

Phebe Jewell

“The past responds to what is happening in the present,” one of the members of the Trazos Libres community in Cienfuegos told our delegation as she explained their work exploring race and gender through art. When I reflect on the eight amazing days we travelled in Cuba, this phrase stays foremost in my mind. No matter where we were, at the Federation of Cuban Women, CENESEX, the Literacy Museum, the Comunitariad de Nicolas Guillen in the Timba neighborhood of Havana, The Che Memorial and El Mejunje in Santa Clara, or the colonial plazas and sugar cane plantations of Trinidad, the past was present, but not as an object to be put away behind a glass case, but as a living force in dialogue with the present. In all four cities we travelled to we met groups working at extremely localized levels, responding to the needs of their communities, often grappling with difficult past legacies. At the Casa de Orientacion in Havana, we met women so excited about the courses for neighborhood women, they could easily have kept talking for hours. The Casa, one of 174 throughout Cuba, is a gathering place offering support, training, and counseling.

The energy and generosity of the people we met was truly inspiring. I left Cuba full of new ideas and wonderful models for integrating local, cultural, and political concerns. I return to Seattle committed to working with my amazing sister delegates to continue solidarity work for Cuba and to effect positive social change in our own communities. Muchas gracias Cindy, Moon, y Tatiana!