OPENING PATHWAYS
I am pleased to welcome you to MassArt’s campus to see the unique work of Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco), the Cuban artist recognized internationally for his innovative work across multiple disciplines. Choco was first introduced to the college when a group of supporters travelled to Cuba in February 2016 to immerse themselves in the country’s rich artistic tradition. After meeting Choco and enjoying a private tour of his studio – seeing collage, bold figurative paintings, bronze sculptures, and more – they were so intrigued that they began making plans for him to share his vision and expertise with the entire MassArt community. We are delighted that those plans have now come to fruition.

As the nation’s first freestanding public institution of higher education dedicated to the preparation of artists, designers, and educators, MassArt is a vibrant community of students from cities throughout the U.S. and around the world. We are committed to providing our community with unique experiences to develop their creative imaginations. With multiple ways to engage with the world – from semester abroad programs to travel courses to a diverse array of visiting artists – MassArt students are eager to broaden their perspectives and cultivate their understanding of what it means to be a creative force in our global community.

With this exhibition and residency at MassArt, Choco joins a distinguished group of artists who have shared their insights and processes with our students through exhibitions, lectures, and residencies – including Israeli graphic designer Oded Ezer, Spanish sculptor Jaume Plensa, and Cuban printmakers Janette Brossard and Norberto Marrero, among others. The significance of this interaction with artists from varied cultures and countries cannot be overestimated.

Thank you for joining us to welcome Choco to MassArt for what we know will be a memorable artistic experience for us all.

Sincerely,

DAVID P. NELSON
President
MassArt
It is a pleasure to welcome renowned Cuban artist, and friend, Choco to the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and to Boston. I first met Choco in Harlem in 2006 and soon thereafter we began a journey that has taken us through numerous exhibitions, many studio visits, and wonderfully shared moments together with our families. Choco’s gentle manner, his positive outlook on life, and unwavering commitment to the arts has been a constant throughout his artistic career, as well as throughout our friendship.

Although wooed by many in the art world, Choco has always chosen to remain true to himself, producing his work with respect for his perceptions, his sensibilities, and his Island. Perhaps this is why his art - whether his collagraphs, sculptures, oil paintings, or ceramic plates - is so organic and compelling to the viewer; not tainted by trends or special interests. His work reaches us deep inside and invites us to engage in a quiet dialogue. Some say this is because of the rich colors that he uses, which his master printer Jorge Muñoz carefully applies by hand to each matrix, or the texture that is derived from the collagraph technique and by applying thick layers of paint on the canvas. Others may argue that the subject matter is what is so fascinating to the viewer; the way that he has managed to represent a part of us all in his orishas, his faces, and his profiles. I believe it is a combination of the three factors that draws one to Choco’s artwork, and to the artist himself.

One may ask, is it Choco or his art that is opening a pathway for mutual understanding and respect? It is difficult to separate the man from the art, as is the case in his current exhibition at MassArt, Opening Pathways. Once you meet Choco and experience his work, you realize that both are striving to unite and highlight qualities, concerns, and a spirituality that are common to us all.

Latin Art Space is very appreciative of the unique opportunity to work with such a great artist and wonderful man. As promoters of Cuban art and culture through art exhibitions and tours of the island, Choco and his artwork are exemplary of both: Cuban art and cultural life. Guests on our tours routinely visit Choco’s studio and are continuously mesmerized by the caliber of his work, his unique style, his humble beginnings, and his infectious laugh.

As we strive to provide visitors with an authentic experience of Cuban art and culture, an encounter with Choco in his Old Havana Studio, Taller del Sol (Workshop of the Sun) allows us to reach this goal, and is the highlight of a visit to Havana.

Mucho cariño para Choco, su familia, y los pueblos de Estados Unidos y Cuba...

ASTRID MARTÍNEZ-JONES Curator / Director Latin Art Space www.latinartspace.com

October 2016
Cuban artist Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco) (Santiago de Cuba, 1949) did not choose his name, that is, the name by which he has reached an unsuspected popularity. They started calling him that, and that is now his name: Choco, one of the most outstanding creators of visual and applied arts of the island. His name is a seal of ingenuity and legitimacy.

Today we stand before a delicate show of talent, to which we are accustomed from its birth in the sixties, whose style is based on features that have traditionally perpetuated his work, which is right now more diverse than it was at its dazzling beginnings.

As the title indicates, Choco has reached this shore to open a pathway, a new path, through which we will find - without forgetting the keys of the first moments - new proposals, new substances, new territories, all adding to the artist’s desire to be reborn in his ways, to revisit the home of his dreams and those images that have adopted a personal language, colossal, seen through a glance, which is renewed today, but always returns to its origins.

I find here in the middle of that path, a brand new breath, a kind of purification of forms that take the viewers by the hand and lead them to contemplate a new dimension of space. This path, opened again by his wise hands, leads us into a challenge of space that is nothing more than the lyrical balance between the grace of a minimal sculpture and the mobility of its poise against the mysteries of a ritual that is perhaps also new. A ritual that confirms Choco’s cubanía, planted in the city of Santiago where he was born, surrounded by mountains and that untamed character that sways them in the splendor of its heroic history. (…)

We are on a living planet, populated by characters, masks, and the indecipherable pulse of a great artist. The vices and brushes enter into a contest; the collagraphs, oils, and canvases initiate their insular dance. This is the new pathway that Choco is opening, for the enjoyment of everyone.
As a sacred symbol of the African footprint, which descended to the Island from the fifteenth century, the ancestral figure of Eleggua – orisha or saint who is one of the most popular emblems of Cuban Santeria, appears in a steady manner. (…) Owner of the roads in Ifá divination and in our daily lives, his eyes made of cowry shells populate the artwork of Choco, who, with his natural grace, has managed to turn him into an instinctive emblem of his creations.²

² Excerpts from the text “Opening Pathways” by Nancy Morejón. The excerpts that accompany the images in the following pages were also taken from the same text.
Fruits, or profiles of saints and passersby, give us back the wonder of their existence, apprehended by Choco in that poetic veil that almost always covers the environment in which his creatures move.

Olor a piña / Scent of Pineapple
2014, Collagraph
42 x 26 1/4" /106 x 67 cm
A road where flavors and smells cross paths in the boiling of that marasmus, son of the tropics, piled up with texture and the unprecedented use of paper of all kinds, as if reminiscent of the popular techniques of papiermaché.
Siete potencias / Seven Powers
2009, Collagraph
34 x 22" / 87 x 56 cm

La Gran Piedra / The Great Stone
2013, Collagraph
37 ½ x 34" / 95 x 86 cm
Yemayá
2011, Wood and Collagraph
Variable dimensions
The mouth of these “elegguases” is bright red, reminiscent of the color of the watermelons found in the costumbrista portraits from the nineteenth century.
No veo, no hablo, no oigo / I Don’t See, I Don’t Talk, I Don’t Hear
2008, Collagraph
31 ¼ x 35 ¼” / 81 x 90 cm

El último de la fila / The Last One in Line
2013, Collagraph
33 ¼ x 35 ¼” / 85 x 90 cm
El beso / The Kiss
2016, Collagraph
30 ¾ x 41” / 78 x 104 cm

Te estoy mirando / I'm Looking at You
2010, Collagraph
25 x 18 ½” / 63,5 x 47 cm
Choco strolls through this kind of bestiary, real and surreal, asleep and awake, where the tenderness of a leaf or the invasion of a mouth with full red lips, searching for the pulp of a guanabana or melon, jump into sight.
A rope crosses horizontally the profile of a face that in its astonishment seeks the game of shapes —mischievous in their splendid space, surrounded by volumes designed by the artist with new textures molded by their diverse material nature.

Cogido con presilla / Fastened with a Clip
2013, Collagraph
29 x 41 ¼” / 75 x 105 cm
Choco is torn between recreating the hyper-realistic contours of the nature of these figures and their figuration, which is the artist’s new visit, supported by new concepts of perspective and composition in painting.

Te estoy mirando / I'm Looking at You
2016, Oil on Canvas
28 x 19” / 71 x 48 cm
El beso / The Kiss
1972, Oil on Canvas
47 ¼ x 79" / 120 x 200 cm

Rogación / Praying
2013, Oil on Canvas
35 x 18" / 89 x 46 cm
It is the knowhow of the artist, his rural and cosmopolitan wisdom. We could be in a gallery with Brancusi sculptures, for example, but Choco’s sculptures challenge at a personal level, not only the rules of space, how it should be, but also the seriousness of those intolerant lines, much like the unforgettable Romanian transplant on the island, Sandu Darie.
El rostro II / The Face II
2016, Wood and Collagraph
16 x 7 x 8" / 40 x 17 x 20 cm

P. 37
El tres / The Three
2016, Wood and Collagraph
32 x 25 ½ x 8" / 82 x 65 x 20 cm
Eye to eye, side by side these works now foreshadow a multidimensional disposition that transports the viewer to that restless mischief that we manage to feel in the features of an arrow marked in a vacuum, latent in those faces pierced almost always by those shells that remind us and put us in front of the god-child so adored by all.

El rostro I / The Face I
2016, Wood and Collagraph
28 x 19 x 7" / 72 x 49 x 17 cm
Homenaje a Changó / Homage to Chango
2016, Wood and Collagraph
27 ¼ x 8 ½ x 9 ½” / 70 x 22 x 24 cm

Columna humana / Human Column
2016, Wood and Collagraph
118 x 39 x 39” / 300 x 100 x 100 cm
El artista cubano Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco) (Santiago de Cuba, 1949), no escogió el nombre a través del cual ha alcanzado una popularidad insospechada. Fueron llamándolo así y, así se nombra, uno de los más extraordinarios creadores de las artes plásticas y aplicadas de la Isla. Su nombre es un sello de ingenio y legitimidad. Quizás el color de su piel haya redondeado la metafóra que los envuelve como quien acaricia el paisaje más cercano.

Estamos hoy ante una delicada muestra de talento –a la que estamos acostumbrados desde su nacimiento, allá por la década de los sesenta–, cuyo estilo se asienta en rasgos que tradicionalmente han perpetuado esta obra más plural ahora que en sus deslumbradores inicios.

Choco ha llegado hasta esta orilla para abrir un camino, un nuevo camino, por el que encontraremos, sin olvidar las claves de los primeros momentos, nuevas propuestas, nuevas sustancias, nuevos territorios sumados todos al deseo del artista de renacer entre sus modos. Choco desea volver a visitar la casa de sus sueños y aquellos espacios que sedimentaron un lenguaje personal, descomunal, vistas a través de esa mirada, que se renueva hoy, pero que siempre retorna a sus orígenes.

Encuentro aquí, en medio de ese camino, un aliento recién estrenado, como una suerte de purificación de las formas que toman de la mano al espectador para irlo llevando a contemplar una nueva dimensión del espacio. Porque este camino, abierto una vez más por sus sabias manos, nos adentra en ese reto del espacio que no es otra cosa que el balance lírico entre la gracia de una escultura mínima y la movilidad de su prestancia frente a los misterios de una ritualidad. La cubanía de Choco, nacido en la ciudad de Santiago de Cuba, rodeado por montañas, se integra por ensoñaciones en donde abundan los cuatro elementos sagrados y esa voluptuosidad, por encima de cualquier otra posibilidad apreciativa. Pasea la figura ancestral de Eleggua –orisho o santo que es uno de los emblemas más populares de la santería cubana. Actualmente su imagen es como un amuleto que pulula en cualquier manifestación del imaginario ritual de los cubanos, más allá de cualquier limitación geográfica. Dueño de los caminos en las adivinaciones, confirma también en ese indómito carácter que las columpiaba en el esplendor de su historia heroica.

Como un símbolo sagrado de la huella africana que, ya desde el siglo XV, descendió a la Isla, aparece de nuevo en el nuevo camino de Choco, entronizada por los extraños pueblos de Cuba, no sólo Eliseo Diego sino la maga que fue Antonia Eiriz.

La boca de estos “eleggues” es de un color rojo, un rojo punzó que está rememorando aquel rojo de los melones de los retratos costumbristas del siglo XIX, usualmente sarcásticos a la hora de contemplar duras escenas de labores en el campo, hechas por supuesto por hombres y mujeres esclavizados. Una cuerda atraviesa, de forma horizontal, el perfil de un rostro que en su azor no busca el juego de las formas, pícaras en su espléndido espacio cercado por volúmenes diseñados por el artista con nuevas texturas, amoldadas por su diversa naturaleza material. Juega el artista con el espacio mientras lo va cercando con volúmenes inesperados ensamblados con una técnica parecidísima a las rompecabezas de su infancia remota.

La pluralidad que se manifiesta en estas figuras es la base indiscutible de su aliento recién estrenado. Frutas, o perfiles de santos y transeúntes, nos devuelven la maravilla de su existencia, aprehendida por Choco en ese velo poético que cubre casi siempre el entorno en el que se desplazan sus criaturas. Un camino por donde se entrecruzan sabores, olores, en la ebullición de ese marasmo, hijo del trópico, aplanados mediante esa textura y la utilización, inédita, de papeles de todo tipo, como rememorando las técnicas populares del papel mache que entronizó por los extraños pueblos de Cuba, no sólo Eliseo Diego sino la maga que fue Antonia Eiriz.

Choco se debate entre recrear los contornos hiperealistas de la naturaleza de esos seres y su figuración que es la nueva visita del artista, apoyada por nuevos conceptos de la perspectiva y la composición, para la pintura; y otros nuevos de espacio y perspectiva profunda. Entre sus bordes, encontramos el imaginario de un artista integrado por ensamblajes en donde abundan los cuatro elementos sagrados y esa volupuosidad, por encima de cualquier otra posibilidad apreciativa. Pasea Choco por esta especie de bestiario, real e irreal, dormido y despierto, en donde saltan a la vista la ternura de una hoja, o la invasión de una boca de labios gruesos, cercando la pulpa de una guanábana o un melón. Es el saber del artista, su sabiduría rural y cosmopolita. Las esculturas de Choco dejan no sólo las leyes del espacio, sino también las de la gravedad a base de aquellas líneas intolerantes, como en el caso del quehacer del indolible rumano, aplatanado en la Isla, el querido Sandu Darie.

Estamos sobre un planeta vivo, poblado por los personajes, las máscaras y el pulso indescifrable de un gran pintor. Las chavetas y los pinceles entran en franca contienda; las colagráfías, los óleos, y lienzos inician su espléndida danza insular. Es el nuevo camino que está abriendo Choco para el disfrute de casi todo el mundo.

El Cerro, 28 de agosto, 2016
EDUARDO ROCA SALAZAR, CHOCO, was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1949. He is a painter, draftsman and engraver who graduated from the Art Teachers’ School in 1963 and from the National School of Art in 1970. He studied at the Faculty of Arts and Literature of the University of Havana. He is a member of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and of the International Association of Visual Artists (AIAP). He was awarded the Distinction for National Culture granted by the Ministry of Culture of Cuba; with the medals “Alejo Carpentier” and “Julio Antonio Mella” by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba; and with the Laureate Pin and Distinction “Raúl Gómez García” by the National Union of Cultural Workers. He has been recognized with the Diploma of Artistic Merit and the category of Consultant Professor by the Higher Institute of Art (ISA) of Havana.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Opening Pathways. The Patricia Doran Graduate Gallery at MassArt (Massachusetts College of Art and Design) and Latin Art Space, Boston, USA.


2013 Retazos del Sol. Valley Arts, Firehouse Gallery and Latin Art Space, New Jersey, USA.

2012 Retazos del sol. Latin Art Space-Multicultural Arts Center, Cambridge, Boston, USA.


2009 Havana to Harlem. Caribbean Cultural Center, NY, USA.


2005 Choco. Infanta Cristina Cultural Center, Pinto, Madrid, Spain.


2003 El Sapito de la vida. Centro de Cultura Casa Lamm, Mexico City, Mexico.

2002 Los misterios del azul. Promo-Arte, Tokyo, Japan.

2001 Choco... late. José Martí Memorial, Havana, Cuba.


1996 En la zona del crepúsculo. Sotomayor Castle, Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain.

1994 Joan Miró Foundation, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.


1989 Materia prima. ISMINT, Havana, Cuba.


1987 Retazos del Sol. Valley Arts, Firehouse Gallery and Latin Art Space, New Jersey, USA.

1986 El sapito de la vida. Trista Gallery, Trinidad, Cuba.

1984 Cosas sueltas. Casa de la Cultura Pirámides, Mexico.

1983 Retazos del sol. Latin Art Space-Multicultural Arts Center, Cambridge, Boston, USA.

1982 Francisco Javier Báez Gallery of Engraving Art, Cathedral Square, Havana, Cuba.


1979 Retazos del sol. Latin Art Space-Multicultural Arts Center, Cambridge, Boston, USA.


GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015 Un malentendido. Santa Fe College/Latin Art Space, Gainesville, USA.
Visiones cruzadas. Alberto Linero Gallery, Miami, USA.
Xico. Latin American Artists, Havana, Cuba.

Drapetomanía. San Francisco, New York and Boston, USA.

2014 Cuban Art Space West, Santa Mónica Art Studios, USA.

Beijing Art Show. Latin American Pavilion, Beijing, China.


2012 Bola Viva, Cuban Painting Today. Gabriel García Márquez Cultural Center, Bogotá, Colombia.

2011 Monstruos devoradores de energía. Seville, Barcelona, Spain.

2010 Cuba Avant-Garde. Xin Dong Cheng Space for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China.

2009 Alex con puntos. José Martí Memorial, Havana, Cuba.

Contemporary Cuban Artist. Guadalajara, Spain.
Instruction Manual. Casa America, Madrid, Spain; Milan, Italy; Grand Palace of Fine Arts, Paris, France.
Onze Artistes Cubains. Centre culturel Le Manoir, Geneva, Switzerland.
Contemporary Cuban Graphics. Lobby Gallery, New York, USA.

El vuelo del bronce. Fierl Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

2005 Six Cuban Artists. Egyptian Center for International Cultural Cooperation, Cairo, Egypt.
De todo un poco. Cuban Art. L’Ariete Gallery, Ponte San Pietro, Italy.

Cuban Painting Today. Guayasamin Foundation, Quito, Ecuador.


2000 Aquí y ahora. José Martí Memorial, Havana, Cuba.
Contemporary Art Today. Tokyo, Japan.

1999 Afro-Cuban Contemporary Graphic Art. The Kennedy Center, Washington, USA.

PRIZES AND MENTIONS


PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

2009 Course on collagraphy, University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina / 2005 Course on collagraphy, Infanta Cristina Cultural Center, Madrid, Spain / 2003 Course on collagraphy, Workshops of the Erasto Cortés Museum, Puebla, Mexico / 2001 Course on collagraphy, SocArts Cultural Center, San Francisco, USA / 2000 He was invited to work in the URDLA workshop, Lyon, France / 1994 He conducted collagraphy courses for professionals, Joan Miró Foundation, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

COLLECTIONS

His works can be found in the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana, Cuba; Museum of Africa, Chicago, USA; Museo de la Estampa, Mexico City, Mexico; Museum of Querétaro, Mexico; Museo Nacional del Grabado, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Joan Miró Foundation, Palma de Mallorca, Spain; Ludwig Foundation, Germany; Museum of the University of Tama, Japan; Galería Franco, Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia; Kochy Museum, Japan.
His works are in prominent private collections in Cuba, Mexico, the United States, Colombia, Canada, Panama, Puerto Rico, Martinique, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Great Britain, China, and Japan.