

From Weir to Seer: The Xiomáro Story

By Pat Tomlinson Updated 6 hrs ago  (...)



Bill Urbin

Richard Dieguez, who goes by Xiomáro, has been named Centennial Visiting Artist at Weir Farm in honor of the National Park Services' upcoming 100th anniversary.

WILTON — Richard Dieguez always led a pretty far-out life — the Brooklyn native was a well-known entertainment lawyer, he had managed high-profile musical artists and he was even playing in a band himself — but on one fateful day his whole life was thrown into a tailspin.

At the peak of Dieguez’s music career in 2004, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Luckily for Dieguez, doctors discovered the cancer early enough to remove the tumor quickly and successfully, thereby skirting any disaster.

“What cancer did was it made me re-evaluate things,” said Dieguez. “During my recovery, I was trying to figure out where to go from there. I felt like I had a second shot at life, so I thought what do I want to do now.”

After overcoming cancer, Dieguez went through a sort of metamorphosis — namely he came to the realization that there was more to life out there, potentials that he had yet to tap, sights he still had not seen.

Dieguez’s close encounter with his own mortality had done more than change his view on life — it had changed him, inextricably so. Dieguez was forced to re-examine his life, seeking out the parts of his daily routine that were truly essential to his being and culling all of extraneous byproducts.

During this soul searching, Dieguez realized that he was no longer the same person that he had been, and his name no longer did his true purpose in life justice. In that moment, Dieguez evolved into someone else.

He became Xiomáro.

“I took on this alter-ego, if you will, and there is something psychologically freeing about that,” said Xiomáro. “Xiomáro is actually a made-up name in all truth, it derives from an old Spanish name for women, but what I did was make it masculine. The name means ‘ready for battle’ and so that connected with me because, having overcome cancer, I had had to battle for my life.”

As his new pseudonym suggested, Xiomáro was not prepared to give up fighting. So, with this newfound state of consciousness, Xiomáro began to look for different avenues of success in life.

Back in his Dieguez days, Xiomáro had begun to flirt with photography, taking shots of the different venues that his band played, and in the process he had developed an acute eye. With life now stretching unexpectedly before him, Xiomáro decided to try and nurture this talent to see where it would bring him.

During his recovery from cancer, Xiomáro had repeatedly found solace in hiking and wandering around parks. Now with this new endeavor on his mind, he sought out that solitude again—this time for inspiration.

Xiomáro got to work on pursuing his new passion, but his photography career didn’t really get jumpstarted until he was struck by a stroke of luck.

One day in 2010, he was alerted by a AAA newsletter about a small farm in a small town called Wilton. Weir Farm was recommended for its inspiration, idyllic views, and to Xiomáro, it seemed like the perfect place to grow as an artist.

As fate would have it, on a whim Xiomáro decided to visit Weir Farm for a weekend, and in doing so he learned of their artist-in-residence program.

The weekend came and went rapidly, but weeks afterward Xiomáro was still fixated on this artist-in-residence program.

In 2011, Xiomáro decided to take the risk and apply for the residency program—a decision that, in retrospect, likely launched his acclaimed career.

Yet, as Weir Farm superintendent Linda Cook tells it, the move not only aided Xiomáro's career, but it benefitted the farm as well.

“His photographs are by far the most intriguing and the most interesting that have been taken of the Weir residence,” said Cook. “His work really brings out the unique qualities of the historic buildings.”

“We’ve had other photographers come in for special events to come and take photographs for us, and we’ll use them for as long as we have to, but when Xio gets a chance, we’ll actually ask him to come in and re-shoot those same photographs, because it has so much more depth or color or structure or layout, there’s something about his design and color that just can’t be replicated,” she added.

Xiomáro's acceptance at Weir Farm, gave him the once in a lifetime chance to shoot the interior of the historic house of Julian Alden Weir, one of the fathers of American impressionism.

His shots of the Weir Farm house before and after it had been refurbished became a huge hit, with a majority of the collection eventually landing in the Washington, D.C. office of then-U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman, who had been working on getting Weir named a National Park.

From there, Xiomáro began taking notice from powerful art brokers, eventually compounding his success into more great opportunities. His excellence in shooting natural landscapes, as well as historical houses, led to multiple commissions from the National Park Service.

These include the Oyster Bay home and Summer White House of former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt; the estate of William Floyd, a Founding Father and signer of the Declaration of Independence; the studio of Mahonri Young, a sculptor of the Ashcan School; the home of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (previously the headquarters of George Washington) and the office of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

These works have been displayed all over the world from the halls of Congress and galleries of Harvard University to the walls of the Siena Art Gallery in Italy.

But, none of this would have happened if it weren't for his first commission at Weir Farm.

“There is a lot of culture and history centered around that area, so if there was any place that was going to change my life, that was the ideal one,” said Xiomáro. “Everything that I have accomplished today traces back to Weir Farm, obviously there were things that happened before that that had prepared me for Weir Farm, but these exhibits and commissions definitely are rooted in Weir Farm.”

To celebrate this symbiotic relationship between the farm and Xiomáro, Weir Farm named Xiomáro their Centennial Visiting Artist in honor of the National Park Services' upcoming 100th anniversary.

In honor of his work at Weir Farm and other historic sites, Xiomáro's photos will be exhibited in Hartford next month both at the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and in October at the Legislative Office Building. To learn more about Xiomáro, visit his website: xiomaro.com.