

President Jimmy Carter visits Drapetomania at The 8th Floor, 3/23/14
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President Jimmy Carter, Rachel Weingeist, and Alejandro de la Fuente

The 8th Floor was proud to host a social event On Sunday, March 23rd, attended by President Jimmy Carter and by his grandson, Georgia State Senator Jason Carter. President Jimmy Carter visited The 8th Floor, the art gallery supported by philanthropists and art collectors Shelley and Donald Rubin in New York City, where the art exhibit *Drapetomanía: Grupo Antillano and the Art of Afro-Cuba*, curated by Harvard professor Alejandro de la Fuente, is currently on display. Organized by Rachel Weingeist, Director of The 8th Floor, the event allowed a group of supporters and friends of President Carter to mingle with the President and to experience a sample of Cuban contemporary art.

Shelley and Donald Rubin are avid collectors of Cuban art who today hold the largest private collection of Cuban art in the world, with nearly 700 pieces. In 2010 they created The 8th Floor, a private exhibition space established to promote cultural and philanthropic initiatives. Recent shows have primarily focused on the presentation of contemporary Cuban art under the direction of curator Weingeist with the collaboration of Cuban partners. The current exhibit, *Drapetomanía*, is a tribute to Grupo Antillano (1978-1983), a forgotten visual arts and cultural movement that privileged the importance of African and Afro-Caribbean influences in the formation of the Cuban nation. The art of Grupo Antillano belongs to a long tradition of Caribbean resistance and cultural assertion. It is part of what Haitian poet René Depestre has described as the African slaves' "prodigious effort at legitimate defense" and "ideological *cimarronaje* ("Self-liberation")" by which they managed to recreate their pasts and cultures in the new world. The exhibit seeks to recover the memory of this group and their important contributions to the art of Cuba, the Caribbean and the African Diaspora. Several members of Grupo Antillano had attended the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Nigeria in 1977 and saw their work as part of a diasporic conversation on art, race and colonialism. At FESTAC they met other artists and intellectuals interested in

race-justice issues, such as activist sculptor Mel Edwards, who became a lifelong friend of several members of Grupo Antillano and who attended the exhibit's opening in New York, where he reencountered some of his old Cuban friends.

Originally presented at the Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas y Diseño in Santiago de Cuba, where it was described as “one of the best visual arts exhibits of the last few years in Santiago de Cuba,” *Drapetomanía* travels to The 8th Floor from the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales in Havana. The exhibition will go on to the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco (fall 2014) and to the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University (Spring 2015).

The exhibit showcases works by the artists of Grupo Antillano (Esteban Ayala, Rogelio Rodríguez Cobas, Manuel Couceiro, Herminio Escalona, Ever Fonseca, Ramón Haití, Adelaida Herrera, Arnaldo Rodríguez Larrinaga, Oscar Rodríguez Lasseria, Alberto Lescay, Manuel Mendive, Leonel Morales, Clara Morera, Miguel Ocejo, Rafael Queneditt and Julia Valdés). *Drapetomanía* also includes works by a group of contemporary artists (Belkis Ayón, Bedia, Choco, Diago, Esquivel, Marta María Pérez Bravo, Montalván, Olazábal, Douglas Pérez, Peña, Elio Rodríguez and Leandro Soto) who share some of the concerns articulated by Grupo Antillano in the late 1970s. As an intellectual and curatorial project, *Drapetomanía* offers a fresh and alternative look at the "new art of Cuba" through the work of artists who have been concerned with issues of race, history, and identity. It reassesses the importance of Grupo Antillano by linking their work with that of a new generation of Cuban artists, particularly those associated since the 1990s with the *Queloides* curatorial project, which was also exhibited at The 8th Floor in 2012. Thirty-five years after its creation in 1978, Grupo Antillano continues to assert, as the late Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz used to say, that "without the black, Cuba would not be Cuba."

The 8th Floor is free and open to the public. School groups are encouraged; viewing hours are Tuesday through Thursday 11-6pm, and Friday 10-5pm.

For more information about the exhibition, or to request press images, please contact Anjuli Nanda, anjuli@the8thfloor.org or (646) 738-3988.