

Related Events:

All events are free and open to the public.

Exhibition Reception

Sunday, May 23, 3 - 5 pm

Open Mic: Record Your History

Thursday, July 22, 6 - 8 pm

What's your family history? Gather with us over coffee to share your family's stories of triumph, struggle and pride at this oral history event. Everyone is invited to tell their story, life lessons and experiences. The stories we share will be recorded and archived by *Chicago Amplified* to download and share with family, friends and future generations.

Film Screening and Debut: *I am Queen* (2010), 1:28 minutes

Saturday, August 14, 1 pm

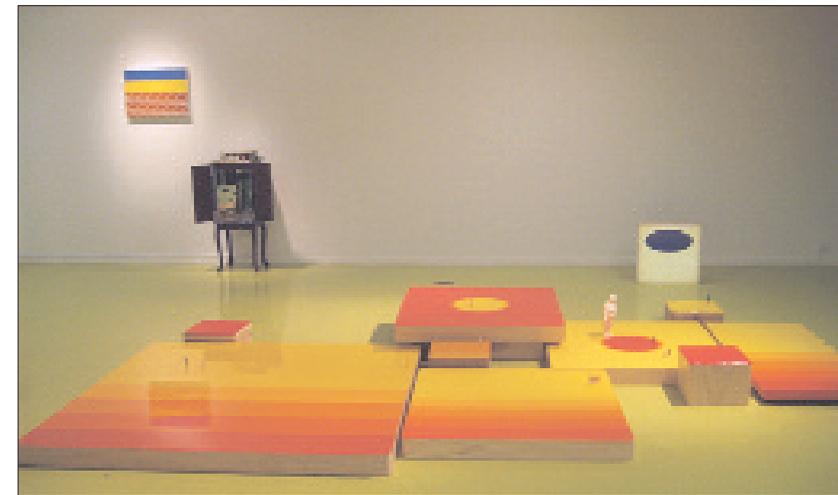
The debut documentary directed and produced by Josue Pellot and Henrique Cirne-Lima, *I am Queen* takes a look at the often unobserved life of Chicago's Puerto Rican transgendered community. In this film, Pellot and Cirne-Lima document the Cacique Pageant, the first annual transgendered pageant held in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. The film exposes the restructuring of the family unit experienced by pageant participants who are often distanced from their biological family only to find kinship among others in the Puerto Rican transgendered community.

About the Artist

Josue Pellot was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, and resides in Chicago. He received a BFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a MA from Northwestern University. Pellot works in various mediums such as painting, video, and sculpture. His work has been shown locally and abroad, including at the Galleria Tinta Roja, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Contemporary Art Society (London, UK), and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Caguas, Puerto Rico.

May 30 - August 22, 2010

Josue Pellot: *Pellot Gonzalez Rios*



Josue Pellot, *Island Installation*, 2010, Figurines on panels: clay, resin, acrylic, and vinyl on wood, dimensions variable

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org

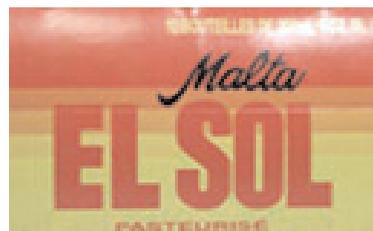
The Hyde Park Art Center is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative exhibitions, primarily work by Chicago-area artists, and educational programs in the visual arts for children and adults of diverse backgrounds. The Center is funded in part by 3Arts, Alphawood Foundation; Boeing; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council; Creative New Zealand; Harper Court Arts Council; The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The Leo S. Guthman Fund; The Irving Harris Foundation; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; JPMorgan Chase Foundation; The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; The MacArthur Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Orbit Fund; Polk Bros. Foundation; The Clinton Family Fund; The Wallace Foundation; and the generosity of its members and friends.

Pellot Gonzalez Rios features all new photographs, paintings, sculpture and installation by the emergent artist Josue Pellot. He combines images of family members and advertising logos in the artwork to understand how we “brand” ourselves. As a point of departure for his work, he looks to his own Puerto Rican culture, tradition, and identity and how it is affected by relocating to the United States. By revisiting memories of his extended maternal family and symbols of Puerto Rican popular culture, Pellot is able to create a slick and puzzling landscape that embodies the alienation felt when stuck between two worlds.

Under American rule since 1898, Puerto Rico has a unique relationship to the US, riddled with mixed emotions. It is the only Spanish colony that has never gained its independence, yet, it is also a proud nation full of rich culture and traditions that carry over into immigrant communities throughout the world. Chicago hosts one of the largest Puerto Rican communities in the United States. The Humboldt Park neighborhood proudly displays a large metal Puerto Rican flag sculpture as its corridor gate. What does it feel like to be here and have a strong national identity but be millions of miles from the “homeland”? As with any immigrant culture, traditions become diluted with distance, thus, allowing new traditions and appropriations of culture to evolve.

Josue Pellot is interested in reframing the commonly held idea of what it means to be “truly” Puerto Rican. Born in Puerto Rico, Josue Pellot moved to Chicago when he was five and was raised by his maternal great aunt (represented as the looming female figure in *Island Installation*). Many in Pellot’s extended family stayed in Puerto Rico, thus, providing an opportunity for him to take frequent trips back and note the differences and similarities of both cultures. For Pellot, the type of fashion, music, and food products favored all play a vital role in the individual’s public display of identity. The artist combines his casual observances of his family with the history of where these cultural allegiances come from to expose the real meaning of the objects people claim as defining of Puerto Rican identity.

In the center of the Cleve Carney Gallery, lies a sprawling horizontal painting, *Island Installation* (2010), which provides the context for the entire exhibition. The horizontal stripes on the painted panels mimic the logo of a popular Puerto Rican/American soda - the malt beverage El Sol. Pellot borrows the warm-toned minimal rays from the El Sol packaging to mimic the commercial presentation of the “glow” of the Caribbean island. Produced in New Jersey and sold only in the US, not in Puerto Rico, El Sol is the ideal icon for Pellot’s discussion of the authentic.



El Sol Malt Beverage logo, image courtesy of El Sol website.

Island Installation also highlights a strong family identity and connection among individuals. The work contains the large clay matriarch figure previously discussed and small groups of figurines, which Pellot calls *Boricuas*. The *Bori uas* are a staple object in Pellot’s body of work. Each hand crafted and painted clay figurine represents one of his family members in their “traditional” (i.e., regular or plain) clothes.

He appropriates the idea for these figures from the mass produced collectible toys called Homies created by David Gonzales, which are typically sold in

corner store vending machines. These miniature toy replicas of Mexican-American west coast characters have a huge popular following among children. The dozens of characters in the Homies series represent “the strong and binding cultural support system” of the Chicano culture “plagued by poverty, oppression, violence and drugs”, according to Gonzalez. Pellot imitates the tiny size of the Homies toys to emphasize his *Boricuas* as an alternative support system rooted in family. Pellot’s *Boricuas*, are anatomically correct, resin-casted reproductions of the real people they replicate, including the artist’s parents and brother and the extended network of great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who played a part in defining who he is. He has represented four generations of his maternal family here. Pellot’s *Boricuas* are an effort to reclaim and reassert the true identity of Puerto Ricans, while subtly critiquing the ghettoized presentation of Hispanic culture in the Homies series.



Josue Pellot, *Felicita Medina de Rios (Mita)*, 2010, Inkjet print on vinyl, 22 x 36 inches

The remaining photographs in the exhibition also allow Pellot to explore Puerto Rican identity on a personal level. The closely cropped bust images, printed on vinyl and adhered directly on the wall, depict the Rios family members as figurines. Blown up to human scale, each figurine’s lack of facial features is exaggerated. The portraits become abstract representations of anyone to allow the viewer to imagine their own friends or family in the photograph. Additionally, Pellot’s stylistic treatment of the lumpy and absent portrait acknowledges the process of time and how it shapes and alters our memory of those important in our lives.

Across the room from the photographs, the sculpture *Mita’s House* sits beside a bright painting of a brick barrier or fence typical in Puerto Rico. The two people greeting the viewer at the front of the house are the artist’s grandparents - the same represented in the photographs, *Mita* and *Papa*. The sculpture is a replica of their home in Puerto Rico. The body cavity of the cabinet contains a custom-fitted fish tank, which displays a plastic palm tree, several fish, snails and some shrimp. The fish tank is an amusing reference to the family’s Caribbean roots. By placing the two renditions of home -the real house and the fake environment - one on top of the other, Pellot plays with clichéd notions of home and identity to caution that home is not always where the heart is.

Josue Pellot surveys his memory of people, places and things in *Pellot Gonzalez Rios* in attempt to visualize the relationships that define us. Puerto Rican culture is rich with pride and customs that the artist acknowledges while questioning which continent those customs originate from. The latest body of work by Pellot shown here, form a humorous meditation on the meaning of family heritage and national identity in a globalized world.

Allison Peters Quinn
Director of Exhibitions