

## ***A man, a plan, a full moon, - Yucatán***

Postcards from the Yucatán

When I was 12 years old, my mother gave me a Pentax SLR camera for Christmas. After Christmas, my father took us on a post-Christmas vacation to Mexico. Throughout the trip I took pictures of all the sites. Rolls and rolls of film. We started in Mexico City and then we went out to Merida. For some reason on that trip, I fell in love with Merida and the Yucatán. Maybe it was the sultriness of the city, maybe it was the comfort of the scale after the vastness of Mexico City. There was something about Merida and the Yucatán that really resonated. We stayed at the Hotel Merida in Centro, and we explored the city and the central market, we went to all the ruins at Uxmal and the surrounding area, we went to a cenote. We were only in Merida for three days, but it left a lasting impression. I often thought about Merida and returning there to see how it changed, but I never did.

Fast forward almost 50 years later, living in Miami, I read something in a travel magazine about Merida and how many creative ex-pats had moved down there. On a whim one weekend, a friend and I went down to Merida to explore it and I was smitten. The memories of the trip fifty years ago seemed fresh. The city had changed but remained hauntingly the same in many ways. Merida had already attracted several prominent artists who had moved there and set up practices. The city's historic colonial legacy, vibrant food, arts culture and surrounding archaeological sites created the perfect environment for creative endeavors.

I began looking for a home and workspace in Merida almost immediately. I thought maybe I could move my studio down there and split time with Miami. I thought the rich cultural offerings and unparalleled, natural beauty of the region would imbibe my work and send me in an exciting new direction. I spent months exploring the entire region. I rented a small car and drove everywhere from the fishing villages that dot the coastline to the numerous Mayan archeological sites that thrived in the region. I traveled back and forth every chance I got. I took pictures constantly.

In Miami, I had been influenced by the vibrant street art scene and as a result began experimenting with different ways of making stencils. I developed a process of making photographic stencils that could be applied to any surface. In 2014 during Art Basel, I covered the entire side of a warehouse in Wynwood with a composition of individual photographic stencils.

In Merida, I wanted to make paintings for my home. Because of the heat, the ceiling heights in Merida can be an excess of 18 to 20 feet so any painting must be quite large. I began experimenting with making large, composite stencil paintings that could be eight or ten feet high. Realizing it would be difficult to transport the large paintings down there, I cut the cardboard stencils and took them down there and made the paintings in Merida. It was an exciting project.

It all seems so perfect... Then my plans started to rapidly unravel.... An illness in the family, Covid, marriage and now a beautiful baby. Life.

This exhibition is a highly personal reflection on my Yucatán adventure and a musing of what clearly was not meant to be regardless of how it seemed.

Some of the paintings in this exhibition were from the pictures I took in 1974. Some of the paintings are from pictures I took more recently traveling through the Yucatán.

I still have the residence in Merida although I have not spent nearly as much time as I anticipated, and I never did set up the studio there. I am thoroughly content with my life today, but I think fondly of what could have been such a wonderful adventure.

William Betts, January 2024