



CUBA LIBROS

Part literature, part artistic creation and part assemblage, Ediciones Vigía books offer a unique medium for the written word. Juanamaria Cordones-Cook, professor of Spanish and collector of the Cuban books, wants to spread the word about the MU Museum of Art and Archaeology's spellbinding collection.

By Marcus Wilkins



Rolando Estévez Jordán, the leading artist of Ediciones Vigía, created *La Silla* (the chair). The one-of-a-kind work is part of a 12-piece series about being separated from his exiled Cuban family at age 16.

In today's world,

books can be had in an instant. Memory cards hold billions of words, e-tablets flip pages with a tap, and batteries last for a whole month. The entire works of Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Twain can be zapped onto your Kindle or iPad before you can brew coffee and flop on the couch.

But for fans of the palpable paperback, nothing can replace the *feeling* of a book. Juanamaria Cordones-Cook, professor of Spanish and researcher of Afro-Hispanic literature, appreciates that sentiment. She has helped assemble Mizzou's Ediciones Vigía collection, a series of handcrafted books from Cuba.

During the decline of communism in the Soviet Union, printing supplies became so scarce in Cuba that the publishing business was struggling to survive. In the 1980s, a group of determined artists and poets formed the collaborative press, which is named after its Plaza de la Vigía (Watchtower Square) home in Matanzas, Cuba.

The literary works of art are hand-printed or mimeographed and intricately illustrated on inexpensive materials such as butcher's paper or cardboard. They contain poetry, prose and drama from contemporary as well as classic authors including Gabriel García Márquez and Emily Dickenson.

The art form is also known as bricolage, and each copy is adorned with found supplies such as feathers, cornhusks, driftwood and sand. Some editions even feature interactive embellishments akin to a pop-up book.

"The artists use a lot of decorating strategies from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the bookmaking process," says Cordones-Cook, who received a Mizzou Advantage grant in February 2011 to develop her research and produce two corresponding documentaries about Ediciones Vigía and Cuban culture. She became interested in the books through her study of Cuban poet Nancy Morejón, the most published writer by the press. "As you turn the page, there is always an element of surprise."

During production, each volume circulates through 14 to 16 artists who make as many as 200 copies, which results in a unique, hand-numbered edition every time. Even the format varies, from scrolls to picture books to delicate journals. The press produces 15 to 20 titles annually.

The Museum of Art and Archaeology has more than 70 copies in its collection, and Cordones-Cook has approximately 60 in her personal collection.

"I have too many favorites," Cordones-Cook says. "They are like children you love very much in their unique ways." ■

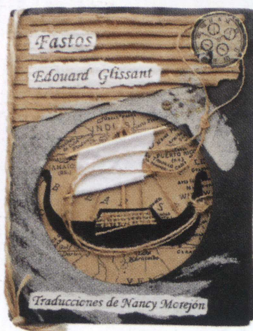


MU Professor of Spanish Juanamaria Cordones-Cook hand-selected the more than 70 art object books in the MU Museum of Art and Archaeology's Ediciones Vigía collection. She has nearly 60 in her personal collection.

LEARN MORE ABOUT JUANAMARIA CORDONES-COOK'S WORK WITH EDICIONES VIGÍA | MIZZOUMAGAZINE.COM



A hand-painted wooden box decorated with dried flowers and vegetable fibers holds *La Silla*. The central poem is printed on a 4-foot sheet of paper folded accordion style.



Fastos is a book of poems by the French writer Edouard Glissant and translated by Cuban poet Nancy Morejón. The sea-themed piece is decorated with sand and watch components.



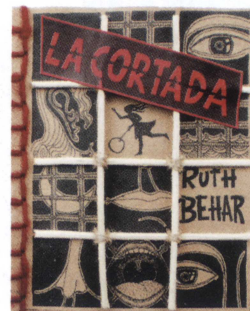
Cuaderno de la fiancée (the fiancée's notebook) by Mabel Cuesta is a book of lesbian-themed short stories adorned with dried roses.



Pais Magico (magic country) by Zaida de Rio contains bilingual poetry in Spanish and English. Like many Ediciones Vigía books, it unfolds to reveal a dramatic, multifaceted illustration.



Los Graduados de Kafka (the graduates of Kafka) by Jorge Angel Hernandez Pérez includes several interpretations of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.



La Cortada (the cut or shortcut) by Ruth Behar employs a wooden grid to imply a cage. The book contains a puzzle that, when assembled, becomes a woman.

Opposite page: The wings of this dove-shaped Christmas card open to reveal a paper cutout of Jesus and a spiritual poem. Bits of wood and twine are fastened to the manger, and the lantern is an Ediciones Vigía trademark that appears in many pieces.

