[...]ENTREFORMAS presents a new survey of Puerto Rican art based on works in which the language of Abstraction prevails. It is a reflection on the importance of rethinking the historiographic narratives of Puerto Rican art. Through the years, many historians and academics in Puerto Rico have considered Abstract art to be inappropriate with respect to the political agendas to which artists in Puerto Rico should be committed; that is, art in Puerto Rico should, according to these professionals, be an art of social commitment characterized by figuration and the exaltation and defense of a Puerto Rican identity.

In Puerto Rico, Abstraction emerged during the 1950s due to the influence of foreign artists who came to the island and the dialogues initiated by the growing migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland, Spain, and Mexico. During the sixties and seventies, approaches to Abstraction multiplied, creating a varied repertory of idioms in which difference and the critical analysis of art itself was a central concern.

This exhibition is the result of ongoing research that proposes a non-linear dialogue between Puerto Rican artists who live on the island, those who live in the diaspora, and artists who come from other countries and have worked in Puerto Rico. The intersections that occur as part of this exchange invite new readings of the relations that exist between Abstract art and the historical and social experience in Puerto Rico.

ABSTRACTION AS AN ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

Abstraction emerged in Europe in the early twentieth century. The artists who took part in this movement approached the creative process through an affirmation of ideas and concepts that did not seek to reproduce the world around them. Following the currents of European avant-garde art, much of the Abstract art we know by artists who adopted abstraction as an artistic language chose to use the most basic forms of artistic language —form, line, and color— as a way to, among other things, produce a new language.

Having spilled into other fields such as architecture and the scenic arts, Abstraction has manifested itself in a range of intensities, from partial, in works in which figurative traits can still be perceived, to a total and absolute abstraction. But it is in artists’ creativity and their selection of visual languages that a reconceptualization of the image and of the ways in which we relate to it occurs.

The works in this exhibition employ Abstraction to comment on aspects of our socio-political situation and events that impact society, not alone from the standpoint of the visual arts, but also from practices of movement, dance, and performance, in which the body is the principal tool in producing the images.

SYSTEM OF LEGENDS IN ARTWORKS CAPTIONS

Considering this exhibition as a work of research in progress, a system of legends has been created that invite viewers to think about, and travel through, the exhibition from several points of view (according, that is, to the thematic axes, the decade of the work’s creation, the artist’s birthplace —Puerto Rico or the diaspora, or tendencies in public or private art collecting), so that visitors may also make their own associations as they view the works.
THEMATICAL AXES

ENTREFORMAS has been conceived to suggest to viewers a web of relationships among the works in the exhibition based on the works’ affinities to one another in terms of formal characteristics, subjects, and the processes employed by their artists. This grouping strategy does not aim to classify the works in categories by style or chronology. Instead, these common denominators or, as we have called them, thematic axes, serve to help us approach their content, and act as a strategy for debating the hegemonic discourses that have inscribed Abstraction on the margins.

Painting: Point of Departure and Site of Reflection

This axis groups together works that demonstrate a kinship to the Abstract art popular in the United States and Europe from the 1940s through the 1960s. They are linked to an aesthetic marked by gestural brushstrokes (or their equivalent), the size of the surfaces painted, and the spontaneity of their compositions. Although at first glance one might say that these works maintain a connection to the aesthetics of Expressionism and Art Informel, they respond to a material reality different from that of post-war American and European artists.

Geometric: Science and Spirituality

The artists and works in this group are characterized by their use of geometry and the study of form. Most of the works are distinguished by the cleanness of their finishes, the use of flat and highly contrasting colors, and the importance of the form and material of their supports. The artists' analytical drive and methodological rigor evidence their interest in searching for new forms of pragmatism, or at least for ways of synthesizing processes, beliefs, and ideologies able to question the traditional strategies of representation in the West.

EVELYN LÓPEZ DE GUZMÁN (New York, USA, 1947)

The Scarab, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, Collection of El Museo del Barrio, New York, Museum purchase through gifts from the Aguirre Family Fund and Boricua College and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

OLGA ALBIZU (Ponce, PR, 1925 – New York, NY, 2005)

Tema invernal II (Winter Subject II), 1955. Oil on canvas, Collection of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture
**Materiality: Expansion and Deconstruction**

The artists grouped in this thematic axis are marked by an attitude of reflection that explores materials and the political, poetic, and formal implications involved in the process of selection and production of the art object. In the execution of their exercise, there is an affirmation of the elasticity of the pictorial medium (at both the physical and conceptual level) and of the artists’ ability to propose critical revisions of the universalist gaze and those perspectives that have insisted on constraining art within canonical boundaries. These works allow us to approach the field of painting and its modern history through critical reflection on its production (both material and discursive) and the symbolic value that both the market and institutions have invested in it.

**The Political: Intention and the Current Moment**

Although it might seem unnecessary to make this distinction, given that all art is political, what differentiates this group of works from others is precisely the artists’ intention to comment on aspects of the social situation and events impacting society. These works exist in a way that is directly connected to important events and issues in society (migration, race, class, gender, etc.). The artists working in this register propose approaches to Abstraction that are often directly informed by current events and the issues that affect citizens’ daily lives. And through their works, they position themselves politically; they employ an aesthetic that allows them to address the present and question it.

**IVELISSE JIMÉNEZ (San Juan, PR, 1966)**

*Detour 21 (Restauración Post-huracán) [Detour 21 (Post-Hurricane Restoration)], 2013. Oil, acrylic, and enamel on canvas, vinyl, and Plexiglas, Collection of the artist*

**NAYDA COLLAZO-LLORENS (San Juan, PR, 1968)**

*Geo Dis/connect 5, 2020. Paper and framed printed maps, Collection of the artist*
(non-binary) Body: Movement and Spaces

This axis brings together the work of artists who approach painting and Abstraction from practices related to the body, movement, and performance, as well as the study of space and organic forms. In some cases, painting is a kind of sideline from which to investigate the physical and metaphorical space occupied by the body in relation to the act of painting. In others, painting is the result of movement itself, and in yet other cases it is a kind of annotation that translates elements of movement to the field of pictorial image. In all, the dialogue between practices and disciplines is complemented by a site of reflection in which the body is both producer and object of study, simultaneously.

AWILDA STERLING DUPREY (San Juan, PR, 1947)

Vivencias extrañas... muy extrañas (Strange... Very Strange Experiences), 1978. Paper, adhesive tape, chalk pastel, and oil pastel on paper, Private collection

ARTISTS:

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