



Decolonial Monument Project

Phase I - Caribbean Listening Tour Report

The first week of December, we had the listening sessions with local artists, 14 in Puerto Rico and 13 in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In these sessions the artists expressed their ideas and perspectives about how colonialism affects arts and culture in their islands, how it impacts their work and what a decolonial monument could be. The artists presented a clear and strong denouncement to the imposition caused by colonialism of ideas, meanings and interests that depreciate and damage local culture and makes it very difficult for artistic endeavors to develop creatively with the intervention of extractive economies. Artists in these Caribbean colonies made clear that any decolonial monument will have to be a “process product” that includes the community, in which local stories are centered in a multi-modal and sensorial experience.



Dialogue Session in St. Croix.



Dialogue Session in Puerto Rico.



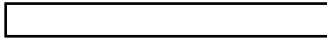
Artist Jaime Suarez, Puerto Rico, using Play-Doh to show what right to democracy means to him.

Inclusion requires continued participation.

In these dialogues, important conversations ensued about what is real, continued, meaningful dialogue and participation.

RtDs methodology, fashioned from the model of *El Enjambre* on last year community dialogues, divided the dialogue in eight prompts. Beginning with what right to democracy means to the participants, which they could answer in artistic ways, the prompts also touched upon the relationship between colonialism, arts and culture, the impact that colonialism has in their work, what a monument is, what a decolonial monument could be, and how they could feel included in a decolonial monument project.

There were diverse reactions of deep emotion. We understand the need for further dialogues and more inclusive spaces for artists to keep exploring these difficult and painful issues.



Local artists - creative and strong voices.
Puerto Rico.



Michelle Marxuach lives and works in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She is the co-director and co-founder of Beta-Local. Her practice is born out of an interest to enhance the creative field and encourage interdisciplinary practices that rethink and redesign their own forms and structures to articulate answers and invent solutions to current issues. She believes that creative, aesthetic thinking is essential for healthy social change. Her curatorial practice established a forum for dialogue and camaraderie among artists.



Gisela Rosario Ramos studied Black and Puerto Rican Studies, Film and Media Studies, and, Fine Arts at Hunter College, NYC. She’s worked in numerous television productions in Puerto Rico as editor and director. In recent years, she has been writing fiction and her screenplay for the short film *Sábado de Gloria* won the first prize of the screenplay competition of CineFiesta 2011.. In addition to her film work, she has an alter ego named Macha Colón, who performs rock/pop music with her band Los Okapi in alternative venues in Puerto Rico.



Twins Javier and Jaime Suárez Berrocal work together and created the manifesto called *Ventre Compartido*. They have a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the UPRM, and a Master's in artistic production from the Polytechnic University of Valencia with a specialization in public art. During their residency in Spain, they began to research topics about minimal interventions in natural environment and strategies for balanced execution in the environment. They excel in “land art” installations using natural materials.

U.S. Virgin Islands



La Vaughn Belle makes visible the unremembered. Through exploring the material culture of coloniality Belle creates narratives from fragments and silences. She has exhibited her work in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe. She is the co-creator of *I Am Queen Mary*, the artist-led groundbreaking monument that confronted the Danish colonial amnesia while commemorating the legacies of resistance of the African people who were brought to the former Danish West Indies.

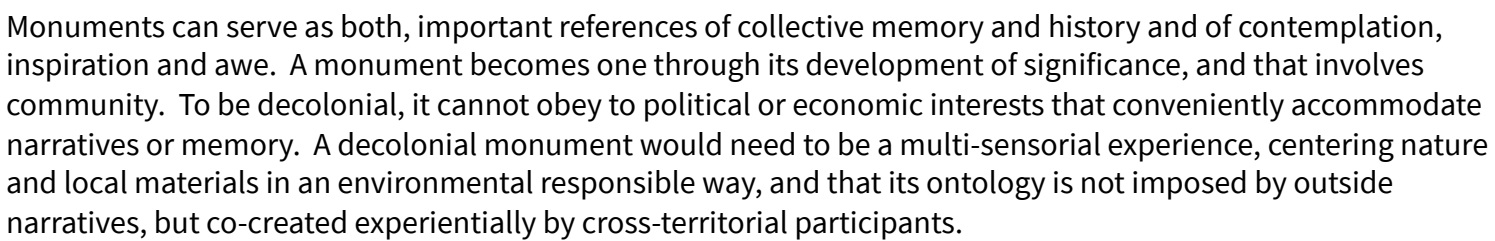
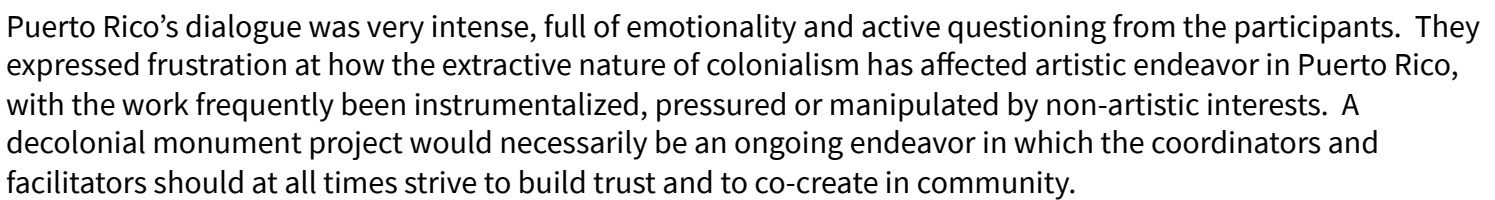


Kurt G. Marsh Jr. is a professional woodworker, architectural designer, and community activist who obtained his Bachelor of Fine Arts and Professional Master’s in Architecture from the Savannah College of Art & Design. Kurt seeks to use his firm as a vehicle to critique socio-cultural constructs regarding identity & culture in a ‘post-colonial’ St. John, using his influence to amplify/stimulate dialogue regarding cultural resistance and adaptation through built form and place-making.



Kamaria Penn is a talented graphic designer. A graduate of the Ringling College of Art and Design with a B.F.A. in Graphic and Interactive Communication and a minor in the Business of Art and Design. She was born and raised in the beautiful U.S. Virgin Islands, which sparked an appreciation for good stories, a love of family, and the richness of culture and community. Her island of St. John inspires her to make life meaningful for others and for herself.

“A decolonial monument cannot derive from imposed agendas. It will have to reflect the intention of the community.”



In Puerto Rico there are many artists with much to say. But there is a need to break free from the imposed and convenient narratives, in order to re-create our memory and re-imagine our public spaces. An impactful and organic monument that broke with imposed narratives was the shoes that were brought in front of El Capitolio, representing the deaths of thousands of loved ones after hurricane Maria. Our favorite monuments are natural, like the Ceiba in Vieques. In a decolonial monument we should recognize those things that we already consider sacred and monumental.

U.S. Virgin Islands

“Stop telling us not to center in our own in order to be creative. Don’t keep stealing our imagination.”



In the Virgin Islands we did dialogues in St. John and St. Croix, and in both there was definite concern with the effects that colonialism has in the stagnation of creativity or the capacity of artists to develop their own narratives. Local institutions do not value artistic endeavor properly, by not prioritizing the spiritual and cultural value of art in education, and looking only to “money-making” endeavors and producing “sellable” things for tourists. Colonialism is definitely stifling creativity and making local traditions of art disappear.



In these dialogues, artists expressed how monuments can be different things; even the ocean and the trees can be monuments. A decolonial monument should be a “gut-punch” that brings you to a realization, but at the same time be a place for contemplation and healing. Recognizing that there will need to be a balance between the community process and the need to trust the artist that build the decolonial monument, participants envisioned the decolonial monument as a multi-sensorial experience or place, environmentally responsible, that should have on-going products and engagement.



The “blinds” need to come off.

We have to recognize that there are people in our islands that do not want to decolonize, and want to keep things the way they are. A decolonial monument will demand that the blinders come off the decolonial subjects.

We also need to face the institutions that have pushed the Americanization of art and culture, keeping our children from not knowing the greatness of their past. Art has the power to create, and education in imposing ideas and not letting us see ourselves. We have to be intentional to create and imagine ourselves.

Local artists - creative and strong voices.



Kimberly Figueroa



Lorel Cubano



Amara Abdal Figueroa



Frendell Gerard



Sommer Sibilly-Brown is a local food systems advocate and the founder and executive director of Virgin Islands Good Food. Sommer has taken courses at University of the Virgin Islands, Walden University and University of Phoenix. She has completed Iowa State's Local Food Leader and Community Food System Program. Ms. Sibilly-Brown has served as the Education Coordinator for St. Croix Landmarks Society and the Farm to School Program Manager for the Virgin Islands Department of Education. She is also an artist and cultural practitioner.