

2017 WORKS MADE IN AND INSPIRED BY CUBA

A working trip to Cuba has been on my mind since I first realized that all of the on-site, wilderness-themed paintings I have made in the US have been about trying to negotiate the complex propositions of *sense of place* and *belonging* which so influence the construction of my identity. **As an on-site painter, place is integral to both my subject and process.** As a Cuban-born American who immigrated as a child, the Cuban landscape is both alien and deeply personal to me. In 2017, I was finally able to and spend two weeks living and working in the Valle de Viñales in Pinar del Rio, a location where many of the iconic Cuban landscape paintings were created by great Cuban painters such as Chartrand, Romañach, Menocal, and Ramos. By walking in their footsteps and gazing out onto the same vistas, I was able to see and make perceptually-based work of the Cuban landscape. As I painted, I thought about the idea of a *hyphenated-nature* and hoped that that the Cuban-American perspective I brought with me would produce new works that offered a pictorial reconciliation between my Cuban and American identities. These new Cuba-centric works ended up being comprised of two distinct sub-series: one created in Viñales called ***Hecho En Cuba*** (*Made In Cuba*) and the other created in the US, while at the Joan Mitchell Center, called ***Hecho Con Cuba*** (*Made With Cuba*).

My strategy for working in Viñales was to model my process as closely as possible to that of my prior plein-air painting practice. Due to travel and material limitations in Cuba, I faced many logistical challenges but was able to produce numerous on-site works using acrylics on watercolor paper. These ***Hecho En Cuba*** paintings focus on capturing views of the *mogotes*, unique geographical hillocks that dramatically punctuate the rich tobacco growing valley in Pinar del Rio. They were conceived to be a type of gateway and springboard for making future off-site works that would explore the **idea** of the Cuban landscape as a broader concept.

Once I was back in the US, I had to shift the inception point of my paintings from perceptually-based to conceptually-based. However, I still felt a deep need for this work to connect directly back to its place of origin and to the material of paint. If I could not physically be in Cuba, the only personally authentic way for me to paint Cuba was by actually using Cuba as a painting material. If not on-site, then *of the site*, hence the series title ***Hecho Con Cuba***. Some works in this series are mash-ups between references to Joseph Albers *Homage the Square* and Ana Mendieta's earth works. I based my *interactions of color* on specific paint combinations selected by *campesinos* for their rural houses in the Viñales Valley and then, on top of those colored squares, painted images of that same valley using its own soil that I hand-ground and turned into pigment. By literally superimposing *Cuba* on Western Bauhaus Modernism, I embraced the modernist grid while busting out of it and rejecting it with the vernacular Cuban landscape, and in so doing, found a new culturally and pictorially hyphenated space to paint.