

THE PHOTOGRAPHER:
Polibio Diaz

Polibio Diaz is a photographer from Barabona, Dominican Republic. His work has been featured in the Venice Biennale and the Brooklyn Museum. Diaz also serves as Cultural Adviser for the Dominican Minister of Foreign Affairs. His art, he says, is “oriented first and foremost toward my fellow Dominicans.”

You, the viewer, the unhurried passerby, see an open door. Inside, flora, fauna, and gimcracks jump out, a crowded and colorful interior. It arouses the neighbor’s envy, and if all that isn’t enough its inhabitants call attention to themselves even more, by playing the stereo as loud as possible (Bachata or Reggaeton), so it’s impossible for them to go unnoticed. It’s no coincidence we’ve been declared the second happiest country in the world, though we don’t have a nickel to our names.

I present my Dominican interiors as polyptychs, multi-layered single shots which may then be broken apart and reconstructed. It’s as if the shot itself is composed of puzzle pieces. The result resembles a collage. I like to refer to these photographs as my *sancocho*, a Dominican dish that mixes elements of the Spanish and Caribbean cultures.

While studying photography and civil engineering in the United States, I learned about the art of several masters—Eadweard Muybridge’s motion capture, Edward Weston’s soft focus, Cartier Bresson’s eye, Walter Evans’s humanity, Eugène Atget’s intense vision—that have formed the foundation of my *sancocho*. When I returned to Santo Domingo and began taking photographs, I employed the works of these individuals in developing my own style, which combines American Expressionism with a variety of European Caribbean influences.

The mark America made on me was

not at all academic. Quite the contrary. Without my American training, I would never have acquired the ingredients I needed to develop a unique and honest *sancocho*. When I click the shutter or assemble my polyptychs, I simply let the objects around me inspire me.

For decades, Caribbean artists have been fighting to be heard, read and seen through their music, literature and art. As a people, Caribbean islanders long to take their place within the contemporary art scene. The stamp of new voices from the Caribbean has intensified recently, and broken down the “border” that demar-



Polibio Diaz’s Dominican interiors are polyptychs—multi-layered shots that can be broken apart and reconstructed. Above: “Retrato de Familia.”

cated today’s art, blurring it and widening it, without delving into the artist’s place of origin so much as responding to a global discourse. I think that this discourse has allowed my Interiors exhibition to take part in international events like the Venice Biennale and Kreyol Factory in the Parc de La Villette in Paris.

Caribbean art is the product of our ancestors’ efforts, who paved the way for new generations of artists to explore their roots within a modern setting. Without forgoing the memories of centuries of civilization and barbarism, as a new generation of artists, we have begun to walk in the path

of our predecessors. We concentrate on the present, expanding the borders that once limited us, allowing the pre-established canons of contemporary art to widen and alight in the Caribbean, enabling us to influence a broad panorama of culture abroad. We derive inspiration from the interior of humble shacks in the islands of the Caribbean, shacks that are always dressed in their Sunday best, where the sun shines in anticipation of the eye of another artist who will click the shutter and celebrate life, even in the face of misfortune.

Translated by Hoyt Rogers