Teaching history through the visual arts is one way of bringing the past into the present. In Cuba, the visual arts and architecture have reflected the country's "flowering of identity" through time, as a multi-ethnic population has grown to recognize its own distinct history, values and attributes, and Cuban artists have portrayed the island's unique geography, flora and fauna. The arts have been a mirror reflecting Cuba's history from earliest times to the present, and they now speak to its future.

Pre-Conquest Arts

In October 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the eastern shores of Cuba with three caravellas. He found a land whose beauty astonished him, and a people and civilization that impressed him. On Christmas Day in 1492, Columbus noted in his day-to-day journal (kept in part as a record for his funders, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain): "I assure your highnesses that in all the world there is no better people nor better country. They love their neighbors as themselves, and have the sweetest talk in the world, and gentle, and always with a smile." (1)

Shortly thereafter, Columbus sailed back to Spain. When he came back the following year, he brought ships, colonists, priests, and soldiers with armor, weapons and cannons. They planned to convert souls, capture slaves, build fortifications, and search for gold. Within 50 years, the pre-Columbian population of Cuba would be decimated due to disease, slavery and war. In present day Cuba, there are no populations of indigenous peoples. Because archaeology was not a developed discipline in Cuba until the twentieth century, and very little was known about the indigenous populations, their art has not had a great impact on the flowering of art in Cuba.

There were two different populations in Cuba at the time of conquest, the pre-ceramic Ciboney and the pottery-using Taino. As prehistoric peoples, they left no writing behind to tell us about themselves and their histories. However, the artifacts they left behind tell a deeper story, connecting them to a larger South American and Caribbean culture. While the origin of the Ciboney is unknown, the Taino are linked to the Arawaks, who originate from South America and who populated the Caribbean basin.

The earliest site of the Ciboney dates from around 5,000 BCE. Burials have revealed beautifully abraded and polished spheroliths, or balls, made of quartz and other hard rock--some found in children's tombs--and ornaments and other objects that show no sign of use as tools.

The most arresting works left behind by the Ciboney peoples are pictographs, or cave paintings, found in caves all over Cuba. The shapes range from small very fine lines to circles, varied geometric figures forming unknown motifs, and stylized representations of vegetable elements, animals, and perhaps meteorological phenomena, such as hurricanes. Many of the rectilinear drawings of crosses and arrows are situated at places where solstices and equinoxes can be observed, and there are compass directions.

The Tainos were far more numerous than the Ciboneys at the time of conquest, and are thought...
visual history. dictionary: art & artists. history of art. Profile Official name República de Cuba (Republic of Cuba) Form of government unitary socialist republic with one legislative house (National Assembly of the Peopleís Power [614]) Head of state and government President Capital Havana Official language Spanish Official religion none Monetary unit Cuban peso (CUP) Population estimate (2008) 11,236,000 Total area (sq mi) 42,427 Total area (sq km). The study of Cuban art and architecture highlights unique aspects of the island's history from prehistoric times through conquest and colonialism, to independence and revolution. Special Section: Teaching about Latin America through the Humanities. The study of Cuban art and architecture highlights unique aspects of the island's history from prehistoric times through conquest and colonialism, to independence and revolution. View PDF File.