

“DREAM THE REST”:

**On the Mystery and Vernacular Modernism of Felipe Jesus Consalvos,
Cubamerican “Cigarmaker, Creator, Healer, & Man”**

Brendan Greaves

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Approved by:

Dr. Glenn D. Hinson (Chair)

Dr. William R. Ferris

Dr. Richard J. Powell

ABSTRACT

BRENDAN GREAVES: “Dream the Rest”: On the Mystery and Vernacular Modernism of Felipe Jesus Consalvos, Cuban American “Cigarmaker, Creator, Healer, & Man”

(Under the direction of Glenn Hinson, Chair; William Ferris; and Richard Powell)

Little is known about enigmatic Cuban American cigarmaker and artist Felipe Jesus Consalvos (1891-c. 1960), whose over 800 collages were discovered at a West Philadelphia garage sale in 1983. By employing diverse disciplinary and critical tools, this thesis examines Consalvos’s collage practice by speculatively tracking its orbit within a constellation of enmeshed contexts: the radical sociopolitical world of Cuban American *tabaqueros*; the fraught history of U.S.-Cuban relations and associated processes of cultural appropriation and hybridization; the rise of collage as a recursive development within both vernacular and elite or academic expressive culture; Consalvos’s potential positioning within the aligned discourses of contemporaneous Euro-American modernist art and poetry (especially Dada, Surrealism, and Pop); the artist’s self-declared role as “healer”; and the machinations of the contemporary North American art market. Essentialist notions of the vernacular, the modern, and the authentic interpenetrate and collapse upon a close analysis of his compelling, unclassifiable collages.

DEDICATION

Para Lipe.

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This project would have been inconceivable without the generous assistance, support, and advice of friends, family, teachers, colleagues, and strangers. Since I don't know quite where to begin, and because my research has been somewhat geographically dispersed, I've sketched a cartography of gratitude.

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Watch out for those outlaws and pirates
Lord knows that they'll steal you blind
Don't mess around with those cutthroats and thieves
They're robbers and killers of time
There's nothing worse than an old sailor's curse
On the seven mile bridge where you'll find
They're stealing the future and making believe
The past is still somewhere behind
The seven mile bridge
The seven mile bridge

– *Spectrum VII*

PREFACE

A note on precedents. I presented a capsule version of this document at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting in Québec (October 2007); at the UNC Festival on the Hill paper panel “Transcending Borders: Cultural Circulation in the Americas” (March 2008); and at the CSAS Interdisciplinary Conference for Graduate Research on the American South (April 2008). That germinal paper, entitled “A Paper Wedding: The Vernacular Modernism of Felipe Jesus Consalvos,” is currently awaiting publication in the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* and *Cigar City Magazine*.

Disclaimers are lame, but so be it. While I offer this document as a finished academic work for my M.A. in Folklore—the culmination of two years of thinking and a few frenetic months of writing—I still consider it very much a work in progress. I look forward to revising and shaping this manuscript into something worthy of publication and wider readership, but that effort requires dialogue, and lots more dreaming. So in that spirit, I welcome any and all comments, criticisms, corrections, Coe arcana, and Consalvos tips. Thanks for checking it out.

B. GREAVES

Womble Lodge, Chapel Hill

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CHAPTER ONE

“STARTING NERVOUSLY”: SOME INTRODUCTIONS

“Odd Moments”: *Late Night* with Uncle Lipe – “A Double Awakening” – “Modern Devices Help”: The Typewriter – *Contexto*, *Constancia*, and Key to Identity – “Adjusted Masks”: A Name-Check and a Blood-Check – “History as a Home Study”: Dangers and Dead-ends – “All Those Who Labor With the Brain”: A Literature Review – “Rules for Self-Measure”: Notes on Methodology and Tone – Fiction, Self-Reflexivity, and the Detective Aesthetic – “Mixing Fact and Fancy” – “I Guess I’ll Have to Dream the Rest”

“Odd Moments”: *Late Night* with Uncle Lipe – “A Double Awakening”

Felipe Jesus Consalvos (1891-c.1960) might be the least famous guest ever to appear on *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*. Actually, and appropriately, he only appeared by proxy or in surrogate, behind the opaque mask of his artwork. But in July 2007, while I lay on a dank Days Inn duvet in rainy Tampa, nursing a drink, I watched an image of his work flash red on network television. For a few zoomed-in seconds, Conan O’Brien held a miniature reproduction of a Consalvos collage (FJC 557) in his hand, printed on the CD cover of the new record by Philadelphia rockers Dr. Dog. This moment was pretty remarkable, and not only as an uncanny, and rare, media validation of my research. I was in Tampa as a fledgling

academic conducting fieldwork, but likewise as an amateur detective tracking a ghost, armed only with a catalogue of his artwork, a notebook, a camera, a transcription of an ambiguous letter from his great-niece, and a headful of hearsay. If this had been a film noir, or a detective novel, here was the moment when my quarry—the missing mystery man—impishly taunted me, hiding in broad daylight (or cathode-ray light), eluding me on an NBC rerun.¹ His shadowy obscurity suddenly softened, and all my studious disavowals of authenticity hang-ups dissolved in twin pangs of anxiety and amusement. I had been bested. Behind the garage-sale provenance of his art, and a few biographical clues buried therein, who was this man, really?

Since his first solo exhibition in 2004, probably a good forty or fifty years after his death, Consalvos has created a minor sensation in the vexed and insular world of vernacular art. His work has sold well to public and private collections throughout the U.S. and in Europe—including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the American Folk Art Museum—and certain curators and critics, myself included, have fawned over it. (Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* called him, keenly if a little oddly, a “self-starting modernist.”²) But far weirder and more unexpected than this circumscribed art-world emergence was the sudden national television exposure of a practice long hidden from sight in a West Philly garage. Having served as curator for Philadelphia’s Fleisher/Ollman Gallery from 2003 through 2006, I was there for the inauguration of Consalvos’s posthumous “career” and personally responsible for refining the market-demanded discovery narrative and writing the first piece of criticism about the artist. Through biographical and historical conjecture, curatorial

¹ Richard Powell has pointed out the similarity of this scenario to other late-night television comings-out of vernacular artists, particularly the Rev. Howard Finster’s appearances on Johnny Carson’s and David Letterman’s programs.

² Smith 2006: E33.

calculations, and old-fashioned salesmanship, my colleagues and I carefully shepherded his twilight legacy into homes, museums, galleries, and onto the pages of magazines, newspapers, books, and websites. Felipe Jesus Consalvos has made money for me, my former clients, and my friends; he helped me get into graduate school. In turn, full-circle, graduate school funded my fieldwork with cigarmakers, cigar industry historians, and archivists in Florida, putting me on his long-cold trail one long, hot summer. If I feel a weird sort of indebtedness to Consalvos, a phantom gratitude with no possibility of absolution, perhaps this manuscript is an attempt at evening the score by opening up his story.

Or so I thought that stormy night in Tampa, my tongue stained with cigar smoke and tequila and my skin still soused with sweat despite the air-conditioning, no match for the oppressive humidity outside. Secure in my esoteric expertise, I was both pilgrim and promoter, and archeologist too; such are the cloaks so easily donned and doffed by the fieldworker, the curator, the writer, whatever. But then against all odds, and in a somewhat unsettling breach of his now defenseless privacy, an artist's strident voice of resistance finally found its true satirical mark, and a broad pop-culture public far beyond the reach of my modest efforts. Swallowed by the TV screen, if only for an instant, Consalvos smiled inside the belly of the beast, an anonymous morsel for the insatiable appetite of the modern North American media machine he both satirized and celebrated.³

“Modern Devices Help”: The typewriter – *Contexto*, *Constancia*, and a Key to Identity

And yet this Cuban American collage artist and cigarmaker is still a mystery and may

³ José Martí spoke of his years spent in the U.S. as living “inside the monster... to know its entrails.” (Perez 1999: 494)

well remain one. Although I'm supposedly the expert on the man, I don't pretend to understand him. My approach has been to try to construct a contextual chassis around the spectral core of his identity, to use his art as an engine to examine the ways in which material culture, art history, and laborlore interpenetrate. I'm interested in how his negotiation of what we might call vernacular modernism—his articulation of “folk” forms to modernist tactics—can bridge the dichotomous (and specious) divides between “folk” and “fine,” “low” and “high,” “labor” and “leisure” (or gasp, “art.”) But that admittedly ambitious enterprise requires a good deal of guesswork, buttressed by artwork. To speak of Consalvos is to invoke context and *constancia* (material evidence), to speculate beyond the scant biographical details. The work speaks eloquently on its own terms, perhaps, but obstinately too, obliquely. However, an inscription on his collaged typewriter, found among the hundreds of other pieces, provides an apt epitaph: “FELIPE JESUS CONSALVO * BORN IN HAVANA * 1891 * CIGARMAKER, CREATOR, HEALER, & MAN.” (Even the final “s” of “Consalvos” is unstable; it’s an uncommon surname, possibly a corruption of a Castilian or Italian analog.⁴) That legend of identity, typed directly onto a piece of Cognac brand cigar box edging, provides the best map for my investigation. The formula begins with biography, moving into occupational, artistic, spiritual, and philosophical facets of identity and

⁴ Over the course of my research, consultants have guessed that Consalvos is a variant of the Castilian Gonsalvo or an Italian equivalent, the Portuguese Gonsalves, or even a Haitian surname. But most had never even heard the name before, and they all agreed it must be exceedingly rare. (There are a few living Consalvos’s that appear in census and ancestry database searches of the U.S., but I have so far been unable to contact any of them.) When I showed him a few Consalvos family photographs, Don Carlos Cobas, owner of my favorite cigar shop in Miami, El Titan de Bronce—“The Bronze Titan,” named after the epithet of Afro-Cuban War of Independence hero General Antonio Maceo—exclaimed, “He looks like a Spanish guy! He has a Spanish face.” He suggested a Basque or Catalan origin. Literally, “Consalvos” means “with safe(s)” in Spanish. In keeping with the unknown origin of the artist’s name, and his own disinclination to accent his typed and handwritten signatures—as in Felipe Jesús Consalvos—I have refrained from including standard Spanish diacritical marks when rendering his full name.

experience, as announced by the artist himself.

My aim with this manuscript is to thread that emic key, the only surviving explanatory statement we have from Consalvos, through his work. Each of the above aspects suggests critical problematics endemic to folklore, art history, cultural history, cultural anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology, thorny barriers to the fruitful and holistic analysis of vernacular art (or any art, for that matter.) Emphasizing biography, formal analysis, historical precedence, or his role as *rolero* alone, above the dynamic braid of contextual features, inevitably risks an unbalanced and essentialist discussion. The only available approach is sidelong. By employing diverse disciplinary and critical tools, this thesis will examine Consalvos's collage practice itself (the *constancia*) by tracking its orbit within a constellation of enmeshed contexts: the radical sociopolitical world of Cuban American cigarmakers; the fraught history of U.S.-Cuban relations and associated processes of cultural appropriation and hybridization; the rise of collage as a recursive development within both vernacular and elite or academic expressive culture; Consalvos's potential positioning within the aligned discourses of contemporaneous Euro-American modernist art and poetry (especially Dada, Surrealism, and Pop); and the artist's self-declared role as healer, considering possible traces of Catholic, Santería, Espiritismo, and herbalist imagery in his work. The final "man" attribute of Consalvos's equation of identity represents both a germination and a culmination of the other three. Hopefully the existential fact of his life and work will suffuse the rest of the discussion, though of course gender and sexuality—the more mundane connotations of "man"—will feature in the interwoven analysis of his collages, which gleefully play with gender stereotypes and transgressions.

An ambitious scope, yes—but in some fundamental sense, my project relies on a dense fabric of context, corollary, contingency, and digression to support and justify a lack of low-flying, concrete detail. In its easy critical counterpoise within a variety of contextual frames, its embodiment of a multiplicity of consciousnesses—both vernacular and modernist, traditional and iconoclastic, resistant and assimilationist, satirical and celebratory, hilarious and deadly serious—Consalvos’s artwork offers a case study in the phenomenology of the everyday, and the unclassifiable, immanent nature of much material culture. As a cigarmaker and a collagist, Consalvos was an artist in two entwined senses; he combined two revolutions—aesthetic and political—in his peculiarly plaited careers.

“Adjusted Masks”: A Name-Check and a Blood-Check

Some sixty years ago, Felipe Jesus Consalvos—a man about whom I know very little but whom I admire very much—wrote a check in the amount of “TEN MILLION CUBAMERICAN DOLLARS ***** PLUS MY BLOOD.” In a winking nod to history and posterity, the typewritten document is dated “1948 AD” (his only deliberately dated artwork) and payable to Mr. Consalvos himself, from the deep dream coffers of “THE UNITED STATES OF CUBAMERICA,” his conflated homelands. Today that check is embedded near the bottom of one of Consalvos’ collages (FJC 642), guarded by a motley crew of sentries: a buxom burlesque dancer with a policeman’s moustachioed mug, a dour bulldog wearing a jaunty military helmet marked “Habana,” a blackface minstrel superimposed onto a caped equestrian statue, a (pre-Warhol) Campbell’s Soup can, and an antique dumptruck, driven by Abe Lincoln and loaded with a precarious cargo that includes the United States Capitol dome

(re-christened “Habana Chicken Pharmacy”), a cartoon pirate, a colossal dodo, and a hide-and-seek harlequin endowed with George Washington’s bewigged head (excised from an actual dollar bill.) This extraordinary artwork—which bears the prominent banner headline “TURN BACK THE UNIVERSE”—recently sold for \$15,000 U.S., well shy of Consalvos’s mark, but still a substantial sum, especially considering the artist’s obscure identity. I hope the man got back his blood, and more, because he and his kin have not been paid. They have not even been found.

Beyond addressing his collages’ subsequent commodification by a hungry (and marginalized) vernacular art market, Consalvos’s bogus blood-check, a rare example of his authorship, speaks to many of the issues central to my project. His work conveys both an uneasy sense of place—Caribbean-American cartographic conflations and Wonderland-worthy scale shifts recur as playing fields for pompous diplomats and grotesque politicians—and his struggle to articulate a translation of place, a translation that mirrored the tobacco industry’s shift from Cuba to the (incrementally Northern) U.S. The political charge of the collages’ content implicates the condition of American factory labor and a Cuban’s corner in it. The ubiquitous cigar bands and box labels that frame and structure the collages provided Consalvos with more than formal graphic, geometric, and color consistency and symmetry. In like manner, the heavy, often sardonic use of text transcend mere comic irony. In both media and message, Consalvos’s practice extends the *tabaquero*’s spirit of critique into the realm of visual art, absorbing the influence of *la lectura*, the practice of factory reading, and the mighty example of revolutionary bard-hero José Martí. The art of cigar rolling offered both a material and conceptual source for Consalvos’s other art, a means of reconfiguring and reconciling the conservative visual idiom of *tabaqueros*—the flood of nostalgic

chromolithographic advertising and the hobbyist tradition of cigar-band collage—with their radical, and often anarchic, politics of unionized resistance. Consalvos called himself a “cigarmaker” first, so that is the context with which I will begin.

But “creator” comes second in his equation of self-estimation. Consalvos’s collages extrapolate the hobbyist and hobo vernacular tradition of patriotic patterned cigar band collage to formally sophisticated, politically subversive, and sexually transgressive ends, using the body—in its political, spiritual, and medical metaphorical permutations—as a vehicle for absurdist satire, by turns hilarious and anxious. The work provocatively addresses imperialism, race, and sexuality. Hitler, blackface minstrels, stylized images of Native Americans, gruesome *Ars Medica* anatomical illustrations, and grinning pin-ups (both beefcake and cheesecake) all make ironic appearances in various states of inversion, hybridity, and humiliation. Staccato headlines and stagy compositions at once celebrate and eviscerate the icons of American history, betraying a deep skepticism of American milk-and-honey mythology, particularly presidents. These ribald and mischievous collages are masterpieces of thick appropriation and bricolage, incorporating an astonishing breadth of published materials dating from the late 18th-century through the 1950s. Consalvos skewered the sensibilities of the North American print culture that flourished in his Cuban youth and U.S. adulthood, much as he commented caustically on contemporary U.S.-Cuban relations and cultural circulations, by knitting his surreal, burlesque aesthetic with the historically revolutionary politics of Cuban American cigarmakers.

He seemingly negotiated the play of his various identities through the political potentialities of collage, a technique of appropriation and collocation native to vernacular tradition, but historicized within the dominant discourse of modernist perceptual revolutions.

The role of collage in the development of European and American “academic” modernism—from Cubism and Dada through Pop, and still flourishing digitally and otherwise—has been well-established. But these “modernist” changes were likewise occurring at subaltern levels, outside galleries and museums and inside private homes and the industrial workplace. Cigar band collage, like related contemporaneous traditions of accumulation, and commemoration—Victorian scrapbook “albums,” memory jugs, quilts, and Brazilian Nativity scenes (*presépios*), for instance—tended to remain a domestic and anonymous practice, a quiet appropriative analog to modernist noise.

Consalvos furnishes but one example of vernacular modernism, bridging the artificial dichotomy between “academic” and “vernacular” realms of expressive culture and offering a heuristic mend, or nexus, for the folklorist and cultural/art historian. Merging the biting socio-political satire and absurdist impulse of Dadaists like Hannah Höch (1898-1978) and Max Ernst (1891-1976) with the abstruse, nostalgic mysticism of Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) and Jess (aka Burgess Collins, 1923-2004), Consalvos parallels and prefigures developments in Dada, Surrealist, and Pop collage. Though apparently self-taught and never exhibited during his lifetime—there is no evidence that Consalvos ever showed his artwork to anyone outside his circle of family and friends—Consalvos’ collages catch and outpace similar stuff by renowned masters like John Heartfield (1891-1968) and Richard Hamilton (b. 1922). This isn’t an art history thesis, but a careful comparison with the work of other strikingly similar modernist collagists—Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971); Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) Georges Hugnet (1906-1974); Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005); Bruce Conner (b. 1933)—can demonstrate how Consalvos employed a vernacular craft tradition, a modest and short-lived fad, to explore issues central to Euro-American and Caribbean modernity, thereby stridently

straddling the falsely divided strains of modernism and exposing their braided nature. Modernity and modernism were arguably not uniform, unilateral, and monolithic phenomena relegated to metropolitan centers and “academic” artists but more democratic, multiplex, pervasive trends of tangled “modernities” and “modernisms.” Consalvos shared several creative concerns with contemporaneous modernists, if not their company (and we have no way of knowing exactly how aware he was of other art and artists). While his work should be assessed in the same historical light as modernism, the pragmatic “vernacular” qualifier admits both the solitary domesticity of his art and a presumed lack of affiliation with other artists.

Beneath the political and pop-cultural sedimentation of Consalvos’s practice lies another stratum, one which I’m unable to tease out completely due to lack of evidence. Consalvos considered himself a “healer.” Might this self-described healer, who his great-niece claimed was “very religious” and could “make medicine with the help of God,”⁵ and whose pasted-poems repeatedly reference magic, magicians, and religion, have used his *chaveta* to conjure or cure (via Santería, Espiritismo, or herbalism) as well as to lacerate and layer American cultural tropes? In the witty words of his own typical headlines, that would make the “Paper Wedding” of his collages a “First Premium Alchemy” indeed. It is a seductive premise, but one I can only point toward, not prove. It is, however, and a significant detail, given that it was one of very few about which Martí was forthcoming. (And certainly the bird, throne, and cigar imagery so prevalent in his work corresponds to traditional *orisha* offerings in Santería.) Because of this exceptionally speculative nature of this aspect of his identity, Chapter Five, the “Healer” chapter, consists only of my own

⁵ See Greaves 2004: 13 and the letter included in Chapter Two.

montage of Consalvos's collaged text fragments that seem to reference these issues of faith, spirit, mysticism, magic, medicine, and the paranormal.

“History as a Home Study”: Dangers and Dead-ends

Having enumerated the various directions I'd like to take my inquiry, it seems equally important to specify briefly what I want to avoid. First of all, there exists a danger in solidifying and sanctifying what could be an elaborate hoax. Felipe Jesus Consalvos may not have even been one man, but rather a name for a family or community project, an idea—an enticing prospect, given the importance of community collaboration to Cuban American cigarmakers. His great-niece Helena Martí—who sold her Uncle Lipe's oeuvre and ephemera, roughly 825 pieces total, to a curator and collector after a West Philadelphia garage sale—claimed that he sometimes collaborated with his son Jose Felipe (aka Cuco, or “Cuckoo,” 1912-1968.) Shortly after the 1983 sale, Martí furnished a few further clues in a brief letter, but her uncle's life remains elliptical and enigmatic. Supposedly, Consalvos lived and worked as a *rolero* in Miami and Panama City, Florida, before moving to New York and Brooklyn and finally settling in Philadelphia. (Felipe was 29 when he left Cuba, the same age as me when I began to trace his journey north this summer.) When our collector returned to elicit more information a year later, Martí had disappeared from the neighborhood, pronounced dead by a neighbor.

The story *almost* defies belief, and subsequent collectors have tweaked it, such that a shroud of accreted—and sometimes commercially diffused—folklore surrounds an already unsteady central myth. While I cannot entirely discount the possibility of some kind of scam,

I will not dwell on it either. My personal dealings with those involved in the discovery and eventual sale of the work have all been positive relationships of mutual trust, respect, and sensitivity. In the present case, I find belief in the basic facts of the story far more interesting and fertile than railing skepticism. More saliently, fretting over the artist's mysterious identity—discrete or group, Cubamerican *tabaquero* or not, male or female—is not nearly as important as discussing the very real evidence of the work itself and unpacking its relevance to its, and our, cultural contexts. Consalvos's collages elicit wonder and laughter from all those who spend time exploring their layered depths, and that fascination matters more to me than any illusory resolution to their maker's inscrutability. Until more information becomes available, I can live with that compromise.

There is of course an inherent risk in reifying *any* story from the few available fragments, in casting these various potentials and vectors into the solidity of a myth-muffled “authoritative” account. For the purposes of this thesis, I want to avoid spending too much time buried in immigration passenger lists, city directories, naturalization and social security records, and cemetery records, an approach that has yielded very little over the course of my research. After several years of looking, I don't harbor much hope of locating paper proof of Consalvos the man; for now I prefer my detective work to concentrate on his artwork and its overlapping contexts. My thesis can succeed only through radical contextuality and a healthy measure of self-reflexivity; I'm writing a work of criticism and cultural history, not an artist exposé or epitaph.

“All Those Who Labor With the Brain”: A Literature Review

I've been shouldering the dubious mantle of "Consalvos expert" somewhat reluctantly since 2004, and now I find myself in a strange position of concretizing that claim. Having written the first catalogue essay and a peppering of other press releases, papers, and lecture and panel presentations about the artist, I have the simultaneous advantage and disadvantage of facing down the precedent of my own flawed and partial research rather than the illustrious or historic work of others. Only a handful of people have published even a paragraph about Consalvos: Philadelphia critics Roberta Fallon, Edith Newhall, and Ed Sozanski; New York critics Grace Glueck, Ed Gomez, and Roberta Smith; and *Cigar Magazine* freelancer Tom Mackie, all of whom spoke to me first and read or quoted my initial essay. The prospect of fulfilling the promise of my own supposed expertise is both intimidating and liberating.

However, beyond the immediate topic at hand—those 825 collages and how they mean—and concerning the wider contexts of the work, my thesis follows in the footsteps of a number of influential scholars in a variety of fields. Because it is the context with which I was least familiar, the bulk of my research has been into modern Cuban and Cuban American history, with an emphasis on Cuban American cigarmaking communities and their politics and expressive culture. The American *tabaquero* culture of Consalvos's disenchanted post-Cuban independence-era generation unfolded from an even more radical and diverse parent culture, one which saw highly mobile diasporic labor communities of West African, Spanish, Italian, German, and Cuban *criollo* descent working side by side, often in tense alliance. Key West and Tampa cigarmakers of Cuban descent were renowned for the ferocity and frequency of their strikes, their spirited funding and military support of *Cuba Libre*, their social clubs and mutual aid societies, and most famously, for *la lectura* (the practice of

factory reading.) This radical history, already fading by the time Consalvos emigrated to the United States in 1920—the year of a cataclysmic sugar market crash and subsequent depression—has been beautifully chronicled by a number of writers, including Robert Ingalls, Gary Mormino, Lou Pérez, and Glenn Westfall.⁶

Patricia Cooper's *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories* (1987), recommended to me by Archie Green, and Denise Sariego's *La Lectura de Tabacqueria: Literacy in the Cigar Makers' World, 1860s-1930s* (2003) have both proved invaluable resources for their thick descriptions of everyday life in Northern cigarmaking communities outside Florida, like those that Consalvos may have moved among in New York and Pennsylvania. Cigarmakers' somewhat belated encounter with industrial modernity, and their art's infiltration by advanced capitalism, irreparably transformed these tight-knit communities in the 1920s and 1930s. With continued U.S. military interventions and economic interference in Cuba, Cuban American allegiances and identities became increasingly unsettled and conflicted. And yet, as convincingly suggested by Lou Pérez in his *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (1999)—a book that traces the profound creolization and syncretism of Cuban culture during the period of Consalvos's life—the complex relationship with the United States was more a process of Cuban and Cuban American cultural affinities, affective acceptance, and acquiescence than imposed and enforced coloniality. The U.S. and Cuba held each other in a mutual cultural thrall, simultaneously inventing each other's imaginary identities in their own likenesses. Consalvos's ambivalent appropriations of North American culture, and even the most cursory glance at bourgeois Cuban periodicals like *Bohemia*, *Social*, and *Carteles* and working-class

⁶ You can find works by these authors in the bibliography; the precedent of their exacting research has been crucial to my own work.

Cuban American publications like *La Gaceta* and *El Internacional*, support this perspective, which I have adopted.

Curiously, in all my research, and in my many conversations and emails with the above writers—and other scholars like Maura Barrios and Kenya Dworkin, whose unpublished work on Cuban American theater in Ybor City has been particularly helpful—visual art has barely registered a footnote. According to most historians' accounts, visual art, in its modern Euro-American definitional segregation from utility, played little to no role in the lives of Cuban American immigrants and cigar workers of that period. (One notable exception is the beloved Key West artist and cigarmaker's son Mario Sanchez [1908-2005], whose polychromed wooden relief panels document the culture of Cuban and Conch *tabaqueros* and other residents in rich detail and harlequin color.) Of course, as explained by Gerald Pocius and Henry Glassie, "art" is obviously a highly culturally relative term of negotiable value, so it is not entirely surprising that these groups didn't swallow the hegemonic model whole.⁷ Cuban American cigarmakers' traditional and innovative material culture and foodways, from *bolita* sets to *peruli* pops, were remarkably rich. Immigrant *roleros* considered cigarmaking itself an art form, and cigar band and ribbon collage offer clear community analogs to Consalvos's practice. But whereas Cuban American *tabaqueros* eagerly embraced, amalgamated, and reconfigured certain indigenous Cuban and Euro-American forms of expressive culture—theater, film, literature, and music were profoundly important, not to mention material culture and design icons like the American automobile—visual art in its elite North American articulation (as in easel painting, sculpture, or studio arts) appears largely absent. If not exactly an anomaly, Consalvos the collagist was at least unusual in his adaptation of a mnemonic and nostalgic craft tradition to the radical tenets of

⁷ See Pocius 2003 and Glassie 1983 and 1999.

Euro-American modernism. Moving beyond the abstract, honorific, or commemorative collaged vessels traditional to tobacciana, Consalvos made unabashedly satirical and surreally representational two-dimensional works (as well as large-scale sculptures on non-traditional surfaces like furniture and musical instruments) similar in many ways to those of the European avant-garde. He seems to have been operating self-consciously in a Euro-American “art” modality rather than a Cuban American creative modality.⁸ Nearly every collage includes printed text fragments appropriated from an abundance of sources, and almost all these cut-and-paste poems, with few exceptions, are in English.

The cigar band collage fad of the early 20th-century makes itself conspicuous both in its absence of identifiable master practitioners and in its lack of commentary on the fraught history of its own materiality, as tangled as it is in the political and labor struggles of colonialism and industrialization. Almost nothing has been written about this anonymous practice outside digressions within studies of cigar label art, a subject which, conversely, has amassed a considerable literature. Like the memory jug tradition, the very anonymity, domesticity, and geographical and cultural diffusion of cigar band collage render it difficult, if not impossible, to trace. Narciso Menocal’s, Glenn Westfall’s, and Tony Hyman’s extensive historical research on and classification of cigar ephemera and tobacciana—especially in regard to its topicality, currency, and visual play on Cuban and North American tropes of imagined identity—helped pave the way for Delores Mitchell’s feminist critique of

⁸ Although, as Glenn Hinson has reminded me, Cuban music—one of the nation’s most influential cultural exports—tends to function through juxtaposition and montage; its distinctiveness is a result of its syncretism, a collage aesthetic that marries West African, Western European, and North and South American sonorities.

cigar label art.⁹ (My conversations with Emanuel Leto and Norman Aberle, respective curators of the Ybor City Museum and of the Key West Art and History Museum, have further enlightened me on the arcana of cigar labels.) Consalvos's appropriation of cigar packaging materials exemplifies a singular departure from the normative representations described by Mitchell, a *détournement* or re-routing of the nationalist, sexist, and racist imagery symptomatic of the U.S. tobacco trade—imagery which, even in the 19th century, functioned via appeals to nostalgia and a distinctively bourgeois consciousness. Much cigar label art was not produced by Cuban Americans—first German and French lithographers and later companies in Southeastern Pennsylvania, New York, Detroit, and Indianapolis dominated the trade—and Consalvos's work offers a scathing commentary on its complacent, deliberately “old-fashioned” imagery.¹⁰ His work exceeds Stuart Davis's graphic infatuation with tobacco packaging, approaching the destabilizing effect of Richard Prince's Marlboro Man appropriations.

My second site of investigation likewise lacks a coherent literature focused specifically on the issues I'm pursuing, but there are a number of touchstones to consider. The world of vernacular art has been consumed with what Gary Alan Fine calls “term warfare”¹¹—scuffles over the relative merits of “folk,” “outsider,” “self-taught,” and “visionary” labels—since at least Roger Cardinal, if not Jean Debuffet.

This art-that-cannot-be-named has suffered both from its semantic elusiveness—words seem to fail us when describing it—and a marked lack of cooperative, interdisciplinary attention from scholars. Despite these artists' considerable achievements, their work has attracted the relative lack of critical theoretical and

⁹ See Mitchell 1992. For far more detailed erudition than I can provide on the vast subject of cigar labels and tobacciana, see Menocal 1995 and 1996; Hyman 1979; and Westfall 1984 and 1987.

¹⁰ Harper 1996: 291

¹¹ Fine 2004: 26

formal analysis endemic to the vexed condition of the vernacular. The troubling dearth of academic discourse on subaltern artists—those artists marginalized or “classed” outside the normative financial and institutional networks—privileges “academic,” “elite,” or “fine” art practices (all equally fraught terms), tending to ghettoize vernacular art into a handful of limited discursive realms.¹²

Art that is inseparable from everyday practice, and not necessarily intended for exhibition or sale, takes a back seat to the more mainstream, art-school and art-star work that drives the art economy.

Sociologist Gary Alan Fine, in his provocative *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (2004), describes how the vernacular art market demands “authentic” criteria of biography, psychology, religion, race, class, and education to validate vernacular artists and their art. The dichotomizing disorder of folklore persists despite our best efforts, in our tendencies to overdetermine and rationalize difference, rending tradition and innovation, continuity and change, authenticity and adaptation, individual and group aesthetics, splitting “elite” or “academic” from “vernacular” or “folk.” Of course, other disciplines suffer from the same too-tidy dichotomies, but often as implicit assumptions, not as a primary (and often unrealized) object of study, as in folkloristics. In her *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725–1907* (1999), Frances Connelly elucidates the etiology of “primitivism” as a concept central to Western art from the Enlightenment through early modernism. Too often we locate authenticity in a presumed stalled or stable culture—as Renato Rosaldo jokes, “if it’s moving, it isn’t cultural”¹³—instead of recognizing the reality of constant cultural flux. Regina Bendix has tackled this problem in her *In Search of Authenticity* (1997). In the field of material culture, folklorist

¹² See my essay on James Castle, in which I first developed this argument. (Greaves 2008)

¹³ Rosaldo 1993: 209

Henry Glassie has perhaps made the most significant gestures toward eventually dissolving these braided binaries and toward discussing art as work, work as art.¹⁴

But that job is far from complete. In choosing to call Felipe Jesus Consalvos a “vernacular modernist,” I hope to step gingerly toward demonstrating the porousness of those boundaries, while acknowledging Consalvos’s seemingly singular role within his presumed community, the private and domestic nature of his practice as opposed to the public aspirations of many self-described “artists,” and the twinning of his two forms of artistry and work.¹⁵

It’s a convenient label and a necessary one too for situating and describing the way his work has been discovered, torn from its private context, marketed, and discussed until now—that is, within the context of the vernacular, the everyday, and the “self-taught.” “Vernacular” is perhaps itself an unsavory term, but in its easy, already established application to language, music, and architecture, and its less judgmental accentuation of the everyday and domestic over the official and the immediately commercial, it is arguably less ambiguous and problematic than the labels espoused elsewhere. Hopefully “vernacular” can designate a fluid artistic process—the ways in which art and ordinary experience and communication are inherently interlocked—rather than assigning a fixed identity to the artist.¹⁶

The everydayness of the encounter between tradition and modernity (in the sense of Henri Lefebvre’s “everydayness” and Michel de Certeau’s “tactics” of the everyday) has a potential to transfigure ordinary practice and agency (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu’s

¹⁴ See in particular Glassie’s *Material Culture* (1999), a masterful distillation of these ideas.

¹⁵ I have been using the term “vernacular modernism” for at least two years now, thinking I had coined it myself. I have since discovered an entire book with that very title: Maiken Umbach and Bernd Hüppauf, eds., *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005). However, this text uses “vernacular” in its more standard and established architectural sense (others have used the term in film criticism and elsewhere), while I use it more broadly. A recent catalogue placing works by Bill Traylor and William Edmondson in thoughtful dialogue points to relationships between African American vernacular artists and modernism: Josef Helfenstein and Roxanne Stanulis, eds., *Bill Traylor, William Edmondson, and the Modernist Impulse* (Champaign, Ill.: Krannert Art Museum, 2004).

¹⁶ The preceding description borrows language from my essay on James Castle for the Philadelphia Museum of Art (see Greaves 2008.)

concept of “habitus.”) In describing a “vernacular modernism,” I am also describing a “vernacular modernity” that Cuban American cigarmaking communities may have experienced in very different ways than previously explained. In insisting that modernity did not, and does not, necessarily represent a monolithic process of homogenization and ineluctable leveling, I suggest instead a process of hybridization, of deeply enmeshed exchanges, appropriations, and both novel and traditional forms of negotiation, assimilation, and resistance. In making the claim for multiple, alternative, or multivalent modernities and modernisms catalyzed by coloniality and globalization, I am emulating and amending the arguments of numerous thinkers in the fields of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, history, and folklore. But the good work of Arjun Appadurai, Arturo Escobar, Larry Grossberg, Charles Taylor, and others on multiple, alternate, and syncretic modernities has not yet to my knowledge fully penetrated the study of vernacular art, which remains sadly stunted and embroiled in semantics.

**“Rules for Self-Measure”: Notes on Methodology and Tone –
Fiction, Self-Reflexivity, and the Detective Aesthetic – “Mixing Fact and Fancy”**

This summer, toward the end of a month-long fieldwork trip funded by the Archie Green Occupational Folklife Fellowship and the Center for the Study of the American South, I visited renowned tobacciana collector Mike Turbeville in his cluttered Tampa studio/warehouse/ museum Perfectos. I had shown Consalvos’s work to dozens of mystified cigarmakers, curators, archivists, and collectors over the preceding few weeks. Most seemed delighted, some seemed apathetic, but none had ever heard the artist’s name or seen anything remotely resembling his artwork. But Mike, an eccentric and ebullient middle-aged man with

a white ponytail, a white *guayabera* shirt, and glinting eyes behind his self-dimming glasses, immediately beckoned me into the back room, where he triumphantly held aloft a guitar he had started collaging with cigar bands in a fashion almost identical to Consalvos's guitars. Shocked, I asked if I might take a photograph.

You will find that photograph, as well as other anecdotes about my research and detective work, as a kind of parallax perspective within this thesis. Consalvos's story, riddled with lacunae and missing information and assumptions, is very much entangled with the somewhat more banal story of his work's discovery, exhibition, marketing, and subsequent criticism and research—that is, with my own story. The two contexts meet in a sympathetic, if inextricably knotty, historical conjuncture. To avoid self-reflexivity, feigning the academician's objectivity feels false, particularly in Consalvos's enigmatic case.

Fleisher/Ollman Gallery is part of the story, a kind of institutional and economic protagonist, and this text incorporates interview excerpts with the Gallery's owner John Ollman as well as the man who originally bought Consalvos's oeuvre, who has asked to remain anonymous in published accounts. I have included episodes like "Late Night with Uncle Lipe," the Mike Turbeville meeting, and conversations with Miami cigarmakers like Carlos Cobas, owner of the excellent shop El Titan de Bronze, in order to illustrate my sometimes bumbling adventures searching for the specter of Consalvos, and to offer a self-effacing counterpoint to the ethnographic and biographical authority implicit, and inevitable, in the text.

Periodically throughout the document, I invoke the frame of fiction, embracing the subjectivity and poetics allowed by that modality. Certain chapters begin with either a dramatized autobiographical episode or an attempt to conjure Consalvos' own experience via a fictional or poetic vignette. (Chapter Five is comprised entirely of one of these poetic

meditations, an intermezzo of sorts.) These short, self-contained experiments with ethnographic fiction—or perhaps more accurately, “ethnomimesis,” to use Bob Cantwell’s apt term—will hopefully serve to flesh out the analytical core of the volume, providing access to elusive experiential details. Drawing from travelogue and detective genres feels particularly appropriate for these brief passages, given the self-conscious ways in which art-world insiders often seek to mold and define the lives and practices of so-called “outsiders,” effectively and affectively conjuring and constructing their hierarchical identities and casting them as shadows of “academic” artists, rather than their equals. The pursuit recalls a hunt.¹⁷ Similarly, folklorists and ethnographers construct ethnographies, for better or for worse (and often unintentionally), in the guise of travel and detective narratives.¹⁸ In some essential sense, maybe we academics and curators are all bullish, hardtalking private eyes on the make.

“I Guess I’ll Have to Dream the Rest”

My project is admittedly a highly speculative (and specular) enterprise.¹⁹ One mandate of contemporary folkloristics calls for the intimate, and collaborative, involvement of emic categories and experiential authority. Whenever possible in this manuscript I have used Consalvos’s own words, slogans, and headlines—the text selected for and juxtaposed

¹⁷ Charles Willeford’s excellent Hoke Mosely novels, which take place in Miami, were an inspiration in formulating this detective aesthetic.

¹⁸ See Kodish 1993.

¹⁹ My colleague and friend Mike Knoll, who, along with the lovely Katherine García, was generous enough to let me stay with him and when I was working in Miami, has taken to calling me the “Maybe-Man,” given the speculative nature of my work and my characteristic response to his curious questions.

within his collages—as chapter and section headings, which is as close as I can get to dialogue or reciprocity with my subject. Voicing Consalvos in the fictional interlude sections proved a particularly tricky task, something like playing ghostwriter to a ghost. Rather than relying exclusively on my clumsy ventriloquism, I offer alongside my own writing recoded versifications of his own collage texts—my own poetic collages, or rearrangements and interpolations, of the thousands of unique phrases found in his collages. Typeface changes indicate changes in voice, with the shift to the typewriter font corresponding to the inclusion of texts found in Consalvos’s collages or in his poetry scrapbook. While I occasionally add punctuation marks to join two or more of his text elements, the phrases that appear in the typewriter typeface come directly from his collages as discrete phrase units. He preferred headline clauses and sentences to single words, so most lines that appear as integers in the Interludes were cut from the various sources as integral clauses and arranged quite differently in his work. Consalvos tended to keep these units intact, seldom slicing and interweaving words as closely and intricately as his images. I have only tried to replicate dimly the acerbic, defiant, mirthful tone of his patchwork poetry. The aim is to engage and evoke, to embody the indomitable and absurd sense of barbed humor that buoys the collages and makes their satire sing, and sting. Consalvos had his own mandates, though he didn’t leave behind much in the way of explanation. To tweak the words of one of his own headlines—lifted from a song popularized by Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, and Frank Sinatra—“I guess we’ll have to dream the rest” (FJC 638).

— INTERLUDE —

Setting the Record Straight: The Incredible Revelation of One Man's
Infatuation.

Reminiscences of Deceased Savants.

Shadow and Reflection, Death and Resurrection.

I was cured of consumption with revolver. (They won't laugh if we won't.)

The Belief in Immortality. Worship of the Dead.

Turn back the Universe and give me Yesterday. The Race of the Time-Keeper.

Witch doctors. Fortune-tellers. Crystal-gazing. Astro-psycho-analysis.

Domestic magic... I have discovered a remedy.

Have you seen the new and wonderful method of showing ghosts in every
man's house without the aid of a medium? This priceless secret yours.

Men are startled!

Just a puddle in an expanse of dust.

A velvet cloud of steam.

An alluring swindle.

A game of riddles.

The missing link.

(I stand on the Fifth Amendment.)

You'll find me gone.

Lector querido, no pienses que he perdido mi chaveta. I have not lost my knife, nor my mind.²⁰ Both are keen, and true. “¡Mi razón es al par luz y firmeza, firmeza y luz como el cristal de roca!”²¹ Truth implies honesty, and truth is stranger than fiction. Let us reason together. Knowledge is power. A little well placed is a very good thing. Before I started cutting *capas* in Habana, I cut my teeth collecting fragrant *picaduras*.²² As I advanced from *mochila* to *rolero*, aided by *lectores* long preceding you, and louder too—for becoming a *tabaquero* once meant more than mastering the various

²⁰ “Dear reader, do not think that I have lost my *chaveta*.” Used to slice tobacco leaves, the *chaveta* (literally, “pin, key, or forelock”) was the *rolero*’s knife, primary tool, and source of pride, a kind of razor-sharp crescent-shaped blade without a handle. The role of *chavatero*, or *chaveta* sharpener, was a coveted and highly respected one; only the *chavatero* could approach the factory’s giant whetstone wheel to hone his *compañero*’s blades. (See Mormino 1991.) It’s possible that Consalvos used his *chaveta* for collages as well as tobacco—in the hands of an artist, it allows for quick, precise cuts. Here the Spanish pun is on losing one’s *chaveta*, *perder chaveta*, which metaphorically meant to lose one’s mind or reason. An English equivalent would be “to lose your marbles.” I owe my knowledge of that idiomatic expression, and much of the following terminology and slang, to John W. Robb’s 1938 typewritten lexicon of Tampa *tabaquero* slang, which I found in the Glenn Westfall Collection at the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg.

²¹ “My reason is like light and solidity paired, solidity and light like rock crystal!” So begins “A Gloria,” the most famous and influential poem of Mexican rabblouser and proto-modernist Salvador Díaz Miron, whose work Consalvos collected and collaged.

²² *Capas*: cigar wrapper leaves. *Picaduras*: tobacco culls or scraps.

vitolas and their *perillas*—I began collecting scraps not just of tobacco, but of words and pictures as well.²³

At the end of a day—an earlier end than yours, at least back when we would work only by natural light—bands, inners and outers, edging, and box wraps settled like so much confetti on the factory floor. (And in fact we used them as confetti sometimes at our *verbenas* and *latas*.²⁴ American holiday. Kills two birds with one shot.) When factories closed, bunches of labels blew off loading docks and down alleyways like weird, literate tumbleweeds. Or like crippled birds. Wild birds of the Rockies. From parrots to bluebirds. But the best picking was usually inside, beneath *vapors* and *taburetes* and beside *barrils*, where *las anilladoras bonitas* stamped their feet, smiling under their bobbing *buscanovios*, to applaud a fine passage well delivered by a gifted *lector*.²⁵ We *roleros* amplified the din by tapping out cheers with our *chavetas*... Bravos beaten in razor-sharp chops, above the rustle of dry tobacco leaves, below the heady odor—like an angry crowd calls for a tyrant’s blood, we called for more charged words.

²³ *Mochila*: cigarmaker apprentice (literally, “knapsack.”) *Rolero*: cigar roller. *Lectores*: factory readers. *Tabaquero*: tobacco worker; cigarmaker. *Vitolas*: cigar shapes and sizes (for instance straight vs. shaped, *parejo* vs. *figurado*.) *Perilla*: the crucial place where the head, or *cabeza*, of a cigar closes at the tuck.

²⁴ *Verbena*: festival. *Lata*: shivaree.

²⁵ *Vapors*: double rows of bench/table workstations for *roleros*, reminiscent of a steamship (hence, *vapor*, or “steam.”) *Taburetes*: traditional *tabaquero* chairs, armless with cowhide seats and backs. *Las anilladoras bonitas*: the pretty banders (the workers, usually girls and young women, responsible for fixing cigar bands on the cigars.) *Buscanovios*: the stylish, methodical forehead curls of hair traditionally worn by single Cuban American women.

Big factories, especially those where cigars were packed and boxes labeled, provided better picking than *chinchales*. *Chincharreros*, some called them, like pig-skin fat.²⁶ New-skin. Magic skin... Before long I needed more pictures than I could find in newspapers, on newsstands, or in factories. That's when I befriended a cooperative Bartleby to acquire for me stamps, dead letters, lost pages, dead books, ruined glossies. Good stuff. Changes in men's standards.

Evolution through adaptation. Does a man notice? The Comedy of Human Life. Ageless World of Infinite Variety.

²⁶ *Chinchales*, *Chinchares*, *chincharreros*, *chinchas*: small cigarmaking operations and shops, generally non-union, often run out of a private home, much like those found today in Miami. *Chinchal* comes from the Spanish word for "bedbug" (Ingalls and Pérez 2003: 77). *Chincharrero* is similar to *chicharrone*, a word for pig-skin fat.) English-speaking cigarmakers usually referred to *chinchales* as "buckeyes."

CHAPTER TWO

“TAKING OFF THE MASK”: BIOGRAPHY, TAXONOMY, AND “AN HISTORICAL MYSTERY”

Rewards of Merit and Certificates of Reasonable Doubt – “Life and Letters”: Biography, Provenance, Exhibition History – “The Unending Search” and “A Game of Riddles” – “One Eye-Witness Is Better than Ten Hear-Says”: Martí’s Letter and the Aftermath – “Curious Inventions”: Towards a Taxonomy of Works – “Listen to the Music!”: “Death Ray Boogie” – “Ageless World of Infinite Variety”: Topside – “A Jester Who Yearned to Be President”: “Party Abuse of Washington” – “Great Parade of President Lincoln”

Rewards of Merit and Certificates of Reasonable Doubt

It is impossible to know whether Felipe Jesus Consalvos would appreciate all the art-world accolades he has garnered over the past few years. But clearly more than compulsion and a contrary spirit impelled him to create such a vast and time-consuming—not to mention expensive—body of work. Despite his family’s seemingly less than favorable appraisal of his practice, which apparently ranged from mild embarrassment and confusion to outright hostility about his dicing of hundreds of dollar bills, Consalvos obviously labored long hours in the collection and collaging of disparate materials.²⁷ His temporal, financial, and critical investments smack of more than a mere hobbyist pastime, like the cigar band collage

²⁷ According to the original collector of the work, from his conversations with Mrs. Martí.

tradition that may have originally inspired him. The large sculptural collages on furniture, a model ship, telephones, and musical instruments irreversibly ornamented their utilitarian surfaces, rendering certain domestic implements useless, and must have required either extensive storage space or integration into everyday home life. The work is deeply committed on several levels—dense, layered, and virtuosic in both technique and concept. As an artist who defaced U.S. currency and incorporated sometimes valuable postage stamps and tobacciana, his art represented a double transgression, which might explain a reticence to share it and show it.²⁸ He appears not to have sought out exhibition himself, but with typically tongue-in-cheek glee, he gladly accepted—well, manufactured—documents of recognition from arguably more venerable sources. Here we turn away briefly from the realm of speculation in order to delve into the harder facts of the case: how the work came to public attention, what little we have been told about the artist, and what the work actually looks like.

A diptych of large collages individually dedicated to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln (FJC 637a-b), two of Consalvos's favorite objects of ridicule and certainly the two U.S. presidents most frequently depicted in his work, make themselves conspicuous among numerous similar presidential pairs for their rare inclusion of Consalvos "signatures." The two pieces, measuring 26" by 20" each, are each dominated by an anatomical illustration of the human skeleton and circulatory system in *contrapposto*, crowned with a head of Egyptian statuary. Both figures are outfitted with a weird armor: breastplates constructed from "Contributor Habana" cigar bands and blood-red tomato slices, and loincloths built out of Samo box edging and Perfecto Garcia and Bros. inner box labels. Ringed "1"'s extracted

²⁸ Hobbyists have however long used currency and canceled stamps in their work without the intention of breaking the law or considering themselves outlaws. But in Consalvos's case, the pervasive currents of protest and defiance in his art, and the sheer scope and profusion of his appropriation, suggest a symbolic value to the destruction of cash, postage, and other governmental documents.

from the corners of U.S. one dollar bills serve as codpieces and ornamentation. Both figures are surrounded by some similar features, familiars in common: kangaroos; images of birds taken both from photographic naturalist illustrations and more stylized fowl lifted from U.S. insignia and propaganda; liquor bottles and glasses; more skeletal or semi-skeletal human figures (as well as one decidedly fleshy, bikini-clad model); playing cards; bunches of grapes; and two photographs of possibly Cuban farmers, both marked “Habana.” Like so many others, both collages are bordered with cigar box edging, what appears to be either wallpaper or book-binding samples, and rows of postage stamps—in this case, mostly 2 cent U.S. stamps picturing Benjamin Franklin, but also a few French and Russian examples. One figure, standing beside a black flag bearer with a U.S. flag and above the conspicuous title “Red Star Washington,” holds a miniature George Washington atop a cake labeled “Champion of His Class.” His mate, titled “El Cubano” and appropriately looming beside a Cuban flag-waver, holds a foppish Lincoln and announces a “Battle of the Brokers.” The two skeletons’ other hands hold certificates, “Rewards of Merit” typed out to “F.J. Consalvos” from “G. Washington” and “A. Lincoln,” respectively. The text is small and discrete, difficult to read at first glance—luckily, “Microscopes” and “Astronomical Dimensions” offer meta-textual aid.

These “Rewards of Merit” provide unusual evidence of Consalvos’s name in association with his artwork. The typewriter presents the most compositionally central and coherently self-referential (and self-analytical) signature in his oeuvre, with the above “Rewards” and the “Cubamerican” check in close, sarcastic second. A tin clock face (FJC 91) bears a photo of a distinguished gentleman in a suit, holding a bowler hat above the typed caption “F J Consalvos.” Is this perhaps Consalvos himself? It doesn’t seem to match other,

admittedly much younger, photographic images assumed to represent the artist. As the Consalvos estate's owner and discoverer gradually restores and releases artworks to the Fleisher/Ollman Gallery for exhibition and sale—at the time of writing, 673 of an estimated 825 have been released—additional signed collages become available. Other works with embedded, signed checks, one with a full twelve manipulated checks on the verso, await restoration. So far one collage that includes a social security card (FJC 579), with an amusement park token and the “America” of a dollar bill affixed, anticipates the release of a handful of other unrestored pieces that include social security cards, manipulated and with the names excised. One yet to be conserved collage allegedly features a family record that claims Napoleon Bonaparte, John Wilkes Booth, vaudeville star and film actress Fannie Brice, Winston Churchill, King Ferdinand of Spain, and (of course) Abraham Lincoln and George Washington as kin to the Consalvos clan.

Other lucid, and already released, examples include a handwritten signature inside a small collaged hand drum, on the underbelly of the skin head, that reads “Felipe J. Consalvos” in a hasty brown script, possibly rendered in tobacco spit (FJC 668).²⁹ Among the restored works, this is the only known occurrence of the artist's handwritten signature, though the poetry books and scrapbook found with his personal items contain numerous instances of elegant cursive transcriptions of and annotations and indices to poems in Spanish, signed “F.J.C.” Additionally, bits of handwritten text appear in his collages, as do hand-addressed envelopes, at least one of which—an envelope made out to “Josef Stalin/ New-York/ Amerika” and covered in Russian and Chinese stamps—is likely another hint of Consalvos's hand. Helena Martí worried about saving family photographs in certain collages,

²⁹ The restorer of most of Consalvos's work conducted a chemical analysis of a brown shellac that appeared on the surface of certain pieces, especially sculptural works, and discovered that it contained nicotine.

and portrait photos in prominent positions may represent Consalvos and his family, but the images are impossible to verify; even Martí herself was unsure which photos were family and which were found. There are several photographs both within collages—notably on a hand mirror (FJC 162), see below—and found separately among Consalvos’s things, but the attribution of names to faces is confusing, and Martí’s comments were inconsistent. The family pictures seem to portray a couple different generations of relatives.

In any event, the artist’s occasional self-implication within the collages belies their general obscurity and attribution difficulties. Both literally and figuratively, these gestures toward self-portraiture contrast with the “Certificates of Reasonable Doubt,” “Dangerous Counterfeits,” “An Alluring Swindle,” “How to Avoid Swindlers,” “Quackery Rampant,” and “Many humbugs exposed” slogans visible elsewhere in his oeuvre and suffusing his backstory, as implicated as it is within the problematic pattern of vernacular art discoveries. As such, the aforementioned works provide an apt entry into a discussion of discovery and from whence Felipe Jesus Consalvos came. I have endeavored to present the following discovery narrative without undue speculation or embellishment, relying on my conversations with the discoverer himself. Following the biographical foray, which explains origins, a taxonomy of works, specifying materials and motifs, can guide us toward more analytical, and free-ranging, frontiers.

**“Life and Letters”: Biography, Provenance, Exhibition History –
“The Unending Search” and “A Game of Riddles”**

Spring and Autumn are flayed; the remaining seasons are skeletons (FJC 574a-d). All four anthropomorphized figures are baseball fans, or at least pedestals of Garcia Grande

“Watch Baseball and Smoke” souvenir score cards would seemingly indicate a sporting nature. (Baseball and boxing have historically been the most popular and culturally symbolic of Cuban sports, and both recur in Consalvos’s art.) *Invierno* grins gamely, eyes upturned, a fresh-faced flapper clutching an issue of “Fortune Telling,” surrounded by rampant wolves, a red cardinal, a blind Meliès moon. *Primavera*’s heavy lids hold secrets, and her left hand holds a “Weather Forecaster” almanac; she stands on “A Thousand Laughs,” buttressed by George Washington weightlifters. A bird has built its nest on her shoulder. *Verano* smokes a cigar so big it supports a housecat. A polecat purrs at her feet, and her “Dream Dictionary” is mirrored by the “Hollywood – Home of the Movies” advertisement she grasps in the other hand. *Otoño* is the only male season, the “Apostle of Prosperity.” He is a fop in a woodsman’s cap. His familiars include a monkey, a turkey-centaur with a woman’s head, and a mounted hedgehog and sheep. A tiny athletic Aquarian empties a Campbell’s soup can from *Otoño*’s shoulder; his almanac is the *Napoleon Dream Mascot Book*, a “Fortune Teller and Horoscope with Combination Numbers,” announcing “Divination by Cards.”³⁰ “Know What the Future Has in Store for Thee.” Autumn’s reflection, emerging from the hand mirror he holds, is yet another Washington, head cocked on a well-corseted woman’s body.

It was fall, 1983.³¹ The man who discovered Consalvos’s work was a graduate student

³⁰ The *Napoleon Mascot Dream Book* was published by Stein Publishing House, c. 1900. The dream-book format might have supplied Consalvos with many of his more mystically and magically-inclined images and texts: “Old dream-books (many of which doubled as almanacs) were published by patent medicine companies and available free of charge at drug stores. In addition to standard almanac-style images, they were peppered with medicine ads (which, during this period, frequently included the terms “electric,” “atomic,” “magnetic,” “galvanize,” and their analogs, including electro- or magneto-*anything*), ads for mystical products (the ghosts-without-a-medium ad comes instantly to mind, along with ads for “Hindoo,” “Egyptian,” and Indian magical concoctions), and ads for health notions and beauty products (salves, compresses, complexion-savers, etc.)” (From personal correspondence with Glenn Hinson.)

³¹ The early 1980s were an important period for the popularization of “folk art” in U.S. culture, years rife with “discoveries” and commentary on vernacular creativity. Howard Finster had caught the

at the University of Pennsylvania and a denizen of local garage sales. A scholar, committed collector, and soon-to-be art museum curator, he was no marauder, nor crusader, nor Jean-François Champollion stumbling upon the Rosetta Stone of Cuban American *tabaquero* collage. (The Consalvos collection is not comparable to that archeological revelation, and anyway art does not survive only to satisfy the decoding pleasures of academics.) Still, he would prefer to remain anonymous, maybe to avoid being embroiled in the kind of scandals that sporadically swamp the world of vernacular art, particularly its patrons, discoverers, and collectors, irregardless of intention or honor—and to say nothing of the poor treatment artists and their families sometimes experience at the hands of well-meaning strangers. I can’t blame him. He is a gentleman, and a friend, and I respect his wishes. So we’ll call him the Collector. Accustomed to weekend wanders and long drives through the hilly, tree-lined streets of West Philadelphia in search of yard sales near his neighborhood of 40th and Pine Sts., one Saturday the Collector found himself at a smallish subdivided home on Cedar Ave. Three pieces stood out from the typical “mix of old and new household stuff, spread out front on the sidewalk and front stoop of the house”: a metal wastepaper basket (FJC 99), a floor lamp with an elegant, antique parquet shade (FJC 105), and a black chair (Collector’s personal collection), all heavily collaged with cigar labels and bands.³² The lamp resembled a larger, more intricate and abstract version of traditional American cigar band collages, some examples of which the Collector already owned and hoped to supplement. However the wastepaper basket featured female figures in Victorian dress with silver blank-moon faces

attention of the art world and then America, and Jane Livingston’s “Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980” exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery garnered a newfound critical gravity for a previously under-explored field.

³²From an email interview with the Collector, Feb. 21, 2008. All information regarding the work’s discovery and restoration come from this written exchange as well as from telephone and personal conversations over the course of our acquaintance since 2004.

atop its red and yellow cigar material backdrop, and the chair was sparsely embellished with yellow box edging, its back decorated with a menagerie of birds, monkeys, and sheep hovering above a human anatomical illustration. The Collector purchased all three pieces from the man attending the sale, who apparently lived at the location.

As he was loading the pieces into his car, the man's mother approached and asked in a heavily accented voice, and in tangled grammar, whether he was interested in seeing more of "these things." She stood slight at maybe a few inches over five feet, "wiry-framed" with "gray hair and weathered skin," wearing jeans and a sweater. Speaking softly and sparingly, but deliberately, she introduced herself as Helena Martí—a heroic name for Cubans and Cuban Americans—and suggested that if the Collector would give her his phone number, she would call the next day, after the garage sale was over. There were many, many more of "these pictures and things" that her great-uncle had made, but somewhere else nearby, at her mother's house, where she lived. The conversation was brief, but the Collector was intrigued; he wrote down his number and went home to await her call.

The house address Martí gave was on Springfield Ave., not very far from the first. As he approached in his car, he noticed that this house was larger than the last, another once-grand Victorian home settling grayly into its more modest role as an urban apartment building. Multiple mailboxes were perched on the porch, but the Collector located the correct buzzer. Upon ringing up and meeting Martí, they proceeded silently to the building's garage. After a few unsuccessful and uncomfortable volleys, the Collector got the distinct impression that his questions made Martí somewhat nervous, perhaps because of her natural shyness, perhaps because of the language barrier. He backed off, perhaps retreating into smiles and polite nods. As the garage door lifted, the good work of one man's life was revealed in all its

anarchic glory—and suitably crammed into suitcases and moldering cardboard crates, stowed above rafters, languishing beneath damp drop cloths and more boxes. The Collector writes, retrospectively:

I looked at it all as best as I could given that it was all really piled up, and you couldn't really see a lot of the individual things because they were stacked, piled, or in boxes and suitcases... I think the son had moved a lot of the material from the house to the garage. Many of the boxes and suitcases of things had been packed longer than the stacks and piles of flat works. The musical instruments were hanging from rafters and also piled in the back corner. There were several leaks, one from a back window that was broken and two or three others from the back corner of the roof, which had been leaking a long time. They had three or four painter's drop cloths pulled over most of the stuff to try and keep it dry. I do not know whether things had been put in any chronology, but a lot of things of similar theme or size were stacked together. Many of the largest collages were stacked together on a large sheet of plywood on the floor in the back corner, and had been covered up and then used as a table top stack boxes and other things. These are the ones that are fused together by moisture, but that survived pretty much intact.

Among the more banal garage contents—garden tools, storage materials, car parts—were also several bottles of glue (including regular old Elmer's), varnish, and paint. More fascinating were the more personal items and ephemera: a tiny crucifix in a tin shrine, a small alarm clock with Washington's dour dollar-mug inserted on the face, a smattering of unlabeled family photographs, and a modest stack of books. The photos—two of which are marked with the name of a Mexican daguerrotype studio³³—show several generations in a variety of settings: formal studio portraits of grown men in formalwear and a boy in short pants; baby pictures; the sullen, stubbly mug of a teenager; folks on horseback and in carts in seemingly rural settings; on the porch of a house and on a country road; men standing on a buoy on the beach; and one snapshot of a slight man with wind-tousled hair in a linen suit

³³ The time-consuming, expensive daguerrotype had largely been replaced by other processes—the calotype, ambrotype, and tintype—by Consalvos's birth in 1891. So these particular Mexican photos may be pictures of a parent or older relative, perhaps the same relative who gave him the *Poesías* scrapbook, which is inscribed "Febrero del año 1,898" and "Orizaba," a Mexican municipality.

holding a young boy, supposedly Lipe and Cuco.³⁴ Among the little library were two properly published, turn of the century poetry anthologies, by Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés) and Díaz Miron, annotated in an elegant cursive script, and a scrapbook of pasted poems (titled simply *Poesías*) clipped from newspapers, marked, indexed, and glossed in the same meticulous hand.³⁵ With a few French exceptions, the poetry is all in Spanish, with an emphasis on the poets of late Romanticism and *modernismo*, especially Cuban revolutionary torchbearer José Martí, massively popular Afro-Cuban lyricist Plácido, and Mexican poet Salvador Díaz Miron, who must have held a particular place in the owner's heart. His autograph conspicuously graces one collage alongside his photograph (possibly excised from the Díaz Miron book, which is missing several pages from the front.) *Havana, Cuba: The City of Charm*, a slim wide-format souvenir picture book of Consalvos's home—twine-bound, with a cover photo of Morro Castle and shipping cranes on the harbor—was the final clue, apparently mailed to him by his sister after he emigrated.

Ms. Martí guessed that everything had belonged to her great-uncle Felipe, who she knew had made the collages, but she seemed unsure about many details, or at least disinclined to discuss anything in great detail. The Collector chose not to press her for answers she obviously did not have or did not feel like sharing. As a result, the chronology and genealogy are somewhat erratic. She estimated that much of the work had been in the garage—and the rest, we can assume, in the house itself—for over fifteen years, meaning

³⁴ According to Helena Martí. A more detailed reading of these mysterious photographs follows in Chapter Five.

³⁵ Both poetry collections are from the *Biblioteca de Poetas Americanos* series. Díaz Miron, Salvador. *Poesías*. Librería Americana: Mexico City, 1900; and Valdés, Gabriel de la Concepción. *Poesías de Plácido (Nueva Edición.)* Mexico City: Librería de la V^{da} de Ch. Bouret, 1904. A more detailed reading of Consalvos's poetic library and lineage, as well as his fascinating poetry album follows at the end of Chapter Four.

since about 1968. The Collector's presumption was that the family, or particularly Martí's mother (assumedly Felipe's niece, daughter to his sister Auristo), had waited for Felipe's death to gather and store the work, a conjecture supported only by implication. The way Martí tells it, her mother moved Lipe's belongings to the Springfield Ave. garage after Helena's aunt, her mother's sister Auresta, passed sometime around 1968, the same year she thought Lipe's son José Felipe died in Brooklyn. One source of confusion is that Martí calls Felipe her grand-uncle, his son Cuco her uncle, and Felipe's daughter Auresta her "aunt" and her mother's "sister," which would make Felipe Helena's grandfather. Perhaps Martí's mother was actually Auresta's sister-in-law, or her first cousin with a sisterly relationship? The latter seems possible; maybe Martí referred to Auresta and Cuco, technically her first cousins once removed, as her aunt and uncle. The genealogy is messy and unresolved. We do know that lived for some time with Helena's "aunt," probably Felipe's daughter Auresta, in a house off Roosevelt Blvd. in Philadelphia. It is not clear whether Consalvos himself ever lived in the house on Springfield Ave., which the Collector never himself entered, but the inference is that his artwork ended up there only after the death of his wife Eriquita, his sister Auristo, his son José, and his daughter Auresta.

Martí did specify that the family had kept the work for so long with the eventual intention of pulling off family photographs to save and postage stamps they considered valuable enough to sell. But as so often happens, the daily grind got in the way, and they never got around to doing so. Since Martí's mother had died the previous year, no one could definitively identify the family photographs anymore anyway, but she remembered being told that there were many embedded in the work. She also recalled her grandmother Auristo's storied fury at her brother Lipe's wanton destruction of U.S. dollars; notwithstanding her

vehement protests, he had apparently cashed at least one check in single bills for the very purpose of dissecting them for use in his collages. The full flood of her grandmother's ire had trickled down into a vestigial, if amused, shame about the family eccentric on the part of subsequent generations. According to the Collector, there were "no discussions of him being an 'artist'... If anything, they were a little embarrassed that he had spent so much time making so much of these things that they saw as having little use." Uncle Lipe's work did not fit their notions of economy, though they were pleased to translate his inheritance into transportation—in the form of a car. The Collector told her that he would buy as much as she was willing to sell. She was eager to clean out the garage once and for all, but first consulted with her son.

Martí called me about three days after I had seen everything and said they would sell it all to me for enough money to get a new (used) car and have another car repaired. I told them I would rather just pay them outright, and we arrived at a price. I went over the next day and paid them, and started to plan to remove the work. I bought a lot of new boxes, plastic, and packing material, and spent about three days cleaning out the garage. My brother did most of the sorting and re-packing. I had asked Helena Martí to write down everything she could remember, which she gave me as the letter when we finished up. That was the last time I saw her. I only tried to look Martí up to find out more information in 1994, when I was told by the woman who now rented the house that she thought she had died in 1990.

*

"One Eye-Witness Is Better than Ten Hear-Says": Martí's Letter and the Aftermath

Martí's letter found its way to me in translation. A note from the Collector to John Ollman prefaced her writing:

John, Here is the list of family and relations as I have gleaned from Helena Marti, the niece from whom I purchased all the material back in Philadelphia in 1983. She lived on Cedar Street in West Philadelphia and

later moved to Springfield Avenue. I went to the address in 1994 to try and track her down for additional information and was told by a neighbor she had died in 1990. She had a husband and son, but I could not locate them.

Felipe Jesus Consalvos b. around 1891 near Havana. Called Uncle Lipe by his family.

Jose Felipe Consalvos, son, born in Havana about 1912. Left for Florida with his father, c. 1920. Died in Brooklyn around 1968. Called Cuco [Cuckoo] by family.

Helena Marti – grandniece from whom all the work was purchased. Died c. 1990 according to neighbors.

Auristo Consalvos Aguire – sister to Consalvos Sr. She is the one pictured on the silver looking glass. [FJC 162]

Eriquita Celia Consalvos, wife of Consalvos Sr. Also pictured on the looking glass.

The following is a translated text of the letter Helena Marti sent to me about a year after I purchased the group from her:

“I thank you for coming to my house sale [and] for liking all the pictures and things made by my uncle. I will tell you what I know. Old Uncle Lipe was born outside Havana about 1890 or 1891 and grew up on the farm of his mother’s family. Her family name [was] Diate. When older he married and moved to Havana and later left with his family to Florida, Miami and Panama City. He had two children before his wife died, Cuco the son and Auresta, my mother’s sister.³⁶ Uncle Lipe and Uncle Cuco worked in cigar factories in Havana, Miami, and later in New York and Brooklyn. They were called wrappers. At one period of time they both worked for the Schmidt factory in New York. I know it was in New York where he had a friend who worked in a mailroom of a building where he got the stamps and books he cut up to make his pictures. Uncle Lipe was very religious, as was my mother. They both knew how to make medicine with the help of God. Uncle Lipe lived with my aunt in Philadelphia off Roosevelt Avenue and died there.³⁷ Cuco died sometime in Brooklyn. When my aunt died, my mother took all of Uncle Cuco’s and Lipe’s things that were in her house and put them in the room and garage where you saw them, about 15 years ago. She died last year and we need the room, so I am happy you like them and now have it.

Thank you and that is all I know to tell you. Helena”

³⁶ This reference to Auresta as her mother’s sister, rather than her mother’s first cousin—or more complicated, her mother’s sister-in-law—makes a simple family tree a tricky proposition.

³⁷ She probably meant Roosevelt Blvd., a section of Rte. 1 that runs through North and Northeast Philadelphia. There is currently no Roosevelt Ave. in the city.

*

By the time the Collector had completed graduate school and had taken a position as an art museum curator in 1986, the work abided at the Collector's parents' more spacious home in North Carolina—oddly, the state wherein I sit writing this account. While employed at the museum, the Collector did not find the time or funds to deal with the expensive conservation of the Consalvos oeuvre, nor did he feel it would be appropriate to consider releasing the work on the market while he was employed by an art museum. So he waited. He waited twenty years. In 2003 the Collector retired and began consolidating his various collections, moving material from North Carolina and Philadelphia to his farm in New York. The lengthy conservation process began, first with a Philadelphia Museum of Art paper conservator named Faith Zeiske, and after her death in 2004, with a contractor in Albany. The Collector first showed some examples of Consalvos's collages to John Ollman, the owner and director of Philadelphia's Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, on an unusually hot summer day in 2003.³⁸ Impressed with the complexity and scope of the work, and excited to see more, Ollman agreed to exhibit and consign the Consalvos estate. The Collector released the works in groups, often about 100 at a time, and payment for sales funded each consecutive round of conservation. So far 673 of an estimated 825 works have been released to Fleisher/Ollman, and the Collector himself has kept approximately 100 of those works for himself, "chosen because I just like them. I have not tried to keep the best or the most important, only what I personally liked."

By this time, I had been implicated in the story and added to the Gallery payroll as Associate Director, Curator, Preparator, and (least glamorous) Shipping Manager. (I started

³⁸ See John Ollman's preface in the 2005 catalog.

out as a lowly wall-painter, but hit it off with John upon his return.) In addition to John, the boss man, we were a staff of three at the time—William Pym, Jina Valentine, and myself—all close friends well before our employment there. We went about selecting, framing, and hanging the pieces we liked best for a premiere solo exhibition. “Felipe Jesus Consalvos: Constructing Images” opened on October 5, 2004, exposing an early group of restored Consalvos collages to blindingly bright gallery halogen lights after over forty years of darkness and seclusion. We all blinked in amazement, astounded, and green-faced George Washingtons stared back stoically. In lingerie.

“Curious Inventions”: Towards a Taxonomy of Works

Judging from sheer breadth of sources visible in the strata of the collages, Consalvos must have been a consummate collector, constantly amassing and archiving countless materials. We can only wonder how he organized his working space, whether this unknowable man might have carefully arranged his clippings, cigar labels, stamps, and photographs in files according to genus and size, like like-minded collage artists such as Joseph Cornell or Ray Johnson, or whether he dug through chaotic drifts of scraps. The thicket of images and print fragments in his work reveals not only excision, juxtaposition, and layering, but likewise the painstaking slicing of slits into extracted images in order to impart an illusion of dimensionality, perspective, and scale. Partial superimposition sometimes gives way to actual melding as images collide and pass through one another. Unless he was fusing two images into an architectural amalgam or a syncretic creature of some kind, as he often did, Consalvos tended to keep his larger cut-out images integral. So

when, for instance, a beefcake bodybuilder with a Washington head rides a beer bottle steed, the giant bottle is inserted into a slit between his legs, and when an Honest Abe in aviator shades cradles a jumbo Campbell's Asparagus Soup can, the can's corner is tucked underneath the top stratum of collaged surface. Consalvos's characters inhabit their spaces in slight sculptural relief, the seams raised like the delicate veins on a cigar wrapper.

The inveterate bookworm, Felipe Jesus Consalvos tunneled into the pages of pop cultural publications—as well as magazines and books with self-consciously loftier class-vaulting aspirations, U.S. analogs to Cuban journals like *Social* and *Bohemia*—meticulously dissecting those books like birds for diagnosis and prognostication. Consalvos's surreal, and angry, augury functions through comic collocation and bricolage, the sounding of a paper polyphony. He responded to his age's profusion of printed material culture, tobacco-related and otherwise, with a seditious playfulness and sport. Late American capitalism, the system largely responsible for both the economic colonization of Cuba by its hulking neighbor ninety miles north, and the co-option of the War of Independence and the forcible sixty year interruption of the Unfinished Revolution, also diffused North American print culture across Cuba in epidemic waves. Walker Evans's 1933 photographs of American film posters in Havana, in counterpoint with his poignant pictures inside the homes of impoverished families in the U.S. South, and his strangely ravishing portraits of urban American signage, attest to the reach and range of American media, especially the graphic printed word. As a Cuban immigrant from Havana, Consalvos would have been preconditioned to the collage-like effects of accumulative North American signage that advertised invasive—if often welcomed or embraced—commodities. His collages certainly imply a rascally response to this milieu of accumulation and coloniality, its economies of gain and loss. In order to evince the diverse

political and aesthetic elements of his work, we must first examine the materiality of the collages, how they are composed of diverse parts, and from where those parts hailed. In other words, what was it that the Collector actually bought on that autumn day in 1983? Since Consalvos's bases vary so much, determining the myriad shapes and sizes of his works, our archeology should begin at the bottom with those foundations, the surfaces and objects that the artist chose to cover. Next we can move on to the topside collaged materials.

The first pieces the Collector brought to Fleisher/Ollman were among the homeliest, least political, and most underwhelming of the oeuvre. Small, sparsely collaged, and festooned with playing cards and Victorian costume illustrations on what appears to be proto-psychedelic wrapping paper, wallpaper, or bookbinding endpaper, these initial pieces remain unique, most notable for their rudimentary and reductive articulations of the artist's ostensibly more mature, developed works. (Whether they predate other more "classic" works is of course open to debate; there are hints that the garage was packed with Consalvos's own boxes, organized either chronologically or thematically.) But unlike others, they do boast so-called "tramp art" frames built out of notched and chip-carved wooden cigar boxes. From after the Civil War through World War II, hobo artisans transformed discarded cigar boxes, widespread components of the American trashscape since at least the 1850s, into utilitarian and decorative items for barter, sale, or even commission. Architectural models of churches, as well as clocks and chests, were all common additions to the popular picture frame format, and Consalvos would certainly have been familiar with this tradition, whether or not he was a practitioner of the craft. A few other pieces were discovered with more conventional original frames ranging from staid, and crumbling, Victorian numbers to quirkier marbled Technicolor examples. The prime candidate among the constructed, rather than just covered,

sculptural objects is a four foot-long model ship, plainly homemade and homely, and neatly detailed with red and white Double A, Gallatin, Lewis, Nometa, and Samo box edging and a matching tape measure as racing stripe (FJC 169). (I vividly remember stumbling upon that ship with surprise during my first and only visit to the Collector's Philadelphia rowhouse to remove an early batch of work.)

Although they account for no more than ten percent of the entire body of work, the sculptural collages are certainly among the most striking. Perhaps because of their unusual shapes and sizes, and their lack of any foundation images or text on which to riff, the majority of Consalvos's sculptural pieces display a more pronounced dependence on cigar box edging and other cigar label materials. Broader fields of abstract designs spun from striped edging and circular labels often dominate, forming a more expansive background coverage built from the bottom up, rather than just from the borders in. In their carefully contained microcosmic symmetry balanced with a feverish charge of color and linear energy, Consalvos's cigar label pinwheel patterns, telescoping or concentric frames, and label-alternating quasi-architectural structures recall the early geometric and mathematical abstractions of Frank Stella and Alfred Jensen as well as traditional North American log-cabin quilt designs. (As we shall see, the more free-form versos more closely resemble "crazy quilts" of West African and African American derivation.) However, the advertising appropriations, the constant, mantric reminders of commodity and brand name in the labels, are pure Pop. In contrast to the two-dimensional pieces, which despite their density often leave negative space to view legible underlying images, the three-dimensional collages sometimes mummify the entire surface of their appropriated sculptural subject, concealing them within Christo-like cerements. But the gridded geometric abstraction of the cigar labels

never entirely suffices—Consalvos always poses at least one other strong, non-tobacciana image on top of his customary palette of red, white, and yellow schemas, and often several in dialogue.

The sculptures fall into a few obvious categories that appear with some frequency: furniture (chairs, stools, tables, lamps, a stunning bureau); vessels (cups, mugs, glasses, bottles, teapots and pitchers, a large ceramic water cooler, plates, trays, bowls, baskets, vases, urns, and trashcans); timepieces (pocket watches, clocks, and few series of disembodied clock faces); telephones; tobacciana (cigar boxes, a pipe, a cigar holder, a book of matches); office supplies and desktop items (a letter opener, clipboards, the typewriter); decorative kitsch (an “American Beauties” stitch sampler, wood-burned sculptural reliefs; crepe-paper flag souvenirs); and optical devices (hand mirrors, binoculars, and kaleidoscopes). Other miscellaneous objects include the model ship, a cane, a pair of candlestick holders, ping-pong paddles, several sets of fans, a pair of steel sheet music printing plates, and a dress form outfitted with a quiver full of arrows. A handful of ventures into manufactured sculptural, and scenic, space exist: a few shallow shadowboxes made from cardboard cigar box drawers, with protruding and freestanding paper cut-outs (FJC 430-432), and incredibly, a gutted table clock filled with a tiny parlor scene diorama attended by female paper dolls, playing cards, and a miniature model birdcage (FJC 92).

“Listen to the Music!”: “Death Ray Boogie”

Most unusual and consistently considered among the sculptures are the myriad musical instruments. Consalvos was either a musician himself or a serious fan of music. With

the post-Independence coupling of Cuban and U.S. capital, cross-pollinating band and dance crazes—swing jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll imported from the U.S. and pop-adulterated *son*, *rumba*, *conga*, *mambo*, and *cha-cha-cha* wafting North from the Caribbean—were a compelling site of cultural exchange and mutual fascination for Cubans and North Americans alike during the period of the artist’s lifetime.³⁹ In addition to the instruments, sheet music adorns many of his collage versos, scores for everything from Romantic piano pieces to musical theater torch songs and pop tunes, and his headline poems proclaim musical motifs: “Are You Musical? Then purchase an organ,” “Listen to the Music!,” “Shot Guns to Music-Land,” “The Home of Boogie Woogie,” “Boogie Woogie Cocktail,” “Boogie Woogie Prayer,” and my favorite, “Death Ray Boogie” (the title of a frenetic, thunderous 1941 recording by pianist Pete Johnson.) Perhaps like the similarly swing-stricken Dutch modernist Piet Mondrian—whose most famous geometric abstraction is titled “Broadway Boogie Woogie” (1943)—Consalvos sensed some equivalence or potential for transliteration between the structured improvisation and syncopated pulse of contemporary jazz and the stuttering, cellular sprawl of his own abstract cigar-label fields. Lynda Hartigan has written about kindred collagist Joseph Cornell’s fanatical interest in music as a metaphor for his visual art—its tendency toward repetition and series (“variations” in the classical music compositional sense) and its balance between appropriative harmony and dissonance.⁴⁰ Her statements aptly apply to Consalvos as well.

Musicians and dancers, in groups and alone, posed and captured in mid-performance, appear everywhere on those patterned swathes, leaping, blowing, strumming, and stomping. Within the photographic collages, band portraits are plentiful—Consalvos even sticks a cadre

³⁹ Pérez 1999: 198-218

⁴⁰ Hartigan 2003: 29

of Presidential faces onto one combo (FJC 352)—and hundreds of figures are granted instruments, especially banjos and guitars. Many of the three-dimensional instrument collages have been silenced by their collage coats, particularly when they intrude onto the fretboards and necks, or when the strings have been removed. Among the 673 restored works, there are nine violins, six of which are accompanied by even more elaborately collaged cases; two violas; five guitars of various sizes and registers, some of which feature police badges under the bridges and images inside the soundholes; five banjos; three ukeleles, one banjo-ukelele, and one banjo-mandolin; nine tambourines; three drums; one zither; one recorder; an accordion and a squeezebox; and one record player with a collaged record (part of Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, op. 23.) With such an orchestra of complementary instrumentation, perhaps there was even a Consalvos family band.

*

In spite of the tactile excitement and undeniable presence of the sculpture, the bulk of Consalvos's art is two-dimensional, and we can likewise sort the foundations of the flat work into several descriptive categories. First, and with hundreds of examples, probably most common, are works that appropriate a photograph as a canvas and working surface. Most common in this category are 8" x 10" glossy silver gelatin portrait photographs—wedding photos, team and school portraits, stage portraits of performers, film stills and production photos, et al.—although smaller and larger examples also abound, as well as the occasional double-sided publicity shots. Many of these appear to have been taken from some

commercial cache, but others are likely the family photographs to which Helena Marti alluded. The photomontages are among the stagier works, framed with proscenium-like borders of cigar box edging and often embracing a narrative bent that subverts or mocks the inherited images. The compositions of the photos themselves generally determine the directions of the collages, which often remain somewhat sparser to preserve a legibility in the formal structure of the underlying image, and to deal effectively with the limited space of the surface itself. Other recurrent image-based surfaces include non-photographic prints and illustrations in both black and white and color, including maps, newspaper pages, and assorted posters and advertisements, all of which vary in size.⁴¹

Abstract or imageless flat collage underpinnings—which, like the sculptures, conversely tend toward denser arrangement—are also quite prevalent, especially for the largest two-dimensional pieces, which, at over four feet in height, reach sizes far bigger than any single page, book, folio, or ordinary photograph. Fugitive book covers and book endpaper suffice as smaller imageless backgrounds, while wallpaper samples and cardboard sheets sometimes appear for larger compositions. Consalvos even managed to collage a few mica transparencies, and one disturbing large-format slide of an emaciated boy (FJC 211). Several works feature pornographic playing cards, most in central positions and some beneath flaps or paper curtains, that reveal naughty details when backlit. (“Peeping at Nature,” as Consalvos puts it.) He collaged at least three books, small notebooks with manipulated bindings, developing pseudo-narrative episodes with titles like “Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and What I Saw There” (about the pleasures and hazards of boozing), “Marriage

⁴¹ One map segment that comprises the background of an envelope collage—ever thrifty, Consalvos incorporated the rest of the map into multiple other pieces—even includes my hometown, Millis, Massachusetts. Millis is a tiny town hidden in the woods, and considerably more rural and backwater during Consalvos’s lifetime, and when I noticed this uncanny detail, I could not help but read it as a sign. Of what, I don’t know...

and the Family” (dedicated to conjugal bliss and mishaps, reproduction, and child-rearing), and “Physical Culture for Women” (a smaller example given to exploring one of the artist’s apparent preoccupations, the female form and fashion.) An entire series, almost one hundred collages, is devoted to George Washington dolls—dollar heads sutured onto formally dressed female Victorian frames—inserted into reclaimed and collaged postal envelopes, generally small, letter-sized ones. These early mail art works never appear to have been sent, since most have imaginary addresses and a mix of canceled international stamps.

Close to half of the flat works, and the larger works in particular, are not in fact fabricated from single sheet backgrounds at all, but are pasted together from smaller pieces. Sheet music and advertisements for films, clothing, and patent medicines and “cures,” as well as tobacciana, function as thickening reinforcement for larger collages, or offer indications of the multilevel recto interpenetration of the more technically sophisticated collages. The result is a verso side that sometimes appears haphazard, mere evidence of construction and process, but more often comprises a partially or entirely realized collage on its own terms. Not only are Consalvos’s more elaborate versos great places to dig for historical and chronological evidence in the less manipulated printed matter found therein, but in many cases the versos represent a deliberate, wholly obverse, or inverted, aesthetic. The verso shift in style frequently rivals or even outstrips the “intended,” more compactly arrayed recto collage. The looser-limbed versos tend toward less regularity and formula—they are usually less symmetrical in structure, more ambidirectional (less situated toward favoring one viewing orientation), less intricate in cutting and overlaying, and because they rely less on cigar labels, the colors are sometimes much more diverse and vivid. More rarefied and less visually hectic and miscellaneous in composition, less complexly manipulated (if at all) in

collage techniques, far less theatrical, and more homogeneous—less alchemical and containing overall fewer and larger components—Consalvos’s enchanting verso collages resemble those of the greatest Pop collagists, especially Eduardo Paolozzi.

Perhaps most historically enticing, and visually busy, of the recurring two-dimensional collage surfaces are the Bank Note cigar box wraps, 15 ¾” x 12” die-cut labels meant for covering the entire outside of the cigar box. This type of machine-applied wrap replaced the piecemeal system of several distinctive, separate labels: “outer” labels, top brands, tax and no-refill warnings, nail and seal labels, and end, front and back labels applied to the exterior of a box; the larger, more ornate, and more lavishly printed “inner” labels prominently displayed inside the lid of open boxes in shops, as well as the cheaper top sheets and thin floating wraps that sat on top of the cigars themselves; fourteen inch-long thin strips of “edging” to hide slivers of exposed wood near the corners of the box; and assorted additional labels that fell in and out of style. The Bank Note box wrap collages, of which there are at least 62 conserved thus far, provide some of the best evidence for dating and locating our man in Havana. But Bank Note was a popular brand manufactured from at least 1918 through 1967 at Factory 417, the workhorse of W.C. Frutiger’s cigar empire in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, a cigar boom town in York County, once home to the most millionaires per capita of any town in the U.S. Die-cut box wraps for mass-assembly date to a post-World War II period, likely no earlier than the 1950—they rendered edging obsolete, and yet Consalvos uses a lot of both, perhaps indicating that his art career straddled World War II. Consalvos might have found his pile of wraps arbitrarily, but may he also have worked at Factory 417, just a few hours west of Philadelphia, at some point in his career? Might he have been employed at an offsite Frutiger box-assembly facility in Philly? Or could he have

worked in management, having graduated from his role as *rolero* into sales, marketing, label design, bookkeeping, or even a position as a traveling *lector*?

“Ageless World of Infinite Variety”: Topside

Of course a successful collage is more than the surface it covers, and exponentially more than the sum of its parts. Arguably the most accessible, populist, and potentially casual form of modernist visual art—in terms of both appreciation and practice—collage combines browsing, borrowing, and bricolage, three activities symptomatic of advanced capitalism and Western modernity. A collagist as prolific and inclined toward compositional congestion as Consalvos must also have been a hoarder, at least selectively, and his evident hoarding stalks the wobbly boundary between sly capitalist critique and shameless celebration of all that appropriated and recontextualized stuff. To apply an outdated but apt Marxist metaphor, in both formal (material) and political and philosophical (materialist) terms, his art spans base and superstructure, allying and alloying production tactics and culturally contingent aesthetic models as reconditioned refuse: in a word, collages. In Consalvos’s case, we respond both to flesh and bone, the flesh grown over the bones of photos, banjos, folios, and curios. The (mostly) paper shapes he applied to base surfaces simultaneously effaced their functionality and (eventually) enhanced their monetary value. The hows and whats of this obsessive application—the *contsancia*—are our current concerns; the baffling whys reside somewhere in the dark conjuncture of the contexts of his identity as cigarmaker, creator, healer, and man.

The Collector’s Albany conservator has determined that Consalvos used some sort of mucilage glue, perhaps a wheat paste or corn starch, to affix the paper elements of his

collages. The glue has held up remarkably well considering the age of the works and the relatively poor discovery condition of the wet, fused pieces, which had to be dipped into a solvent bath to separate them. Some pieces display a faint white halo of powdery residue around certain pasted elements. Sculptural work like the large bass drum (FJC 572), as well as elements within two-dimensional collages, are sometimes discolored by a brown, gummy shellac or varnish, which exhibit chemical traces of linseed oil and nicotine, according to the conservator. Perhaps tobacco juice or tobacco spit was an element that Consalvos used to control heavier papers peeling away from curved or angled three-dimensional surfaces. Despite rumors to the contrary—a few early advocates of machine-made cigars advertised a “spit-free” product as part of a pro-mechanization, anti-union “hygiene” campaign—*roleros* historically have used a vegetable gum glue or vegetable paste to seal the cigar at the *perilla*.⁴² It is tempting to suppose that Consalvos used the same glue formula for his collages, and even his *chaveta* too, but at the moment there is no way to verify those guesses. However, we can enumerate certain of his favorite themes and motifs.

**“A Jester Who Yearned to Be President”:
“Party Abuse of Washington” – “Great Parade of President Lincoln”**

First of all, there are the presidents, who appear as musicians, transvestites, chimerical animal-man hybrids, and sundry other undignified, sexually and racially transgressive, and monstrous guises. Instead of the presidential honorifics of the

⁴² I have watched *roleros* use a very similar concoction today in Miami shops like El Credito and El Titan de Bronze, where they keep the glue in a Dixie cup and dip into it with a latex-swathed ring finger. So some details have changed, but today’s finest *roleros* remain proud of their traditions and disciplines, despite modern conveniences. An atmosphere of silent concentration still pervades the rolling floors I’ve visited, with occasional interruptions for coffee or a cell phone ring to the tune of “Für Elise.”

contemporaneous cigar band collage kits plied by ladies' and scouts' journals, in Consalvos' work, George Washington persistently appears decapitated from dollar bills and dressed in drag, or else stitched onto a Frankenstein muscle-man body or fauna. One "Incident in the Life of George Washington" shows him in a Wild West show, complete with cow-hide shirt (FJC 294); another finds him in a dunce cap (FJC 95). Abe Lincoln is lobotomized, subjected to a craniometrical examination with a tailor's tape measure in one piece (FJC 84), and elsewhere crowned with a U.S. Capitol dome, given goofy googly eyes, or hidden behind sunglasses. Demonstrating the artist's keen grasp on the ironies of U.S. history, Lincoln often appears in proximity to images of African Americans or text that references slavery, the Civil War, or racist American outrages like the Ku Klux Klan (FJC 9, 414, 514a, 627). Here Honest Abe is also decapitated, his head hanging from the hand of a monumental zoot-suited black man beside the caption "The house where Lincoln died" and the RCA slogan "His Master's Voice" (FJC 9); here Lincoln genuflects to a black golfer who holds the Statue of Liberty under his arm instead of his clubs (FJC 661).

Above all their cohorts, it is Washington and Lincoln who bear the brunt of Uncle Lipe's ire, ridicule, and avuncular sense of humor. (Appropriately, given his blustery and self-aggrandizing role as celebrity Rough Rider in what he deemed the Spanish-American War, Teddy Roosevelt probably finishes in third place. And Adolf Hitler is hiding everywhere, on stamps, in photos, on a sign captioned "Peron," and in humorous headlines like "Hitler's Car," "Sterilizing Hitler," "A Hitler-Eye View," and "Amateur Sorcerers in Washington Try Black Magic Against Hitler.") Those two presidents remained perhaps the most popular and recognized North American political personages for Cubans, though Consalvos showed little respect for their images or the American currency—so invasive in

the Cuban economy—that carried them. (And considering that the—often rigged—re-election of an incumbent president precipitated nearly every post-Independence Cuban uprising demonstrates the distrust in which Cuban citizens held their own heads of state, who were sometimes handpicked or facilitated by U.S. leaders.) In fact, the sheer volume and frequency of Washington’s green-faced presence in his art implies a near-compulsive (and costly) destruction of dollars, an antic paper-doll play with the presidential body around which the rest of his oeuvre accumulates. Although only a few boast several, works that do not feature at least one Washington dollar-bill head register in the minority of Consalvos’s work. One particularly pointed collage (FJC 629) includes a full seven Washington noggins, six outfitted in football uniforms around the periphery and one on a fetal body nestled inside the swollen womb of a fashionable flapper, a hip Lady Liberty whose loins and genitals are tattooed with “Habana” labels. She is “Not a Girl that Men forget.” “Timely Advice to the Expectant Mother” looms, as does a global “Independence of Cuba” hot-air balloon and a dire, ambiguously jingoistic warning of hybrid Cubamerican identity: “It’s Not Your Nationality (Ev’ry Time).” We’re talking hundreds of dollars desecrated with scissors or *chaveta*, and then further humiliated contextually on the page or the ping-pong paddle, teeming multitudes of Washingtonian homunculi laid low. “America alchemy,” indeed. This Washingtonian cloning ad nauseum is reminiscent of the words of José Martí in 1893: “Our America springs neither from Rousseau nor Washington, but from itself.”

And yet it seems that it was not only the image of Washington that stoked Consalvos’s relentless critique and hilarious ire, but rather the very idea of official, governmentally sanctioned currency, legal tender, and other documents of monetary or imaginary lucre. In Cuba, the U.S. dollar was a symbol of both dominance and longing; a

flood of foreign capital had controlled the Cuban economy for Consalvos's entire life. That inundation catalyzed a relentless series of schizoid economic swings, catastrophic boom and bust cycles that culminated in the comically flush "Dance of the Millions" and subsequent sugar crash and depression in 1920, the very year he emigrated. In addition to the diced American dollars and a Virginia Confederate bank note, U.S. and French coins periodically appear, as do stock transfer stickers (a few from Schulte Cigars) and certificates, tax stamps and tax labels from cigar boxes, United Cigar Store coupons, amusement tokens and play money, the aforementioned checks and social security cards, and crucially, perhaps a thousand postal stamps from around the globe, donations from his postal worker friend. I'm not a philatelist, but to demonstrate the breadth of Consalvos's sources, it is worth mentioning the countries whose stamps I can at least cursorily identify from photographs: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, British Guiana (now Guyana), the Central African Republic, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Chile, China, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Eritrea, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Martinique, Mexico, Mozambique, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Nyasaland (now Malawi), Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Poland, Romania, USSR (now Russia), El Salvador, Slovenia, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tasmania, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela.⁴³

⁴³ Despite his friend in the mailroom, Consalvos could have ordered all these stamps from a service of the type common in the 1940s and 1950s. The Kenmore Stamp Company (founded in 1932) and others like it offered piles of stamps for virtually nothing, to entice would-be philatelists to start a collector's approval account. These firms advertised in everything "from comic books to almanacs and dream-books." (Thanks to Glenn Hinson for this information, which I too recollect from a childhood reading *Boy's Life* magazine.)

At first blush Consalvos's collages display a marked ambivalence, an equivocating, Janus-faced disposition toward icons and iconoclasm. This unhinged prevarication imbues a complexity and guile to the work, a certain opacity that resists easy political categorization or condemnation, perhaps insulating the maker from a degree of unwanted criticism. (Though misreading the George Washington dolls as anything but satire and provocation begs incredulity.) Our readings vacillate, though when we take into account the political traditions of Cubamerican tabaqueros, as I will in the next chapter, we can strike a straight path through this jungle of seemingly contradictory material. Recurring images and motifs include clocks, government buildings and institutional architecture (in one piece, the U.S. Congress rises out of the Roman Coliseum [FJC 644]), liquor advertisements (lots of sweating bottles and icy glasses), eggs, animals (particularly birds, monkies, and cats), performers (often musicians, bodybuilders, and burlesque dancers, and a number of blackface performers), musical instruments, animals, anatomy illustrations, tickets, British coronation stamps and stickers, playing cards, flower and poultry show ribbons, flags, dunce caps and party hats, patent medicine ads (the phrase "opium-eaters" appears over a dozen times), New York tourist ephemera, presidents, science and technology sloganeering (numerous "atomic," "electric," and "molecular" references), small colorful fish with numbers (perhaps part of a game), "America" and I's cut from dollars, eyes and hands, cars, gas masks, maps, sheet music, African Americans, Native Americans, and ethnographic images. This list is partial, even slight, but even an arbitrary catalog of persistent themes can equip later investigations into context.

Of course, most noticeable are the cigar labels. If we accept his great-niece's claim that, after leaving Havana, Consalvos worked as a *rolero* (a cigar roller) in Miami and Panama City, Florida—unpopular locations at that early date, compared to Tampa, although factories and smaller operations (known as *chinchales* or *chinchares*) did thrive in both places—and that he later lived in New York for a spell, finally settling in Philadelphia, the collages bear scrutiny. Every single collage incorporates branded U.S.-manufactured cigar box labels, though often only as a frame. Inferring from the source material and language, we can assume that all extant artwork dates to a post-immigration period, and judging from the specific labels used repeatedly, much dates to his years in the Northeast. Southeastern Pennsylvania, from Reading to Philadelphia, and to a lesser extent, New York, were cigar industry hubs during Consalvos's lifetime, known for the manufacture of cheaper stogies and Seed and Havana brands as well as for inexpensive label printing.⁴⁴ The die-cut box wrap labels that Consalvos favored date to the 1950s, indicating that much of his surviving work, or at least some of its media, may date to a later era and more northerly source than previously suspected. Or perhaps these were his son's contributions. Tellingly, since they may date to a more recent period when he lived in Pennsylvania, the box wrap pieces tend to contain more Philadelphia references, while the envelopes contain more New York references.

Helena Martí mentioned a Schmidt factory in New York where she believed her Uncle Lipe had worked, and while no Schmidt brand cigar labels are visible in the work, most brands can be traced New York and Southeastern Pennsylvania companies. (I have not been able to find any information on the Schmidt factory that Martí mentions; there were

⁴⁴ In a very literal, and unappetizing, trickle-down economical system, high-end handmade Clear Havana and Seed and Havana cigar companies often sold their Florida factory floor sweepings of fine tobacco to stogie factories in the North and Midwest.

hundreds of factories and thousands of brands in New York in Consalvos's day.) Cigar brands can be difficult to trace, given the constant trading, stealing, buyouts, and updating of brand names to follow fashion, and the relatively brief lifespan of many, including custom-made vanity brands. Consalvos used much more edging than inners, outers, or bands, and because edging is far less collectable and valuable today, designs can be difficult to trace. Some Northeastern brands common to the collages include Amerco, American Citizen (which featured a portrait of George Washington on the labels), Bank Note (Red Lion, PA), Baby Ruth, Double A, Flor Fina, Gallatin (York, PA, named after U.S. treasurer Albert Gallatin), Lewis, Little Cable (New York), Nicki (New York), Nometa, Samo, and Thendora. All these cheaper five and ten-cent stogie and seed and Havana brands were manufactured in New York or Southeastern Philadelphia and represent only a fraction of the countless brands. Certain of Consalvos's brands were Tampa manufactured, including Havana Inn, Flor de Andres Díaz (which moved from New York to West Tampa in 1908), Perfecto Garcia & Bros., and the perennial favorite smoke Tampa Nugget. Contributor Habana and Fraternidad Habana may be Cuban or U.S. labels claiming Caribbean provenance, but a few appear to truly hail from Cuba. Whether or not these brands situate Consalvos in particular factories, they do suggest the extent of tobacco's saturation of his art, and as his typewriter intimates, his identity too.

— INTERLUDE —

Why Anglo-American History Doesn't Get Made Overnight:

**A Miniature History of Cuba, 1492-c.1960, According to F.J. Consalvos,
with Particular Attention Paid to U.S.-Cuban Relations**

*“Si la patria es pequeña, uno grande la sueña.”*⁴⁵

Cuba. The land of never was.

Indigenous to America. Home of the nature freak. Rude stone monuments.

Peeping at nature. Nature's noblemen. The chant of the jungle.

Western world. North America. Empire. How to think about “civilization.”

Jockeys, crooks, and kings. Kings and slaves. Slaves offered at cut rates.

Home and foreign gossip. Home games. Foreign bodies. Reconstruction of religious belief. Scenes of provincial life.

Peculiar customs. Alien skepticism. Napoleon mascot dream. The national lullaby. The national toy. Patriarchal system. Breaking into society.

⁴⁵ Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío: “If the homeland is small, one dreams it large.” Darío, the father of *modernismo*, is among the poets included in Consalvos's *Poesías* scrapbook.

Trapped by conscience. Friction with government. Began to feel their oats.

Paremos la agresion a la clase obrera. Warlike trouble brewing. The lost city.

Ayude usted!

Struggle for liberty. The revolutionary way out. Idolized by the great mass of his party.

La Revolución. War in a nutshell. A hazardous task about which the public knows little. The death of the righteous. Let's make victory sure. Nutrition for victory.

Ganaremos la paz si luchamos por ella. Complete surrender. The independence of Cuba. The Republic of Cuba.

The latest intelligence from Cuba. A bleak future for imperialism. Reformist policies. Imposing political structures. Only by such a universal system can a nation be bound together. Tierras, Educacion, Irrigacion.

The rise of American nationality. A bundle of blunders. A battalion of buffoons. Democratic failure. A nation too full of worries. Rather shaky. An area of instability. Some social implications.

Caution: American citizen. Southern imperialism. North American mixture. America alchemy. Changing America. The American way of life is good. Let's all be Americans now. The ideal American public. Politics of American Christians.

Notas de sociedad. Habana. 1000 entertainments. Merry dance. The Cuban glide. Burpee's Cuban Queen. Mistaken tributes. Constitution bitter.

Advancing backwards.

A message from underground. A rival hero turns up. Man of the people. The country must come up to him, they say. Tierra y libertad. Some economical notions. Merciless fury unleashed by the underworld. Guerilla robbers and murderers. Another syndicate arises. Socialism. Communism. The Communist Party. The vital force of our time.

Rural revolution. Public scapegoats. The abominations of modern society. Guarding the President. Washington as national target. Washington creeps noiselessly toward the fog. Sad but noisy rebels. There is always somebody to blame. Who holds power?

Here's America. Which America?

*Mientras tanto, en el destierro:*⁴⁶

*“Flores son de un ingenio sin cultura,
Cual las que dan los campos de mi patria,
Ricas de olor, de tintes y hermosura.”*⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in exile.

Hope.

Made in Key West, for men of brains. Tampa prince. Tampa nugget. Miami Beach. Miami broadleaf cigar. Why not smoke? Watch baseball and smoke.

*“The India Leaf, the comfort of the pensive, delight of the daydreamer, fragrant bosom of the winged opal.”*⁴⁸

The hazards of industry. The capitalist solution. Birth of a world system.
Employment for the insane. Give me a job. Labor helps out the boss.

With the compliments of working dogs,

F.J. Consalvos

⁴⁷ From the epigram to a hand-annotated volume of poetry of Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (commonly known as Plácido) that belonged to Consalvos: “Flowers are of a talent without culture/ like those that the fields of my homeland yield/ Rich in fragrance, tinge and beauty.” (*Poesías de Plácido*. México: Librería de la Vda. De Ch. Bouret, 1904.)

⁴⁸ José Martí on tobacco.

CHAPTER THREE

BORN IN HAVANA 1891 * CIGARMAKER *

“The Land of Never Was” – “The Land Divided and the Waters United”: “The Rise of American Nationality” and the Dream of Cubamerica – “Why Not Smoke?”: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, and sometimes it’s not – “Will the Snake Swallow the Toad?”: Cuban-American *Tabaqueros* and their Radical Politics of Resistance – “Learning Mixed with Idolatry”: *La Lectura* and Literacy Among Cigarmakers – “Labor Helps Out the Boss” – “Blackout in Eden”: The U.S. Cigar Industry in Transition

“The Land of Never Was”

Glassy with heat and punctuated by bridges, the long road from Homestead to Key West passes from key to key in a thin asphalt ribbon that skirts improbably close to the sea. Driving certain low-lying stretches of the Overseas Highway with windows down and sunroof open can temporarily transform your car—even my modest, battled-scarred 1997 Honda Civic—into a speedboat. On the way to Key West last summer with my sweetheart Samantha, this sensation stopped suddenly in a construction gridlock in Marathon, just east of the Seven Mile Bridge. I was eager to play a mixtape of songs I had made for the moment we moved onto the bridge to Big Pine Key, once one of the longest in the world. My iPod playlist paired American country musicians with Conch loyalties (like Jimmy Buffett, Jerry

Jeff Walker, and David Allan Coe, whose 1979 Conch concept record *Spectrum VII* includes a seven-minute, seven-second-long song entitled “Seven Mile Bridge”) with Cuban legends (like the flamboyant Afro-Cuban pianist Bola de Nieve and *son* innovators Septeto Boloña, Beny Moré, and Arsenio Rodríguez.) Anchored between two continents and two worlds, Key West is closer to Havana than to Miami, and that liminal oceanic affect seemed best celebrated by mingling sounds and songs. Hearing songwriters and stylists as different as Beny Moré and David Allan Coe back to back in such a suspended spot was an experience I had anticipated since leaving Miami.

Instead, impatient with the cramped road ahead of the bridge, I let my eyes wander across the sunblind horizon, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Straits of Florida, out past those treacherous and infamous ninety-four miles of open Caribbean to Cuba. U.S. Route 1 parallels the skeletal remains of an older, even more unlikely route, the hurricane-doomed Overseas Railway, which once traversed the entire 129 mile distance of the current road. Today, at Bahia Honda State Park and elsewhere, truncated lengths of the spidery trestle end abruptly in mid-air, hanging evidence of the 1935 storm that destroyed Florida real estate mogul Henry Flagler’s heroic fever dream, completed a mere twenty-three years earlier, just in time for him to roll out to sea in style once before his death. As I picked up speed again southwest from Marathon toward the southernmost point in the continental States, I imagined Consalvos, a man my age but away from his wife and son in a (nearby) foreign country, chugging along the Key West Extension in the opposite direction, drifting above coral, oolite, and mangrove, all the way to Miami and beyond...

With its unusual deep water harbor and booming cigar industry, Key West (or Cayo Hueso⁴⁹) was the most common port of entry for several generations of Cuban immigrants. The Ten Years' War in Cuba (1868-1878) catalyzed a mass exodus of emigrants; seeking economic stability and peace away from the wartime wreckage, thousands of *tabaqueros* streamed onto the tiny, seven-square mile island sparsely inhabited by pirates, sponge divers, rum runners, and a Bahamian-British diaspora who called themselves "Conchs." The arrival of both permanent and temporary workers on overnight ships like the S.S. Olivette and the S.S. Hutchinson, which required no documentation, ensured the outlandish success of big cigar factories like Gato, Sanchez y Haya, Seidenberg, and Ybor, at least until some moved away to less crowded and union-ridden pastures. Consalvos may have been no stranger to Key West (or even Tampa)—*tabaqueros* moved freely and swiftly between Cuba and the U.S., following pay fluctuations and outrunning the constant economic crises of their homeland.⁵⁰ Immigrant cigarmakers continued to arrive (and leave) in droves until the 1920s, by which point a succession of disasters had finally completely displaced the upmarket handmade cigar industry—which clung tenaciously to the so-called Spanish hand method—to Ybor City and West Tampa, with important outposts in Jacksonville, Ocala, and points further north. A catastrophic 1886 fire ominously presaged a series of debilitating strikes and violent clashes between Cuban revolutionaries and Spanish anarchists that changed the island irreparably. From its pre-20th century peak as the wealthiest town per capita in the U.S.,⁵¹

⁴⁹ Literally "Bone Key," supposedly named for the Native American bones littering the island when Ponce de León first visited.

⁵⁰ In our preoccupation with the insecurity of today's U.S. job market and our romanticization of the past's artisans, we too easily forget the sometimes manic mobility of migrant laborers.

⁵¹ See Kennedy 1989.

boasting well over a hundred factories, tens of thousands of international and multiracial cigarmakers, and a surprisingly cosmopolitan frontier culture almost unrecognizably different from the mainland U.S., Key West crashed into an early depression in the 1920s, winning the dubious designation as the first American city to declare bankruptcy.⁵²

Today Cayo Hueso's economy overwhelmingly depends on tourism and the service industry, not politically radical, anarcho-syndicalist Cuban *tabaqueros*. The remaining *roleros* there, most of whom are Cuban, work in the windows of tobacco shops for tourists to gawk at. But some things haven't changed—a few *chinchales* and brightly painted *tabaqueros'* shotgun houses survive in the shadows of museum-made or municipally converted factories like the onetime Navy commissary and Gato plant. The strange multifarious history, abetted as always by geography and climate, is still palpable on these streets, the same that Consalvos himself may have trod almost ninety years ago.⁵³ Key West's humid weather is nearly identical to the patterns of the rich *fincas* and *vegas* that still spot Western Cuba's fertile Matanzas, Habana, and Pinar del Rio provinces, making it an ideal place for the production, manufacture, and storage of tobacco products. The swampy mosquito and alligator infested Florida peninsula from Miami to Tampa, droning with the unrelenting din of frogs, were more challenging environments, forbiddingly wet and, to

⁵² Personal conversation with Norman Aberle, curator at the Key West Art and History Museum.

⁵³ And what a climate! The July humidity in the Keys is almost unbearable to a Yankee like me. I have to lift my hat several times an hour to wipe down my brow with a sodden handkerchief. I lift by the crown, palm down and elbow forward – briny smell of sweat in armpit – and as I lift, the redoubled smell, plus a raining halo of sweat. After a few days, that halo registers dimly around the black band, a pale sweat-silt tidal line like the leavings of the sinking sea, the Plimsoll mark of a ship, or an echo of the corona that rings some of Consalvos's constituent clippings. His hat must have born the same mark. I recently quit smoking cigarettes, but somehow smoking cigars makes sense here; the tiny fire and swirl of redolent smoke seem to diminish the heat, to dry my face briefly through distraction.

Cubans, freakishly flat.⁵⁴ But land was cheap, and by the early 20th century, after the War of Independence's triumph and carnage and the Platt Amendment's humiliation and disgrace, Tampa's Ybor City and West Tampa settler communities had stolen Key West's crown as the leading producer of cigars worldwide.

And so the story of Cuban American cigarmakers begins here, an expansive story that counts among its cast a little-known *rolero* named Felipe Jesus Consalvos. I recount something of their history here not just as a case study in the tortuous, star-crossed paths of U.S. and Cuban history that inevitably informed Consalvos's identity and political and cultural consciousness—although I do aspire toward that end—but more pointedly and precisely, in order to explicate the political content and message of his collages. He was a Cuban American cigar roller, and his background and occupation dovetailed with his extraordinary art practice. The collages are really all we have, and reading them requires a working knowledge of the extraordinary labor community with which he identified himself first and foremost on his typewriter, with which Helena Martí associated her great-uncle, and with which the primary collage medium of cigar box labels implicate him. Whether or not he lived or worked in Key West, Miami, Tampa, or Panama City—claims and suppositions which we cannot verify—as a *rolero*, Consalvos had an occupation that carried with it a unique legacy of nationalism, socialism, and revolution. Examining the Florida communities that epitomize the radical, esoteric culture of that occupation can not only help illuminate an oft-forgotten corner of the American immigrant experience, but it can amplify the more subtle overtones of Consalvos's political attitudes as evident in his artwork. For a Cuban American to claim to be cigarmaker, as Consalvos did, was in some sense to invoke a hydra-headed diasporic identity bound up in struggles for Cuban independence, American labor

⁵⁴ Cruz 2003: 52

rights, local immigrant community support and organization, and even extreme leftist political and economic actions for change or outright rebellion at home and abroad. A Cuban American cigarmaker of his generation was a very particular kind of Cuban and a very particular kind of cigarmaker. We can of course only speak in sweeping cultural and historical generalities, but perhaps sweeping historical generalities—particularly when coupled with the vertiginous detail of Consalvos’s collages—can inch us closer to a kind of understanding, a clarification and magnification of his life and practice through the lens of laborlore and the immigrant experience.

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The great irony of that life and that practice is that it spans the frustrating interregnum period—the Unfinished Revolution—between the Cuban War of Independence’s anticlimactic end in U.S. intervention in 1898 and the 1958 Revolution. The devastation of two wars for freedom, fought against colonialist and collaborationist planter hegemonies, bookended the artist’s conscious life, most of which was lived while Cuba was under official or unofficial U.S. control. As much as cigarmaking must have defined Consalvos’s immigration, life, and everyday life, his nationality and sense of *patria* and diasporic space, his *cubanismo*, are an intrinsic piece of the puzzle of his identity. The Cuba he knew was one of overwhelming political and cultural contradictions, complexity, and often chaotic and violent change. The vicious War of Independence (1895-1898) and Spanish-American War must have marred Consalvos’s childhood just as the abortive Ten Wars’ War (1868-1878) for independence and subsequent Little War (*La Guerra Chiquita*, 1879-1880) must have scarred

his parents' youths (and moreso if they or extended family lived in the East, where the fiercest guerilla fighting was concentrated.) The rural provinces and interior of the island endured the worst of the ravages, effectively depopulated by the Spanish regime's Reconcentration Policy, which might have been responsible for pushing Consalvos's family off their farm and into Havana when he was a boy.

In fact, statistically speaking, Consalvos was lucky to have been born at all, and to survive the War of '95. The torching, terror, and slaughter instigated by Spanish General Valeriano "Butcher" Weyler resulted in a staggering mortality rate and a consequential fall in fertility, calculated as a net loss of 700,000 people between 1890 and 1899, including 100,000 children and unborn children; "No country in the world for which data was available in 1899 had so small a proportion of children."⁵⁵ Damaged and traumatized Cuban families recovered with an 1899-1907 baby boom that articulated their hope for a peaceful future and produced one of the defining revolutionary generations of the 20th century. Consalvos's earlier, and rarer, 1891 birth date and survival through the war would have made him an especially prized son and heir to his parents. When he emigrated in 1920, the Cuban population had more than doubled since his birth.⁵⁶

But did he live to see the sovereign and populist promise of Martí's revolution, the democratic dream deferred, regroup and take shape again in 1958, only to veer toward communism and ultimately to unravel into failed economic initiatives, isolationism, and dictatorship? Given an estimated death around 1960, Consalvos's twilight years could have coincided with the morning of Fidel Castro's idealistic youth revolution. He may or may not have witnessed that euphoric upheaval and long-delayed march into Santiago, or its tragic

⁵⁵ Pérez 2006: 146

⁵⁶ Pérez 2006: 280

reversal over the course of the next decade. If he did, the collages bear no witness—despite their limpid look at the legacy of North American imperialism, they remain silent on the controversial subject of the Revolution. Then again, they virtually scream aloud about the ambivalent process of U.S.-Cuban cultural colonization and exchange that ushered in a new order, ousting Batista and Eisenhower in one blow.⁵⁷ “Kills Two Birds With One Shot!” one collage shouts, though obliquely, of course (FJC 635).

**“The Land Divided and the Waters United”:
“The Rise of American Nationality” and the Dream of Cubamerica**

We have as Consalvos’s heritage hundreds of collages, but no directions, no manual for understanding them. An historical and occupational reading of the collages might brighten the tenebrous recesses of their creator’s biography and intentions. Consalvos left few maps intact for us, fewer trails of crumbs for us to follow, but he did include some literal cartography in his collages, maps that mean through miniaturization, conflation, and segmentation. They provide an elementary history lesson and a way to parse the pieces according to his Cubamerican nationality and his cigarmaker identity. A small map of Cuba extends past the Cuban “Fraternidad Habana” cigar label (emblazoned with an image of a Taino Indian) and U.S. stamps partially blocking it; below, the title “Nervous System” and a scene of white dancers are foregrounded by a prominent blackface singer belting out “Keep Moving” (FJC 406). A tambourine scene finds Washington shaking hands with a family of monkeys sitting on the Eastern end of Cuba, on the tip of the Oriente Province that nurtured all the island’s rebellions and revolutions; the title here is “The Natural History of Fashions” (FJC 454).

⁵⁷ See Pérez 1999 and Benjamin 1990, to whom I am indebted for these ideas.

Although most maps exist in similarly fractured form within smaller pieces like the photocollages, cigar boxes, and especially the envelope dolls, larger integral examples do exist. Two verso images in particular come to mind. One deceptively simple piece constructed of a bisected map of the U.S. appends Florida to the Baja Peninsula, conflating the historically Latino states of Florida and California, and pushing Cuba toward the American West (FJC 644).⁵⁸ Here the geographic elision seems illustrative of “Cubamerica,” his textual elision of empire and annexation. Another verso is comprised of a Shell-sponsored tourist map of Havana, poorly translated into English, bordered with Nicki 5-cent edging and conspicuously occupied by a dapper businessman in a bespoke suit astride a massive goat (FJC 647).⁵⁹ Upon closer inspection a small red clock face hovers above like a sun, and a distinctly piratical hindquarters—a pair of legs in striped stockings, buckled shoes, and pantaloons—sticks feet-up from the Castillo de Atarés like a buried, upended ostrich. A harbor fortification built at head of Western arm of Havana’s pouch port bay in 1767, after the 1762 British occupation, the Castillo de Atarés was a military response to colonial competition. The recto side of this collage is dominated by a large anatomical figure with a black man’s head and a Washington fetus in his womb, beneath the telling title “Jealous World.” Considered in dialogue with other pieces that depict colonial landmarks like Morro Castle (FJC 151), the ubiquity of Native American images, and with Cuba’s history as a besieged island state, these cartographic appropriations and re-renderings read clearly as colonial satire. Consalvos must have known that in 1905, when he was fourteen, the U.S.

⁵⁸ FJC 565b also features a prominent map of Florida.

⁵⁹ “Seing [sic] Havana – Our motto: every passenger a guest at present, and a very dear friend in the future!”

owned the majority of Cuban property, 60% of the island, with Spain in control of an additional 15%.⁶⁰

Maybe most impressive and direct, however, is a recto collage on an uncut map of Mexico, Central America, and the Greater Antilles, including Cuba (FJC 202).⁶¹ Here Consalvos charts a veritable geography of exile and revolt, where land, sea, and the borders between belch up mutant politicians in seismic mutiny. The headline “Politics for Young Americans” serves as caption to an imperial, Romican coliseum that obscures Juarez and much of the U.S.-Mexico border. Further south an angry man waves a tablet emblazoned with “The Policy of Silence by the Democratic Party.” Bloated men in military and formal attire, some smiling from shrunken baby heads and one with the requisite Washington head, stand poised as leering Goliaths across Latin America. A patrician old man fondles a boy in the Yucatán. The photographic bust of a man who bears a striking resemblance to the fellow pictured on the “F J Consalvos” clock (FJC 91) bridges the ninety mile interval between Havana and Key West like a monumental cipher or Easter Island monolith. (The man pictured is the same as the one in the Mexican daguerreotypes found with his work, and the photo was clearly taken during the same session. Martí believed this was Felipe, and there is some resemblance to other photos, but his clothing and facial hair look more nineteenth-century than early twentieth...) Consalvos labeled Cuba itself a “Democratic Failure,” but a sign promising “HOPE” sprouts cockeyed from Miami. Bathers dive off the western coast of Cuba and the Baja Peninsula, and one demure-looking 19th-century lady’s head (“Tourists”)

⁶⁰ Pérez 2006: 127

⁶¹ Consalvos references Cuba’s tourist and colonialist title of “Queen of the Antilles” in comic fashion elsewhere with a “Burpee’s Cuban Queen” watermelon ad (FJC 367).

hangs from the mouth of a fat shark in a top hat (“Caution!”).⁶² The map’s verso side is composed exclusively of hymnal sheet music and pages from the Bible (Romans 5-6, 9-10, and some Psalms), perhaps a prayer for Cuban sovereignty.

By the time a twenty-nine year old Felipe Jesus Consalvos crossed the Florida Straits from Havana to Key West (or far less likely, straight to Miami) in 1920, he and his family had experienced a chain of national disappointments, disillusionments, and broken promises, enough to sour even the staunchest Cuban patriot.⁶³ While the immediate culprits were both domestic and North American, the ultimate causality and agency often lay with meddling U.S. diplomats and administrators whose fiscal decisions and documents resulted in political violence and fantastic corruption, economic and ecological ruin, and the sad backsliding from biracial, colorblind Revolutionary rhetoric into racism that tore across a Cuba rife with poverty and greed. When the U.S. swooped in to protect American interests and to stymie Cuban sovereignty during the last six months of the War of Independence, General Shafter not only forbade Cuban forces from marching into Santiago in victory, but the American delegation did not even invite any Cuban representatives to attend the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Since the birth of its own nationhood in 1776, the U.S. had presumed the essential, eventual, and inexorable annexation of Cuba as an additional state, territory, or quasi-colony. In the mid-19th century, U.S. Presidents Polk, Pierce, and Buchanan all attempted unsuccessfully to purchase Cuba from Spain, and even Jefferson and Henry Clay expressed

⁶² Sharks bear a gruesome political symbolism for Cubans. The spectacularly corrupt President José Miguel Gómez, in office from 1909-1912, was known as The Shark—*El Tiburón*—and in 1931, under the brutal Machado administration, shark fishing was outlawed because the grisly, gnawed remains of too many political dissidents were being found inside catches.

⁶³ At twenty-nine—and I speak from recent experience—one’s identity, ideas, and aesthetic have been forged, if not ossified, so Consalvos’s early life in Cuba is eminently relevant to his émigré art practice.

their beliefs in the inevitability of Cuban capture. What Jon Quincy Adams had explained as the “law of political gravitation” in 1823, describing Cuba as a ripe apple ready to fall, Senator William Soule of New York extended fancifully to geological history and creationism in 1859, suggesting that Cuba was actually formed from Mississippi River silt and therefore belonged to the United States.⁶⁴ The pathological obsession with Cuban annexation began with the Florida Purchase in 1821 and Southern concerns about the balance of slave states, only to be rearticulated in officially compulsive colonial language in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and No-Transfer Policy, the 1854 Ostend Manifesto, the 1898 Teller Amendment, and finally, and most resoundingly and humiliatingly, in the Platt Amendment, a 1901 addendum to the Army Appropriations Act.

If José Martí’s death in battle on May 15, 1895 was the ultimate symbol of Cuba’s martyrdom in the glorious, racially collaborative fight for freedom, the Platt Amendment was the ultimate symbol of the compromised terms of Cuba’s undermined independence at the hands of the United States government—a danger the visionary Martí himself recognized in advance and sought to avoid. As Habaneros, the Consalvos family might have been insulated from some of the racial and wartime violence, but not from war itself or the astronomical political graft of the post-Independence Republic of Cuba under the Platt Amendment. And, unless his family were of the wealthy planter class or *criollo* bourgeoisie—which seems unlikely given his job and his apparent political attitude—Consalvos’s parents and elders would certainly have indoctrinated Consalvos the boy with the evils of the amendment. Senator Orville Platt probably little knew the rage his name would provoke with the passing of his bill by a margin of one vote in the Cuban Constitutional Convention. But the document he sponsored galvanized Cuban autonomist and anti-U.S. sentiments until its abrogation in

⁶⁴ Pérez 2006: 80

1934, and particularly during the Martí revival and nationalist resurgence in the late teens and 1920s (right about when Consalvos boarded the boat.) Essentially, the amendment prevented Cuba from making any treaty with or ceding any territory to a country other than the U.S.; limited Cuba's foreign debt; stipulated the United States' right to intervene at any time in order to protect American life, liberty, and property; established the Guantanamo Bay naval base; and more banally, set guidelines to maintain Cuba's sanitation system. In effect, "the United States had not only rescued and revived the moribund colonial order, it had also assumed responsibility for its protection and preservation"; after all the violence and tragedy of the war, "Cubans had achieved self-government without self-determination and independence without sovereignty."⁶⁵ The Platt Amendment effectively crippled the promise of the Cuban Constitution, a final insult after the U.S. had already altered election rules, thereby disenfranchising two-thirds of the male Cuban population—and three-quarters of the Liberation Army—on the basis of literacy and property ownership.

Consalvos was eleven when Cubans formally declared their independence by raising the Cuban flag over Havana on May 20, 1902. The U.S. military presence nominally ended then (except in Guantanamo), but of course North Americans continued to exert a profound, and profoundly resented, influence, a paternalistic puppetry through capital and market culture, culminating in regular occupations. The increasingly corrupt and inept administrations of pawn Presidents Palma, Gómez, and Menocal did little to repair permanently the ruined Cuban economy or to prevent frequent outbreaks of violent rebellion. Cuba had no choice but to submit to a second protracted U.S. occupation and governance from 1906-1909, ostensibly to quell revolt after Palma's re-election. In 1912, the year

⁶⁵ Pérez 2006: 147

Consalvos's son and later artistic collaborator José Felipe was born, a bloody Afro-Cuban uprising in the East resulted in another U.S. military intervention. More tragic still was the subsequent silencing of serious public discourse on racial equality and the potential for Afro-Cuban political power, which had been stolen with the 1910 Morúa Law. (Slavery had only been outlawed in 1885, five years before Consalvos was born.) Five years later, in 1917, Washington landed military forces on Cuba a third time to keep Menocal in power for a second term. This time the occupation lasted until 1921, meaning Consalvos left Cuba for the U.S. while American soldiers roamed the streets of Havana alongside legions of American tourists. Those civilian American citizens sought the alluring exoticism and moral license they perceived in Cuba and its burgeoning entertainment and vice industries. For North Americans, Havana had become the Playhouse of the Caribbean, the Caribbean Riviera, the Nice of the Atlantic, the Paris of Americas. Consalvos explored this dysfunctional and abusive marriage with works like "The Hazards of Industry," a ten-panel piece of wedding portraits with brides and grooms waving the fantasy flags of "Havana" and "America" (FJC 464). This volatile union was at once a drunken embrace, an enchantment, and a ticking time-bomb of inscrutable social control and inexorable coloniality, as indicated by a formula of temporal, political, moral, and magical metaphors: the betrotheds' clock-faces, the vigilant Washington-headed birds, the bottles of booze, and the accompanying slogans advertising "sympathetic magic" and "magical control."

World War I sparked a temporary economic recovery, as Cubans capitalized on the European beet sugar crash by blanketing their raped landscape with highly productive sugar fields. As a result Consalvos emigrated during a watershed year in Cuban history, twelve short months that held both outrageous affluence and abject poverty. In 1920, sugar

skyrocketed in value, as did most everything else, ushering in the “Dance of the Millions,” a brief, blissful period of unprecedented, dizzying prosperity and financial speculation that swept the entire nation, but with particularly dramatic consequences in Havana. Prices per pound of sugar leapt from 10 cents in March up to 22.5 cents in May. But by December of the same year, the oversaturated economy had collapsed under its own opulence, and that value had plummeted to 3.8 cents, throwing Cuba into an early depression.⁶⁶ “El Crac” affected nearly every corner of the Cuban economy—rampant suicides followed bank busts, foreclosures, bankruptcy, and all-around disaster. In response to this catastrophe, Cubans of Consalvos’s generation—the middle class, working-class leaders, women, students, and intellectuals—ramped up their political activity. They protested and organized, deifying Martí, reifying his dream and revolutionary program, and even resuscitating the aims of his PRC (Cuban Revolutionary Party). Anti-imperialist groups opposed to the Platt Amendment joined anti-corruption campaigns, women’s rights advocates, trade unions, and socialist and communist leagues in seething discontent. The Communist Group of Havana, soon to become the Communist Party of Cuba, organized in 1923 under cigarmaker and original PRC member Carlos Baliño. It was likely in this atmosphere of crisis, despair, and renewed unrest that a Havana *rolero* named Felipe Jesus Consalvos sailed from his homeland to the United States, where perhaps he would find another “Dance of Millions,” one without a curfew, one that would better support his young family. Despite the fact that the best tobacco was still grown in Cuba and exported, Cuban cigarmakers were in direct competition with the U.S. workers, and the U.S. was winning in terms of both production levels and wages. Besides, both on the cigar factory floor, listening to the lector and in arguments with his fellow

⁶⁶ Pérez 2006: 170

tabaqueros, and at home in his studio, Consalvos had his own means of critique, the voice of vernacular modernism. Proximity to his satirical target only amplified that voice.

*

“Struggle for Liberty,” a scantily clad woman declaims, slouching sidesaddle. Her contrary horse heralds “1000 Entertainments!” in rejoinder. Such was one of Cuba’s many discursive dichotomies in the years of the Republic. In this particular collage, a riotous shipwreck, the “Republic of Cuba,” steams over a torrential waterfall, maybe Niagara (FJC 411). Is this Cuba Libre as the ill-fated Titanic—or more pointedly, as the U.S.S. Maine, whose 1898 destruction in Havana’s harbor triggered the U.S. intervention in the War of Independence? “Remember the Maine!” served as jingoistic battle cry for the Spanish-American War, despite the fact that all investigations indicate that the ship was not a victim of a terrorist bombing but rather of an incendiary coal bin accident.⁶⁷ This Maine, the “Republic of Cuba,” has been caught up in some sort of cataclysmic storm, about to crash into “The American Nation” below, represented by an African American military regiment in uniform. Perhaps Cuba, as colonial darling to so many jealous powers in the grip of passionate Manifest Destiny, has simply fallen prey to “Love’s Cross-Currents.” The A. Kafka and Co. (!) label above suggests this Kafkaesque fate may be Cuba’s “Evermore.”⁶⁸ Consalvos framed this piece with more map excerpts, stamps, crows, and “Maryland Chief” labels featuring the stoic Indian ubiquitous to tobacciana of the period—perhaps a nod here

⁶⁷ You may well also remember another potential miniature U.S.S. Maine stand-in, Consalvos’s model boat collage.

⁶⁸ The Kafka factory was located in New Haven (Cooper 1987: 79).

to Cuba's decimated Native population? A towering transvestite Washington presides over the scene, hands on hips, calmly menacing.

Here we can begin to understand how Consalvos's army of decapitated Washingtons functions as funereal metonyms not necessarily for Washington the man and president, not necessarily for the whole of the United States, but for Washington, D.C. "Washington" doubles as the eponymous seat of governmentality and international machinations, as announced in newspapers and newscasts, and also as the face on the elemental unit of the powerful economy that is its infernal engine. Already when Consalvos was a kid, in 1894, 97% of Cuban exports—much of that tobacco and sugar—went to the U.S, and North American landowners and businesses held vast tracts of the island.⁶⁹ The U.S. further formulated and solidified that relationship with tariff incentives built into the 1903 Reciprocity Treaty and millions upon millions of dollars in land buyouts. More than any other American or Caribbean nation, Cuba, "The Land of Never Was" (a phrase that appears in a few collages), was flooded with U.S. capital and market culture, but unable entirely or consistently to reap its benefits. First Spain, and then the U.S. systematically excluded Cuba from the colonial logic of the "Economic Map of South America" that Consalvos culled (FJC 365.) Towns like McKinley and Omaja sprung up across the island, and parents named their children Usnavy. Progressive Protestant missionaries converted thousands of Cubans, finding ready apostates to the conservative Catholic Church, so long identified with colonialist Spain and the wealthy planter class. Films, print media, and music promoted models of American style and glamour, convenience and technology—in short, American modernity.

⁶⁹ Lecture by Louis Pérez, September 27, 2007.

In many ways, “Cubans knew North America better than any other people in Latin America,” and certainly better than they knew Spain—they “criticized North Americans with the presumption of familiarity, as insiders, possessing privileged insights accumulated over decades.”⁷⁰ With typical poetic flair, the great Martí, who lived in the North for much of his life, expressed this corrosive insider critique as having lived “inside the monster... to know its entrails.”⁷¹ Consalvos was well acquainted with the monster, and his collages, masterpieces of recombination and mutation, reflect his conflicted anatomization and dismemberment of North American memes. Louis Pérez’s argument that “for many other Cubans, the process of appropriation and adoption became the means to defend nationality” resonates deeply with Consalvos’s émigré practice.⁷² His statements about the enmeshed process of cultural exchange, appropriation, acquiescence, and resistance read almost as a description of Consalvos’s art:

Identification with ways and things North American was unabashed and unambiguous, but it was not untroubled, not without its anomalies. It would be facile to suggest that these were positions without conflict or contradiction. Cubans had linked both worlds sufficiently to cross between each with frequency and familiarity... They had created a world of borrowed forms, improvised in large measure as a strategy for mobility and security and requiring, in the end, a redefinition along the lines of North American models.⁷³

⁷⁰ Pérez 1999: 494

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.: 162

⁷³ Ibid.: 492

That is, contrary to conventional wisdom, to some extent, assimilation, appropriation, and Americanization was patriotic.⁷⁴ Hence the tension in the collages between satire and celebration. Consalvos's art is nothing if not "a world of borrowed forms."

"Why Not Smoke?": Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, and sometimes it's not

And what were the most immediately accessible and easily encountered of those "North American models" for a Cuban immigrant and cigarmaker in the 1920s and 1930s? Psychoanalytic folklore's most famous anecdote may be apocryphal, but it's certainly pungent: when asked about the psychological implications of his fondness for phallic cigars, Freud supposedly retorted, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." René Magritte's overhyped 1928 pipe parry notwithstanding, sometimes a cigar signifies much, much more than its suggestive shape or its myriad representations. Sometimes a cigar means revolution. In February 1895, a secret *junta* met at the O'Halloran Cigar Factory in Ybor City, a bustling immigrant enclave of Tampa, Florida. After much deliberation, orders had come directly from Gonzalo de Quesada, secretary of the New York PRC, to issue orders of insurrection to Cuba, finally setting in motion *la lucha*, the struggle for independence. Late that night Blas O'Halloran rolled five identical panatela cigars, one of which he marked faintly with two tiny yellow flecks on the wrapper. This was the "Cigar of Liberty," a hard draw for a would-be smoker, as the PRC's official call to arms was rolled inside. On February 21, the cigars sailed with a messenger to Key West and on to Havana. Three days later the Grito de Baire commenced the revolution.⁷⁵ In the early 1960s, after a very different sort of coup d'état, the

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 290

⁷⁵ See Tony Pizzo's essay "The Cigar that Sparked a Revolution," available at Ybor City Museum.

CIA allegedly constructed several exploding cigar prototypes to assassinate Fidel Castro, one of hundreds of botched attempts to kill El Comandante. Out of dozens of Consalvos collages that feature cigars, often in the mouths of presidents and other distinguished personages, one work depicts Washington with a peculiarly plump stogie hanging from his pursed red lips (FJC 576a). On second glance, the cigar reveals itself as a distended, slightly flaccid bomb. Hitler lurks in the background, in an evening gown. And in what could read as an oracular prophecy of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, “Washington Creeps Noiselessly Toward the Fog.”

Felipe Jesus Consalvos combined two revolutions—aesthetic and Marxist—in his peculiarly plaited careers. The history of American cigarmaking communities, especially those in Florida, offers an insight into the political charge of his collages. Regardless of whether or not he stayed in Key West or ever worked in Tampa before continuing north, regardless of whether he worked in a major factory or a *chinchal*, as *rolero* or *resagador*⁷⁶ or *lector* or *bonchero*⁷⁷ or clerk or label designer or foreman, regardless of whether he was a dues-paying CMIU member or not a union man at all—Consalvos would have been keyed in to these radical communities, which only grew in strength and numbers after Cuban independence. I do not mean to imply that he necessarily worked through Tampa, or Key West, or even definitively identified with the activities of these centers of agitation. But as a Cuban American cigarmaker, and an apparently extremely well-read one at that, he would undoubtedly have been familiar with at least elements of their social and political experiments.

I perceive in his work a shared affect with the seditious sentiments of those marginalized immigrant communities, a common worldview and understanding of how

⁷⁶ A tobacco selector.

⁷⁷ Bunchers were responsible for gathering and shaping the filler in an assembly-line situation.

individuals might best create and challenge political structures and cultural assumptions. Surely he used cigar labels in every extant collage for a reason beyond easy availability and formal qualities. His art openly, savagely, and often literally attacks American capital; these artworks are in some sense about the artist's other political and physical work as a *rolero* as much as they are about North American culture. Consalvos's collages inherit from the previous proud generation of Cubamerican *tabaqueros* an insurgent political outrage, the simultaneous embrace and eschewal of American pop culture, a thrifty, omnivorous scavenging aesthetic, and a highly literary intellectual sensibility verging on the abstruse. (As we shall see later, he shares these traits in turn with certain contemporaneous modernist artists.) He is, if you will, the visual heir to the storied *lector* figure, a teacher-in-culture. But instead of hiring out his voice and library to his fellow workers, to edify and entertain, Consalvos ostensibly toiled at pruning and refashioning that library in domestic obscurity, inwardly, for himself, perhaps for family, for friends—maybe for future generations of artists. For whatever reason, dissemination came only much later.

**“Will the Snake Swallow the Toad?”:
Cubamerican *Tabaqueros* and their Radical Politics of Resistance**

From within North America, “inside the monster,” Cubamerican cigarmakers reimagined and re-forged their homeland and their national identity; Consalvos, in tackling and amalgamating American tropes, spoke of his *Cubanismo* and his cigarmaking forebears as much as his adopted country. Arguably more than any other working class group, even within Cuba, it was Cuban American *tabaqueros* who both abstractly and actually came to represent Cuba Libre and the project of *independista*. In a very real way, “emigration served

as the crucible of nation.”⁷⁸ On the part of the creole Cuban revolutionary leadership, “Martí required the allegiance of workers to legitimize the construct of Cuba Libre as a representation of the whole nation and could plausibly find this endorsement only among the cigar workers of Florida.”⁷⁹ The exile experience (*destierro*) of cigarmakers in Florida not only fostered an inflammatory revolutionary discourse from the safe distance of North America, but *tabaqueros* funded and fought the war alongside their Cuban brothers, sneaking behind enemy lines into Havana. Cigar workers established PRC headquarters in Key West and Tampa in 1892, and many donated *una dia por la patria*: one day’s salary a week for the cause.⁸⁰ *Tabaqueros* and other exiled Cubans conducted the preparatory, planning, and financial work of the revolution from grand community cultural centers like Key West’s San Carlos and Tampa’s El Circulo Cubano. Decades after the war had ended, Consalvos tapped into this discursive mode of *destierro* with his collage practice, re-articulating in an optical idiom—an idiom borrowed, at least in a fundamental sense, from the folk tradition of cigar band collage—the once obvious linkage between Cubamerican cigarmakers and revolution.

Upon arrival in Key West in 1920, Consalvos would have discovered a cigar industry on the wane since Ybor’s eponymous Tampa company town experiment had turned out to be a success, attracting hundreds of other operations after Ybor and Co.’s initial move in 1886. After that year’s fire, hurricanes in 1909 and 1910 literally changed the face of *La Isla Solariega*, and with rising labor disputes, union deportations, and diminishing land

⁷⁸ Pérez 1999: 43

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 47. Martí thought highly of both *tabaqueros* and tobacco: “The India Leaf, the comfort of the pensive, delight of the daydreamer, fragrant bosom of the winged opal.”

⁸⁰ Cigarmaking was piecework, payable per thousand cigars produced, and so many skilled cigarmakers enjoyed an unusual freedom in setting their own relaxed hours, even coming and going from the factory at whim.

availability on the diminutive island, the wide open spaces of West Tampa and Ybor City started to look more and more promising to many of the biggest companies. The once mighty Key West industry had nearly vanished by 1931, the victim of its own zealotry and the very tropical climate that made it so attractive in the first place. From the 1890s through the 1930s, thousands of immigrant *tabaqueros* and their families transformed the once sleepy frontier fringes of Tampa into an almost implausibly socialist space, a wildly heterogeneous, liminal borderlands of political and cultural ferment and unparalleled radicalism and community organization. In 1919, a U.S. federal agent from the Special Bureau of Investigation claimed Tampa resembled Communist Russia, “a Soviet on a small scale.”⁸¹ Creole Cubans, Afro-Cubans, Spanish, Italians, and Germans worked and went on strike side by side in Tampa, and their respective mutual aid societies and clubs—El Circulo Cubano, Sociedad La Union Martí-Maceo, Centro Español, Centro Asturiano were the largest and longest-lived—not only provided crucial structures of community support for thousands, but likewise insulated workers from factory and broader city retaliation and aggression. These buildings served a multiplicity of symbolic and social functions for residents: social club; cultural center; mutual aid society; medical clinic; insurance company; office building; quitting time hangout; cantina; theater, dance hall, cinema, and lecture hall; library; school; athletic club and gymnasium (El Circulo Cubano boasted bowling lanes, billiards, and a wading pool); and family meeting place and youth center (at least on weekends, when clubs were open to women and children.)⁸² Supposedly El Circulo Cubano prohibited overt

⁸¹ Henderson and Mormino 1991: 192

⁸² In addition to the surviving El Circulo Cubano, during the Revolution, Tampa had at least thirty different Cuban clubs, including the Disciples of Martí, the National Cuban Club, and the Havana Club, according to the May 23, 1909 issue of the *Tampa Tribune*. It is also sobering to remember that, despite all the revolutionary enthusiasm for racial brotherhood, Afro-Cubans, even those involved

discussion of labor, politics, or religion inside—to promote harmony among members of different classes—but the community who gathered there chose other staging grounds for revolution, welcoming José Martí to speak from a *lector's tribuna* in 1891 and hosting a young Fidel Castro in 1955.

Consummate craftsmen and women, Cuban American cigarmakers earned the dubious title of “labor artistocrats”⁸³ for their almost middle-class respectability, their decent wages, their often exclusive mutual aid societies and social clubs, the intellectual athletics of their *tertulias* inspired by *la lectura* (the practice of factory reading), and more immediately, for the fine suits or *flus* (and in many cases, dresses) and shoes they wore to and from work every day, or even under their aprons. The respected, skilled, and sedentary work attracted women, the physically handicapped, and a range of nationalities and races, although creole Cubans asserted supremacy. In the beginning, the luxury Clear Havana cigar reigned in Tampa, handmade for the discriminating palette in the traditional Cuban style from imported Pinar del Rio tobacco, and pricey at 15-20 cents a pop. Traditional Cuban *roleros* in particular considered themselves artists, and certainly their attitude, politics, and skill—along with their pay, sense of style, and reputation as “intellectuals of the proletariat”⁸⁴—separated them from much of the immigrant working class of the day. (The classic Cuban dichotomy between sugar and tobacco that Fernando Ortíz outlines in *Cuban Counterpoint* certainly extends to labor and diametrically opposed working-class attitudes and self-images.)

with the PRC, were relegated to a separate, decidedly less regal club, the Sociedad La Union Martí-Maceo.

⁸³ Stubbs 1985: 65

⁸⁴ Stubbs 1985: 88

Typical apprenticeships lasted twelve to eighteen months at least, during which time the master would educate his *mochila* (literally, knapsack) in the aesthetic principles of a good smoke—which involved smoking a sickening number of cigars—rigorously training him to develop the necessary manual sensitivity, consistency, dexterity, delicacy, finesse, and speed. Conditions for a *mochila* were often tough, and almost as much depended on his natural aptitude and innate ability as his regimen. Cuban ethnographer and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz describes how the perfect *tobacco* (as cigars are known in Cuba) demands a “precision and sureness of touch as characteristic of the Cuban cigarmaker as the Savile Row tailor.”⁸⁵ (Or as G. Cabrera Infante observed in his novel *Holy Smoke*, “to make a cigar is a devil of a skill, but to roll so many in a day’s work is sheer sorcery.”⁸⁶) This earnest dedication to artisanal craftsmanship had both positive and negative results: because of their exceptional skill, cigarmakers were able to exercise a healthy degree of control over management in a preindustrial market, but they had difficulty adapting to the division of labor, specialization, and mechanization that arrived with widespread industrialization in the 1920s.⁸⁷ With the established association between artistry and cigars, it is easy to see how Consalvos made the transition from one art form to another, whether a daily adjustment in media or a dedicated retirement career; it certainly would have taken little adaptation, only the slightest shift in self-image and artistic identity, when he turned his *chaveta* to another use. As the saying goes, “Once a cigarmaker, always a cigarmaker.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ortiz 1995: 75

⁸⁶ Infante 1998

⁸⁷ Ingalls 1988: 34

⁸⁸ See Cooper 1987.

“Learning Mixed with Idolatry”: *La Lectura* and Literacy Among Cigarmakers

Even decades after the revolution, its memory sustained a discursive class articulation of Cuban American *tabaqueros* to the project of *independista*, to revolution, radicalism, socialism, and all that those categories implied. This articulation was accomplished and maintained most visibly and infamously by *lectores*, the factory readers, whom Consalvos resembles in spirit. If they were not in reality the lightning rods of insurrection that management and the conservative press painted them to be, these idolized inciters were certainly the primary scapegoats for the industry’s retaliation. (“Public scapegoats,” as Consalvos put it.) Their outspokenness and leadership doomed them.

The tradition of *la lectura* probably developed in mid-nineteenth-century Cuban prisons, but it reached its full flowering of fame and radicalism in Florida in the years before the War of Independence and survived there, though only in Hispanophone cigarmaking communities, and only until 1931.⁸⁹ (In Nilo Cruz’s play *Anna in the Tropics*, Tampan *tabaqueros*, who call themselves “listeners,” discuss the Taino origin of reading as a way to facilitate and mediate communication with the gods through the medium of tobacco smoke.⁹⁰) The readers, who read aloud from a high *tribuna* (some of which were elaborately carved) above the *galera*, or factory floor—microphones and loudspeaker systems were scoffed at—aimed to educate and entertain.⁹¹ Through the 1920s, the cigar factory functioned

⁸⁹ Sariego 2003: 35

⁹⁰ Cruz 2003: 52

⁹¹ Ingalls and Pérez 2003: 87

as an informal academy, a “working-class university.”⁹² Although the literacy rate in Ybor City soared to an astonishing 97% of residents over ten years old in 1910, earlier well-read-to *tabaqueros*, and those less lucky or living elsewhere, like in Cuba, sometimes found themselves in the awkward position of being highly educated, but illiterate, experts on world literature and international relations.⁹³ Detractors in management maintained that *lectores* not only riled up their employees to strike, but likewise encouraged “cultural indigestion” and the use of “flowery and metaphorical language,” assumedly unseemly traits for working-class men and women.⁹⁴ But beyond the condescension of those remarks, that sounds a lot like Consalvos, doesn’t it?

Particularly in Tampa, but also in New York, *la lectura* was associated with the prolific local émigré press, a burgeoning of leftist and labor newspapers that often featured *lectors* as writers or editors: *Cuba* (1883-1899, published by a *lector*); *El Yara* (established 1886, published by a *lector*); *La Traduccion*, (1903, published a *lector*); and *El Internacional* (established 1904, the local CMIU journal). Perhaps most renowned was *El Gaceta*, established in 1922 by *lector* Victor Manteigna and still on newsstands today. The first trilingual newspaper—published in Spanish, Italian, and English—it reflects the heady and catholic mix of international and local political and cultural issues that interested Tampa cigarmakers and *lectors* (and Consalvos too.) In the 1920s “The Paper with a Larger Circulation” covered not only international and local news (“Cablegramas de Cuba, España, y Todas Partes”), but labor and union issues, social club and mutual aid society happenings,

⁹² Kennedy 1989: 276

⁹³ See Sariego 2003.

⁹⁴ Stubbs 1985: 88

theatrical productions (“Teatros”), baseball, and even psychology (“Yntermedio Psicológica”). *El Gaceta* featured serialized poetry and fiction and advertised automobile repair, restaurants, dentists (preposterously, a Dr. R.M. Clinkscases), botanicas, bodegas, and markets (even Piggly Wiggly!), photographic services, cinema (Douglas Fairbanks, Max Linder, Pola Negri, and Mary Pickford were favorite stars), calls for local construction crews, patent medicines (“para el dolor de la cabeza”), and other goods (lots of the “self-reducing corsets” ads Consalvos was fond of sampling.)⁹⁵ Here U.S. ambassador to Cuba Enoch Crowder shared space on a page with a Señorita Fi-Fi—the jarring juxtapositions recall not only Consalvos’s sources, but indeed his collages.

When *tabaqueros* hired *lectores* to relieve the monotony of such repetitive, meticulous work, their preferred texts included a similarly assorted combination of sources, especially socialist and anarcho-syndicalist tracts, leftist and labor newspapers like those listed above, and classic and pulp literature. Cigarmakers paid their readers out of their own pockets, contributing a portion of their paycheck, and they voted on the reader’s selections. *Lectors* served as orators, interpreters, professors, community leaders, and ultimate authorities on the texts—and often on many other subjects as well—but *tabaqueros* themselves elected and fired them at will and curated their own education. Although the reader was “the prince of the factory,” making up to \$70 a week compared to a cigarmaker’s \$10 and with his own social club in Ybor City, the Cooperative Association of Cigar Factory Readers, he was still an employee of the cigarmaker.⁹⁶ Although silence was enforced during readings—except for *chaveta*-tapping applause—workers encouraged protest and debate and

⁹⁵ I thank the patient staff of the Special Collections Library at USF-Tampa for allowing to peruse piles of fragile newspapers and countless other materials.

⁹⁶ Ingalls and Pérez 2003: 87

even instituted a system of moderation; when all else failed, they consulted a library of reference books known as *mataburros*, or donkey-slayers, to settle the *perrera*, or dog fight.⁹⁷ There was an established schedule or rotation of materials on which most *tabaqueros* agreed. According to *lector* Honorato Henry Domínguez:

El lector had to be an educated man to make the translation from English to Spanish... In the first period, we read political news from the world over. In the second period, we read news from labor organizations, also the world over. In the third and fourth periods, we read history, novels, culture, entertainment. The great *Don Quixote* by Cervantes was a favorite. We were more than readers. We were also actors. We read in character. We read to make the characters come alive. We were performers.⁹⁸

Other favorite authors included Honoré de Balzac, Pérez Galdós, Armando Palacio Valdés, Leo Tolstoy, Emile Zola, and a whole host of popular, but less remembered writers of romantic and crime fiction. In the Key West Public Library, I examined a crumbling handwritten invoice from F. Garcia, Bro. & Co., “Growers and Importers of Havana Tobacco.”⁹⁹ The stationary is marked “190_,” dating it to the first decade of the twentieth century, and it records the purchase of an entire library of books, including canonical works by James Boswell, John Bunyan, J. Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Benjamin Franklin, Bret Harte, Abraham Lincoln, Edgar Allan Poe, Theodore Roosevelt, John Ruskin, Samuel Johnson, Henry David Thoreau, and William Wordsworth. Histories of Africa, England, France, Germany, China, the Spanish-American War, and *Japan in History, Folklore, and Art* (57 cents) are listed beside biographies of American presidents and statesmen, an anthology of Swedish fables and folktales, *Brown’s Dictionary of Miracles*,

⁹⁷ Sariego 2003: 30

⁹⁸ Ingalls and Pérez 2003: 84

⁹⁹ Tom Hambright, librarian and supreme Monroe County historian, showed me the invoice and explained that it recorded the requests of *tabaqueros* for *la lectura*.

and a *Dictionary of Mythology*. Scribbled additions spilled off the page, amounting to a grand total of 133 volumes for over \$165, including up to 12 copies of the same book. The Garcia factory *tabaqueros* and *lectores*, like Consalvos, evidently were ravenous cultural omnivores.

Miguel de Cervantes, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Victor Hugo were perennial favorites in most factories, though his poetry scrapbooks suggest that Consalvos's tastes were more aligned with the poets of *modernismo*, like Mexican poet Salvador Diaz Miron and José Martí, and popular Cuban epigrammatist Plácido. (But the artist's own writing—and I'll venture to call his cut-and-paste texts writing—edged closer to the bombastic rants and coiled calls-to-arms of Vorticism or the visual poetry of Dadaists and Russian *zaumniki*.) When Tampa management finally permanently banned readers—following a vicious 1931 strike and a parade to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution—*roleros* reportedly wept as their *tribunas* were torn down.¹⁰⁰ In some factories, radios or even piano music, which could be heard above the loud rolling machinery, replaced the readers, but of course the effect paled in comparison. In New York, however, where Consalvos may have been at the time, *la lectura* survived into the 1930s, at least within the Puerto Rican cigarmaking community, who began to veer toward Leninism. Apparently anarchist writers like Mickail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and Errico Malatesta joined the classic canon there, and even a few women became respected readers.¹⁰¹ If he did not exactly share their sincere reverence for the sanctity of books and knowledge, certainly Consalvos would have understood the atmosphere that the *lectores* cultivated, an atmosphere where militant protest coexisted with poetry, and political and intellectual debate thrived.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson and Mormino 1991: 64

¹⁰¹ See Sariego 2003.

“Labor Helps Out the Boss”

Although in many ways Tampa in its 1890-1930 heyday was a model of progressive thinking and tolerance for its age, class, ethnic, and race relations were of course not ideal inside these communities. Racial segregation persisted outside the workplace, and we must not romanticize the reality of labor violence in a changing cigar industry that made increasingly little room for artists. The broader Anglo communities, outside Ybor City and West Tampa, did not always agree with the company town goings-on, and many strikes ended in a brutal backlash of urban vigilantism, lynchings, and racial intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁰² The battle for industry independence paralleled the battle for Cuba Libre long after Cuban independence, merging with socialist and communist causes. In the 1930s many Cubans and Spaniards alike strongly supported the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, and Communists and anti-fascists made inroads in Tampa. The maxim “Obedezco pero no cumplo” (“I obey but I do not comply”) applied to cigar laborers as much as its original origin as a mantra for Cubans under Spanish colonial rule. Whether explicitly politically motivated or not, the strikes were many and violent. So fierce and unrelenting were labor-capital conflicts in Tampa that residents dated their lives and senses of history to the intermittent punctuations of major, crippling strikes in 1901, 1910, 1920, and 1931. “Para las calles!” (For the streets!) was an often heard battle cry. The 1901 strike ended in the banishment of the popular pan-national and pan-racial local union La Resistencia and the deportation of some of its members. La Sociedad de Torcedores de Tampa, another more radical alternative to the CMIU, met a similar fate after the McKinley assassination. The

¹⁰² See Ingalls 1988.

CMIU, founded in 1864 and labor hero Samuel Gompers' first union, eventually came to dominate the cigar industry. But many dismissive Tampan hand rollers regarded the organization as excessively conservative and too dominated by Northern German workers and so-called "mold work."¹⁰³

Had Consalvos headed immediately to Tampa for work after arriving in Key West and passing through Miami, to save up some cash to move North, he would have encountered a scene of total disarray and churning discontent.¹⁰⁴ The 1920 strike extended into a debilitating ten month standoff, followed by a wildcat strike in 1921. Some workers returned to Cuba for the interim. After 1931, with *lectores* banned and rolling machines taking over, many *tabaqueros* moved north. Perhaps Consalvos did so as well. In the North, things were different; although cigarmakers were organized, the remarkable collectivity of Florida was uncommon. Jewish, Puerto Rican, German and Bohemian workers outnumbered Cuban Americans in cigar centers like Pennsylvania and New York. There were of course Cubans and socialists in New York and Philadelphia, but there was evidently not a cohesive Cuban cigarmaking community in either city.¹⁰⁵ Consalvos's work life was probably more solitary there. By the 1920s, mixed Seed and Havana cigars and stogies, manufactured with molds and machines, had edged out the hand process for which Cubans were known, accounting for

¹⁰³ Wooden cigar molds were introduced in the 1870s to regulate uniform shapes. Traditional Cuban *tabaqueros* who practiced the Spanish hand method scorned such newfangled devices, which were eventually replaced in turn by automated rolling machines in the 1920s and 1930s. Although most cigars are machine-made today, a recent renaissance in traditional hand-rolling does account for an important share of the high-end cigar market. However, many shops open to visitors today in the U.S.—whether in Little Havana, Key West, or Ybor City—resemble human folklife displays or museums more than functional factories.

¹⁰⁴ Perennially in search of work, cigarmakers were wanderers whose nomadic bands cohered through unions like the CMIU, the "traveling fraternity" (Cooper 1987: 75).

¹⁰⁵ However, West Philadelphia, where the Collector discovered Consalvos's work, has nurtured hotbeds of socialist and anarchist activity, even today.

more and more of the annual production. There was a Circulo de Tabaqueros in Brooklyn in the 1920s, largely of Puerto Rican stock, and a community of cigarmakers lived on 3rd Ave. between 64th and 106th Sts, but the Florida model was more of a memory or a rumor to many Northern *tabaqueros*, possibly to Consalvos too.¹⁰⁶ That heritage of artisanal and intellectual sovereignty was already fading by the time Consalvos was gleaning cigar bands and box labels from the floors of industrialized stogie factories in Philadelphia, but it imparts a compelling context, one with which he was undoubtedly familiar.

“Blackout in Eden”: The U.S. Cigar Industry in Transition

The U.S. cigar industry that Consalvos joined in the 1920s was undergoing a profound transformation due to belated, long resisted industrialization after World War I. The move toward mechanization and Duke’s cross-class popularization of cheap mass-produced cigarettes, once considered beneath the level of a gentleman or lady, hit the industry with a double-fisted blow. These changes deterred and even reversed growth, activating a process of consolidation and concentration in the Northeast and Midwest. As job availability swung North, so did cigarmakers. Key West virtually emptied in the early 1920s, and Tampa blamed its downfall a decade later on the noisy, abominable machinery that drowned out its beloved *lectores* and reduced gentlemen *tabaqueros* to lever-pullers and bums. The first machines arrived in Ybor in 1925; four years later, 35% of cigars were machine made; by 1938, that number had risen to 80%.¹⁰⁷ The handmade Clear Havana cigars that made Florida

¹⁰⁶ See Sariago 2003 and Vega 1984 for more about the New York Latin American cigarmaking community.

¹⁰⁷ According to wall text literature at the Ybor City Museum.

famous were relegated to specialty or luxury items, and the attendant apprentice culture was further marginalized. The 22,519 American cigar factories in 1910 had plummeted to half that in 1920, when Consalvos arrived, and they diminished to a mere 4157 by 1938, radically altering the American market and severely limiting the cigar band collagist's palette. By 1935, production levels had returned to those of 1891, when Consalvos was born, falling to half of the dizzying peak of some 8,730,000,000 cigars manufactured in the U.S. in 1920. Manufacturing centers like Ybor City and Southeastern Pennsylvania were profoundly affected by these Depression-era drops.

The CMIU—going strong since 1864—floundered in the wake of the 1919 introduction of the first fully automated cigar-rolling machine, which could roll more cigars in an hour than most cigarmakers could in a whole day. The white, male, German CMIU also suffered from its own obstinate unwillingness to admit the growing post-WWI population of female workers—“by 1920 women accounted for 58% of the labor force, and the CMIU was visibly in retreat.”¹⁰⁸ But Consalvos may not have even been associated with a union during his time in the North, since the CMIU was notoriously weak in Philadelphia and Southeastern Pennsylvania, and not much more prominent in New York. Undaunted by the waning popularity and status of cigars and cigar band collage, Consalvos negotiated his Cuban heritage and his new American home by using cigar factory scraps to frame a busy bricolage of American themes. Maybe Consalvos moved from Key West to the mainland immediately in a rush to get North to these increasingly grim conditions. But perhaps he did spend some time in Miami and Panama City, as Helena Martí supposed.

¹⁰⁸ Cooper 1987: 3

Miami in the 1920s did not support a Cuban American community or cigar industry of any note, so a longterm residence there seems improbable—but then again, judging from his collages, Consalvos was nothing if not unconventional and unpredictable, so maybe he found in Miami an appealing challenge. Although I have discovered no compelling evidence of an established industry then, there were likely a few *chinchales* in the Miami area. The main obstacle to any Miami manufacturing was distribution, since rail travel came limited and late with city incorporation in 1896, and its roads were not paved until 1920. In the 1920s Miami was evolving from an isolated “provincial”¹⁰⁹ backwater on an inhospitable sliver of limestone surrounded by the Everglades and still embroiled in quarrels with Seminoles and Spaniards, into a desirable, glamorous vacation destination for American tourists. But in its inchoate stages the town tended to attract wealthy Northerners and working class African Americans—the two groups strictly segregated—far more than Caribbean immigrants. (It was only over thirty years later, after the Cuban Revolution, that a massive influx of exiled Cubans helped rebuild Miami as an imaginary pre-Castro Havana.) Enterprising entrepreneurs like Henry Flagler, George Merrick, and John Collins endeavored to drag Dade County out of the howling wilderness of the Florida frontier into an deliberately exoticized wonderland of mannerist architecture (later to be outshone by an Art Deco explosion in the 1930s.) Merrick’s Spanish colonial and Mediterranean Revival themed Coral Gables and developer Glenn Curtiss’s even more fanciful planned architectural theme communities—most bizarrely, the “Moorish” Opa-Locka and the Southwestern Pueblo style Miami Springs—would probably have captivated Consalvos’s idiosyncratic design sensibility and appreciation for the absurd. His work reflects an interest in architecture and architectural hybrids, and at least once he constructed a mosque-like structure out of postage

¹⁰⁹ Harper 1996: 282

stamps and foil (FJC 88). But he would have been hard pressed to find lasting employment there as a cigarmaker, and the building boom's plentiful construction jobs (and almost everything else) ground to a halt after the near total devastation of the 1926 hurricane.

Panama City, Consalvos's other purported Florida residence, appears a similarly perplexing place for Consalvos to live. Today it lies in the garish shadow of Panama City Beach, a spring break destination on the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida Panhandle, alternately known as the Emerald Coast or the Redneck Riviera, depending on who you ask. Despite a late start—it was only incorporated in 1909—Panama City burned brightly for about a decade as an important lumber and mill region that drew loggers, turpentiners, and moonshiners. The wild boom town thrived from the turn of the century through the late 1920s, due in part to the Kraft paper mill and Spann Brothers Turpentine and German-American Lumber Co. in nearby Fountain, Florida. Although its Latino population has historically been negligible, Panama City might have once been another North Florida cigar manufacturing satellite city, an Anglo analog to Cuban American exile communities in Jacksonville and Ocala. A kindly librarian in the Panama City Public Library showed me a cigar box from the Cora McQuagge Cigar Factory in Fountain, probably dating to the 1920s. Perusing ten years of the *Panama City Pilot* (1920-1930) and the earliest city directory on file (1935) turned up a number of local factories that mass produced inexpensive, low-quality 5-cent stogies while Consalvos might have lived there: Florida Favorite Cigars, Fountain Cigars, the Panama City Cigar Co., and St. Andrew's Cigar Co. Cigars this cheap—Fountain Cigars advertised 2 for 5 cents—would have been machine or mold-made, and taking into account the vast preponderance of cheaper, mass-produced brand labels in his work, we

might assume that Consalvos could not afford to be picky about employment, or was not trained in the Clear Havana Spanish hand method.

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Consalvos riddles his collages with references to Cuba Libre and La Revolución, and all of the works reference cigarmaking more palpably by virtue of their very materiality. At least five pieces that incorporate Mexican posters or broadsides also explicitly reference union and labor rights. A poster for the Congreso Continental Americano por la Paz, held in Mexico City in September 1949 contains the slogan “Ganaremos La Paz Si Luchamos Por Ella” (“We will achieve peace if we fight for it”) below an image of a worker with hammer raised, beside his family (FJC 86). Consalvos has overlaid images of a Native American girl in dishabille, a soda spokesmodel, and Congress. A companion piece (both are similarly framed) depicts another working-class family threatened with the business end of a bayonet. Demanding help, the poster’s slogan reads “Paremos La Agresion a La Clase Obrera!” (“Let’s Stop the Aggression toward the Working Class!”) (FJC 87). A row of real matches along the bottom edge of the collage adds to the incendiary message. Another Mexican print takes the form of a broadside ballad, the “Corrido de la Expropiacion Petrolera” (“Ballad of the Oil Expropriation”), juxtaposing an image of workers spraying mosquitoes federales with poison (or oil?) with a lily-white couple in evening dress discussing “Home and Foreign Gossip” (FJC 199).¹¹⁰ A classic cartoon image of a grinning skeleton—again with the requisite wife and infant nearby—bowed under a heap of crucifixes marked “High Prices,” “Scarcity,” “Monopolies,” and “Rising Dollar” accompanies more images of luxury (a car, a

¹¹⁰ This piece also features a signed portrait of Díaz Miron.

pocket watch, white wingtips, a tuxedoed man.) An inset pornographic playing card and the slogan “Soy Puro Mexicano!” (I am pure Mexican!) complete the picture (FJC 201). Finally, a verso collage articulates “La Revolucion” and a scene of a strike or demonstration—the banners read “*Irrigacion, Tierras, Educacion*”—to a walrus-headed Statue of Liberty and a caricature of Andrew Carnegie in a Scottish kilt, surrounded by money bags, art, and other lucre. You would be hard pressed to misread which side of the labor-capital divide Consalvos chose.

– INTERLUDE –

Comic Yankee, criticism contest winners, far-famed gladiators, button-hole workers:

How can I reach you? Are you on our mailing list? (Stammering cured by mail.)

I will make you prosperous. Perhaps you have noticed that my creations are charged with cash. Emergency money, candy money. Perhaps you understand my romantic madness, madness in my veins. Perhaps you have found some benefit in my money-play. Magic eye's on you. Encourage American arts, the art of being disagreeable.

A double awakening. This looks silly but has a serious purpose. Can you guess it? Singularly diabolical appearances. Almost hobbylike effects continue to prevail. And so. You could call it a hobby, like worship of the dead is a hobby to some. The national pastime.

Is part time work the answer? Evenings at my desk, an oily wood beneath an oilier wood, beneath my stained fingers. Stronghold of peace and contentment. A *rolero*'s board frames a photograph nicely: nine inches by fifteen inches by two and a half inches thick. A different sort of piecework—patchwork—far from *chinchals y galeras*. Claro claro, claro, colorado claro, colorado, colorado maduro, maduro, raton, pajizo, sangre de toro.¹¹¹ An arched slice here, a “right” then a “left,” not unlike the veins of a *capa*.¹¹² These are simple models.

Bad habits, cleanly habits. My dear family does not approve, the only real sacrifice. Abstinence is a sacrifice. The boomerang of sacrifice. Foolish family, family in transition, marriage and the family. Early American family life. The supreme test of a woman. Tremendous trifles in smart service.

Why experiment? Why do we scratch when we don't have fleas? Why worry about baggage? Why pagans? Why indeed. Why not? Why do you make me care? Suppose nobody cared.

True confessions – I am The Delineator, The Fun Doctor. There is a reason why. The shadow of life. Modern living. The mysterious world within you. A man-made world. Natural and man-made curios. Another language. Jokes and

¹¹¹ Various tobacco leaf shades of wrappers.

¹¹² The veining direction on a wrapper leaf—known as a “right” or a “left”—determined how to roll the cigar, much like formal, directional, and geometric aspects of an element cut from a book determine how to incorporate it into a collage.

stories, droll stories. Curious inventions. Exploded whims. Exotic pictorials.
Eureka, beauty! You too can have beauty. Beauty and wonders...

When the tinker came along. When men seek adventure. Artists and jokers.
Self-taught. Amateur professionals peeping at nature. Who's who in the brain
trust?

The Art Gallery. Thieves often operate under the guise of borrowers. Rob
Peter to pay Paul. Showmanship vs. salesmanship. Many humbugs exposed.
Dangerous counterfeits. Look out for the swindlers. How to avoid swindlers?
Organs of taste. Atrophy of the brain. Good god, save your eyes! Slaying the
Philistine. Incarnate human gods!

How have I done it, you may ask? Brain-forcing.

Sin otro particular, le saluda atentamente,

Tío Lipe

CHAPTER FOUR

* CREATOR *

“Patriotic Panoramic Pageantry”: Cigar Labels and Material Culture – “A Paper Wedding”: Accumulation, *Horror Vacui*, and the recursive contexts of collage – “Artists and Jokers”: Modernist Analogs – “Sad But Noisy Rebels”: The Poets of *Modernismo* – “The Meaning of Words” vs. “The Word as Such”: On Visual Poetry

“Patriotic Panoramic Pageantry”: Cigar Labels and the Material Culture of *Tabaqueros*

Most collectors of tobacciana in Tampa—and there are quite a few—seem to have at least a few cigar band and label collages, although few know much about who made them.¹¹³ For \$16.99 you can buy a mass-produced cigar band collaged picture frame in an Ybor City gift shop, a sleek simulacrum of a working-class artifact. However, the history of this vernacular art form, briefly widespread but transitory and never taken very seriously by culture brokers, has been largely forgotten. At Perfectos, Mike Turbeville’s antique collages reside on a roll-top desk between a lifesize cardboard cutout of Paris Hilton and a landscape painting by prolific Miami Mediterranean Revival architect and artist Phineas Paist, one of Turbeville’s non-cigar obsessions. Mike explains that cigar band collages frequently served

¹¹³ And in a sense, before the arrival of 1950s box wraps, cigar boxes were themselves collaged by hand, covered with various labels: ins and outs, edging, ends, flaps, top sheets, et al.

as gifts or commemorative objects, mnemonic devices both personal (for a sweetheart) and political (the equivalent of presidential and patriotic plaques). Often the collages pinwheel kaleidoscopically around a central image of honor, whether George Washington, the girl next door, or a photo of a dearly departed pal. Cigarmakers as well as serious smokers made their own collages, as you would expect, but with the irrepressible rise of the cigar as a symbol of wealth, style, and “class” par excellence, the fashion-conscious hobbyist could also purchase a prefab kit from the back pages of a magazine or from a tobacconist. The most common format was a clear glass plate, tray, or vessel of some kind, often sealed with a piece of felt or velvet behind the collage, embalming the ephemera. Surfaces varied somewhat from the small-scaled standard, but cigar label expert, tobacciana historian, and National Cigar Museum curator Tony Hyman told me that in over fifty years of collecting, he has never seen anything approaching the scope or sophistication of Consalvos’s work.¹¹⁴ And yet, having discussed the artist’s political orientation and influences, it follows to consider some potential visual inspirations as well, of which cigar band collage seems an obvious forerunner.

Uncle Lipe, it seems, found merely a departure point in this tradition—his collages recall Dada, Surrealist, and Pop collage more than the more homogeneous cigar label antecedents from which he might have derived his practice. (Also, Consalvos rarely used actual cigar bands, preferring the border-length box edging and larger box labels to augment materials gathered primarily from other sources.) Due to distraction, Mike Turbeville had not finished his collaged guitar—which uses some of the same gilded Tampa Nugget labels that appear in Consalvos’s collages—but the basic resemblance is uncanny. Supplies were once easy to come by, as they would have been for Consalvos decades earlier. Mike described

¹¹⁴ From a personal telephone conversation, 2005.

watching bales of cigar labels creep down the street like tumbleweeds in the 1960s and 1970s, before Ybor City's urban renewal and gentrification; bands and edging were so plentiful he and his friends used them as confetti at parties. Because of its abundance and limited graphic nature, edging remains the least collectable variety of label, and Mike sent me on my way with a ream of Gallatin and Banker's Bouquet edging identical to some used by Consalvos himself.

Although today the world of Cuban American *tabaqueros* is more renowned for its culture of performing arts than for its visual art or material culture, certain surviving artifacts, though few, defy that retrospective sense of total imbalance. After all, artistry thrives within, not parallel to, or outside, the everyday; or as Raymond Williams put it, "Art is ratified, in the end, by the fact of creativity in all our living."¹¹⁵ Paul Camp at the Special Collections Library of the University of South Florida-Tampa, a voluble man in an immaculate white *guayabera*, took time to show me some pre-World War I "German Lover" brand cigar band collages in the collection, one of which featured at its heart a strangely melancholy photograph of a group of young swimmers. It reminded me of some of the dour family portraits in Consalvos's oeuvre. More unexpected were a few examples of pillow shams and mini-quilts or fabric collages. Dating to around 1900, these unusual objects were stitched together from promotional silk ribbons originally packaged inside cigar boxes. The Ybor City Museum holds a tiny souvenir doll constructed from coconut chips and cigar bands, probably from around the same era. Consalvos's use of what appear to be bingo boards and numbered lottery tickets may echo the importance of *bolita* in the *tabaquero* community.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Williams 1961: 37

¹¹⁶ Stetson Kennedy writes: "'The chief industries of Ybor City are cigar-making and bolita, and the chief recreations are love-making and arguing.' That saying has been popularized by the Chamber of

A wildly popular gambling game that had spawned a local empire by the 1920s—often the subject of corruption and even murder—*bolita* involved sets of handmade, black-numbered ivory balls tossed from person to person inside velvet bags.

But beyond cigar label collages themselves, the closest links of *tabaquero* material culture to Consalvos I have discovered are, oddly, El Circulo Cubano's play scripts (stamped with "Seccion de Declamacion"). Ybor City in the 1920s fostered a flourishing theatrical scene, rivaled only by cinema.¹¹⁷ Hundreds of actors trod the boards in bustling Tampa, often at the clubs, and in the 1930s the Centro Asturiano was home to the local Federal Theater Project, the only Spanish-language theater group in the U.S. at the time. Unsurprisingly, Manuel Aparicio, a famous *lector*, directed the company. The productions disappeared the nights they closed, of course, but hundreds of El Circulo Cubano's scripts survived, most heavily annotated by hand, retyped, and lovingly rebound, much like Consalvos' *Poesías* scrapbook. The bindings display a pervasive impulse toward thrifty bricolage—these dog-eared, reconditioned books, most originally published between 1890 and 1930, are themselves ravishing collages. *Robo en Despoblado* has been rebound in floral wrapping paper or wallpaper and a Western union ad; Armando Bronca's *La Maldita Pequeña* is enclosed within a University Loose Leaf ledger; and *El Bateo*, by Antonio Paso and Antonio Dominguez, is bound in Ybor City ads for pharmacies and tailors in both English and Spanish. The scripts recall artist James Castle's homemade code and comic books bound in

Commerce, but the inhabitants tell a different story: 'We live in Ybor City because we can't afford to live nowhere else.'" (Kennedy 1942: 323)

¹¹⁷ Ybor City social club theaters transformed into cinemas on a periodic basis. And the magnificently restored 1926 Tampa Theatre, a Mannerist atmospheric cinema designed like a Mediterranean grotto beneath a twinkling night sky, has to be seen to be believed. An organist and his antique Wurlitzer provide pre-show entertainment, only to sink into the stage as the lights dim and the constellations brighten. Several film stars and movie ads appear in Consalvos's collages.

salvaged trash paper and cardboard. Such artifacts speak to the pervasiveness of bricolage in modern America, the aesthetic in frugality evident in so much vernacular art of this century.

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Just as crucial as an examination of the material culture of laboring *tabaquero* communities is a probing of the tobacco industry's capitalist, commercial visual culture—and more broadly, the visual representations of Cuba and Cubanness (*lo cubano*) in North American popular culture—which provided raw materials and riffs for Consalvos's collages.¹¹⁸ During the American cigar-box label's 1890-1930 heyday, tobacco advertising was responsible not only for enormously popularizing the chromolithographic printing process on this side of the Atlantic, but also for developing its own distinctively wispy, nostalgic aesthetic, "drawing on the tradition of 19th-century Academic Realism with Victorian-Baroque embellishments."¹¹⁹ Before the transition to photomechanical printing and embossing, cigar advertising accounted for a full 80 percent of all lithographic printing in the United States, which was the favored method of color print advertising.¹²⁰ "People had gone, in the words of a 19th century lithographer, 'picture crazy.'"¹²¹ Interestingly, Philadelphia, Boston, and particularly New York emerged as the country's commercial printing centers, which helps explain how Consalvos got his hands on such a surplus of labels. For the most

¹¹⁸ As interesting is the history of Cuban *marquillas*, the smaller, but often compositionally denser images on cigarette packaging, but I'm afraid this is a topic for a separate study.

¹¹⁹ Harper 1996: 284

¹²⁰ See Leto 2005.

¹²¹ Ibid.

part, label designers of fancy Clear Havana brands and gnarly, stubby stogies alike hewed close to a conservative visual idiom of nostalgic romanticism, exoticism, and primitivism (in content, not style), demonstrating the steadfast articulation of cigar smoking to class aspirations, respectability, and masculinity. After all, powerful corporate tobacco interests controlled label design, not *tabaqueros*.

But the relatively unregulated, competitive world of cigar label design and lithography was in other ways often as wild and woolly as Consalvos's collages, with American brands stealing names and images from Cuban and even other U.S. brands in a constant quest for novelty, safe salaciousness, and especially topicality. Manufacturers likewise lifted images from popular artists like James Audobon and Maxfield Parrish.¹²² Despite a conservatism, nostalgia, and representational, decorative design sensibility rooted in the nineteenth century, this was also culture of appropriation, essentially modern in its participation in advanced capitalism, consumerism, and celebrity worship. Consalvos' aesthetic extrapolates that curious nostalgia-newness dichotomy—a dichotomy that Joseph Cornell also embraced and extended—further into avant-garde modernism, while retaining a certain retrospective, romantic, and nostalgic tinge, at least in terms of appropriated and undermined material.

Sex, celebrity, and patriotism sold well, and there existed no official regulations on what cigar labels could say or portray. Consalvos's many female nudes—many of whom became hermaphroditic depending on how he beheaded and reheaded them—are cousins to the thousands of idealized nymphs on cigar labels. Many of these prurient, sexist images are also baldly racist, placing anatomically exaggerated Native Americans and African Americans in preposterously idyllic Edens and plantations. Consalvos's consciousness of

¹²² Personal conversation with historian Tom Hambright at the Key West Public Library.

these nasty overtones surely influenced his ironic use of appropriated racist imagery. Aunt Jemimas and minstrels recur in his work, as do Indian chiefs and maidens. One busy blue collage, suggestively titled “Hazardous Exhibitions Replete with Jungle Folk,” pairs “Dusky Belles” with “Witch Doctors” and “Cannibals,” featuring stereotypically racialized images of a black organist with tribal earrings and a kneeling Native American man as Elizabethan actors on a stage set background. They fraternize with a pantsless Hitler who holds an infant Washington (FJC 625), among other freaks. A bass drum’s geometric patterns radiate from a large theatrical photo of an Indian maiden, crowned with an edging headdress and adorned with George Washington jewelry tangled among her cowries (FJC 572). A “Diplomatic Adventure” finds another Washington, this time in lingerie, hanging from a housecat’s jaws; on the verso an illustration of an Indian warrior covered in tattoos stands on Rococo putti, holding a “Keep This Coupon” stub (FJC 545).

Cigar labels included almost every possible historical and pop cultural theme or famous person you can imagine. Washington and Lincoln were popular—one label featured “Los Dos Presidentes,” Washington and Palma—but more surprising (white) personages would also have appealed to Consalvos: Samuel Gompers, Ivanhoe, Julia Marlowe, Karl Marx, Henry Miller, Tom Mix, Eugen Sandow, Rembrandt van Rijn, Peter Paul Rubens, John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson, Leonardo da Vinci, and Walt Whitman, to name just a few cameos. Artists’ styles were appropriated, as were poets’ verses and actresses’ likenesses. Few customized vanity labels survive, but most of these are either commemorative in nature and occasion-specific—baby’s birthday, dad’s retirement, sis’s wedding—or group-specific, as in Masonic boxes. (Speaking of which, Consalvos did seem particularly fond of the Masonic eye-pyramid on the dollar bill.) Political figures, battle scenes, and national

monuments like the White House offered idealized images of nation, state, and governmental and military power with which the smoker could associated himself. Tampa and Key West *tabaqueros* who owned their own *chinchales* did not have to hide their political sentiments, so their labels became slightly more revolutionary, but for the most part labels presented a safe, simplified, iconic, and unironic politics of patriotism, nationalism, and even jingoism, often in allegorical form. Some pre-1900 labels portrayed Cuba Libre, but usually anthropomorphized as a threatened female or a child protected by Uncle Sam or Lady Liberty.

To a great extent, cigar labels were simply a specialized, formulaic reiteration of stereotypical depictions of Cuba common in the United States; codependent and mutually influential, the two veins of representation parallel and occasionally converge. From cigar label art to Cuba-themed songs to tourist literature to *I Love Lucy*, the dominant stereotype was one of an adorably hotheaded or passionate “Latin” character living in a paradoxically pristine state of nature that was somehow simultaneously a cosmopolitan site of (im)moral license and sensuality.¹²³ This sanitized primitivism, exoticism, and eroticism reeked of a nostalgia and condescension that many Cubans found repugnant, an obstacle on the path to liberty and sovereignty; it was, after all, at odds with the modernity they desired. Frances Connelly explains the European conception of “primitive” art as “a cultural construct that emerged in European discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,”¹²⁴ via Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico and Enlightenment universalism, by which “the

¹²³ Lou Pérez, lecture notes, passim.

¹²⁴ Connelly 1999: 111

classical norm cast the ‘primitive’ as a dark mirror image of itself.”¹²⁵ This dialectical otherness sold cigars, slaves, and many other things too. Later on, European modernists set about pilfering “primitive” art to augment and authenticate their own radical breaks from Western formal convention. (It happens today too, with the fashionable influence of so-called “outsiders” on more advantaged artists.) The discourse of primitivism was a colonial mechanism for controlling Cuba, the wood that stoked the colonialist engine, and “the claim to modernity could be sustained only insofar as the challenges to the notion of Cuba as civilized were eliminated.”¹²⁶ “Cuba always seemed among the first to adopt and display modernity,” and so Cubans resented these representations and the implied pressure to *extranjerizarse* (become foreign), to fully adopt all North American discursive modes.¹²⁷ Cubans aspired to modernity, but not exclusively on North American terms.

Felipe Consalvos reversed, inverted, subverted, parodied, détourned, re-routed, and made surreal the typical and stereotypical advertising and travel literature, posters, and songs produced in the U.S. about Cuba. And so we have a ukelele pasted over with over ten brands of cigar box edging, one of Consalvos’s several straight-faced attempts at replicating the traditional cigar band collage style (FJC 451). However, the entire back of the instrument’s body is covered by a single glossy illustration, in vivid, woozy color, of a young woman with a red flower in her hair, large hoop earrings, and a silk scarf over her red dress, smilingly flirtatiously—a depiction of the sensual Latin girl. Consalvos adds just one detail: a text caption falling from her red lips that reads: “Used Boogie Woogie.” A similarly restrained, abstractly collaged miniature guitar showcases a pair of 3d glasses on the front; its back

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 9

¹²⁶ Pérez 1999: 162

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 286

contains an image of a stylish, smiling couple in formalwear, dancing languorously on a field of tropical flowers. Consalvos has placed a bottle of “elixir” in their clasped hands, and he labels the intoxicating scene itself in bold across the lady’s lithe torso: “Stammering” (FJC 144). These tropes of a tropical, enticing Cuba were exactly that to Consalvos—“used” and “stammering,” stuck in incoherent, archaic repetition.

But this binary between Northern representation and lived reality struck higher stakes than style and sexuality. A particularly arresting verso collage superimposes a “Bank Roll” label and an immense Teddy Roosevelt onto a diptych of two formally twinned photographs (FJC 587). Fleshy female sunbathers in repose on their towels mirror a ghastly scene of slain bodies sprawled on steps, children and adults alike, clothes torn asunder to reveal bare legs startling similar to the bathing beauties’ pale limbs. Beneath this chilling scene of human wreckage is a photo of a “Family Circus.” A father guides his little son across a tightrope to his mother’s open arms, the acrobats’ stances eerily replicating the broken doll-angle poses of the dead bodies above. On the recto side a ravenous zombie straddles a map of the United States while Roosevelt and Washington watch this “Circus,” a “Carnival of Fun.” “The Marauders Are Coming,” warns the caption.

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American avant-garde art and design have offered little overt resistance to this smoky infiltration of idealized icons, despite—or perhaps because of—tobacciana’s kitschy traffic in exoticism and deliberately “old-fashioned” tropes.¹²⁸ Indeed, the two modes have often

¹²⁸ Harper 1996: 291

comfortably commingled in popular packaging design.¹²⁹ Numerous artists have embraced or at least propagated tobacco design motifs as ironic inspiration, or as fodder for sly assessment or appropriation. From Stuart Davis' early-1920s paintings based on tobacco graphics through Philip Guston's goof-sinister hooded smokers in the 1960s and '70s to Richard Prince's landmark early-1980s Marlboro Man appropriation photographs, American modernists have not only been fueled by nicotine, but have responded enthusiastically to the tobacco industry's alluring (and addictive) glut of material culture. But what is missing from this art-historical dialogue on tobacciana has been an actual tobacco laborer's perspective, someone subjectively qualified to engage in the discourse of cigar production as well as consumption. In general, the phenomenology of the everyday—and in this case, the cigarmaker's role in the manufacture and dissemination of its own coded visual culture, its own stylistic mode—has been neglected or segregated from discussions of modernism. If appropriation—that civil word for stealing—is a corollary of modernity and modern consumerism, what could a cigarmaker reveal with his or her own expressive artifacts on the subject?

“A Paper Wedding”: Accumulation, *Horror Vacui*, and the recursive contexts of collage

“One does not choose what is modern, one accepts it.”¹³⁰ Or so wrote the great poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913 about Picasso's *papiers collés*, the “stuck papers” that he and Braque, and then many followers, fiddled with and fought over in the first two

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ G. Apollinaire, “Picasso et les papiers collés,” *Montjoie*, Paris, March 14, 1913. Quoted in Breunig, LeRoy, ed. *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*. New York: Viking Press, 1972.

decades of the 20th century. (“*Papiers collés*” provided the etymological root for “collage.”) It is hard not to agree with such an appealingly elliptical riddle, and this shrewd statement seems to address directly the subject at hand, collage as both modernist working method and as metaphor for the media-saturated condition of modernity. In Consalvos method and metaphor coincide. But are choice and acceptance necessarily always distinct? Perhaps when it comes to art, or the components of modernity for that matter, choosing and accepting are best considered as nested processes, a dialectic of agency analogous to control and chance. (For instance, although it only lasted a few generations, Tampa cigarmakers chose a version of the modern conspicuously different from the normative, supposedly monolithic Anglo-American version.) It is the sculptural-ephemeral process of collage, its basis in polysemic appropriation and juxtaposition as opposed to germinal rendering or discrete construction, that largely defines it (especially in those early years.) Affect and more material formal attributes alike visibly inform the accumulative act at the core of collage. Its construction is limpid, its choices ferreted from chance encounters and associations, but often concealed beyond the briefest *trompe l’oeil* effects.

For that reason, collage is perhaps the most egalitarian mode of visual art associated with modernism or the elitist lineage of avant-garde “fine art.” Collage has long been a staple of elementary school art curricula, and even more specifically vernacular versions like memory jugs have occasionally appeared in the classroom too. Quilting, a fabric collage tradition practiced in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe, has in recent years enjoyed a renaissance with the stunning success and controversy of the Gee’s Bend exhibitions. Software like Photoshop has simplified, accelerated, and further democratized photomontage and collage activities, and the easy forum of the internet offers a public, vernacular venue for

them to percolate and prosper. As a medium collage delights in its democracy—it flourishes in the natural habitat of teenagers’ bedrooms, for example—and in its principled recycling of detritus, its re-embrace of the everyday and the castaway. Collage delights in the very fact of its transparency of assemblage from disparate sources. Frequently (as in Consalvos’s art) the dimensional and integral illusionism of even the most lauded paper collages is fleet, plainly and obviously false, which is not to say that non-photomontage collage is unsophisticated. Quite the contrary: it exists at the wobbly fulcrum of painting and sculpture, representation and abstraction, vernacular and academic, necessity and desire, control and chance, and indeed, choice and acceptance. The contiguity and discontinuity of found materials establish and smash associations, firing and splitting synapses between images and between texts. In France Apollinaire deemed the essential immediacy, presence, and “realness” of the appropriated collage surface *énumération*¹³¹; in Russia linguist and critic Victor Schlovsky coined the word *faktura* to describe a similar quality of surface density and palpable materiality. Both terms are notoriously slippery, but if we can apply them at all, we can find these vital modernist characteristics in the strata of Consalvos’s collages, thick with recontextualized materials both easy and illicit.

Just as choice and acceptance of the materials of modernity are inextricably nested procedures, so too are the origins and perpetuation of collage essentially recursive. Although historicized and periodicized as coeval with Euro-American “high” modernism, an academic avant-garde innovation ascribed to the Picasso/Braque juggernaut and soon mastered by many others in Cubist, Dada, Surrealist, Pop, and Beat camps, the wide-ranging phenomenon of collage has no lucid genesis. Modernist collage was a specific formal technique developed by specialist-artists in reaction to Western European easel painting; it shared some of

¹³¹ Taylor 2004: 9

painting's compositional tactics and strengths, while evading or deconstructing some of its hang-ups and limitations. "Appropriation was central to the modernist mission at least since Marcel Duchamp, even if obviously borrowed from traditional (folk?) compositional practices of incorporating available materials, both traditional and novel. Here again the entwined nature of 'folk' and 'fine,' their common kinship with bricolage, outshines any dissonance between the two."¹³² Montage as a general artistic principle occurs throughout history, transcending social boundaries and hierarchies that would exclude non-normative or vernacular permutations. Its textbook articulation to an elite cadre of aesthetic revolutionaries belies its vernacular axes, which remain clouded and unmapped because of collage's embeddedness in the everyday and the vernacular imagination, in the domestic production of women and children, in private commemoration and hobbyist activities. Collage has hidden in plain sight. Consalvos's method, as involved as it was with his day job and with three-dimensional surfaces, fixes it to the more fundamental notion of bricolage. One arm of anthropology situates collage as a deeply human impulse:

The French structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss defined bricolage as a kind of resourceful itch to combine existing materials in order to create something new. However limited that strict structuralist term may sound today in the context of the dissolving cultural dichotomies we've already discussed, the word has outpaced its anthropological coinage to make itself more universal. In an art historical context, the term is closely related to the more familiar and user-friendly "collage" or "assemblage," but for Lévi-Strauss, bricolage was something far broader and more diffuse, fundamentally useful in explaining the patterns of mythological thought. For us, bricolage offers a way to understand the appropriative elements of Consalvos's works and how he coded them into communications. Consalvos summoned new meanings from the trashed, commandeered, or fugitive remains of fuller, rounder images and sentences, such that the remixed parts became a new whole, an amalgam of visual and linguistic meanings. As an appropriationist of commercial media, he

¹³² See Greaves 2008. The preceding argument shares language and ideas with my forthcoming 2008 James Castle essay for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Characters More Comely to the Eye," as do the following indented paragraphs.

blurred the porous boundaries between public and private, between “‘art’ and ‘everyday life’ in mediated societies.”¹³³

Appropriation and recontextualization allowed Consalvos to wipe away the “film of familiarity” from commodified images and texts, poeticizing the mundane and market-mastered. Schklovsky called this tactic *ostrananie*, or “strangemaking.”¹³⁴

As singular (or strange) as it stands, Consalvos’s oeuvre mines a constellation of incidental influences, threading its own quiet path through the thicket of mid-twentieth-century material culture, particularly those piles of wasted paper and mail that today we throw into blue or orange government bins to recycle, albeit in a different sense. Mass culture—the hegemony, dominant culture, whatever—can yield private vernacular effects, either through deliberate appropriation or the osmosis accompanying constant exposure. (Of course, that catalytic equation is reversible too – just look at today’s online culture.) Print culture provided Consalvos with a template for scrutinizing the mysteries of North American market culture, and in so doing, delimiting his own hybrid Cubamerican identity. As such, his art sounds at two distinct registers: home and horizon. A paper polyphony entwines Consalvos’s private whispers about domestic spaces and rituals, his rehearsals of identity, with public messages meant to sell or standardize. The works function not only through unilateral statements and staccato headlines, but in a tender, dialogic counterpoint – now harmonious, now dissonant – that reuses and redeems the castaway glut of printed matter endemic to his (or any) generation: cigar labels, dead letters, mail-order catalogues, beer advertisements, promotional photographs, sheet music, and wallpaper (like Braque!). These banal backgrounds of published text and image—sometimes disjunctive, sometimes hilariously or eerily apt—serve as experimental fields, testing-grounds on which Consalvos could arrange additional strata of his own images and texts, which arrogate advertising aesthetics while destroying or obfuscating the slogans and the hard sell. The result is a palimpsest of rendered superimpositions, pasted sedimentation, and excisions, at once personal and public. Through accumulation, the accretion of text on text, the pieces accrue a double resonance. The completed work both underscores and obscures the hijacked and transfigured source material.¹³⁵

¹³³ Final quote from Morris and Frow 1999: xxviii. Block quote from Greaves 2008, “Characters Comely to the Eye.”

¹³⁴ Percy Shelley spoke of using poetic language to wipe away the “film of familiarity” (see Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 10).

¹³⁵ The two indented paragraphs above are excerpted from my 2008 essay on James Castle, but altered to reflect Consalvos. I composed parts of that soon-to-be published essay in tandem with this thesis manuscript, while an M.A. student at UNC, and so there are vestiges of considerable conceptual overlap, in particular generalized meditations on vernacular appropriation, vernacular modernism, and the history of visual poetry (see below.)

But is modernist collage, the form that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century at the fingertips of white European virtuosos, just one particular paper-and-paint rendition of bricolage? Not exactly. Was it new? Maybe. To venture a distinction, theoretically the bricoleur combined disparate elements of value or power to produce an object of enhanced, conglomerate aesthetic and economic value, a solution; the modern(ist) collagist located value not in the ordinary materials themselves, or in any pragmatic solution, but in their very transformation through appropriation and juxtaposition into a surface of problematized aesthetic novelty and expressive individual authorship. The avant-garde collagist sought problems, not solutions.¹³⁶ Still, the distinction is rather semantic and subtle. Approaches to problematization aside, economic and aesthetic considerations alike often drive both bricoleur and collagist toward innovation, so perhaps we should position collage as a subset of bricolage, a specific iteration of a universal desire for gestalt. Perhaps auto mechanic and avant-garde collagist are more alike than different, just tinkers of different trades.¹³⁷ (“When the Tinker Came Along”...)

One could claim that collage as we know it became possible with the invention of paper in China in the first few centuries B.C., but the medium remained in the rarefied realm of the decorative and courtly for millennia until printing technology advanced enough to make paper less of a luxury. Incipient examples of multilayered “stuck papers” exist throughout history, in twelfth-century Japanese calligraphic scrolls and in Medieval illuminated texts and coats-of-arms. But part of Picasso and Braque’s appropriative

¹³⁶ Though as far as problems go, it was Marcel Duchamp, himself a great—if perverse—bricoleur and collagist, who helpfully proclaimed, “There is no solution because there isn’t any problem.” (Duchamp 1973: 6)

¹³⁷ Thanks to Glenn Hinson for pushing me toward this comparison.

revolution was the “fine art” exaltation and sacralization of commonly available printed materials, formerly the province of clerks, housewives, and newsboys. The Medieval idea of art as communal, anonymous, traditional, and inseparable from craft collapsed under the weight of Renaissance individualism, humanism, and emphases on innovation and the rigid dichotomization of nature. And despite the best efforts of William Morris and other vocal opponents, European modernism ushered in a further calcification of the already irreparable ideological rift between craft and art, low and high, folk and fine.¹³⁸

Modernity stimulated a collage rage that cut across the social spectrum, but its use value registered differently among different groups of makers. For professional practitioners with an established market and a public audience, like avant-gardists Braque and Max Ernst and Eduardo Paolozzi, value resided in the liminality of the medium, in its processual potential for irony, shock, and fracture. For the teeming multitudes of vernacular collagists who created within the privacy of their homes for themselves and family and friends, perhaps value resided rather in sincerity and sentiment, in commemoration, collection, containment. Regardless of their unknowable intentions, it was these anonymous experimenters who made the modernist re-articulation possible in the first place. Early modernism was largely driven by primitivism, and it should come as no surprise that the academic set might sometimes have looked to vernacular material culture and everyday creativity for inspiration.¹³⁹ Where else would they look? (Hans Christian Andersen, that great champion and innovator of the folktale form, was one of the most famous early proponents of collage as an illustrative technique for his books.) The domestic worlds of scrapbook collage, quilting, and cigar band

¹³⁸ Here I follow the more expansive arguments of Gerald Pocius and Henry Glassie. See bibliography.

¹³⁹ See Connelly 1999 for a discussion of primitivism’s pivotal role in defining Euro-American modernism.

collage and the studio worlds of avant-garde collage were after all rather close, not interplanetary, so steadfast disavowals of potential vernacular and academic interpenetration are in vain. That rupture between kinds of creativity results in an artificial and spurious binary. The stratification of social and class differences is all too real, but when those selfsame hierarchical structures infiltrate our very evaluation of the things people make as an a priori assumption, then we look with halfblind eyes. Collage occupies a material cultural node where the early twentieth-century atelier and gallery and museum intersected with the nineteenth-century parlor and bedroom and factory; it is at this historical conjuncture that we can locate Consalvos. I do not mean to suggest any hierarchical verticality in this intersection of expressive culture, but rather a planar or dimensional confluence, a level flowing together of same-water streams. Henry Glassie's observations on this problematic of cultural study are among the most astute:

Society is not peaked like a pyramid or layered like a cake. It is composed of communities simultaneously occupying space and time at the same human level... All seem reasonable from within, strange from without, silent at a distance. The way to study people is not from the top down or the bottom up, but from the inside out, from the place where people are articulate to the place where they are not, from the place where they are in control of their destinies to the place where they are not.¹⁴⁰

Again, it comes down to control and eloquence. So let's start on the inside and work out. Collage is a site of modern Western visual eloquence, a technology of control over the encroaching commodification of everyday life. Collage is endemic to market culture, capitalist consumerism, and the media production of modernity, especially printed matter. It is a corollary and optical apotheosis of modernity, symptom as well as pneuma. With modernity's shining pledge of technology, shrinking distances, and new mediated modes of communication—radio, the telephone, television—plastered everywhere in the environment,

¹⁴⁰ Glassie 1995: 86

artists responded with montage, in music, film, and visual art. Consalvos's collages share a lineage and idiom with early modernist collage and text/art experiments as well as with the vernacular roots they wear on their raggedy sleeves of cigar box edging. In Europe and the Americas, the appropriative and accumulative act gradually accrued momentum and value over the course of the nineteenth century's sweeping technological, socioeconomic, and cultural changes. The Victorian era saw the onset of advanced capitalism and attendant developments in advertising—like the explosion in print media—concomitant with increasing urbanization and the birth of the modern metropolis, a site of heretofore unimaginable anxiety, wonder, and human and material density. The wide dissemination and democratization of affordable printed matter of all kinds following the emergence of the penny press, coupled with the invention of photography and then halftone printing, kindled the rapid proliferation and diversification of collage and collage-like activities. With this gradual banalization of printed matter, there was suddenly a lot more wastepaper, a surfeit of cheap and readily available paper featuring not only text but also engravings and photography.

The rapidly expanding urban-industrial capitalist society of the late nineteenth century restructured lived urban spatiality and domestic interiority along the new boundary lines of market culture, commodity, and the ubiquitous printed and illustrated advertisement. What cultural historian John Kasson has called a “semiotic breakdown” of information superfluity and sensory overload resulted in a “redefinition of the character of public and private life.”¹⁴¹ And what else is a collage but a simulated, or reassembled, semiotic breakdown? In some cases breakdown may have succumbed to pathology. In his *An*

¹⁴¹ Kasson 1990: 4, 70

Illustrated History of Interior Decoration from Pompeii to Art Nouveau (1981), designer Mario Praz describes the Victorian urge to embellish all available space inside the home as *horror vacui*, a fear of emptiness. This characteristically hectic visual clutter and density eventually reached critical mass, swelling outside of the home, onto the page and into the streets—or vice versa; again these processes are recursive—surely influencing the ascendancy of collage during that period. All these processes of advancing modernity were still accelerating in Consalvos’s youth and throughout his adulthood. Photographers Walker Evans and Eugène Atget captured both domestic and public conglomerations of text and image, homemade and readymade environmental collages, in kitchens and on street corners on both sides of the Atlantic (and in Evans’s case, in the Caribbean too, in Cuba.) Some of Eldzier Cortor’s lyrical paintings of the same era capture non-photographic impressions of the wall collages in Southern African American homes. Once again, assemblage genius Joseph Cornell provides a roughly contemporary counterpoint to Consalvos. Lynda Hartigan explains how “Cornell surrounded himself with volumes of stuff, telling proof that he had absorbed the *horror vacui* – or fear of empty spaces – associated with the design sensibility of the Victorian era in which his family lived.”¹⁴²

These tendencies would not have been foreign to Consalvos. The artist would have been greeted with an unprecedented bonanza of media, a lode of material to appropriate, upon his arrival in swarming U.S. cities like Philadelphia and New York, both quintessential centers of modern(ist) North American urban culture by the 1920s. But he would have already been well acquainted with a thoroughly modern and largely North Americanized Havana. Cuban visual culture was cosmopolitan, catholic, and steeped in U.S. popular

¹⁴² Hartigan 2003: 15

culture; proximity and coloniality had nurtured a healthy home appetite for North American images. Appropriation and juxtaposition—collage—was common then and now in Cuban homes as a decorative trope of respect, admiration, and longing.¹⁴³ Lou Pérez cites a number of evocative wall collages in Cuban homes, which, despite their later dates, conjure Consalvos’s ardent collisions of political and pop cultural avatars. Author Armando Couto remembers seeing a wall covered “with all the things available in the *Ten Cent*... the Sacred Heart of Jesus displaying his bleeding heart... alongside a photograph of [American film actor] Robert Taylor.” A 1932 Wenceslao Gálvez story called “Cinemanía” features a protagonist who “had amassed a vast collection of photographs” that he plastered in a special alcove in his home. In the 1990s, writer Pico Iyer described a domestic scene in Havana “where you could see Che and Michael Jackson and Jesus on the Cross all at once,” and Pérez himself recalls a 1991 visit to the home of a Habanero colleague “whose living room wall held photographs of José Martí, Camilo Cienfuegos, Ernesto Che Guevara, and Marilyn Monroe.”¹⁴⁴

Cuban vernacular analogs were not limited to the profane and political, but also existed in the sacred realms. Even if he had no formal relationship with the religion, Consalvos would likely have been somewhat familiar with the visual culture of Santería or

¹⁴³ However, there can be a subtle difference between juxtaposition and excised juxtaposition, or between wall decoration and collage: “One simply captures side-by-side positioning, where commentary emerges from the juxtaposition, while the other conjoins excised parts into altogether new wholes, and in so doing creates a wholly new commentary that erases the singular meanings of the originals and transforms them into evocations” (Glenn Hinson, personal correspondence.) Listing and linking images are not necessarily the same thing, but collagists such as Joseph Cornell, Gerhard Richter, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Ray Johnson have sought to efface this distinction with various scrapbook collocation techniques, establishing dialogic relations between integral images. Prague poet and artist Jiri Kolár deemed his technique of collage as side-by-side juxtaposition *confrontage* (Taylor 2004: 181).

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in and from Pérez 1999: 290.

orisha worship, which involves accumulation and appropriation of Catholic and indigenous objects and symbolism. Shrines, altars, and thrones share with Consalvos's work a visual density, decorative embellishment, and collage aesthetic—moreover, dollar bills and cigars often appear as offerings, and Consalvos's favorite colors of red, white, and black are associated with Elegba. Likewise, the essential masking nature of Santería—wherein Catholic saints and other icons act as secret analogs or metaphors for orishas—resonates with Consalvos's compulsive masking and unmasking of presidents as sanctioned, official faces for other entities and alter egos.

*

On the subject of faith and secrecy, there is perhaps “a paradox in the relative *privacy* of collage,” which steals glimpses from public view for private contemplation and fragmentation.¹⁴⁵ Inherently modern, the appropriative modality of the collagist is both populist and private. Collage encircles and exposes the lost, prodigal moments—minutes, days, years—between consumption or loss of constituent stuff and its reclamation. The collagist engages an economy of accumulation and loss when he or she picks up that pair of scissors, choosing which discarded bits to accept and how to recontextualize them again in privacy, how to make them relevant, new, personal. The nineteenth-century popularization of collage concurred with the cultural invention of privacy, first in spatial and domestic terms and then in judicial terms.¹⁴⁶ Brilliant and under-celebrated Californian collagist and painter

¹⁴⁵ Taylor 2004: 9

¹⁴⁶ An initial statement on privacy was written in 1890, but the “right to be let alone” was a longstanding maxim of the century.

Jess (born Burgess Collins) spoke of the essential privacy involved in making his 1950s *Tricky Cad* series, nonsensical “paste-ups” of *Dick Tracy* comics composed in a “process-oriented, aleatory way”: “for me, the *Tricky Cad* paste-ups were fun. Many, as I recall, were done at the kitchen table, and certainly not with the idea of a historical statement about collage.”¹⁴⁷ Montage seems a natural, even “fun” reaction to the media frenzy of modernity.

So it was with the (often female) Victorian compilers who filled “albums” or scrapbooks with mementoes, souvenirs, keepsakes, signatures, calling cards, letters, photographs, poems and all the minutiae of memory. (Remember that Consalvos kept his own obsessively annotated poetry scrapbook.) So it was with the makers of barnacled memory jugs, who pressed commemorative knickknacks into putty on vessels and other objects, an obscure but widespread practice.¹⁴⁸ So it was and still is in Brazil, where Nativity scenes, or *presépios*, are masterpieces of montage, featuring movie stars mugging among the Magi.¹⁴⁹ So it is with quilters across the globe, whose so-called “crazy quilts” gather and recycle scraps of fabric otherwise destined for the ragheap. So it was with the cigar band collagists who spun the colorful vestiges of their smokes around photographs of their darlings. And so it was, perhaps, with Consalvos, who may never have shown or distributed his collages to anyone outside his home. Somehow those chance dances with media, the introspective and improvisatory riffing central to the process of digesting and personalizing all that naked mass media, were for him a private affair. Consalvos’s collages mean through

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Taylor 2004: 122

¹⁴⁸ See my essay “I’m going home to Georgia in a jug” (Greaves 2008) for a more detailed analysis of the mysterious history of memory jugs.

¹⁴⁹ John Chasteen pointed out this correspondence to me, referring to Jorge Amado’s beautiful description of a Brazilian *presépio* collage in his novel *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*.

selection, careful cutting, and assembly—not unlike the cigarmaking process of selecting wrapper leaves to cut and roll around a filler bunch. Selectors chose the best leaves, sorting them into arcane categories according to affect and refined sensory instincts: touch, smell, appearance. In fact, the connoisseurship and craft of cigarmaking, an art that likewise relies on detailed and consistent slicing and gluing, a sculptural understanding, and a manual delicacy and dexterity (not to mention speed), would have provided the perfect aesthetic training for a collagist. Industrial mechanization in the 1920s erased much of the artistry and sensitivity from the work of a *tabaquero*, so perhaps Consalvos's collage practice represents an attempt to regain that artful engagement.

Of course, collage obviously caters to the imaginary in a way that cigarmaking cannot. For Consalvos, collage seemed a mystical mode of self-portraiture and introspection, a means of defining himself and negotiating his Cubamerican politics by defining and collapsing space with blade and glue. Gilles Deleuze wrote of a charged field of relationships, with the compositional elements arranged in a position bursting with possibility, and deemed this dynamism “intensity.” It is the potential energy of collage, its virtuality or web of appropriated “intensities” that simultaneously gesture toward old and new meanings, that attracts and enthralls. Within and out of this “semiotic breakdown” a distinctly modern imaginary unfolds. In the mapping of that imaginary, Consalvos meets the collage artists of modernism.

“Artists and Jokers”: Modernist Analogs

Strange bedfellows! On October 19, 2004, my colleagues Jina Valentine and Will Pym helped me heave a gut-bustingly heavy Plexiglas vitrine onto the reinforced hooks hanging beside a Consalvos collage. Encased inside this hermetically sealed, seemingly bombproof transparent box, which stood almost five feet tall, was an odd clot of classical statuary, architectural fragments, stunned owls, screen stars, anonymous ancestors, and vaguely erotic fractional nudes—the constituent images inside a congested collage with a fragile handmade frame. Entitled “The Chariot: Tarot VII,” this dynamic 1962 work by the California artist Jess was among his first large-scale color collages. One of my personal favorites of all post-World War II artists, Jess Collins was a character superficially worlds apart from Consalvos, with whom he briefly shared a pristine white wall in Harvard University’s Carpenter Center that one autumn. A gay radiochemist turned visual artist, Jess began his idiosyncratic career in the arts around 1949, when he dropped his surname and began experimenting with collages (he preferred the childish term “paste-ups”) and paintings of found imagery (he called them “translations”) and imaginary portraits, rendered in thick, topographical impasto and dull and acidic tones.

His allusions to scientific, mythological, and historical arcana are as obscure as Consalvos’s obsessions and intentions; the formal relationships—for instance, the use of apparently identical anatomical illustrations—are still more surprising. My co-curators and I paired these two unlikely like-minded artists in an exhibition designed to expose the similarities between three particular trios of twentieth-century American artists variously and peremptorily historicized as trained or academic and self-taught or vernacular.¹⁵⁰ This show

¹⁵⁰ Entitled “Fabulous Histories: Indigenous Anomalies in American Art,” the exhibition also included Anthony Campuzano, James Castle, Jim Nutt, Martin Ramirez, Luis Romero, Christina Ramberg, and P.M. Wentworth. We mounted it twice, once at Harvard in Fall 2004, and again at Art

was one of the first we curated together, and we hoped, quite idealistically and fiercely too, to demonstrate once and for all how permeable and bogus these kinds of commercial categories truly were. I don't know if we changed any minds, but if we did, it was probably because of this duo. These two collages, viewed together side by side, exhibited an undeniable alliance, a sympathetic intensity that thawed any icy art-market, academic, and museum taxonomical boundaries of class or education. But if you look away from the wall, and into books, the artists' biographical differences disguise their aesthetic and temperamental kinships.

Those kinships are even more evident in an earlier paste-up by Jess. Entitled "Goddess Is Is Falling Asleep," this stuttering 1954 collage poses a female body with a transplanted sculptural head and a gargantuan foot in a domestic interior rimmed with manipulated headline text: "Of Nature and Art and a Puppy Pilgrimage"; "Visits the Old Crow"; "Eye Shimmies So It Can See." The similarity to Consalvos, and one collage in particular, is striking—Consalvos's central female body, this time with a bird's head, even echoes the axis of Jess's more demure lady, as do the scale discrepancies and anatomical and architectural play (FJC 309). And the absurd headlines—"A Battalion of Buffoons"; "Built Not Stuffed"; "Cocktail Sausages" could almost be interchangeable. What's going on with these roughly contemporaneous collages made by two allegedly unrelated artists? Interestingly, like Consalvos, Jess migrated from a highly specialized, almost separatist occupation to an art practice. He abandoned his radiochemical research after a macabre 1948 dream of the impending apocalypse—he had contributed to the Manhattan Project during World War II—enrolling at the California School of Fine Arts in his mid-twenties to study

36 Basel that summer. Obviously, no one knows if Consalvos was formally trained or self-taught—and our point was that it doesn't matter—but he has been lumped into the latter category.

under Clyfford Still and Ad Reinhardt. He and his partner and collaborator, the poet Robert Duncan, lived in a Victorian house crowded with containers of clippings, the prototypical collagist's home, presumably much like Consalvos's might have looked during his life.

Today Jess is recognized as one of the twentieth-century's virtuosos of collage (he was also a highly accomplished painter and draughtsman), and yet Consalvos's work displays a sense of style and an adeptness with the medium that rivals Jess's mastery. To put these similarities in perspective, in a field that fetishizes novelty, originality and primacy, remember that Jess was thirty-two years younger than Consalvos. To understand the extent of Consalvos's aesthetic vanguardism, his departure from mainstream artistic representations and possibly his prediction of what are deemed Euro-American modernist innovations, we can trace his contemporaries and would-be disciples backwards toward artists of his own generation, and forward to artists born while a middle-aged Consalvos was already working.

Some of the qualities Consalvos seemingly shares with Jess—a prevailing sense of nostalgia; a penchant for repurposing the antique ephemera of the past in counterpoint to that of his own age; a keen eye for esoteric poetry; and a narrative, literary, and mystical bent—reach a pinnacle in an artist born in the generation between the two, Joseph Cornell, who worked from about 1931 until his death in 1972. Although known more for his singular sculptural shadowbox assemblages than for his impressive two-dimensional work or his meditative film collages, Cornell approached appropriation through a hermetic and hermitic focus that resonates with what we can only assume was Consalvos's predominantly, if not equally, private practice. His now notoriously packed house on Utopia Parkway in Flushing, Queens, was a secret museum for his collections and collages, which merged inside his handcrafted boxes. Works like Consalvos's dioramas and shadowboxes—FJC 92 and FJC

430, for instance—definitely veer toward Cornell country in easily observable ways, but it is Cornell’s process and aesthetic, not an obviously related style, that most recall Consalvos. Cornell’s melancholy mysticism and quiet sentimentality feel jarringly different than Consalvos’s hilarity and satirical instinct, but despite different styles and artistic dispositions, both artists arrive with readymade airs of mystery, isolation, and introspection. That is, we viewers, nudged by the comments of critics, curators, and dealers, project the makers’ eccentric personalities and reputations onto reading their work as self-portraiture, at least to some degree. Those critical matrices are crucial in their cases. Their collages function as impenetrable codes which exploit the medium to draw together divergent spatial and temporal factors in opaque gestures toward limning the artist’s enigmatic identity around his own fetishistic symbolism—in Cornell’s case, silent film stars, the Medicis, cosmology, animals, music; for Consalvos, cigar ephemera, currency and stamps, U.S. presidents, and also music. Both compulsive collectors, they cultivated what Cornell called, in characteristically quirky language, a “*métaphysique d’éphémère*,” a commitment to the “beauty of the commonplace” and “borrower’s rights.”¹⁵¹

Art historians have difficulty classifying Joseph Cornell, and not just for his indecipherable loner sensibility. Just as Jess stood outside Pop, only aligned in terms of certain appropriative tactics, Joseph Cornell stood outside Surrealism, accepting certain of its dreamier post-Romanticist tenets, but shying away from its leftist and anarchist politics, its violence, and most noticeably, its overt eroticism and sexuality. Cornell and Consalvos are further linked as oddballs, fringe figures even farther afield of all these too-tidy isms, not only by their processes of making images but also by their religions. Joseph Cornell was a

¹⁵¹ Hartigan 2003: 23, 25

pious Christian Scientist, an aspect of his life often overlooked and underestimated in writing about his art, since “few notions are more alien to today’s critical mindset than that of a truly religious avant-garde artist.”¹⁵² The shrine-like sublimity of his art is likely derived in part from his almost monastic seclusion as an adult and his reverence for the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. Helena Martí claims that Consalvos was both devoutly religious and a “healer,” perhaps a herbalist; his work shows some speculative signs of Santería as well as Espiritismo. Maybe he found in collage not just the potential for geographical and political reconciliation, but a vehicle for spiritual reconciliation and symbolic integration.

While mysticism and spiritualism were important to certain corners of modern art—Symbolism and Abstract Expressionism, for instance—many avant-garde modernists ignored or deliberately dismantled and mocked what they perceived as the inherent dogma of organized religion. (Futurists and Vorticists were particularly disgusted by faith.) With some exceptions, doctrinal or denominational faith remained largely absent from the domain of the textbook twentieth-century avant-garde, which is one reason—along with race—why spiritual vernacular modernist artists like William Edmondson and Sister Gertrude Morgan have been excluded from normative accounts of modernism. Religious zealotry, or even ecstatic religious experience, sometimes automatically consigns artists to the discursive realm of “outsiderness”; after centuries of almost exclusively nominally religious art, there has long existed in the West a seeming, and silly, incompatibility of denominational religion and experimental or progressive creativity. Consalvos and Cornell demonstrate the nearsightedness of this part of modernism’s critical legacy—there is no necessary

¹⁵² Richard Vine quoted in Hartigan 2003: 36.

incongruity or mutual exclusivity between religion and radical artistry or modernism, no ordained disconnect between tradition and innovation.¹⁵³

And indeed, the clearest aspect of these two men's artistic empathy was the strange simultaneity of their nostalgia and newness. Cornell, whose words will have to suffice in the absence of Consalvos's, treasured "the light of other days" to illuminate his own prolific work; his friend Mina Loy described Cornell's appropriative, taxonomical methodology as "a contemporary brain wielding a prior brain as a more potent implement than a paintbrush," a lovely line that could well describe Consalvos's visual invocation of elder *lectores*.¹⁵⁴ Consalvos and Cornell each delimited their own personal avant-gardist boundaries for modernism with obsessive permutations and combinations of their commonplace, and somewhat old-fashioned, obsessions for accumulation. Their far-reaching stagy aesthetics, though formally quite distinct, both stitch a vernacular Victorian sensibility—Cornell's gentleman curator of a cabinet of curiosities and Consalvos's hobbyist cigar band collagist—to the fractured, self-reflexive illusions of modernism (and even postmodernism, if you prefer.) Cornell and Consalvos are linked by affinity, singularity, and individuation, but other artists strike a slightly straighter path through those modernist movements—Dada, Surrealism, Pop—that elevated collage to an independent, radically reputable medium from

¹⁵³ A more detailed discussion of art historical and folkloristic dichotomies follows in the next chapter, where I will assess the overeager yoking of value primarily to either tradition or innovation, vernacular or modern, without sufficient regard to their inherent mutuality.

¹⁵⁴ Hartigan 2003: 36

the more tentative, but crucial, painting-collage fusions of the Cubists.¹⁵⁵ So let's step back another generation.

In his recontextualized invocations of Victoriana, Cornell followed Max Ernst, especially the 1929 book of collages *La femme 100 têtes*, which he much admired. Jess only dedicated himself in earnest to collage after Duncan bought him a copy of Max Ernst's cryptically narrative collage book *Une semaine de bonté*, originally published in 1934, for his birthday; "Chariot: Tarot VII" was an important transition from his small, Ernst-inspired black and white paste-ups toward his own mature style. Consalvos may or may not have ever seen Ernst's collages, but again, the comparison is worth making, particularly since Ernst and Consalvos were born in the same year and mastered the same medium. (Ernst also mastered painting, sculpture, and poetry, despite his lack of formal artistic training—yet more proof of the meaninglessness of the classist "self-taught" label applied, without proof, to Consalvos and so many others.) In 1920, the year Consalvos left Cuba and six years after Ernst declared himself killed in World War I, Max left behind his hometown of Cologne for Paris, turning toward paper collage and joining forces with the Paris Dadas, and eventually, the Surrealists. Beyond incidental associations like a shared fondness for animalistic, especially avian, chimeras—Ernst's alter ego was a bird-like creature named Loplop—Ernst and Consalvos share a narrative, scenic quality derived from a preference for Victorian engravings and other older illustrative materials, often in juxtaposition with more contemporary images (FJC 248). In fact, Ernst's fantastic collage books like *Une semaine de bonté* rely entirely on the Victorian equivalent of pulp fiction engravings and photogravures. And although they lack Consalvos's (and Jess's) arch humor and light touch and instead strive for a kind of

¹⁵⁵ Brandon Taylor's insightful overview of the avant-gardist articulation of the medium, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art*, has been enormously helpful in tracing modernist explorations. I roughly follow his chronological history here.

existential dread and a seamless illusionism in execution, they offer similarly stagy somatic and psychosexual confections and traumas typical of Surrealism (see FJC 596).

But regardless of certain thematic and visual similarities, Ernst's remarkable collages also lack the explicit political content of nearly all Consalvos's work. Consalvos's satirical *raison d'être* registers more with other Dadaists like Hannah Höch and John Heartfield, retaining their overt politics while reaching toward the less Cubist-inspired dimensionality and illustrative essence of Surrealist collage. Despite their rabbleroising and self-conscious affrontery, both Dadas and Surrealists for the most part preserved the pictorial logic, and even the narrative nature, of painting in their collages. Like so many others—André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Tristan Tzara—Ernst was a chief proponent and architect of both Dada and Surrealism.

Surrealism metastasized partially out of Dada, and Consalvos's work bears the marks of both. If he did not embrace the anti-art insult of Dada, he would have appreciated its truculent attempts at synthesizing a kind of mutinous, multimedia cultural antimatter from trash and cultural detritus. Marcel Duchamp had begun to theorize, title, and exhibit his readymade outrages—the bicycle wheel, the bottle rack, the comb, the snow shovel, the urinal, the “Mona Lisa”—at least seven years before Consalvos arrived in the U.S., when the young *rolero* was twenty-two years old and Duchamp was twenty-five. Duchamp's readymades are pure appropriations, anti-collages in most cases, but his concept of assisted or reciprocal readymades jibes with Consalvos's collaged instruments and objects, particularly the minimally collaged sculptures. Consalvos's use of appropriated and either manipulated or recontextualized art images recalls Duchamp's moustachioed Mona Lisa, the 1919 joke “L.H.O.O.Q.,” as well as his infamous formula for a reciprocal readymade: “Use a

Rembrandt as an ironing board.” Uncle Lipe ransacked Jan Van Eyck and Rembrandt (from cigar labels); Gilbert Stuart (the famous dollar bill portrait of Washington); and Michelangelo (Consalvos thieves his *pietà*, putting a Native American head on Mary and a Washington head on Jesus [FJC 644.]) Compare Duchamp’s tonsorial detailing in “L.H.O.O.Q.” to the verso of Consalvos’s “The Rise of American Nationality” (FJC 416), which contains nothing but one large cartoon image of a clown’s face mounted on sheet music. Consalvos has barely manipulated the image, simply gold-foiling the whites of the eyes and covering the teeth with Bank Note cigar band nubs (in fact, the verso is in many ways more striking than the recto.)

André Breton, the difficult self-declared “Pope” of Surrealism, championed Dada before writing his Surrealist manifesto in 1924:

It is Dada and Dada alone whose ability is the marvelous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience, of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact; of gathering within reach of our senses abstract figures endowed with the same intensity, the same relief as other figures; and of disorienting us in our own memory by depriving us of a frame of reference.¹⁵⁶

By that definitional statement, Consalvos would certainly qualify as a Dada artist, one who knit “two widely separate realities... drawing a spark from their contact.” That spark, something like Deleuze’s “intensity,” ignited an innately political practice. While Merz maestro, collagist, assemblage artist, and installation trailblazer Kurt Schwitters and self-described Dadasopher Raoul Hausmann—four and five years older than Consalvos respectively—certainly offended their fair share with their montage practices, their works, respectively more sculptural and painterly, did not attain the dissident tone of their contemporaries Hannah Höch and John Heartfield. Höch, at one time Hausmann’s lover, was one of the very few women associated with Dada, and she used her position to critique the

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Camfield 1993: 97

rampant sexism of the macho avant-garde boys' club, addressing the fluidity and malleability of gender (she herself was bisexual) with the frequent ironic inclusion of nudes and stereotypically gendered images. Her frank surrogates for genitalia (eyes, lips), her use of political personages (like Woodrow Wilson in "Dada Panorama," 1919), and her bombastic titles ("Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany," 1919) are all reminiscent of Consalvos.

Even more daring were the pioneering photomontages of John Heartfield, a German born the same year as Consalvos, who after a collaboration with Dadaist George Grosz—together they collaged great tidal masses of news headlines and dissected screeds—concentrated on appropriating and subverting the compositional and communicative strategies of Nazi propaganda. His bold *détournements*, rephotographed photocollages of gut-wrenching graphic power, were analogous to Consalvos's ironic "cultural indigestion," his chewing through and vomiting forth of cigar label tropes and materials, patent medicine ads, and tourist literature. Heartfield tackles Hitler and the icons of Nazism, including the swastika, head-on, and it is these provocative images—a swastika transforming into a crucifix, an x-ray of Hitler's torso full of blood money, Hermann Göring with the head of a fanged fish—that provide a startling German analog to Consalvos's recusant, openly political anthropomorphisms and anatomical guttings of U.S. presidents. Heartfield's courageous and often blackly humorous work, with its unabashedly didactic, strident, urgent pitch, is perhaps the closest the early European avant-garde came to Consalvos, at least as far as substance and political stance.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ In his important 1966 book *Intermedia*, Fluxus-associated concrete poet and critic Dick Higgins, himself a formidable artistic talent, wrote that "by invading the land between collage and photography, the German John Heartfield produced the what are probably the greatest graphics of our century, certainly the most powerful political art that has been done to date." (Higgins 1984: 19)

The spark in collision of which Breton spoke had its own spark in the writings of 19th-century proto-Surrealist wunderkind Lautréamont's recipe for beauty: "the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella."¹⁵⁸ If we have no obvious evidence of Surrealism's emphasis on automatism, the subconscious, and Freudian psychoanalysis in Consalvos's work, that movement's interests in irrationality and the phantasmagoric (il)logic of dreams find seeming parallels in his weird fantasies. Surrealist preoccupations with the somatic symbolism of sex and death, the fetishized violence and dark eroticism evident in Ernst, echo Consalvos's droller gender confusion and conflation, his prevalent use of phallic imagery and the suggestion of sodomy by bottle and skyscraper. As opposed to Dada's paradoxical visions of an anarchic escape from culture, Surrealists sustained a steady flirtation with pop culture, like Consalvos hewing somewhat closer to more conventional media containers like photography and mass publications. The hypersexual collages of French poet and critic Georges Hugnet (another Dadist convert to Surrealism) and Czech Poetist Jindrich Styrsky resemble Consalvos's in their scale shifts, animal anthroporphism, and corporeal consciousness, but stray from his politics by centralizing the libido as psychic engine of identity and action. Formally, however, their heavy reliance on advertising text and imagery places their picture-poems or word-images close to Consalvos's garrulous work.

World War II redefined the project of modernism just as World War I had propelled it toward psychology, violence, and absurdity. Postwar artists negotiated the vociferous legacies of Dada and Surrealism in various ways—most famously, the public's attention shifted toward New York and the Abstract Expressionist reorientation toward process and

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Taylor 2004: 67.

painting's collage potentialities—and dedicated collagists were no exception to this reactive searching. Cornell toiled away in Queens, and Jess and Bruce Conner did their thing out in California. In Paris, second generation French Surrealists like Jacques Prévert and Max Bucaille mined and refined Max Ernst's perverted Victorian idiom, making montages of antiquated materials that mocked historical figures and contemporary mores by invading "reality" with fantastic creatures and situations. The turn to contemporary Pop culture, and eventually the phenomenon known as Pop Art, began to take shape in London in the early 1950s. Calling themselves "The Independent Group," students at the Institute for Contemporary Art mobilized to address and incorporate contemporary popular culture, consumer market culture, more centrally within their art. Consalvos of course had already been doing this with cigar labels, cash, and found photos of celebrities.

The foremost collagists among this group of youngsters were Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, both over thirty years Consalvos's junior. Paolozzi's statements on the power of collage almost sound as if they could have come from Bréton's mouth, or Consalvos's. As if in awe of the medium himself, he applauds "this magic process of picture-making—of introducing strange fellows to each other ... without recourse to a standard drawing and painting practice... of strange weddings between marooned boats on ancient plazas or bizarre flying machines trapped in city halls."¹⁵⁹ Elsewhere, his descriptions gather more detail, even more redolent of Consalvos's process of lacing together a Cubamerican voice of carnivalesque protest. "To finally harness this set of free spirits is like an act of betrayal," he explained, "imprisoning these individuals, condemning them to a life of frozen

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Taylor 2004: 135

violence.”¹⁶⁰

Improbable events can be frozen into peculiar assemblies by manipulation: time and space can be drawn together into a new spatial strategy... Figures from a Turkish landscape trapped by cruelty may be released and find themselves perplexed and frightened in a French nursery flanked by a mechanical sphinx... the Rathaus in Zurich dwarfed by a frog represents not only poetic ambiguity but a personal hypothesis.¹⁶¹

Might Consalvos also have also felt he was imprisoning his presidents through this “magic process of picture-making,” this “personal hypothesis”? Paolozzi’s collages from the late 1940s and early 1950s were still influenced by Ernst, but they prefigured Pop in their appropriative flatness and Duchampian non-illusionism, as well as their combination of far fewer visual elements, often only two or three. Richard Hamilton’s groundbreaking 1956 collage “Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?,” sometimes considered the first work of Pop Art proper, extends Paolozzi’s blunt, silent photographic diptychs and triptychs into a slightly less detached, satirical style and a scenic staginess that once again hearkens back to Ernst (and to Consalvos’s interior scenes like FJC 596.) But there is something new here too, a rough and ready appropriation of 1950s market culture and consumerism. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, early British Pop’s ambivalent embrace of commodification—critique and celebration sounding in indiscrete harmony—had exploded on the other side of the Atlantic with Johns, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Warhol et al. Warhol developed his screenprinting technique in 1961, and his earliest deadpan appropriations in 1962 were U.S. dollar bills and Campbell’s soup cans, iconic currency and commodity that Consalvos had most likely incorporated into his collages several years prior. (His son Cuco died around 1968, and Martí implied that his father had died first.)

¹⁶⁰ Ibid: 137

¹⁶¹ Ibid: 139

More substantively, I could very easily have repeated the Jess and Consalvos collage comparison with which we began this section with either Eduardo Paolozzi or Richard Hamilton. All it would have taken is a flip. The relative attenuation, rarefaction, and abstraction of Consalvos's most developed verso collages, their ambiguous coldness and calm, contrast with the rectos, which remain dense, narrative, hectic and hot, stubbornly representational and directional. But these composed versos, though fewer, fascinate in their opposite aesthetic, a style that more closely approximates looser and less splintered postwar Pop collage styles than the those of early modernist Dada and Surrealism. Much as his collages have one foot planted firmly in the vernacular and folk, and the other in the academic and elite end of the modernist spectrum—thus straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the recto/verso differences of his oeuvre bridge early and mid-twentieth-century modernism. More abstract, less formulaic, and less directly satirical, his verso images are arguably more avant-garde, fresher to contemporary eyes than the rectos (FJC 570v). Many abandon scenic pictorial logic completely for abstract, irrational arrangements of appropriated representational images.

Three collages with strong, even noteworthy, rectos—FJC 517, 527, and 567—are backed with particularly developed verso collages containing fewer, and far less tightly cropped and manipulated images, and generally less text too. All three versos collocate blocky color images on backgrounds of much more varied color than the rectos, and all three feature only marginal, or entirely missing, cigar label elements. While the rectos explore typical subjects—Washington in drag, automobiles, grotesque caricatures of African faces, bare bodies, music, architecture—the versos include less closely dissected images and more image context. So the domestic scene on FJC 527v disturbs with its nude young boy sitting in

a saucer of peas surrounded by leering adult female faces, while a lonely cowpoke smokes beneath a canopy bed. Flip the speeding train with the sexy Washington figurehead on its prow, and you will find an arresting image of large smiling faces—cut, perhaps from *Life* magazine, given the headline (FJC 567). Look closer, and you will notice the tobacco auctioneering scene atop the newspaper ad for mens' formalwear. The densest and largest collage of the three, "The Fun Doctor" (FJC 517) has the sparsest verso, with only full pages or rectilinear clippings—a muscly lipstick-red Dodge, a pink washing machine, whirring alphabet balls, an ad for Chesterfield cigarettes, and a nineteenth-century engraving. If all three versos contain some characteristics of Paolozzi and Hamilton, this one undoubtedly conjures Paolozzi's spare compositions most lucidly.

The associations get even more current, if we care to follow them. The post-Pop shenanigans of prolific multimedia artist Mike Kelley—who has, incidentally, built a impressive career out of pilfering (um, appropriating) from vernacular artists—find a forebear in Consalvos too. Kelley's 1987 sculpture "Nature and Culture," a dresser decoupaged in a swarm of glossy lips and tongues cut from magazines, evokes a collision between Consalvos's bureau (FJC 103) and his floating lips and eyes motif (FJC 391). Our list of cited similarities to other artists could unfurl forever, but a litany of comparisons is hardly the point. Art historians have enshrined all these great artists as arbiters of -isms, partially and implicitly according to arbitrary qualifications of training, education, and, let's face it, male Euro-American whiteness. But training comes in different forms; not all education is formal, not all pedagogy professorial. Consalvos's job as a *rolero* would have uniquely prepared him for cuts and folds of his extraordinary collages, most of which feature several dense layers of interwoven, slit-inserted, and wheat-pasted material. I've watched

with fascination the stained hands of *roleros*, clutching their keen *chavetas*, dance over the fragrant, moist tobacco leaf and then deftly wrap the reshaped *capa* around the binder in one graceful gesture. The vegetable-gum glue they still use to seal their cigars and the constant, intuitive, tapped-out cutting—repetitive strain injuries in the wrists and hands were a constant source of pain for cigarmakers—conjure Consalvos: might he have used these very skills and tools in his intricately constructed collages?

*

And enough of all these North Americans and Europeans—where, you might ask, were Consalvos’s fellow Cubans amidst all this modernist mess? As discussed in Chapter One and earlier in this chapter, the idea of “modernism” was a Euro-American construct—plainly primitivist, and therefore colonialist—so the artistry of Cuba, which was of course pervasive and highly influential internationally, especially in music and literature, is perhaps not best analyzed with these clumsy academic and etic terms. On the other hand, many Cubans constructed their own longed-for modernity precisely through their affinity for and appropriation of European and North American models. And so some studio artists did gravitate toward the very specific easel painting tradition of European modernism, especially its late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century incarnations. But modernist Cuban art had not even entered what art historian Juan Martínez calls its “embryonic period” until four years after Consalvos emigrated to the U.S., and even then, the so-called *vanguardia* artists were mostly concerned with painting and the gradual “abandonment of academic practices

for tentative approximations of French impressionism and postimpressionism.”¹⁶² When the movement began to mature into its own suite of styles, European modernism was for many years the primary variant they followed; turning away from rich Cuban vernacular forms, “these painters appropriated forms and concepts from French modernism to interpret and affirm *lo cubano* in its most evident manifestations.”¹⁶³ Apparently collage was not yet articulated to mainstream Cuban modernism, and so Consalvos’s work bears little resemblance to Cuban *vanguardia* artists of the period. Of course, Wilfredo Lam would later explore *lo cubano* in a more indigenously influenced manner, and outside academic art and off the printed page, the concepts of collage, montage, and bricolage flourished. For instance, Cuban music freely and sublimely amalgamated West African, Spanish, North American, French Creole, and Native American tonalities and rhythms. Later, after Consalvos’s time, Castro-era propaganda and poster designers developed a fascinating syncretic style of their own by modifying and domesticating Soviet Russian and North and South American modes. But to discuss *modernismo* in official and elite Cuban culture during Consalvos’s lifetime, we must discuss literature, in particular poetry.

“Sad But Noisy Rebels”: The Poets of *Modernismo*

“*Ignoras el lenguaje misterioso de todos/ Los que aman en la vida?*” “Do you ignore the mysterious language of all/ those who love in life?” The couplet is the only one underlined on a carefully folded poem entitled “A Una Novia” (“To a Girlfriend/Fiancée”) found inside Consalvos’s poetry album. Typed in red ink on tissue-thin “Gaviota”

¹⁶² Martínez 1994: 5

¹⁶³ Ibid.

("Seagull") brand typewriter paper, it is the only poem among hundreds not clipped from a printed source, and it has the smell of dried leaves, or the basement-moldering cardboard boxes in which my mother stored her Christmas ornaments when I was a kid. Consalvos may indeed have written this one himself, a florid and desperate elegy from a jilted lover. Whether he composed the verse or only transcribed it, he saw fit to underline the bit about a "mysterious language." One of the few things we do know about Consalvos is that he was a great lover of poetry. His personal items include two volumes from the *Biblioteca de Poetas Americanos*, a 1904 volume of *Poesías de Plácido* (purchased from Librería de Benavent in Havana), and a 1900 volume of Salvador Díaz Míron's *Poesías* (dated "+ 12 Junio de 1928.") The former includes dozens of calendar day-leaves featuring verses from Plácido inserted between pages in appropriated spots, and bound in a miniature booklet at the end. Consalvos has added a number of poems to the Míron collection too, both hand transcribed and pasted in blank spaces or even on partial pages apparently added to the binding. The poetry books are themselves collages.

He annotated both books by hand, in tiny and tidy script signed "F.J.C.," with an eye for completism, specifying different variants of the preface to the Plácido collection and offering explanations for inclusion of additional Míron poems and parts of poems: "This last stanza appears in some copies of this poem, which is why I've added it in this form"; "Taken from a copy given to me by my *compañero* and friend Francisco Marty Carrillo." He has also added a handwritten "Fuera del índice," an "Outside index" for the poems *manuscritas y adheridas* ("handwritten and adhered.") Consalvos's larger poetry scrapbook consists entirely of *poesías adheridas*, cut from newspapers and magazines and pasted into what appears in some margins to be a French-language technical manual or catalog. Each poet's

nationality—all Latin American and Caribbean countries, and Spain—is specified by hand beneath his or her printed name, sometimes accompanied by dates, brief notes, asterisks, and even corrections to the poems. On the title page, facing a tidily glued photograph of a couple on horseback and another of two boys and two men in a horse-drawn cart, the compiler has written in a lavish cursive: “Poesías/ sacadas de periodicos, y coleccionadas por” (“Poetry/ removed from periodicals and collected for” or “by,” or more likely “in” or “near”); and an another partial-leaf page below it, “Orizaba, Febrero del año 1,898=.” The date is exactly three years after the War of Independence had begun, the selfsame month that the U.S.S. Maine explosion excused U.S. intervention; Consalvos was seven. Orizaba is a city and municipality in Veracruz, in southern Mexico. It’s likely that an older friend or relative (maybe in exile in Mexico during the war?) gave Consalvos the *Poesías* album, or began it for him, since one annotation lists the author’s birth date as 1873, eighteen years before Consalvos’s.¹⁶⁴ The spine is stamped in goldleaf: “POESIAS,” and “L.J.C.” (Not F.J.C., but the initials are close enough to guess at Felipe’s father’s name...) Again, a detailed and ornately handwritten index ends the book.

Clearly, poetry was important to Consalvos. His tastes seem to run the nineteenth-century gamut from Romanticism and Symbolism through *modernismo*, the Latin American movement that adapted those European styles, along with influences from Parnassianism and North Americans like Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe. Although the text sources for his

¹⁶⁴ A handwritten footnote to “A Rosario” by Mexican poet Manuel Acuña, the annotation tells the story of the poet’s suicide by poison after losing his beloved Rosario to a rival in 1873—“precisamente el año en que nací yo” (“precisely the year in which I was born.”) This was a formidable rival: José Martí, who lived in Mexico in 1875 and in 1877. Whoever began this poetry album compilation must have identified to some extent with Mexico, and Orizaba in particular, as well as Cuba. There are as many “Mexicanos” as “Cubanos” among the included poets, and at least two, Vincente Daniel Llorente and M. Montiel Y Cámara, are marked with “Orizaba.” Montiel y Cámara was apparently an acquaintance in Orizaba—he merits a “Lo conocí” (“I knew him.”)

collages were almost entirely in English, Consalvos's modest surviving poetry library recites the story of his Hispanophone literary leanings. Plácido, born Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (1809-1844), was perhaps the most popular and widely known poet in nineteenth century Cuba. An autodidact mulatto and orphan with revolutionary leanings, he was executed for his alleged involvement in La Conspiración de la Escalera, a supposed slave uprising that ended in a bloody massacre of Afro-Cubans. The broad readership of Plácido's vernacular Romanticism explains the appearance of his work on the cheap, mass-produced calendar (printed on the Island of Pines) included in Consalvos's copy of his work. The Mexican Salvador Díaz Míron (1853-1928)—another revolutionary spirit, and incidentally also from Veracruz—was in certain respects a proto-modernist, and his career bridges the French Romantic idiom of Victor Hugo and a more stylized, mannerist mode that subsequent poets and critics found germinal to the development of *modernismo*.

The poetry album contains verse from all over Latin America as well as Spain, but Cuba and Mexico are represented above all other nations, in near equal measure. Some favorites and representatives stick out. Many consider José Martí' (1853-1895) the prototypical pioneer of *modernismo*, and his vigorous verse, political genius, and stature as Cuban national hero, revolutionary mastermind, and martyr make him a Cuban equivalent to a George Washington-Walt Whitman—Martin Luther King, Jr. hydra. Martí rivaled any Latin American poet of his age, and his massively influential lyrics expound upon political philosophy, romantic love, and hashish with equal fervor and brilliance. Fellow Cuban Julián del Casal (1868-1893), yet another poet in the album who died before his time, was important to the emergence of the French-derived fantasy and artificiality of *modernismo*. Mexican Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895) and Colombian Julio Flores (1875-1933)

appear with some frequency in *Poesías*. But it was a poet included at the very end of Consalvos's scrapbook, Nicaraguan prodigy Rubén Darío (1867-1916), that became the first international celebrity of the movement, sparking a pan-national Latin American intellectual Renaissance. The publication of his exquisitely concise 1888 collection *Azul...* cemented the highly allusive, esoteric mysticism of *modernismo*, launching its melancholy symbolism and stylized, flowery language to new breathtaking heights of *l'art pour l'art* aestheticism.

“The Meaning of Words” and “The Word as Such”: On Visual Poetry

None of which really explains Consalvos's ubiquitous use of text, a collage tactic that we should briefly unpack in a poetic context in addition to the context of visual art. The poetry permeates his pictures like warp and weft. The language he chose is composed of discrete appropriated units, just like the images and cigar materials. The nostalgia and revolutionary fervor of the *modernismo* poets may reveal itself in Consalvos's politics and symbolist schemes, but he shunned the baroque extravagance of their language for punchy, staccato headlines arrogated from advertisements and news sources. (He was both literally and figuratively a bookworm.) His poems, which I have remixed for the interludes herein, resonate less with *modernismo* than with the later poetic projects of European avant-garde modernism.

Visual poetry hinged on efforts to divorce the referential relationships between signified and signifier, to unloose language from its codified phonetic and textual moorings. (The emancipatory endeavor was not just aesthetically radical but sometimes explicitly political too – Filippo Tommaso Marinetti dubbed his proto-fascist Italian Futurist version *parole in libertà*, “words at liberty” or, better, “liberated words.”) Visual poets insisted (and insist still) that the abstract optical qualities of language are as if not more significant than the arbitrary meanings assigned words and letters, that words and characters have symbolic visual value

beyond their (artificial) literal meanings. Thus emptied of their syntactical context, and sometimes their content too, words can be reconditioned and recontextualized.¹⁶⁵

In his essay on René Magritte, *This Is Not a Pipe*, Michel Foucault (echoing Eduardo Paolozzi's hostage metaphor for collage) explains the visual and textual discourses of modernist art as locked in battle: "We must therefore admit between the figure and text a whole series of intersections—or rather attacks launched by one against the other, arrows shot at the enemy target, enterprises of subversion and destruction, lance blows and wounds, a battleground."¹⁶⁶ It is on this eternal battleground that Consalvos's collages exist, inside the tense, sometimes dissonant word-image conflict.

Various described as pattern poetry, *parole in libertà*, lettrism, or concrete poetry, the idea of eliding visual and poetic effects was not a new one, but it found one of its first full, international flowering in Futurism, of the very discrete Italian and Russian varieties and voices. From the *carmina figurata* of the early Middle Ages through Futurisms to Fluxus and beyond, the visual poetic effort suffused much of early modernism, beginning perhaps with the rivalry between Guillaume Apollinaire and his *calligrammes* and Marinetti's Futurist words-at-liberty. (Even earlier, the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé's emphasis on sound and the "visual silence" allowed by blank space on the printed page pointed both back at least to ancient Hellenistic period pattern poetry and forward to a succession of textual outrages perpetrated by Futurists, Zaumniks, Dadaists, Lettrists, and Concretists.)¹⁶⁷ Avant-garde poets impudently extrapolated Horace's ancient equation "ut pictura poesis" ("in poetry as in painting") to its most basic literal level, employing invented languages, indeterminacy, and "spatial syntax" to expand verse onto exciting new linguistic and artistic planes. Whether or not the public responded favorably to this imprecise painting-with-letters maxim, visual poetry quickly infiltrated an international arena. Dadaists in Germany and Switzerland (Hugo Ball, Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara) enhanced the hilarity and absurdity quotients of the more militaristic Italian Futurists following Marinetti (Carlo Carrà, Adengo Soffici.)

¹⁶⁵ The preceding paragraph and the three indented paragraphs below are excerpted from my 2008 essay on James Castle, but altered to reflect Consalvos. I composed parts of that soon-to-be published essay in tandem with this thesis manuscript, while an M.A. student at UNC, and so there are vestiges of considerable conceptual overlap, in particular generalized meditations on vernacular appropriation, vernacular modernism, and the history of visual poetry.

¹⁶⁶ Foucault 1983: 26

¹⁶⁷ See Bohn 1986 for an in-depth discussion of visual poetry's modernist origins.

Spain sustained radical poetic scenes in Catalonia (Josep-Maria Junoy and Joan Salvat-Papasseit in Barcelona) and in Madrid with the Castilian Ultraists (Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, Guillermo de Torre, and Jorge Luis Borges.)¹⁶⁸ In Paris André Breton brashly declared that “words make love”—what would he and his Surrealist cohorts have thought of Consalvos’s word-works?

The Russian avant-garde – Cubo-Futurists and Futurists (or Futurians) alike – nurtured perhaps the most extreme school of modernist poetry, known as *zaum*, which more closely resembled Dada’s aims than those of their accidental Italian counterparts. The word itself is an elision in Russian – “beyond sense” probably approximates its meaning most closely in English.¹⁶⁹ The primary practitioners of *zaum*, the chief *zaumniki*, were also its founding formulators and frequent collaborators, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, but their influence on other artists, poets, and linguists was substantial. They proposed a “transrational” use of poetic language through both sound (performance) and visual (compositional) devices. In his 1913 manifesto “The Word as Such,” Khlebnikov argues that “henceforth a work of art could consist of a *single word*, and simply by skillful alteration of that word the fullness and expressivity of artistic form might be attained.”¹⁷⁰

Well, Consalvos might not have agreed exactly with such extreme and minimalist statements, but the concept and the process are salient to his work. Nearly all of his artworks feature at least two or three lines—at least a couplet or a stanza—arrayed across the splintered surface of the collage. His poetry is montage, an aleatory operation of linguistic collage supplementary to the imagistic collage. On the more tightly composed rectos, the text determines the directionality of the piece, but one may still read these words and phrases in any order one wishes: literally, as narrative captions or isolated thought-bubbles, or more abstractly and holistically, as poems. That recombinant potential for seriality, as well as the spatiality of the syntax, has allowed me to use Consalvos’s selected and sequenced phrases—themselves appropriated from other anonymous writers for hire—as discrete elements, or

¹⁶⁸ Willard Bohn examines the modernist history of visual poetry in Bohn 1986 and Bohn 1993. This section reflects his taxonomical overview of the various movements.

¹⁶⁹ Khlebnikov 1990

¹⁷⁰ Khlebnikov 1990: 119

units, in my own ventriloquist Interlude poems between chapters. Paolozzi called collage an “exhilarating brew,” and Consalvos’s truly modernist work offers ingredients both optical and aural, pictorial and poetic.¹⁷¹ That was his *lenguaje misterioso*, the *lingua franca* of modernism. And as Martí himself wrote, “A grain of poetry suffices to season a century.”

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Taylor 2004: 137.

CHAPTER FIVE (INTERMEZZO)¹⁷²

* HEALER *

A Study in Magic and Religion

*Si el hombre es pequeño, uno grande lo sueña.*¹⁷³

Welcome! Magic Town. Gateway to the Magic City.

I am the man with the magic. Religion.

Have you another self? O Mysterious Priest! Mysterious Question-Answerer!

Take notice of this.

Astronomical calculations. Records of eclipses. The shades of night.

The quest eternal.

Centuries of religious emotion... still more centuries. Sisters going to nurse the lepers.

¹⁷² Because of this exceptionally speculative nature of this most elusive aspect of his identity, Chapter Five, the “Healer” chapter, consists only of my own montage of Consalvos’s collaged text fragments that seem to reference these issues of faith, spirit, mysticism, magic, medicine, and the paranormal. Other brief (non-poetic) sections on spirituality occur throughout.

¹⁷³ My own transposition of Darío’s famous aphorism “If the homeland is small, one dreams it large.” Instead, “If man is small, one dreams him great.”

Sacredly confidential: Get thee behind me, Satan! Haste O sinner!

When Satan whispered: Moment of temptation. The devil's heir. Devil refugee.

Perils of the soul. Double martyrs chant: "Jesus loves the little children."

Aids to Bible Study. Religious intelligence. Christian science. Daily life in a temple.

Act of Worship. The Boomerang of Sacrifice. Tabooed acts. The Blood is the Life.

Look at the facts. More and more in evidence. Internal wonders revealed!

Vital powers. "Domestic" magic. Phrenology, palmistry.

The story of man, learning mixed with idolatry.

Chiromagica.¹⁷⁴ Sympathetic magic. Magical control. Psychic Phenomenon.

The Roman saturnalia. Processions with Sacred Animals. Types of animal sacrament: Carps or minnows? Frolic of the frogs? The love-making of a saddle horse? French bulldog? Why not a trained dog? Human scapegoats?

Teasing a crocodile. Steer hurled him through window.

(Evolution of ceremonial government. Amateur sorcerers in Washington try black magic against Hitler.)

Fortune-teller! Horoscope, tricks with cards, fortune-telling by cards & numbers.

¹⁷⁴ *Chiromagica* was a fortune-telling board game released in 1870.

Attention all magicians! Be a magician. Abracadabra. Magic.

The wizard is the best. The Wizard of Oz.

Fun, magic, and mystery! Free love!

To the pure all things are pure. Golden Dawn. Evolution through isolation.

The heavenly stars reveal to me the weave and web of human destiny.

Shift the ballast. Curious Scenes Witnessed.

Hypnotism exposed, evil effects in hypnotism. (Don't be alarmed, quackery rampant.)

Lost illusions. The Lost Atlantis.

Curious phases of life. Plunged in a Gulf of Dark Despair.

Free opium! Opium eaters, are you tired of drugs? You can depend on any drug. Sold by druggists.

Give your lazy liver a gentle "nudge"! Signs and symptoms, painful affections.

Diseases arising from impurity of blood. Nervous diseases. Paralysis.

Drugs and dopes are dangerous. Big night at the canteen. Ten nights in a bar-room, and what I saw there.¹⁷⁵ Tired kidneys often bring sleepless nights.

A question of command.

¹⁷⁵ An intriguing tidbit about this terrific title... According to Glenn Hinson, "'Ten Nights in a Barroom, and What I Saw There' is the name of a 19th century afterpiece that was popular in medicine shows, and then in vernacular vaudeville, into the 20th century. I've seen typescripts of this playlet, and have heard it invoked countless times by players from the traveling stage. It was apparently one of the most commonly performed closing pieces in both med and tent show performances" (personal correspondence.)

My dream of tomorrow? The history of the human race. The great remedy for debility. The science of a new life. Meet me at the Astor.

– INTERLUDE –

The Mystery of Life: Glimpses of the Passing Show.

‘Racist’ is a confusing word, and it should be clarified. Men have no special rights simply because they belong to one race or another. When you say ‘men,’ you have already imbued them with all their rights. Negroes, because they are black, are not inferior or superior to any other men. Whites who say ‘my race’ commit the sin of redundancy; so do Negroes who say the same. Everything that divides men, everything that specifies, separates, or pens them, is a sin against humanity.¹⁷⁶

– José Martí

Insanity of wit! Wild man’s logic!

The new masquerade? Amateur minstrelsy.

Vaudeville. Young America. I love those clowns.

White and black-face comedians. Hebrew Jones. Pale Face Pow-Wow.

Vestiges of a Retreating Race. Witch doctors, cannibals, and dusky belles.

The black crook! Uncle Tom’s Cabin!

The alarm clock fails—but Aunt Jemimas ring the bell.

Wilmington colored man landed with face in a restaurant lemon pie... Long necks very handy.

¹⁷⁶ From “Mi Raza,” first published in *Patria*, April 16, 1893.

Negro home exhibit. Mississippi Ku-Klux in the disguises in which they were captured. Kommon Kerosene Kills.

Tipos de la Raza Caucasica? What is the test of ability? Do not storm the System. The decline and fall of turtle-racing. Amerika.

TRUE WISDOM:

When society sins. Now be wise.

Give man the power. Underground railroad. Mutiny in the big house. The free press.

Army of the Revolution. The American Revolution.

Let dreams come true.

*“Como el hueso al cuerpo humano, y el eje a una rueda, y el ala a un pájaro, y el aire al ala, así es la libertad la esencia de la vida. Cuanto sin ella se hace es imperfecto.”*¹⁷⁷

But.

*“La libertad es incompatible con el amor. Uno amante no es mas que uno esclavo.”*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ “Like bones to the human body, the axle to the wheel, the wing to the bird, and the air to the wing, so is liberty the essence of life. Whatever is done without it is imperfect.” – José Martí.

¹⁷⁸ “Liberty is incompatible with love. A lover is no more than a slave.” Handwritten in pencil on the obverse of Consalvos’s rhyming love poem “A Una Novia,” with no attribution, this is a translated paraphrase of a line by Anne Louis Germaine de Staël-Holstein (Madame de Staël, 1766-1817),

One wild girl. You never saw such a girl. She put madness in my veins!

Keener-eyed than men-folk. (The confirmed bachelor doesn't exist.)

Conflicting sex patterns. The ins and outs of men and women. Sex and marriage, irregularities in breeding. History of marriage:

polygamy/monogamy. Marriage would have been scandalous. The complications that motherhood involves...

Flesh and fantasy. The appearance of the meat. Flat-chested women. Physical culture for women. Girlie shows, peep shows. Behold the babe. Select your favorite girl & win a 10-lb turkey! Not all girls are bad. Reason for the seclusion of girls. The girl I left behind me. The beast in men.

The ideas of a plain country woman. Nudist colony. Her three lovers. Began to feel their oats. Ladies wanting homework. How one woman earns a living. The results of refined usage by women.

New status of women!

War of Women!

The sweetest girl in Iowa has a Stevens rifle.

The trouble with trousers...

popular author, famous lover, abolitionist, and sworn foe to Napoleon.

Multitudes of bright women talk. Intelligent women.

A woman in the pulpit. A woman's vengeance.

Some social effects of women working outside the home.

Sexual relations? What is sexual equality?

Husbands go home. Life goes on in the backyard.

When you look in your mirror, are you satisfied?

Life or accident?

The shadow of life.

CHAPTER SIX

* & MAN *

“Tabooed Acts”: Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Body – Zeno, Miami, and the Marketplace: On Authenticity and “Apocrypha” – “Beating the Brokers” – “Odd Fellowship Exposed”: On Modernities, Modernisms, and Folkloristic Dichotomies – “How to Think About ‘Civilization’”: On Vernacular Modernism – Toward a New Historiography – “Phases de la Lune”: Some post-Castro conclusions, under a “Havana Moon” – “Curious Phases of Life”

“Tabooed Acts”: Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Body

“Shadow and Reflection.” Consalvos poses an important question when he asks whether we are satisfied with our own reflections. The mirror as a motif and reflections in general—doubles, twins, symmetrical likenesses, and clones taken from identical copies of the same image or text—are a recurring trope in his collages. As a medium collage served both as a tool for introspection, self-scrutiny through printed surfaces, and as a metaphor for migration, the collection and collocation of printed matter from the factory floor, the boutique, the newsstand, the post office, the wedding photographer’s studio. He himself chose mirrors to frame some of the only photos that Helena Martí could definitely identify as

family members. I live with a Consalvos collage, the only one I own, which features a prominent mirror image (FJC 294). It hangs above my desk as I write this manuscript. A rare 8 x 10" collage on a double-sided glossy Western stage show publicity photo, one side depicts Washington as ham-hock wielding rodeo-roper and as leather-clad biker, performing in front of a Southwestern backdrop of mountains, mesas, and cacti. He's joined by Ben Franklin, a fat frog in a waistcoat, and near-nude squatting athlete. On the other side a grotesquely swollen baby's head masks the head of a blue-jeaned performer at a microphone. In one hand this troubled troubadour holds a young girl upside-down by her ankle; in the other he holds a hand mirror in an oversized hand. The reflection shows a man's toothy sneer, which bears no resemblance to the blank-faced cherubic baby it purportedly reflects—"Mockingbird," this phantom mouth hisses. A gray-blue bird perches at the singer's feet.

This chapter, which concerns Consalvos's deceptively simple self-imputed status as a "Man," addresses humanity, modernity, and historiography. "Man," ineluctably chosen by Consalvos himself with his typewriter banner, presents a thornier problematic than the other facets, because it suggests the subtly changing ways in which modernity and modernism redefined the human body and humanity. (The archetypal modern mirror is a smashed one.) It also suggests how our present cultural conjuncture—institutional and vernacular alike—can deny both modernity and humanity to those deemed subaltern in status or otherwise othered. How does official, elite culture receive and deal with vernacular artistry? Here those of us who are artists, academics, critics, art collectors, folklorists, cultural or art historians, writers, or just self-aware students and consumers of culture must face the "Mockingbird" mirror ourselves. This final chapter on the final aspect of Consalvos's identity demands the transmogrification of an idea into individual, a metaphor into a human being. It means no

longer thinking of Consalvos as only a Cuban American, a cigarmaker, an artist, or a healer in isolation, but considering the organic whole of him in terms of his and our particular cultural conjunctures. In order to do so, I will try to summarize my previous arguments along the way. As a prologue to this imperfect and ongoing effort, we begin with the body, and in his own era, where we find an encapsulated recapitulation of many of the themes of *contexto y constancia* through which we have already traveled.

*

We find bodies everywhere in Consalvos's art. "Frozen body found at farm gate." "Bodies of man and woman found." "Foreign bodies." His pictures rarely lack human bodies in proportionate and perspectival distortion. Consalvos critiques, deconstructs, and amends photographic and illustrative representations and their substance, and his treatment of the human body provides a metonym for the rest of his work. Starting with the body, we can indeed "Dream the Rest." As in Pop Art, American emblems, including the modern body in all its bare and buffed glory, are at once celebrated and denigrated, and the boundary between satire and celebration is porous and resistant to easy readings. As we have seen, his work weaves a web of contexts. We can connect his collages to the world of *lectores* and radical unionized cigarmakers—the CMIU was among the first organized protectors of the human body's labor rights in the U.S.—and possibly even to his own religious beliefs as a practitioner of Catholicism, Santería, or Espiritismo (or as a follower of contemporary paranormal crazes.) Just as we have approached Consalvos as "Cigarmaker, Creator, Healer, & Man," we can approach the artist's somatic satire, his treatment of physical "man," by

threading our way through a corporeal crowd: the working body, the political body, the racial body, the sexual and gendered body, the spiritual body, and the performing body.

We have already consorted with the first two of this uncouth crowd, at least by proxy. The political body, which we examined in Chapters Two and Three, figures centrally alongside the working body, both literally and figuratively. Imagining the assembly-line tedium of Consalvos' daily work as a *rolero*, punctuated by recitations by *lectores*—at least in his Cuban and pre-1931 North American career—helps account for the meticulous construction of his collages and their highly literate, allusive modernism. Investigating the historical context of dissident *tabaqueros* and the strained ambivalence of Cuban-U.S. relations during his lifetime has given us a basis for surmising the political significance of the collages' content and materiality, especially the currency, labels, and presidential lampoons. His graphic palette was determined largely by his labor, the colorful, overwrought leavings of commercial labels, bands, and boxes on the factory floor. But additionally, the racial body and the sexual body are everywhere encoded with ambiguity and power. Racially charged images—of proud African-American soldiers and musicians, blackface minstrel performers (FJC 562 and 563), KKK captives guarded by Lincoln and Washington (FJC 9 and 68), and exotic (often Native American) “cigar girls”—abound, as do men and women in various states of provocative, and often re-gendered, undress.

A Cuban immigrant of Consalvos's generation would encounter a very different system of codified racism in the United States, one against which the artist apparently chafed. José Martí framed the rhetoric of the revolution in terms that were not only specifically anti-racist, but even anti-race (see his essay “Mi Raza,” quoted in the Interlude above.) To Martí—and by extension, to many of the *tabaqueros* who worshipped his example—even in

the 1890s, race was a concept that had been bled dry. For many of that pivotal generation, “race” had exhausted itself in gore and degradation; indeed it now qualified as an impediment to nationalism and a “sin against humanity” itself.¹⁷⁹ Still, slavery was only outlawed in Cuba in 1886, five years before Consalvos’s birth, and it obviously survived among *tabaquero* communities in the U.S. and quickly re-emerged in Cuba after independence. Although occasionally lapsing into typically non-dogmatic ambiguity, several of Consalvos’s images (in addition to those mentioned in previous chapters) read as ironic appraisals of race and racism. One work captions images of a white banjoist and a man in a gas mask as “Black-Face Comedians,” while a uniformed black man holding a George Washington doll pilots the elephant “Havana” (FJC 585). Another black man sits on the cupola of “Young America,” next to a prominent, boldface headline reading “Give Man the Power.”¹⁸⁰ In FJC 368, Consalvos includes a photo of an African American man in a U.S. flag tunic, sliding a watermelon under one of his arms and a bejeweled white woman under the other, all beneath the title “Mulata.” The man’s “SAMO” hat, beyond referencing the cigar brand so common in the collages, also echoes the demeaning “Sambo” epithet and, for the contemporary viewer, artist Jean-Michel Basquiat’s identical graffiti tag and sometime sobriquet.¹⁸¹ FJC 416 contains a seated image of the same flag-wearing man, as does FJC 638 (the titular “Dream the Rest” collage), both of which feature Lincoln as a central figure. The latter collage likewise points an enormous pistol at Lincoln’s face; Hitler dances in

¹⁷⁹ From “Mi Raza,” first published in *Patria*, April 16, 1893. Many of the radical ideas Martí espouses here prefigure later arguments from Frantz Fanon to Paul Gilroy (in *Against Race*, for instance) and other postmodern theorists of race.

¹⁸⁰ George Washington, on the other hand, appears as “The Man I Pity Most” and “The White Tom” (FJC 489).

¹⁸¹ For Basquiat, SAMO stood for “same ol’ shit.” Thanks to Glenn Hinson for reminding me of these links.

pilgrim drag below, and a black man and boy wave the American flag, rifle on the boy's shoulder.

For a cigarmaker like Consalvos, images of unclad, exoticized women would have been familiar as racialized and racist images, if not as contested by males. The two demeaning representational modes are related, both part of cigar industry culture and U.S. popular culture. (Medicine show minstrelsy and burlesque were both still enormously popular entertainments in the 1920s.) The often European-derived cigar labels he saw every day tended to present fantasies of sensuous “harem women,” “white slaves,” elegant Spanish *peninsulares*, and African Americans as ciphers of sexuality and submission.¹⁸² Cuban and Cuban American women of Consalvos's generation were involved in a complex rebellion toward these traditional, exoticized representations and a rapid realignment toward more “modern” and North American (if no less codified and sexualized) body ideals and styles: slimness, bobbed hair, Hollywood fashions, and make-up.¹⁸³ Gender boundaries shifted and came into conflict. Dolores Mitchell argues that “at a time when few American men saw fine art of any kind, such advertising images encouraged the tendency within a capitalist society to commodify both women and people of ‘outsider’ cultures.”¹⁸⁴ Maybe so, but Consalvos did much to subvert that tendency. By recontextualizing and even re-gendering those images, which dwarf presidents and carry presidential heads, he endows them with a certain casual authority. There is also an analytical equanimity in his frank use of pornographic playing cards and his balanced display of both male and female bodies—in fact, the male body-builders are generally wearing much less than the women (FJC 517). The stagy cigar-box

¹⁸² Mitchell 1992: 340

¹⁸³ Pérez 1999: 297, 316

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

edging framing and composition of many collages emphasizes the popular performative content: vaudeville actors, chorus girls, magicians, minstrels, and muscle men, liminal individuals able to transcend or even temporarily overtopple certain normative gender roles in early 20th-century North American society.

A fascination with anthropometry, anatomy (especially manifest in the ubiquitous, synecdochal human parts, dismembered and re-assigned), and the promotional literature of fitness, medicines, and “cures” permeates. But in Consalvos’s art, the medical body’s measure is strictly of aesthetic concern, since he so manipulates scale and disturbs somatic integrity—in fact, the anthropometrical materials seem to serve spiritual purposes more than scientific. (He even appropriates the doctor’s clipboard as a surface to explore the abject, and spooky, reassembly of the human body [FJC 462.]) Tobacco, particularly the status-imbued cigar, is an important offering substance in Santería. Likewise the preponderance of heads and birds may speak to the artist’s profound spirituality, since both the ritual washing and maintenance of the head and the sacrifice of birds are fundamental rites in Cuban-American Santería initiation and spirit worship.¹⁸⁵ Could those flayed figures from anatomical studies also serve as transparent avatars of *orishas*? *Ars Medica* texts inspired by Renaissance paintings—borrowed in turn from the poses of Classical statuary, also common in the collages—share a certain sanctified gesture, an open and erect *contrapposto* display of the body and its hidden (and holy? blood-blessed?) systems for unabashed scrutiny. (“The Internal Wonders Revealed!”) In that sense, they resemble the icons of Catholic saints used to disguise—or at least veil—Santería’s *orishas*; and Consalvos often places these skinless sentries in axial positions of honor in the center of compositions, usually as unruptured entities among other shattered and dissected bodies.

¹⁸⁵ Mason 1994: 27, 30

Certainly Santería provides a useful metaphor for Consalvos' historical position and methodology, regardless of how evidently his art practice plumbs his religion. Folklorist Stetson Kennedy, writing about the declining Florida cigar industry in the 1930s, describes the popularity of *brujería* charms, roots, mojo hands, and other West African-derived power objects among Cuban American cigarmakers looking to ward off unemployment.¹⁸⁶ As a syncretic faith, a vibrant hybrid of Spanish Catholicism and West African beliefs, Santería's host of saints originally functioned as a secret analogue for spirits descended from indigenous Yoruban spirits, providing a metaphorical correspondence that was at once sanctioned cover and symbolic counterpoint. So too did Consalvos re-route the dross of a failing cigar industry to his own critical ends, launching mundane cigar materials into an abstract ether of clown-kingdoms, gender confusion, political resistance, and general psychosexual hilarity. He hid his fantastic modernism in the guise of the cigar band collage tradition, an anonymous artistry historicized as mere craft, as vernacular. And the body was one of his most useful transformative tools in this radical endeavor. Consalvos's seemingly negotiated his artistic space within U.S. modernity, and perhaps in dialogue with Euro-American modernism, through an elaborate system of disguise and comic dissent, something like Hamlet's "antic disposition."¹⁸⁷

**Zeno, Miami, and the Marketplace:
On Authenticity and "Apocrypha" – "Beating the Brokers"**

Speaking of antic dispositions, the U.S. art world reaches its antic apex annually each December for Art Basel Miami Beach. Dealers, collectors, artists, curators, and many, many

¹⁸⁶ Kennedy 1942: 295

¹⁸⁷ *Hamlet* 1.5.192

hangers-on descend on the beachside city like vultures to engage in an annual bacchanal that temporarily suspends the stratified social distinctions of the rarefied, solipsistic urban art world in a prolonged narcotic stupor of revelry, self-congratulation, and shared stardom. It's a glitzy, drugged trade show, basically. My experiences as a curator and dealer at these seasonal freakouts have brought moments of quiet euphoria (nightswimming with pals in an empty, bioluminescent Atlantic while the hotel parties raged up and down the beach) and exhausted, numb depression (most of the other moments). Every December for the past several years, the Townhouse Hotel on Miami Beach has hosted a more contained international art fair called Scope, one of the many little-league fairs that have cropped up to feed on the overripe carcass of the much larger and more moneyed Art Basel. The strange set-up of Scope places galleries in the Townhouse's high-concept spartan hotel rooms, decorated exclusively in red and white, with complimentary beach ball, condoms, and all the Red Stripe beer you can drink (which conveniently matches the color scheme.) My two colleagues and I slept in this modest room every night, two on the double bed and one on the floor. Each morning we awoke hungover to make the bed (which doubled as an exhibition surface), stow our dirty clothes and damp bathing suits in the closet, and set up the miniature exhibit, all of which we endeavored to sell to the throngs of visitors that wandered in and out all day long. There was a free breakfast of hard boiled eggs and shriveled croissants before the onslaught.

This is not the Miami Consalvos stumbled on in 1920. Nonetheless he was present in spirit. For two successive years the Fleisher/Ollman Gallery featured a solid selection of Consalvos's collages on the walls and in portfolios. (In this way, I honeymooned with Felipe before his collage moved in with me.) His work sold well. It is Miami after all, cigar-crazy

and Cuban-proud. I had just sold a text painting by my friend Anthony Campuzano (“Raised by Wolves with No Sense of Time,” aptly titled for my state of mind) to a fascinating fellow named John, who rode off on his bicycle with the framed picture strapped to his back. As I was filing the invoice, a middle-aged gentleman in glasses turned from the Consalvos wall to me, glared, turned back, glared again. After some huffed whispers to his female companion, he stepped forward—not far given the size of the room—and in a truculent, accusatorial tone demanded to know where we had gotten “those collages” and who had “ripped off the outsider cigar guy from Fleisher/Ollman.” After a few seconds of shock, I explained that I was at the fair as a consultant to a business associate’s gallery, to whom we had consigned a number of works, and that the collages were indeed by Felipe Jesus Consalvos, if that was who he meant. “So are they *real*?” he demanded. Still unsure what this guy was on about, I timorously showed him my Fleisher/Ollman Gallery business card, and he immediately softened, leaning in conspiratorially. He smelled like Red Stripe beer. “Oh, okay, I just wanted to make sure there wasn’t some art-school charlatan posing as self-taught and cheapening everything for the rest of us.” He seemed deadly serious about all this.

Thus assuaged, the gentleman returned to browsing. A few minutes later he handed over his credit card and bought a Consalvos collage. Suddenly effusive and confidential, he confessed an immediate affinity and aesthetic response to the piece he chose, but to me his purchase nonetheless hinged entirely on a name, on the truth value or authenticity quotient I myself had such a strong hand in assigning to this mysterious artist. The appellation “Felipe Jesus Consalvos” was a boon to the gallery, and to my commissions; I am not sure the same work would have been as popular had it been entirely anonymous (although let’s admit, it is close.) This client could only rationalize his affective desire for this glutinous, ultimately

ephemeral mass of *papiers collés* by appealing to and verifying the criteria of “outsider” authenticity. But can I blame him?

This incident illustrates one of the central problematics of the contemporary art market. How much do biography and back story matter to the appreciation and valuation of an artwork, particularly one classified as vernacular or self-taught? The perturbed gentleman at Scope called Consalvos an “outsider.” Cue the Ennio Morricone soundtrack and the Sergio Leone tumbleweeds.

That epithet is a threat. The game of inventing isms and other labels to categorize artists may be primarily visually descriptive, theoretical, or historical—“cubism,” “minimalism,” or “post-impressionism,” for instance. But it can also hinge more on the supposed social or cultural otherness of the artist than the formal qualities of the art itself, as is the case with “outsider,” “folk,” “self-taught,” “art brut,” “naïve,” or “visionary” art. These classes describe the artist’s assumed difference or deviance, not the art he or she makes. A number of major American artists (James Castle, Henry Darger, William Edmondson, Martin Ramirez, and Bill Traylor, for example) have been dumped into these leaky euphemistic containers, often without sufficient regard to their actual practice. Arcane taxonomies have been advanced to separate “folk” from “outsider” from “self-taught” and to keep all three sodden species safely distinct from “high” (and dry) “fine” or “academic” art. But who are “the folk,” anyway, and where do they live? If we accept Dan Ben-Amos’ classic, broad definition of folklore as “artistic communication in small groups,”¹⁸⁸ then I would suggest that the New York art world, to choose the most notoriously rarefied example, is itself the ultimate folk realm in many respects. If we mean to emphasize the traditional nature of a body of work as transmitted through, say, apprenticeship or orality, the artists listed above do not exhibit any lucid lineage with community folk forms either past or present. In fact, the canon-fodder of the Western European atelier system bears a closer resemblance to this folk model of transmission; but what about technically “self-taught” artists of that elite list, like Joseph Cornell, Max Ernst, and Paul Gauguin?¹⁸⁹ Aren’t all innovative or otherwise accomplished artists—remembered artists—to some extent both taught *and* self-taught? If an artist’s creative idiosyncrasies and formal eccentricities indicate “outsider” status, what or whom is he or she outside? The New York commercial art market? The white-columned museums, university galleries, and other cultural institutions? The academy? Don’t *most* people stand outside these tiny elitist worlds, and most of them proudly? Aren’t the art world and academia the social exceptions, the outsiders to the vast balance of expressive social

¹⁸⁸ Ben-Amos 1971: 12

¹⁸⁹ Glassie 1983: 272

milieus? Who picks these shadowy teams? Just as in the schoolyard, it seems players are often chosen for reasons beyond the quality of the art – or even the *fact* of the art.¹⁹⁰

Foggy (more than misty) nostalgia has replaced aesthetics when it comes to poor, non-Caucasian, or formally uneducated artists. The easy willingness to assign commercial and aesthetic value based on education, socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, psychology, and religion calibrates “authenticity” as an insidiously overdetermined quantity of culture (or even worse, nature.) Despite my own best efforts, the working-class and Caribbean valences of Consalvos’s practice seemed to ring the alarm of authenticity for collectors of vernacular art, automatically associating him with certain constrained discursive modes of biography, belief, and premodern or primitive purity of expression. And yet we know so little about the man himself. If anything the work and the contextual framework indicate a thoroughly modern(ist) artist of formidable education, sophistication, and self-awareness.

The whole endeavor of determining, appraising, and preserving “authenticity” is a sham, an illusion dependent on a tired terminology of authority and time. (Sadly, a number of cultural markets and institutions are dedicated to this very project.) The attempt to locate a definitively authentic state or statement from an artist and his or her culture presupposes a stalled or stable society. Can such a static state really reside in a constantly evolving, emergent culture, and if so (holding the Heisenberg Principle in our hearts) could we actually measure it? There is nothing static about the warren of contexts and Cubamerican pathways that Consalvos’s art and identity evince. As Regina Bendix suggests in her *In Search of Authenticity*, maintaining the antiquated, polar opposition of these dubious and overdetermined categories—the holy “authentic” and the dread “inauthentic”—inevitably results in the consecration of authenticity as a concrete, quantifiable quality residing in

¹⁹⁰ I first developed this argument in this form in my James Castle essay. (Greaves 2008)

imaginary cultural stasis rather than in natural dynamism and change.¹⁹¹ Cultures (and individuals too) are constantly in flux, shifting, adapting, innovating, and incorporating new and outside ideas to complement and expand the old ones. Consalvos engaged this same process with his innovative extrapolation of cigar band collage into something at once intensely personal and aligned with the Euro-American avant-garde.

In that sense, the search for authenticity is illusory—how can we authoritatively locate the authentic moment (in performance, for instance) or the authentic physical condensation (in material culture) without presuming an inanimate society? Our empirical work in the field—informed, at its best, by the Heisenberg principle—has proven time and time again that any cultural product or formation, any historical conjuncture, represents a temporal and social hybridity, a straddling of tradition and innovation, a counterpoise of tradition in innovation, change in continuity. Anthropologist Renato Renaldo has summarized this essentializing, tradition-yoking approach with the faulty formula “if it’s moving, it isn’t cultural.”¹⁹² If we disagree, as we should, then there must be many authenticities.

But the hunt for absolute authenticity continues unabated, led by intrepid scholars, producers, curators, and collectors, and exacerbated by the superficially homogenizing influence of rapidly proliferating mass electronic culture. The pursuit for authenticity recalls Zeno’s Arrow Paradox, which argues that motion is logically impossible, since even an arrow in flight must occupy a specific, distinct position in space at any given infinitesimal moment. For Zeno of Elea, back in the 5th century B.C., time could be segmented into discrete, indivisible instants, at each of which his arrow is at rest, since it can’t logically exist

¹⁹¹ Bendix 1997, *passim*.

¹⁹² Renaldo 1993: 209

in two contiguous locations at once. Applying this sort of antiquated, *reductio ad absurdum* reasoning to art results in an othering and ambering effect, isolating and embalming the culture or artist in question as both separate (out of context) and ageless (out of time). An enforced authentic identity can sadly supplant intentionality, withering the vernacular artist's will into something stunted and insignificant, incidental or peripheral to his or her "outsider" stance.

If you subscribe to the so-called "intentional fallacy"—that an artist's intention and identity are merely of secondary importance (or not at all) in assessing an artwork—it seems only logical to apply it evenly across the socioeconomic, historical, and racial spectrum, or not at all. (I personally prefer the latter option.) Biographical criteria like class, race, religion, et al. can absolutely be useful, even crucial, in discussing an artist's practice and analyzing his or her work, but not if only or lopsidedly applied to the vernacular artist and not the museum-enshrined arbiter of isms, as is too often the case. Identity does matter, just not exclusively, and not especially if that identity is other. As James Clifford puts it, "for better *and* worse, claims to identity—articulations of ethnic, cultural, gender, and sexual distinction—have emerged as things people, across the globe and social spectrum, care about."¹⁹³ In structuring this thesis as I have, according to Consalvos's key of identity, I have invoked all of these repositories of meaning, and I have drunk deeply. But I have tried to avoid designating Consalvos as an authentic anything, folk or fine, traditional or innovative, vernacular or modernist—because he, like any of us in different degrees, is all of those things. And yet there persists an ironic prestige, market-wise at least, in biographical degradation and exoticism. That's a frank diagnosis of the situation as it stands, without

¹⁹³ Clifford 1998: 368

undue prognostication. The path toward “term peace” is well-trod, but we have yet to lick the demeaning class-based connotations of all these brands. Let’s stay hopeful.

**“Odd Fellowship Exposed”:
On Multiple Modernities, Modernisms, and Folkloristic Dichotomies**

In 1970, songwriter Mickey Newbury recorded a sedate crawler of a song called “The Future’s Not What it Used to Be,” a title Consalvos himself might have appreciated for its paradoxical appeal (and repeal), its clever temporal inversion.¹⁹⁴ It would have made a great headline for a collage... Let’s keep that tune in mind as we proceed. You’ll notice that we have slid from the realms of the physical toward the metaphysical or at least the epistemic, from paper and practice (rooted in the past) toward a new historiography. A short detour into theory is required in order to move ahead, to fathom Consalvos’s emergent legacy in the present and future days. Up to now, I have been reading his art primarily from a retrospective vantage, within the contexts of his life, from the perspective of my own. But my very reading—not to mention the availability of his art from a commercial dealer—has been profoundly shaped by current contingencies, the contingencies of the culture of now, this “culture of authenticity”¹⁹⁵ through which his art circulates.

Since Consalvos’s collages have been exposed to the North American market culture that was their crucible, albeit fifty to eighty years after their creation, the visible contexts of the work have shifted dramatically to include a baroque culture brokerage to which the artist himself, in his presumed privacy and tongue-in-cheek derision of commercialism, might have thought himself insusceptible. This sounds simple enough, but our analysis must somehow

¹⁹⁴ From *‘Frisco Mabel Joy*, Mountain Retreat, 1971.

¹⁹⁵ Fine 2004, *passim*.

take into account this historical translation of cultural contexts, from Havana farm, Florida factory, and Philadelphia rowhouse to Scope Miami, Art Basel, Switzerland, and the hallowed walls of Harvard University. We can feel no nostalgia for now, because our history has not yet been adequately narrated and normalized, so we have little recourse but theory. But sclerotic singularity theories of authenticity and modernity do not suffice to explain vernacular modernism.

I have argued that the problem with authenticity is that it denies emergence and contingency and valorizes homogenization and essentialism. The dialectic of authenticity, which so often polarizes observer and participant principles, denies all kinds of in-between-ness, oscillation, and flow, the fluid equilibrium of innovation in tradition. Such is the legacy not only of folklore as a discipline, but of post-Enlightenment Western notions of culture as successive waves of uniform, “this-or-that” phenomena. In his *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*, sociologist Gary Alan Fine discusses the ways in which the American self-taught art market has articulated authenticity to religious belief, poverty and class, biography, race, and other leaky categories outside the purview of formal analysis or emic criteria of evaluation.¹⁹⁶ With specific reference to folkloristics, Henry Glassie has challenged this myopic view of authenticity both in his essay “The Idea of Folk Art” and in his *Material Culture*, emphasizing that all artists are in some fundamental sense both self-taught (innovative) and permanently anchored in their culture and worldview (traditional). He argues, in fact, that an entirely traditional, mimetic object of material culture sometimes fails to achieve artistic excellence, whereas an entirely novel object—if it were even possible—would be utterly illegible to a culture’s standards of analysis and evaluation. In the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

spirit of Glassie's statement, let's retread the terrain of Consalvos's practice, with an eye to expanding the dialogue into the present and keeping "the idea of art wide and useful."¹⁹⁷

When it comes to Consalvos, an artist in two entwined senses—a collagist and a cigar roller—I have assiduously tried to balance notions of tradition and innovation. (I won't claim that I've succeeded.) As we have seen, Consalvos' formally inventive and politically radical collages represent an convergence and enmeshing of various traditional vernacular practices and discourses with Euro-American modernist analogs. Consalvos extrapolated the hobbyist tradition of cigar band collage, a practice common to male and female cigarmakers and (non-cigarmaker) women and children, to fantastic heights of modernist fracture, critique, and formal sophistication and skill. He incorporated materials, media, and surfaces foreign to the vernacular practice of cigar band collage, but he used a meticulous cutting technique common to any good cigarmaker and his *chaveta*. The political radicalism of the work owes as much to the context of Cuban-American cigarmakers' laborlore and revolutionary politics as to the context of explicitly satirical modernist collagists like John Heartfield and Max Ernst.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Four, all these cultural contexts are recursive. The very tradition of modernist collage, normatively historicized as an "academic" innovation, likely developed out of multivalent vernacular traditions that rechanneled the surfeit of printed and mass-produced media endemic to modernity and advanced industrialism: ladies' scrapbook "albums," memory jugs, crazy quilts, and cigar band collage itself, for example. In this way, innovation strengthened and buttressed tradition, but also obscured it. So-called vernacular and elite art interpenetrate in the contexts of modernity and modernism—as artists seek new solutions to new problems, their art is transformed. Alternately, in the

¹⁹⁷ Glassie 1999: 86

contemporary commercial art world, galleries balance the banishment of utility with financial value and easy commodification; investment portfolios and market trading replace use value. Tradition—in the sense of art history, or established artists whose market value has been determined and entrenched—is still highly valued, but outside the canon of critically acclaimed artists, innovation is the primary engine of exchange in contemporary art world hubs like New York and London. And with vernacular artists, formal innovation has become inseparable from biographical authenticity.

That epistemological fixedness informs some deep-seated articulations. I myself have gestured toward authenticity in situating Consalvos within a radical political context; my project of speculation demands certain concessions to the concept. None of us are quite ready wholly to discard the function of authenticity. The fact is that authenticity remains an incredibly appealing and persistent concept with the potential to unite rather than divide, to nourish vernacular and group culture rather than desiccate it and segregate it from official and other spheres of cultural production. I do not intend to present a manifesto against the idea itself, only against its singularity and its essentialism. As often as authenticity can create divisive situations when applied from without, emic appeals to authenticity can instill powerful senses of belonging and promote the construction of important group identities. Despite my admittedly semantic and specific complaints, authenticity is not likely to disappear any time soon. We're stuck with it, so we might as well decide what to do with it. Our challenge lies in addressing it and thwarting its pernicious, or just careless, invocations in our etic commentary, consumption, and funding. The challenge lies in accepting the infinite shades and spectrums of authenticities—a proliferation of authenticities as distinct as

modernity's fracture and proliferation of subjectivities, subject positions, and socioeconomic class constructs.

After all, authenticity, as an idea ingrown into class-based considerations of difference and unspoiled, isolated cultural purity, is an essential quotient of modernity. And the historical concept of a monolithic global modernity, with its clearly delineated progressive opposition to the vernacular, traditional, and local, has become unsatisfactory to explain a multiplicity of anomalies to that model. It has become evident that a single Western modernity did not and does not simply wash over traditional culture in a cleansing, erasing flood, in an irrevocable march of ultimately homogenizing "progress" and "development."¹⁹⁸ The routes to modernity are as myriad as the destinations. Against all odds, so-called "traditional" cultures are often able to invent their own ad hoc modernities to combat or contain the versions foisted on them from abroad, and thinkers have come to recognize both versions of modernity as equally "authentic" historical innovations and compromises. Witness the work of Appadurai, Escobar, Grossberg, Taylor, and (specifically applied to Latin American hybrid and contradictory modernities) Néstor García Canclini; it's easy either to dismiss these discourses as abstract academic fads (which of course they are to some extent) or to accept the standard model of the modern, with the West vs. the Rest, as sufficient. But like Jacob and the angel, we need to wrestle with these normative ideations of the modern in order to approach Consalvos's vernacular modernism as a creative

¹⁹⁸ See Taylor 2000: 367. Charles Taylor summarizes this faulty "acultural" view brilliantly: "'Development' occurs through 'modernization,' which designates the ensemble of those culture-neutral processes, both in outlook (individuation, rise of instrumental reason), and in institutions and practices (industrialization, urbanization, mass literacy, the introduction of markets and bureaucratic states) that carry us through the transition." He argues that "this viewpoint projects a future in which we all emerge together into a single, homogenous world culture. In our 'traditional' societies, we were very different from each other. But once these early horizons have been lost, we shall all be the same."

compromise and a personal adaptation, as that hypothetical site where vernacular, traditional culture and elite, colonial culture interpenetrate.

This story is not a new one. After all, “the folk,” and folk-lore too, after Vico and all the other Enlightenment dichotomizers, could only be defined in opposition to the modern. If, as Marx claimed, in capitalist cultures “all that is solid melts into air,” resulting in what Nietzsche deemed a kind of cultural “weightlessness,” early folklorists sought a sort of stable ballast and a staunch, if mystically-tinged, identity in the perceived conservatism and passive consumption of lower classes and foreign subjects.¹⁹⁹ Ethnocentric North Atlantic modernity²⁰⁰ presumed and enforced its own universality and the universality of its ideologies through the religious, educational, governmental, and military technologies of colonialism. But as with the example of Cubamerican mobility, appropriation, and exchange, especially within the radical *tabaquero* communities of Florida, it is fallacious to assume an entirely unilateral and uniform process of modernization. The porousness of that North American-Caribbean cultural circulation, a complex negotiation of complicity and

¹⁹⁹ Early folklorists assumed that “the folk” were largely unexposed to “mass culture,” and would with any luck (and some enthusiastic help from preservationist folklorists) stay that way. So Johann Herder foraged in the German forests for a cohesive German identity in folk poetry; so Francis James Child collected creaky and wondrous examples of ancient Anglo-American balladry in impoverished Appalachian communities; so the Lomax boys dressed Leadbelly in overalls instead of the slick zoot suits he preferred. Dan Ben-Amos’ classic 1971 definition of folklore as “communication in small groups” helped to pull folklorist’s attention from socioeconomic classes toward other kinds of groups, dispelling the necessity of poverty in the constitution of “the folk.” So contemporary and later folklorists located the folk everywhere, in us all—in waiters, debutantes, drag queens, corporate office workers, football players, even within the sacrosanct realm of academic folklorists. Gendered, racial, occupational, and subcultural groups were quickly recognized as inherently folkloric, their own genera of “class.” But despite important contributions to the study of middle-class and upper-class folklore, and gestures toward auto-ethnography, much of the general emphasis has at least implicitly remained on “Other” groups easily located in socioeconomic brackets lower than those of the researchers. Class did not die as an object of folkloristic inquiry, but perhaps it temporarily guttered during the so-called performance or contextual turn in the discipline.

²⁰⁰ This is Paul Gilroy’s phrase. (Gilroy 1993, *passim*.)

capitulation as well as resistance and critique, demonstrates an alternative reaction to the supposedly steamrolling “logics of North Atlantic modernity,” perhaps even an interim escape from those logics, or an acceptable middle ground.²⁰¹ Édouard Glissant indicts these essentialist notion of modernity in specific reference to the Caribbean, in verse “litany” form:

The lure of the Caribbean
(the outer edge of space and time)

Passive consumption
(flood of imports)

The trap of folklore
(denial of consciousness)²⁰²

In his native Martinique and elsewhere in the Caribbean, Glissant instead observes “the poetics of resistance and the poetics of natural expression”²⁰³ in action, a kind of cultural pastiche in production. That network of invasions and adjustments, what Charles Taylor calls a “creative adaptation,”²⁰⁴ may resemble the host culture’s response to parasitic modernism. To describe this process as modern-evolution retains the nasty connotation of nineteenth-century cultural evolutionism, but the term does offer a way of theorizing these new contingent modernities. What we’re really talking about is creolization of the modern—a provisional, if only partial, reverse colonization of the modern with elements of the traditional. Instead of defining modernization as the linear development of traditional societies toward conformity with North Atlantic industrial market economies, we should consider adaptation the guiding principle, including the reconfiguration of vernacular culture

²⁰¹ Grossberg 1999, *passim*

²⁰² See Glissant 1992: 231. I have changed the order of his items to reflect the issues at hand.

²⁰³ Glissant 1992: 236

²⁰⁴ Charles Taylor 2000: 368

to accept and transform certain elements of imported modernity. What Taylor calls “modern social imaginaries”—the on-the-ground lived reality of modernity, that is, the subject of folkloristics—entail both affinities and rejections, both enthusiastic and begrudging reactions to modernity in lived experience, beyond macroscopic and theoretical structural changes.²⁰⁵ Social imaginaries glove a matrix of emic authenticities. The “folk” aspects of all of us, those pieces of identity and ideology that allow our social imaginaries to take flight and guide us, if only temporarily, live in conjunction with modernity, not only in antagonism to it.

Of course, the notion of multiple modernities applies to immigrant communities as well as to communities colonized by foreigners. There are multiple experiences of modernity within North Atlantic modernity itself as well as in exterior reaction to it. Modernity is not only multiple, but multivalent. As a Cuban American who only emigrated in adulthood, Consalvos would have experienced the subject positions both of a Cuban living under the Platt Amendment in Cuba and a Cuban living “inside the monster” in the U.S. He was both Cuban and American, Cubamerican, and his art orbits twin axes of satire and celebration. Consalvos was not necessarily locked in battle with modern North American culture; he was rather studiously shattering and dissecting it, collecting its splinters and shards to assemble a viable, customized representation of his own experience of that modernity, his own imaginary. Arjun Appadurai has posited “five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) *ethnoscapes*, (b) *mediascapes*, (c) *technoscapes*, (d) *financescapes*, and (e) *ideoscapes*,”²⁰⁶ a sort of archipelago of metaphors for modernity’s movement. Consalvos

²⁰⁵ See Taylor 2000: 370. He defines the social imaginary in contrast to social theory, as “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms. It is carried in images, stories, legends, etc.... The social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

²⁰⁶ Appadurai 1996: 33, italics his.

leapt and plugged and widened the interstices between those imaginary transnational islands, subverting normative art historical, sociopolitical, and moral hierarchies and replacing them with heterarchical critiques.

The modern's not what it used to be.

**“How to Think About ‘Civilization’”:
On Vernacular Modernism – Toward a New Historiography**

I have no idea what Consalvos meant when he glued the title “Modern Devices Help” over a military wedding portrait attended by a clock-faced bride and her elephant-headed bridesmaid (Ganesha, perhaps) (FJC 334). The collage itself is unspectacular, one of his humbler works. In Chapter One, I used this same headline to apply to his typewriter, but the connotation changes if we interpret “devices” not as machines but as technologies, not as instruments or equipment but as processes or means. Now the slogan speaks to his curious relationship with Euro-American modernism, a dismantling, amalgamation, and reconstruction of its muddled doctrines and “modern devices.” It does not matter whether Consalvos’s versioning of modernist collage—I use the action in the sense of Jamaican musicians’ versioning of recordings—occurred in total seclusion from Ernst and his gang (unlikely given the cosmopolitanism of *tabaquero* culture) or in collaboration and open dialogue (an equally farfetched proposition.) The reality, as is so often the case, probably lies somewhere between these poles, in semi-awareness and similar reactions to some shared aspects of the modern North Atlantic experience. Whether autochthonous developments, secretly collaborative enterprise, or coalescing circuits of recursive cultural feedback, the proof of the modernist imaginary is in the *constancia*.

If we are willing to admit the existence of more than one modernity, it follows that there might also be more than one adaptation of modernism. The entrenched monolithic concept of modernism resembles and ennobles the old modernity, and since that modernism was an ensemble of aesthetic changes in reaction to that singular modernity, the multiplication of one implies a multiplication of the other. As the twentieth century's umbrellaism, modernism need not preclude individual artists unaligned with any specific movement—in some fundamental sense, it specifies only the context of modernity and associated artistic transformation. Might broader cultural adaptations to modernity find expression in artistic adaptations to modernism, traditionalized renditions of avant-garde formations? (Certainly, primitivism involves the reverse, avant-gardist renditions of traditional forms.) As the study of cultural hybridity and creolization has demonstrated again and again, one should not condescend to postcolonial cultures by assuming imperfect mimesis of the hegemonic instead of creative versioning of elements thereof; but yet when it comes to the plastic arts, that is often what happens. Glissant, again specifically addressing Caribbean modernity, offers a diagnosis of modernization from the perspective of the local social imaginary (through another geological metaphor):

Mimesis operates like an earthquake. There is something in us that struggles against it, and we remain bewildered by it...²⁰⁷ All mimesis presupposes that what is represented is 'the only true reality.' When it involves two realities of which one is destined to reproduce the other, inevitably those who are part of the process see themselves living in a permanent state of the unreal. That is the case with us.²⁰⁸

Consalvos's articulation of vernacular practice to avant-garde practice, his vernacular modernism, overleaps mimesis for hybrid invention. But in so doing, it acknowledges the processual "unreal," an unreal that closely resembles the "surreal" of Euro-American

²⁰⁷ Glissant 1992: 244

²⁰⁸ Ibid.: 242

modernism. The process is not mimetic but rather recursive. Vernacular modernism may offer a way to circumvent that unreal condition, to sidestep the mimetic and to crawl out from the guts of Martí's North American monster. Modernism, like modernity, is not only multiple, but also multivalent. Consalvos and Ernst, two contemporaneous "self-taught" artists from drastically different backgrounds, followed intersecting routes to their collage practices. Consalvos's work is neither "authentically" modernist or "authentically" vernacular, but transcends those leaky categories and their corollary containers, folding them in on themselves. Until we can dissolve these dichotomies of culture completely—and I'm not holding my breath—a qualified terminology is perhaps the best we can do. So vernacular modernism is exactly that, a concatenation of the two concepts, a marriage that honors the emergent and recursive reality of modern culture.

Vernacular modernism designates a transposition of vernacular modes to modern modes, and a simultaneous transposition of modern modes to vernacular modes. To invoke a musical metaphor, vernacular modernism designates a keying of registers, a modal mutuality. As Dave Hickey suggests so eloquently (echoing Glassie) regarding the influence of jazz and rock on the American modernists Stan Brakhage and Andy Warhol, the process of cultural exchange involves more than a stratified "trickling up" or "tricking down."²⁰⁹ Instead, a tidal ebb and flow, an eddying exchange of incidental, organic reciprocity, better evokes the lived experiences of multiple, multivariant modernities and modernisms. Euro-American modernism of the textbook visual art variety signifies a suite of tendencies and tactics: a break with conventions of painterly representation, a faith in new technologies like photography and film, the rhetoric of *l'art pour l'art*, an alignment with multiplicity, fracture, ambiguity, appropriation, abstraction, secularism, primitivism. But vernacular modernism posits that the

²⁰⁹ Hickey 1997: 100

standard modernist suite—and the latter list is by no means comprehensive—can coexist with the standard suite of traditional artistry, which may include anonymity or collectivity, community solidarity, integration and repetition, bricolage, representation, religion and spirituality, utility, faith in traditional technologies, labor, conservative values, and the opposite of primitivism (elitism? evolutionism? positivism?)

These suites are not mutually exclusive. Vernacular modernism imagines not only the coexistence of these tendencies and tactics, but their mutuality and interpenetration in everyday life and the lived experience of modernity, their indissoluble coequality and simultaneity in the social imaginaries of “modern” artists. It is within this hybridity, within these adaptations and between the cracks of culture and history as it were, that everyday creativity is constituted. Deleuze describes such a space:

From one diagram to the next, new maps are drawn. Thus there is no diagram that does not also include, besides the points which it connects up, certain relatively free or unbound points, points of creativity, change and resistance, and it is perhaps with these that we ought to begin in order to understand the whole picture. It is on the basis of the ‘struggles’ of each age, and the style of these struggles, that we can understand the succession of diagrams or the way in which they become linked up again above and beyond the discontinuities.²¹⁰

I locate vernacular modernism, and Consalvos too, within these “relatively free or unbound points.” At the expense of literalism, consider again his large Caribbean map collage, which inserts free radicals—family photographs and cigar labels, the artifacts of working class labor—between islands and among fat cats and generals (FJC 202). As a Cubamerican cigarmaker, Consalvos was certainly a child of the “struggles” Deleuze cites. Even if he did not partake in their activities, he might have partaken in the generational affect of striking cigarmakers and revolutionaries, what Raymond Williams calls a “structure of

²¹⁰ Deleuze 1988: 44

feeling.”²¹¹ That term strikes me as a pertinent way to describe the links between Consalvos’s aesthetic and economic occupations. His art reflects his culturally conditioned knowledge, his perception of axiomatic labor-capital, nation-individual, and governmentality-everydayness relations. Since it is impossible without further information to substantively and materially connect the artist to the historical legacy of radical *tabaqueros* engaged in revolution and class warfare, or to modernist collage artists, we have turned to theoretical speculation. By invoking the multivalent contexts of vernacular modernism, I mean to suggest an affective kinship of consciousness between Consalvos and the contemporaneous experiments of modernist collagists, and between him and the singular working class radicalism from which his everyday work descended. His art exists at a parallax between those two contexts, between vernacular and modernist worlds; the collages share a discursive modality with these groups. Vernacular modernism itself necessitates a parallax perspective, a calibration of everyday artistry according to superficially divergent contexts and the vectors between them—“The Great Double Track.”

*

But why should we care about any of this? I can hear a chorus of Consalvos collages: “Why did you make me care?” “Why do we scratch when we don’t have fleas?” When it comes to culture, don’t we already have “tags of every description”? Well, “this looks silly but has a serious purpose.” At the risk of floating one more lame label out to sea, I think that this kind of parallax work can matter. Maybe—just maybe—a new historiography of plurality and mutuality can inch us closer to sketching a phenomenology of the everyday, a

²¹¹ Williams 1977: 132

discourse that heals some of the divisive wounds left by misreading modernities for modernity and modernisms for modernism, by mistaking healthy diversity, adaptation, and hybridity in expressive culture for broken uniformity. In his 1981 essay “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’”—written, incidentally, during one of the early periods of popular ardor for American vernacular art—cultural studies maven Stuart Hall declared that “popular culture is one of the sites where the struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged; it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle... It is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why ‘popular culture’ matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don’t give a damn about it.”²¹² Without claiming an exact equivalence between popular culture, vernacular culture, and folk culture, we might substitute “vernacular” or “folk” for “popular” in his statement without losing its main thrust. (Though certainly in advanced capitalist societies like ours, and theoretically and semantically too, the three categories bleed into each other, sometimes rendering them nearly indistinguishable.) Whether you agree with Hall’s post-Marxist slant or not—and I’m not sure I’m convinced—his brashness is salient. Why should we give a damn?

Because when it comes to vernacular artistry, this business of culture blushes and breaks down. So part of my own giving a damn is disciplinary. As a folklorist, I’m interested in resuscitating a discourse of class that can move away from the field’s history of blundering patronization. Like Glassie, I’d like to keep the “idea of art wide and useful,”²¹³ and that idealistic effort involves rethinking notions of class, authenticity, and authority. So how might folklorists invoke class today? Dell Hymes fretted in 1975 that other academics might

²¹² Hall 1981: 239

²¹³ Glassie 1999: 86

view folklore as simply “the study of things neglected by others, the leavings of other sciences.”²¹⁴ But perhaps that is a scavenging niche to be embraced and relished—so much *does* fall through the academic cracks. A marginal discipline itself, perhaps folklore can resurrect itself as the unabashed study of the culturally marginal, the ignored and forgotten, the overlooked (overlooked due to hegemonic or taken-for-granted “high” status as well as due to marginalization and peripheral status). While class can remain one lens for folkloristic investigation, we must look outward and inward to other kinds of social identities as well, since today class is not constituted only by socioeconomic standing, but likewise by both overdetermined or volitional racial, ethnic, occupational, and myriad other identities. Peasant-based conceptions of the folk, as well as Marxist, Gramscian and post-Marxist definitions of class, have offered the discipline only partial and ultimately inadequate interpretive matrices. But economic realities, and their consequent discrepancies and social stratifications, persist. As long as they do (remember, even More’s Utopia had slaves) and as long as groups affiliate themselves with characteristic forms of expressive culture, class—broadly defined, flexible, and easily permeable by other group identities—should continue to matter to folklorists. Of course, there are still plenty of other things for folklorists to give a damn about too. But with our disciplinary roots in exploitation and rampant classist cultural evolutionism, we may do well to consider how we might redeem ourselves through advocacy on behalf of those we study, those who give us their time and their ideas.

Given the rich community legacy of Cubamerican *tabaqueros* and their mutual aid societies, I’d like to think that Consalvos might have agreed.

²¹⁴ Hymes 1975: 346

**“Phases de la Lune” : Some post-Castro conclusions, under a “Havana Moon” –
“Curious Phases of Life”**

Recently I played Geoff and Maria Muldaur’s 1972 version of Chuck Berry’s 1963 “Havana Moon” on the radio. Theirs is a particularly poignant and lush version of that strangely somnolent song, but it’s hard to beat Berry’s original, which is a minimal masterpiece of taut restraint and insistence (or monotony, depending on your ears.) Berry might have meant to mimic a “Cuban” rhythm with his repetitive, crooked guitar riff, but it didn’t quite come off. When I was ten or so years old, “Havana Moon” was the first song I had ever heard about Cuba, and I recall asking my parents where or what or who Havana was. (I was slightly better prepared when I heard the Ramones’ “Havana Affair” a couple years later.) Anyway, sitting there in the studio, it struck me that this churning, stuttering tune—which never really resolves melodically or lyrically—could serve as a musical metaphor for the vexed international identities that Consalvos experienced as a Cuban American *tabaquero* and that he so eloquently articulated in his artwork. In an exaggerated and offensively embroidered creole dialect, the song spins a tragicomic tale of a poor Habanero waiting fruitlessly for his American lover. “De boat” is late, and our shoeless hero drinks from “de jug” to pass the time, finally missing her ship in his rum-drunk stupor. As a cultural artifact, “Havana Moon” speaks to the grotesque, salacious embrace and subsequent anxious standoff between these two neighbor states; as a pop song written by an African American man and sung by two white folkies, it becomes even more complex.

The song could serve as a soundtrack to Consalvos’s ten-panel “Hazards of Industry” (FJC 464), a series of wedding photos which pairs clock-faced brides and grooms under Cuban and American flags, and under the pasted-in influence of alcoholic beverages and

“magic.” The history of U.S.-Cuban relations reads like a jealous, intoxicated, abusive relationship. These collages—all Uncle Lipe’s collages—shout even louder now that an ailing Fidel Castro has stepped aside. It remains to be seen whether his brother Raúl will make any concessions or gestures toward democracy. Change will likely be hesitant and halting until Fidel’s death and possibly thereafter as well. But I wonder what Consalvos would have to say about the current situation in Cuba. One of the reasons I have assumed that Consalvos died about forty years after he emigrated, around the time Castro took power, is that otherwise it is hard to imagine why Fidel would not have appeared in the collages, since he was everywhere in the U.S. media at the time. And an opposition to Castro does not adequately explain his absence—Hitler, a greater villain than Castro ever was, shows up everywhere in the work. Even if Consalvos lived to hear about the Cuban Revolution and the beginning of the Castro regime, he could not have possibly imagined that this bearded young man from Oriente Province would continue to rule for another half century. These two Cubans probably knew nothing of each other or even each other’s families. But I can imagine *El Comandante en Jefe* getting a kick out of Uncle Lipe’s collages, which so ridiculed the icons of U.S. culture. I can imagine them laughing together. I challenge you not to laugh.

– CODA –

Your picture taken rain or shine.

“There is the man, and then there are pictures of the man. There is the man, and then there are the man’s pictures.”²¹⁵ So began my first piece of writing on Felipe Jesus Consalvos, and it somehow feels fittingly symmetrical to end the same way this time around. I know more now, but not enough to do him justice. The Collector has released hundreds more works since then, but one hundred and fifty still remain to be seen. This is a dream in progress. The hungry eye will certainly find things in this lattice of *constancia* that I have never seen. There are memories enough in Consalvos’s collages to furnish an infinity of dreams. (I am reminded of Odilon Redon’s atmospheric 1882 lithograph, “The eye like a strange balloon mounts toward infinity”...)

Those strata of memories are not mine, so my speculative archeology is but one of many; much more of Consalvos the man has been forgotten and remains ripe for dreaming. In 1983, the same year the Collector met Helena Martí at a West Philly garage sale, Chris Marker, another artist adept at the adoption of fugitive images, cryptically declared in his film *Sans Soleil* that “memory is not the opposite of forgetting, but its lining.”²¹⁶ I’ve described in detail dozens of Consalvos’s collages, but I don’t know if I’ve reached the lining

²¹⁵ Greaves 2005: 8

²¹⁶ Marker, Chris, dir. *Sans Soleil*, 1983.

yet. More excavation is needed. Ultimately, even illusive photographs, which capture one moment as refracted through a glass lens to one subjective human eye, contain personal memory better than collage's scavenging process. The focus is tighter, the mnemonic value more entrenched—Consalvos's own family considered peeling off the photos from his art and discarding the rest.

But what have I arbitrarily saved and accidentally discarded? I have no doubt dreamt a man quite different than the man who called himself Felipe Jesus Consalvos, the artist who assembled some 800 collages out of cigar labels and magazine clippings. That man needs no help from me—his art has staved off what Thomas Hardy called “our second future death” in “oblivion's swallowing sea.”²¹⁷ Part of my hope in writing and publishing this book is that a relative might come forward to explain more of the mystery, to fill those interstices of the story that so desperately need filling. So I offer these meditations on the thirteen ghostly photographs found with Consalvos's oeuvre in the hope of some future moment when a descendant of Lipe—or perhaps another Collector in Cuba—reads my words with surreal glee, as if hearing an elegy delivered by a complete stranger. Even if the collages are unique, there is always a probability of duplicate photographic prints of the following pictures. I imagine the Twain scene when Tom and Huck eavesdrop on their own funeral, and I wonder if a Diate or a Martí or a Consalvos might one day happen upon this modest monument to the dead and disappeared...

*

²¹⁷ From Hardy's 1901 poem “The To-be-forgotten.”

Binoculi prismatici. (Models now being delivered.)

Early American family life. Look out across this brief field, ankled in dry grass, to a modest but sturdy home. A shotgun house swung sidelong, low-slung porch roofs on either side. (Too dark to make out a dogtrot.) There are three or four faceless figures shaded beneath, at a distance that makes their identity difficult to discern. I see a seated woman in a long dress (Helena says Eriquita), a man in short sleeves standing with hands on hips (Helena says Felipe), and another seated man in front of that man. This man's legs look crossed. The fourth figure could be a ghost, or else a shadow, or a derelict dress left out to air-dry on a chair. Beyond, and above the gables, a minor jungle looms, flippant palm fronds raised high above their naked stalks like sickly broccoli. Are those bananas? Harvest home. A little bit of heaven.

Down the road apiece. Five photos. (Of thirteen pictures, a full four feature horses and riders.) One. A study of provincial life. A deserted road choked with dust. Lined with houses much like the field house, with leaning porches. Punctuated by telephone poles. Brushwood.

Two. Here comes the cavalry. Eight male riders, black and white and in between, ranged across another dry dusty road. Bright light of early morning stretches the shadows long, including those of the two photographers, one longer than the other.

Three. When I was a boy. A young boy in a straw hat and kerchief has stopped his pony on a path. Spanish colonial architecture, ribbed tiled roofs, squared off columns, all overgrown but not yet settled into ruin.

Four. **Sore buttocks.** A couple shot head-on, on horseback, both in straw hats, hers floppier, his hooding his eyes. Long and listless shadows in the grass. She grins gamely. She's wearing what looks like round sunglasses. A low forest behind them.

Five. **Car horror.** Four boys in a horse-drawn cart look directly at the camera. The ones in front are older, dressed it too. One holding the reins up high. The smaller ones in back smile openly, both dressed in white shirt sleeves and shorts. The telephone pole seem at odds with three grass-thatched houses and the spindly carriage wheels. The horse stands just off the road. They've paused on their way somewhere to take the photograph.

A family in transition. A winding flagstone path, a park, perhaps. Sky blown white like nacre, a horizon opened up as if above the sea. Is that the sea beyond them? The top third of the frame bares milky white, but cloudless. **No trace of seamen.** There in the distance, a hillock, hints of scrubby growth. Here is a slight man in a light linen suit, tie and collar just slightly askew, baring a button or two. The camera captures him head to shins. Heavy brow and lids—soulful, some might say—broad ears and nose, and a faint smile below dark wind-tousled hair. He holds a bare-legged child to the center of the frame. The boy squints in the sun, all tow-headed grimace. He wears banded sandals on his feet and holds a toy pistol, kid-hand clutched over the cylinder, barrel pointed back from his hip. The man's fingers graze the boy's closed fist on the knuckles. Fifteen paces behind these two stands another man in a striped shirt and porkpie hat (all the men in these pictures wear porkpies or boaters or sometimes newsboy caps), rummaging in his pockets and staring off to his left. I'd like to think it's the sea staring back.

By the sea. A buoy beached like a bloated steel porpoise, its rivets caked with sand. ("Rivets had rolled into the grove of death."²¹⁸) It looks like Meliès's rocket in *A Trip to the Moon*, like it could have fallen from the sky instead of washing in with that crinkle-weed. Two men in light suits stand stern atop the bulbous wreck, identical porkpies in their hands. A teenage boy stands a step apart to their left and lower, sullen or bored in his mismatched jacket, holding a flat cap in his right hand. The man who calmly sails. His pants are several inches too short. Their shoes are leather, the water is calm.

Vital powers. The grand young man. The boy has become more of a man. His stubble deliberate and thick, cap tilted rakishly to one side. Long eyes. A faint smirk. Politics of young America.

The individual jelly school. He might be twelve years old now, no older. The polished patterned tiles of the floor faintly reflect his shoes and his legs, which are dressed in short pants. His dark suit looks Sunday best or school uniform, and his hair is combed down tidily. A picture frame hangs above his head, and his arms are crossed. A hallway behind, and the edge of another frame.

This boy is much younger, in a sailor's suit and cap. He was a sailor. Arm up on the gunwale of a dry-docked wooden rowboat. Lifeboat. Factory smokestacks belch stained smoke, but all out of focus, and a stick leans lamely against the belly of the boat. This boy's

²¹⁸ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Peterborough: Broadview, 1999, p. 98.

eyes project a sadness, maybe just the seriousness and discomfort of small children asked to sit still for photographs.

Five cameo photos, three rectangular and two oval, in a photography studio's paper frame. Embossed floral and flame motifs, a torch and olive branches. Four windows frame a baby with dark bangs framing those same mournful eyes. Creeping baby. Who caught the baby in the Bronx. Helena says this is baby Cuco, but it could just as easily be his sister Auresta. Dressed in lace, a high-backed baby's chair. The child seems alternately bemused and delighted with his series of headwear: a frilly bonnet, a miniature newsboy's cap, a ribbon. From the fifth window, the one above all the others, George Washington's sickly green dollar-bill visage beams benevolently. "The Child is the father of the Man."²¹⁹

Dream the rest.

²¹⁹ From William Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" (1802). Wordsworth, William. *The Complete Poetical Works*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1888; Bartleby.com, 1999. www.bartleby.com/145/. [March 30, 2008].

APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS

All of the following untitled works are attributed to Felipe Jesus Consalvos, except the anonymous non-collage photographs, which were discovered with his artwork, and a few of the author's photos. Due to file size constraints, only a fraction of the cited works could be included here, and because of copyright limitations, no comparatives of images by other artists could be included. Consalvos works appear in numerical order by Fleisher/Ollman Gallery inventory numbers, which reflect the chronology of restoration and release by the Collector. Photographs appear at the end. All images from the Consalvos estate © Doodletown Farm, LLC, and reproduced here with permission.





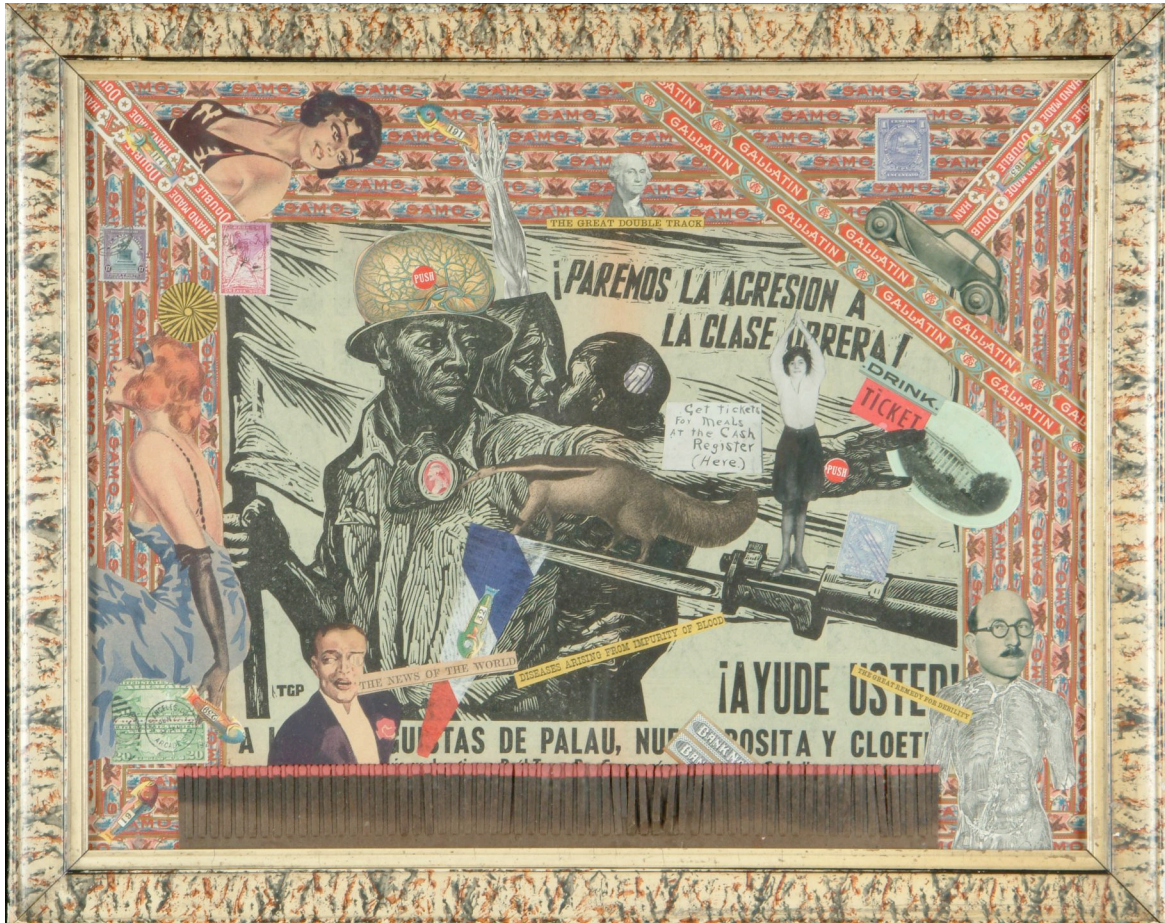
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FJC 84.



FJC 87.



FJC 103.



FJC 144.



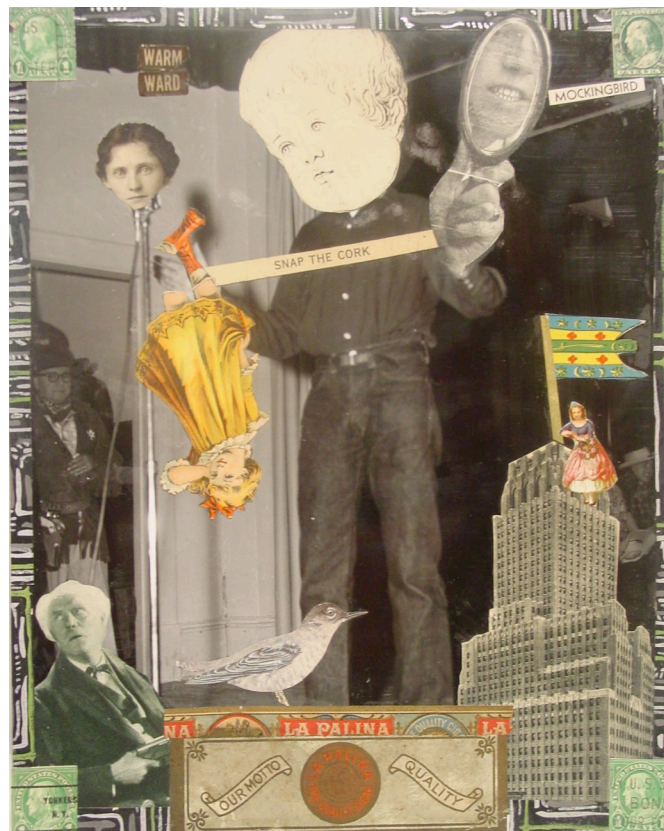
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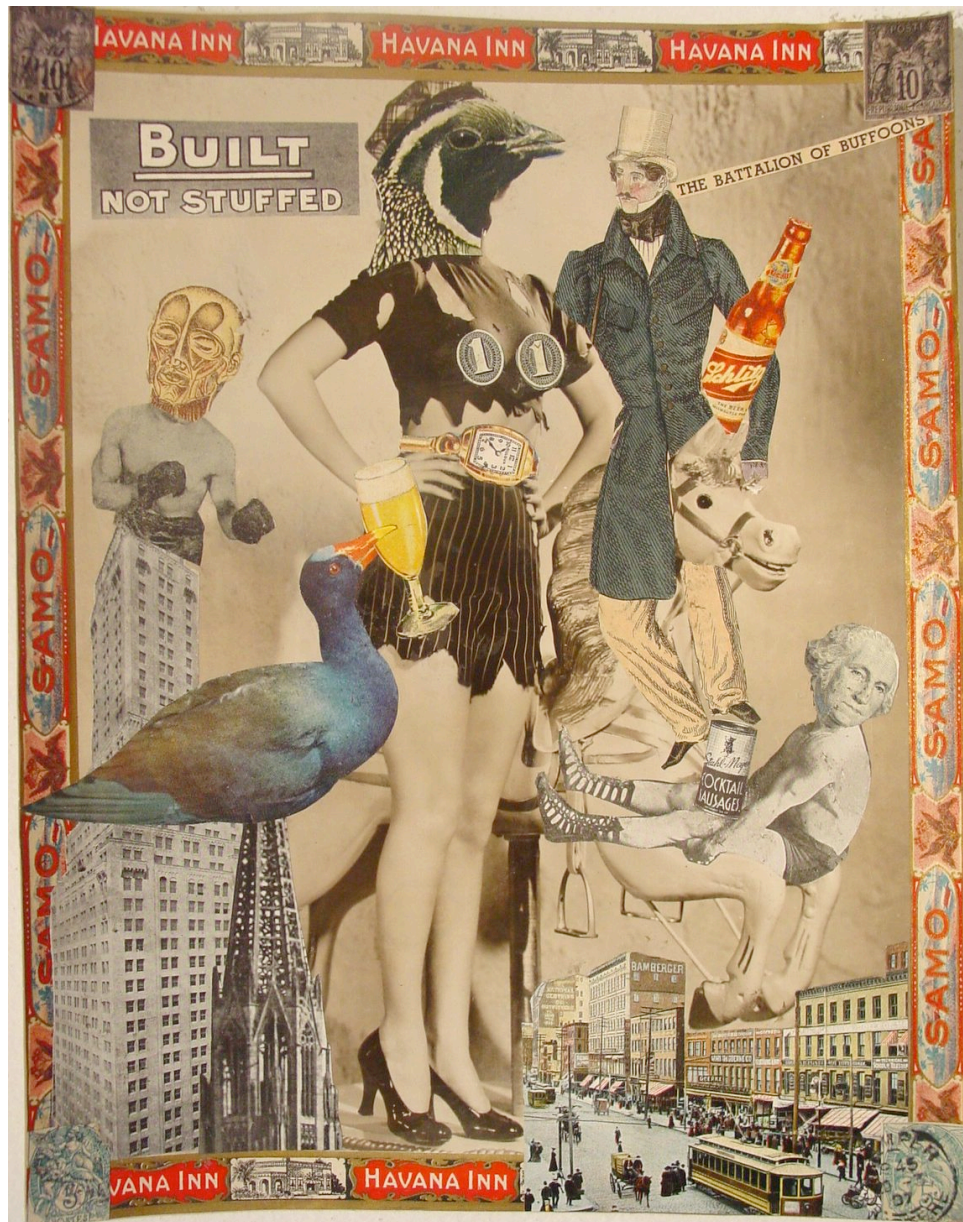
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FJC 309.



FJC 368.



FJC 391, recto and verso.



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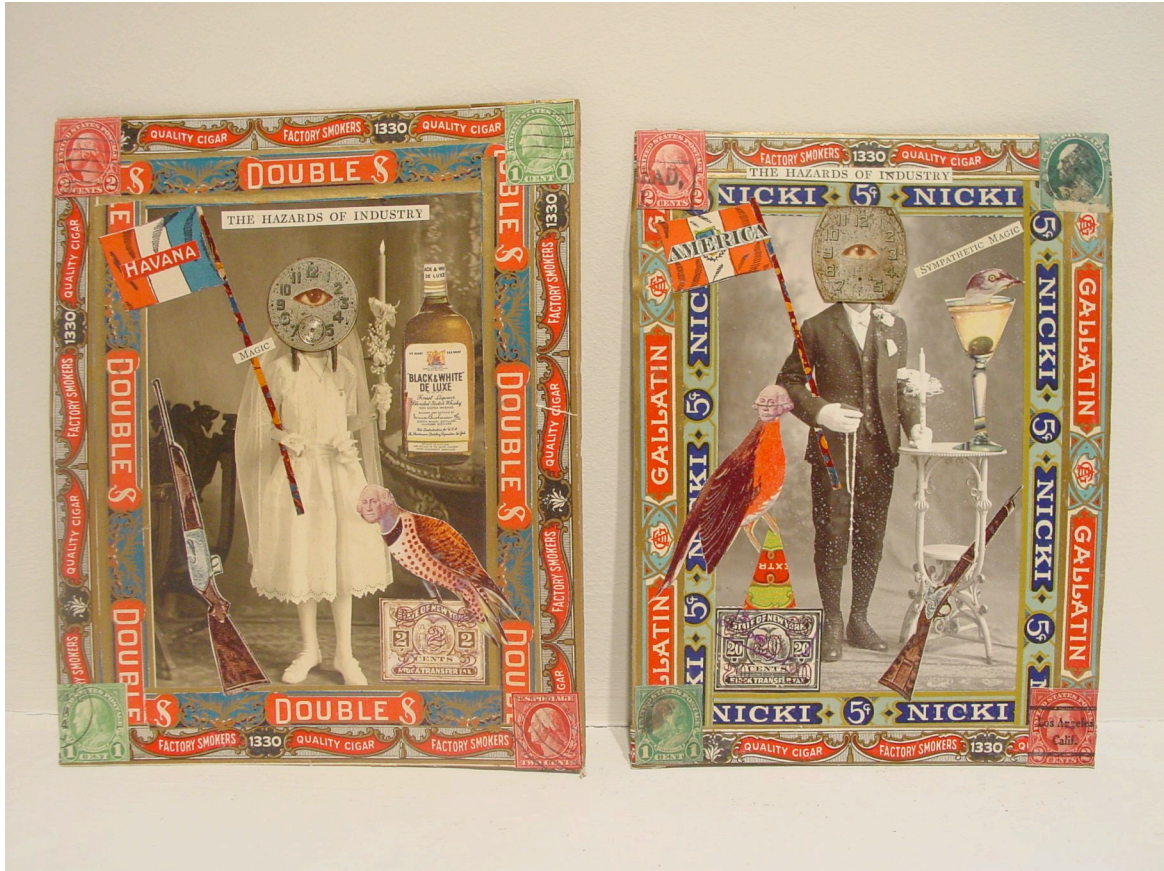
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FJC 462.



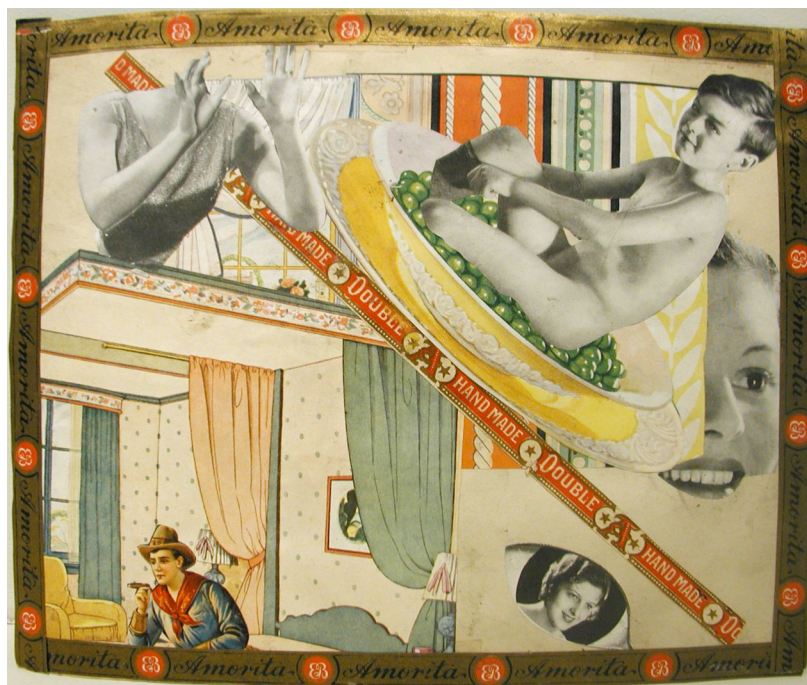
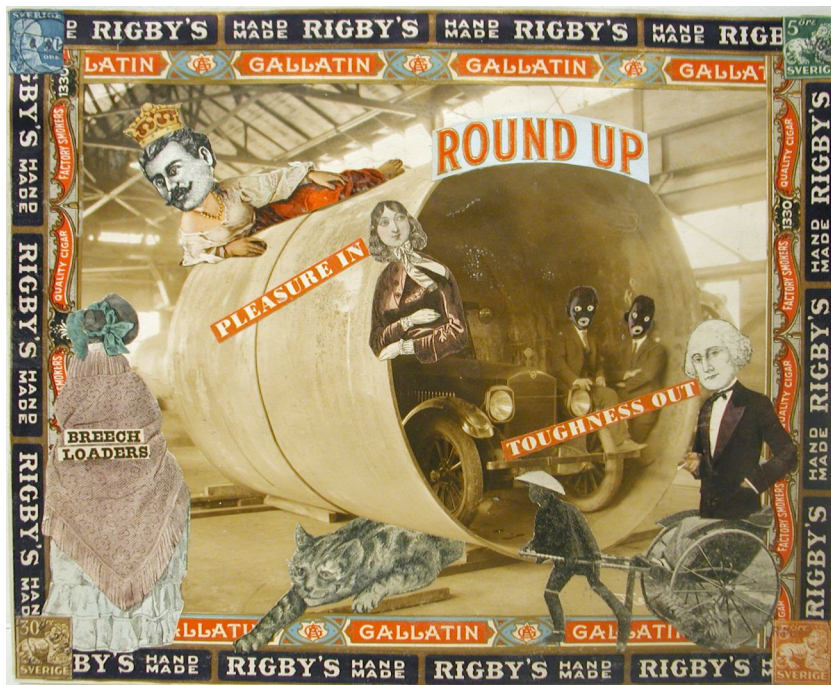
FJC 464d.



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FJC 527, recto and verso.



FJC 567, recto and verso.



FJC 571.



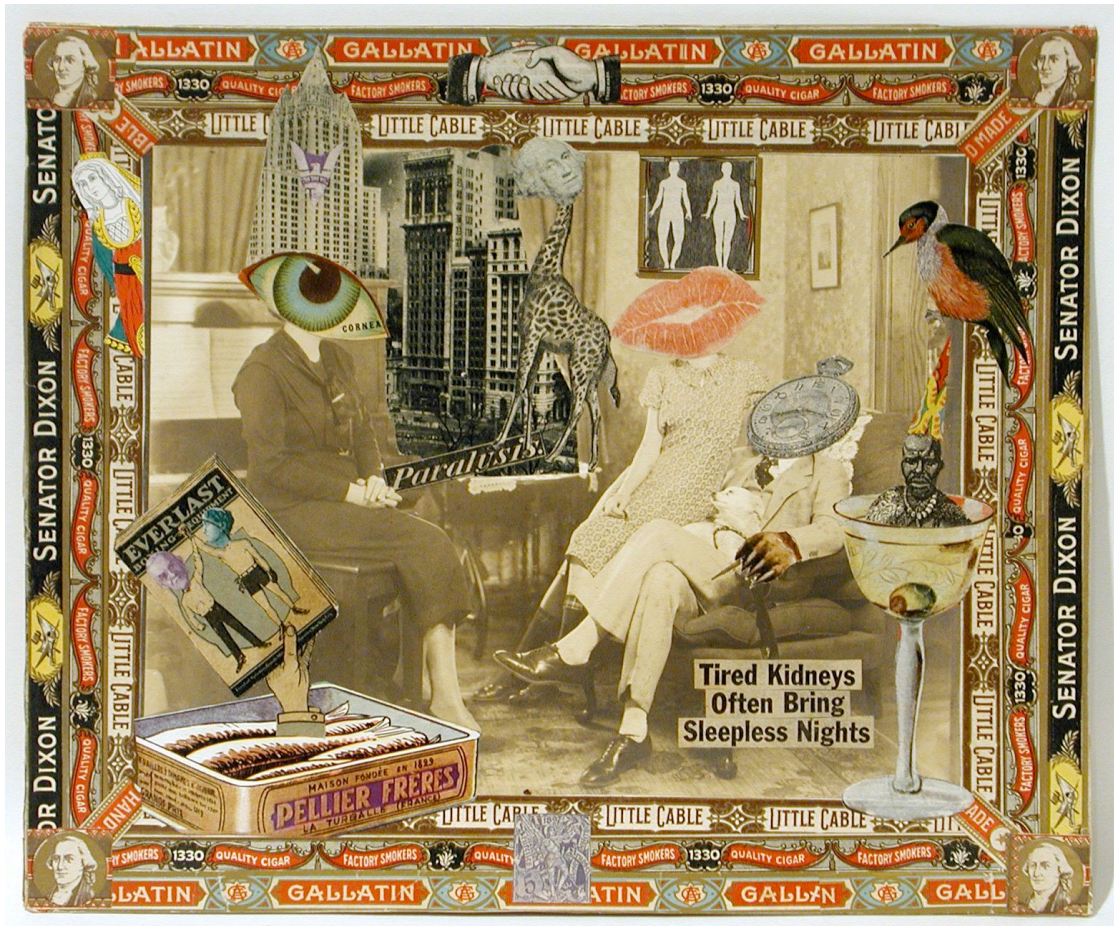
FJC 579, recto and verso.



FJC 587, recto and verso.



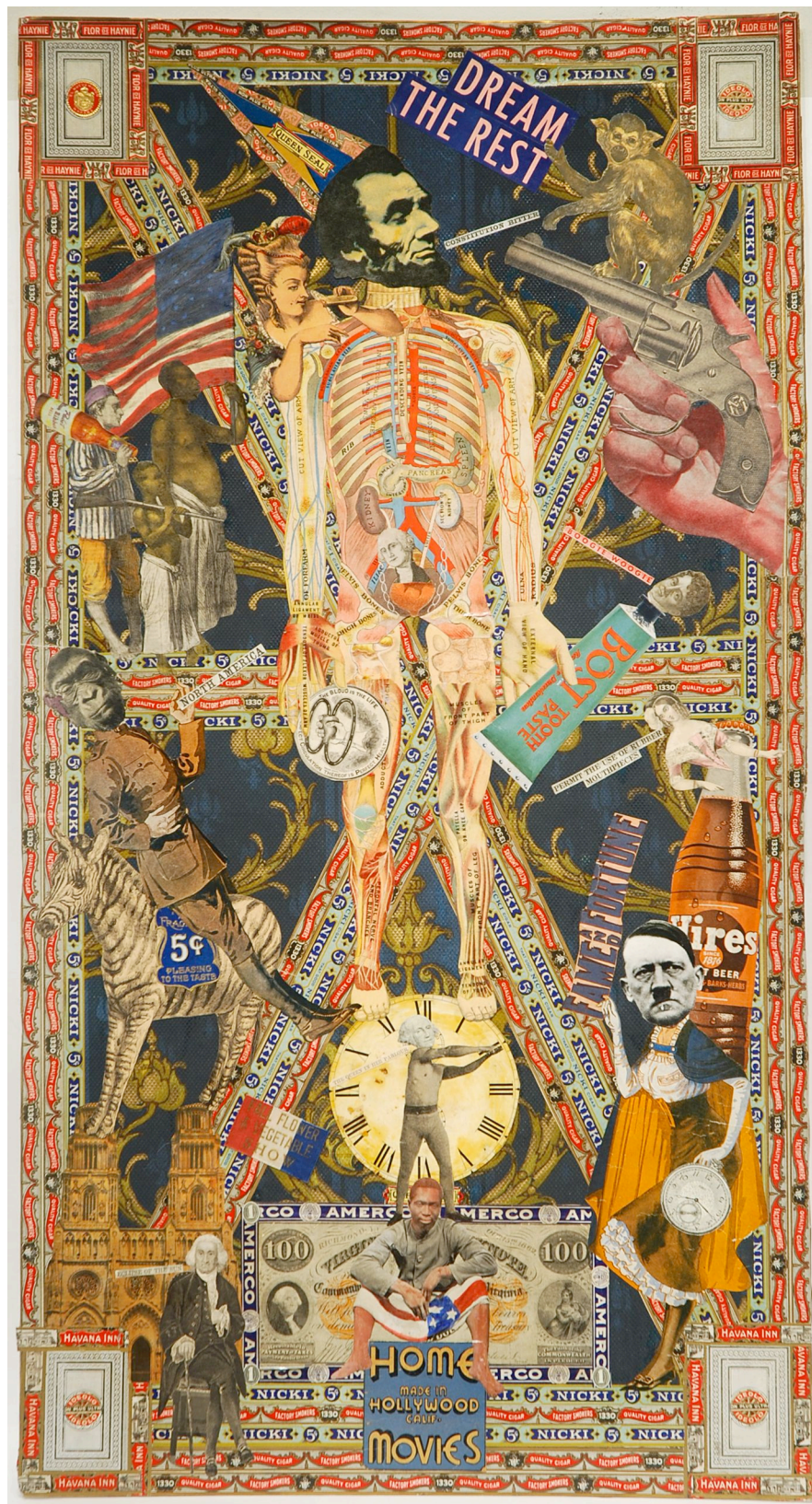
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FJC 625.









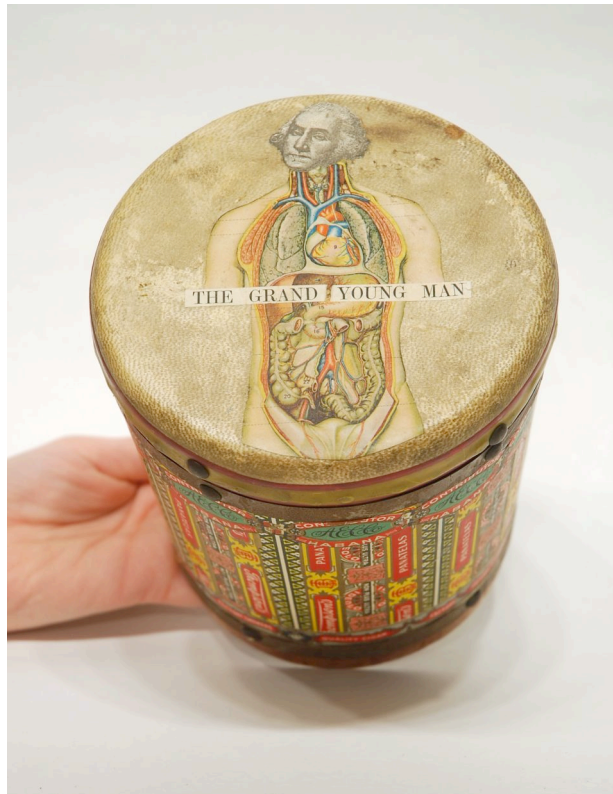
FJC 642, detail and verso.



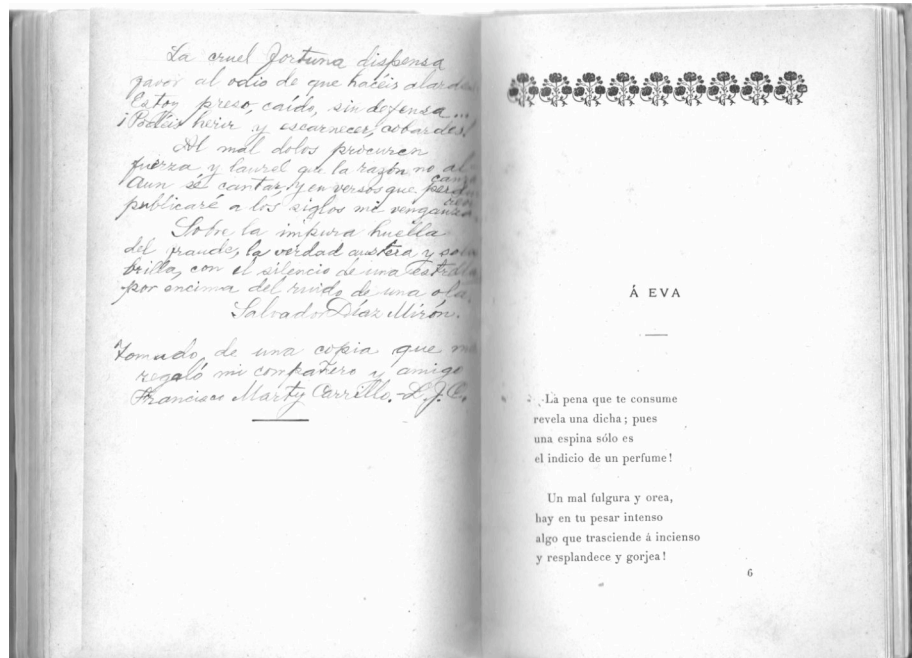
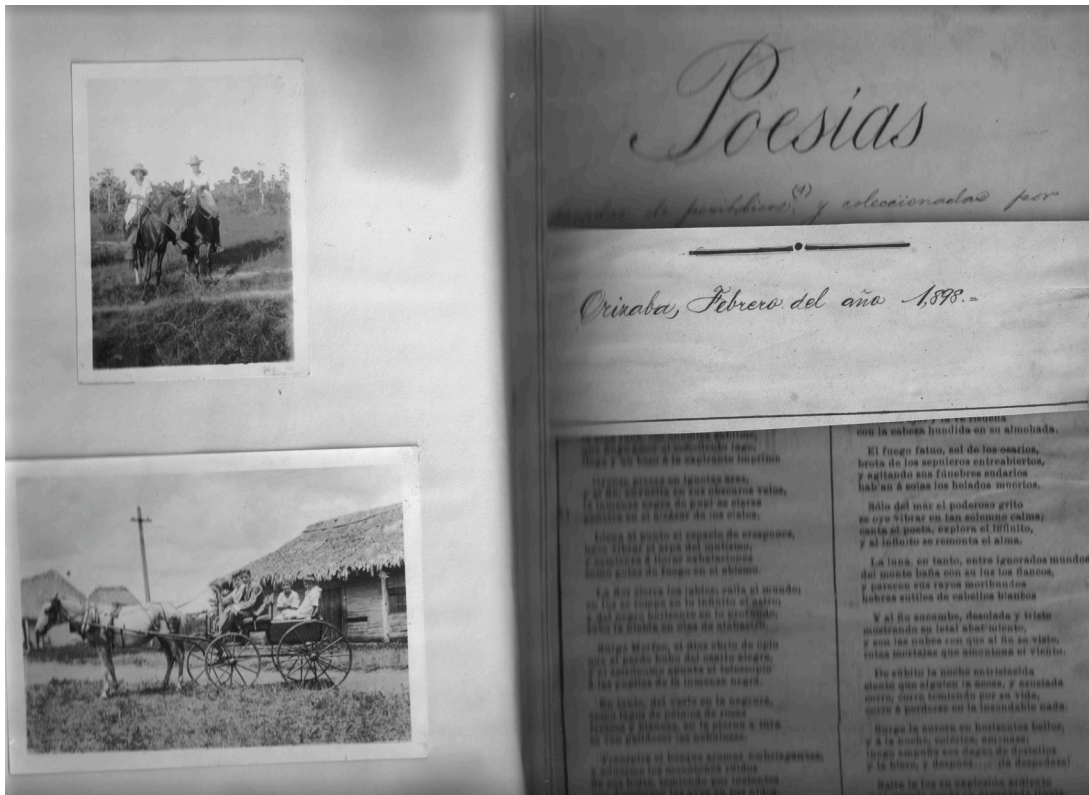
FJC 644, recto and verso.



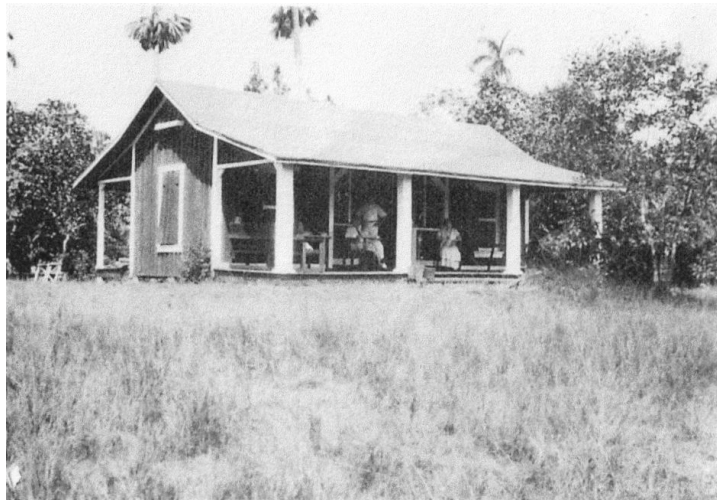
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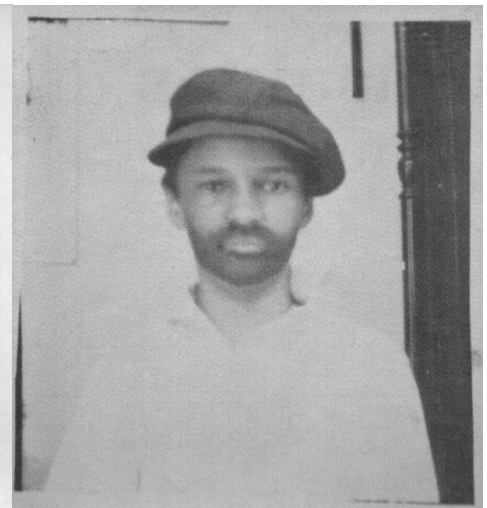
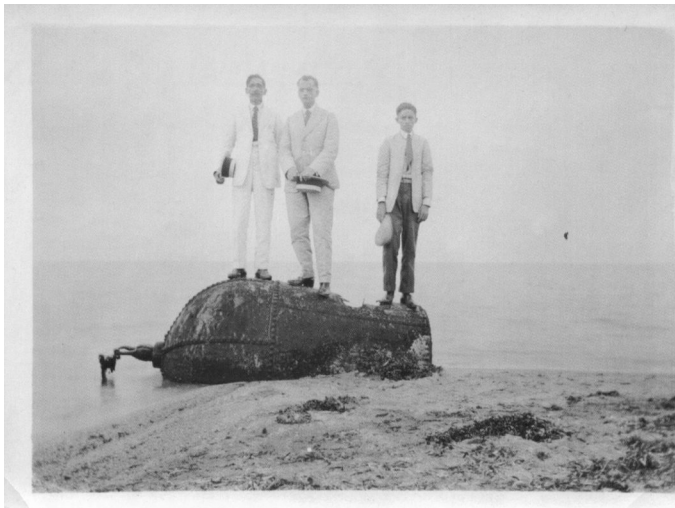
Pages from Consalvos's poetry scrapbook and Míron anthology, with handwritten annotation.



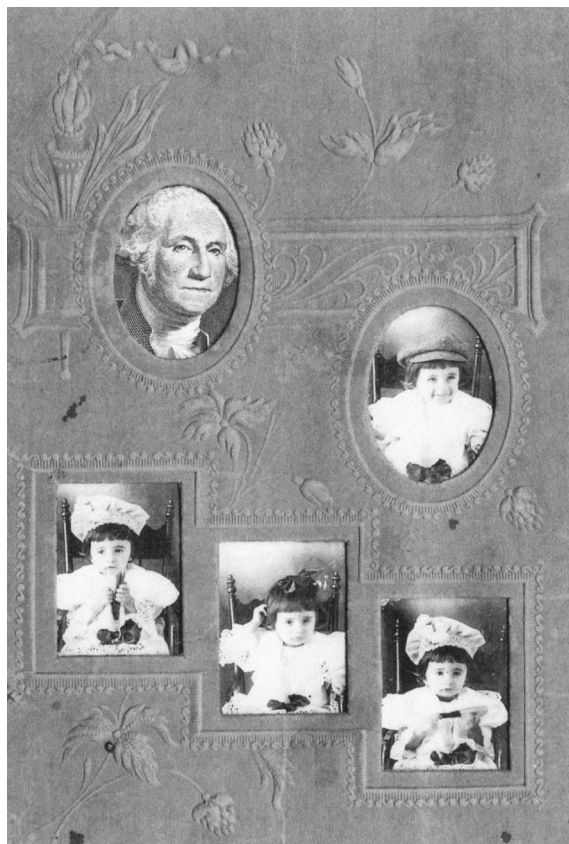
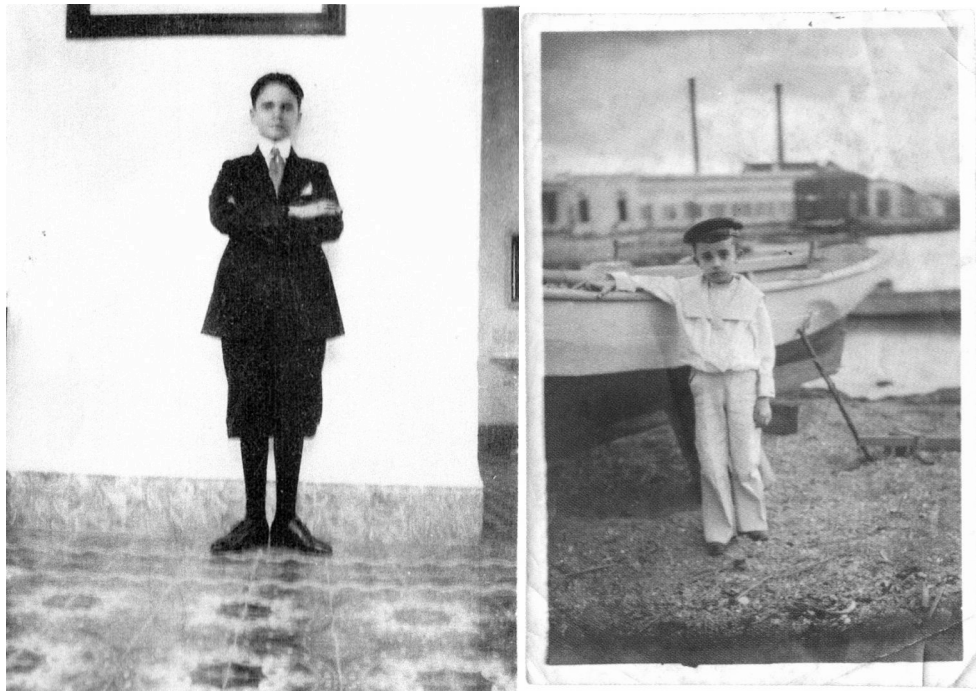
Photographs found with Consalvos's collages (see Coda.)



More Consalvos photos.



Consalvos photos.



Roleros at El Titan de Bronze, Calle Ocho, Miami, July 2007.



Contemporary cigar band collage souvenirs at an Ybor City shop.



Antique cigar band collages (with friend) at Mike Turbeville's Perfectos, Tampa, July 2007.



Mike Turbeville with his collaged guitar, July 2007.



The author in Key West, July 2007.



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