

IMAGES OF PANAMA / PORTOBELO II **CABÁN**



*"En la bahía de mi cerebro hay un recuerdo de cuerpos negros, un salto jubiloso sobre un cielo alegre que besó mi vida."  
- Cabán*

## Portobelo Rediscovered

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Columbus named it the "beautiful port." The Spaniards dotted its marvelous bay with small forts to defend it. Sir Francis Drake died before he could capture it. His body, encased in Elizabethan armor, lies in a lead coffin somewhere beneath the blue waters of Portobelo bay.

Today, the town on the Atlantic coast of Panama does not dwell in its past history. Most of the forts are in ruin, devoured by the surrounding jungle. Francis Drake is still to be found and the town mostly comes alive during the feast of the Black Christ. According to legend, in 1821 the statue of el Cristo Negro spared the town from a cholera epidemic sweeping the isthmus. And ever since, he is thanked every October.

That much we'd heard about Portobelo. Now, it has taken a Puerto Rican photographer from Isabela to discover for us **the people** of Portobelo. Roger Cabán unashamedly fell in love with the town's present, not with its past. His lens respectfully swept over the historical and archeological landmarks and joyfully focused on the splendor and the beauty of the people amidst the ancient ruins and the present poverty.

Cabán's words speak of Portobelo as a "paradise to which I plan to return, for there is still much magic and mystery there." However, his photographs tell us eloquently of "the men and women moving with a grace in their bodies that speak of their pact with nature."

Besides his demonstrated skill with the camera, it is undoubtedly Cabán's human appeal, his ability to empathize, to make pacts with his subjects that turn his photographs into windows that allow us to look beyond the obvious. He captured the people of Portobelo with a sensuous ease and esthetic success that surely had Sir Francis turning in his coral-encrusted grave. Cabán captured them in all their unadorned "beingness," their earthy magic and mystery. And the most disarming revelation is that they let themselves be captured – smiling, singing, deep in thought, airborne over the unpolluted beach.

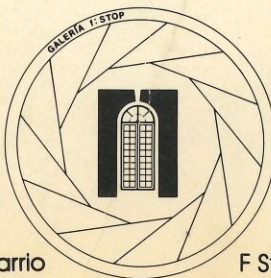
Although the photographs may seem cool and stark against the tropical locale, the warmth radiating from the beautiful people of the beautiful port makes it easy for us to imagine the radiance of the ocean, the intensity of the sky, the glow of the distant hills that for centuries have seen pirates come and go – and still watch over the bodies of those who stayed behind.

– Dolores Prida

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Estas fotografías fueron tomadas en un pequeño poblado de Panamá. Cuando tomé estas fotografías yo estaba en perfecta unidad con la naturaleza. Esta fue una gran experiencia. Portobelo es un paraíso al que regresaré una y otra vez, pues hay todavía mucha magia y misterio por encontrar allí y la libertad que trae la fuerza de la belleza y el orgullo. Este es un poblado orgulloso con una fuerte herencia de cultura africana, lleno de hombres y mujeres que se mueven con una gracia que habla de su pacto con la naturaleza."

– R.C.



El Museo del Barrio

F Stop Gallery

**B**orn in Isabela, Puerto Rico, Cabán resides in New York where he works as a free lance photographer. Primarily self taught, except for a semester under Cjon Mili, his work has been published in various photo annuals as well as other major publications. The **IRT Prayer Book**, a collection of poems and photographs was published in collaboration with Dolores Prida. He has worked with various Puerto Rican institutions including the National Puerto Rican Forum and ASPIRA. In addition, he was a member of the National Task Force on Hispanic Arts for NEA, and a former chairman of the Special Arts Services Panel of NYSCA. He was an assistant to the former Mayor of New York, Abraham D. Beame. In conjunction with his past presidency of En Foco, he was Exhibition Director of *Mujer*, a major exhibition by this collaborative of Latin American photographs.



photo: Gimpaya

Cabán's work is included in the permanent collections of the Museo del Barrio, New York, The Harlem Art Collection, New York, the Museum of Natural History, New York, the Tucson Museum of Art, Arizona, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena, Puerto Rico, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City and various private collections.

Cabán was one of the invited photographers to represent Puerto Rico at the first colloquium of contemporary Latin American photography in Mexico City at the Museo de Art Moderno, May, 1978.

Of greatest significance, he is the father of Rebecca Elisa Cabán, 6 years of age.

#### INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

The Dark Room, New York, 1973  
 Porto Gallo Gallery, New York, 1974 and 78  
 Crossroads Gallery, New York, 1975  
 Nadar Gallery, Pisa, Italy, 1975  
 Soho Gallery, New York, 1973 and 76  
 Neorican Cafe, New York, 1978  
 INTAR Gallery, New York, 1979  
 Casa Aboy Gallery, San Juan, P.R., 1979  
 El Museo del Barrio, New York, 1980

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

"Dos Mundos"  
 1973-74  
 New York Cultural Center  
 Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
 Delaware Art Museum  
 Instituto de Cultura P.R.  
 Galeria de la Raza, L.A.

"View of Seeing"  
 1975  
 Neikrug Gallery, N.Y.

"En Esta Vida"  
 1975  
 Universidad Boricua, N.Y.  
 Galeria Oller-Campeche, N.Y.

"The Spirit of Independence"  
 July, 1976  
 Cayman Gallery, N.Y.

"Mujer"  
 1976-77  
 Rockefeller Center, N.Y.  
 Bronx Museum

"Ancient Roots/New Visions  
 Raices Antiguas/Visiones Neuvas"  
 1977-79  
 Tucson Museum of Art  
 National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.  
 Museum of Albuquerque  
 El Pason Museum of Art  
 Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery  
 Everson Museum of Art, N.Y.  
 Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art

"En Foco Documentation Portfolio No. 1"  
 1978  
 El Museo del Barrio

"Venezia 79 - La Fotografia"  
 1979  
 Venice, Italy

"El Niño"  
 1979  
 Casa Aboy, P.R.