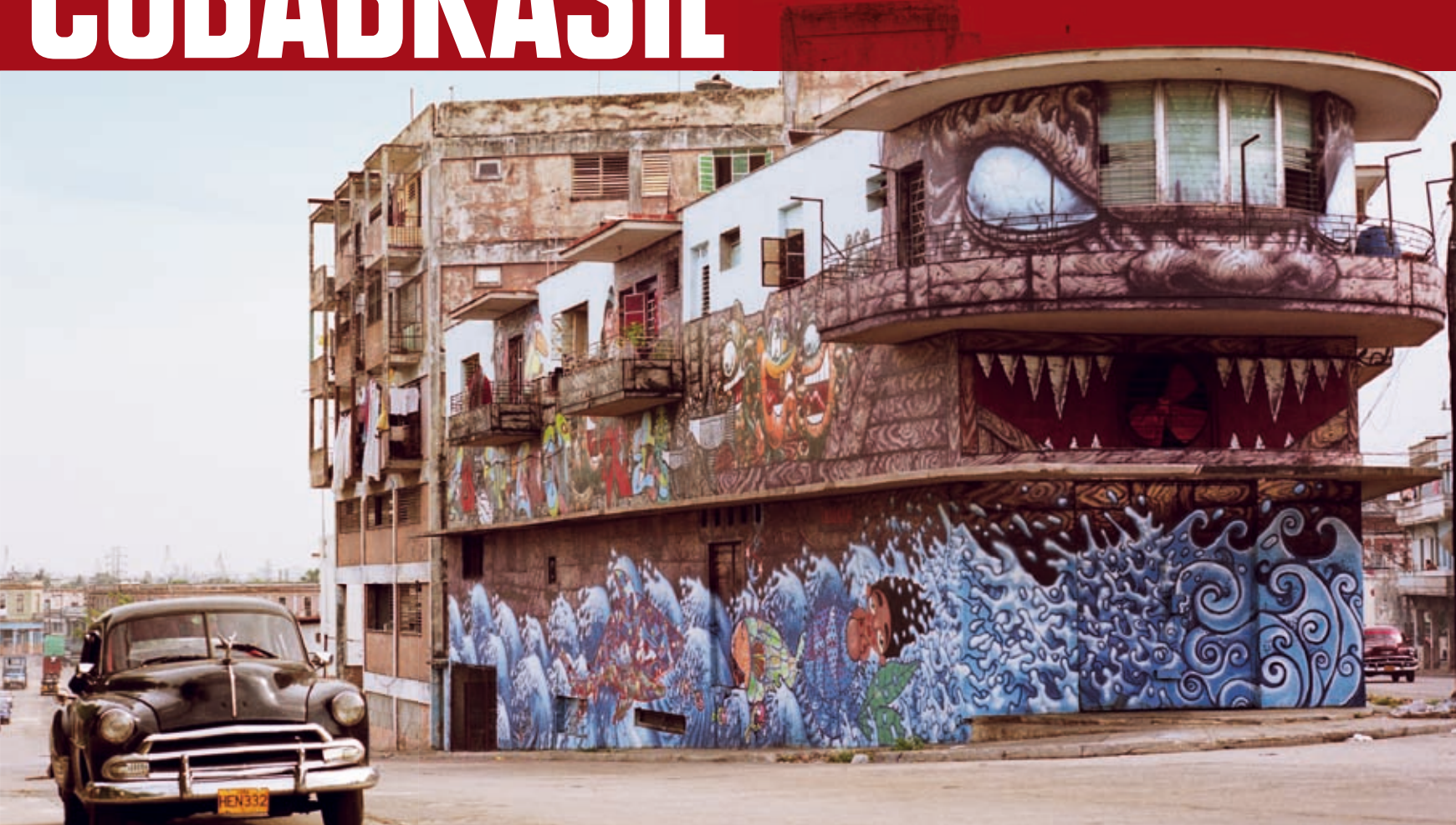


CUBABRASIL

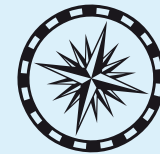


EVENT

 ON THE RUN



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CUBABRASIL 1

COLLISION AND FUSION

HOW could this novice to Cuba possibly pull off such an ambitious project in such a short time on the 'Isla Bonita'? The looks on their faces betrayed the question that so many 'experts' bemusedly asked themselves when Stone approached them for advice during the months leading up to the launch. Now, in hindsight, he realizes where these doubting glances came from. It is a testament to the magic of this project that, once the ball was rolling, it became unstoppable. Masterminding the project in Havana, the Cubans Jesús Magán and Víctor Rodríguez started to knock on doors. They quickly built a network which was ready to welcome the artists on their arrival. When the spray cans and art supplies left the harbor on a rumbling truck, 'Cubabrazil 1' was ready to take off.

The project was launched under the radar and the authorities initially were entirely oblivious to what was going on. One of the challenges facing the foreign artists, who strongly objected to being cornered by the Cuban autocracy, was to adjust and work within the political circumstances. They per-

OS GEMEOS / Centro Habana / 2003

“ At first I thought that this was just one more dream from another foreign dreamer... ”

VICTOR RODRÍGUEZ SANCHEZ

sonally encountered the difficulties that ordinary Cuban people deal with in their daily lives, which were still somehow easier than the challenges facing those who try to do something out of ordinary within the government-drawn lines. Still, the artists had no intentions of indoctrinating anyone. They had not come as ambassadors of some 'great' Western democracies. What they did do was demonstrate that it is possible to recapture a significant amount of public space in a collectivist pseudo-socialist state—this, while infecting virgin Cuba with the 'virus' that is the highly individualistic aerosol culture. And so, two of the primary goals of their clandestine plan were accomplished.

But 'Cubabrazil 1' was envisioned as a multi-dimensional public project from the start. The mix of the night-active German and Brazilian street artists with the members of a highly energetic Cuban art scene would birth exquisitely colorful paintings and video projections on walls and façades. These, in addition to the many workshops and commu-



nity collaborations they were involved in, opened a shortcut for them to the heart of Cuban society—its people—many of whom were quick to offer not only their support and their 'cafecitos', but their love and friendship as well.

PINAR DEL RIO

“ We met very, very good artists. They have very beautiful hearts. What they did for us is crazy, we know parts of it, but the major part was hidden behind the scenes. ” OS GEMEOS

UNLIKE in other Latin American countries, the ‘Muralism’ movement has not taken root in Cuba. While links to the latter can be found in the country’s artistic history, large public wall paintings are not a common sight, due not only to the pervasive political propaganda but also the lack of art supplies. Despite this, two wonderful exceptions stand out. One, Santiago de Cuba, on the eastern tip of the island, even quite regularly has an international mural festival. The other, located on the opposite western tip of Cuba, is the city of Pinar del Rio. Most famous for its tobacco production and cigar factories, Pinar del Rio also boasts a tremendous population of exciting contemporary artists. Many of these achieved fame and influence not only across Cuba, but far beyond. In large part thanks to German muralist Klaus Klinger and local artists such as the Grupo Eco collective, this little town is a living gallery of many of the most beautiful murals in Cuba. Arriving from Havana, the foreign artists of Cubabrazil quickly discovered that things here worked quite differently from the city they had just left. Invited



'Nature Conversation' / ISAAC LINARES,
JUAN G. MÍLO, ABEL MOREJON GALA,
KLAUS KLINGER / Pinar del Rio / 2000



left: 'Don Quijote is riding again' / ULISSES
BRETAÑA, MARIO PORTELA, KLAUS
KLINGER / Pinar del Rio / 1993

overleaf pages:
ISAAC LINARES, JUAN G. MÍLO, PAPLO,
NINA, NEON, OS GEMEOS, STONE / Pinar
del Rio / 2003

by the local authorities, and cared for by the local artists, the project suddenly received all the support and interest that they had been denied by the capital city's administrative bodies. Under the auspices of the National Council of Culture and Art, the local powers of Pinar del Rio went to great lengths to support the project. Hotel, food, transportation, scaffoldings... an organized day off to relax in the countryside; everything we needed and more had been thought of and arranged.

GRUPO ECO is an initiative of visual artists from Pinar del Rio, who share a concern for the ecological and environmental problems of the world, and have for fifteen years been creating and organizing mural projects, both in Cuba and Europe. Each member develops their own personal works while, together with their fellow Grupo Eco artists, uses a combination of elements of nature, humanity and its surroundings to contribute to the group's collective statement.



CUBABRASIL AND CENSORSHIP

THE presentation and authorization of the mural design for our huge wall (page 20/21) more resembled a casual meeting of friends. Inevitably, this was too much to bear for certain officials of the Communist Party who obviously felt left out of the fun. One day, after receiving official approval, we learned that someone had found a suspicious motif painted by a Cuban artist in our sketches. It showed little men sitting on tropical fruits, paddling out to sea. Naturally, this innocent scene was linked to one of the most pressing topics in Cuban society: the problem of migration and escape from the island. Strikingly, in Cuban art, this subject is usually dealt with openly. Even the UNEAC Gallery in Pinar del Rio that we had visited only the day before for our 'approval' meeting, exhibited several installations and paintings showing boats or related items. However, for our public mural, there was no way to work around our censors' wishes—the motif had to be changed. From this day on, the symbolic boats and ships appeared again and again in the artwork of Cubabrasil.



'Don't talk!' / OS GEMEOS / University of Pinar del Rio / 2003



NINA, ISAAC LINEARES GUERRA / sketch / 2003



NINA / detail of final mural version / Pinar del Rio / 2003

left: ISAAC LINEARES GUERRA / Print / 40 x 55 cm / 2003



OS GEMEOS / University of Pinar del Rio / 2003



'A lua que comia banana' / OS GEMEOS / University of Pinar del Rio / 2003



TROQUE A
UMIDADE POR
VEDACIT
SANTO BALMART

Pedestre
Aguarde o
Sinal Verde

BRASIL

IN 2005, Neon and Stone visited São Paulo, Brazil. It had long been a part of the Cubabrasil concept to make an actual cultural exchange happen, with a chapter of the successful project actually taking place in Brazil.

However, to this day, the plan to bring Cuban artists to Brazil has not manifested. Nevertheless, in São Paulo the writers wasted no time and, while trying to secure partners for Cubabrasil, hit the city hard. Only a fraction of the pieces that resulted from this ten days of havoc, alongside Ise and Os Gemeos, can be presented in this book. Stone had visited São Paulo previously in 2000, and this was where plans of the project, later born in Cuba, first took seed.

SÃO PAULO – NO PARAÍSO DE GRAFFITI

EARLY in the morning, a thunderstorm pours rain on the south of the city. As cars and trucks, even houses slip away in the mud, people are trapped and drown. On the northern side of town however, the citizens enjoy a dry, sunny day. Not many mega-cities exist on the planet where a situation like this is possible. São Paulo is one of them. Over 18 million people share space along its skyline, which has steadily grown beyond the horizon,

and stretches 50 miles from one end of the city to the other. Of course, this does not even include all the other little cities and favelas (shanty towns) that have merged with São Paulo. The ocean of skyscrapers includes buildings of every shape and size, from vertical-built slums to high tech palaces of the capital market. On the outer reaches of the city lie vast disconsolate favelas. For years, the downtown core has shifted from one point to another, while the more hastily erected style of architecture overruns historical buildings.

A walk through São Paulo finds eight year-old kids lying on the street vomiting, their heads in plastic bags filled with glue. Some 100 meters above, helicopters sail across the city, shuttling bank managers to their offices. Cocaine accounts for most of the local violence, which shapes this city's profile in the media. One part of downtown São Paulo even goes by the name "Cracklandia", a part of town that is best avoided at night, by tourists and locals alike. Finally, the massive environmental pollution bears mentioning. In the poorest favelas, people still settle on the banks of the muddy waters, polluted beyond hope by every possible fluid of man and otherwise. The ground that kids play soccer on is a

bed of chemical litter, while the city's sky is thickly tinted by a rust-colored smog that extends to the stratosphere. Among the favelas, these slums of Brazil, strong communities and complicated social structures belie the wildly-built settlements. Clinging to their right to shelter, they are dug deep into the cities, and are not going anywhere. From an ordinary point of view, São Paulo is anything but a beautiful city... more of an ugly disease, a monster. To uncover the special pulse of São Paulo, you must have a taste for the morbid charm of a megacity. Those who can see it in this light are rewarded with a vibrant nightlife in this human swamp, where subcultures of every variety fester and flourish.

In this melting pot, all facets co-exist: The industrial 'first world', and its temples of consumption and fast-food chains; a stable, middle class and their neat houses, which are spread-out across the city; the poor, stuck at the bottom of society; and the 'fourth world', serving as a mother to the street kids. If you want to enjoy your life here in São Paulo you have to be quick. This is why 'Paulistas' mobilize with every new day, just to protect their little place in the greater picture. Here, being a workaholic is not a lazy yuppie excuse, but more of a necessity of life on the edge of the city's abyss. Strikingly, people of every social class have a particular relationship to arts and culture.



In this city of walls, many of its residents see graffiti not only as natural, but also as one of precious few efforts at beautifying the city. Seemingly any attempt to paint a piece inspires kind words and expressions of “Ohhh, muito bonito!” from passers-by the whole day through. To the surprise of writers who visit from the northern hemisphere, locals pat you on the back, and express admiration when you explain that you are doing it free of charge; in the next breath, this person might invite you to paint their walls.

In something of a construction oddity, the buildings and houses of the Paulistas are built in such a way that nearly every single complex has one large, plain wall next to the street. There are countless walls like this in this writer’s paradise, enough that it would take another 50 years for all of them to be covered... without crossing or painting over anybody.

However, one movement here has become the voice of all the throw-ups, tags and large-scale productions, and is unique in the world: the ‘pixação’



Dazed street kid / Cracklandia, São Paulo / 2005



São Paulo skyline / 2000

(pronounced 'pish-a-sow'). Painted mostly with big paint rollers, but sometimes with spray cans, these tags recall the 'hits' of Norman Mailer's 'The Faith of Graffiti', but have evolved their very own style. In fact, even though this movement emerged after the birth of the writing movement in the U.S., it has arisen wholly independently, with no relation to Philadelphia or New York, born of a heavy metal culture and aesthetic instead. While the rest of the writing world sees a finished whole train car as the ultimate achievement, in São Paulo noth-

ing brings you more fame than writing your name atop the highest skyscrapers in the city. Seeing the pixadore's names in these impossible spots is testament to the many of them who are said to have fallen to their death. People love graffiti to the same degree that they detest the pixação; the latter is particularly true of the police officers, commonly on drugs themselves. In a country where policemen have founded secret death squads to hunt down and kill street kids, it is conceivable that the stories are true: that an unknown number of

unlucky pixadores have paid for their obsession with a shot to the head.

Just as in Europe, Hip Hop graffiti reached São Paulo through movies like 'Wild Style' and 'Beat Street', but because of the language barrier most of the writers needed time to discover a relationship between it and pixação. Meanwhile, more and more of this army of pixadores have explored throw-ups and tags. Lately, a new and interesting way of writing your name has evolved in São Paulo, called 'grapixo'. This writing style combines

ARTE CUBANO

“ Cuban art in general is very human and pure, glowing with good energy. ” VITCHE



'Regreso de Indochina'
ALFREDO SOSABRAVO / Oil and collage
on canvas / 153 x 107 cm / Collection Museo
Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana / 1971

THE history of Cuban art began at the time of the island's colonization. But it was not until the end of the 18th century—when the new wealth created by the sugar industry and the slave trade led to a thriving bourgeoisie—that art started to play a major role in Cuban society. Portrait, landscape and genre painting; the art of lithography and graphic art; political caricature and illustration; all artistic movements and techniques landed on the island and found gifted interpreters who added their individual imprints and works to the national cultural treasure trove. The same adoptive phenomenon occurred after the arrival of modern art, when the influence of European as well as Mexican avant-garde laid the foundation for a genuinely native Cuban interpretation. This began the 'Arte Nuevo' movement that lasted from the late 1920s until the late 30s and helped Cuban art emancipate itself from Europe and 'Pan-

'Saturno expels one of his daughters'
PEDRO PAPLO OLIVIA / Oil on canvas
200 x 205 cm / 1970

Americanism'. Cuban modernism had unearthed its national essence, and now allowed the artists to take both a conscious look at themselves and at the world beyond the island. When World War II—the ultimate clash of 'isms'—shook the planet, the grand art movements of the world were shattered, bringing about an artistic exodus of the diaspora, for example of the 'School of Paris', back to Cuba. Absorbing this cultural knowledge while at the same time re-discovering the Spanish and African roots of their own culture, the Cuban artists with their paintings and sculptures formed the 'School of Havana' and began an exuberant new era. With the same energy and confidence, the abstract art styles of New York and Paris were absorbed by a new generation in the 50s which, through this exercise, found its own Cuban rhythms.

The revolution of 1959, ushering in an age of global upheaval that would mark the 60s, naturally also took place in the arts. The seemingly endless prospects of a Cuba that had just freed itself from oppression were greeted enthusiastically and celebrated by graphic artists and painters of





EDUARDO SANTANA NAVARRO / Oil on canvas / 2002

the new 'utopia'. Fidel Castro proclaimed art to be 'a weapon of the Revolution' and a wave of motifs and slogans appeared. Over the next 20 years, as general disappointment finally set in, the new 'freedom of art' slowly morphed into a regulated ideological language. It was not before 1979 and the beginning of the 80s that the artists finally dared to tackle this stagnation, and the kitsch that resulted from it. It was high-time since social realities—culminating in mass emigration—changed island life at their own pace. Humor—which had always played a prominent role in Cuban art—and cynicism were discovered as perfect tools to deconstruct revolutionary myths and falsehoods. Tools so powerful that by the end of the decade, the state rewarded those who wielded them with censorship and even imprisonment. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the resulting hardship of the 'special period' (1990-1995) that followed, many artists of this generation emigrated.

It is ironic that the state itself, thanks in part to its decision to allow sales of art in US dollars, set



JUAN GARCÍA MILO / Collection Pedro Pablo Olivia / Acrylic and ink on cardboard / 75 x 54 cm / 1970

the stage for the most critical generation of artists to date. Of course, this had an ambiguous effect. Suddenly art became not only a passion but a lucrative profession as well: one of the very few ways to get one's hands on foreign currency. Evidently, the effects would be corruptive, to the point where criticism of the political system in a piece had become a sales point. At the same time though, scores of students and artists elevated their skills and were



HAVANA BIENNIAL

DINÁMICAS DE LA CULTURA URBANA

ATOP a hill, overlooking the bay of Havana stands the majestic 'Fortaleza de la Cabaña'. In 2006, this fortress was once again the principal venue of the Havana Biennial. On this occasion, the ninth edition of the tradition-steeped event, its curators were anxious to uphold its reputation as one of the most important art happenings in the world. The numerous buildings of the fortress are connected by a labyrinth of alleys and hallways, and the beautiful setting of these rooms, halls and pavilions comfortably accommodated the majority of the over 120 Biennial artists exhibiting at the Cabaña.

Perfectly in sync with the curators' concept 'Dynamics of Urban Culture', Cubabrazil was invited to attend. When the artists proposed to stage one of the largest special projects the Biennial had ever seen, its organizers at the Centro Wilfredo Lam seemed a little overwhelmed. With the arrival of more than one ton of cargo shipments—by plane and ship from Brazil, Spain and Germany—it slowly dawned on the organizers the artists of Cubabrazil did, in fact, mean business. The 'Fortaleza de la Cabaña', built originally for what would turn out to be a futile defense of Havana from pirates, became the point of entry for 'Cubabrazil 2' and its second invasion of the city.

'Macina del Tiempo' / OS GEMEOS / Detail / 2006



'Muros y mas muros' / RAÚL CAMILO DE LA VEGA DÍAZ / 300 x 185 cm / Charcoal on paper / 2003



NINA / Puppets / 2006



left: 'Opium', 'Indio', 'Neon' / NEON
3 x 300 x 220 cm / Acrylic, spray paint
and ink on canvas / 2006



'Cubabrazil 2003' / STONE / Video / 2006



'UP, UP, UP!' / NEON / Sculpture / 45 x 49 x 14 cm / Styrofoam, polyester resin-coated / 2003

right: 'Double N' / NEON / Sculpture and installation
/ 100 x 90 x 60 cm / Styrofoam, wood,
polyester resin-coated; found objects / 2003







“ What I liked the most was the old texture of the beautiful Cuban walls. [...] Interaction with the people in Cuba was always very intense. We were painting on the street for entire days at a time, which gave us a sense of daily life in Cuba. ” JANA JOANA



NINA / Centro Habana, Havana / 2006

right: VÍCTOR MORA, NINA
Urban intervention / Centro
Habana, Havana / 2006

OS GEMEOS / Urban intervention
Chinatown, Havana / 2006

left: OS GEMEOS, NINA
Chinatown, Havana / 2006



An abandoned skyscraper at Centro/Havana.

DRIVE-BY BEAMING



AFTER doing the installation at the Biennial, we were looking forward to some urban interventions. Building on the 'RebeldeTV' theme, we decided to go mobile: Five locations, a car, a generator, a cam-



era and five bedroom-produced videoworks would transform buildings into storytelling personas. We beamed on five different walls in Centro and La Habana Vieja, changing locations after 30 minutes to avoid attracting a crowd, which could lead to trouble with the authorities. Of course, trouble came regardless...



WORKSHOPS

BUILDING on the great experiences of 'Cubabrazil 1' in 2003, the socio-cultural aspect of the project was extended even further in 2006. More than 90 people participated in a huge workshop jointly organized with the 'Proyecto Psicoballet' and held at the Convento de Belén, which was aimed at tearing down social divisions. Children with Down's syndrome worked alongside children from a local school, all together working hand in hand with senior citizens. During a separate event, a street in the city center was even closed down to make room for a workshop with autistic children. For half an hour, they pitched paint at a mural in a hurricane of creativity. In San Sebastian (Havana), a workshop took place with the children of families who had lived for years (and still live) in the poor conditions of so-called 'temporary' housing complexes.



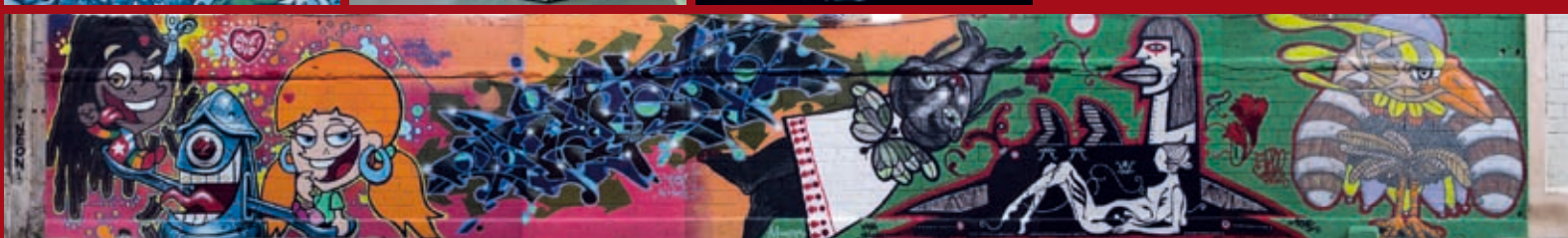
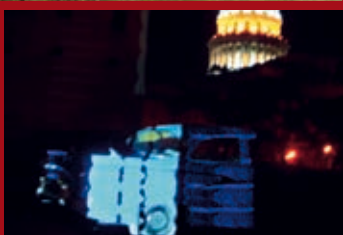
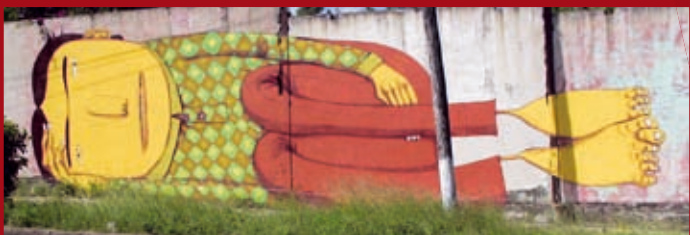




'Terra' - CEMNOZ, STONE, NEON / Chinatown, Havana / 2007



'Mundo' - CEMNOZ, STONE, VÍCTOR MORA, NEON / Chinatown, Havana / 2007



ON THE RUN BOOKS form together an encyclopedia that catalogs graffiti and urban art around the world. Since 1990, the OTR team has built an ever-growing archive, to be eventually donated to the Museum of Urban Art, a project presently in development as part of the Campus of Urban Culture, in support of its focus on Hip Hop and graffiti culture. With every title, we digitize and preserve original material from various key artists, and bring their story to the public. All this, in keeping with our motto: **KNOW YOUR HISTORY.**



CUBABRASIL: Over 25 artists from Brazil, Germany and Cuba joined forces in this extraordinary creative coming-together, which took place in Havana, Pinar del Rio, São Paulo and Berlin. This book documents the countless pieces and large-scale murals, guerrilla video projections, workshops and exhibitions, which were born from this intercultural collaboration. Cubabrasil features Latin American aerosol stars like Os Gemeos, Vitché, Nina and Joana; German aerosol artists Won, Neon, Cemnoz, Stone, the video artists group BerlinBeam-Boys and some of Cubas' best muralists.

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