



Artists in Residence in Everglades EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

Cristina de la Vega

Since coming from Cuba as political refugee in 1961, Florida has been my home. I grew up under the vast Florida sky, amid the cane fields planted in the black muck of Belle Glade. The wide open spaces of the Everglades left a lasting impression on me and a deep appreciation for the natural world and wilderness.

I have lived along the Indian River lagoon most of my life. I love the river. Along the western shoreline, facing east, you can feel the ocean, smell the salt air and hear the waves pounding on stormy nights. When we first moved to Indian River Drive, the nights were so dark, not one light shone across the river. During the day, not one condo broke the skyline of trees and sky. We felt we had moved to Eden and we really had. Living here, amidst the development of the last thirty years, has led me to realize the importance of recording this beloved landscape as honestly as I can.

Following in the tradition of American and Cuban landscape painting my work unites the viewer with the subject, the wilderness. The paintings are an enviropolitical manifesto of what I consider to be one of the important issues of our time: the disappearance of the wilderness.

The Cuban poet-philosopher, Jose Marti, believed that man, through his connection to nature, builds a strong community; and through that community can battle the forces of tyranny (in this instance, the destruction to the natural environment). I believe, as our modern lives separate us from nature we lose our sense of community and this allows the destruction of nature we see around us daily. It is my aim, through landscape painting, to provide a connection to nature, increasing awareness in a community of stewardship, instead of abuse.

I paint primarily on site, starting the paintings in the field and finishing them in the studio from my sketches and photographs. I am interested in accurate accounts of time and space as well as the poetry of the landscape in order to bring the viewer emotionally and cognitively into the scene, while simultaneously recognizing the two dimensional quality of the work. My paintings develop from random marks laid on the canvas, layer upon layer, until the images appear.

I paint the wilderness, or what little there is left; along the side of US1, deep in Florida Bay, the sand hills of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, the Bahamas, Maine or anywhere I can go. I paint portraits of places. I strive to capture the poetry of the place and to record for the future. Edward Abee said, "The idea of wilderness needs no defense. It only needs more defenders." In my work, I want to be one of the defenders.