

## **RAFAEL CÁCERES VALLADARES**

*My personal life, by myself*

*After some hesitation, I decided to be born on December, 1956 in the Cuban town of Cienfuegos. Amparo Valladares y Gomez, my mother, confirmed what I had already suspected: I was born while the sun was still shining. My father was Angel Cáceres y Suarez and I shall talk about him below.*

*At the age of two, my mother was forced by circumstances to delegate her maternal duties to an elderly lady with no children. Amanda Cáceres y Medinillas was the sister of Raúl Cáceres y Medinillas, my paternal grandfather. She was like a grandmother to me, for all practical purposes.*

*As a result, I was raised relatively distant from my nuclear family. Another peculiar character, Froilán Cáceres y Suarez (my father's brother), who already lived with Amanda, took control of my whereabouts with her tacit complicity.*

*From then on, my humanistic cultivation was entrusted to my aunt and my uncle. During my formative years, I really had two mothers and two fathers. It may seem strange, but for me, as time went by, it became natural.*

*My beloved father, Angel, was functionally illiterate. During his youth he had been a member of the old Batista police and after the popular revolt of September 5, 1957, he almost lost his life. As a result, he changed his occupation and became a bricklayer, while also taking care of his 5 children.*

*I was raised in a very humble house which did not belong to my parents, a modest home with French tiles placed over time with a small living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen. I still remember the two wicker armchairs, the glass cabinet full of small imitation porcelain, crystal glasses and an old radio receiver. I still remember aunt Amanda cooking meals with charcoal in her rustic kitchen, where she also brewed my breakfast coffee using cloth filters.*

*I slept on an old cast iron bed always covered, at bedtime, with a white impeccable mosquito net, that great invention of the Egyptians that not only protected me from terrible mosquito bites, but also gave me a strange pleasurable feeling.*

*In this environment, full of magazines, some books and also comics (which my uncle read and collected), I discovered the art of drawing. During primary school my first teacher was Esperanza Sánchez, who provided me with the first tools I used to paint at school; while at home, where my uncle played his guitar and there was much interest in books, I enjoyed an acceptable cultural life.*

*It was then when my life as an artist began. Initially, the school professors of geography requested that I reproduce in large paintings the maps of Cuba and the world, as well as a variety of posters and other didactic illustrations.*

*While attending 6<sup>th</sup>. grade, my uncle Froilán brought home a professional draftsman to give me drawing classes. The "american", as he was called, would bring along his pencils and papers. Using an improvised drawing table, he explained to me how elegant houses were built using special rulers: some straight, others triangular and others T shaped.*

*But one day, an unexpected blow shook me up. It was the beginning of the hardest part of my life. My uncle Froilán suddenly abandoned his home, his family, everything, and left Cuba to go forever to the United States. I was only 14 years old and cried during two days after his sudden departure. I never saw him again. He just left me some comics, his old Philips bicycle and my broken heart.*

*In that loneliness, I started to visit my parents and siblings, particularly in the afternoons. I remember those furious summer storms and hard winters, when we covered our beds with canvas sugar bags, since we did not have any blankets. Many times I attended school with torn shoes and large holes in my stockings. Although still young, I started to suffer painful ear and toothaches. It was also the same time when I began to lose some of my teeth.*

*Then I first left Cienfuegos and my aunt's home to attend a course for Art Instructors. I stayed in a rustic camp where I worked on agricultural jobs during the mornings and attended art classes in the afternoon. This brief experience was the starting impulse of my interest in Art, which has continued until today.*

*In 1973, Inocencio Iznaga, a neighbour, suggested that I enrolled the Provincial School of Arts in the city of Santa Clara. I gave him some drawings and he took care of the rest. By September, I had been admitted and started my studies in the prestigious Leopoldo Romañach School of Arts, an old and traditional institution that was founded well before the 1959 Revolution in the Province of Las Villas.*

*From then on, my life as an artist and as a teacher went on, as described in the resumé that is enclosed. In order to finish here this short summary of my personal life, I should say that I married twice and I have three daughters: Diana, Dianne y Dianela, none of whom had the luck to study arts. Lidia Maria, my wife is the person who gives me support and it is she is who runs the house while I dream about engravings and pastels.*

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### ***My life as an artist, by myself***

*In 1975 I was admitted to the National School of Arts in La Habana where I obtained my Arts degree in 1980 with a specialization in Engraving. It was a significant experience in my life, since I had the privilege to know and study with artists like Antonio Vidal, Tomas Sánchez, Nelson Domínguez, Raymundo Orozco, y Luis Miguel Valdés, among others.*

*I completed my social service work during three years at the Elementary Art School Rolando Escardó in Cienfuegos, where I gave engraving lessons. I was head of the Art Chair. As there were no materials available to practice engraving (metals or linoleum or wood), I taught drawing, which required less artifacts.*

*I also became the President of the Brigade Hermanos Sainz and in 1985, I was invited to visit the old URSS. I had an unforgettable experience and obtained direct contact with a culture that had already a strong influence in our country in the field of art instruction. Upon my return and during the following years, In 1991, I was appointed the President of the Provincial Council of Plastic Arts, which I retained during more than two years.*

*In those years, a new office of UNEAC was set up in Cienfuegos. This agency convokes avant-garde artists in all fields, from literature to plastic arts. I was appointed President of its Plastic Arts section.*

*I formed and organized the Mateo Torriente Creative Workshop which later became the Cienfuegos Graphic Arts Society, of which I currently preside as Principal Specialist of the Provincial Council for Plastic Arts.*

*In 2000 I was invited to Argentina, where I exhibited my paintings (pastel drawings on canson art paper) at Recoleta Cultural Center while the annual Arte BA exhibition was also taking place. This allowed me to be in contact with art galleries and the Argentine culture, which increased my energy for later artistic development, with a clearer understanding of my role as an artist.*

*I have had several stages in my creative development: Drawing, semisoft Pastel and all sort of Engraving techniques. I used all kinds of support, from packaging boxes to nylon, or whatever else was available. My work has always been nurtured by my own reality. I have always wished to be a witness of what I saw, my world, mutant and rich. I have refused to hide what I have actually lived and have endeavored to raise it to the level of a visual testimony using all the expressive techniques that are available, including the most contemporary elements.*

*Since 2007, I have had the opportunity to exhibit my works in other countries, such as Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, United States, Canada, Belgium and Spain. Some important art collectors have acquired some of my creations. I have also taught Engraving in universities and art institutions in Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil, reproducing my longtime Cuban experience.*

*I have exhibited my art works in more than 200 collective exhibitions and have organized more than 20 individual exhibitions, some of drawings, others of paintings and most of them of engravings*

*This is the story of so many years of challenging creative work. There are many stories that I have omitted and shall relate at some point in the future. As it always happens with art, I believe I have not reached yet the point of full achievement of my potential, but there is still time ahead. And I shall keep trying.*

*Rafael Ángel Cáceres Valladares*

*Cienfuegos, August 2016.*

*Cuba.*