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Artists in the Shadow of Castro: See Michael Dweck's Photographs of Havana's Sultry Cultural Bohemia



Michael Dweck captured the Peace Without Borders Concert in Revolution square in Habana (2009).

In 2009, **Michael Dweck** traveled to Cuba through a General License visa that allowed him to research the communist Caribbean nation as a photographer. At a party on the night of his arrival, he was surprised to find himself in a sea of creative people, a class of artists, filmmakers, models, and musicians who comprised the country's cultural elite.

"All different disciplines mix together normally like they used to do in French salons in Paris in the 1930s," he said. "It was a social class in what was supposed to be a classless society, and that's what interested me."

Impressed with what he found, Dweck began photographing the members of Cuba's artistic circles, or *farándulas*, over the course of 14 months. Notably, he captured images of **Camilo Guevara** and **Alex Castro**, incidentally sons of the island's two best-known revolutionaries. The culmination of Dweck's work is "Habana Libre" (Damiani), a book to be released in the U.S. in October 1 and November 1 internationally, with a traveling exhibition of the same name. The show opens

in **San Francisco's Modernism Gallery** on September 8 before heading to Tokyo, Paris, and New York.

The photographs reveal a Cuba typically seen only by insiders — a world of beautiful nude models lazing in hotel bedrooms, musicians performing in small clubs, and artists at work in their studios.

"Political propaganda would have us believe that Cuba is all crumbling buildings, vintage cars, and repressed, miserable, unhappy, desperate people — but there is a privileged class of these really interesting, socially connected people — that was quite a surprise to me," he said, and the country itself further fueled his interest.

"It's seductive, it's dangerous, it's charming, it's authoritative — and those are ingredients that I like."

While one would easily assume that the country's communist regime restricts its creatives, Dweck asserts the opposite is the case. "With these people, what the government says is if you have the talent and you're part of this creative class, you can sell your wares," said Dweck. "If you're a painter, you can show at Art Basel. Or if you're a filmmaker you can sell your films in Spain or Mexico, or the U.S. and Europe."