

**Let's**

**Pretend**

Curated by  
**Dr. Leslie C. Sotomayor II**

Presented by  
Bruce Gallery of  
Edinboro University

JUNE — SEPTEMBER 2021 ART EXHIBITION  
DIGITAL BOOK

## Let's Pretend

Bruce Gallery, Edinboro University  
June—September, 2021

### Curator

Dr. Leslie C. Sotomayor II

### Essayist

Dr. Rhonda Matthews

### Artists

Antonio Howard  
Lourdes Jasso  
Sheldon McNeill  
Esther Ortiz  
Emidalys Serrano  
Danielle Slade  
Roland Slade  
Armando Reyes  
Marquis Wallace

### Catalog Editors

Walter Ang & Lisa Austin

### Graphic Designer

Alex Herr

### Printer

Piper Press, June 2021

### Typography

Gotham

# Let's Pretend

## ART EXHIBITION

**Open by Appt** June 5—August 22, 2021

**Gallery Hours** August 23—September 24  
M—F, 3PM-6PM  
Closed Labor Day.

### **Bruce Gallery**

Doucette Hall of Edinboro University  
Edinboro, PA

**Bruce Gallery Director** Lisa Austin

# IN THE “LAND OF OPPORTUNITY,”

in which opportunity has been denied to many, the act of claiming space becomes revolutionary, because doing so is most often identified with power. There is, however, a tension between the denotation of power and the connotations expressed in United States society. They are highlighted when people of color and people from other marginalized groups claim space, where previously, they were denied it. The history of ideas in this country is fraught with notions designed to mold cultural thought into expressions that reflect the narrowness of its view and scope. At the same time, the vastness of the identities and lived experiences of its survivors and inhabitants have reshaped the mold and pushed it to the precipice of something that reflects real culture. The lofty ideals of U.S. culture and the realities of our daily cultural practice highlights the differences each day and are most pointed when we assert our humanity.

## Yet another way to claim **SPACE.**

In recent years, we find that each day there is a newness to the experiences of our shared culture that can only come with new information. That knowledge inserts itself into U.S. life, because people who have previously been unheard, are now claiming their space in many realms, especially those of justice, culture, academia and art and it is upon this cultural precipice that this exhibit stands.

**T**he artists of this show find themselves at the intersection of their personal ethnicities, identities, community memberships, relationships with academia, public intellectualism, region and nation. Their realities are constructed by a mix of experiences, ideology and talent and they bring those factors of their lives into the art that they create. The accessibility of the work that they have created provides for us—the audience—an entrance to a world that is often constructed to intimidate, but art is, indeed, for everyone and, in this exhibit, we see the importance of diverse voices on a local scale.

In the last few years, there has been a focus upon the importance of diverse representation in media. The conversation often takes place at the macro level. While it is important national discourse, most often overlooked is the representation at the local level. In this exhibit, art is conceived, created, and presented by people from diverse backgrounds from right here surrounding communities. Their mere presence as artists, who make art based in their own experiences, is important to the functions of neighborhood, sharing, collective well-being and community, for there can be none of the aforementioned, without inclusion of all members.

Artists form meaning, when their vision takes a platform—when the artist claims space for their voice. The stories enter the consciousness of others, and it is at that moment that the community becomes whole. The work that you see here is the way forward to an engaged, whole, community.

*Join us on this wholly human journey.*

—Dr. Rhonda Matthews, 2020

## CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS, CREATIVE ACTS

**T**he current social and political climate in our nation has continued to perpetuate systemic racism, exacerbating wounds and traumas that have deeply penetrated our psyches. This multimedia art exhibition is curated by artists, activists, educators and curators of color with the intention to unite the Erie community through the arts.

**IN THE SPRING OF 2020,** CIVITAS artist and Edinboro University Professor Lisa Austin invited me to moderate a community book discussion of Aruna D'Souza's *Whitewalling: Art, Race, and Protest in 3 Acts*. The book discussion was a collaborative initiative of CIVITAS, Edinboro's VASE (Visiting Artist & Speaker Endowment), Alexa Potter, president of NPAA (Northwestern Pennsylvania Artist Association) and Patrick Fisher, executive director of Erie Arts & Culture and initiator of the CHROMA Guild. CHROMA was formed to support creative and cultural professionals of color in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

From the over 20 members from the Erie community who joined the critical conversations around the book, several participants committed to continue meeting with the goal of curating creative efforts to unite the underrepresented Erie community. In her new capacity as Director of the Bruce Gallery, Austin offered space for an exhibition. Artists and creative professionals involved with *Let's Pretend* include writer Walter Ang, hair artist Danielle Slade, photographer and mixed media artist Lourdes Jasso, painter Antonio Howard, piñata maker Esther Ortiz, painter Sheldon McNeill, photographer Emidalys Serrano, associate professor Dr. Rhonda Matthews, wood furniture maker Armando Reyes, filmmaker Roland Slade, and multidisciplinary artist Marquis Wallace.

## COLLABORATION

**W**hile each artist is contributing to the art exhibition and has creative freedom within their work, the curatorial process is a collaborative effort in coming together as a core artist group having meaningful discussions about our art, our processes, our viewpoints, our lived experiences, and what we want to say in response to what is happening around us. The title *Let's Pretend* speaks to the idea that as underrepresented artists our opportunities and access within the art world are often limited or reduced to token gestures and not integrated into the curatorial-making process, thus marginalizing our experiences even further.

*Let's Pretend* plays off of the notion that during this specific time in our community, our city and our nation, there is a new kind of awareness around racism and historical social issues. But we ask: is this temporary? Is the allyship temporary? Is it genuine? Is it authentic? Is it sincere? Is it true? Is it real? Is it imaginary? *Let's pretend* that: we have been included in U.S. history; you see me; you acknowledge my mind; you give a fuck; we matter, we exist, we/they are equal; my life matters; we are included. *Let's pretend* we didn't need to have this specific exhibition in the first place. Pretension could be signified as one form of phenomenological expression of neplanta (Anzaldúa, 2015) as an act of being in-between realities, offering opportunities for new modes of knowledge production.

The art exhibition, which could be decoded as embodying the artist's hi/stories, offers a prompt for a new consciousness.

—**Dr. Leslie C. Sotomayor, 2020**

## ANTONIO HOWARD

Painter/Writer/Muralist/Spoken Word Artist

**A**ntonio Howard is Peggy's son, a poet, autodidact artist, and author of *When a Child is Worth More than the Worst Mistake He Ever Made: A Juvenile Lifer's Story*. He is a recipient of the 2019 Erie Arts & Culture Emerging Artist Fellowship Award. At the young age of 15, he was incarcerated and sentenced to life in prison as a juvenile. While in prison, he educated himself on the concepts and processes of visual art-making through instructional books. He writes, "Although I often dreamed of being an escape artist, as a visual artist, my paintings broke free of that place long before I did." Paroled in 2017 and now living as a civilian, he is committed to serving Erie and documenting his life through his paintings.

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## LOURDES JASSO

Photographer

**L**ourdes Jasso is a mixed media artist focusing on social justice and the experiences of Mexican immigrant women in the United States. Born in 1983 in Acambaro, Guanajuato, Mexico, she immigrated at age three, with her parents and two sisters, to the United States. She grew up immersed in the vibrant Latino culture of her working class Chicago neighborhood. She participated in Mexican folkloric dance performances and honed her spoken word craft, communicating her messages in Spanish to her many non-English speaking community members. Her artistry grew into a passion for photography during high school, which

Jasso carried out of the barrio and into college. In 2005, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Photography from Columbia College Chicago. From that point, she knew she would be able to use the same art form that saved her from the inner city's negative aspects to change the lives of other youth. Jasso's vast experiences in arts and education include Columbia College Chicago's Photography Department Digital Lab and the Museum of Contemporary Photography's Exhibition Department. She has taught inner city students traditional and digital photographic processes as a form of creative self-expression. In 2007, Jasso moved with her family to Erie, Pennsylvania. For the past 12 years, she has been transforming how underprivileged youth see the world at the Benedictine Sisters of Erie Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, through a variety of artistic mediums at no cost to their families. She is a committeewoman for the Erie Democratic Committee's Sixth Ward, Sixth District. Jasso's commitment to Erie was recognized when she was nominated in the Erie Reader's 40 Under 40: Class of 2019.

## Sheldon McNeill

Painter

**S**heldon McNeill has been drawing since he was introduced to superheroes at a young age. His hope is to make his community stand out and become more vibrant. The two pieces he submitted *Malcolm X* and "Mother Rose", represent black identities in the United States. *Malcolm X*, a civil rights activist that fought for a better progressive and equal world and "Mother Rose" representing the beauty and loving nature of a black woman.

## **ESTHER ORTIZ**

Piñata Artist

**E**sther Ortiz began creating piñatas after being inspired from a trip she took to Colorado. In Colorado there is a large population of Mexican Americans who brought with them a lot of their culture. She saw a wide variety of piñatas hanging on display and that's when it struck her to make them. She has always been a creative person and has loved making and admiring crafts, leading to her making piñatas today. The satisfaction and empowerment she feels when creating piñatas is unlike any other feeling. It has made her a stronger person allowing her to be opened to critique from not only her family but the community as well. Making piñatas is a way she can express herself in color, shape and design. Self-expression is another reason she creates art. Ortiz believes that everyone should have a passion in life and they should be able to express it creatively. Most importantly, that there are no limits when you have a will to create something. Her piñatas have come to represent independence and courage to try new things. She allows her art to speak for itself and takes great pride in every single detail. Ortiz creates piñatas not just for how they look and what you see; it has come to mean so much more in her life signifying innovation and celebration.

## **EMIDALYS SERRANO**

Photographer

**E**midalys Serrano is the eye behind the visionary glimpses into ordinary life from an alternative point of view by E'yanae Productions. Born to a single non-English speaking Puerto Rican mother of two in 1986. Location, Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit Michigan. A Puerto Rican American, redundant yet an exact description.

Native Spanish tongue tamed by an American accent taught in the before the streetlights came on of a dead-end street. In 2003 a love affair began with an Olympus Stylus. An enchantment with the beauty of a people as they are, developed a vision trapped within a lens. A familiar stranger. A 2004 Central High School Senior Yearbook Editor slowly became E'yanae Productions in 2015. Collaborations with Underground Hip-Hop Artists, Dancers, Contemporary Ballets, Youth Leadership Development Groups, and other CHROMA Artists is framing motion into still and visual to lyric. Liberal Arts student at Mercyhurst University, Program Manager at Youth Leadership Institute of Erie and VP of CHROMA Guild.

## **DANIELLE SLADE**

Hair Stylist, Artist, & Advocate

**D**anielle Slade is a licensed cosmetologist, co-owner of a 5-star salon, an educator and author. She serves as Vice President for Concerned Beauty and Barber Professionals, an organization advocating for the health and safety of workers and clients. As the Executive Director and Trainer Advocate for Politics, Beauty and Barber, Slade leads industry professionals in advocacy, policy and politics. In her salon, Danielle Slade works intimately with people on their appearance. The co-owner of a minority-owned, small business, Slade embraces all hair types—especially kinky and curly texture making natural black hair a gorgeous “crown” accepted in social and professional settings. At the salon, Slade addresses issues of “race, gender, beauty and class” with her clients. Slade partnered with the CIVITAS collaborative to develop an art project celebrating the hair of Black women. Slade says, “our hair is complete selfexpression.” The #ErieCrown project challenges our default focus on “white” hair as the standard of beauty. Designed to celebrate Black families (and to educate non-Black communities on the variety and beauty of Black hair).

Slade's **#ErieCrown** will focus on Eastside Erie residents of zip code 16503—one of the nation's most diverse and impoverished zip codes. Slade will style the hair of women of color in Erie. The resulting hairstyles will be documented in photographs with the hashtag **#ErieCrown**. These photos will be featured in a series of billboards posted along the Rt. 290 Eastside Bayfront Connector—an arterial highway that was carved through zip code 16503 at the end of the 20th Century. The billboards showcasing local women celebrating their beauty will bring attention and pride to Eastside Erie.

## **ROLAND SLADE**

Videographer & Cultural Critic

**F**or decades, Roland Slade's artistic vision and cultural observations have been distilled in a series of raw "found video collages." His "Celebrity Activists" was included in the Erie Art Museum 2020 Spring Show curated by Aruna D'Souza. As a Pittsburgh native, Slade has made his home in Erie since 1995. He has worked as an Annealing & Fork Lift Operator and as an Environmental Health Safety Coordinator. He is a member of United Electrical Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) Local 506. In addition to his full-time employment, Slade has co-owned and co-managed So Fancy Hair Salon since 2015 and Three Lee Productions, a video production company, from 2016 to 2019. Slade's Instagram (@cleezereport) has 20,000 followers. As a black man, Slade asks other men to "speak out and be visible" because when children see fathers, grandfathers, and uncles involved, it "shows youth there is a future out there."

 Visit [Vimeo.com/cleeze](https://vimeo.com/cleeze).

## **ARMANDO REYES**

Wood Furniture Maker

**A**rmando Reyes, originally from Chicago, has made a home in Erie, PA as a wood craftsmen and owner of Lake Erie Woodworks, and Lake Erie Drumworks. Reyes is driven by his work day to day as he finds solace in connecting with others through his chosen medium of wood. His commissioned work is client driven while simultaneously bringing and exciting strong emotions through his conversations with his clients. Reyes, who has been working with creating fine furniture pieces for the last two decades, enjoys focusing on a piece and creating forms from wood. His work also includes drum making out of wood catapulting his art career creating one of a kind original wood pieces for his clients.

## **MARQUIS WALLACE**

Conceptual Artist

**O**riginally from New York City, Marquis Wallace is an interdisciplinary conceptual artist whose work ranges in diverse manifestations such as choreography, performance art, digital, and installations. His love for history was ignited at a young age as he read books about his African revolutionary roots which began to shape his identity and politics as a Black man in the United States. His work engages intergenerational collaborative work as he ties historical narratives and contextualizes social issues by making historical and contemporary connections. Critically self-reflecting and analyzing U.S. histories with his lived experiences, Wallace conceptualizes dramatic art landscapes to draw the viewer into his work calling for a pause.

His work begs the question: **how am I implicit?**

## DR. LESLIE C. SOTOMAYOR

Dr. Sotomayor holds a dual doctorate in Art Education and Women's Studies and was an artist, curator, and educator at Edinboro University from 2019, until 2021 when she accepted a position at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX. To guide her teaching methodology, she uses Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* and *autohistoria-teoría*, a feminist writing practice that theorizes experiences as transformative acts. She interprets *nepantla* as a transcultural temporal location for artists and educators, often feeling and being in-between 'worlds' or realms (physical or spiritual), offering opportunities for new stories, consciousness and knowledge to cross thresholds. Like an educator, artist, and curator, a *nepantlera* is a messenger, choosing to mediate back and forth in the in between—often transcultural—spaces.

The act of being a *nepantlera* transcends mere representations of self, it extends to the interconnectedness of cultural narratives; choosing not only to create and educate from a place of personal lived experiences, but also to question who tells which hi/stories.

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## DR. RHONDA MATTHEWS

Dr. Matthews is a political sociologist and university professor, whose career has spanned 30 years in student affairs, administrative work, & academia. After earning degrees from Alcorn State University, Mississippi State University and the University of Oklahoma, the majority of her work experience has been teaching in university classrooms. She has also worked as an advocate & therapist, for survivors of rape & sexual assault. She is a tireless supporter of the work of real justice. As a womanist, scholar and public speaker, her work extends beyond the classroom, into the realms of, diversity education, political action & advocacy, thus taking teaching & learning outside of the classroom & into community spaces. She is keenly aware of the impact of art upon culture, beliefs and the collective psyche.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**CHROMA GUILD** President Dr. Leslie C. Sotomayor II

**ERIE ARTS & CULTURE** Executive Director Patrick Fisher

## EDINBORO UNIVERSITY

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Dr. Leslie C. Sotomayor II

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Dr. Rhonda Matthews

Amanda Sisseem

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Dr. Charlotte Wellman

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Sculpture, Painting & Drawing

Evan Hughey, BFA

Film & Video Production

Mary Olyer, BA

Art Education

Leonard Vesely, BFA

Animation

### Bruce Gallery Staff

#### Gallery Director:

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3D & 4D Design, SEA & Sculpture

#### Assistant Director

Erikka Spaid, MFA

Painting & Drawing

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Printmaking

#### Media Director

Madison Egleston, MFA

Jewelry & Metals

#### Virtual Director

Rachel Maly, BFA & MFA

Sculpture

Let's Pretend Exhibit Inspiration:  
**WHITEWALLING:**  
**Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts**

by **Aruna D'Souza**

**Visiting Artist & Speaker Endowment (VASE) Keynotes  
and Erie Art Museum Spring Show Jurors:**

1999 Anne Ellegood  
2000 Faith Ringgold  
2001 Fred Wilson  
2002 Sandy Skoglund  
2003 James Yood  
2004 Gregory Knight  
2005 Stephen Assael  
2006 Joyce Scott  
2007 Janet Koplos  
2008 Dave Hickey  
2009 Wendell Castle  
2010 Roger Shimoura

2011 Mark Newport  
2012 Emily Hubley  
2013 Alexis Rockman  
2014 Sergei Isupov  
2015 Jo Farb Hernandez  
2016 Virgil Marti  
2017 William Wegman  
2018 Wendy Maruyama  
2019 Arthur Ganson  
2020 **Aruna D'Souza**  
2021 Roberto Lugo



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