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**INTRODUCTION**

*Temporal: Puerto Rican Resistance* explores Puerto Rico’s contemporary history as a United States unincorporated territory. The exhibition traces the continued impact of three recent major events: the enactment of the US federal law titled the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (*PROMESA*) in 2016, the US response to Hurricane María’s landfall on the island in 2017, and the mass protests in July 2019 that forced the governor’s resignation.

*Temporal*, which roughly translates to “storm,” takes its name from a Puerto Rican *plena* song. Plena, a style of music with Afro-Caribbean origins dating back to the early 1900s, has been referred to as the “sung newspaper” of the Puerto Rican people and is often incorporated into protest chants on the island. The exhibition follows the storytelling style of this traditional Puerto Rican musical genre, showcasing the documentation of protests, life during and after María, and the art of the resistance.

*Temporal* is organized by MoCP curatorial fellow for diversity in the arts Dalina Aimée Perdomo Álvarez.
FEATURED ARTISTS

Erika P. Rodríguez
Puerto Rican, b. 1988

Mari B. Robles López
Puerto Rican, b. 1993

Christopher Gregory-Rivera
Puerto Rican, b. 1989

Eduardo Martínez
Puerto Rican, b. 1974

Adriana Parrilla
Puerto Rican, b. 1983

SUPAKID
Puerto Rican

Ojos Nebulosos
Puerto Rican, b. 1995

Rogelio Baéz Vega
Puerto Rican, b. 1974

Dennis M. Rivera Pichardo
Puerto Rican, b. 1988

Edra Soto
Puerto Rican, b. 1971

Natalia Lassalle-Morrillo
Puerto Rican
A CONDENSED TIMELINE
OF MAJOR EVENTS IN PUERTO RICO

Natural Disaster
Protest

1898

1900
US Congress institutes civil government in Puerto Rico under the Foraker Act.

1917
The Jones Act (also known as the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act) is signed by President Woodrow Wilson. Puerto Ricans are given US citizenship.

1918
The earthquake and ensuing tsunami, San Fermín, hits the island, measuring at the magnitude of 7.1 and costing approximately $4–29 million in damage and killing an estimated 118 people.

1922
The Puerto Rico Nacionalist Party is founded. Their primary goal is independence.

1928
The category five storm, Hurricane San Felipe Segundo, hits the island, killing 2,500 people. This was the worst hurricane on record until María and greatly reduced production of the island’s two main exports at the time—raw sugar and coffee—massively damaging the economy.

1929
The Great Depression begins. Massive labor strikes occur, including approximately 16,000 people working in tobacco, sugar, textiles, and taxis, among other industries. These protests, led by Puerto Rican nationalists, prompted the Roosevelt Administration to create specific New Deal policies to aid and recover Puerto Rico after the depression and leading to the establishment of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in 1935.

1932
The category four storm, Hurricane San Ciprian, hits the island, furthering economic devastation and costing $30 million in damage.

1935
Police officers open fire on Puerto Rico Nacionalist Party supporters at the University of Puerto Rico campus in what is now known as the Río Piedras massacre, killing seven people.

1937
21 people are killed and over 200 wounded at a civilian protest in what is now known as the Ponce Massacre. The attempted peaceful march was organized by the Puerto Rican Nacionalist Party commemorating the abolition of slavery and to protest the incarceration of Pedro Albizu Campos, the party’s leader.

1946
Jesús T. Piñero becomes the first and only Puerto Rican to be appointed governor by the US government.

1948
Luis Muñoz Marín, known as the “Father of Modern Puerto Rico,” is the first democratically elected governor for the Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático, or PPD) and the leader of the senate. Muñoz Marín, a former independence supporter, guided the Puerto Rican Senate in passing Law 53, or Ley de la Mordaza (Gag Law). The law made it a felony to display the Puerto Rican Flag, sing Puerto Rico’s National Anthem, La Borinqueña, and to publish writings about gaining independence. Muñoz Marín’s policy was inspired by the Smith Act of 1940, which made it illegal to advocate for the overthrow of the US government and targeted communist and anarchist groups. La Mordaza followed a similar framework which served to consolidate power for the PPD by suppressing pro-independence movements and arresting opposing political figures without due process.

1950
Two Puerto Rican Nationals attempt to assassinate President Harry S. Truman to raise awareness for governmental repression of the independence movement.

1952
Puerto Rico’s constitution is ratified.
1954
Four Puerto Rican Nationalists shot semi-automatic pistols off in a balcony in the House of Representatives chamber of the United States Capitol as representatives were debating a bill on immigration. Five representatives were injured but all recovered. The action was to protest the US colonialism over the island and to call for independence.

1957
Ley de la Mordaza (the Gag Law) was repealed based on the law being considered a violation of freedom of speech under both Puerto Rican and United States’ constitutions.

1978
Police murder two pro-independence activists on Cerro Maravilla Mountain.

1985
Massive floods caused by a tropical wave result in the deadliest landslide on record in North America, killing 130 people and causing approximately $125 million in damage.

1998
Approximately 500,000 people participate in a two-day general strike endorsed by over 50 unions in protest of a plan the government made to privatize the Puerto Rico Telephone Company. The strike cause malls, hospitals, banks, and public offices to close, bringing awareness to then Governor Pedro Rosselló’s attempts to privatize many services on the island and threatening worker’s rights.

1999
The US Navy kills a Puerto Rican security guard while setting off test bombings on the US military training base on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. This sparks historical protests, causing President Clinton to remove the training base in 2003.

2000
Sila María Calderón Serra is elected—Puerto Rico’s first female governor.

2005
Independence leader Filiberto Ojeda is murdered by the FBI.

2010
University of Puerto Rican students protest budget cuts, tuition increases, and the proposed privatization of the school. The strike caused the school to close for 80 days.

2016
The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) was put into law in attempts to restructure Puerto Rico’s debt. While intended to provide a path forward to manage finances, many see PROMESA as a move that has further stripped agency from Puerto Rico as the law gives power to a Fiscal Control Board, appointed by and reporting to the President of the United States. Additionally, PROMESA allowed for the federal minimum wage to drop to $4.25 per hour for workers in Puerto Rico under the age of 25.

2017
The category five storm, Hurricane Maria, devastates the islands of Puerto Rico, Dominican, and St. Croix, becoming the worst recorded natural disaster in the history of the island, killing 3,059 people and costing an estimated $91.6 billion in damage.

2019
People unite in mass protest to demand the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló. The protests—initially led by a group known as the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción—began after two top members of his administration were indicted on charges of federal corruption and a series of text messages were released with language that was derogatory towards women and mocking those who suffered after Hurricane Maria. The governor’s resigned two weeks after on August 2, 2019.1

2019–2020
A series of damaging earthquakes swarm Puerto Rico, crumbling homes and businesses.

Plena in contemporary Puerto Rico is nearly always present in protests, functioning as an unofficial soundtrack to resistance movements. This exhibition follows in the storytelling style of plena folk music with each gallery referencing specific songs. The curator used the book *Plenas: 12 Grabados de Lorenzo Homar y Rafael Tufiño* (1953) and its companion mural *La Plena* (1952–1954) by Rafael Tufiño as conceptual inspiration for the exhibition. As the mural demonstrates, the threat of a storm looms over everything, always complicating existing social and infrastructural problems.

For examples of la plena, please listen to the playlist created for this exhibition by Dalina Aimée Perdomo Álvarez.

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Rafael Tufiño, *La Plena*, 1952-1954, collection of the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan

1. Temporal (Storm)
2. Cortaron a Elena (They Stabbed Elena)
3. Tintorera del Mar (Shark of the Sea)
4. Fuego, Fuego, Fuego (Fire, Fire, Fire)
The lyrics from the plena *Temporal (Storm)* (first recorded in 1929) are featured in this gallery alongside images taken in the aftermath of the hurricane.

**Temporal, temporal,**  
¡qué tremendo temporal!  
San Felipe, San Felipe,  
¡qué terrible temporal!  
¿Qué será de Puerto Rico,  
cuando pase el temporal?  

**Storm, Storm**  
What a tremendous storm!  
San Felipe, San Felipe,  
What a terrible storm!  
What will become of Puerto Rico,  
when the storm passes?
The US Response to Hurricane María

Hurricane María struck Puerto Rico in September of 2017, destroying the power grid and leaving 1.5 million people without electricity and water. The US government was criticized for not sending enough aid to restore services to the island as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was depleted of funding and supplies from storms on the US Virgin Islands two weeks prior. Further complicating the issue, the US government hired a small contractor based in Montana, Whitefish Energy, to oversee the restoration of the grid at inflated costs, depleting the budget, delaying progress, and contributing to additional deaths of an estimated 3,290 people. Full power was not restored to the island until August 2018—nearly eleven months after the storm.


Mari B. Robles López merges found objects with her photojournalist practice. By printing photographs on FEMA tarps, pots and pans used in recent noise protests, she displays documentation of protests and Hurricane María in a way that removes the images from a news media context and transforms them into sculptural forms.

FEMA distributes blue tarps after hurricanes to function as temporary waterproof roofing material. After Hurricane María, approximately 78 percent of the 1.23 million homes on the island were damaged from the storm and needed tarps. Today, approximately 30,000 homes are still using these FEMA tarps as roofing material due to a lack of federal housing assistance—more than 2.5 years after the storm hit.1

Interdisciplinary artist Edra Soto’s ongoing project **GRAFT** is an intervention of vernacular Puerto Rican architecture modeled after two forms: *quiebrasoles*-ornamental concrete blocks that provide shade from the sun; and *rejas*-wrought iron fences or screens used as a protective barrier on homes. Both quiebrasoles and rejas are prominently used on the island. Here, Soto uses their patterns to transform the gallery into a space that recalls familiar Puerto Rican architecture. Viewfinders are embedded into the holes of the structure, revealing images the artist has taken while in Puerto Rico immediately after the passage of Hurricane María.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- Consider the material this image was printed on. How might this photograph read differently if it were printed on paper?
- Do these images in this gallery differ from photojournalistic images you have seen in the news of the aftermath of Hurricane María? How or how not?

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- Notice the overall color palette of images in this gallery. What mood or temperature do the colors convey?
- Look closely at the images embedded in Soto’s installation. Why might the artist present images in this way? How does the act of looking through the graft change the way you read the images?
La Guagua (The Bus) are featured in this gallery alongside a video installation addressing infrastructure problems on the island.

Si quieres gozar un rato,
Vente conmigo en la guagua.

Si New York tuviera guaguas
Como las tiene San Juan
Que gusto yo me daría
Llevando gente hasta Coney Ailán.

If you want to enjoy yourself for a while,
Come with me on the bus

If New York had buses
Like San Juan has
What a pleasure it would be
Taking people to Coney Island.
The state of Puerto Rico’s infrastructure has been declining in recent history. In the 1920s, Puerto Rico’s economy was thriving due to an increased price in sugar—the primary export of the region. As a result, the government invested in building new roads, bridges and schools. The island’s economy slowed once the great depression hit, but infrastructure was maintained from funding provided by Roosevelt’s New Deal. In 1947, Luis Muñoz Marín of the Popular Democratic Party, proposed what would come to be known as Operation Bootstrap. Influenced by Roosevelt’s New Deal, Operation Bootstrap was designed to shift Puerto Rico’s economy from one based on farming to one that thrives on industrial production. This shift allowed an industrial middle-class to flourish and brought in larger economic incentives for outside companies to invest.

In the 1970s the government began to offer tax incentives for companies to build factories in the southern portion of the island. The Puerto Rican Electric Power Authority (PREPA) built several generating facilities with 70% of Puerto Rico’s power generated on the southern portion of the island while 70% of the population resided on the Northern portion of the island. When the tax breaks expired in 1996, many US companies left, causing the company to rely on international creditors to provide loans. With limited funding, PREPA began to overlook maintenance issues and generator failures and blackout rates increased dramatically.
Concerning the effects of an already failing infrastructure, Natalia Lassalle Morillo’s three-channel video installation takes audiences through a tourism route built in 1974. The route is now known for its poor road infrastructure and relative isolation from the populated metropolitan area, resulting in a loss of histories that took place there.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- This video installation is projected on sustainable fabric screens prepared by a Puerto Rican textile worker. Why might the artist choose these materials to use as a backdrop for her film? Do these materials add to the narrative? How or how not?
- Lassalle-Morillo states that Puerto Rico is “a country that lives in constant state of reimagining and therefore, redefining a sense of collective and individual identity.” As you view this video installation and walk further through the exhibition, how is this sense of a constantly redefined identity as a US territory conveyed by the artists?
The lyrics from the plena *Cortaron a Elena*, (They Stabbed Elena) are featured in this gallery alongside an installation depicting a typical hair salon in Puerto Rico by Ojos Nebulosos. This installation addresses women-led movements and women-owned businesses in Puerto Rico.
FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN PUERTO RICO

In Puerto Rico and around the world, the feminist movement and the fight for women’s rights has strong roots in the fight for worker’s rights. At the turn of the 20th Century, middle class and working-class Puerto Rican women began demanding the right to vote, questioning their patriarchal society and calling for a higher standard of living. Founded in 1920, the Popular Feminist Association of Women Workers of Puerto Rico was a defining part of the labor and suffrage movement. Women workers rallied, marched, and created petitions expressing their right to vote. In 1929 literate women were given the ability to vote, but it took another six years before all women were granted the right to vote in 1935.

During the 1970s, feminism in Puerto Rico experienced a surge and many organizations were formed with the goal of protecting women against gender-based violence and calling for equal rights. Contemporary feminist organizations started the protests that led to the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló in 2019 due to the government’s lack of action or investigations of the rising murders of women on the island since Hurricane María.

Currently, women in Puerto Rico have become active leaders in the sociopolitical landscape on both the island and in the continental United States. After Hurricane María, local women-owned businesses greatly aided in restoring the economy. Since the early 2000s, Latina entrepreneurship has grown exponentially and in 2013 the Center for American Progress estimated that Latinas brought in revenue of $65.7 billion to the island’s economy—accounting to approximately 60% of Puerto Rico’s gross domestic product.5

Exploring the roles of women in a failing economy in the aftermath of María and PROMESA, the installation by Ojos Nebulosos titled *Kiskeya Salón* is inspired by the two salons owned by the artist’s aunts. The installation highlights women-owned businesses, calling attention to salons in Puerto Rico as places where people gather socially to discuss issues. While topics including the hurricane, protests, migration, immigration to the island and the US, and women’s rights are discussed, TVs often play in the background.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**
- Like the plena songs, discussions in hair salons are another way for people to learn about the news and to share their thoughts on current events. How do you learn about news in your own life? How do you share and process this information with others?
The lyrics from the plena *Tintorera del Mar*, (Shark of the Sea) are featured in this gallery alongside images of FBI files kept on pro-Independence activists to investigate attempts at repressing pro-independence activists and efforts.

Tintorera del mar,
Tintorera del mar,
Tintorera del mar,
Te comiste el abogado de la Guánica Central.

Shark of the sea,
Shark of the sea,
Shark of the sea,
You ate the Central Guanica lawyer.
THE THREE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN PUERTO RICO

Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño
“Puerto Rican Independence Party”
The Puerto Rican Independence Party campaigns for the independence of Puerto Rico from the United States. Followers of the independence status call themselves “independentistas.” Independentistas usually identify themselves by their party’s green flag with a white horizontal cross, or by waving a sole Puerto Rican flag. This latter as a symbol of Puerto Rico alone, without the US relationship.

Partido Popular Democratico
“Popular Democratic Party”
The Popular Democratic Party advocates maintaining the current political status of Puerto Rico as that of an unincorporated territory of the United States with self-government. Followers of the commonwealth status call themselves “populares” or “estadolibristas.” They identify themselves by waving a white flag with a red “pava,” (a figure of a man wearing a straw worker’s hat), or by waving a Puerto Rican and American flag, as symbols of the relationship of Puerto Rico in union with the US.

Partido Nuevo Progresista
“New Progressive Party”
The New Progressive Party believes that full American Citizenship and a fair and equitable permanent relationship with the United States can only be achieved by becoming a full state of the United States. Followers of the statehood status call themselves “estadistas.” They usually identify themselves by waving their party’s flag, white with a blue palm tree in the center or by an American flag.
Providing a historical background to the resistance movement through a contemporary lens, Christopher Gregory-Rivera presents Las Carpetas, a series of photographs exploring an archive in Puerto Rico. His images document pages from a collection of physical file folders created and kept by the Puerto Rican Police Department in collaboration with the FBI for a surveillance operation aimed at silencing the independence movement on the island.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- As you view evidence from the archives, what can these documents tell us about the United States’ role in the history of colonialism and political oppression within Puerto Rico?
- How do the political parties in Puerto Rico listed above differ from your understanding of US political parties?
The lyrics from the plena *Fuego, Fuego, Fuego* (Fire, Fire, Fire) are featured in this gallery alongside images of post-PROMESA demonstrations with a focus on protests demanding the removal of the governor in July 2019.

**Fuego, fuego, fuego;**
**Fuego, en la cantera.**
**Vengan los bomberos, mamá,**
**Que el pueblo se quema.**

**Fire, fire, fire;**
**Fire in the quarry.**
**Call the firemen, mama,**
**The town is burning.**
The Puerto Rican flag has been a deeply political symbol since its inception. The current design, based on the Cuban flag with inverted colors, became a symbol of Puerto Rico’s independence from Spain in the early 1890s. Though the United States invaded shortly after, the flag remained a marker of the independence movement, gaining momentum as a symbol within the movement in the mid 1900’s. In response to this momentum, Luis Muñoz Marín signed the Ley de la Mordaza (Gag Law) in 1948 making it illegal to display the flag on the island. Four years later, in what was seen as an attempt to combat the independence movement, Muñoz Marín adopted the current flag design, changing the light blue that was on the early design to a navy blue which matched that of the United States’. In recent years, in response to the PROMESA law of 2016 a new version of the flag has come to the forefront of the independence movement. The new version contains black in place of the blue and red, which is meant to re-contextualize the flag back to its original role as a signifier of independence for use in the ongoing protests on the island.
EDUARDO MARTÍNEZ
PUERTO RICAN, B. 1974

SUPAKID
PUERTO RICAN

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

• Consider the works by SUPAKID in this gallery and how you have seen imagery of Puerto Rico’s flag throughout the exhibition. Consider also the presentation of the Puerto Rican flag during Jennifer Lopez’s performance in the 2020 Super Bowl halftime show. After now knowing about the Gag Law, has your understanding of the role of the flag to Puerto Ricans changed? How do the flags above differ from the flag J. Lo is wearing? Explain.
• As you walk back through the exhibition, consider where you see the flag represented throughout the galleries. How many can you find? How many are in full color? Which contain light blue? Which contain navy blue? And how many are in black? How does the rest of the information in the images inform your understanding of the meaning of these color choices?
• As you look at protest images, how are the colors of clothing, flags, and signs used to reference Puerto Rico’s historic independence movement?
EXTENDED RESOURCES


Selections:

“Accountability and Representation: Photographic Coverage after the Disaster,” Erika P. Rodríguez, page 124. (Artist in *Temporal*)

“Lifting the Veil: Portraiture as a Tool for Bilateral Representation,” Christopher Gregory, page 152. (Artist in *Temporal*)


“Si no pudiera hacer arte, me iba: The Aesthetics of Disaster as Catharsis in Contemporary Puerto Rican Art,” Carlos Ramírez Santana, page 178.


ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS GUIDE

VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

**VA:Re7.2.K–12** Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

**VA:Re8.K–12** Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

**VA:Re9.K–12** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria.

**VA:Cn11.K–12** Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

MEDIA ARTS STANDARDS

**MA:Re7.1.PK-12** Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work. Media artworks can be appreciated and interpreted through analyzing their components.

**MA:Re8.1.PK-12** Anchor Standard 8: Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. Interpretation and appreciation require engagement with the content, form, and context of media artworks.

**MA:Re9.1.PK-12** Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Skillful evaluation and critique are critical components of experiencing, appreciating, and producing media artworks.

SOCIAL SCIENCES STANDARDS

**SS.CV.1.9-12** Distinguish the rights, roles, powers, and responsibilities of individuals and institutions in the political system.

**SS.CV.2.4** Explain how a democracy relies on people’s responsible participation and draw implications for how individuals should participate.

**SS.CV.2.K-5** Processes, Rules, and Laws

**SS.CV.3.5** Compare the origins, functions, and structure of different systems of government.

**SS.CV.3.9-12** Analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, and agreements on the maintenance of order, justice, equality, and liberty.

**SS.CV.5.9-12** Analyze the impact of personal interest and diverse perspectives on the application of civic dispositions, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

**SS.CV.6.9-12** Describe how political parties, the media, and public interest groups both influence and reflect social and political interests.

**SS.CV.8.9-12** Analyze how individuals use and challenge laws to address a variety of public issues.

**SS.H.3.9-12** Evaluate the methods utilized by people and institutions to promote change.

**SS.H.7.9-12** Identify the role of individuals, groups, and institutions in people’s struggle for safety, freedom, equality, and justice.

**SS.H.8.9-12** Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically under-represented groups.

**SS.H.11.9-12** Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.