







Rican/Structured Realities

Confronted Evidence

New paintings and prints by Juan Sánchez

Realidades Riqueñas/estructuradas

Evidencia confrontada

Nuevas pinturas y grabados de Juan Sánchez

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Rican/Structured Realities Confronted Evidence

by Juan Sánchez

Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.

—Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)

The artist, like the writer, has the obligation to be of use; his painting must be a book that teaches; it must serve to better the human condition; it must castigate evil and exalt virtue.

—Francisco Oller (1833-1917)

All art should seek a liberating orientation... Art is the necessity of freedom, the necessity of the slave who liberates him/herself and contacts his/her freedom in a thousand ways, giving it a thousand meanings with a dialectical no and yes... And what is a slave doing saying he is free? Spiritual liberation—as Marx said about revolution—is a precondition to real freedom.

—Elizam Escobar (1948-)

Following the palpitations of one's heart and mind through painting as well as through various forms of activism has its pleasures and sometimes its despairs.

We are living in times of great social upheaval, where evil can openly be observed in many different manifestations. Today we have apartheid in South Africa and colonial imperialism in Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. We also have hunger, AIDS, and other terrible diseases, plus the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. At the same time, in our own backyards people are living in dire poverty, oppressed and spiritually brutalized.

Colonialism, like the evil epidemic it is, continues to damage Puerto Rican land and culture. Boriquén (the original name of the island, given by the Taino Indians) has been under United States military rule and occupation since its illegal invasion in 1898. Colonialism is the real AIDS of the Puerto Rican reality in the island as well as in the cities of the United States. All the vileness of a rotting society—poverty, alienation, prostitution, drugs, homelessness, high infant mortality rates, diseases, environmental and economic exploitation, and other plagues—flourishes in Puerto Rico. Most of us, especially those who have been brought up in United States ghettos, have gone through its racist and sexist educational system and have been constantly denied our wonderful and unique history and status as a nation. Our second and third class status as citizens does not grant Puerto Ricans living in the Island the right to participate in Presidential elections. Yet we have been drafted to fight in two World Wars, the Korean War, and the Viet Nam War. Puerto Ricans have performed military duty in all these conflicts as well as in other post-draft U.S. military interventions (Granada, Lebanon, Panama, and now the Middle East).

My art is inspired by the fact that even though the empire tries to bury the truth, the Puerto Rican people resist. They never allowed imperial powers to bury their island, their culture, their history, and their lives. They continue to fight to preserve the truth and have repeatedly denounced colonial control. They have shouted their national identity and proclaimed their in-

dependence. Many individuals have paid heavily for being Puerto Rican *Independistas* and human-rights activists. The United States colonial system presently has Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war. Many activists have also been assassinated. Yet the people's will for freedom remains unbroken.

Oil paint, canvas, paper, pastels, photographs, poetic images, symbols, and words—presented through tearing, cutting, pasting, and collaging—are what brings me closer to expressing these realities. It is a constant stimulus to aim towards self-realization in objective and subjective correlation with a people who are moving and evolving with the passion and convictions that reflect their inner strength. My commitment is to express significant concerns and content through the investigation of aesthetic and formal practice. To search for racial, cultural, social, and political definitions rooted in and erupting from a hostile environment is a necessity in my creative process. To dig deep into the history of the colonized and the colonizers, and to take back what is rightfully ours, is part of that process. The multilayering of this process also expresses the complexity of the reality of the Puerto Rican people. To be responsible and responsive to a culture challenged by genocide is to make art that serves progress and not reactionary forces; to take sides with the oppressed and not with the oppressors; to deal not only with protest but also with recuperation and regenerative healing; to take sides with victory in affirming life and not embracing death.

In this new series of paintings and prints, you will notice images of children. Along with Taino petroglyphs of Boriquén, revolutionary figures, images of saints and African orishas, sacred hearts, leaves, Puerto Rican flags, and the torn edges of the gritty urban-ghetto environment, there are boys and girls running, jumping, and playing. There are even images of myself when I was one and four years old, together with photographs of my beloved mother. I can't help but realize that my people's long and epochal history of heroism, patriotism, and violence has always been dedicated to the future of our children. This exhibition is testimony of the love and celebration of the Puerto Rican people and their capacity to move forward, assert themselves, and energize and enrich the present in their attempt to get rid of the evil empire's epidemic and become a free and sovereign nation. My art attempts to Rican/structure our reality so that we can confront the evidence. My art is also an act of faith.

In the poorest part of town/Where the sun never reaches the ground/And seeing's not believing/The feeling stays alive, yeah yeah/Little children laughing and playing/'Cause they haven't learned to start hating/Never giving up/They still believe in love sweet love.*

*G. Ballard, C. Magness, C. Semenza, "The Places You Find Love," song from the Quincey Jones album Back On the Block, Qwest Records, 1989.

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Realidades Requeñas/estructuradas

Evidencia confrontada

por Juan Sánchez

Cada generación tiene, de la obscuridad relativa, que descubrir su misión, cumplirla o traicionarla.

—Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)

El artista, como el escritor, tiene la obligación de ser útil; su pintura tiene que ser un libro que educa; tiene que servir para mejorar la condición humana; tiene que castigar el mal y exaltar la virtud.

—Francisco Oller (1833-1917)

Todo arte debe perseguir una orientación liberadora... El arte es la necesidad de la libertad, la necesidad de una persona esclavizada que se libera a ella misma y que se pone en contacto con su libertad de miles maneras, dandole miles significados con un "no" o un "sí" dialécticos... ¿Y qué es esto de un esclavo afirmando que es libre? La liberación espiritual—como Marx llamo a la revolución—es un requisito previo a la verdadera libertad.

—Elizam Escobar (1948-)

Siguiendo las palpitaciones del corazón y la mente de uno por medio de la pintura, al igual que por medio de las varias formas de activismo, tiene sus placeres y a veces sus desesperaciones.

Estamos viviendo en tiempos de gran desasosiego social, donde el mal puede observarse abiertamente en sus múltiples manifestaciones. Hoy tenemos el apartheid en África del Sur y el imperialismo colonial en América Latina, en el Caribe y en otras partes del mundo. También tenemos el hambre, el SIDA y otras enfermedades terribles, más la posibilidad de un holocausto nuclear. A la misma vez y en nuestro propio patio, hay gente viviendo en un espantoso estado de pobreza, oprimidos y espiritualmente brutalizados.

El colonialismo, como la epidemia malevola que es en realidad, continua perjudicando

la tierra y cultura puertorriqueñas. Boriquén (el nombre original de la Isla, el que le dieron los indigenas tainos) ha estado bajo la dominación y ocupación militar de los Estados Unidos desde la invasión ilegal de 1898. El colonialismo es el verdadero SIDA de la realidad puertorriqueña en la Isla, al igual que en las ciudades de los Estados Unidos. Todas las infamias de una sociedad podrida—la pobreza, la enajenación, la prostitución, las drogas, el no tener un techo para cobijarse, las altas tasas de mortalidad infantil, las enfermedades, la explotación económica y ambiental y demás plagas—abundan en Puerto Rico. La mayor parte de nosotros, especialmente los que hemos sido criados en los arrabales de los Estados Unidos, hemos sufrido su sistema de instrucción racista y sexista, donde se nos ha negado nuestra maravillosa y particular historia y nuestro status de nación. Nuestra ciudadanía de segunda y tercera clase no le ha otorgado a los puertorriqueños que viven en la isla el derecho a participar en las elecciones presidenciales. Más, sin embargo, hemos cumplido Servicio Militar Obligatorio (SMO) en dos guerras mundiales, en Corea y en Viet Nam. Hemos servido como carne de cañón en estos conflictos y en otras intervenciones militares estadounidenses post-SMO (Grana, Líbano, Panamá, y, ohora, el Medio Oriente).

Mi arte esta inspirado en el hecho de que, a pesar de los intentos del imperio por sepultar la verdad, el pueblo puertorriqueño sigue resistiendo. Ellos y ellas nunca dejaron que el poderío imperial enterrara su Isla, su cultura, su historia y sus vidas. Ellos y ellas continúan luchando por preservar la verdad y en repetidas ocasiones han denunciado el control colonial. Ellos y ellas han gritado su identidad nacional y proclamado su independencia. Muchas personas han pagado un precio elevado por ser puertorriqueños independentistas y

activistas de los derechos humanos. En la actualidad, el sistema colonial estadounidense tiene en sus cárceles a prisioneros políticos y prisioneros de guerra puertorriqueños. Muchos activistas también han sido asesinados. Pero la voluntad libertaria del pueblo permanece inquebrantable.

Pinturas de aceite, lienzo, papel, pastel, fotografías, imágenes poéticas, símbolos y palabras—presentados por medio de razgaduras, cortaduras, pegadizos y colajes—son los recursos que me acercan a estas realidades. Resulta ser un estímulo constante el poder apuntar hacia la auto-realización mediante la interrelación recíproca, objetiva y subjetiva, con un pueblo que está en marcha y evolucionando con una pasión y unas convicciones que reflejan la fortaleza interna de dicho pueblo. La búsqueda de definiciones raciales, culturales, sociales y políticas—enzaizadas en, e irrumpiendo desde, un ambiente hostil—resulta ser una necesidad para mi proceso creativo. El escarbar profundamente dentro de la historia de los colonizados y de los colonizadores, y reclamar lo que en derecho nos pertenece, es parte de este proceso. Los múltiples niveles de este proceso también expresan la compleja realidad del pueblo puertorriqueño. Ser responsable ante y el responder a una cultura amenazada por el genocidio es crear arte al servicio del progreso y no al servicio de fuerzas reaccionarias; tomar partido a favor de los oprimidos y no a favor de los opresores; esforzarse, no solo con la protesta, sino también por la recuperación y la curación regeneradora; tomar partido a favor de la victoria, afirmando la vida y no abrazando la muerte.

En esta nueva serie de pinturas y grabados, se pueden notar las imágenes de niños y niñas. Junto a los petroglifos tainos de Boriquen, figuras revolucionarias, imágenes

de santos y orichas africanas, sagrados corazones, hojas, banderas puertorriqueñas y los filos desgarrados del ambiente animado de los arrabales urbanos, se encuentran niños y niñas corriendo, brincando y jugando. Hay hasta imágenes de mí mismo a las edades de uno y de cuatro años, junto con fotografías de mi querida madre. No puedo evitar darme cuenta de que la larga y centenaria historia de heroísmo, patriotismo y violencia de mi pueblo también ha sido dedicada al futuro de los niños. Esta exhibición es un testimonio del amor y de la celebración del pueblo puertorriqueño y de su capacidad de marchar hacia adelante, afirmándose a sí mismo y fortaleciendo y enriqueciendo el presente a través de su intento por zafarse de la epidemia del imperio malévolos y por convertirse en una nación libre y soberana. Mi arte intenta Puerto-Rico/estructurar nuestra realidad para que podamos confrontar la evidencia. Mi arte es también un acto de fe.

En la parte mas pobre de la ciudad,/Donde el sol nunca toca el suelo/Y donde ver no es creer,/El sentimiento permanece vivo, si, si;/Niños pequeños riendo y jugando/Porque todavía no han aprendido a odiar,/Sin rendirse nunca,/Todavía creen en el amor-dulce-amor.*

*G. Ballard, C. Magness, C. Semenza, "The Places You Find Love", canción del álbum de Quincey Jones Back On the Block, Qwest Records, 1989.

Introduction

Rican/Structured Realities is presented as part of the Museum's ongoing "Current Events" series. "Current Events" gives space and voice to a diversity of view in an annual exhibition of a single artist. Artists selected for the series are committed to challenging the dominant discourse of a white patriarchal culture that positions its own point of view as the mainstream and everything else as marginal. The concept of a mainstream is powerful and ubiquitous, but recently progressive artists, writers, educators, and activists have asked the question, Whose mainstream? "Current Events" calls into question the meaning of representation. Which work and views are represented, exhibited, collected, written about, discussed, reproduced, included in the canon? And which views are ignored?

Juan Sánchez is a painter whose work confronts racism and passionately analyzes his Puerto Rican identity. His work celebrates Puerto Rican history and culture, while

presenting a compelling critique of the implications of colonialism. Sánchez is part of a community of artists and activists who engage in art as a social and political practice.

An annual series of exhibitions at a university art museum of a state university cannot redress the racist and sexist institutional structures that consistently exclude particular groups of artists from exhibition. It can, however, provide an opportunity and forum for discussion about exclusion and marginality and the complex mechanisms that perpetuate racism, sexism, and homophobia.

A project like this is never the work of a single individual but a product of the cooperative efforts of many. I would like to thank Juan Sánchez for his generosity and many stimulating studio visits when he patiently presented his work and discussed his artistic convictions. Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz wrote an eloquent and insightful essay that contributes significantly to our understanding of the resonances of Juan's work. Gladys has enriched my experience and understanding of Juan's paintings by providing translations of the Spanish text and background in Puerto Rican history, poetry, and the independence movement. I would like to thank the University Art Museum staff for their attention to this project: Lynn Gamwell, Tiffany Roberts, Norma Moses, and Matthew Zupnick. And

finally, thanks to my close colleagues for their support, lively intellectual inquisitiveness, and commitment to challenging exclusion on all levels. They are Deborah Britzman, Laura Lasham, Kelvin Santiago Valles, Anna Davin, Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz, Jeffner Allen, Carole Boyce Davies, Maureen Turim, and participants in the Women's Studies Program.

—Nancy Gonchar

Introducción

Realidades Requeñas/ estructuradas se presenta como parte de la serie permanente—titulada “Sucesos Contemporáneos”—de este museo. “Sucesos Contemporáneos” le ofrece espacio y voz a una diversidad de perspectivas durante la exhibición anual de un artista particular. Las personas escogidas en calidad de artistas para esta serie están comprometidas con la tarea de retar el discurso predominante de una cultura blanca y patriarcal que construye su propio punto de vista como la corriente socio-cultural principal y coloca a todo lo demás en los márgenes. La noción de una “corriente principal” es una idea poderosa y omnipresente; pero, recientemente, personas progresistas—incluyendo aquí a artistas, escritores, educadores y activistas—han formulado la siguiente pregunta: ¿la corriente principal de quién o de quiénes? La serie “Sucesos Contemporáneos” se propone cuestionar el significado de toda forma de representación. ¿Cuáles trabajos y puntos de vista son los representados: exhibidos, colecionados, reseñados, discutidos, reproducidos, incluidos en el canon artístico? ¿Y cuáles puntos de vista son ignorados?

Juan Sánchez es un pintor cuyo trabajo confronta el racismo y apasionadamente analiza su identidad puertorriqueña. Su trabajo celebra la historia y cultura puertorriqueñas, a la misma vez que presenta una crítica convincente de las implicaciones del colonialismo. Sánchez es parte de una comunidad de artistas y activistas envueltos en la creación artística como práctica política y social.

Una sola serie anual de exhibiciones (en un museo universitario de arte en una universidad pública) no puede reparar ni compensar los efectos de estructuras e instituciones—racistas y sexistas—que consistentemente excluyen de la inmensa mayor de sus exhibiciones a grupos particulares de artistas. No obstante, si puede proveer una oportunidad y un foro para una discusión en torno a la exclusión y la marginalidad y en torno a los mecanismos complejos que perpetúan el racismo, el sexism y la homofobia.

Un proyecto como este nunca es el resultado de la labor de un solo individuo sino que se trata del producto de los esfuerzos conjuntos de muchas personas. Quiero darle las gracias a Juan Sánchez por su generosidad y por lo estimulantes que resultaron las varias visitas que hicimos a su estudio, donde él nos presentó su trabajo y pacientemente discutió sus convicciones. Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz ha escrito un ensayo elocuente e incisivo que contribuye

significativamente a nuestro entendimiento de las resonancias en el trabajo de Juan. Gladys ha enriquecido mi experiencia y comprensión de las pinturas de Juan, proveyendo traducciones del texto en español y contribuyendo al trasfondo sobre historia de Puerto Rico, sobre poesía puertorriqueña y sobre el movimiento independentista. Quiero darle las gracias al personal del Museo Universitario de Arte por sus atenciones en torno a este proyecto: Lynn Gamwell, Tiffany Roberts, Norma Moses y Matthew Zupnick. Y, finalmente, quiero darle las gracias a mis colaboradores más cercanos por su apoyo, sus movidos cuestionamientos intelectuales y su compromiso con la labor de retar la exclusión a todos los niveles. Me refiero aquí a: Deborah Britzman, Laura Lamash, Kelvin Santiago Valles, Anna Davin, Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz, Jeffner Allen, Carole Boyce Davies, Maureen Turim y las integrantes del Programa de Estudios Sobre la Mujer.

—Nancy Gonchar

The Work of Juan Sánchez: Dismantling the Mirage of the US Cracker-Jack

by Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz

It all started with a cup of Puerto Rican coffee on a borrowed ground called Brooklyn in the fall of 1990. Liora (the daughter of Juan and Alma) was sleeping in a cradle in the center of the living room. Alma and I were sitting at the table as we attempted to place ourselves: here, there, in time. We were trying to locate the vanishing points, the lines that came together, the lines of history and social context, the lines of denial and confrontation. How had things happened? What did/does it mean to be a Puerto Rican—this particular species of Puerto Rican—of the '60s and the '70s? What does it mean to be here and there and everywhere, as Trinh Minh-ha says, shifting and in a continuous re-departure?

As we drank the Puerto Rican coffee, our words became perceptible points of reference, and we started placing our identities. Alma was naming all her moments of departure: "Anamú," "Taller de Histriones," "Teatro Escam-

bray," the strike of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation in 1974. I was renaming all of them: "Guajana," Antonia Martínez, "la IUPI," endlessly, "sin prisa, pero sin pausa." All the Puerto Ricans from here, from there, and from everywhere have their own ways of fashioning, of arriving at, and of conceiving connections. We always find the passage, the lines, the ways of making the crossing, in order to talk about the Island and about the other islands, about Puerto Rico and Manhattan/Brooklyn/the Bronx: "de Barrio Obrero a la Quince..." and back to "Nuyol" and back... Could it be oppression?

Juan entered our conversation in time to share our efforts at placing ourselves. We entered the second floor where he presented his IDs. And they are many: Pedro Albizu Campos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, the Young Lords, Vieques, Ray Barreto, Eddie Palmieri, Willie Colón. And I answered back with: Julia de Burgos, Lolita Lebrón, Doña Isabelita Rosado, la Isla Nena, El Gran Combo, Lucrecia Benítez, Danny Rivera. Then he replied, and I followed suit, until very soon it became one common response, one common condition. Could it be colonialism?

The "carimbo," the mark of this bondage, is clearly represented in the work of Juan Sánchez: the extermination of the aboriginal Tainos, slavery's abyss, five hundred years of colonialism, José Luis González's "el

pais de cuatro pisos." Certain aspects of his work are characterized by a general recurrence and sequence. The eagles and the palm trees turned upside down: the signs of crooked things, of things gone awry, of distant and nearby vehicles of oppression, of gringo and Creole lies. The baroque conglomeration of riotous images piled upon riotous images: the multi-layered and contradictory character of Puerto Rican culture(s) and identity(ies), the congested and parodic universe of our everyday trials and clarifications. The religious (Catholic) replicas that appear here explicitly (saintly icons, bleeding hearts, the Last Supper) and implicitly (paintings that, when mounted together on the wall, evoke a cross): a cultural index of torment and of sacrifice, of a complex (and imposed/foreign) religious heritage that is, simultaneously, recuperated here as native in the face of the Second Colonization—in much the same way that the old, Nationalist Party led by Albizu Campos vindicated the hallmarks of Catholicism (for example, a white Maltese cross on a black background) in defiance of the Protestant, yankee invader. The Taino symbols: an invocation of the ancient petroglyphs, the symbols of the culture of Boriken (the Land of the Proud Lord), the emblems of a people who do not exist anymore but whose memory must be re-imagined, because it still signifies the dignity and self-respect that was lost and may—must—some day be recuperated, healed, forged again.

But as I shift from one piece to another, I am not viewing the same thing, but rather the continuous transubstantiation of arresting images. Something that forces a rethinking of the context in which those visions appear in that particular piece, as well as the ways in which they have already been represented, by him, by others. Images that appear again and yet appear as if for the first time; images that appear in place of others; images that re-appear to locate/localize remembrances and tributes. It is as if he were trying to use reiteration to remedy the failure of memory, of our memory, of all of our memories. We become aware that to be colonized is to be trained to, somewhere down the road, forget our feelings, to forget the capacity to feel anything. As Michelle Cliff says, it is to have those most fundamental parts—needed for the maintenance of your self/lour selves—become numb, heartless, insensitive. We realize that the confirmation of the colonized is to walk through any slum in San Juan or New York or Kingston and not to think twice about what we have just seen, not to remember anything. And—because we try to struggle against this anesthesia, against this coldness—we think twice, we notice, we re-recognize. Juan's images are part of this effort to fight back the coldness, the death of memory loss, the paralysis of indifference. They are part of this attempt to come home by re-imagining/re-constructing [an image of] what that place would be like,

by resisting the ravages of detachment and oblivion, by repudiating the stifling results of the present: "We came here with the notion that we would go back," explains Juan, who was born in Brooklyn. "But what [we] left behind is not what is there now."

Juan is not claiming to have definitively grasped or to have obtained irrefutable knowledge of our "authentic" national-cultural identity, of what it means to be Puerto Rican. He is clearly aware that there are multiple and subtle ways through which we internalize identity and subjectification. Many of these ways are fashioned out of images and emotions that, in turn, require the construction of individual and collective points of departure. This is why Juan needs to tell his stories, stories of cultural survival and of emergence. This is why his work is full of recollections of a past-present-always-already-becoming-future: old questions become new and culturally meaningful, now, making us marvel and speculate about the future.

None of this is as simple as it sounds or looks. Some of us have learned to treasure the rejection of the colonizer. And, through these endless displacements, we have symbolically achieved between us an intimacy informed by these common reference points, this common identity. Our various contexts are affected by the call of the Island as much as they are affected by our refusal of

colonialism and of this particular colonialism. This is one of our common points of departure. We and Puerto Rico is who we are, in certain moments, in certain imaginary places. Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican-ness is a place in which Juan, Alma, I, and people like us, connect. Yet it is also the place where we disconnect—while co-existing—inasmuch as here too we experience our differences: political (disparate views as to how sovereignty should be achieved and as to the meanings and implications of such political projects), cultural (regional disparities between those brought up in the Caribbean and those brought up in the US mainland), gendered (being Puerto Rican as a man vs. being Puerto Rican as a woman). "¿Qué será de Borinquén, mi Dios querido? ¿Qué será de mis hijos y de mi hogar?" What is to become of us? Liora will probably live one of these answers.

The author is a PhD student in women's history at the State University of New York at Binghamton. She was formerly a secondary-school teacher in Puerto Rico.

La obra de Juan Sánchez: Desmantelando el espejismo de la caja de sorpresas estadounidense

por Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz

Todo comenzó con una taza de café puertorriqueño en un terreno prestado llamado Brooklyn, en el otoño de 1990. Liora (la hija de Juan y Alma) estaba durmiendo en la cuna en el medio de la sala. Alma y yo estábamos en la mesa, intentando ubicarnos: aquí, allá, en el tiempo. Intentábamos localizar los puntos donde—para nosotras—todo se desvanece en el horizonte, donde las líneas se juntan, las líneas de la historia y de los contextos sociales, las líneas de la negación y de la confrontación. ¿Cómo habían ocurrido las cosas? ¿Qué significa/significaba ser una persona puertorriqueña—vale decir, esta especie particular de puertorriqueño—de los '60 y de los '70? ¿Qué significa estar aquí y allá en todas partes, como dice Trinh Minh-ha, desplazándose y en un continuo partir-de-nuevo?

Mientras tomábamos café puertorriqueño, nuestras palabras se

transformaron en puntos de referencia tangibles y comenzamos localizando nuestras identidades. Alma estaba nombrando todos sus momentos/puntos de partida: "Anamú", "Taller de Histriones", "Teatro Escambray", la huelga de la Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico en 1974. Yo estaba renombrándolos a todos: "Guajana", Antonia Martínez, la "lupi", interminablemente, sin prisa, pero sin pausa. Todas las personas puertorriqueñas de aquí, de allá y de todas partes tienen su propia forma de construir, de llegar a y de concebir conexiones. Siempre encontramos el pasadizo y el pasaje, las líneas, las maneras de realizar la travesía, para poder hablar sobre la Isla y sobre las otras islas, sobre Puerto Rico y Manhattan/Brooklyn/el Bronx: "de Barrio Obrero a la Quince..." y de vuelta a "Nuyol" y de vuelta otra vez... ¿Podría tratarse acaso de la opresión?

Juan se unió a nuestra conversación a tiempo para compartir nuestros esfuerzos por ubicarnos. Subimos al segundo piso donde él nos presentó sus tarjetas de identificación. Y eran muchas: Pedro Albizu Campos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, los Young Lords, Vieques, Ray Barreto, Eddie Palmieri, Willie Colón. Y yo riposté con: Julia de Burgos, Lolita Lebrón, Doña Isabelita Rosado, la Isla Nena, El Gran Combo, Lucecita Benítez, Danny Rivera. Entonces el contestó de nuevo, yo hice lo mismo, hasta que de pronto todo se convirtió

en una respuesta común, una condición común. ¿Podría tratarse acaso del colonialismo?

El carimbo, la marca de este cautiverio, está claramente representado en la obra de Juan Sánchez: el exterminio de los aborígenes tainos, el abismo de la esclavitud, quinientos años de colonialismo, el "País de los Cuatro Pisos" de José Luis González. Algunos aspectos de su obra están caracterizados por ciertas recurrencias y secuencias generales. Las águilas y las palmas boca abajo: los símbolos de las cosas torcidas, de las cosas que no salen bien, de los vehículos cercanos y lejanos de la opresión, de las mentiras gringas y criollas. El conglomerado barroco de imágenes alborotadas amontonadas sobre más imágenes alborotadas: el carácter contradictorio y multidimensional de la[s] cultura[s] e identidad[es] puertorriqueña[s], el universo congestionado y paradójico de nuestras tribulaciones cotidianas y nuestras clarificaciones diarias. Los duplicados religiosos [católicos] que aparecen aquí de manera explícita (iconos, sagrados corazones, la Santa Cena) y de manera implícita (pinturas que, al ser montadas sobre la pared, evocan la imagen de una cruz): un índice cultural del tormento y el sacrificio, de una herencia religiosa compleja [e impuesta/extranjera] que simultáneamente es recuperada aquí como algo autóctono frente a la Segunda Colonización—de igual manera que el antiguo Partido Nacionalista, dirigido por Albizu

Campos, reivindicó los emblemas del catolicismo (por ejemplo, la Cruz de Malta blanca sobre un fondo negro) en desafío al invasor yanqui y protestante. Los símbolos tainos: una invocación de las arcaicas imágenes sobre las piedras, los símbolos de la cultura de Borikén (la Tierra del Alto Señor), los emblemas de un pueblo que ya no existe pero cuya memoria debe ser re-imaginada, porque todavía representa la dignidad y el auto-respeto perdido que puede—y debe—ser recuperado, sanado, forjado de nuevo.

Pero mientras me traslado de una obra a la otra, me encuentro contemplando, no la misma cosa, sino la continúa transubstanciación de unas imágenes que me agarran. Se trata de algo que obliga a re-pensar el contexto en el que estas visiones aparecen en esta obra particular, al igual que las formas en que ya han sido representadas, por él, por otras personas. Imágenes que aparecen de nuevo y que, sin embargo, aparecen como si por primera vez; imágenes que aparecen en lugar de otras; imágenes que [aparecen] estando situando/localizando de nuevo remembranzas y tributos. Es como si él estuviese tratando de utilizar la capacidad de reiterar para de esa manera remediar la falta de memoria, de nuestra memoria, de todas las memorias. Así nos damos cuenta de que estar colonizados es acostumbrarse (mediante el adiestramiento y la domesticación) a, en algún lugar del camino, olvidar nuestros

sentimientos, a olvidar nuestra capacidad de sentir cosa alguna. Como ha dicho Michelle Cliff: es como tener aquellas partes mas fundamentales—las que necesitamos para mantener nuestra identidad y nuestras diversas identidades—bajo un estado profundo de adormecimiento, crueldad, insensibilidad. Nos damos cuenta de que la confirmación de ser colonizado es el caminar por un arrabal en San Juan o en Nueva York o en Kingston y no pensar dos veces sobre lo que hemos visto: es el no recordar nada. Y—porque tratamos de luchar en contra de esta anestesia, en contra de esta frialdad e indiferencia—pensamos dos veces, nos damos cuenta, re-conocemos. Las imágenes de Juan son parte de este esfuerzo por abatir la frialdad, la muerte de la falta de memoria, la parálisis de la indiferencia. Son parte de este esfuerzo por retornar al hogar mediante el intento de re-imaginar/reconstruir [una imagen de] como este lugar podría llegar a ser, resistiendo los embates del distanciamiento y del olvido, repudiando los resultados asfixiantes del presente: "Llegamos aquí con la idea de que regresaríamos algún dia," explica Juan, que nació en Brooklyn. "Pero lo que [nosotros] dejamos atrás no es lo que hay allá ahora."

Juan no pretende haber definitivamente precisado, ni haber obtenido conocimiento irrefutable de, nuestra "auténtica" identidad cultural-nacional, de lo que significa ser puertorriqueño. Él está plenamente consciente de que

existen múltiples maneras sutiles a través de las cuales nosotros internalizamos la identidad y la subjetificación. Muchos de estos mecanismos surgen mediante imágenes y emociones que, a su vez, requieren la construcción de puntos de partida individuales y colectivos. Por eso es que Juan siente la necesidad de contar sus historias, historias de supervivencia cultural y de germinación apremiante. Por eso es que su obra esta repleta de recuerdos de un pasado-presente-que-es-siempre-ya-un-futuro: viejas preguntas se transforman en nuevas preguntas que culturalmente están llenas de significado, ahora, obligándonos a maravillar y a especular acerca del futuro.

Nada de esto es tan sencillo como aparenta ser. Algunos/as de nosotros/as hemos aprendido a atesorar el hecho de que el colonizador nos rechace. Y, a través de estos desplazamientos interminables, simbólicamente hemos logrado entre nosotros/as una intimidad informada por estos puntos de referencias comunes, por esta identidad común. Nuestros varios contextos se ven afectados por el llamado de la Isla, pero también se ven afectados por nuestro rechazo al colonialismo y a este colonialismo en particular. Este es uno de nuestros puntos de partida comunes. Nosotros/as y Puerto Rico es lo que somos, en ciertos momentos, en ciertos lugares imaginarios. Puerto Rico y la puertorriqueñidad es un lugar

donde Juan, Alma y yo, y la gente como nosotros/as, logran conectarse y encontrarse. Y, sin embargo, tambien es un lugar donde nos des-conectamos y nos des-encontramos—mientras seguimos co-existiendo—en tanto y en cuanto incluso aqui sentimos nuestras diferencias: políticas (perspectivas dispares en torno a como la soberanía debe lograrse y en torno al significado e implicaciones de tales proyectos políticos), culturales (diferencias regionales entre las personas que nos criamos en el Caribe y las que se criaron en los Estados Unidos), de género (el ser puertorriqueño de los hombres vs. el ser puertorriqueño de las mujeres). "¿Qué será de Borinquen mi Dios querido? ¿Qué será de mis hijos y de mi hogar?" ¿Qué será de nosotros? Liora con toda probabilidad ha de vivir una de estas respuestas.

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The Work of Juan Sánchez: Dismantling the Mirage of the US Cracker-Jack

by Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz

It all started with a cup of Puerto Rican coffee on a borrowed ground called Brooklyn in the fall of 1990. Liora (the daughter of Juan and Alma) was sleeping in a cradle in the center of the living room. Alma and I were sitting at the table as we attempted to place ourselves: here, there, in time. We were trying to locate the vanishing points, the lines that came together, the lines of history and social context, the lines of denial and confrontation. How had things happened? What did/does it mean to be a Puerto Rican—this particular species of Puerto Rican—of the '60s and the '70s? What does it mean to be here and there and everywhere, as Trinh Minh-ha says, shifting and in a continuous re-departure?

As we drank the Puerto Rican coffee, our words became perceptible points of reference, and we started placing our identities. Alma was naming all her moments of departure: "Anamú," "Taller de Histriones," "Teatro Escam-

bray," the strike of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation in 1974. I was renaming all of them: "Guajana," Antonia Martínez, "la IUPI," endlessly, "sin prisa, pero sin pausa." All the Puerto Ricans from here, from there, and from everywhere have their own ways of fashioning, of arriving at, and of conceiving connections. We always find the passage, the lines, the ways of making the crossing, in order to talk about the Island and about the other islands, about Puerto Rico and Manhattan/Brooklyn/the Bronx: "de Barrio Obrero a la Quince..." and back to "Nuyol" and back... Could it be oppression?

Juan entered our conversation in time to share our efforts at placing ourselves. We entered the second floor where he presented his IDs. And they are many: Pedro Albizu Campos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, the Young Lords, Vieques, Ray Barreto, Eddie Palmieri, Willie Colón. And I answered back with: Julia de Burgos, Lolita Lebrón, Doña Isabelita Rosado, la Isla Nena, El Gran Combo, Lucrecia Benítez, Danny Rivera. Then he replied, and I followed suit, until very soon it became one common response, one common condition. Could it be colonialism?

The "carimbo," the mark of this bondage, is clearly represented in the work of Juan Sánchez: the extermination of the aboriginal Tainos, slavery's abyss, five hundred years of colonialism, José Luis González's "el

pais de cuatro pisos." Certain aspects of his work are characterized by a general recurrence and sequence. The eagles and the palm trees turned upside down: the signs of crooked things, of things gone awry, of distant and nearby vehicles of oppression, of gringo and Creole lies. The baroque conglomeration of riotous images piled upon riotous images: the multi-layered and contradictory character of Puerto Rican culture(s) and identity(ies), the congested and parodic universe of our everyday trials and clarifications. The religious (Catholic) replicas that appear here explicitly (saintly icons, bleeding hearts, the Last Supper) and implicitly (paintings that, when mounted together on the wall, evoke a cross): a cultural index of torment and of sacrifice, of a complex (and imposed/foreign) religious heritage that is, simultaneously, recuperated here as native in the face of the Second Colonization—in much the same way that the old, Nationalist Party led by Albizu Campos vindicated the hallmarks of Catholicism (for example, a white Maltese cross on a black background) in defiance of the Protestant, yankee invader. The Taino symbols: an invocation of the ancient petroglyphs, the symbols of the culture of Boriken (the Land of the Proud Lord), the emblems of a people who do not exist anymore but whose memory must be re-imagined, because it still signifies the dignity and self-respect that was lost and may—must—some day be recuperated, healed, forged again.

But as I shift from one piece to another, I am not viewing the same thing, but rather the continuous transubstantiation of arresting images. Something that forces a rethinking of the context in which those visions appear in that particular piece, as well as the ways in which they have already been represented, by him, by others. Images that appear again and yet appear as if for the first time; images that appear in place of others; images that re-appear to locate/localize remembrances and tributes. It is as if he were trying to use reiteration to remedy the failure of memory, of our memory, of all of our memories. We become aware that to be colonized is to be trained to, somewhere down the road, forget our feelings, to forget the capacity to feel anything. As Michelle Cliff says, it is to have those most fundamental parts—needed for the maintenance of your self/our selves—become numbed, heartless, insensitive. We realize that the confirmation of the colonized is to walk through any slum in San Juan or New York or Kingston and not to think twice about what we have just seen, not to remember anything. And—because we try to struggle against this anesthesia, against this coldness—we think twice, we notice, we re-recognize. Juan's images are part of this effort to fight back the coldness, the death of memory loss, the paralysis of indifference. They are part of this attempt to come home by re-imagining/re-constructing [an image of] what that place would be like,

by resisting the ravages of detachment and oblivion, by repudiating the stifling results of the present: "We came here with the notion that we would go back," explains Juan, who was born in Brooklyn. "But what [we] left behind is not what is there now."

Juan is not claiming to have definitively grasped or to have obtained irrefutable knowledge of our "authentic" national-cultural identity, of what it means to be Puerto Rican. He is clearly aware that there are multiple and subtle ways through which we internalize identity and subjectification. Many of these ways are fashioned out of images and emotions that, in turn, require the construction of individual and collective points of departure. This is why Juan needs to tell his stories, stories of cultural survival and of emergence. This is why his work is full of recollections of a past-present-always-already-becoming-future: old questions become new and culturally meaningful, now, making us marvel and speculate about the future.

None of this is as simple as it sounds or looks. Some of us have learned to treasure the rejection of the colonizer. And, through these endless displacements, we have symbolically achieved between us an intimacy informed by these common reference points, this common identity. Our various contexts are affected by the call of the Island as much as they are affected by our refusal of

colonialism and of this particular colonialism. This is one of our common points of departure. We and Puerto Rico is who we are, in certain moments, in certain imaginary places. Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican-ness is a place in which Juan, Alma, I, and people like us, connect. Yet it is also the place where we disconnect—while co-existing—inasmuch as here too we experience our differences: political (disparate views as to how sovereignty should be achieved and as to the meanings and implications of such political projects), cultural (regional disparities between those brought up in the Caribbean and those brought up in the US mainland), gendered (being Puerto Rican as a man vs. being Puerto Rican as a woman). "¿Qué será de Borinquén, mi Dios querido? ¿Qué será de mis hijos y de mi hogar?" What is to become of us? Liora will probably live one of these answers.

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