

ARLIS/NA IRC Cuba Study Tour 2018
June 2nd - 8th, 2018



Attendees: Gabrielle Reed, Heather Topcik, Sumitra Duncan, Katharine Keller, Tammi Lawson, Miguel Rosales, Trudy Jacoby, Ross Day, Nancy Norris, Nadine Sergejeff, Floyd Zula, Lauren Gottlieb-Miller, Judith Golden, Stefanie Hilles, Kimberly Lesley, Laurel Bliss, Rachel Resnik, Caley Cannon, Sarah Carter, Trey Piepmeier, and Olivia Miller.

Tour Guide: Alejandro Infante, San Cristóbal Travel Agency

Group Flickr Site: <https://www.flickr.com/groups/3785725@N22/pool/>

Day 1: Saturday

Arrival in Havana

Participants arrived at Havana's José Martí International Airport and were escorted in groups by our travel agency to [Hotel Sevilla](#), where the group stayed for the duration of the study tour. While awaiting dinner, participants were free to get to know the neighborhood or rest after a long day of travel.

Dinner at Mediterraneo Havana

Our group ate dinner together at [Mediterraneo Havana](#), a farm to table restaurant in Havana's Vedado neighborhood. The group enjoyed a memorable family style meal of meats, fresh cheeses, red snapper ceviche with arugula, tomato and spinach raviolis, and swordfish. We shared a toast to Sarah Carter, whose birthday kicked off the trip.

Day 2: Sunday

Walking Tour of Old Havana

Our group started the day after breakfast in the hotel with a several hours long walking tour of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Havana was founded in 1519 on Cuba's North-Western shore and preserves a rich mix of Baroque and Neoclassical style buildings within the boundaries of the city's original walls. On our walking tour we visited:

- *Cathedral Square* - site of the baroque Cathedral of Havana, finished in 1777, and built from blocks of coral cut from the floor of the Gulf of Mexico. Marine fossils are visible through the facade.
- *Plaza de las Armas* - During colonial times, this was the site of military parades, musical performances, and other spectator events. This was the original administrative center of Havana. In the center of the square is a white marble statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, initiator of the Cuban wars of independence and Father of the Homeland.
- *Plaza Vieja* - This square was laid out in 1559 and was originally called *Plaza Nueva*. In the 19th century it was renamed after losing significance to other larger squares (such as Plaza de las Armas). From the 1950s to the 1990s it was used as a parking lot but has since been restored to its original look.
- *Plaza de San Francisco* - Laid out in 1575 and bordering the port, this was the primary square that enslaved people were unloaded during the slave trade. Today it is the main docking port for cruise ships carrying tourists. It is flanked by the Iglesia y Convento de San Francisco de Asís, a basilica and monastery originally built by the Franciscans in 1591, partially toppled by a hurricane in 1694, and rebuilt in its current form in 1739.

Lunch at Paladar Havana 61

After a long morning of walking and sightseeing the group enjoyed a long lunch at [Paladar Havana 61](#). Memorable dishes included the soup, a delicious creamed taro with sundried tomato oil drizzle, and desert, a cheese stuffed poached guava in a mint-basil sauce.

Callejon de Hamel



Callejon de Hamel entrance

Also known as [Hamel Alley](#), this street is an open-air Afro-Cuban sanctuary. The colorful 200 foot mural that stretches along the street is the work of Cuban painter Salvador González Escalona. In addition to visiting various artists shops, we briefly observed a [rumba](#) show, which happens every Sunday and is attended by locals and tourists alike.

Grupo Retazos



Grupo Retazos

Our group visited Grupo Retazos, the center for the promotion of dance under the

Ministry of Culture of Cuba and the Office of the Historian of Old Havana. It is run by [Isabel Bustos](#), a former professor at the National School of Modern Dance and the University of the Arts in Cuba. We viewed a dance performance and Isabel Bustos generously answered our questions afterwards.

Bus Tour

After the dance performance the group took a bus tour narrated by our tour guide to visit sites outside of Old Havana, including the Plaza de la Revolución, including the 109-meter tall José Martí Memorial Tower. The Plaza de la Revolución is one of the largest city squares in the world, and is hemmed in by the Ministry of the Interior building, adorned with a steel portrait of Che Guevara on the facade, and a portrait of Camilo Cienfuegos was installed on the adjacent Telecommunications Building with the words “Va Bien, Fidel” emblazoned below. We drove through the Vedado Neighborhood where we dined on our first evening, and stopped briefly at John Lennon Park, which features a bronze sculpture of John Lennon. After the bus tour we decamped briefly at the hotel to rest before dinner and El Cañonazo.

Dinner at Cuba 54



The group enjoyed dinner together at [Cuba 54](#), a restaurant in Old Havana within view of the Malecón, the seawall and roadway that stretches along the north edge of Havana along the Gulf of Mexico, connecting the Centro neighborhood, Old Havana, and the Vedado neighborhood. We were serenaded by a musical trio performing various Spanish language hits.

El Cañonazo at the Fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña



The group concluded our first full day by traveling to the Fortress of San Carlos de la Cabaña, where we saw and exhibit of Che Guevara's personal effects and writings, including his office and desk. We watched the sun set over the Gulf of Mexico while waiting to watch watch "El Cañonazo", a colonial reenactment dating back to 1519 when the city of Havana was enclosed by a tall thick rock wall to ward off attacks from pirates and the English. The cannon firing each night at 9pm signaled the closing of the city gates for the evening.



View from the ramparts

Day 3: Monday

University of Havana

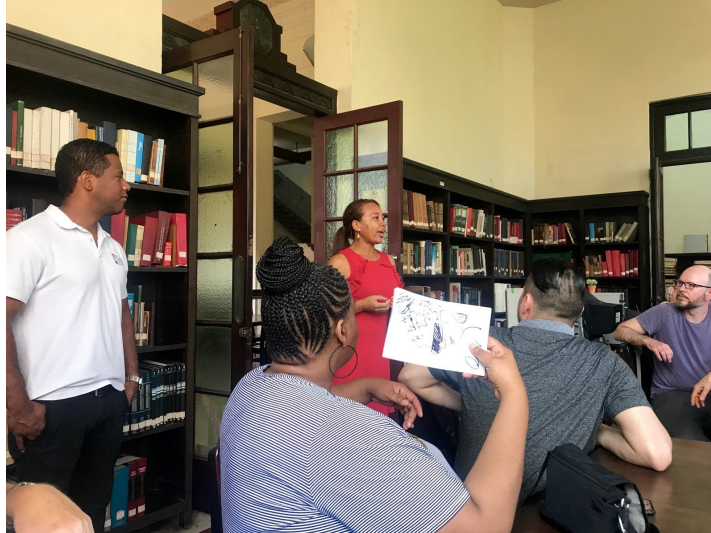


Alma Mater

After breakfast at the hotel we took a brief bus ride to the University of Havana. The current campus, nestled on a hill, was established in 1902 but the University dates back to 1728. The University has 72 degree programs, 25 Ph.D. programs, 1,600 professors; the current chancellor is a woman . Attendance is free for Cuban citizens and employment is guaranteed upon finishing your degree. There are many international students at the university, and international students pay approximately \$30,00 for 5 years of education.

On the first day of school all the students are photographed with the Alma Mater sculpture and then proceed through the gates, beginning their education. Upon graduate they pose in the same location holding their diplomas. We posed for a group photograph before proceeding to the main library.

University of Havana Library (closed stacks)



ARLIS/NA meeting with library director Yohannis Marti Lahera

We visited the main library where we met with Yohannis Marti Lahera (yohannis@dict.uh.cu), Library Director and Director of Shared Resources for the Museo des Bellas Artes and the National Library of Cuba. Yohannis studied at the University of Havana and did a 5-year program archives work and information science, she also received her masters degree in information science. We presented books to Yohannis and she gave us a brief talk about the history of the library. The main library "Rubén Martínez Villena" was established in 1936, though the library collection has been built over the past 170 years. Their special collections contain the papers of important Cuban intellectuals, explorer's narratives, and a Bible illustrated by Salvador Dali. They use IIF and they are working on an action plan for preservation of their collections with their physics department to monitor the health of the collection. They are also working with the medical school to monitor the health of the books, as well as the health of the people who work in the library, and the library is included in the strategic planning efforts of the University. The library's physical collections are organized according to the Dewey decimal system. They do a lot of outreach in their library to expand use, teaching information literacy courses, promoting the library on social media, and they are engaged in a national digital library initiative with other Cuban libraries.

José Martí National Library (closed stacks)



We had planned to meet with Yolanda Núñez González, Senior Specialist (yolandan@bnjm.cu) but she was out the day of our visit. We were able to meet with her colleague, Juan Carlos Fernandez, who has worked at the library for 18 years. We took a tour of the lower levels, reference room with English reference materials, including gifts from a librarian at the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, and the Sala Braille Frank Emilio, a department where they handle alternative text formats for patrons with disabilities. They send braille, audio, and large print manuscripts all over Cuba, not just to Havana residents. Our group was truly impressed with the amazing service they provide their fellow Cubans. We concluded our tour upstairs in the fine arts department, Sala de Arte Wifredo Lam, which abuts the Russian language collection. We met with their art librarian and print curator. They spoke to us about the collection and brought out a multitude of beautiful Cuban posters to view.



A open-air palapa style family style restaurant specializing in roast chicken (for those that eat it), as well as the ubiquitous rice-and-beans, plantain chips, and assorted vegetables. Cats roamed the restaurant for handouts. A talented quartet played a selection of traditional Cuban music. The restaurant's name refers to the typical home water cisterns. This is a state run restaurant .



Gato de ajibe

Museo Hemingway Finca Vigía, Ernest Hemingway House



Hemingway's home in Cuba is located ten miles east of Havana. Finca Vigia, or "lookout house" is located in the small, working-class town of San Francisco de Paula. Hemingway selected this town because he enjoyed fishing, and would often fish with his neighbors. Hemingway's wooden 38-foot (12 m) fishing boat named Pilar remains on the property. It is a 1934 Wheeler.

Hemingway wrote three novels in Finca Vigia: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and *A Moveable Feast*. The grounds are populated with plants and trees planted by Hemingway and a small path through a bamboo thicket leads to his boat, as well as a graveyard for his dogs. From the windows you can look in to see Hemingway's rooms, his coat hanging in the closet, and his handwriting scrawled on the wall in his bathroom. Various hunting trophies are hung on the walls.

Dinner on our own

- (Ross) *Palador de los Mercaderes*, Mercaderes 207 entre Lamparilla y Amargura, Habana Vieja. Highly recommended. Italian-Spanish fusion, cloth napkins. Reservations suggested but not critical. The couple at the next table were evidently celebrating their engagement, so reasonably romantic to boot.
- (Gabrielle, Rachel, Caley, and Miguel) Ivan Chef Justo Paladar
- (Caley, Sarah, Laurel) [5 Sentidos Restaurant](#) An extremely popular restaurant with seating outside. The waitstaff kept adding tables to the outdoor dining area as more guests arrived.

Day 4: Tuesday

[Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes](#), Centro de Información Antonio Rodríguez Morey
(cinfo@bellasartes.co.cu)



After breakfast at the hotel we walked the one block to gather at the National Art Museum. The building that houses the library, or “information center”, contains only artwork made by Cuban artists. We received a warm welcome by library director Cristina Ruiz (cristinaruiz@bellasartes.co.cu) followed by a presentation by Beatriz “Betty” Tarré Alonso (betty@bellasartes.co.cu, bettytarrealonso@gmail.com) on the founding and history of the museum, the library, and ongoing automation projects. (Betty promises to send/share a copy of the PowerPoint Presentation). Betty has worked at the museum for three years.



A Facebook post on the Centro’s page (June 19, 2018) highlights the donations to the museum from the ARLIS/NA study group participants.

[Fototeca de Cuba](#), Centro Nacional de Fotografía

We returned to Old Havana to visit the Fototeca and were welcomed by Chief Curator Nelson Ramírez de Arellano Conde. He reminded us that one of the earliest New World daguerreotypes was taken in Havana, and that the most reproduced photographic image in the world originated in Cuba: Alberto Korda's "Guerrillero Heróico" (portrait of Che Guevara). We viewed two current exhibits, "Valentín Sanz: entre el alfa y el omega" and "En el día del padre: Irolán Maroselli." We were allowed a limited sneak peak at their closed stacks. Nelson greatly appreciated the photobook donations. MassArt faculty member [Abelardo Morrell](#) is a Cuban born photographer of notoriety. We will attempt to ship his latest book to the Fototeca.

Library of Society Economic Friends ([Sociedad Económica de los Amigos del País de la Habana](#))

*The **Sociedad Económica de los Amigos del País de la Habana** or **Real Sociedad Patriótica de la Habana** (est. 1792 or 1793) is a [learned society](#) in [Havana, Cuba](#). It was initially organized to promote agriculture, commerce, education, and industry,^[1] modelled on the [Sociedad Económica de los Amigos del País](#) in [Spain](#). Founding members included Diego de la Barrera, Francisco Joseph Basabe, [José Agustín Caballero \(es\)](#), [Luis de Las Casas](#), Juan Manuel O'Farrill, Tomás Romay y Luis Peñalver, and Antonio Robledo.^{[2][3]} In its early decades the group produced publications, maintained a library in the Convento de Santo Domingo (1800-1844),^[4] and arranged educational programs.^[5] Around the 1790s the group built the Hospicio o Casa de Beneficencia in Havana.^[3] From Wikipedia .*

Lunch at The Decameron Paladar

[Cuba Libro Bookstore](#)

Offers used books and original artwork and posters for sale in a relaxed and welcoming setting. We got to sip tea and coffee and relax on a leafy patio (or swing on the hammock!). A customer's wish list of books and magazines is periodically posted on the store's Facebook page [though I can't seem to locate it]. On view was "ALMA AZUL (Trans Masculina en Cuba)" by Liam Duran, an exhibition of portraits of transgender Cuban men.

Dinner at Nazdarovie

[Nazdarovie](#) is a state run "retro Soviet restaurant" along the Malecón. We shared a meal together while watching the sunset over the Gulf of Mexico. Vegetarians came out on top during this particular meal, enjoying homemade pierogies. Some participants walked back to the hotel, stopping in on various galleries and artists spaces in Old Havana before heading to bed.

Day 5: Wednesday



[Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales](#) (*Center for the Development of the Visual Arts*)

We started our day at the Center for the Development of Visual Arts (CDAV). Founded in 1989, their mission is to promote, research, and support contemporary Cuban visual art. CDAV hosts regular exhibitions, supports the Centros Provinciales de Artes Plásticas, and organizes two important events: los Salones de Premiados y los Salones de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo. CDAV has a resource center on site which students and researchers can use, containing a library and digital archive. We presented director, Gretel Medina Delgado with books and viewed a Linocut exhibition and a contemporary art exhibition called “Moments of clarity” by Thierry Geoffroy (FR/DK), Levi Orta (CU), Ismar Cirkinagic (BiH/DK), and Lester Alvarez (CU) curated by Gretel Medina (CU) and Tijana Miskovic.



Lino Print exhibition

Fusterlandia, Jaimanitas (and lunch)



Fusterlandia

In 1975, after moving into a modest wood house in the rundown neighborhood of Jaimanitas outside Havana, Cuban artist José Fuster “set about decorating his studio in colorful mosaic. Once he was done there, he asked his neighbors if he could decorate their homes and business as well. A few accepted his offer and the tile creations grew. Over the course of a decade, doctors’ offices, bus stops, fountains, benches, gateways, and more were enveloped by Fuster’s whimsical imagination. Today, his artwork coats the neighborhood in a rainbow of strange, enchanting fantasy. Jaimanitas was an economically depressed area before Fuster arrived, and now it has turned into an artist’s paradise. Our time at Fusterland was a highlight of the trip.”¹ During lunchtime they closed the grounds and served us a feast of rice, black beans, vegetables, yams, grilled fish, and curried chicken and we ate surrounded by Fuster’s beautiful mosaics.

ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte o Universidad de las Artes)

¹ Text from *Atlas Obscura*: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/fusterlandia>



“Vagina Square”

“The University of Arts of Cuba / Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) was established on September 1, 1976, by the Cuban government as a school for the arts. Its original structure had three schools: [Music](#), [Visual Arts](#), and [Performing Arts](#). At present the ISA has four schools, the previous three and one for Arts and Audiovisual Communication Media. There are also four teaching schools in the provinces, one in [Camagüey](#), two in [Holguín](#) and one in [Santiago de Cuba](#). ISA offers pre-degree and post-degree courses, as well as a wide spectrum of brief and extension courses, including preparation for Cuban and foreign professors for a degree of Doctor on Sciences in Art. Pre-degree education has increased to five careers: Music, Visual Arts, Theatre Arts, Dance Arts and Arts and Audiovisual Communication Media. In 1996, the ISA established the *National Award of Artistic Teaching*, conceived for recognizing a lifework devoted to arts teaching.”²

We were able to tour the iconic buildings that house the Visual Arts department. The buildings were designed by architects Roberto Gottardi (Italian), Vittorio Garatti (italian), and Ricardo Porro Hidalgo (Cuban) . They designed the buildings to represent a female's reproductive organs. Students working on their craft would eventually be birthed artists. The buildings surround a square nicknamed the “vagina square” due to the presence of a very large halved papaya.

Ediciones Boloña

² Text from Wikipedia entry.



Located in a building overlooking the Plaza Vieja, Ediciones Boloña (catalog [here](#)) is the publishing arm of the office of the Havana City Historian, Eusebio Leal Spengler, who welcomed us to their offices and gave us an overview of their operations. He offered first-hand background on the recently installed equestrian sculpture of José Martí, a faithful reproduction of the one originally destined for Cuba but installed instead at an entrance to Central Park in New York City, and the years-long effort to insure its fabrication and installation in Havana. He looked forward to opening wider the U.S. market to Ediciones Boloña.

Dinner on our own

(Laurel and Sarah) Dinner at *El del Frente*, near O'Reilly and Aguilar. On the second floor, with a roof-top bar above. Reservations recommended.

We were treated, in the late afternoon, to a spectacular thunder and lightning storm moving across the island, typical for the rainy season in Cuba. Many chose to dine in the hotel though some brave explorers ventured out despite the heavy rain.

Day 6: Thursday

Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam (Wifredo Lam Center)



The center is housed in a colonial-era mansion near the Plaza de la Catedral. Greeted by , curator José Manuel “Pepe” Noceda Fernández and artist Adonis Ferro (b. 1986), whose multimedia work “Des-concierto 9. El Banquete” (a play on the word for ‘bewilderment’) was on exhibit. In the open air patio of the museum a ‘Frankenstein’ brass instrument or ‘tributófono’ was suspended by guy-wires over a raked gravel surface meant to evoke the artist’s memories of growing up in Havana, which used to have more sand and gravel in the streets. It was one of three instruments created for the exhibit and featured in the concert/opening. The full work is divided into four ‘acts’ each of which fills an adjacent room. In another room are videos of the making of the brass instrument by local luthiers and the mesmerizing inaugural performance.

Taller Experimental de Gráfica



Taller Experimental de Grafica began in 1962. It is a studio collaborative of 120 artists. It is also the 2nd largest collection of litho stones. The stones were gathered and kept safe

after many news outlets went out of business in cuba. The center allows scheduling studio and presses to the general public. They have been collaborating with may institutions like the SVA, Woman Workshop, and Alabama book arts program.

Lunch on our own

- (Gabrielle Reed & Ross Day) Donde Lis
Tejadillo No. 163 entre
Habana y Compostela
La Habana Vieja, Cuba

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes Tour



Peces, 1941
Fidelio Ponce De leon (1895-1949)



Estudio con Estrella
By José Segura Ezquerro (1897- 1963)

The Cuban Art Collection -

“With a thesaurus that amounts to more than 30 thousand pieces, the patrimonial fund of the Cuban plasticity testifies to the symbolic production carried out on our island from the 17th century to the present, through paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings and installations.

The permanent exhibition of his artistic treasures consists of 940 works grouped in four conceptual nuclei: Art in the Colony, Change of Century, Modern Art and Contemporary Art.” From Website <http://www.bellasartes.co.cu/>

Dinner at La Casa



Portrait of owner's mother in honor of her quinceanera

Our penultimate meal was shared at *La Casa*, a restaurant in the Vedado neighborhood. *La Casa* is one of Havana's oldest private restaurants (paladares) and was opened shortly after private businesses were legally allowed to operate in the 1990s. Originally a private home, it's now home to only the owner's father. Entrees included the usual fare as well as *conejo* (rabbit) and *cabra* (goat, often misidentified in English as 'lamb'). We enjoyed live music by a trio of musicians playing for us in the dining room.

Day 7: Friday

Returning Home

After breakfast in the hotel, the IRC Study Tour concluded as participants gathered in the lobby and left in groups towards the airport. A few of us were able to purchase prints from ISA faculty member and artists [Frank David](#).



Frank david with Rachel Resnik June 8, 2018