

---

Havana: A Christ with His Feet on the Ground

29/02/2016



The author, Jilma Madera (San Cristóbal, Pinar del Río, September 17, 1915- Havana, February 21, 2000), preferred a much more human expression with the strength of the look and the hand on the heart.

Rumor has it, common knowledge, that Jilma recreated the image of Jesus of Nazareth based on the figure of someone she was sentimentally linked.

This approach will never be known because the sculptor did not leave any written testimony, although it has been said she discussed it with friends or acquaintances.

What has been left is this confession of her: "I followed my principles and tried to achieve a statue full of vigor and human determination. To the face I imposed serenity and composure as to transmit the idea of someone who has the certainty of his ideas; I did not see him as an angel within the clouds, but with his feet firmly on the ground".

With the city at his feet, the Christ of Havana, which was inaugurated on December 25, 1958, is one of the biggest works carried out by a woman.

The 20 meters high work—including the 3 meters of its pedestal—is admired by believers and nonbelievers, and even some people endorse him miraculous actions.

To the center of the statue, made up of 67 pieces, there is a rebar frame sharpening to the torso, from which a steel beam reaches the head. Each fraction of marble (Carrara, Italy) is attached to the central structure with steel tensors, and then covered with concrete.

It is said that the author placed newspapers of the time and gold coins at the base of the monument, whose total weight is 320 tons.

The Christ of Havana lies on a hill in the old fishing community of Casablanca and on the left side of the inlet channel of the most important bay of Cuba, and because of its height, it can be seen from several parts of the city.

The structure resisted at least three rays in 1961, 1962 and 1986. In this last year it was protected with a lightning conductor to prevent those frequent phenomena, given its location at little more than 51 meters above the sea level and its ferrous frame.

The first ray struck the side of its head.

As a precaution, Jilma brought from Italy an additional block of marble, with which she recovered the original form of her work. The restoration took five months despite working urgently to prevent the corrosion of the saltpeter on the metal.

The sculptor stayed two years in Italy before leaving in boat to Cuba in mid-1958 to finish her Christ, blessed by Pope Pius XII.

"That monumental work was inaugurated by an unpopular government between the rumblings of a civil war ... It was with great pomp and military and civilian authorities, blessings of cardinals and clerical minstrelsy; and legions of uncivil devils enjoying that spectacular sarcasm. The people, skeptical, did not attend the ceremony", wrote the Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz.

"A few days later, at the dawn of the new year, it was thought if that hieratic image had already performed a miracle," said Ortiz, referring to the fact that only one week later, the troops led by the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, defeated dictator Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959), responsible of the deaths of about 20,000 people.

Translation: Lisandra Alapón (Cubarte)

---