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	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221

NEW pictures

HASUPED

Subway ~~plebicide~~

PPC

Bleeding Reality

HASUPED

MPK

Garden

Real - ~~plebicide~~

The war

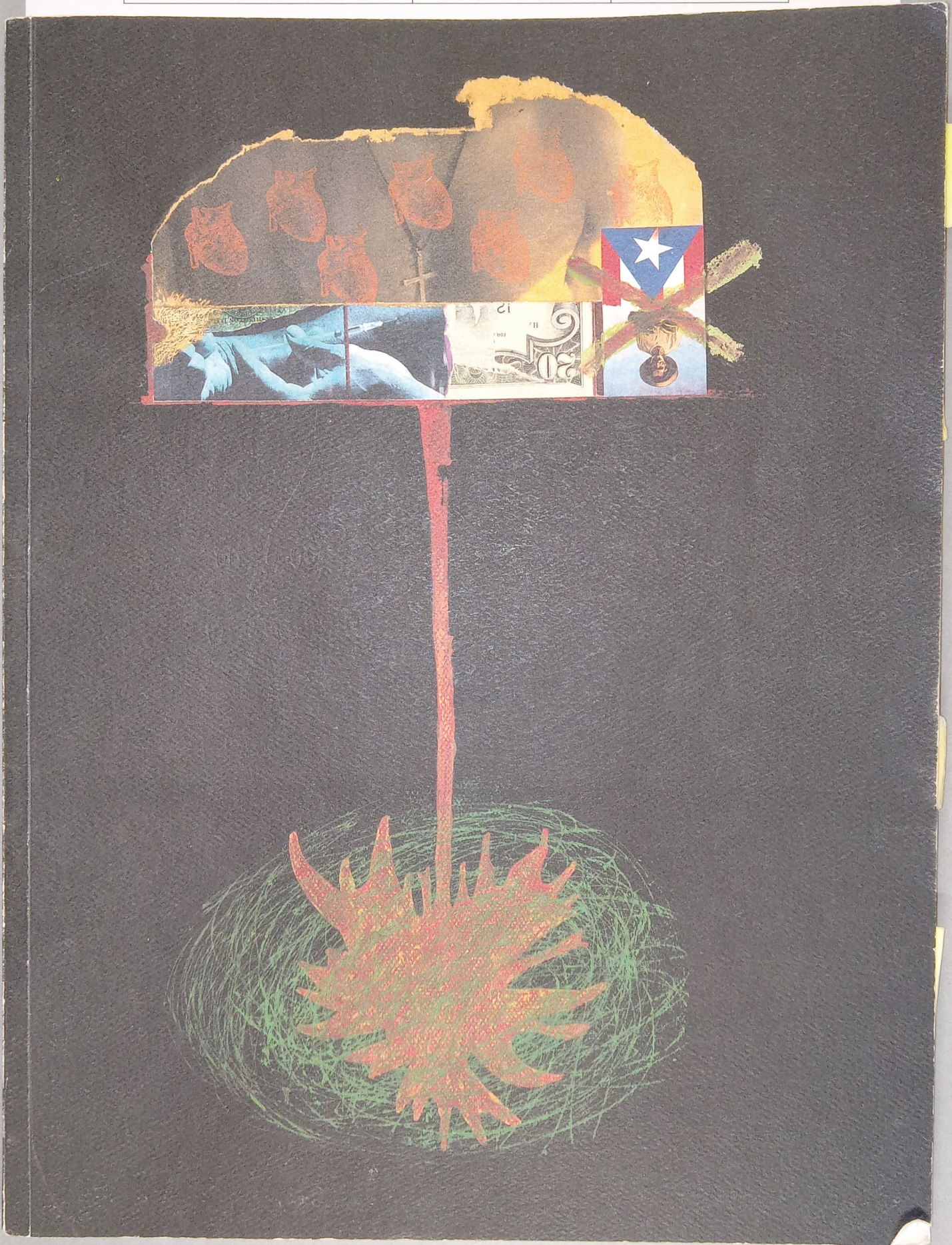
The reason why I put the subway picture with

picture is like going away and soon there will be no Puerto Rico just another country that America was dominated.

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	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221



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	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221

**Juan Sánchez**

**Printed  
Convictions**

**Convicciones  
Grabadas**

**Prints and Related Works  
on Paper**

**Grabados y Obras en Papel**

Organized by / Organizada por  
Alejandro Anreus, Ph.D.

**Jersey City Museum**

**December 2, 1998 -  
March 20, 1999**

*This catalogue and exhibition  
have been made possible in part  
through the generous support of  
The Peter Norton Family Foundation  
and AT&T*

*Este catalogo y exhibición  
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debido al patrocinio de  
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Juan Sánchez

**Printed Convictions / Convicciones Grabadas**

Prints and Related Works on Paper / Grabados y Obras en Papel

December 2, 1998 - March 20, 1999

Jersey City Museum



NEW JERSEY  
STATE  
COUNCIL  
ON THE  
ARTS

The Jersey City Museum is funded in part by the City of Jersey City and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, A Partner Agency of The National Endowment for the Arts.

Organized by: Alejandro Anreus, Ph.D.

Catalogue Design: Garry M. Rideout

Photography: Robert and Aida Mates

Type set in Times Roman.

© 1998 Jersey City Museum

472 Jersey Avenue

Jersey City, New Jersey 07302

Cover: *Huracan Here and There*, 1998,

mixed media on paper

unique numbered catalog edition

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## Exhibition Schedule

December 2, 1998 - March 20, 1999

Jersey City Museum

472 Jersey Avenue

Jersey City, New Jersey 07302

September 4, 1999 - January 9, 2000

El Museo del Barrio

1239 Fifth Avenue at East 104th Street

New York, New York 10029

January 24 - March 31, 2000

Center for Latino Art and Culture

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903

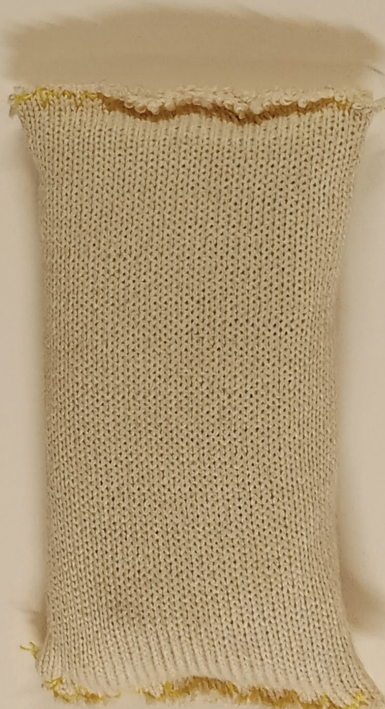
January 16 - March 11, 2001

University Art Museum

The University of New Mexico

UNM Fine Arts Center

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131



The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221

## Artist's Dedication

First, I wish to praise my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his continued blessings.

To Julio Juristo (1927-1995), a much missed and cherished friend, artist and master printer, who taught me a new approach to making monotypes. Julio's sense of humor, love and enthusiasm for art, life, his darling wife Michelle, his sharing of tears for our beloved mothers, his yearning for his Mexican and Spanish heritage, and his appetizing peanut butter sandwiches revealed to me that art must persist as an act of faith. When he dared me to produce monotypes, I had to learn that the heart is where the art is.

To Robert Blackburn, master printmaker, artist and dear friend. It was your persistent urging that made me go into printmaking. God bless you.

To my beautiful daughter Liora Sánchez-Villegas and beloved wife Alma Villegas.

To my adored mother, Carmen Maria Colón (1919-1987). Your absence continues to inspire and occupy a powerful presence.

To my father, Juan Enrique Sánchez, Sr. (1930-1996). We never really bonded or understood each other. But your passing was nevertheless painful, sad, and I always loved you.

To the Puerto Rican prisoners of war and political prisoners incarcerated throughout the United States: Edwin Cortes, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jimenez, Adolfo Matos, Alejandrina Torres, Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydee Torres, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Alberto Rodriguez, Ida Luz Rodriguez, Dylcia Pagan, Luis Rosa and Carmen Valentin.

Juan Sánchez

## Dedicatoria Del Artista

Primero quiero alabar a mi Señor y Salvador Jesús Cristo por sus continuas bendiciones.

A Julio Juristo (1927-1995), un amigo muy añorado y querido, artista y maestro grabador, quien me enseñó una nueva forma de hacer monotipos. El sentido del humor de Julio, su amor y entusiasmo por el arte y la vida, su amada mujer Michelle, el haber compartido lagrimas por nuestras queridas madres, su ansia por su herencia Mexicana y Española, y sus sandwiches de mantequilla de maní, me revelaron que el arte debe de persistir como un acto de fé. Cuando me retó a producir los monotipos, tuve que aprender que el arte está en donde está el corazón.

A Robert Blackburn, maestro artesano del grabado, artista y querido amigo. Fue tu persistencia la que me empujó al grabado. Dios te bendiga.

A mi bella hija Liora Sánchez-Villegas, y mi querida mujer Alma Villegas.

A mi adorada madre Carmen Maria Colón (1919-1987). Tu ausencia me sigue inspirando y sigues siendo una fuerte presencia.

A mi padre Juan Enrique Sánchez, Sr. (1930-1996). No nos acercamos y comprendimos mutuamente. Tu muerte me duele y llena de tristeza, y siempre te amé.

A los presos de guerra Puertorriqueños y a todos los presos políticos encarcelados por todos los Estados Unidos: Edwin Cortes, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jimenez, Adolfo Matos, Alejandrina Torres, Carlos Alberto Torres, Hayde Torres, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Alberto Rodriguez, Ida Luz Rodriguez, Dylcia Pagan, Luis Rosa y Carmen Valentin.

Juan Sánchez

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221

## Juan Sánchez Rican/Structs

In these times when bureaucracies censor art and the latest faddish decadence is proclaimed as art in the name of freedom, it is refreshing to encounter the work of Juan Sánchez. There is no doubt that Juan Sánchez is one of the most important Latino visual artists working in the United States. Yet, I will go even further, betting that Sánchez' work will have the permanence of a rock; that is, it will prevail.

Juan Sánchez was born in Brooklyn in 1954, to a working class Puerto Rican family, one of the many families who immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. Instead, they found that the American Dream was not reserved for the poor. Sánchez grew up in the barrios, where economic deprivations, poverty and violence are common. From an early age, his mother (possibly the most powerful influence in his life) gave him a profound and impassioned sense of his Puerto Rican identity.

Juan Sánchez attended Arts High in Manhattan. In 1977, he received his B.F.A. from Cooper Union and in 1980, his M.F.A. from the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Since his youth, Sánchez had been in contact with the activist group the Young Lords. He was also involved with the Taller Boricua in East Harlem. His development as a man and artist has always been within the social dialectic. By 1980, Sánchez already possessed his own visual vocabulary, and, since then, has used it to express the essence of his art: the liberation of Puerto Rico, the struggle against political oppression, and the spiritual and social emancipation of his people.

Sánchez is a mixed media painter. In his colorful and highly textured canvases, acrylics, grease pencils, oil sticks and photographs are intermixed. In addition, Sánchez has produced a substantial body of work on paper; not only in printmaking, but also in unique works. Since 1991 he has been making an impressive series on paper entitled *Rican/structsions*. The term refers to a word invented by salsa musician Ray Barretto — meaning a recovery of the hidden histories of a people. Up to now, the series consists of some one hundred works, all of them on sheets of black paper which measure 16 x 20 inches. Several of these images will be published shortly in book form, together with poems by Puerto Rican authors.

Recently, I visited the artist's studio and was in awe of the consistent intensity of the *Rican/structsions* pieces. My eyes were filled with flowers, crosses, Taino symbols, Puerto Rican flags, the warm figure of the

artist's mother, guns, fetuses, the serene face of Alma Villegas (Juan's wife), saints, the joyous figure of Liora (Juan and Alma's daughter), and the holy face of Don Pedro Albizu Campos. I decided to stop with greater detail in front of these *Rican/structsions*, so that I may understand and interpret them better. Among several powerful images, I stopped to look at five.

The first image that I examined juxtaposes past and present identities of Puerto Ricans. A photo from the Puerto Rican Day Parade of an old man with a hat and *guayabera*, a folded flag resting on his arm, floats above a larger, inverted image. It is a detail from Ramón Frade's classic 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting *Our Daily Bread*, which depicts an old peasant wearing a hat, shirt and slacks, and walking barefoot down a hill, holding a bunch of green plantains. His thin face has been burned by the sun, his hands are wrinkled and callused from so much toil. The background is yellow ochre, like the earth itself. Sánchez contrasts the old peasant of yesteryear with the old man of today. Both are dignified, both are holding on to their identity in spite of the devastation of colonialism.

The second image is sober, almost all in black, gray and pieces of white. Throughout the entire rectangle, an image repeats itself twelve times; three military policemen are lifting and arresting an old woman. This old woman is the activist and poet Isabel Rosado, who since the age of twelve has been a member of the Nationalist movement. The incident, whose fragment we view, was a protest on the island of Vieques, across from the Marine base there. This was in 1979. We see the faces of two of the policemen; they have the cold, rigid faces of power. The face of Doña Isabel Rosado is a poem of resistance. Juan Sánchez has drawn hearts, each a different color, around the figure of Isabel Rosado. These are signs of love and admiration for this activist. In the middle of this composition, we find a leaf, brown, delicate, yet strong — a symbol of life. Sánchez pays homage to one of the heroines of the movement of Puerto Rican independence; the figures of de Burgos and Lebrón are united with the figure of Isabel Rosado, within the artist's pictorial repertoire.

Undoubtedly, the most virulent image that I contemplate is the third one. The black of the paper surrounds everything. A fetus is repeated six times on the top of the sheet. Over the six figures, Sánchez has drawn an enormous flower with yellow petals and a red center. Underneath this, a face is covered by the Puerto Rican flag, to the left of which are fingerprints. A piece of newspaper takes up the right of the sheet: "El Mundo, Sunday October 2, 1988/page 17/hispanic slain by police." Underneath, a photograph of a hand holding a

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY

Collection:

MoMA PS1

Series.Folder:

II. B. 221

first study and use photography in your work, and how has it evolved? Who were some of the mother or father figures?

**JS:** I was first introduced to photography during a three-week course at the High School of Art and Design. However, I really connected to photography as a working medium when I was a freshman at Cooper Union in 1973. I studied with Eugene Tulchin who had the patience and insight to focus my attention on issues that were important to me. Using the contact print, he taught me how to select images that could narrate a story or express an idea. Although a demanding teacher, Tulchin showed great concern for my work, so I felt nurtured. He not only taught me a lot about photography, but he instilled in me an ethic for hard work.

At some early point, I learned about the photographic work of Robert Frank and Gary Winogrand as well as a host of other important photographers. With the exception of Gordon Parks and Roy de Carava, however, most of the photographers I had been introduced to were white North Americans and Europeans. So I yearned to learn about Latino photographers whom I had only heard about through artists at the Taller Boricua. Sometime during 1974, I saw the exhibition "Dos Mundos: Worlds of the Puerto Rican" at the City Gallery at Columbus Circle.<sup>5</sup> It was an exhibition of Puerto Rican photographers who lived on the island as well as in the United States. The catalogue, designed in the format of a portfolio, featured a selection of prints from the exhibition. Whenever I shot rolls of film and made contact prints out of them, "Dos Mundos" was my point of departure. The exhibition had a tremendous impact on me—so much so that I began to emulate the documentary style and the social/political themes of those photographers.

**JPH:** How did you connect with the photographer Julio Mitchel?

**JS:** Interestingly enough, I came across the photography of Julio Mitchel through En Foco. I started following his work from that point on. Although I had really admired his work, I didn't meet him personally until 1980 when I had begun working as an admissions officer for the School of Art and the School of Architecture at the Cooper Union College where Julio was also teaching. Some friends suggested that we meet each other. He came to my office one day, and from that point on, we hit it off. In all honesty, I learned more about photography from Julio Mitchel at the time than I could ever have imagined. He showed me his own photographs, but more importantly, he showed me his

contact prints which gave me a sense of his conceptual and formal approach to his subject. We still exchange ideas and show each other our work.

**JPH:** You use many kinds of found materials in your work. Describe some of them, and tell us why you use those materials the way you do. What do those materials help you communicate visually and thematically?

**JS:** Regarding found materials, I'd begin with my appropriations from newspaper and magazine clippings and images. Behind the layout of these images is the incredible mechanism of advertising that is designed to disseminate information to produce a particular impact on society. In examining media images for information and misinformation, as well as for the multiple readings contained therein, I often feel compelled to appropriate them and subvert the context in which they appear by combining them with my own imagery, texts and information. For example, at one point I came across an advertisement for the American Express Card. The ad said: "You got Puerto Rico in the palm of your hand." In terms of marketing strategies, it appears that that ad had a favorable impact on the tourist business. The allure of that ad was such that I felt compelled to take that image and make a collage out of it. However, my interest was in bringing attention to another layer of meaning imbedded in the advertising text. To hold a country in the palm of your hand, from a commercial perspective, is to exercise an economic stranglehold on it. That is an explicit form of colonialism. Therefore, the ad, in its new context, is intended to raise questions about the colonial role of the United States in Puerto Rico.

I also tend to appropriate other elements, such as the Taino petroglyphs, related to our own (Puerto Rican) cultural legacy. The history of Taino petroglyphs goes back centuries. From a contemporary perspective of people interested in reclaiming our cultural roots, the petroglyphs are very loaded with new meanings. The image of the Cemi, which I use in the print *Confused Paradise*, as well as in other prints, represents a god—Cemi in Taino means god. By placing the image of a deity over an upside-down palm tree, I am able to make several references: on one hand, I recall the original inhabitants of the island through the figure of the Cemi, and on the other, I appropriate the palm tree, the stereotypical tropical plant, with the knowledge that it was originally brought to the New World by the early colonizers. By placing the palm tree upside down, I communicate the notion that the political status of Puerto Rico, presently a "commonwealth," is a precarious, ambivalent one. From my viewpoint as an *independentista* (advocate for Puerto Rican indepen-

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA PS1	II. B. 221

dence), the island is out of balance, or upside down. Furthermore, the image of the Cemi petroglyph symbolizes an ongoing struggle for freedom throughout the centuries.

**JHP:** How does autobiography inform your work?

**JS:** I think it is important for people who look at my work to understand that whatever I address is filtered through from my own eyes, heart, and mind. I'm saying things that have had a direct effect on me as well as on fellow Puerto Ricans, who have had similar life experiences. I speak to the autobiographical, by incorporating images from our family album of my mother, brothers, and myself. The portraits of my mother and my godmother in the diptych *Comadres* (1990) is my way of communicating their importance to me as individuals who had to struggle during their lives. Through their portraits I convey my love and affection for them. The text over the portrait of my mother communicates my thoughts of her as a woman, who was often ill, but who nevertheless showed great strength of character. It reads: "My mother was a wonderful woman raising my two brothers and me alone. My mother always smiled even when in pain." The text above the photographic portrait of my godmother addresses her friendship with my mother and also states how she helped our family to survive. My godmother has had an incredible influence on our family; she contributed to my development as well as to that of my two brothers. For me, *Comadres* celebrates the closest of friendships between two women who helped each other in so many ways.

**JPH:** The monotype *Yo fui* (1990) is one of only a few works that features a self-portrait. You haven't done many works recalling childhood, have you?

**JS:** That is correct. *Yo fui* is one of only two or three self-portraits that I have done throughout my career. In this one I took an old photograph from 1958 that captures children celebrating a birthday party. The children around the cake are all wearing the funny, cone-shaped birthday hats. I'm the one in the photograph wearing a black suit and hat. I developed the composition by surrounding the photo with palm trees and *vejigante* masks. The *vejigante*, a trickster of African descent, is one of the most popular folk figures in Puerto Rican lore. The *vejigante*, characterized by horns and a protruding tongue, is held to be a free spirit who plays with children. As an adult looking at my picture in the birthday hat (which resembles the figure's horn), I thought of myself as a *vejigante*. Therefore, I wrote in the text: "I wish I was a *vejigante* again." By drawing a circle on the photograph around myself, I

was recalling my childhood when at four, I was a happy, carefree child. When I worked on that piece, I couldn't help compare the different experiences I have gone through from my childhood through adulthood. *Yo fui* is also a humorous print—different in tone from most of the others.

**JPH:** You often adopt written texts or passages in your work. Some are appropriated, others are self-authored. When appropriated, they are from Juan Antonio Corretjer, Julia de Burgos, Pedro Albizu Campos, Sandra María Esteves, among others. Your selection of educators, writers, and politicians informs the viewer as much about your interests in those people and their ideas as it does about the meanings communicated by the writers themselves. Why, for example, did you select the particular passage you did from Julia de Burgos in the print *Corazones y flores para Julia* (1994)?

**JS:** A lot of Julia de Burgos's poetry has a very dramatic, theatrical quality to it. Her political poetry is less well-known than her other writings. One of her particularly impassioned verses left an indelible impression on me:

When the multitudes run rioting  
leaving behind ashes of burned injustices,  
and with the torch of the seven virtues,  
the multitudes run after the seven sins,  
against you and against everything unjust and  
inhuman,  
I will be in their midst with the torch in my hand.\*

Burgos's political plea for Puerto Rico's struggle for freedom, in my mind, also applies to other Latin American struggles. As a reflection of my affection for Julia de Burgos, I have incorporated her text into this print as well as into several paintings on the subject.

**JPH:** How do you use screenprinting in your work today? What does it help you to achieve?

**JS:** The screenprinting medium helps me in terms of printing photographic images because it has a whole different quality and density in comparison to a silver-print photograph. I also use it with stencils to create repeated patterns and impressions (marks, shapes, and symbols). At present, screenprinting plays an important role in that it enables me to combine different printmaking techniques. *Confused Paradi(c)e* (1996), made at the Brandywine Workshop, was a combination of offset lithography and screenprinting. By the way, the word "paradice" is spelled with a "c" instead of an "s," so the word references the game of dice. Offset lithography has a slightly different quality in relation to

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