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## **A Rich, Layered Exploration of Race & Identity Revealed in *Without Masks: Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art***

***First-of-its-kind exhibition reveals age-old cultural and religious  
Afro-Cuban traditions in contemporary art***

VANCOUVER, BC – The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at UBC opens a window into the lives and struggles of Cubans of African descent in its new exhibition ***Without Masks: Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art*** on display from **May 2 to November 2, 2014**. This remarkable exhibition has assembled a diverse group of 31 Cuban contemporary artists devoted to two fascinating themes: on the one hand an insight into contemporary Afro-Cuban cultural and religious traditions and, on the other, an intense dialogue on the complex racial issues affecting the country today.

“MOA is a place of both historic and contemporary world arts and culture; an institution where Vancouver’s residents and visitors can develop an understanding and appreciation of the complexities of our global community,” says Nuno Porto, Curatorial Liaison for *Without Masks* at MOA. “*Without Masks* gives us opportunities to broaden our understanding of issues of global concern, such as racism today. The Afro-Cuban struggle for recognition and social equity in contemporary Cuba resonate with challenges faced by communities all over the world, including here.”

Orlando Hernández, formerly of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana, curated *Without Masks* following his own rigorous criteria. Focusing beyond aesthetic, the exhibit favours originality and the profoundness of the works’ sociological, historical, anthropological, religious, ethical and political messages.

“There is a very strong African tradition in Cuba. We inherited many religious practices from Africa — Palo Monte, Santería, Ifá, Abakuá — and there are a lot of Cubans of direct or mixed African descent,” says Curator Orlando Hernández. “In *Without Masks* we seek to make new and deeper studies of those cultural, aesthetic, symbolic, and religious legacies that we share and take for granted, without forgetting that we have received them from black sub-Saharan Africa.”

For *Without Masks*, Hernández has curated a powerful collection of artworks representing a cross-section of Afro-Cuban artists - from the internationally renowned to street and folk artists. The exhibition features 31 artists showing a total of 85 works (from the 146 which at present comprise the whole collection) spanning a range of media including painting on canvas and wood, watercolour, drawing, printing (xylography, silk-screen, calligraphy), collage, patchwork, installation, soft-sculpture, photography, video-installation and video art.

All the works in the exhibition are drawn from the von Christierson Collection. Chris and Marina von Christierson, themselves South African, first visited Cuba in 2007 and were drawn

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to the country and its art. During this visit they met Orlando Hernández and established a collaboration with him to develop a collection of Afro-Cuban art that would show the multiple imprints of Africa in Cuba's artistic culture. The collection was first exhibited at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2010 during the FIFA World Cup. A major catalogue featuring the collection is available in the MOA Shop. The collection is held by the family's Watch Hill Foundation, a not-for-profit charitable organization.

*Without Masks* will be exhibited in MOA's Audain Gallery.

### **About MOA**

The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) is world-renowned for its collections, research, teaching, public programs, and community connections. Founded in 1949 in the basement of the Main Library at UBC, its mission is to inspire understanding of and respect for world arts and cultures. Today, Canada's largest teaching museum is located in a spectacular building overlooking mountains and sea. MOA houses more than 42,000 ethnographic objects and 535,000 archaeological objects, including many, which originate from the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. The Koerner Gallery features one of Canada's most important European ceramics collections, while MOA's recently opened Multiversity Galleries provide public access to more than 10,000 objects from around the world. The Audain Gallery and the O'Brian Gallery, MOA's temporary exhibition spaces showcase travelling exhibits as well as those developed in-house. [www.moa.ubc.ca](http://www.moa.ubc.ca)

### **About Curator Orlando Hernández**

Born in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba in 1953, Orlando Hernández is an independent writer, poet, art critic and a researcher in popular cultures and Afro-Cuban ritual arts. He graduated in Art History at Universidad de La Habana, Cuba, in 1978. He worked as a curator and researcher in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana from 1978 to 1989. His essays on art and culture have been published extensively in catalogues, magazines and books in Cuba and abroad since the 1980's. As a poet he has made "Artist's Books" with Cuban artists José Bedía, Julio Girona, Gustavo Acosta, Carlos Garaicoa, Lázaro Saavedra and Ibrahim Miranda. He is a member of AICA – Southern Caribbean and UNEAC. He lives in La Habana, Cuba.

### **LISTING INFORMATION**

#### **MOA presents WITHOUT MASKS: Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art**

Date: May 2 to November 2, 2014

Venue: Museum of Anthropology  
University of British Columbia  
6393 NW Marine Drive, Vancouver, BC

Website: [www.moa.ubc.ca](http://www.moa.ubc.ca)

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