

No Holds Barred with Coco Fusco at The Ringling

SRQ srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-10-12/9339_No-Holds-Barred-with-Coco-Fusco-at-The-Ringling

Museum

BY PHILIP LEDERER SRQ DAILY FRIDAY WEEKEND EDITION FRIDAY OCT 12, 2018



Coco Fusco walks fast and she talks fast. But maybe that's because she has a lot to do and a lot to say. There's a "showdown" coming, she says, between the Cuban government and the independent artist communities of the island nation, with a new decree set to become law in December. "It basically criminalizes independent art activity," Fusco says. And as a Cuban-American artist who has spent more than 30 years putting Cuba's politics and the Castro regime under the microscope with critical writings and subversive performance, she'll have something to say about that. But first, she visits Sarasota and the Ringling Museum for *Coco Fusco: Twilight*, a new video exhibition in the Monda Gallery opening this Sunday (including a world premiere), and the unveiling of a new sculpture on the museum grounds.

With Ezra Masch's *Volumes* vacating the Monda, the black paint job remains, the light columns replaced by a sparse selection of black-cushioned benches. On the far wall, a great projector screen loops four of Fusco's video projects. One is a 2011 collaboration with Cuban writer

Yoani Sanchez, reflecting on the lack of Cuban activity in a time of protest that became known as the Arab Spring. Another explores the Cuban poet Herberto Padilla, imprisoned for criticizing the Castro regime, and yet another takes a closer look at a poet from the 1980s who dared question the Cuban constitution. These have all been seen before. The fourth, however, funded by the 2016 Hermitage Artist Retreat's Greenfield Prize, makes its world premiere in the Ringling Museum.

A but of guerrilla filmmaking, Fusco herself was actually denied entry to Cuba in order to make *Vivir en junio con la lengua afuera* ("To Live in June with Your Tongue Hanging Out"), instead relying on her "gringos"—two blue-eyed *norteamericanos*—to execute her vision in her absence. Armed with video cameras and pairing up with a trio of local independent poets and actors, the filmmakers head to Cuba's Lenin Park with an illegal poem from Reinaldo Arenas, celebrated everywhere but his home country, where his homosexuality made him an enemy of the state and his work remains forbidden. What follows is a restrained but surprisingly emotional journey, as the participants come to terms with the words for the first time on camera.

Stepping out of the darkness of the Monda Mini-Cinema, Fusco has one more piece to show Sarasota—one that speaks for itself. Entitled *Tin Man of the Twenty-First Century*, and made in collaboration with Chico MacMurtrie, the towering statue sees the artist placing President Donald Trump's visage atop those metal shoulders, his hand in the signature 'OK' pointer and thumb pose. And though it may speak for itself, Fusco doesn't mind putting a point on it. "The problem with the tin man is that he had no heart and needed oil," she says.

Museum guests are encouraged to take pictures of and with the sculpture, and share their thoughts with the #TinManatTheRingling hashtag. For a special memory, inquire with museum staff about opportunities to pose with a special Russian oil can as well.

Coco Fusco: Twilight opens this Sunday and runs through February 17.

Pictured: "Tin Man of the Twenty-First Century" by Coco Fusco. Photo by Phil Lederer.