in the Work of

Miguel Luciano & Hiram Maristany

# Joy, Play & Resistance

# Joy, Play and Resistance

## in the Work of Miguel Luciano & Hiram Maristany

March 24 – May 14, 2022

Binghamton University Art Museum

In loving memory of Hiram Maristany
1945–2022

This catalogue accompanies an exhibition organized by the Binghamton University Art Museum.
All images are printed courtesy of the artist, unless noted otherwise.

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Cover Images:
Hiram Maristany, *Children at Play*, 1965, silver gelatin LE/Selenium print, printed 2022.
Miguel Luciano, *Amani Kites*, Karanja launching Jackson, Rift Valley, Nairobi, Kenya, 2014. Photo credit: James Muriuki.

Back Cover Image:
Hiram Maristany, *Young Lords Member with Pa'lante Newspaper*, 1970, silver gelatin print.
Miguel Luciano, *RUN-A-BOUT*, 2017, 1969 Schwinn Run-A-Bout, restored & customized, machete, flags. Photo credit: Chaz Langley.



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# Contents

# Images

All images are listed by page number.

3. Hiram Maristany, *Young Lords and Community Members March to Free the Panther 21*, 1969, silver gelatin print.
4. Hiram Maristany, *Young Lords Member with Pa'lante Newspaper*, 1970, silver gelatin print.
5. Miguel Luciano, *Health, Food, Housing, & Education*, 2015, wood, urethane enamel, vinyl.
6. Hiram Maristany, *The Bronx March* (detail), 1969, silver gelatin print.
8. Hiram Maristany, *Juan Gonzalez, Minister of Education of the Young Lords, at Original Storefront Office Headquarters*, 1969, silver gelatin print.
9. Miguel Luciano, *Re-creation of the Original Storefront Office Window of the Young Lords Party in East Harlem*, Hunter East Harlem Gallery, 2015.
14. Hiram Maristany, *Buttons*, 1969, silver gelatin print.
15. Miguel Luciano, *Black Pyramids — Panthers and Lords (after Hiram Maristany's 'Buttons,' 1969)*, 2015, original vintage buttons from the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party, ca. 1969, leather, wood.
19. Hiram Maristany, *Hydrant: Hand*, 1963, silver gelatin print.
20. Hiram Maristany, *Hydrant: In the Air*, 1963, silver gelatin print.
22. Hiram Maristany, *Kite Flying on Rooftop*, 1964, silver gelatin print.
23. Miguel Luciano, *Karanja Launching Jackson, Amani Kites,* a public art project with Wajukuu in Nairobi, Kenya, 2014. Photo credit: James Muriuki.
24. Hiram Maristany, *Children at Play*, 1965, silver gelatin print.
25. Miguel Luciano, *Sela and Adi, Amani Kites,* a public art project in Nairobi, Kenya supported through the smARTpower program of the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, 2012. Photo credit: James Muriuki.
26. Hiram Maristany, *Lechón / Roasting Pig in Alley*, 1971, silver gelatin print.
27. Miguel Luciano, *Coquí Kiddie Ride*, 2003, coin-operated kiddie ride with sound.
28. Hiram Maristany, *Kids on Bikes, 109th St.*, ca. 1970, silver gelatin print.
29. Miguel Luciano, *Pimp My Piragua*, Riding with the Classic Riders in the 2019 Bushwick Puerto Rican Day Parade. Photo credit: Argenis Apolinario.
30. Miguel Luciano, *Pimp My Piragua*, 2009, Customized tricycle-pushcart, sound, video, LEDs. Photo credit: Jason Wyche.
31. Miguel Luciano, *Pimp My Piragua*, 2019 Bushwick Puerto Rican Day Parade. Photo credit: Argenis Apolinario.
32. Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany, *Mapping Resistance: The Young Lords in El Barrio*, a public art project commemorating the activist legacy of the Young Lords in East Harlem, 2019. Lexington Avenue and 111th St. (Young Lords Way). Image: Hiram Maristany, *The Bronx March*, 1969.
39. Installation photo, "Joy, Play, and Resistance in the Work of Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany," Binghamton University Art Museum, March 24–May 14, 2022. Photo credit: Marc Newton.
40. Hiram Maristany, *The Gathering*, 1964, silver gelatin print.
41. Hiram Maristany, *Young Man with Roses*, 1971, silver gelatin print.
42. Hiram Maristany, *Young Lords, Children Marching in the Funeral Procession for Julio Roldán*, 1970, silver gelatin print.
43. Hiram Maristany, *Takeover of the People's Church*, 1969, silver gelatin print.
44. Hiram Maristany, *Denise Oliver, Minister of Finance at Young Lords Storefront Office Headquarters*, 1969, silver gelatin print.
45. Hiram Maristany, *Clothing Drive*, 1971, silver gelatin print.
46. Hiram Maristany, *X-ray Truck*, 1970, silver gelatin print.
47. Miguel Luciano, *Young Lord*, 2017, 1969 Schwinn Fastback, restored & customized. Photo credit: Marc Newton.
48. Hiram Maristany, *Night View*, 1961, silver gelatin print.
49. Hiram Maristany, *Group of Young Men on 111th Street*, 1966, silver gelatin print.
50. Miguel Luciano, *RUN-A-BOUT*, 2017, 1969 Schwinn Run-A-Bout, restored & customized, machete, flags. Photo credit: Chaz Langley.
51. Miguel Luciano, *RUN-A-BOUT* (detail), 2017, 1969 Schwinn Run-A-Bout, restored & customized, machete, flags. Photo credit: Jason Wyche.
52. Installation photo, "Joy, Play, and Resistance in the Work of Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany," Binghamton University Art Museum, March 24–May 14, 2022. Photo credit: Marc Newton.
54. Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany, 2019. Photo credit: Miguel Rivera.

# Curator's Foreword

Conversations for this exhibition began in October 2019, a very different space than this present moment. I had recently joined the staff of the Binghamton University Art Museum as Curator of Collections and Exhibitions and was thinking about an exhibition that would complement the Spring 2021 traveling exhibition of *Dos Mundos: (Re)Constructing Narratives*. Conceptually, I was thinking about artists whose work might echo the cultural moment embodied in the original *Dos Mundos: Worlds of the Puerto Rican* (1973) and the efforts towards self-determination in the Nuyorican neighborhood of El Barrio in the late '60s and early '70s. Having worked with Cha-Cha Jiménez, the founder of the Young Lords, on several projects regarding their genesis in Chicago and a celebration of their 50th anniversary, I was interested in turning to the Young Lords in New York City and the contemporary artists whose work focused on that history. A conversation with Josh Franco, PhD '16, who was then the Latino Collections Specialist at the Archives of American Art, put me onto the work of Miguel Luciano. I quickly realized that his work was already familiar to me, as it was part of *¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York* (2015, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, Loisaida Inc.). Discussions with Luciano ensued and he soon suggested an intergenerational exhibition with Hiram Maristany, since the two had worked together before on a variety of projects, most recently, *Mapping Resistance: The Young Lords in El Barrio* (2019). As we all know, the world changed quickly as we moved through 2020 and, as the righteous anger again bubbled up in response to the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and too many others, our conversations shifted to other modes of protest and resistance: joy and play. It felt like a necessary balm in the summer of 2020, and it is from that place that this exhibition found its form.

Claire L. Kovacs, PhD
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions

# Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany for sharing their work, wisdom and experiences with the communities of Binghamton. From our first public encounters when Miguel and Hiram conversed via Zoom to Miguel's interactions with us during the installation of the exhibition, we have truly enjoyed their collaborative spirit and warm engagement.

The creation of this catalogue and the exhibition truly take a village. Our thanks goes to Josh T Franco for introducing us to Miguel and for sharing his perspective through his insightful essay. This exhibition marks one of the first opportunities for Claire Kovacs, our new Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, to flex her curatorial muscle by envisioning the exhibition and bringing together the myriad objects and players to a successful conclusion here at the Binghamton University Art Museum. I greatly appreciate her dedication and vision.

Our appreciation to Griffin Editions for their photographic support, Northeast Transit Fine Art Services for their care in transporting Miguel and Hiram's works to the museum, GHP Media for the production of this catalogue, and Bob Carr 2.0 for the production of the postcards for the exhibition.

There are many at Binghamton University who deserve our thanks: the Binghamton University Art Museum staff: Silvia Ivanova, Ann Ordiway and Cynthia Riley; Alessandro Segalini for his design of the catalogue; and Gökhan Ersan for his design of the interpretive materials in the exhibition. Also essential to the presentation of the exhibition were Marc Newton for his help in the printing of materials in the exhibition, Peter Harris and the Binghamton carpentry shop for the fabrication of exhibition materials, and Shari Casterlin and the Binghamton sign shop for the production of signage for the exhibition. Thanks, too, to the Binghamton University Art Museum spring 2022 interns, especially our engagement team: Alexa Belowich, Mariya Ivanova, Chloe Vecchio and Livia Zarge.

We appreciate the support of our campus collaborators on the exhibition and programming, especially the Student Association of Binghamton University and the Department of Latin American and Caribbean American Studies.

Finally, we value the support from the Convocation Committee of Binghamton University, as well as alumni and other friends who have contributed to the Binghamton Fund, without whom this exhibition, programming and catalogue would not be possible.

Diane S. Butler, PhD
Director


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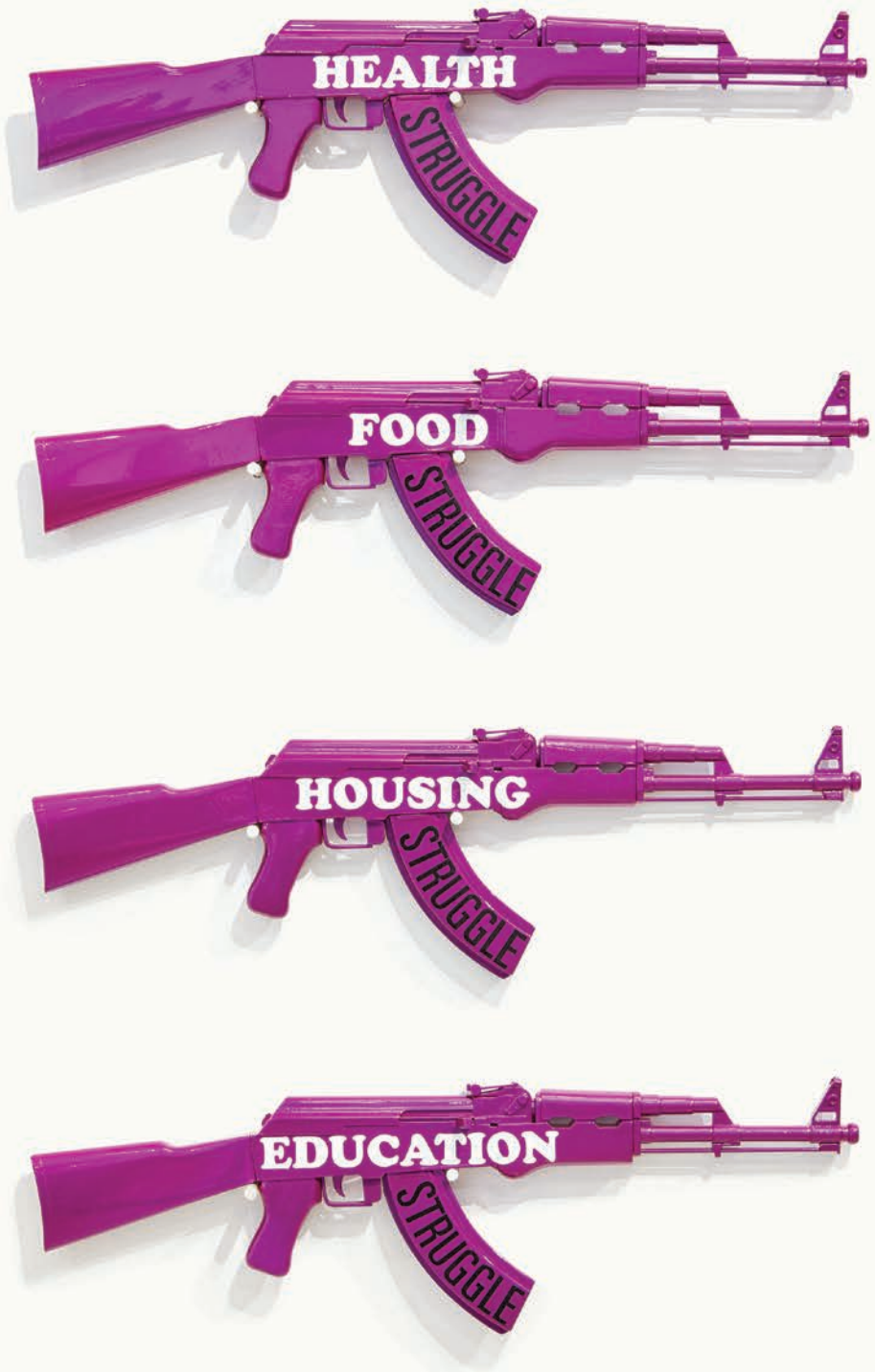
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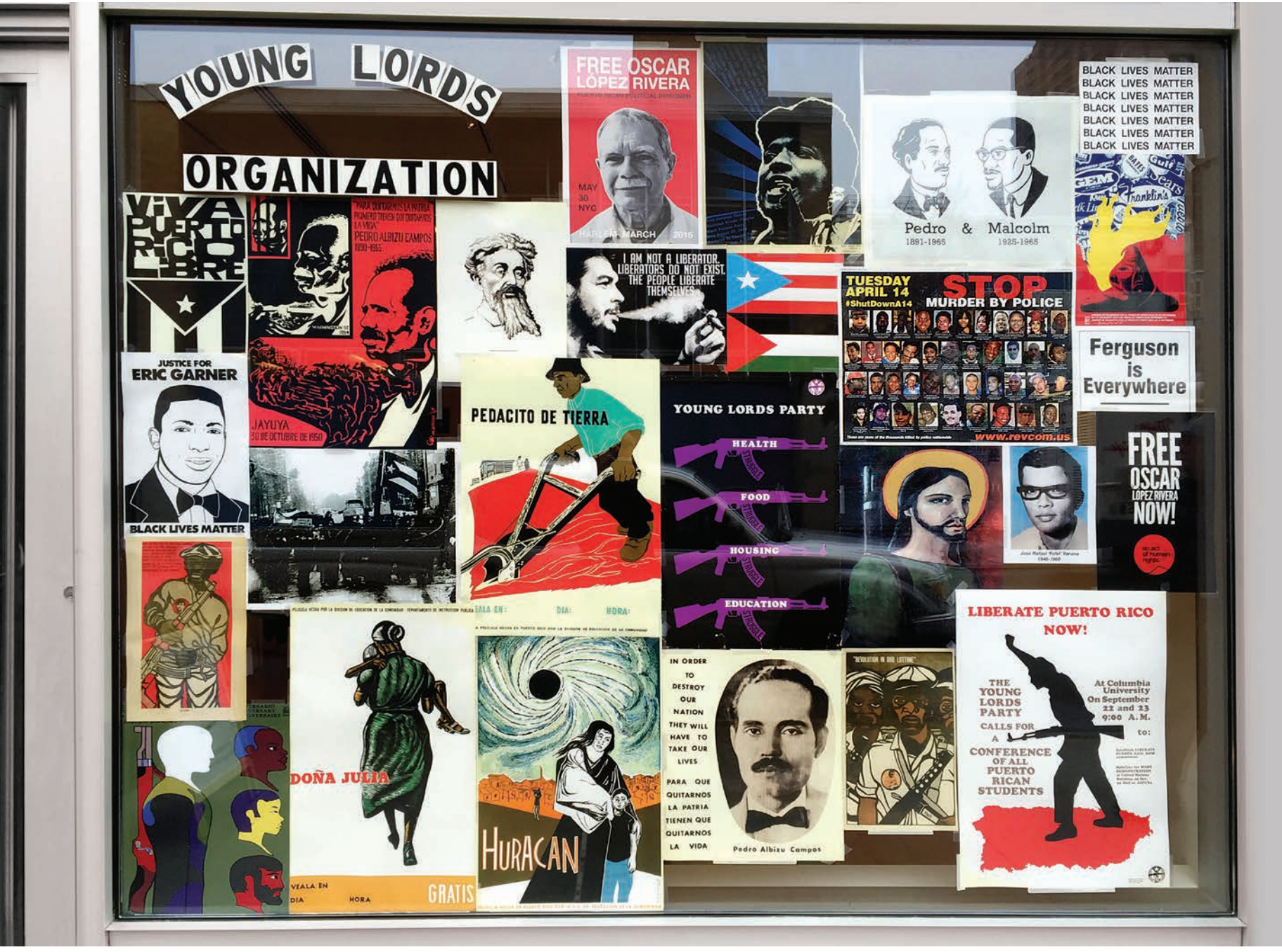
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# "Joy is an act of resistance" as are kinship, pleasure and play

**by Claire L. Kovacs**

The highly fraught 2020 presidential election was a catalyst for many expressions of joy and community building. Klinton Cooper, sporting a "Fuck 2020" T-shirt that he bought after his uncle died of COVID, led voters, many of them wearing white in their own sartorial expressions of a determination to vote, in a "Cha Cha Slide." As Philadelphia counted its votes, a two-day block party developed outside the Convention Center to cheer on the workers counting ballots in a particularly Philly style: complete with Gritty, Philly Elmo and his drumline, bopping T-rexes, and the drowning out of homophobic slurs with a French horn. Gia Kourlas, dance critic for the *New York Times* saw the joy, too, in spontaneous dancing celebrations popping up around the country as Joe Biden was declared winner of the 2020 election:

> The past few years have been exhausting. And when you factor in the past eight months of coronavirus lockdown, protests in the street and the election, many Americans are tightly wound. It felt right that collective stress, sleepless nights, frustration and fear would spill out of bodies and into the streets. And that it was genuine said something, too. This wasn't a performative response, but a gut reaction — a way to express churning emotions, most conspicuously joy, when words alone couldn't do the trick.[1]

These celebrations embody joy as a mechanism to fight against frameworks of systemic oppression and to combat tremendous pain, outrage, and sorrow. In her poem that provides part of the title for this essay, the poet Toi Derricotte asks:

> What does her love have to do
> with five hundred years of
> sorrow, then joy coming up like a
> small breath, a
> bubble?[2]

Similarly, in her conversation with Dionne Brand, the Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks about the importance of the creation of "temporary spaces of joy & freedom" for Black and Indigenous people:

> I really liked creating these islands of freedom, little glimpses of freedom where we stand together and we get to feel, just for a second maybe, what freedom might be like, and to get that feeling into our bones. These spaces open up different possibilities. These spaces are not just spaces of refusal, they are also generative. They are also spaces of joy and possibility.[3]

Joy, when used in this sense, is not comfortable or easy. It is transformative. It pushes against structures of empire, of colonialism, of

1. Gia Kourlas, "The Election Brings Dance to the Streets for a Collective Roar," *The New York Times*, November 10, 2020, sec. Arts.
2. Toi Dericotte, "Joy Is an Act of Resistance, and: Special Ears, and: Another Poem of a Small Grieving for My Fish Telly, and: On the Reasons I Loved Telly the Fish," *Prairie Schooner* 82, № 3 (2008): 22–27.
3. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Dionne Brand, "'Temporary Spaces of Joy and Freedom,'" *Literary Review of Canada* (blog), accessed December 27, 2019, https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2018/06/temporary-spaces-of-joy-and-freedom/.

bigotry. It vibrates with generative possibility, not to control and direct others, but revels in an emergent and collective capacity to reimagine, to discover, to undo painful habits and systems. It is not about avoiding pain, but by struggling in its midst. Joy directs feelings of rage, grief, loneliness toward transformative spaces.[4] The importance and expansive nature of joy are not just conceptual. A 2019 meta-analysis published in the *Annual Review of Public Health* found that seeking joy and pleasure lowers stress hormones such as cortisone, which is overproduced in situations of chronic stress (a side effect of systemic forms of bigotry and poverty).[5] Joy is nourishment.

Hand in hand with joy, is the role of pleasure as another space of resistance, as it is derived from acts of play in their many permutations. It is not a frivolous activity nor a spoil of luxury, but action that centers care of the self and kin; a measure of joy in the face of systemic oppression. Writing about the body as a political site, Stephanie M. H. Camp describes that the bodies of Black women under the bonds of slavery were sources of pleasure, pride and self-expression. Putting enormous time, energy, and care into the seemingly indulgent activities of making and wearing beautiful dresses and attending forbidden parties indicates the importance of such activities. "Just as exploitation, containment, and punishment of the body were political acts, so too was the enjoyment of the body."[6] Audre Lorde, too, speaks of the political power of joy. Sharing joy forms a bridge between people; it can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared and lessens the threat of difference. For Lorde, pleasure/joy in addition to anger/rage are important affective components of the political life:

> …once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of…[it] empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally accepted, nor the merely safe.[7]

adrienne maree brown's *Pleasure Activism* argues a similar point. As brown articulates, "pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy."[8] She encourages her readers to center pleasure as an organizing principle and joy as a mode of resistance.

In a passage from *Through the Eyes of a Rebel Woman*, Iris Morales shares with the reader a moment that occurred during a Young Lords Women's Caucus meeting in 1970 when the members started questioning the concept of "revolutionary machismo" included in the Young Lords' Thirteen-Point Program and Platform.[9] One Caucus member broke the ice by saying, "I've never known anything good to come out of machismo." Someone else added, "How you gonna put 'revolutionary' and 'machismo' in the same sentence?" Laughing, another said "It's like saying revolutionary racism. It just doesn't make sense."[10] This moment of joy sparked by levity, catalyzed the Women's Caucus to challenge the

4. See Nick Montgomery and carla bergman, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (AK Press, 2017), 29.
5. Andrew Steptoe, "Happiness and Health," *Annual Review of Public Health* 40, № 1 (2019): 339–59, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040218-044150.
6. Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, № 3 (2002): 544, https://doi.org/10.2307/3070158.
7. Lorde embeds joy within the term of the erotic, which she utilizes conceptions of pleasure and joy in all aspects life, including and extending well beyond frameworks of sexual intimacy. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*, ed. Roxane Gay (Norton, 2020), 33–34.
8. adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (AK Press, 2019), 13.
9. Point 10: We want equality for women. Machismo must be revolutionary… not oppressive.
10. Iris Morales, *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women. The Young Lords: 1969–1976* (New York: Red Sugarcane Press, 2016), 49.

organization's gendered assumptions and led to the rewriting of the Thirteen-Point Program and Platform. It provided the opportunity for a more egalitarian structure and a centering of joy in the Young Lords' political organizing that is couched in a decolonial feminist praxis, making way for alternate forms of kinship and prioritizing care of self and community, the foundations of a sustainable movement.[11]

Joy and pleasure provide a framework from which to push back at colonial and capitalist systems of power. Kinship is an essential mechanism to work across hierarchical and colonialist divides, providing the bridges that Lorde speaks about and breaking down the ways in which racist, ableist, sexist, ageist, and otherwise bigoted systems teach us to enact violence on each other and internalize oppressive systems of relating to each other. Montgomery and bergman bring these ideas to the contemporary moment and provide a way for us to engage in similar non-hierarchical bridge building:

> We believe that close ties of friendship and kinship, far from isolating us into cliques or enclaves, actually enable people to better extend themselves to others and participate in transformative encounters. Close friends and loved ones are what enable us to gripe and vent so that we can be compassionate and patient with those who don't know us well. They help us process fears and anxieties so that we are better able to trust people up front and move towards trouble and discomfort. They sit with us when we inevitably fuck up and flail. In turn, transformative struggle can deepen these bonds and generate new ones.[12]

The New York Young Lords utilized the affective nature of joy and pleasure in their People's Church Occupation of 1969 when the organization took over the First Spanish United Methodist Church in East Harlem for eleven days to provide services to the community which was suffering from food insecurity. At that moment, Robert LaCavita, director of *El Pueblo Se Levanta* (*The People Rise*, documentary, 1971), recalls"I just remember the streets be very—especially around the church, the streets being really lively. There were people there and, ah, a lot of activity and a lot of energy… There was a lot of music." [13] Frances Negrón-Muntaner pulls these ideas of an anti-colonialism and joy together in a concept she calls "decolonial joy" which found its genesis in her project *Valor y Cambio*. For her, the concept of decolonial joy asserts people's individual and collective capacities to thrive under the conditions of colonialism; to find exuberance of joy because of pain, suffering, and catastrophe.[14] As Kristie Soares points out in her work on the Young Lords, "Performing these affects became one way of working toward 'liberation' and 'self-determination' by rejecting the gendered and racialized colonial expectations of how people of color were supposed to behave." [15]

Maria Lugones, too, pushes back against colonial and gendered expectations in her provocative study of conceptions of play. Taking issue with the frameworks that center the agonistic and contest-nature of play within the work of two established writers on the subject, Johan Huizinga & Hans-Georg Gadamer, Lugones breaks from the Euro-American centric nature of their investigations, turning instead to posit an alternative theory of play:

> Rather the attitude that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play. Our activity has no rules, though it is certainly intentional activity and we both understand what we are doing. The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an openness to

11. See Kristie Soares, "Joy, Rage, and Activism: The Gendered Politics of Affect in the Young Lords Party," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 46, № 4 (June 1, 2021): 940, https://doi.org/10.1086/713295.
12. Montgomery and bergman, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*, 236–37.
13. Quoted from Soares, "Joy, Rage, and Activism," 956.
14. See Frances Negrón-Muntaner, "Decolonial Joy: Theorising from the Art of Valor y Cambio," in *Theorising Cultures of Equality* (Routledge, 2020), 171–94.
15. Soares, "Joy, Rage, and Activism," 948.

> surprise. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are open to self-construction. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular 'world.' We are there creatively. We are not passive. Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight. So, positively, the playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' we inhabit playfully.[16]

The emphasis on play, joy and pleasure can be seen in the foundational actions of the Young Lords' foundational chapter in Chicago. Pushing against the earliest iteration of Urban Renewal which focused on rezoning Lincoln Park as an upper-class, white suburb, they created an oppositional vision of the community by protecting public spaces and submitting sophisticated plans for low-income housing in the neighborhood. For the Young Lords, Lincoln Park became not just the site of protest, it became the very material of protest. After learning about the plans to turn an empty lot into a private tennis club, the Young Lords disrupted a Lincoln Park Conservation Community Council meeting in July 1969. They went on to create People's Park, thereby retaining an urban greenspace in which youth and children could congregate and play. A geodesic dome, based on Buckminster Fuller's design, was assembled in a local yard and carried to the site.[17] Swings were constructed from found materials. A sign on the corner of the lot asked for volunteers (particularly those who could operate a bulldozer) to help clear the lot and turn it into a garden and public space that would function as a protest against urban renewal and a physical manifestation of joy.

These ideas, fundamental to the work of the Young Lords from their very beginnings, percolate through Hiram Maristany's images of the Young Lords and permeate the self-determination of the Puerto Ricans who populate his photos of El Barrio. In the contemporary moment, these concepts ring out in the celebrations embodied in Miguel Luciano's work, from his performances of *Pimp my Piragua* to his participatory public art projects like *Amani Kites*. These two artists, through an intergenerational and transmedia dialogue, remind us of the transformative power and generative possibilities of joy, of play, of pleasure, and of kin.

16. María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2, Nº 2 (1987): 16–17.

17. Fuller grew up in Lincoln Park and was supportive of the Young Lords' actions. There is a fantastic interview of Fuller by Studs Terkel as they both rode around the city with Cha-Cha Jiménez, founder of the Young Lords.


FREE THE
PANTHER 21
TENGO PUERTO RICO
EN MI
CORAZON
YLP


FREE The PANTHERS
SEIZE The TIME


TENGO PUERTO RICO
EN MI
CORAZON
YLP

# ~~Influence~~ Inheritance (Hiram y Miguel at Play)

**by Josh T Franco**

Inheritance demands skill. Witnessing an artist adept at receiving what preceding generations provide him is akin to observing a star athlete. Likewise—when they are available and willing to participate—witnessing the interpreted elder respond in turn to the adept's playful receptions. For art historians, this is our sport. Hiram Mirastany and Miguel Luciano are a marvel on the field, though better to envision this game on the streets and rooflines of New York City than on grass or in stadiums. Dazzled fans observe from stoops, not bleachers. Now, they also observe on museum walls, though it is vital to not forget the Barrio origins. Hiram's pictures are their own reminders in this regard. For both participants, the respective activities of handing over and receiving are anything but passive. Inheritance requires generosity from one end, carefulness from the other, and deep trust in the air between. This trust holds the ball aloft.

I remember attending a walkthrough of the exhibition *Down These Mean Streets* with Hiram.[1] In conversation with curator E. Carmen Ramos, the artist, stationed before each of his photographs for a few moments at a time, held court. One of my aims with this writing is to evoke the dissonance between his standing there, suited and stately, and where he stood to execute the very photographs now displayed in their museum-grade and institutional frames. This dissonance echoes the shift in perception the photographer himself was generating all those years ago. The joy and playfulness they picture directly results from Hiram's core strategy of resistance: "Most of the time, whenever you saw images of us, sadly, most of the time they were negative. Sadly, they would be a reflection of us by someone other than us, and I had a lot of resentment to that. I tried my best to present a more fair, balanced representation of us. To show our joy and show our passion and show who we were."[2] The pictures were not originally intended for the nation's museumgoers after all; they were for the residents of El Barrio themselves. As Hiram was also a primary documentarian of the Young Lords, this makes absolute sense. Inspired by the Black Panthers, the Young Lords' mission was not upward mobility, was not about self-improvement as defined by white and wealthy standards of success like entering one of the nation's premiere museums. Rather, the mission was a radical transformation of communal self-perception and remaining in, while transforming, the places they already were. Hiram's photographs (and the breakfast programs, and the acupuncture clinics, and so on) were and are, first and foremost, for the community they picture.

Miguel, on the other hand, makes art with the museum already in mind. It is not his only intended audience to be sure, and he shares an equal commitment to the care of El Barrio, but there's no denying his participation in the studio-to-market-to-museum aspect of his practice. He holds faculty positions in prestigious art programs at institutions including Yale and the School of Visual Arts. This is not the irreconcilable difference it may seem on the surface. A neighboring Latinx community offers a helpful framework for intervening in any assumption that these different intentions are opposed rather than complementary. In Chicano art, rasquachismo — a prevalent term in the field with all the benefits and pitfalls of any 'ism' — has been

1. *Down These Mean Streets: Community and Place in Urban Photography*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, May 11 – August 5, 2017.
2. Hiramy Mirstany, "Play and Resistance in El Barrio: a Conversation between Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany," Binghamton University Art Museum, April 22, 2021.

articulated in three degrees: first degree rasquachismo is identified as the sensibility of the everyday that is suffused throughout how one cooks, makes repairs, dresses and so on. It is a style, and it is hardly named out loud, because one simply lives it. First degree rasquachismo meets daily needs with creative solutions and elaborations: employing a paperclip where a button has gone missing; using collected bacon fat from the canned reserve that sits on the stovetop at your abuela's when the store-bought oil runs out; salvaging discarded city playground equipment to build a playful environment in one's backyard. Third degree rasquachismo, then, describes the means by which Chicano artists resist losing sight of these powerful strategies and imaginations while being run through the process of stacking up degrees, gallery shows, and institutional acquisitions. It's how we resist being whitewashed in the process, as these mechanisms have been built on a foundation of white supremacy. While the term "rasquachismo" itself is undeniably Chicano, it is not difficult to see this dynamic operating across different communities of color. We all feel the demands of this game, and this is how we win without losing ourselves, without losing sight of the people and places from which we come. This is how we resist. This is how we play.[3] As one studies Miguel's work — both the objects he makes and the ways in which he presents them to the world — it is clear that he operates in this third-degree way in relation to Hiram's first-degree legacy.

This is not to imply that Hiram does not affirm the significance of his photographs now being in an institution where he may not have originally imagined them: "There are people that I know that when they come here and they see this, they will feel included in the history of America. That's something that so many people take for granted," he reflects, demonstrating his strong concern for national as well as neighborhood identity. In 2017, the Smithsonian American Art Museum also acquired two of Miguel's works: *Double Phantom / EntroP.R.* and *PA-LAN-TE*. I have stood alongside Miguel in their presence at the museum. Like Hiram, it is clear that while East Harlem is the artist's home and inspiration, he also cares deeply about the works' potential to redefine Americanness more broadly. Órale.

If Hiram was reinventing through the medium of photography to invoke joy in an image environment that did everything to hide it, Miguel deploys the same creative spirit and strategies through his own chosen mediums to intervene directly in the story of American art as it is narrated in official institutions. Miguel's project *Mapping Resistance: The Young Lords in El Barrio* (2019), which required Hiram's blessing and participation to succeed, then generated a rich feedback loop between these positions. For the project, the two worked closely to return these images to El Barrio in the form of strategically placed, enlarged vinyl reproductions of Hiram's photographs. Audiences included those who signed up for walking tours with the artist, but also anyone on the streets, signed up or not. The project was executed while Miguel was artist-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of its Civic Practice Partnership. The Surdna Foundation, A Blade of Grass, and El Museo del Barrio also supported the project. This time-space alchemy among major institutions, individual artists, and a neighborhood (in two temporalities) hinges on the inter-generational collaboration between Hiram and Miguel. Like the political transformation brought about by the Young Lords, time is a key ingredient, and we are privileged witnesses to the encounters now taking place with photographs created decades ago. Both residents of the neighborhood and art scholars will be unpacking the meanings of this project for years to come. Bringing these audiences to one another's attention constitutes one of the most brilliant aspects of Hiram's body of pictures and Miguel's radical intervention.

Miguel's curiosity together with Hiram's willingness raises a question at the core of art history: What of influence? Explaining how pictures travel and reconfigure from one generation to the next is arguably our discipline's primary task. But this notion has been challenged and complicated as well, not least of all by Michael Baxandall, whose interventions present an opportunity to see Hiram and Miguel in a richer light still. Baxandall writes:

3. For the full elaboration of the three degrees of rasquachismo, see Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998.

> "'Influence' is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality."[4]

The typical grammatical structure of how influence often gets described does, in fact, mislead. The preceding generation does not so much *do intentionally to* the subsequent ones, as the subsequent ones intentionally *do to* the legacies in which they have no option but to exist. To make his point about the interpretive options that open up once this "wrong-headed grammatical prejudice" is corrected, Baxandall delivers a string of over forty verbs then available to the course-correcting critic.[5]

From here, I want to argue that artists also produce art history and criticism; that an artwork can serve as a critical interpretation of another artwork, alongside more conventional scholarship in the form of articles and reviews. So often, the artist in this position is communicating with ghosts. (I am thinking of the presence of Kasimir Malevich for Donald Judd, for instance.) The presence of Hiram Mirastany in Miguel Luciano's life and practice, however, is anything but ghostly. These two artists enjoy the privilege of being enfleshed, speaking beings available to one another. Together, they enact a now in which the past becomes presence. Some artworks demonstrate this function forthrightly, as in the title of Miguel's *Black Pyramids — Panthers and Lords (after Hiram Maristany)*. Responding to, and displayed alongside, Hiram's *Buttons*, the wood-encased, button-adorned leather pieces enact a number of verbs on the work and legacy of Hiram: abstract, double, compartmentalize, geometricize, materialize, focus, institutionalize… I could go on and on. I want to argue further that, because Hiram speaks back to and engages with Miguel's actions, what we are witnessing is more than influence. When collaboration enters the generation-to-generation dynamic, it disrupts it as a merely forward-moving thing. In this writing, I call this inheritance to distinguish it from influence. Inheritance provides younger generations opportunities to surprise predecessors, and the predecessors to respond to their play in kind. That inheritance can scramble time and space is perhaps its most playful feature.

And they are not done. Both artists recognize a cosmos of shared interests, from bikes and kites to justice and freedom. They remain neighbors in El Barrio, and like their neighbors there, we await the next thrill while witnessing Hiram and Miguel at play.

4. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, 59.
5. It's a fascinating list that warrants reproducing: "If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to, avail oneself of, appropriate from, have recourse to, adapt, misunderstand, refer to, pick up, take on, engage with, react to, quote, differentiate oneself from, assimilate oneself to, assimilate, align oneself with, copy, address, paraphrase, absorb, make a variation on, revive, continue, remodel, ape, emulate, travesty, parody, extract from, distort, attend to, resist, simplify, reconstitute, elaborate on, develop, face up to, master, subvert, perpetuate, reduce, promote, respond to, transform, tackle… — everyone will be able to think of others." Ibid.


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GRINNING
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS NOW!!
MAPPING RESISTANCE
THE YOUNG LORDS IN EL BARRIO

# Play and Resistance in El Barrio: A Conversation Between Miguel Luciano and Hiram Maristany*

Miguel Luciano (ML):

This talk is a chance for us to talk a little bit about some connections between our work, but things that we talk about a lot, the arc of this work that involves both joy and play, love and resistance in our communities. I thought we could also talk a little bit about how we connected and met as artists. I live in El Barrio now, like I said, a few blocks away from Hiram, but Hiram you were born and raised in El Barrio, right?

Hiram Maristany (HM):

Correct.

ML: And have been here a lot longer than I have. You've been on this earth a lot longer than I have, but having said that, working with you has been an extraordinary opportunity to actually learn about the history of this community and about the history of the Puerto Rican community in New York, specifically here in El Barrio and that for me has been one of the greatest joys in connecting with your work and archive.

I thought we'd just start in with some of these images. I put together some images that I've been incredibly inspired by, but really for me are the epitome of joy in our community. In the streets of East Harlem, this is El Barrio in the early '60s, right Hiram?

HM: Correct. This image to me is important because it speaks to something that a lot of my generation and maybe a few generations later had in common. East Harlem was a place that, in the summer, was very, very, very hot and very, very uncomfortable. This is a hydrant and we would open it and actually find a way to spray ourselves with water, to cool ourselves down. It became something of, almost a ritual for a lot of us. It was a form of doing something that relieved us from the tremendous heat, but also was something that was very joyful and very pleasant.

ML: Sure. This is 111th street, right? This is one among many images that was shot, literally on the block that you grew up on, right?

HM: Yes. It's the block I was born and raised on.

ML: Right. Beautiful. That's, for me, something that was really important in understanding these images later on and also just understanding more about you and your own history here.

HM: Well, my path when I started was to actually photograph on my block. I photographed my neighbors, I photographed my friends, I photographed people who I knew and it was almost an instant bond of trust. They knew me and I was not an outsider. These are the kinds of things that, I don't know if easy is the best word, but allowed me to do certain things within my community. I always tried to photograph people in the most natural way, as opposed to looking for someone to pose. It was always an attempt to honor them. It was always an attempt to reflect, to show them as best I could without altering them, without changing them, without making them become something else and I tried my best to do that.

* Presented by the Binghamton University Art Museum via Zoom on April 22, 2021. The text has been edited for length and clarity.

ML: We're going to come back to these images, but I just want to start out with some of the things that these images made me think so much about, just the history of 111th street. These images were just about pure joy and kids being kids in the streets. This is also the 1960s, early '60s in East Harlem. This was a tough time to grow up in El Barrio. Despite that, these images are just beautiful images. They're incredibly beautiful portraits of our community. These are just a few among many, but that's one of the things that always stood out to me. This was a time when we know there was extreme poverty. There were drugs and there were other things that were plaguing the community.

HM: A lot of violence.

ML: A lot of violence, but there was also this kind of beauty every day, right?

HM: One of the things that I realized at an early age is that most of the time, whenever we saw images of us, sadly, most of the time they were negative. Sadly, they were a reflection of us by someone other than us. I had a lot of resentment of that and I tried my best to present a more fair, balanced representation of us, to show our joy and to show our passion, to show who we were. To try and bring out our humanity without going to the other extreme and creating stuff that was not true. Images like this are very, very important to me because rarely, in the past, almost 60 years ago, we were never given that opportunity. That's why I'm very blessed and honored that some of these images still endure after many, many decades.

ML: These are all images from the early '60s of young people on the block and a few short years later the images transform in your portfolio and your role in the community changes. This is during the Civil Rights movement and during the formation of the Young Lords Party here in New York.

HM: Well, it was rough; it was a difficult time nationwide. There were a lot of things going on, specifically to start with the Civil Rights movement, the anti-war movement, the feminist movement, the Gay rights movement, the whole society was on the move. Coming of age in that period, we were very, very concerned with the liberation of Puerto Rico. We were very, very concerned with what we inherited as a result of some of the things that occurred on the island. We were very, very engaged in the political reality of trying to have the independence of our nation and our country.

ML: That's a good segue into some of the work that we're going to talk about. You went from basically being a teenage photographer, to a young adult who was a photographer and also an activist, one of the founding members of the Young Lords party here in New York. These two images show a vulnerability and strength and political resistance. They're both images of strength, but different forms of strength.

ML: I got to look through your archive, through the different projects we've worked on and I love how there are these different energies that run through the work. But they are always energies of pride in our community, and about love and resistance. I thought we could talk a little bit about how we met. In 2014 I was invited to be part of the *Anchor* exhibition in East Harlem. What we're looking at is a photograph of the first headquarters of the Young Lords party in New York. That's a very young Juan Gonzalez standing in the doorway, at that time, the minister of education among other things. This was on Madison between 111th and 112th.

It was one of several images that I got to explore when getting to know your archive. I ended up recreating a contemporary version of that office window in the window of the Hunter East Harlem Gallery on 119th street. This was the first time we actually got to work together on a project. This is also where the Center for Puerto Rican Studies is located. The Center for

Puerto Rican Studies is literally right behind these walls. We tried to get as many of the original posters as we could. Some of them were in Centro's archives, some of them we pieced back together. In other cases, we included contemporary issues that were many of the same issues, unfortunately, dealing with police brutality & violence. It was 2014, so justice for Eric Garner was big in our minds that year. In 1969, it was Manuel Ramos who had been [murdered by an off-duty police officer in Chicago], if I remember that history, right? A lot of these issues had not changed a lot over the arc of 50 years, which was another story we were telling by connecting these histories.

HM: It's an interesting point, because I think what you're saying is that through art, we are saying that things really have not changed. If we look at the most recent developments in terms of the national focus, in terms of how certain people are being treated, and how certain people are killed. Sadly, there's still a lot of negative stuff that we have to endure. I think that your depiction of the window is valid because you brought contemporary issues to that window, which I thought was extraordinary and very, very important. We never forget that many of our successes came from the struggle of people before us. Sometimes we lose sight of that. I'm hoping that doesn't continue and that we pay homage to those pioneers who stood up and who resisted.

ML: One of the other images that I chose to work with was this image, one that I always loved in your portfolio. I love it because it reminds us of the connection between the Black Panther party and the Young Lords party; the connection between black liberation and Puerto Rican liberation, and how intertwined these movements are. It's such a powerful photograph that shows them both on the chest of a Young Lords member marching. Black and Puerto Rican solidarity is so much the statement of this photograph.

There were different ways that we responded to your archive. It was really a great group of artists that all did very different kinds of work. But from the Young Lords, we also had a lot of East Harlem's history. My personal favorites of all the photographs have always been these images of children at play, and specifically of the children on the rooftops flying kites. As you know, I have a strong affinity for kites and kite flying, and have been working with kites as symbols and objects in my work for many years. This was a really beautiful connection to a history of our community — associating it with kite flying in the skies and recreating these traditions that really came from the islands — for Puerto Ricans. Those who grew up, some of them making kites in Puerto Rico, teaching folks how to make kites here, and then finding the rooftops as a place to actually access the wind.

You shot these images. This is also the early '60s, maybe '64, but could you say something about that? About the flying?

HM: This photograph to me is very, very important and symbolic because I'm not much older than the subject. I'm maybe two to three years older than he is. But what I was doing was trying to record and to show that we were not consumed with all of the poverty, and the anger, and the mistreatment. All the negative things that we had to deal with. But we also knew how to play. We also knew how to enjoy ourselves and how to find things that were of value to us. It's a significant thing because, for me, it was a way of releasing a lot of the aggressive anger that many of us had. I find it very, very pleasing that this photograph has a lineage, it's old. It still evokes a sense of joy, the wind and the movement, the moving and to trying to raise the kite higher and higher into the sky.

ML: I remember, I'll never forget, it was both you and Charlie Diaz [the boy in the photograph] telling stories about kite flying in those years. I never would have thought that rooftops would be a place to escape from the violence of the streets. The danger in the streets. East Harlem was very territorial from block to block and very segregated in many ways. So the rooftops became a kind of escape also that was ironically, as dangerous as it sounds, it was in this space where kids could still be kids and have this communion with the sky.

HM: I think that's very accurate. And for me, personally, as a photographer, it was a way for me to photograph something that was not necessarily dangerous. Because the reality of East Harlem was that you had to be very careful who you photographed and what you photographed. It wasn't a simple cakewalk that you could go and just at random photograph anything you wanted. There were a lot of things going on in East Harlem that you just should not point a camera at. I had to learn those limitations and I had to learn not to use the camera in a way that was detrimental to individuals or to the community in general.

ML: Amani Kites was a public art project that I did in 2012 & 2014 in collaboration with Wajukuu, an amazing arts collective in Nairobi. And it was a really, really beautiful project, a public art project about kites and kite flying. It started in 2012. I was thinking about kites as symbols of freedom and as vehicles for representations of our bodies. Our photographs as kites could travel in the sky across fences and across boundaries. It later traveled to many different parts of the world, exploring the same question about what freedom means in different communities and in different parts of the world. The idea for this project was really simple.

It was really made for young people, although all ages have participated. So, Sella & Adi here in 2012 were seven or eight years old, then we had elders who were in their 80s participating. But for young people, the images could actually be life size. The whole idea of this project is based on young people who can potentially see a life size representation of themselves flying in the air, then be able to reflect on themselves and on their own images in the sky, and think about what that means and what that feels like. So, for me, it's a really simple, but really poetic project when it all comes together. Seeing reflections of ourselves that can be proud, beautiful reflections of ourselves. Fundamentally, that's what the whole thing is about.

And so this is what this looks like as a public art project, right? And when the kites really start to fly, it's a beautiful project. They remind me a lot of being in the air, about playing, about just pure joy and being free in the space of joy and play.

And so that's something, again, that I come back to your work with. This photograph is literally called *Hydrant: In the Air*. I love how these images relate to each other with the jumping into the water and into the sky. It's part of the reason I think I've responded so much to these images in your archive.

HM: Well, thank you. It's really a compliment when you see beautiful children smiling and doing things that are not necessarily negative. I really appreciate that. I'm really responding, that's very cool. Very good.

ML: When so many of the depictions, as you said, during that time especially, were negative depictions, you know? It's like pushing back against those kinds of stereotypes of our communities and really insisting upon the beauty and the joy that exists all around us.

ML: I love these images, too. This is *Night View* and maybe you can take us into this image a little bit and tell us what we're looking at.

HM: This is a view from a building right across the street from where I was born and raised. The building number is 57 East 111th Street. There's a view of Madison looking towards the West Side, the avenue that's perpendicular is Fifth Avenue. It's a street in East Harlem that is, for all intents and purposes, a play street, a street where we'd go to play. And in that context, it has a lot of value to us. It has a lot of value to me.

They are moving and the image is standing stationary. It gives a sense of activity, of life going on. It's a night shot. You can see people are engaged with each other and this is part of how East Harlem looked and what we used to do in these spaces. The block still exists, but all of that is gone. Some people would say it's gentrification, but many of those buildings were not necessarily in bad shape. It was just a process of ...

ML: Of removal.

HM: Of removal. So for me, this is a very, very personal image.

ML: So, this is the same street, right? But a close-up shot.

HM: Right. It's the same street.

ML: Children at play during the day.

HM: This is titled *Children at Play*. Again, and I have to keep saying this because it's really important, but I know these people. I know their first names. They're not strangers to me. And that's something because sometimes photographers are photographing people they don't know.

ML: What I love about this image is that we see a boy who's back is turned to us and he's drawing this character with wings. Which also goes back to the kites and flying and freedom. I love the way that the image at the bottom of this winged character is mirrored by the child doing the handstand with his legs up in the air.

HM: I get sometimes people making some observations, they say, "How did you time it? How did you get it that way? How did you get him to do that? And how did you coordinate it?" As if it was something that I orchestrated. I'm like, no way.

HM: It's a very, very important image to me. And I love the fact that somebody is drawing. And then in the other images you see that they're playing a game we used to call Skullies, some people call Loadies and whatnot. But they're fully engaged. They were not paying attention to me. I was almost irrelevant.

ML: And it's clearly their street, you know?

HM: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

ML: I love that about this image too. The street became the canvas too. Much of my work also goes back to associations with childhood and play. I've done a lot of different sculptures from kiddie rides to vending machine sculptures and carnival games…

HM: A Coquí kiddie ride, wow.

ML: Yeah. So if you haven't seen it before, it's a kiddie ride based on the coquí. If you don't know Puerto Rico and the coquí, it's one of the national symbols of the island. It's an indigenous small tree frog in Puerto Rico that sings at night a very sweet and loud song when it rains. Like this.

HM: Yeah. That's the name?

ML: Yeah, exactly. So, when you put a quarter in one of these vending machines, this is what you hear. And these are recordings of the coquís in the rainforest in Puerto Rico. You hear that for a minute and a half or something whenever you put a quarter in.

ML: Now that may not sound like something extraordinary, but if you're in El Barrio and you hear a coquí coming from one of the blocks out of a mechanical frog, it's incredibly nostalgic, that sound in our neighborhood.

So, then we get to my favorite part. When I saw this photograph, I was like, "Wow, this is now totally speaking my language and reminds me of my childhood." Although this was still before my time. This is around 1970, something like that. Right? Late '60s/early '70s. So, I'm not quite born yet, but these are still the bikes that informed my generation's bikes. We got the banana seat bikes before we got the BMX bikes. And so I know this is late '60s/early '70s just by the style of bikes.

HM: This is really joyful because it was a big deal for them to be photographed with their bicycles. I mean, it was like, "Yo, wait a minute, man." The smallest member of this group, he's

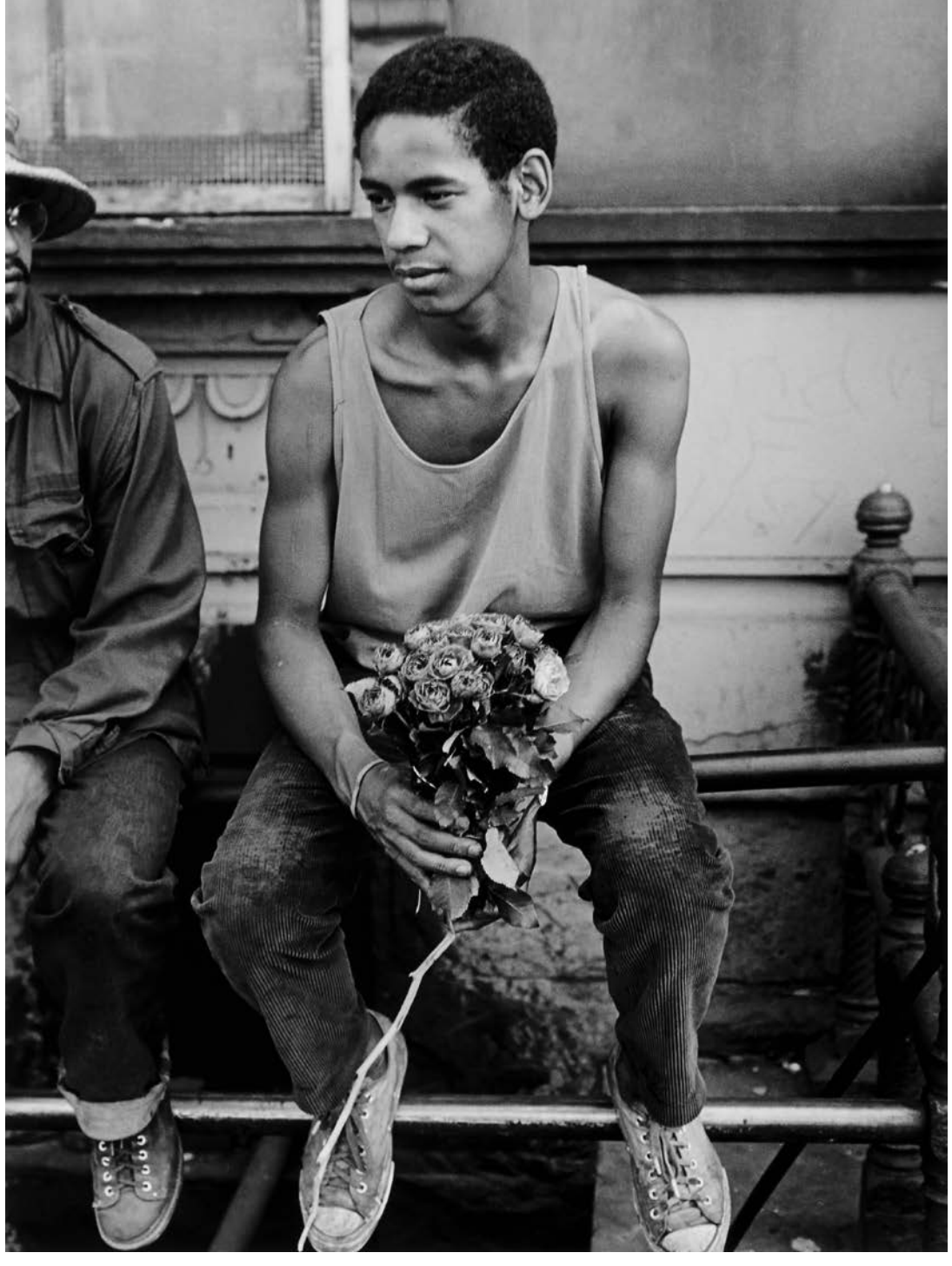
centered in the white shirt. He was like, "Hold up, man, wait a minute. Wait, wait." He was really proud of his bike, and somehow or another, his bike was better than all the others. So it's a real pleasure to see this because it's just joyful.

ML: Another thing I love about this is it reminds me about how long bike culture has been part of our community's history. Forever. But that goes all the way back to the island, and then here in the diaspora, it's a big thing. Bike culture, Puerto Rican / Nuyorican bike culture has been a huge influence on the work that I make. I ended up in Brooklyn when I first moved to New York and had a studio in Bushwick, and became close with the Puerto Rico Schwinn Club and the Classic Riders. I started making work inspired by the way that our culture is celebrated within Nuyorican bike culture. So this is *Pimp My Piragua*, which is a customized piragua cart / bicycle. Here, I was riding with the Classic Riders in the Puerto Rican Day Parade in 2019. This was the first bike sculpture that I made and it's fully functional as a piragua cart. So it's really commemorating one of the oldest start-up businesses in our community.

Piragua traditions came from the island to El Barrio and other Puerto Rican neighborhoods. It was a simple business — a block of ice, some homemade syrups, and a homemade push cart became a business. They've been around for as long as Puerto Ricans have been in New York. They've never been legal. They have never been sanctioned by the city or licensable, but have always been a part of our culture and a part of the informal economy of our neighborhoods. And so this was a commemoration of that tradition in the form of a super tricked out bike/cart, but again, fully functional. It's pure joy also. This was a project that was made not for museums, but it was really made to return to the community that inspired it. And that's where it comes to life the most.

HM: That's great. That's exactly what should be one part, not the only part, but one of the elements of great art: that it returns to the community.


PALANTE
Young Lords Party
¡LIBERACION O MUERTE!
YOUNG LORDS PARTY
INSIDE:

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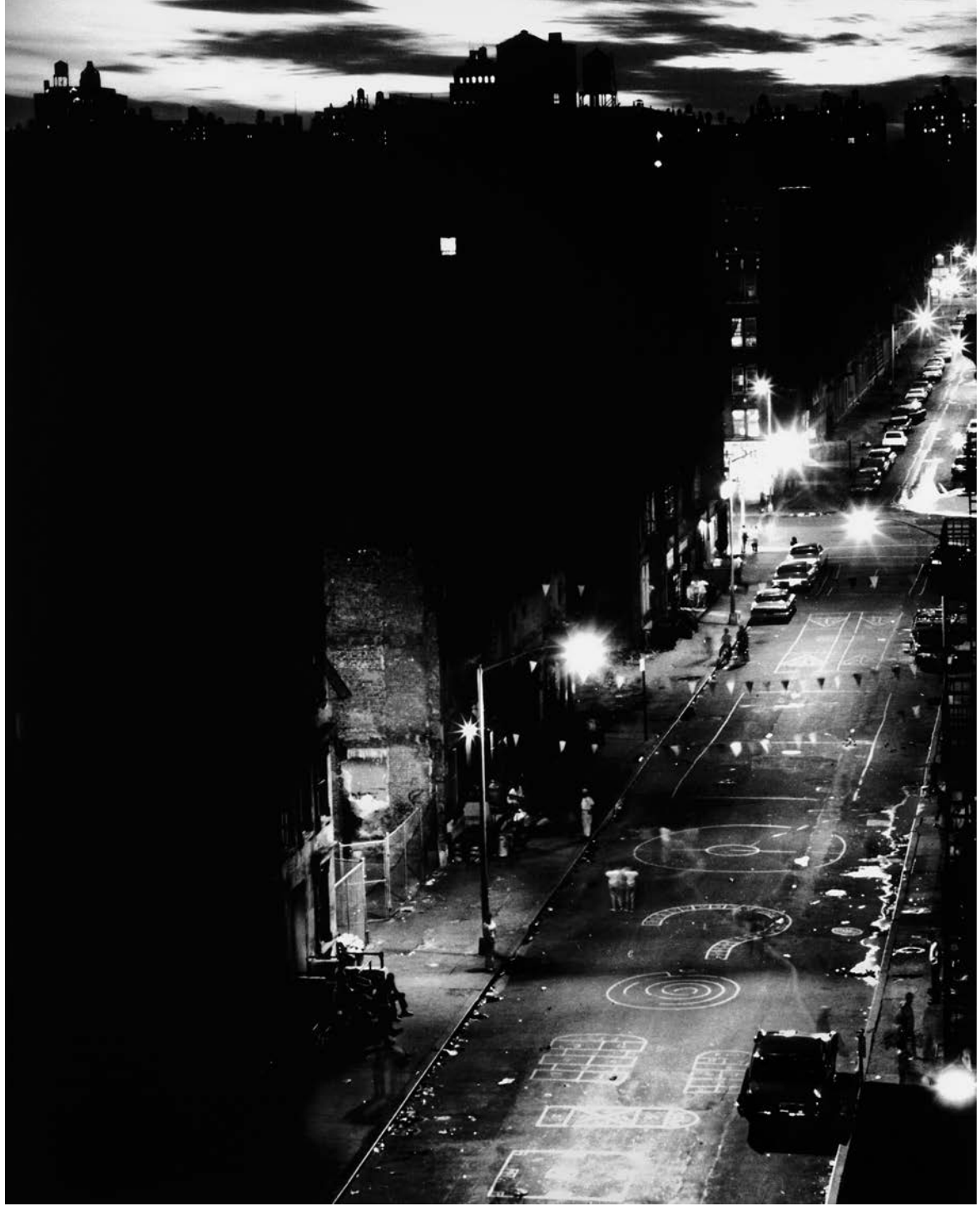


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HEALTH
FOOD
HOUSING
EDUCATION

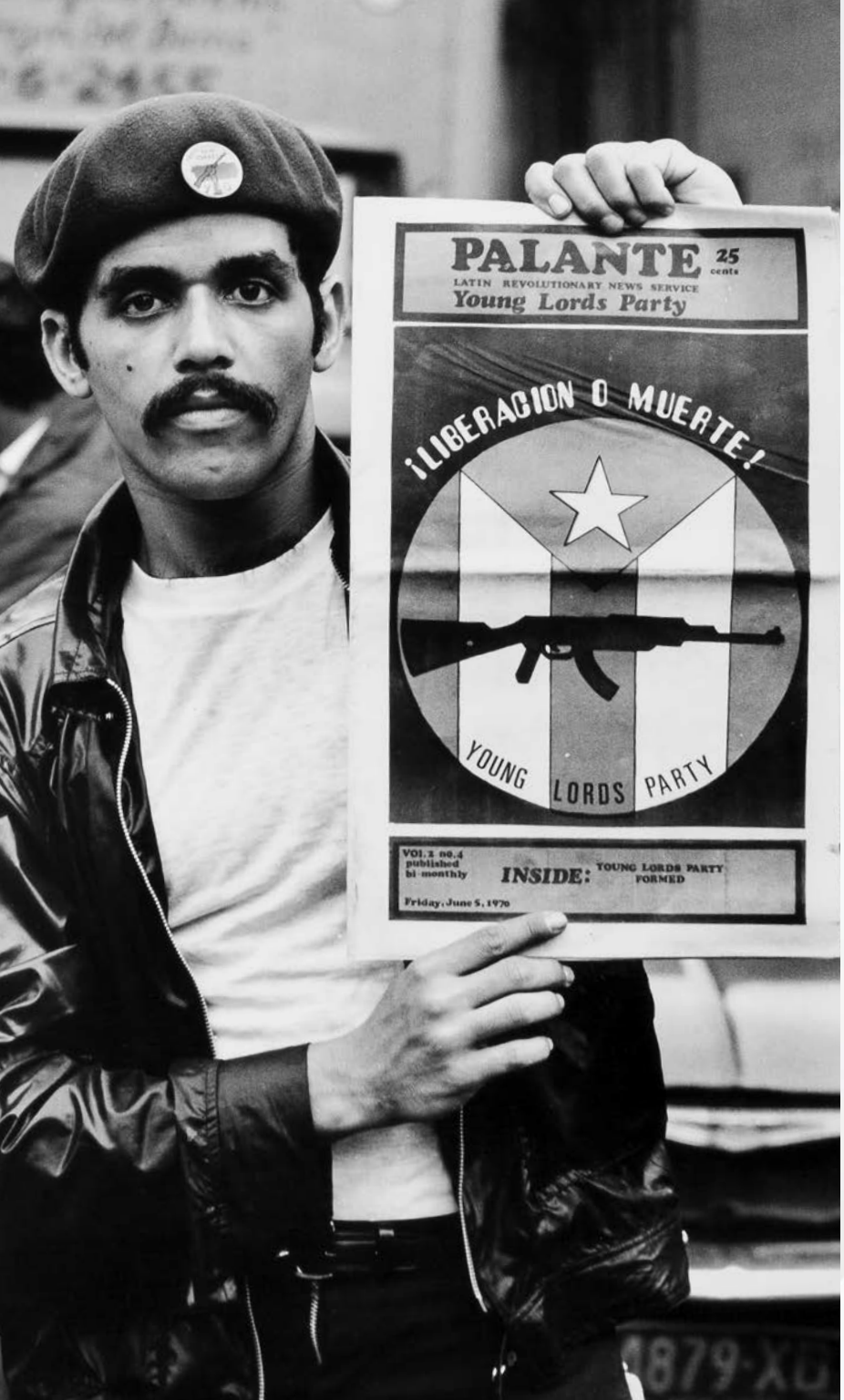

33
SUPER MARKET

**Miguel Luciano** is a multimedia visual artist whose work explores themes of history, popular culture, social justice and migration via sculpture, painting and socially engaged public art projects. His work has been exhibited widely and is featured in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Newark Museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico. Luciano is a faculty member at Yale University School of Art and The School of Visual Arts in NYC, and he was an inaugural Artist-in-Residence (2018–2021) in the Civic Practice Partnership Artist Residency Program at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**Hiram Maristany** was a photographer born & raised in El Barrio (East Harlem), New York. He came of age in the 1960s, when young New York–born Puerto Ricans were asserting a new cultural-political identity inspired by the Cuban Revolution, the Chicago Young Lords, and the civil rights and Black Power movements. Maristany was one of the founding members of the New York chapter of the Young Lords Party and became its official photographer, capturing some of its most iconic moments. His work is featured in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Museum of African American History & Culture, El Museo del Barrio, The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art and The Whitney Museum of American Art.

**Josh T Franco**, PhD '16, is an artist and art historian from West Texas. He believes art history is made by hand.

**Claire L. Kovacs** is the curator of collections and exhibitions at the Binghamton University Art Museum.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