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Film - First Look

by Luis Francia

Perhaps the most interesting documentary in the [Asian-American] festival is Kavery Dutta's *First Look*, about the first U.S. exhibit of Cuban art in 20 years. Dutta spends most of the film's 60 minutes examining the milieu of two visiting artists Choco Roca and Nelson Dominguez and their peers, most of whom grew up in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. The artists talk easily about social transformations, art and the lack of a market, curiosity about the non-Cuban artists and life in general. What we see of their work and lives argues against facile generalizations. One artist humorously recounts how on a visit to Spain, he found the right-wingers their thinking that Cuban artists were an oppressed lot while the left-wingers assumed *los pintores* all had studios by the beach. The truth naturally lies somewhere in between.

Roca and Dominguez visit both U.S. coasts and artists like James Rosenquist, Alice Neel, and Al Loving. The Cubans become the predictable focus of media attention but handle the blitz with grace. Quiet and observant, they relax visibly only when with black and Hispanic artists. Dutta, as much as possible, avoids obvious partisanship; clearly, however, her sympathies lie with the artists. And I don't blame her.