

Latin American Spirituality
The Sculpture of Juan Francisco Elso Padilla

February 23 - April 14, 1991
Public opening reception Friday, February 22, 5 to 7 pm

Juan Francisco Elso Padilla was a Cuban sculptor who died of leukemia in 1988 at the age of 32; despite his short life he set an influential example. He sought to know himself and his particular culture and the complex convergence of traditions -- Caribbean, African, socialist, Western -- that bound them together in suffering and hope. His art embodied an odd mixture of secularism and mysticism. Elso acknowledged santeria, the Afro-Cuban religion whose divinities were formally identified with Roman Catholic saints and whose rituals were devoted to fending off evil.

He was part of the Cuban Renaissance of the late 1970s, a group of artists who introduced experimental styles and new content into the prevailing figurative realism. His first works were a series of installations, primarily made out of ceramic elements and mixing the real with reproductions, to explore the role of maize in Amerindian cultures.

Elso subsequently produced *For America*, a three-quarter size, wooden effigy of Jose Marti, the Cuban revolutionary hero, which was studded with red and green darts, the first signifying the blood drawn by aggression, the second being sprouts of fertile rebirth. When the sculptor died his widow reported that the arrows dropped off the figure.

During the last year of his life he worked on *The Transparency of God*, an ambitious, three-part sculptural installation involving a two meter high heart constructed of twisted branches and an equally monumental hand, modelled on his own, with its life line interrupted. Both are seen through the eyes of a huge suspended skull of twigs and canvas. In Elso's vision the face signified the search for one's own way, the heart gave the energy to the way, and the hand represented the tools with which the world was created. The face of God, however, is transparent. It is the face of death, a mask to be looked through in order then to see life in a forced perspective defined by the other two parts.

Hours: Weekdays 12-6; Weekends 1-5 Gallery phone (617) 253-4680
The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located near the Kendall Square Red Line T Station.
All events are free and open to the public.

For further information or publicity materials contact RON PLATT, 253-4400