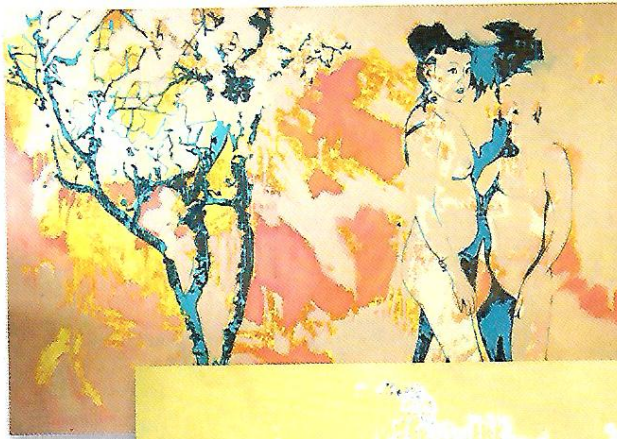
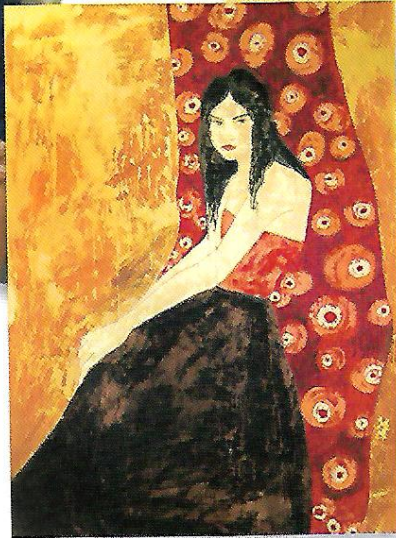




Photo: Rebecca M. Alvin



Clockwise from left: Aissa Santiso at Galeria Cubana in Provincetown; Otono (Autumn) (2015, oil on canvas, 51x74.75"); Siames (Twins) (2015, oil on canvas, 47.5x70.5"); and Ms. Bechabell (2015, oil on canvas, 74.75x51").



Art=Life

Cuban Artist Aissa Santiso

by Rebecca M. Alvin

Aissa Santiso has never been to the United States before. The 24-year-old Cuban artist sits on the floor of Galeria Cubana, stretching a canvas in preparation for her show with Edel Bordon that is about to open. Her first impressions of this country are that "It's amazing because you have a lot of things here, a lot of developments. But at the same time, I feel that some people don't know how to use it in the best way." In comparison, she says, "For us, we are Cuban, so we don't have anything. All the time we have to figure out something with the stuff we have and try to find new solutions."

The gallery is filled with Santisos's large-scale paintings, mostly of women, although she is quick to dismiss the idea that her work is about women's issues, specifically. Instead, as she explains in her artist statement, "My art comes from my experiences and memories... My work talks about how the perception of the past is just a product of the manipulation and reconstruction of the images engraved on both our personal and collective memory."

Santiso comes up with her images by looking at and reflecting upon other images, such as the paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec or Monet, family photos and ones she took herself, and stills from movies. She mashes up the images in her mind to come up with different compositions that combine and transform those images into something quite different from the original source material.

"I see [these other images] and compose it and frame it in my mind, because memory works like that, in frames. The kind of technique I use to express something like that, I use a sketch and then manipulate the pictures, so it's not a copy," she explains.

Santiso's motivation for creating these works speaks of a broader cultural difference. In Cuba, she says art is "a part of life actually, because in Cuba, in the field of visual arts there doesn't exist a market to sell, so...you have to like it, because you know that if you are Cuban there is no market; it's only for the true artists.... Really it's like a lifestyle actually." Many of her family members are musicians, so she says she was brought up around creative expression, although she admits she did not inherit musical talent.

While studying at the San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy and then later at Higher Institute for the Arts (ISA) in Havana, she met and worked with Edel Bordon, a Cuban artist and professor. The show at Galeria Cubana includes Bordon's work alongside Santiso's, demonstrating the link between the two.

Bordon, she says, has been an important influence in her work. "He's a very good professor. He taught me different kinds of techniques as a painter, and also with his point of view about art, that art [always] has to be experimental. He is a very great influence for me," she says.

This experimentation he encouraged extends to all parts of the artmaking process. "The technique, even in your thought, the ideas. All the time you have to test yourself," she explains.

Although the Galeria Cubana show only includes paintings, Santiso also works in other media, including video art, and her work has been shown in Mexico, Spain, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Switzerland. For her, art is all about bringing together techniques, ideas, and something else that you don't actually control. "There is another part that is dependent on the accident...all the time you find something new and you try to use it.

Profesor y Estudiante (Teacher and Student): Edel Bordon and Aissa Santiso is on exhibit through June 9 at Galeria Cubana, 357 Commercial St. For more information visit lagaleriacubana.com.