

María “Lulu” Varona  
*Justo ahora* (right now)  
June 15–August 17, 2024

EMBAJADA, San Juan, is excited to announce artist María “Lulu” Varona’s second solo exhibition at the gallery, *Justo ahora* (right now), on view June 15–August 17, 2024.



*María “Lulú” Varona describes her practice of embroidering images on fabric using the cross-stitch technique as one that not only requires a significant investment of time and attention, but also necessarily requires affection, requires love. Her compositions are, in addition to an artistic practice, a practice of care—in fact, it is precisely this care that makes possible the poetry that **Justo ahora** gives us. Beyond being personal care, it is above all collective care. It does not merely encompass the present. Since it is a product of tradition, it is also a product of that which recurs.*

*Like Lulú, her grandmother also sewed, and it is the inherited pulse that is honored in each piece. The needle of Lulú, of our moment, is in turn the needle of a country. The needle passed from hand to hand, from generation to generation - crossed by social classes, crossed by gender, crossed by the resistance that subsists and continues to affirm its existence despite everything, despite so much in the colony. Lulú inserts and passes her*

*needle through her dyed and colorful textiles, full of an apparent infinity of tiny holes that she takes advantage of in order to spin embroideries that break with the norm of the patterns we are so accustomed to. That is, this practice of care also goes hand in hand with rejecting and abandoning that which is normative or hegemonic, both formally and figuratively.*

*Lulú improvises her compositions on the textiles like someone who sows in his land what becomes possible according to their needs and abilities. She thus ends up harvesting a symbology that we can formally trace, not only to the most immediate past, but also to the caves, to the stones where our island navigating ancestors recorded their desires, occurrences, dreams and experiences. Today we call these images petroglyphs, distinguishing the spirituality of their respective artisans, healers, priests - behiques - from our own creative germ. As if it were not the same impulse, the same collective being, the same tradition - which now leads Lulú to forge her representative compositions of our community through a particular set of signs that, over the span of her career, are transformed into her own figures - a product of her unique hand.*

*Just as we can articulate that a certain petroglyph is a Taíno idealization of the sun, Lulú's work gives us the opportunity to name the embroideries as collective signs which we can identify with. Whoever lives in this archipelago is able to see their world in one of these pieces. It is not a matter of being the most elaborate, it is instead about the immediate (that which is closest, including the struggles), the primitive, which in turn is still the most loaded - what belongs to us. The wind and the coast along with the beings that reproduce on it. The possibilities of life that the land offers accompanied by the hands that honor it by working under the common sky.*

*In **Justo ahora** Lulú exposes the collective fight against the violence that we suffer from and are so used to resisting. At the same time, she does not remain an observer, but rather represents herself in these images, in these processes. It's as if she tells us: "Right now (the literal translation of **Justo ahora**) what we have to do is venerate life, our life." Lulú shares with us a collective tradition she belongs to, first through the legacy of her ancestors and secondly, through her own work— but mainly and maybe most importantly because she is, after all, Puerto Rican.*

—Alberto Zayas, 2024

Maria Lulu Varona (b.1993, San Juan, Puerto Rico) started her studies in theater before transferring to the visual arts at the University of Puerto Rico. Varona learned embroidery techniques from her grandmother, applying it to make works addressing contemporary conditions. She has participated in a number of residencies including the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) Brooklyn, NY (2018), Flux Factory, Queens (2019), Program for Independent studies at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico (MACPR), San Juan (2020), ACRE Residency, Steuben, Wisconsin (2021), Teton Artlab, Jackson, WY (2022), New Wave Art Residency, Palm Beach (2022), the Clemente Soto Velez, New York, NY (2022), Art Omi, Ghent, NY (2023), and Bed Stuy Art Residency, Brooklyn, NY (2024). Varona had her first solo exhibition *LABOR-DADA* in 2021 at Embajada, San Juan. She has exhibited in various group exhibitions including the pioneering exhibition *No Existe un mundo post huracán* curated by Marcella Guerrero, the Whitney Museum, New York (2022) as well as at Charles Moffett Gallery, New York (2023), the Green Gallery, Milwaukee (2021), Abrons Art Center, New York (2021), Embajada, San Juan (2020), Fluxus Factory, Brooklyn, NY (2019), Bronx Art Space, New York (2017), and Roberto Paradise, San Juan (2017). Varona lives and works between New York and San Juan.