

VENEZUELA RESISTS, Images of a Tragedy

Photo and Art Exhibit

AMA - ART MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAS
201 18th St, Washington, DC

October 27 / November 14, 2021



VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

Talking about Venezuela over the past 22 years has been a difficult task, having witnessed the devastation under the regime that has been in power during that time, while the rest of the world remains largely unaware of what is actually happening.

It is because of this that the Latin America Programs of Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VoC) decided to embark on this project, which is aimed at informing, denouncing and revealing the country's deplorable state to the world, the systemic degradation of everyday life, the political-institutional crisis, the concentration of public state powers, the serious deterioration of people's well-being and financial security, not to mention the annihilation of human skills and capital, the collapse of public services, and the rapid decline in purchasing power. We want to show how a regime has been capable of destroying an entire country, causing a humanitarian crisis and one of the largest forced migrations in the history of the region.

“To notice how time passes and what comes of it. How we used to live, how we live now. In short, exposing the consequent decline.”

In order to do this, the VOC has prepared two exhibitions, which will be hosted in the Art Museum of the Americas of the Organization of American States, with the support of the Government of the United States, to display two important artistic visions of Venezuela's decline: one by renowned Venezuelan artist **VASCOSZINETAR**, who explores the “unnamable edges of these misgivings”, and the new visions of Venezuelan photographers participating in the contest **“VENEZUELA IN CONTRAST”** who offer a glimpse of daily life through their lenses.

VASCO SZINETAR

On the Final Notes from a Besieged City

The erasure of memory is a mechanism often used by totalitarian regimes to condemn and debilitate the resistance of its citizens, redirecting critical thinking, supplanting symbols, and even unraveling the emotional bonds individuals have established with their history and past, as well as with their achievements, expectations, failures, and desires. The many ways in which this strategy can materialize vary depending on the context and the demands of the political, economic, and social background that characterize it. In most cases, such tactics lead to a dangerous and recurrent common destination: a mishmash of nameless people, lost causes, and entelechies trapped by the fateful mandate of necessity.

In Caracas postcards: últimos apuntes (Caracas Postcards: Final Notes), Vasco Szinetar explores the unnamable edges of these misgivings, epigraphs of a city scrutinized by the gaze of a restless observer compiling evidence of the perpetual dialogue that is being woven around him. Like a collector of tensions and voids, in each of his works the artist raises the uncertainties of these silent wanderers. From his own inner discourse, he delves into the causes and consequences of a dark agenda that has ruined the life of an entire country for nearly twenty years. Stripping himself of the uniformity of formats, he resorts to the intersection of technical temperatures stemming from the particular nuances that arise from each situation: straight photography, portraits, screenshots, modified books, landscapes, appropriations, and the constant concealment and alteration of images, all of which lead to the presence of the word.

And, so, the great portrait photographer of days gone by has become the watchful wanderer of a languishing city, salvaging fragments

from the strange cycle that constitutes his own history and the story of Venezuela today. Despite the leap, death and questions related to power remain the central themes of Szinetar's production, reminding us that they were always present in both the performative portraits he shot in front of mirrors with celebrities and the visual plots of lesser-known series.

This time, the work examines the fabric of that interstice with an unbridled abandon and opens up like a personal diary to the audience, revealing the notes of a body marked by history. At the center of the events — and from the silences of that posthumous night that Szinetar has captured in his most recent production —, the puzzle of fragments and the exhalation of the image steer us towards scenes that somehow reflect back to us. We walk beside him, to the beat of his step. We look around and are reminded of ourselves, lost, filled with the countless questions that he might have asked himself while pointing the camera into corners confined by their own disappearance.

The images and words in these final notes are dejected postcards with which the author is trying to send a message, as he asks both himself and us about this state of confinement: posthumous streets of an ulterior vision encompassing us all. In Postcards, Szinetar whispers what we already know but have not yet fully heard. While we are listening for signs, the city unravels itself, crammed and consumed by postponed fates, immersed in the death throes of the vanished and almost sealed book that is Venezuela's reality.

Lorena González Inneco



LOS CAMINANTES





LOS PENITENTES



TODOS PODEMOS SER VÍCTIMAS



LOS BÁRBAROS



Venezuela in Contrast

Photography Contest, the Winners

1st Place

Author: Lenny Ruiz

SERIES ON THE CARACAS METRO

Caracas, erstwhile closest place on earth to heaven, the city of colors and culture, the metropolis that welcomed tourists to its old town of red roofs and smiling faces. Today, it is a city of darkness, of somber grays and, above all, of survivors. The last few years in my city have been witness to the decaying of our architecture, our businesses and public utilities, and, saddest of all, of our people. Twenty years have gone by with this regime that ended the dreams of so many, that forced millions into exile leaving homes and families behind. This series of images portrays the reflection of people that go about their daily lives, driven on by keeping alive the hope of someday recovering the dignity that was lost. After a long and solitary struggle for their country, the new “nation” and its “people” are nothing compared to the country of happy folk, full of dreams of the future, that once lived here.”



2nd Place

Author: Alejandro José Pernía Paredes

Photo 1 **Bitter Agony**

There is simply no excuse for the large number of homeless men, women, and children who lack access to healthcare in the midst of the pandemic. The collapse of public services has left Venezuelans struggling with their health in a country where people's lives cannot be safeguarded and many are lost each day due to neglect, but where money for weapons is always available. While military vehicles and weapons continue to arrive, the risks remain to the lives of thousands of cancer or transplant patients, the hospitalized, those infected by the coronavirus or who suffer from other illnesses. Enough is enough!

The far-reaching corruption and the declining living conditions of Venezuelans have to be acknowledged. The aim is to enable the visual content to have an impact by reinterpreting the words “public health” without the need to be a supporter of the governing party to receive medical attention.

Entrusting their health to the “doctor of the poor” —otherwise known as José Gregorio Hernández— they pray for recovery amidst the tears of every homeless person in Venezuela.



Photo 2 **Comfort in their sadness**

Venezuela is mired in a major crisis due to the degeneration of government institutions and the decline in economic and social conditions. Is it really possible for Venezuelans to survive on a monthly salary of two dollars? People's quality of life has worsened enormously, as they struggle with a multitude of problems due to the corruption of those in power.

Venezuelans are starving. Every day, large numbers of children die of malnutrition and many people can only afford to eat one meal a day, if at all. This oil-rich nation is falling apart. Patients lack access to medicines. Those who are sick in Venezuela have no quality of life, as food becomes increasingly scarce and what little there is declines in quality due to inflation and the depreciation of the local

currency. This image thus becomes a visual device that enables us to see the stories of Venezuelans' everyday lives as a consequence of poor management of public services and the health system.



Photo 3 **Voices of Lament**

There are many Venezuelan men and women roaming the streets, but despite the pandemic they are still fighting the government's appalling social and economic measures. The severe deterioration of the country's health system has become evident. Most hospitals are barely functioning and lack resources. The chronic state of public health centers has led people to die due to neglect or shortages of medicines and supplies, even though many of these deaths could easily be avoided. Meanwhile, they pray to Dr. José Gregorio for an end to the pandemic and for the country's freedom to be restored.



3rd Place

Author: Azalia Licon

SERIES CLOSED

Cerrado reveals one of the facets of Venezuela's economic and social crisis. The first stage of this project was carried out in Chacao municipality during 2017, followed by the municipalities of Libertador and Baruta. According to the state-controlled media, the crisis has been fabricated by the national and international opposition. It simply doesn't exist. We don't exist. But a wide range of businesses still do exist —or at least they used to— as their façades demonstrate. In 2018, over two hundred businesses that had closed due to the crisis were registered and photographed.



SERIES LOST CCS

Lost CCS is a compilation of a large number of photographs taken on everyday journeys around the Venezuelan capital over the past ten years. This series focuses on the Simón Bolívar Center, which was formerly a symbol of development and modernity. A deep economic crisis and the Chavist political system have deepened the rifts in Venezuelan society and the ruins of iconic urban spaces such as this remind us of the project of a metropolis that died on the vine.



Honorable Mention 1

Author: Anonymous

Photo 1 **And What about the Bolívar?**

Venezuela has suffered one of the worst episodes of hyperinflation in history. The depreciation of the bolívar has continued unabated for the last forty-four months in a row. The value of the currency drops every day and seemingly nothing can stop it. The bolívar has been replaced with new versions and different denominations three times, but it continues to lose value. Bills are discarded in the streets because they are worthless, a sign of an ongoing and apparently infinite decline.



Photo 2 **Living without Water**

Venezuela suffers from serious problems of distribution and supply of potable water. The water shortage is no longer affecting just rural areas, but is now affecting the big cities, where supplies are only available for a few hours a day, if at all.

Eustaquio José lives in Turgua, El Hatillo, just thirty minutes from Caracas. He is more than eighty years old and there is no water where he lives. He has to walk to a well several times a day to get some non-potable water to wash and bathe himself.



Honorable Mention 2

Author: Maxwell Briceño

SERIES TOSTONES IN THE VIASA TOWER

Since 2006, a number of families have been living in the Viasa tower, a building that used to belong to the now-defunct Venezuelan airline of the same name, as they wait for the state to fulfill its promises to provide them with better housing. Those residing there say there are more than 200 families living in deplorable makeshift apartments and that the government has failed to fulfill its pledge to rehouse them despite various negotiations.

Regardless of that, some of the residents have made the best of the building, working to make



and sell tostones, or fried plantain slices. Every floor has masses of oil-filled pots and pans for frying, while plantain peelers and packers go about their daily work to try and make ends meet.

Honorable Mention 3

Author: Leonardo Díaz

SERIES FIREWOOD, A LIFELINE FOR MANY

The widespread use of firewood in Venezuela is directly related to how difficult it is —due to either availability or cost— to gain access to gas cylinders, as well as the constant power cuts.

The lucky ones who do manage to obtain a gas cylinder say that it can take up to a week to get a new one once they return an empty cylinder, but most say they have to wait between one and three months.

Firewood is a lifeline for many, so much so that it has become a basic necessity. This is where the loggers come in, getting up early, axes on their backs, to do their work in the hot sun.

William “El Tigre” says that they go to Campo Alegre to cut wood either for themselves or to sell in order to put food on the table in Concordia, where he lives.



Honorable Mention 4

Author: Argenis Bellizzio

Photo 1 **Desolation**

Photo 2 **Hunger**

Sadly, in this series of photographs one can see what I had always said I would never do: show other people's misery. However, as time went on, the streets on which I walked each day began to display a reality that I could no longer ignore. It's not easy to see your country crumble so quickly. The soul of my surroundings faded rapidly and radically, so I began to record it. After a while, the decline worsened.

Sometimes, it seemed like I was walking amongst either sleepwalkers attempting to live in their own unaltered bubbles or those searching for food in trashcans out of the harshest necessity, all of them ultimately with the same objective: trying to survive.



Honorable Mention 5

Author: Adan Zarate

SERIES REPRESSION IN DEMONSTRATIONS

Confrontations between the state's security forces, armed civilians, and demonstrators protesting against President Nicolás Maduro's government. The government responds with generalized violence and brutality towards those who dare to criticize it and those who are arrested are denied the right to due process.



Honorable Mention 6

Author: Anabella Koesling

SERIES 9TH FLOOR AND 90 STEPS TO GET THERE

The ninth floor is where the children with cancer can be found, where hope grips their families. I stop to look and feel my heart shrinking, as my mind races and my tears flow.

Here there is no point in criticizing, as it only sickens our soul. The only thing left to do is pray for each and every angel who is there.

The NGO does beautiful work with the help of the wonderful people who contribute to the organization. Without them nothing would be possible, because almost nothing reaches this hospital. It is thanks to them that I can show part of this documentary.



Honorable Mention 7

Author: Ana Cristina Febres

SERIES GO HOME

Over the last 22 years Venezuela has experienced a deep crisis resulting in terrible consequences in all areas: economic, social, sanitary, and political. Citizens have been the witnesses and victims of the severe decline into which Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro have led us. Just as in Cuba, Venezuelans are used to hearing the phrase “Yankee go home”, a slogan used to distract our attention from the reality that our nation has become a patient in intensive care, at risk of rapid death if things don’t change.



Honorable mention 8

Author: Oriana Abello

SERIES NOSTALGIA OF A DREAMED METROPOLIS

Nostalgia de una metrópolis soñada is the result of an introspective look at my home town of Valencia. Traditionally known as the “industrial capital” of Venezuela, the city once stood proud as the entry point for the whole country’s technological development. With its miles of factories and warehouses, Valencia embodied the dream of progress and the possibility of becoming an economic powerhouse. However, over the last twenty years the city has seen its dignity stripped away by an administration that despises private capital, not only destroying job opportunities, but also undermining the civil nature of its people.





VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation

VOC is an educational, research, and human rights nonprofit organization and museum devoted to commemorating the more than 100 million victims of communism around the world and to pursuing the freedom of those still living under totalitarian regimes. The Foundation was authorized in 1993 by a unanimous Act of Congress signed as Public Law 103-199 by President William J. Clinton on December 17, 1993.

www.victimsofcommunism.org

Our VOC Museum:

<https://victimsofcommunism.org/about/museum/>