

VCReporter

NEWS, ENTERTAINMENT, ENVIRONMENT



Havana to Ventura

The geography of friendship and collaboration

By [Claudia Pardo](#) 07/16/2015

The Story

"From Havana to Ventura," the mural project that is front and center at this year's ArtWalk Ventura, is an inspiring tale about abiding friendship, torn barriers, artistic collaboration, determination, good intention and a bit of magic.

Endearingly labeled "the Cubans," Pedro Pulido, an illustrious sculptor and painter, along with Victor Pina, a distinguished former aeronautical engineer, are two Cuban creatives who, over the years, built a close relationship with some prominent artists in Ventura, resulting in their current visit to the city and participation in ArtWalk 2015.

The story began in 1997 when Paul Lindhard, founder of ArtCity, and Lorenzo DeStefano, photographer, filmmaker and Ventura Film Society founder, invited the well-known sculptor Pulido to be an artist-in-residence at ArtCity. During Pulido's six-month stay at ArtCity, he created Embargo, a striking sculpture representative of a time in Ventura when Thompson Boulevard, a main thoroughfare, was under construction and said to be populated by prostitutes. Pulido built Embargo with the remnants of the construction site and with mindfulness of the women it attracted. Today, it is a permanent piece displayed at ArtCity's entrance.

In 2002 Victor Pina participated in Lorenzo DeStefano's production of the film *Los Zafiros: Música desde el Borde del Tiempo*, based on the famous Cuban musical group of the 1960s that has maintained its popularity into the 21st century. During their time together, a friendship grew between the two men, and similar to the fame of *Los Zafiros*, it has endured over the years.

In December of 2014, Ventura College professor of photography Bill Hendricks led his 54th trip to Cuba. Commercial interior designer Sue Pollack and philanthropist Patti Channer, along with their friends and a handful of students from Brooks Institute, headed out for their Cuban adventure. They had the opportunity to spend time with Pina and Pulido in Havana. It was during this visit that Pollack, co-chair of the ArtWalk committee, invited "the Cubans" to participate in the annual event.

The Mural

Owned by Bell Arts Founder Josh Addison and the Addison Family Trust, 50 W. Main St. is characterized by a main arch door on the front façade. The mural mimics this architectural design on the west wall, depicting five painted scenes framed by archways and separated by 10-foot blank areas reserved for the eventual installation of planters.

An attention-grabbing orange construction sign reads "Art Work Ahead" and pulls you into the visual narrative of this intercultural creative collaborative. Next to the sign is a vintage 1950s blue Chrysler similar to Ernest Hemmingway's (his was red) with the author himself at the wheel. Riding in the backseat is a patron of Pulido's who found the actual car in a garage 15 years ago.



MB Hanrahan (left, kneeling) and Pedro Pulido (far right with hat) hard at work with volunteers on the "Havana to Ventura" mural.

Pulido and MB Hanrahan work intuitively on the mural as they make the necessary tweaks to the design and color. The early designs were developed over a period of several months between the artists. For a mural of this scale, the foundational sketches are bound to evolve and change, especially with the participation of community volunteers of all ages.

Containing elements of both cultures, the "Havana to Ventura" mural juxtaposes images of Cuban life against the California coastal environment. Indigenous Cuban birds are perched on a plant among monarch butterflies. Deeply meaningful to Pulido and widely used in his figurative work, a conch shell represents the flow of creative energy, like music, between the two cultures. Here, the giant shell is gently held by the hand of an islander and emanates a stream of colorful music. A pair of dancers energetically kick their legs up. One wears a white dress printed with images from the Channel Islands, the other wears red, aptly depicting the island of Cuba. A multicolored butterfly lands on a passion flower symbolizing cross-cultural and artistic pollination. A Trojan horse, representing a gift to a city, elegantly shows up with what is revealed to be the hopes and expectations of this collaboration.

Scheduled to be finished in time for this weekend's ArtWalk, the "Havana to Ventura" mural is bright, happy and colorful, but carries a deep emotional resonance as the culmination of an 18-year friendship. The scenes boast the personalities, individual styles and overall gracious attitudes of the two friends.

The Cubans

Victor Pina: Upon retiring from an impressive career as a mechanical aeronautical engineer and international representative of Cuban aviation, Pina became involved in historical research, which led him to participate in the production of several documentaries and, in turn, become an advocate for the promotion of art, specifically fine art. In addition, Pina has built several studies on the life and work of Ernest Hemingway, particularly about the writer's experiences in Cuba. Over the last six years, Pina's works on this subject, titled "Mr. Way" for the term the fishermen of Cojimar, La Habana, gave Hemingway, were accepted into the international event Coloquios Internacionales Ernest Hemingway in Cuba, which has a growing reception among international scholars.

In 2013 Mary Mount University in San Pedro invited Pina, a scholar in the history of science and technology and a member of the Cuban Society of

History of Science and Technology, to lead several conferences about aeronautical ties between the U.S. and Cuba.

Pedro Pulido: An internationally exhibiting artist whose works have shown around the world in Cuba, Italy, Bulgaria, Australia and the United States in private collections and at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Habana and the Museum of Sydney in Sydney, Australia. He is a graduate of the University of Havana with degrees in graphic design, ceramic, sculpture and ecology. He holds a B.A. in drawing and sculpture from the National School of Fine Art, San Alejandro, Cuba, and has been commissioned for monumental national works by the Cuban government and tours worldwide as a professor of fine art.

Widely recognized as a sculptor and poet, Pulido is the coordinator of Proyecto Socio cultural Comunitario Cintio Vitier which is a net of people who voluntarily work on projects for the social well-being of communities, including schools, workplaces, families, organizations and more.

Haciendo Almas, (Forging Souls) is at the core of its philosophy. The term was originally used by Cuban and intellectual patriot Jose Martí upon his return to Cuba to fight in the war for independence. Founded in art classes, the main principles are love, well-being, hard work, good social actions that go beyond words and the care and respect for nature and the planet. A participant in the project wrote that Pulido was born with star qualities. "From an early age he had big dreams. He owns everything he proposes, tears down barriers, and mocks those who oppose him. He has created his own world, his own school where he regularly enjoys gifting students with his experiences . . . by teaching them how to express themselves through painting and sculpture, and infusing their artwork with feeling, values, joys and sorrows, and dreams. This is Pulido's fundamental objective. He is an individual who refuses to conform, who strives to continually give more. He demands more of himself and picks himself up the moment he seems to falter. A warrior, that is Pulido."

The mural can be seen at 50 W. Main St. in downtown Ventura. An exhibit of DeStefano's photographs from Cuba will be on display at the Museum of Ventura County and a breakfast discussion with DeStefano and Hendricks will take place there on Saturday morning. For more information, visit www.venturamuseum.org and www.artwalkventura.org. □

ArtWalk 2015 Highlights

For a complete schedule and map, visit www.artwalkventura.org.

PODS

The transformation begins! Once again, 15 PODS containers will act as mini art galleries and be placed in different locations throughout Downtown and Ventura Avenue. Participating artists transform the 8-by-8-by-16 spaces into unique art installations and interactive exhibits.

Bowl Hop

It's baaack! Buy a handcrafted bowl during ArtWalk and visit participating Ventura restaurants for a sample of their cuisines. A bowl costs \$25 and benefits Ventura's Project Understanding. Once you purchase your one-of-a-kind bowl, you can store it away as it is only symbolic. In its place, you will receive a punch card to take to sponsoring restaurants.

Music, performances and more music

On Saturday, Ventura College will provide an array of music classes and performances, ranging from 10 to 90 minutes, including guitar, percussion and piano performances, costume and street-dance demonstrations, and a student wheelchair dance performance. The Rubicon Theatre will bring Shakespeare and West Side Story to the streets with 20-minute presentations. Domingo Siete will close the evening with Cuban and Afro-Latin-infused melodies.

PLACE – Public Art Installations

Temporary public art is blowing up all over the city. Several installations and performances will be unveiled during ArtWalk, including a near-full-scale whale's tail made completely out of plastic bottles; a 13-foot long sculpture inspired by a Chumash canoe; illustrations and graphics that will temporarily replace vacant storefronts with words of encouragement; and a choreographed dance.

Not to be missed

In addition to the many fixes art lovers get to have during ArtWalk, there are several not-to-miss events worth mentioning:

The Collector's Gala at City Hall – July 17, 6 p.m.

Ventura's majestic and historic 1913 City Hall building will keep its doors open for a special collector's gala event precluding ArtWalk. Art collectors and art lovers will get an opportunity to get a first look at a curated selection from each artist participating in ArtWalk 2015, enjoy hors d'oeuvres, music and a no-host bar. In addition, art docents will be available to give tours of

the impressive municipal art collection and offer details of City Hall's notable architecture. Mayor Cheryl Heitmann will acknowledge sculptor Michele Chapin as this year's Artist of Distinction, and Pedro Pulido will be recognized as the 2015 Global Artist.

Cuban Breakfast at the Museum of Ventura County –July 18, 10 a.m. to noon

Victor Pina will give a visual presentation on Ernest Hemmingway called "Mr. Way and Cuba"; Bill Hendricks will discuss his experiences in Cuba and his new book Proof; photographer and filmmaker Lorenzo DeStefano will discuss his diverse experiences in Cuba while filming Los Zafiros: Music from the Edge of Time and share photos and film clips.

Pedro Pulido at the Tool Room Gallery – July 18-19

Artwork by visiting Cuban artist and mural collaborator Pedro Pulido.

http://www.vcreporter.com/cms/story/detail/havana_to_ventura/13156/