

Carlos Betancourt's "Imperfect Utopia" is Heaven on Earth

The maestro of Miami Beach celebrates a life in art with an incredible new monograph that will leave you breathless.



by Miss Rosen

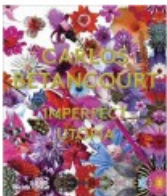
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Artwork: *El Portal I*, 2011, digital image on photographic paper, 72 x 107 in.

Imperfect Utopia, the Miami Beach studio of Puerto Rican artist **Carlos Betancourt** (b. 1966), became the center of the bohemian art scene in Miami Beach during the 1980s and '90s. It was here that artists, writers, poets, architects, dancers, and musician gathered. Luminaries including Gianni Versace, Celia Cruz, and Rudolph Nureyev mingled with the likes of Bunny Yeager, Morris Lapidus, and Bruce Weber, helping to create a contemporary arts environment that has grown into one of the largest and most significant markets on earth.

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Betancourt's work blurs the boundaries between art, photography, and nature in a highly innovative approach to creating images that embodies the spirit of connectivity, creativity, and individuality. **Carlos Betancourt: Imperfect Utopia** (Skira/Rizzoli), a new book celebrating his life in art, launched on Wednesday, June 1 in New York. The evening began with a conversation with art critic Paul Laster at Rizzoli Bookstore, and was followed by a reception at The Gilded Lily, which featured a music and video installation. Guests in attendance included Maria Brito, Sandra Bernhard, April Hunt, Robin Cembalest, and Petra Mason, among others.

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Amulet For Light I, 2012, color photograph, 72 x 110 in.



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Imperfect Utopia is a luscious, lavish collection of work that celebrates Betancourt's radiant and eccentric sensibilities. Feature more than 250 images, the book is a rich, multi-layered blend of the many influences that

make Betancourt a true original. His works are kaleidoscopic studies of Caribbean and American culture, creating an exquisite blend of multi-racial, multi-lingual, trans-cultural energies. Betancourt brilliantly synthesizes both the media and the subject matter to incredible effect, creating a series of works that make you look, again and again.

Betancourt's intuitive process points to the connectivity between the artist and his environment. His attraction to the going past the boundaries to explore new worlds is echoed in both his work and his approach to making art. He reveals, "The experience of creating art in general can be as simple and as fulfilling as picking up seashells. I have waterfalls and seashells in my head all the time. For me it usually starts with collages in my mind that start forming an idea, and the idea usually tells me the medium."



Beijgante en Casa Flamboyant, El Yungue, Puerto Rico, 2007, color photograph, 45 x 36 in.

Whether creating a collage of visual materials or a collage of personalities, Betancourt is drawn to explore the beauty that exists in new and unexpected juxtapositions. He explains, "I have also come to realize that all

people have their own kind of exile. We have been disconnected from something or some place at some time, and that is why maybe other countries' cultures and their histories inspire me with fantastic materials. Sometimes I want to belong to all these culture!"

And in the act of making art, Betancourt does just this. An ever-gracious host, he invites us to share in his world, to embrace the beauty and joy that is to be found in humanity, nature, and the very spirit of life itself.



Album Collages: Masai Mara, Kenya, 1988-present, mixed media on paper, 12 x 18 in.

All artwork: © Carlos Betancourt, from *Imperfect Utopia*, published by Skira/Rizzoli.

Miss Rosen is a New York-based writer, curator, and brand strategist. There is nothing she adores so much as photography and books. A small part of her wishes she had a proper library, like in the game of Clue. Then she could blaze and write soliloquies to her in and out of print loves.

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