

500 WORDS

Glenda
Leon

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Glenda Leon is a Cuban artist based in Havana and Madrid. Her conceptual works span a range of media including drawing, video, and installation. Leon currently has a solo exhibition at the



Glenda Leon, *Wasted Time*, 2013, hourglass, sand, 78 3/4 x 94 1/2 x 94 1/2".

*Chateau Des Adhemar in Montélimar, France, which is on view until March 24, and she will also exhibit her new work, on behalf of Magnan Metz Gallery, in *Solo Projects at ARCO Madrid*, which runs February 13–17. Leon, along with two other artists, will represent Cuba in the 2013 Venice Biennale.*

BEFORE I WAS A VISUAL ARTIST, I was a dancer. Cuba is a country of dance—it's everywhere here: in the streets, in restaurants and bars, performance halls and schools—and from the time that I was a little girl, I studied dance, hoping to become a choreographer. I realize now that this passion for dance actually came from sound; I had an enormous need to express with my body what I was listening to. I believe that music is actually a superior art and that it can take us, like no other medium, to a higher level of existence.

Sound is an element I play with aesthetically. I like the space where sound and the visual merge—where sound is not yet music and where the visual takes on another dimension. Every object contains a potential sound, and as an artist I look for ways to shape sound visually. I am interested in the abstract quality of sound and its connection to that part of us that we can't verbalize.

In the past, for instance, I created a series of music boxes, "Interpreted World," where the names of gods of different denominations are spelled out in braille; I have translated the braille into notes on a score and each music box plays the resulting sound. In much of my work, especially the pieces that I'm presenting at ARCO, I want to get at the interstice of sound and time. Time passes as quickly as sound passes, but the visual is static. I suppose I try to freeze sound and time through visual representation—to get at the

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interstice between sound and silence, between the instant and eternity—sound being the absence of silence.

Until recently in Cuba, artists were one of the few groups of people that were allowed to travel freely and live abroad. And while living abroad I have realized the wide spectrum of possibilities that exist artistically, the different sorts of artwork that can be produced. It's much easier to do certain technical things outside of Cuba; fabrication is practically impossible to do in Cuba and supplies are quite hard to come by. But what I like about being in Cuba is the easiness of life there. Art, at least for me, aims at taking one to a higher state of being, but that shouldn't, or doesn't need to, come out of tribulation—that's perhaps why much of my work uses sound to get at silence, a concept of inner silence.

*Silence is where one can find balance—there is so much talking, so much wasted time. One of the pieces I am showing at ARCO Madrid, *Wasted Time*, is a mountain of sand with an hourglass peeking over the top. It's sort of a pessimistic work, as it gestures at lost time—it's as if at each point the hourglass has been turned over, sand has slipped through the glass, collecting into this enormous pile. But don't mistake my work for being escapist—it's not—I want to pay attention to the real root of how transformation and solutions occur. There's already enough noise in the world, don't you think?*

— As told to Allese Thomson