



Library podcast

Artist Talk with Juan Alonso-Rodriguez

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[00:00:38] How's everybody feeling tonight.

[00:00:40] Good. You know we like our audience that talks back to us.

[00:00:44] Hi my name's Davida Ingram and we we pride ourselves on starting our programs at the library by saying that we want to acknowledge that we're on Duwamish land and we are so excited to have you here tonight.

[00:00:58] Also there is a tradition at our public engagement programs where we want you to engage not just with the library but with one another. So if you don't mind before we start the program officially Do you mind taking a moment and introducing yourself to your neighbor and especially if your neighbor happens to be someone you don't know. Just take a moment to say hello and meet your neighbors.

[00:01:27] All right. Is it okay to bring it back to center.

[00:01:31] I'm delighted to bring my colleague Orlando Lugo to the stage. Orlando will tell you a little bit more about tonight's program.

[00:01:37] Thank you. Good evening everybody. It's my pleasure to tell you a little bit more about this program and to introduce one. Tonight's program is Juan Alonso artists talk and is made possible along with a lot of other programs that we do with support and funding from the Seattle Public Library Foundation. So big shout out to them Juan Alonso really he guests left Havana Cuba and his immediate family on March 2nd 1966 arriving in the US exactly one month before his tenth birthday. He's a he is a self-taught artist whose transition from music to visual arts coincided with his move to Seattle in 1980 to his work has been exhibited throughout the US Canada and Latin America and is included in the the permanent collections of the Tacoma Art Museum. Portland Art Museum Museum of Northwest art Microsoft Swedish and Harborview hospitals General Mills and has created public

works for the Century Link Field. Seattle Tacoma International Airport. King County Housing Authority epiphany schools Sound Transit's light rail system. Chief stealth high school and Renton Technical College both commissioned by Washington State our commission so super accomplished His awards include a 2010 Seattle's Metro art awards the natty fellowship poncho artists of the year to artists trust gaps too for culture. Individual Artist grants art space arts spaces 2016.

[00:03:24] The genius Hughes Award for activism and the 2017 conductive Gar Boyle Grant Horn is a Seattle Arts commissioner and serves on the public art Advisory Committee for the city of Seattle. We are honored to have one here tonight for us for his artist talk in his presentation tonight on will include influences in his art from his childhood in Cuba reuniting with siblings and findings that there is much more to his homeland an old American cars romanticized versions of a casual tourist and the Buena Vista Social Club that we're all probably so familiar with unlike a travelogue. This is an artist's personal view of Cuba as a complex place that has been and remains a major source of inspiration in a career that spans over three decades. That sounds that sounds very refreshing to me. Once conversation tonight is part of a commitment at the library and via public engagement to keep an international intentional focus on how communities of color are defining their own creative lives by and for themselves and service to transforming our public institutions so that they can be equitable and inclusive as well as relevant. Please join me in welcoming Juan to the stage his artist artist talk will be followed by an interview with poet Felicia Gonzalez applause

[00:05:00] Thank you for being here.

[00:05:01] I was really afraid that there was nobody was gonna show up but to morrow to morrow I'm having my press secretary say that this was the biggest audience. That's the Seattle library has ever had

[00:05:21] Believe me.

[00:05:24] So anyway thank you for being here. I'm a self-taught artist. I'm also one of those rare people that I've made my living as an artist in Seattle for a little bit over 30 years without a trust fund. I don't know how I did it but anyway.

[00:05:47] So this talk is primarily about how my childhood cultural heritage and the trauma of leaving my family at an early age have always and still continue to influence me my my daily life and how these events are also intrinsically connected to my art.

[00:06:05] I want you to understand an artist's process and artists thought process and also where I get my inspiration. I'm going to try to talk about a lot of things but I know that there's no way to cover everything.

[00:06:21] Plus I want you to leave here wanting more and have you explore my Web site and all that good stuff so to me Cuba is a child of Spanish and African parents with a sprinkling of relatives from

China France and the Middle East among others. And to me without those ingredients Cuban culture can not comprehensively exist.

[00:06:45] Just in my own family my one of my nephews is half Chinese.

[00:06:50] On from one sister and from the other sister my nieces have German.

[00:06:55] So you know there's there's that there's that combination you know. And if you look at some of the old old photographs of my family you see people from very very dark skin to the blondes.

[00:07:08] And so it's it's it's quite a mix. So to get started here.

[00:07:17] These are some significant dates and I and I'll tell you why. Obviously it's significant where I was when I was born because otherwise I wouldn't be here.

[00:07:28] So I had the day that my mother died and the date that my grandfather died and I didn't actually have the date when my mother died until I went back to Cuba in 2011 and 2011 was the first time that I went back since I left.

[00:07:46] So that's 45 years after I left. And what happens.

[00:07:52] You know I think we are we are all influence and we all carry things from wherever we were born and wherever we're from. But the thing is it's usually you can go back to the town that you are that you came from.

[00:08:07] And for forty five years or for a little less I knew that I could not I could not go back home and my family could not come and visit me.

[00:08:19] So there was this there was this severe loss. There was this a severe sense of loss and this severe just longing for didn't you know what family was. So when. Also when my mother died I.

[00:08:38] And then just giving you a background and to some some of the things that that I've had to deal with at a very early age added on top of the fact that I was like brought here just with people I knew but became very different after I got here.

[00:08:55] So when my mother died I was I had not turned 6 yet and my grandmother decided that I was not old enough to understand that. So I was not told that she was dead. I found out that my mother died by deduction and also by hearing it from other people telling other people I kept that quiet so that I could protect my adult relatives.

[00:09:28] So imagine what that's like for a child to keep a secret to protect your relatives even though you know that it's your own mother who is dead. So that just gives you a little bit of like what you know the complications of an individual. And my grandfather was an important figure to me.

[00:09:48] He was this very very strict guy from Galicia Spain and I I guess when I was born I just kind of changed all of that and he was just this a little marshmallow and the the other thing too is that one of the reasons why my grandmother after he passed away.

[00:10:12] You know there were there there were three. That was my grandparents and their three sons and their spouses. And we all lived in this house which I'll show you. But you know everybody has favorites in their house in their household. So my nuclear family was not my grandmother's favorite because my mother got along very well with my grandfather and they liked planting and farming and you know the whole like horses and that kind of thing.

[00:10:45] So she was actually jealous of my mother.

[00:10:49] Anyway my father died March 13 1981. I actually tried to go back and see him before he died but this was during the Gulf War and I was not yet an American citizen because the ISIS had lost my paperwork.

[00:11:08] They soon found it after I hired a lawyer immediately. It was like it was like a miracle that all of a sudden they found it.

[00:11:17] So and so my my oldest sister Sylvia arrived in the U.S. in nineteen ninety five and she was able to fill me in on a lot of questions that I had that I that I just didn't know anything about my own my own family. She told me a little story about my parents that inspired me to create work. That that same year. And I'll talk to you a little bit more about that. Her son with his wife and kid arrived in 2008. They now all live in Key Largo Florida. And I went with them back to Cuba for the first time in 2011. My most recent trip was in July this year and I I was able to take my husband which was like it was such an amazing experience because the acceptance that I found from my family in Cuba was so much easier than that. And then the lack of acceptance that I had found from my family that I came to this country with so this is this is the front of the house where I grew up.

[00:12:30] And just to give you an idea of some of the things that you have to deal with when you go to when you go to a place where you haven't been in such a long time. One of the in 2011 when I was there for the first time I was standing in front of the House and this man came walking towards me.

[00:12:47] And he had this very strange look on his face he had he looked very puzzled and he just kept looking at me like almost like Like what. What. Who are you. And then I realized he thought well he couldn't have thought that. But he in his mind something went off and he thought that I was my father.

[00:13:11] I didn't know how to react to that.

[00:13:13] I just I froze and then I go to humoring like now he's dead. I just came back to life as him and you know like I don't know I just kind of make light of it. And but but it's interesting because that would not happen in most other people's circumstances when they go back home.

[00:13:34] You're not you're not confused for your for one of your parents.

[00:13:41] I really have no reason to show this image except that I love it.

[00:13:47] My family used to rent a farm and so that was there.

[00:13:52] That was her pleasure place so they rented this farm for many many years. And my father loved horses. My mother loved farming.

[00:14:06] And lucky for me because I am not a farm boy. They decided the year that I was born that they were going to build a house on the beach and that no longer rent this farm so these are my parents at the farm. And so as I said my when my sister came in 1995 she she told me that before my parents got married my father who worked at the wrought iron shop that my grandfather had started had met my mother and she was a potter and she made these beautiful pots that were decorated with flowers. And so then they started creating he thought he would make the basis for these flower pots and she would make the pots and they would sell them together and I thought that that was a beautiful story and I was I was showing at a gallery here and I was doing figurative work and I said to Francine sellers I said By the way this I've changed my mind I'm not doing this body of work that I thought I was gonna do I'm gonna do a set of flowers and there was silence on the other side. And she goes Well you know as long as they're as good as everything else that you've done then we're OK.

[00:15:19] But the quality you know she was interested in the quality which is fantastic so this is a this is before digital imagery so I just took this from you know it was on some resale like auction thing.

[00:15:36] So that's one of the pieces that I did using the flower form and the wrought iron as well.

[00:15:46] So this is the house I grew up so very large house my family. They were not wealthy. They were pretty much middle class. And as I like to joke to them about that the fact that they were socialists before socialism came to Cuba because they all worked in the same business and they all like distributed the money from the business and everybody got the same amount of money. And so it was the house had seven bedrooms. And at one point there were 14 of us living in the same house. So it was my grandparents there their sons their wives their kids. And that's a pretty common thing not only in Cuba but I think in a lot of Latin American countries.

[00:16:38] I told you about the house that was built in 1956 when I was born. So that was it then. And we're gonna go back to that. But I just you know keep that in mind and keep in mind those railings around the house.

[00:16:51] So this is this is taken from the rooftop of the city house that I showed you. So this was our neighborhood. It was very eclectic integrated middle class neighborhood. I felt very safe. So this is a house from it's like pulling pulling back from a rare street and if you pull back a little more you can still see the house on the center left and then this building on the very far right with the little crossing sign was the school that I went to so that's how far I had to walk to school and that that is a that is the school.

[00:17:43] The other thing that I want you to notice is that there is no way that I mean I think that school was here. There were kids being impaled by that fence like all the time and there are lawsuits. I don't know anyone that has been impaled just just to you know I have not heard of any impairments of children but that was you know going back this time and taking a photograph and thought Yeah that would never fly in the US so that's the long hallway of my house. And so these are right these were my playgrounds I used to ride my I learned how to ride my bike on this in this hallway. But the bike riding was not just limited to the outside hallway because the inside hallway was just as long. And I rode my bike through there to so if you notice the color pink of the house it's hideous. It's like a bad Pepto pink. But what happens in Cuba is that you.

[00:18:52] If you if you're lucky enough that you can afford or fine paint you don't really get to choose the color you go and use whatever.

[00:19:01] There's a lot a lot of. Sometimes they just mix it together and they go here you go here's some paint for your house and you know you don't exactly know what color it's gonna be. So that was the story of that hideous pink but I guess it was better than although I don't necessarily agree.

[00:19:20] Better than what was there or I guess it was kind of crumbling down.

[00:19:23] So so this is the rooftop of the House which is another one of my playgrounds. This rooftop not only was it great to do play as a kid but it also served after the revolution and rations became very small and food was very scarce. My family actually raised chickens and pigs their very quietly because nobody was supposed to know. And you know if the Committee of the block would find out they would report you and you could actually be arrested for raising food so that's a little another shot of the rooftop and if you start noticing that that building on the far left so this this photograph was taken in 2011 and I went this time and that building has crumbled. That building is no longer there. It just fell. There is no there's. It's really difficult to repair anything so it thinks just crumble. And you know.

[00:20:39] And that adds I mean it it's a horrible horrible thing.

[00:20:42] But it also there's such beauty in some of these crumbling facades.

[00:20:47] And it's it's such a a beautiful sad thing and I knew that this this has been going on and this had been going on for a long time because I kept seeing photographs and you know in a lot of a lot of my inspiration for for making art and making art inspired by Cuba with all these weathered surfaces.

So I I crave making weathered surfaces with my work. So when you take images like this which I saw after you know what I went back for the first time in 2011 and you see images like this it makes you realize why I was making artwork like this so a lot of a lot of the memories that I had were my own memories and things that I had collected a lot of books about Cuba in Havana and a lot of the work that I create has a glossy finish and it has a glossy finish because my memories were very glossy because in spite of the fact that I had some hardships growing up you know losing my mother and then losing my father also I feel like I had a good childhood. I had I was living in a house with 14 people with 13 other people who were taking care of me. So I really did not have it it was not a tough childhood. I enjoyed myself I didn't know what was going on around in the world.

[00:22:27] And so in the books also have a glossy finish. So I felt that these memories needed to be shown with a glossy surface.

[00:22:36] So I have become very fluent in varnish so you know images like this the lines and the curves and you know in the architecture which is something that also inspires me very much. Plus the wrought iron that I grew up with because my my my family's business was wrought iron and I actually ended up working at a wrought iron shop.

[00:23:02] When I came to the U.S. that my uncle opened up you know it helped me create works like this.

[00:23:12] Interestingly enough this piece I did in 2009 and I had not actually seen this building but I thought that the similarities of the shapes were pretty remarkable. So when I was walking around Havana and I saw this building I had to take a photograph of it just for my own sake. It's like oh this really does exist. It's now a sewing school that I just went to see when I went in July so even the colors and though the weathered aspect of the sides of the house where I grew up has inspired artwork that I created. In fact this one is called weathered wall too. It's it's one of two large paintings that I I started I created in 2005 with a grant from the city of Seattle so when I went in 2011 I got to go inside the house where the houses where I had grown up and one of the things that I said is please do not do not change.

[00:24:32] Do not stage the house. I just want I just want to take photographs of the house where I grew up. I want it and I also if I use it because I didn't know if I was gonna show this to anyone. If I show these photographs if I do anything with them I want people to see how actual the average Cuban person lives. And in this house. I have to say it is a little better than the average way that people live.

[00:25:03] My cousin lucked out that she sort of inherited this house where so many people live.

[00:25:09] And the thing is if you have something good you just cannot let it go there because then wherever you go next it's gonna be probably bad. So I said do not I want this to be the same. You know how. However it is you would normally live. I don't want anything changed. So I took photographs that altar and the corner was there when I was when I was living there as a kid so it was

the one in the living room. And interestingly enough the furniture in the living room was the same exact furniture that was there when I lived there so you know probably the most difficult thing about about this first trip you know and it was it was so cathartic and it was so wonderful to be able to go into this house.

[00:26:00] But the most difficult thing was going into my pattern my my parents bedroom and I wrote a little something here for the for the book that I actually published the 50 images. The toughest part was going into what used to be my parents bedroom. Many memories suddenly suddenly came to the surface and I felt what I imagine would be like to be punched. And at the same time enveloped in the most ethereal love in order to make the pain tolerable. It was a quick moment that almost seemed minor in comparison to all the other sensory experiences of my trip.

[00:26:32] Yet looking back it may have been the most important and even with this I was able to be inspired to create something very abstract but with very similar colors back to the house.

[00:26:51] So this was the house in Santa Maria that my beach.

[00:26:57] I love this house. This was the house that my family built. The euro was born. And when I say My family built it they actually built it. They they my father design all the wrought iron. My uncle made all the wood work. Their company provided and installed all the steel to build a house. So really with the exception of a couple of people that were builders it was pretty much a family affair. It was something that they had whatever money they made from their small business. They put into building this house because they wanted the kids to just have a place to go at the beach. And it wasn't just the kids it was a lot. There were a lot of other people that came and stepped in state for the weekend or in the summers.

[00:27:48] We spent a lot of time there so this and this is part of something that I wrote for I had a I had the opportunity and the pleasure of having the first solo show at the time when they first built the building for the Belleview Arts Museum. And one of the pieces called it was called dive and I had thought about this little thing that I had written about it.

[00:28:16] My father taught me how to swim in the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean. When I was very young I am no means a good swimmer but I do know how to stay afloat. I would watch my father float and I would mimic leg straight forward arms spread out eyes closed muffle sounds I would let the water take me knowing that my father's eyes would never completely closed and I was safe.

[00:28:43] So this is what the house looks like now and it's crumbling. There's hardly any running water. There is no money for repairs. There's no there and there are no materials. Even if you had the money to repair it it was always a fantasy when I know years ago when I was you know being here and thinking If only I had money to send and have this house repaired and then I realized that it was just this losing battle and it also would not necessarily look good for them to be able to repair this house when everybody else was having a hard time but a lot of people there depend on people from here sending them money and that's I make a point of you know every quarter I make a point to send

them some money and that's that's where my savings go so I'm you know I'm fortunate that I I am I am married and my my business is my business and you know we don't really you know they don't really mix.

[00:29:54] But whenever I have money that I can spend that's like the best thing that I can do with it.

[00:30:04] So this is the back of the house. And this this place was where I would love to get lost. And it didn't didn't look like this when I was there.

[00:30:13] It was full of fruit trees a lot. There were lots of fires that you know we're not be. You know we just were so many other houses were abandoned. I remember when I was living there when I was you know before I was 9 and at the beginning of the revolution that a lot of the folks from the socialist revolution were going to the biggest houses in on the beach and taking them over our house was fairly small and not that great.

[00:30:50] So we lucked out that we got to keep the house. But a lot of people you know the house across the street was even smaller. They they just got it got torn down. So this backyard was full of fruit trees and all kinds of critters. And one of one of my favorite things that I asked my my godfather to do is he built me this little wire cage and this plant is a type of milkweed and it is the one of the few plants that the monarch caterpillar feeds on and so I would I would collect these little pieces you know pieces of trees and I would collect the caterpillars and I put them in this little cage and I would watch it really is kind of like watching paint dry. So it gave me you know some good for four for future reference that you know I do have to sometimes watch paint dry. So I would watch them like build a cocoon and do the whole metamorphosis thing and then when they when the butterfly would turn out then I would open the cage and and let it let it leave.

[00:31:57] So I was so happy to find one of those plants left that I had to take a photo of it back to these railings which were a huge huge part of my inspiration for a project my father designed and built those railings.

[00:32:22] And he did it for our house. And then there was one other house in the whole city. Well the whole country that had the same exact railings and I was always I was always fascinated by them. And I always thought that there was the most beautiful design and it was so like you know mid century modern you know which is now it is very cool now as well. But I just was so proud of him that when I had the opportunity to create some public art for who sells high school in West Seattle I decided to create take to isolate three of the images from his design and create these sculptures for for the high school and just to give you a little bit more of an idea.

[00:33:10] So I took you know took that one design and I created that particular sculpture and then it took a little freedom there and created together one and then the last design was based on this particular part of the railing but my inspiration for creating work has as you can see there's all these little details that having that have inspired what I do and the beach was a huge huge inspiration.

Anybody that knows me knows that I like turquoise and aquamarine blue a lot and a lot of my work is uses those colors.

[00:33:58] And so when you combine that natural beauty and I I'm fascinated by the the the push and pull thing with a natural made beauty and and manmade structures and how the most successful ones are just so beautiful because they have a little bit of both and and so it taking you know those colors from from the beach and then taking some of the abstract things that you see around around Havana and these are like this is a makeshift garage door that because you have to find materials wherever you can and then and then you build something and you make it work. And then I had to do a painting that's called swim and this is eight feet by eight feet. And I just wanted to have that feeling of the the waves and the water. I wanted something that somebody just wanted to look at it and dive into the water. Another huge inspiration is carnival that I remember when I was a kid that was my favorite time of the year. This this red and white and yellow. Let's call it photo LA. And people would take them in in the parades and twirl them and there were all kinds of different designs. I actually have one piece that's part of the Washington state arts commission collection. But again pre digital age and I still only I have like a stack of slides that I need to digitize that are not but Carnival was great.

[00:35:35] And one of the one of the things about count of all that I remember is being really really frightened by these big papier mâché heads that people would wear and then they would kind of lean to. You know there would be like right where you are. The parade would be going down the street and these heads would just lean. And as a kid I was just terrified of them. But as an adult I decided that I wanted to recreate them you know on paper or on canvas and just create these bigger than life masks like faces.

[00:36:16] And no one did it.

[00:36:18] One of the most brilliant things that we we went to do while we were there this time was go to the Tropicana and I thought Oh this is gonna be a tacky little show and it's gonna be you know it was this very expensive and and and it was really difficult.

[00:36:34] This is another thing to keep in mind is that like my husband wanted to take my family to this and I said let me. I need to do a lot of translation because for them the idea of you spending this money to for one night is going to seem absolutely crazy. And. And so then I approached them and they said this is absolutely crazy. And then I went back to him I said they think it's absolutely crazy and he goes I really want them to have a good time. I really I want them to have a memory that they in that experience that they would not be able to do otherwise. And you know. So you're like OK do you realize how much they could do with that money. And he goes yes. But sometimes experiences make a huge impact.

[00:37:28] And so then I went back to them and I said like OK you're going to have this experience that you probably would never have again.

[00:37:36] And it's something you to we're gonna do this together as a family and anyway we went everybody had a good time but this this show is fantastic.

[00:37:48] If you go there spend the bucks spend the bucks and go. The sad thing is that Cubans cannot go. Cubans cannot afford to go.

[00:37:58] And the only reason why my family went is because we bought the tickets ahead of time and we didn't say who was whom and that the fact that they actually lived there so that that's one of the difficult things about being there is that a lot of times tourists are valued more than their own citizens.

[00:38:21] But you know this kind of costume and this kind of festivity has always been an inspiration for me and I've done a couple recently I've been doing a little bit more of of the carnival like mask work and these are this is like six feet by four feet and this is actually one that I am working on for an exhibit that's gonna be at the Paramount Theater bar in 2018.

[00:38:53] It's called redefinition and it's a Ninetieth celebration of the Paramount Theater and the work is gonna be so three curators to Rico waters Tracy Rector and myself. Each one of us is creating a work and each one of us is bringing in an emerging artists to create a work on their own and then one together.

[00:39:14] So I'm really excited and I hope that everybody gets a chance to see it's gonna be the be the whole year. And if anybody is lucky enough to be going to Hamilton you're going to get to have a drink at the bar.

[00:39:27] So anyway when I was there in 2011 I took about eight hundred photographs and I ended up taking 50 of them and putting them into a book.

[00:39:43] The book is sold out and I didn't I didn't really want to do that again because to me it was like it had to be like for the first time that I went I didn't want it to be like an ongoing thing. Every time I go I'm going to create this work and you know I'm not a photographer I just I use photography to create images.

[00:40:03] And so I just wanted to this time I decided to narrow down some of the photographs that I took and I came up with six different images that I actually went ahead and went ahead and had printed this is one of them. This is called Ricardo and I love that painting. You know on that back wall I had to wait until the game was over because I trying to be respectful. So this is you know four eleven by 14 image addition of five. This is a tattoo parlor the entrance to a tattoo parlor. And this this image is. I printed it and eleven by 14 and also thirty three and a half by 44.

[00:41:01] This is called bodega ironically that is a grocery store that's that's a Cuban grocery store.

[00:41:12] And as you can see the shelves are fairly empty but we do have a picture of role next to Jesus so my thoughts and prayers let's think and pray that their food is going to appear.

[00:41:31] But in order for the food to appear you need one of these.

[00:41:36] This is a ration card so whenever you know in different times of the month you get different types of food. And it's all it's all done by hand. It's all there's no computerized system.

[00:41:54] You have to go into the store on price day and make sure you get your rice and you might be able to get some beans and that's it for the month. At one point my my niece was supposed to meet me at my hotel with her husband and I asked her Where's your husband she goes well it was chicken day so somebody won it. Somebody had to stay and wait in line for chicken. And so if you miss the day we're certain we're certain the food is available then you can no longer have it until the following time where it's available either you're entitled to your opinion

[00:42:35] Absolutely. Anyway so there are times that you know because everything is rationed. A lot of the a lot of the food that you have to get you have to you have to try when you're there. You have to try it 10 times as hard as you could possibly think to get anything that you need. Okay.

[00:42:59] All right. So you know another little story was like my when I was waiting for my sister and my knees to come to meet me at my hotel.

[00:43:13] They said oh we're just going we're just gonna go get some ice cream. They went around the block to get ice cream. They found several places that had ice cream and nobody had spoons. So then they went to the store to see the story if they could buy spoons at the store and this store did not have spoons so and then they ended up coming back and getting ice cream. So these are just things that happened there and they're they're just part of life.

[00:43:39] So back to the photographs that I took this time. This was another.

[00:43:43] So this is one of the bicycle taxis that they have because everybody has to be very creative in the way that they do things. Not everybody can afford to have an old car. So you you you you make the taxis you go out of bicycling and add seats. And the other thing too is I generally don't like photographing people.

[00:44:09] But this time I made an exception a couple of times.

[00:44:12] This is another photo that is done in two different sizes and this is a man I was he was just fixing his taxi. And I and I walked by and I said Do you mind if I take a photograph of you. And I gave him some money because everybody's there making very little. So if you if you stop in and ask somebody to take a photograph please give them some money because you know they they really could use it. OK. Anyway the other person that I absolutely felt that I had to take a photograph because I thought she was such a there was such a beautiful image as this woman and she was

lovely and I again I went up to her and I said can I can I give you some money and take your photograph. And she said yes.

[00:45:08] And this is actually the first time that I've sold out an image very very quickly so. But I knew that the minute that I saw her she was just there was something very beautiful about her. And you know and I know that she's there because she wants her photograph taken.

[00:45:28] But I just I just loved her so another thing to tell you about.

[00:45:38] Let's see. So some of some of the little quirky things that happen there likes to Sudan you is I don't know who made up the name but so it's you would think a place like Cuba would be able to grow like really good coffee. I don't know why I had this idea in my head but it's that the coffee is really awful. So when you if you go and you have people that you know there take them take instant coffee like even Starbucks that's going gonna sound great to them.

[00:46:10] So so I want to talk to you about the old American cars because I feel like that's a little bit of the always the elephant in the room for me they're beautiful and some of them are so well-kept but keep in mind like let's say that you you hated smoke and so in your house you decided no one was allowed to smoke but you felt OK about going to somebody else's house and smoking at their house at their house. That doesn't sound very fair. So I hear a lot of people come coming going to Cuba from here saying oh I want to go and I want to writing one of those old cars because it's so great and they're so beautiful and good. And I got in I totally agree I totally agree but they are polluting the island. And if you actually write in one of those depending on the condition that they're in the you know the fumes or are pretty bad. Like I wrote on one on the way to the airport to the hotel and I felt like I needed like oxygen after I.

[00:47:22] So they're beautiful enjoy them but don't wish that on them.

[00:47:30] You know there is this thing about Cuba there's always like this good and there is this negative aspect to a lot of things. And I want to give you like the reality like that what actually happens in the way that people actually live and not just gloss over the nice things and then or nor do I want to concentrate on the negative because there is always something to balance it out.

[00:47:58] So this is a Florida which is a very well-known nightclub where Hemingway's to go and this a big there's a statue of him in the back I wouldn't go here.

[00:48:10] It's a little bit of a rip off. But if you just want to go in just look at it and come out. That's one thing. But what I wanted to to tell you with this image is that there is music everywhere and there's such good music. I mean all the musicians are just amazing the talent and probably the my favorite musical group that I saw when I was there was the rooftop of the hotel where we stayed. And the reason why I really really liked them besides the fact that there were these two amazingly beautiful women that were lead singers is because they were not doing. When I was at a social club they were not. And everywhere you go every hotel lobby every every every nightclub. So you know if I hear that

song I mean I loved that song. I don't even know what it's called. Anyway that whole album is great. And it brought Cuban music to the forefront but my God I don't ever want to hear it for a while because every single place and so. But it's interesting that at this point so many years after the revolution and when. When I think Cuba is trying to move forward. I'm surprised at how they've gone a little backed backwards towards nostalgia to bring. I guess maybe to bring in tourism. And but I don't want I don't want Cuba to be tourism of the past.

[00:49:43] I really don't want Cuba to be like your Disney land country. You know I.

[00:49:52] There is just so much to this country that is so rich in history that I just really I don't want it to be known as that so.

[00:50:04] When one of the things I recently I I watched those awful awful film called collateral beauty and don't watch it. It's manipulative and it's like sappy and it's just horrible. But I started thinking about that I started thinking about collateral beauty and I started thinking that you know people one of the things that people say like well you know I went to Cuba and everybody was so happy and there were there were people playing music everywhere. And you know and I mean like what did you want them to do. Like crawl into a little corner and cry or you know. No. Yes they have hardships but they also have a lot of positive things. So it's never you know I used to hear a lot of people they say like it's this way or it's that way. And the truth is no it like. Like anywhere else. There's there's a positive and there's a negative.

[00:51:00] And so then I started thinking about well I think a lot of the things that I've experienced over the years and a lot of that that hurt and that longing and that sadness that I have experienced because I couldn't go back or because I couldn't have the things you know I didn't have a childhood.

[00:51:17] I didn't have my father I didn't have all those things but you know without that I would have a different kind of beauty in my life. You know with that I would have a different kind of beauty in my life with. With what I've had.

[00:51:31] You know I got to reunite with my sisters forty five years it took but I got to do that and one of the things that I was lucky enough to go do and that I had to do was go to where my parents had been very and because I did not get. Nobody told me. Your mother is dead and then when I found out my my father was dead there was nothing I could do. I could not be present so I also had the beauty of going back with my spouse and take my family to a beautiful dinner to a very overpriced overpriced restaurant which is where if you've never seen this the movie strawberry and chocolate this is where it was filmed.

[00:52:29] And it's a lovely lovely movie and it's not. There's no propaganda and it's not pro revolution. It's not against that. It's just as beautiful love story.

[00:52:40] I got to go take them and they you know they had a wonderful meal and all the kids you know love.

[00:52:47] I love the kids in my family. Can't really say that for all the time anyway.

[00:52:55] Yes. The treat of taking them to the Tropicana. You know that's something that they had.

[00:53:03] You know my my sister had done when she was a teenager and I remember I remember being a kid and hearing that she was gonna go to the Tropicana with my other sister and my two girl cousins were all about the same age and I was so jealous that I wanted to go to the Tropicana and they told me that I was gonna go to the Tropicana which would translate to the choppy bed.

[00:53:24] So I finally got to go my my family was just sitting outside that hotel in LA Tetra where they were not allowed to go into the hotel but we could sit outside and have drinks and this was right before we were coming back.

[00:53:45] And so there was that you know there was again the negative thing that well they can't come in but we can sit here and we can enjoy each other.

[00:53:54] I got to go to the patio where there was where were my husband and my niece are standing. They. I used to have this swing and there was a fig tree right above it. And I remember just sitting there and just reaching up and eating these fresh figs.

[00:54:13] Now there's a guava tree.

[00:54:14] It's kind of on the other side but um I got to go and see my friend didn't Rodriguez who I met here because she was brought here to the Moore theater to dance and we've stayed in touch and because she's one of those people. And I had to say that the arts are really appreciated in Cuba. And and if you are connected because there has to be some sort of government connection for you to get the better things it's not equal.

[00:54:47] It's not it's not everybody does not have an equal share. That is a myth. But some people get to do wonderful things like my friend who the government just gave her this building and you know it's an amazing building. It's been restored. She also told me the stories about how every little every little restoration every little part of the restoration takes you know 10 times longer than you think it should anywhere else. Like just getting wood for certain repairs. But the thing is it's happening for her so I was so happy to see that.

[00:55:31] So that I guess that that's the collateral beauty that you get from having a little bit of a hardship at some point in your life.

[00:55:40] And I have learned to realize that there is beauty in it and that there's beauty and loss and there is beauty and sadness as well.

[00:55:51] So a couple of things that I want to talk to you about before I show you my last slide.

[00:56:00] So one of the things that I wrote even back in 2011 thinking about everything that I had seen and everything that I had experienced is as I spent time there taking it all in I began to understand my own people a little bit more. I understood why that if there is an opportunity to celebrate something one must jump on it with great enthusiasm. And I understood why if there's music playing You simply must dance.

[00:56:28] There is a street called Juan Alonso and it also crosses a street called Rodriguez. I actually don't know where it started. My my grandfather's uncle was the first one in our family to go from Spain to Cuba and he started a foundry and there was if there are light posts all over Havana with his name on it.

[00:56:57] So it may have been him. I don't know. I'd like to claim it for myself. I'd like to say that in fact my publicity spokesperson is gonna tell everybody that that street was named after me. But you know some of the things that I would like for you to take away and I mentioned this earlier that you know Cuba is a country full of people trying to make the best of their situation that for the most part is difficult it does not. And it should not exist for the amusement of tourists. If and when things change the Cuban people should dictate the changes that they and they should not be made to accommodate the tourists desire to designate the island a nostalgic fossil of an era. They missed many Cubans. Many Cuban people would like to enjoy the same pleasures we would daily take for granted and even more even and even some of the luxuries that we can afford. They are not less and they do not deserve less the embargo is the greatest gift from the US to the Cuban government and the worst gift to the Cuban people.

[00:58:11] Without the embargo the government could not hold over its own people the fact that there are these bad people across the ocean that are coming to do us harm.

[00:58:24] If you don't do what I tell you to do even folks with internet access I have a cousin and a cousin and her husband who they actually travel to to hurt their jobs and they still do not comprehend what the Internet can actually do so they still even though they have they because their access is very limited.

[00:58:54] I want them to have that I don't know it whenever somebody says well I don't want to go to Cuba and see a Starbucks at every corner.

[00:59:00] It's not up to you. It's not up to you.

[00:59:04] It's your food you do not own them. You do not you are not going to colonize them again. It's about what they want. It's about what they need. And I don't really care what kind of government system they have. I want the people to have their choices the same way that we have here. Cuba is a complex place with a complicated sets of rules and many dichotomies and it will always be a huge source of inspiration for me.

[00:59:37] Thank you. APPLAUSE You have one more round of applause for one

[01:00:06] I'm it for two reasons because in addition to that fabulous artists talk we are going to have Felicia Gonzalez come to the stage to interview want one before we open up the floor to the audience. Felicia is a really delightful poet and a dear friend from one Alonzo. And just personally because this is the third of an artist series that we've done in 2017 where we've had a chance to highlight our local luminaries. So we had Dr. Julian Pistor we had Barbara Earl Thomas and now we have one Alonzo and I'm excited to have one and Felicia have a conversation and we'll probably have time for about maybe two or three questions at the end so I'd like it if you do have questions. If you can please keep them brief so we can get as many people in as we can. Thank you.

[01:01:02] Can you hear me. Thank you all for being here. Thank you Davida. Thank you.

[01:01:11] One in the book eight days in Havana and you showed us some of the images from that you wrote.

[01:01:20] I could no longer claim my innocence and rely on books or my relatives versions of this place of Cuba what has surprised you the most about your version of Cuba since you've been back now twice I think when it probably you know I don't know that anything was a surprise but it was it was becoming aware of of the place.

[01:01:50] But I I felt so safe and I felt very connected to these people even though I had not been there for so long and I felt a sense of family.

[01:02:06] I felt a sense of family with my actual relatives there that I have not felt with my relatives here and in there was a sense of warmth and that I think even even some of the people some of the Cubans that I know that have come to this country I think in order to fit in we tend to to put up a facade and to lose a little bit of that in your face.

[01:02:40] And I want to know everything about you kind of thing right away and you know which now I especially in the Pacific Northwest really Oh my God you know you just met me. You're asking me to lunch in there to meet you and they just like pull you in their house and they feed you whether you want to or not.

[01:03:00] So I think that that was one. That was one of the biggest surprises. And and also in something that I was talking about today is that I'm not not everything is good and not everything is bad there. There is such a balance in some things I disagree with a lot. And then some things that go. This is really kind of cool so it's just knowing for myself and not not listening to what some relatives have to say about it because they lived a different life and they they have different opinions.

[01:03:35] And just coming in and coming in and seeing for myself what how how it really felt you are one of the things that you also mentioned is in the book are things that are undeniably Cuban. You just mentioned that you know total lack of personal space. Right and as a kid growing up after I left

Cuba when I was seven and growing up in DC I would come home and there'd be strangers having lunch with my parents that I'd look at and I say Oh I think you work at the bank or you work at the grocery store because there was that instant poll. Can you tell us a bit more about what does it mean for you to be that there are things that are undeniably Cuban.

[01:04:22] I can't dance without my hips moving.

[01:04:28] I even tried to to learn how to two step can do it.

[01:04:33] You know I think that there is there's this relaxed thing that I don't know if it's because it's such a warm climate and people tend to you know there's most houses I don't know any house that has air conditioning. So you have to be outside you have to have your windows open and that that just freedom of movement and I mean movement and not just in the dance sort of way but just movement about and just feeling like this there's an informal informality of it at the same time that there is a formality that I also don't find here.

[01:05:21] There are things that you just don't do like you know like I think you even with all the poverty and even with all the the necessities and all the things that the people have to go through their you would never even think of going to the symphony in shorts and sandals I don't know if he saw the photograph with my whole family in front of LaGuardia that Roger was the only one wearing shorts it was like and I said I don't wear shorts because the Cubans don't wear shorts when they go out to dinner.

[01:06:00] It's just not done because it's so hot. It's like well I understand so I actually I had to compromise and wear long ish shorts so that nobody would feel bad because I was playing like making sure everybody gets along kind of thing. But but it's there's so many like there's such subtle things and there.

[01:06:25] And I think every probably every culture has things like that and even within Latin American culture it's like you go like one like one country will think this is fine. But then the next one thing well no that's not the way we do it we do it this other way.

[01:06:40] But I think it was more in the little things you mentioned that Cuba as a place is both a source of trauma as well as inspiration both in your life and your work. Are there particular visual elements that represent Cuba for you.

[01:07:00] You showed us some of the iron work some of the color but I'm thinking especially in that kind of narrow band between the trauma and the joy and the inspiration I think I think most of what I want to project with my artwork is the joy. I think that trauma is what I'm trying to work through in order to get to that. I don't I really want. I really want my work to be joyful. Although there were some photographs from the book that uh you know we're a little bit like there were there was one that I don't know if I showed the pre slides but there was one that it was the bed that I slept in at the beach house and it was like it was just all coming apart and in the walls or you know pretty run down and there was

this little tiny child's drawing pinned to the wall. I couldn't find much joy in that but I felt that it was important to show. But most of the times I'm trying to to work through the trauma and work through the sadness to bring the beauty out of it because I think otherwise I would want to crawl in a corner and curl up and not not do anything even so that you know the carnival works like I want to bring that joy. I really I really want for people to hear the music when they're looking at their work.

[01:08:35] I want people to to want to dance. I want people to feel excited that wrought iron work. Obviously it's a tribute to my parents. Even some of them like this new newer work that's based on pattern. It's based on a lot of patterns from there like the buildings railings that hold you know mid century mindset has has inspired that of the color in the form even in the slides here.

[01:09:14] I feel that they convey so much energy and that sense of joy and movement.

[01:09:23] So we both know from our own experiences and that of family in Cuba as you've shared here that making do Soledad is absolutely essential to day to day survival.

[01:09:35] Right. Waiting in line to get necessities that we have lots of conveniences around being.

[01:09:42] You've been on tour de yes even that. How has that concept. Or has that concept of race or bid influenced your art practice Oh hugely.

[01:09:58] I mean I I feel that if I if it if I did not have that ingrained in my head I would probably not have accomplished a third of the things that I have. It's just there's nothing more exciting for me than when somebody says I bet you can't do that like oh yeah watch me. You know it just it's it's this thing that OK you're a high school dropout you didn't go to corners you didn't go to the university you've never taken an art class you can't be an artist and you can you know you can't do all of this stuff and it's like yeah I can I will. This is determination that I will find some way to do it. And it's not that I've accomplished everything I've ever wanted to accomplish. I don't know anybody who does. But you know my father sent me here have a better life and dammit I was gonna do that. And there was just nothing that would that could stop me from doing it. No. Whatever it takes to keep moving ahead. That's what I'm gonna do. And you know I that's whenever somebody thinks that you can't do something like the best revenge is to do it indeed.

[01:11:19] This notion of Cuba is a complex place right. And especially the unfulfilled promises of the 1959 revolution.

[01:11:28] I think those I think those influences are very lingering with us and we saw some of that or at least what I heard earlier this evening the young woman who was upset is about that question of unfulfilled fulfilled promises and aspirations for a sort of utopian ideal.

[01:11:48] Has that sense of unfulfilled promise. Does it influence your activism as an artist.

[01:11:57] Yes absolutely. I want for everyone to have equal human rights. And I think whenever I see any kind of community or any kind of group that's not getting their fair share I think it's important for me to at least make an effort to try to bring them up somehow. And my art itself is not political. So what I do is like I used whatever position I have the fortune to to gain and to use that. As a tool to lift other people up.

[01:12:41] You know just like you know showing some folks in my studio that are either people of color women LGBT artists or just anyone who's having a hard time trying to get you know their work shown. I'm I will go to bat for you. And whenever I'm on the Arts Commission meeting or public art Advisory Committee where I feel like OK I need to say something and you know and those who know me know that I am not a quiet wallflower.

[01:13:14] And so whenever I see something that I feel is not right I bring it up and and it's because I want and this is the thing I want that for my family and I want that for every single person in Cuba. I want them to be able to have whatever it is that they desire. It's not what I desire for them. It's like I that that should not matter it should be what they want and they should have the right to it. And there's nothing to me more powerful than the right to free speech and I want them to have that fully. I think it keeps improving but I want them to have it in as far away as possible. So absolutely I think it just makes me want for more people to have those choices.

[01:14:07] Right now in your artwork What promise are you striving to keep.

[01:14:11] Is there something in this particular point in time right where there's such an undercurrent of division distrust and disrespect disinterest in others.

[01:14:24] What promise are you trying to keep in your work.

[01:14:29] I'm trying I'm trying to promise that I can pay my rent and so that so that I can keep keep my space so that I have other people that I can help other people.

[01:14:39] And I also I liked the idea and you know that the uglier the world gets. I think that more beauty we need to bring into it and there's beauty and not just beauty in creating artwork but beauty and making connections with people and and saying I'm you know I'm there and you know opening yourself up in that.

[01:15:02] And I wanted I wanted changed that whole aspect of being a little bit more open too to somebody you know kind of getting your space and you can still say just back off a little bit. But it's we're all good. You know I think we don't do that enough and I remembers feeling that when I was there I am going into somebodies place where they were like all these like people living in these little tiny place and isolated. And these people have nothing and they all were offering me things like Do you want coffee. Do you want a list. Are you hungry. Do you want this. You want that and I want. I want that sense.

[01:15:44] You know I look for it. I always have that sense when I go into your studio. Let's open it up to questions please so there are mikes coming up.

[01:15:56] If you have a question raise your hand and the Mike will come to you.

[01:16:02] I want my question is. You said dish started out as a musician and I'm interested in finding out a little bit more about how that could've been a foundation for your art to you and what type of music you played so well.

[01:16:21] When I was a kid in Cuba I wanted to learn how to play the piano my sisters and my cousins learn how to play the piano and they hated it except for one cousin liked it and then so when I said to my grandmother I said I want to learn how to play the piano and she says Well the piano is for girls but we'll give you guitar lessons and OK. So I learned how to play guitar and when I was slightly under that it was about 20. I I'd seat out my first job singing in a nightclub and I knew I knew that the owner really really you know this is like 1970 something around there I knew that the owner really like Cat Stevens. And so I had long black hair and a beard and I made sure that I shaped it exactly like he did on his album cover. And I went in and I auditioned and I got the job and then I told my singing partner who played piano and I said we have a job that we starting next week. And so then we learned how to you know learned a bunch of songs and played and I want you know music was my first love. And when I after I moved from I had fairly good success in Miami. I actually got relatively I got paid more than I'd gotten paid for anything else that I've ever done in my life. But that had to come to an end and I moved to San Francisco tried to do a little bit of that and didn't have much luck. And then when I moved here I kind of fell into the whole visual art thing by accident from working in a frame shop and the owner liked what I was doing. He's said you can frame stuff and put it on the walls and people notice the work that I did. I didn't really I wasn't trying to be an artist. I was just trying to do things that I wanted to do so that's how it happened.

[01:18:34] Other questions.

[01:18:37] So you say it was like a lie your artwork they use a lot of shapes and stuff so we use a lot of shapes and your artwork and I just curious it makes things a lot. Abstract art. But do you like to like is your art more sent around like what you portray from your like your childhood and like you know your past or is it more lately kind of like just abstract art. I'm just curious. I have had a really hard time understanding. Like you can see yourself like an abstract artist or one who kind of like does art like based on what you see and like what you experience in life.

[01:19:11] Right I do a lot of abstract work. But even some abstract work is based on things that are not necessarily abstract. And then especially since I've gotten to do some public work that work is abstracted but it's usually based on a lot of different things that go into you know I take eye I make sure that I know what the who the audience is going to be what is supposed to be representing for them the work that you saw there there was four chief sells the. You know it's called she sells high school and I the originally they wanted to put totem poles on those on those pose and the Dumas tribe does not make totem poles. So then I had to come and correct that whole thing was like oh no

you can't do that but I can create something that you know they call sentinels and there they give a nod to the Duwamish Tribe but they're not derivative of the Duwamish tribe and they were based on personal experiences like you know my father's designs. So you take a lot of stuff into consideration but most of the work that I do is probably considered abstract and you know and even like the masks that are based on Carnival faces they're just made up masks and I don't I'm not necessarily trying to make them look like anything but I would I wouldn't really call those abstract or abstracted faces but.

[01:20:47] So it's it's all a balance.

[01:20:50] Thanks other questions you probably don't have time to really answer my question.

[01:20:56] But you mentioned at the very beginning that when you went back to Cuba your family was much more accepting of you than the family that you went to Florida with.

[01:21:05] And I just wanted you to talk a little bit more about what it was like when you moved to Florida and make that transition um changing cultures and a little bit about that so when I when I moved to Florida in 1966 I went with my my aunt and uncle my uncle was my father's brother I should say I went with my uncle and his wife because his wife this the minute that we crossed that water said Don't ever call me your aunt I am your uncle's wife.

[01:21:38] So that set the tone in when I was when I was 15. I thought that there was something going on that I did not understand. I didn't really think about sexuality. And I and I'd always been very honest with everybody in my family. And so I think at 16 might my aunt my uncle's wife asked me you know what was the problem.

[01:22:11] And the thing is. And I said Well I don't know that you would necessarily understand. So you know I don't really want to talk about it and she goes so. So I went across the street and my grandmother's two sisters were living there. They had just come from Cuba. I don't know if it was different generation and I and I but I trusted them I actually got along with them way better than I got along with my grandmother and I told my grandmother sisters.

[01:22:40] I said I I like boys. I was I was 16. I said I like boys.

[01:22:50] And I just felt like I needed to talk to somebody because I have nobody to talk to and there. They said well you're not the only person that you know like that. And all we have to say is that please be careful who you associate with because there will be a lot of people that are going to be out to harm you for no reason and I thought Oh okay.

[01:23:14] So then I went back across the street and my went across the street to talk to them and they said what what what was discussed. And then she came back and her eyes were bugging out of her head and there was like smoke coming out of there. And so I left home when I was 17 and I didn't go back and I was that was a rough period. I was on the streets and I had a rough time but I bounced back and I was just determined you know I was just determined that again I had that thing about my

father wanted me to have a good life and that I was just not going to squander that one more question.

[01:24:02] We've got a question here. So there's three hands all right. Um I. Oh sorry.

[01:24:12] I immigrated here from Cuba when I was 7 as well. And I think in the past couple years I've felt the longing to return back to Cuba. You can hear anything you hear this. Yeah. Okay. Um I also immigrated here around the same age as you from Cuba and haven't been back since um. So I think as I get older there is this desire to return and reconnect with my culture especially because the pressure to assimilate in this country has been so strong that I've lost a large sense of um my Cuban identity. And I think one of the things that keeps me from returning besides like just fear of you know the communist regime and whatnot is not knowing how to find what I want there which is to connect with artist community which is to connect with queer communities. And I'm not sure if you address this um during the first half of your lecture because I wasn't here for that but when you were there how did you connect with those communities how did you find them when there's so much oppression of that. And um like I wouldn't know how to find the local queer community if there is any.

[01:25:24] As someone who hasn't been back to Cuba since I was a kid um there is there's a lot more than you think and there and it does not feel that oppressive anymore.

[01:25:38] I would strongly suggest that you go.

[01:25:42] Your mind is just gonna go like you know you're just going to have this feeling of that you're gonna recognize your own people you're gonna feel that and you know and you may not meet all these people the first time you go. I didn't I didn't really go to any any gay bar or gathering or anything like that. I know that they exist and I know that for a long time I avoided going to Cuba because I was afraid of that especially like you know in the early 90s you know in the 90s when they were putting and putting people with HIV in concentration camps and you know they were very poorly treated. But Raul Castro's daughter has made a huge huge change and she has really brought up the LGBTQ community to the forefront.

[01:26:35] So when you have the the president's daughter be at the forefront of this movement it makes it a lot easier.

[01:26:45] Also it's easy to count to to meet artists. It's a lot easier. I mean you just walking down the street and artists have their doors open and you can see that there's their artwork is there and there are studios and they want you to come in. So there there are. There are ways all you have to do.

[01:27:03] I mean I would just recommend going and you know if you go you will meet people and you will meet people from all kinds of groups and you will feel you will feel that warmth that I felt I am and I would guarantee that that's gonna happen.

[01:27:22] So I encourage you to go slide down towards the front to take the last two questions I think I want over there.

[01:27:29] Well while you're moving I'll just add if I may that in some ways that isolation you mention going to Cuba. It'll give you the cultural inoculation that you need to survive that cultural isolation one.

[01:27:47] Thank you for that excellent talk. That was really really enjoyable. I think you're the most connected person that I've had a chance to talk to you that's been in both cultures. And I would ask What do you see for Cuba American relations are really just Cuba in the world in the next five years 10 and 15.

[01:28:11] It depends on who is president here. I think we were going in a really good direction and I like and I don't I don't have an issue with people saying well they need they need to give in a little bit.

[01:28:26] They need to give you know if we're gonna give they need to give. That's fine but why not take the the the road of saying like we don't want to be the people that you know the organization the country that you hang over your own people as the boogey man.

[01:28:47] And I think if we just get rid of that. There is and the more information the people in Cuba have the more they have the opportunity to make change for themselves. And this is the thing and I feel like the only way that change is going to happen is the same way that happened when the revolution came the people revolted. Why. Because there was so much corruption there were like you know a few people holding on to most of the money and most and controlling everything. Wow that's happening here. But anyway so we don't you know. But to give the people that power. And for us in the US I think if we just get rid of the embargo and say Do whatever you want like without it without expecting anything back that in itself will let the people there know that the US is not the enemy and without the US as the enemy the government there has very little to hold in control of of its own citizens. And it could be like a wonderful play it could still be a socialist country at that. I mean it could actually be a real socialist country which there is nothing I have no problem with that. I just want people to enjoy the freedoms that many other countries enjoy including including us.

[01:30:19] Well on that note of power to the people. Thank you so much Juan. And thank you all for coming out.

[01:30:35] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.