

Art from Puerto Rico goes beyond the canvas

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Installation of Beyond the Canvas showing, left to right, works by Arnaldo Roche Rabell, Elsa María Meléndez, and Zilia Sánchez. (Photo by Jeffery Johnston)

Coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans and the impending referendum on the territory's political status, Tulane's Newcomb Art Museum presents "Beyond the Canvas: Contemporary Art From Puerto Rico."

The exhibition presents the work of five artists whose works allude to this critical moment in Puerto Rican history: Zilia Sánchez, Julio Suárez, Arnaldo Roche Rabell, Pedro Vélez and Elsa María Meléndez. Each of the artists challenges the notion of the canvas as a flat surface for painted images by pulling, rubbing, folding, slashing, ripping, sewing and warping the fabric.

“Beyond the Canvas” is accompanied by a student-curated show, “Culture, Community, and Civic Imagination in Greater San Juan.”

The smaller exhibition was envisioned, curated and designed by Tulane students enrolled in Women, Community and Art in Latin America: Puerto Rico. The course, co-taught by Edith Wolfe, assistant director of the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, and Mónica Ramírez-Montagu, director of the Newcomb Art Museum, included a trip to Puerto Rico in March.

This exhibits documents citizen-led projects, including a “theater of the oppressed,” organized by a community-run educational center; collective paintings on houses aimed at increasing visibility of marginalized populations; intergenerational workshops for the recuperation of lost artisanal traditions; participatory urban design projects for restoring blighted properties; and the reclaiming of public space through feminist street art and performance.

“Puerto Rico and New Orleans (often called the northernmost point of the Caribbean) share a rich cultural history,” said Ramírez-Montagu. “Tulane is widely recognized for its expertise in Latin American and Caribbean studies, especially through the work of the Stone Center, and we are fortunate enough to leverage that expertise in this pair of exhibitions exploring the current situation in Puerto Rico.”

The exhibition, made possible through the generous support of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Jennifer Wooster (NC '91), Don Peters (A&S '81), and Newcomb College Institute of Tulane University, opens on Wednesday with a curatorial talk at 6:30 p.m. and a public reception from 7:30–9 p.m. The talk will include co-curators Ramírez-Montagu and Warren James, Wolfe, and students from the Women, Community and Art in Latin America class.

“Beyond the Canvas: Contemporary Art from Puerto Rico” will be on view from April 26 through July 9.