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**Rare Photographs, Advertisements, and Posters  
from Pre-1959 Cuba to Premiere at The Wolfsonian on May 6, 2016**

*Promising Paradise: Cuban Allure, American Seduction explores how Americans and Cubans shaped perceptions of one another through print media, film, and music in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century*

*Exhibition coincides with a major gift of over 1,000 works from collector Vicki Gold Levi to the museum*

**MIAMI BEACH (April 6, 2016)** — On the heels of renewed diplomatic relations and travel between the United States and Cuba, The Wolfsonian–Florida International University presents an exhibition exploring our two nations’ past connections and first major period of cultural exchange, from 1920 to 1959. ***Promising Paradise: Cuban Allure, American Seduction, on view May 6 through August 21, 2016***, sheds light on the glamour and exoticism of tourism campaigns that lured Americans to their southerly neighbor, as well as the remarkable impact of Cuban culture in the U.S. that resulted from this contact—from rumba and mambo to Afro-Cuban jazz and Latin nightclubs. Complementing the hundreds of photographs, posters, and promotional ephemera on display will be a series of reproduction record album covers and a floor installation of Arthur Murray dance steps in The Wolfsonian’s historic lobby, together activating the museum’s first floor with a summer-long celebration of Cuban music and dance.

In tandem with *Promising Paradise*, The Wolfsonian will acquire over 1,000 works from collector, author, and longtime Wolfsonian donor Vicki Gold Levi. The acquisition bolsters previous gifts of Cuban material by Levi to the museum, including a collection donated in 2002 of over 400 objects

ranging from cigar labels to magazine covers. Selections from both gifts will be included in *Promising Paradise*, in addition to loans and other items from The Wolfsonian's permanent collection. Many of the gifted works are reproduced in the exhibition's companion publication *Cuba Style: Graphics from the Golden Age of Design*, co-authored by Gold Levi with renowned art director and Wolfsonian advisory board member Steven Heller.

"We are thrilled to be presenting this exhibition on the cusp of a new dawn in Cuba-U.S. relations," stated Wolfsonian chief librarian Francis X. Luca, who is co-curating *Promising Paradise* with Rosa Lowinger, noted Cuban-born conservator and author of *Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub*. "These rare materials provide a glimpse into a period many Cubans and Americans have forgotten after more than fifty years of isolation. We're excited to share Vicki Gold Levi's gift with Miami, a city so richly influenced by the Cuban-American community."

Added donor Vicki Gold Levi: "I've had Latin rhythms in my DNA since growing up in Atlantic City, mamboing my way through high school dancing to Pérez Prado. As a picture editor and later as an author, I became further enthralled with Cuba. My collection is right at home at The Wolfsonian, where I know it will be the subject of continual study and re-examination for years to come."

*Promising Paradise* features products of the pre-1959 tourist trade that framed Cuba as an escape for wealthy Americans from the bounds of Prohibition, Depression-era economic woes, and wartime rationing. Through bold graphics, lush imagery, and dazzling, enticing color palettes, these materials packaged and publicized the enchantment and beauty of Cuba for Americans, creating a fantasy of a dreamy island paradise. The exhibition also addresses the role of Cuban tastemakers—artists, musicians, performers, graphic designers, and the Cuban Tourist Commission—in shaping this vision of Cuba for American audiences in travel brochures, posters, and promotional films.

Key works include:

- A late-1920s sheet music cover for Cuban dances, *Siboney*, a true Cuban-American collaboration between Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona and American lyricist Dolly Morse;
- A film poster for the 1949 classic *Holiday in Havana*, with Mary Hatcher and pre-*I Love Lucy* Desi Arnaz;
- *Come to Cuba*, an early-1950s, vibrant brochure advertising the country's wide variety of attractions (dancing, beach-going, gambling, and horse racing) below Columbus' description of Cuba as "the loveliest land that human eyes have ever seen";
- *Cuba, Ideal Vacation Land: Tour Guide* (1951–52), touting a colorful book cover associating the island with the allure of a long-limbed, swimsuit-clad woman; and
- A tropical menu cover from the restaurant in Havana's Sans Souci nightclub and casino.

In addition, photographs, film clips, and other artifacts reveal the craze for Latin culture in the U.S., particularly among celebrities and the Hollywood elite. As the rich and famous frequented the cabarets and casinos of Havana, Americans adapted Afro-Cuban dance and music for the stage and screen—bringing the Cuban flavor experienced abroad back home, and resulting in an explosion of Latin-inspired nightclubs across the country and the establishment of many Cuban performers as household names. The indelible influence of Cuban culture on the U.S. extended beyond movies, jazz, mambo, cha-cha-cha, and the conga to sports, fashion, and more.

Highlights of this section are:

- A Prohibition-era image of an American tourist enjoying the newly unveiled Bacardi Quest Bar in Havana in 1931;
- A photograph (c. 1945) capturing many of Cuba's most famous musicians of the 1940s, including rumbero Silvestre Méndez, singer Miguelito Valdés, and Chano Pozo, one of the creators of Afro-Cuban jazz;
- A mid-1940s photograph with Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr. and novelist Ernest Hemingway among a crowd gathered around a large swordfish on the Cuban docks;
- Two original performance dresses worn by famed Cuban singers Celia Cruz and Olga Guillot in the 1950s—Cruz's decorated with gold sequins, and Guillot's with coral beads;
- A mid-1950s photograph of Cuban singer Benny Moré, probably taken at the Bambu Club in Havana;
- A photograph (c. 1955) of Celia Cruz posing with American singer Frankie Laine, Cuban modelo Nora Osorio, Rolando from the dancing team of Ana Gloria and Rolando, and Tropicana Club stars;
- A photograph (1955) of American actor Marlon Brando playing the bongos in Cuba, with Cuban author Guillermo Cabrera Infante looking on; and
- A photograph of gangster Meyer Lansky and staff of his Hotel Habana Riviera, in 1958.

Additional works feature Frank Sinatra and Ava Gardner, Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor, and Cesar Romero with samba performer Carmen Miranda.

Many of the works speak to historic issues of race and gender in representing ideas of the tropics, the exotic, and the "other"—resulting in a highly constructed portrayal of Cuban culture. Women and the female body played prominent roles, as did acknowledgments of the Latin American and African geneses of jazz, rumba, and other popular music and dance genres of the first half of the twentieth century.

"*Promising Paradise* marks new territory for The Wolfsonian," said museum director Tim Rodgers. "As we continue to research the collection generously gifted to us by Vicki Gold Levi, we look forward to building upon these opportunities to tell the nuanced, complex stories of Cuba and the U.S.—neighboring cultures that together shaped Miami into what it is today."

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#### Exhibition Support

*Promising Paradise: Cuban Allure, American Seduction* is made possible by Vicki Gold Levi and Dr. Alexander Levi; Bacardi USA, Inc.; Arthur Murray International; Terra Group; Trina Turk; Brickell Bank; Marsh & McLennan Agency; AIG; BankUnited; Dr. Felipe Del Valle M.D. P.A.; and the Cuban Research Institute at FIU.

#### About Donor Vicki Gold Levi

Vicki Gold Levi is a picture editor, photography curator, and historian. She co-authored both *Atlantic City: 125 Years of Ocean Madness* and *Cuba Style: Graphics from the Golden Age of Design*, co-founded the Atlantic City Historical Museum, and served as an historical consultant on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*. Gold Levi is a longtime donor of Cuban ephemera and vintage photography to The Wolfsonian, and has also given works to the International Center of Photography and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

#### About The Wolfsonian—Florida International University

The Wolfsonian—FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects from the 1850s to the 1950s—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the

Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors, students, and children age 6–12; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under six. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at [wolfsonian.org](http://wolfsonian.org) for further information.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

#### About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity and recognized as a Carnegie engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offers 196 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in fields such as engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida's anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 54,000 students in two campuses and three centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, and the Miami Beach Urban Studios. FIU's Medina Aquarius Program houses the Aquarius Reef Base, a unique underwater research facility in the Florida Keys. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian–FIU, and the Jewish Museum of Florida–FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit [fiu.edu](http://fiu.edu).