

Miami Cubans

Art by Carmen Diez-Oñate

Carmen Diez-Oñate:
The painter and her canvas

"[...] a rich, exquisitely crafted and beautiful work in which formal splendor and mastery of craft are given their maximum expression under two fundamental constellations. Those signs, two forces as subtle as they are absolute, are united in a group of major works whose pulse fuses poetry with the vast record of sacred experience, of human piety."

Armando Álvarez-Bravo¹

We remember when we visited Carmen Diez Oñate's home a few years ago. We went in the company of her son Carlos who, by the way, is the graphic designer, photographer and translator of the *Catalog* from which we obtained the photographs we are publishing here. A beautiful and lovingly polished *Catalog* with the photos of his mother Carmen's most recent work. We should digress some to talk about Carlos. He is an exemplary Cuban-American. We remember when in 1983 he was president of CASA, (Cuban American Students Association) a student organization we had joined at the University of Florida. Already then, he stood out not only as a patriot and a great Cuban, but also as a great photographer. Among some of the projects sponsored by CASA was a *Photo Essay* of Cubans in Miami. We approved the project to clarify once and for all, the diversity, laboriousness and vitality of a community distorted by the media, and an academy, that does not forgive us the massive exodus from the "Caribbean paradise". And Carlos not only promoted the project, but was one of its major contributors. The *Photo Essay* of Cubans in Miami, was exhibited in the gallery of the graduate studies building of the university, Grinter Hall, for one month and it was a success.

That day at Carmen's house, which is also her study, her paintings hung on every wall in the house- it was an exhibition of her work. When we entered the house, we marveled at what we saw. One of her main works is a color lithograph she named *Butterfly*. The lithograph, from her indigenist period, evokes a wedding, where a young *Taino* indian of stylized features, brings his wedding offerings to his bride, and among anphoras and urns in cubist style with white and ochre tones, holds in his hand a white butterfly, which is the name of Cuba's national flower, the butterfly Jasmine.

While strolling in rapture through the illuminated rooms and guided by the artist, we entered a main room where she was exhibiting her poems in colors, a collection where on each canvas she had hand written verses by other poets.

Mnemosyne, the goddess of all the muses, had obviously descended to inspire Carmen. "Poetry is incantation," wrote Álvarez-Bravo in his essay called "The poetry of imagination". And Carmen's paintings and verses are doubly evocative.

Armando Alvarez-Bravo. *The poetry of imagination*.

Essay-catalog of work by Carmen Diez-Oñate exhibited in Miami, Oñate Fine Art, September-October, 2005, p. 6.

Carmen was born in Santiago de Cuba. Exiled in United States since 1962. She is a graduate of San Alejandro Academia de Bellas Artes, Havana, 1953. She studied at lithography at the Art Students League, New York and portraiture at the Art Center of Oranges, New Jersey. She earned a Masters in Education at Montclair State College, and has been Art Instructor and Professor of Fine Arts at Mercy College and Saint Thomas University.



Todo palacio es un enigma insoluble (una diosa en el palacio de Cnosos), 2004
Every Palace is an Unsolvable Enigma (a goddess in the Palace at Knossos), 2004



La belleza se sume espléndida en sí misma (Narciso) 2004
Beauty is abundantly contained in itself (Narcissus) 2004