

apexart

2022-23 INTL Proposal

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Exhibition City: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Voicing the Silence

submitted by: Mariana Ramos Ortiz

"I saw the future, it's so wonderful, there are no Puerto Ricans" declared a close advisor to Ricardo Rosella, the governor overthrown by Puerto Ricans in 2019. The appalling statement was discovered in a group message leak known as Telegramgate, involving many high-ranking government officials. The suggestion that Puerto Ricans are the root of the archipelago's development problems and that their eradication would benefit the island's growth is not a recent concept. This narrative dates back to Spanish colonization and continues to be embedded in the United States' current colonial control of Puerto Rico. This premise is the backbone for ongoing austerity measures for residents and tax exemptions for wealthy foreigners that have launched a race for a slice of paradise, violently displacing Puerto Ricans, rapidly creating a Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans. "I saw the future, it's so wonderful, there are Puerto Ricans" is an exhibition in San Juan, Puerto Rico bringing together Puerto Rican artists whose work engages with speculative fictions, world building, Caribbean futurism, and reinterpretations of the past, present and future as forms of resistance.

This exhibition considers Afro-Indigenous futurisms and the radical imaginary as tools for colonial subjects to gain agency through the recontextualized past, the contested present, and the liberated future. Artist's works will suggest alternatives on how to traverse our present, produce future forms of knowledge, center collective healing, and forge new vocabularies to secure our permanence.

Through a photographic series, an artists restages images of NASA's moon landing with Puerto Ricans. In this speculative piece of evidence, the Puerto Rican flag was planted on the moon in 1963, predating the U.S. landing by six years. One of the images captures the spaceship landing with the frase "Houston we have a problem!" The series addresses subjective realities while affirming the arbitrariness and fraudulence of all colonial claims.

Another artist's paintings create futuristic rural landscapes integrating supernatural and cultural myths endemic to Puerto Rico. Oftentimes referencing "el garadiablo", a mythical eerie swamp creature native to the Caribbean, the paintings hold a humorous approach where the line between history and fiction is blurred, giving space to alternative narratives where only the viewer's imaginations can play host.

A third artist embodies through video-performance the role of a golf player in the streets of Puerto Rico, attempting to hit a golf ball into the asphalt potholes of abandoned broken down roads. The artist's imaginary golf course displays a parallel urban reality that critiques the rapid development of resort-like spaces exclusively at the service of wealthy tourists that are erasing the Puerto Rican landscape and its people.

291 Church Street
New York, NY 10013
212.431.5270
info@apexart.org; www.apexart.org

As Puerto Rico's capacity for self-determination is obstructed by those with access to hegemonic forms of power aiming to remove us, it is imperative that we prioritize speculative forms of aesthetic production. This practice acts as a framework for interrogating the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico, our contemporary context, and the planning of a decolonized future. After all, If we don't imagine our futures, who will?

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