

Statement from curator Walter Meyer, Professor of Art History:

Zelko's art is both familiar and foreign at the same time. He has the ability to take subjects that we have seen before (*Nudes, Cuba, Pin-Ups*) and allow us to view them again as for the first time. What makes them so striking?

Giovanni speaks at length about his desire to create "timelessness". This is initially apparent through the selection of his subjects. In the *Cigar Pin-Ups*, he shows the evolution of this genre by time-period. We intuitively know about the flapper in *Gatsby Girl*, or the WWII pilot in *Ace Flyer*; they effectively take us to a different time and place. But are they not also extremely contemporary? In our age of appropriation, fashion and pop culture are crudely ushering the past as present. With his photography, Zelko elegantly recreates the past and simultaneously makes it accessible and relevant to the present. He connects them all brilliantly by adding a cohesive element in capturing them smoking cigars. Traditionally a male accessory, the cigar is here co-opted by the female protagonists, furthering their heroic stature while keeping their intense femininity. They are a celebration and a re-figuring of a classic identity for a contemporary audience: confident, powerful women who are not ashamed or afraid to showcase and utilize their sexual identity.

The diversity and agility with which he takes his images is also to be noted. Instead of working in one singular style, he adapts himself and his technique to solve the unique problems in telling a story or imbuing a feeling: different angles and points of view, all working harmoniously with the subject and composition, relating to the nuances of subject and setting. In *Havana Frozen*, four different styles are shown: a portrait-like description of the cigar making process, a strong angle of a car which frames its landscape, the motion of showgirls dancing, and the sheer monumentality of a cathedral. In each instance we are given a narrative uniquely captured for its context.

Perhaps the toughest subject for photographers to showcase their originality is the nude. Since the invention of the camera, its lens has often been focused on the nude form. One need only pick up a photography magazine to find numerous artists devoting themselves to the naked form. Zelko's genius here lies in his ability to balance his strong eye for composition and lighting without losing focus on the body as individual & real. Photography pioneers like Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston utilized the nude to examine its relation to other organic forms, focusing in to the point of abstraction. Later, artists like Helmut Newton pushed the erotic and fashion sense combining it with a striking portrait-like quality. Zelko combines the two techniques and fuses them into sensuous depictions of the female form: abstract and real. By hiding the faces through cropping, focus length, and lighting, he simultaneously lowers and raises the voyeuristic and erotic qualities. The women become anonymous and mythical. The *Geisha Girl* is one of the few in his *oeuvre* that reveals a face. Yet, we are not looking at her true face but rather through the anonymous mask of stark white make-up, idealized beauty contrasted with the natural flesh of her naked body.

The artist's "Global Passions" for people, cities, and cultures stem from his continuing quest to see the world with eyes wide open. Each of his photographs are icons representing his accumulated experiences in exploring more than thirty countries. These restless travels deliver images which evoke a keen insight into our ever-shrinking global community. For Zelko, photography is, "like capturing a fleeting moment of precious beauty and purity and embracing it for eternity, but not selfishly. Rather for all to see. It has the potential to be a global experience, breaking all cultural boundaries across all of time. It is a profound way to silently whisper to the future of mankind. I strive for that excellence in every genre I shoot in."