

Puerto Rican visual artists and the United States

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This special section on Puerto Rican visual art . . .

. . .has been incubating since *CENTRO Journal's* inception in 1987. In the words of one of the journal's founders, Blanca Vásquez: "From the beginning, there was never a separation of form and content in our collective minds...the Journal's visual aspects were another form of "language" meant to convey information and perspectives that expanded and enhanced the analytic content...artists were an integral part of the Puerto Rican community and culture, the delineators and embodiment of our identity...our understanding was that the rescued and reclaimed past was literary and visual as well as historical, social and political."¹

Why has it taken (academics) decades to respond to the art around us and about us? Puerto Ricans are a transnational, tri-racial, bilingual people living under colonial rule; for the most part, our visual artists have sought to address the complexity of our culture, to translate lived experience into symbolic language, sometimes veiling and encoding their images out of psychic and social pressures to repress certain (ugly) truths.

Practically speaking, it takes years of looking, deciphering, reading, and reflecting before good scholarship on an artist can be produced. Another factor that has affected scholarship on the visual arts is that the disciplines that train us to become "art historians" and "art critics" have been slow to recognize the art of "other" peoples and to accept

methodologies other than formalism as valid research tools.

We Puerto Rican visual art scholars are pioneering new research paradigms. Apart from the obvious ethnic-specificity of the subject matter, an intellectual thread that binds the articles in this issue is that the authors Taína Caragol-Barreto, Francisco Cabanillas, and Raquel M. Ortiz Rodríguez employ interdisciplinary methodologies (literary theory, post-colonial and Africana studies) to examine artists and their images. The section also includes an article by artist Yasmín Hernández, a poem dedicated to Basquiat by Lourdes Vásquez, and a tribute to poet Pedro Pietri by several artists. Taken as a whole this section reflects the wide range of approaches that artists and scholars are using to document Puerto Rican art and culture.

For far too long, the dialogue between Puerto Rican artists, poets, and scholars has been stymied by disciplinary conventions and/or undervalued as peripheral to the "real" issues that our communities need to be informed about. Our work is both exciting and exasperating because there are few precedents to follow and many artists that deserve serious study. We hope that these articles will encourage more scholarship on the visual arts in the Journal and more visits to artist studios, galleries and museums in your daily life.

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¹ Blanca Vásquez and Néstor Otero, "The Art of the *CENTRO Journal*: A Visual Representation of a Social Reality" (Manuscript, 2005), p. 6.