

CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTION

Los Carpinteros

Complejo Martí (tríptico)

2007

Watercolor on paper

98½ × 165 ⅜ in. (250.2 × 420.1 cm)

Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and friends of the Harn Museum

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Los Carpinteros, members of a Havana-based collective formed in 1991, are among the most important and innovative artists to emerge from the Cuban avant-garde. They adopted their name in 1994 in support of the collaborative spirit, discipline, and craftsmanship associated with the guild tradition of artisans and skilled laborers. Students at the acclaimed Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), they use subversive and subtle strategies employing metaphor, irony, and humor to explore the contradictions of Cuban reality.

The work of Los Carpinteros emerges from drawings for their paintings, furniture, and large-scale architectural installations. They use found and simple materials that reflect both the extreme economic plight of Cuba and the resourceful inventiveness of Cuban people. Their work is playful, yet aesthetically and thematically sophisticated. They explore the tensions between the ordinary and the extraordinary, art and craft, art and society, while also focusing on existential, historical, and social problems.

Complejo Martí is a watercolor drawing that portrays three Olympic-sized swimming pools. Rendered in washes of blue, the empty pools suggest sites of athletic display or lavish and luxurious recreation. Abundant in Cuba prior to the revolution, pools were banned by the new regime in 1959 as products of decadence. In this work, the artists create a deliberate dissonance between the familiar and the fantastic. Within the pools, targets in human form have been set up for shooting practice. Ominously, they suggest the political persecution and assassinations that have taken place in abandoned gyms and stadiums.

