



THE MUSEUM OF THE OLD COLONY



**AN INSTALLATION BY
PABLO DELANO**

**JUNE 1 TO NOVEMBER 11, 2018
HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE ART GALLERY**

COVER

Tropical Contrast |
Punta Salinas, Puerto
Rico — A contrast on
the Punta Salinas road,
a few miles outside
San Juan, Puerto Rico,
as the great guns
with which the U.S. is
fortifying the island
pass the humble ox
cart of a Puerto Rican
"Jibaro" (mountain
man). Credit line
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In 1898, the United States intervened in the long independence wars of Puerto Rico and Cuba, going to battle with Spain over its colonial possessions. Hijacking the struggle for national sovereignty in the Caribbean, the U.S. army invaded and occupied Puerto Rico. As Spain lost its last colony, the U.S. gained new imperial territory. The Stars and Stripes was pronounced Puerto Rico's flag.

Puerto Rican responses to U.S. annexation were, and continue to be, complex and varied. Some celebrated and supported the U.S. presence, believing conditions would improve compared to the state of affairs under Spanish rule. Others resisted, carrying on the fight for independence during the 20th and 21st centuries through peaceful or violent struggle including protests, uprisings, and clandestine operations. Oscar López Rivera, an independence activist and one of the longest-held political prisoners in the United States, was only recently released at the end of the Obama administration after serving 36 years in prison.

Under the 1898 occupation, the new colony was controlled by America's burgeoning military power, its economy redirected, and its status justified through U.S. official discourse and propaganda. With annexation, the U.S. orchestrated the takeover of lands to benefit U.S. sugar companies, a series of "modernizing" programs, and a colonial logic of social hygiene and racial hierarchy. New schools were constructed, English was declared the obligatory language of instruction, and children were taught "American values."

Photographers, writers, and "experts" were deployed to the new colony of "Porto" Rico, producing images and narratives that helped to define this newly acquired, "primitive" territory and its people for North American audiences. These photographs often depicted lush tropical flora and fauna, or captured the pathetic state of impoverished "Porto" Ricans who would soon reap the "benefits" of living as colonial subjects.

Since 1900, Puerto Rico has been officially deemed a unincorporated territory of the United States of America. Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens in 1917. The U.S. approved gubernatorial elections (1947) and a



new constitution (1952) even as it poured millions into expanding and buttressing its strategic military footprint on the island. To help justify the maintenance of Puerto Rico as a modern-day colony, the stream of propagandistic images and discourses that began in 1898 continued, echoed by local media beholden to American interests. With the triumph of the Cuban revolution (1959), Puerto Rico was painted as a showcase of democracy in the Caribbean.

Today, in the wake of the so-called debt crisis, Puerto Rico is suffering a withering economic collapse, a humanitarian emergency, and a massive exodus of its population. The devastation left by hurricanes Irma and Maria, which struck Puerto Rico in 2017, has only worsened the island's already dire situation, dramatically unveiling its crumbling infrastructure and extreme poverty. Sluggish aid response from local and federal authorities, along with local corruption, has resulted in a slow pace of recovery. It has also shed new light on an old and unequal power relationship. Puerto Ricans may be U.S. citizens, but they do not receive the full benefits conferred by citizenship.

LITTLE NATIVES AND DUSKY BELLES



Pablo Delanos's
The Museum of the Old Colony

NELSON RIVERA
ARTIST/CURATOR, UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO

No One Loves Me
Native Porto Ricans,
Keystone View
Company, Meadville
PA, photograph by
B.L. Singley, 1900.
Part of *The Museum
of the Old Colony*.



Afraid? What of? What is there to be afraid of?
Who are the Yankees to fear them? Why fear them?

PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS, APRIL 8, 1950, CABO ROJO

TUSA. [Spanish for “corncob”]

MACHA COLÓN

In a political cartoon published by the *Cincinnati Post* in 1898, we observe a row of subhuman creatures listening to the reading of a text titled “How to Become a Good American.” Among them, one creature yawns grotesquely. This specimen is identified as “Puerto Rico.” The image encapsulates the perception of Puerto Ricans held in the United States to this day. It also sheds light on the challenges that Puerto Ricans, and particularly artists, face from 1898 on to create a truthful and dignified self-image that refutes the demeaning fabrications of the colonizer. Confronted with the imposition of colonial rule, post-1898 Puerto Rican artists countered with a celebration of their culture, a self-definition of identity in opposition to that of the colonizer, and the development of pictorial strategies useful in the struggle toward decolonization. [Figure 2]

These artists built their work on what was already a solid foundation. The turn-of-the-century Puerto Rican artistic and intellectual class was exceedingly cultured and included exceptional, internationally recognized intellectuals and activists such as Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón Emeterio Betances, to name but two. By 1898, Puerto Rican art had experienced the impact of two great masters, unrivalled in the

Figure 2
First class in
"United States"
Cincinnati Post,
Elmer Andrews
Bushnell,
cartoon, 1898.



First class in "United States."—*Cincinnati Post*.

Figure 3
Francisco Oller,
El Velorio (The Wake), 1893, oil on
canvas. From the
collection of the
Museum of Art,
Anthropology, and
History at the Uni-
versity of Puerto
Rico. Image in the
public domain.



rest of Latin America: José Campeche and Francisco Oller. The former began his career in San Juan before the birth of the United States. The latter lived through the trauma of the invasion and the subsequent imposition of a military government. However, by this time, Oller was already a mature artist who not only had produced Puerto Rican art's foundational work *The Wake* (1893) but also had set a paradigm for future artists. Consequently, artists in the ensuing decades did not develop their work in a vacuum, other than that caused by the absence of local institutions to foster their efforts. [Figure 3]

In order to offset the image devised by American vanquishers of the "subhuman Puerto Rican creature," artists responded with wide-ranging creativity. They employed, on the one hand, a resolute celebration of the landscape and its people; on the other hand, a lingering formal dialogue with all variants of Western art in a gesture that irrefutably positioned Puerto Rican art within that tradition. Furthermore, the recurrent inclusion of historical figures and events in paintings and sculptures served as testimony to an unyielding sense of purpose: a refusal of erasure. In these artistic manifestations, we notice the conscious undertaking of artists who set out to undermine the colonizer's image of a picturesque tropical island inhabited by savage and ignorant "natives," simultaneously urging viewers to see themselves without the blinders imposed by the invader. Puerto Rican art becomes a communal celebration in which it is imperative to share this critical and participatory space, restoring to spectators the responsibility of assembling its images in a process akin to a decolonizing of the mind.

A cursory glance at twentieth-century Puerto Rican art reveals a critical stance on the Puerto Rican condition, immersed as it is in a humiliating colonial system. Less urgent, however, is its gaze toward the colonizer. While there exist images in which U.S. power is represented — mostly through the depiction of monstrous figures — artists placed more weight on the consequences of that power on Puerto Ricans instead of on the colonizers. This marks a striking departure from other decolonizing projects. In two of the most significant critiques of colonial discourse — *Discourse on Colonialism*, by Aimé Césaire and *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, by Albert Memmi — both authors start their analysis with portraits of the colonizer before addressing their colonized fellows. These writers recognize that because it is the colonizer who begets the colonized, one cannot portray the latter without depicting the former. In Puerto Rican art, however, these depictions are not frequent. The difference may lie in the fact that the main readers of Césaire and Memmi are European and, therefore, this return of the gaze toward the colonizer is a crucial part of their project, whereas Puerto Rican art is created mainly for Puerto Rican spectators, thus defining identity is a much more urgent task than regarding the colonizers. For Puerto Rican artists, raising a mirror with which the colonizers may recognize themselves has not been a priority.

Figure 4
The Star Spangled Banner: Puerto Rico's Flag. Source: *A Little Journey to Puerto Rico*, Marian M. George, A. Flanagan Company, Chicago and New York, 1900. From *The Museum of the Old Colony* installation, Hampshire College Art Gallery.

Until now. The approach is not unfamiliar: the “natives” seize the anthropologists’ camera and turn the tables to document them. This is the strategy used by Pablo Delano in his installation *The Museum of the Old Colony*. Instead of depicting and denouncing the colonizer, the artist mutes his voice, allowing the imperialists to speak for themselves, to manifest their racism, sexism, and misogyny in all their brash arrogance. Delano appropriates photographs taken by Americans during the early twentieth century and places them in his “museum” to expose the colonizers’ visual logic exactly as they themselves define it. As a result, the images collected by Delano comply with Césaire’s maxim: “colonization *decivilizes* the colonizer, *brutalizes* him in the true sense of the word, degrades him, awakens his buried instincts to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism.” The colonial artist has no need for denunciation, for the colonizers, drunk with power, openly and shamelessly expose their own degradation and misery through their photographs and texts.

Pablo Delano is an artist born, raised, and educated in Puerto Rico and a resident of the United States. His decades-long work is based on his Puerto Rican roots, but has not been widely known among island audiences. The fact that his work has engaged viewers mainly outside Puerto Rico perhaps explains why, unlike his colleagues in Puerto Rico, Delano chooses to fix his gaze on the colonizers. He benefits from a critical distance that enables him to observe that which would not be evident — even less, acceptable — for an American. Thus, Delano is confronted with the unenviable task of airing the dirty laundry of his fellow citizens, customarily reluctant to acknowledge their own abjection, prone to seeing themselves as “good neighbors” with benevolent intentions. Let us exhume the words of General Nelson A. Miles as he led the invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898: “This is not a war of devastation, but one to give all within the control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of an enlightened civilization.” To Miles, to the U.S. military apparatus, the invasion was a “gift,” a “benefaction” bestowed upon Puerto Ricans by a force that saw itself as not only superior but also benevolent and civilizing. The task that Delano has taken on with *The Museum of the Old Colony* amounts to shredding that deplorable blindfold, showing the emperor that he is indeed naked. [Figure 4]

The Museum of the Old Colony uses a well-known strategy in Puerto Rican art, one already employed by Oller in *The Wake*, in which the artist places in spectators’ hands the task of assembling autonomous parts of the work, a strategy that, in other writings, I have defined as decolonizing: decolonizing, for it transfers the decision-making power to the viewer instead of imposing it from the outside; because it stimulates in its spectators, whoever they may be, the use of untapped critical resources; and because it encourages the oppressors to acknowledge their own crimes and inhumanity, in a process akin



to Gandhi’s resistance strategies. As in Gandhi’s case, this process is empowering for the colonized, who, by recognizing the indignity and moral inferiority of the colonizer, can in turn relinquish themselves of their hesitation and fear of confrontation.

The photographs collected by Delano for his “museum” present the image that the white man constructs of those he considers inferiors — more so, his property. The portrait made by the white man is, inevitably, his own. These images are the involuntary and unconscious self-portraits of the oppressor, who in his arrogance has no misgivings in exposing his moral misery, racism, sexism, and misogyny. Particularly distressing are the images of children, for whom the invader saves his most malignant gaze. [Figure 5]

These images are accompanied by captions. This practice of combining word and image has been constant in Puerto Rican art (almost as if there was no faith in images alone and words were better trusted). From prayers of gratitude inscribed by Campeche in his paintings, to the condemnation of colonialism by Oller in his portrait of Román Baldorioty de Castro, to the extensive production of prints and literary portfolios (such as those by Lorenzo Homar, Antonio Martorell, and Consuelo Gotay), to recent works (such as those of Elsa

Figure 5
Typical Native
Farmers. The
farming class is
about on a par with
the poor darkies
down South, and
varies much even
in race and color
ranging from
Spanish white trash
to full-blooded
Ethiopians. *Neely's
Panorama of Our
New Possessions.*
Photograph by:
Magherita Arlina
Hamm. F. Tennyson
Neely, New York
and London 1898.
From *The Museum
of the Old Colony*
installation,
Hampshire College
Art Gallery.



TYPICAL NATIVE FARMERS.

The farming class is about on a par with the poor darkies down South, and varies much even in race and color, ranging from Spanish white trash to full-blooded Ethiopians.



Figure 6
Chemical Warfare
and Chattering
Machine Guns
Disturb the Peace
of Coconut
Palm Groves.
Photography by:
Ralph Kestly.
Puerto Rico:
Watchdog of
the Caribbean -
Venerable Domain
under American
Flag Has New
Role as West
Indian Stronghold
and Sentinel
of the Panama
Canal, *National
Geographic*,
December, 1939.

Meléndez and Osvaldo Budet), Puerto Rican art incorporates texts as a reaffirmation of a shared history. With *The Museum of the Old Colony*, Delano joins this tradition, but adds a new twist: the words, just like the images, are those of the colonizer, quoted directly. Women are described as “dusky belles” and “muscular half-breeds”; other subjects are described with phrases such as “little natives” and “Spanish white trash.” Those in power utilize such terminology within the self-assurance of their biased beliefs that the supposedly “simple” colonized subjects, with their supposed intellectual “shortcomings,” cannot comprehend it. Delano’s installation addresses this absurd notion head-on, transforming the aggressor’s weapons into the instrument of his own destruction, fulfilling the dictum “Hate oppression; fear the oppressed.” [Figure 6]

The photos collected by the artist for his installation/ready-made offer other insights as well. From the very first examples, violence appears as the foundation of all order of life. Images of the Puerto Rican people are underpinned by those highlighting the American Army and Marines, along with the Insular Police, who keep the “natives” at bay. Landscape, education, social gatherings, Puerto Rican existence itself, fall under the concrete fact of repression. Colonial rule cannot exist without violence, and in this installation violence defines the colonized life of Puerto Ricans, seemingly destined to erase themselves and become the conquerors’ servants.

The Museum of the Old Colony is an artistic project steeped in historical research and developed over several years. Six versions of the installation have already been exhibited in diverse locations across the Americas, among them Puerto Rico. Delano modifies the piece, creating a unique dialogue with each new geographic location and exhibition space by altering the specific image selection, size, quantity, and narrative structure. For instance, at the Argentine Biennial of Documentary Photography, in 2016, he purposefully included images that evoked not only the U.S. military occupation of Puerto Rico, but also the legacy of military dictatorship in Argentina. At the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center at New York University, he eschewed a gallery altogether, occupying corridors and study halls, invading the everyday life of those in these spaces. In doing so, Delano reminds us that the violence of colonialism, racism, and sexism never ceases. In these neoliberal times of financial oversight boards, *The Museum of the Old Colony* urges us to remain vigilant, to maintain a critical stance. Thus, Delano adds to the treasured tradition of Puerto Rican anticolonial art. [Figure 7]

References

Césaire, Aimé. 1972. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Méndez Saavedra, Manuel. 1992. *1898: La Guerra Hispanoamericana en caricaturas*. San Juan: Gráfica Metropolitana.

This essay, updated here by Nelson Rivera for the new iteration of *The Museum of the Old Colony* at Hampshire College Art Gallery, originally appeared in Spanish in the online publication *80 grados*. Translation by Eric Vasquez.

Figure 7
Installation view
of *The Museum
of the Old Colony*
at the King Juan
Carlos I of Spain
Center at New
York University,
where Delano’s
materials were
integrated with
the existing
space, including
a portrait of
the King (left).
Photograph by:
Nelson Rivera.



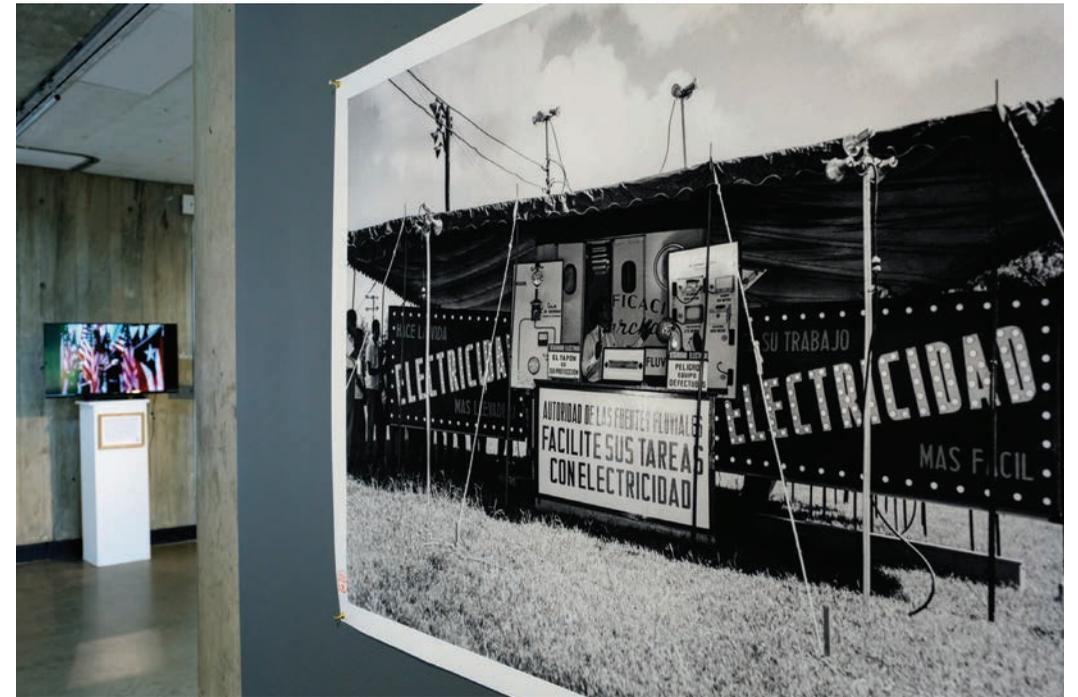
UNCANNY HISTORY



Encounters with *The Museum of the Old Colony*

AMY HALLIDAY
GALLERY DIRECTOR, HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE

Figure 1
Camión de la Autoridad de las Fuentes Fluviales con exhibición sobre el uso de electricidad. Photograph by: D. Bartolomei, Vega Baja 10/9/58, Biblioteca Digital Puertorriqueña, UPR. Colección de fotos del periódico *El Mundo*. Installation view from *The Museum of the Old Colony*.



“Electricity makes life more bearable and work easier” announce the signs that surge from the center of a traveling showcase for the benefits of widespread electrification in Puerto Rico, circa 1958.

In the center of the photograph, a man in a bow tie gestures to a didactic display: you can almost hear his charismatic delivery booming from the loudspeakers that run from overhead power cables. Yet the voice spilling out across the gallery space proclaims, instead, a series of lines spliced and looped from a 1965 Encyclopaedia Britannica Film, part of an adjacent video work:

In San Juan, the capital, the influence of the United States can be seen everywhere. And why not? For we are citizens of the United States, in almost every way . . .

Figure 2
Federal Aid Is
a Staple, AP
Newsfeatures.
Photograph by:
Gary Williams,
7/22/80.
Installation view
from *The Museum
of the Old Colony*.

In that small gap of semantics and sovereignty, the contingency of the *almost*, Pablo Delano's conceptual art installation — *The Museum of the Old Colony* — positions itself. Indeed, there's a wry irony in receiving instruction on the benefits of electrification from an image six decades after it was first circulated, at a moment when much of the contemporary Puerto Rican population is still without reliable power post-Hurricane Maria. [Figure 1]

Between this image and one in which a well-dressed couple examine an interactive electricity display lies another telling juxtaposition. Here, the winning smile of a white, blonde-haired Miss Teenage Puerto Rico 1969 (beauty pageants are an arena in which Puerto Rico proudly competes as an independent entity) is echoed by that of a darker-skinned supermarket cashier in the adjacent image. [Figures 2 and 3] Beaming for the lens of an Associated Press photojournalist, the cashier accepts a handful of food stamps over a large counter of consumer goods at a Pueblo supermarket (Perfecta white flour, pure white sugar), while shoppers look on in curiosity, judgment, disinterest. The caption on the verso of the photograph (and reproduced in the exhibition) references issues of debt and the uncertain economic promise of statehood, circa 1980. The author cannot resist a loaded pun: "Federal Aid Is a Staple."

Delano's installation abounds with these self-conscious decisions and time-traveling moments, when the past calls the present into question.

Figure 3
Coronación de
Pamela Hatley
como Miss
Teenager 1968.
Photograph by:
Eddie Vélez,
19 nov. 1968,
Biblioteca Digital
Puertorriqueña,
UPR. Colección
de fotos del
periódico *El
Mundo*. Detail
view from *The
Museum of the
Old Colony*.



FEDERAL AID IS A STAPLE

A customer hands over food stamps in payment for groceries in San Juan's Pueblo supermarket, the largest in Puerto Rico. More than half the island's population is eligible for federal food stamps, and, although there is a growing middle class, Puerto Rico maintains its lifestyle in good part on credit and federal aid. Supporters of statehood for the island say that Puerto Rico needs statehood to take it further on the road to prosperity.

jb-7/22/80 stf-Gary Williams jzcsil350



Figure 4
Old Colony
Beverage Timeline.
Original Old
Colony bottles and
cans, 1940s–2017,
Mayagüez, Puerto
Rico. Installation
view from *The
Museum of the
Old Colony*.

Named in part for the popular brand of soda Old Colony [Figure 4], manufactured on the island since 1940, *The Museum of the Old Colony* also alludes to the island’s complex political status in relation to the United States, and as arguably the world’s oldest continual colony (beginning with Spanish rule in 1493). The installation — conceived anew as a conceptual unit for each venue where the *Museum* materializes — is assembled from a continually growing collection of more than a century of archival imaging of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. Ranging from military scenes to newly established American schools [Figure 5] (in which children imbibe “American values” from dressing up as cowboys and pilgrims, or gathering reverently around a portrait of Abraham Lincoln) to the “native types” typical of anthropological inquiry [Figure 6], these images were largely produced by and for the U.S. and originally displayed, disseminated and interpreted in museums and magazines, newspapers and postcards, books and government reports. Each partakes in the construction of racialized, often primitivist stereotypes or the lauding of U.S. intervention, in turn naturalizing and legitimating U.S. rule.

MAKING A STRONG IMPRESSION

Moving through *The Museum of the Old Colony* unsettles you. Spending time in the installation, one feels, in turn, disgusted, curious, confused, indignant, charmed, or challenged by the images, for in their overwhelming accrual and scale, the rhetoric of colonial power becomes palpable, absurd. This power acts through recourse to the stereotype: a

widely circulated, reductive impression of a group of people based on a single characteristic and a term whose historical origin lies in the printing plates made for duplicating typography. In the case of Puerto Rico, Delano’s installation charts the (re)production and circulation of countless impressions of an “exotic” but poorly managed nation in need of material and moral uplift. Nowhere is this narrative more pernicious than in the images of children, from the stereoscopic print of naked toddlers on a beach arranged in a racialized chiaroscuro as they “[wait] for Uncle Sam,” [Figure 7] to the little boy who flexes his muscles in the hybrid garb of a *jibaro* hat and Roy Rogers shorts, enclosed by an exoticizing pineapple and palm trees and placed on a stool for the viewer’s visual consumption. [Figure 8] The caption, with unsettling eugenic undertones, proclaims that Kike Arostegui, the 4-year-old “Adonis,” was chosen by tourists at the Caribe Hilton Hotel as the “most perfect child.”

Figure 5
Installation view,
Village School near
San Juan, Porto
Rico, *The Mentor*
magazine, January
1921. A Trip to Porto
Rico — Three R’s in
Porto Rico: American
Teachers Training the
Young Idea.



Figure 6
Tipos de Mestizos.
Informe sobre el Censo
de Puerto Rico 1899,
Teniente Coronel J.
P. Sanger, Inspector-
General, Director,
Henry Gannett, Walter
F. Wilcox, Peritos en
Estadística, Traducido
del inglés por Frank L.
Joannini, Washington:
Imprenta del Gobierno,
1900.



As scholar and critical theorist Homi Bhabha has argued, stereotypes present a powerful “form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.” Stereotypes form a mainstay of colonial discourse, which actively “produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible ... [by employing] a system of representation, a regime of truth.”¹ Photography, with its claims to an unmediated reality through mechanical inscription, and the “biological ease of vision ... [which] naturalizes [ways of seeing that are], in fact, a cultural construct,” played a particularly persuasive role in the colonial rhetoric of representation.² Despite drawing on historical imagery depicting Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, the installation as a whole becomes an incisive portrait of the colonizing lens of the United States, darkly illuminating the socioeconomic and racial power structures that undergird lived experience both on the mainland and in its last remaining unincorporated territory.

TAKING A “CURATORIAL TURN”

The Museum of the Old Colony has been a collecting institution for decades. Although its institutional home is at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Puerto Rico (MAC-PR), Delano — who playfully considers himself the director, curator, registrar and chief custodian of *The Museum of the Old Colony* — continues to expand its reach through new acquisitions, site-specific exhibitions, and satellite venues. Rather than risking the viewer’s passive consumption and romanticization of the small-scale, original materials that he has collected, however, Delano scans, enlarges, and reprints them, sequencing and stacking the reproductions spatially according to an intuitive logic of association and affinity. In doing so, he charts the complex cadences of his own relationship with the place where he was



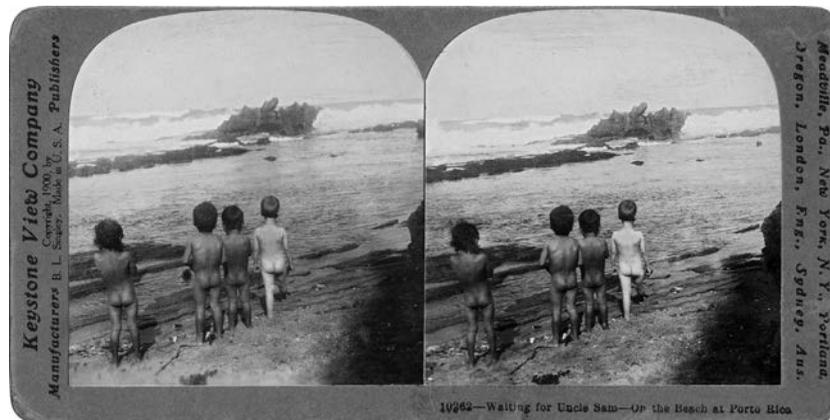
Figure 8
Healthiest, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1960, Hamilton Wright, New York. Installation view from *The Museum of the Old Colony*.

born and raised, and with the complicity of photography — Delano’s usual creative medium and that of his documentary-photographer father, Jack Delano — in the imperial enterprise.

Moreover, for Delano, the selection, reproduction, and sequencing of material is a curatorial act: the museum as both subject and medium. The “curatorial turn” in artistic practice has a rich history, as Jennifer Gonzalez explores in *Against the Grain: The Artist as Conceptual Materialist* (1999). Gonzalez traces the way in which artists throughout the twentieth century have engaged with collections, organizational taxonomies, hierarchies of value, and rhetorics of installation and interpretation. In the late 1980s and ‘90s, Gonzalez contends, contemporary artists (as well as scholars of postcolonialism) increasingly focused on the ideologies and exclusions inherent in museums.³ In the United States, the work of Cuban-American artist Coco Fusco and of African-American artist Fred Wilson (who identifies as being of both Caribbean and African descent) provides a contextual lineage for Delano’s *Museum of the Old Colony*.

In 1992, for example, Fusco, in collaboration with Guillermo Gomez-Peña, marked the global quincentenary celebrations of Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas with the performance and documentary *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992). Fusco and Gomez-Peña presented themselves in a cage — as indigenous exponents of an undiscovered island in the Gulf of Mexico

Figure 7
Waiting for Uncle Sam — On the Beach at Porto Rico. Photograph by: B. L. Singley, Keystone View Company, 1900. From *The Museum of the Old Colony*.





Installation view of *The Museum of the Old Colony* at Hampshire College Art Gallery.

— for public display at several museums and historical sites associated with colonialism. Their satirical self-presentation (alluding to a long history of exhibiting the “exotic” other for the Western gaze) included a repertoire of rituals and utilitarian tasks and an invitation for viewers to interact with them or pose for a (paid) picture (which many did, utterly invested in the “truth” of the spectacle). The performance was also buttressed by extensive pseudoscientific interpretative materials. Using her own body, Fusco directly confronted viewers with the contemporary legacy of colonial forms of representation in museums, pointing up their absurdity even as she employed their foundational logics toward a performance of “authenticity.”

Rather than rendering his own body as artifact, Fred Wilson (re)surfaces the traces of marginalized bodies and histories in existing museum collections. Wilson is perhaps best known for *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society (1992), in which the act of “mining” operates on multiple levels. First, “mining” works to extract the unseen or buried to produce new forms of value; second, it is an act of personal investiture (“mine-ing”), activating untold and silenced histories of Native Americans and African Americans in the area. Using only existing museum materials, Wilson employed such strategies as the reinterpretation of traditional categories (a pair of crudely wrought slave shackles is set alongside the ornate silver objects that usually stand for period artisanship: “Metalwork 1793-1880”); jarring juxtapositions (a Ku Klux Klan hood in a baby carriage); and multimedia that encourage new ways of seeing (illuminating the unknown black figures in period portraits, for example, and overlaying them with audio tracks of a child asking personal questions, thereby asserting individual presence and history).

The current moment in the United States has led to a renewed sense of urgency in addressing the role of museums and archives as sites of ideological power and of potential social agency and change. With civic discourse often mired in an antagonistic stalemate and as “alternative facts” produce new regimes of truth that veil rampant racism, xenophobia, and climate injustice (all interwoven in the sluggish federal response to Hurricane Maria), #MuseumsAreNotNeutral has become a rallying call across the United States and internationally.⁴ The growing movement both “calls out” — highlighting inequitable practices, exclusionary narratives, and colonial complicity — and “calls in” — by asking cultural workers, institutions, and social organizers to engage with how the power of museums might be rendered visible, interrogated, redistributed, and mustered in the service of social change. Such change ranges from increased transparency about collection histories and interpretation,⁵ to the sharing of curatorial authority and recognition of broader forms of expertise, to new staffing and salary structures, to direct engagement in exhibitions and programming with controversial or provocative



Figure 9
Patriot Economy Eraser. *The Museum of the Old Colony*.



Figure 10
Installation view with executive desk, patriotic pen set, and guest book. *The Museum of the Old Colony*.

contemporary issues about which museums have historically preferred to remain silent.⁶

Despite being crowded out of the news cycle by hurricanes in Texas and Florida and by debates over NFL kneeling, Hurricane Maria revealed extensive structural neglect and economic precarity in Puerto Rico. Delano’s installation surfaces several of these historical faultlines, prompting viewers to reflect, in turn, on the current relationship of the United States and Puerto Rico. In the absence of the “aura” of the original material, spectators must confront their own assumptions about value and authenticity. Without extensive interpretative aids, viewers must actively contend with the content and juxtaposition of each image, searching for and producing coherent relationships: working out a story to tell themselves.

What will they make of the series of monochromatic images that follow the buoyantly colored graphic dimensionality of the entryway’s

Figure 11
NASA astronaut Joe Acaba on the
International Space Station.
NASA/Twitter.

Figure 12
Juan José Martínez con su proyecto
de la Feria Científica. Photograph by:
Rafael Santiago Sosa, 1966, Biblioteca
Digital Puertorriqueña. Colección de
fotos del periódico *El Mundo*. From
The Museum of the Old Colony.



display timeline of Old Colony soda bottles and cans? [Figure 4] Will they notice the strong lines of the cannon [cover image] that have been reinforced by the hand of the original newspaper retoucher for reproduction and widespread dissemination, a common practice for strengthening visual effects long before the dawn of Photoshop? The reinforced lines, visible only through Delano's enlargement, underscore the rhetorical role of these images: here the graphic contrast further delineates a picture of progress versus stasis, industrial might versus agricultural humility . . . If they sit at the executive desk to record their response to the exhibition with the cheap patriotic pen set provided, might they catch sight of the unobtrusive *Economy Eraser* that lies, mockingly, in its rarefied miniature vitrine [Figures 9 and 10] or feel drawn to interact with the domino set that alludes at once to a popular Puerto Rican leisure activity and to the fragile contingencies of lived experience on the island, especially post-Maria? And how might each of the exhibition's many associated programs and partnerships inflect, extend, or activate *The Museum of the Old Colony* anew? For all Delano's careful curation, the installation is not static. Rather, it becomes an expansive framework, a series of suggestive starting points for critical conversations about race, history, photography, colonialism; then and now bound up in one another.

THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

We began with a time-traveling moment: a mobile exhibition of the benefits of electricity, circa 1958, from the vantage point of the longest blackout in U.S. history, circa 2018. While *The Museum of the Old Colony* purposefully denies any sense of closure or resolution, let us end with another: In January of this year, Joseph Acaba, the first NASA astronaut of Puerto Rican descent, held a Puerto Rican flag as he spoke to Puerto Rican schoolchildren in Manatí from the international space station, telling them that at night, after the hurricane, the island he loved and sought from space had become all but invisible. [Figure 11] Despite the lack of any official reference to his Puerto Rican heritage on the NASA website, which refers to him only as a "California native," Acaba has a strong Puerto Rican following. His Twitter feed reads as an informal clearinghouse for a nation of "frustrated astronauts,"⁷ aspirations grounded as they work to rebuild the island's decimated physical and economic infrastructure, and continue to navigate political precarity. We are met, in this moment, by the uncertain gaze of Juan José Martínez, holding the base of his cardboard rocket ship emblazoned with large letters spelling out "PUERTO RICO" and no NASA ensign, in a 1966 school science fair. [Figure 12] Set among orderly rock samples, dioramas, posters, and scale models, the makeshift rocket stirs the contemporary imagination. Its surging upward momentum seems set to break the upper limits of the picture plane.

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4. While many individuals and institutions have, over many years, drawn attention to how the notion of “neutrality” in museums is largely a mechanism for maintaining an exclusionary (Eurocentric, patriarchal, heteronormative) status quo, the #MuseumsAreNotNeutral initiative can be traced to the work of cultural organizer LaTanya Autry and director of education and public programs at the Portland Art Museum, Mike Murawski.
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6. Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary museum — which now includes an exhibition about contemporary mass incarceration — has actively engaged with how its “version of ‘neutrality’ was mostly taking the form of silence ... an excuse for simply avoiding thorny issues of race, poverty, and policy that we weren’t ready to address.” See Kelley, Sean. “Beyond Neutrality.” *Center for the Future of Museums Blog*, American Alliance of Museums, 23 August 2016. <https://www.aam-us.org/2016/08/23/beyond-neutrality/>
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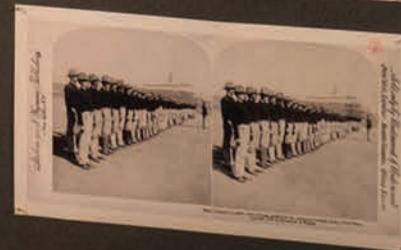
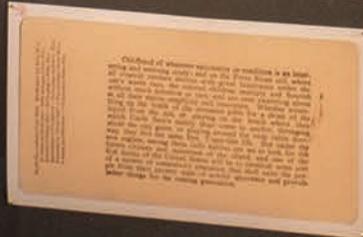
A COLORED BELLE OF PUERTO RICO
A picture of African with Spanish blood is not found in all of the people of this island. The
of white people hold themselves as strictly in their own society as in any other country.
The colored girl is of the higher type of that race.



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20



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18



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73 Camp at San Juan, Porto Rico. Copyright 1901 by Underwood & Underwood.

21



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98 Porto Rican Boys in their Sunday Dress, near Alouba. Copyright 1901 by Underwood & Underwood.

19



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INSTALLATION CHECKLIST*

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* Please note that captions are original to image source and may contain errors, inconsistencies, and offensive language.

PABLO DELANO was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He earned a BFA in painting from Temple University and an MFA in painting from Yale University. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at museums and galleries across the Americas, the Caribbean, and in Europe. He is the author of three books of photography: *Faces of America* (Smithsonian, 1992), *In Trinidad* (Ian Randle Publishers, 2008), and *Hartford Seen* (forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press, 2019). Delano teaches studio art and photography at Trinity College, Hartford, where he also serves as codirector of the Center for Caribbean Studies.

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THE MUSEUM OF THE OLD COLONY



Timeline to date

FEBRUARY 19-26, 2016

Alice Yard, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

APRIL 2-JULY 4, 2016

National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston (part of the Digital group exhibition)

OCTOBER 7-30, 2016

7th Argentine Biennial of Documentary Photography, Tucumán, Argentina

FEBRUARY 2-JUNE 21, 2017

King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University, New York City

DECEMBER 2017-JULY 2018

Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico (part of the Entredichos group exhibit)

JUNE 2-NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Hampshire College Art Gallery, Amherst, Massachusetts

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