

SULLIVAN GALLERIES

BEATRIZ SANTIAGO MUÑOZ

SAFEHOUSE

AUGUST 27 - DECEMBER 8

CURATED BY HANNAH BARCO AND TREVOR MARTIN

with Graduate Curatorial Assistants Almudena Caso Burbano (MA 2019) and Carlos Salazar Lermont (Dual MA 2019)

This exhibition presents a new body of work by Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (MFA 1997), whose projects often arise out of long periods of observation and documentation, in which the camera is present as an object with social implications and as an instrument mediating aesthetic thought. Over the course of a two-year residency, Santiago Muñoz researched the history of the Puerto Rican anti-colonial movement which was based, in part, in Chicago. The work examines the material culture related to the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN),

much of which has been suppressed or must necessarily remain hidden. Santiago Muñoz focuses on the complicated desires, anxieties, and split subjects that emerge from the toll of colonialism and forms of resistance to it. Informed as much by what is said and can be seen as by what is invisible, gone, and remains unsaid, *Safehouse* presents a series of moving image works and objects used to explore this sensorial unconscious in order to expand and reformulate the constellation of ideas surrounding this history.

20
18



Production still from *Safehouse*

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Reception
Friday, September 28
6:00-9:00 p.m.

**A Brief History of
Political Prisoners in
the United States**
with Jan Susler
Monday, October 1
6:00 p.m.

**On Art, Liberation, and
the Political Subject**
Elizam Escobar in
conversation with
Beatriz Santiago Muñoz
Tuesday, October 2
6:00 p.m.

**Colonialism and the
Unconscious**
with Patricia Gherovici
Wednesday, October 17
6:00 p.m.

*All public programs for this
exhibition will take place at
SAIC Sullivan Galleries
33 S. State St. 7th floor,
Chicago, IL 60603*

Safehouse is a two-channel video, screened like a vinyl record with an A-Side and B-Side. Three actors perform gestures that we could imagine might take place in a clandestine apartment, but they also listen to music, eat, and take pleasure in being by themselves and developing a way of being together.

The performers are both themselves and imagined others—members of a clandestine political organization. They perform both naturalism and stylization, as when Joelle Mercedes seems to be both looking for a listening device and “playing” the table. The house is heard throughout the soundtrack—the floorboards creak, the chairs bang together, a spigot is opened and left running as a noise-making device, one actor fingers a vent, another smells the sheets for anything amiss. Attention to the house and all its pieces, noises, and order is an important part of maintaining a clandestine space. Boredom and carelessness is dangerous. There is only one conversation in side A. Two actors lie together on the floor and speak to each other about bricks. One says a brick holds the memory of the bricklayer’s thought. The other says, “this has to do with matter and the body”—these are the pieces of the puzzle that I am most interested in.

All the audio explosions are hand-made—literally made by hand—carefully built through Foley recordings of breaking glass, banged metal, dangling keys, or voice and body sounds that are then layered and slowed down in order to create the illusion of a bomb. The B-Side of *Safehouse* is dominated by a conversation between myself and the actors who—

because they feel themselves related to and implicated by these histories—sometimes speak as if they were members of the FALN and at other times speak *about* them. The conversation circles around related ideas: from *our* responsibility to imagine a complex assemblage of past events, ideas, and people to resistance and a persistent desire for new images and forms to think about these ideas.

In the footage, there are cues to suggest a time—the records are Miles Davis, Los Panchos, Sun Ra, and Parliament. The actors listen to albums on cassette; sometimes they seem to be listening to words, and, at other times, they take pleasure in listening to music, not doing what they are there to do. There is a record player, a cassette player, an 80’s analog phone. But the details don’t amount to a period piece; there is no attempt at verisimilitude. The house where we filmed is a place I feel to be analogous to the safehouse. It is in Humboldt Park as well and belongs to people who support radical political projects, many times hosting informal dialogues as well as activists in need of a home. The camera moves as if it were another actor, in and out of rooms, in the middle, underneath the table, it follows bodies up-close. It never leaves the house; it doesn’t show you where you are.

A lot of the collective work of an anti-colonialist community is in crafting a common position and putting together language that states that position. But there is other work, too: the work of building trust, as well as the necessity of complex dialogue, planned actions, and the negotiation between individual subjects, their individual desires, and a common set of actions while also parsing anxieties and misgivings about each other, everyday work, and power differences. This all took place in specific houses or churches and classrooms that felt, sounded, and smelled a certain way. People sat on the floor, reclined on a bed, or sat around in chairs or in the kitchen—to me, all of this makes a difference. There is one kind of political thought that comes from a podium and lecture hall and another that comes out around a cheap kitchen table in a house in Humboldt Park.

Throughout it all, there were the ways in which people hung together, ways they spoke to each other, loved each other, or not. To engage with all of this, to think with it, we are limited—we have only communiqués and whatever the FBI cobbled together to press charges. This is why I am interested in the possibilities of thinking with material culture, to think through *the way we move, the way we speak*. If we have no material culture—if objects and places have been lost, suppressed and transformed—I believe it is necessary to create new materials, new images, not as a recreation but as an expansion, a multiplication, a wild stream-of-consciousness gamble.

The ceramic objects are also related to this history—the oversized cartoonish gun with two holes, the fingers, the wig and mustache, a long

white horn. I propose these objects as a way of accessing our unconscious. We have no “evidentiary” materials, no documents to think about a “real past.” In this story, not everything can be said, but perhaps it can be felt, weighed, heard. I propose that the kind of world-making available to the colonial subject emerges not from a historical record but from fantasy.

Colonialism is a constant, communal trauma. The structural injustices of colonialism are hard to understand as violence even by the community that suffers it. It is experienced instead as everyday alienation, displacement, guilt, rage, and a split subjectivity that is at once deeply resentful of this injustice and ashamed of our inability to transform it.

The history of an anti-colonial, clandestine, armed organization produces yet other unresolved traumas. The members of the group who were arrested and served long sentences were known organizers. Some of them were teachers. Some were committed activists, beloved in the community—people who are known to march, organize, and resist injustice. They were involved in clandestine organizations in parallel to many other forms of political work. The community was called to testify against them before a grand jury and, by and large, chose not to collaborate with the state because, in part, they felt their actions had indeed been just. But there is another way in which we—all of us, everyday—are forced to abjure them.

— Beatriz Santiago Muñoz

WITH THANKS

Juan Antonio Arroyo, Andrew Barco, Ramón Miranda Beltrán, Elizam Escobar, Patricia Gherovici, Brian Holmes, José Lopez, Zuqiang Peng, Claire Pentecost, Sarah Skaggs, Michael Staudenmaier, Jan Susler, Teófilo Torres, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, and all of the careful and attentive curatorial and operating staff of the SAIC Sullivan Galleries who have been such a pleasure to work with, especially Hannah Barco and Trevor Martin. They have been wonderful interlocutors of this work and enthusiastic supporters of these ideas within SAIC and the larger community. All of this started a few years ago when the SAIC Film, Video, New Media, and Animation Department conspired to bring me back for a screening—thank you, you are also a dear family.



This project is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

SAFEHOUSE

2018 | 2-channel hd video | color | sound

A Side | 10 minutes

B Side | 10 minutes

Total audio loop | 20 minutes

Actors: Pepe Álvarez, Joelle Mercedes, Kairiana Nuñez Santaliz

Location sound recording: Julian Flavin

Sound editing and additional sound recording:

Joel Rodríguez, Sindhu Thirumalaisamy

ONEIROMANCER

2017 | hd video | color | sound

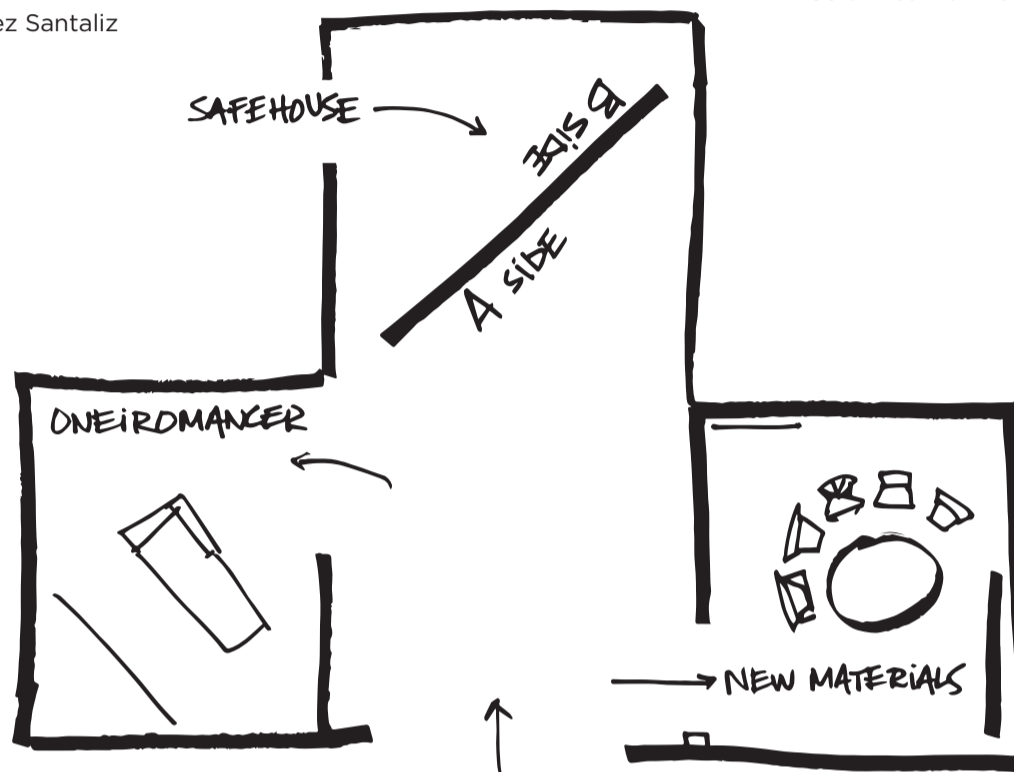
26 minutes

with Jan Susler

Additional camera: Zuqiang Peng

Sound mix: Juan Antonio Arroyo

Beekeeper: Teófilo Torres



NEW MATERIALS

2018 | installation of ceramic objects
video | silent | 4:20 minutes | drawings

Additional camera: Ramón Miranda Beltrán

Ceramics: Yamileth Flores, Andrea Pérez

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 6:00 P.M.

A Brief History of Political Prisoners in the United States

with Jan Susler

EXCERPT FROM: Ramón Bosque-Pérez and José Javier Colón Morera, eds, *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 122-23.

The Trials

The various proceedings against the captured independentistas shared in common a virtual hysteria by the media, law enforcement, and the courts. Many of the arrests were carried out in military regalia, replete with helicopters, snipers, and excessive numbers of FBI agents. In the earlier arrests, the government sought, and the courts set, prohibitive bail. With the advent of “preventive detention,” the government sought, and the courts ordered, no bail at all, and, in the case of Filiberto Ojeda, set the record for the longest preventive detention. Awaiting trial, all of the prisoners were held in the most punitive, restrictive, often unprecedented isolation unless and until some outside intervention occurred—hunger strikes by the prisoners, protests by the indepen-

dence movement and supporters, lawsuits by the attorneys, and monitoring by Amnesty International. Newspapers whipped the public—and potential jurors—into an anti-terrorist frenzy, aided by and assisting the marshals’ court “security,” which not only sent a message to the judges and juries that the accused were guilty but also sought to intimidate supporters. The courts, open as a forum for the government’s political agenda, facilitated and cooperated in acts ranging from permitting the government’s use of terms such as terrorist and banning the defense’s use of terms such as colonialism, to convening anonymous juries, to cutting back on traditional limitations on state power, particularly on the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures.

The Sentences

Length of Sentence

Puerto Rican independentistas are punished for their beliefs and associations, for who they are, not for any act they’ve committed. Government statistics prove

that those that commit criminal offenses receive far lesser sentences than do independentista fighters. In 1981, the year most of the political prisoners were sentenced, the average federal sentence for murder was 10.3 years. [...] Their sentences were still about five times longer than the average. Perhaps a concrete application of the sentences will provide insight: Oscar López will be 113 years old if he is made to serve his entire sentence; Carlos Alberto Torres, ninety-eight.

Jan Susler joined People’s Law Office in 1982 after working for six years as a Clinical Law Professor at the legal clinic at Southern Illinois University’s School of Law, Prison Legal Aid. At the People’s Law Office she continued her litigation and advocacy work on prisoners’ rights issues and also took on representing people wrongfully imprisoned, falsely arrested, strip searched, or subjected to excessive force by police officers.

Her long history of work on behalf of political prisoners and prisoners’ rights includes litigation, advocacy, and educational work around federal and state control unit prisons in the US. Her work with the Puerto Rican Independence Movement and with progressive movements challenging US foreign and domestic policies has been a constant throughout her 36 years as a lawyer. She was an adjunct professor of criminal justice at Northeastern Illinois University and taught constitutional law at the University of Puerto Rico. For over three decades she has represented Puerto Rican political prisoners, and she served as lead counsel in the efforts culminating in the 1999 presidential commutation of their sentences. She continues to represent those who remain imprisoned. Her advocacy has included testifying in hearings at the US House of Representatives and the United Nations, and she has written and lectured extensively about her work.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 6:00 P.M. On Art, Liberation, and the Political Subject

Elizam Escobar in conversation with Beatriz Santiago Muñoz

EXCERPT FROM: Elizam Escobar, “**The Heuristic Power of Art,**” in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35-53.

All these conflicting aspects of existence nurture and inform the artist in me. I am simultaneously an artist and imprisoned political activist. As a political prisoner and prisoner of war, others see me as a symbol and/or martyr of the independence cause—an immolated living being. But as a thinker-activist who needs to conceptualize and determine his role, in part supported by all past traditions, in part against them, I refuse to play the role of a “passive” martyr. Although my comrades and I have been, in fact, martyred, I see myself first as an active thinker who has too much to contribute to the struggle to be comfortable in such a role. Paradoxically, as an artist I produce images of martyrdom and death. The irony is that many of those who see me as a symbol and martyr for the cause would like me to produce heroic images of combatants or write optimistic messages and statements, while being, on the other hand, a passively faithful comrade in political terms. Instead, I do the reverse.

It couldn't be otherwise: the artist and the imagination are the limits of liberty. And the artist exists in a concrete particular body, an imprisoned body that “belongs” to the State: a slave, whose body is constantly humiliated and repressed, the object of the State's desire. The fact that privacy is nonexistent is not enough to satisfy this desire: There is no cavity or interstice of the prisoner's body that escapes the inspection of prison functionaries. It is not enough that they repress you sexually, but in order to see your loved ones you have to allow them to view and inspect all the cavities of your naked body. This is the obscenity of prison.

Surrounded by obscenity, art becomes a salvation, the sacred activity of liberty. My interpretation of Baudelaire's words, “To be a great man and a saint every day for oneself” describes this path, which I do not confuse with a “narcissistic” goal. It entails a sublime and poetic understanding that, in the end, it is up to us to decide what constitutes *the sacred*, and therefore, how sacrifice (and the sacrificed) is creatively and ironically treated—how sacrifice is sublimated and transcended. In this sense, my martyrdom, my sainthood, my compulsory celibacy, my pain and suffering, becomes an image exhibited for the individual and collective

body. *In this sense, I can say that the personal is political.* In this sense, the embarrassment of becoming an object of exhibition is redeemed by an act of liberation.

When the cultural-mythological penetrates the personal, the personal mythologizes itself, because the personal is no longer “private.” My body as a work of art, an “exhibited body,” an heuristic body, does not belong to me. It is something other. The body becomes an offering, a symbolic exchange. This symbolic exchange is what I oppose to “ideologism” (the reduction of everything to Ideology), imposed from the outside to codify my body's experience and knowledge. My exposed body poetically contains all that which dominant ideology wants to domesticate or reduce to cheap and easy pleasure. Pleasure that makes of the body an object dislocated from all liberty. In this liberty, with this responsibility, and in the voluntary act of offering, the exhibited body becomes sublime (transfixed), containing all the possibilities that make the body (the aching, redeemed, “triumphant” body) into the redemptive image of what would otherwise become part of collective, historical oblivion or an object of quantitative, nominal, and arbitrary documentation.

Elizam Escobar is an artist and writer. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Art from the University of Puerto Rico and continued his studies at the University of New York City and the New York Art Students League. He worked as a cartoonist and as a teacher at several public schools and the Art School at El Museo del Barrio in New York and was linked with the Association of Hispanic Arts of New York. In 1980 he was sentenced to 68 years in state and federal US prisons for the charge of seditious conspiracy, a political accusation for those fighting against US colonial rule in Puerto Rico. While in prison, he continued to paint and write. Over the past decades he has published books of poetry, prison diaries, and essays as well as exhibited his visual art internationally. He was released from prison in 1999 and returned to Puerto Rico where he has been a professor of painting at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico (School of Visual Arts). In his more recent painting and mixed media works, he raises matters of human communication, the phenomenon of the painter as an observer (or not) of the reality, alienation, and the isolation in the contemporary world. He is currently working on a series of clay portraits and mixed media works.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 6:00 P.M. Colonialism and the Unconscious

with Patricia Gherovici

EXCERPT FROM: Patricia Gherovici, *The Puerto Rican Syndrome* (New York: Other Press, 2003), 92-92.

When Aristotle addresses the question of anger, he contends that:

Acts proceeding from anger are rightly judged not to be done of malice aforethought; for it is not the man who acts in anger but he who enraged him that starts the mischief. Again, the matter in dispute is not whether the thing happened or not, but it is justice; for it is apparent injustice that occasions rage. [Ethics, 1980, 127]

Anger, in Aristotle's perspective, arises from a situation of injustice that needs to be corrected. “Let anger be [defined as] desire accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for conspicuous retaliation because of a conspicuous slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one” (On Rhetoric, 1991, p. 124). Aristotle admits therefore that acts triggered by anger are not without virtue. “The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought,

when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised” (Ethics, 1980, p. 96). This naturally leads to a conception of anger as a handmaiden of justice. Moderate rage follows reason. Revenge would call for justice. Yet, this rage for justice is within measure—never excessive. For Aristotle, the “goodtempered man” is not led by passion, tends to be unperturbed, and if he gets angry, he is angry “in the manner, at the things, and for the length of time, that the rule dictates.” Nonetheless, let us note that Aristotle considers the lack of anger, or “unirascibility,” undesirable:

For those who are not angry at the things they should be angry at are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the right way, at the right time, with the right persons; for such a man is thought not to feel things nor to be pained by them, and, since he does not get angry, he is thought unlikely to defend himself; and to endure being insulted and put up with insult to one's friend is slavish. [Ethics, 1980, 97]

The use of the expression “they should be angry” betrays the policing aspect in

anger. The ability to get angry at injustice would be a call to restore dignity and fair play, which may lead to correct the circumstances that elicited the anger in the first place. Anger, therefore, would be a political matter. Anger could be read as a message: I don't like what you are doing.

Patricia Gherovici, Ph.D. is a psychoanalyst and analytic supervisor. She is co-founder and director of the Philadelphia Lacan Group and Associate Faculty, Psychoanalytic Studies Minor, University of Pennsylvania (PSYS), Honorary Member at IPTAR the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research in New York City, and Founding Member of Das Unbehagen.

Her books include *The Puerto Rican Syndrome* (Other Press: 2003) winner of the Grady Award and the Boyer Prize, and *Please Select Your Gender: From the Invention of Hysteria to the Democratizing of Transgenderism* (Routledge: 2010). She has published two edited collections (both with Manya Steinkoler) *Lacan On Madness: Madness Yes You Can't* (Rout-

ledge: 2015) and *Lacan, Psychoanalysis and Comedy* (Cambridge University Press: 2016). Her new book *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference* was published by Routledge in June 2017. She is currently completing a collection (co-edited with Chris Christian) *Psychoanalysis in the Barrios: Race, Class, and the Unconscious* (forthcoming with Routledge.)

In her publication of the same name, Gherovici thoroughly examines the so-called Puerto Rican Syndrome in the contemporary world, its social and cultural implications for the growing Hispanic population in the US and, therefore, for the US as a whole. As a mental illness that is, allegedly, uniquely Puerto Rican, this syndrome links nationality and culture to a psychiatric disease whose reappearance recalls the spectacular hysteria that led to the discovery of the unconscious and the birth of psychoanalysis. Gherovici systematically uses the combined insights of Freud and Lacan to examine the current state of psychoanalysis and the Hispanic community in America.