

*The Uprooted & the  
Gift Givers*

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Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW)  
Lecture-Performance

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York City  
2015

The Uprooted sits in his cell, looking at the laundry hanging across it to dry. As he watches the clothes gently sway in the breeze of the air conditioner always set just a few degrees too low, he thinks about his unknowing hosts. The ones outside of this place, who might never know his name.

He thinks about them drying their laundry, wonders what it might look like, and imagines what he might say if he ever meets them. He feels he would tell them a story, his story, one



that has no beginning and no end, only a middle that has been beaten and bruised. He wonders what they will think of it. Will they care about the words that fall from his mouth, dry and brittle like autumn leaves? Will they collect them into little piles in the corners of their memory? Or let them blow away in the

wind lost and forgotten?

He waits a moment, listening, but hears no response to his thoughtful questions. The halls remain silent save for the clanging and banging of white doors separating whiter rooms and controlled by an even whiter house 2,120 kilometers away. But The Uprooted has heard he could be leaving soon, and so he begins to tell his story to the hosts he has never seen...

“I remember a village, where unripened wheat swayed green against a blue stream. I

remember a mother, whose

unbroken back rose before dawn to bake the morning bread. I remember a chaikhana, where I sat drinking cardamom-scented green tea when they came, pale-faced and sweaty, to take me.

I remember a dark room where the grumble of my stomach echoed in my ears as a voice, low and mean, spoke when I came to 'Welcome to paradise.'”

**Jose, 92 years old**

yes

i have heard of the [place]

i have heard of prisoners there  
treated poorly  
many years  
torture

things are changing

Americans need to give the [place] back  
to Cuba

i think when he left  
i would  
give  
him  
a basic need  
for the journey

food



The Uprooted continues... “If only they had asked to come we might have welcomed them. Helped them even in their fight against those who sought to hurt us both. But they didn't ask, they didn't ask for

anything, they simply took; our  
lands, our lives, our futures. I  
could have been their friend,  
but they made me something  
else.”

**Rudolpho, 53 years old**

my knowledge  
about the [place]  
is limited

i believe that we

the people of Cuba  
do not really know

exactly  
what happens  
there

i know there is torture

at the prison  
i know that most of the prisoners  
were not terrorists

the Americans should close this place

give it back  
to Cuba

we must wait and see  
there is not enough information  
in the media

Cuba wants it back

i am not optimistic

before he leaves  
i would want him to know  
he has a friend  
to show  
my solidarity

and give him a proper “Saludo”



The Uprooted is pensive, “Over the years I spent here I regularly wondered if you ever thought of me, the invisible guest. Here but not here in a land I have come to know only through the books I have read about it from behind these walls. I read about how you too suffered at the

hands of the capitalists. I read about the revolution you fought to take back your future, but like us, unsure of what that future would look like. I read also about the green moisture and guava-scented air that they say still hangs thick across

these islands that once floated free before the arrival of the Europeans.”

**Angel, 49 years old**

that [place]

belongs to the Cuban people

we do not want that prison on our land

i know they have been trying to close it  
but so far we see nothing

has changed

imagine

the implications for Cuba  
so many prisoners  
not charged with a crime

innocent

locked away and treated like that  
on our land

the [place] should be closed

given back to Cuba

i would like to give him a book

here  
i'll show you



The Uprooted seeks within his own words an image to help him see the islands as they must have looked then, of himself as a Ciboney hunter-gatherer standing on the shore as Conquistador ships swiftly moved towards him. But all he sees is the exercise yard he is



now standing in, where he spends an hour three times a week, alone, stretching his broken spirit towards the sky and trying to lift his already buried bones from the earth. “This yard is the closest I have come to freedom in 12 years, this square of concrete beneath my feet, these walls of chain-link fence around my body, and that heavy patch of blue above my head. I ask you, what can a man do with this kind of freedom except wish he never had it?”

**Francisco, 68 years old**

the [place] is illegal

an occupation

America uses invasion  
to solve problems

things may not be the best they could be  
here... but

we try to deal with issues  
in different ways

not using war

America is always just invading places

and trying to justify their actions  
to the world

i think I would give him a painting

somehow



reflecting

being free



However, as The Uprooted stares up at the sky, the pain that had settled across his face slowly passes to reveal a sad, thoughtful smile gently taking shape upon his lips.

“But some mornings, he continues, “when the wind is blowing just right, I can hear the birds singing from the other side of these whitewashed

walls. Some mornings, when the sun is shining just right, I can see her face in the clouds. Some mornings...”



**Regina, 38 years old**

i do know a little  
about

the [place]

but I do not know  
much about

the prison there

about what happened  
to them  
the prisoners  
inside

he should know  
what he experienced

there

is not the real Cuba

i would like

if he could  
walk freely  
in Cuba

and when he left

i would give him

a kiss on the cheek



Returning to his room, The Uprooted becomes nervous, “The funny thing is,” he says, “I always wanted to go somewhere. To leave behind the dust and the mud in search of a better life. But my dream of migration traveled a different route, one that didn't leave behind my family, that didn't make me an enemy to humanity, and that didn't pass through this place smelling of vinegar and violence. I have heard they will send me from this place, but not home. Rather, to a country where they say I

will have a house, a job; where they say I will be free. But what will I do with freedom in a land where my family-less future is written in a foreign tongue? What if I said I wanted to stay here with you? That I would like for you to know if my skin burns the same beneath your bright sun, to see if my footprints last as long in your wet sand, to build our uncertain futures together in peace. Would you let me stay?”



**Pedro, 58 years old**

i have heard there are prisoners  
from many  
different countries

is he in prison for being a terrorist  
against the United States?

Cuba does not give asylum  
to terrorists

if given asylum somewhere

i imagine  
must be  
other  
countries

if he is not guilty  
decision  
to stay  
in Cuba  
is up to

government

the Americans called us terrorists  
once

if he stayed  
it would be nice  
if he had some local clothes

I would give him that

The Uprooted thinks about his  
life beyond the walls of this  
place but he can't see it clearly.  
He can't imagine a future where  
this place ceases to exist.

**Yenei, 40 years old**

there is not much  
that i know  
about that  
[place]

I have heard  
prisoners  
leaving

i think  
the only thing  
i could give

is

to remove what has happened  
to him

to be able to empty it  
from his mind





He begins to think about all that he has seen with his own eyes, all that he has memorized in his own mind, and all that he has felt upon his own skin. He tries to imagine the ship that might carry him away from this place, across unsure waters to a new land, a new life, but no matter



how tightly he squints his eyes, he can't see the shore.



He imagines all of the humans crossing borders today, forced by wars and the smallness of men to traverse lands and sail seas. He thinks about the names they are called – migrants, terrorists, refugees, detainees,

opportunists, asylum seekers.



“It's enough to label them to pity or vilify them,” he sadly thinks aloud. “Will we ever truly be free, from what we have known and from how others attempt to know us?” He contemplates the millions who are fleeing their homes, floating through time

and space, adrift on the waters that carry their unwanted lives back and forth between an idea and an experience.



And it is only now, at this very moment, that The Uprooted realizes how, for him and so many



others, there may never be a shore.



**FIN**