

## **Why Sculpture, Why Here**

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Co-organised by Tate Modern, Iniva and Henry Moore Institute

Participating artists: Subodh Gupta, Abel Barroso, Dilomprizulike (The Junkman from Africa), Huang Yong Ping, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Mamiko Otsubo, with a conclusion by Sarat Maharaj

### **Introduction for Abel Barroso**

It's my pleasure to introduce Abel Barroso, currently based in Havana, Cuba. Abel Barroso is an artist and curator, born in 1971 in Pinar del Río. He studied art at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in 1990 and the Instituto Superior de Arte in 1995 in Havana and has exhibited internationally in museums and galleries in Germany, Canada and North America. Barroso's work combines printmaking with handmade sculptural constructions and installations which often display a cheeky commentary on Cuban culture as well as addressing global themes such as poverty and wealth distribution. His installation, 'Third World Internet Café' was presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennale in 2000, and he curated an exhibition of emerging Cuban artists for the 9<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennale in 2006. Along with Cuban artists Sandra Ramos, Belkis Ayon and Ibrahim Miranda, he founded and curated an ongoing exhibition project called 'La Huella Multiple', 'The Multiple Trace', which was launched in 1996 and had its most recent manifestation in 2006.

### **Abel Barroso**

My story begins as a printmaker at the university, but I wanted to go farther than the conventional way of printmaking, and that's why I made a big join of my work with sculpture, and almost everything I do is only sculpture. Sometimes people identify my work as sculpture. No, I say, it's printmaking.

The first piece you see here belongs to the 'Third World Internet Café'. I was invited to the 2000 Havana Biennale and I proposed to do an intervention in a public space. I proposed to do this intervention in a coffee place where they have food, coffee and musicians, and I made a series of wooden computers and put all of them in this coffee place. Inside the Internet Café, I had a sign saying 'Third World Internet Café'. This is a picture of when I made a version of it in Tokyo, which was of course very different from the version in Havana. For this exhibition in New York, in the

museum in Albany, I did a series of place mats for the tables, and when people ate using these placemats made of silkscreen, I signed them like an edition and I used a logo for my Internet Café with a t-shirt for the workers.

I had this exhibition in Texas; it's a small version of the 'Third World Internet Café'. I call it 'Third World Internet Café', because, using low-tech, it's a kind of reflection about high-tech and low-tech. The way you can surf on my computer is by using the handles; you can surf that internet with the handles; the website is very limited. In Cuba internet is not available for everybody, and I had the opportunity to introduce the internet in the Biennale in the Havana context, and people enjoyed it a lot. In this case, I made the exhibition in New York City, in a Chelsea gallery. This is what my Internet Café exhibition at the Havana Biennale looked like.

Of course I have different kinds of computers. What you can see here is a Pentium 5 with a mobile included and a CD-ROM which you can open and take the CD out. It's a very fast computer, a flat screen of course, and the website is secure, and this computer is entitled 'Windows'. I was all over Havana taking pictures of windows and I put all of them in my computer. This is a cutting-edge technology with two DVDs and this is a palm pilot, because in this case I was making a reflection about censorship, and all these pencils don't have points. It's very hard to write with them. [His mobile is ringing.] Hello, sorry, I am giving a lecture at the Tate Modern, ring me up later, Bye. Sorry.

This computer is to test for terrorists. I use this kind of ink, and you need to put your finger on the ink and follow the text which will tell you if you are a terrorist or not. Of course in my computer nobody is a terrorist. I made this video camera for my 'Third World Internet Café', and I had different flick books, and each flick book is like a six-second video.

This piece is called 'Robot from the Third World', and the only way this robot moves is because I am inside. In the middle is the wood block and on the other side are the prints. It's a very high-tech robot with the internet included, and what you can see around the whole body is all the things he can do. This is my performance in Havana. People enjoy a lot watching me suffer inside and sweat a lot, putting on my costume. I was doing the performance in Spain recently at the Estampa Fair, and in this case, I was playing with the football like a football player and I had something writing in my back, like asking for a job. This is in Tokyo in a gallery and it was a good experience for my robot. My robot wanted to do a performance with a real

robot, this is an exchange between a third world robot and a first world robot. Here he was moving like a real human being, and I was moving like a robot, as you can see. I couldn't move, because I was very afraid.

This is another series, called 'Cars for the Third World'. I made these cars for two people, one person is driving and the other person is pushing the car, they are very ecological. I was inspired by a form of transportation in Cuba where people use these cars with a ball bearing, in the Western part of Cuba. It is not like these cars, but similar, used for transportation in the mountains, and they go through their heels, you see the heels, the gravity, and they go to the places where they need to go using this kind of transportation. That's why I had the idea to do an exhibition with my 'Cars for the Third World', and I made five of these. The technique is woodcut; it takes a lot of time for me to do all these pieces, because I do them by hand, but now I have an electric tool which is better and more high-tech. What you can read is 'Mango Technology'; I am using this brand, this name 'Mango', making a kind of irony with the 'Apple'.

They loved my cars, and this exhibition which I did in Havana in 2006 is entitled 'The Cold War is Over, Let's Enjoy Globalisation'. Because globalisation means that everything around the world has to be the same, I had the idea to do these construction boxes; people can assemble the same things whatever place in the world, I just send the boxes, and when people follow the instructions they will assemble different pieces. This is the kind of boxes that I made with the instructions there using knots and screws, everything made in wood.

The title of this piece is 'Globalisation Bridge', and it's a video projection of the CD that is changing the whole time, including the first world CD and third world CDs; all these cars are going back and forth, but each car represents a big corporation.

This is an installation view. I did this aeroplane carrier, and the aeroplane carrier is taking care of the oil tower. This piece was dedicated to the victims of September 11; it is in an exhibition in a museum in Florida right now. Of course in Cuba we had a couple of these kind of devices to spy on the United States. This is very similar to a Russian antenna used to spy on the US.

This last series I'm doing is my last production of 'Mango-Tech'. I am working right now on border frontiers, and this is one of the borders, the airports. In this case I am using engines with a mechanism; the passport and the stamp date never get close to each other. In this case, behind the fence is the first world with the big

buildings, and I made a mechanism that opens just one door a little; the mechanism opens and closes the door just a little. This is an international airport, this has crawled behind the windows, it's not in the picture but I made this sign behind the windows, that reads 'we are all made the same'. This is a border patrol, in this case I have an engine, I moved the charts like dolphins. This is a factory of the globalisation, here coming out from the factory, you can see computers, TVs and different things made in the third world with the advertisement that was made in the third world country.

### **Question**

Why did you feel the need to make these objects, when you could have quite easily drawn them in two dimensions? Was there something about the physicality of it that you were interested in as well?

### **Abel**

When I began my presentation, I was telling a little bit about how my stories are based on printmaking, but I was tired of doing printmaking, a bi-dimensional thing, I always wanted to be a father, getting close to the three-dimensional with the sculpture, because I felt like I needed the three-dimensional way to expand the meanings of my work in a way that people can see in the three-dimensional way in my constructions. They can take more meanings from my work, and if they move, it will be even better, they will come closer to the way I want them to understand my work.

### **Question**

The style of the printmaking that you use, does that have a particular source, I'm thinking of the c. nineteenth-century tradition in printmaking... I'm just wondering whether that's totally you, or whether there's a kind of historical background to that.

### **Abel**

I think living in the Caribbean, in a way we have all this tradition of printmaking, because what we get at school is a result of the mix of the culture and all the influence that we had of the printmaking of Latin America, and the influence of the first prints made in Latin America explaining about the new continent or using this as a way of

information about a new place. I think I have all these, I have it myself, a cultural process in my work.

**Question**

You mentioned that one of the inspirations for the 'Third World Internet Café' is that access to the internet and this kind of technology isn't widely available in Cuba, but you've also shown that piece in New York, in Texas, in Tokyo, and I was just wondering if you felt that it was necessary for the different audiences that have a different experience of and relationship to technology when you show in those places, is it important for them to understand the current conditions in Cuba when they're looking at your work?

**Abel**

Yes, I think that was part of my idea or my version of the Internet Café, and when they see my objects and they look like stone age computers, they will take the irony very fast. Just reading my name, seeing that I live in Cuba, they will understand it.

Transcribed by Jackie Howson and edited by Marion Endt.