



**CARLOS BETANCOURT "RE-COLLECTIONS"**



This essential notion is a cornerstone in Carlos Betancourt's proposal. Even when his oeuvre is inhabited by the most controversial characters, impressive for their richness and diversity, all of them are located at the same level, always positioned in the human condition. The *Cut-Out Army* (2006) is an obvious exponent of this concept. First of all, and from a nominal point of view, the title imposes different semantic levels. On the one hand, there is a reference to the technical production process of the work, in which the artist cut out the characters in order to fully integrate them to a new, different composition non-existent outside the oeuvre. On the other hand, the title refers to a sort of surreptitious communication. In the espionage language, a cutout is a mutually trusted intermediary or channel of communication that facilitates the exchange of information between agents. An ideal cutout agent doesn't know whom the message comes from or goes to, thus if captured will be unable to reveal other colleagues. In Carlos Betancourt's oeuvre, this idea is emphasized by the characters that forced to share the same space, seem to ignore each other.

The *Cut-Out Army* compiles an amazing collection of characters, arranged symmetrically on a black background, as a very organized sequence. Each of the characters engaged in such a capricious procession, looks straight to the camera, challenging the viewer, confronting the viewer openly. Paradoxically, none of them seems aware of the other people surrounding them. So outgoing and uninhibited, these archetypes reveal to us their real selves, their most intimate fantasies and desires, integrating the most outstanding eccentric collection. *The (Last) Supper* (2008) is a kind of compendium and at the same time is a paradigmatic creation within the production of this artist. The magnificent gleece print is a clin d'oeil to Leonardo da Vinci's famous mural. It is not the first time that Betancourt makes fair use of the common cultural legacy that the Renaissance conveys. Obsessed with the exploration into the human being through the identity, the artist uses this common repertoire to introduce to us new topics.

The main idea featuring in *The (Last) Supper* remains the offering. But now the characters themselves seem to embody the idea of gift, exposing them as the best offering. All of them carry elements and/or stereotypes, generally associated with the Caribbean culture. We can barely separate them from each other, because they all appear to be juxtaposed in an overwhelming cross-symbiosis. Knowing Betancourt's interest for the Caribbean identity, the work immediately brings to our minds the passage narrated by Columbus on his trip diary where the Admiral described how the Tainos, which in Arawak language means good people, approached the conquerors with their hands full of offerings. Both sides exchanged presents as a symbol of friendship. This alleged peace pact sealed by the offering, however, lasted a very short time which in the work of Betancourt is reaffirmed by the title of the artwork that refers to the moment when Jesus tells his Apostles that one of them will betray him. The *Re-Collections* series (2008) is closely related to the above-mentioned works. The series shares the idea of cut-out. The elements conforming the series are extracted from its original context and extrapolated, being re-inserted in a new cosmogony. We attend to the stereotypical idea about The Caribbean: colorful flowers, exotic shells, exuberant nature, sensual bodies.

From a formal language point of view, prevails a sort of horror vacui. No space is neglected. However dominating, the composition's global harmony returns a quiet state of mind to the spectator. The preference for the accumulation, the bright colors, the glossy surface, the exaggeration, and sometimes the grotesque, ties Betancourt's production with the tradition of the American pop culture and kitsch. These influences



*Re-Collections VI*, print on canvas, 48" x 48", 2008

