

This student research project was generously funded by the Robert D.L. Gardiner Foundation and uses Long Island Studies Institute collections as the basis for the project.

Exhibit created by Dennis Belen-Morales



Pura Cruz, "Self Portrait by Day"

Introduction:

I was given a research grant to create an exhibit in the Long Island Studies Institute and I decided to conduct a research about the Puerto Rican artist Pura Cruz. I have a personal connection to the Pura Cruz Collection here at Hofstra University as I am a Puerto Rican student from the South Bronx. Over the past few years, I questioned why some communities like the South Bronx are economically segregated. The need to expand my knowledge and understand the plight of Puerto Ricans on Long Island and in New York was integral to creating this research project. Eager to understand this history, I dedicated my time and effort into researching

and reading books and articles on the subject. The research has motivated me to create a bridge of understanding for my peers, who may not have the same opportunities as I did to look so closely at this topic. I noticed that students in my neighborhood were not aware that their voices mattered or that they did not have to go along with the status quo. I realized then that I could play a role in society and make a difference through education.

Using *Historical Populations of Long Island Communities 1790 – 1980*, I was able to figure out that “(t)he Nassau County total was included in Queens County. The 1790 population count for Nassau County was derived from the total of the three towns which separated from Queens in 1899 (15).” It was difficult to find the exact number of Puerto Rican migrants because they were counted in with the rest of the Hispanic population as immigrants, when, in fact, Puerto Ricans became citizens in 1917 under the Jones Act. I came across an article entitled “54 Puerto Rican Laborers Arrive for Suffolk Harvest,” in *The Long Islander*, which reports on the migration of Puerto Ricans into Long Island. The article states that the first set of 27 of 400 Puerto Ricans recruited from San Juan for agricultural labor was set to land on Long Island at MacArthur Field in Islip on July 22, 1948.

Pura Cruz, was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, on September 2, 1942. Her life is vividly detailed in Hofstra University’s Special Collection Department’s Hispanic/Latino Collection, which holds an assortment of documents, videos, and other materials relating to her life. Cruz, aside from her obvious artistic and creative talents, owes some of her other qualities to New York City. “Being raised in the city,” Cruz says, “forces one to learn street smarts.” The creative process for her artwork is spontaneous and original because she generally “plays with a pencil or a brush and draws whatever comes to mind as simple gestures” before they become her art.

The Pura Cruz collection includes a number of personal journals that she used for brainstorming and gathering her ideas. These journals are about the size of an autograph book and contain stapled pictures to their pages that include about 4 or 5 sketches of broken guitars. She might have used these sketches for her “Broken Guitars” [sic] series, which has become Cruz’s signature work, both in sculptures and in paintings. She described the series as “a way of holding on to [her] heritage, as well as a tribute to [su]/[her] papa, Narciso, who helped support his brothers and sisters by playing his guitarra at public events when he was thirteen in Puerto Rico.” The broken guitar collection was a way for her to keep the legacy of her father alive and a way to remain aligned with her culture. Pura Cruz is not only dedicated to her father, but to the Hispanic community that she features in her artwork.



[Puerto Rican Migration](#)



[Pura Cruz](#)



[Pura Cruz Drawings and Artwork](#)



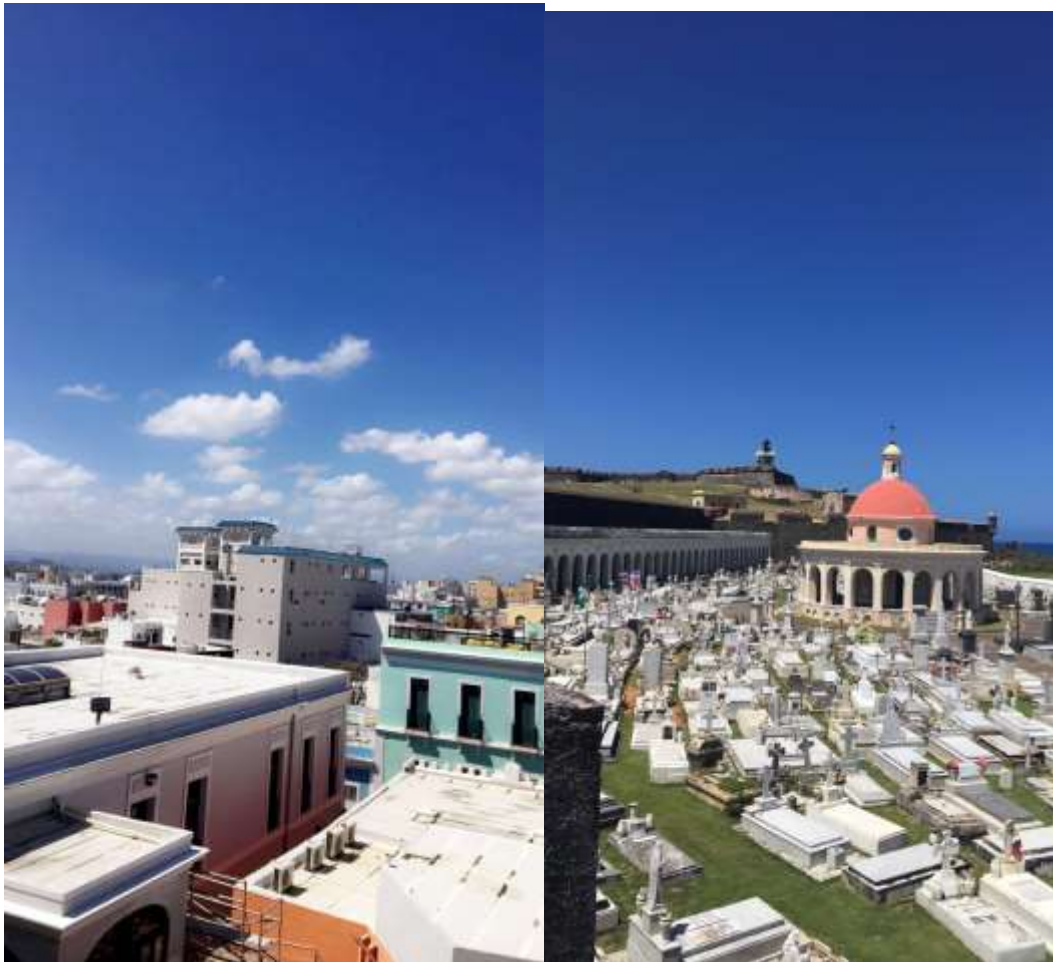
[Broken Guitar Collection](#)

Puerto Rican Migration:

The Puerto Rican community, like other immigrant communities, did not have intentions of leaving their homeland. However, after the Spanish-American War (1898), Puerto Rico officially became a United States Territory. Nineteen years later Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship in order to fight during World War I. Puerto Ricans came to the United States to earn a living, fully intending to go back to their island when the work was done, unlike some immigrant groups who stayed because they were escaping hardship. Puerto Ricans traveled between Puerto Rico and the United States mainland without the need of a passport, therefore becoming migrants. The creation of air travel was one of the principal factors that led to the largest wave of migration—"The Great Migration"—of Puerto Ricans to New York City in the 1950s. They were the first Hispanic group to move to New York City and many other east coast cities in large numbers.



Ensenada, Puerto Rico



San Juan, Puerto Rico

Pura Cruz: Portraits



Pura Cruz, “A celebration for the pride.”
Pura Cruz celebrating her birthday and her father showing the pride he has in his family’s last name. She is happily enjoying her birthday.

Photograph from scrapbook.



Pura Cruz, August 1981



Pura Cruz, 1992



Opening of the show celebrating the life of Marcelo Lucero, 2015. Marcelo Lucero was a 37-year-old man who was stabbed to death in 2008 by a group of teenagers. Pura Cruz honored him with a painting to bring attention to this hate-crime and the anti-Latino sentiment on Long Island.

Pura Cruz: Drawings and Artwork



Native New Yorker, 2006

Pura Cruz grew up in East Harlem and other parts of Manhattan. This painting symbolizes her transition into womanhood with the two sets of lips that represents the artist as a young girl and then as a woman. The skyline represents New York City with its streets and avenues.



A Border Wall Series, Mixed Media

This series is a 5-piece installation consisting of wood, brass sheeting, and chains shows the new Latino labor force coming to America surviving the border.

Time Tunnel Series



The Time Tunnel 2008, Acrylic

Painting

After making several visits to “Our Journeys/Our Stories: Portrait of Latin Achievement,”

at the Long Island Museum in Stony Brook, NY, which Pura Cruz was part of, images of 17th, 18th, and 19th-century travel forms led her to this series where she placed "time" around the old Stony Brook community, and its antique vehicles as a stage actor.

Vertigo Series



Vertigo Series 2010, Acrylic Painting

Pura Cruz developed this series when she discovered that astronaut Neil Armstrong had vertigo; however, he was still able to overcome it to become the first man on the moon. This piece shows that a person can stand up to adversity and refuse to let it stop them. It represents growth and commitment to one's own self-being.



self-portrait by day, 2003 Painting

Self-

Broken Guitar Collection:

In 1999, Pura Cruz felt a disconnect with her family because her father passed away.¹ She learned that he had helped support his thirteen brothers by playing a guitar made only in Puerto Rico known as “el cuatro,” which resembles a violin with similar cut-outs; that he went to weddings and public celebrations, and that he was the lead guitarist during his time. It was in 1999 that Cruz started her broken guitar series and pledged to make 1,000 guitar sculptures as a tribute to her father, her roots, and her heritage.² This series remains a work-in-progress.



Broken Guitara, Barefooted Gypsy 2009 Mixed Media

¹ DVD from October 19, 2009, Box 11 in the Hispanic/Latino Collection located at the Hofstra University Library of Special Collections Archive.

² DVD from October 19, 2009, Box 11 in the Hispanic/Latino Collection located at the Hofstra University Library of Special Collections Archive.



“A Guitar Grows on Long Island,” Broken Guitar

This Guitar was a tribute to Marcelo Lucero. “The thick black ribbon, of course, depicts mourning,” as Pura describes. She included a titled cross. The shape of the guitar portrays growth with its out-reached branches.



Broken Guitara # 41, 2002 Mixed Media

Broken Guitara #18, 2001 Mixed media



This guitar is often mistaken for Cruz's feelings about her Puerto Rican nationalism with its red, white, and blue colors. In fact, this piece was created in remembrance of the September 11th terrorist attacks.



Broken Guitara

Self-portrait with 12 guitars, Mixed media

Sources:

DVD from October 19, 2009, Box 11 in the Hispanic/Latino Collection located at the Hofstra University Library of Special Collections Archive.

“Long Island Puerto Rican Community Thriving.” *New York Times*, 12 November 1972, p.131.

“Hispanic Enclave on Long Island Fights to Retain Bilingual Education Program,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1977, p.21.

“54 Puerto Rican Laborers Arrive for Suffolk Harvest.” *Long Islander*, 22 July 1948, p.21.