Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: All right. And it's noon, exactly, so, we'll get started.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Hi, my name is Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez. I'm a Curatorial Fellow for Diversity in the Arts at the Museum of Contemporary photography and welcome to “Behind the Lens.” This is a series we've been doing, basically—well since lockdown, where we invite photographers and, in this case, video artists, to give us a sort of virtual sneak peek into their studio.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Of course, studio can mean many things, in this case Natalia’s studio is in Puerto Rico right now.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, we are here with artist Natalia Lassalle Morillo who is exhibiting in the exhibition “Temporal,” that I have curated and it's up now at the MoCP until September 19th. If you're in Chicago you can make a reservation to go visit it in person, just go to our website to make a free reservation.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And so, a little bit about Natalia. She’s from Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. Theatre maker, filmmaker, visual artist, performer, and educator. Her work melts documentary, fiction, and performance in order to decentralize traditional canonical narratives and re-imagine our perspective on individual and collective histories.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: She earned the BFA in Drama from the experimental theatre wing at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and an MFA in Directing from CalArts School of Theater. She is currently based between Los Angeles, California, and Bayamón, Puerto Rico. And in this case, she's in Puerto Rico right now.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, she will be showing us talking a little bit about her work “La Ruta”, that is currently in the exhibition “Temporal,” but
mostly she'll be talking about new work, other work that she's been working on even now in Puerto Rico.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So yeah, we'll get started, I’ll let Natalia take over.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Hello. Okay, I'm gonna share screen.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: If you have questions, feel free to ask questions.


Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay, thank you Dalina, thank you, Kristin, and thank you, Marissa.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Okay, I’ll fade into the background now.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Thank you everybody who has made this possible. And, yeah, thank you everybody for taking an hour of your time to see and talk and learn more about what I'm doing and thinking.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Like Dalina said, my name is Natalia Lassalle Morillo. And even though I'm not a photographer and I do make images. I'm a theater maker, performer, performance director, filmmaker, installation maker.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And like Dalina said, a lot of my work focuses sort of in the melting of forms and the melding of mediums. So, I'm very much interested in the intersection between performance and film and liveness and permanence within form, but I'm also interested in you know the convergence of fiction, non-fiction, documentary, and embodied performance as a means to disorient the way that we perceive narrative in history and truth.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Also, as a means to construct a new sense of truth or a new sense of what we think history is. I think a lot of my work, even though it's not about Puerto Rico, it is defined by me being born in Puerto Rico and it's really an attempt to understand my experience as a person who navigates in-betweens.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: You know, as a person who grew up in Bayamón but really started questioning and understanding Puerto Rican history after I left Puerto Rico when I was 17 years old. So, I think at this moment with my work, the questions that I'm asking have mostly to do with who tells history? And what is history? And when you grow up in a place where you're used to the fact that the government is not taking care of you and the history that you learn is quite skewed, then what is truth?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Within my work I collaborate a lot with non-actors and non-artists. Because I am interested in bringing those perspectives into this questioning of what is truth and what is history.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And like Dalina mentioned today I'm going to be mostly screen sharing a lot of stuff. I'm going to be screen sharing and screening a lot of my films.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And feel free to ask any questions as they come up. And I'm sure that if we don't answer them now, we'll answer them at the end.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay, so I think even though a lot of the work that I do is focused in filmmaking and documentary making. I want to start this conversation speaking about my work in theatre and performance because that is where a lot of my artistic and aesthetic and also interests began, I studied acting for many years.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I did an undergrad in acting and performance, and I think for me theatre really is the mother of art forms. You know, it's one of the oldest forms that we have in order to express feeling and express our consciousness and our history.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But it also is a practice of communion and ritual and collective understanding.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So even as I started working more in documentary, or film, I started thinking of film and making image as a performative act. And I'm always questioning performativity in filmmaking and image making and even, you know, as a way of melding these two forms, I think the most important thing that I've learned from making theatre is this collaborative process of being in a room with people and having to make compromises because of other people, but also you know that this form of making lifeness. Because for me lifeness is extremely radical because it is so fragile. And especially in these times where we're spending so much time on the computer, I think it's a big time to question lifeness. But also, because this form really asks you to be in service of something that's higher than you, something that's greater than you.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And that is something that I like to think about when I'm also making films and working with my collaborators in creating film works. And, you know, as I came from theater and started working in performance and performing myself, I started becoming a bit dissatisfied with that world and started working within documentary. And within photography as well, but mostly because of my interest in going deeper in truth, and going deeper, you know in the stories that surrounded me.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think at this moment in my practice, I'm still actively trying to figure out the intersection between these two. You
know, an intersection between how performance and theatricality and narrative and fiction exist within the filmmaking experience also within the experience of spectating film. So how does the contexts, both political, social, geopolitical—I want to say too. Just the context that surrounds the space that the film is being presented can also become part of that conversation.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And then in live performance, how do you experience permanence? And how do you intersect performance with reality?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think also, a lot of my work even began inspired by the work of Ariella Azoulay and her idea of potential history, which is really a way of thinking about history, taking in consideration, who we are in the telling, or the capturing of images, when we're in a world where constant violence becomes an image, as well. So that is something that also intervenes with a lot of what I'm doing.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But to start, I'm going to take us back five years and I'm going to start with a work that took me six years to make. And it's called “Retiro.”

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And “Retiro,” was a work that began in late 2014/2015 and it's a piece that I started making in collaboration with my mother.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: The work began, not as a project or not as a creative endeavor. I decided to move back to my mother's house after her mother died. And I think I was living in Germany at the time and I had this huge urge to just return to my mother. Mainly because I started feeling empathy because of the fact that she had lost her origin and it made sense for me to be there.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And when I moved back into her house. I started thinking of her experience and decided to start interviewing her as a means for us to really start getting along because you know, I think we all have an
experience of returning home, and going back home, and going back to that route and feeling chaotic.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I think in a way it was a means for us to communicate. And in that process of interviews and her giving me her perspective, not only on her current situation of grief, but also on her body and her experience being a woman who grew up on this island.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I decided to collaborate with her in writing a script about a memory of her life.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And the whole idea behind the script was mainly for us to work together, but also to give her an opportunity to realign her relationship to her past.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, everything goes on the script. I told her, forget about the truth, you know. Really focus on how you wish to remember this- this moment. And I gave her total control over the artistic direction, the style of the film, and casting as well. So, we had a whole production set and pretty much tried to make this film happen.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But in that process. We were looking for somebody to perform her and she decided to cast me in the film, which was not part of my plan, but in a way, I sort of surrendered to that idea. So, it really transformed into another project that is more about her attempt of making- our attempt of making this film that is a memory of her life.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But also, since it took five years to make. There's a history that is happening peripherally on the island. Which is, you know, if I were to pinpoint a couple of the phenomena, you know, it was the PROMESA bill to, you know, 2016. Then it was hurricane Maria in 2017. She also was going- she was getting surgery and going through some other personal situations. And then in 2019, we had Ricky Renuncia.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, in a way, it tracks that whole peripheral history and it really became an attempt for both of us to shift our perspective on our own family's history and accumulated trauma. And accumulated trauma also just in relationship to this place.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I'm going to screenshare because I think it's best if you watch a little bit of it. So, I'm going to screen some- I think, a little bit of the beginning and a little bit of the end. Or maybe just the beginning for the interest of time.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And you know, this film as many of my other film works is a multi-channel film work. And that means that I work with three video channels. So, it's three images that are happening simultaneously, that are going on at the same time.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think my interest in that is really to consider the convergence of all of these perspectives that are manifesting.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And in the case of this film, it's really, well, my mother's attempt to direct this film. It is the film itself and then the peripheral history that surrounds it that I mentioned earlier. So, I'm just going to screen a little bit of this.

Mother: And it deviated from what I imagined my life to be when I grew up.

Natalia: And in terms of casting me, what was the decision behind that?
Mother: Well, because you are the actor that can portray me the best in terms of physical appearance, and because you have qualities, no? That are a reflection of who I am.

Mother: For example, one thing that I've discovered in my life process is that I am becoming my mother.

Voice: At the top of the earth’ this is what death is, according to Plato, and this is what the bible is based on. But truly, the soul does not die.

Natalia: How would you end this film?

Mother: I would end this film when she tears her wedding dress, turns it into a pillow for her dog and then takes the card her dad gave her, already decided that she has to break her marriage, legally and emotionally, so she can be born again and perhaps begin a new life.

Natalia: We have to do that again and close the windows because the coquíes are singing already.

Mother: Those are the coquíes? Not lizards?

Natalia: No, those are coquíes.

Natalia: How are you becoming your mother?
Mother: I’m becoming my mother

Natalia: Why?

Mother: Because I look at my reflection and I think of her. I see her in the physical aspect and in the emotional aspect. And if I don’t put an effort to my part, I will become her completely, even though she had her upbringing, and I had my own. I had some privileges she did not have that are a part of the socioeconomic changes that took place in this country in the 20th century. She grew up in extreme poverty and I grew up having everything I needed to live.

Natalia: Are you afraid of becoming your mother?

Mother: It isn’t fear. It’s not fear, I just wouldn’t want to become a person that depends on others to be happy. I want to find happiness within myself doing things I like, that after tripping and lifting myself up, repeatedly, I’ll get to a point in my life, where I won’t be able to lift myself up anymore.

Natalia: And when you mentioned that you didn’t want to, that I was the most adequate person for that role, and that you realized you are much more like your mother than what you thought, does that comment have anything to do with me?

Mother: Well, you look like me. Obviously, your soul is free, you are not subjected to the same social conventions I was subjected to. Because the nuns and the priests planted so many things in my head. Religion planted a lot of things in my head. Everything was evil, everything was a sin. But because of the physical aspect, you look so much like me when I was young. The same body, the same face. I always told my daughter, you, to never give up her dreams from nothing and for nobody. Why? Because I gave mine up and I don’t
want, I don’t want to repeat history, because history repeats itself, continuously. I don’t want to repeat history, everyone must make their own history, of their life. I sound like a philosopher when I talk, everyone must make their own history, of their life. I said all those things without thinking, without a script, with nothing.

Voice: It’s finished right? But it doesn’t say "the end." The coquíes slowly fade out.

Natalia: Are you hot?

Mother: Yes, It’s hot.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So those were some excerpts of the film.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And like many of my other works, it's not the case with “La Ruta,” but it is the case with “Retiro,” and “Conversations” which is the work that I'm currently developing. There is a theatrical or a life manifestation of the film. And these are just some images of a performance in 2017 which attempted to translate this film I made with my mother to a life form. And my mother couldn't be there, so I ended up casting three women that lived in Miami, who I ended up collaborating with in other films. One of them being Alvis, which I made a film called “Holguin, Hialeah” about her journey as a new immigrant to the United States at age 81.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But in this whole theatrical project of the theater- a lot of what I was interested in was having these women embody my mother's story.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And that is still a project that I would love to- that I'm interested in performing with my mother once COVID has passed.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Let me- I’m going to jump a little bit ahead just for the interest of time and I’m going to actually skip “Holguín, Hialeah” and take you directly to “La Ruta”.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Which is the project that is being presented right now at The Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago as a part of “Temporal.” “La Ruta” is a collaborative project that I made with photographers Christopher Gregory and Erika P. Rodriguez who are also part of the exhibition and who has spoken in the “Behind the Lens,” in the last two weeks.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And “La Ruta,” really is more than anything for me a road trip that we decided to take with a lot of questions in the back of our head as we were transversing the Panoramic Route.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, “La Ruta,” visually traces the infrastructure of the Panoramic Route. The Panoramic Route was the brainchild of Luis Muñoz Marín, who was the first elected governor and who was the governor who established ELA, the estado libre asociado, in Puerto Rico. But this route intended to provide a concept of progress to the island.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: It was supposed to mirror like an ID- like a fantasy route 66 on the island which could be a route that tourists could take but also locals to take in order to vacation.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: The whole project that was implemented also included recreational infrastructure and programs for these communities as an attempt to modernize the island after the ELA was established. It caught, the initial budget of this route was supposed to be 4 million and ended up costing 20 million dollars.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, you know, in this project that is a collaborative work between Chris, Erika, and I. We all took on different projects within this larger scheme—Erika was doing Polaroid photos and she ended up creating these postcards of different locations throughout the route and Chris did these large format prints of people that we met throughout the route but also of the infrastructure that we encountered and the landscape. And my focus was creating this film that is part of the exhibit which for me focused much more on, I would say three things. Which were the people that live in these areas and what their perspective is of this road or so what their idea of progress is in relationship to the political and social situation of the island.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But also, to really stop and observe the route. A lot of people go through the route, but don't stop. So, the film really involves the conversations, long takes of the scenery, and also these interviews.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I'm going to show you a little excerpt of the film.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: These are images, so you have an idea. It's also a three-channel piece, similar to Retiro, and the work that is presented at the museum is a collaboration with a Hungarian textile maker who lives in Puerto Rico.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And these curtains were made out of Abaca, which is banana and pineapple fiber. And the installation itself also includes a hammock. To give, you know, going back to what I said in the beginning, how the film experience and you know, this film was presented in a museum. So, it was a lot of how to think about the location where it was filmed and bring that into the space and into the viewing experience for the spectator.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I'm going to play an excerpt of the film.
Man in grey shirt: but it’s boring when there’s no baseball, look at us there’s not much to do, there’s not much movement. Well, you shouldn’t go because you’re taking photos.

Man in blue shirt: I leave, we go around, we go to the beach and everything because there’s no variety of distractions here. If I’m going to Caguas, or Guayama, or Salinas.

Man, in blue shirt: We take it because it’s as beautiful as road 14 which takes you to Aibonito, or from Salinas, which passes by the “Tetas de Cayey”, that’s how they’re called, but through the old road, it’s a beauty that huge rock, going up you don’t see it. The camera can’t capture it because it’s so close and you can’t get a good perspective and it’s impressive. Really, really, really awesome.

Man in blue shirt: I mean, they walk around with a sign that says “let me pray for you” but they pass by you and don’t even say hi.

Man in blue shirt: If you want to pray for me give me a blessing. How the aqua viva do.

Man in grey shirt: Have you been to fairs in the states?

Voice: Forget about that. Nor you nor I decided that, they decide that.

Voice: That’s deceiving the country. It’s a promise you can’t keep.
Voice: You know what’s deceiving the country? The "free associate state". It is not a state, it is not free, and it is not associated. It is just a vulgar colony and colonies are offensive. Anti-nature, against nature, anti-human, offensive, criminal.

Other voice: Pleased to meet you. Are you going down there?

Man in grey shirt: No, I’m not going. I don’t like going to those activities so you can get a free ball. At this point in my life I’m going to play with what?

Man in grey shirt: If I’m in love with a girl, I have to be able to tell her “I’m in love with you, would you like to be my girlfriend?”. She’s going to say: I congratulate you for your good taste, but no. That’s what you would say, right. But I tried to find a solution, the problem is that we haven’t asked for it and the doubt, the uncertainty, remains. The popular party saying they are not giving it to us. You don’t have to think I behalf of the Americans, the Americans can think in behalf of themselves. But ask for it, ask for statehood, and when they say no, then you figure it out.

Man in grey shirt: Where are you going to go? If you will continue being an embarrassing colony, disgusting. Or if you decide to seek refuge in the dignity of mankind and become the master of your destiny. It’s not complicated.

Man in grey shirt: The problem with statehood. I’m pro-independence, but whether you like it or not, the decision depends on the Americans. Someone has to say, “I want Puerto Rico to be a state,” “you guys won’t give us statehood,” “no,” then it’s all done.

Man in grey shirt: But they should ask for it, I think they should ask for it.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: *Inaudible*

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Can you hear me now?

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: A little bit.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Better?

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Oh, there.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay, I'll just move forward, because I think maybe with the video and me speaking at the same time, it becomes a bit complicated.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But I'll leave it here. So yeah, I just wanted to talk about the two projects that I'm working on right now, which is a bit of a departure from "La Ruta," and "Retiro."

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think has to do with what is in my mind right now. I think after studying, I spend the past three years studying directing and studying theatre. I think before going through this process of incubation and studying and thinking about directing so much, I used to think of directing as a form of developing structures and developing systems. And I don't know if that has to do with the fact that I went to military school for 10 years or something else. But I kept thinking about the need to develop a system.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And in studying theatre and working with so many collaborators in one space, who started realizing that it's not that much about what I'm doing, but what I'm allowing to exist. And what I'm seeing and how I listen deeply and how I observe. It's a lot about being present in the act of making and I started realizing that it's much more about observing the phenomena that is taking place and moving that phenomenon.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: As opposed to doing something. And I wanted to share one quote that I think, when I read it, I thought, oh wow this makes sense of what I'm feeling.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Which was a quote found in Maya Deren’s book “The Divine Horsemen.” It's a book that she wrote about her experience traveling to Haiti, but it really is a film of her attempt to trying to make a film about Haitian voodoo practices. Arriving at Haiti, with all of this equipment and all of these ideas and this film that she had written in her mind.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And then encountering the voodoo system as one that she could not capture on film and that she could not contain and she actually ended up visiting and revisiting Haiti and staying in Haiti. And the book really is very thorough descriptive, but also experiential document about Haitian voodoo as a system, as a spiritual system that can compare to the way that we see Greek mythology or understand Greek mythology. It's a really amazing book.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But I'm just going to share this quote in order to introduce myself into these two works.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But the quote goes “I began as an artist, as someone who would manipulate the elements of reality into a work of art in the image of my creative integrity. And I ended up by recording as humbly and accurately as I can, the logics I want to say the metaphysical experience of our reality which has forced me to recognize its integrity and abandon my own manipulations.”
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So that being said, let me take you into two projects that at after being in Puerto Rico for a month and a half. I've realized that they might be part of the same project, that they're not separate. But one of them is this project film work called “Paro,” - “Paro/Triptico.”

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And this is really an accidental film, I want to say because it...*inaudible*... is filming of being present in the protests of 2019 in Puerto Rico, the Ricky Renuncia protests.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I was really struggling with documenting and filming. I went with my camera and with my microphone and it was impossible for me to shoot it because there were so many things going on at the same time. Let me see if I can play.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: *inaudible*

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I bumped into friends...*inaudible*...Trying not to get teargassed and I’m teargassed in this footage. So, it's a really complicated set of information that I'm still trying to navigate and trying to understand how that exists and how that is translated into film a, because I'm really not interested in the success or failure of the protests, I'm not interested in furthering the- you know, the image, the images that are constantly created about protests at a time, sometimes romanticizing the experience.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I'm more interested in how to encompass this, as I mentioned earlier, Dionysian experience that takes place in....*inaudible*...
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, this is something and I am currently working on and I have attempted. I've had several attempts and trying to put on.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But like I said it my art of other projects, and with this I will finish the thought-

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Oh, sorry. It's hard to hear you again, I think if you just turn off, I think you can leave the video on but just turn off the volume.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay, what about now. Can you hear me now?

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Yeah.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay. Cool. Yeah, I think the video and me talking at the same time becomes a complicated action.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: I think you can leave the image, but maybe just turn down the volume. If you want the video playing on.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Okay, we're almost done so.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Straight into the background thing again.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But that project— I'm understanding and I'm explaining myself to you as I'm trying to understand I think is a part of this other project that is a long-term project that I've been working on for three years, which has the working title “Conversations From Tragedy” or “En Parábola.”

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And this is a film and performance project that attempts to adapt and contextualize Greek texts to the current social and political experience of Puerto Rico and the diaspora.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, the film and the project really utilizes the structure of the Greek tragedy. And attempts to adapt it with a cast of Puerto Ricans that are from the island of Puerto Ricans that live in different communities in the United States. Which is for me, I'm working particularly with New York, Buffalo, Chicago, and Orlando.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Orlando being a fascinating diaspora because of all the different levels of arrival of the diaspora.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But, I mean, the reason why I'm working with the tragedy as a form is because people assume the Greek tragedies is the most traditional thing, but it really is not.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: It is really time and logic and the system of the Greek tragedy is not conventional. Everything's happening at the same time. And after I came back to Puerto Rico after the hurricane, I started understanding what's happening as somebody who didn't experience the hurricane while reading Greek tragedies and understanding the connections and seeing all these connections.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And Greek tragedies initially were this forum that was established in order to convene, to bring together those people who had left to go to war and the people that had stayed in the city state.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: To convene and experience a sense of catharsis together and then have a Dionysian fest and have a collective understanding of the consciousness of the town—after a catastrophe.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I've been thinking a lot about that in the context of Puerto Rico as a place, who is dealing with an accumulation of tragedy, an accumulation of phenomena. You know, and I say, if I were to track back the last six years, we have the PROMESA bill, we have the economic crisis, we have hurricane Maria, we have the government and dealing with the political system, we have Ricky Renuncia, we have the earthquakes.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: We have everything that has happened with los suministros (relief aid/supplies) and all of the spectacles that take place on a daily basis. So, what is my question with this film is really how, what is the new consciousness that is developing? And like what is the spiritual system? Or what is the metaphysical system? Or what is the system that we can't rationalize, that exists among everybody that calls Puerto Rico their home? And I'm including the diaspora in that question because I'm interested in the convergence of all these different ways of experiencing the island and how all of these experiences are valid. And how I know that if it weren't like the diaspora has taken a big part in the reconstruction of the country after hurricane Maria and there were parallel protests that were taking place last year, to the protests here.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, it's really opening up that question.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And allowing there to be no answer. I'm just attempting to find a communal ground within all of these people.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And then giving them the opportunity to understand this text and change it in whichever way they want, or you know, mostly redirected to their own relationship of the island. And I worked on this piece, I've been working on it for three years and I did a first draft, with
my mom because she is always down to work with me, and she will be part of the final film.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But right now, it's still a work in progress because of COVID but also because I have a lot to shoot. So, it's not only going to be my mom, but hopefully a cast from all of these different communities.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So yeah, I think Dalina, for me that is it because I know we're on time. I can continue, but I also want to open up and converse and see if there's anybody who has questions or if you have questions.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Yeah, we can make these last 15 minutes, it can be a conversation if people have questions, feel free to type it into the chat. We do have a comment. Someone says “estamos aqua con cariño, deste Republica Dominicana

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I couldn't hear you. Sorry.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Oh, sorry. Let me see, can you hear me?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Yeah.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: I’m speaking in Spanish, sorry.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Okay, so the comment is in Spanish, it says estamos aqua con cariño, deste Republica Dominicana, aprendieron de la ELA.
Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Someone named Júlia.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Hi Júlia.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So yeah, someone's just saying hi from the Dominican Republic for-

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Hi Júlia.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So yeah, if anyone has questions.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Someone on Facebook says hi from Peru and hi from Ireland.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So those are the comments. We have people watching us everywhere except Chicago and Puerto Rico.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, yeah, feel free to type in questions in the chat. If you have questions for Natalia.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: To start off, I think one part in the video where we couldn't hear you very well, you were explaining something. I kind of knew what you said because I know a little bit about the video, but when you were talking about “Paro.”
Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: I think you were talking about how the camera- you didn't intend to have your camera on and then it kind of turned on and then you just kind of let it happen. And then you also got teargassed after that, so you were actually running from the tear gas. I think that was the part where we couldn't hear you. So, if you could go back to that that would be great.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Yeah, I mean what I was- let me return in my head. I think what I was trying to say is that, you know, at that point in time, I was really struggling with documenting the protest and I gave up because I just wanted to be present.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I realized that it was it was quite difficult to not do what the media was doing, which is take these images and they- I think when I'm working in Puerto Rico, I'm always thinking about how the image that I'm making is read and perceived and understood in the United States and elsewhere. So, I gave up.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And then the camera turned on. The camera, one night I accidentally left it on, and it just received all this information. Like it was images, but it was also sound, it was conversations that I was having with the people that were with me.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: There's people that I encountered as we were trying to pass Plaza de Armas to get away from the police and then when I encountered the material, I was really thinking of how to work with this material on how to make something with this material.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Because I was not interested in making a documentary- or a conventional documentary about the protest but more- nor thinking about the failure or the success of the protest. But attempting to document- attempting to capture the experience of the protests, which is this
chaotic Dionysian experience where everything's happening at the same time, and how the protest for me experiencing them as a body in the space.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: The protests were also an experience of grief and an experience of people coming together after the hurricane and deciding that it was enough.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, my interest with the piece as it stands is how do you create- how do you recreate that experience as a person, for the spectator who's walking into the installation space?

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: We have three questions so... The first one is, do you think there are two Puerto Rico's? One that is the viewpoint from the locals living in Puerto Rico and another from those that live in the mainland, the US but have family living in Puerto Rico?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Hmm. I mean, I think, for me, it's not about- like I actually had a conversation yesterday that had to do. I've been talking to a lot of- to several Puerto Ricans who were not born in Puerto Rico, who are Nuyorican. And I've been asking these questions to them. Like, what is your relationship to this place?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think there's not one, I think there's plenty. I think there's many. And it's not about what it means to be Puerto Rican, but it's really a lot about- for me as I'm questioning, it's about what you can rationalize as you try to make a connection to the territory or to the land.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I think there's many different Puerto Rico’s. You know, many different experiences that- even me being a person who's constantly leaving and coming back, like I'm here, but in two weeks I'm not going to be here. And I'm experiencing Puerto Rico from the distance and that gives me a different relationship to the island.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I think we all have a relationship to the home, to the territory, that is constantly changing. That is constantly moving. Especially because in Puerto Rico there's something happening every day.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And there's, you know, just as there is many Puerto Rico’s, depending on our relationship, you know, if you were Puerto Rican who grew up in New York, I think your Puerto Rico is very different than a Puerto Rican who grew up in Minnesota. And who never went to the island.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But I do think all of those ideas are valid. All of those ideas of belonging or non-belonging, or in-betweens are extremely valid. That's my opinion. I think everybody can have a different way of seeing that.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, second question is, did the film you worked on with your mother- was it as much a project for her to heal as it was for you to heal in your relationship with her?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I mean, I think for me I didn't know I was making a project with her when I started working with her.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And my focus was mostly her, but it didn't occur to me until last year. Cause I finished this film during the protests, like literally during the protest- I would go in the morning, I would go during the night to protest and in the morning, I would be finishing editing and finishing the sound mix.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: It wasn't until I decided to pretty much, you know, rethink all the edits that I had done over four years and see all the footage and also include myself and also implicate myself.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: That I started realizing, oh, it's also an experience of me coming to terms with history and coming to terms with what I've inherited. And coming to terms with the fact that the only way that this, you know, more than a project or a film, it's really something that I did for my mother and for me.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think we're both different after that. But it didn't occur to me that I was also going through something making it, until I started, I understood, that it was important for me to implicate myself. And the film changed a lot because I started, including things that were embarrassing for me to include. Like the fact that, you know, I'm- the way that I speak to my mother when I'm directing her is very different from the way that I speak to somebody else. And that I'm not nice all the time.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And that there's all this tension that's there. So, it was really- it became that for me, but I wouldn't say healing as much as I would say like we were transforming our relationship. Because healing is life long and goes beyond life. I think it's more of a transformation for both of us.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: We have two more questions.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Júlia, I'm interested in this connection, you are making between Maya Deren’s work and current cosmology/collective consciousness. Could you expand a little more on this?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Sure, hola Júlia.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Alegra mucha que esta aquí, Julia
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I mean, it's- I think, when I read Maya Deren's work regarding Haitian voodoo. I started- I was really struck by a line in the book where she speaks about how the system, the spiritual system that was created in Haiti is really specific.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And it's really profound, but it is based on the material circumstances of this place. It's not something that exists here, it's really, it has really emerged because of the fact that these people have endured and suffered so much, and you know went through revolution. And there's theories of- a lot of, you know, what is belief? Everybody believes something different, but it is said that, you know, it was through voodoo that the revolution- the Haitian Revolution really happen.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: So, I think I've been reading this book and thinking of what is the spiritual system? And a spiritual system for me, is really not this, you know, it's not about going beyond. It's really about being grounded and present. And a spiritual and a cosmology does not have to mirror the way that we view religion or understand religion, like it can actually be very mundane.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: It can be the metaphysics of the mundane, you know, it's a question that I have. But I do think that with this accumulation of experiences and phenomena and tragedy that have happened in Puerto Rico, there's a new consciousness that has to be developing.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I don't know what that is. That's why I'm asking these questions. And I'm reading this book and just gathering more information about what that could be.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Yeah. A lot of questions.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: I want to read that book.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Everybody should try to read it.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, our last question, and I think this is for sure the last question, because we have about four more minutes.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: In your opinion, in that in-betweenness experience of home, what is the role of land and connection to land?

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I mean, I think that this is also a question, like, I'm going to give my opinion. I think everybody has a different relationship to what in-betweenness means. I think in-betweenness can be experienced in many ways.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: For me and I'm speaking from my visceral relationship, I think when I try to rationalize to other people- when I'm not in Puerto Rico, why I work so much with Puerto Rico and why it's so important for me to work and tell stories and make an archive of the history of this place.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I always bring it back to the fact that when I'm here there is a very visceral experience that happens to me that- and maybe this is because I was an actor and I performed. So, I'm always thinking about the body and how the body relates to place.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But for me, it's very visceral, it's like gravity's thicker. It's harder for me to leave.
Natalia Lassalle Morillo: And I think that's not an experience with Puerto Rico, I think that's an experience with whatever home means to anybody. But for me, beyond the rational, you know, it's really a physical experience. Where my body feels different. And then I start thinking differently. And I started seeing differently and I start questioning things differently. And I then become a bit more careful of how I document and think and talk about this place. So, for me, it's that and then there's, you know, all the material information. Like the political situation and histories that we've inherited over time.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But for me it's really a lot about the fact that this is an island that exists in the Caribbean. That is a volcanic island and that is in constant atmospheric and seismic trip.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Seismic- is that how you say it? Like in constant threat of earthquakes, you know, and that for me has a lot of information already and has to do with my connection. Even though I'm not here, even though I might be in California and I might be dealing with another reality. I'm always feeling this. This gravitational pull to this territory.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Yeah, when we were planning this “Behind the Lens,” one thing that you mentioned to me is that you’d kind of prefer to do it while you were in Puerto Rico. And in the mindset and the body of being in Puerto Rico.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Yeah.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And to have it in the background.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: But even- I know we're done, but in terms of the in-betweenness that I'm also aware that this experience of in-betweenness- people experience it while only living here and people experience it while being a first generation or second generation. So, it’s an idea and an
experience that extends beyond me being back and forth. I think everybody can relate to it in a different form.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And speaking of that— the one last comment we have was “Puerto Rico presente” so... presente tambien.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, yeah. I guess we're done.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Thank you all for joining “Behind the Lens,” with Natalia Lassalle Morillo.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Remember that you can see her work at the Museum of Contemporary Photography if you're in Chicago.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Also, we are recording this, so if you know someone who really wanted to watch it and missed it, we're going to post it on our Vimeo page. Probably sometime next week.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: We post all our “Behind the Lens,” recordings on the MoCP Vimeo page. You can also go back to the events page on the website. And once we have the recording, we’ll have it embedded on there as well.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And as well as Erika’s and Chris's and other “Behind the Lens.”

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So yeah, remember “Temporal: Puerto Rican Resistance,” is on view now at the MoCP up until September 19th by
reservation. You can go to the website to make the reservation if you want to see it in person.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: You can also go to our website to see the other materials like the exhibition essay and the tour- the virtual tour in Spanish and English. There's two versions.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So yeah, thank you for watching. Stay tuned for next week. We have a program with artist Ojos Nebulosos who is also in “Temporal.”

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And the week after, we also have one with Adriana Parilla also. So, keep an eye on that because we're going to be posting more about that. So, thank you all for joining and thank you Natalia.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: Thank you for making time, making time.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: And it looks like we beat the loudest storm so...

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I can hear it though. I can hear it. I see the gray skies right here.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Because we were worried like, about power and stuff, but we made it. We did it and people are saying thank you. Someone said that was amazing, thanks.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: So, I think, yeah.
Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Okay, thank you. More thank you’s pouring in.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Thank you all and thank you Natalia.

Dalina Perdomo-Alvarez: Yeah, go to mocp.org for more and that’s it.