

QUEERING HISTORY IN AFTER SCHOOL AND MANDINGA TIMES

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Rita Indiana's new musical project presents an updated version of our narratives about history. The *After School* video emerges from the pandemic as a cover letter for her new album, *Mandinga Times*. Thirteen minutes are enough to unleash the narrative demons of otherness.

The failure of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth is old news. The economic recession/depression coincided with the unpayable indebtedness and bankruptcy of the country's finances. The precariousness and deterioration of living conditions on the island explain, among other things, its increasing depopulation. In the summer of 2016, a series of judicial, legislative, and executive determinations revealed to us that territorial self-government was an illusion. Just then, we learned that the narratives about the history of Puerto Rico had already been exhausted. Still, the hurricanes of 2017, the earthquakes of 2019 and 2020, and the ravages of the global pandemic were yet to come. After losing so much, even history was stripped from us.

The rewrites become urgent; Rita Indiana's *After School* is one of them. The launch of *Mandinga Times* was filmed in one of the

more than 673 schools closed in pursuit of debt repayment. From an empty classroom, we remember the revolution's fire and strategies—discursive contours determined by reparations and demands for love and justice.

In this empty classroom, a bolero-son cries for the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. Under the musical production of Eduardo Cabra and featuring the guitar of Café Tacvba's Rubén Albarrán, Caribbean rhythms reach Mexico. It is necessary to cross land and sea to light a candle. Inside an empty classroom, we miss the *normalista* students who are gone. "Who executes an order like that?" sings Rita Indiana.

Love is the geographical space of *After School* —the voice of conviction, a claim for the writings of a new world, promising different cartographies.

The song "The Heist" evokes a long tradition of piracy and smuggling. The story of the Wells Fargo robbery of 1983 echoes our pirate centuries (from the 16th to the 18th). The mockery of capital's transports—robbing them without shooting fire and using the money to gift toys to the children—proposes another kind of resistance, a different-other course of history. The march that combines the voices of Rita and Mima creates pan-Caribbean, queer-amorous polyphonies as narratives of a new and defiant history, a queer history. In the meanwhile, we recover the figure of Pedro Albizu Campos, and political determination takes refuge in Havana.

After School closes with a call for revolution. *Mandinga Times* means to abandon fear, not to give in, to learn how to live and survive. With terror at night and revolutions by day, "llegó

Mandinga” sings Kiko el Crazy, at full speed (180 bpm). “*Los tiempos de Mandinga*” are the times to inhabit a new world. This is a radical story, a discursive bet on the abject, the queer, and the decolonial. Let’s write together . . . there’s a future.

Commonwealth is organized and curated by Beta-Local co-directors Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares, and nibia pastrana santiago and former co-director Sofía Gallisá Muriente; ICA at VCU Chief Curator Stephanie Smith; Noah Simblist, Chair of Painting + Printmaking at VCUarts; and Kerry Bickford, Director of Programs, Nicole Pollard, Program Coordinator and Nato Thompson, Sueyun and Gene Locks Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary.

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