



CUBA by A
KORDA



PREFACE

Jaime Sarusky

I first met Alberto Díaz in 1941, within the austere walls of a Protestant college in the suburbs of Havana. That name probably means nothing to the reader, until I explain that the man was Alberto Korda, the photographer who took the picture of Che Guevara that is known around the world—the most reproduced image in the history of photography. At the time, we were students at the prestigious college where the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier had completed his studies some years before. I still wonder whether it was in the chapel where, unaware, Korda developed his passion for women and feminine beauty. All of us witnessed the adoration for women he began to develop, contemplating those beautiful girls listening to the pastor's sermons.

Like a good number of his Cuban colleagues, Korda started out in photography as a *lambio*—someone who takes photos at banquets, baptisms, or weddings. He'd dash to his studio to develop the film, returning to the function to sell photos to people who wanted a souvenir of the event. In reality, the photo quality was very poor—the paper turned yellow after a few months and the images blurred. He later opened a studio with Luis Pierce, a resourceful fellow who cruised around Havana on a bicycle, doing bits and pieces to earn himself a bit of money. We gave Luis the nickname "Korda Senior," but many people called him "Hemingway" because he had an extraordinary resemblance to the famous writer. Their studio carried the name of two Hungarian directors, Alexander and Zoltan Korda, whose films were showing in Havana at the time. The name also evoked "Kodak," a word long associated with photography.

Alberto Korda was most interested in the world of fashion, which allowed him to combine his two passions, his two obsessions: photography and feminine beauty. He started to chase after up-and-coming models. This type of photography was unknown in Cuba. But Korda managed to find a regular spot in a Havana weekly where elegant, beautiful young women posed, suggestively erotic, with dresses, perfume, and soap. Korda became the pioneer of fashion photography and advertising in Cuba. This was without doubt his real vocation, but as they say, fate has a tendency to intervene. History erupted and there was a turning point in Korda's professional career and his life in general. His plans were radically altered by the victory of the revolutionaries, the *barbudos* (bearded ones) who came down from the mountains to take over the cities.

Korda was called on to join the staff of the newly created newspaper *Revolución*. We were in the first weeks of 1959 and Cuba was a world turned upside down. The newspaper offered vast space for photography; giant headlines were like posters calling on the population to mobilize. They published a photo supplement three times a week. When Fidel Castro visited the United States in April 1959, Korda was part of the team sent to cover the trip. He was swept up in this extraordinary event, photographing the Cuban leader day by day. He captured activities such as Castro's visit to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, producing a striking image of the event. He then accompanied Castro on his tours around Cuba and overseas, including the *comandante's* visits to the Soviet Union in 1963 and 1964. Korda shared intimate moments with Nikita Khrushchev and his family, recording these moments for posterity. These photos reveal, or appear to reveal, the rapprochement between the two leaders, ending a breach created by their diverging policies during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962...

I lost contact with Alberto Díaz for almost 20 years, but I encountered him again as Alberto Korda. He was a photographer; I was a journalist with *Revolución*. On March 5, 1960, I was working on the platform as an interpreter for Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir on the day Korda took his famous photo of Che Guevara. It was during the funeral ceremony for victims of the sabotage of the French freighter *La Coubre* in Havana's port. Korda was taking photos less than a dozen steps from the platform where Fidel Castro was addressing the crowd. Che came forward to the balustrade to look over the crowd. At that moment Korda's lynx-like eye focused on Che through his camera's telephoto lens. The contrast between the momentary nature of that snapshot and the durability of the image in our time is striking. This photograph has become a universal symbol, to which everyone gives their own interpretation.



Above: Alberto Korda
Left: "Don Quixote of the Lamp Post," Cuba 1959





Above left: Celia Sánchez
Above right: Fidel Castro in the Soviet Union
Below left: Camila Cienfuegos and Fidel Castro
Below right: Cuban militia woman
Opposite page: "Norka" by Korda





"At the foot of the podium draped in black crepe, my eye pressed to my old Leica, I was focusing on Fidel and the people around him. Suddenly, through the 90mm lens, Che loomed above me. I was surprised by his look..."

—Alberto Korda

CUBA KORDA

CUBA BY KORDA is the first publication of the work of the Cuban photographer celebrated for his iconic portrait of Che Guevara. The photograph—Che staring into the distance like a prophet—has been reproduced on millions of t-shirts and posters around the world. This book gives an overview of Korda's extraordinary camerawork, from his first work as a fashion photographer to "Don Quixote of the Lamp Post"—a Cuban peasant sitting on a lamp post above a sea of people during a mass rally. It includes other striking, sometimes quirky, and lesser-known photographs, such as Fidel Castro warily eyeing a tiger at the Bronx zoo; Che Guevara playing golf; Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev throwing snowballs at each other; Hemingway in Cuba; and Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in conversations with Che.

ALBERTO KORDA was born Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez in Havana in 1928—the same year as Ernesto Che Guevara. Their fates were to be entwined as Korda's portrait of the Argentine became his most famous photograph. Korda was Cuba's best-known photographer of the revolutionary period. He died while visiting Paris in 2001.

This project has been coordinated by Christophe Loviny.

- Korda took the most famous photo of the 20th century—the iconic Che Guevara
- First ever book by one of the masters of photography



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