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Making Do With Little, Yet Making Art

'Alumbrones,' a Documentary, Looks at Cuban Artists

By RACHEL SALTZ SEPT. 11, 2014

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ALUMBRONES

Opens on Friday

Directed by Bruce Donnelly

In Spanish, with English subtitles

1 hour 15 minutes; not rated

The Cuban artists featured in Bruce Donnelly's documentary "[Alumbrones](#)" are used to making do. Scarcity — of materials, of electricity, even of food — has been a condition of their creative lives. If we had money, one painting student says, maybe we wouldn't be as interested in art.

Short and sweet and limited, "[Alumbrones](#)" — it means little bursts of light, as when the electricity flickers on briefly during blackouts — is itself less interested in art than in these [artists](#). And for good reason. They're charming, insightful about life and art, and seemingly free of self-pity, with memorable faces and voices. By the end of the movie, they all feel a bit like pals.

Mr. Donnelly isn't much for context, though the artists provide some, talking about the "special period" in the 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union made material conditions in Cuba a disaster. One points out that without real access to the Internet, artists have scant ideas about trends beyond the island. Their art is influenced by other Cuban art, and the work we see bears this out.

The film makes an odd, quick detour to Boston, where we're told that artists need patrons and collectors, but we're not introduced to any. The press notes solve this mystery: Most of the artists in this movie — who themselves aren't named until the very end — are represented by Michelle Wojcik's [Galería Cubana](#) in Boston, which Mr. Donnelly happened into once and which clearly shaped this film's vision of Cuban art. **RACHEL SALTZ**

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The artist Luis Rodríguez NOA, in Havana. The artworks in "Alumbrones" are influenced by other Cuban art. Esteban Malpica/Candy Factory Productions

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