

“Notwithstanding his premature disappearance at age 37, Pedro Álvarez remains a key painter of the ‘Special Period’ in Cuba in the 1990s. Offering both a critical and analytical reflection on Cuba’s past and on the complexities and absurdities that have come to be identified with Cuban life today, Álvarez’s paintings are, metaphorically speaking, an open book waiting to be read by anyone interested in the culture of post-revolutionary Cuba. The first monograph on the artist, *The Signs Pile Up: Paintings by Pedro Álvarez*, is a much needed publication, one poised to become an authoritative source on this talented artist’s oeuvre and a must read for scholars, art historians, curators, or anyone who wants to gain a genuine understanding of contemporary art and, in particular, of the so-called ‘90s generation’ in Cuba.”

Alma Ruiz
Curator
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

“Pedro Álvarez was emblematic of Cuba’s much heralded artist generation of the 1990s. His life and his work represent all that was exciting about cultural production on the island and all of the hardships, self doubt and manic search for geographic and career expansion that provided oxygen from the beautiful and stifling life of an artist in Havana during the turn of the 21st Century. This monograph on Álvarez’s art will be a necessary tool to fully understand the depth of Cuban existentialism and one artist’s attempt to make sense of it to the world.”

Adolfo V. Nodal
Executive Director, FarmLab LLC
President, City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Commission
Co-author, *Memoria: Cuban Art of the 20th Century*

“The harsh nineties left no room for sophistication in Cuban culture. In the middle of the economic crisis, many of the metaphors that we embraced were gastronomical. José Lezama Lima’s novel *Paradiso* or Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate* became cult books as they featured succulent banquets and recipes of all forbidden and forgotten delicacies. Fernando Ortiz’s metaphor describing Cuban identity as an *ajiaco*, a traditional stew made out of almost anything, was revived. Pedro Álvarez ‘baked’ his paintings in this re-collection spirit. He placed layers and layers of a “Cuban culture” sort of cake—made out of almost everything. This book will help you find many of its multiple ingredients, and more importantly, the unique way in which he blended them.”

Elvis Fuentes
Curator
El Museo del Barrio, New York



The Signs Pile Up: Paintings by Pedro Álvarez is the first comprehensive book on the artist and his work. It represents one of the few monographs published in the United States to focus on one of the leading artists who established themselves in Cuba during the 1990s, a period of time that has been called the Special Period, or *Periodo Especial*. This was an extended period of economic crisis that began in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its withdrawal of support from Cuba after thirty years of patronage. Pedro Álvarez (1967-2004) utilized collage and appropriation in evocative, large-scale paintings as a postmodern technique for examining cultural identity. He often juxtaposed different time periods from Cuba, along with references to popular culture through the decades that range from Disney characters to the classic American cars left behind in the 1950s after Castro rose to power to the works of Cuban painters from the 19th century. After moving to Spain, his interests broadened into explorations of transnationalism, among other topics. Much of the subject matter in the paintings deals with the cultural interchange between Cuba and the U.S., Afro-Cuban history, U.S. slavery, the affects of the legalization of the U.S. dollar in Cuba in the 90s, and the role of landscape painting within a highly charged socio-political context. The book includes essays, in English and Spanish, by Tyler Stallings, Kevin Power, Antonio Eligio Fernández (Tonel), Orlando Hernández, Ry Cooder, and Tom Patchett.

THE SIGNS PILE UP Paintings by Pedro Álvarez LOS SIGNOS SE ACUMULAN Pinturas de Pedro Álvarez



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The Signs Pile Up Paintings by Pedro Álvarez



Los signos se acumulan Pinturas de Pedro Álvarez

On dust jacket and cover wrap:
Pedro Álvarez
La Historia del Arte Cubano ya está contada!, 1999
Collage and oil on canvas, Private Collection