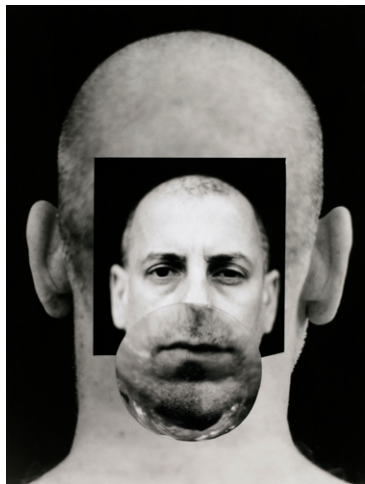


# CUBAN AMERICANS IN FOCUS

Photographs from Lehigh University Art Galleries  
October 30, 2007 - December 19, 2008



To be Cuban American is to claim an ethnic identity based on cultural heritage, ancestry and geographic origin. However, the forces of globalization and the ongoing influx of other cultures are constantly changing the dynamics here on the American continent. Internet and telephone communication, widespread air travel, and migration spurred by political and economic motivation all contribute to the diaspora of Cubans in the United States. Increasingly in recent decades, photography and video have embraced a wide range of ideas and new technologies, crossing over to all areas of the visual arts. For this reason, the photography included in this exhibition emphasizes photography as contemporary art.

Paradoxically, photography is not only about images. The 18 featured artists in this show exemplify this point often transcending the visual, creating their own personal theater while exercising a high degree of

technical and conceptual excellence. Each artist brings to the medium a difference in style, method, age and gender. All of the photographers were born in Cuba and speak about cultural and aesthetic issues. Most of the artists are living in the United States as American citizens, and two are no longer with us, Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) and Roberto Machado (1930-1958).

As art-photography has become an integral and respected part of the contemporary art world, Cuban Americans have made their mark as individuals. Through their images they not only communicate the broad and rich scenario of Latin American culture, they also examine current social and political issues such as the Earth, the human body, spirituality, and religion. This exhibition also reminds us of the ever present link America shares with Spain, whose colonial past and ongoing presence, continue to influence the United States, a nation with a long Hispanic heritage and an increasingly diverse Latino population.

Cuban Americans in Focus represents a joint collaboration between Lehigh University, Kean University and Cuba Art New York, an organization that promotes Cuban American Artists in the Tri-State Region. All of the photographs in this exhibition come from Lehigh University which holds approximately 2500 photographs from all over the world. This diverse work-study collection serves as an educational laboratory and valuable classroom resource for art and architecture students, students from other disciplines, local institutions of higher learning, and the community at large.

Lehigh University's vast collection includes a Latin American component of over 300 photographs with many works by Cuban American artists. These artist-photographers do more than record an event in color, black and white, or digitally. Many are storytellers by nature. They tell

stories with strong narratives and visual metaphors. They draw with light. Their work is a matter of expression, poetry and passion. They define their own histories and traditions with the photographic medium. With individual eyes looking at a pluralistic world, they create indelible things. These images should elicit strong feelings, mixed responses and dialogue. They communicate the human and the absurd, the whimsical and the poetic. They reflect, manipulate, re-think and question the world. They are a mirror of our times.

It is our intention that these photographs serve as teaching tools that fulfill our commitment to the mission of visual literacy and cultural development. It is our hope that the photographs in this exhibition may be inspirational to students, artists and to audiences looking for an understanding of the many streams of Cuban American art and culture.

**Ricardo Viera** Lehigh University

**Neil Tetkowski**

**Kean University**