

A 40 AÑOS DE ¡VAMPIROS EN LA HABANA!

30.08.2025 – 1.11.2025

GALLERIA CONTINUA is pleased to present the exhibition *Juan Padrón. 40 Years After Vampires in Havana!*, a tribute to the legacy of an iconic figure in Cuban art and culture, renowned particularly for his contributions to animation, comics, and film. Curated by Niurma Pérez Zerpas, this display celebrates the pictorial work of the creator of emblematic characters in the Cuban collective imagination and commemorates the four decades since his most celebrated film – a work that has become a cult classic and a turning point in the animated language of Latin America.

Juan Manuel Padrón Blanco (1947–2020) is remembered as one of Cuba's great visual storytellers. His filmography includes titles that left a mark on multiple generations; however, *Vampires in Havana!* holds a central place in the collective memory. Forty years after its premiere, it remains one of the most irreverent and iconic works of Cuban and Latin American animation. It broke the mold with its bold blend of political satire, black comedy, and parody of gangster films. Set in the Cuban capital of the 1930s, the film narrates the dispute between European and American vampire clans to seize "Vampisol," a formula created by the vampire scientist Werner Amadeus Von Drácula that allows vampires to live in daylight, and which has been successfully tested on his nephew, Pepito. Co-produced by ICAIC, Televisión Española, and Durniok Productions, the film endures as an ingenious metaphor for power, resistance, and freedom, with a rebellious aesthetic that continues to captivate new generations.

Beginning in the year 2000, Juan Padrón actively turned his focus to painting: a lesser-known yet profoundly revealing facet of his work, testament to his inexhaustible narrative drive and his capacity for reinvention. The exhibition now hosted

by GALLERIA CONTINUA's Cuban venue brings together 86 works – including inks, tempera paint, mixed media, and acrylics—that translate the vampire universe created by the author into pictorial language.

While his works retain the irreverence and agile linework of a comic book artist, they explore other dimensions of the collective imaginary. Grouped into various themes – erotic scenes, educational lessons, portraits of diverse characters, occasional situations, and night views of Havana – the pieces reveal a universe where the fantastic and the ordinary merge in a humorous and satirical way. Padrón's vampires do not correspond to the European Gothic archetype. Instead of dark capes and gloomy castles, they go about their daily lives wearing T-shirts, baseball caps, or gold chains. They are ironic and worldly characters, more devoted to tropical pleasures than to terror, figures who embody the vitality of the city and its festive spirit.

In the central hall, two large-scale wallpapers reproduce Padrón's paintings, notable for their composition, color, and humor. One evokes familiar characters from the film, while the other belongs to the vast and free universe of new situations and beings imagined by this brilliant visual storyteller.

The strength of his painting is evident in its remarkable chromatic expressiveness and the narrative density he achieves in each composition. He experiments with a wide range of colors, from saturated and bright tones to muted shades, depending on the atmosphere or message of each piece. The result is compositions laden with pictorial intent, where color fulfills expressive, symbolic, and narrative functions at the same time. His works reveal meticulous attention to detail. Every element within the frame – from the furniture

in a room to the gestures of the characters - is deliberately placed to support the visual structure and enhance the reading of the image. This thoroughness does not sacrifice dynamism; on the contrary, the lively and fluent drawing, together with the bold compositions, give the scenes an internal rhythm reminiscent of film editing.

At the same time, the drawing and line have a very personal, expressive, and dynamic style. In the ink drawings on cardboard created during Padrón's stay in London in 2014, the gracefulness of the line, the gestures, and the power of synthesis stand out. Some works achieve such a level of formal condensation that they stand alone, while in others the text provides an ironic or humorous twist, intensifying the narrative effect.

Also included are pieces of great historical value, such as excerpts of the original storyboard corresponding to Sequence 22 of the film and original cels to which Padrón added painted backgrounds on cardboard years later. In the video room, filmminutes related to the world of vampires, classic scenes from the feature film, and a daily screening of *¡Vampiros en La Habana! [Vampires in Havana!]* are shown.

With this exhibition, GALLERIA CONTINUA celebrates Juan Padrón in his dual role as a key filmmaker in Cuban animation and as a visual artist who, with humor and lucidity, knew how to portray cultural identity through fantasy. His graphic and narrative ingenuity is part of the emotional memory of those who grew up enjoying his characters. *Juan Padrón. 40 Years After Vampires in Havana!* invites the public to rediscover an essential creator, capable of making people laugh and think with equal intensity, and whose acid humor and social criticism continue to resonate with relevance in the present.

About the artist:

Juan Manuel Padrón Blanco (1947-2020) was one of the most influential artists in 20th century Cuban culture. His work - which comprises comics, animation, film, and painting - has shaped the collective imaginary of generations both inside and outside Cuba. He began his career in graphic arts in the 1960s, publishing cartoons, humorous vignettes, and comic strips in the print media. In 1972, he joined the Animation Department at ICAIC, where he established himself as a filmmaker and film director. In 1981, he graduated with a degree in Art History from the University of Havana. His filmography includes the animated feature films: *Elpidio Valdés* (1979), *Elpidio Valdés contra dólar y cañón [Elpidio Valdés against Dollar and Cannon]* (1983), *¡Vampiros en La Habana! [Vampires in Havana!]* (1985), *Mafalda* (1994), *Contra el águila y el león [Against the Eagle and the Lion]* (1996) and *¡Más vampiros en La Habana! [More Vampires in Havana!]*

(2003). He created more than sixty short films, including the series *Elpidio Valdés* (1974-2015), *Filminutos [One-Minute Films]* (1980-2006), *Quinoscopios* (1985-1987) and *Cineclips [Movie clips]* (1994-2004) for Canal+ España. In parallel, he published books such as *El libro del mambí [The Book of the Mambí]* (1985), *Aventuras de Elpidio Valdés [Adventures of Elpidio Valdés]* (1997), *Tribu Tapok: historias de la prehistoria [Tapok Tribe: Stories of Pre-history]* (2005), *¡Vampiros en La Habana! [Vampires in Havana!]* (2006), *Vampirenkomando [Vampire Command]* (2008), *Crónicas de La Habana: un gallego en la Cuba socialista [Havana Chronicles: a Galician in Socialist Cuba]* (2016), *Verdugos [Torturers]* (2017) and *Mi vida en Cuba [My Life in Cuba]* (2021). During the 2000s, he expanded his practice to include visual arts, increasing his production of drawings and paintings. His visual work has been presented in solo exhibitions such as: *De Eros, vampiros y tapoks [Of Eros, vampires and tapoks]* (Hispanic American Cultural Center, Havana, 2013), *Vampiros en La Habana. Dibujos de Juan Padrón [Vampires in Havana. Drawings by Juan Padrón]* (Casa Colón, Huelva, 2016), and *Tan fiero como lo pintan [As Fierce as People Say]* (Servando Gallery, Havana, 2018). He taught at the University of Art (ISA, initials in Spanish) and at the International Film and Television School in San Antonio de los Baños. He taught courses in Spain, Chile, Cuba, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina. His film work was distinguished with a dozen Coral Awards at the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, as well as awards at festivals in Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and England.

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome and Paris. Remaining faithful to the spirit of perpetual evolution, and committed to engaging the widest possible audiences in contemporary art, GALLERIA CONTINUA has built a strong identity through its bonds and experiences, thriving away from the conventional urban centres, in completely unexpected yet timeless locations. The gallery inaugurated its permanent space in Havana, in Aguila de Oro, a cinema theater from the '50s at the heart of Havana's Chinatown, in November 2015.

GALLERIA CONTINUA / Habana

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