

CubaStreet is photographer Tony Bonanno's visual expression of his Cuba experience in 2009 and 2010. Yet it really is more than that, much more..... For Bonanno's skillful use of his lens takes us deeply into the strange yet familiar ambience of Cuban culture, bringing us into this unexpected ground of shared human experience. It is apparent that Bonanno's eye is very humane and clear. We are alternately entranced by the frozen-in-time quality of the Cuban environment, and touched by the implicit dignity and grace of his subjects.

It is this indefinable quality of grace which permeates these images – the street-sweeper peers benignly into the camera, with a gentle inquisitiveness that reaches us through the page. It was last year, and it could have been 100 years ago. An old man smokes a cigar in his humble country shack, a beautiful woman is fussed over in the street, a young boy looks at us with a gaze both innocent and knowing. Who are these people? And those streets.... crumbling buildings, ancient cars lost in time past – what is this a testament of? Is it the enduring capacity for survival and hope, that breaks out spontaneously in a tempo of music and laughter dancing through these images?

There is much of mortality here, yet so many of these images, or should I say gestures.....? are simply, to use a non-technical phrase – marvelous – the children and young men playing in the streets, a man stretching down to touch the earth, three men gazing directly at this Gringo Americano Photographer, a hauntingly vacant mission school room, a living diorama of buildings like a sepia fantasy. We become both witness and vicarious participant to this vibrant life lived so openly in these Cuban streets – the happy joy of a tumultuous sports celebration, children dressed up as magical dancers, an old woman sitting outside in her chair – these are tableaux that look impossibly staged, but are not.

What do these people see? We gaze through these photos and through a mysterious process of tropical alchemy we are able to see what is unseen and hear what is unspoken....Opening to these images allows the poignant dreams of Cuba to enter deeply into us, a gift of unexpected magic. We experience our Cuban brothers and sisters and now we can say – “Yes.... I know you.” In the words of The Mayan.... “You are another myself.”

It is this mysterious gaze implicit in Bonanno's images that remain in our awareness long after we have closed the portfolio. In our dreams a horse-drawn cart approaches us, a woman smiles enigmatically from her balcony over the café Santo Domingo, the old compadre puffs on his cigar – they are hearing the rattling of a wheezy 57 Chevy shattering the somnolent street..... perhaps they are thinking of lovers walking along the Malecon, the sound of the ocean in counterpoint to the soft sighing of the wind..... next time..... next year.....maybe..... There is no future in this dream, only the eternal NOW, frozen in place under the baking Cuban sun.