 Installed in the Freedom Tower in downtown Miami, William Cordova’s exhibition *Ceiba: Reconsidering Ephemeral Spaces* shares a geopolitical bond with the building in which it is located. Now a venue for Miami-Dade College’s Museum of Art and Design, the Freedom Tower’s original tenant was the Miami News & Metropolis newspaper. After a period of vacancy, it served as an immigration center for Cuban refugees fleeing Fidel Castro’s regime. The tower once again fell vacant in the mid-1970s and was purchased and resold several times before finally being donated to Miami-Dade College in 2008. A steadfast icon of the Miami skyline since 1925, the building—one that vastly predates the myriad condominium buildings surrounding it—has served itinerant purposes only.

Such ephemerality is embraced by Cordova in this exhibition. Consisting of film, photography, and sculpture, his works are often made up of found ephemera and other reclaimed materials. The use of such objects is immediately recognizable upon entering the main gallery—from his Untitled *(Geronimo I y II)* (2006–2014), composed of a “reclaimed paper bag, feather, brick, [and] pocket-size *Art of War* by Sun Tzu,” to his Untitled *(White Nebula)* (2013), whose quotidian components—steel and reclaimed ball...
bearings—form a very simple work. A diverse set of everyday objects make up other works throughout the gallery and are presented with little context; each work requires the viewer’s reckoning to help complete each work.

Similarly, a viewer’s participation is required to complete each of the two film–sculptures. The first, *Sculpting Elsewhere in Time (Fort Mose, St. Augustine, FL/Ceiba Mocha, Matanzas, Cuba)* (2012), exists as two solitary slides transmitted by two side-by-side projectors. A spinning turntable sits nearby, beckoning the visitor to operate it—and in turn complete the "film." This audio component is an environmental field recording meant to accompany the two juxtaposed landscape images from the titular locales. In the second work, *Mujercita Bembelanga* (2011–2014), a story narrated in Spanish via turntable joins a sole image of a mundane streetscape projected into a custom cedar box to create this film–sculpture, in a collaboration with Cuban author Ivette Vian.
The way the works are presented—in a seemingly haphazard arrangement and presented with little context—requires a personal narrative or an imaginative assessment from the viewers. A key work that illustrates this necessity of interpretation is *Smoke Signals* (2011–2014). Sitting in the middle of the gallery, the work exists as a display case with “various books and magazines” in it. However, the glass panels of the case have been covered with translucent tracing paper, preventing viewers from recognizing any of the books inside. The tracing paper becomes a physical manifestation of the conceptual obscurity that surrounds each object—viewers see traces of meaning, yet they must also supplement the extant work with their own personal histories and experiences.

While the objects may seem to eschew any sort of indexical meaning to a specific time or place, the title of the exhibition provides an initial lens through which to view the exhibition. Specifically, Cordova points to Fort Mose, an establishment in St. Augustine, Florida, founded by “run away African slaves and Native Americans fleeing British persecution” in the southern colonies in 1739. Less than thirty years later, these persecuted groups later relocated to a similar stronghold, this time in Ceiba Mocha, Mantanzas, Cuba, in 1763. By connecting this history to a migration of “more than 80 Asian, Black, and Latinos from America” to Havana, Cuba, seeking political refuge between 1978 and 1981, Cordova seeks to explore the complicated network of forces and implications of what he terms “trans-cultural migration.”[1]
But Cordova is less interested in dictating the stories of Fort Mose and Ceiba than he is in helping to connect viewers to the broader complexities that exist in seemingly disparate cultures. In trying to navigate a complex, interconnected web of meaning, these open-ended works connect these particular histories to the personal histories of each viewer. The introductory text to the exhibition suggests that such a conceptual practice “may ultimately lead to social change, which only happens when we change our perspective.” While small and seemingly open-ended, Cordova’s exhibition provides a platform for social change, one that is more capable than other, more traditional curatorial models.

Ceiba: Reconsidering Ephemeral Spaces is on view through July 12, 2014.