

## **ADÁL**

Born 1948 in Utuado, Puerto Rico, lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico after many years in New York City.

Adal Maldonado known as ADÁL is an innovative and celebrated artist. As have many other artists of his generation and due to his complex view of double identity, ADÁL has systematically explored identity issues to their ultimate consequences.

ADÁL is the author of "La Mambopera" and is known for his collaborations with different artists. He conceived and directed "Mambo Rap Sodi" in collaboration with Pedro Pietri and Tito Puente presented at the Joseph Papp Public Theater, 1990, NYC and has collaborated with Ntozake Shange author of "For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When The Rainbow's Enuff", creating the Photographic Environmental Design for Ms. Shange's "Love Space Demands", Crossroads Theater, New Brunswick, NY 1994.

ADÁL has exhibited and is in the permanent collection of, Museum of Modern Art, NY, San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA, El Museo del Barrio, NY, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France, Musée de la Photographie à Charleroi, Belgium, Lehigh University Art Galleries, Bethlehem, PA, and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. A retrospective of his work was exhibited at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies with an accompanying book/catalog published by Harvard University Press, 2004-2005 and the series, "Out of Focus Traffik Signs" was on view at Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico.

ADÁL's work is currently represented in the traveling collective exhibition "Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art" produced and curated by the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. He is currently working on an imaginary Jíbaro Opera. This thought experiment deals with genetic experimentation on unsuspecting farm workers on a remote region of the island entitled, "La Isla del Espanto".

>>> [www.adalmindfictions.com](http://www.adalmindfictions.com)

### **Works:**

"Operation Mind Scrub: Toward a New Global Colonialism / Flaco Delgado", 2014

"Operation Mind Scrub: Toward a New Global Colonialism / María Luna", 2014

*Individually framed prints in a light box, 20" x 29"*

### **Artist's statement:**

In an ideal and independent nation people act according to their free will and are able to shape their destiny through collective decisions. Within the context of "Operation Mind Scrub: Towards a New Global Colonialism" the citizen surrenders self-determination (an individual's consciousness of his own identity or being that is essential to the mind or soul) in return for the creation of a perceived state of Utopia where their needs are met by the government's intervention in their daily lives.

The negotiation allows the willing insertion of a two-way device in the subject's head that allows the charting of mental thoughts, vision, hearing, feelings, and behavioral reactions. At the onset of any intrusive conflicting thought or impulse, corrective currents begin immediate behavioral rehabilitation to re-establish harmony with their circumstances in the body politic and to re-establish the blissful experience of their colonial comfort.

## **ae.i.ou**

ae.i.ou, the art collective formed by Victor **Nieto Villalon**, \*1982 and Pedro J. **Santa**, \*1982, has been featured in architectural magazines and art exhibitions since 2007. The collective has conducted research and design projects that deal with urbanism, architecture and the use of public space.

>>> [www.ae-i-ou.com](http://www.ae-i-ou.com)

### **Work:**

“Des-Control de Acceso”, 2011

*Print, 48" x 18"*

### **Artists' statement:**

Nobody wants to live in inert cities. It is part of human nature to be curious and feel attracted to a dynamic society. But we live in a world, where consumerism has distorted our way to interact with our environment. Our cities have become static. As artists we are free to interpret the human condition and come up with ideas about the use of public spaces in order to lead people out of social isolation.

## Denise Bennerson

Denise Bennerson, PhD is an award winning professional photographer. The daughter of native Crucian parents, she was born 1953 in New York and raised on St. Croix where she still lives.

From a child was always passionate about photography. For over twenty years she has showcased her photography on her website (>>> [www.homelandcollections.com](http://www.homelandcollections.com)) focused on Virgin Islands' people, history and culture. Former president of, "St. Croix Digital and Film Photography Club" and has conducted numerous workshops on photography and technology. She was voted "Best Photographer" by Virgin Island Daily News readers and received a Wedding and Portrait Photographer International Accolade of Excellence for her portraits. She owns "Homeland Collections Portrait Gallery, LLC".

For the last ten years, Bennerson focused on photographing weddings. She designs coffee table albums, slide shows, and wall portraits for wedding couples.

Recently she was honored by the Virgin Islands Small Business Development Center as the "2013 Nascent Small Business of the Year." She publishes on line and in print "Elegant St. Croix Caribbean Weddings" (>>> [www.stcroixcaribbeanweddings.com](http://www.stcroixcaribbeanweddings.com)) magazine to promote St. Croix as a wedding destination and give local businesses exposure to the world about their wedding services. She lives in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands.

### **Works:**

"Bits and pieces of the Wedding", 2014  
*Coffee table album and calendar*

### **Artist's statement:**

For "Colonial Comfort" I showcase photographs of accessories that add to the décor of a wedding. Center pieces, table decorations, place cards, flowers and candles are very important parts of the wedding, even if sometimes over looked by the others.

The focus of any wedding is the bride and groom. But it is the little things selected by the wedding couple that adds that special touch to a wedding. If accessories are selected and not there, the bride will express her dismay with the décor to her wedding coordinator. In one case, a bride even wanted me to reshoot the reception area another day with all the accessories. I informed her it would not be the same.

No matter the economy, time in history or place: weddings are celebrated at any time and the décor and accessories for the wedding are chosen based on how the couple feels, and on how it wants other people to feel, when they come in to the ceremony or reception.

## David Berg

David A. Berg was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico and raised on the island of St. Croix. Ever since he can remember, he has always had an appreciation for art, and even more so, a respect for the artist. Although he had never truly found a medium to work in, he always had a dream to create art. It wasn't until he experienced a serious physical injury during his studies in the U.S., that a medium found him. In order to distract himself, from the physical pain, a good friend advised him to pick up a camera. He has not put it down since then. As he started to explore this new way to express himself, friends would see his work and describe it in a way that made him feel like an artist. From these experiences, photography became a very important part of his life. He wanted to improve and learn about this skill. He left the school he was attending and transferred to the Center for Digital Imaging and Arts at Boston University. From CDIA, he gained certification for photography. He is now living in St. Croix doing what he loves such much.

>>> [www.blackwoodimaging.com](http://www.blackwoodimaging.com)

### Works:

"Currents of the Past"

"Shadows of Yesterday"

"Paradise?"

*Photographic works, framed, 11" x 14"*

### Artist's statement:

There are certain elements of our culture that we celebrate today, accepted and revered that are indeed rooted in a very dark history forgotten. Through the medium of photography, I wish to present a different perspective about specific parts of our Caribbean culture. I want to keep the audience aware and engaged through my photography that the way our culture is today is because of history that was not have always positive.

"Currents of the Past": For many of us the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea was the path that our ancestor used either by force or choice to find themselves living in the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico. Many that were forced to take the journey, never made it to the intended destination. They found themselves lost amongst the currents of the sea, currents of the past.

"Shadows of Yesterday": The Sugar Mill is now a symbol of Crucian culture and is used today as a "Comfort" setting for special occasions. These may include upscale vacation homes, villa rentals, settings for wedding photos, and other celebrations, despite its horrid past of slavery during colonial times. Slaves were held in chains as they constructed these edifices that are now symbols of comfort. While today tourists enjoy these sites with no knowledge of the history.

"Paradise?": This photo expresses the concept of giving up something unseen for the comforts of modern day parking lots. This is depicted through two Taíno descendants standing at the parking lot of the Columbus Landing Site, a National Historic Landmark. The backdrop is the only sign at the site that mentions the parking lot's history of once being a ball court, a ceremonial site belonging to the native Taíno.

## **Diane M. Butler**

Born in Chicago, USA in 1968, Diane Butler has been living in St. Croix, USVI for 24 years. Over this time she has been creating over fifty thousand images for commercial and private clients as well as for her own archives, mainly featuring island life.

She is the publisher and photographer for the St. Croix Explorer Map, a travel guide and map of St. Croix, the journal Crucian Time, and the yearly St Croix Calendar.

>>> [www.dmbutler.com](http://www.dmbutler.com)

### **Works:**

Five untitled still lifes, photographed with a 1948 Spartus medium format film camera using T-MAX 400 ASA black and white film. Printed on 10" x 10" Ilford Multigrade FB Fiber paper, framed to 14" x 14".

### **Artist's statement:**

Representing my interruption of "Colonial Comfort" I have decided to photograph, in a month, my idea of what this statement means to me. I used a medium format 1948 camera and traditional film to produce these images. I intended to use a camera from the past, to create still life photos of things that brought us comfort in that time period. My hope is that the photographs bring the audience back to a time when life was simple and as a colony we enjoyed our own simple pleasures.

## Nicole Canegata

Nicole Yvette Canegata was born in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands to a Puerto Rican Crucian mother and a Crucian West Indian father. She is fifth generation Crucian on her father's side, and has spent most of her life on the island where she is currently based. Nicole holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from Brooks Institute, a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from Duquesne University, and is an alumna of the Institute for Shipboard Education's, Semester at Sea program. She is a commercial, editorial and fine art photographer who is fascinated with people, places, architecture, food, nature, fine art and documentary photography. To date, she has traveled to 6 continents, 48 countries and 185 cities across the globe. Her fine art prints have been featured in several exhibitions in the U.S. Virgin Islands and California. Particularly, her first solo exhibit, "The Traveling Lense" was the catalyst that inspired her to quit her financial research job of 8 years and pursue photography as a full-time career.

>>> [www.nicolecanegata.com](http://www.nicolecanegata.com)

### **Works:**

*Framed photographic prints, 16" x 20", from the series "Colonial Detachment"*

"Hovensa Oil Refinery: Our Last Hope" (diptych): Paradoxically, the Hovensa Refinery was our economy's beacon of hope for the last 50 years, and since the refinery shut down in 2012, this autonomous modern "colonial" institution has contributed to the stifling and worst economic downturn our island of St. Croix has seen in its history.

"Bambula Entranced" is a portrait depicting a Bambula ceremony at Whim Great House, which was performed by the slaves in the Virgin Islands & Puerto Rico. In this photo, the young woman is channeling the disheartened, discomfort, repression and identity void, felt by her ancestors that were enforced by colonial masters.

*Framed photographic prints, 20" x 16", from the series "Cultural Ramifications"*

"Estate Profit": A cultural sense of pride always prevails within this local housing community despite life's apparent hardships.

"Colonial Identity": The conscious choice to leave the PR and USVI flags in color is symbolic that we are not entirely part of the US - we are U.S. Citizens, but don't have the same rights as US mainland residents, in many respects; culturally we are so different and don't necessarily identify as being Americans. Sugar cane in the background is also significant - the industry brought many of the Puerto Ricans to St. Croix, uniting both cultures, but in the end, it was representative of another major colonial influence: the Danish West Indies.

### **Artist's statement:**

To be able to speak through my lens and give an image / person / event, a voice; create a story; stir discussions and dialogue; or shed light on a particular subject, is my driving force. Being able to capture a moment and duplicate it in time is like modern day magic in my book. To have my viewers emotionally connect with my images and subject matter is one of the main objectives in my work. Photography allows me to be honest, to be free, to be ever present, and to honor my subjects and the world around me. With that said, I am proud of my unique and cultural heritage and with this body of work that I am exploring / showcasing, I would like to convey through my lens the symbiotic relationship of Puerto Rican Crucians, apparent colonial detachment and ramification factors, and how all of this relates to the colonial comforts of present day society.

## Janet Cook-Rutnik

Born in New York, resident of St. John, USVI since 1969.

Cook-Rutnik studied sculpture at graduate level with Richard Stankiewicz at SUNY (1968), printmaking at Skidmore College, NY (1990), public art, installation and new media at the School of Visual Arts (2006) and was a Mid Atlantic Arts Creative Fellow, VCCA, VA (2011, 2008).

She has exhibited in museums and galleries in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Bahamas, Cuba, New York, Trinidad, France, Italy, Barbados, Argentina, Switzerland, the Dominican Republic and Germany. Her work is in museum collections in Havana, Cuba, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Washington, D. C., and the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas, U. S. Virgin Islands.

Current work involves collaborative and solo projects in multimedia, which deal with migration and journeys in a personal and collective way and the impact of colonialism in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean.

>>> [www.cookrutnikart.vi](http://www.cookrutnikart.vi)

### Works:

"The House of Dreams", 2014

*Mixed media installation, 54" x 27" x 1.5"*

In this piece photographs were transferred to found objects: some of the photos are from the USVI archives; the portrait and group of people in front of a building are USVI archive photos, the other photos; the West Indian cottage in the yard, the Gingerbread house and the derelict building were taken by the artist. Among the objects are the machetes that were used to cut sugar cane, called "bills" in the USVI. They have photos transferred onto them that were taken by the artist from "Free Women of Color with their Children and Servants in a Landscape", an oil painting by Agostino Brunias. This 18th century painting depicts colonial women of color as privileged and prosperous, and is now in the Brooklyn Museum.

### Artist's statement:

In the face of the violent and cataclysmic history of colonialism in the Caribbean the term "Colonial Comfort" seems an oxymoron. Great wealth was produced through the brutal production of sugar or white gold as it was called by the enforced labor of the enslaved Africans, who were the black gold. The remnants of this alchemy are all around us in the ruins of the centuries old sugar factories and plantation great houses. Because of the substantiality of these structures many of them will be here long after most of us are gone.

The humble dwellings built by the ancestors of these Africans and colonists who remained after the wealth from the white gold and the black gold had vanished, are fading daily from the landscape. These shanties, cottages, "naïf houses" were once the "House of Dreams" for those who held on and forged a future out of the rubble of abandonment and neglect. The euphoria of freedom fueled the monumental effort required to build a home, a society and a future. The pride, craftsmanship, and love is still evident in these noble structures that stand as a testament to a way of life that nourishes the soul through memory.

## Lionel Cruet

Lionel Cruet Morales was born 1989 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He lives in New York City and San Juan.

Cruet began studying art in Puerto Rico through summer programs at Universidad de Puerto Rico. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Escuela de Artes Plásticas and a Master of Fine Arts from the City College of New York (CUNY). Cruet's work has been included in many exhibitions including *Superreal: Alternative Realities in Photography and Video* at El Museo del Barrio, New York, and the 11th Media Arts Biennale at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile.

>>> [www.lionelcruet.com](http://www.lionelcruet.com)

### **Work:**

*"On Related Circumstances"*, 2009-2014

*Photographic installation, studio lighting barn door, dimension variable*

### **Artist's statement:**

A selection of digital photographs of abandoned and unfinished constructed houses represents the unused architecture in Puerto Rico. The photographs are mounted on three-dimensional structures in order to suggest imaginary houses or living spaces. Each structure represents an idea in progress. The lack of economy, and the uncontrolled development clashes with the desire to construct. Creating chaos of structures that depreciate without being completely fully developed.

The combinations of structures remind us of an ideal reality, the partial reality, and a reality in progress. While photography, the mechanical use of a camera and its two-dimensional result, represents time, the three-dimensional structures represent emptiness and hollowness, which can be understood through post-colonial theory.



## Mónica Félix

Born 1984 in San Juan, Puerto Rico; currently lives and works in San Juan and New York.

Mónica Félix is a professional photographer, self-portrait and visual narration artist. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, she studied her BA at the School of Communications of the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. She then moved to New York City where she formally completed studies in photography at Pratt Institute in Manhattan. Beyond the lens, through her feminine themes and her ambitious affirmations, Félix explores the needle and thread that unite life and art. In September 2013 she opened with her new body of work *Recámara* at the Lexus Grant for Artists exhibition titled *The Supremacy of Chaos* at the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico. Currently, Mónica Félix works between New York and Puerto Rico as a professional photographer expanding her conceptual body work in a parallel manner.

>>> [www.monicafelix.com](http://www.monicafelix.com)

### Work:

"... so one morning she packed her tainted heart and ran for the hills" (series of three images), 2014  
*Digital photography, 8" x 12" each, acrylic top*

### Artist's statement:

My work is a confessional, tightly bonded to the purpose of recreating an ocular recount that magnifies an exploration, a self-discovery. My perspective as a woman born and raised in a beautiful, small, chauvinistic and conflictive island in the Caribbean serves as the skeleton for my body of work. Through my projects I mean to recreate my own and other stories that come to relevance when attempting to fabricate the fantasy of a female, a puertorriqueña female in my case. If there is a way to "democratize all experiences by translating them into images" as once Susan Sontag wrote, I endeavor to visually narrate the anxiety that brings us closer, human experience.

"... so one morning she packed her tainted heart and ran for the hills" depicts a dream I had about leaving behind insularism, the Island's beauty and emptiness. It was a repeated scene of myself literally running for the hills that can be seen from my street, in my hometown. At the time I was struggling to progress on a personal and professional level. I wanted more and I knew I had to distance myself from the comfortable bliss of my life in Puerto Rico to get it.

Originally I'm from a town in a valley called Cayey. Early one morning, when the fog was over the mountains and everybody was still asleep I deserted ... Currently I live as an artist and professional photographer in New York City. My heart might never be whole again, but my escape turned out to be a happy adventure.

## Tina Henle

Tina Henle is an award winning freelance photographer with over 35 years of photographic experience. Henle grew up on St. Croix and graduated from the Good Hope School in 1976. In 1984 she received a BA in Art and Anthropology from the University of New Mexico and worked and mentored with her father, the photographer Fritz Henle, throughout the 1980's. Her interest in people and cultures are a central part of her work as well as landscape. Her work is documentary in style and un-manipulated in technique. She travels worldwide and has resided in St. Croix since 1993 where she currently operates the Henle Studio Fine Art Gallery in Christiansted along with her brother Martin Henle. She has exhibited her fine art photography in numerous group shows in the Virgin Islands as well as solo exhibitions at the Henle Studio.

>>> [www.tinahenle.com](http://www.tinahenle.com)

### **Works:**

"At the Well"

"On the Steps of the Church"

"Under the Arches"

*Images taken with iPhone, printed and framed, 11" x 14"*

### **Artist's statement:**

These images illustrate a paradox as the homeless are juxtaposed against the declining grandeur of the colonial past of Christiansted. The street people are a small part of the overall homelessness in the VI yet they are the most visible. They come from all corners of society and often live homeless for years.

Economic factors as well as mental illness, addiction and estrangement from family often contribute to this multi-faceted issue. Some comfort is offered and maintained by government as well as grass roots services yet much energy is needed for basic survival, health and safety on a daily basis. The idea of any real comfort in these situations seems remote.

**At the Well:** This image was taken at what is known as the Hendricks Market in Christiansted. It was one of the first planned public spaces built in 1735 as the vegetable market. The small building on the left in the background was and still is used as the privy, the public rest room. It is built over a major gut. It still has the original tile roof and its original integrity. The man is lying on top of the original well to which the title refers.

**On the Steps of the Church:** The church in this picture is the oldest church on St. Croix. It is located in Christiansted and was built in 1740 as the Dutch Reform Church. When the Danes took over the island in the 1840s it became the Lutheran Church.

**Under the Arches:** Christiansted's streets are lined with covered sidewalks that were built by the Danes. These archways on King Street provide shade from the strong tropical sun.

## Erik Miles

Erik Lief Miles is a fourth generation Virgin Islander of colonial Danish decent, but was born in Puerto Rico in 1968 and has an extensive Puerto Rican family. He lives in St. Thomas, USVI and works all over the Caribbean.

He grew up in the Virgin Islands, or more precisely in the studio of his father Ray Miles which was a production house specializing in motion picture and still photography. At the age of eight he received a Nikonos IVA and was quickly published, frequently landing magazine and newspaper covers. Also his professional film career started at an early age, working on sets of films such as "The Deep" and "Charlies Angels" (Love Boat Angels). By the age of 18 Erik had been a cameraman on documentaries for the BBC, National Geographic, and Jacques Cousteau.

His location, coupled with his technical skills put him in demand on film productions shooting in the Caribbean region. His specialty is underwater and Aerial cinematography. He has worked with some of the industries greatest talents. When he relocated to Miami, Erik began working on commercial shoots and music videos eventually transitioning back into feature films. The work took him all over the continental United States, Caribbean, South America, and Europe. Erik has returned to the Virgin Islands to pursue the production of his own films, (several of which have been given prestigious awards) and to dedicate himself to fine art photography and film making. One of his latest shoots was as the underwater DP/Operator for "Real Housewives of NY", and the last six Virgin Islands Department of Tourism spots.

>>> [www.studio5films.com](http://www.studio5films.com)

### **Works:**

"Broken Dream" / "Chinese Characters" / "Loss" / "Haitian Bible" / "Walking in their Shoes"  
*Photographs, 17" x 22"*

### **Artist's Statement:**

I have born witness to scenes that haunt me even now. I have watched the Yola's come ashore at night on Mona Island, which sits between Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic. Boats filled with people, fifty souls on a boat, standing room only. They don't see the government agents concealed in the tree line just behind the beach watching through night vision goggles which give them an alien appearance, they knew of the boats approach hours in advance. Boats white like the foaming waves under the moonlight as the bows knives into the sand and people spill out, men, women, children, babies, infants. One of the Yola's is caught broadside in a wave and pitches onto its side on the beach. A brief run for freedom, hope swelling in their chests, a chance of a better life, for them, their families, then they see the agents, hear the loudspeakers shattering the night, shattering their dreams the floodlights go on, the harsh light blinding them exposing cruel reality, a terrible lie told and sold to desperate people. The immigrants never had a chance, they have arrived at a small, desolate island in the middle of the sea 40 miles short of Puerto Rico. They are quickly rounded up and detained awaiting transport and processing.

I have watched this scenario played out over and over from Florida to the small keys and cays off the U.S. and British Virgin Islands.

A boat ran into a rock at night. People were wounded but rescued by a helicopter - just to be deported again. Among the things found on the small cays around St. Thomas: Chinese characters in a notebook, shoes and other personal items lost or left behind, crumbled pages from a bible in French. Were the refugees Haitian, Santo Dominican or Chinese?

They risk their lives to start a new one elsewhere. They are being let off the smuggler boats at night, thinking they have reached freedom. But when the sun comes up they find themselves on an uninhabited islet in the middle of nowhere.

I feel sorrow and admiration for them. To leave your family and friends, everything that you know, and surrender yourself to an often perilous ocean crossing - at the hands sometimes of very bad people. The desperateness that leads to this act and the incredible bravery it must take. I took these images to call attention to their plight. I never photograph the immigrants themselves. I don't want to do that to them, to catch them at one of the lowest points of their lives. I value their dignity. I always think about the countless others that didn't survive the crossing. They are somewhere out there, forever, Mothers, Fathers, children.

## Ray Miles

Raymond Miles was born and raised in London England, attending art schools and serving a photographic apprenticeship in the city of London with the Air Ministry before serving two years with the Royal Air force as a photographer in Singapore and Malaya. On returning to the civilian world and London, resumed life as a fine art student and photographer. He took a post as a ships photographer sailing between New York City and the Caribbean. Miles found New York, the Greenwich Village, and the art scene of that time most stimulating. It was the time of Pollock, DeKooning and Rothko. He later attended the Art Students league and worked as a freelance photographer working on assignment for advertising agencies.

A chance assignment took him to the Virgin Islands where he became completely sold on the Island way of life, its tropical beauty and its people. Amongst his photographic files are many excellent classic creative pictures of The Islands as they were in the 1960's. Island sloops lined up along the waterfront taking on, and unloading inter island cargo, others selling fish, exotic fruits and vegetables brought fresh from neighboring islands.

Ray Miles has been the recipient of many awards for his paintings and photographs, collectors valuing his work highly. Miles was honored by the Governor of the Virgin Islands with a gold medal and an excellence in the fine arts award. He is the father of photographer and filmmaker Erik Miles who also participates in "Colonial Comfort" and lives in St. Thomas, USVI.

### Works:

"Iron Cog & Whim Sugar Mill", Frederiksted, St. Croix, 1963

"Long Boom", King's Wharf, Christiansted, St. Croix, 1962

"Sugar not Paie", 1966

*All images printed 2014 on Hahnemühle Photo Rag paper (archival quality), 16" x 20".*

*Mounted on acid free mat board, 24"x 30" (unframed).*

### Curator's statement:

Ray Miles photos, taken in the 1960s in the U.S. Virgin Islands, remind us of better and not so good days in the past.

Estate Whim is a plantation, laid out in the 1730's by the Danish West Indian Company. The first records of ownership show cotton as being grown on the estate. By 1754, sugar had apparently become the main crop and so it continued until the 1920's, when sugar, long since an unprofitable industry on the island, gave way to cattle. The Sugar Mill now serves as a tourist attraction.

"Long boom" is a term used to refer to long periods of economic growth. In this case to the global period of economic growth following the Second World War from 1945 until the 1973 oil crisis which was also felt in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The King's Wharf in Christiansted was the center of trade on St. Croix in the Danish West Indies.

In 1966 Governor Paiewonsky put an end to 200 years of sugar production on St. Croix. The agricultural land these protesters were working on, was signed over to Hess Oil Refinery.

## Liza Morales Ortíz

Born on 1975 in Mayagüez and being raised in Cabo Rojo, both coastal towns of Puerto Rico helped her develop a close connection to the environment. This love for nature motivated her to pursue a bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, later on continuing to an MPH at the University of Puerto Rico, Graduate School of Public Health.

Photography has always been a tool for self-expression but for the past nine years, Liza Morales has focused her photography as a tool for social transformation. Her humanitarian and public health work with the non-profit Iniciativa Comunitaria (>>> [www.iniciativacomunitaria.org](http://www.iniciativacomunitaria.org)) in Puerto Rico, Haiti and Guatemala and other International NGOs in Latin America and Nepal have given her many visual stories to tell about resilience, social justice, drug addiction, homelessness but most of all about hope. Her freelance documentary work has been part of the 2010 VII International Photography Biennale of Puerto Rico, held at the Museum of the Americas, and received second place in the Human Interest category at the 18th Association of Puerto Rican Photojournalists Exhibition, both in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Liza resides in Santurce/San Juan, Puerto Rico.  
>>> [lizamoralesfotografia.carbonmade.com](http://lizamoralesfotografia.carbonmade.com)

### **Work:**

"La Calle", "Tendedero" series of 6 images, 2013-2014

*iPhoneography, 8" x 8", presented using found material (wire, clips, plastic straps)*

### **Artist's statement:**

"La Calle" ("The Street") reflects the many symptoms of our colonial complexity and inertia. The dangerous comfort that we as a country have come to normalize can be seen in all social strata – the most affected the ones being those with the least power. Our inability to move forward with public health policy and recognize violence as an end result has driven our social structure into a downwind spiral.

This visual documentation created during nightly street medicine interventions comes to be a mirror of how the lack of political and civic wills nurture cycles that perpetuate poverty just to maintain the status quo. It represents the bits and pieces of a parallel colony in which some of the more than 21,000 homeless people in Puerto Rico live in. It explores as a whole the political costs of punitive drug addiction policies and their reflection on the homeless – all while letting the human connection and dark beauty of the street be the driving force.

## Marta Mabel Pérez

Marta Mabel Pérez was born in Lares, Puerto Rico, 1968. Photographer, installation artist, museologist, curator. Pérez Maldonado received the President's Fellowship from the University of Puerto Rico to study art and architecture at the American University in Washington, D.C. In 1986 she completed her undergraduate degree in art at the UPR and received a fellowship from the government of Mexico to pursue a master's degree at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma in Mexico City, where she was awarded that institution's prize for academic excellence. In 2002, she was given the prize for the best installation in contemporary media by the International Art Critics Association, Puerto Rico Chapter. She has taken part in national exhibitions and international biennials, such as the First Prints Biennial in Argentina and the Vila Nova Biennial in Cerveira, Portugal. Recently, on the basis of her success in her project titled *Entre Islas (Between Islands)* in Tenerife, Canary Islands, she received a commission from the Department of Culture in Monza, Italy, to do a photography project. Her work can be found in private and institutional collections in Puerto Rico and Mexico. She has shown her photographs in Puerto Rico, at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, in Latin America, and in Europe. Both her photographs and her installations reflect a constant examination of situations that affect Puerto Rican society, and use a conceptual, contemporary idiom to explore subjects that reflect the collective and her personal life and blur the boundaries between art and public behavior.

### **Works:**

"Local Comfort on the 4th of July", 2014

"Local Comfort on Christmas", 2014

*Digital photography, 30" x 20", acrylic top, unframed*

### **Artist's statement:**

"Local Comfort" consists of a series of portraits of a boy who in the course of a year dresses up for the holidays that are being celebrated in Puerto Rico. The celebration of these holidays were imposed by commerce but are perceived as part of the local culture. "Local Comfort" invites you to rethink these traditions that reflect more the status of Puerto Rico than "real" Puerto Rican traditions.

## Herminio Rodríguez

Born 1971 in Madrid, Spain; American; works and lives in Puerto Rico.

Herminio Rodríguez is a photo journalist, a fine art and commercial photographer who set up his studio in San Juan's Barrio Obrero. Besides commercial food and package shots, he has also documented the design of drug bags found in the streets, covered weddings and "Quinceañeras" in social housing projects, has portrayed insects and Dominican immigrants and photographed erotic studios and motel rooms in Puerto Rico, assigned by their owners who needed images for their promotion.

>>> [www.herminiorodriguez.com](http://www.herminiorodriguez.com)

### Works:

"Motel Rooms (African)", 2012

"Motel Rooms (Asian)", 2012

*C-Prints, framed*

### Artist's statement:

Among all colonized cultures there is a strange resemblance with sex and politics. The more conservative the culture is, the more sex is taboo. Lust and fetishism are hidden under the skirt of intimacy. The lusty behavior and thoughts are often repressed. In a hidden spot or a secret place or in a certain hour with a certain light there is a precise moment in which those feeling are released. Sometimes sex is good, sometimes it turns violent. Everything depends on how spectacular the environment is. If it looks good and comfortable, if everything is well designed, at least 75% of the conditional approval is reached.

A lot has been written about the use of sex as a weapon or as a way of control in conservative spheres of society in which sex becomes violent. Also, the oppressor assumes violence a price to pay in order to reach some kind of comfort, to experience something new, and reach the expected climax. Usually, that is the rule, and it always ends on depression under the oppression.

In the "Motel Rooms" series, the motel room is as metaphor for a colonized environment. The relationship between "love" and "lust" (the bed and the "Love Machine") resemble the relationship of a good colony and the empire. In the Caribbean there are great colonies (not going to mention any). Much of them look like paradise. Palm trees and beautiful beaches, great weather, nice people, superb food are a few of the details that persuade us to think, that we have reached 75% of the conditional approval. We are comfortable enough.

But the price we pay for that comfort is represented by the "Love Machine". Totally awkward and at the same time familiar. Its analytical and obstetric design makes it clear, that you have to work in order to reach pleasure. And the pleasure is not guaranteed, as the lack of practice, courage and experience won't let you easily reach a climax in such a mechanical environment. But there is no time for practice - the "Love Machine" cannot always be conquered.

You just want to fulfill a desire. But when you think you're close to your goal, the "Love Machine" turns out to be too uncomfortable. That is when depression arises and oppression begins. Violently, guilt turns into weakness. A quick end. That sums up, what the remaining 25% of our debate consist of: politics.

At the end we abandon the "Love Machine", turn to the bed, and dream with geishas and zebras.

## Steve Simonsen

Born in Michigan, and attending school in Boulder CO, professional photographer Steve Simonsen has lived in and worked in locations around the globe such as Moorea, Egypt, Micronesia, Mexico, Bahamas and Virgin Islands. For the past 24 years, Steve has been based on the island of St. John, USVI.

A tireless explorer and documentarian, Steve has brought alluring scenes of natural tropical beauty to everything from resort marketing to stock photo collections to coffee table books. He is a stock and assignment photographer as well as a diving instructor and underwater naturalist with year-round access to the Caribbean. His specialties include underwater, nature and aerial photography, photography of villas and resort properties, and HD video productions. He offers workshops and is a member of the American Society of Media Photographers, PADI and NAUI instructor.

>>> [www.stevesimonsen.com](http://www.stevesimonsen.com)

### **Works:**

Four images of villas in the USVI.

*two 8" x 12" and two 12" x 8" standouts*

### **Curator's statement:**

Clicking my way through Steve Simonsen's archive of photos taken of mansions in the Caribbean I felt like browsing through a catalogue featuring five star resorts in Asian, African and Arabian countries. Ottoman and safari lodge design, buddha statues and pool-side cocktails, roofs covered with solar panels, home movie theaters, jacuzzis and posh bedrooms – they all represent an international taste of exotic luxury without minding too much about local customs and interior decoration history.



## William Stelzer

William Stelzer was born 1965 in Southfield, Michigan, USA and has been a St. John, USVI resident since 1992. Stelzer is a freelance artist/filmmaker who has worked on numerous commercial film and video projects in the Virgin Islands. Prior to living in St. John he worked as Graphics Director for the ABC-TV affiliate in Central Texas during the First Gulf War and as a Special Visual Effects Director using computer and model animation for accident reconstructions. He was also part of a research expedition into the Venezuelan Amazon to study burial cave artwork, has taught computer graphics in West Africa as part of an AIDS project and shot footage high on a Peruvian glacier to help document the human effects of its melting. In addition he did design work on the prototype of a first generation game controller for computer train simulators. He has helped set up pilots and produced a series of mini documentaries in Haiti, Nicaragua, St. John and Florida for Waveplace, a non-profit foundation designed to teach Caribbean school kids using OLPC's revolutionary children's laptop computer. Stelzer received his education at Michigan State University (Industrial, Computer and Graphic Design) and at the University of Texas at Austin (Radio-Television-Film).

### **Work:**

"Climbing out of the Comfort Zone", 2014

*Photographic installation (4 digital giclée prints, 22" x 34" each, LEGO figure, video)*

### **Artist's statement:**

A number of years ago, while exploring ruins in the Virgin Islands National Park, I came across a stone well built during St. John's colonial era. I was far off the trail, totally alone in a rarely visited part of the island, and I couldn't help but think that if I were to somehow fall in, it would be nearly impossible to get out.

"Climbing out of the Comfort Zone" is a photo installation in part inspired by that experience. In it a tiny Lego guy, determined on the outside and terrified on the inside, is faced with the herculean effort of literally climbing out of this well. Below him is his comfortable little Lego house, with its BBQ grill, internet connection and big screen TV. Above him is the unknown - but also his only chance to live his own authentic life.

Hundreds of thousands of years of evolution have honed the human mind with very specific wants and needs, crucial to our survival and spiritual fulfillment. But in this technological age we have gotten so good at satisfying those desires with expert simulations, even exaggerations of the real thing, that these newly developed technical wonders have the unnerving potential to comfortably enslave us. Flooding the reward centers of our brains with their seductive siren songs.

The digital revolution has provided us with an unprecedented window to the world outside of our own. From the BBC and the National Geographic channel, to YouTube and Facebook, the imagery from the visions of others can either inspire us to either greater heights, or paralyze us with feelings of inadequacy. We are all both storytellers and story audiences. But the path to creating our own story can be overwhelming difficult, unpredictable, even dangerous. No matter how hard we try to achieve our dreams, we may still fail. The only thing guaranteed is battle scars.

And yet the alternative is to comfortably succumb to a hyper beautiful simulation of reality. Disappearing into a world where we only live through the stories of others, while the story we might have lived slowly fades away.

## Rebecca Zilenziger

Born 1965 in Somers Point, New Jersey; American and Swiss; lives and works in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico

Rebecca Zilenziger graduated from the Parsons School of Design in 1989. Since that time much of her work has explored portraiture as it interacts with environmental, social and personal relationships. She uses portraiture as catalyst and base from which to explore various visual and content juxtapositions, using body and face to explore and define a particular vision of the human being in context of his/her environment. Recently, *Self Portrait*, 2012 was purchased and entered into the prestigious photography collection owned by architect, Luis Gutierrez. Zilenziger's work is presented in various ways, as a singular image or as horizontal or vertical polyptychs combined with urban or rural landscapes, lending a lyrical, allegorical interpretation of the subject. Using only one light source, she secures a final work that remains devoid of artificiality as her subjects seamlessly emerge from their own natural shadows. Zilenziger has exhibited in New York City, Philadelphia, Zurich and San Juan. Her work has been published in magazines such as *Artes*, *Imágen*, and *Interior*.  
>>> [www.rebeccazilenziger.com](http://www.rebeccazilenziger.com)

### Work:

"The Best Things in Life Are Free", 2014

*Digitally finished photographic triptych, Lambda prints mounted on 1/8" Gator, 19" x 30", unframed.  
Limited edition of 10 triptychs.*

### Artist's statement:

The Best Things In Life Are Free. They are innately from and of this island. There is no American jurisdiction over the islands natural beauty. The beach is open to ALL. The beach sits within a metropolis that swings from one political party to another, from one economic advantage to another social disadvantage. It is an unchanging oasis free from political overtones and class structure. The Escambrón beach is a place where a great mix of people relax and share a common view and experience. Perhaps non structured experience shared is the greatest democratization of humanity. We take in the sun, we observe the sky, we swim in the waters, we throw our heads back and laugh, pick up the baby, breastfeed, drink a beer, rest on a towel and listen to each other.

My beach, my Escambrón defies political ownership and speaks directly to my sense of well-being and independence, my freedom to gather, to talk, to share as I please, right here in Puerto Rico, with anyone that decides to show up. This beach is better than any colonial comfort, it is better than dogma. It exists defiant and brilliant before any philosophical export, or cheap knockoff import.

COLONY is down on paper, as a term, a bias, an inescapable definition of national existence. What does it say about us as we choose to ignore it on a daily basis? Is it more prominently fixed in the political landscape than any state of mind, or opinion of ourselves harbored within the recesses of our unconscious mind? If it sleeps within the blurred lines that run between trained and lazy purchasing choices, varying levels of homegrown pride, than let something natural and untainted speak to us at the water's edge of a greater political and social awakening.

Let us all honor what is here as I, a long time transplant to this island, honor what is uniquely Puerto Rican. There is democracy at my beach that defies ink to paper and I will let that guide me to knowing better who we are individually and collectively. And if for nothing else beyond swimming, relaxing and opening ourselves to the ocean and sky, let this watering hole be a place for discussion on said topic.