

INTERVENXIONS

2022

Volume 1

The Latinx Project at NYU



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2022

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**A BRIEF
INTRODUC-
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The following interviews are culled from *Intervencions*, a digital publication that began in earnest at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the cancellation of events and stay-at-home orders in place, I shifted into the role of editor, working with our director Arlene Dávila to put together a few articles mostly responding to the pandemic in some way or another. Our sense of purpose deepened during the summer of 2020 amid the mass demonstrations triggered by the police murder of George Floyd. We continued working ad-hoc for months, until the fall semester, when *Intervencions* coalesced around a team of three editors and weekly editorial meetings that became a refuge creatively, intellectually, and spiritually—an experience for which I am eternally grateful. With the addition of Janel Martínez and Yollotl López, *Intervencions* was able to produce more ambitious work, including a collection of political essays solicited from The Latinx Project's conference, *Latinx Politics—Resistance, Disruption, and Power*. For the summer of 2021, we were joined by Jorge Cruz, whose writing for *Intervencions* on queer representations in Latinx art became part of a much larger body of work on Latinx art, including the interviews in this catalog. Credit to Alex Santana, who stepped into the role of associate editor following the departures of Janel and Yollotl—it was her suggestion to republish primary source material in the first of what we hope will become a series of volumes covering different topics within Latinx Studies. For now, we are simply thrilled for the sense of permanence that comes with *Intervencions* going from digital to print, and offer this modest selection of interviews and conversations, which cover an eclectic range of topics that represent the breadth and dynamism of our publication.

To our readers, our contributors and collaborators, and above all, my colleagues, thank you.

NÉSTOR DAVID PASTOR

PLACE MAKING

Placemaking, however broadly defined, speaks to intentionality; that is, the many ways in which we infuse place with meaning and purpose, and above all, a sense of connection. In return, place holds so much of who we are and where we come from, a collective memory that we claim, for better or worse, as we each carry our unique sense of place into the world. If anything, the pandemic and subsequent lockdown have only heightened awareness of the role that place plays in our lives. In this section, the ability to gather in community, in protest or celebration, and despite the threat of contagion, repression, etc., is what makes placemaking such a transformative concept. This is precisely what informs the self-described “site-responsive artwork” of Edra Soto. Through the use of Caribbean architecture and other symbolic elements, such as a series of redesigned flags, the Chicago-based artist establishes a literal and figurative connection between colonial structures on the island and the history of U.S. imperialism. Similarly, Victoria Martinez employs mapmaking to revisit and preserve the Mexican heritage of the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago where she was raised and is currently based. Francisco Donoso, in turn, adds color to rehabilitate the drab image of the border fence as a site of oppression and exclusion. In doing so, the colors bleed into one another in a way that our physical and mental borders do not allow. Placemaking is therefore an act of healing, an urgent plea to reconnect with ourselves and the environment around us.

By Eva Mayhabal Davis

MAPPING INTUITION: AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTORIA MARTINEZ



Victoria Martinez, *What the cards say* (2021). Nylon, chiffon, cotton, spandex, silk, eyelash fabric, foil chiffon, paint, lava gel, and dyes. Approx: 9 x 18 inches.

Victoria Martinez's work explores landscapes, systems of power, and archiving particular sites as a form of honoring histories. In her abstractions, there are portals of reimagining spaces and memories, as well as embracing alternative methods of mapmaking. This is most notable in the material layers and textured textiles that are painted and transformed into an intuitive language.

On the occasion of Next Chapter, Victoria's solo exhibition at TSA Chicago, Eva Mayhabal Davis, co-director at Transmitter asked a few questions to contextualize Victoria's work further.

EMD: One of the premises in your work is yourself as the flâneur, the observer of the city. Can you take us on a journey—what do you look for when you wonder or what have you come across recently that caught your eye? How do you eventually translate this into painting?

VM: I observe murals and decaying paint. I study the geometry and surface of public art, and how it varies between metal and brick. I'm currently based in Chicago and live in Pilsen, where I was raised. Every time I walk to the 18th Street pink line station, I photograph different intersections of the paintings that exist on the stairs leading up the trains. The steps and walls are covered with vibrant murals depicting various perspectives of Mexican iconography including Aztec calendars, nature, combinations of Indigenous and colonial architecture, and Selena. A lot of it is decaying or buffed and I believe it will be repainted soon so I'm documenting the space to preserve some of the culture for my archives. I love to examine different angles

of the stairs and walls that I feel are often overlooked. I see fascinating compositions made of color fields and aging paint that creates this rich texture. I translate these perspectives into my own paintings by allowing my intuition to guide me. I reiterate the murals and architecture through abstract painting with fabric, dyes, and bleach.

EMD: This brings various inquiries to mind, when you describe layers that peel and decay or build up on top of each other. Are you conscious of the direct influence of the urban space, does your work connect outside of the urban environment?

VM: I'm definitely conscious of the direct influence of the urban environment, especially because I grew up in the Pilsen community. This neighborhood is full of murals and graffiti and it helped me develop my art practice. I have always been inspired by the scale and color palettes included in public art. Furthermore, I love to travel to Latin America because I have a lifelong commitment to



Installation photo of "Next Chapter," works of Victoria Martinez at TSA: Chicago, 2021. Photo by Tom Van Eynde, Courtesy of TSA, Chicago and Transmitter, NY.

researching my Mexican roots and its cross-cultural connections that relate to additional parts of the world. I research textiles, archaeological sites, and ancient pyramids when I travel. I believe there is an association between murals and the monumental scale of the pyramids.

EMD: I like the concept of building blocks and the immediate and intricate relationship of the grid system. You have this continued interest in studying ancient places, and through your art, you're citing a memory of the sacred sites you've visited in the past. It's like these spaces function as a place of study and meditation for you.

VM: In a sense, I feel like I'm viewing a live encyclopedia. It's all about the experience of being there in person to understand a morsel of the intellectual and spiritual strength that once existed on earth. I believe it still exists. One site where I felt the most alive was in Bacalar, Quintana Roo in Mexico. I didn't see pyramids but I had the chance to experience Lago Bacalar (Lake of the Seven Colors), which consisted of seven cenotes. A cenote is a natural well, and Bacalar's cenotes dropped as deep as 150 meters. From what I learned in Bacalar, cenotes are associated with Indigenous rain gods and are the source of where stars are born. During my trip, I met a chef and we went on an adventure with a surfer/pirate on a makeshift boat. One of the most memorable cenotes the surfer showed us felt like a cloud. I remember getting off the boat and sitting on white sand. The clouds and the sky were the exact same color of the sand. That's the moment that inspired me to create maps. I wanted to recreate and visually document that specific place in time because I couldn't believe that I ended up there. I wasn't planning on visiting Bacalar during my trip but I took a risk and it was one of my best experiences as an artist because the water took away a lot of emotions from me and granted me new strength.

A map is a form of documentation. I remember an art history course I took in graduate school, which was about Mexican art in the sixteenth century. The professor would say that there aren't enough documents to provide the history of Indigenous people and their contributions to Mexico. However, there are plenty of drawings and maps of how colonizers directed the indigenous population to construct churches across Mexico. This academic course motivated me to create artwork based on what I see and study in Latin America and the U.S., and I am currently developing a series of maps as documents of my existence in the arts.

EMD: Can you talk more about your experiences with textiles? Where does your passion for fiber stem from? Where in Mexico have you gained more insight?

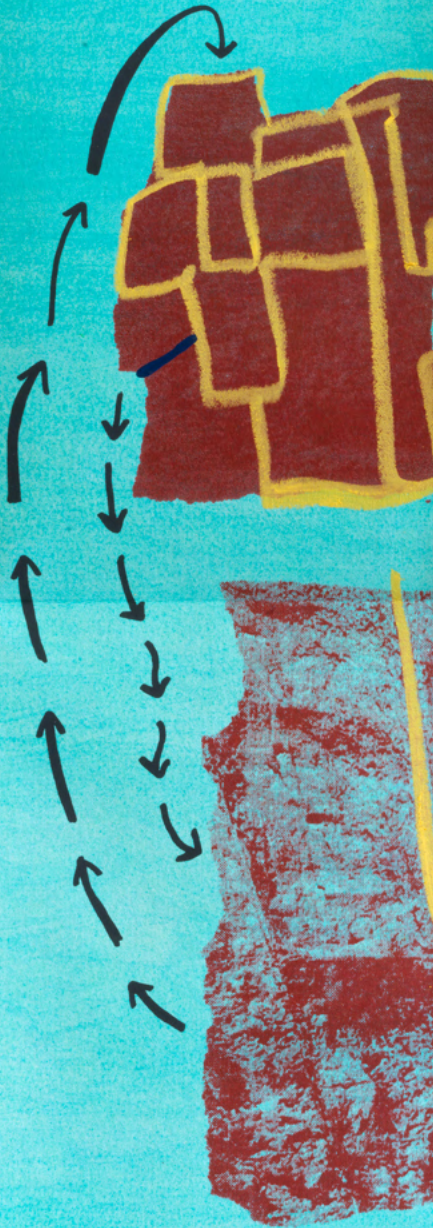
VM: My grandmother taught me how to hand sew when I was a child. However, my first research trip was to El Salvador when I was twenty-three. I had the desire to learn from women and expand my textile knowledge outside my academic training in the United States. I worked with a collective of women through Walls of Hope, an art and human rights project that once existed in Central America. Through this experience, I led painting workshops for the collective and they led embroidery workshops where I learned a lot about the history of El Salvador. We created a large-scale installation that combined the techniques and exhibited the project in their community.

Moving on, I believe there are several different ways to learn, which is part of the reason why I go to Mexico. My most recent trip was to Oaxaca where I spent time meeting textile artists and studying at numerous places. Some of the places included Centro de las Artes de San Agustín, Museo Textil de Oaxaca, Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú Oaxaca, and Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca. I read through various books on textiles and

GUÍA ALTERNATIVA DE UNA PARED



DISCURSO SOBRE LAS
PASIONES DE LA ARQUITECTURA
IMAGINANDO LA
GRAN DIOSA de TEOTIHUACÁN
CONTEMPORÁNEA





Victoria Martinez, *Guía Alternativa de Una Pared* (2021). Screenprint, solidified paint, and gouache on paper. 15.5 x 24 inches.

painting and started to think more deeply about painting and how the history of painting cannot exist without textiles. I also read about Anni Albers and her site visits to the pyramids of Monte Albán in Oaxaca. She spent a lot of time studying the pyramids and created weavings in response to what she saw. I admire this process and am grateful that Anni Albers took the time to focus on this type of project in Mexico. However, I feel that there is space and time for this project to be reiterated. There are many Indigenous groups in Oaxaca that should be included in this type of project because they are the most knowledgeable on the subject, landscape, and history. Additionally, the natural dyes that exist in Oaxaca need to be acknowledged and celebrated.

EMD: Your new maps in your recent solo show “Next Chapter” feel like the beginning of something bigger. Can you please describe what you’re thinking about in terms of expanding this body of work?

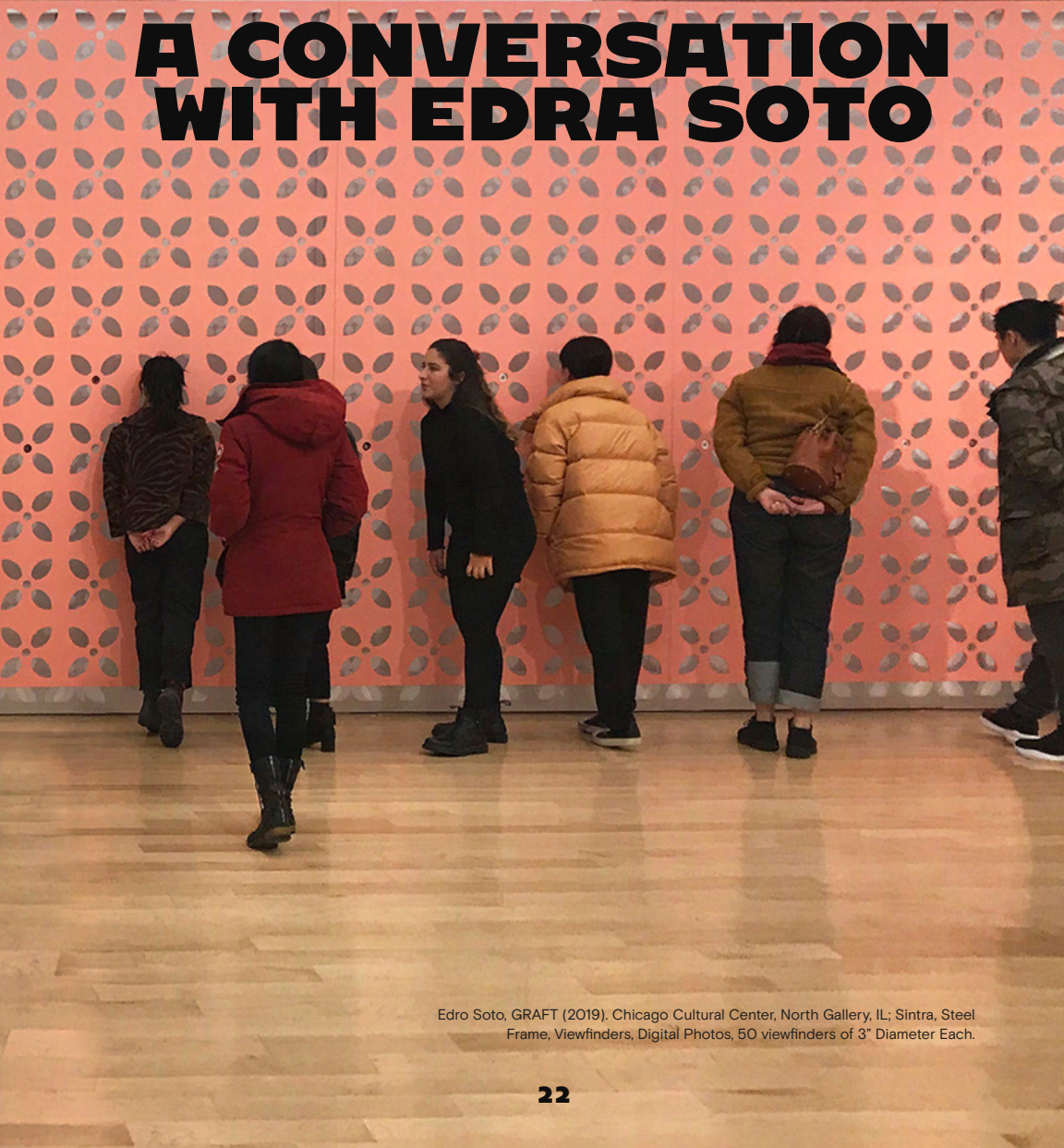
VM: The maps are very exciting for me. I want to continue making them and expand the artwork into a large-scale project that requires the public to interact with the work. I currently made maps that include fragments of industrial walls, fruit, Lake Michigan, and my body. I imagine creating large sculptures with bricks that I cover in paint and textiles to replace the fragments of the industrial wall that I printed in my maps. The sculptural map would exist in a public space like a beach or a park and I would invite people to explore the project. The map would be activated by people exploring the sculptures. Their footprints would replace the arrows that I printed in my maps, as their steps are another form of drawing and mark making. My goal is to make the maps a collective effort in different sites so I can share my vision with people.

This interview was originally published on October 1st, 2021.

By Natalia Viera-Salgado

NAVIGATING COLONIAL HISTORIES:

A CONVERSATION WITH EDRA SOTO



Edro Soto, GRAFT (2019), Chicago Cultural Center, North Gallery, IL; Sintra, Steel Frame, Viewfinders, Digital Photos, 50 viewfinders of 3" Diameter Each.

CHICAGO-BASED, PUERTO RICAN INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST EDRA SOTO'S WORK IS ABOUT BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

Through sharing experiences and questioning histories, Soto invites us to reimagine and meet between worlds. The way one feels about Soto's work is something quite special, that very same feeling of community gets activated through her work by incorporating food, elements of memory and place such as tiny viewfinders, while also creating spaces for joy.

With her architectural interventions and sculptural work, and what she calls "site-responsive artwork," Soto also suggests looking back to our colonial histories around ideas of territories, *Graft* and *Screenhouse* are two such examples. These particular interventions talk about post-war architecture in the Caribbean, particularly houses in Puerto Rico with "rejas" (iron screens) that have become ubiquitous in our quotidian landscapes on the island, especially for those of us born and raised there. In the past, these rejas served as protection devices and have become characteristic of a decorative aesthetic for the island's visual culture. However, they also carry exploitative Antillean histories which we may not be aware of due to our colonial condition.

These ideas around memory and the in-betweenness of the artist's geographical relationship with Puerto Rico and the United States can be adapted to different communities the same way her work *Graft* is placed in a building. Soto invites the public to engage with dialogues around communities and environments that offer space for empathy and generosity within an educational framework. That complements her work and proposes the following question: what can we learn and unlearn from our past and present histories and in which way does this inform our future? Another example that refers to this and practically offers a space for unlearning our histories is her work *Tropicalamerican*, which consists of four redesigned flags—the American, the Puerto Rican, and, two versions of the city of Chicago's flag. This work addresses plantations in the Caribbean as a result of agricultural exploitation to produce crops such as coffee, plantain, and sugar cane, among others. But the creation of the *Tropicalamerican* flags with green tropical leaves in the form of geometric patterns also reflects on traditional quilting techniques used to make hats, rugs, and island souvenirs in the Caribbean. Beyond just a reflection, it is a representation of a clear example of the disparities between the United States and Puerto Rico, a complicated colonial relationship that remains clearly unresolved for some.

Natalia Viera-Salgado (NVS): You have been making work around architecture found in the Caribbean for a while now and also doing interventions in places that do not look like the Caribbean, we can see this in your works *Graft*, *Manual Graft*, and *Screenhouse*. What is the intention of doing an intervention in an institution or building that does not possess these qualities or aesthetics? Can you also talk about the meaning of the name *Graft* in the work?

Edra Soto (ES): *GRAFT* is an ongoing project representative of vernacular architectural interventions that take the form of immersive installations and accompanying publications. Citing structures known as quiebrasoles and rejas found predominantly in Puerto Rico, *GRAFT* physically interconnects this existing architecture to a site specific place while conceptually representing an imaginary transplant or migratory gesture. *Manual GRAFT* arrives to viewers in performative form and *Screenhouse* is a self-standing version that responds to the built environment conceptually and materially.

NVS: These works are clearly inspired by 1950's houses from gated and non-gated communities on the island and vernacular art from Puerto Rico. What can architecture teach us about our colonial histories? It almost feels like it works as an accomplice or as a registered document of our colonial past.

ES: I kept thinking about populous knowledge. What do we know about the places we live? What kind of historic and cultural value do they have and why we didn't learn that during our formative years? So to me, it's a debate between historic colonial architecture versus residential architecture. Professor Jorge Ortiz Colom's monograph, *The African Influence in the Design Build Edification of Puerto Rico*, states that criollo architecture, which incorporates quiebrasoles and rejas, originated from sub-Saharan Africa through

the population brought to Puerto Rico as slaves to work on plantations during the rise of colonization. He argues that this influence is largely overlooked by historians due to the impression that, "Africans could not transplant their ancestral ways of life under the inhumane conditions of their transfer, and the lack of freedom in their new home." It was previously thought that this decorative architecture was an amalgamation of European features that had undergone a topicalization through the Western lens. Due to the growing commercial sugar trade between the U.S. and Puerto Rico in the late 19th century, the "style" of criolla architecture was rampantly appropriated in the Southern U.S. and according to Ortiz Colom, sometimes even purchased outright as entire homes and relocated to the U.S.

NVS: Your work *OPEN 24 HOURS* started from an interest in knowing more about the prevalence of empty bottles found on your daily walks in your neighborhood in Chicago's Garfield Park. Can you give context to this project and what did it reveal from this community specifically?

ES: *OPEN 24 HOURS* is a response to the littering of bottles in my neighborhood, East Garfield Park, and how it relates to the historic connection between African Americans and cognac through its genesis in the 1930s to contemporary repercussions instigated by hip-hop and rap culture. Through this project, alcohol glass bottle archives present archaeological evidence of my surroundings and how the refuse material coincides to a history of affiliation as a sign of democracy and acceptance. The visualization of the vast amounts of refuse also serves as a reflection on the complex role of alcohol in our society.

"Cognac's relationship with African American consumers started later, when black soldiers stationed in southwest France were introduced to it during both world wars. The connection between cognac producers

and black consumers was likely bolstered by the arrival of black artists and musicians. France appreciated these distinctive art forms before the U.S. did, continuing a French tradition dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville of understanding aspects of American culture better than Americans did. For African Americans, the elegant cognac of a country that celebrated their culture instead of marginalizing it must have tasted sweet ... During the 1990s, cognac sales were slow, and the industry was battling an

–Reid Mitenbuler, author of *Bourbon Empire: The Past and Future of America's Whiskey*

NVS: I want to talk about your work *Happy Hour* at Casa Rosada, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil which includes a happy hour, dance party and a collaboration with DJ Afrodjia. Can you talk about the initial idea of this work and how this collaboration started?

ES: Back in 2015, I did the first version of the *Happy Hour* project in collaboration with



"Screenhouse" (2020-2021) sculpture at Boeing Gallery North, Millennium Park. Photo credit: Georgia Ruth Hampton.

image populated by fusty geriatrics. Then references to cognac began surfacing in rap lyrics, a phenomenon that peaked in 2001 with Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy's hit "Pass the Courvoisier," causing sales of the brand to jump 30 percent. During the next five years, other rappers teamed up with brands, and increased overall sales of cognac in the U.S. by a similar percentage, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States."

Antiquarian, now Compound Yellow, a project space in Chicago run by Laura Shaffer. The Antiquarian was a beautiful store front with a bar set by the entrance. Assessing the bar and the possibilities of working on that site gave me the idea for the happy hour event. I never created a physical space or installation for it. All my "food activations" have been a direct response to the type of events space and audience they address. For the first *Happy Hour*, I also bought a collection of



Detail of viewfinder *GRAFT* at Chicago Cultural Center. Image courtesy of Jeanne Donegan.

records from my childhood in Puerto Rico, and played them during the event. Nostalgia and memory are the archives examined and recreated for a sensorial experience. At the time, I was already working with food-hybrids like *The Wedding Cake Project*, a recreation of the wedding cake that my mother made for my wedding with my husband Dan in 2002. The motivations behind recreating the cake were related to the symptoms of angst that the experience left. I recreated the cake and placed it at alternative art venues for it to be consumed as an act of celebration, to compensate for the heartache the original cake brought to my life at that moment. This cake is a pineapple - upside down cake that could easily be a part of the various foods represented in *Happy Hour*, but at the time, I was not thinking of the cultural and socio-political content of food. Nowadays, we have more sources of information devoted to food than ever. At some point, it occurred to me that the food that Puerto Ricans consume and have adopted as part of their culture is equally problematic and fascinating. This project allows me to explore these issues and engage in collaboration. Sadie Woods, aka Afrodjia, comes in to the picture as one of my guest artists for the various projects I curated for *Open 24 Hours* at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago for the Commons. I offer a platform for projects like Sadie's, titled *Social Music*, to highlight intellectual discourse within the exhibition's space.

NVS: Thinking about the pandemic and understanding how important the participatory and community aspect is in your work, how do you think that spaces can be activated? As a co-director and co-founder of THE FRANKLIN, have you thought about other ways of creating programs or exhibitions? Do you think that social and community projects will have a transformation?

ES: Within weeks of the pandemic, and because of my interest in forms of engagement, I organized a Live community activation inspired by COVIDtv, a media network that organizes longform programming for IG Live. I was invited to do a live segment with them around the end of March. I teamed with my husband to present a tour of our art collection. I had such a wonderful experience that I felt motivated to organize a day long event. The event was a @thefranklinoutdoor @covidtv takeover. I brought 25 artists and gave them 30 minutes each to go Live. I think what was so remarkable about this moment was the community that I got to involve in the takeover. Most of the artists are represented in our collection, and in their own right they are quite accomplished and beloved in Chicago. I opened the event at 9am with a morning walk - just to set the tone and welcome attendees - and my husband Dan Sullivan closed the event at 10:30pm with a *Tiny Studio Concert*. Dan is a long time musician besides being a designer and fabricator. He has a music studio in our house and he really brought it that night. I keep getting emails and messages from artists and people of the community letting me know how much they enjoyed the experience and that it truly felt like a concert for solidarity. My motivations came from a place of generosity and hope for bringing some joy to all. And yes, I think things will continue to evolve, but if we have the opportunity to be well again, all together, we will take it.

This interview was originally published on June 30, 2021.

By Grecia Huesca Dominguez

REFRAMING THE BORDER: AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCISCO DONOSO

In his current work, Francisco Donoso takes his chain-link fence motif from 2D to 3D and challenges spectators to face the border as a structure of oppression and separation. Donoso's latest site-specific installation is not just a mural, it is a place to meet. The installation is made up of seven panels that reveal a 10ft tall and 20ft wide mural. But it is not something to be looked at from afar. To view the work, one must walk up to it, look at it closely, and immerse oneself in it.



View of artist studio and works during Kates-Ferri Projects Residency. Credit the artist and Kates-Ferri Projects.

Donoso immigrated from Quito, Ecuador as a 5-year old and settled with family in Miami, Florida. As a DACA recipient the issue of immigration is never far from his mind. But while the border wall is usually mentioned, it is not something most people have to look at every day. People can watch the news and turn away from it. Donoso's body of work, in turn, challenges our distance to it and reminds us that it is a real place full of nuance that needs to be experienced and not just theorized about.

Using a colorful and vibrant palette, Donoso's work has always depicted the border fence as a complicated structure. The spaces in the fence are portals that accentuate rhythm and motion. There is an ebb and flow that reminds us that the border, much like immigration and immigrants, is always changing. In our conversation below, Donoso shares more about his ever-evolving work.



Grecia Huesca Dominguez (GHD): Francisco, you are in the midst of your Kates-Ferri Projects Residency where you have continued to work with the chain-link fence motif. How has your work with that motif evolved during this residency?

Francisco Donoso (FD): The fence has gone from a flattened stencil to dimensional and architectural, standing in color fields of illusory space that both ground and reject the fences. The dimensional spaces move in and out of legibility, moving from flat planes of color to modulated forms casting shadows and kissed by ambiguous light sources. The pictures suggest the familiarity of real spaces, archways and tunnels, but deny the viewer an easy explanation, rather they ask the viewer to consider the precariousness of place and belonging.

GHD: As we speak, the border fence is between us and I can't help but think about how it separates but also how our continued communication and collaboration defies its existence. Your work both acknowledges the physical structure and dares to reimagine it. How does your work reimagine the border fence?

FD: I'm exploring the fence as an architecture of play, care, transformation, and possibility,

subverting its power as a symbol and architecture of violence, dislocation, and trauma. I'm asking: what if the fence was there to transition you into your next stage in life? What if the fence was a structure of transformation that welcomed your humanity? What if the fence, and the border that it symbolizes, was a way to signify, and grant passage, rather than entrapment? In some ways I am asking the fence to stop being a fence. I'm subverting its utility. I'm helping it to heal. The fence in my work is never fully realized. It's in a constant state of construction and deconstruction, always in flux, moving in and out of completion. I think of the paintings as spaces within our psyche, where forces compete for resolution, but never lock into place.

GHD: You have a site-specific installation in the studio that takes the chain-link fence motif from the canvas and literally physically expands it into a structure we have to witness. What is the importance of witnessing it as a structure, especially in New York, where you are thousands of miles away from the Southern border?

FD: The installation is both human scale, and larger than life. It's immersive and invites the viewer into its world of dizzying overall color and pattern. There are moments

where everything in sight is charged and you're enveloped in it. Unlike the southern border fence, the energy created by the installation isn't villainous or violent, it's vibrant and seductive. There is a component to experiencing the work that is theatrical or monumental, which invites introspection. I have a spiritual connection to color and pattern at this scale. You almost feel like you're swimming in it. Witnessing the installation allows for new possible realities to emerge. The fence in the work is not machine-made, it's not rigid and it's not sterile. It's imbued with movement, and softened by the gesture of the hand. There is a sense that the fence is cascading throughout the space, dancing and alive. I'm bearing witness to survival, and to resilience.

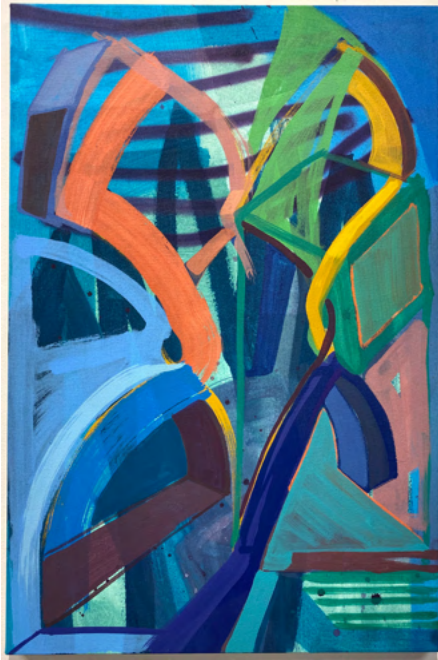
GHD: Over the years, we have seen the violence at the border fence escalate, especially against Black immigrants. The border is both a place synonymous with violence but also of hope. Immigrants trek thousands of miles and through numerous

countries to arrive at the place that they hope will mark a new start for their lives. How do you navigate the nuance of what this place means in your work?

FD: My family came to the US from Ecuador 28 years ago, and set roots down in Miami, Florida. As an undocumented individual with DACA, my relationship to home and belonging change every day. The ongoing, and escalating criminalization of migrants and refugees in the US, particularly Black immigrants, keeps the image of the fence etched in my mind. Borders don't only exist in the physical world, they also exist in our minds and deep within us. Sometimes the journeys taken in migration are not the obvious ones of crossing international borders and fighting to adjust your status. There are journeys happening internally, and we have to find a way of healing and liberating ourselves so that we can exist in our fullest humanity—not the one mediated by authorities. I want my work to be a moment of respite for those that have experienced the traumas of migration.



View of artist studio during Kates-Ferri Projects Residency. Credit the artist and Kates-Ferri Projects.



Francisco Donoso, *The Border Portal* (2021).
30 x 20 inches. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas.
Credit the artist and Kates-Ferri Projects

I want them to find a way of retelling their story that makes room for play, delight and abstraction. I want my work to suggest that every border can be dismantled and crossed, every journey can be navigated, and every ICE will eventually melt.

GHD: As we are seeing during your current residency, your work is evolving. In 2022, you will have your first major solo exhibition at Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville, VA. How do you imagine your work will continue to evolve and take new forms?

FD: I imagine creating more large-scale canvases that continue to explore the fence as architecture of constant change and passage. I want to keep thinking of them as portals, tunnels, and doorways—sites where transformation is welcomed. I imagine the installation growing and taking form based on the physical gallery space, but also

responding to the history of Charlottesville as an historic site—often remembered for the white supremacist rally of 2017. I'm excited to work with the greater Charlottesville community, including students at the University of Virginia, to reimagine borders and fences, reclaim agency for ourselves, and continue imagining a future where migration is the beginning, not the end, of the story.

GHD: I only have one more question. As you imagine your own future, what are you hopeful for as an artist, an immigrant, and just as Francisco?

FD: I'm humbled by every opportunity to share my work and continue making my work. The cards are stacked against you when you're an artist—even more so with the additional barriers that come from being undocumented. I hope that we (the larger undocumented community which includes formerly undocumented people) are able to imagine ourselves free from the trappings of citizenship and nationalism. I hope that while we continue to fight for legislation and legal change, we center the struggles of Black and Indigenous immigrants and refugees, acknowledging the intersectionality of the "immigrant issue." I hope that more undocumented artists and art workers rise in the ranks of the art world—within institutions, in positions of leadership, as a collector base, within contemporary art practices. I hope I get to see the southern border wall demolished within my lifetime.

This interview was originally published on November 5, 2021.



Artist in Kates-Ferri Projects Residency studio. Credit: Yekaterina Gyadu.

ART & EMPIRE

The rise and fall of empire is the repetition of a cycle, the experience of which becomes more acute as we approach an inevitable state of decline and decay. Throughout each stage of this process, the promise of liberation remains dutifully on the horizon, ultimately fulfilled and cultivated as a ritual of resistance, a survival instinct. The role of art is to break this cycle, to invest in counternarratives just beyond the horizon, and reconfigure reality in a way that satisfies our visceral longing for transcendence. In this section, the ruins of a tobacco factory allow Alicia Díaz and Patricia Herrera to establish a throughline from Puerto Rico to Virginia, and embody the obscured narratives of revolutionary women figures. Colonial vestiges also surface in a conversation between visual artist Patricia Encarnación and poet Darrel Alejandro Holnes. Together, they bear witness to the ancestors who sought freedom—from the cimarrones of Panamá to the Freeman community in Samaná Bay—while reflecting on the way U.S. imperialism has altered their personal trajectories. Lastly, Lourdes Bernard insists on a historical reckoning that highlights the role of the Women of April, and their heroic efforts during the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965.

By Alex Santana

THE WOMEN OF APRIL: AN INTERVIEW WITH LOURDES BERNARD





Women of April drawing installation, courtesy of the New York Studio School.

Lourdes Bernard is a Dominican–American artist who makes multimedia works on paper addressing historical events and how they take shape within a landscape. Her research-based practice unravels complex histories through visual storytelling, ultimately inviting viewers to contemplate shared experiences. Her solo exhibition, *Mujeres de Abril*, was on view in 2022 at the New York Studio School.



AS: Tell us a bit about your newest body of work, *The Women of April (Las mujeres de abril)*, and how these paintings fit into your broader research practice.

LB: “The Women of April” is a research-based group of works on paper that commemorate the upcoming 57th anniversary of the April 1965 revolution and U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. The narrative images celebrate and highlight the role of “The Women of April,” untrained civilian resistance fighters who fought against the 42,000 U.S. Marines ordered by Lyndon B. Johnson to invade the small Caribbean nation. Shortly after I attended the D.C. Women’s March in 2017, the new administration began to roll out controversial immigration policies targeting vulnerable immigrant groups. I became curious about my own parents’ migration journey and began historical research which led to a three-part Dominican Migration series. I wanted to unpack the catalysts that led to the creation of the vast Dominican diaspora, now the largest immigrant group in New York City. When I discovered the *Women of April* I knew I wanted to make images about them. The women were attorneys, journalists, artists, teachers, academics, housewives, and students ranging in age and economic status. I was particularly excited because I’d previously made images about women warriors as part of another body of work, “The Art of War,” which I began several years ago when the war in Iraq entered its 9th year. Those images were colorful and figurative images exploring aggression in war as face to face encounters. In that work, the images I made were not tied to a particular

history, people or conflict. In doing research for that series I came across the Dahomey warrior women, a.k.a. “The Minon,” which means “our mothers,” who faced off against the French when they attempted to colonize Benin. I made large format images of Warrior Women to deconstruct the notions of male power in a society informed by colonization. Some are rather large and monumental. When I discovered *Las Mujeres de Abril*, it was familiar artistic territory and this time I got to make work where I had a particular connection to the historical context, so it was exciting.

AS: Would you consider your work to be archival, or filling in historical gaps in popular memory that intentionally hide legacies of U.S. imperialism?

LB: Absolutely. The process of making images was very organic. I began researching the Trujillo era to better understand authoritarianism and also to reclaim the history which had led to April 1965. So the first set of 40 images begins with the Trujillo era and ends with the April 1965 U.S. invasion, showcasing the Dominican civilian resistance and *The Women of April*. The works also unpack the immigrant narrative that is tied to U.S. militarism. This universal story is current and still unfolding today as we see people displaced by war rightfully fleeing for safety. The ink images are a prologue to April 1965 and yet they also mirror and name contemporary patterns that are found within all authoritarian regimes. For example, the works “Anatomy of a Dictator”, “Water,” and “Stop, Frisk” are all images which point to



EL COLMADO ASET



la nueva con su nuevo sabor



"Con Su Nuevo Sabor" ©2020 Lourdes Bernard, courtesy of the artist.



"Puerta del Corazón" © Lourdes Bernard, courtesy of the artist.

issues that we are grappling with today.

AS: How does your own personal family history tie into your research on the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in April 1965?

LB: Ciudad Nueva was a key Constitucionalista stronghold in the colonial part of Santo Domingo where the initial invasion of the Americas by Columbus also occurred 500 years prior. When the U.S. invaded Santo Domingo, my parents and siblings lived in Ciudad Nueva, in a house with a sunny courtyard and a parrot named Cuca. Our family was displaced and separated shortly after the invasion. Until I began this research I didn't know my story well enough to feel the impact of my immigrant experience. I made the first images in shock, then anger, which gradually gave way to awe and that felt like a new beginning. It didn't settle anything for me that our time in Ciudad Nueva coincided with the U.S. bombing and occupation of Santo Domingo so I set out to document history as a way to witness what happened. I made drawings to fixate on something, to capture and digest the past clearly for the first time. The historical drawings became part of my story, which is also a universal story of immigrants forced to flee the instability created by war. This body of work raises questions about the impact of militarism and the cultural price of displacement and migration.

AS: Does this history inform your approach to making drawings or paintings?

LB: The first set of images are a visual archive of the Trujillo era and the images are drawn directly in an old family album with yellowed pages. Using a restricted palette of sumi ink and gray washes allowed me to emphasize the shadows of this difficult history and to reinforce the sharp contrast between light and dark as a metaphor for authoritarianism.

AS: How do audiences usually respond to your work? Does context matter? Does it depend on the audience's relationship to the DR, or its diaspora?

LB: Well the audience responds to the work on two levels—first, they respond to the art and then to the content. Proximity to this Dominican history doesn't affect the response, which is overwhelmingly strong and positive and moving. Once folks get past the shock that this history was unknown to them, or kept from them, they have expressed many feelings, including gratitude to a desire to learn more or feeling enlightened about this part of U.S. history and being impacted by the art. Most women connect to the empowering feminist images of *Las Mujeres de Abril*, and many men also find them inspiring. As part of the research I hand out a "beyond the exhibition" questionnaire to gauge the social impact of this work. Some of the American comments have been: "I was surprised about the history of U.S. imperialism that I was ignorant about. I'm reminded how art adds another dimension to our experience and creates a more emotional and spiritual connection." Other immigrants with similar diasporic histories have expressed a moment of encounter and recognition: "the same thing happened in my country South Korea." Of course the most concrete responses come from Dominicans who express being touched by work that commemorates women who were central to the struggle in April 1965, a really important chapter in Dominican history. Many Dominicans shared their stories of April 1965 as they viewed the art and that makes it even more poignant.

AS: Some striking works from *The Women of April* include women in poses of rest, while they simultaneously wield weapons. Specifically, "Love as Resistance" and "Disobedience" feature women in moments of respite (or even celebration) who still maintain their right to self-defense against an invasive militaristic empire. Are these

poses informed by archival research or are they emotional portraits of brave women during a state of duress?

LB: The woman in repose with a gun in "Disobedience" is in fact a historical Mujer de Abril, Carmen Josefina Lora Iglesias. Nicknamed "Picky Lora," she was a lifelong revolutionary and an attorney who played a significant role in April 1965 by providing civilian women with basic combat training. She was also the only woman who participated in the June 14th movement in DR, which attempted to overthrow Trujillo in 1959 by launching an invasion with two hundred combatants. So as a lifelong revolutionary it was fitting that even in rest she was prepared. The woman in "Love as Resistance" is fictional. The phrase comes from a conversation with a friend about how resistance is also about sustaining healthy connections to community, family, friends, and partners.

AS: How do you use (or withhold) color in your works as a formal strategy for the creation of a mood or tone?

LB: As an oil painter, I consider myself a colorist. However, in this body of work I reserved color primarily to depict The Women of April and sometimes to depict contemporary issues. When I looked at the historical photographs of these women I was struck by the many symbols of femininity, lipstick, curlers, manicured nails, and chanclas, and the juxtaposition of these symbols with the weapons they carried. The women simply showed up as themselves. There was something hopeful and life-giving about their determined participation in April 1965. I wanted to celebrate that feminine energy through the use of color.

AS: How do you see your research evolving in the future?

LB: The process for this project was quite different for me. Before I began making the work I engaged members of various

communities by asking them to share their stories with me of April 1965. This includes both Dominicans and Americans who were in the Dominican Republic during April 1965. Sometimes the images in this body of work were inspired by a phrase or just a part of a personal narrative. These personal accounts now live in the work which is now part of the legacy of April 1965. Using oral histories was new for me and very powerful and hopefully I'll get to repeat that process for another project.

This interview was originally published on March 29, 2022.

"THE WOMEN SIMPLY SHOWED UP AS THEMSELVES. THERE WAS SOMETHING HOPEFUL AND LIFE-GIVING ABOUT THEIR DETERMINED PARTICIPATION IN APRIL 1965. I WANTED TO CELEBRATE THAT FEMININE ENERGY THROUGH THE USE OF COLOR."

By Carlos Rivera Santana, Whitney Ledesma & Malvika Shrimali

ENTRE PUERTO RICO Y RICHMOND: A CONVERSATION ON EMBODIED DECOLONIAL CREATION WITH ALICIA DÍAZ & PATRICIA HERRERA



Still from *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*, 2020. Directed by Alicia Díaz.

This text¹ is a result of a collaborative process orbiting a collaborative project, a conversation stemming from events centered on *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*. This award-winning film²—most recently presented in March 2022 at the University of Richmond and in November 2021 at the College of William & Mary’s Muscarelle Museum—is a product of a collaborative ethos in which all participants are recognized as co-creators. One of its main messages is a focus on linkages, the *entre* [between] that suggests what powerful women like Luisa Capetillo called for and worked toward.

Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond... centers its narrative on the embodied personifications of Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922) and Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909–1981). This text coincides with the 100th anniversary of Capetillo’s death on April 10, 1922. Capetillo, an anarcho-syndicalist and radical feminist, and de la Cruz Becerril, an Afro–Puerto Rican leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party who survived the 1937 Ponce Massacre, were women in resistance. *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond...* goes beyond educating us about these overlooked figures and celebrates Capetillo and de la Cruz Becerril’s radical activism.

Finally, *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond...* augments its complexity by weaving interrelated histories from Virginia and Puerto Rico’s colonial capitalist context, represented materially in the former American Tobacco Company warehouse where the piece was filmed. These linkages are framed from a critical-creative practice where radical imagination can constitute overlooked colonial histories. Notwithstanding, Capetillo and de la Cruz Becerril, both tobacco factory readers, likely did not meet. There is also very little information about the Black female tobacco stemmers union leaders that the film honors and the segregation they faced at the American Tobacco Company warehouse in Virginia. Moreover, Virginia and Puerto Rico are ‘commonwealths,’ though Puerto Rico remains a non-incorporated territory (a euphemism for an arcane form of colonialism). The film’s interrelated histories link the perverse politics of patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism or coloniality, and racial capitalism that all depend on disproportionately extracting more labor out of racialized and gendered bodies. At the same time, the film eclipses these processes through a powerful foregrounding of Blackness, Brownness, Ritual and Femininity, and the indisputable power of these celebrated linkages. As Luisa Capetillo stated in *Ensayos Libertarios*³:

“La organización [social] es el único medio defensivo contra el Sistema actual. Es el único medio para combatir las injusticias que se nos cometen contra todos los que producen”.

¹This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Carlos Rivera Santana (CRS): You both share a fascinating artistic trajectory, transiting between dance, performance, art, theater, and more. Yet perhaps a good entry point for this conversation could be to focus on your individual trajectories leading to the video art/performance film *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*. I am particularly interested in how you both arrive at this powerful project as co-creators.

Alicia Díaz (AD): I come from a family of artists. My mother, Alma Concepción, was a dancer with Ballets de San Juan in Puerto Rico. She was a student of Gilda Navarra, director of Taller de Histriones and co-founder of Ballets de San Juan with Ana García. So I grew up in that world—Gilda was my godmother. I insisted I wanted to dance since I was three. So when my mother opened a dance studio in Río Piedras downstairs from where we lived, she opened a class for three-year-olds and up. So literally I have been dancing my entire life.

I migrated when I was twelve from San Juan to Princeton, New Jersey, where my father, Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, was teaching at Princeton University. Dance became my anchor in that traumatic experience of migration. I didn't speak English, I had never encountered questions of my own racial identity in Puerto Rico and that was at the forefront when I came to Princeton, where I was the only Latina in a very segregated school. So all these questions of identity were at the forefront, without a language to be able to articulate it. Dance became the place where I could connect with myself, where I could negotiate a sense of who I am in this nonverbal way. It was also the place of being "othered." I was neither white nor Black. So what do you do with a body like mine? I was in student dance companies at the Princeton Ballet at the time—how do you cast this brown body that doesn't fit into the stories that are being told in the 1980s and 90s?

I also began teaching very early on with my mother. She had a volunteer dance program called Taller de Danza for about 30 years in Trenton, NJ, with the Puerto Rican community where we lived. Dancing also connected me with education. That early training wasn't about creating curriculum, it was about creating community through dance and movement. That's at the core of my understanding of dance as an art form.

When I graduated from high school, I auditioned and was accepted in the Scholarship Program of The Ailey School, the school of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. That was my entry point to a more pre-professional and then professional level in the Black dance community. The experience that Ailey provides for aspiring young dancers was another entry point into thinking about dance, not only through very rigorous technical work, but also what stories do we tell through dance? And there are stories that need to be told that if we don't tell them ourselves, no one will tell them, or they will be told through stereotypes.

CRS: Embodied stories, which sounds like an interesting intersection between performance art and contemporary art. How did these stereotypes affect you in that context?

AD: I was really invested in my understanding of art in that context, while at the same time I was the Other. I was, again, not Black, like the majority of my peers, so all these questions of what it means to be Puerto Rican in this context, a light brown-skinned Puerto Rican in this context, were very present for me. And even in this wonderful world that is inclusive of stories that are not told, what stories of my own heritage, and my own lineage, and my own conditions, am I not able to explore here? I always have this dance with the Other. Being on the margins is a place that I'm very familiar with.

I continued to dance in college. Eventually my parents said, “We support you as an artist, but you have to go to college.” So I continued thinking about anthropology and dance. I did my senior thesis on dance in the Puerto Rican community in New York. So these ideas of oral histories and activating them through movement were already part of what I was thinking as I was completing college.

I met Patricia at Henry Street Settlement in New York City, where we were working with the Urban Youth Theater Ensemble—a program offering young aspiring actors,

Patricia Herrera (PH): Yes, I’ll go backwards from there. So we met in Henry Street Settlement. I had just graduated from Dartmouth College, which, to a city girl like myself, is in the middle of nowhere in New Hampshire. But my interest in theater started there. I literally was in an English writing seminar and the writing consultant said, “Would you audition for my play?” I was like, “I have no experience with theater or anything.” And he said, “It doesn’t matter, I just want you to audition.” And I did. I got the part and from that moment on, I got the theater bug. Just the idea of being on stage and being able



Still from *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*, 2020. Directed by Alicia Diaz.

writers and musicians the opportunity to dive into the world of theater. Our initial connection was through theater director José Joaquín García, who was with *Pregones*. We were both working with José in Henry Street Settlement and we met doing this really intense community work with youth through the arts in the Lower East Side.

CRS: That is a great entry point for Patricia to tell us about her journey leading up to meeting Alicia.

to be somebody else—I don’t think I ever stepped outside of myself. So at that moment, I remember the possibilities of what theater can do and what you can make with theater—if you can just imagine being somebody else, imagine the possibilities.

In 1992, my first year at Dartmouth, I had not experienced the racial tensions yet. I think we were still in our first or second week of the semester, so I was just beginning to kind of settle in. It was in New Hampshire where



Still from *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*, 2020. Directed by Alicia Díaz.

I became politically a Latina, because I had never identified myself as being Latina. I grew up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and everyone looked like me! I grew up in a Caribbean neighborhood. I didn't have to say, "I'm Latina." But I quickly realized how important it was because there were so few of us at that time—there were only 3% Latinos at Dartmouth. It was a small community. That really got me into connecting with other Chicanos there. I would say that I learned my "Boricuaness" in New York and my "Chicanxness" in college.

My mom always talks about how she came here as an immigrant. Both of my parents are from Ecuador. In fact, they came to New York City for their honeymoon, and they never left, so the joke is that they're still on their honeymoon. If you have a child here in the U.S., then they automatically get citizenship. I was the child who made their citizenship possible. My mom talks about how the people who really supported her and made her feel at home were predominantly Puerto Ricans in Brooklyn. She always says she cooks like a Boricua because her friends taught her how to cook. I think that's why I gravitate to Nuyoric culture. My work is on Nuyoric culture and I feel very much connected to that. But ancestrally, my parents are from Ecuador. I have an Afro-Ecuadorian father and my mom is white Ecuadorian of Indigenous descent. But the politics of identity really didn't come to me 'til I was in college, where I had to articulate who I was and where I came from.

I took Chicano studies classes and was very much influenced and shaped by Diana Taylor's work. She was a professor there and she taught Latinx classes. I began to think about how I could use theater to bring in who I am or my experiences into that process. At the time, the students had just founded *Nuestras Voces*, a Latino student theater group. In my second year, a senior passed it on to me to direct the organization. I did not have any experience, but that's okay: ¡Ahí

me metí en el teatro! All of a sudden I was directing Cherríe Moraga's plays and Migdalia Cruz's plays without ever having taken a directing or acting class. I just knew that these were stories that needed to be told and put on stage. So I really kind of dove into theater blindly, but very curious.

CRS: What were you majoring in at Dartmouth College?

PH: I was going to be a Biomedical Sciences major. I was a science student throughout my whole career. While I was doing theater, I was still doing lab work. The directors would be like, "What are you doing?" And I'm like, "I have to do my lab work." It wasn't until junior year when I had the opportunity to study abroad in London that I decided, "Why am I trying to split myself into two people?" The desire to be a doctor was coming from Mami and Papi, who wanted me to have a good profession and a good job. I finally affirmed at the end of my junior year that I wanted to do theater, which of course blew my parents away. They were really upset, "Why are we sending you to college? What are you doing with your life? What is that anyway? I have no idea what you're doing." But it really opened up many possibilities for me because it forced me to be like, "How will I pursue this?" As a child of immigrant parents, education was the only way around having a better life.

And the same way that you're talking about Alicia, it's like, "Well, I have to continue going to school." So los que me dieron la beca was the CUNY Graduate Center and I just embarked on that. How I got to Henry Street Settlement was that my senior year I was determined to continue the route of exploring what Latino theater means. Dartmouth had an opportunity for seniors, like a gap year, where you could apply for funding to study or intern with somebody. I had proposed to apprentice with three Latina playwrights: Carmen Rivera, Migdalia Cruz, and Dolores Prida. They gave me funding for the year to do that. So I

deferred graduate school and did these two apprenticeships. But the money wasn't going to last long, so I started looking into other places and Henry Street Settlement came up as a possibility for me to work there. So while I was apprenticing, I was working at the Henry Street Settlement. I was the coordinator for Urban Theater, which was a great connection because Carmen Rivera also taught playwriting at Henry Street Settlement, and Migdalia Cruz grew up in the Lower East Side. So there were a lot of interesting connections that really helped me to think about how we create culture through the arts. There's something about the creation of language, the production of sound and music—how that happens within the experience of a particular space. And it was clear that these different artists from the Lower East Side were creating their own culture through their art. And that was exciting to me. José is one of these people; Alicia is one of these people. They're bringing their culture and their familial knowledge into the art-making practice. Which for me was really eye opening. The youth's entry point was very different. They were adding a different language into the mix—rapping, beatboxing, and breakdancing became part of this bigger picture, which is what also brought us together, like “Ooh, wow, we're creating new things, creating other possibilities.”

AD: I love hearing that story all in one sitting and this forgotten science world of yours—that's why you're good at math! [laughs].

CRS: I was also pleasantly shaken by the difference, yet sameness of both of your experiences. How they are, como, casi respondiendo a lo mismo, but at the same time, necessarily unlike. It's basically coming from different perspectives, but complementing each other. From performance and dance to theater experiences, dealing with the politics of identity, the ways in which you both found a medium and a language that was not

logocentric or just the dominant/traditional way of understanding how we should express ourselves. Even within that embodied way of expressing the politics of identity—when one goes from one place to another—it's urgent to locate oneself.

Alicia, you were talking about something that stayed with me: that you understand dance as community building. And Patricia, it's so interesting the way you built community through theater and processed otherness through imagining yourself as other when you were first on the stage. At the same time, you were both telling and creating more stories using overlooked representations in narratives, movement, etc.—not the mainstream or canonical way of creating theater or performing dance. Sometimes we don't see ourselves represented. It's not that the stories are not there, it's just not dominant. They're just not easily accessible, particularly in contexts like a university. Building community is the healthiest way to thrive in contexts where underrepresentation seeks to invisibilize us. I can see a common thread in your affirmation of creating work collaboratively—your stance that works like “Entre Richmond y Puerto Rico...” have co-creators and collaborators, and not defined hierarchical roles like director, producer, writer, etc. Did this start with the Henry Street Settlement project?

AD: Yes, Henry Street Settlement is where we, for the first time, [in the 90s] collaborated with each other. With José García as mentor for both of us. For me, he was a crucial person in understanding what the possibilities of performance could provide us. He helped us understand theater as a transformational experience in community and how you can work with youth—this demand for excellence that was really eye opening to me. No matter the circumstances, no matter the conditions that you're working in, this demand for excellence was transformational in the quality of all the creativity that came out of



Still from *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*, 2020. Directed by Alicia Diaz.

that. Then there was a play that Patricia did the dramaturgy and direction for, “A Woman Who Outshone the Sun” [by Lucia Zenteno], within the work that we were doing at Henry Street and with Urban Youth Theater. And I feel that’s where I was working with you, Patricia. Like there was a new way of working together, creatively, through that play, which is a beautiful story of struggle, hope, and strategizing of a community for a future and an environmental issue—like all sorts of ways in which I could look at that experience now that I wasn’t as aware [of] then. So in these ideas of collaboration, the accumulation of years and experiences is really important. It doesn’t have to happen, but in this case it did: a friendship developed and deeply integrated into our lives. Our lives have been connected in very deep ways. We’ve been in each other’s births of our children. That doesn’t have to happen for a successful collaboration, but it is present in this one.

PH: There’s a couple of things that you’re reminding me of. José was directing and was the artistic director of the Urban Youth Theatre Ensemble. Something beautiful that I learned from José is that no matter what,

everyone has a creative contribution to give. As directors and mentors, we have—or at least that’s what I feel José taught me—the ability to make everyone shine, regardless of where they are in their creative process. That level of artistry, it’s a skill to do that. That was something that I feel he definitely passed on to everyone he taught. It’s easy to say, “I’m going to work with youth.” But to commit to working and creating original work with them is a whole different type of work. That is what inspired us to found our theater company, Rubí Theater Company. Alicia, José, Jennifer Fleming, and Amarelys Pérez were part of that. We were committed to working with youth in creating original theater and dance pieces, and really opened the doors for them to just do what they brought to the table. We produced several original plays that were created by youth, and we also created pieces inspired by Martín Espada’s poetry that then were turned into dance/theater pieces incorporating hip-hop elements.

AD: That was with “Imagine the Angels of Bread.”⁴

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CRS: That's a beautiful poem. This is so informative because, in that context, the work that you both did for *Entre Richmond y Puerto Rico*... makes a lot of sense. Obviously, there is a clear, established connection that goes beyond a working relationship. I like the word "vínculo" en español: hay un vínculo ya establecido. The work is clearly intentional, that is seen in the community that participated in the production, the co-creators, as you intentionally name them. So there is a radically collaborative approach to creating work, community, and culture.

Given the overlooked figures of Luisa Capetillo and Dominga Becerril, despite their visionary politics in Puerto Rico and globally, what was the creative process to represent these figures as protagonists in the film? You mentioned that the film was co-created during the pandemic amid the BLM and George Floyd movement. There are even flyers in the film referencing George Floyd protests. How did that manifest in the creative process when bridging the gap between two historical figures, the space of the American Tobacco Company warehouse (all referring to the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century), and contemporary issues such as the BLM movement?

PH: One of the things that was done by two of our co-creators, Christine Wyatt and Cristina Leoni-Osion, was to create values and agreements for the group. The question that was also posed to all of us, "What are you doing to contribute to Black liberation?" This was important because the film crew were not people of color. They had no connections with us, but they asked them that question. Which is a very challenging question if that's not the space you're coming from. Many of us went often, if not daily, to the BLM protests in Monument Avenue in Richmond where Robert E. Lee's statue eventually was removed. But to think that from out of ruins there is beauty, and that beauty can grow,

that brings a sense of joy and freedom. That is something that we talked about: "Wow, we're in the middle of challenging times, but we're also in the middle of this creative project." It's like ecstasy and pain at the same time. And I must say, it's reminding me that the coupling of emotions, two historical figures, Richmond and Puerto Rico, is not harmonious whatsoever. Luisa Capetillo is an anarchist, Dominga is a nationalist, these two philosophies do not necessarily fit nicely together. Even thinking about all of our co-creators, not all of them were people of color. We had a Black woman who was questioning, "Well, why am I embodying an Afro-Puerto Rican woman? What does that mean? What does it mean to me? And how do you reconcile those differences?" In the case of Cristina Leoni-Osion, her family were Italian immigrants who worked in a tobacco company. She had a history without even knowing that linking histories existed with her family. She was like, "How do I create from this space, knowing very well that my ancestors also had a similar experience in a place like this?" This creative process is about inciting historical imagination. What does it mean to bring different historical figures from different periods, who wouldn't necessarily be on the same pathways, together? What we realized is that these kinds of couplings—history, political ideas, personal experiences, countries—bring us to notions of coalition building, and what does that show, and how do we take those strategies of coalition building into our present moment for justice and equity?

AD: That brings me back because we didn't talk that much about Luisa and Dominga and their work. Christine and Cristina didn't know these figures either. Patricia gave them biographical notes on Luisa Capetillo and Dominga Becerril, all of the writings of Luisa, the interview given to *Claridad*, etc. That was our research and the materials we collected for them to also investigate these historical figures, to be able to embody them.

I remember Cristina saying, “How can we be making a work based on Luisa Capetillo and all that she stands for and her ideas, and not think about how we’re making the work in relation to all those political positions?” Anarcho-syndicalism, radical feminism, anti-colonialism, self-determination, and more. That was really interesting, because it’s not just the embodying of the character, but it entails a meaningful engagement with the material, with the thinking, the doing, the action of the women in the making of a political imagination and coming together, alive, in the process.

CRS: That is so powerful, and the idea of unforeseen connections and relationships, perhaps non-linear relationships. Even Richmond (rich world) and Puerto Rico (rich port) have an almost homonym connection, perhaps to name or target a place for the purposes of extraction for profit which can define colonialism. In the presentation of the film at the Muscarelle Museum at William and Mary, we discussed how the work is at the intersection of a few artistic genres—dance, theater, literature, video art, visual art, and performance art—and how it revisits the idea of genre and tries to even implode categorizations of genres. It’s not really a film that has a traditional narrative; it’s not solely a dance performance; it’s not only a film that depicts a theater play; it’s not a purely abstract video art piece in the tradition of the 1930s surrealist movement. I’m thinking that it’s in the path of the contemporary, a perpetual present.

Thinking of that, what are your thoughts of these new emerging mediums, artists, new ways of doing work and new cultures, and how do you see your work in relation to these new landscapes of creativity? Broadly, I am curious about both of your reflections on the future of culture and art.

AD: That’s a big question Carlos! (laughs)

PH: Sure! (laughs). We’ve created a workshop

entitled “Using The Arts For Social Change,” which encourages participants to bring their personal history and connect with other people. We ask participants to bring three objects that express who they are. They get a chance to share an object and then create a piece about their object, but in relationship to other people who have come to the workshops and share their objects as well. At the end of the day, what we’ve done is create a community archive of people’s personal objects. At the same time, we’ve created a vocabulary in which people are connecting their history with other people! Very contrary to how we think about history traditionally. To think about future work, it’s more related to how we create a sense of presence today, and bring light to people’s histories, experiences, and stories, and make it important—because they matter! I think part of what’s so violent about being in academia is that you’re supposed to not be in your story and not be in your body, and you study and examine other people’s stories and bodies. The work that I feel is really urgent is how do you connect your story to these histories? How do we find ways of connecting, relating, building coalitions? I’m also thinking about the dance piece “We Must Say Her Name” and how our youth or just people in general are disconnected from that history because it’s painful! Because sometimes you don’t want to see it! How do you make a history that you don’t want to see—and that’s hard to see in some ways—aesthetically pleasing so that you can take it, understand it, digest it, and then let it sit with you for a while?

AD: You know, I think about the idea of facilitating that visibilization process through co-creation and collaboration. We’re both doing that very much in our teaching (we co-teach courses), as well as in our artistic practices. How do we move away from the single authorship, and so many other issues with academia that Patricia was thinking about before, to actually nurturing collaboration? It’s about how you collaborate

to co-create something new. Many of the assignments we give our students require collaboration. Yes, you can do things on your own as well, but that's not what is dominant in our approach. And I think that is part of our future. The future is collaboration.

This interview was originally published on April 10, 2022.

FOOTNOTES

1 Special thanks to the William & Mary Hispanic Studies Program and the C. Sharon Philpott and Marta Perez (SPMP) Faculty-Student Research Endowment.

2 Best Experimental Film at the International Puerto Rican Heritage Film Festival, Vanguard Award for Outstanding Experimental Film at The Art of Brooklyn Film Festival, among others.

3 Ensayos Libertarios (edited by Norma del Valle Ferrer).

4 Alabanza: New and Selected Poems 1982-2002 by Martín Espada. Recipient of the 2021 National Book Award.

By Darrel Alejandro Holnes and Patricia Encarnación

ANGELITOS NEGROS HABLAN EN SAMANÁ:

DARREL ALEJANDRO HOLNES IN CONVERSATION WITH PATRICIA ENCARNACION

Still from "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná" (2022).
Video by Patricia Encarnación.

Samaná was once a place of refuge for Black families who sought to escape U.S. slavery and racism in the early 19th century. Situated on the northeast coast of the Dominican Republic, it is also a place of immense natural beauty, which prompted interdisciplinary artist Patricia Encarnación and award-winning poet Darrel Alejandro Holnes to meet up for a pilgrimage of sorts, spending the day in Samaná before heading back to the capital of Santo Domingo, where the two would discuss their shared diasporic identities, the influence of U.S. imperialism on their personal and familial trajectories, and the creative process behind some of their current work, among other topics.

Darrel: Can you talk a little bit about where we are?

Patricia: So we're in the colonial zone of the city of Santo Domingo, where colonization started on this side of the world. This cathedral [La Primada de América Cathedral-Santa María de la Encarnación] was meant to be the core foundation of the city. From there, the city expanded. It wasn't finished until 1541. Santo Domingo also hosted the first art pieces ever imported to the Americas. That cathedral used to hold the altars of all the different Black ethnicities that lived here. Eventually, [they] were moved to another location or Church of San Pedro.

Darrel: And what ethnicities are those?

helped to free a lot of enslaved people at that time. He was executed a few blocks from here.

Darrel: This reminds me so much of Casco Antiguo or Casco Viejo in Panama, which is the Old City. It was similarly built hundreds of years ago. And the figure that you just talked about reminded me a lot of Bayano, who escaped slavery in Panama and waged war against the Spanish to liberate over 1,000 people. There's actually a poem in the book called "Black Parade" that I wrote after writing a play about him.

I'm excited to be in Santo Domingo with you, where I'm having an opportunity to learn just how much we have in common and how much our cities and our cultures have



Still from "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná" (2022). Video by Patricia Encarnación.

Patricia: There were many ethnicities, but one I can think of is Lemba, one of the 69 ethnicities Spanish colonizers documented under their (mis)understanding. Lemba is considered an ethnicity, but it was a person, too. Sebastián Lemba helped to start the first Black rebellion in the Americas in 1521. He

in common...and the beautiful differences as well. We just drove to Santo Domingo from Samaná and it's been really fascinating learning about the people and the culture that have been there. I'm reminiscing about one particular moment where we saw several young men on horseback wearing gold

chains and basketball jerseys from the U.S.

Patricia: It was really interesting to see this aesthetic while they were riding horses on the highway, which was just recently constructed. When we talk about Caribbean aesthetics, that specific combination is like a clash of time and aesthetics because we have had so many influences—from colonization to U.S. imperialism. Also, having a huge Dominican diaspora in New York, most of those jerseys and chains are probably from their families who brought those things here. I would even assume those types of things. I think the influence of all these elements and moments in history is a beautiful, poetic way to describe the aesthetics of the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean in general.

little story about how the collage piece that you created is now the cover of my poetry book!

Patricia: It's like this overlapping of elements. The images I explore visually convey these realities that can happen in Abya Yala, specifically in the Caribbean, because it's my home. In the end, I see myself collaging other entities and all the different elements and aesthetics that I can experience in these spaces. Simultaneously, showcasing how polarized these experiences can be depending on who you are. For example, suppose you come from the perspective of a tourist, a diasporic person, or a local person. In that case, one can perceive the landscapes, the bodies, and economics



Still from "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná" (2022). Video by Patricia Encarnación.

Darrel: It made me think about your visual artwork, because sometimes you work with collage. And there is a sense of layered history, layered time, right? And it's presented in a combination of aesthetics. Can you tell us a little bit about the role that collage plays in your work? There's also a fun

differently. That's why collaging allows me to do that, to recreate that Caribbean surrealism.

Darrel: It's an intersection of vantage points.

Patricia: And breaking through the landscape, no? Breaking through the aesthetics and

the elements that compose this region—through nature, colors, and elements that we borrow from the diaspora, the government, colonization, etc.

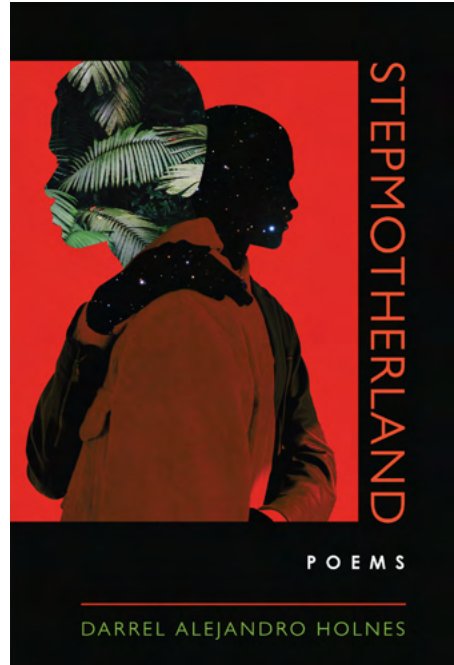
Darrel: That's one of the things that really attracted me to your work. When I saw these collages, I saw a poem because I saw a gathering of images that are arranged according to a particular thought or question or an idea that you, as the speaker, had of the poem. And I saw multiple stories happening at once. Those are essentially the ingredients that make a good poem.

Patricia: Right. But you also work a lot with intersectionality. Based on what I read: immigration, gender, family—all these elements are really important for your work. How do they make it through a poem to compose these pieces?

Darrel: When I write poems, I'm usually summoning something in a very practical way. I'm recollecting an event that might have happened to me at one point or another. But I also feel that through that exercise of recollection, that I'm also summoning the histories that support this experience.

For example, I have always been torn over my identity as a Panamanian who has U.S. citizenship. And that tension is a historical one that has existed within my community, the Black community in Panama, especially the Afro-Antillano community—many of whom came to Panama specifically to build the canal. Although some of that immigration started before the construction of the canal, the bulk of it happened during. And it was primarily to realize this great engineering marvel under the control of U.S. companies and the U.S. federal government.

Blacks from the West Indies were not considered U.S. citizens. Many of them struggled to get Panamanian citizenship because they were classified as migrant workers, which also meant that they were



Patricia Encarnación, "Dame Tú Mano" from the Abya Yala series. Courtesy of Notre Dame University Press.

supposed to be transient. So when they stayed to contribute more to the country, it became a source of tension as racism was and is really strong in Panama. There was this movement to try to keep Panama for Panamanians. Which would also mean to deport as many Black people as possible back to the islands where they came from. And when you look at a lot of early 20th to mid-20th century Black Panamanian literature, you see the divide between Blacks in Panama writing about a sense of sovereignty or sense of patria that is stronger than race. Then you see Blacks presenting their narratives and identities where race comes before nationality because of this weird way that race and nationality are sometimes put against each other. So because you're Black, you are other—unless you renounce your race. Then you're just Panamanian: not Black Panamanian, not white Panamanian, just Panamanian.

When it comes to my poems, if I'm talking about my identity, I'm always talking about my history, my family. I'm always talking about so much more. So it's not hard to be intersectional, it's kind of the only choice.

Patricia: It's such a complex and layered history because you said your family comes from the Caribbean as well. That's how they arrived in Panama.

Darrel: The majority.

Patricia: Does your family relate to race above nation? Or do they hold onto national identity?

Darrel: I think it depends on who you ask in my family. But it might arguably come down to their complexion and how Black they are perceived and if they've only experienced being read as a racialized body in the Panamanian context, or if they've also had that experience abroad—whether in the United States or elsewhere.

I would say that I was raised thinking about Afro-Antillano identity as the root of my Afro-Panamanian-ness. There is this overlap between West Indian traditions in the islands, and Black West Indian traditions in Panama. That's one of the interesting things about living in Crown Heights. I'm not Jamaican or Trini, but when someone talks to me in Jamaican Patois, I can actually understand what they're saying. Or if I go to the jerk chicken shop and it's not fresh, I can tell. At the same time, I can literally go from the jerk chicken shop to a Dominican barber shop, and feel completely at home. Because I'm also part of the Spanish crew. So to be a Black Panamanian is to be at the intersection of those things.

Patricia: Interestingly, we touched on how race can be depending on their privilege and their position in your family. You also told me how your mom had this great American Dream, and how it was sort of imposed on

you, too. Do you think even though she's perceived as a Black woman, this "American Dream" was inculcated in your mom because of her relationship with the canal's history?

Darrel: Absolutely. As her son, in proximity to the story that she lived, I would say that there were a lot of challenges that she experienced growing up as a Black woman, specifically how it intersects with patriarchy. That's not my experience, I'm not a Black Panamanian woman. I wonder sometimes if that was the difference between my dad wanting to have a family in Panama, and my mom wanting to stay to have the family in the U.S.

I'm actually interested in what you have to say about the intersections between race and gender in your work. Thinking about the image from the *Abya Yala* series on the cover of my book, you have mentioned to me how the figures are genderless. But it feels like they're set up in a way where someone could project gender onto them.

Patricia: So the ambiguity with this particular series when it comes to gender is to challenge our understanding of the Americas, which I believe is one continent, the American continent, viewed through the lens of colonialism, as we perceive it today. *Abya Yala* could become a project of constructing something completely new. But we need imagination for that. And ambiguity is an important element when it comes to reconstructing or reimagining something.

Throughout the series, I use elements of nature that can repeat and become this narrative of elements of nature, landscapes, and bodies that we can perpetuate in order to imagine this new stage of the continent, *Abya Yala*. We form this new space.

These particular two elements are going opposite ways, but at the same time, supporting and contrasting each other. That's the beauty of collage. It's almost like

a beautiful accident. I have an idea of what I want to do, but then I look in my archives of images and things kind of fall together.

Darrel: I'm so happy that you talked about how those images are in motion because that's definitely how I see them. And also, these stories started out as storyboards for films.

Patricia: Actually, it wasn't this series that started as a storyboard, it was just the first series of collages, which is called "I'm From Where You Vacation." And those were really visualizing a sarcastic, surreal world of how it looks when others are enjoying these spaces that people go to vacation. It's my home at the end of the day. How can these spaces become disposable for some, while it's the homeland for others? It's definitely critiquing systems and norms.

Darrel: It's so interesting because we were talking about the tourists that were in Samaná. We may not be those tourists, but we're still a sort of tourist. And tourism is a significant portion of the economy. What does it mean to be a citizen of the world at the same time that you are a tourist? What does it mean to participate in an economy as a tourist that maybe the locals don't have access to?

The other point I was gonna make is a connection between labor and exploitation. Because I do think that is something that's at the heart of a lot of the poems in my book—this question of the citizenship of the Blacks in the context of Panama. It's also a question of labor and the relationship between laborers and the state. Because you have the negro coloniales who were descendants of enslaved people, who were considered property and completely exploited. And then you have the Afro-Antillanos, who were brought as migrant workers and recognized by neither country as belonging to them.

Patricia: Basically stateless.

Darrel: But you are recognized as a laborer because we'll pay you a wage so you can work and leave. So there is that question of "I'm from where you vacation." And it's like, "Am I from paradise? A country that has such a contentious history regarding how Black people are part of its population?" I don't know if people realize that literally tens of thousands of people died during the construction of the canal. And every time you're flowing through those waterways, you're surrounded by ghosts.

Patricia: Sadly, the entire construction of this side of the world is full of blood, fueled by our wrong ideas of progress and success. And it ties into what we were talking about earlier with liberation: what freedom actually means and how it can be different for others. But when it comes to the question of is this just an extension of colonialism? When we just go back to a plantation and keep exploiting these people who have been disposable since our country's beginning, or am I really from paradise? I think those two elements intersect. Because at the end of the day, we haven't stopped being colonized. Imperialism is still vivid in these spaces. The idea of our independence as a country is fake since the "revolutionaries" were just European descendants that didn't want to continue paying taxes to the empire but wanted to maintain the same exploitative systems to keep their profit to themselves. And tourism is definitely an extension of colonialism. In the end, I would prefer to believe our countries are paradise because if you remove the social and political aspects, the land is still there, and our beautiful resources are there. And that's what we need to be proud of. We shouldn't be proud of a nation, una patria, or the idea of Latinx. We should be proud of what the earth has given us. I am from paradise—I am paradise!

Darrel: That's so beautiful.



Still from "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná" (2022). Video by Patricia Encarnación.

Patricia: So how has U.S. imperialism influenced your experiences?

Darrel: I would say U.S. imperialism has defined my experience, but I'm trying to think through the lens that you just articulated and it's hard for me to wrap my mind around that because I keep on hearing it as someone else's paradise. I think that my paradise was supposed to be the United States. To think of Panama as my paradise even though I've been raised to look at it through the lens of its complicated history and its problems with race, I'm struggling, frankly. But it's an important exercise and I'm so glad that we're having this conversation because I do think that I need to continue to define my relationship to nation-state outside of U.S. imperialism, but it's hard because the whole project of nation-state is linked to Empire and the Empire of the greatest significance in our region, in our lifetimes, is the United States. So that's my project. How can we think of ourselves as paradise outside of these constructs? What does it mean to be of the land and not of the passport?

Patricia: I never wanted to go to the U.S. I've been going to New York City since 1996. I have uncles and a grandmother living there. I didn't like going there. I didn't understand why my parents would bring me. They would force me to spend my summers [in New York City] to keep the visa. And we all know New York is a harsh place. Imagine back then as a seven-year-old? I never thought I would end up there, but sadly, these cycles of oppression and understanding of high and low culture still exist. I was raised thinking that I would never make it if I stayed here. So I accepted a scholarship and completed my BFA at Parsons. My parents were jumping for joy. But now I'm forced to leave my homeland. That's why it's hard for me to fully fall in love with a place even though it has become my home because of U.S. imperialism.

Darrel: There's a poem in my book called "Poder" that's about Central American migrants marching towards the border, which is honestly very different from how I got here...on a plane.

Patricia: We have to own up to our privilege. I arrived in New York with a scholarship to study art. How many immigrants get that? I do not want to sound ungrateful. The crazy thing, something that we have in common, is that I am my parents' dream. My mother cried when I got my citizenship. It's something that I cannot believe. I just sold my soul to the devil and my mom is crying of happiness.

Darrel: It's a huge generational thing. It's very meaningful for my mother that I was able to make it here because of what she had to give up. My parents fell in love in the middle of a dictatorship, and then started working and were trying to raise a family in the midst of an invasion and corruption on many levels. It was a different time, and I will never really know what that was like. It's fueled my work to look at the differences between their perspective, and what my experience is, what their hopes and aspirations and dreams were for me, and then what my reality is in this country. That's what the book is about.

This interview was originally published on July 26, 2022.

EMOTIONAL MEMORY

In 2022, it feels especially appropriate to consider the role of memory in the development of our collective emotions. In our current reality, deeply marked by anxieties of contagion, fear of missing out, overconsumption, and extreme alienation, it is productive to engage in actions of remembrance. Our memories can help us grapple with the loneliness of life fractured through screens, or in isolation, wanting and waiting for something to end, or alternatively, waiting for something to happen. Emotions are our most reliable memory devices precisely because they are intuitive agents, and potential catalysts for liberation. How are feelings a valid form of remembering, and of processing the relentless passage of time, of bodies across borders over generations? Mining the memories our families once kept hidden can allow us to reimagine the idea of home, even through generations of diasporic distance. Memories allow us to process grief through smell, or trauma through song, or joy through movement. How might memory serve as a vehicle for the production of affect, which in turn fuels our capacity for collective empathy, solidarity, and dissent? In this section, artists Marisol T. Martinez and C.J. Chueca discuss the role of death and grief in their practices, with particular attention to how the pandemic shifted their worldviews and encouraged collaborative creative thinking. Jasmin Hernandez interviews artist Moises Salazar on the role of queer affect and materiality in their multimedia work, evoking the liberatory power of softness in the face of toxic masculinity. In an interview between artist José Campos and Melissa Saenz Gordon, the artist complicates the notion of homeland, making room for alternative understandings of self, place, and culture through remembrance. Finally, in a tender conversation between Petrina Dacres and artist Alicia Brown, they examine the role of familial, cultural, and societal pressure on youth, underscoring painting as a process of emancipatory creative expression and healing.

By Marisol Martinez & C.J. Chueca

IN CONVERSATION WITH ARTISTS MARISOL T. MARTINEZ & C.J. CHUECA

View from my bedroom in Peru during confinement. C.J. Chueca.

Latina artists often serve as interlocutors for one another, and we learned about these two artists, Marisol Martinez and C.J. Chueca, who forged a friendship after participating in *XX* at Latchkey Gallery, a group exhibition featuring Latina artists who engage with abstraction. Since then, they have remained close friends and occasional collaborators. In this conversation they discuss horizons and skylines, color theory and affect, and grief and solidarity among artists during the pandemic lockdown.

Marisol Martinez (MM): Because I'm a color-based artist and a color theorist, color is always going to be what attracts me. I am drawn to your "airplane windows" and the beautiful mural you made which reflected the view from your window at your home in Lima during the pandemic, both reflecting different views you encountered. How did that juxtaposition feel? One of the views is from a plane which shows your travels and the other is doing the opposite: it is a stationed view. Was your feeling of both "views" the same?

C.J. Chueca (CJC): I wanted to have a sense of the open space that the sky gives you regardless if you are moving or not. Because it is so large, it will always be around you. When you walk through them, the ceramic airplane windows talk about change. The title of the series is *We Are Night And Day*, and a few years ago I titled another group *The Fugitive Days*. Each window has this calm aspect of two colors forming a horizon, or sometimes they are almost a monochrome field. There is also the presence of the airplane window that calls to mind ideas of transport, immigration, transformation, change of moods, etc.

The mural at the show was a view I was seeing over and over from my static pandemic bedroom window. On some days that view was more yellow, and on another more blue. Even when it was totally foggy, the same horizontal line remained, the same division was there.

The window is also a confrontation of us, humans in lockdown, immobilized, looking at the grandiosity of life in front of us. This time, without being able to form part of it.

MM: How did you go about choosing the color palette for your windows?

CJC: I draw from real trips I've done. That's why I title each window painting according to the seat I sat in: "31B", "16C", and so on. But



Frente a tus ojos el fuego inextinguible, 2020. C.J. Chueca. Acrylic on canvas, 59 x 47 inches | 150 x 120 cm.

instead of recreating the actual view from the window of that particular trip, I think I was more interested in the mood I was in, and then I chose how that mental state translates to a certain hour of the day. Let's say: 5:30 am, dawn, or the sensation of waking up. That very bright light that you see when opening your eyes in the morning. From there, then I say, OK, this window will be all shades of white. If a particular trip was a sad trip, or if I felt sad leaving that city, then I play with other hours of the day. It is in my interest to put a few windows together because we pass from one state to the next all the time--physically, emotionally, legally, etc.

MM: That makes beautiful sense to me. I appreciate your ability to show your emotional state through color. I feel very connected to that. As an artist, I see myself as a colorist in addition to many other things. What do you consider yourself? Do you put yourself and your work in categories or genres?



The Space Between Us #1, 2021. Marisol T. Martinez.
Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 48 in.

CJC: Because I navigate in different waters, I consider myself more like a music composer. I like to make exhibitions that have different media playing in unison. I work congregating gestures of an idea to form an experience. Mostly I work with materials that are either hard and breakable like ceramics, or I work with the sky and water that are intangible (almost the opposite). Ceramics are what I feel most connected to. There's something about the fragility of ceramics but also the hardness and how it has been present in many different traditions from Western to Eastern culture, and also in many Indigenous cultures.

Most of the time I work with abstraction because for me it's about the hardness, the sensuality, the loneliness, and the traces of certain materials and colors. And color is also about the absence of color, like sometimes I think in whites or blacks, and also in different tones. I do think that color is very charged.

What about you Marisol, do you think there is a category that you feel close to?

You, yourself, are working primarily with abstraction...

MM: The category I feel personally connected to is "colorist" though most people know me as an abstract artist. I resonate with "colorist" because it is what drives me. I am super in touch with my emotions and the way I navigate the world as a human—the colors I choose reflect the mood and language I want to convey through the work. Without color my work has no words, no feeling, no expression. At times I can be anti-colorist—more minimal, playing with black and white which some argue are not colors, but that is work I have not shown much of to the outer world. I like the feeling of playing with intensity and softness.

CJC: I understand what you mean. But even when we use one tone of black in the entire piece, in my case, a wall for example, in your case, a large painting, even that one tone of black says a lot.

MM: Yes, I agree. The intensity of one color can smack you in the face, it can hit you harder than multiple colors which can be a distraction.

CJC: Sometimes I find abstract works to be more direct than figurative works for the public, in the first impression, in the sensorial first encounter. Is that first interaction with the work important to you?

MM: Yes! The sensory interaction with painting is what I am in love with. Not just in the actual work of making the painting but also in seeing other people's sensorial reactions when they see it for the first time. The connection they make is purely related to themselves and their soul, removing me completely from the work. I enjoy watching people have a connection to themselves, carving their own narrative—that excites me! They give me perspective and personal stories I may have not seen or experienced otherwise. In essence, it's a form of

I KNOW WITHOUT A DOUBT MY WORK IN COLOR COMES FROM THE NEED TO COLOR MY WORLD AND MY LIFE.

storytelling without the actual story being obvious, like it can sometimes be through figurative painting.

CJC: There are qualities in both worlds of abstraction and figuration that engage with the spectator. But somehow I feel more related to the connections that are made through materiality, through color, and through shapes. You can be very political through abstraction, but that's a long conversation.

It comes to mind how your family business these past two years has literally influenced the tone of your paintings. You run a funeral home...

MM: Yes, I grew up with my father and godfather, both owners of funeral homes. A few years ago, my father passed away and my brothers and I inherited the business, and to this day we manage it. That industry is very heavy and dark (literally and figuratively). It takes an emotional toll on you. During the onset of the pandemic, it was heartbreaking to hear people saying, "no one's taking us because they are at capacity," or to have people calling from other states because they just couldn't get a funeral for their family member. These are the most heart-wrenching stories, and a lot of the cases that we had were families who were also immigrants or undocumented. It was an intense situation to deal with. You're

trying to find ways to help families that don't have resources, and it was a level of stress that I've never experienced before. It got to the point where I was going to end up getting sick. Working on painting in my studio was about having a moment of not thinking about it. I don't use any rulers, tapes, or tools in my work, it's literally all freehand. For me, finding stillness, peace, and quiet was coming from working on the lines and the colors in the painting.

I know without a doubt my work in color comes from the need to color my world and my life. I was creating a world full of vibrancy, excitement, freedom, and joy all through the use of color. It makes me feel alive. My work has lots of layers in narrative and feeling but the overall tone is connectedness to whatever is happening to me, to you, our community, and the world. My intention is to invoke honest conversation, potential healing, and self-connectivity. I believe being raised around death my entire life has increased my ability to dig deep and reach for the uncomfortable. Abstraction is not comfortable for the most part and that's exactly why it is a natural fit for me.

CJC: These times have been very somber so I understand what you're saying. I have seen colorful statements from artists these past few years. Myself too. It's like survival mode.

MM: Survival mode is a perfect statement. I love the pure joy that comes from color.



Micaela lavándose las heridas en el río, 2021. C.J. Chueca. Acrílico en lienzo. 180 x 120 cm.

Within the past few years, we both created work that helped us get through very somber times. And in turn has helped people feel understood, seen, and loved.

CJC: I guess we were under so much pressure and an unknown future that creating parallel worlds--ones as uncertain, abstract, and indecipherable as our state of being--was a natural thing to do. During COVID, I started to make these paintings of landscapes that were darker, with a lot of dark droppings. I made a painting titled *A.M. 2020*. I think that my positivity went into a dark place. And I think it was good that I went to that dark place in my work, too. For some part of my life, my work was more political, and then it became more personal. And now I think that the personal becomes political somehow. I think that art did a lot for people that wanted to talk about issues happening now. Art has certainly helped as a connector. In this moment of confinement, the little bits of color, in real life, are a treasure. For me, to paint feels like an extension to one's limited life.

MM: Cecilia, thank you for this statement, "To paint feels like an extension to one's limited life." You connected another dot for me. That is what art has the power to do: expansion.

CJC: Yes, and your friendship appeared while we were in the midst of grabbing rays of life, as an expansion we needed to continue. I think art was important during this time, as it fostered camaraderie between artists.

MM: I completely agree. Also, participating in the *XX* exhibition at Latchkey Gallery in 2021 with other women artists really helped bring me back to life and gave me a renewed sense of self. I felt so much joy being part of a show that highlighted incredibly talented women within an industry that is male-centric. Prior to that show, I wasn't really seeing a lot of other Latina abstract artists being shown in museums or galleries, other than very sparingly, like Carmen Herrera and Luchita Hurtado. Convening with artists in

the *XX* show made me realize I'm not the only one out there. I was so overjoyed to be able to see other Latina women doing abstraction in their own way. We each had our own voice and our own distinct style. Meeting all these women was so exciting and everybody was so nice and supportive. I get choked up thinking about it. It was amazing.

CJC: It was a very nice time to collaborate on different levels. I think that a lot of ideas were exchanged, and we established some beautiful connections with the soul. That



show *XX* was a beautiful time for us because all of the artists felt connected. I still keep in touch with the other women who were in the show and exchange messages.

MM: Speaking of women, your most recent

solo exhibition was in Cusco, Peru in Fall 2021. Can you talk a bit about that?

CJC: Yes. The show is titled *Micaela, the blood of all women*. It is a break from my usual visual and conceptual rhythm to discuss a concern I have had since forever but was very present during the pandemic: the never-ending fight of women for liberation. Micaela Bastidas was a biracial woman (from Indigenous and Spanish blood), who along with her husband, Tupac Amaru II, in 1780-81 led an important rebellion against the



Maquette of site specific installation "We are night and day / Nous sommes la nuit et le jour" at Palais de Congres for Art Souterrain Festival, Montreal, 2021. C.J. Chueca.

Spaniards in Perú that was the seed to the independence of the country a few years after. She was brutally executed as well as her partner, son, and many others. I wanted to talk through her story about the ongoing battle of women back then and in present

society. In the exhibition, I transform her skin into mountains and her spirit into unstoppable water. That's how powerful her legacy is. That is how powerful of a force we are, too.

And that's how some phantoms of the past invaded my head and made me do that show. It was a celebration of a powerful woman, Micaela Bastidas, but also a celebration of all of us, in crisis and in victory. That's also why I asked you, Marisol, to pose for me in the lake, as a reference for the painting *Micaela lavándose las heridas en el río*.

MM: When you asked me, I was blown away. I was also completely scared. When it comes to actually doing things in public, I'm a massive introvert. And I know if I had been asked by anyone else, I would have said no. But I trust you, Ceci. I also loved the story of Micaela Bastidas. We ended up having a great time that day.

Thank you for showing such a powerful history and one that in different forms seems to repeat itself for women in the present day. It is so important to study the history of women in an effort for us to understand how we can try to change the future. The show was powerful, in both your materials and the colors you chose to express the passion of who Bastidas truly was.

CJC: Thank you, Marisol. What projects and collaborations are coming up for you this year?

MM: In spring 2022 you and I will both participate in a project called *Homecoming*, which includes last year's alumni artists from the Kates-Ferri Projects residency program. I am also going to be included in a group exhibition titled *Look Again*, curated by Michael Mosby, that opens on February 10 at the Historic Opera House in Hudson, NY. Beyond these exhibitions, I work on expanding my practice daily. It's a daily practice of looking towards what's next.

What about you? What are you working towards in 2022?

CJC: I feel like my panorama is kind of open, although I have a few shows coming up too. I'm very happy I'm going to share space again with you, Marisol. I'm moving back to the U.S. fully at the end of March. So it's a transitional year. I think that this year is very hopeful somehow, I guess because we feel like we are at least getting used to this virus now. So, we'll see what comes in terms of new projects and new subject matter for the work.

This interview was originally published on February 2, 2022.



Color Blind, 2020. Marisol T. Martinez. Acrylic on deckled watercolor paper.

By Jasmin Hernández

SOFTNESS AS LIBERATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIXED MEDIA ARTIST MOISES SALAZAR





Moises Salazar. Llévame contigo, 2021. Glitter on canvas, yarn. 41" x 53"

In Moises Salazar's (they/them) recent exhibit at Mindy Solomon, *Puto El Último*, the beautiful brown figures depicted in their vibrant mixed media works resist masculinity. The subjects exist as femme and carefree, finding joy in rest. *Puto El Último* marks Salazar's debut show with the Miami-based gallery, where they unpacked the multiplicity of their identities — being queer, non-binary, first-gen, and Mexicanx — thoughtfully on the canvas. The show's name, *Puto El Último*, reveals its homophobic connotation within Mexican and larger Latinx culture. Because, all too often, toxic machismo is familiar territory for those of us raised in Latinx communities. The phrase is meant to taunt "men" who aren't "macho" enough, and ostracizes their perceived "weakness." Salazar, a Chicago-raised artist who grew up in a Mexican immigrant household, both celebrates and investigates their otherness. Specifically, their work underscores the ways in which they were othered in a cis-hetero Latinx family and as a brown, queer non-binary person othered in white, cis-hetero power structures in the U.S.

In *Puto El Último*, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago alum ('20), incorporates flashy elements like glitter, faux fur, and yarn in 10 mixed media works. And it's very visually seductive. In *Murió la Flor* (2021), the single figure feels romantic in their solitude, adorned with red roses. In *Que Calor* (2021), a brown nude figure indulges in the fullness of their body and in nature. There's a visual rhythm present in Salazar's work, as it flows from the sensorial, to the sensual, and praises softness. There's a very pretty softness found in the tactility of the pieces, and Salazar's gorgeous queer subjects embrace softness as liberation. In a generous and candid conversation, Salazar shares how they're leaning into healing, the pleasure in being a maximalist with their art practice, and why anyone can find themselves in their faceless, colorful subjects.



Jasmin Hernandez: How's your summer going? And what self-care practices have helped you remain focused and present with your art?

Moises Salazar: My summer has been great! I'm very lucky to have several opportunities to showcase my work, so I've been busy in my studio. I actually fractured my ankle last August and had to get surgery. So, I've been in a self-care mindset for the past year. I was in and out of physical therapy for months. It was a strange thing to experience that time of the year while being bedridden. It allowed me to just focus on healing. After I learned to walk again, I was ready to just get back to work. I think that I appreciate being able to work in my studio because I wasn't able to do it before.

JH: Your brown queer figures are faceless and are depicted with tender gestures and poses. How do you feel that you address safety and intimacy in your work?

MS: My figures are faceless because I want folks to identify with my work. I depict images of intimacy, tenderness, and safety because we should all be open to talk about our needs and how we expect to be treated by people around us. I didn't feel like I could express my needs when I was younger, and it landed me in tough situations. I ended up experiencing abuse and trauma in past relationships because I didn't know I could ask for what I wanted. For that reason, I address consent, intimacy, tenderness and safety in my work as a way to advocate for it.



Moises Salazar. *Que Calor*, 2021.
Glitter on board, faux fur. 30" x 24"

JH: Your aesthetic is fantastical and very vibrant, and you use materials such as clay, paper mache, glitter and crochet. What freedom do you find in these tools combined with your bright color palette?

MS: I used to overthink my practice all the time. I think because now I use things like glitter, yarn, paper mache and clay, I don't anymore. I let the material exist and I love all the textures that these materials can produce. When I step back and look at the pieces all together, I think "this is fabulous!" I don't worry too much how the work is going to end up because I'm having fun making it. I'm honestly obsessed with the materials and colors I use.

JH: In *Puto El Último*, you unapologetically show brown queer figures resisting masculinity and investing in rest and femme expression. Why was this critical to show?

MS: I keep wanting to make work for my younger self. I keep wanting to tell my younger self that it's okay and that you don't have to change for the people around you.

I've been reflecting so much these past few months about family and my childhood, so it felt natural to make this exhibition. My family no longer says "puto" around me because I put my foot down, but I keep thinking about all the other Latinx children growing up hearing these things and feeling like there's something wrong with them. I now understand that it's okay to be femme, and it's okay to not listen to your uncles, cousins, siblings, and parents.

JH: Also, in *Puto El Último*, there are so many auto-biographical elements at play: your queer and non-binary identity, being first-gen, your Mexicanness, and Brownness. How did you navigate deciding what parts of yourself you decided to share?

MS: I'm a person that needs to talk about my challenges as I'm experiencing them. As I reflect on things then it naturally shows up in my work. I'm the kind of person that puts it all on the table. I sometimes make separate bodies of work that explore a specific aspect of my identity because I want to be an artist that can participate in a broad range of conversations.

JH: The mixed-media pieces in *Puto El Último* use glitter, faux fur, and yarn. Works like *Dumped* (2021) and *Glamorous* (2021) feel tactile, soft, and inviting for the viewer. Can you talk about creating this soothing visual experience?

MS: I love feeling glamorous and I think that's something universal. Regardless of gender, age, and sexual expression, we all love feeling our best and that's what I'm trying to express in my work. As children I think we're taught to not stand out or cause attention to ourselves, but I think we should do the opposite. That's why I put so much emphasis on creating a tactile experience. I want my work to stand out and I pull out all the stunts to do it. If I'm asked, "don't you think that's too much?", I add twenty new things.



Moises Salazar. Glamorous, 2021. Glitter on board, faux fur, yarn. 30" x 24"

JH: In another series, *Cuerpos Desechables*, you portray Mexican and other Latinx immigrants' inhumane conditions in U.S. detention centers. The brown figures are portrayed as piñatas, which really illustrates the ferocious harm Latinx immigrants and separated families face. Can you expand on this series?

MS: In *Cuerpos Desechables*, the bodies I represent are immigrant bodies in detention centers. They're installed in a way that's representative of the poor living conditions people face when they're detained. I chose to represent children because of the surge of unaccompanied minors found at the border. Universally, we accept that children are innocent, and we have a moral obligation to protect them, yet they're treated as criminals and left to suffer in our detention centers. I use piñatas because we socially accept that they must go through an action of violence, and I find similar parallels to the immigrant experience. None of my piñatas will ever be destroyed because I want to combat the narrative of the expectation of violence.

JH: What's next for 2021 that you're excited to share?

MS: In August, I'll be in a show at Co-Prosperty in Chicago about quinceañeras, and an upcoming presentation at Soho Beach House in September. In October, I will also be in a two-person show at REGULARNORMAL in New York. I'm so excited!!!

This interview was originally published on August 10, 2021.

By Melissa Saenz Gordon

JOSE CAMPOS' STUDIO LENCA: CREATING SALVADOREÑO VISIBILITY IN THE UK



Studio Lenca. Doing and Undoing, 2019.

HOW DO YOU CONNECT TO YOUR HOMETLAND WHEN ISOLATED FROM IT?

Jose Campos is an Salvadoran artist-teacher based in London and the neighboring seaside town of Margate who works under the umbrella Studio Lenca, a creative confluence of photography, performance, and pedagogy. His practice amplifies the history and culture of his native El Salvador through contemporary portraiture and social practice-inspired installations that confront who galleries are designed to serve and who they neglect.

We first met in 2000 as students at an arts high school in San Francisco—where he studied dance and I visual art—and reconnected in London in 2016. Jose’s practice has evolved from elegant, ephemeral performances into vibrant visuals of Latinidad, self-portraits draped with tapestries inspired by Salvadoreño iconography. We spoke in March, as the COVID-19 pandemic was gaining momentum, and again in June, as the United Kingdom was reopening. Our conversation explores how the arts provided a place of refuge as a child adjusting to the United States and how he’s using his creative practice to reconnect to his heritage.



Melissa Saenz Gordon (MSG): How did you come to name your practice Studio Lenca?

Jose Campos (JC): Lenca refers to my ancestors of my native El Salvador. I like the word “studio” because it refers to a space that is constantly shifting—it could be a scientific lab, an art studio, a fashion studio, or a photography studio—it’s this space to experiment with. What’s nice about Studio Lenca is that it removes me from the equation and doesn’t center me as the “almighty artist.” A studio can be a collective voice, so from the start, Studio Lenca is saying: This is a space for possibility.

MSG: What inspired you to pursue the arts?

JC: I was born in La Paz, El Salvador during the late 1980s, and like many, I had to flee the

country because of the violent civil war. My mom moved us to San Francisco, California, during a very conservative time in American history with the Bush Administration, and we were undocumented illegal aliens in that context [Interviewer’s note: the artist used illegal aliens to amplify the hideous nature of the term and social climate of the time]. That was difficult because I was finding out I was queer and [undocumented] and felt disenfranchised in every way. Luckily there was a free arts provision in my community that I lived in. And through that, I became involved in the arts. My family didn’t know anything about the arts, and they weren’t really interested, we were just trying to survive really. I was growing up in a very conservative and strict Salvadoran household and needed space to be myself, and dance allowed me to be that person.

Eventually I went to the School of the Arts [high school] in San Francisco, which offered an opportunity to engage in the arts in a real-world setting. I remember when we visited an artist or to see a performance, and those performances were really shocking, and that discomfort led to change and learning.

MSG: Was there a performance in particular that resonated with you?

JC: We watched the Stephen Petronio Company, I must have been 14 or 15, and at that point, I had only studied classical ballet, and I remember seeing this Latino dancer. First of all, he was dancing in his underwear and he had boxing gloves on, and someone might've been throwing water on him, and I thought, how is this dance? You know, how is that guy a dancer? It was just so shocking, but now as an adult, I really appreciate that. It was that shock factor that really made learning possible.

MSG: Can you discuss some of your recent work?

JC: My most recent work is a series called *Los Historiantes*. It's a photographic series of portraits, mostly of men, and I see it as performance as well, as the process is quite performative. I've been collecting materials to create these costumes. I feel completely isolated because there's no access to Salvadoreño culture here in the UK, so I borrow from West African and Muslim cultures which are accessible here. What's interesting is when I borrow materials from these cultures, they share similar histories of colonization, and this work is revealing that we're sort of the same.

MSG: What draws you to Los Historiantes?

JC: Historiantes are folkloric dancers in El Salvador. Conquistadores introduced this dance to the native people, so they've made this tradition that represents this moment of mixing. Their costumes refer to things

like religion and pre-Columbian traditions and they carry corvos, long, curved knives that have to do with agricultural traditions. I see them as these living archives of this moment of colonization. There are different versions of Historiantes throughout Central America and South America because a lot of the histories are quite similar, but they're an iconic Salvadoran thing that I've latched on to, because this intergenerational trauma is still relevant today, during this post-colonial time that we're experiencing.

When I visited El Salvador with my family when I was young, I would see Los Historiantes, they would walk around the neighborhood and perform in front of your house. I want to make work that is visibly Salvadoreño so that other Salvadorans can see themselves in the work, because I never had that really, you know, I've never been to an institution, to a gallery and seen a portrait of a Salvadoreño, so I gravitate towards these icons of El Salvador and it's like presenting it for everyone else.

MSG: How does your work speak to being a Salvadoreño artist in the UK?

JC: When I moved to the UK, I felt this pressure had been lifted. Often people don't know what I am, and think that I look Iranian or something else. So they don't have these assumptions of what a Latino person is, and that's really powerful because you can just then be yourself, you know, that pressure isn't there.

But I do have to say, it's lonely being Latino in the UK—there's no food, there are no Latin people. This work has really connected me to people in El Salvador and Salvadoreño artists who I never thought would exist growing up, you know? So making these things happen is a way of being visibly Latino, being visibly Salvadorian, and being visible online because I do feel isolated, I do miss El Salvador and the Mission [District] in San Francisco so much, and I think that that's why I'm making



Studio Lenca. El historiante blanco, 2019. Digital print, 46.8" x 33"

EMOTIONAL MEMORY

the work that I'm making, because I feel like I'm a part of a community. I found that this work has connected me to Salvadorans all around the world. Slowly I'm learning about artists and artist networks that exist. That's really incredible because growing up, I never thought that I'd have discussions with other Salvadoreño artists.

There's an amazing network called YES Contemporary, and it's a coalition of artists in El Salvador and around the world. Again, I'd never imagined that I'd be a part of a Salvadoreño network of artists. I've always just been an artist, you know, and now I have people that look like me, that sound like me, that have similar histories, and that's really comforting.

MSG: Like many artists, you have a day-job. Can you speak to how being an educator informs your creative practice?

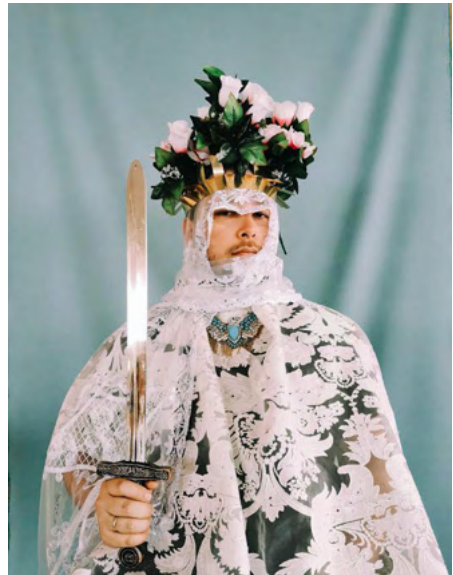
JC: I know it sounds cheesy, but working with high school-age students is like a direct link to society, and as an artist, that's what I'm interested in. I often refer to myself as an artist-teacher, not just an artist or a teacher, because I think those two things are in such dialogue, one doesn't exist without the other.

I got really inspired by Paulo Freire who talks about critical pedagogy and revisiting the hierarchies between teacher and student in the classroom. In 2019, I created a collective work with my students called *Mile of String* (2019). It was commissioned by the Horniman Museum in London, which is a small natural history museum that's rooted in a very colonial past. Essentially it was a group of five students and myself, and we took tons of black elastic and basically made it difficult for people to access that space. It was important for me that we all got paid equally, because I didn't see that in my background. I always say to the students that you can have a career in art.

MSG: What was something you noticed about this performance?

JC: One of the things I observed was that the students were sort of doing what you're not meant to do—run around, scream, throw themselves on the floor—it was incredible to see how much power they had in that space; often students are quiet, timid, and feel like they shouldn't be there, but the opposite was happening. These students were also local to the Horniman, but some had never been there, and most of them felt like it wasn't a space for them; they're working-class students from underrepresented backgrounds. It's problematic for children and young people to feel that way because they're the future. But what's happening is that students from certain communities are already being excluded from day one, so how do we expect to see art from these communities if they're already being asked not to participate?

MSG: When we spoke last, the COVID-19 pandemic had just forced society to shut



Studio Lenca. *El Historiante de Inglaterra*, 2019.
Digital print, 46.8" x 33"

down and you mentioned not feeling safe to go to your studio. What were some of the strategies and projects that came out of this experience?

JC: I can't believe there was a time when I was scared to go to my studio, that seems so far away now. I found that I had a lot of time, so I started painting in the kitchen. In collaboration with another teacher, I worked on an exhibition called *Unknown Learning*. It ended up being an exhibition that no one could attend—hosting it would have been completely illegal—and we wanted to explore this moment of teaching remotely through materials, and worked with materials that we just had because we couldn't go to conventional art shops.

I made a piece on a duvet that says "School Kills Artists" and on the back it said, "School Makes Artists", and often as an artist-teacher, you sit on either side. It's like a scale, and you're either working with this idea of, "I want my students to be artists" or the idea "I want them to do well on this exam." In a way, both ideologies are in battle with each other. If you think about a duvet, it's such a personal material, it's something that you sleep with. This duvet creates a wall where you have to be on one side or another.

That's exactly what it's like as a teacher, [you often question] what values do you hold? They're so influenced by your own personal trajectory. How were you taught? What do you value, what was your family like? You know, your class, your age, or race, all of these things position you on that scale. But also the duvet hangs in a way where you can transgress the boundary, where you can choose to be on one side or another, or in between.

MSG: You were planning to travel back to El Salvador in August for a residency, is that still happening?

JC: I applied for funding called Developing Your Creative Practice with the Arts Council of England. All of a sudden they just told us that the funding was no longer available. It's very showing of what's to come in the arts, and not nurturing emerging artists is also going to have lasting effects down the line. The arts have always been seen as a luxury, haven't they? When it's literally getting people through this pandemic and catering to their mental health.

MSG: Given the circumstances, what are your next steps as an artist?

JC: The next thing I want to do is create a series of portraits called Marica which means sissy in Spanish. It's a derogatory term I heard because Tíos would call me that at family events. Growing up Salvadoreño is very much about being macho. I think that there's a change happening amongst Latino men in El Salvador because of the internet, but I don't think that it's in the public narrative, so I'm interested in capturing that moment and making it more visible. I plan to go to El Salvador and take a series of portraits that subverts the masculine Latino identity. A series that embodies an alternative masculine identity in the style of the National Portrait Gallery, but in El Salvador. Even if I don't get the funding, I'd love to do it, I just have to get myself to El Salvador.

This interview was originally published on July 20, 2021.

By Petrina Dacres

**SURVIVAL
STORIES:
A CONVERSATION
ON ART WITH
ALICIA BROWN**



Alicia Brown, *You Look Just Like Your Father*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 46 × 38 in. Photo by Daniel Perales Studio.



Alicia Brown, Portrait of Lady Cameal from Alva, 2021. Oil on canvas, 36 × 28 in. Photo by Daniel Perales Studio.

Alicia Brown is a contemporary figurative artist who uses traditional painting techniques and symbolic references to examine issues of race, power, and social status. A native of Jamaica, Brown is a graduate of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, and the New York Academy of Art where she received her MFA. After teaching for a number of years in Jamaica, the artist eventually migrated to the U.S., where she now lives, in Florida. Brown's oil paintings and drawings feature portraits of young black subjects surrounded by lushly rendered foliage. Her sitters, while casually dressed, often appear adorned with collars of paper doilies, balloons, or ferns to reference the European ruff collars that became popular during the 16th century—a period which heightened the development of the slave trade to the Americas. The collars, like other features of her work, are part of a symbolic vocabulary that considers the continued legacy of the colonial experience on contemporary life, cultural mimicry and adaptation, and the burdens and beauty of tropicity. Many of the paintings in Brown's recent solo exhibition at the UUU Art Collective in Rochester, New York have an air of playfulness different from her previous works. Last year was a period of deep sadness for the artist. She had to deal with the death of a relative and another's mental health crisis in the summer of 2021. In these images, context and content, like past and present, collapse. Like the surface of her paintings, the veneers of beauty, status, and identity are often created and performed under conditions of violence.

In February 2022, I sat down with the artist to discuss her work:



Petrina Dacres: In your wall installations of drawings and paintings at the Clemente Art Center in 2021 you included close-up images of plants and animals as well as portraits. Your solo show this year in Rochester, NY had full length portraits of young people surrounded by nature or adorned with plant life. Perhaps we could start by discussing this combined interest in portraiture and nature.

Alicia Brown: I'm interested in nature because we are a part of nature. I grew up in rural Jamaica in the mountains and I was always surrounded by nature. When you go away from that space you start to miss it; you start to realize that the air smells differently. You miss seeing a flower and hummingbirds and grass growing instead of just looking at concrete every day. Humans have become so far removed from nature. In the paintings, if I force the figures into these natural neck

pieces and natural environments, it's because I want to bring across the idea that nature is healing and we need it.

I was also looking at how insects and plants use mimicry as a way of surviving and adapting to a given space. I'm trying to compare that to how humans use mimicry to adapt to a space as well. We are not different from nature in that regard. Through nature—and through my images of plants and animals—I am interested in the idea of survival. When you move from one place to another you're trying to find elements of things that look familiar, like your home. For me, when I moved to the United States, I would get so excited if I saw a plant that looked similar to a plant from back home. These are the elements of nature that we use to survive even if it might not be in a very obvious way. I'm still invested in doing more research about how the natural elements

influence the way we do things, especially in fashion and design.

PD: You seem to take pleasure in depicting fabric and fashion. Could you discuss your interest in fashion and your approach to depicting ornamentation in your paintings?

AB: In Jamaican culture, people love to get dressed up for any occasion. When you dress up, it actually changes how you feel about yourself and it transforms you. I like the idea of fabric because it is a way of transforming the wearer—to add a different self, for want of a better word. It's almost as if you're recreating who you are every time you dress a certain way. It's also about fitting in. It's about acceptance. Stuart Hall wrote about identity as something that is not fixed but that it is an ongoing process—it's a performance. This is what I was trying to explore in my paintings. I like this idea of a performance.

If I could go all the way back to when I first started making these paintings of [black] women dressed in ruff collars, that was maybe 2012 or 2013. This was before I decided to go to the Academy in New York and I was still in Jamaica. I loved the streets of downtown Kingston for various reasons and one of the things that always jumped out to me is how expressive people are, especially on the streets. People are not afraid to express themselves, and they will do it in whatever way just to get that attention because it does something for them. I am sure you're familiar with the sidewalk street salons in downtown Kingston. That's where I started to look at my culture more intensely. What was fascinating was to see these women fixing someone's hair, but what really caught my attention was the way they adorned themselves, the way they dressed elegantly. They would wear these pearl necklaces as if they were stepping out of a scene from a movie set in the 17th century. I was always fascinated by that period and I still am. I thought to myself how interesting it would be to mix these

different cultures in my paintings.

PD: Yes. In many of your paintings your subjects are dressed in contemporary casual clothing, but you have adorned them with your own version of 16th and 17th century dress codes—necklaces of sweets and toys, ruff and headdresses made of an assortment of materials including foliage, balloons, and insects.

AB: The juxtaposition of objects makes the narrative of the paintings seem bigger than just my representation of something from one culture. When you see a ruff collar you start thinking about 16th and 17th century aristocrats. So I started to think about how I could create my own collars and give meaning to them. I'm always trying to figure out how I can use them in a way that is mine.

The first time I saw a painting with the ruff collar was in Dutch paintings. The nature of 17th century Dutch paintings is that normally the background is darker and then you have this white collar to create that strong contrast. That was alluring to me. What really drew me into that type of painting is that even though there's this powerful person in the image, it's not the person that really creates the power but it's the object that we relate to. I thought that was striking. The thing becomes even more powerful than the person who is represented because our eyes are immediately drawn to these objects. When I started making my paintings, I focused on this aspect of the power and politics of objects.

PD: In some of your paintings the figures seem burdened by the collar. In the painting *Male Bird of Paradise*, for instance, his body appears weighted down by his floral collar.

AB: When you mention that, I get emotional because my nephew depicted in the painting was going through a lot mentally and he is burdened, of course. The collars may look beautiful with the plants but it becomes a burden. Can you imagine even wearing one of

WHEN YOU DRESS UP, IT ACTUALLY CHANGES HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF AND IT TRANSFORMS YOU. I LIKE THE IDEA OF FABRIC BECAUSE IT IS A WAY OF TRANSFORMING THE WEARER-- TO ADD A DIFFERENT SELF, FOR WANT OF A BETTER WORD.

these 16th century costumes? These collars were originally made from wires and beads. Can you imagine wearing that around your neck for long periods of time? It becomes a burden on the body in that sense. And, if you don't wear it, then you'll lose that kind of visual power and control as a ruler or as a person of certain class or status.

In *Male Bird of Paradise*, I created that collar from cardboard and paper, and then I attached leaves and ferns. It's not that the collar was heavy. The object itself was not heavy. It wasn't an object that was his burden but rather, his emotions were overwhelming. I wanted to make the collar out of a range of natural elements because I want it to be a shield or a kind of support. It has multiple meanings.

PD: Your treatment of dress and adornment in your paintings weaves together ideas of cultural and design creativity, mimicry, and identity which makes the paintings conceptually complex.

AB: Personally, I'm not really into fashion that much, but I'm fascinated by how people express themselves through clothing and use fashion to fit in and show a certain

status. When I'm making the paintings I'm not even thinking about fashion, in that sense, but, when I look at the paintings, I am thinking of how I can make the image rich. One way is by just layering things that you wouldn't think belong in the same space. But, I do take elements from these periods like the Elizabethan era with these elaborate dress codes of kings and queens. It's about enriching the image that you're looking at. I am not necessarily elevating the status of the figures by painting these references. I'm not trying to do that.

PD: It's hard to not make comparisons between the black subjects and the clothing references that you use to adorn them. The clothing was worn by Europeans during the height of the slave trade. They seem to create a narrative around the legacy of colonialism.

AB: We're from the Caribbean. I love history. And one of the things I thought was lacking in history is that I didn't know enough about our African descendants. I use these elements to reflect on their experiences. What I find fascinating is that histories are written by individuals and that you can always change them. That's what I'm trying to do—share my

own idea of that same story. To add-on to the stories [of black people in the West].

PD: When we discuss how Black people adorn themselves with aspects of European culture it is easy to take a critical position against that type of practice. When you discuss the issue of cultural mimicry you also talk about adaptation. I find that your position has a certain kindness and understanding of decisions people make to survive under conditions of power and extreme violence.

AB: My move to Kingston is actually how it started. When you grow up in a certain space, you only know what is in that space and I didn't have access to TV. Growing up, I didn't have access to a lot of things. My access was through books—I was reading about different issues in different cultures. If you're from the rural areas in Jamaica everybody says "Kingston is a bad place" and expresses negative ideas about it. But when I moved there I started to see how rich Kingston was through the diversity. It made me question and become more critical about my own perceptions. My move to Kingston was important in developing a critical perspective on knowledge and identity.

PD: Alicia, could you discuss the inspiration for your recent exhibition, *What About the Men*?

AB: The idea for *What About the Men* came about from observing my nephews. I have no brothers and I don't have a very close relationship with my father, even though we have a relationship. By observing my nephews, having my son, and looking at how men operate in this society, I realize that the media and different cultures tell men to behave a certain way.

PD: Admittedly, I was surprised by and curious about the exhibition's title. I remember several years ago this question was being asked in Jamaica by men

who were concerned that girls were outperforming boys in education, with more young women at university, and of course there were also concerns about young boys getting mixed up in crime. I remember feeling that the question was being asked without acknowledging the serious institutional and cultural biases that existed against women. And of course, today, following the renewed conversation around gender discrimination and sexual violence with the #MeToo movement, the title is provocative. Is the title a confrontational question or a beckoning to conversation? Could you discuss the title's significance?

AB: Before I started that new body of work, I was just making the paintings that I am most known for—these portraits of women—and I had to put them aside because when something is pressing it's very hard for you to focus on doing anything else. I had an invitation to this solo show at UUU Art Collective in Rochester, New York, and at the time a lot of things were happening in my family. This is not easy for me to talk about. One of my nephews was having a lot of issues. He just came out of the hospital after being "Baker Acted" and this wasn't the first attempt.

PD: Could you explain what this means?

AB: It's a term to describe putting someone in an institution—a behavioral or psych ward—if you are trying to hurt yourself or commit suicide. You're under watch 24 hours to determine the reason behind wanting to self-harm.

PD: I see.

AB: The painting in the show, *Male Bird of Paradise*, depicts his aura and the way he looked when he came out of the hospital. We wanted him to come and stay with us to get a break and to be in a different environment. He has tried numerous times. That along with observing other nephews, you know, I could



Alicia Brown, Male Bird of Paradise, 2021. Oil on canvas, 64 x 42 in. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo by Daniel Perales Studio.

not focus on anything else. I was trying to figure out how I can help them, how I can help my nephew, in particular. And, I started thinking about my son as well and thinking about how cruel society can be, how cruel family can be and how all of that affects you.

As an artist, as a mother myself, and as his aunt, I love him dearly. I started to think about how I could bring up this idea of mental illness, especially the fact that young men feel like they cannot talk about their emotions or talk about what hurts them.

PD: Another painting in the show, *You Look Just Like Your Father*, includes female figures in a double portrait.

AB: That's the only painting in the recent exhibition depicting women. That painting is about my niece who I took care of and who was like my child--we had this very strong connection. I decided to include the painting in the exhibition because her father was not a part of her life, and I could see how that affected her. It's a very common thing in Caribbean culture where you have a lot of absent fathers. Or, a lot of fathers who have about a hundred children, and you know it's almost impossible for you to maintain a relationship with a hundred children. In my niece's case, she was her father's only child and he decided he didn't want to be a part of her life, and that really hurt her.

PD: So this work is also about manhood and pain from a different perspective--from a daughter's perspective.

AB: My niece's father recently passed away. He was killed. She was hoping to have this relationship, but then he got killed. So you can just imagine how that affects someone because she loved her father. She looks just like him, and that is why I decided to name the painting that too.

The painting is of my niece and her friend. I needed to represent both of them because

they are two strong young women. I wanted to represent them in a way where they feel like they belong somewhere and that their stories are as important as anybody else's. I wanted to represent the women, along with young men, to show how women are expected to hold up the fort in a lot of ways.

PD: In the background of the painting there's a faceless male figure on the wall. Is this to represent an absent father?

AB: I almost forgot that was there. Interestingly, that's a silhouette of my father. Even though he's my niece's grandfather there's still not a strong bond between them. So again, I am pointing to that cycle. Your father can be present but can also be absent. You're not really communicating. I really have no relationship with him. And that's also the case for my nephew, who as I said, inspired this whole series of paintings.

PD: You have said that you wanted viewers to see themselves in the sitters: "to share their world, and to come to the awareness that we share so much in common, we are connected as beings." How would you say this relates to your approach to contemporary figuration?

AB: When a viewer looks at one of my paintings, I want them to see that they are no different from the person they're looking at in the painting, because as humans, we have a certain connection. In making the paintings, I'm trying to understand the different stories I have heard and the stories I have learned. I'm trying to figure things out. As an artist, I just try to share the stories [of] these experiences that I've had and [the] experiences of others. I also want the viewers to keep questioning as well. When they look at a painting, I don't want them to simply ask, 'Why did I put a spoon there?' but to dive deeper and try to think about the significance of the object, and what it could mean to a different group of people.

PD: What are you working on now?

AB: Currently I am working on a new body of work for a solo show with Winston Wachter Fine Art in NY scheduled for 2023.

PD: I wish you well, Alicia. Thank you.

AB: Thank you.

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RECLAMA- TION OF SELF

A scar can be a physical manifestation of desire, or a clock that keeps track of cyclical time, reminding us of what was once abundantly available, now sutured but still visible beneath the surface. It is a beautiful palimpsest because of this willingness to remain, despite external forces that seek to prescribe endless remedies for invisible symptoms. A scar is a marker of a persistent past but an even more persistent future. Our bodies are fluid, resilient, and multifaceted. We can resist legibility, digestibility, commodification, and consumption. It is possible to write our own narratives and reclaim ourselves for the world we live in today, freed from the dreams and aspirations of the dead, while still cultivating generative possibilities for a future. Reclamation is a powerful ongoing practice aligned with decolonization that requires, first and foremost, a deep and urgent sense of care. Strength comes from understanding the self in context with those around you. How might worldbuilding and self-making facilitate the cumulative power of community? What can love look like among the ruins of an empire, informed by the past, or in the vast field of the unknown? In this section, Juan Omar Rodriguez interviews artist Felicita "Felli" Maynard about their photography and archival intervention, as well as the potential of queer and trans reclamation of historical representations of Black bodies. Maya Ortiz Saucedo discusses the role of craft and bodily autonomy with artist Benjamin Lundberg Torres Sánchez, highlighting the nuances of ancestral memory and performance. In conversation with artist and activist María Jose, Laura Suárez contextualizes the transformative power of trans resistance and shared community, critiquing institutional hierarchies, biases, and violences.

By Juan Omar Rodriguez

**QUEERNESS AND
BLACKNESS IN
THE ARCHIVE:**

**AN INTERVIEW
WITH FELICITA
“FELLI”
MAYNARD**



Jean with hands up, 2019, Ambrotype. Courtesy of the artist.

"WHAT WE HAVE LOST AS
AFRICAN-DIASPORIC PEOPLE,
AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE,
AS QUEER PEOPLE,
AS TRANS PEOPLE, AND
AS UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE
IS MEMORY. WE HAVE LOST
OUR MEMORY."

Felicita “Felli” Maynard is a genderqueer Afro-Latinx photographer based in Brooklyn who works against the silences of our archives and the violent history of photography by creating images grounded in speculative history and consent. By foregrounding embodiment and ritual as important forms of memory and as models of archival activation, Felli brings together the past and present to assert that queer and trans Black people have a historical presence and will continue to exist.

I first encountered Felli’s work after reading *Intergalactic Travels: poems from a fugitive alien* (2020) by AfroIndigenous poet Alan Pelaez Lopez. In this collection of art and writings is a manifesto for Black and Indigenous artists, which opens with the lines quoted above, calling forth the most marginalized in the Americas. They argue that as people struggling against empire, we must take up the responsibility of remembering, that our ancestors “left us blueprints of how to resist, survive and thrive” in art, and that we need artists to win the revolution.

Echoing Pelaez Lopez’s sentiment that colonialism and empire have disrupted our memory, Felli takes on the responsibility of remembering those who have not been recorded in official archives or in our family albums. Felli’s black-and-white photographs document contemporary figures for a more expansive archive, validating the presence and entanglement of queer, trans, Black, and Latinx communities while also inviting us all to imagine and claim our unnamed ancestors.



Juan Omar (JO): You recently participated in *The Now* at Pen + Brush. Can you tell me more about the exhibition and the work that you showed?

Felli (F): It was a group show with artists Hannah Layden, Rowan Renee & Beatrice Scaccia. All our work brought in aspects of what we felt are issues that are being talked about now, such as gender identity, body dysmorphia, anxiety, depression, ownership of your body physically, and ownership related to technology. The work I showed is part of a larger series called *Ole Dandy*. It looks into the lives of two fictional characters that I created, Jean Loren Feliz and Angelo Lwazi Owenzayo. They are both male impersonators that would have lived during the early 1900s. I have always been interested in the whole idea of history, queer history, how there are a lot of gaps that just shouldn’t be there. And then from an Afro-Latinx perspective—my mom is Colombian and my dad is Panamanian. I don’t know any of my queer ancestors related to my

blood line and who could have possibly been in my life. So me creating these characters is a way of also looking into my own history, but also looking into this bigger history—of queer, trans and nonbinary individuals.

I just started making this work. I was really influenced by *When Brooklyn Was Queer* (2019), by Hugh Ryan. In the book, I learned about Florence Hines who was a drag king during the 1890s, a Black drag king.

JO: During one of our email conversations, you mentioned that *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) by Cheryl Dunye was really influential for your work. I saw the film recently, and this one quote from the ending credits where Dunye says, “Sometimes you have to create your own history,” seemed particularly resonant with *Ole Dandy*. Can you talk more about this influence and about the role of speculative history in your work?

F: So I knew about *The Watermelon Woman*

by Cheryl Dunye, but didn't know about it. I kind of stumbled upon the movie while I was working as a gallery assistant at the Whitney Museum. They had a retrospective of Zoe Leonard's work, she was the photographer who worked with Cheryl to make the archival images for the movie. So I'm in the galleries. I'm looking at this work and I'm just like, "who are these queers?" These are lesbians in the 1930s, and the main focus is this Black woman. Representation, representation! I don't remember if the exhibition said that the photo series was from *The Watermelon Woman*, but looking more into the work, I found out that it was related to this movie and then saw the movie and was just like, "this is really awesome." I thought to myself, "how did I not know about this movie for so long?"

I'm supposed to be giving light to the fact that my ancestors existed. Giving light to the fact that there have always been fluid beings. The fact that colonialism has come in and messed up everything and basically made it seem that us Black queer people are not supposed to be here. We're magical people, we always have been, and we've been connected to things spiritually and magically. Re-finding *The Watermelon Woman* was just part of the whole thing to solidify that, like, "look, you're doing the right thing. You're on the right path. Keep doing the work."

I'm doing a mentorship program with Queer | Art, an organization that helps with the advancement of queer artists. My mentor is photographer Lola Flash, who is dope and has been doing the work for so long. The first time I went to their house for our first meeting, there was a portrait of Cheryl right there. Things keep letting me know that I'm on the right path.

JO: That's really amazing! Can you talk more about this dynamic of being driven by the ancestors to uncover and create the stories that are hidden or missing in the archive?

F: Literally we all have a piece of the archive,

like I tell people all the time, "You have your own archive. Your photo albums. Go back to those, those are your archive." Those are literally parts of your family, pieces of things, moments in time that you can't fully understand but feel somewhat... feel very much connected to. I start off with that. I think about the queer archive and it hasn't been documented the way it needed to be or saved in the way it should have been, either for the fact of lack of understanding, erasure by family, or just someone seeking total privacy. When looking through the public archive, I keep thinking about this thing of not wanting to "out" anybody. And even though the archive is important, going back into archives is very tricky because I don't want to tell a story that doesn't want to be told. That's why for *Ole Dandy*, even though Florence Hines influenced most of the work, I didn't want to tell the story of Florence. I wanted to tell the story of someone who could have been like Florence, could have lived at the same time as Florence, but I'm not putting any words in anyone's mouth. Sometimes a person or thing you find in the archive was never meant to be brought back out.

The archive is a beautiful place, but it can be a dark and lonely place as well. A lot of the work that I'm trying to do, too, is just to make a more public archive—my characters have given consent to have their archive be out there, to basically educate people. I'm constantly thinking about how to integrate everything in a way that makes sense but also creates a safe space.

JO: I really appreciate you talking about the dynamics of the archive and the politics and potential issues of doing these kinds of creative interventions. When I first learned about your photography, I was thinking a lot about Carlos Motta's 2015 film *Deseos*, which features a fictional conversation between two queer women from the 1800s; one from Colombia and one from the Ottoman Empire. The character from Colombia, Martina, is



Angelo under the Clark Street Station, 2019, Silver Gelatin Print. Courtesy of the artist.

based on legal documents of an intersex woman tried at the Spanish colonial court for having an “unnatural” body. Her story only exists because of this documentation that came from a legal system that criminalized non-normative bodies and “deviant” desires. I’m also thinking now about William Dorsey Swann, the first American—not just Black American, first American—to lead a queer resistance group, in the 1880s, and also the first person to dub himself a drag queen. And we only know of him because of his arrest documents in the legal archive.

F: And in tabloids. I’m thinking about how they would have had the conversation about people at that time, and it’s not always, like, the most positive.

JO: Yeah, exactly. Using these documents to uncover forgotten or silenced narratives also

has the potential of bringing traumas back to life. Your practice, however, circumvents that by creating these new images that look historical. Can you talk more about your choice of medium?

F: I became really interested in wet plate photography for two reasons. One reason is the history of wet plate photography. I’m shooting tintypes and ambrotypes, but daguerreotypes were the previous form, kind of like the grandfather of everything. The first daguerreotypes that I saw were the slave classification daguerreotypes by Louis Agassiz from the 1850s. These images are really gruesome, just non-consensual images used as a way to show that Africans and African-Americans were less than. I thought to myself, “What if I learned this process and then made new images that kind of cancel

out these old, messed up representations of Black bodies?”

Photography was created at the same time that Europeans were colonizing Africa, so it was not only used to document atrocities but also implemented as a power tool. European photographers often did not ask the African people they photographed for consent, and they also staged many of the photographs to support the colonial project. Now we have these ethnographic images that are messed up. So what if I made a new set and found a way to still cancel out all this BS?

The second reason is that wet plate allows me to be the creator of all my materials, which I find is very important for my work. I want my hand in as much of the process as I can. With this process, I'm mixing my own chemicals. I'm collecting my own glass, so I'm trying to also do it in a way that's sustainable.

JO: We talked about ritual as another form of archive in an earlier conversation. How does this come up in your practice, especially in relation to what you just said about your presence in and ownership of the creative process?

F: I feel like every time I do this whole process—especially with the wet plate—it's like an energy exchange between me and the other person. We both are in ritual together because we have to work in unison in order to make this thing work. From start to finish, shooting one plate can take anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour, and that's just one plate. I want the subjects that I'm photographing to represent themselves how they want to be represented, and it's not about what I want you to do. It's what you want to do and how you feel to do it. I don't want to capture your soul, but I want your soul to shine through the image. And in that sense, every time I do the process, because it's so intensive and it has so many parts to it, it becomes a ritual for me as well.

JO: In your *Ole Dandy* series, you photograph yourself as embodying one of your characters. I'm thinking about embodiment as a way to connect with the ancestors, to remember history—of being in history and bringing the past to the present. What is it like to photograph your own body?

F: It's so hard. It's such a process. Sometimes to take a self-portrait, it takes me all day. I'm also a semi-perfectionist when it comes to this work because it's very important to me. I want it to be as authentic as I can make it. In the *Ole Dandy* series, my character is Jean Loren Feliz. They are from New Orleans and their father is from Panama, and their mother is from New Orleans. Their father came to the United States basically looking for gold during the gold rush and ended up moving to New Orleans. When I think about Jean, when I embody Jean, I think about people like Gladys Bentley. I think about people like Stormé DeLarverie, Florence Hines, and Mabel Hampton—she helped start the Herstory Archives in Park Slope. I try to embody these people but also do it in a way that shows it's so many pieces. It's so many pieces that I'm bringing together.

And even sometimes when I take the photographs and I look at them later, I don't see myself in them. I see someone else. I see Jean—I really do see Jean at times. Even when I'm performing Jean, too, I bring aspects of my grandfather and aspects of my uncles and make this character a very well-rounded person, not only based off of my experiences but also based off of the experiences of these inspirational individuals.

JO: Your images connect people from the past, present, and future, so I'm wondering if you can talk more about your conception of time.

F: Afrofuturism plays a big part in all of this just for the fact that with my work, I'm trying to have it be like layers of past, present, and future. There is no specific time for all this.

This could even be happening right now in another time dimension. That's why it feels so right and so strong. Time is like layers. Time is not as static as we think it to be. So maybe even by doing this work, this ripple effect will go into the past somehow, and I know it's definitely going to go into the future.

We need to continue doing this work because there has to be more equal representation in how people see our community and also dismantling a lot of issues.

JO: Yes, definitely. I'm wondering if you can talk more about representation and community and your relationship to Latinidad. Black people live everywhere in the Americas because of slavery and migration. But the prevalence of anti-Blackness and white supremacy throughout the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean erases this historical presence.

F: Blackness exists everywhere. It's a part of slavery. It's a part of colonialism. Black people are everywhere. They might be a very small minority where they are at, but they're there. So it's just like the Latinx community generally—Latinx people are everywhere, and part of it is from having to leave your home country to find a "better life." And in a way, yes, it is a better life, but in other ways you inherit a whole bunch of things related to, ultimately the big problem, colonialism. And until we find a way to dismantle all that or really own up to the fact that that is the elephant in the room, there's just going to continue to be problems. That's just what it is.

JO: I'm a second-generation immigrant, so I think a lot about this sense of dislocation that I feel because of my proximity to the experience of migration. I remember you spoke about your experience as a second-generation immigrant in your interview for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. How does this experience inform your thinking about the queer ancestors in your immediate family?

F: That's once again another elephant in the room, and that's why I live my life so loudly because I want the next generation or whoever to have someone to look to. I've always been seeking some type of LGBTQ elderly community to be there for me, and that's why doing this mentorship program with Lola has been so important in my life and just so awesome. They're like the queer parent that I never had. It's kind of awesome. I think people don't realize, especially for us queers, the relationship that we have with home is already complicated. And then when you also add issues of immigration and issues of trying to find belonging, it's literally like just trying to belong on steroids because you're trying to belong at home, you're trying to belong within the LGBTQ community. You're trying to belong in so many ways.

JO: That is so powerful. Lola Flash has a series where they've been documenting LGBTQ elders. Working under their mentorship, you've been in close proximity to these projects that are thinking about the people that are alive now who we can claim and celebrate as ancestors. I'd love to hear more about your relationship with Lola.

F: It's awesome. It's been such an awesome, awesome experience. And it's funny because—it once again shows me all the pieces are coming together. Before we met, me and Lola were in a show at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. I modeled for the Pur-suit deck, photographed by Naima Green. Lola also modeled for that. We're in a lot of things together, and it has been validating for my own work but also just shows me we were supposed to meet. Even if we didn't meet through Queer | Art, we were going to meet anyway because their name kept popping up. Before we met in person, I went to their big retrospective at Pen + Brush gallery. Amazingly enough, a few years later I got to show work in the same space. I feel very blessed and very grateful to the universe, my ancestors, and everyone in my community.





Jean in the Garden, 2019, Tintype. Courtesy of the artist.

RECLAMATION OF SELF

JO: What other projects are you working on?

F: I'm very interested in showing equal representation of people like me. I've just started doing a series of self-documentation, self-portraits, titled *Studies on a Fluid Body*. I'm coming more into myself and understanding who I am and also showing a lot of people that transness and gender nonbinary-ness come in many shapes and sizes. It's fluid. There's no one way that you have to look in order to be trans or to be whatever. If that's part of you, that's part of you. And through this work, I'm doing self-portraits. I'm writing journal entries. I'm also coupling it up with family photographs and things like that. Doing this deep dig to free myself but also hopefully free someone else in the process.

JO: Who are the artists that inspire you?

F: I'm really inspired by the work of Lola Flash, Texas Isaiah, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Naima Green, Khadija Saye, Laylah Amatullah Barrayn, Adama Delphine Fawundu, Dario Calmese and so many more.

Right now I'm in an awesome show *Por Los Ojos de Mi Gente* with Alanna Fields, Alexis-Ruiseco Lombera, Antonio Pulgarin, Derick Whitson and Golden at the Baxter Street Camera Club of New York, curated by Alanna Fields and Antonio Pulgarin. All of the work in the show is based on this search for queer community, whether it be within ourselves or through finding others like ourselves.

Zanele Muholi also has been an inspiration. And Renee Cox.

JO: What is on the horizon for you? What are you excited about that's coming next?

F: I want to go to grad school. I think that's my next step. I think I'm at a bright point in my life and career to be thinking about that because my ultimate goal is to teach. I want to share this knowledge of wet plate with

more Black photographers, with more queer Black photographers who might not have the access to learn this. Even for me — I had to crowdfund to learn how to do this, and even with that I had to be persistent and say that this is something that I wanted to do because the world of wet plate is very much a white male world. I want to uncover the histories of the Black women in my family and also at the same time, work on creating a wet plate photography archive in Colombia of Black people there because I believe that they also deserve more representation. Colombia is very messed up when it comes to affairs related to Afro-Colombians. And hopefully with my privilege of being from the U.S., I can go over there and help, inspire, and educate.

JO: Thank you so much for your generosity, for sharing your thoughts, your experiences, and your work with us.

F: Thank you for having me, and thank you for also believing in me. By doing this, this is also just more inspiration and positive energy exchange so I appreciate it.

This interview was originally published on August 19, 2020.

By Maya Ortiz Saucedo

**ADOPTING
PERFORMANCE:
A CONVERSATION
WITH BENJAMIN
LUNDBERG
TORRES SANCHEZ**



Parachute, (circa 1988 – 2006) (2015) Performance photo. The Queens Museum (Queens, NY) © Sam Eckmeier 2015

RECLAMATION OF SELF

In the work of Benjamin Lundberg Torres Sánchez, the challenge of how to reimagine physical spaces alongside the presence of their body's own physical and generational history is interwoven with their identity as a transnational adoptee. I first encountered them in conversation for a curatorial project of theirs titled *Se Acullillo?*, co-curated by Kat Chavez, in Providence, Rhode Island. The project contested the fear from art spaces and institutions to work beyond tokenization and mass grouping, as well as the dismissal of identities and bodies, ideas challenged in Lundberg Torres Sánchez' various works.

As a domestic adoptee, ideas of reclamation and the search for ancestry and generational history place me in a personal state of limbo, a space that informs the way I navigate my work in relation to art. Conversations around discovering, deconstructing, and dismantling ancestry are dissected through the lens of our experiences as adoptees. There becomes a method of work in how we self-educate, while also educating those within, connected to or outside the community of Adopted and Fostered Peoples, a role Lundberg Torres Sánchez has taken on in their work surrounding Adoption and Foster Care Abolition.

In our conversations, I became drawn to how they engage spaces with histories and ancestry using their body as material and vehicle. In *TO THE BONE* (2017), Lundberg Torres Sánchez engages in the laborious task of sanding down the surface a piece of clapboard siding, painted "White Core," and slowly excavates to reveal the coat of "Nearly Brown" paint, an act that mirrors the labor of decolonization. Labor through the body is also seen in their earlier work *Parachute*, (circa 1988-2006) (2015), where Lundberg Torres Sánchez engages with a parachute created from newspaper archives given to them by their mother, compiled under the terms "Colombia" and "Adoption." The performance examines the term inheritance and what it carries, which as an adoptee can include the information of your personal history and first family given to you at the discretion of your adopted family. In further conversations throughout the years, and in our collaboration with the exhibition HILOS, ancestry became a perception of value, monetarily and intimately between an act in invitation of healing. I witnessed this in Lundberg Torres-Sánchez performance, *It will heal*, performed at the opening of HILOS at Latchkey Gallery in 2021, where they stitched the price of their adoption on their leg, "\$12-15K," inviting the audience to come remove each stitch, leaving the threads behind.

In a deeper conversation with Benjamin Lundberg Torres Sánchez, we spoke of their personal work as an artist and the work of Adopted and Fostered artists to dismantle and decipher these ideas within our personal context. In these short excerpts, Lundberg Torres Sánchez also highlights their work with Adoption and Foster Care abolition, how their adoptee identity influences their practice, and their work as a performance artist.



MOS: The idea of space is something I see in your work, your body as space, but also as a conceptual space. How is this idea of space in relation to boundaries and of the idea of forced removal something you play with in your performance work?

BLTS: Trying to place my body where my question is a phrase that comes up for me sometimes. In that way, I'm really trying to create spaces that are plural, that invite questioning or investigation, places that I make some guesses about that I'm really hopeful will be live enough to push me into directions I didn't plan for or perceive. I think early on in my performance work, I had to start in a very me-centered identitarian space, because that didn't feel available to me in theatre. I was receiving a lot of information that suggested to me that there was some kind of universal story to tap into, which I think a lot of artists face when they are being trained in a certain way, so I think I just had to break that down and build some comfortability in facing myself and my art, which looked like a lot of explorations of adoption and explorations of my relationships to states. I think an adoptee sometimes,

especially a transnationally adopted person, feels some kind of longing towards some kind of place that they don't maybe know or haven't experienced and that gets expressed most often in terms of nationalism because it's available. I think I had to really deal with some questions about experiences that I know are viewed in a particular way by mainstream cultures.

MOS: I want to touch upon your use of craft within your work. You use a lot of ideas of embroidery and using textile within these ideas that you're piecing together. In specifically talking about your piece *Ancestres* (2019) and the use of thread and fabric, how do these materials tie together with these ideas that you speak about?

BLTS: *Ancestres* (2019) came from a performance experiment, an impulse that I was asked to try to make something in 5 minutes. I was working on embroidery and I was feeling what you had brought up earlier about the commodification of ancestry and ancestors. I had to decide, how am I going to figure ancestors, so I chose Spanish and I chose gender neutralized Spanish. As a queer



Detail of skirt from *Ancestres* (2019) Photo. © Benjamin Lundberg Torres Sánchez 2020



It will heal. Video stills. Latchkey Gallery (Manhattan, NY.) © Josh Wells 2021

person who wants to investigate the queering and gender neutralizing of this language that I'm supposed to have a connection to but is also colonial, that part comes from what I can know, from my relationship to language, to to my body, to queerness. Am I talking in Spanish to antepasados? Or am I talking to ancestres, the different [ones] between generations that are near to me, and generations that are buried in history? I think what I'm hungry for is the root of the root. The other thing that was so apparent to me was this word [ancestres] has to be created with one unbroken thread because that's a fantasy I have as an adopted person. In this process, I wanted to make this cumbia skirt to dress myself in something that is available to me. My cultural references sometimes feel scarce to me, but I can like latch on to cumbia because it's something that feels available because of its spread. My heart reaches for the dress, my heart reaches for an idea of who came before me that I still have so many questions about, this process of weaving as both how am I trying to return to that story but then also in the performance in picking it out little by little and trying to unravel it. I see the holes that are still there, I see the impression of what the embroidery was before, I have the memory of doing it all over again. Another iteration of going into the thread, going into the story or going into the space of trying to understand again and then undoing it again. Thinking about it was really healing to me, to think about the ways in which what I cannot perceive is still there. The other point of that triangle between my question about ancestry, the dress or this cumbia skirt and the form of that movement was to bring in one of my most contemporary, superficial ways of grounding myself as somebody who knew that they were Colombian growing up, which was to put Shakira in there too. My dance and movement vacillated between when cumbia was playing on my tape recorder, but I stopped to undo the ancestor word while listening to *Underneath Your Clothes*, which was something that I was listening to

as a young person. I'm very interested in how you can bring a reference like that that has a personal meaning that other people don't really need to know or perceive. Every lyric felt a significance to this quest for ancestor and the relationship with ancestor, "you are a song/written by the hand of god" or Shakira's references to territory and the land and what is uncovered, and just wanting to have longing, desire and sit in desire and for intimacy with ancestors as such a huge part of the collage that is brought into that performance.

MOS: I know personally as someone who is domestically adopted I have a certain proximity, but at the same time, there's this distance in grasping at identity and specifically thinking about concepts of ancestry. I see personally, with the continuation of speaking of identity especially within Latinx art, the idea of ancestry constantly comes up. The whole idea of ancestry has become almost commercialized in some way with people hunting for DNA kits and learning about their "true" ancestry but also realizing the sort of privilege in that and how it's such a commodity. What are your thoughts on the idea of ancestry, how you sort of play with that and come to terms with that in terms of adoption, the child welfare complex and the foster care system.

BLTS: My immediate thoughts go towards this predicament of DNA testing within the perception of scarcity around identity for adopted people who are experiencing situations that touch on many other people's lived experiences, like forced removal, forced migration, being cut off from culture, from land, certain kinds of re-education, dynamics of assimilation. For transnationally adopted people, adoption is an immigration story. In indigeneity, I think there's a lot of ripe, messy and complex questioning that comes from an adoptee space about understanding relationship to land and kin from lands

that we've been removed from, particularly in my case, and in many other peoples context where indigeneity is criminalized and submerged by a national culture. Adoptees in reunion with their first family are even facing further blocks to knowing self because of the way that information has been submerged both by nation, by culture and by your direct family. To bring that back around to performance, I think that's why knowing and the body is so important to me, trying to understand what it is that I know in a sense without relying on some European shit like archives and data is really important to me, and sometimes that looks like sensing the body, sometimes it looks like figuring something outside of myself. All these things I've mentioned about migration or forced migration, these situations that spiral out of adoption, I think connect to other identity spaces certainly, but also just lived experiences of people on this earth.

MOS: I think people see adoption and foster care in such a separate light when it's connected to white supremacy and capitalism. Adoption is an industry of purchasing children as a product. I think a lot about the term "investment syndrome" and feeling like you were a paid-for product and how that affects thoughts on being an adoptee. I want to give you space to comment and speak towards abolition in terms of adoption and foster care.

BLTS: Right now, in returning to self and also connecting self to wider systems and experiences of others through considering adoption and foster care, I am so fortunate to be in community with a small group of people I met in the frame of an academic conference called the Alliance and Study of Adoption and Culture (ASAC) in 2018 in Oakland. With those comrades that I met there who stand many different kinds of experiences with adoption and foster care, transracially, transnationally and coercive adoptions compelled by the 1970s Baby Scoop. All

of our experiences certainly point to these systems that you're naming, of capitalism, of white supremacy, and, I think that's where my awareness was most early on in my politicized adoptee identity: considering whiteness and considering class and capitalism. I think you're right to name it as a for profit industry that requires children in order to remain profitable and there's a flow of children from the Global South to the Global North. I think as I continue to be in relationship with this struggle and to find more politicized adoptees and to find other spaces of connection that are opening up, we know that adoption and foster care disproportionately impact Black and brown people, in particular Black and Indigenous people, and so I think it's becoming more and more clear and apparent to me the systems like prisons and borders and the death penalty, are things that can cause a lot of harm in kinship, family members being removed from familial contexts, separation, short term and long term, that are injurious to people.

This interview was originally published on September 1, 2020.

ADDENDUM

I've learned a lot, and grown a lot – as a person impacted by adoption, as a Family Regulation Systems abolitionist – since we did this interview together, and appreciate the space to comment further. While it is true that adoption and foster care is a multibillion dollar industry that uses billions of dollars of public and private money annually and requires other people's children to keep the lights on and stay in business (think of the phrase "domestic supply of infants," in the draft opinion of the Roe v. Wade overturn), as my friend and collaborator, J. Khadijah Abdurahman recently noted, "the placement of black and indigenous children up for adoption or foster care is not driven primarily by the desires of adoptive parents but by the states' desire to eliminate their kinship ties, by any means necessary." People have to come to understand that adoption and foster care are rooted in specific histories of control that play out in our contemporary institutions. We know that it's the state and the non profit sector that have perpetuated the organized abandonment of families. These systems are not broken, they are working as intended.

By Laura Suárez

**“DON’T BOTHER
SEARCHING IF
THERE’S BEEN A
BITCH LIKE ME”:
A CONVERSATION
WITH MARIA JOSÉ**



María José, "Amor," 2020, archival inkjet print, 24 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist and El Museo del Barrio, New York.

On a Tuesday afternoon, I found myself calling María José via Instagram. The Puerto Rican artist can be hard to get a hold of but she's working on it. After a few back and forths on different platforms, she interrupts a conversation we're having on Instagram and says, "I'm free now?" She admits: "I'm very ephemeral, but I always show up and I show up magnificently."

María José is a self-described poet, photographer, performer, activist, mother, musician, designer, warrior, among so many other things. “I’m an intentional and intuitive bitch,” she confidently declares, “and observant. With big eyes, a big heart, and a big mind.” Even over Instagram, she carries a presence and charisma that is undeniable; she knows herself and it shows. María José has received a deal of notoriety on the island and beyond, including a profile about House of Grace in *TIME Magazine*, the trans, queer collective of which she is a/the mother. I was curious about her photography and her artistic practice, especially after seeing her works in El Museo del Barrio’s *Estamos Bien: La Trienal 20/21*. I have a particular interest in her as a subject. In our fifth grade class, she brought the first digital camera I ever saw. The tiny camera could only make single digit megapixel images, but after living within the boundaries of film, it seemed limitless. They’ve always been an artist, and one that I admire. I left the island as I entered my teens, while María José grew into herself, including being one of the most visible trans women in Puerto Rico. Now, after many years, she and her works are worthy of attention, and we’re overdue for a reintroduction.



María José had two photographs on display at *Estamos Bien*: “Papi” (2020, archival inkjet print, 24x18 in.) and “Love” (2019, archival inkjet print, 24x18 in.). In “Papi,” her father stands behind a scratched plexiglass structure that looks like a desk or a bank teller’s box separating the photographer from the subject beyond the mediating camera lens. The environment betrays a certain kind of wealth: “Papi,” the photographer’s own father, is wearing a suit. He is standing in what appears to be a well-manicured backyard, with well manicured lawns in the background. Juxtaposed against “Papi,” is the intimate “Love.” The psychic distance apparent in “Papi,” the perceived coldness from the subject’s stare, how he holds his hands, his apparent discomfort, and tense expression are all completely absent from “Love.” In “Love,” two people are kneeling in the middle of a road, approaching to kiss. They’re wearing yellow shirts and blue shorts. Unlike the manicured landscape in “Papi,” “Love” is set in *el campo*, where the lush, verdant landscape literally interrupts the infrastructure (the paved road) as a flood stream forms a small cascade. In a Junta governed, post-María Puerto Rico, queer love can triumph amidst the uncertainty of colonial capitalism,

much like nature can triumph over man’s interventions. The photograph rejects the binaries and social order imposed by imperial cis-heteropatriarchy. Love exists against those odds, in spite of those odds, and to spite those odds.

“I think my practice informs who I am,” she begins, “I feel deeply, observe carefully, and embody intentionally. Photography is the art of observing; poetry is the art of feeling and putting word into feeling; and performance is the art of embodying. I’m a highly sensitive girl.”

Her photographs pack layers of poetry, they tell a story. Her poems conjure images, and are performances in and of themselves, like when she delivered a speech/poem during the Summer 2019 Ricky Renuncia protests. Her performances, including voguing the house down boots, physically and kinetically express her poetic spirit, and her expertise in composing visual forms. It’s no wonder that when I asked her which artists have influenced her, she jumped to the surrealists.

“I consider myself, as an artist, a surrealist, first and foremost. In my art education, I

always gravitated towards surrealism, and the surrealists...but they were all assholes!" She concludes with a laugh. Who is she influenced by? "I would say Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Marcel Duchamp—who did drag! And loved Dada. Dada is the camp of art history." Duchamp's alter-ego "Rose Sélavy," has been immortalized in Man Ray's photographs both as a hyper-feminized cosmopolitan French woman, and as a much more masculine presenting "man in a dress." Duchamp seems like a fitting ancestor to María José, and not merely in his irreverent gender play. When asked by New Yorker art critic Calvin Tomkins about why it appeared that Duchamp didn't really believe in art, despite having a life full of it, Duchamp replied, "I don't believe in art, I believe in artists," which is a fitting summary of María José's own philosophy.

"I seek to find ways to decolonize the medium. I see my presence in the field as an attempt to decolonize." There's this ongoing question for María José, "How can what I do be a social practice? And the answer for me is to redistribute wealth."

When given opportunities and platforms to discuss her art, she would rather not. She's done with professionalism, and these questions that ask her to make herself digestible, quantifiable, and understandable, in "rows and columns," like she can be reduced to an Excel spreadsheet. "Isn't what you see enough?" she declares, "Isn't what you feel enough?" She refuses to be the art world's token trans girl. The representation of trans artists in exhibitions is not enough for institutions to claim allyship with trans people.

"[Merely including trans artists] is not redistributing the resources that you already have. You have to be actively redistributing those resources to trans people in Puerto Rico. I would not like to demand, but there's a lot that we need. Not that I need, that my friends need, my poor friends, and as someone with access to spaces, platforms,

people, and connections, I am going to try to really pull this [redistribution of resources] off. But also, I deserve this. I am a great artist, and I'm not only great, I'm also unique, and not in the ways that it is unimportant to be unique, but I am a trans woman in Puerto Rico after all. Don't bother searching if there's been a bitch like me [in these art spaces]... There has not been!" She may be one of the first, but refuses to be the last. "I won't let myself become the end of that space [for trans people] that needs to be nurtured and expanded, and which will require a redistribution of resources and power."

María José is clear on how her own family's wealth has contributed to her success. She spoke about having access to shelter, to food, to the very basics needed for human survival. But she also had access to film, to equipment, to developing the film, and to an elite education in one of the most expensive private universities in the United States. But she uses that privilege and those opportunities to prioritize others.

"People need to have a larger sense of urgency when it comes to supporting, centering, empowering, enriching. There needs to be an urgency, in all levels of our society, of really supporting, centering, empowering, and enriching the voices of the whole nine [yards] for immigrant, trans, Black, feminine people.

"People are dying." Puerto Rico leads the United States in transphobic murders. When we began our conversation, she spoke of the "third girl" she knew to die recently. I asked María José if she felt any risks associated with being so hypervisible as a trans woman in Puerto Rico.

"I think what's tricky about trans women is that we look so beautiful, and so powerful. We emanate inner power. Aside from, of course, people wanting to murder me, I risk people projecting on my identity this false idea of who I am, or not having a full representation

THERE NEEDS TO BE AN URGENCY, IN ALL LEVELS OF OUR SOCIETY, OF REALLY SUPPORTING, CENTERING, EMPOWERING, AND ENRICHING THE VOICES OF THE WHOLE NINE [YARDS] FOR IMMIGRANT, TRANS, BLACK, FEMININE PEOPLE.

of what's going on in my life. With fame comes idealization." The risks, including the ever present threat of transfemicide, feel minimal to the artist compared to the urgency of now.

"When it comes to creating spaces for people that are less fortunate than you, blazing trails for people that maybe have no access to fire to blaze it themselves, it really is a responsibility. And I feel like white people, and people with class privilege always think of the work that we have to do as a sacrifice and not a responsibility. It sucks to be the only trans person in a room, feeling constantly misunderstood, having to put in the emotional and material labor of putting myself in the front lines, but, it's not really a time to be at peace. You know? We can foster inner peace, but also people are dying. People are dying. Black trans people need spaces to live, and be, and work. There's a lot of extreme poverty in Puerto Rico. So...when I look at the entire picture, I'm actually really thankful that I get to play a part in this."

María José is writing her own narrative, and centering others in the process, while uplifting herself. At her core, she is still an artist, a poet, a dreamer, while also being a warrior, a guardian, and an activist.

"I think what art can offer is quite important to humankind. People have to say what they want to say, what they want to feel, what they want to put on a canvas, what they want to write, how they want to move in a space. I feel like these are contributions that are being missed out on, because there's no systemic support for these people who want to die, who are working at fast food chains for \$7.25 an hour. But I have marvelous gifts, and those people that are close to me. I'm just really passionate about uplifting other Puerto Rican trans artists working on decolonization, anti-racism, anti-capitalism, the abolition of the binary. I believe in that, and I get to do it."

This interview was originally published on October 8, 2021.



María José, Papi (2020, archival inkjet print, 24x18 in.), Courtesy of the artist and El Museo del Barrio, New York.

RECLAMATION OF SELF

ART- IST BIOS

LOURDES BERNARD

Lourdes Bernard is a Dominican–American artist from Brooklyn. She is a graduate of Syracuse University School of Architecture and she practiced architecture for 23 years working on high-end projects nationwide. She is a graduate of the New York Studio School of Painting and Drawing. She is a Brooklyn Arts Council 2022 grantee and in 2020 she received the Sendak–Glynn Narrative Illustration Grant from the Yaddo Foundation. Artist residencies include a Yaddo Foundation fellowship, a Wurlitzer Foundation fellowship, an artist residency at El Museo del Barrio, a JCAL artist residency, a Heliker LaHotan Foundation fellowship and a Vermont Studio Center residency. Her work has been exhibited at El Museo del Barrio, Boston College, The Wilmer Jennings Gallery, FiveMyles Gallery, MoMA PS1, the Brooklyn Central Library, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, and other venues. As an art educator, she often lectures on her research-based projects and leads art making workshops at colleges and cultural institutions. Her work is in numerous private collections.

ALICIA BROWN

Born in 1981, St. Ann, Jamaica, Alicia Brown is a contemporary realist oil painter. She received her BFA in Painting and a diploma in Art Education from Edna Manley College of the Visual Performing Arts and an MFA in Painting from the New York Academy of Art in 2014. She was a recipient of the Dawn Scott Memorial award from the Jamaica Biennial 2017, two Elizabeth Foundation Grants 2019 and 2021, the Joan Brady Foundation Grant 2013 and LCU Foundation Grants 2012 and 2014. Alicia has attended residencies at the Leipzig International Art Program in Germany and the Cuttyhunk Island Artists' residency in Massachusetts. Exhibitions have included the 2017 Jamaica Biennial, Prizm Art Fair Miami, Jamaica Spiritual 2017 London, and Painting the Figure Now 2019 at the Wausau Museum of Contemporary Art. She has had solo shows at Studio 174 in Kingston, Jamaica 2016 and Virago Gallery, Seattle, Washington 2019. Her work has been featured in Beautiful Bizarre Magazine, American Art Collector, Painting the Figure Now 2019 magazine, SHOUT MIAMI magazine, ARTIT Voice of Artists Magazine, Caribbean Quarterly Journal, and other publications. Her work is in notable collections such as the Bennett Collection of Women Realists and other private collections.

JOSÉ CAMPOS

Studio Lenca (José Campos) fled his native El Salvador during the violent civil war in the 1980s. The war claimed the lives of over 80,000 Salvadoreños and displaced much of the population. José travelled to the US by land with his mother and grew up as an undocumented illegal immigrant. Eventually settling in the UK, José received a Masters from Goldsmiths University of London in 2019. His work is collected and exhibited globally and was recently acquired by the MER Foundation.

C.J. CHUECA

C.J. Chueca has lived between Lima and New York since 2003. Chueca's history as a perpetual immigrant has led her to explore the concepts of home, territory, transit, multiculturalism, uprooting, and solitude. Her work focuses on those lives that are still on the road (or without

route) in the streets of the world. In another way, she investigates water as a subject and metaphor: its never ending ride, its possibility to pass through the smallest gap, its condition of eternal traveler, and its power to transform like a river mixing with other rivers in the grandiosity of the ocean. C.J. Chueca's exhibitions in 2021 include: *What Lies Beneath* at Kates-Ferri Projects NY, *El sonido de las voces que se unen* at CCEspaña Tegucigalpa, curated by Blanca de la Torre, Micaela, *La Sangre de Todas* at Vigil Gonzales Galería, *A Very Anxious Feeling: Voices of Unrest in the American Experience*; *20 Years of the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection* at the Taubman Museum of Art, curated by Amethyst Rey Beaver and Eva Thornton, *Art Souterrain* in Montreal with a public commissioned installation curated by Dulce Pinzón at Palais des Congres and *Hay algo incomedible en la garganta. Poéticas antipatriarcales y nueva escena en los años noventa* at ICPNA-Lima, curated by Miguel López. Her work has been featured in *Hyperallergic*, *Artnet*, *Flaunt*, *Artishock*, *Artealdia*, *El Comercio* y *La República*, among others. Forthcoming, C.J. Chueca will work on a public commission in the Bronx managed by Percent for Art, from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

PETRINA DACRES

Petrina Dacres is a current curatorial fellow at the International Studio and Curatorial Program. As the Head of Art History at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, her teaching, research, and writing focuses on Caribbean Art, African Diaspora Art, Public Sculpture and Memorials, and Memory Studies. She is also a founding member of Tide Rising Art Projects, an organization created to support and promote contemporary Caribbean art and film.

EVA MAYHABAL DAVIS

Eva Mayhabal Davis (b. Toluca, Mexico) is a cultural advocate working directly with artists and creatives in the production of exhibitions, texts, and events. Recently, she was the co-curator of *Bronx Calling: The Bronx 5th Biennial* at The Bronx Museum of the Arts and is a co-director at *Transmitter*, a collaborative curatorial initiative. She has curated exhibitions at *BronxArtSpace*, the *Queens Museum*, *Smack Mellon*, *NARS Foundation*, *The Latinx Project* and *TSA New York/Chicago*. Her writing has been featured in exhibition catalogs and publications such as the *NYU Hemispheric Institute's Cuadernos*, *Nueva Luz: Photographic Journal*, and *Swap Meet* with *Temblores Publications*. Eva bridges cultural and community building as an Intake Paralegal at *UnLocal, Inc*, a non-profit organization that provides direct legal aid and community education to New York City's undocumented immigrant communities.

ALICIA DIAZ

As a Puerto Rican contemporary dance artist in the diaspora, Alicia Díaz's choreographic work speaks to issues of memory and identity, migration, colonialism, and the legacy of slavery. Her decolonizing and inclusive artistic and pedagogical approaches are rooted in the premise that the body is a site of knowledge. She is committed to engaging dance as a tool for social justice through acts of co-creation and collaboration, creating works for concert dance, museums, film, and site-specific locations. Trained in modern dance at The Ailey School of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and later in postmodern dance at Movement Research in New York City. Alicia has performed professionally nationally and internationally with *Complexions Contemporary Ballet*, *Andanza: Puerto Rican Contemporary Dance Company*, *Donald Byrd/The*

Group, Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre, Maida Withers Dance Construction Company, numerous independent choreographers including Marion Ramírez and Sally Silvers. She has co-directed several companies including Rubí Theatre, an intergenerational ensemble that produced original plays and conducted performance workshops in New York City; en la brega dance company, with Esther Ñequi González; and Agua Dulce Dance Theater, with Matthew Thornton. Recent collaborations with Puerto Rican percussionist Héctor “Coco” Barez engage with Afro-Puerto Rican Bomba as a point of reference to investigate cultural memory, resistance, and healing. Alicia is associate professor of dance at The University of Richmond where she received the 2020 Center for Civic Engagement’s Community-Engaged Scholarship Award. Alicia serves on the Board of Papatíán: Bronx Arts CoLABorative and served as one of the lead artists of Dancing La Botánica: La Tierra Vive!, a platform that supports Latinx dance artists that center Afro-Latinx, Caribbean, Latin American, and indigenous traditions.

FRANCISCO DONOSO

Francisco Donoso is a transnational artist based in NYC. Donoso’s works are embodiments of the human experience where notions of placement and fixed boundaries are questioned to reveal the precariousness of belonging. Originally from Ecuador, but raised in Miami, FL, he’s been a recipient of DACA since 2013. He received his BFA from Purchase College and has participated in fellowships and residencies at Wave Hill as a Van Lier Fellow, Stony Brook University, The Bronx Museum Artist in the Marketplace, and the Kates-Ferri Projects Residency, among others. Francisco has participated in solo and group exhibitions throughout the US: in NYC, notably at El Museo del Barrio, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Children’s Museum of Manhattan, Wave Hill, and Field Projects; in Virginia, at Second Street Gallery; in Los Angeles, during SPRING/BREAK; as well as in Las Vegas and Berlin. He is a recipient of an Artist Corps Grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts and a Cultural Solidarity Fund Grant. Donoso’s work has been written about in Hyperallergic, CRUSHfanzine, The Latinx Project Intervenxions, The Financial Times, The Village Voice, and Art Zealous, among others. He is the owner of the online shop Donoso Studio, an immigrant-powered design studio specializing in uniquely handcrafted art objects. He is the founder of The Undocu Spark Lab, a creative incubator and nomadic classroom for undocumented artists, fiscally sponsored by the New York State Youth Leadership Council. He is represented by Kates-Ferri Projects in NYC.

PATRICIA ENCARNACIÓN

Patricia Encarnación (she/her) is an Afro-Caribbean interdisciplinary artist and scholar who explores the idea of being from the Caribbean through reconstructing quotidian objects, landscapes, and aesthetics she was exposed to while growing up in her homeland. After being awarded a full-tuition scholarship, Encarnación completed her BFA at Parsons The New School of Design, New York. Encarnación has participated twice in the Centro León Jiménez Biennial and won the prize awarded by Cádiz for cultural immersion and a residency with Tropiques Atrium in Martinique. She has participated in multiple residencies with institutions like MuseumsQuartier Vienna, Kovent Catalonia, and Smack Mellon as a Van Lier recipient. Collective exhibitions include Afro Syncretic at NYU, I Am: New Afro-Latinx Narratives at MOLAA, CA, and VOOOO1 at Homework Gallery during Miami art week. Encarnación recently finished her MA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies with a concentration in Museum Studies at New York University and is part of the Silver Art Projects art residency at the World Trade Center.

JASMIN HERNANDEZ

Jasmin Hernandez (she/her) is the Black Latinx founder and editor in chief of Gallery Gurls. Her writing has appeared in Harper's Bazaar, Paper, Bustle, Elle, Artsy, Sotheby's and more. She is the debut author of *We Are Here: Visionaries of Color Transforming the Art World* (Abrams, 2021). She is a born and bred New Yorker, born to Dominican parents, based in Harlem, New York City. To learn more, follow @gallerygurls.

DR. PATRICIA HERRERA

As a community-engaged educator, scholar, and artist, Dr. Patricia Herrera uses the arts to produce radical imaginings of resilience, hope, futurity, and justice. She is the author of *Nuyorican Feminist Performances: From the Café to Hip Hop Theater* (University of Michigan Press). Since 2011 Patricia has engaged with the city of Richmond on a community-based public history project entitled Civil Rights and Education in Richmond, Virginia: A Documentary Theater Project, which has led to the creation of a digital archive The Fight for Knowledge, as well as three community exhibitions at The Valentine Museum: Made in Church Hill (2015), Nuestras Historias: Latinos in Richmond (2017) and Voices from Richmond's Hidden Epidemic (2019–2020) and Through it All: Families Moving Richmond (2021) at GRTC's Transit Museum. She has co-created a series of seven docudramas about gentrification, educational disparities, HIV/AIDS, segregation and Latinos in Richmond with community partners and students. As dramaturg, she has also assisted with the development of original dance pieces and plays such as *Through It All* (2022) *We Must Say Her Name* (2019), *Threshold* (2014), *My Life is a Telenovela* (2004) and *Through My Eyes* (1999). She has also served as dramaturg for *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (2020) and *Blues for Mister Charlie* (2018). She was the co-founder and co-director of Rubi Theater Company, an intergenerational ensemble that produced original plays and conducted performance workshops in New York City. She has appeared with the group as a lyricist and rapper on Dan Zanes's *Nueva York* (2008), *Catch That Train* (2006 Grammy Award Winning CD for Best Children's Musical Album), *House Party* (2003), and *Night Time* (2002). Her plays *A Woman Who Outshone the Sun* (2003), *Embrace Me with Your Shawl* (1997), and the musical *Remnants* (2014) co-written with José Joaquín García, deal with growing up in New York City, environmental justice, and urban youth experiences. They have appeared at the Brooklyn Arts Exchange, International Fringe Festival, Rubicon Theatre Company, University of Richmond and Culver Center of the Arts. She is currently an Associate Professor of Theater affiliated with American Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexualities Studies programs at the University of Richmond.

DARREL ALEJANDRO HOLNES

Darrel Alejandro Holnes is an Afro-Panamanian American writer. His plays have received productions or readings at the Kennedy Center for the Arts American College Theater Festival (KCACTF), The Brick Theater, Kitchen Theater Company, Pregones Theater/PRTT, Primary Stages, and elsewhere. He is a member of the Lincoln Center Director's Lab, Civilians R&D Group, Page 73's Interstate 73 Writers Workshop, and other groups. His play, *Starry Night*, was a finalist for the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference and the Princess Grace Award in Playwriting. His play *Bayano* was also a finalist for the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference. His most recent play, *Black Feminist Video Game*, was produced by The Civilians for 59E59, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Center Theater Group, and other theaters

and venues and won an inaugural Anthem Award. He is the founder of the Greater Good Commission and Festival, a festival of Latinx short plays. Holnes is the author of *Migrant Psalms* (Northwestern University Press, 2021) and *Stepmotherland* (Notre Dame Press, 2022). He is the recipient of the Andres Montoya Poetry Prize from Letras Latinas, the Drinking Gourd Poetry Prize, and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship in Creative Writing (Poetry). His poem "Praise Song for My Mutilated World" won the C. P. Cavafy Poetry Prize from Poetry International. He is an assistant professor of English at Medgar Evers College, a senior college of the City University of New York (CUNY), and a faculty member at New York University.

GRECIA HUESCA DOMINGUEZ

Grecia Huesca Dominguez is a writer, poet, and author of the children's book *Dear Abuelo*, shortlisted for the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award and recognized by Bank Street College of Education as one of the Best Children's Books of 2020. She was a 2020 Define American Immigrant Artist Fellow. Her work has appeared in *Vogue México*, *Latino Book Review*, *The Latinx Project Interventions*, *The Breakbeat Poets Vol. 4 LatiNext*, *Hobart After Dark*, and *The Acentos Review*. At the age of ten, she immigrated from Veracruz, Mexico to the Hudson Valley, where she lived for 21 years as an undocumented/Dacamented immigrant. In 2021, she moved to Querétaro, México, where she currently resides with her daughter.

MARÍA JOSÉ

María José is an artist and activist whose practice deals with identity, gender, and race, combining autobiographical and diaristic aspects with elements of fantasy. They are currently the matriarch of the recently formed House of Grace, a trans-feminist anti racist collective with members across Puerto Rico.

WHITNEY LEDESMA

Whitney Ledesma has a BA in Latin American Studies with a minor in Psychology at the College of William & Mary and is pursuing a MSW at Virginia Commonwealth University. She is a listener, artist, and aspiring holistic therapist/community builder dedicated to collective movement toward decolonial love and liberation.

BENJAMIN LUNDBERG TORRES SÁNCHEZ

Benjamin Lundberg Torres Sánchez (b. 1987, Bogotá) uses their art to transform individual witness into collective action. Their work has been shown in the U.S. at the Queens Museum, Museum of the Moving Image, The Mills Gallery at Boston Center for the Arts, RISD Museum, and Knockdown Center, and internationally in Montreal, Mexico City, São Paulo, Lima, and La Paz. Lundberg Torres Sánchez is the founder of the exhibition series, *Se Acuililló?*, co-editor of *You Are Holding This: an abolitionist zine for and by adopted and fostered people (weareholdingthis.org)*, and was a 2022 Broadway Advocacy Coalition Fellow.

MARISOL MARTINEZ

Uncommon as her expression, Marisol Martinez's story begs telling. After cutting her media teeth on the moving picture, the former Vice President of Video at Atlantic Records is now finding her pulse as a visual artist whose use of color reflects a complicated, exuberant life. She is a painter who contrasts both thru color and subject matter, often spatial as well as prismatic. The unguided stillness of each shape is a meditative process individually created to compliment the other. The interconnection of shapes and colors offer insight into Martinez's unique experience of the world creating a visually spiritual vocabulary. She confronts the curious, the heartbreaking, and the maddening experiences of living life so close to death. Daughter of a funeral director, Martinez inherited her father's business after his passing in 2017. This familial legacy, combined with daily glimpses at the face of death, has allowed Martinez to tap into a spirituality that's become the mystical centerpiece of her work. Martinez has lived and studied in Paris, Miami and Los Angeles. Her works emerge from mornings spent at the funeral home, and afternoons and evenings spent in the studio—and their constant mingling of presences. Broader inspiration follows a family lineage of women whose creativity encouraged Martinez to express herself visually. Artist influences such as Carmen Herrera, Agnes Martin, Alma Thomas, Luchita Hurtado & Josef Albers are deeply faceted components in her process and work. She earned her BBA in Design/Art Marketing from Parsons School of Design, having attended both New York and Paris campuses.

VICTORIA MARTINEZ

Victoria Martinez (b. Chicago, IL) is an interdisciplinary artist who has a reverence for textiles, public art, and architecture. She produces fiber-based projects including painting and installation art, inspired by ancient sites and the urban environment. Martinez has exhibited at the Yale University Art Gallery, the National Museum of Mexican Art, Northwestern University, the Perrotin Gallery viewing salon, and at Transmitter Gallery in Brooklyn. Her work has been supported by The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library Research Fellowship and The MacMillian Center Field Research Fellowship through Yale University, the Career Development Grant through the American Association of University Women, and a travel grant through Theaster Gates Rebuild Foundation. Martinez holds a BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and an MFA from Yale University School of Art in Painting and Printmaking. Upcoming projects include a group show at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts and a solo exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center.

FELICITA "FELLI" MAYNARD

Felicita "Felli" Maynard is a first generation Afrolatine interdisciplinary artist & educator. They work across traditional analog and alternative photography processes to create artwork to further understand their ancestors in order to better understand their own layered identity. There is a focus on retelling stories that challenge misrepresented histories of people from the African Diaspora, queering the past, and critiquing the concept of time within a Western context. Maynard is a New York Community Trust Van Lier Fellow (2018-19), BRIC Media Fellow (2018-19), Queer | Art Mentorship Fellow (2020), and a Leslie Lohman Museum Fellow (2020). They have participated in residencies at Smack Mellon (2018-19), Nurture Arts (2018-19), and BRIC (2019-2020). They are currently an MFA photography candidate at Tulane University and a Mellon Fellow in Community-Engaged Scholarship (2023).

MAYA ORTIZ SAUCEDO

Maya Ortiz Saucedo is a domestic adoptee, independent curator, writer and researcher based in Chicago, IL. She has written for various publications including The Latinx Project at NYU and the publication *Digimyth*s; and curated exhibitions, most recently HILOS at LatchKey Gallery in New York. She is the 2022 BIPOC Curatorial Mentee at Heaven Gallery (Chicago) in partnership with Equity Arts, and the Director of Exhibitions at Companion Cooperative (Chicago). She holds a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, and is currently a graduate student in the Dual Degree MA in Art History and Arts Administration & Policy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

NÉSTOR DAVID PASTOR

Néstor David Pastor is a writer, editor, musician, and translator from Queens, NY. He is the co-founder of *huellas*, a bilingual magazine of crónicas narrativas, and managing editor for *Intervencions*, a digital publication of the Latinx Project at NYU that focuses on Latinx arts, culture, and politics. He has previously worked with Radio Ambulante, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, and the North American Congress on Latin America. For more information, visit www.ndpastor.com

CARLOS RIVERA SANTANA

Carlos Rivera Santana is an assistant professor of Hispanic Studies at the College of William & Mary. Rivera Santana is a Latin American/Caribbean cultural studies scholar specializing in visual culture, Afro/Indigenous studies, and decolonial theories. He critically examines histories of colonization and looks at their counter-discourses seen in Global South knowledges expressed in visual culture and literature, especially those produced from ancestral worldviews. Rivera Santana was based in Australia for over seven years where he completed his PhD and was a lecturer specializing in global south and postcolonial cultural studies at The University of Queensland, Australia. After, Rivera Santana worked at Hunter College, CUNY where he was a research associate looking at decolonial Puerto Rican and Latinx contemporary art. He has contributed to books such as *Aftershocks of Disaster* (Eds. Bonilla & Lebrón) published by Haymarket Books and has published in peer-reviewed journals such as in *Cultural Studies*, *Third Text*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, and others. He is also the author of the book, *Archaeology of Colonisation: From Aesthetics to Biopolitics* published in 2019 and 2022 in paperback, within the series of "Critical Perspectives on Theory, Culture and Politics." He is currently working on a second book with renowned artist Diógenes Ballester entitled *Puerto Rican Visual Arts and its Decolonial Diasporic Character: An Arteologist Approach*, signed with Centro Press.

JUAN OMAR RODRIGUEZ

Juan Omar Rodriguez (he/him) is a curator of contemporary art and Latinx cultural worker based in Philadelphia, PA. Juan Omar's recent exhibition projects include Vernacular Glamour at the Cambridge Art Association, Linger and Flow at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and TBD at Boston CyberArts in collaboration with the Boston LGBTQIA+ Artist Alliance. He received an M.A. in Art History and Museum Studies from Tufts University in 2019 and a B.A. in Neuroscience from Oberlin College in 2017.

MELISSA SAENZ GORDON

Melissa Saenz Gordon is a cultural worker based in Brooklyn who works to illuminate the achievements and legacy of artists of color and marginalized voices through audio and visual storytelling. She is the co-founder of Soft Power Vote, an independent civic engagement initiative centered on New York City voters.

MOISES SALAZAR

Moises Salazar is a non-binary artist based in Chicago, Illinois. Salazar holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Salazar's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at WOAW Gallery, Salon ACME 8, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, NADA, National Museum of Mexican Art, and the Chicago Cultural Center. Represented by Mindy Solomon Gallery, Salazar had their inaugural solo exhibition in August 2021. Salazar has been focused on conceptual and installation-based work. Salazar's presentation Let's Get Physical facilitated by Filo Sofi Arts was included in HEARSAY:HERESY Spring Break Art Show to much critical acclaim. In Gracias a la Vida, Salazar created a chapel to queer ancestry at Red Arrow Gallery. Most recently Salazar's project Santuario, a large-scale altar, was presented at Skin in the Game, Chicago edition, curated by Zoe Lukov. A Finalist of The QUEERART PRIZE, Salazar's work has been featured in publications such as The Hispanic Executive, artnet, Hyperallergic, and The Latinx Project Intervencions. Salazar has participated in the The Hyde Park Art Center Residency and is a recipient of the LuminArts Foundation Arts Fellowship and 3Arts Make a Wave Grant.

ALEX SANTANA

Alex Santana is a writer and curator with an interest in conceptual art, political intervention, and public participation. Currently based in New York but originally from Newark, NJ, she has held positions at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Joan Mitchell Center, Mana Contemporary, and Alexander Gray Associates. Her interviews and essays have been published by CUE Art Foundation, Terremoto Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Precog Magazine, Artsy, and The Latinx Project.

MALVIKA SHRIMALI

Malvika Shrimali is an undergraduate student at the College of William & Mary. They are studying Hispanic Studies & Environmental Science, with a focus on decolonization and Indigenous environmental justice. They are invested in themes of documentation and disrupting the silence. Malvika aims to work closely with communities in the field of journalism.

EDRA SOTO

Puerto Rican-born Edra Soto is an interdisciplinary artist and co-director of The Franklin in Chicago, IL. Soto holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Bachelor's degree from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico. More of Edra's work can be found on her website.

LAURA SUÁREZ

Laura Suárez is a writer, curator, and producer. Her art historical research focuses on politically-engaged art works from Latin America and its diaspora, particularly from the Caribbean. She is a PhD student in Art History at the Graduate Center, CUNY. Born in Puerto Rico, Suárez is currently based in New York City.

NATALIA VIERA SALGADO

Natalia Viera Salgado is a Puerto Rican curator and curatorial consultant based in New York City. She is the co-founder of :Pública Espacio Cultural, an independent art space in Puerto Rico. Her art historical research focuses on contemporary art in relation to decolonial practices, architecture, social and environmental justice, and new media with a keen interest in hybrid and interdisciplinary projects. She has worked at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, El Museo del Barrio, Socrates Sculpture Park, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Americas Society. Viera holds a MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and is currently a Curator in Residence at the Abrons Arts Center and the Associate Curator at the National Academy of Design.

JESSY V. CASTILLO, DESIGNER

Jessy V. Castillo is a gender-fluid UX, Visual, and Print designer building un otro modo de ser through arts, culture, and change. Her work balances simplicity with experimentation and is climate-focused, trauma and accessibility informed, and rooted in equity for all. She can be found online at @practicayproceso and sitting somewhere in the Los Angeles/Tongva Land sunshine having coffee.

IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

MAPPING INTUITION: AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTORIA MARTINEZ

1. Martinez's work titled "Guía Alternativa de Una Pared" which features a piece of blue paper with four red abstract shapes. The shapes all have black arrows pointing to one another. There is text in the bottom left corner that reads: "Discurso sobre las pasiones de la arquitectura; imaginando la gran diosa de Teotihuacán contemporánea".
2. An installation photo of Martinez's "Next Chapter," consisting of two pedestals draped with tie-dye fabric featuring two abstract sculptures on top of each. The back wall has four sheets of paper, each one a different color, with text and drawings.
3. Martinez's work titled "What The Cards Say," which consists of multicolor fabric arranged into a curtain shape with a large arch-shaped cut-out towards the center of the piece.

NAVIGATING COLONIAL HISTORIES: A CONVERSATION WITH EDRA SOTO

1. Soto's installation titled "GRAFT," which features a light pink wall with viewfinders at eye-level and decorative, architectural cut-outs. Six people stand by the installation, some peering into the viewfinders.
2. Soto's installation titled "Screenhouse," which features a black architectural structure situated outdoors. The structure features large openings as entryways, and its walls are perforated with decorative cut-outs, allowing for the filtering of natural light. In the background there are trees and some passersby.
3. A detail view of Soto's installation "GRAFT," in which a person's mouth and chin are visible, as well as the viewfinder for their cell phone camera. In a smaller concentric circle within the viewfinder

there is an image of a clocktower nestled in a landscape of palm trees with a cloudy sky.

REFRAMING THE BORDER: AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCISCO DONOSO

1. A corner view of the artist's studio. Both walls pictured are covered in brightly colored artworks. The corner where the two walls meet has a large multicolored mural covered in painted netting. In the center of the room, there are two large white tables that serve as the artist's workspace.
2. A closer view of the artist's studio space, featuring four different size artworks on canvas against a large mural. The floor is covered with a large tarp with paint marks.
3. Donoso's abstract work "The Border Portal," which consists of a vibrant blue background with different color brush strokes painted over it.
4. The artist working in their studio. They are wearing glasses, a denim jacket, and a dark tee shirt. They are working on a white table, with a paintbrush in their hand, dipping into a paint palette. The table has several different cans of spray paint, three cups of water, and a bright orange cloth.

THE WOMEN OF APRIL: AN INTERVIEW WITH LOURDES BERNARD

1. A photo of the gallery entrance featuring Bernard's work from "The Women of April" exhibition. On the left, four small framed drawings depict landscapes including figures rendered in bright colors. On the right, four large-scale

charcoal drawings on paper feature portraits of women in movement carrying guns.

2. Bernard's work "Con Su Nuevo Sabor," which features a woman walking in an orange dress with white flowers while carrying a rifle. She also wears white flip flops and yellow curlers on her head. In the background, another woman leans against an open doorway observing, and an advertisement for a restaurant features a portrait of a woman dressed in white serving hot food.
3. Bernard's work "Puerta del Conde," which features a military tank surrounded by soldiers carrying guns entering through an archway. In the background there is a palm tree and a building. The artwork is rendered in black and gray, with loose line work suggesting movement.

ENTRE PUERTO RICO Y RICHMOND: A CONVERSATION ON EMBODIED DECOLONIAL CREATION WITH ALICIA DÍAZ & PATRICIA HERRERA

1. A still from Alicia Diaz's film "Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not be Moved" depicting two women in front of the remains of a large damaged building, with pieces of roof and lumber piling up in the background. Both women are dressed in white, one sitting and another kneeling, with red flowers scattered in front of their feet.
2. A still from Alicia Diaz's film "Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not be Moved" depicting two women laying down within a circle of red flowers. The circle has four lit candles around the edges, and the women are dressed in all white laying with their

heads at the other one's feet.

3. A still from Alicia Diaz's film "Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not be Moved" depicting two women standing within a double circle of red flowers inside a damaged structure of a large building. They are each holding a machete in one hand, and the same large piece of tobacco in the other, hands interlocked. The second circle also has tobacco scattered around the edge. Both women are dressed in all white, looking directly at the camera.
4. A still from Alicia Diaz's film "Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not be Moved" depicting the silhouette of a woman dancing within a circle of red flowers with bright natural light coming in through the doors in the background. There is also a silhouette of a woman sitting down in the right side of the shot.

ANGELITOS NEGROS HABLAN EN SAMANÁ: DARREL ALEJANDRO HOLNES IN CONVERSATION WITH PATRICIA ENCARNACIÓN

1. A still from the short film "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná," depicting an ornate silver cross pendant dangling from a silver chain necklace, and a colorful floral-print shirt.
2. A still from the short film "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná," depicting a woman with a medium complexion looking directly at the camera. She wears a colorful shirt with abstract patterns and is surrounded by rocks.
3. A still from the short film "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná," depicting the back torso of a person with a dark

complexion partially submerged in the ocean. In the background, dense foliage meets a rocky landscape.

4. The book cover of *Stepmotherland*, a collection of poems by Darrel Alejandro Holnes, featuring Encarnación's work "Dame Tu Mano." The image depicts two human figures in a partial embrace, looking away from each other. One figure's skin is composed of a starry night sky, and the other's of tropical foliage.
5. A still from the short film "Angelitos Negros Hablan en Samaná," depicting a close-up view of the surface of a body of water, including the reflective shadows of trees and their foliage.

IN CONVERSATION WITH ARTISTS MARISOL T. MARTINEZ & C.J. CHUECA

1. A mural by Chueca titled "View from my bedroom in Peru during confinement," featuring a long red band of color, sandwiched between broader swaths of blue and pink. The colors occupy a horizontal plane receding back into space, implying a horizon. The colors are translucent, and drip into one another.
2. Chueca's work titled "Frente a tus ojos el fuego inextinguible," depicting a red, pink, and blue gradient sky with the shadow of a mountain range in the background. In the foreground are two dark rectangular structures.
3. Martinez's work "The Space Between Us #1," which features abstract shapes in various tones of brown and white floating against a black background. The precise geometric shapes include triangles, circles, rectangles, and trapezoids and their edges do not intersect.

4. Chueca's work "Micaela lavándose las heridas en el río," which depicts a monochromatic female-coded figure with her back turned, partially submerged in water. She wears a long braid, and her arms are crossed as she looks over her shoulder. The entire image is painted in hues of red.
5. Chueca's visual proposal for an installation titled "We are night and day," which features two white prop walls facing each other, each side lined with small ovular windows with different-colored views seen from the inside of each.
6. Martinez's work "Color Blind," depicting four central black and white circles surrounded by overlapping geometric shapes of color. Accumulating circular, rectangular, and triangular shapes in a variety of colors connect the central spheres. The work is on white paper and framed in white.

SOFTNESS AS LIBERATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIXED MEDIA ARTIST MOISES SALAZAR

1. Salazar's work "Llévame Contigo", which features four male-coded figures in a muted shade of purple-pink. One figure is lying down while the other three are sitting around his head. The background mimics a green pasture, but the figures are laying in a blue puddle presumed to look like a body of water. The texture of the piece is glittery and grainy, and the work is framed by a baby blue lace border.
2. Salazar's work "Qué Calor", which depicts a male-coded figure sitting on his side in a meadow of grass and flowers. The figure has a warm, golden color, and

he has a circle of gold light around his head. The horizon in the background is made of baby pink fur, which differs from the glittery texture throughout the rest of the piece.

3. Salazar's work "Glamorous", which features a golden-brown male-coded figure lying with his legs up in the air against a background of lilac fur. The figure is wearing silver high heels. There are pink lace flowers throughout the piece, surrounding the figure.

JOSE CAMPOS' STUDIO LENCA: CREATING SALVADOREÑO VISIBILITY IN THE UK

1. A photograph of Campos' work "Doing and Undoing" featuring the artist with many pieces of pottery, all of different colors, shapes, and sizes. The artist is standing behind the table with the pottery, holding a large gray pottery piece on his head. The white wall behind him consists of black abstract graffiti.
2. A photograph of part of Campos' series *Los Historiantes*, featuring the artist draped in a royal blue garment with intricate cream-colored details. The artist's face is covered by a silver headdress with red flowers and orange and pink detailing. The top of the headdress has a silver cross.
3. A photograph of part of Campos' series *Los Historiantes*, featuring the artist dressed in a white lace garment that covers his body as well as the perimeter of his face. He is holding a sword in one hand, and he is wearing a gold headdress with light pink flowers coming out of the top. He is also wearing a silver and blue necklace.

SURVIVAL STORIES THROUGH PORTRAIT PAINTING: A CONVERSATION WITH ALICIA BROWN

1. A photo of Alicia Brown's work "Portrait of Lady Cameal from Alva", which features a young woman with a dark complexion, dressed in a red blouse with white ruffles around her neck. She has her hands in the pockets of her belted jeans, and a hat with a feather coming out of one side. The background features large palm leaves and a squirrel in the bottom left corner.
2. A photo of Alicia Brown's work "Male Bird from Paradise," which depicts a young man with a medium-dark complexion surrounded by large leafy bushes. He is wearing gym shorts, a t-shirt and a pair of white cable headphones. His expression has a slight frown, and his neck has a wide, white collar with purple and green leaves attached to it.
3. A photo of Alicia Brown's work "You Look Just Like Your Father", depicting two young women with dark complexions. One woman is sitting on a white patterned couch with her legs crossed, wearing a jersey with the Pepsi logo and a purple bandana print collar with white lace around the edge. She has long red box braids. The other woman is standing, holding the first woman's shoulder, and is wearing a tee shirt with a large collar made of cactus. In the background, there are white birds walking across a tiled floor and a cameo portrait of a faceless man on the back wall.

QUEERNESS AND BLACKNESS IN THE ARCHIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH FELICITA "FELLI" MAYNARD

1. Maynard's work titled "Jean in the Garden," featuring a young woman with a dark complexion from the torso up, sitting in a chair with one arm draped over it. The photo is in black and white, and is visibly distressed.
2. Maynard's work titled "Jean Hands Up," featuring a young woman with a dark complexion from the torso up, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a dark-colored waistcoat with her hands on her head. The photo is in black and white, and is visibly distressed.
3. Maynard's work titled "Angelo under the Clark St. Sign," a black and white photograph featuring a young boy with a dark complexion leaning up against a concrete wall. The boy is dressed in formal clothing, with a black suit jacket, dress shirt, and bowler hat. The photo shows the boy from the torso up from a slightly upwards-pointing angle.

ADOPTING PERFORMANCE: A CONVERSATION WITH BENJAMIN LUNDBERG TORRES SÁNCHEZ

1. Photo of a close-up detail of a skirt, showing a section of wrinkled white fabric with embroidery in red yarn. The embroidery originally read, "ANCESTRES," with leftover red yarn extending from the final letter ("S") and draped on top of the fabric. The first three embroidered letters, "A," "N," and "C" have been removed, leaving behind a visible pattern of holes from where the embroidery needle and thread pierced the fabric, and traces of red fibers from at points where the yarn was removed.
2. Black and white photo of a light-skinned person with dark brown hair pulled into a loose bun, a short goatee, and wearing

a black, V-neck t-shirt and black jeans pulled up so that the cuff of each leg rests mid-calf in the middle of a large museum atrium with hardwood floors. A decorative architecture structure made of panels of frosted glass held by metal fixtures resembling window blinds is suspended above the atrium. Newspaper clippings are scattered across the floor of the atrium.

The person stands slightly bent forward, knees bent, with feet in a wide stance. Their right hand, extending into the air above their head, holds a group of thin nylon ropes extending towards and attached to many points around an eighty-four inch diameter parachute constructed from newspaper that is held aloft by ropes and the force of the person's hand and arm motion.

Subodh Gupta's sculpture, *What does the room encompass that is not in the city?*, (2014) is visible in the background.

"DON'T BOTHER SEARCHING IF THERE'S BEEN A BITCH LIKE ME": A CONVERSATION WITH MARÍA JOSÉ

1. Maria José's work titled "Amor", which is a photograph featuring a young couple kneeling down on both knees in a creek, facing each other. The creek leads out to a small waterfall, which is seen on the right side of the image. Behind the couple is a small road surrounded by lush trees and plants.
2. Maria José's work titled "Papi", which is a photograph featuring a man standing behind a glass barrier. The man is dressed in a black tuxedo, and he is seen adjusting his sleeve while facing the camera. The background features some palm trees and houses in the distance.
3. Two images placed side by side showing two different moments of performance. The image on the left is a close up on a light-skinned person's thigh extended over polished concrete in a kneeling stance. "12-15 K" is embroidered with gold thread into the skin of their thigh. The hands of a light-skinned person extend tweezers and a small pair of scissors toward the person kneeling. The image on the right is a close up on a light-skinned person's thigh extended over polished concrete in a kneeling stance. "12-15 K" is embroidered with gold thread into the skin of their thigh. The right hand of a light-skinned person nearby holds a small pair of scissors while using their left hand to steady themselves on the thigh of the person kneeling. They use the scissors to lift one of the threads and cut through it.

The Latinx Project at New York University

explores and promotes U.S. Latinx Art, Culture and Scholarship through creative and interdisciplinary programs. Founded in 2018, it serves as a platform to foster critical public programming and for hosting artists and scholars. We are especially committed to examining and highlighting the multitude of Latinx identities as central to developing a more inclusive and equitable vision of Latinx Studies.

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