

Alejandro González 2005-2018

*"I take photos to see what aspect of the world is in them."  
Garry Winogrand*

I have a quasi-scientific drive for freezing the different stages of society: Its ornaments, traditions, ideology. Since 2005 I have been making a photographic record of life in Cuba in which I reflect on a reality that sometimes is confused with the official discourse.

In some of my works I articulate the resistant past and its antagonism with the present. I show a sector of society somehow silenced by officialdom, its significance being only a number within a population census.

In my last works I have returned to a more traditional mode, making use of the most employed genres found in art: portrait and landscape. I assume them as a unit. In them human presence is central because everything alludes to it. Even if away it emerges because of its most absolute absence.

I use photography in its most primary character: Documentary. Photography unveils things I was not aware I knew, and this condition allows for re-thinking a moment. Although there is certainly conceptual nuance in any one of the works, my main intention is showing reality up-front, without sweeteners. Photography not only is useful for generating memories but also to provoke a kind of mythology: the photographic truth of the world such as it is now.

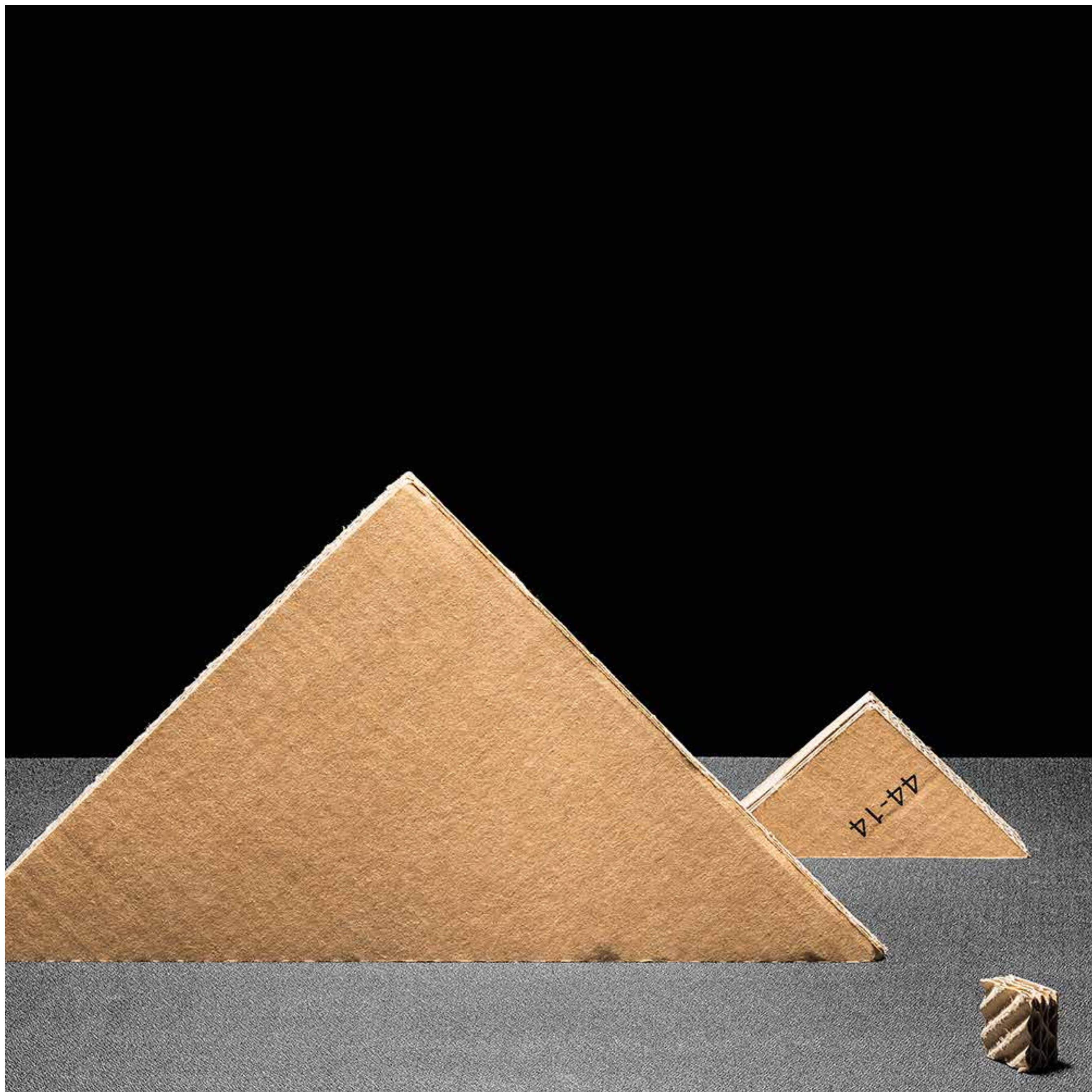
*Alejandro González*

Series

# Pelos en la lengua 2017

(Beating around the bush)

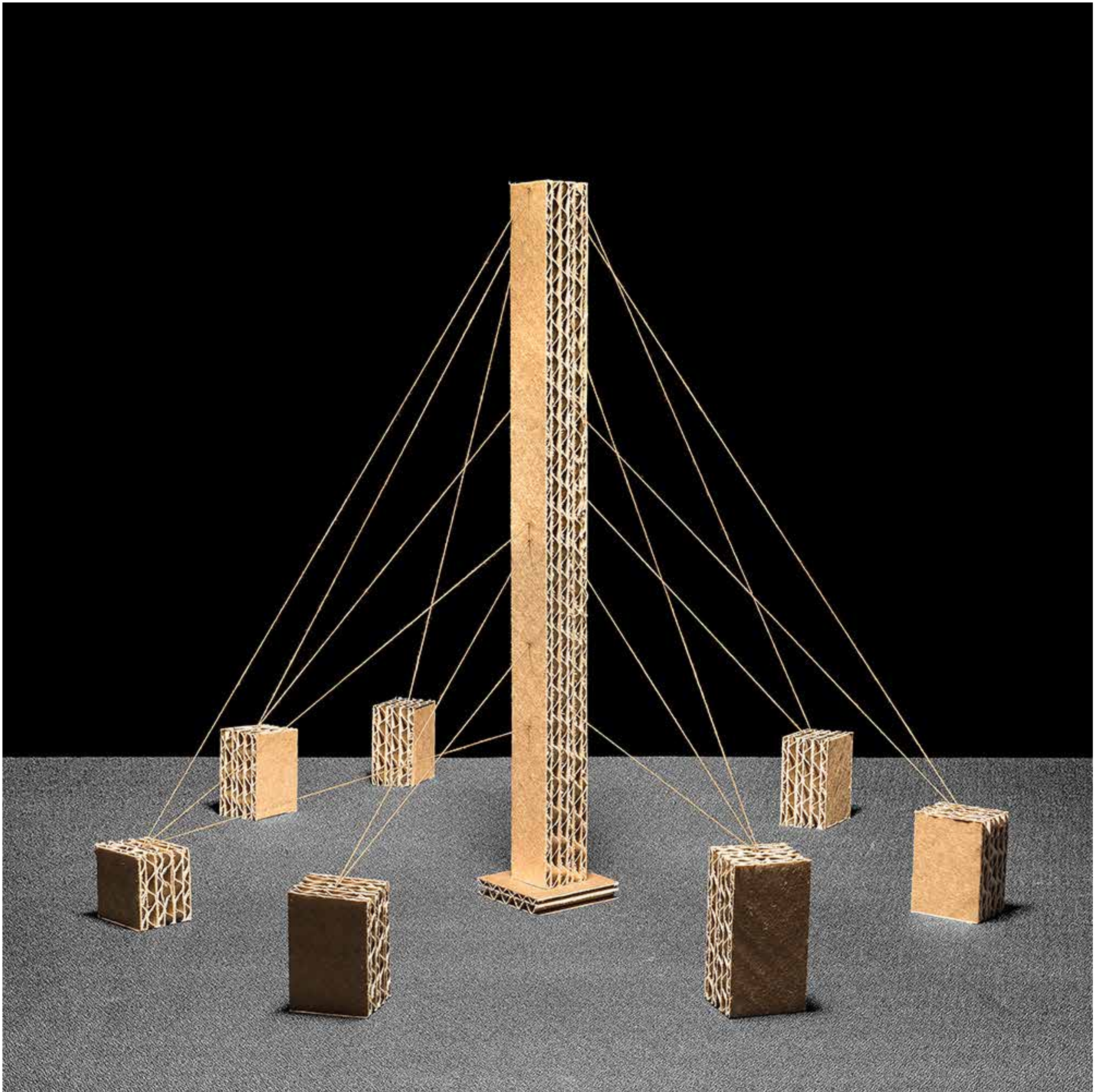
Through a staged world I narrate the cycle of genesis and fall of a whole system.



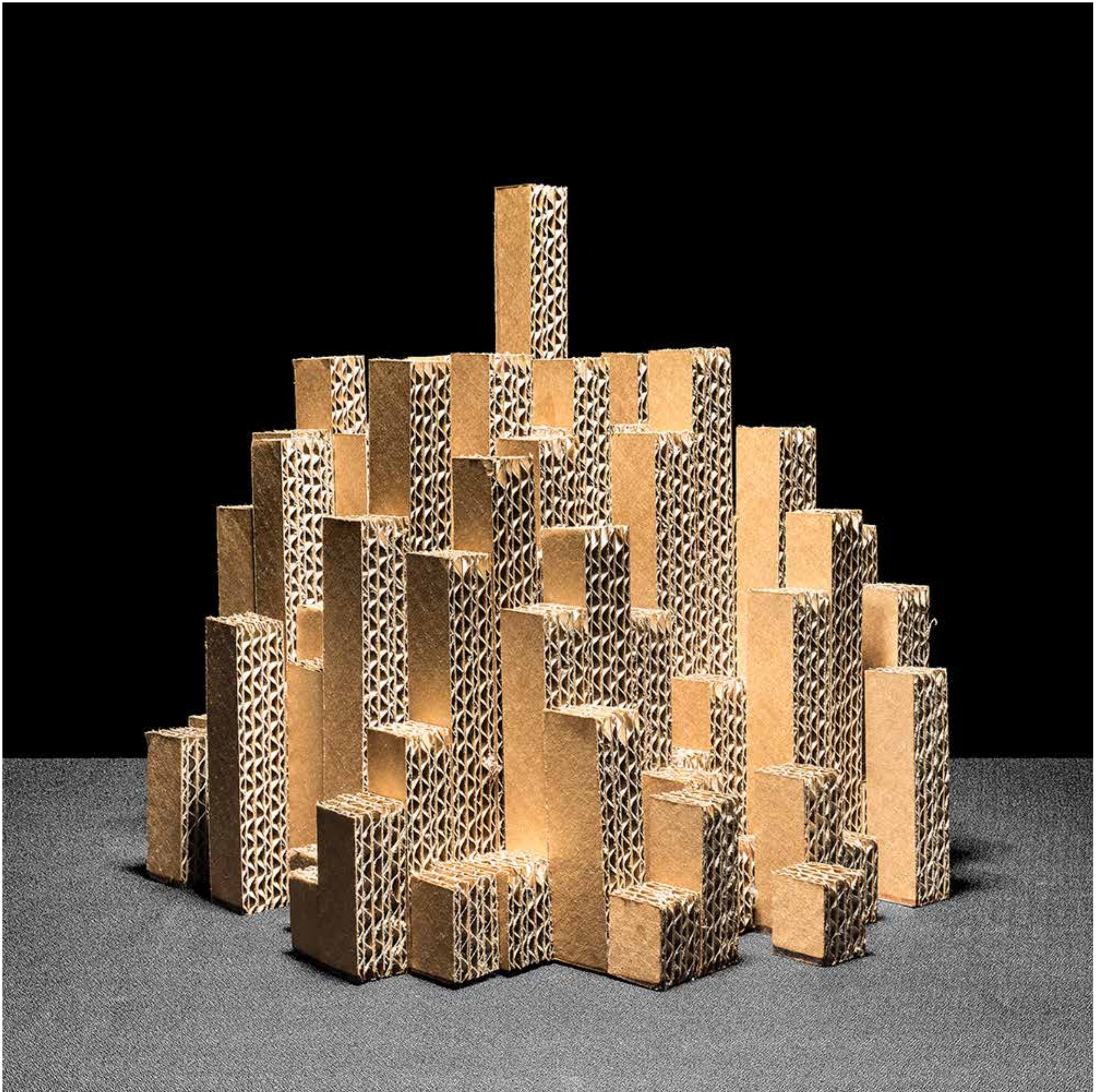
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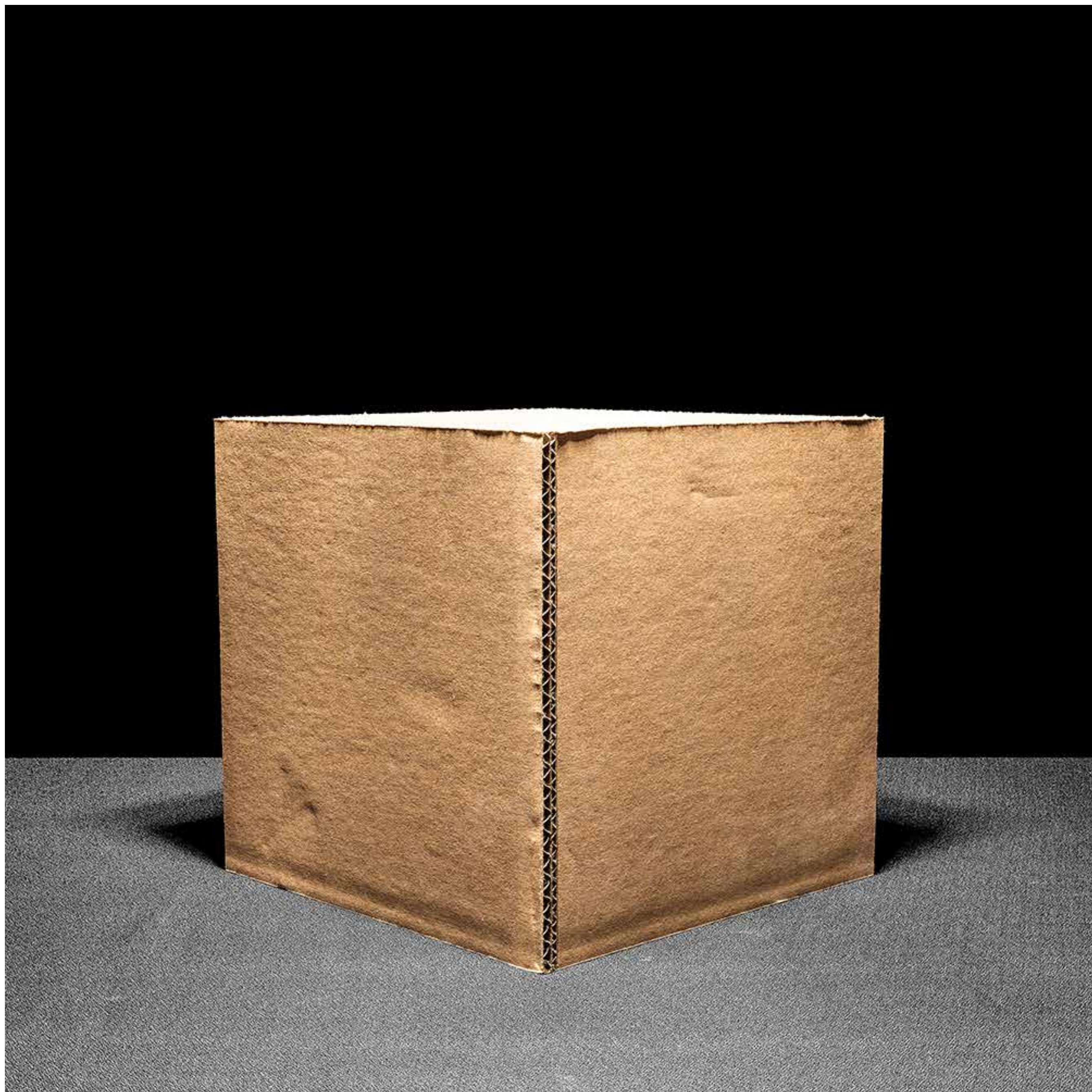














# Quinquenio Gris 2015

(Gray five-year period)

The decade of the 1970s started in Cuba with the fervor generated by the official challenge to get a 10 million ton sugar harvest that year, a last attempt by the Cuban people and government to achieve economic and political sovereignty. On 19 May 1970, Fidel had to admit to the failure of this undertaking, signaling the end of an era and the beginning of the Sovietization of the Cuban model. The period that followed became known as the “Gray Five-year Period” (1970-1975). There was a policy of intolerance established. Soviet systems were copied as models to follow, in the military, in management and in the administration: Cuba revolved around the economic machinery of the USSR. The First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (1975) agreed on drafting a Socialist Constitution.

Five moments, five scale models made of cardboard and lead, reconstruct a period of dogmatism and bureaucracy.



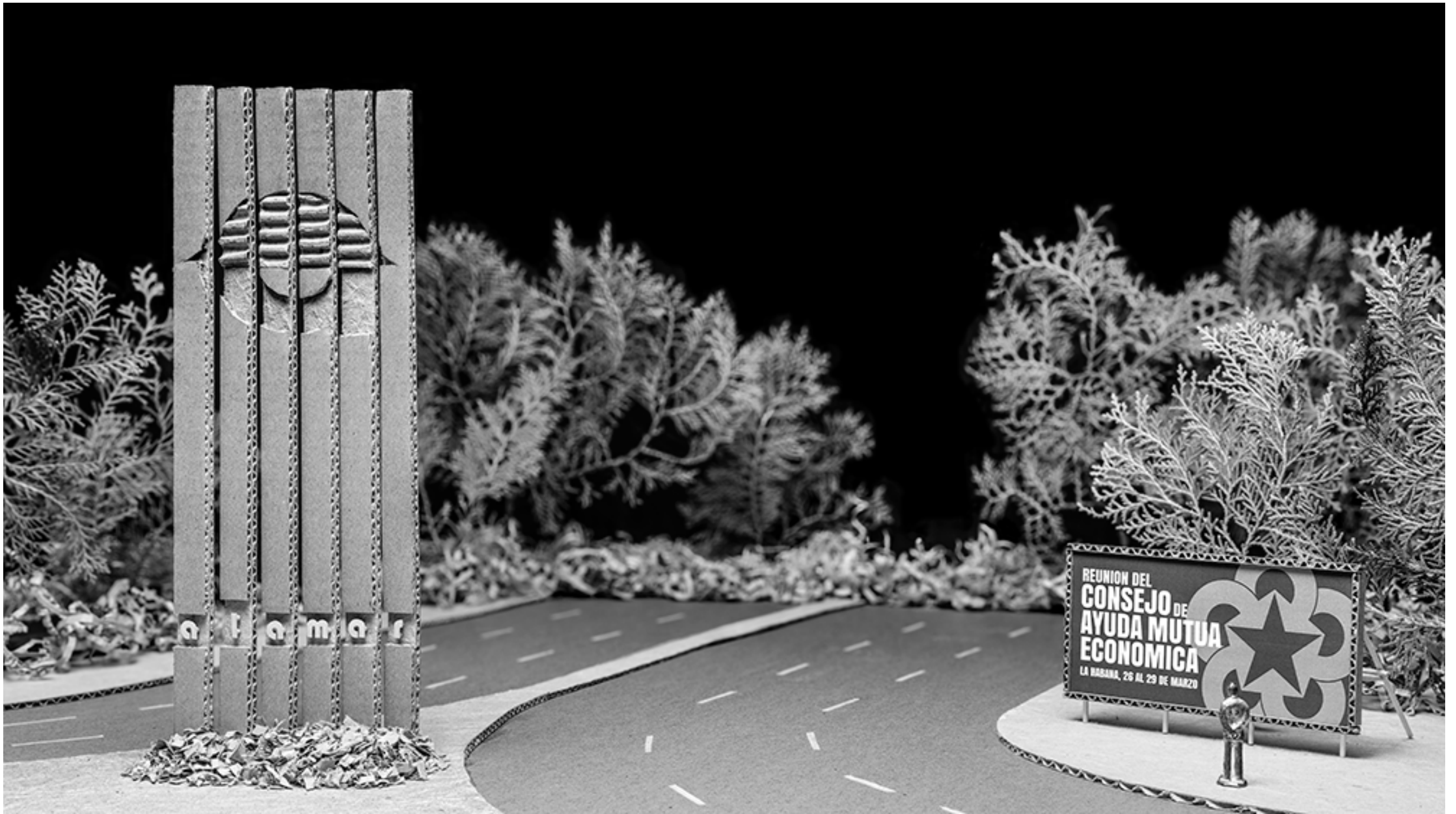
1971

The First National Congress on Education and Culture (CNEC) was held, and policies to be followed regarding education, religion, sexuality, mass media, fashion and custom, among others, were established. Art was agreed upon to be a weapon of the Revolution, an instrument against enemy penetration. Homosexuality was defined as a social pathology. The dismissal of artists, intellectuals and professors "of amoral, extravagant or scandalous life" began.



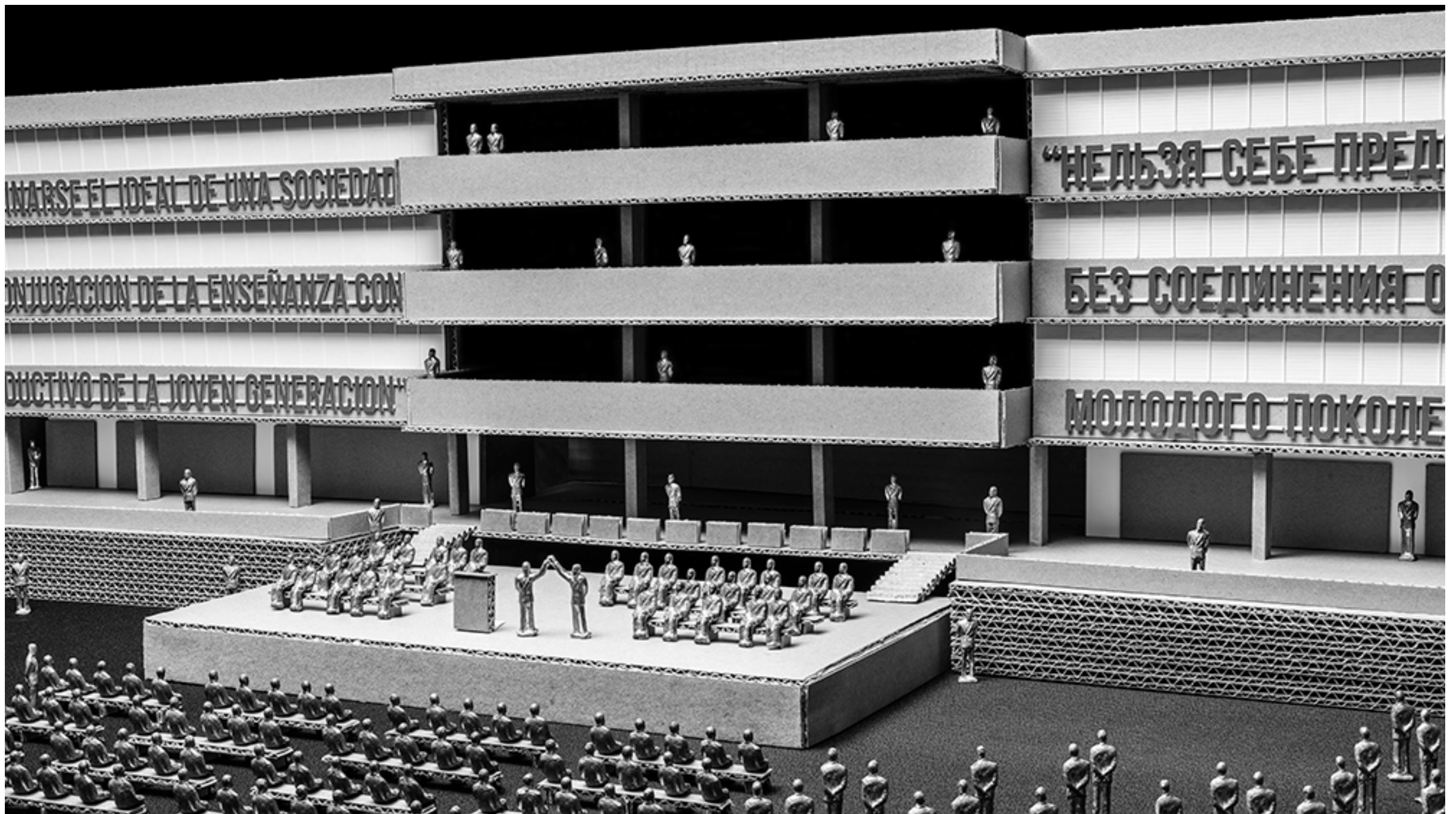
1972

April 22, Lenin Park was officially opened. Situated in the outskirts of Havana and covering an area of 680 hectares, the park was conceived with a capacity to receive 65,000 users every eight hours. A floating stage rested on a lagoon, and at the opening gala the National Ballet of Cuba danced the second act of Swan Lake.



1973

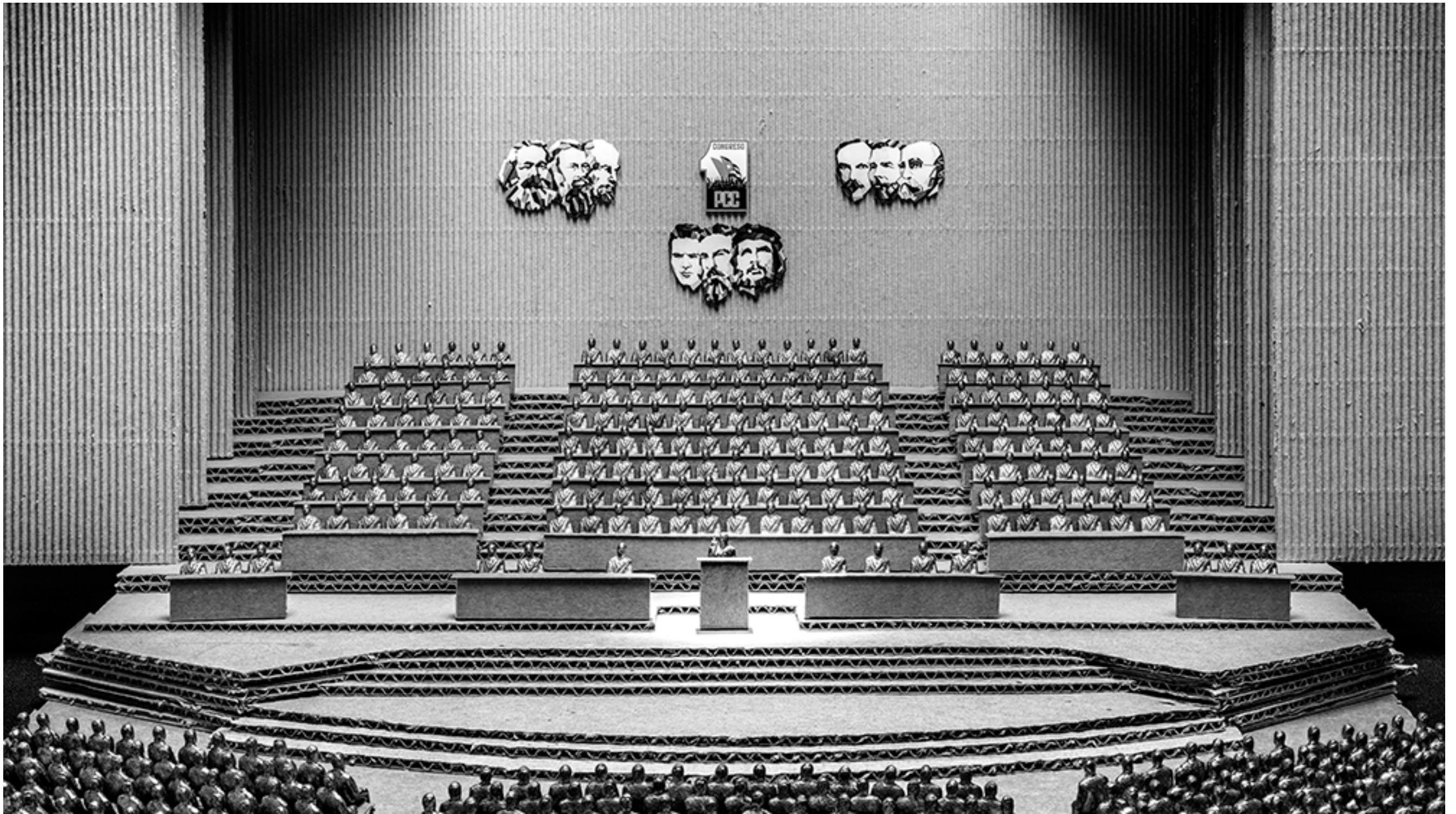
The first meeting in Havana of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (CAME), an organization composed of mostly socialist countries members. Cuba had become a member in 1972. The image reproduces the entrance to Alamar, a masterplanned residential community built mostly with socialist materials and technologies.



1974

Opening of the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (La Lenin) School. The opening ceremony was presided by Leonid Brezhnev, President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This school and other similar ones were part of a development plan emphasizing work/study programs combined. For Lenin it was "impossible to imagine a new society without the combination of teaching with the productive work of the younger generation."





1975

December 17, the first Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) opened at the Karl Marx Theater. This was the beginning of the institutionalization process in Cuba.

# The Mega-Projects 2014

Utopian obstinacy turns dreams into nightmares...

*Enrique Colina (Cuban filmmaker)*

This chapter spotlights some of the mega-projects of the revolutionary era: grandiloquent, massive, nearly supernatural works that would supposedly save Cuba from underdevelopment.



## 1979-1992

Topography work for a planned nuclear power station in the town of Juraguá, province of Cienfuegos, started in early 1979, under the Soviet Union's advice and financing. Programming had it covering approximately 20% of the national power in its first stage. Hundreds of Cubans were sent to study at the Lomonosov State University in Moscow. The first stage of the work was 70% completed when stopped in 1992 after the disappearance of the USRR. After the abandonment of the project the installation was systematically looted. The only construction that prevails today is the dome of the nuclear reactor.



1982-1992

The nuclear city is approximately 6 Km from the Nuclear Power Station (CEN) of Juraguá, in the province of Cienfuegos. It was built to house workers and their families. The city was not completed since work on the power station stopped in 1992. Some of the structures of the unfinished buildings remain.

There are about 10,000 dwellers in this city, most of them the former engineers and workers involved in the mega-project.



## 1972-1985

Ubre Blanca (White Udder), a Cuban F2 cow (75% Holstein, 25% Zebu), became famous for its extraordinary milk yield. In 1982 it produced 109.5 liters in only one day, for a common cow 30 liters of milk a day being quite a feat, and 24.268.9 liters throughout a milking period. Both of these achievements were recognized on the Guinness Book of World Records. During this time, the cow's deeds were often the main news appearing on the mass media.

In 1985 Ubre Blanca was slaughtered, the stuffed body exhibited in a glass box under controlled temperature in the lobby of the National Center of Agricultural Health (CENSA), 40 km from Havana.



1974-1990

During the pre-Revolutionary years this building was the site of the famous Montmartre nightclub. In August 1974, after a remodeling, it became a restaurant called Moscú (Moscow). As symbol of Cuban-Soviet friendship, it specialized on the traditional cuisine of the Euro-Asiatic republics, with a capacity for around 300 guests. It burnt down on January 20, 1990.

# Re-construction 2012-2013

Re-construction 2012-2013 reflects on key moments in the history of the country: Some real and historic; others part of the collective imagination. Many of the re-created moments were not recorded or broadcast by the official media (at least not in the way that I show them in my photos). That is why rather than reconstructing, I compose history.

I am interested in the possibilities of photographing what I have not always witnessed, organizing it from a distance, and at certain moments, manipulating, altering, and offering other probabilities. I do not adjust myself to the facts as such, but I also propose more elliptical scenes, other codas. The objective is to re-generate, re-present, re-construct, stage.

Not limiting myself to the past, I suggest a future, attempting to generate a photographic truth.



Any day of 1965-2012

The newspaper Granma was established in 1965 and has since been the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). The image shows the pits of the printing press where reels of paper await the fresh news to be printed.





## Any day of 1970-2012

Revolutionary fatigue started to be more visible as of 1970. The once renovating, impetuous, and creative spirit of the 1960s was left behind, giving way to the power and weight of bureaucracy. Laxity and boredom took over the meetings and a process of purges, distrust, and radicalization started.



## One day of 1984

The Chaica, a car of Soviet manufacture, was used by Fidel Castro as the presidential car in the 1980s . The image, as the title indicates, recreates any day of the year 1984, when it was common to see scenes like this of the President's personal security detail waiting by the car during an official occasion.



July 7, 1989

While political and social changes pushed by Perestroika in the USSR were changing Eastern Europe, in Cuba a trial known as "Cause 1" against high ranking officers and officials of the Army and the State was taking place. The trial was televised almost entirely. The photograph shows General Arnaldo Ochoa during one of the sessions. Ochoa, together with three other defendants, was executed.



November 9, 1989

On this day the Berlin Wall fell and, according to this image, television gave details of the important fact. In actuality, it was never broadcast by Cuban television.



**December 25, 1993**

The most difficult year after the disappearance of the socialist camp of Eastern Europe was 1993. Severe food shortages and power failures (blackouts) generated ample discontent lasting years. The government named this time: "Special Period in Times of Peace." Anti-government signs appeared frequently. In the photo, a government sympathizer covers text on unfinished wall graffiti: "Down with... "



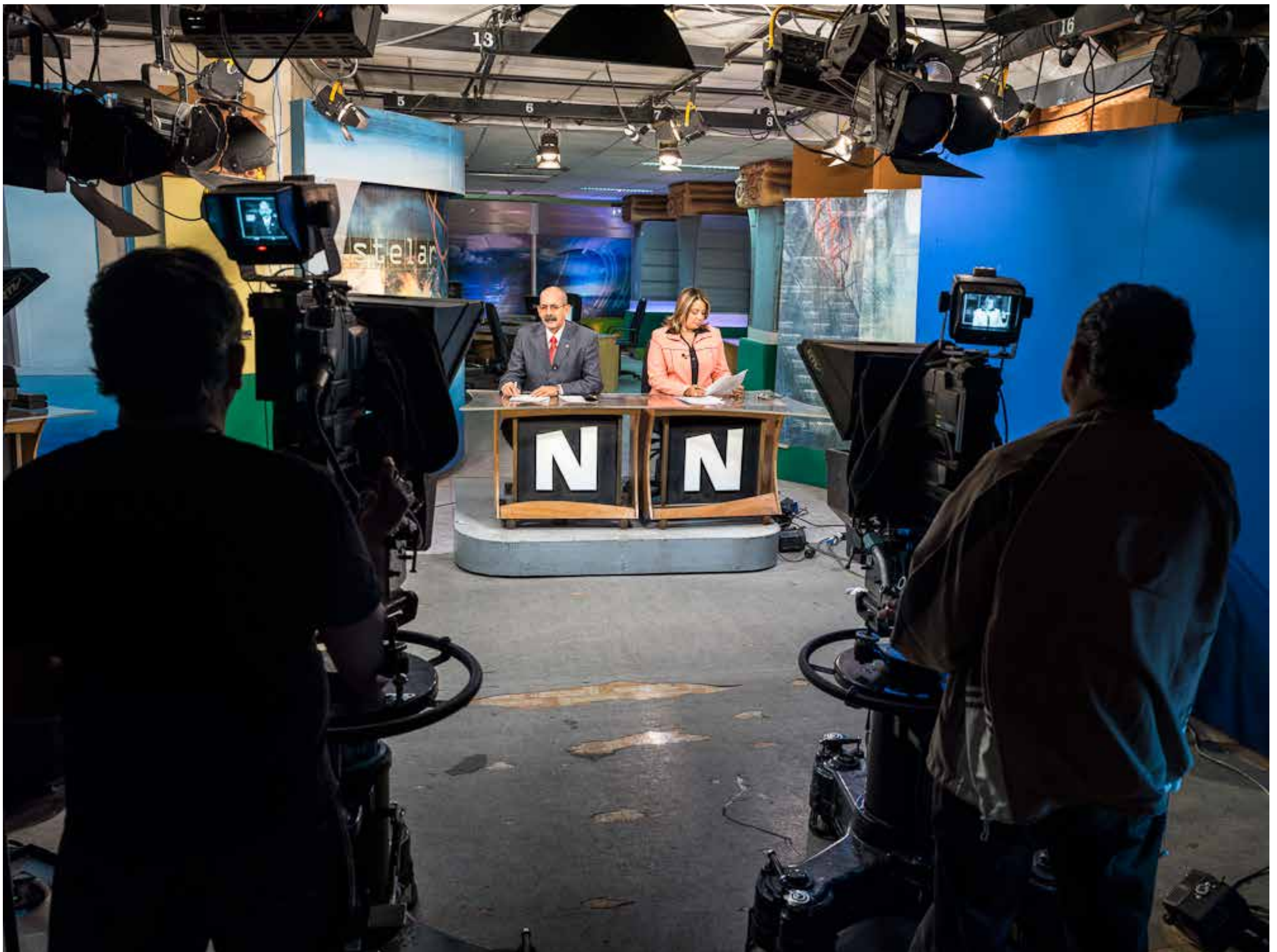
August 6, 1994

The day August 5, 1994, there were riots in Havana generated by social dissatisfaction. These events are known as the maleconazo, since they took place on the street that borders Havana's seafont. Days later there was a mass sea exodus towards the USA now known as "the rafter's crisis." The image takes place one day after the riots, when some streets were still full of police officers in civilian clothes, and detachments of construction laborers, armed with sticks or pipes, ready to go into action against those who protested.



June 10, 2002

In response to the Varela Project promoted by dissidents who were attempting to change the Cuban constitution by collecting the required ten thousand signatures, the State called a Referendum that would perpetuate the socialist character of Cuba in the constitution itself.



November 22, 2012

From this set the National News Bulletin of the Cuban Television (NTV) broadcasts the news every evening between 8:00 and 8:30 pm. Hosts Agnes Becerra and Rafael Serrano, in the photograph, have done so the last 25 years.





January 13, 2013

Access to Internet in Cuba is taboo. The government holds strict controls and only certain areas of professional services have available limited entry. Usage from hotel platforms is expensive (175-200 Cuban pesos per hour, or the equivalent of 50-58% of the average salary) and service is very slow. The image displays a wish for a democratic access to the Internet.

\*Recently some WiFi public areas have opened up, allowing for better connections at an official rate of 50 Cuban pesos per hour. Still, Internet home service is denied to the general population. (Artist's note, 2015).

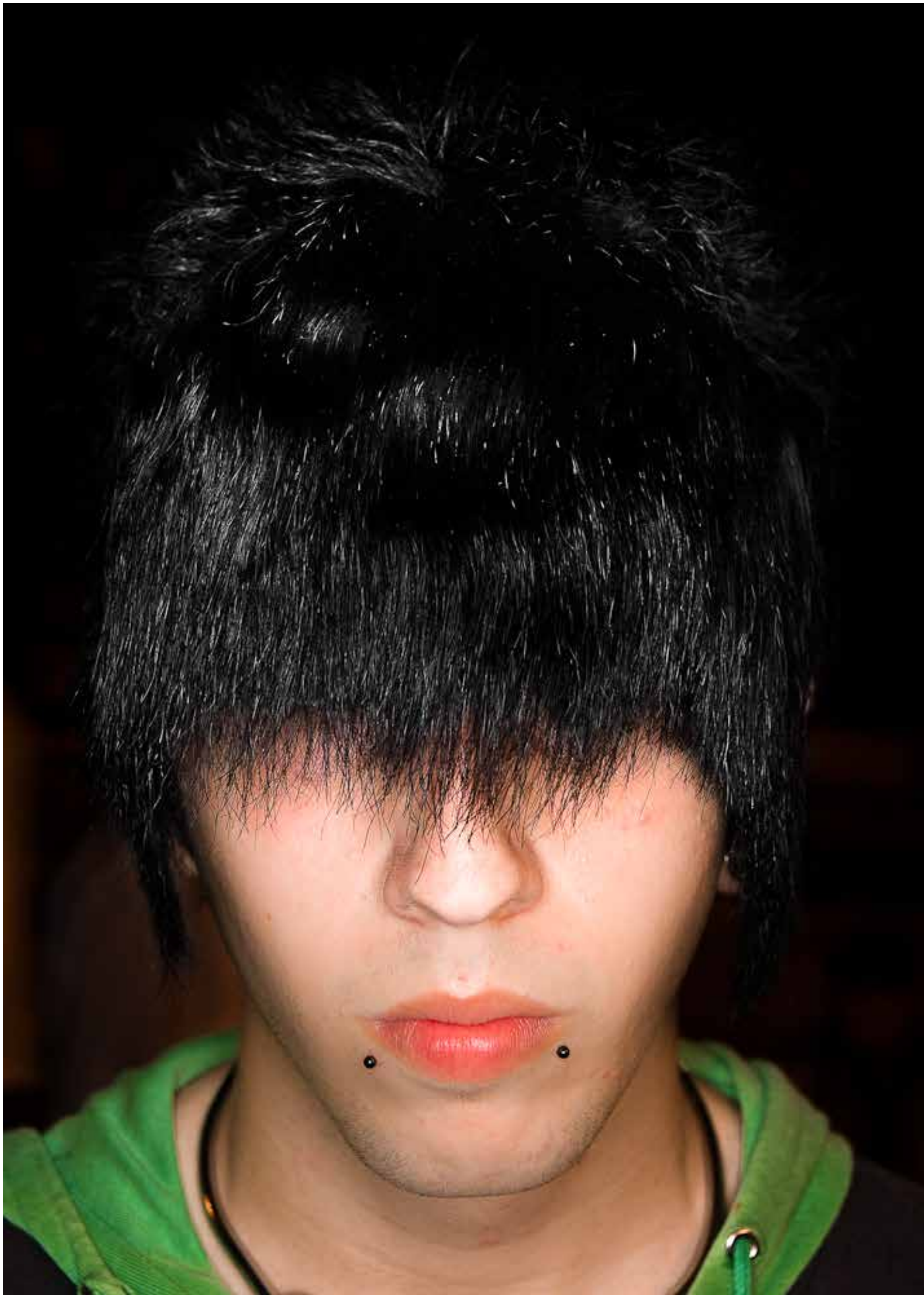


May 2, 2017

Through the last 50 years successive purges have occurred for political and ideological reasons. Many families have been divided by these events. Popular imagination speculates often on what the future may bring. An official seal on a door, as shown on this photo, warns that this house has been shut down by a transitional government.

# Cuba, year zero 2010-2012

The series is a sociological record of Cuban adolescents, a generation living in a social context ripe with confrontation between the official discourse and the chaotic reality. It is a dialogue about the past, the present and the future of Cuba. Observing this generation born after 1990, we discover their states of rebelliousness, pleasures, anguishes, naiveté, doubt, frustration, hope, joy...







































A capoeira é o raio de um arco  
vítima de crueldade  
perseguida e discriminada  
e ainda assim persiste  
com mais de 200 anos  
bravando bem forte  
survive, eu sou negão!

**CAPOEIRANGOLE**  
MUITO MAIS DO QUE UM JOGO











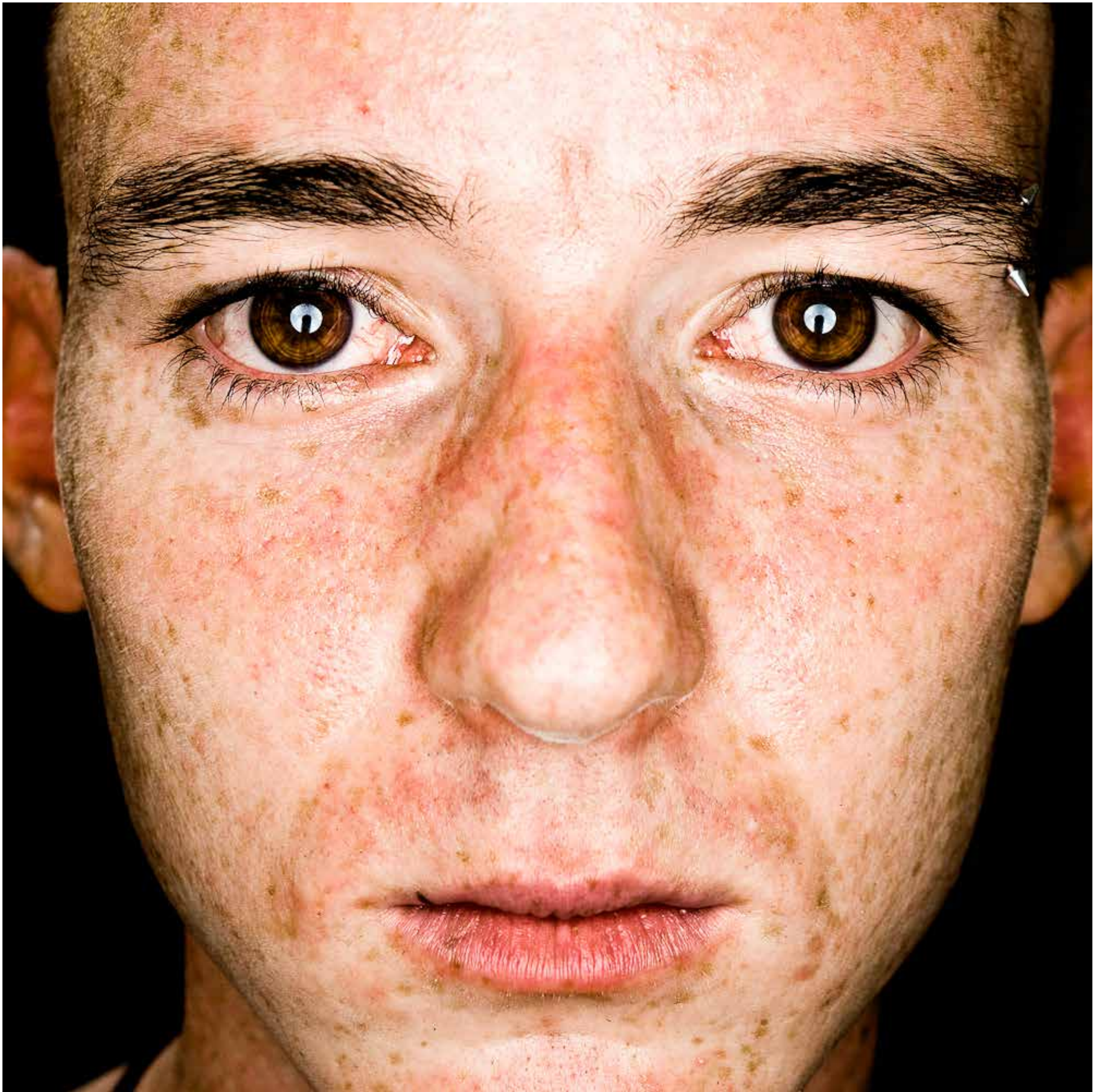
# Improper Behavior 2008

As an inventory of those subject to rejection or exclusion due to their sexual preference, this work is a denunciation against homophobia. As symbol it also serves claim for respect on political, ideological, and religious differences.

The series is divided in two parts: close-ups made during the celebration of the International Day against Homophobia (May 17, 2008), and portraits shot during a Gay Pride Party at "Mi Cayito" beach (June 14, 2008).

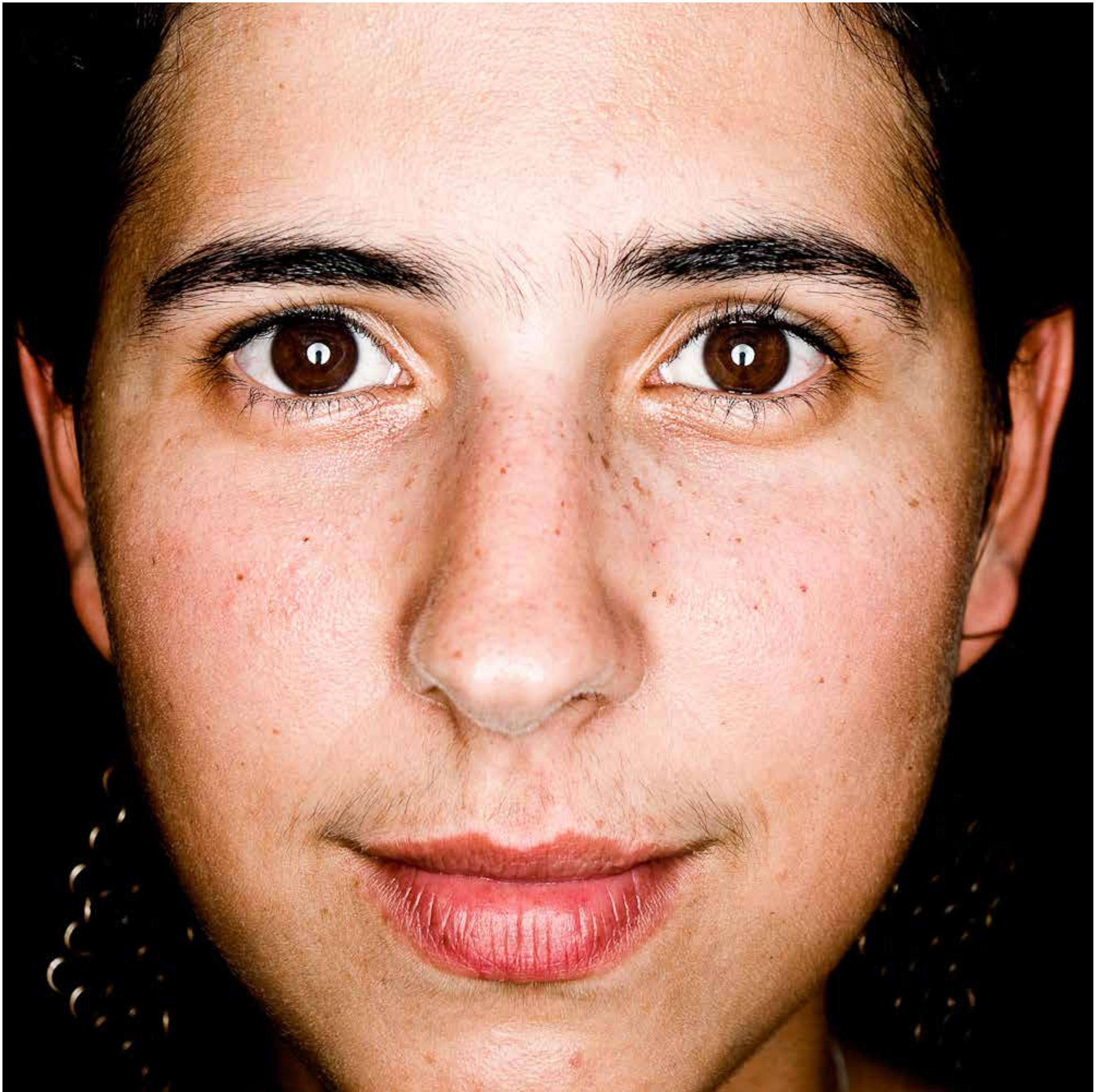


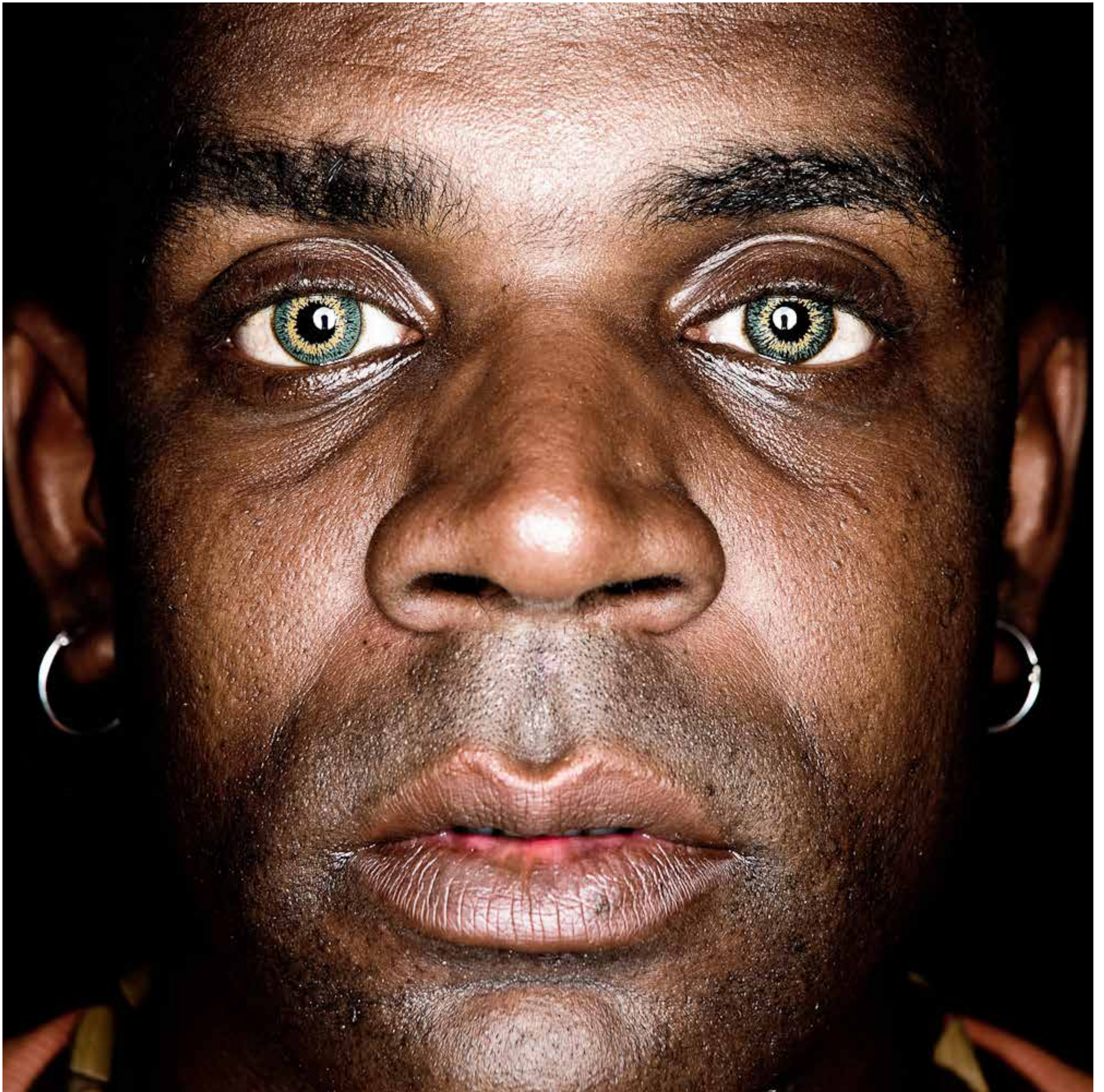




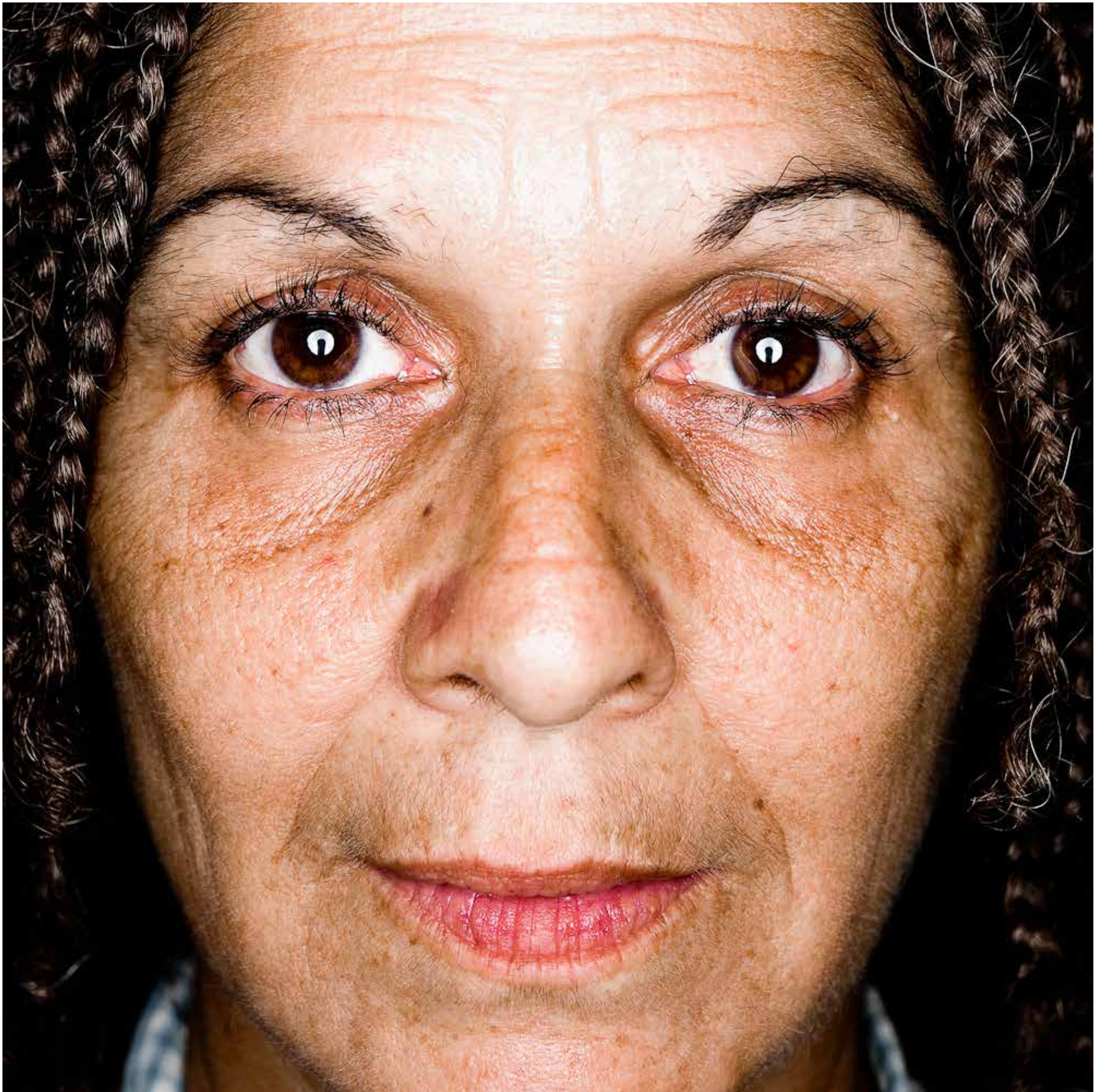


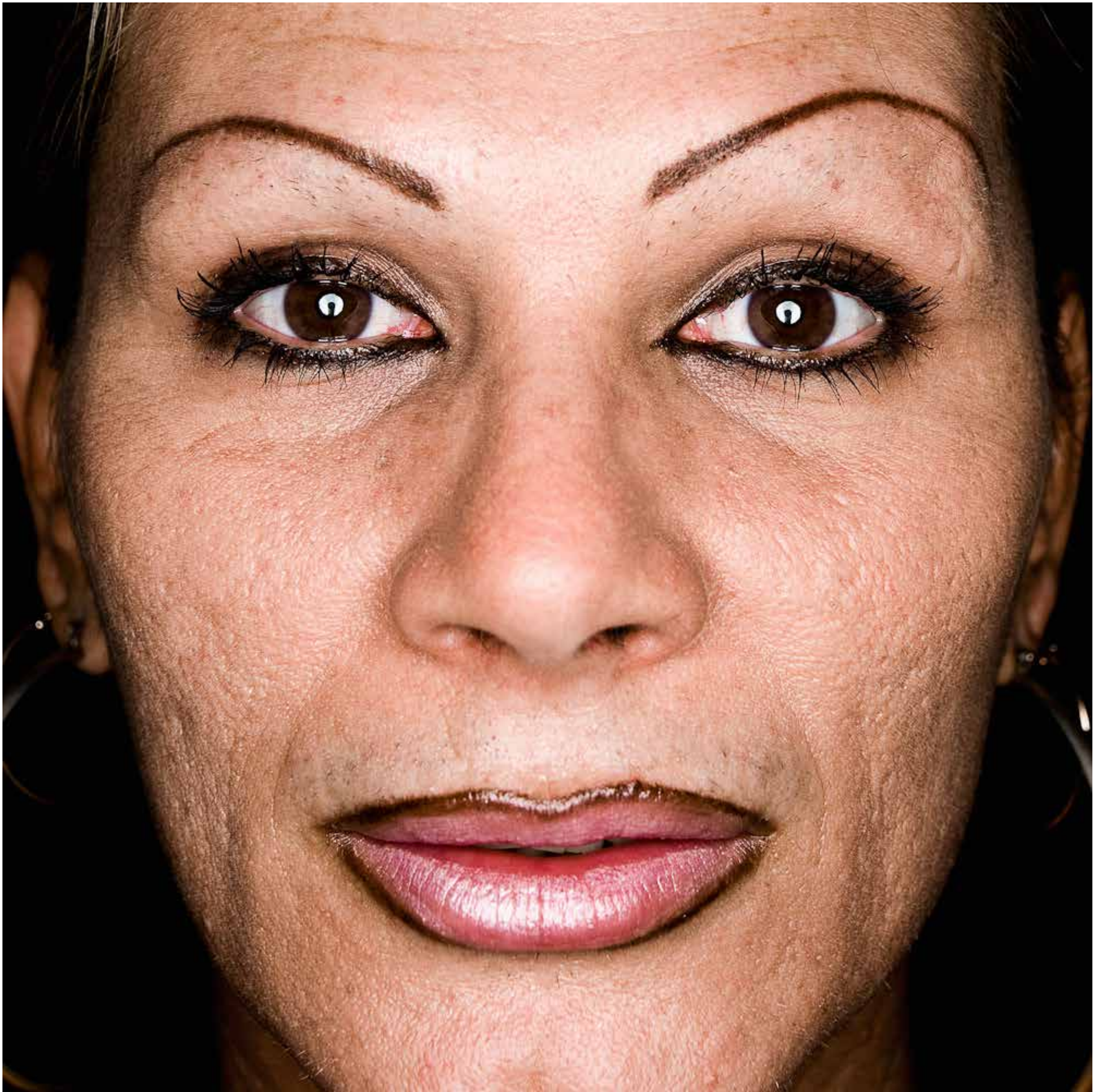
































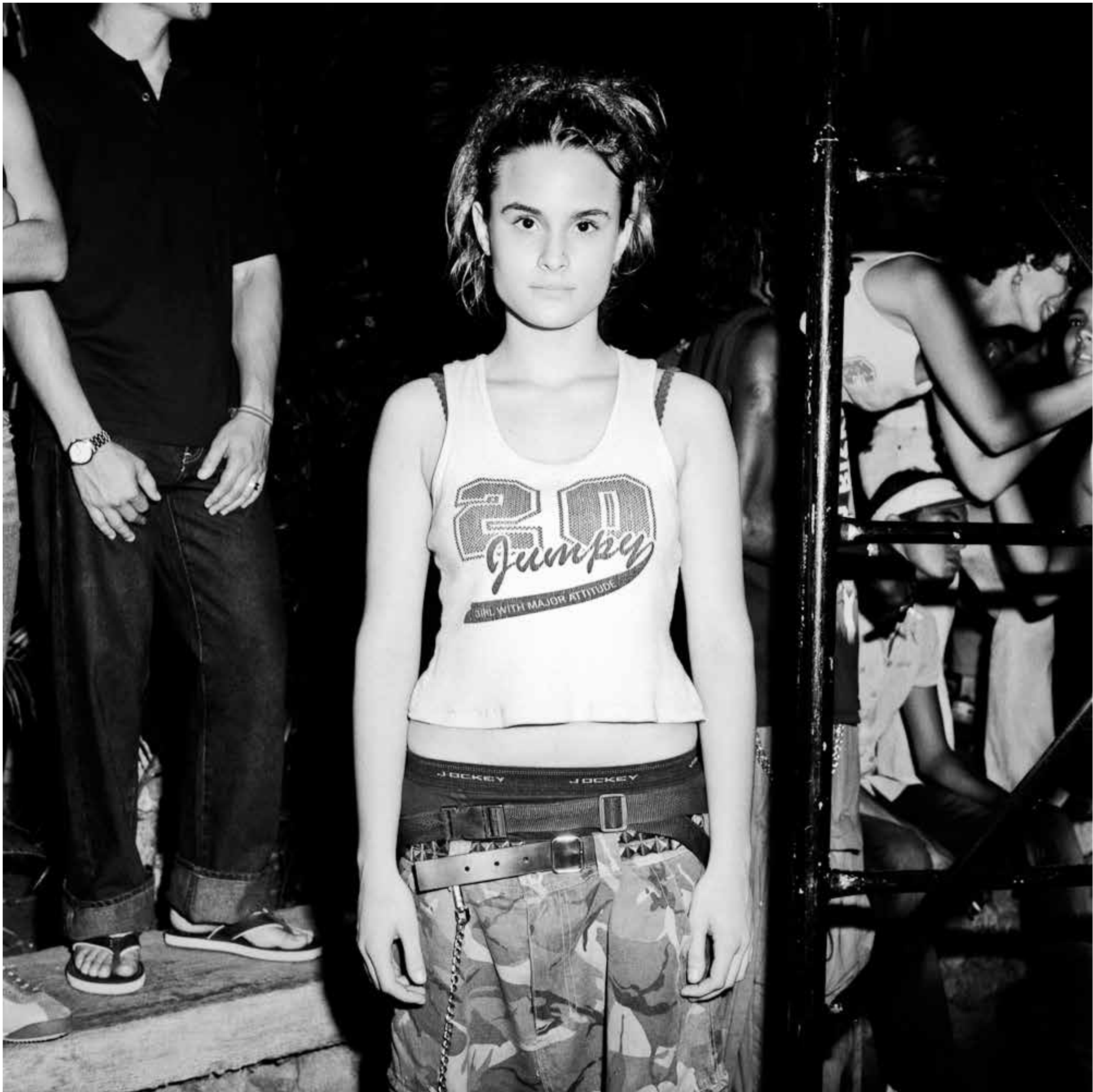


# AM-PM 2005

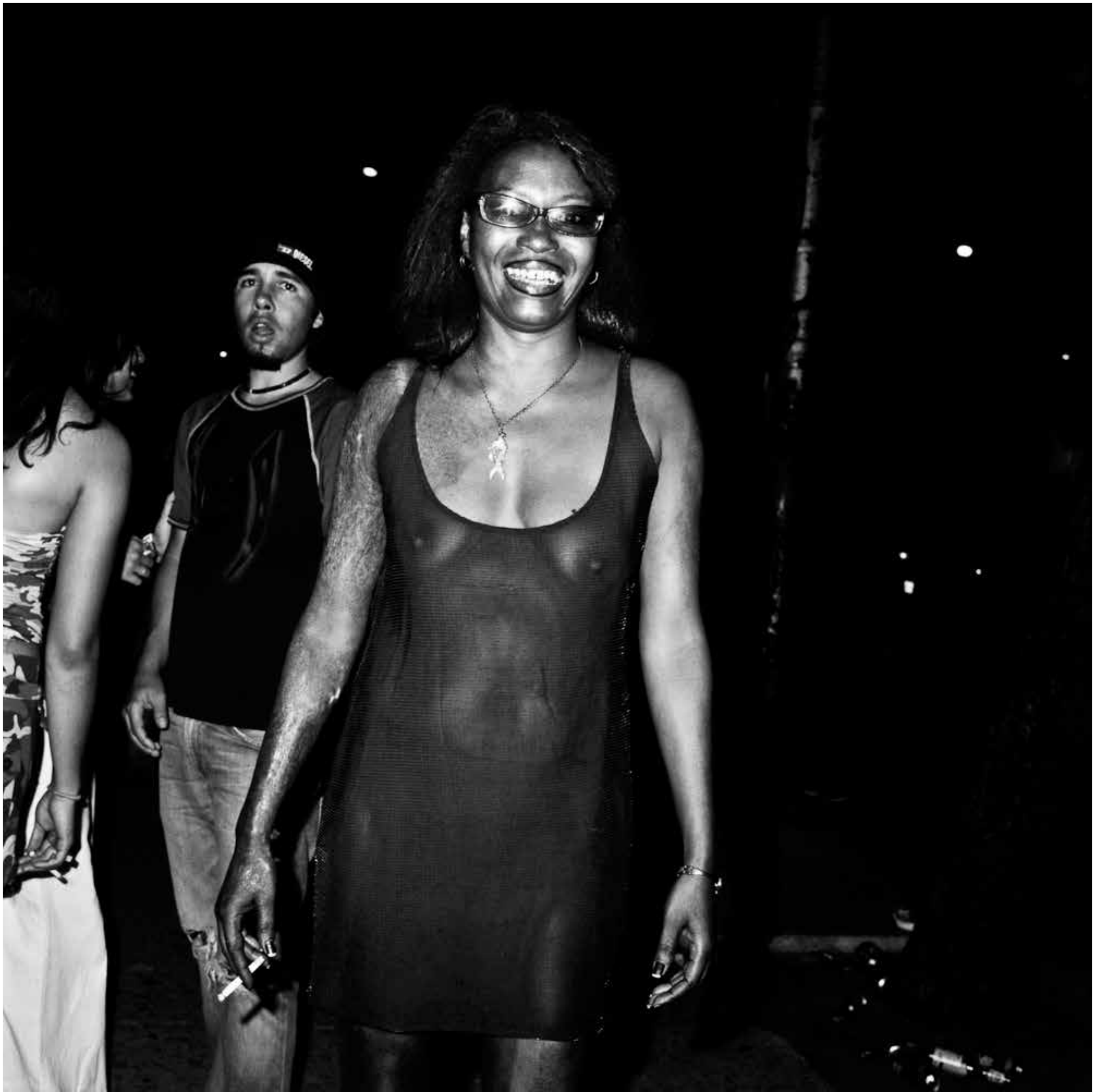
The series depicts nightlife along 23rd Street, one of Havana's main arteries, highlighting a sector of society silenced by officialdom and only registers within a population census.



1:41 am, 21 de mayo de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



11:14 pm, 21 de abril de 2005, Playa, La Habana, Cuba

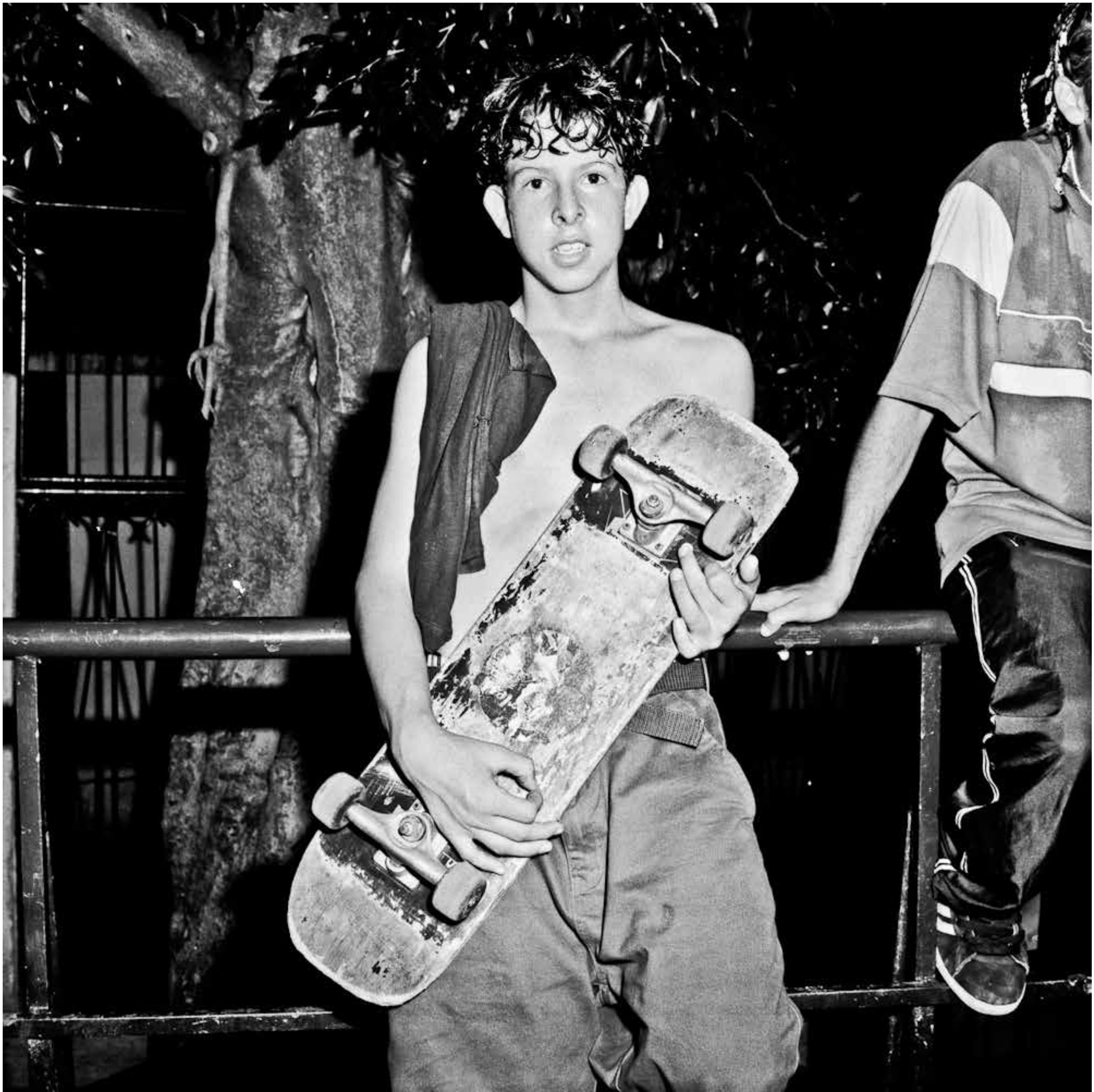


2:20 am, 21 de mayo de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba





1:47 am, 25 de junio de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



11:09 pm, 21 de abril de 2005, Playa, La Habana, Cuba



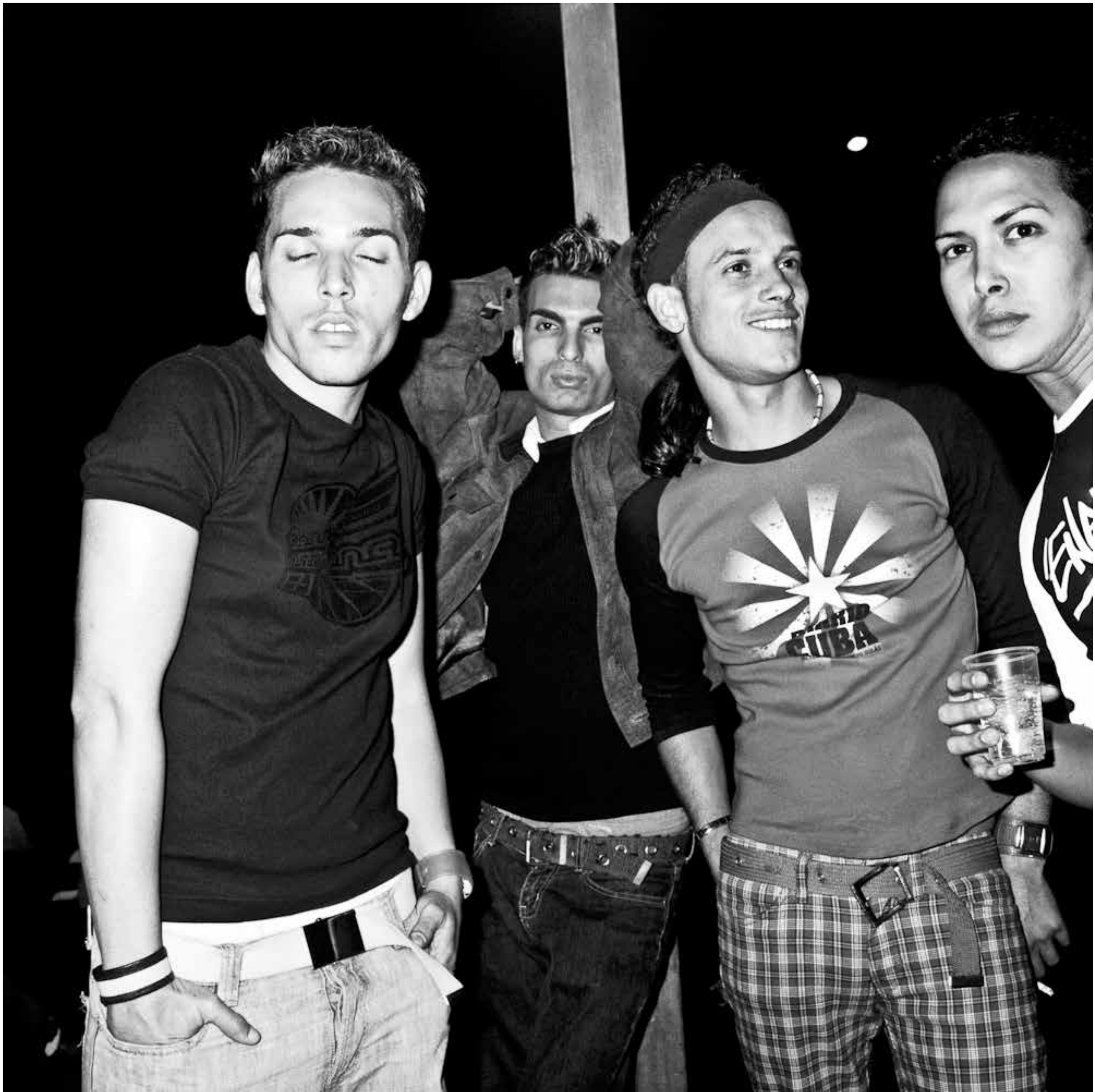
10:46 pm, 19 de nov de 2005, Playa, La Habana, Cuba



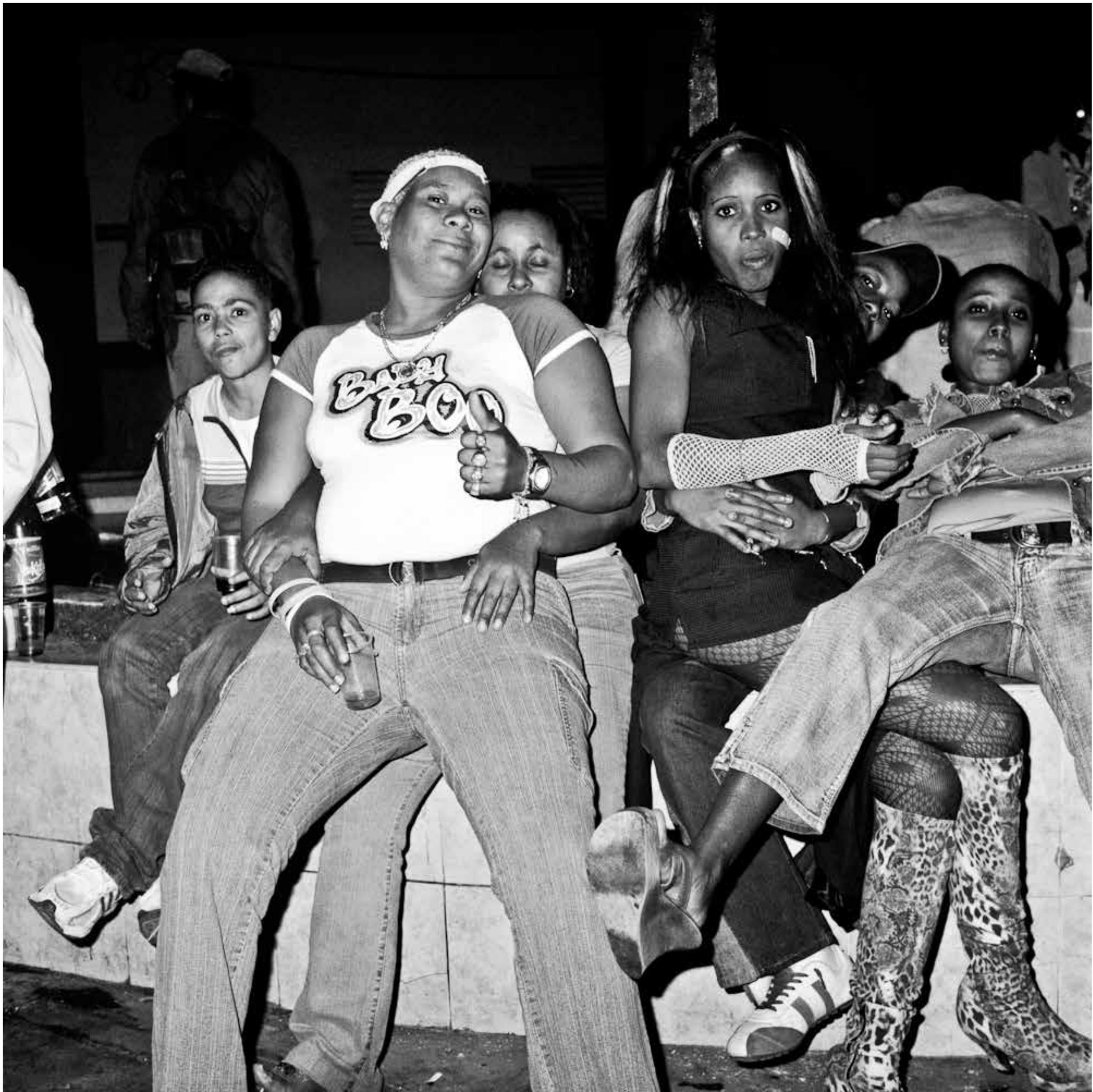
12:07 am, 27 de agosto de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



10:09 pm, 21 de abril de 2005, Playa, La Habana, Cuba



2:57 am, 24 de dic de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



1:42 am, 24 de dic de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



2:37 am, 24 de dic de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba





1:19 am, 18 de junio de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba



10:31 am, 18 de dic de 2005, Vedado, La Habana, Cuba

# Future 2005

In my childhood there was much talk of 'the man of the future.'

I am from the generation that enjoyed stays at the "Tarará Pioneers Camp" and trips to 'Lenin Park.' These were emblematic places of my time, and it is there the future of my generation was forged. We were called "generation 2000," a date seeming distant but one truly promising.

This photographic series marks a return to these places today, twenty or twenty-five years later, to rediscover them in their new condition, a trip to a once promised future. My generation, the one past and the one present, meets in a 'reflective picnic' to repeat once more that our future appears every moment. In any case, the future of 20-25 years ago is today, isn't it?













# Alejandro González Méndez (Havana, 1974)

Lives and works in Havana.

As a self-taught artist, Alejandro González made his first photographic series in 1999-2000 (*¿Quién?/Who?* and *¿Dónde?/Where?*) with the interest of perpetuating in documentary photos the transitory nature and precariousness of time, spaces and individuals of his city in the late nineties.

His series *Habana: Futuro 2005* (Havana: Future 2005) exhibited as an essay in LUMO'07. International Triennial of Photography, Finland, 2007, defines his mission to rethink both the past and present history of his generation and reflect critically on its real legacy and needs. Also from 2005 is his series *AM-PM*, exhibited at the 9<sup>a</sup> Havana Biennale, 2006, with which he started his research on juvenile sectors of the Cuban society.

*Conducta Impropia* (Improper Conduct), 2008, exhibited at the Quai Branly Museum, Paris, 2011; and *Cuba año cero* (Cuba Year Zero), Havana Cultura Visual Art Project Fellowship, Paris, 2010, continue vindicating the ethics, aesthetic and rights of those regarded as "different," still degraded owing to sex, conduct or preferences.

Alejandro's more recent series *Re-construction* (2012-2015), on the other hand, carried out a upending or reversing process through photography. Separated in three distinct essays, he rebuilt with almost obsessive thoroughness the scenarios where the hidden side of the official Cuban news happened (*Re-construction*, 2012); the mega projects of the Revolutionary Government that were never finished (*The Megaprojects*, 2013); and the crucial political events of the first five years of the seventies decade took place (*The Gray Five-year Period*, 2015) when the drowning economy of the country led it to affiliate to the Soviet model as a means salvation. Everything appears to be historically correct in Alejandro's photographs. The panorama he shows gives the sensation of being able to replace the reality imitated, except by a suspicious critical approach with which the artist guides us to re-visit the history lived.

## Solo Shows (Selection)

2017. *Pelos en la lengua*. El Apartamento, Havana.

2015. *Re-construction*. Galleria Art Forum Contemporary, Bologna.

2013. *Historias Diferidas* (Alejandro González/José A. Figueroa). Galería Servando, Havana.

2008. *Conducta Impropia*. Galería Servando, Havana.

2006. *9 Fotos*. Fototeca de Cuba, Havana.

2004. *Memorias del subsuelo II*. Galería Habana, Havana.

2001. *Memorias del subsuelo*. Centro Cultural ICAIC, Havana.

2000. *Ven y mira*. Fototeca de Cuba, Havana

## Group Shows (Selection)

2017. *Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Arts Since 1950*. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.  
*Art x Cuba - Contemporary Perspectives since 1989*. Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, Germany.  
*Doble Play; Fotografía cubana*. Foto Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico D.F.  
*Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Arts Since 1950*. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
2016. *Q&A with Nine Contemporary Cuban Artist*. Museum of Art + Design, Miami Dade College, Miami.  
*La banalidad del mar; Fotografía cubana*. Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, Dominicana.
2015. *Q&A with Seven Contemporary Cuban Artist*. IDB Cultural Center, Washington.  
*VII International Festival of Photography PhotoVisa*. Krasnodar , Russia.  
*De la acera de enfrente (Across the Street)*. Estudio Figueroa-Vives/Embassy of Norway, Havana. *The Light in Cuban Eyes*. Robert Mann Gallery, New York.
2014. *Avalancha* (Alejandro González/A. Campins/A. Capó). Galería Villamanuela, Havana.
2013. *Imagining Cuba*. Tyler Art Gallery, Oswego, New York.
2012. *Un olor que entra por mi ventana*. 11na. Bienal de La Habana. Museo del Ron, Havana.  
*Detrás del Muro*. 11na. Bienal de La Habana (site specific installation at the Malecon Avenue). Havana.
2011. *Photoquai. International Photographic Biennial*. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.
2010. *Baobabs, FotoVisura*. Latin American Pavilion, New York Photo Festival, New York.
2009. *XX Aniversario*. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana.  
*Arte América International Art Fair*. Miami.
2008. *Fotología. 6 Festival Internacional de Fotografía de Bogotá*. Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá.  
*Far far away*. Co-Lab, Copenhagen.  
*CUBA: Artists Experience Their Country*. Hunterdon Museum of Arts. New Jersey.
2007. *Killing Time*. Exit Art, New York.  
*LUMO'07, 7th International Photography Triennial*. Alvar Aalto Art Museum, Finland.
2006. *Glasgow International. Festival of Contemporary Visual Art*. Glasgow.  
*9na. Bienal de la Habana*. Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña, Havana.  
*La Habana y la Fotografía: 1900- 2005*. National Library, Havana.
2005. *Utilitarian Dreams. The Brighton Film Festival*. Lighthouse, University of Brighton, UK.  
*Fotoseptiembre 2005*. Salón de la Plástica Mexicana. México D.F.

## Awards and Residency Programs

2010. Habana Cultura Visual Art Project Fellowship. Havana-Paris.

2009. Premio Fotográfico Casa de las Américas-CLACSO, Havana.

2006. Residency Program Batiscafo. Havana.

2002. Artist in Residency. Kunsthochschule für Medien, Köln.

## Public Collections

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Shelley & Donald Rubin Collection. New York.

Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA). Long Beach, California.

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. Oregon.

Casa de las Américas, Havana.

Fototeca de Cuba, Havana.