

“FROM LA HABANA TO LITTLE HAVANA”

BY: Miriam Páez Bolet

Project Statement:

This project is a visual memory of the Capital of Cuban Exile from a young perspective. A dialogue between the fragmented society of the two sides, as an intent of reconciliation.

Project Description:

In 2013 I moved from La Habana, Cuba, to a neighborhood known as Little Havana in Miami, Florida. I knew, beforehand, that this change not only implied the usual adaptation or “retrofitting” that an emigrant undergoes when accessing the “relocation space,” but that I would be entering an environment full of political dichotomies.

Moving to Little Havana would represent, in first order, inserting myself in a space of symbolic constructions driven by nostalgia; a space for conversation about Cuban historical memory.

I began photographing everything around me as a process of exploration, a tool for assimilation into my new space. Little by little, I discovered the way each person was Cuban: through their experiences. It was an interesting process that has transformed into a commitment to my sentiment of “Cubanía” (Cubanness); thus, I have constructed my own new reality within Miami, which is undoubtedly, the Capital of Cuban Exile.

This is a project that is not encased in one type or another of photography. It engages a range of elements from documentary to portraits, details, spaces, and places in both color and black and white photography.

There are different types of Cuban exiles, but within the community they are delimited and thoroughly distinguished among themselves.

After living here in Miami, the times I have visited Cuba for family reasons have been, for me, entirely experimental because of how I am seeing the conflicting narrative between the similarities and antagonistic properties regarding my experience and what I am living.

My idea is to collect and recompile this memory so that it can serve as a source of graphic and visual information. It seems to me that much of the history of Cuban exile has been very misunderstood and there must be a reconciliation among Cubans themselves in order to rebuild our deeply fragmented society and population. All of the knowledge about Cuba is relevant and to be taken as an example for avoiding any repetition of disintegration of a country and its society due to a dictatorship.

There are stories that need to be told, and that is what I seek to do. Utilizing my age and background, I would like to be a bridge of understanding. I feel the responsibility of transmitting these experiences so that they remain embodied, serving to both contribute and inform.

Ignorance permits many atrocities and justifies them; that is why we must fight it with information.

The great José Martí once said that “Ser cultos es el único modo de ser libres”; that roughly translates to “Being educated is the only way to be free.” Therefore, yes. We must know and understand our own history to be able to know who we are and where we are going.