**Pigeons, Smuggling, and the Art of Defiance
Duke Riley’s *Trading with the Enemy* Returns to Key West**

**Key West, FL** — What if pigeons could challenge the way we think about borders, history and politics? In 2013, Duke Riley did just that. A trailblazing artist celebrated for transforming maritime history and urban folklore into captivating modern narratives, Riley orchestrated an extraordinary feat: training a flock of pigeons to smuggle cameras and Cuban cigars across the 90-mile stretch from Havana to Key West. Through this audacious project, *Trading with the Enemy,* Riley turned these unassuming birds into symbols of resistance, sparking conversations about surveillance, smuggling and Key West’s longstanding unique relationship with Cuba.

For the first time, Riley’s project returns to the island where it originated: running January 2–30, 2025, at The Studios of Key West.

At the center of the exhibition is Riley’s original pigeon loft, made from found materials and stocked with live pigeons. The artist housed a kit of 50 pigeons there In 2013, after four years of meticulous planning and eight months of breeding, with the goal of releasing them in Havana to make the trek home. “The birds were either ‘smugglers’ carrying contraband, and named after historical smugglers, or ‘documentarians’ wearing customized cameras, named after filmmakers who have had brushes with the law,” Riley recalls. “Eleven pigeons successfully completed their mission. One documentarian landed on a yacht and quickly became the subject of conversation.”

In addition to the live installation, the exhibition includes video of the pigeons’ historic flights, painted portraits of the individual pigeons on repurposed Key West roof tiles, and related works that delve deeper into the themes of migration, ingenuity, and exchange. Its resonance has only grown in recent years, with the continued US embargo, and the historic exodus of millions of Cubans in the post-pandemic era.

**What to Expect**

* **Live Pigeon Installation:** A dynamic living centerpiece recalling the original project’s spirit of resilience and ingenuity.
* **Video:** a 3-channel video composed of documentation from the 2013 pigeons’ flights, offering a glimpse into their daring journeys.
* **Works:** This exhibit includes elements from the 2013 project such as the original pigeon harnesses, along with pigeon portraits and other related works.

Join us and meet the artist at the Opening Reception on Thursday, January 2, from 6–8pm.

**About the Artist**

Duke Riley’s thoughtful, sometimes humorous and often provocative work has been featured in some of the most prestigious institutions in the world, including MoMA, the Smithsonian, and a major solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2023. He is known for ambitious and daring performative works as well as handmade objects made from trash and repurposed materials that borrow from folk traditions to critique contemporary politics and material consumption.

**About The Studios of Key West**

The Studios of Key West is the island’s creative hub, fostering connections between artists and audiences through exhibitions, residencies, and performances. For more information, visit [www.tskw.org](http://www.tskw.org).

**On View: January 2–30, 2025**
**Opening Reception: Thursday, January 2, 6–8 PM
Gallery Hours: Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm. Free and open to the public.**
**Location: Sanger Gallery, The Studios of Key West, 533 Eaton Street.** [**www.tskw.org**](http://www.tskw.org) **Made possible by Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson**