



EMBAJADA

Jean-Pierre Villafañe

*OFRENDAS*

EMBAJADA, San Juan

January 30-April 18, 2026

Presented at Embajada, *Ofrendas* is a body of work by Jean-Pierre Villafañe that considers Puerto Rico as a lived space shaped by repeated gestures of devotion, abandonment, and extraction. The works attend to the slow transfer of places; how ownership, purpose, and responsibility shift through quiet procedures, strategic delays, and persuasive forms of normalcy. Change does not arrive suddenly; it settles into routine until the handover feels complete.

Across the paintings, architecture appears hollowed yet carefully arranged. Schools, houses, coastal structures, and public housing interiors exist in states of readiness, as if prepared for uses already decided elsewhere. These spaces bear the marks of overextension; not physical ruin, but the fatigue of being shaped by distant decisions rather than local needs.

One painting centers on the former Escuela Madame Luchetti, a public school named after a pioneering Puerto Rican educator and later sold to a private institution. Villafañe depicts the building on the first day of classes under its new administration. The figures belong fully to the present: a girl dressed as the Statue of Liberty, a boy as a conquistador. Their costumes register how colonial histories are absorbed early and rehearsed through education and play. A mother turns away with a pilates mat while the labor of care shifts to a maid. Within the same walls, instruction, work, and belonging are redistributed into a new institutional rhythm.

Elsewhere, a house becomes the site of an unspoken transaction. A blank check enters quietly, framed as temptation rather than demand. Inside, the figures turn inward, weighing memory against relief, attachment against escape. The home hovers between what it has held and what it promises to release. The offer gains its force through imagination, through the futures it allows the family to rehearse beyond the strain of staying.

Along the coast, a hotel rises among the edge of the beach. The sea remains visible, reorganized through access points, boundaries, and conditions. The shoreline functions as an interior; managed, regulated, priced, where common space is converted into framed experience through permits and assurances.

In *Puerta Sin Tierra*, Villafañe turns to a site where residents were displaced to clear space for future development. The painting holds the moment of departure. What remains is the posture of someone who trusted a promise that did not hold. The scene registers the recognition that decisions were made elsewhere and already carried out. Dispossession appears as awareness, arriving after the moment when return is no longer possible.

A recurring presence in the works is the oversized head; detached from ground, labor, and choreography. These figures function as speculative gazes, projecting futures onto spaces they will never inhabit. Their scale establishes distance: close enough to assign value, distant enough to evade consequence. Throughout *Ofrendas*, bodies are arranged into gestures of offering, restraint, and appeal. They wait, carry, present themselves, endure. Devotion takes the form of posture, directed toward institutions, authority, and deferred guarantees. Architecture



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operates as a stage where these postures are practiced long after reciprocity has faded from the exchange.

Villafañe does not resolve these tensions. He stages them. In these paintings, the body becomes measure, architecture leaves its trace, and painting becomes a site where looking and owning can no longer be separated. They do not narrate a story; they mark a situation already in progress.

Jean-Pierre Villafañe (b. 1992, Puerto Rico) earned his Master's in Architecture from Columbia University in New York in 2019, following a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from SCAD. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at Embajada, Puerto Rico (2025); Charles Moffett, New York (2024); Diablo Rosso, Panama City (2023); The Armory Fair, New York (2023); Galerie Hussenot, Paris (2022); Hoffmann Maler Wallenberg, Nice (2022); The Yale School of Architecture, New Haven (2022); and Museo de Arte y Diseño, San José (2021), among others. In 2024, he was selected as a resident artist for the year-long Silver Arts residency program at 4 World Trade Center in New York City, and in 2023 he was awarded the TPC Art Finance Prize for the most exceptional and innovative presentation at The Armory Fair. That same year, he completed three large-scale permanent murals for the restaurant Cecchi's in the West Village, which have since been featured in publications including *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, and *Vogue*. His work was recently featured on the cover of the winter issue of *Art in America*, and his studio practice is based in Chinatown, New York City.