Mario Coyula presents “The Many Centers of Havana” in UTSA College of Architecture series

(San Antonio) … Cuban architect, urban designer, and critic Dr. Mario Coyula Cowley will present the third installment of the UTSA College of Architecture’s Fall Lecture Series. In his lecture, “The Many Centers of Havana,” Coyula challenges the conventional wisdom of Havana as a monocentric city, examining it instead as a polycentric structure which was created around a system of squares rather than a single Main Square. Coyula’s presentation will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 16 in the Aula Canaria, Buena Vista Bldg. #1.328 on the UTSA Downtown Campus.

A noted authority on the history and preservation of Havana, Coyula has been directly involved in issues of urban planning, government, and design in the capital city for many years. Presently, he is a Visiting Scholar at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University. This is the second time Coyula has been named as a Visiting Professor — he returns to Harvard after having served as a Robert F. Kennedy Visiting Professor from 2002-2003 at the Graduate School of Design. Currently, Coyula has been researching old master plans of Havana that are contained within Harvard’s archives. The original plans had never been accessible to Coyula previously; having access to them heightens the scholarship he already possesses in
regard to the intentions of previous master planners and the decisions they made concerning Havana.

Though Havana’s unique political history has stunted infrastructure growth in the past, it also helped to create the unique, vibrant metropolis that contains incredible neighborhoods and buildings dating back to the 16th century. Coyula will discuss how newer centers began to appear west of the original center by the Bay and how they survived with divergent inhabitants. The traditional centers have suffered from the loss of functions, disinvestment, disrepair, and partial marginalization as many stores were closed, or even changed into makeshift dwellings to shelter homeless people. At the same time, however, former vacant mansions in upscale neighborhoods were abandoned by wealthy residents and turned into stores, dwellings, and hotbeds of activity for the poor and the lower middle class.

A young man of college age during the Revolution — he was 24 years old in 1959 — Coyula was an active participant in the affairs of his time. One of his most significant commissions is “Panteón del 13 de Marzo,” a memorial installation in the Colón Cemetery that is dedicated to the revolutionaries, his peers, killed in the attack on the Presidential Palace on March 13th, 1957.

In addition to being the 2001 recipient of the National Prize of Architecture, he is the former director of the CUJAE’s School of Architecture and of the Architecture and Urban Planning Department of Havana, as well as of the Group for the Integral Development in Havana. Coyula is also the co-author of *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* with Roberto Segre and Joseph L. Scarpaci.
“Mario’s research on urban planning and 20th-century development in Havana is highly significant because he has lived and practiced there for his entire career, and there is no more notable or highly regarded Cuban author publishing on this topic,” noted Professor William Dupont, who is also the Director of the Center for Cultural Sustainability and the Historic Preservation Program Coordinator at UTSA. “Mario’s depth of professional experience, coupled with his straightforward explanations, provide an excellent history of Havana’s growth and change, also offering keen insight into the current urban situations in all parts of the city.”

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