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Lionel Cruet Flood Aftermath and Other Hurricane Stories

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An exhibition of new work by Puerto Rican artist Lionel Cruet “Flood
Aftermath and Other Hurricane Stories” is part of the group exhibition
“A Perfect Storm” curated by Natasha Becker at FACTION Art Projects in
Harlem, NYC Wednesday-Sunday, February 15–March 8, 2020.

The exhibition opens with a reception at the gallery on Saturday, February 15, 2020
from 4-6pm. The show based on environmental issues includes work by Tatiana
Arocha, Allison Janae Hamilton, Riitta Ikonen, Joiiri Minaya and Demian DinéYazhí.

“Flood Aftermath and Other Hurricane Stories” for A Perfect Storm

We don't know what Cruet has up his sleeve, but the stories of people who lived through the direct hit of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017 are epic.

When the storm passed there was no electricity, no mobile communication, and no government. Services simply evaporated as the entire tropical island turned brown. Everybody was on their own for days, weeks and months. We got thrown back into the Stone Age in a heartbeat. It took a year and a half to reconnect (not fix) the electrical grid.

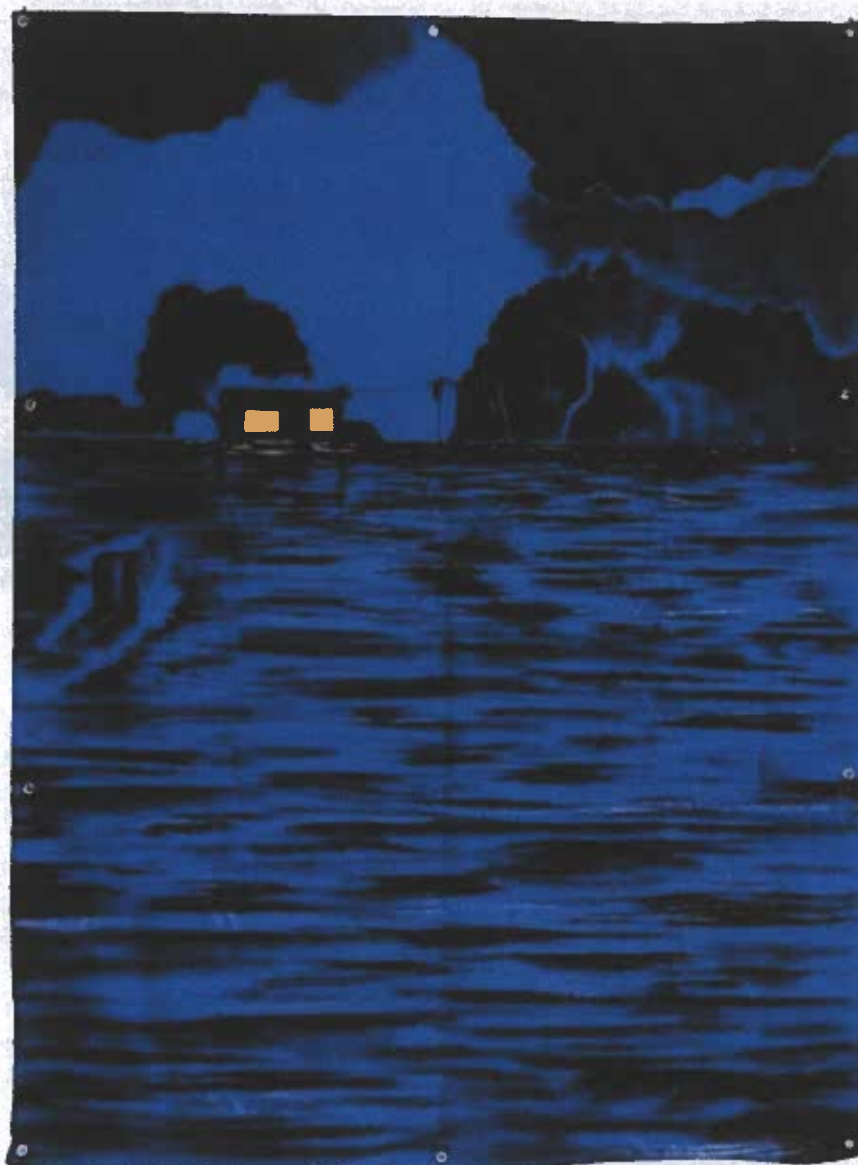
Most of Puerto Rico is fine now, except that thousands of poor people are still living under blue tarps waiting for the promised billions in government assistance that have been “held” by the current administration.

Cruet references those blue tarps in the cover image. The clouds of Puerto Rico have that surreal quality that he anthropomorphizes. The image is a typical Puerto Rican house with electricity among a landscape of floods ahead and clouds behind.

Welcome to Puerto Rico. Don't worry about all the complaining. Come live with us and see just how rich life can be.

Reading the Work

Cruet's work is more interesting if you understand the context. This is our own reading. If you want to know what Lionel has in mind, ask him. He is around and accessible.



"Flood Aftermath and Other Hurricane Stories" by Lionel Cruet

What looks like a person wearing glasses inside a classic Japanese print, is actually a typical Puerto Rican house with the lights on, in the eye of a hurricane.



The Great Wave Off Kanagawa by Katsushika Hokusai (c. 1829-1833). Metropolitan Museum of Art

There may be a reference to Hokusai's "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" (c. 1829-1833), the first print in his series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji. That influential print, one of the most recognized pieces of art in the world, has the sacred mountain of Japan, Mount Fuji in the background.

The hill to the right of Curet's house can be read as the sacred mountain of Puerto Rico, El Yunque. El Yunque is the home of an ancient rainforest and makes her own weather. She really is something. That is why it is so important to protect the forests because trees make weather as if the earth is breathing. Killing the forests kills the earth.

Hurricane Maria crossed over Puerto Rico from the southeast, so for most of the island she would have been seen to come from the same orientation as in the art, as if she was coming from El Yunque. It is ironic that Maria, the Christian mother of God, caused so much pain to a people who love her. Yet suffering is what makes us grow the most. The faithful and all parents know this.

Maria, the Virgin Mary is known for her virgin birth. Atabey, the supreme goddess of the Indigenous Taíno of Puerto Rico also conceived without intercourse. Like the Virgin Mary, Atabey has many manifestations or faces (characters) of the goddess. She represents the physical world, motherhood and love, but also the violence of storms, volcanoes and earthquakes. The human nervous system generates and responds to the same metaphors, around the world and throughout all time. By any name, the divine is divine.

Home is the hearth of the family, the core structure of Latin and Puerto Rican culture. Keeping the lights on in a storm may refer to the way Puerto Ricans survived Hurricane Maria by retreating to their families.

The electric line comes right out of the mountain showing Mother Earth, El Yunque, Atabey, as the source of energy and light.

With the wall in the middle foreground completely surrounded by water, Cruet is illustrating that the building of walls, to keep out people or nature, is an exercise in futility. Cruet's wall almost looks like one of the boats in Hokusai's print.

The blue tarp Cruet painted on is a reference to the tens of thousands of poor Puerto Ricans still living under blue tarps while most of the money budgeted for Hurricane Maria aid (from 2017) is held up in Washington. Supposedly the reason for the delay is fear of corruption. Sound familiar?

Don't quote these numbers because we haven't fact-checked them, but we are hearing of 16,000 Puerto Rican households living under blue tarps in 2020, and something like only \$10 million of \$70 million budgeted for Hurricane Maria aid by the U.S. Congress having been disbursed two and a half years on.

Many of us don't realize that Puerto Ricans are American citizens. It's the poor who still need help. It's the old and the young who either never became part of the system or haven't had a chance yet. Our fellow Americans need and deserve our help.

Don't get me wrong, most of Puerto Rico has recovered itself, certainly all the tourism is operating. We have been in Puerto Rico the entire last year and are not leaving. You should come see how much you can enjoy a simple life with us.

Lionel Cruet

Lionel Cruet (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1989) is a geopolitical artist who explores the environment at the intersection of economics, geopolitics and technology. He lives and works between San Juan and New York City.

Cruet's BFA is from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico (2011). His MFA is from City College of New York (2014). He also has a Masters in Education from College of Saint Rose. He has taught at City College, Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education, and for the New York City Department of Education.

The artist has exhibited at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico and other venues.

He received a Juan Downey Audiovisual Award at the 11th Media Arts Biennale (2013) at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile.

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