

NUYORICAN & DIASPORICAN VISUAL ART



NUYORICAN & DIASPORICAN VISUAL ART

A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Arlene Dávila and Yasmin Ramirez

with Néstor David Pastor, Gabriel Magraner, and Nikki Myers



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NIVERSII

CONTENTS

ix		Acknowledgments
1		Introduction Arlene Dávila and Yasmin Ramirez
		PART I. FROM PUERTO RICAN TO NUYORICAN FORGING DIASPORICAN ART IN NEW YORK
27	1	The Way Out = Left Out? Paradoxes of Puerto Rican Avant-Garde Art Melissa M. Ramos Borges
45	2	Nuyorican Vanguards The Puerto Rican Alternative Art Space Movement in New York
70	3	Yasmin Ramirez The Construction of Nuyorican Identity in the Art of Taller Boricua
U	NIVI	Taína Caragol

90	4	The Politics and Poetics of Máximo Colón's Activist Photography
		Elizabeth Ferrer
104	5	Artistic Decoloniality as Aesthetic Praxis Making and Transforming Imaginations and Communities in NYC Wilson Valentín-Escobar
		wiison valentin-Escobai
131	6	The Art of Survival The Visual Art Activism of Maria Dominguez Al Hoyos-Twomey
149	7	The Parallel Aesthetics of Nilda Peraza
149	7	The Parallel Aesthetics of Nilda Peraza Néstor David Pastor
149	8	
		Néstor David Pastor Creative Camaraderie Puerto Rican/Nuyorican Artists and Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop

Locating Diasporican Art

Teréz Iacovino

UNIVERSITY

212	10	Puerto Rican Arts in Philadelphia Una Perla Boricua en Filadelfia Johnny Irizarry
233	11	"A pesar de todo" The Survival of an Afro-Puerto Rican Family in Frank Espada's Puerto Rican Diaspora Project Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez
250	12	The Fight to Make Art in Borilando
		Raquel Reichard
270	13	Abstractions between Puerto Rico and Chicago An Ongoing Conversation about Nationalism and Nonrepresentational Art Abdiel D. Segarra Ríos
		PART III. ALL OF THE ABOVE
		DIASPORICAN AESTHETICS
291	14	Nuyorican Poets' Art of Making Books Urayoán Noel
311	15	Visual Artists, Surrealist Communions
	17	Lois Elaine Griffith and Jorge Soto Sánchez at the Nuyorican Poets Café

Joseph Anthony Cáceres

UNIVERSITY

329	16	"SAMO© AS AN EPIC POEM WITH FLAMES" Al Díaz's Poetics of Disruption Rojo Robles
352	17	¡No te luzcas! Nuyorican Performance and Spectacularity in the Visual Art of Adál, David Antonio Cruz, and Luis Carle Arnaldo M. Cruz-Malavé
372	18	"Bridging Gaps and Building Communities" Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz's Ask Chuleta and Afro-Latinx Identity beyond the "White Box" Kerry Doran
393	19	A Modernist Nuyorican Casita and the Aesthetics of Gentrification Johana Londoño
407		Conclusion The Spatial Politics of Shellyne Rodriguez, Rigoberto Torres, Lee Quiñones, and Danielle De Jesus—With Some Concluding Comments
427	K	Arlene Dávila Contributors

Index

UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Arlene Dávila and Yasmin Ramirez

The objective of *Nuyorican & Diasporican Visual Art: A Critical Anthology* is to anchor our understanding of the historical importance of the first Puerto Rican art movement in New York, aka the Nuyorican art movement, and to introduce new scholarship that centers the work, innovation, and worldmaking of Puerto Rican artists across the United States—that is, Diasporican artists. In particular, the chapters in the anthology call for us to reassess the presence of Puerto Rican artists living and working in the United States within the broader mainstream context of the US and international art world. Not accepted as either fully "Puerto Rican" or "American," Puerto Ricans in the United States defy restrictive boundaries

of ethnicity and national identification, and they have yet to receive substantive attention in museums, exhibitions, and contemporary scholarship. Puerto Rican artists remain generally missing from art historical scholarship, but even more overlooked are those who were born and/or raised and primarily live and work outside the archipelago.

As a result, we know little about visual artists who were generative to creating new visual vocabularies, such as Jorge Soto Sánchez and his urban Afro-Taino aesthetics (see figure I.1); or about pioneers in street and mural art, such as muralist Maria Dominguez or graffiti artist Lee Quiñones; or about artists who innovated interdisciplinary approaches in performance and visual art, such as Adál Maldonado and Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, among others. When Pablo Delano's *The Museum of the Old Colony* was featured in the Venice Biennale 2024, joining the ranks of many Diasporican artists finally receiving the recognition they deserve, it came as no shock to scholars of Puerto Rican studies who have long acknowledged his contributions. In other words, the fate and experiences of Nuyorican/Diasporican artists in the United States are generative for learning about the difficulties of Latinx artists at large and for obtaining a fuller understanding of American art history.

The scope of the anthology spans from an examination of Nuyorican participation in the alternative and multicultural art movements of the late twentieth century to the roles of Diasporican artists in creating new artistic communities under the constraints of massive debt, displacement, and natural disasters that have beset Puerto Ricans in the twenty-first century. Altogether, these chapters help explain the reasons underlying Nuyorican art invisibility—among them, the nationalist tendencies of art history to relegate these artists to the "American" and Latin American art canon, the racism that has tended to limit our understanding of the rich history of Puerto Ricans in the United States, and the disciplinary boundaries that limit assessment of alternative vanguardist art practices.¹

Puerto Rico's colonial status has rendered all Puerto Rican artists invisible to art scholars and institutions worldwide. Nevertheless, for generations Puerto Rican artists, as well as scholars and curators, have migrated to the United States, especially to New York, to pursue advanced arts degrees while often continuing to center archipelago and Latin American art in their work and curatorial approaches. As a result, many Puerto Rican art initiatives have failed to explore, uplift, learn from, or make connections with Nuyorican/Diasporican artists in the United States in ways that would also elevate these artists in the art world. This is despite the increasingly popular



I.1 Jorge Soto Sánchez, *El Velorio de Oller en Nueva York*, 1974 (revised 1984). Hand-colored screenprint, $25\% \times 39\%$ in. Collection of Smithsonian American Art Museum.

declaration that we are all part of the same community and "equally Puerto Rican." In this way, centering Nuyorican/Diasporican artists who live and work primarily in the United States is crucial to addressing the historical disinvestment in Latinx art within art history, visual arts scholarship, museums, archives, and arts and cultural institutions at large.

We also invite readers to see this volume as a personal intervention in the spirit of the work we have been doing at The Latinx Project at New York University (NYU). We offer this book as a call to action for scholars, curators, and fellow artists to be attentive to hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality that are often reproduced, veiled, and erased by public assertions of Puerto Ricanness that fail to pay attention to the historical patterns of exclusion of Diasporican artists in the art world. Our goal is to create the dialogue necessary to produce more equitable exchanges and relationships among all Puerto Rican artists within the archipelago and across the United States.

The editors have been working to uplift and document the work of Nuyorican and Latinx creatives in their individual work for decades: Arlene Dávila through her work on cultural politics and the Latinization of New York, Yasmin Ramirez through her foundational research and curatorial work on Nuyorican art, and our editorial team—Néstor David Pastor, Gabriel Magraner, and Nikki Myers—through their extensive background in Puerto Rican and Latinx arts and cultural institutions and their work with The Latinx Project. We came together to make a public call to identify contributors across the United States that led first to a virtual conference organized by The Latinx Project in the fall of 2022 and then to this volume in the spirit of artivism that pervades the current Latinx movement—where we see a rise of scholarly and institutional interest in and attention to Latinx artists. In this regard, we are in solidarity with so many members of our scholarly and activist community intent on creating and addressing the existing voids in the art history and scholarship cannon.

Our initial call for the conference and book sought contributors exploring the creative work and practices of Nuyorican/Diasporican artists from the 1960s onward and in all genres of visual art, such as street art, muralism, printmaking, painting, photography, performance art, conceptualism, architecture, advertising, and more, with a special appeal for topics focusing on historical perspectives, decolonial aesthetics, queer identities, aesthetics and movements, arts activism and art historical revisions, underground genres, fashion and design, and unknown figures. The submissions came from all fields, and while the final program and content of this book are not a comprehensive or accurate portrayal of the current state of research, they are nonetheless highly informative.

First, our premise that Nuyorican art has been studied primarily through poetry and performance studies and that Diasporican art is understudied was confirmed by the general lack of submissions focusing on diverse forms of visual culture and on Diasporican art beyond New York City. While the Nuyorican movement is celebrated for its legacy of sociopolitical activism, poetry, and music, there has been a notable lag in critical awareness and scholarship regarding Nuyorican visual art. In particular, many of the topics identified by our initial call remain generally untapped and understudied, and we urge students to heed our initial public call. We

encountered an even greater dearth of submissions on key diaspora cities, such as Chicago and Orlando. We realized that our inability to identify contributors in states where Diasporican populations are numerous was linked to a void in institutional structures to support and sustain art worlds and networks, driving our call for more robust art resources across the United States that promote arts and educational opportunities and serve as catalysts of creativity for diverse communities.

Interestingly, and not surprisingly, the submissions of art historians in part I of this book focus primarily on NYC, which is the most established and somewhat documented art scene, while interdisciplinary, independent, and younger writers and scholars in parts II and III look at scenes beyond New York. We feel this speaks to the key role that interdisciplinary scholars have historically played in opening up fields of study before the traditional disciplines. On this point, it is worth quoting Adriana Zavala's observation of the field of art history at large. As she explains, "An informal survey reveals that out of approximately 72 *current* PhD students in art history with a declared focus in Latin American or Latinx visual art, and including PhD students in the ethnic studies fields of Chicano/a/x and Latino/a/x studies, who are focusing on the visual arts, only one is currently writing a dissertation focused on Nuyorican/Diasporican visual art."² As she notes, most of the current Latinx art historical scholarly work focuses on Latinx or Chicanx art, a trend that points to the need for more art historical research on the diversity of Latinx artists at large, from Diasporican art to Central American and Dominican artists in the diaspora, and the like. Then there are structural issues in academia, such as the lack of archives available to scholars, and how this contributes to the absence of research on Nuyorican/Diasporican art. For instance, NYU houses the Downtown Collection at Fales Library—an important archive that has contributed to the art historical canon of late twentieth-century New York art history. However, this collection contains virtually no works by Nuyorican visual artists beyond Papo Colo, the founder of Exit Art. This is despite the fact that Downtown Manhattan was a central hub of the Nuyorican art and poetry movement. A researcher would need to know they should comb through the Exit Art Archives to find catalogs from the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA) featuring Nuyorican and Latinx artists to reconstruct some of the living art history captured in chapters by contributors Al Hoyos-Twomey, Joseph Anthony Cáceres, Pastor, and Ramirez.³ In this way, another key takeaway from this book is the importance of Latinx-specific archives in filling the void in art history. We extend a special shout-out to the efforts of

the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library and Archive; the Latin American and Latino Art Documents at the International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Latinx archivist and curator Josh T. Franco at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. We are also excited about the digitization, of the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art archives, launched in 2024 at Hostos College in New York City, which has finally made this important collection accessible to the public. These archives have played a crucial role in documenting Nuyorican art, which, in turn, greatly assisted the work of several of our contributors.

In summary, our book seeks to address sedimented erasures in academia, art history, archives, and museums through interdisciplinary examinations of the evolution and impact of Puerto Rican visual culture in the United States. The collection provides a critical (re)evaluation and historical overview of Nuyorican and Diasporican visual art production with the aim of asserting its importance and contemporaneity alongside the vanguardist movements that emerged in New York City from the 1960s onward. Moreover, the chapters included here, while not intended to be comprehensive, develop a more intersectional and inclusive understanding of Nuyorican/Diasporican art as it pertains to a specific community-based visual aesthetic aligned with the Nuyorican movement and manifest in a wide array of artistic mediums. As such, there is a particular emphasis on the undervalued contributions and radical aesthetics of female, Black, and queer Puerto Rican artists. In addition, this volume addresses the expansion and decentralization of the Puerto Rican diaspora by the turn of the twenty-first century and explores Diasporican art as expressive of Puerto Rican communities in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Orlando.

Altogether, the chapters in this book fill the current void of knowledge and appreciation of Nuyorican and Diasporican artists by showing that the Nuyorican/Diasporican art movement has always been global and vanguardist in scope. The printmaking, painting, muralism, photography, and performance-based art practices that arose from the Nuyorican art movement in the 1970s were not only significant to the Puerto Rican community at that time. Rather, the politically engaged, global cultural sensibility of Nuvorican art anticipated the contemporary interest in Afro-diasporic expressivity, artivism, social practice art, and decolonial aesthetics. It also innovated across genres, formats, and mediums, from printmaking to graffiti arts.

We also recognize that the visual arts were always produced in conversation with music, performance, and poetry, and we encourage readers to consult several scholars who take interdisciplinary perspectives and who have provided a larger context of this movement. In this regard, our work is in conversation with a growing literature on Latinx art—including new or forthcoming works by Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, Deborah Cullen-Morales, and E. Carmen Ramos, among others—as well as with the growing archives of the US Latinx Art forum and The Latinx Project's digital publication *Intervenxions*, where readers can find original interviews and oral histories and new criticism of Nuyorican and Latinx artists. This being said, our volume is far from comprehensive, as there are many gaps and areas in need of further research. We hope this anthology inspires others to fill these gaps and to carve new paths of study. Our goal is that this interdisciplinary and collaborative project helps bring about the necessary change that allows these fantastic artists to get the attention and appreciation they legitimately deserve.

Part I of our anthology, "From Puerto Rican to Nuyorican: Forging Diasporican Art in New York," offers chapters on the history of the Puerto Rican art movement in New York, aka the Nuyorican movement. In particular, many of these chapters focus on underexamined art spaces that provided artists with communal platforms from which to address the long-standing ethnic, gender, and racial discrimination that Puerto Ricans and other Black and Latinx groups faced in New York.

Puerto Ricans artists have been migrating to the United States since the late nineteenth century; however, the effervescence of Puerto Rican activism in the visual arts occurred after the postwar migration of Puerto Ricans to New York, also known as the Great Migration. Subject to ethnoracial discrimination, Puerto Rican artists were practically invisible in New York until the late 1960s when a new generation of artists who were born and/or raised in the city became activists in civil rights struggles and affiliated themselves with radical groups such as The Young Lords Organization, the Puerto Rican Student Union, the Black and Puerto Rican Art Workers' Coalition, El Comité, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party. Their rebellion evolved into a movement to establish alternative art spaces in their communities, transforming the politics of race, space, and representation in New York's cultural landscape.

Puerto Rican artists formed their own movement within the larger New York alternative art space movement. From the mid-1960s to late 1980s, artists from diverse backgrounds began operating nonprofit "alternative" galleries that enabled women, African American, LGBTQ, and Puerto Rican/Latin American artists to gain a measure of visibility and validation in the New York art world, whose hierarchical institutions were governed by Eurocentric,

patriarchal, and market-driven values.⁵ The concentration of artists' lofts and galleries in SoHo made Lower Manhattan the alternative art space epicenter. Puerto Rican alternative galleries in SoHo were few in number since most of these artists were invested in rebuilding New York's barrios and operating in community-based art spaces in the neighborhoods in which they were raised.

Between 1969 and 1993, interlinked circles of Puerto Rican artists and poets formed collectives and founded an array of multidisciplinary art spaces in East Harlem/El Barrio, the Lower East Side/Loisaida, Lower Manhattan more generally, and in the South Bronx. Some of the notable groups and spaces that emerged during this era include the Real Great Society Urban Planning Studio (1968), Black and Puerto Rican Artworkers (1969), El Museo del Barrio (1969), Taller Boricua (1970), CHARAS (1970), United Graffiti Artists (1972), Institute of Contemporary Hispanic Art (1973), Nuyorican Poets Café (1973), En Foco (1974), Galería Tito/Moriviví (1974), Cayman Gallery (1975), The Alternative Museum (1975), Foto Gallery (1975), New Rican Village (1976), CHARAS/El Bohío (1979), Association of Hispanic Arts (1975), Caribbean Cultural Center (1976), Longwood Arts Project (1981), Exit Art (1982), Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (1985), Eventos: Space for Living Arts (1987), and the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural and Educational Center (1993).

It is at this juncture that some discussion of the different terms that authors use to describe the movement and the art that arose within these spaces is needed. The visual artists who established the first alternative art spaces in East Harlem identified themselves as Puerto Rican and saw their spaces as serving the needs of the Puerto Rican artistic community in New York and beyond. In deference to these artists, Ramirez has termed their collective efforts the "Puerto Rican alternative art space movement." The founding of the Nuyorican Poets Café in 1973, along with the subsequent publication of the anthology Nuyorican Poetry by Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero in 1975, made the term *Nuyorican* widespread as an "alternative" name for Puerto Rican New Yorkers and a descriptor of the rebirth of Puerto Rican culture in the city, a hybridity that Nuyorican poets celebrated.⁶ Although visual artists did not always apply the term *Nuyorican* to themselves or their work—some rejected the term outright—the decision of scholars in this anthology to use the terms Nuyorican art and Nuyorican movement is intended to uplift and validate the work of artists and poets who invented visual/verbal languages that portrayed the Puerto Rican identity as transnational, transhistorical, racially mixed, culturally hybrid, and unapologetically queer.⁷

Despite the significant number of collectives and alternative spaces that Puerto Rican artists operated, and the hundreds of exhibits, happenings, festivals, and demonstrations that occurred during the twenty-year span of the alternative art movement in New York, Puerto Rican alternative art spaces and the Nuyorican art movement remain largely absent from historical surveys of art movements in New York. Whereas mainstream dealers, curators, and critics are now inclined to visit shows of emerging artists at El Museo del Barrio and the Artist in the Marketplace at the Bronx Museum, Puerto Rican alternative art spaces were infrequently reviewed in the 1970s and 1980s, a fact that suggests that New York art critics foreclosed the possibility that vanguard work could be found in galleries that identified themselves as "community-based" or "Puerto Rican/Latino" (see figure I.2). Ironically, the interdisciplinary structure of Puerto Rican alternative spaces may have also contributed to their invisibility in the New York art world; one of the most important revelations in this anthology is that spaces renowned for poetry and theater like the Nuyorican Poets Café, the New Rican Village, and CHARAS/El Bohío were important venues for visual artists.

Scholarship on the alternative art movement has grown since 2000, but the underrepresentation of alternative spaces led by Puerto Rican artists remains the same in surveys such as *Alternative Art, New York*, 1965–1985 (2002) and Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960– 2010 (2012).8 In what may be a once-in-a-decade tradition at this point, chapters by Ramirez, Hoyos-Twomey, Wilson Valentín-Escobar, and Pastor in this anthology further revise the history of the alternative art movement. Namely, this volume shows that Puerto Rican alternative art spaces comprised a movement within a movement that had specifically anti-racist foundations and aims where the focus was not only about achieving creative equity and accessibility, as is largely associated with the alternative space movement, but also about challenging the elitism and binary assumptions that marginalized artists of color more generally. As we will see, the vanguardist perspective of these artists and artivists echoes the Afro-diasporic positionality espoused by diaspora thinkers such as Arturo Schomburg, the Young Lords, and Marta Moreno Vega. This foreshadows the current attention to Black expressivity in Puerto Rican culture, both on the archipelago and beyond, that we're finally witnessing as part of larger movements toward equity and inclusion in the art world. One example is the exhibition *Puerto Rico Negrx* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Puerto Rico (October 20, 2023-September 1, 2024), the largest institutional



I.2 Domingo García, Felicidades-El Museo del Barrio, 1977. Serigraph. Collection of El Museo del Barrio, New York.

exhibition of Black Puerto Rican artists (including Diasporican artists) in a major art museum on the archipelago.⁹

Chapters by Melissa M. Ramos Borges and Taína Caragol document the trajectories of two pioneering artist collectives that emerged in the mid to late 1960s. Ramos Borges focuses on Carlos Irizarry and Domingo López de Victoria, two New York—trained artists/*impresarios* who organized a series of exhibitions in New York and Puerto Rico that promoted Pop Art, hard-edge abstraction, and installation-based works. While this duo and their peers were working in styles that should have earned them international acclaim, Ramos Borges notes that Irizarry and López de Victoria were met with condescension from New York critics like Jay Jacobs, who dubbed their efforts

as outdated, and rejection from established artists on the archipelago that regarded them as foreigners. Determined to be accepted as Puerto Rican artists, Irizarry and López de Victoria remained on the archipelago for most of their lives, yet as Ramos Borges reminds us, they remain stigmatized as examples of "way out" artists in Puerto Rican history.

Caragol examines the early work of the printmaking collective Taller Boricua. Founded in 1969, incorporated as the Puerto Rican Workshop Inc. in 1970, and still operating today, Taller Boricua together with El Museo del Barrio hold pride of place as the first artist-run spaces in East Harlem, the cradle of the Puerto Rican diaspora. In contrast to scholarship that foregrounds the heroic agit prop posters that Taller members produced, Caragol draws attention to works of art by Marcos Dimas, Fernando Salicrup, Jorge Soto Sánchez, and Nitza Tufiño to explore the unique perspectives, experiences, and identities that emerge from their diasporic subjectivity. The breakthrough that Caragol credits these artists with making is to transform figures of historic rupture—the Indigenous Taino peoples as signifiers of colonial genocide—into polyvalent "figures of connection" (see figure I.3).

In their chapters, Ramirez, Valentín-Escobar, Hoyos-Twomey, Elizabeth Ferrer, and Pastor describe some of the collaborative relationships and overlapping agendas of alternative spaces that broke ground for the outpouring of art, activism, photography, poetry, and performance from the Puerto Rican artistic community in New York and beyond. They demonstrate that the artistic innovation and political interventions that occurred in these spaces was unprecedented and transformative. Within the alternative art world circuit, the boundaries between curators and artists and activists were blurred, enabling the display and validation of artistic practices and forms of expression that were new and radical at the time. Barrio-based alternative galleries became havens for artists whose aesthetic practices, political beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation positioned them as outsiders; within the liminal alternative art world circuit, a plurality of styles and conceptual approaches coexisted and became visible and viable to the public at large. In particular, Ramirez's chapter highlights that Nuyorican artists in the 1970s represent a vanguard because their innovation in several key elements is recognized as vanguardist artistic practices broadly. Specifically, she documents how these artists helped introduce new elements into New York's visual culture, in particular Afro-Taino iconography, as well as new content directed to an oppressed working-class minority that had not been prioritized as consumers and audiences for contemporary art. Finally, these artists also helped reshape



I.3 Taller Boricua, 1971. Silkscreen, $21 \times 14\%$ in. Collection of Marcos Dimas.

the production and distribution of art through the creation of alternative spaces that valued underserved audiences and artists.

The proliferation of Nuyorican alternative art spaces detached the New York art world from its moorings in wealthy districts on the Upper East Side. Artist-run alternative galleries became sites for experiments and interventions that destabilized hierarchical structures. Within the alternative art world circuit, the boundaries between curators and artists and activists were blurred, enabling artists to display and validate art forms and practices that were unconventional and critical of societal and institutional norms. Alternative art spaces thus became a support system for artists whose aesthetic practices, political beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation positioned them as outsiders; within the liminal alternative art

world circuit, conceptual, feminist, political, performance, and identity-based art became visible and viable to the public at large.

The effervescence of these spaces is evident in chapters by Ramirez, Valentín-Escobar, Pastor, and Hoyos-Twomey, who delve into the wideranging artistic exchanges that occurred at MoCHA, Taller Boricua, the Nuyorican Café, the New Rican Village, and Charas/El Bohío. The emergence of these multidisciplinary alternative art spaces positioned artists and poets in the trenches of numerous battles waged by Puerto Rican, African American, and Asian community activists on behalf of the city's growing population of ethnoracial minorities to gain visibility in the civic sphere and assume community control of New York's public schools, universities, libraries, housing stock, health facilities, and cultural institutions.

As many of the chapters argue, a unique and unappreciated aspect of the Puerto Rican alternative art space movement, particularly at spaces like the Alternative Museum, Exit Art, and MoCHA, is that the artists not only shouldered the responsibility for creating the infrastructures to exhibit their own work—they also exhibited work by Latin American, Caribbean, Latino, African American, and Asian artists who faced similar discrimination in New York City. One must consider that Puerto Rican alternative spaces served diverse constituencies in the 1970s and 1980s and continue to do so today. In addition, while the local community was a primary audience, these galleries also served the mainstream art world by providing places for emerging artists of color to exhibit in New York and emerging curators of color to organize exhibits, including several authors in our anthology such as Caragol, Ferrer, Cullen-Morales, Ramirez, and Valentín-Escobar.

Cullen-Morales's chapter on the camaraderie that existed at Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop makes an important intervention in the exclusionary practice of segregating "African American" and "Nuyorican/Puerto Rican" artistic circles in New York. Blackburn was trained in printmaking by Harlem Renaissance artists; his studio is renowned for nurturing African American artists. As Cullen-Morales demonstrates, he was equally invested in mentoring Nuyorican artists. Notably, Marcos Dimas and Fernando Salicrup, cofounders of Taller Boricua, studied with Blackburn at the School of Visual Arts. Blackburn's workshop was the site where artists such as Nitza Tufiño and Juan Sánchez created some of their best works in the 1980s and 1990s. Cullen-Morales notes that the inclusion of Blackburn, who was honored at the XLL Printmaking Biennial of San Juan, in Puerto Rico's printmaking lineage, affirms his role as overlooked but "crucial to the development of Nuyorican art."



Part II, "Diasporican Sites: Reports from the Field," champions some of the artists making a difference in the diaspora. This section demonstrates that Nuyorican is no longer adequate for a survey of the Puerto Rican diaspora and its art production. For decades the diaspora has expanded geographically and now doubles the population of the archipelago. Whereas Nuyorican could once adequately serve as a signifier for all Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, given the prominence and sheer concentration of the New York population, that is simply no longer the case as outmigration, gentrification, and other factors have led to the displacement and migration of Puerto Rican communities throughout the United States. In particular, activism around displacement and colonialism was fundamental to this conception of "the diaspora." We note here the importance of the Vieques movement to oust the US Navy from the island in the late 1990s, which coincided with the one-hundredth anniversary of the 1898 US invasion and followed the five-hundred-year anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean. This movement provoked a broader reckoning with the colonial history of Puerto Rico, the oldest colony in the world. Likewise, Diasporican activism around the release of political prisoners and contemporary activism around Hurricane Maria has marked a growing transition to the development of a broader consciousness in which the Puerto Rican diaspora became less centered around New York City and the Northeast in general. These mobilizations appeal to a broader consciousness and recognize the diaspora at-large as a political force. Nuyorican is therefore a term in need of revision, even as we attempt to expand its resonance within the world of art. As such, in our anthology, we limit the term Nuyorican to describe New York Puerto Rican artists who came of age in New York during the post-civil rights era and to those artists who claim this identification today. Otherwise, we use Diasporican, a term inaugurated by poet Mariposa Fernández at the turn of the twenty-first century, to account for the sizable Puerto Rican communities that have emerged in new areas of the United States.

In geographical terms, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Florida are necessary areas of research and documentation, not only to combat erasure but to showcase a new generation of artists—some in transit via the *vaivén* (back and forth) that exists between Puerto Rico and the mainland, and others establishing art practices and participating in broader movements. At the same time, we remind readers that this was also the section that received fewer submissions and is unfortunately the least represented in our volume. To our surprise and alarm, we did not find published surveys about

Puerto Rican artists beyond NYC that could provide more background to supplement this section. However, it is important to acknowledge that while art historical sources on the art worlds of regions beyond NYC may be generally missing, Puerto Rican cultural activism has been long in the making in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and beyond.

We encourage readers to learn about the origins and development of the Puerto Rican Chicago community and the Young Lords in Chicago. ¹⁰ There are also scholars such as Ivis García and Nilda Flores-Gonzalez documenting the community activism that led to the institution of Paseo Boricua and the National Museum of Puerto Rican Art and Culture in Chicago. ¹¹ Artists are also filling the void, as is the case of Edra Soto's The Franklin—a home garage she turned into a gallery and collaborative artists' space. By the time this volume is published, we will have also seen foundational exhibitions on Chicago diasporic artists at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago via the work of Puerto Rican curator Carla Acevedo-Yates.

For our anthology, we were grateful to receive Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vásquez's close readings of photographs by Frank Espada of an Afro-Puerto Rican family in Chicago. Noting that Black Puerto Ricans are marginalized by racism on the island and in the continental United States, Figueroa-Vásquez argues that Espada's photographs and taped interviews with the family have much to show us about ethical approaches to documenting the lived experience of overlooked populations. Additionally, in dialogue with the curatorial investigations that Carla Acevedo Yates is initiating at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Abdiel D. Segarra Ríos's chapter explores a network of Puerto Rican abstract artists who migrate between the island, New York, and Chicago to expose the theme of diaspora and abstraction and how artists perform and expand notions of Puerto Rican identity through their work.

Philadelphia is home to one of the most established Diasporican institutions, Taller Puertorriqueño, which is also one of the few local organizations that owns its building and has achieved a level of institutional sustainability that has been impossible for most organizations in New York City. In his chapter, Johnny Irizarry covers institution building in Philadelphia and discusses the diverse networks of artists who have been feeding community-based work in the region.

Raquel Reichard's chapter examines emergent artists and cultural organizations in Orlando, Florida, one of the fastest-growing Diasporican cities in the world. Orlando's first Puerto Rican boom came in the early 1990s and 2000s, when Boricuas on the archipelago fled financial crises

and Diasporicans in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New Jersey left gentrifying neighborhoods to start over in Central Florida. Reichard observes that akin to how Nuyoricans in the 1960s introduced a culture of diasporic art and activism nearly three decades after Puerto Ricans began migrating to New York, the youth of the families who found refuge in Orlando and Kissimmee are beginning to create visual art that speaks to the struggles and joys in their homelands and their new homes. From the street art of locals like Don Rimx, public art initiatives by Mariah Román, photography by Nancy Rosado, and political illustrations by Ricky Rodriguez and Vanessa Flores, a new generation of Diasporican art is taking shape.

While we did not receive more submissions from other regional areas and cities across the United States, we are excited about emerging scholarship on Latinos in the Midwest, where Diasporicans are discussed alongside multiethnic communities across the region. ¹² Consider, for instance, the *Latino Art Midwest* initiative by Alex E. Chávez and Gilberto Cardenas, specifically geared to uplifting knowledge of Latinx artists in the region, many of whom are Diasporican. In this volume, contributor Teréz Iacovino examines the placemaking practices of artists working in Minneapolis, Miami, and Philadelphia to explore how social, regional, and demographic considerations, among other variables, affect their Diasporican identities and art practices.

We also acknowledge a number of important university-based projects foregrounding Diasporican artists, such as La Estación Gallery, founded by the scholar Sandra Ruiz along with a group of queer women of color and feminists of color across the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In Austin, Texas, Diasporican scholar Ramón Rivera-Servera has been advancing Diasporican art through his Puerto Rican Arts Initiative (PRAI) since 2017. Initially founded to help artists rebuild after hurricanes Maria and Irma devastated the island, it has grown into a foundational project creating networks of exchange and collaboration between artists and scholars in the archipelago and the diaspora.

The chapters in part III, "All of the Above: Diasporican Aesthetics," provide close readings of the aesthetic practices and formal innovations of underrecognized artists. They also offer new proposals for documenting and reconceptualizing Puerto Rican identity, illustrating how artists expanded notions of art through their work. For instance, Urayoán Noel argues that self-published chapbooks and zines created by Nuyorican poets expand the field of what is considered "Nuyorican art." He argues against the disciplinary silos that obfuscate the significant intersections between

literary, visual, and performance arts across the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States and traces an alternative history rooted in these intersections through avant-garde book art and performance.

Joseph Anthony Cáceres highlights the importance of Surrealism in the works of many Nuyorican artists. This section also reveals the power of oral histories and interviews with key founding figures in the movement and speaks to a general trend in alternative art history where it is people's memories, stories, and archives (rather than in official sources, museums, and libraries) where scholars must search to reconstruct the missing pieces of American art histories. In particular, Cáceres draws from interviews and conversations with Lois Elaine Griffith, an Afro-Caribbean diasporic artist of Barbadian descent and one of the founders of the Nuyorican Poets Café, to establish linkages between the movement's connection to surrealism, Yoruba religious practices, and the work of Nuyorican visual artist Jorge Soto Sánchez.

Rojo Robles examines Samo© (1978–80), the conceptual art intervention by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Al Díaz. Presented simultaneously as a tag and a corporate entity, Samo©'s messages, spray-painted on Manhattan walls, used cryptic ironic tones that questioned our dependency on products and artificial brainwashed lifestyles. While Basquiat left the project in 1980 and declared that Samo® was dead, Díaz resuscitated the text-based graffiti in 2016. Robles's chapter examines how Díaz has actualized the conceptual project by tackling current neoliberal political issues, notably with the processes of commodification and co-option of Afro-Boricua aesthetics and hip-hop culture.

In addition, Arnaldo M. Cruz-Malavé and Kerry Doran examine the spectacularity of Nuyorican art. Doran focuses on the class-hierarchy breaking and critical perspective of artist Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, who performs as an avatar-like version of herself to challenge the racism and elitism of the art world. Cruz-Malavé, in turn, focuses on David Antonio Cruz and Luis Carle to make an argument about how Nuyorican artists have long challenged socially enforced respectability through the performative aesthetics of their work. Queer and performance studies take center stage in these analyses into alternative ways to read the visual work and contributions of these artists.

This section shows how Nuyorican visual art in this period manifests in images the concepts and feelings that were revolutionary and beyond words at the time. Nuyorican poetry invented language to convey a consciousness that Puerto Rican nationhood transcends, authenticating boundaries that limited nationality and identity to geographical boundaries. Visual artists

did the same, drawing from and uplifting the most marginalized components of Puerto Rican identity—such as Afro-Taino iconography and urban vernacular culture, as this volume evinces. Arguably the most impactful work of this movement results from cross-disciplinary collaborations between Nuyorican poets and visual artists who prefigure our century's concerns with diasporic aesthetics and decolonial praxis.

Finally, Johana Londoño and Rojo Robles look at Nuyorican interventions in public spaces—from street art to the Nuyorican casitas—to explore the role of Nuyorican art in graffiti arts, architecture, and design history more broadly. In particular, Londoño centers Nuyorican history within design history to point scholars to pay more careful attention to the work and value of vernacular architecture and to its transformative impact on urban space. Her chapter not only delves into the aesthetics of gentrification but also underscores the crucial importance of recognizing and evaluating Nuyorican/Diasporican aesthetics as a subject deserving serious study and consideration.

The conclusion by Arlene Dávila explores the spatial politics involved in the work of four artists whose practices show how much political/economic considerations have come to bear in their art practices. Just like Nuyorican artists fought for real estate in the arts/cultural ecosystem, challenging the racism and elitism of the New York City art establishment to establish alternative spaces, artists today continue to struggle for space, especially amid the rapid neoliberal gentrification of contemporary cities. They do so on behalf of multidiverse communities of color in New York City and beyond, as is evident in the work of activist artists Shellyne Rodriguez, Rigoberto Torres, Lee Quiñones, and Danielle De Jesus.

Finally, in the spirit of encouraging more work on this topic, we humbly note the shortcomings that surfaced through our call. We are excited that women artists such as Sophie Rivera and Nitza Tufiño have received some attention through recent exhibitions, such as in the Brooklyn version of the traveling exhibition Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960–1985 (2018) and Domesticanx at El Museo del Barrio (2023) (see figure I.4). Yet we recognize that women artists remain undocumented relative to their male counterparts. Likewise, there is a dearth of substantive scholarly research on foundational Puerto Rican artists. Take, for example, Jorge Luis Rodriguez, who exhibited at MoCHA and JAM gallery and internationally, artists who worked on abstraction such as Evelyn López de Guzmán, or even Juan Sánchez, who is one of the most well-known Nuyorican artists and subject of important scholarship yet is seldom known in the archipelago. 13 Likewise,



I.4 Sophie Rivera, Untitled, 1978 (printed in 2006). Gelatin silver print, sheet, and image, 48 × 48 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2011.24.1, © 1978, Sophie Rivera.

we need more work on experimental film, architecture, and design as well as documentation and criticism of both foundational pioneers and contemporary artists to halt their historical erasure in the scholarly literature.

Most of all, there is a huge void of research on Diasporican artists and artistic communities beyond New York City more generally. A key takeaway of our public call was the difficulty of finding contributors who explored Diasporican artists beyond the major city centers of Philadelphia, Chicago, and Orlando. As mentioned, we feel this gap in the literature reveals the significance of having access to institutional infrastructures for artistic communities to develop and thrive, underscoring the need for

more equitable arts/cultural policies that make artistic and cultural opportunities and resources more freely accessible across the United States.

Together, the chapters in this collection make clear and bold statements. First, the history of Nuyorican and Diasporican artists is rich and complex, and any project, exhibition, or art history of the Americas that does not center or engage with the evolving community of Nuyorican/Diasporican artists and interdisciplinary scholars will remain forever uninformed and incomplete. Second, we have a clear foundation for appreciating Nuyorican/Diasporican art history; although, we are barely getting started. We need and hope that more scholars and writers continue the work, among the areas we've identified as well as others we may not have even imagined.

NOTES

- See Dávila, Latinx Art, particularly chapter 3, "Nationalism and the Currency of Categories," on the nationalist dimensions of the global contemporary art market; and Zavala, "Latin@ Art at the Intersection." These works show how distinctions are sustained by the nationalist biases that influence the organization of art history, exhibitions, and collections, and by the lack of institutional spaces devoted to the study, archiving, and exhibition of Latinx artists in the United States.
- 2 Conversation with art historian Adriana Zavala, director of the US Latinx Art Forum (http://uslaf.org), October 19, 2023.
- 3 Thanks to Al Hoyos-Twomey for this insight, corroborated through interviews with librarians of the special collections for NYU's Fales Library on November 6, 2023.
- 4 Some key examples include Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*; Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés, "Ambiguous Identities!"; Fernandez, *Young Lords*; Fusco, *English Is Broken Here*; Jaime, *Queer Nuyorican*; Jones, *Basquiat*; Indych, "Nuyorican Baroque"; Londoño, *Abstract Barrios*; Morales; Negrón-Muntaner, "Look of Sovereignty"; Noel, *In Visible Movement*; Noriega, "Sacred Contingencies"; Ramirez, "Place for Us"; Ramirez, "Activist Legacy"; Rivera, *New York Ricans*; and Ruiz, *Ricanness*. We also acknowledge Tatiana Reinoza's 2023 study of the Taller Boricua Print Workshop, which she appraises in relation to a larger history of print workshops across the Americas, as the type of art historical comparative work that is needed for this movement. Reinoza, *Reclaiming the Americas*.
- 5 Ault, Alternative Art.
- 6 Algarín and Piñero, Nuyorican Poetry.

- 7 On the queer aesthetics of the Nuyorican movement, see Jaime, Queer Nuyorican.
- 8 Ault, *Alternative Art*; Rosati and Stanieszewski, *Alternative Histories*. These chronological surveys exclude some of the most important alternative Puerto Rican institutions at the time, such as CHARAS/El Bohío, the New Rican Village, and the Nuyorican Poets Café.
- 9 Vargas Rodriguez, "'Puerto Rico Negrx."
- 10 See Pérez, Near Northwest Side Story; and Fernandez, Young Lords, as examples.
- 11 See García, "No Se Vende"; Flores-Gonzalez, "Paseo Boricua"; and Pallares and Flores-González, *¡Marcha!*
- 12 See Delgadillo et al., *Building Sustainable Worlds*, which compiles work by key scholars working on Latinos in the Midwest.
- 13 Zavala, "Juan Sanchez's Counter-Archive."

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