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Robert Colescott, *Havana Corona*
Ross Bleckner, *Green Hands and Faces*

Dominic Carter: Robert Colescott's painting *Havana Corona* is about Cuba, whose revolutionary politics have been a political flash point in the U.S. since the early 1960s. But what is this painting telling us about Cuba? Who is the woman? Is she advertising Cuban cigars, or is she mocking our inability to buy them because of the U.S. embargo against Cuban goods? Who's the man in the sunglasses? A friend or foe? And who's smoking the cigar? It's hard to know, but there are a few clues.

Robert Colescott is an African American artist whose work often spoofs stereotypes of white and black people. Here he may be spoofing the stereotype of Cuban culture. Also, it helps to know that Colescott admired the Cuban revolution, according to curator Charlotta Kotik.

Charlotta Kotik: I see the central figure as a personification of the Cuban people, and they are now able to decide what to do with the products that their country possesses.

Dominic Carter: Now turn around and look at the abstract painting to the right of the doorway. Like *Havana Corona*, this work by Ross Bleckner openly addresses political and social issues—though that may not be obvious at first glance. In the mid-1990s, Bleckner frequently alluded to AIDS in his work. The title of this painting, *Green Hands and Faces*, refers to the hands and faces of people who have died from the disease, represented here as shimmering lights. Without that bit of information, would this painting have the same emotional impact?

Charlotta Kotik: I would know that it's about something mysterious, and the colors are kind of somber. There is a little eerie moment in it. And I think that the color sort of vibrates. It's like there is a light behind these color spots that makes you stop and think about what is going on here.

Dominic Carter: Works like *Havana Corona* and *Green Hands and Faces* suggest the diverse perspectives and political involvement of artists in America today—a role that is sometimes as controversial as politics itself.