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The small body, a mote in a vast world of blue,

spun slowly to the silty ocean floor and died. And then another until the remains of a million, trillion corals constructed, over time, a thin spine of islands rising out of fertile waters. Left in its briny grave this coral rock underlying the Florida Keys remains soft and malleable. Once exposed to air and sun it is transformed into the hard, lightly textured instrument of numerous construction projects. This is the foundation of the Florida Keys then -- one thing, until it is another.

Despite hostile Indians, lack of drinking water, malaria and the occasional hurricane the Keys still lured settlers. These early inhabitants of the Keys burned through turtles, conch, shrimp—depleted all in the mad dash to wealth—all fortunes ripped from the nearby waters. By the Depression unemployment in Key West was a staggering 85 percent. The federal government sent artists as salvation. Avery Johnson, Henry La Cagnina, Sidney Laufman and Richard Sargent among others created public murals, tourist brochures and postcards. 40,000 tourists came in the winter of 1934. Over 1 million tourists visit the Keys today. Artists and writers continue to dig down in the Keys, transforming the malleable to the visible every day.

It looked like a black ribbon, like the sort of velvet choker women of a certain era wore strung through a cameo. The sign around his neck reading--“ABC EL A.B.C. DARA ESTA MUERTE A TODOS LOS LENGUI LARGOS” --death to those with long tongues.

Walker Evans took this photograph in Cuba, May of 1933. In “*To Have or Have Not.*” Hemingway has narrator Harry Morgan look "at a close-up picture of the head and chest...with his throat cut clear across from ear to ear and then stitched up and a card on his chest saying in Spanish "This is what we do to *lengui larga.*"

Did Walker Evans influence Hemingway?

Claudia Pennington asks just that question. **Ernest Hemingway and Walker Evans: Three Weeks in Cuba** opens January 2004 at the Key West Museum of Art and History. This is startling stuff—many of Evans’ never before exhibited photographs are referred to directly in “*To Have and Have Not*”. While this show travels to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC only in Key West can you walk out and be embraced by the salty, humid air Key West shares with Cuba, only 90 miles away. <http://kwahs.com/>

Specific in its profusion to Key West, gingerbread acts as a seductive screen, attracting the eye but concealing interiors. Intricate, wholly Key West, a seductive shield: these phrases describe Sal Salinaro’s work. Salinaro’s palette of of

tropical excess—vermillion, crimson, cobalt—is balanced by underlying cool rich greens. Showing at Gingerbread Square Gallery, his multitude of tropical plants, insects and animals press fleshily against the painting foreground, leaving the indelible impression of mysteries unrevealed.

Kept immediate and fresh with ink-drawn lines over flat, broad colored fields Palmer sketches scenes from daily life. In “Flamboyant” a woman in a purple and orange striped dress sleeps on a rattan chair against a muted cinderblock wall under red Poinciana. Gingerbread Square Gallery also represents Jim Salem’s luxuriantly tropical stillifes which have the architected sense of 19th century Dutch work, John McIntosh’s liquidly-painted harbor scenes and light-filled Robert James Johnson landscapes.

www.gingerbreadsquaregallery.com

Known for it's diversity, Gallery on Greene stands out for it’s terrific contemporary Cuban Artists. Their work represents the legacy of a classical European training (ending at modernism), indigenous influences and the isolation of a proud, cultured, educated people. A Cuban master, Roberto Fabalo’s handsome graphite work offers you mermaids on a series of dishes accompanied by forks. Luis Abreux mixes the influence of Picasso with his own internal carnival.

Gallery on Greene also notably represents Mario Sanchez. Collected by the MOMA and the Whitney, the American Folk Art Museum considers Sanchez is one of the most important Cuban-American Folk Artist of the 20th Century. His scenes of Key West are carved painstakingly, cobblestone brick by cobblestone brick, and then simply painted.

Peter Vey, William Welch and WB Thompson represent the galleries’ stable of “new impressionists” with gloriously colored Key West scenes, landscapes and room interiors respectively. Brightly and simply hued, Russell D’Alessio works in confident compositions with spaces defined boldly by color and pattern. Lucianna Abait creates a series small, simple, almost-abstract worlds of red beach umbrellas, or red and white lighthouses on 4”x4” flat blue fields, each piece a word in language of shape and color. She shares simplicity and economy with Harriet Frank’s bright and joyful watercolors.

Gallery on Greene also represents late triple Pulitzer Prize winner and editorial cartoonist Jeff MacNelly. MacNelly with classics like “Dragster” a 6 -foot rooster in bustier and high heels. Work by Photographer Steve Miller, Pop-Expressionist Mark T. Smith (Absolut Smith) and the beautiful sculptural glassworks of Michael Holberg are also on display. www.galleryongreene.com

In the 80s, New York artist Susan Rodgers developed a sensibility that stays with her today: the aesthetics of the unexpected. Two lines of steel rods form a descriptive arc soaring against a brilliant blue sky--you sigh because it is so perfectly

drawn. And then the lines move, and the space you once thought exact and fixed becomes an individual collection of lines. Her wall constructions exhibited at Lucky Street Gallery are no less about that perfectly drawn line in space, caressing a volume into shape, becoming once again it's own fine signature against the light.

Also at Lucky Street Gallery is Val Hird. Her large, oil on linen, canvas and paper paintings reference directly the 'fabric' of different cultures. Each swell of hill, each thrusting peak face painted the textures, colors and values of the culture. In her newer work the landscapes are becoming more maps; but non-linear maps of history, cultural references, textures and influences. Lucky Street also represents well-known steel sculpture John Martini, painters Robert Marks, Lynn Sherman and A.D. Tinkham.

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At Key West Light Gallery, Sharon Wells works *are a lush remembrance of glances* in time, the corner of gingerbread-laden eaves, weathered cobalt-blue shutters. Her photos are painterly compositions of angle and light, Caribbean color and historical influences.

A few years back Wells' moved into painting and collage. Painting on top of black and white photographs flattens the mostly architectural studies, abstracting them, while the bright colors and fluid brush strokes dis-engage them from static time and space.

Other photographers/painters at KW Light Gallery include Lazero Estevez, who has a photo-driven sensibility of the use and concept of light in architectural studies and Allan Kennish's strikingly-colored architectural abstractions. Again, like Wells, dealing in slices of place and time. www.kwlightgallery.com

ART IN THE PARK grew out of Jim Racchi's two interests: sculpture and Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park. It's a terrific concept. Fort Zachary Taylor itself is quintessential Key West—a crumbling civil war era fort surrounded by the islands' best beaches and the Key West harbor—*baked daily by a tropical sun*, cooled by ocean breezes at night.

It's a fantastic venue for sculpture—work is silhouetted by sun, sky, sea—or framed by dramatic spaces in and around the historic fort, moat, open fields and wooded areas. Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park offers visitors a unique opportunity to view contemporary large-scale sculpture from a variety of vantage points. Art in the Park February 8 – March 26. Karley Klopfenstein 305-296-9296 or karleyinmotion@mac.com

Marianne G. Motches describes studying abstract expressionism "like diving into the ocean." If you avoid drowning you begin to see "a diversity of shapes and figures" in a world not before "understood or been conscious of." It's an apt description of her large, oil, abstract paintings. Drowned by color, you begin to distinguish shapes and

layers. And like in deepwater, the shapes and colors form slowly around the edges of perception.

In “Category 4” a solitary palm formed by thick, precise brush strokes exists in an indeterminate world, buffeted by swirling blue. It’s eerie, and captures perfectly a *landscape hidden by a deluge of rain and wind*. Pineapple Gallery in Key West or Marianne Motches 305-743-2744

Too-easily called sensuous, Helen Harrison’s work is a gourmands’ love for the rich patinas and shapes of nature. “Melon and Spoon” is a stunning sculpture of corkwood and lignum vitae (iron wood) shaped into a melon slice and spoon on green glass. It’s a simple piece made resonant by the texture and color of the materials and the care taken in revealing them (Meret Oppenheims’ “Fur Lined Teacup” comes to mind).

Harrison exhibits a number of fine painters. Melinda Hall’s “Staying Fluid” is a large, blue-toned painting with a multitude of bottles drawn, painted and scratched into the surface. In Cynthia Kulp’s fantastically-detailed tropical birds, each feather a sculptural element and Elizabeth DeVries’ slat-wood window-box constructions of meticulously crafted scenes. To visit Harrison Gallery is to indulge yourself in the richness of a space revolving around a shared reverence for texture and the deep beauty of true, saturated color. www.harrison-gallery.com

The Wave Gallery focus on local artists, but brings in great art from all over the world. Since it’s inception they’ve exhibited Robert Kobayashi, collected by the MOMA, Leo Sewell, who’s shown all over the world and outsider Artist Kina Crow. This season the Wave will features Sharon Howe Myers, an award-winning photo-real watercolorist and Tim Bell’s palette knife painting of reflective, multi-faceted surfaces.

The Wave also represents Blair Martin who subtly paints well-modeled portraits drawn from internal fantasies made real. Leaning towards whimsy but not getting there, this work is reminiscent of Donald Roller Wilson, if he was reborn in Key West with an interest in buddhism. www.thewavegallery.com

Winslow Homer, John James Audubon, Henry Faulkner--all lived in Key West at one time. Each adding their layer to the patina making the islands unique. The Keys remain an endless fascination for the fertile and forlorn, *her mysteries endlessly quarried and transformed* by the many poets, writers and artists that visit her shores.