

About the Photographer

Tony Mendoza was born in 1941 in Havana, Cuba. He claims he started to seriously worry about what he was going to do when he grew up at the age of ten. His relatives were all business persons, and young Mendoza noticed that they were always laughing and telling each other loud jokes. Mendoza reasoned that he probably would not succeed in business because he was somewhat quiet and could never remember the punch lines of jokes. After much agonizing in high school he thought that maybe he could be a doctor. As a freshman at Yale, he enrolled in a pre-med program in which the students witnessed operations at a nearby hospital. At the first sight of a knife cutting the skin of a patient, he fainted. He then decided on engineering, mostly because that was his father's profession, and he thought that maybe his father would give him a job. Unfortunately, his father's business was taken over by Fidel Castro. His family left Cuba, and after graduation from Yale in 1963, Mendoza found himself designing railroad bridges for an engineering firm in New York City, an activity he never fully understood. In future years, he made sure to never take the train that crossed the railroad bridge he had designed.

After one year of engineering he knew he should look for another profession. After reading and being very impressed by *The Fountainhead*, he took night art classes at the Cooper Union and applied to architectural school. He graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1968, at a time when everyone he knew was exploring alternative life styles. He moved into a commune, let his hair grow long, did some research in mind expanding drugs and managed to work as an architect for five years until he decided that getting up every day to the sound of an alarm clock at seven in the morning to go to work was detrimental to his health and his spirit. A course with Minor White, Boston's resident photography guru, convinced him that he should try photography. He quit architecture and for six years worked diligently perfecting the craft of his new calling. In 1979, he decided he was ready for the big time and moved to New York City, where he discovered that paying New York City rents would prove to be a huge nuisance. In 1985 he published *Ernie: A photographer's Memoir*, a book about his life with his loftmate, a cat. The book did well, and with the first royalty check he moved to Florida, where he fell in love with the tropical climate and with Carmen Areces, a Cuban woman whom he had first met in Boston. They were married in a ceremony by the sea.

Artists should not move to the tropics. In the next few years, Mendoza became very adept at fishing, snorkeling, having wine and cheese picnics by the sea, activities which left him with very little time to make photographs. Alex, Carmen's son from her first marriage, got a bad stomach flu and had to spend three days in the hospital. The hospital bill, which he paid for in cash, convinced Mendoza that he needed health insurance, and possibly, a

job, preferably teaching photography. After a few Visiting Artist jobs, he eventually landed at the Ohio State University, where he is currently a professor in the Art Department.

People born in islands should not move to the Midwest. Mendoza missed the ocean, the tropics, and the picnics by the sea, but his job as professor afforded him enough time to become a tennis fanatic and publish a few more books. Words progressively edged out the photographs in his books. In 2003, after five years of work, he finished his first novel, about a 14-year-old boy called Tony growing up rather quickly in Havana, during the summer of 1954. No one seemed to want to publish the novel. Now he is back to taking photographs, mostly of flowers, seemingly with a lot of enthusiasm, and the photographs have kicked out the words in his recent book projects.

Tony Mendoza is the author of *Cuba: Going Back*, an account of his first trip back to his native land after 36 years of exile, *Stories*, a photography book which combines photographs with short autobiographical stories, and *Ernie, A Photographer's Memoir*, a book of photos and short texts about his life with a cat. His photographs are included in the collections of many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York. He is the recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts Photography Fellowships and A Guggenheim Photography Fellowship, as well as five Ohio Arts Council Fellowships in photography, creative writing, and video.

He is represented by the Stephen Cohen Gallery in Los Angeles and the Kathryn Markel Gallery in New York City.