

CUCHIFRITOS

GALLERY + PROJECT SPACE

— a program of ARTISTS ALLIANCE INC

artistsallianceinc.org

88 Essex Street
New York NY 10002

Weds through Sat
Noon - 6p or by appt.

Leila Mattina

Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil

Curated by Natalia Viera Salgado

Presented in partnership with Abrons Arts Center

September 22 through November 18, 2023

Cuchifritos Gallery Space is pleased to present ***Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil***, Leila Mattina's first U.S. solo exhibition by Puerto Rican artist Leila Mattina. The exhibition encompasses artworks and documentation that trace indigo production in the Puerto Rican archipelago. Through research and material-based work, Mattina shares insights garnered from the cultivation and processing of different types of indigo in Puerto Rico and their interconnectedness in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil considers how blue—the color that indigo produces—connects us within and to the Archipelago, physically, historically and politically. The exhibition showcases varieties of seeds, unprocessed fibers, powdered indigo, and a mortar. All produced and sourced from Puerto Rico, these materials are gathered from TRAMA Antillana, a farm in Aibonito, Puerto Rico founded by the artist. TRAMA Antillana educates the public on the processing of natural dyes and fibers, alongside the chemical constituents and historical significance associated with these materials.

This exhibition aims to illuminate overlooked or eradicated craft practices in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean due to colonization, extractivist practices, destruction of natural resources, and modernization in the name of “progress.” For the Puerto Rican archipelago—a land so fertile yet prevented from producing and exporting local goods by its colonial relationship with the U.S.—*Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil* offers pathways for self-governance and self-determination.

On the left-hand side of the gallery space, three works *Horizonte aparente* and *Horizonte aparente II*, can be understood as abstractions and remnants of the indigo dyeing process. Mattina incorporates into the final work the same filter she uses to extract the pigment from the plant: from liquid to its final form as a dusty brick with a rich color. Similarly, the third work, *Entrelazando Fronteras* makes reference to the intertwining of different forms of migration —by land or sea— in Latin America and the Caribbean and presents a gradient of blues seen throughout the journey. One direct experience that drove the artist to create this work was her travels to Mexico as part of her research trip in preparation for the exhibition. Since the practice of dyeing Indigo is a forgotten craft, Mattina wanted to learn more about how other countries were mixing, processing, practicing, and teaching the manifestations of the color blue. While she was a passenger in a “blue bus” with migrants on her way from Arriaga to Niltepec, she thought about how the plant had migrated and her as well.

When considering the political status and the mobility, or immobility, of being a migrant, Mattina realized that she, too, had migrated within the island to different places to continue the work that she was doing with TRAMA Antillana. She also thought about the possibilities of a U.S. passport and, through a text message exchange with Amanda Hernández (one of the contributors of the Reader of this exhibition), the conversation turned into the political significance of the color blue in our Caribbean archipelago and Latin America.

The video work in the gallery's back room, titled *El azul que nos conecta* and shot by Leonardo Laboy, reflects on this trip and the connections between the practices in Mexico and the Caribbean. Similarly, *Cortando las aguas*, on the gallery's center wall, makes reference to the cross of indigo from Mexico and Puerto Rico. The work itself is made out of mahogany from Puerto Rico and threads are made of different fiber materials from cotton and wool all produced at Mattina's farm. Interestingly the title of the farm 'TRAMA' responds directly to the idea that the "trama" (weft):the crossing of threads on a loom, over and under and back again, similar to the skein of interwoven histories and knowledge.

On the right-hand side of the gallery *Armas de construcción masiva*, includes a Paddle in Cedar wood and Bamboo, shovel, and Leila's machete, which she uses every day at the farm. It is accompanied by a quote that reads: "*Agriculture is a weapon of massive construction in the hands of the people and it's within the reach of our will. We have to transform the country from the bottom, as far down as the earth herself*", by Ian Pagán Roig who is the director of El Josco Bravo, an agroecological farm in Puerto Rico, where Leila started studying and learning about agriculture and agroecology practices.

Next to the tools, *Topografía del Añil*, makes reference to the relief or the surface of the indigo pigment after using the canvas as a filter. On the right hand side, *Persicaria tinctoria*, species that comes from Japan, is displayed and installed with wood; part of the remnants of the dried leaves are displayed below the video as well. The two specimens displayed after this work, *Persicaria tinctoria* and *Indigofera Suffruticosa* were collected by botanist Steve Maldonado Silvestrini in two different trips to Puerto Rico. It represents the two different species that grow on the island. The final work *Texto Geográfico*, made by thread worker and collaborator Beatriz Lizardi with Leila Mattina, incorporates different loom weaving techniques and crochet, with a block of indigo grounding the work on the floor.

Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil is organized by Natalia Viera Salgado and co-presented by Artists Alliance Inc., Abrons Arts Center, and Pública Espacio Cultural as part of La Residencia.

La Residencia is a collaborative residency partnership between Abrons Arts Center (New York, NY) and Pública (San Juan, PR) and made possible with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Leila Mattina is a Puerto Rican artist/farmer based in Aibonito, Puerto Rico. She is co-founder of TRAMA Antillana, a farm space focused primarily on producing and processing natural dyes and fibers. Trama is a place for research and development of different practices to grow or source natural raw materials for arts and culture. It also provides a space for continued education and access to a variety of raw materials for the community.

Natalia Viera Salgado is a Puerto Rican curator and curatorial consultant based in New York City. She is also the founder of :Pública Espacio Cultural, an independent art space in Alto del Cabro, Santurce Puerto Rico. Her art historical research focuses on contemporary art in relation to decolonial practices, architecture, social and environmental justice, and new media with a keen interest in hybrid and interdisciplinary projects. She has worked at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, El Museo de Barrio, Art in General, Socrates Sculpture Park, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Americas Society. Viera holds a MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and is currently the Associate Curator at the National Academy of Design and curatorial Resident at the Abrons Arts Center.

Abrons Arts Center is a home for contemporary interdisciplinary arts in Manhattan's Lower East Side neighborhood. A core program of the Henry Street Settlement, Abrons believes that access to the arts is essential to a free and healthy society. Through performance presentations, exhibitions, education programs, and residencies, Abrons mobilizes communities with the transformative power of art. La Residencia is a collaboration between Abrons Arts Center and Pública Espacio Cultural that supports artists of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Abrons and Pública, together with resident artists, develop platforms to support interdisciplinary, transnational collaboration with Puerto Rican and New York-based artists and cultural institutions facing challenges due to the archipelago's colonial relationship to the United States.

Pública Espacio Cultural is a cultural space founded in November 2018 by cultural producer Naíma Rodríguez and independent curator Natalia Viera Salgado. The space is located in the community of Alto del Cabro, one of the most important historic neighborhoods of Santurce, Puerto Rico. One of the major problems on the island currently is the lack of funding and spaces dedicated to serve the community in the cultural and arts sector. In November 2018, Pública: opened up its doors to become a platform for local artists and international artists as a way to strengthen the relationship between Puerto Rico and an international audience.

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space is located inside Essex Market, which is fully accessible by ADA standards. The gallery can be accessed from any ground floor entrance. Cuchifritos Gallery welcomes assistance dogs and has wheelchair-accessible restroom facilities on the lower level and 2nd floor, which can be accessed by the east-side elevator. For access inquiries, please contact Artists Alliance at info@artistsallianceinc.org or (212) 420-9202.

Artists Alliance Inc. is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization located on the Lower East Side of New York City within the Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center. Cuchifritos Gallery is supported in part by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Exhibition programming is made possible by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and the National Endowment for the Arts. We thank the New York City Economic Development Corporation and individual supporters of Artists Alliance Inc for their continued support. Special thanks go to our team of dedicated volunteers and interns, without whom this program would not be possible.