

HAVANA,
FROM ON HIGH

A FILM BY **PEDRO RUIZ**



«In every soul, like every house, there is a hidden interior behind the façade.» **Raul Brandao**

An aerial photograph of a historic, multi-story yellow building in Havana, Cuba. The building features arched windows and a rooftop terrace with a balcony. The building is situated in a dense urban environment, with other buildings and a street visible in the background. The sky is clear and blue.

[Brief Summary]

The chronic shortage of housing in Central Havana has pushed the city upwards, where life spills out onto the rooftops.

Resilient and remarkable, these rooftop dwellers have a privileged point of view on a society in the process of major transformation.



[Synopsis]

Nestled above a decaying district of Havana is a secret village, hidden from the clamour of the streets below. These makeshift houses are inhabited by Arturo, Tita, Pedro, Lala, Roberto, José, Reynol, Juan, Alejandro, María and Omar. Like many other residents in Central Havana, they have been forced upwards by the chronic shortage of housing. From their perch atop the city, they bear witness to a society in full historical transformation after more than 60 years of revolutionary government.

[Director's Bio]

Pedro Ruiz is a Bachelor in Social Communication, photojournalist and filmmaker. His works include *Tropical animal in Montreal* (50 min.), a portrait of Cuban writer, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, broadcast by ARTV. In 2009, he released *The sweet drifting of a child from Haiti* (84 min.), a film that immerses us in Dany Laferrière's unbridled imagination. The film premiered at Montreal International Documentary Festival and received the Audience Award. It was also nominated for Best Documentary Film at Banff World Media Festival in 2010. Two years later, he directed a feature documentary entitled *Philémon chante Habana* (84 min.), an intimate odyssey of composer and singer Philémon Simon. In 2018, Ruiz finishes *Havana, from on high* (80 min.), a dazzling and poetic journey into Havana.

[Filmography]

- **Tropical animal in Montreal.** 50 min. (2007).
- **The sweet drifting of a child from Haiti.** 84 min. (2009).
- **Philémon chante Habana.** 84 min. (2012).
- **Havana, from on high.** 80 min. (2018).



[Director's Statement]

Hunger can wreak terrible havoc, it's true, but human beings are incredibly resourceful. The human spirit is always searching for solutions to the problems that arise. It is difficult to know exactly what a good life is.

My documentary film project, HAVANA, FROM ON HIGH, seeks to highlight the subtleties that permeates the daily lives of the inhabitants of Havana's rooftops.

In the elusive quest for happiness, the rooftop dwellers of Havana have developed tactics as clever as they are tenuous. Unique characters in a unique world, living realities with no apparent common thread, except for having suffered hunger and misery, and who, by the grace of their tenacity, have become survivors of the *Special Period*.

The Special Period is the name given to this terrible and deadly economic crisis that hit the island of Cuba following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and fuelled by the ratification of the 1992 North American trade embargo.

Those who view this work will witness the wisdom gained by these people living in a singular universe - that of heights, the crumbling canopy of an architecturally elegant city. These rooftops are vestiges of harder times, inhabited by audacious and remarkable people.

Women and men I have confined to these spaces, on the rooftops of Havana, show their willingness to find happiness despite adversity. A vast landscape reveals nothing of the true depth of these people, who could serve as models for others in search of happiness on this planet. Viewed from the outside, the "characters" in this documentary are, by their spirit, above poverty.

HAVANA, FROM ON HIGH

A film by
PEDRO RUIZ
80 min.

A **FAITS DIVERS MÉDIA** production
Colour grading **CHARLES BOILEAU**
Sound **RENÉ PORTILLO**
Music **JÉRÉMI ROY**
Assistant director **GUSTAVO MARCANO**
Documentary research **JEAN FUGÈRE**
Produced by **ARANTZA MALDONADO**
Production, direction, camera and
video editing **PEDRO RUIZ**

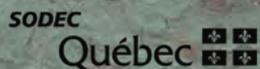
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