Decadence in Havana, Cuba

Kylie L. Grow  November 30th - December 12th, 2015

This essay begins with propaganda critical of a (outdated) United States federal government, and ends with an image portraying important political figures in Cuba’s recent history. What lies between is the messy evidence behind the blame game of U.S.-Cuba poverty politics. The democratic government has criticized the socialist one for acts of terrorism and civil rights violations, and the socialist government has accused the democratic one of the same ills. In these arguments, the Castro regime has used the U.S.-imposed multilateral trade embargo (el bloqueo) as a scapegoat for the economic stagnation of the island, while various U.S. politicians blame the evils of socialism in general. These arguments are very dogmatic, and also very linear. Is it possible to attribute all of Cuba’s social ailments to individual political acts?

Through the portrayal of social infrastructure and living conditions in urban settings in Cuba, the artist hopes to reveal the complex reality of U.S.-Cuban poverty politics and dialogue. Can an embargo that basically only prevents U.S. capitalist investment in the island really be to blame for injustices such as the lack of potable water in the home over months at a time? Can such an economic freeze actually be expected to protect the rights and civil liberties of the average Cuban? We should continue to consider these questions as thawing relations with Cuba remain at the forefront of our minds.

Decadence is a darkroom-processed photo essay shot in film from January-May of 2015 in Cuba. This body of work, and the opening of the show on December 4th were made possible thanks to the generous support of the University of Virginia’s College of Arts and Sciences, and the endowment of the Miller Arts Scholars. Many thanks to Professor of Art Amy Chan and the McIntire Department of Art for hosting this show.