"Curating in Cuba: from Advertisement Websites to Night Spaces" proposes that newly established socio-commercial spaces in Cuba are more appropriate to exhibit projects of contemporary art than traditional state-owned galleries and museums. It analyses two exhibitions which took place at heterogeneous sites — *Handmade Twitting* (Revolico, Twelfth Havana Biennial, 2015) and *Pórtate Bien. De lo erótico y de lo heroico: sexo y resistencia cultural* (Fábrica de Arte Cubano, 2016)—by tracing how they responded to current changes in Cuba’s economic and sociopolitical landscape, and by exposing how they rethink and upset conventional ways of exhibition making. *Handmade Twitting* was a virtual exhibition that explored how historically opposing economic and value systems are increasingly merging in contemporary Cuba. It took place at the online auction and shopping website Revolico and was made available to the Cuban audience through the distribution of the paquete semanal: a selection of digital information distributed on Cuba’s black market. *Pórtate bien* was a nocturnal exhibition about the revolutionary potentials of sexuality which was held at the Fábrica de Arte Cubano: a fusion of a discotheque, a commercial gallery and an art space.

**Keywords:** Beatriz Gago; Curating; Contemporary Art; Exhibition; Performance; Cuba

Revolico is disorder, mess, bewilderment, exhilaration, agitation, and stir. Since 2007, it is also a Cuban advertisement website run by four young Cuban entrepreneurs living in Spain and Cuba—a sort of Cuban Craigslist where everything one could possibly think of is for sale: from cars to houses, diapers, eggs, meat, massages, salsa classes, Chinese lessons, and most surprising, internet access. Many of the goods and services that are difficult to find in state-owned shops, or not at all for sale, are offered through Revolico. It is curious of course that in a country with such limited access to internet, people visit a digital marketplace to obtain many of the products to satisfy both their primary and secondary needs. For the Twelfth Havana Biennial (2015), Cuban curator Beatriz Gago and I (Gago & Noach) made this website into our gallery space for the exhibition *Handmade Twitting*.

In this article I will reflect on *Handmade Twitting* and another project of contemporary art I curated with Gago the year after, *Pórtate Bien. De lo erótico y lo heroico: sexo y resistencia cultural* (2016). This was a nocturnal exhibition about the subversive potentials of sex that took place at the Fábrica de Arte Cubano (FAC): a fusion of a discotheque, an art space, and a commercial gallery. For however different these exhibitions might be in a formal and thematic sense—the first digital and about exchange, the latter mostly performative and about sexuality—they coincided in their experimentalism and in that they occurred at sites that were, so we believed, representative of Cuba’s actual state of affairs. Both Revolico and FAC are highly profitable undertakings that simultaneously have important social functions, and emerged in a Cuba that is, as argued by president Raúl Castro, in a process of ‘modernising’ and ‘updating’ its economy. This can be read as: a Cuba that is embracing the market as never before and that is increasingly letting go of its egalitarian ideals. The Cuba that is modernising and updating its economy is a Cuba that is inching towards market-socialism.

It was important to Gago and me to present our exhibitions at sites that testified to Cuba’s socio-political and economic environment. This was one of three reasons why we chose to use the Revolico website and one of the concert halls of Fábrica de Arte Cubano as gallery spaces. In our view, they speak to the island’s actual state of affairs to a much greater extent than the state’s official institutions of art such as museums and *casas de la cultura* do.

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1 In several speeches since 2007 Raúl Castro underlined the importance of updating and/or modernising Cuba’s socialist economy. See for example his: Sesión de clausura de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, 20/12/2009; Informe Central al VI Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 19/04/2011, and the Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social de la Revolución de Cuba (PCC), 18/04/2011.
Second, besides the initiated art audience we intended to also reach people that do not frequent exhibitions. While certainly some people go to FAC to see art, it is more likely that the primary interest of most visitors is to enjoy an evening out. With regard to Revolico, before Handmade Twitting no revoliquero (user of Revolico) had expected to encounter an art exhibition here. To a certain degree, these sites served as baits to interact with those who were in their daily lives concerned with the socio-political issues presented in the exhibitions, but would probably not step into a traditional art institution. By using these platforms, we confronted them with critical issues in their more natural habitats. FAC attracts thousands of visitors every night: Cuban youngsters from across the city, tourists, and specialised art audiences. Revolico reaches an even larger and broader audience. It is used by people across the entire island and also makes it to the Cuban community living abroad. Together, they are responsible for more than ten million page views per month. As we spread Handmade Twitting through cyberspace and presented it in a local gallery, both Cubans living on the island and in the diaspora could access the exhibition.

In the last place, we opted for these gallery spaces because they awarded us with much greater freedom than the state owned spaces would. As both Revolico and FAC are not under state control, at least not directly, we could take greater liberties with showing experimental and critical artworks and with presenting our curatorial concepts. Revolico is officially a Spanish company; the website is not hosted by servers on the island and does not respond to state policies. FAC finds itself in a liminal zone, being neither a private enterprise nor a state-run institution—officially it is a community project—it can partly escape from state control. The building is owned by the government, but the funds for the artistic programmes come primarily from private investors, embassies, crowdfunding, and foreign cultural foundations.

**Handmade Twitting – Sin oficio ni beneficio**

As I said above, Handmade Twitting was a virtual exhibition that took place at Revolico and was included in the Twelfth Havana Biennial. It formed part of a larger exhibition—Sin oficio ni beneficio—about the cohabitation of two different and seemingly contradicting exchange systems in Cuba: One free of money and revolving around the exchange or sharing of largely immaterial things such as designs, motor rides and ideas, the other dominated by capital and revolving around the monetary exchange of commodities such as rose petals, economic theories, or artworks. Since the outbreak of the revolution in 1959, these different systems have experienced times of greater and lesser compatibility, but commercial exchanges have never been as broadly embraced by the revolutionary government as under Raúl Castro’s presidency. Sin oficio ni beneficio departed from the premise that money-oriented and non-profit exchanges had since Raúl been unprecedentedly close to each other and explored how intimately intertwined they actually were anno 2015.

Through artworks reflecting on seemingly contradictory forms of exchange and through actually inserting the exhibition into already existing platforms for exchange, Sin oficio ni beneficio/Handmade Twitting reflected on a psychedelic reality in which people continuously switch from engaging in networks of exchange that foster collectivity and solidarity to buying and selling at uncontrolled and clandestine market spaces. The installations, performances, and gestures of around 30 artists from both Latin America and Europe could roughly be divided into two groups that responded to these different systems of exchange: one free of money, the other dominated by it. Showing them side by side was for us an attempt to give insight into how commercial and non-commercial exchanges, capitalism and socialism, personal profit and solidarity, the black and the white market, and illegality and legality were increasingly merging, and becoming more alike. They reflected on how issues that had once been reason enough for accusing someone of being a counterrevolutionary or a traitor—such as being self-employed or engaging in commercial activities—now became embedded in the daily lives of many Cubans, and on how people's professional and community activities in the public sector oftentimes occurred alongside (complementary) activities in the private sector.

To work around these ‘coalescing’ systems of exchange, we decided to use also two types of spaces that, in our perception, exemplified them: an official gallery space owned by the state, Galeria La moderna, and the website Revolico, in hands of entrepreneurs living mostly in Spain. While certainly no strict division can be made (anymore) between a supposedly socialist and uncommercial state-owned space and a market-oriented virtual space—traditionally all cultural institutions were state-controlled and not engaged in any type of commercial activity whereas the internet was considered as an uncontrolled space where all sorts of counterrevolutionary activities could take place, including of course commercial ones—we believed that a traditional gallery space of the government and a ‘foreign’ auction website symbolised the traditional oppositions of non-monetary versus commercial exchange, national state institutions versus the global web, Cuba versus imperialism, and socialism versus capitalism.

The physical headquarters of Sin oficio ni beneficio/Handmade Twitting was at La moderna, an official gallery located in the heart of the popular neighbourhood Centro Habana. In and around this government-owned art space, a number of performances and activities took place and installations were exhibited. Florida-based Cuban artist Ernesto Oroza for example had developed an application for Cuba's largest underground intranet, Snet, and invited all of those who had connection to this network to write a communal poem (Si despierta un pájaro intercambian sus cabezas los jugadores, 2015). Besides the people accessing Snet from their homes, it concerned also the visitors of Sin oficio ni beneficio who were connected to Snet at La moderna. Either through private computers or through the two tablets at the gallery, each

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2 This was argued by Hiram Centelles, one of the founders of Revolico, during our phone interview, October 2nd 2017.

3 A number of measures implemented by Raúl Castro hints at the increasing possibilities for engaging in commercial exchanges. Amongst them the possibilities for people to legally buy and sell houses and cars.
participant could enter one word which together with the words of the other participants would make up for a collective poem and thus—so believed Oroza—capture the group’s collective subconscious. Orestes Hernández’s Harley (2008, 2015) consisted of a number of visits of the Latinoamericanos Motociclistas Asociados (LAMA). A group of bikers, all dressed up in LAMA uniforms, occasionally arrived at the exhibition space to divulge information about the social projects they had been involved in, and to do what they usually do in their monthly encounters: show off their legendary bikes, share their enthusiasm for motorcycles and plan their next trip across the island. José Mesías provided the owners of singing birds a platform to meet and listen to the songs of their mockingbirds, bullfinches, mountain bluebirds, cockatiels and tawny-shouldered blackbirds. Sesión de Aves Cantoras (2015) was the installation of a temporary and small scale bird fair at La moderna, similar to the ones that take place at clandestine and ever-changing locations in Havana. Yornel Martínez circulated some of his newly ‘edited’ P350s: the independent and self-produced fanzine of recycled cement sacks which had been published under the auspices of the artist himself and poet Omar Pérez since 2010. Just as in previous editions, they had invited people from a range of disciplines to intervene with text, design, collage (or whatever they pleased) in the former cement pages they had cleaned and cut for them.

During the time of the biennial, La moderna offered a lively environment where artworks were exhibited that alluded mostly to the exchange of immaterial and uncommercial goods such as knowledge, words, ideas, and design. Visitors related to these works either in a hands-on manner—by collectively writing a poem for example—or gained direct insight into some local systems of exchange that had been created from the bottom up. Handmade Twitting was located in the midst of these networks of non-commercial exchanges, literally, and responded to types of commercial exchange. In the centre of La moderna was a laptop. This was the brain of Sin oficio ni beneficio and the only place where information about the works and the exhibition could be found. Images of the works and their labels circulated as screensaver and also the catalogue was located here. This catalogue was digital, of course, and consisted of a number of folders like for example:


These categories, and the structure as such, were not invented by us but instead represented the same logic as El paquete, the package: a digital compilation of information and entertainment that circulates weekly throughout entire Cuba. This is a sort of creole offline internet that contains an enormous amount of information that is downloaded from the internet, and collected within Cuba, by nobody knows who. It ranges from pirated just for laugh gags to a copy of the Spanish Wikipedia, the latest reggeátón songs to classical music, North American reality shows to cult movies and software updates for Office, Windows and Android—a haphazard selection of information arranged in a just as haphazard manner. Except for pornography and political and religious content, the package offers much information that most Cubans do not have access to—either because they cannot download it due to the lack of internet, or because it is not offered by the state-run media. Paqueteros or mensajeros, the terms used to refer to the distributors of the package, bring the digital content to the user’s home. He/she pays around one dollar per gigabyte to copy the information from the distributor’s hard disk.

It was through the virtual catalogue—which was included in the laptop at La moderna, and in the 200 memory sticks that we distributed to the visitors—that people could visit Handmade Twitting. (That was the idea at least. I will shortly turn to how this attempt was frustrated.) By going into the Revolico folder, one could find a downloaded copy of the website and, with that, also of the exhibition. Exploring the Revolico folder through the laptop at La moderna, or through the usb stick, were just two of the ways in which people could visit Handmade Twitting. They could also access the exhibition through the package as delivered to their homes by the paqueteros. During the entire month of the biennial (22 May—22 June 2015), Handmade Twitting had been included in the package. This seemed to us the most adequate manner to make it accessible to local audiences because most people in Cuba are only able to visit Revolico, and thus the exhibition, in this manner. The third possibility to visit Handmade Twitting was the most difficult for local audiences, but the most straightforward for any other person in the world with a good internet connection: to go to the website www.revolico.com. In short, the exhibition could be visited either by navigating Revolico online, as done mainly by visitors abroad, or offline, by people living on the island.

Handmade Twitting presented the works of five Cuban artists that are currently residing in Canada, Mexico, the United States, or on the island itself. They all had an entirely different way of approaching the virtual gallery space. Ernesto Oroza presented Revolico Retombée (2015): a collaboration with a number of artists and intellectuals who during the month of the exhibition intervened in the layout and conceptual content of Revolico (Figure 1: Revolico Retombée as explained by Ernesto Oroza at Revolico website). Half of them redesigned its logo, the others collaborated with written texts that reflected on its functions, and its importance within Cuban society (Figure 2: designs by the invited artists as appeared on the website). Every fourth day their outcomes appeared on the site: The original Croobie font was replaced by a different one and a new text was located alongside the who are we?’ and ‘what is this?’ sections of the site.

Altering the original Croobie font of the website was a way of converting Revolico into something else, of giving up on the freshness and coolness that Croobie refers to and proposing a new (visual) identity. With artist Liber May, the Revolico logo turned into a combination of Asian characters, the artist Lexis Novoa used a typography inspired on the ones used in socialist designs of the late eighties, and artist/designer Julio César Llópiz had reversed the R of Revolico just as had been done in some of the editions of the state newspaper Lunes de Revolución (Figure 3: front page Lunes de Revolución).
On their turn, the writers delved into the world of Revolico by analysing how it had changed, and/or represented, Cuba’s contemporary society. History professor Adrián López Denos considered that Revolico is the key to get insight into contemporary Cuba. He assures that it is one of the richest and most dynamic sources of information for those who want to understand what is happening on the island at this very moment. He continues by arguing:

Revolico es uno de los pocos espacios virtuales donde mi gente puede hacer comunidad. Donde no se les exige que se levanten en contra o a favor de nada. Donde nadie les pide que sean otra cosa, que quieran algo distinto, que le pongan freno a sus pasiones. En Revolico, mi gente se siente mejor.⁴

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⁴ Adrián López Denis, Seamos consumidores, 2015, as part of the artwork Revolico Retombée by Ernesto Oroza. Can be consulted at Revolico website: https://www.revolico.com/retombee/seamos-consumidores.html.
In his text *Revolikear la normalización*, the anthropologist Dmitri Prieto compares the ways in which people communicate and negotiate at Revolico with the ways in which the ‘government of your country’ speaks and reaches agreements with the government north of your country, thereby alluding to the normalising agreement secretly negotiated between US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro. According to Prieto, their ways of negotiating could not be more different from each other. Through a cryptic language, he shows that the negotiations at Revolico are clear and direct, while the ones of the two states are obscure and enigmatic. As a consequence of the states’ negotiations, ‘strange’ things can occur; for example, one could—without his/her knowledge or consent—end up eating transgenic chicken or buy clothes made by child slaves. By the end of his article the anthropologist comes with a possible solution to these strange situations: to use virtual platforms such as Revolico to post information about what has been called ‘normalisation’. In that way, he concludes, the ‘normalisation’ could become a bit more direct, just like Revolico.5

Irving Vera participated with *Visiones de un mundo revuelto* (2015). This intervention consisted of one simple gesture that changed the outlay of Revolico for good: the inclusion of the category Art under the buying and selling section of the website’s home page. In the column of Cell Phones/Accessories, Air Conditioning, Videogames, Pets/Animals and Satellites, the artist provided a platform for people to buy and sell art (*Figure 4*: intervention Irving Vera as appeared on Revolico website). Just as with the other headings, everybody who was able to connect to internet could offer what he/she pleased. And so people posted what he understood would fit into this category: from paintings of some of Cuba’s most famous artists (such as René Francisco), to painting brushes, an original painting of the US president Roosevelt, painting and drawing courses, tattoo classes, tours to museums and a reggaetón workshop.

*M.A.n.l* (2015) and *M.E.R.C.A* (2015) by Julio César Llópiz were posted under the services section, within the Restaurants/Gastronomy category (*Figures 5 and 6*: intervention Julio César Llópiz as appeared on Revolico website). These terms could literally be translated as peanuts and shopping, but they are also Cuban slang for marijuana and cocaine. When clicking on these items for sale, the potential buyer was offered more visual and textual information about the products. The mani add included three images of what seemed to be a pile of cannabis. The text below, however, claimed that it was 500 mg of dried rose petals, wrapped in white nylon and fastened with a thread of vegetable fibre. Similar information appeared when going to the M.E.R.C.A offer. The images of what looked like lines of cocaine were accompanied by a text that explained what these images actually represented: macerated sugar.

Tonel’s intervention *Método para explición de la nueva economía* (2015) was included under the Classes/Courses section and consisted of a number of handmade diagrams that pretended to explain the new Cuban economy (*Figure 7*: intervention Tonel as appeared on Revolico website). What they did was the contrary. The invented histograms and pie charts only lead to more confusion and uncertainty about what this new economy actually was. Just as with the official explanations about Cuba’s modernising economy, it was impossible to make sense of Tonel’s data provided in *toneladas métricas millones*, of a pie-chart that exceeds hundred percent, and of a diagram that showed the arts as measurable part of reality.

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Besides being included in the Revolico website, Tonel’s diagrams also served as illustrations to the essay ¡Se formó tremendo revolico señores! by the Cuban economic anthropologist Pablo Rodríguez. This text was specially written for Sin oficio ni beneficio/Handmade Twitting and was distributed in two ways: through the ‘who are we?’ section at the Revolico website and through the mailing list of the Cuban curator and critic Magaly Espinosa. The sending of emails to large groups of recipients is another strategy to circulate independent information on the island. And by using these lists we inserted the exhibition in yet another networks of exchange—in addition to the package, Snet and memory sticks.

A visitor of Revolico would have easily missed out on the fact that the aforementioned interventions were actually artworks, were it not for subtle allusions that communicated that they were participating in an exhibition of the Twelfth Havana Biennial. Alongside every intervention, a small announcement appeared which offered the visitor the possibility to find out more about the items and services that were presumably for sale. ‘Para saber más sobre este método/oferta’, it said, ‘contacte a través de http://handmadetwitting.esy.es/’. When clicking on the link, they were redirected to a page where a short text appeared:

‘Bienvenido. Usted ha accedido a la exposición Handmade Twitting, que se celebra en el marco de la 12va Bienal de La Habana y que utiliza como galería de arte el sitio virtual www.revolico.com (http://www.revolico.com).’
Unfortunately, many of the local visitors we wanted to attract never made it to Handmade Twitting. One day before the opening of Sin oficio ni beneficio, Revolico was excluded from the package. When clicking on its folder, one could only find a short message which communicated that the website had been used for ‘political slander’ and ‘defamation’. Revolico was not accessible through the package during the entire course of Handmade Twitting (Figure 8: Announcement as appeared in the Revolico folder of the package, 21/5/2015).

Pórtate Bien

Pórtate bien took place at the Fábrica de arte Cubano, one of the hippest and most visited night time facilities/art spaces in contemporary Havana. Since 2014, this old oil fabric offers a wide array of activities related to art and leisure: from exhibitions of contemporary art to fashion shows, dance parties, theatre pieces, dance performances and live concerts. From Thursday to Sunday, this enormous two-storey building is frequented by night revellers and art lovers from Cuba and abroad who over the course of just a few hours can look at, listen to, move to, and buy the works of emerging local artists and of some of Cuba’s, and even the world’s, leading artists. Matthew Barney, Rufus Wainwright, Carlos Varela and Dave Matthews are amongst the artists that have performed and exhibited here, and Lady Gaga, Mick Jagger and
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Michelle Obama are amongst its guests. However, FAC is not merely a place where the rich and famous hang out, buy or perform, or where those ‘happy few’ who can afford it spend an evening of drinking and ‘consuming’ art. FAC also hosts all sorts of social activities such as summer schools and art workshops for kids and teenagers from the neighbourhood. A straightforward description of this space is impossible. FAC is many things that might in a first instance seem in conflict with one another: an exhibition space for established artists and art students, a venue for popular and traditional music, a community project, and a commercial gallery of amateur designers and top-end visual artists. Gago and I understood that it is exactly FAC’s ambiguous character which made it representative of Cuba’s current socio-political environment, and thus an ideal venue for our exhibition Pórtate Bien.

Surrounded by a design exhibition and by hip hop concerts, one could visit Pórtate Bien. The exhibition was located at the Sala Santiago Feliu, a space of no larger than four by eight meters that normally hosts live concerts and lectures. During one month, we closed the space and switched off the lights to present a number of installations, performances and presentations by around 15 artists, performers, and writers from Cuba, Brazil, Turkey, Spain, South Korea, and the United States. They reflected on how sexuality can be used to resist and escape from oppressive social, political and economic structures. Through sexual forms and languages, they rebelled against discourses and systems that have represented and used bodies primarily for their own interest, profit and/or pleasure. Amongst other issues, they considered how capitalism has made the female body, and especially the Latina female body, into a passive object eager to be consumed and enjoyed by others, and how socialism converted the body into a productive machine for collective labour, thereby eradicating the idea of the body as a site of personal pleasure and gain.

While normally the Sala Santiago Feliu was an open space that visitors could access from different entrances, we closed it so it could be entered only through one main opening. Once the visitors made it into Pórtate Bien, what they encountered was all but a conventional exhibition hall: there was a dark centre space flanked by two large and generously illuminated vitrines with soft sculptures, a stage which alternately accommodated performances, presentations and a video, and a completely darkened cave like corridor presenting yet another installation (Figure 9: exhibition view of the vitrine). The eroticised live performances, in combination with the ostentatious vitrines and the dark room, made that the visitors were doubtful whether they were in a dancing hall, a performance bar, a presentation room, or something altogether different. They could not tell either from the reactions of the fellow visitors, as they all had different reasons for being at the exhibition, and hence of relating to the works. Some had known about the exhibition and visited it ‘intentionally’, while others arrived by accident. They might have been attracted by the music or by the blinking vitrines—something which is not at all common in a country with nearly no shops. Just as with Handmade Twitting, one of our main concerns was to speak with these different types of audiences. We wanted to interact equally with the people who came to look at beautiful objects, to move to danceable rhythms, or to analyse the socio-political messages hidden in the exhibition, as with those who ended up doing all of this.

The large and generously illuminated vitrines accommodated a range of sexually laden soft sculptures by artists such as Susana Guerrero (Spain) and Elio Rodríguez (Cuba/Spain), and created the illusion of an adult shop. While at first glance they seemed to be nothing more than just extravagant shop windows presenting attractive commodities, similar to the ones that figure so prominently in the capitalist world, in reality they presented multifaceted artworks and called attention to how Caribbean bodies had been sexualised in order to be consumed and enjoyed by male and female tourists from the north and by wealthy compatriots. Susana Guerrero’s sculptures consisted of handmade women’s clothes and formed part of the series Cómo crecieron las espinas (2005–2016). But Guerrero’s dresses and corsets are different from the ones that we are used to seeing in most vitrines: instead of beautifying women, limiting their mobility, and modifying their autonomy, these served to empower her. Guerrero had either replaced or furnished the traditionally soft and cuddly fabrics with cactuses, thorns, and bird peaks. By sewing these sharp and pointed organic objects into

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6 The entrance fee at FAC is 2 CUC, or 50 Cuban Pesos, which is expensive for the average Cuban. Exhibitions can be visited for free.
the garments, Guerrero converted them into subtle weapons which symbolised her rebellion against the ways in which women had been degraded into vulnerable and easily consumable objects of desire.

Behind Guerrero’s corsets and dresses hung a white ceramic and a white fabric of the series *Forest on the Wall* (2013) by Elio Rodríguez. These sculptures were hallucinatory amalgamations of tropical plants and sexual organs: a penis that emerges from a bush of wild flowers, or is enclosed by a banana peel, and a vagina taking the appearance of an exotic, meat-eating plant. These fruity penises and vicious vaginas create estrangement, all the more because they are made by an Afro-Cuban male artist who also call himself El Macho. Rodríguez’s alter ego breaks all expectations: he works with soft and powerless materials, and creates fruity penises and forceful vaginas. By so doing, he challenges existing clichés about the black Cuban man, and also about the island as being a savage paradise of tropical fruits and libidinous and sexually aggressive inhabitants.

In between the vitrines and the entrance, and nearly hidden behind a black curtain, was the installation *Un cuarto oscuro para los 5 dedos de la mano es directamente proporcional a la nostalgia de un pájaro enfermo* - *magister dixit* by Jorge & Larry (Figure 10: installation view). One had to lower two steps to enter into what appeared to be a dark room. This completely dark space was enclosed by three walls, with a number of little holes at waist level perforated into the middle one. Contrary to what the audience might have expected, these holes did not serve to facilitate the (sexual) encounter with bodies behind the wall. They were there to peek at what was at the other side: the reconstruction of a contemporary Cuban cell. From this space emerged the songs of five exiled female singers who are largely forgotten in Cuba, yet are still remembered as iconic divas of Cuban popular culture by Havana’s gay community. To listen to them within a space that simultaneously evokes confinement and anonymous homosexual encounters, is a way of going back to the alienation, discrimination and expulsion of Cuban homosexuals under the revolution. The installation recalled how the dominant idea about the true revolutionary militant as being masculine, heterosexual and white, had led to the re-education, imprisonment and exile of many homosexual men.

As mentioned, these sculptures and installations were exhibited in an environment of continuous live action. Nearly non-stop visitors could engage with performances, presentations, and concerts. These all departed from the rhythms of genres of Cuban and Latin American popular music that have throughout the continent’s history been condemned for their supposed vulgarity, hypersexualisation, and hedonism. Through their performances, artists and poets such as Fabiana Faleiros, Kiko Faxa, Omar Peréz, Abdíel Rodríguez, and Tamara Venéreo showed how reggeatón and funk karaoke can also offer a platform for experimentation and critique. With them, these much despised genres became a site for poetry, for transmitting a feminist discourse, and for showing the hypocrisy of systems and individuals that sexualise and objectify the female body, yet condemn popular music for doing the same. Thanks to the efforts of these artists, for the first time in its history FAC provided a podium for reggeatón.

The Brazilian artist Fabiana Faleiros gave a lecture performance that reflected on the repression of the female masturbatory hand, *Mastur Bar* (2015) (Figure 11: documentation Mastur Bar). In her cover versions of widely-known funk karaoke and pop songs, she explained that since the eighteenth century many efforts have been made to prevent the female hand from reaching the clitoris. It is in this light, she assures the audience, that the invention of hysteria, the
practice of electroconvulsive therapy, the use of the chastity belt and the idea that the female orgasm was harmful should be seen. While singing, dancing and showing art historical images of women touching their vaginas, she argued that behind these practices and constructs lies a profound fear for the hand. This went as far as to believe that, by masturbating, the hand could disintegrate society. Women who used their hand to give pleasure to themselves would fail to fulfil their most important duties: to serve their husbands and to reproduce.

Using similar beats, Cuban artist Abdiel Rodríguez performed his *Repártete* (2016) (**Figure 12**: documentation *Repártete*). But unlike Faleiros, Rodríguez had composed the songs himself, with the help of a music producer and a musician. Against a background of historic advertisements with sexualised representations of women, he sang and read out loud a manifesto for reggaetón. Through this mix of images and texts, he tried to convince the audience (and FAC) that reggaetón is not a vulgar and misogynist musical style that threatens Cuba’s traditional musical culture, but instead a site of great potentialities, especially for the youth. Deprived of most platforms in society, they find in this genre a way to speak out about their concerns and struggles. For however hedonistic and materialist the content of its songs often is—and Rodríguez does not deny this—it is for many youngsters the only place where they can express themselves and visualise other ways of living. Furthermore, Rodríguez claimed, reggaetón stands for self-organisation.
It seems simple: since there are no established standards for this genre and since one is not in need of a professional recording studio or a music label, virtually everybody with access to a laptop could make reggaetón and create his/her own network of production and dissemination. On another level, the images projected on the screen behind the performers served to remind the audience that the sexualisation and objectification of the female body is not unique to reggaetón. Rodríguez had superimposed some reggaetón slang words and expressions over these North American advertisements that had circulated in Cuba in the forties to show that the representation of women as sexual objects runs through history. We should go to the roots of the sexualisation of women, he argued, instead of just suppressing one of its many symptoms.

Also poet Omar Pérez used the rhythms of reggaetón for his poetry performance. Armed with his cajón, a percussion instrument, he sang around eight poems (Figure 13: documentation poetry performance). Different from Rodríguez, he only used the rhythms of the genre. They formed the background of his canto-poems in which he chanted about several issues that were unrelated to each other in subject matter, but did coincide in their musicality and in their resemblance to a mantra. The rhymes addressed, for example, the position of poetry within the revolution — ‘La poesía es el arma de la revolución. La poesía es el harpa de la revolución, La poesía es el herpes de la revolución’—and his act of writing reggaetón — ‘Escribo reggaetón y olvido el tema. No hay teorema’. Perez’s performance was followed by other poetry performances by musicians and poets such as Kiko Faxa, Jamila Medina, Rito Ramón Arrocha, and Tamara Venéreo, and by their performative distribution of 69 poems addressing issues related to sexuality and resistance. These 69 texts were another reference to cunnilingus (and/or anilingus and fellatio), and were read collectively by the poets and the audience.

When there was nobody on the stage to perform, the music video Cunnilingus in North Korea (2003) by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industry was projected on the screen. This was an apocryphal conference by the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il who explains why sex in communist nations, especially in North Korea, is much more pleasurable than under capitalism. The reproduced text by the ‘dear leader’ interacted with the song See Line Women by Nina Simone and commented that sexual equality and the intense attention that men pay to blowing, licking, nibbling, biting, and sucking women’s erogenous zones, around and inside her vagina, are amongst the triumphs of communism. For South Korea, or any other capitalist and bourgeois society, it is inconceivable to dedicate as much time to satisfying the other while not asking anything in return. Their systems are based upon the idea that everything is a negotiation or an exchange. In addition, since they are slaves to bourgeois sexual inhibition, South Koreans were said to blush at the mere thought of free sex. This message by Kim Jong-Il was a parody of the speeches of all communist leaders, who just like him saw communism as the solution for everything: even for a good cunnilingus.

People could only visit Portate Bien from eight pm to three am in the weekends, during the normal opening hours of FAC. Just as with Revolico, the exhibition thus attracted some kind of accidental audiences: People that had not made it to FAC specially to see Portate Bien. They were there for any other reason and by chance visited the exhibition. Also just as with Revolico, it was perfectly possible that those who entered the Sala Santiago Feliu and looked at the performances and installations would not notice that they were visiting an exhibition. There were little conventional markers that reminded that one was immersed in an exhibition of contemporary art. Portate Bien did not have any white wall, wall text or label, the distances between the works were unequal, there was not a uniform way in which the works were presented, there was little light, and one could not visit during conventional gallery hours. Also the format of the catalogue was unorthodox. For the occasion, we had made black and white pillows with the logo of

Figure 12: Abel Rodríguez, Repártete, 2016, manifesto performance, Pórtate Bien, Fábrica de Arte Cubano, 2016, photo: Nestor Martí.
Pórtate Bien on the front, and information about the works on the back. These were distributed to the visitors, who oftentimes showed more interest in the utility of the object than in the information it contained. In the same vein as the exhibition, with this catalogue it was also possible that one just saw it as a pillow, as something pleasurable to look at or to use.

**Conclusion**

If not too much distracted by the fact that *Handmade Twitting* was in the first place a virtual exhibition with ‘incorporal’ navigating audiences while *Pórtate Bien* was largely a performative exhibition which awarded great importance to the bodily activity of its visitors, one sees that these projects were actually very close to each other. In the first place this was because of their location. Both exhibitions took place at sites that, according to us, were indicative of the socio-political state of affairs in Cuba. Revolico and FAC simultaneously serve social (or socio-artistic) and commercial purposes: FAC is officially a community project but also sells art and other ‘commodities’; Revolico, on the contrary, is primarily a commercial website but furthermore offers a platform for encounter and communication. More so than the traditional state-owned galleries and museums, these semi-commercial, semi-social spaces give shape to a Cuba that is in a process of ‘modernisation’, to a Cuba that is increasingly embracing the market.

In the second place, both *Handmade Twitting* and *Pórtate Bien* were exhibitions that at first blush were most likely not recognised as such. In the case of *Handmade Twitting* this was mainly because the exhibition so much submerged in the overall layout of Revolico that it was not always clear where the boundaries between the exhibition and the website lay. With regard to *Pórtate Bien* this was due to its hybrid character. This exhibition was, amongst other things, a performance bar, a presentation room, and a concert hall. To a certain extent these exhibitions thus did not resemble exhibitions because of the galleries that accommodated them, but, I think, to just as great an extent it was due to the ways in which we dealt with other traditional markers of art exhibitions, such as the visiting hours and the catalogue. Our exhibitions were open either 24/7, or only in the middle of the night; its catalogues either took the form of a pillow or of virtual paquete-like collection (on an usb stick).

As far apart as the themes of both exhibitions might seem, they met each other in that they explored issues that were critical to contemporary society—this was their third point of convergence. *Handmade Twitting* reflected on the cohabitation of different systems of exchange, and with that on the merging of ideologies that had at certain points in Cuba’s revolutionary history been regarded as each other’s opponents. *Pórtate Bien* reflected on the manners in which

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**Figure 13:** Omar Pérez, Cubanología, 2015, poetry performance, Pórtate Bien, Fábrica de Arte Cubano, 2016, photo: Nestor Martí.
through sexuality people can re-appropriate their bodies from totalitarian economic and political systems, and thereby how sex can be a form of resistance and liberation.

In the last place, there was a strategical similarity between *Handmade Twitting* and *Pórtate Bien*. For both, we used gallery spaces as baits to reach audiences that would most likely not have made it to conventional exhibition spaces. By installing them at Revolico and FAC we interacted with people in their more natural environments.

**Competing Interests**
The author has no competing interests to declare.