



“SURVIVING BETWEEN FAILURE AND QUEER/QUIR MAROON WRITINGS”

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By Mabel Rodríguez Centeno

An hour less. How strange is the time change from latitudes so hot, so Caribbean, so wild? Of course, that time is not ours. Shall we elope?

In Puerto Rico “we learned to read the times of nature when the human time was suspended,” says the voice of Sofía Gallisá Muriente in *Celaje*¹ (2020). “Some times are only visible if they stay in your memory” because “here nothing is forever.” “The tropics devour the ruins of progress.” *Celaje* is “an elegy to the death of ELA,” “a piece of experimental film oscillating between an intimate chronicle, a dream, and the historical document.” Just like the archipelago, “disasters, deaths, and absences” accumulate.

By challenging conventional perceptions of time, the piece proposes an other-ours and Cuir/queer temporality that involves historical rewritings, like the slow and constant change of a stone. It is a way of being with/in nature, the recognition of the tiny timescale of our species. It is the possibility of looking at us from “the oldest corner of the island.” It is “dreaming that the ocean swallowed the cement” and that we rescued “ruins with

our hands” to create our own story from premonitions, leftovers, mistakes, and ghosts. It is a narrative of survival out of love — a history from the loving memories of those who are gone and of those who are still here.

Sofía Gallisá provoked me — and I came to understand maroonage in the Caribbean as a historical opening to the affirmation of *celajes*, or bodies escaping from the dominant order. As such, the maroon bodies found the other-ours temporality, different from the regimentation of time that was established by the plantation, as Sidney Mintz reminds us. For many Caribbean thinkers and artists, coloniality is the same as slavery. In these conditions, our only option is to flee. Pedro Lebrón proposes that we should inhabit the archipelago as a *world* of our own, an “exteriority of the Eurocentric world.” In Édouard Glissant’s “right to opacity,” this is described as a maroonage of opacity. I mean, as bodies that travel like unapproachable shadows, leaving the trail of their mystery, far from power’s reach.

The history of Puerto Rico has many erasures. The narratives about the archipelago —from the gold depletion of the 16th century to the Royal Decree of Graces of 1815— insist on material and moral failure. This is the version of the captain-generals, envoys of the crown, and the bishops. But I like to tell them as cracks, a chance to live our own dispersed lives, *vidas-celajes*, full of freedom.

I think of the Cuir/queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist opacity that surrounds me. Every time I go to the Loverbar or Taller Libertá I thrive in our beautiful monstrosity. And I recognize myself and my own as *celajes*. I see us in those free and maroon dwellers of the 16th-18th centuries, who have never disappeared. That

other-world is here. Watching *Celaje* and listening to “Bairópolis” by Ana Macho, along with the Cuir/queer songbook by Alegría Rampante, Rita Indiana, Mima, Macha Colón, Lizbeth Román, and many others, I am sure that there is a future in our opacity and the opacity of stones.

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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