

---

Countercriticism: Ana de Armas and Cuban Globalized Cinema

By: Mauricio Escuela

28/02/2024



What can we say about Ana de Armas? The person who makes art works seems to go hand in hand with the same person who visits us and who has a simple, familiar demeanor, close to friends. Whenever images of the actress are seen in our Havana, there are those who think that a figure of this caliber would forget about her training in our present conditions, in the harshness of everyday life. The image of Ana de Armas who enters the island and is seen with Claudia Alvariño and her friend Jazz Vilá is something that can only occur in the context of a woman who doesn't forget the values that fostered her personality. Within her exists the powerful light of the woman who plays a role like that of Marilyn Monroe, a kind of quintessence of fatal beauty that at the same time elevates, kills. There's a magic in this procedure that cannot be cataloged in art and only exists through mystery. But it's worth going deep into the meaning of that icon of the newest Cuban cinema who is Ana de Armas.



Born into a family with the same difficulties as any group in Cuba, her growth was marked by effort and perseverance. Even so, we see her in her first roles as a girl with the gift for greater tasks. In the film *A Rose of France* she was huge next to a Jorge Perugorría who gave her the chance of that masterful participation. The proposal being another drama with historical shades, in which the adolescent beauty of Ana de Armas drives crazy while showing a disturbing energy; the film manages to move. The girl, who was studying acting, takes a risk and exchanges classes for filming sets. She has a preference for the path of praxis and that leads her to make an art within the margin of what's allowed for her age and dimensions of being starting. Ana is not the femme fatale, but the girl who convinces with her eyes lowering and goes for a glory that illuminates and that puts her at risk of even losing her academic year.

It was those stormy beginnings that made the girl a name in the art circuit and gave her the early opportunity to reach a larger audience. Much has been written about her imprint on Spanish cinema, but it is worth highlighting the cultivation of a kind aspect of her physical beauty as well as her acting talent. With the colors and emotions that are typical of Iberian cinema, Ana gave an excellent presentation and knew how to make a presence for herself. But her consecration or, rather, her role that would launch her to stardom was missing. It is often read that this only happens when she manages to act in Hollywood. Ana was a Latin, Cuban girl, a complete eccentricity. She didn't know the language and as always she was alone and on her own in the middle of a difficult world. The arrival of

several roles that took her into Hollywood gave her the chance to perfect her diction and gain linguistic skills. More than that, she polished the form and essence of her art. Her presence in *Blonde* was like that light everyone expected, but that no one believed to see in a Cuban girl.

What significance could it have for a girl like her to play one of the quintessential icons not only of cinema but of art? In the first instance, globalization has delocalized what's understood by identity and that as part of the complex processes it has meant that everything we are is not constrained within borders, but must be seen from a horizon in which the contexts, the semiotic, so to speak, is something that can't be bound in the stagnations of the national circuit, but rather we must be prepared to assume a Cuba that can be a global hybrid with other identities. This is what the theorists of the global village refer to with the loss of borders, which is more than the physical issue, it's something that addresses the metaphysical substance of the event of art in this case. Ana represents a moment in Cuban art in which we have to think again about the avant-garde not only as geographical, but as what offers us a universal footprint. It's really rewarding that at a time when national cinema is at a crossroads, we can think about it from this other perspective. Immersed in productions that allude to a world that's more referential than of essences, the Cuban film label requires an approach that's more aesthetic and global and less local that does not transcend, and that bets on "squibbles" that have no purpose.



What's in *Blonde*? In another space in *La Jiribilla I* I wrote what I consider critically redundant in the film, but when it comes to Ana de Armas everything is praise on my behalf. If in the course of the plot events are skipped that form an organic nature of the piece and if one choses for a dream game that is not always successful; that is but a speck of dust in the huge performance of the Cuban Marilyn who can stand before any effort and illustrious character. For Ana de Armas there was a golden opportunity that she knew how to take advantage of and that ultimately resulted in salvation and contrast with less lucid elements of a film that was at times long and tedious. The actress is the dynamic element in an environment that didn't know how to turn the tables well with that great character. But Ana is not a director, yet. Her job was to interpret and she did it and in that way she marked an era in the cinema of this hemisphere. Like Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn is a symbol of what shines brightest in the world of celluloid. Not only because she is attributed the essence of a sex goddess, but because of the entire mysterious plot that she carries and that's the testimony of an era. And that's where our Cuban actress arrived, with all her shadows, her lights and achievements. We must not tarnish Ana, but give her the meaning she carries and give to Cuban cinema, that global seal that until now was absent. The debate about what's Cuban resurfaces again after *Blonde*. But that's not new. It had already happened before with the literary works of Severo Sarduy or Lydia Cabrera just to mention two names that reached the top while still universally referring to the magma that gave them original shelter. What is carried inside is a geography so real that explodes wherever we go. Taking what's

Cuban only with what's produced within the physical borders is an exercise of empty rhetoric. We must expand this margin and avoid error and reductionism.

Ana de Armas demonstrates that the frontier of what we understand as Cuban must be broadened, that it's possible to look at the island's art from a global horizon without giving up the essence of this country. I personally know the playwright Jazz Vilá, because I reviewed three of his works in the La Jiribilla magazine. And it made me proud to know that he's part of Ana's inner circle of friends. Vilá has a discourse that critically approaches the Cuban reality and that dialogues with who we are. There is no escapism but rather a search for universality. I think that the gesture of coming, of being among us, of not forgetting, is part of what's expected of great artists. More than a frivolity, magazines and media have to see in the cinema made by Ana de Armas the new mark that globalization is leaving on Cuban culture and that's not at all a negative balance in this case. We must break down what's trivial and give it its true dimension. Only in this way can the path of criticism be cleared and the contributions to the aesthetic universe of this actress placed in its rightful measure.



What lies within Ana de Armas? The Cuban who always comes to her land and who is on the highest stages but who prefers her friends. The girl who, before being so famous, fought hard in hostile and difficult environments and with everything against her. The spirit of someone who believes in her talent and knows how to take advantage of it without detracting from her humility as a human being. That's as far as we have to go when the chroniclers weigh what is happening with Ana de Armas' cinema. It's not just adding to the avalanche of superficialities that the mainstream press makes its own and that ignore in every sense what it's like to be born and grow up in Cuba. Ana has taken the best of a tradition and has taken it to the world. The product is already supreme and different, but it's

still ours. There's a healthy pride in knowing we are at her side, in the midst of the vicissitudes that the country is going through, but which will always be lighter if we have beauty.

Ana is more than Marilyn, although her role has launched her to absolute stardom. She is not a platinum blonde who recites phrases in front of the cameras, but rather the woman who possesses all the possible virtues within an art that she magnifies.

**Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff**

---