

MATANDO EL RATO

Matando el Rato - Eileen Noy

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Text by Eileen Noy on the installation “Matando el Rato”

Following the thread of the current customs and traditions of our people, the moment of the neighborhood talk in the afternoon has become a ritual, inseparable from the idiosyncrasy of ordinary Cubans. Pulling out a chair to feel comfortable, chat and find out the latest is also creating an identity. Along with the chair are the photographs of the chairs that are used daily to carry out a socialization ritual with others and wait for the hours to pass. Exercise that is performed daily as a daily guideline.

The chair that separated from the table acquiring autonomy and its own expression, today is also separated from the interior of the house and turns to the outside giving the social fabric of the street in a native expression. That intimacy of the chair within the home is lost as a result of sharing the experience and the dialogue.

The chair also contains certain added values in Cuban social context: the gestation of local or passing identities (it is precisely at this moment when socialization is supposed to be a solution to the everyday boredom), laziness (because in the first instance the image of this object is conceptualized as an expression that the Cuban has finished their his day of work and that they have nothing more to do) and in contrast to the latter the reflective intellectual activity on the most immediate.

Everyday life turns this image into a paradigm of continued waiting, a symbol of physical fatigue that in turn entails a spontaneous relationship with the gesture of immortalizing a “minor” tradition. The interest is to capture this sphere of the “History” of everyday life. This gesture wants to enable the understanding of those social agents who are mostly those called voiceless but who nevertheless have an impact on the construction of local and national history. It is in the street where the historical and identity processes, where virtues (ought to be, being, sympathy, compassion, trust, work, justice, shame) and vices (cheating, indolence, opportunism, Cubanism, corruption, lack of punctuality, illegality) color society; and the chair is in part one of those places where these moral qualities that appear as essential in our civil society are concretized.

It is only the seat that captures the attention, but the almost sacred charge lies behind the image. I talk about deep Cuba as a witness: perhaps it is because I have been watching the rite for years that I can properly discuss what it means. This is part of my daily life, because generationally it was my turn, as in every tradition, to become a practitioner. I am interested in alluding and emphasizing the ritual character behind the chair, accentuating the importance of this practice through the photographic image that my generation assimilated as something every day and of spontaneous use. The relationship of each generation with the image is a good scale to understand historical changes. For this reason, I add to the usual digestion of the photographic image an absolute respect, almost veneration, of a life history.

The veracity of the image (digital) is distorted by chemical processes that imitate types of previous photographic procedures (digital-analog conversion, etc.) in order to speak of a future.

The chair's location changes: in a neighborhood of Old Havana (San Isidro) a precarious texture prevails and marginal, while in Vedado or Playa from the residences and mansions the chair becomes a throne on which the majority wants to perpetuate itself; in a municipal seat (Minas) in Camagüey the swing flat and slow pattern the almost immobile dynamics of small cities and towns in countryside (Marroquín in Ciego de Ávila) the stools lean against the walls and the rhythm of life is located in the language of the peasantry.

Collecting these moments of memory in Cuba enhances the interest of this photographic essay stratifying the tale of the chair in society as the language of our local identities and our tradition extended over time in a Cuba that in its history has seen entire generations “matando el rato” - killing time.