



GALLERY

A German Photographer's Meditation on Havana's Quinceañeras

By Morgan Sykes

Photographs By Frank Thiel

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"Dailys López Alejo, La Habana, Playa, Miramar," 2016. Photo: © Frank Thiel
/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

Frank Thiel's portraits of young Cuban women on the day of their *quinceañera* are textured, layered delights. A *quinceañera*, or *quince*, is a lavish celebration held on a Latin American girl's 15th birthday that marks her transition into womanhood. While each country has its own traditions, a reliable common denominator is the glamour factor, which includes *ruffled confections of gowns* and princess-worthy tiaras. Thiel's

photos are a visual feast: the poufy skirts! The bejeweled bodices! The gasp-inducing backdrops! Thiel, who has been celebrated for his photographs of Berlin's post-wall urban flux and the disappearing glaciers of Patagonia, continues his exploration of transformation by contextualizing this rite of passage within each young woman's neighborhood in Havana. In *15 [Quince]*, the effect is a stunning collision of character, color, and light.



"Beatriz Maricé Darna García, La Habana, Playa, Miramar", 2016. Photo: © Frank Thiel / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York



“Gabriela León Greenup, La Habana, Cerro, Latinoamericano (Carragao)”, 2016. Photo: © Frank Thiel / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

For these intimate portraits, Thiel focused on “the first generation of millennials born in 2000 to celebrate their Quince.” The outdoor settings are a direct inversion of the dreamy enchantment that typically characterizes *quince* photography — usually a professionally orchestrated, highly stylized affair. Instead, the young women are positioned in front of twisting tangles of trees, the Havana skyline, and a lush,

kudzu-draped forest. One levitates between an infinity pool and the ocean. Another stands before a bright blue backdrop, her tangerine dress contrasting with the geometric latticework behind her. Each young woman poses the same exact way: hands on hips, elbows out, looking into the camera. Every gaze crackles with presence — some smile, while others have a more ambivalent expression. Cumulatively, what emerges is a meditation on Havana’s scenery and a generation in flux.

Thiel, born near Berlin in 1966, has exhibited extensively. His work is included in collections in major international museums and he is currently based in Berlin.



“Donna Gladys Machado Sánchez, La Habana, Plaza de la Revolución, Rampa”, 2016. Photo: © Frank Thiel / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York



*“Naomi Francisca Dangel Rodriguez, La Habana, Playa, Kohly”, 2015. Photo:
© Frank Thiel / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York*

*“15 [Quince]” opens at Sean Kelly Gallery with a reception on
February 10 and is on view through March 17, 2018.*