

SEANKELLY

“A German Photographer’s Meditation on Havana’s Quinceañeras,” *The Cut*, February 9, 2018

# THE CUT

## A German Photographer’s Meditation on Havana’s Quinceañeras



“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 (Carraguo)", 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*