spanish rule and especially on the devastating and enduring consequences of slavery, which was not abolished until 1886.

70 Archive of the National Gallery in Prague, František Muzika (1900–1974) collection. Osobní fond, Pohlednice 1963–1965, Paris, 28 December 1963.

71 Cf. Suzanne PRESTON BLIER, *Picasso’s Demoiselles: The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece*, Durham: Duke University Press 2019, 57–58; Sieglinde LEMKE, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, New York: Oxford University Press 1998, pp. 33–38.

72 Cf. CERNUSCHI, *Race, Anthropology, and Politics*, chapter 1.

73 *Ibid.*, introduction.

74 *Ibid.*, introduction, chapter 3. Cf. Homi BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge 1994.

75 *Ibid.*, chapter 5.

76 Colleen KATTAU – David CRAVEN, “‘My Painting is an Act of Decolonization’. An Interview with Wifredo Lam by Gerardo Mosquera (1980),” *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, Vol. 3, 2009, Nos. 1–2, pp. 1–8, here p. 3.

A certain parallel may be observed between Wifredo Lam in Paris and Tony Évora in Prague, despite the nearly thirty-year interval and the entirely different socio-political paradigms in which they operated. Both artists left their country at a young age to pursue academic artistic training in Europe (one in the West, the other in the East), and both maintained friendships with and respect for white European artists and their work. They thus had to learn to navigate between different worlds and aesthetic traditions, and it was precisely their encounter with a different visual language and mode of thinking that led them to explore their own origins. Both took a sustained interest in Afro-Cuban syncretic religions and approached them through the anthropological studies of Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera (with whom each established close collaboration),⁷⁷ whose work sought to legitimize and secure recognition for non-Western cultures. Lam returned to Cuba for the first time in 1964 (though he never settled there permanently), by then already an internationally recognized artist, to present his own exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana. At that time Évora was already active in Prague; the two artists almost certainly met in person during the second half of the 1960s, at the latest in 1968. According to Évora's later recollections, Lam represented a significant artistic role model for him, motivating him to shape his own distinctive visual language.⁷⁸

The Question of Race and the Cuban Context

By the mid-1960s, Tony Évora was thus already familiar with a discourse critically oriented toward colonialism and was equally aware of the urgency of racial inequality as a contemporary issue.⁷⁹ In this regard, many representatives of the international intelligentsia and human rights activists looked to Cuba with hope. Although racial equality did not occupy a central position in the program of the new revolutionary leadership, a strong emphasis was being placed on social justice. At the legal level, segregationist regulations were indeed abolished—Afro-Cubans were granted access to what had previously been racially exclusive spaces such as schools, beaches, and clubs, and in a number of social indicators (for example, the redistribution of economic resources) racial inequality significantly declined or disappeared altogether, given the high proportion of Afro-Cubans in the lower strata of society.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, deeply rooted racial discrimination did not vanish entirely from everyday life in Cuba even after 1959.⁸¹

The persistence of discrimination was also linked to the ruling ideology, which promoted the principle of national unity. While the revolutionary concept of Cuban national identity drew upon earlier ideas of *Cubanidad*, in the context of escalating Cold War tensions,

77 Lam had been close friends with Lydia Cabrera since the early 1940s and illustrated several of her books and translations. Évora only established personal contact with her in the 1970s, when he typeset three of her works, including her best-known publication *Anaforuana: Ritual y símbolos de la iniciación en la sociedad secreta Abakuá* (1975).

78 See GARCÍA MÉNDEZ, "Elegguá y el destino cubano."

79 Cf. Tony ÉVORA, "Plomo papel y tinta," *Encuentro de la cultura cubana*, Vol. 12, 2007, No. 44, pp. 151–158, here p. 152.

80 Cf. Alejandro DE LA FUENTE, "Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba: An Overview," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 25, May 1998, No. 3, Race and National Identity in the Americas, pp. 43–69, esp. pp. 60–63.

81 Cf. John CLYTUS, "Black Man in Red Cuba," in: Aviva CHOMSKY – Pamela Maria SMORKALOFF – Barry CARR (et al.), *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, New York: Duke University Press 2004, pp. 424–426.

culture during the 1960s became increasingly grounded in Marxist-Leninist politics, which tended to suppress Cuban diversity rather than foreground it.⁸² Afro-Cuban culture was thus, on the one hand, officially accepted as part of national folklore,⁸³ although it was permitted to exist only as an object of scholarly inquiry, detached from religion and ritual (the practice of Santería was not legalized until 1991).⁸⁴ On the other hand, the issue of racial inequality was reduced to a mere “by-product of class divisions”⁸⁵ and effectively eliminated from public discourse. Alejandro de la Fuente has described this strategy as “racial silence:” racism continued to be presented as a problematic legacy of the country’s colonial past, albeit one that the revolutionary government had definitively overcome through the elimination of class differences. Further open discussion of the issue was perceived as a threat to the necessary unity of the nation and was therefore undesirable.⁸⁶ This principle extended to the visual arts as well—emphasizing racial or cultural differences, including visual references to Afro-Cuban heritage, could be perceived as potentially divisive.⁸⁷

As Claude Cernuschi has pointed out, Wifredo Lam himself unexpectedly aligned with a similar interpretation of the racial question in 1980,⁸⁸ declaring that “the real problem of history is ultimately not race but class struggle,”⁸⁹ thereby expressing disagreement with the doctrine of *négritude*, which sought recognition and emancipation for African culture. Yet Lam actively advocated the “injection of Black experience into art”⁹⁰ and maintained a longstanding friendship with Aimé Césaire, a leading figure of the movement, with whom he shared an interest in decolonization, African heritage, and the cultural identity of the Black diaspora. Their seminal meeting, together with André Breton, took place in the early 1940s, when Lam and Breton were fleeing Nazi-occupied France via Martinique.⁹¹ The intense contact amongst the three figures resulted in a number of significant professional collaborations.⁹² Lam’s prioritization of class over race was

82 See Isabel STORY, *When the Soviets Came to Stay: The Soviet Influence on Cuban Cultural Institutions, 1961 to 1987* [dissertation], Nottingham: University of Nottingham 2017, esp. pp. 93–150.

83 The African roots of Cuban culture were celebrated and promoted through newly established, state-sponsored folklore institutions, books and magazines; Afro-Cuban culture also experienced a wave of interest from professional and amateur researchers, who followed up (like Tony Évora) on the studies of Fernando Ortiz. Cf. DE LA FUENTE, “Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba,” p. 61.

84 The massive institutionalization of Afro-Cuban culture could have led to its being emptied out and torn from its original meaning and the race of its bearers. Cf. Kristina WIRTZ, *Performing Afro-Cuban: Image, Voice, Spectacle in the Making of Race and History*, Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press 2014, pp. 45–87.

85 DE LA FUENTE, “Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba,” p. 61.

86 *Ibid.*

87 For example, the work of the later prominent Afro-Cuban artist Manuel Mendive, which drew directly on references to religious rituals, was still completely marginalized in the 1960s and 1970s. See, for example, Doreen WEPPLER-GROGAN, “Cultural Policy, the Visual Arts, and the Advance of the Cuban Revolution in the Aftermath of the Gray Years,” *Cuban Studies*, 2010, No. 41, p. 147.

88 CERNUSCHI, *Race, Anthropology, and Politics*, chapter 6.

89 KATTAU – CRAVEN, “Manuel Mendive Painting is an Act of Decolonization,” p. 6.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

91 See CERNUSCHI, *Race, Anthropology, and Politics*, chapter 2.

92 For example, their collaboration on the second edition of Césaire’s famous text *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, which Lam illustrated and Breton supplemented with an introductory text, and which is considered one of the key manifestos of the *négritude* movement. Aimé CESAIRE, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, Paris: Bordas 1947.

moreover at odds with his own conceptualization of his work as an act of decolonization. According to Cernuschi, this contradictory stance may be explained less as an expression of genuine conviction than as a reluctance to alienate himself from Castro's regime and a desire to secure governmental support and artistic freedom.

Racial equality was likewise far from unequivocal in Eastern Europe, despite the proclaimed ideals of socialist internationalism. As Quinn Slobodian has argued through the example of so-called "socialist chromaticism,"⁹³ the Eastern Bloc propagated an image of a colorful world, notwithstanding the fact that representation remained in the hands of white actors, reinforcing their leading role or presenting nonwhite individuals as icons rather than as complex subjects. Unlike Wifredo Lam, Tony Évora did not possess visibly Afro-Cuban physical features; nevertheless, in the Prague environment he was unequivocally perceived as nonwhite—as other. As a result, during his stay in Czechoslovakia, like many other students from countries of the so-called Third World,⁹⁴ he experienced several xenophobic or racially motivated attacks.⁹⁵ The depiction of a crowned face with African features in his work may therefore be interpreted as an expression of recognition and solidarity with the Afro-Cuban roots of his own culture.

This premise may be further illuminated by considering the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, albeit created two decades later, for whom the motif of the crown became emblematic. In Basquiat's portraits of the "primitive-looking Black man,"⁹⁶ the art critic Thomas McEvelley discerned a representation of a Yoruba deity of Santería. The crown, as a symbol and relic of a lost royal origin, referred, in McEvelley's interpretation, to the sense of double identity characteristic of the African diaspora in the United States during the 1980s.⁹⁷ McEvelley, a vocal critic of the 1984 exhibition *Primitivism* at MoMA,⁹⁸ described the visual imitation of nonwhite cultures by white artists of late colonial modernism—namely, the appropriation of the visual language of the colonized by the colonizers—as "royal slumming."⁹⁹ By consciously and ironically adopting the form of so-called primitivism in his own work, Basquiat, as an artist of Afro-American and Caribbean descent, was able, in McEvelley's view, to blur the distinction between colonizer and colonized.¹⁰⁰ In other words, for Basquiat, as for Wifredo Lam—and perhaps also for Tony Évora—artistic production itself could constitute an act of decolonization.

93 Quinn SLOBODIAN, "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany," in: Quinn SLOBODIAN (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015, pp. 23–40.

94 E.g. Marta Edith HOLEČKOVÁ, "Konfliktní lekce z internacionalismu. Studenti z 'třetího světa' a jejich konfrontace s českým prostředím (1961–1974)," *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 20, 2013, Nos. 1–2, pp. 158–175; Tereza STEJSKALOVÁ (ed.), *Filmaři všech zemí, spojte se! Zapomenutý internacionalismus, československý film a třetí svět*, Praha: Tranzit.cz 2017.

95 Email correspondence between the author and the British graphic designer Richard Hollis, 30 March 2019.

96 Thomas McEVILLEY, "Royal Slumming: Jean-Michel Basquiat Here Below," *Artforum*, Vol. 31, 1992, No. 3, pp. 92–97, here p. 96.

97 *Ibid.*

98 Cf. Thomas McEVILLEY, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum*, Vol. 23, 1984, No. 3, pp. 42–51.

99 McEvelley used this term to describe a strategy whereby an artist in a privileged position consciously uses visual language or aesthetics associated with marginalized groups or subcultures. McEVILLEY, *Royal Slumming*, p. 95.

100 *Ibid.*

While race became a nonissue in Cuba's domestic affairs after 1959, the exploitation of people of color worldwide emerged as one of the principal themes advanced by Cuba on the international stage. According to Alejandro de la Fuente, the Cuban government effectively employed accusations of racism as a political instrument, particularly to discredit the social order of the United States.¹⁰¹ The country's intense cultural and political engagement reached a peak with the organization of the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana and the subsequent establishment of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL). The organization's activities significantly contributed to the internationalization of the issue of racial inequality and fostered encounters among activists, artists, and intellectuals from the Global South.

As Andrea Giunta and George F. Flaherty have observed, the aesthetic dimension of the Cuban revolutionary project's international self-representation also played a crucial role in challenging the cultural order defined by the Cold War.¹⁰² As inserts in the journal *Tricontinental*, posters by leading Cuban designers—including Tony Évora—for OSPAAAL, combining the dynamic aesthetics of Western styles with bold typography, photographic elements, expansive monochromatic surfaces, and Afro-Cuban motifs, were distributed worldwide, thereby securing international recognition and prestige. Visually compelling works, accessible even to illiterate audiences, helped disseminate socialist propaganda to regions it might otherwise not have reached. A decisive moment in this regard was the exhibition *The Art of Revolution* in London in 1970, and particularly its lavish catalog featuring an introductory essay by Susan Sontag.¹⁰³ It was the first publication in English to present the Cuban poster as an autonomous artifact of modern art, to reassess prevailing assumptions about the medium, and to trigger a wave of interest expressed in collecting, exhibitions, and further scholarly research.

Lunes and the Cultural Policy of Revolutionary Cuba

Alongside colonial and racial questions, the political dimension of the ongoing Cold War must necessarily be taken into account in interpreting Évora's work from the mid-1960s. In 1960, Tony Évora briefly served as art director of *Lunes de Revolución*, the literary supplement of the newspaper *Revolución*, the official organ of Castro's July 26 Movement, which brought together a broader circle of left-leaning nationalists. In the early years, all were enthusiastic supporters of the Cuban Revolution. After Castro's turn toward Soviet-style socialism in 1961, however, their initial enthusiasm waned, and most of them—including Évora—ultimately emigrated.

Although Évora was critical of certain steps taken by Castro, he tended to express himself in relatively apolitical terms and remained a humanist of cultural-nationalist

101 Cf. DE LA FUENTE, "Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba," p. 62.

102 Andrea GIUNTA – George F. FLAHERTY, "Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn," *Art in Translation*, Vol. 9, 2017, No. 1, p. 129, cited in Paulina CARO TRONCOSO, "Introduction, Special Issue on Surrealism and the 1960s Americas," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, Vol. 14, 2023, No. 1, pp. 1–5.

103 Susan SONTAG, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity," in: Donald STERMER (ed.), *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba 1959–1970*, New York: Pall Mall Press 1970.

persuasion (which included Afro-Cuban culture as an essential component of national identity), faithful to the revolutionary spirit.¹⁰⁴

At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, *Lunes*, under the leadership of Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Carlos Franqui, constituted a crucial cultural forum in Cuba and became one of the most widely read periodicals in Latin America, reaching a circulation of up to 250,000 copies.¹⁰⁵ Owing to its experimental graphic approach—combining typography, photography, and illustration—it is regarded by art historians as one of the most progressive manifestations of Cuban graphic design and a precursor to the later Cuban poster school at its height.¹⁰⁶ The greatest credit for the graphic identity of *Lunes* is often attributed to Raúl Martínez, later a prominent Cuban painter. Martínez himself, however, repeatedly emphasized Évora's contribution in this regard,¹⁰⁷ as he took over the visual editorship only because of Évora's impending departure for his study stay in Prague (though Évora ultimately left for Czechoslovakia two years later for reasons that remain unclear).

Tony Évora was responsible for the typographic design of issues 47 to 71 (February to August 1960).¹⁰⁸ The visual character he imparted to the publication during this period ranks among his most compelling typographic achievements. Bold layouts evocative of visual poetry drew inspiration from both the European avant-garde and the commercial graphic production of North American designers.¹⁰⁹ Through these means, in combination with other high-quality visual content (the pages of *Lunes* frequently reproduced works by leading international and local artists, including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Wifredo Lam, and Antonia Eiriz), the magazine helped shape the aesthetic vocabulary of revolutionary Cuba and advocated maximal freedom of artistic expression in an effort to dismantle the barrier between high art and mass culture. According to Rebecca J. Gordon-Nesbitt, the intellectual circle surrounding the weekly believed it possible to correct what they perceived as a historical error of Marxism-Leninism, which, by rejecting modernism, had reinforced the separation between the political and the artistic avant-garde.¹¹⁰

"In the editorial office of *Lunes* we did not conceal our incompatible sympathies for Karl Marx, André Breton, and the existentialism that was in vogue,"¹¹¹ Tony Évora recalled in 2007. It was he who was responsible for the typographic design and illustration of a special issue of *Lunes*¹¹² devoted to the visit of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, representatives of the international intellectual left expressing their support for

104 Cf. ÉVORA, "Plomo papel y tinta," esp. pp. 152–153; GOLD, "Art Man from Havana," p. 12; email correspondence with Jan Solpera.

105 William LUIS, *Lunes de Revolución. Literatura y cultura de los primeros años de la revolución cubana*, Madrid: Editorial Verbum 2003; Leandro ESTUPIÑÁN, *Lunes: un día de la revolución cubana*, Buenos Aires: Dunkin 2015.

106 José MENÉNDEZ, "Cuba. Diseño gráfico," in: Silvia FERNÁNDEZ – Gui BONSIÉPE (eds.), *Historia del diseño en América Latina y el Caribe. Industrialización y comunicación visual para la autonomía*, São Paulo: Editora Blücher 2008, p. 127; CAMNITZER, *New Art of Cuba*, pp. 108–109.

107 Cf. Raúl MÁRTÍNEZ, "La R al revés que tanto irritaba a muchos, no tenía ningún sentido," in: VILLAYERDE, *Testimonios del diseño gráfico*, pp. 71–72.

108 Some sources state that Évora worked for the weekly *Lunes* until the spring of 1961. E.g. ÉVORA, "Plomo papel y tinta," p. 156.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 151–152.

110 Rebecca J. GORDON-NESBITT, "The Aesthetics of Socialism: Cultural Polemics in 1960s Cuba," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 37, 2014, No. 3, pp. 265–283, esp. pp. 271–272.

111 ÉVORA, "Plomo papel y tinta," p. 152.

112 *Lunes de Revolución*, No. 51, 21 March 1960.

the Cuban Revolution. Évora later described their stay as a historic moment and the culmination of intellectuals' illusions about political power,¹¹³ probably alluding to Sartre's subsequent break with Castro, which began after Cuba's official support for the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.

French Surrealists, who saw themselves as catalysts of revolt within the artistic sphere,¹¹⁴ initially found this alignment equally compelling. According to Anne Foucault, Castro's regime appeared to offer them a third path between North American imperialism and Soviet authoritarianism.¹¹⁵ Castro's declared willingness to diverge from Soviet methods, his defense of revolutionary internationalism embodied in Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and his proclamations of artistic freedom convinced members of the Parisian Surrealist group to publicly express recognition and support for the Cuban Revolution, which they first demonstrated in 1964.¹¹⁶

The Surrealists had been attentive to cultural and political developments in the Caribbean since the early 1940s, when André Breton and Wifredo Lam's encounter with Aimé Césaire in Martinique proved decisive. As noted earlier, Lam had already introduced Afro-Cuban culture to Paris in 1939 through his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Pierre Loeb. French Surrealist interest in Cuba was reactivated in the second half of the 1950s by the arrival in Paris of two Cuban artists, Agustín Cárdenas and Jorge Camacho. Yet the connection between French Surrealism and Cuba as a non-Francophone country did not become firmly established until the Cuban Revolution emerged in the early 1960s as the principal symbol of the revolutionary potential of Third-Worldism, understood as a struggle against both Western and Eastern imperialism.¹¹⁷

Evidence of this alignment is found in the fact that several members of the Parisian Surrealist group—along with other prominent international adherents of Surrealism, including René Magritte, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta, Dorothea Tanning, Alexander Calder, and Joan Miró—accepted the invitation of Wifredo Lam and Carlos Franqui to participate in *Salón de Mayo*, a reprise of the Parisian *Salon de Mai* held in Havana in July 1967.¹¹⁸ For at least some members of the Surrealist group, the journey was motivated more by political than artistic considerations; several subsequently also took part in the Cultural Congress of Havana in January 1968. Upon their return, many shared their enthusiasm for Cuban socialism with colleagues and in the French press, which ultimately led to the signing of the collective declaration *Pour Cuba*.¹¹⁹ Only a few months later, however, disillusionment set in when Fidel Castro approved the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.

A number of earlier events might already have served as warning signs to the Surrealists regarding the problematic nature of Cuban socialism and the question of artistic freedom. Throughout the 1960s, the French public was informed through the press about extensive repression by the Cuban regime against political opponents and social groups

113 ÉVORA, "Plomo papel y tinta," p. 155.

114 Cf. "L'exemple de Cuba et la révolution," *La Brèche*, December 1964, No. 7, p. 104, cited by Anne FOUCAULT, "Surrealist Utopias and the Cuban Revolution," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, Vol. 14, 2023, No. 1, pp. 6–26, here p. 6.

115 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–18.

116 "L'exemple de Cuba et la révolution," *La Brèche*.

117 FOUCAULT, "Surrealist Utopias," pp. 9–10.

118 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–12.

119 "Pour Cuba, collective déclaration, Paris, le 14 novembre 1967," *L'Archibras*, March 1968, No. 3, p. 3, cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

deemed undesirable by the regime.¹²⁰ The weekly *Lunes* was banned as early as the autumn of 1961 due to its support for the short lyrical film *PM* (dir. Orlando Jiménez-Leal, Sabá Cabrera Infante), which, in a politically orchestrated process, was deemed decadent and counterrevolutionary.¹²¹ On that occasion, Castro delivered his well-known speech *Palabras a los intelectuales* (Words to the Intellectuals),¹²² in which he did not deny the principle of artistic freedom, but established an ambiguous ideological framework whose boundaries—highly fluid throughout the 1960s—remain the subject of debate.¹²³ The fundamental internal contradictions and ideological ambiguities of Cuban cultural policy, particularly regarding artistic freedom, were likewise repeatedly noted in analytical reports by the Czechoslovak diplomatic mission in Havana.¹²⁴

Artistic (Un)Freedom

The art historian David Craven has noted that at the beginning of the 1960s, while leaders of the Eastern Bloc continued to condemn modern art, Castro instead astutely declared: “Our enemies are capitalists and imperialists, not abstract art.”¹²⁵ The fact that Cuba never officially adopted the Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism or any other rigid system of aesthetic regulation¹²⁶ is often presented as an important indicator of the relative autonomy of the Cuban cultural scene.¹²⁷ At the same time, however, the delineation of an ideological line for artistic production—moreover a highly unstable one which, according to Gerardo Mosquera, ultimately resulted in the “practice of culture as ideological propaganda, along with a stereotyped nationalism”¹²⁸—proved repressive for many.¹²⁹ As Rebecca J. Gordon-Nesbitt has shown in her detailed analysis of the shifts in Cuban cultural policy during the turbulent 1960s,¹³⁰ these developments largely mirrored the country’s political reality. Disputes over artistic freedom were, in her view, part of a broader ideological struggle for power and control over specific spheres of influence.

120 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

121 See Rebecca J. GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution*, 2015 (e-book), chapters: The Early Cultural Climate, *PM* and Its Aftermath (May–June 1961) and Words to the Intellectuals (30 June 1961); Michael CHANAN, *Cuban Cinema*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2004, pp. 133–143.

122 Fidel CASTRO, “Palabras a los intelectuales,” *Latin American Network Information Center* (LANIC) – *Fidel Castro Speech Database*, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610630.html> (accessed 20 October 2023); GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*, chapter: The Early Cultural Climate.

123 See GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*.

124 Cf. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, TO-Tajné fonds, Kuba 1965–1969, box 1, Zpráva o současných směrech a tendencích v kubánské kultuře a umění a o kulturní politice strany, 4 May 1967.

125 David CRAVEN, “The Visual Arts Since The Cuban Revolution,” *Third Text*, Vol. 6, 1992, No. 20, p. 80 (interview with Fidel Castro by Claude Julien, February 1963), cited in GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*.

126 CAMNITZER, *New Art of Cuba*, p. 10.

127 GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*.

128 Gerardo MOSQUERA, “The New Cuban Art,” in: Aleš ERJAVEN (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2003, pp. 208–246, cited in WEPPLER-GROGAN, “Cultural Policy, the Visual Arts,” p. 149.

129 E.g. Aviva CHOMSKY, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell 2011, cited in CERNUSCHI, *Race, Anthropology, and Politics*, chapter 6 Négritude.

130 See GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*.

It was precisely the concept of freedom—albeit more personal than strictly artistic—that stood at the center of Jean-Paul Sartre’s ideas, with whom Tony Évora, as noted above, met in the editorial offices of *Lunes*. Sartre’s Marxist-existentialist political philosophy, inherently anti-racist and acutely sensitive to the tension between individual freedom and the forces of history, must have resonated strongly with Évora, as is evident in several of his later works and reflections.¹³¹ During his stay in Prague, Évora likely also became acquainted with the ideas of another exponent of existentialism, the British Marxist art theorist Herbert Read,¹³² with whom he shared the conviction that high-quality art—historical as well as contemporary, and not constrained by formal dogma—could serve as a tool for strengthening humanist culture.¹³³ Évora expressed himself in a similar vein in an existentially inflected essay written in 1964 for the Czechoslovak popular magazine *Latinská Amerika*. He wrote of the mission of artists in the Cuban Revolution, whose task was to create a “new revolutionary art” through which peace and freedom would be achieved.¹³⁴ In the text, he metaphorically affirmed the freedom of artistic expression and concluded by aligning himself with official anti-imperialist rhetoric: “Cuban artists struggle so that they may offer their country more beautiful and more authentic fruits of their labor. [...] We will change the fruit that was imposed upon us. And the new art born from the transformation of the world has unlimited possibilities.”¹³⁵ What “imposed fruit” did Tony Évora truly have in mind? The imported, commercialized culture of the United States, as contemporary propaganda would suggest? Or perhaps the growing threat of a Eurocentric Socialist Realist diktat in Cuba as a new form of cultural colonialism?¹³⁶

When Heberto Padilla, in 1965, interpreted Tony Évora’s autonomous artistic production as “an expression of fear after encountering the contemporary European world,”¹³⁷ he himself had already spent several years in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.¹³⁸ In his autobiography *La mala memoria* (Bad Memory), published in exile in New York in 1989, he summarized his experiences of mid-1960s Prague as follows: “[...] In Prague I found the same bureaucratic authoritarianism, the same political espionage, the same censorship, the same fear, the same nihilistic resignation [as during his previous

131 For example, in Évora’s autonomous graphic work, which he returned to marginally in the 1970s and 1980s, the motif of birds is prominent, serving as a metaphor for the fear of restrictions on human freedom. *Tony Évora: The focus on Prints* (exh. cat.), Southampton: The First Gallery 2008.

132 Although three translations of Read’s texts were published in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s, Évora allegedly owned and thoroughly studied one of Read’s books in English, which he probably purchased during one of his trips to Western Europe. Author’s interview with Czech art historian Pavel Štěpánek, Prague, 8 February 2020.

133 See Milena BARTLOVÁ, “Marxistické dějiny umění: direktivní model, nebo radikální inspirace?,” *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny*, Vol. 14, 2020, No. 29, pp. 27–28.

134 Tony ÉVORA, “Apuntes sobre el arte,” *Latinská Amerika*, 1964, No. 5, p. 2–6.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

136 Cf. CRAVEN, “The Visual Arts Since The Cuban Revolution,” p. 92.

137 PADILLA, *Tony Évora*.

138 In the first half of the 1960s, Padilla was a correspondent working for the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina and editor of the weekly *Novedades de Moscú* in Moscow (1962–64). He then worked in Prague as a representative of the Cuban state agency CUBARTIMPEX, which was part of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Trade and was responsible for trade in artistic and cultural products between Cuba, Eastern European countries, and Scandinavia (1964–66). He returned to Havana in 1966.

visit in the 1950s].”¹³⁹ A similar atmosphere may in fact have been suggested by the dramatic composition of the photographic portrait of Tony Évora reproduced in the catalog of the exhibition at the House of Cuban Culture, in which heavy iron gates secured with a padlock occupy much of the image. Despite the ongoing political and cultural thaw, Padilla thus articulated a striking disillusionment with the contemporary Czechoslovak art scene, which, in his view, produced works of high quality yet remained constrained by the state apparatus.¹⁴⁰

Padilla himself had the opportunity in Prague to speak with writers, visual artists, and musicians, and to read translations of local poetry and novels. His key guide was Mariella Kutserová, a Czech woman fluent in Spanish, whom Padilla identified as Tony Évora’s wife.¹⁴¹ “She guided us through the labyrinths of Prague, showed us the hidden city, and did so without bitterness. She wanted us to miss nothing of the country she loved, but what resulted from that contact with the ‘reality’ was collective frustration and anxiety.”¹⁴² It should be noted that Padilla wrote his autobiography with considerable temporal distance (albeit still before the fall of the Berlin Wall) and after his own experience of several years of severe political persecution in Cuba. Even the relatively liberal climate in Czechoslovakia before August 1968 did not convince him that the Cuban regime would avoid the errors of “actually existing socialism.”

Disappointment and political disillusionment were reflected, in various forms, in the work of a number of artists. In Cuba, one can find works formally related to the portrait reproduced in Tony Évora’s exhibition catalog, for example in the oeuvre of the expressive painter Antonia Eiriz, although she herself regarded her paintings as apolitical. In the first half of the 1960s, contemporary critics compared her existentially inflected canvases to the work of José Clemente Orozco and Francisco Goya.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, from the mid-1960s onward she faced increasing criticism from official circles for allegedly counterrevolutionary subject matter (as well as for an expressive style rejected by dogmatists), a development that ultimately contributed significantly to her withdrawal from public artistic life.¹⁴⁴ According to Doreen Wepler-Grogan, the contested status of Eiriz’s work may also have stemmed from her earlier close ties to the cultural weekly *Lunes* and the personalities associated with it.¹⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that Eiriz’s paintings were included in the representative exhibition *Pintores cubanos*, organized under the auspices of the Cuban National Council of Culture (the predecessor of the Ministry of Culture), which toured Eastern Bloc countries and was shown in the spring of 1962 in Prague’s Mánes exhibition hall under the title *Současní malíři z Kuby* (Contemporary Painters from Cuba). Due to the predominance of abstract works, the exhibition as a whole was received rather coldly

139 Heberto PADILLA, *Self-Portrait of the Other*, New York:

Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1990, pp. 126–127.

140 PADILLA, *Self-Portrait of the Other*, p. 127.

141 Mariella Kučerová (Czech transcription of surname) probably worked as a Spanish translator in Prague. Her name appears in the Czechoslovak press in connection with Cuban authors, among others. She is mentioned, for example, in Calvert CASEY, “Nedělní procházka,” *Kulturní tvorba*, No. 22, 2 June 1966, pp. 8–9. However, it is not entirely certain whether she was actually Évora’s wife or girlfriend. The testimonies of eyewitnesses differ on this point.

142 PADILLA, *Self-Portrait of the Other*, p. 127.

143 Roberto FERNÁNDEZ RETAMAR, “Antonia Eiriz,” *La Gaceta de Cuba*, 20 March 1964.

144 See Alejandro ANREUS, “The Road to Dystopia: The Paintings of Antonia Eiriz,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 63, 2004, No. 3, pp. 5–17.

145 WEPPLER-GROGAN, “Cultural Policy, the Visual Arts,” pp. 149–154.

in the Czechoslovak press; Eiriz, however, was one of the few artists to be mentioned by name thanks to her figurative subjects: “A. Eiriz’s drawing strives for somewhat terrifying, grotesque Goyaesque visions.”¹⁴⁶

The faces from Antonia Eiriz’s paintings were captured by Heberto Padilla in a poem of the same name, published in 1968 in the collection *Fuera del juego* (Out of the Game).¹⁴⁷ The verses strikingly echo certain passages of Padilla’s text from the catalog of Tony Évora’s exhibition written three years earlier in Prague. That same poetry collection, encapsulating the author’s profound disillusionment with the course of the Cuban Revolution, ultimately became the pretext for a prolonged show trial known as the *Caso Padilla* (Padilla Affair).¹⁴⁸ In 1971, Padilla was arrested, imprisoned for several weeks, and subsequently forced into a public confession and self-criticism. He was permitted to leave the country only in 1980. Intellectual figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Sontag, Julio Cortázar, and Mario Vargas Llosa spoke out in his defense. The affair shook the international left-leaning intellectual community and, in Cuba, heralded the onset of the so-called *Gray Period* of cultural normalization.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

During his three-year stay in Prague, Tony Évora had the opportunity to become acquainted with European art produced on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The capital of Czechoslovakia served as a base for his travels to the West, and the fact that he received his academic artistic training in the East apparently did not play a significant role from his Cuban perspective.¹⁵⁰

His stay in Czechoslovakia motivated him to pursue autonomous artistic production, in which he turned toward traditional figuration and an expressive style. Among the primary impulses in this direction may have been the artistic environment of Prague’s Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, including the pedagogical guidance of Professors Muzika and Svolinský, as well as the Western art he encountered during his travels and, more broadly, the historical setting and vibrant cultural life of Prague and other European cities. At the same time, he may also have been drawn to Czech folk art and folkloric traditions, which—perhaps in combination with his visit to the collections of the Musée de l’Homme in Paris—could have helped him fully recognize the significance of the African roots of his own culture. Negative experiences related to xenophobia and racism, or even a certain political awakening to the realization that the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia was not in fact as “Western” as compared to the Soviet model as it might have appeared, may likewise

146 Jiří ŠMÍD, “Dvě zahraniční výstavy. Kuba a Indonésie,” *Rudé právo*, 29 April 1962, 4; Jiří ŠETLÍK, “Současné kubánské malířství,” *Literární noviny*, Vol. 11, 1962, No. 18, p. 5.

147 Heberto PADILLA, “Antonia Eiriz,” in: Heberto PADILLA, *Fuera del juego*, La Habana: Unión 1968.

148 See, for example, GORDON-NESBITT, *To Defend the Revolution*, chapters: Cultural Policy of the Revolution 1968–76, The Padilla Case (1968–71), and The First National Congress of Education and Culture (April 23–30, 1971); Anežka CHARVÁTOVÁ, “Případ Padilla,” in: Anežka CHARVÁTOVÁ, “Karneval na troskách (Kubánská disidentská próza),” *Revolver Revue*, May 1996, No. 31, pp. 194–275, here esp. pp. 229–233.

149 See WEPPLER-GROGAN, “Cultural Policy, the Visual Arts,” pp. 143–165.

150 See Piotr PIOTROWSKI, “O prostorovém obratu aneb O horizontálních dějinách umění,” in: Pavlína MORGANOVÁ – Martin ŠKABRAHA (eds.), *Umění a emancipace. Výbor z textů Piotra Piotrowského*, Praha: AVU 2022, pp. 96–97.

have served as sources of inspiration. On the other hand, a wholly practical motive cannot be excluded: unlike his usual professional workload in Cuba, during his study stay in Czechoslovakia he may simply have had the time to devote to autonomous work.

It would therefore be overly speculative to derive from the interpretation of Tony Évora's autonomous artistic production of the mid-1960s—represented solely by a small reproduction in the catalog of his Prague exhibition—a definitive conclusion. Neither the content of the painting nor the motivation for its creation can be determined with certainty, however suggestive references to possible political disillusionment or ideological decolonization may be. Despite his prominent institutional position, Évora's solo exhibition received little more than a factual mention in the press,¹⁵¹ and his work thus remained marginalized on the Czechoslovak art scene. It is likely that in increasingly Sovietized Cuba his autonomous production, with its potentially problematic emphasis on cultural or racial diversity and its tension with the official policy of national unity, might in the mid-1960s have met with ambivalent reception or even criticism.

After 1989, as Piotr Piotrowski has argued, it is no longer possible to describe the world in binary terms, and contemporary art must be viewed through a global lens.¹⁵² The work of Tony Évora examined here directly engages with current global concerns such as racial discrimination and decolonization. From the perspective of Piotrowski's concept of horizontal art history, it might be understood as an attempt at an entirely new and original form drawing from both center (Paris) and periphery—both the proximate Eastern European Prague (a “close Other”) and the distant, exotic Havana (the “truly Other”)¹⁵³—in a manner comparable to the original trajectory from which South American Surrealism, for example, emerged. In 1965, however, Évora's autonomous work—like that of Wifredo Lam in the 1940s—occupied a difficult-to-classify liminal space. In the absence of its further development, his work remains a mere fragment within global art history.

Epilogue

Upon his return to Cuba in 1965, Évora—by then one of the country's most qualified and experienced graphic designers and typographers—devoted himself once again to applied graphic design. For OSPAAAL he designed numerous political posters, and from 1967 he served as art director of the newly established centralized Cuban Book Institute, under whose auspices he typeset a large number of publications. In this capacity, at the end of June 1968 he found himself part of a small working group¹⁵⁴ that, under Fidel Castro's direct supervision, prepared the international publication of Ernesto Guevara's Bolivian diaries with the aim of surprising the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.¹⁵⁵ The graphic designer and visual artist thus became directly involved in a covert political operation. When, shortly thereafter, in August 1968, he suddenly emigrated to Western Europe, this

151 E.g. J.F., “Cestou do Havany,” *Literární noviny*, Vol. 14, 1965, No. 30, p. 9.

152 Cf. PIOTROWSKI, “Jak psát o umění po roce 1989,” in: MORGANOVÁ – ŠKABRAHA (eds.), *Umění a emancipace*, p. 120.

153 See PIOTROWSKI, “O prostorovém obrátu,” in: *Ibid.*, 96–97; PIOTROWSKI, “East European Art Peripheries Facing Post-Colonial Theory,” *Nonsite*, August 12, 2014, <http://nonsite.org/article/east-european-art-peripheries-facing-post-colonial-theory> (accessed 27 August 2023).

154 Rolando RODRÍGUEZ, “El diseño del libro cubano 1959–1974,” in: VILLAVERDE, *Testimonios del diseño gráfico*, p. 247.

155 Michael CASEY, *Che's Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image*, New York: Vintage Books 2009, p. 187.

fact likely contributed to the subsequent tabooization of his name and professional contribution in Cuba, as occurred with a number of political and public figures (for example, Carlos Franqui, after his emigration, was even erased from several official photographs depicting him alongside Fidel Castro).¹⁵⁶

One consequence of this process concerns the authorship of one of the most iconic Cuban political posters, which helped disseminate Ernesto Guevara's image worldwide. The poster entitled *Día del Guerrillero Heroico* (Day of the Heroic Guerrilla) features a bitonal rendering of the famous 1960 photograph of Guevara by Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez (Korda), progressively enlarged across the outline of a map of South America. Produced for OSPAAAL on the occasion of the first anniversary of Guevara's death in Bolivia, the poster was distributed in September 1968 as an insert in the magazine *Tricontinental*. Its international renown was significantly reinforced by the London exhibition *The Art of Revolution* in 1970, where it was used as the frontispiece of the catalog—albeit without attribution of authorship. Although such omission was common practice following the abolition of copyright in Cuba, Évora's name is entirely absent even from Susan Sontag's introductory essay, where other Cuban artists are mentioned.¹⁵⁷ In fact, almost none of the subsequent Cuban or international references—including collections such as those of the Museum of Modern Art, in which the poster is held, or David Craven's extensive publication *The Art of Revolution*—attribute its authorship to Tony Évora.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps the only affirmative reference, aside from Évora's own testimony,¹⁵⁹ is that of the British graphic designer and contemporary Richard Hollis.¹⁶⁰

Évora's authorship is today difficult to prove. Nevertheless, elements employed in the design undeniably appeared in his earlier graphic works: photographs translated into bitonal images; the use of psychedelic colors reminiscent of mid-1960s Californian designers; and above all the same progressive enlargement of a dominant image,¹⁶¹ which Évora had already applied, for example, in his 1967 OSPAAAL poster *Semana mundial de solidaridad con los pueblos de África* (World Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa). Owing to its dynamic aesthetic, its accessible message free of ideological bombast, and the fetishization of Che Guevara's personality cult, the poster has become the subject of numerous art historical interpretations. David Craven, for instance, compared it to Raúl Martínez's landmark representation of José Martí,¹⁶² Martínez being Évora's successor at *Lunes* and a painter who in the mid-1960s developed a distinctly Cuban variant of Pop Art. Craven, like other scholars,¹⁶³ regarded Martínez as one of the most influential Latin American painters of the 1960s and 1970s. By contrast, Tony Évora never achieved recognition as a visual artist—neither in Cuba nor abroad.

156 Tom MILLER, *Cuba, Hot and Cold*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press 2017, p. 99.

157 SONTAG, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity."

158 Helena Serrano (or Elena in English transcription) is sometimes credited as the creator of the poster.

159 GOLD, "Art Man from Havana," p. 12.

160 Richard HOLLIS, *Stručná historie grafického designu*, Praha: Rubato 2014, p. 199.

161 The effect was reportedly achieved through the use of a Lucigraph typographic projector, a device employed in North American advertising agencies. Email correspondence with Richard Hollis.

162 See David CRAVEN, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910–1990*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press 2002, pp. 18–19 and pp. 101–102.

163 Cf. CAMNITZER, *The New Art of Cuba*, p. 68.