



Goodman, Carole and Claudio Sotolongo, eds. *Soy Cuba. El cartel de cine en Cuba después de la Revolución*. México, D.F.: Trilce Ediciones, 2011. 319p.

Editors Carole Goodman and Claudio Sotolongo borrow the title, *Soy Cuba*, from the 1964 Soviet-Cuban film by director Mikhail Kalatozov, and whose recovery owes a great debt to Martin Scorsese, for their 2011 Spanish-English bilingual tome, which brings together 250 full-page reproductions of "Cuban Cinema Posters from After the Revolution" (the book's subtitle).

The volume begins with a short foreword by Steven Heller, who frames the contents and contributions of Cuban poster design. The editors follow with their introductory remarks, Ms. Goodman's being

somewhat more personal, while Claudio Sotolongo gives an accounting of the ICAIC's (Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas) role and poster design's reference to history. The rest of the volume divides the presentation of posters into three immediately post-revolutionary periods of five to seven years each between the 1950's and 1980.

Each of these subsections bears a subtitle, and each is preceded by text. The first of the sections is subtitled "Un nuevo comienzo" ("A New Beginning"), and it is preceded by a retrospective, "Cuban Film Posters and the Newer Generations," written by Flor de Lis López Hernández, a professor at Cuba's Instituto Superior de Diseño Industrial. This first section displays 89 posters from the years 1959-1966. The second section, "Preservation and Circulation," contains 116 posters from the years 1967-1974, which are introduced by an essay, "The Depths [sic, probably it should be "holdings"] of the Cuban Cinematheque Are Moving," authored by Sara Vega Miche. An interview with poster designer and professor at the ISDI, Nelson Ponce Sánchez, precedes the third section of the volume titled "The Phenomenon of Contemporary Cuban Design." Forty-four posters from the years 1975-1980 comprise this section.

The posters displayed relate to films from Cuba, of course, and to films from all over the world: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Soviet Union, Romania, Yugoslavia, Japan, China, United States, England, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Nigeria, Senegal, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, and Vietnam. Included in the compendium are posters for international films that most every reader will recognize; yet, the Cuban posters reveal a different sensibility and instinct with respect to the films they seek to promote. Worthy of mention are the posters for *Seven Samurai* (101), *The Face* (50), *Pickpocket* (105), *Moby Dick* (152), *The Godfather* (155), *Avarice* (162), *Gigi* (173), *Z* (219), *Stolen Kisses* (231), *War and Peace* (233), *Lord Jim* (235), *Peppermint Frappe* (246), *God's Little Acre* (249), *Battleship Potemkin* (269), *Cría cuervos* (283), and *The Kid* (297).

While pre-revolutionary posters own debts to prevailing American and European styles, it becomes clear to the reader that the style of the posters included in this visually and intellectually stimulating volume is unique, bearing no links to Hollywood, European or Latin American design

styles of the same period. Before the Revolution, most Cuban film posters were similar in design to those of the United States and Mexico in that they typically included illustrative photographic imagery, incorporating vignettes from the film, and bold, hand-lettered typography. After the Revolution, Cuban artists went to Russia and Poland to study, and this gave rise to a shift towards symbolic imagery, typography which becomes part of the overall design, and bold, graphic compositions with far fewer elements on the page, where the viewer's gaze is focused on a single expressive element of the film.

Susan Sontag pointed out in her 1970 essay on posters that movie posters in post-revolutionary Cuba are somewhat of a paradox. Since, due to a lack of entertainment opportunities, every movie showing will be sold out, movie posters serve no practical need; they are not really cultural advertisement. Cuban cinema posters must be treated as a new creative work of art, supplemental to the film.

Gems of visual acuity and typographic expression, these works do not follow conventions of posters, and they run the conceptual and formal gamut from decorative to symbolic, from comic to serious, from expressive to surreal. And every reader will leave the volume remembering a few standout gems. Memorable for this reviewer are: *The Little Apartment* (Rafael Morante Boyerizo) (88), *The Sea* (Raymundo García Parra) (228), *We All Loved Each Other So Much* (Ñiko González) (281), *Tulipa* (Fernando Pérez O'Reilly) (248), and a miniature inset (128) of a posture promoting the ICAIC's Cine Móvil.

Movie posters are typically mediocre and characterized by unoriginal images that marketing executives believe will pique audience interest. This is not so with the nearly 300 (counting smaller insets which punctuate the commentary texts) posters representing cinema poster output from post-revolutionary Cuba. The Cuban visual language of these posters aesthetically expresses and embodies a revolutionary zeal. The style exudes a sense of individual freedom. Their expression is different, not just when compared to Hollywood, but when compared to other cinema poster designs, be they Polish [from the 60's and 70's] or Latin America.

Because *Soy Cuba's* striking collection of cinema posters offers a view into an expressive art form, it has the attendant value of putting readers in touch with artists they otherwise may never know. Such is the

notable case with Eduardo Muñoz Bachs. Born in Valencia, Spain in 1937, he immigrated with his family in 1941 to Cuba, where he became one of the island's most respected artists. Vast and hardly limited to the cinema posters included in the compendium, the work of Muñoz Bachs has been the object of numerous studies as well as the well-known documentary *El cine y yo* (Mayra Vilasís, 1995). With a poster style which constantly renews and re-invents itself, Muñoz Bachs' posters are the paradigmatic expression of a revolutionary aesthetic and its link to its times. Witness to the status of his work is that a number of his posters are readily known outside of the confines of the volume which now collects them, as is the case, for example, with his design for *Vampiros en la Habana* (contrast it with Nelson Ponce's version [34]), *Papa Dollar* (37), *Realengo 18* (72), *Gigi* (173), *Los amantes de Hiroshima* (185), *Lokis* (197), *Trópico* (205), *Cría cuervos* (283), and his posters for the ICAIC's Cine Móvil.

Of course, numerous other poster artists are well represented in *Soy Cuba*, and readers will appreciate the chance to get to know them and their art, as, certainly each reader will have a favorite (René Azcuy Cárdenas will appeal to many). This volume is appealing on several levels: historical, because it offers lessons in Cuban history; cinematographic, because it offers lessons in Cuban cinema production through posters of films like *Now* (58), *Ociel de la toa* (65), *Cuba baila* (Muñoz Bachs) (71), *Marilyn Monroe in memoriam* (136), *Lucia* (224), *Che, comandante amigo* (267), *Una mujer, un hombre, una ciudad* (272) *Con las mujeres cubanas* (299); and aesthetic, because it offers a lesson in a distinctive creative art form. Above all, *Soy Cuba's* appeal is visual. Turning from one page to another is an adventure in visual discovery for specialists and non-specialists alike.

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