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### Corpus Cuba: Ever Imagined and Inscribed

Cuba—*Cobao, Cubanascan, Juana, La Siempre Fiel* and *La Perla de la Antillas*—the greatest of the Greater Antilles has been or continues to be a site of enormous ambivalence, of annihilation and enslavement, a source of wealth and wonder, a cradle of revolutions, a haven for ruthless pirates and capitalists, a mecca for pleasure-seeking tourists, and a fulcrum of Indigenous, African, and European cultures and peoples at some point during the past 500 years or so. The sheer number of names (and there are more) or characteristics attributed to the island from multiple perspectives—native, colonial, wistful—attests to how the island has meant and means different things to an equally significant number of different nations and people ever since the Columbian Encounter. Suffice it to say that to utter ‘Cuba’ is to reference an island whose many faces often defy effective categorization.

At this particular time—mid 2018—during a frenzy of ongoing economic reforms and concomitant restrictions, embassy closures and visa troubles, recent changes in visible leadership, continuing opposition and repression, and troubled as well as troubling U.S.-Cuba relations, editing a special issue of Washington & Jefferson College’s journal *Voces del Caribe* dedicated to Cuba has been no small





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task—not if one wants it to be both truly interdisciplinary and insightful. Despite the freedom of space an online journal affords, which has allowed us to include a considerable number of documentary images and even a opening image by Cuban artists Alejandro Aguilera, the filling of its pages has required casting a wide net across writers and scholars of a broad variety of disciplines, in order to ensure an expansive but keenly new, diachronic and synchronic view of the arts and society in Cuba, both now and in the past. No one perspective could fulfill such a mission, so what this issue offers its readers has been contemplated and put into words or photographs by ten different contributors ranging in disciplines art history and literature to social science and anthropology. They have focused on widely different topics, among them iconic sculpture and politics in New York and Cuba; photography, curating, and representational responsibility; U.S.-Cuba relations during the Revolution's early years; national identity in Cuban-American literature; poetry and war, and feminism and feminist devices in 19th-century literature; memory and lost time as seen through exile and immigration; ideology and pop culture; Orientalism and its peripheries on the island; and identity making among contemporary young Cubans.

In an effort to provide some sort of functional grouping, I decided to cluster the





articles around broad but cohesive themes, each one a hermeneutic tool with which to explore a very wide-ranging yet exclusive category of historical, social, or representational analysis. Despite the enormous distance between Niria Leyva-Gutierrez's detailed examination of issues surrounding Anna Hyatt Huntington's famed Martí statue in Central Park; my own reflections on the responsibilities assumed when one curates documentary photography in a setting devoid of linguistic, historical, and cultural context; and Silvia Álvarez-Curbelo's insightful analysis of the ways in which the *New York Times* has served as center stage for crafting and disseminating images and perceptions of Fidel Castro, the Revolution, and Barack Obama's 2017 rapprochement, all three articles accentuate how representation—be it artistic or textual or not—is an juncture for political, social, or perceptual manipulations. All three directly address issues of politics and representation across three very different media.

Likewise, a variety of literary analyses serve to elucidate the essential role—historical and contemporary—of past and present *cubana* and Cuban-American women writers such as Cristina Garcia, by Amanda Fleites; numerous independence- and colonial-era women poets, e.g., Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Sofía Estévez, Domitila García de Coronado, and Martina Pierra de Poo, by Ana García Chichester





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and Jennifer Bartlett del Castillo; and, Ada Ortúzar-Young's examination of contemporary U.S.-Cuban author Uva de Aragón, meticulously reveal not only these women writers' exilic and spiritual intimacies, but also their heretofore unacknowledged or sometimes presently veiled contributions to our understanding of Cuba's independence period, the interplay of spirituality and nationalism, and the subsequent separation and exile of the island's citizens.

Finally, Amauri Gutiérrez Coto, Maite Villoria-Notta, and Julie Rausenberger enthusiastically delve into the complexities of identity and music, the experience of Chinese immigration to Cuba, and contemporary consumption, each one of them elucidating how popular culture and history, and historical and contemporary foreign influences all contribute to shaping the distinctiveness of myriad, multilayered Cuban identities and ideologies through time and now, laying bare Cuba's ever-present if sometimes subtle self loathing and its love-hate relationship with Eurocentrism and fascination with Western imagery and values, despite the rhetoric. Through their analyses, the authors of each one of these articles bear witness to how a diversity of influences have and still give form to what Fernando Ortiz would denominate Cuba's rich *ajiaco criollo*.





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As all the articles in this issue reflect, while the ingredients, their contributors, and the products vary throughout time and circumstance, the complexity of Cuba never ceases. It remains ambivalent, fascinating, and difficult to categorize, as it has always been, since the first Europeans set their gaze upon its lush, tropical beauty, and began its violent transformation. And it promises to continue to be so.

*Kenya C. Dworkin y Méndez  
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\* For information about the creator of the cover art, Cuban artist Alejandro Aguilera, and where you can see some his artwork, please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/alejandro.aguilera.9279>

<http://artsatl.com/tag/alejandro-aguilera/>

<https://www.saatchiart.com/AlejandroAguilera>

<https://www.high.org/exhibition/alejandro-aguilera/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4\\_TGkknkIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4_TGkknkIQ)

