

# CUCHIFRITOS

## GALLERY + PROJECT SPACE

— a program of ARTISTS ALLIANCE INC

artistsallianceinc.org

88 Essex Street  
New York NY 10002

Weds through Sat  
Noon - 6p or by appt.

Leila Mattina

### ***Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil***

Curated by Natalia Viera Salgado

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space

On View Sep 22 - Nov 18, 2023

*Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil is organized by Natalia Viera Salgado and co-presented by Artists Alliance Inc., Abrons Arts Center, and Pública Espacio Cultural as part of La Residencia. La Residencia is a collaborative residency partnership between Abrons Arts Center (New York, NY) and Pública (San Juan, PR) and made possible with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.*

## *Education Materials*

### **Exhibition Overview**

***Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil*** is the first solo exhibition by Puerto Rican artist Leila Mattina. The exhibition encompasses artworks and documentation that trace indigo production in the Puerto Rican archipelago. Through research and material-based work, Mattina shares insights garnered from the cultivation and processing of different types of indigo in Puerto Rico and their interconnectedness in the Caribbean and Latin America.

### **About *Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil***

*Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil* considers how blue—the color that indigo produces—connects us within and to the Archipelago, physically, historically and politically. Along with Mattina’s solo and collaborative art works, the exhibition showcases varieties of seeds, unprocessed fibers, and powdered indigo. All produced and sourced from Puerto Rico, these materials are gathered from TRAMA Antillana, a farm in Aibonito, Puerto Rico founded by the artist. TRAMA Antillana educates the public on the processing of natural dyes and fibers, alongside the chemical constituents and historical significance associated with these materials.

This exhibition aims to illuminate overlooked or eradicated craft practices in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean due to colonization, extractivist practices, destruction of natural resources, and modernization in the name of “progress.” For the Puerto Rican archipelago—a land so fertile, yet prevented from producing and exporting local goods by its colonial relationship with the U.S—*Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil* offers pathways for self-governance and self-determination.

### **Reference**

#### **Añil:** a·ñil

A plant native to the subtropical and tropical Americas, including the Southern United States, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and South America as far south as northern Argentina. It is commonly used as a source for indigo dye, and if mixed with Palygorskite clays, can produce Maya blue, a pigment used by the Mesoamerican civilizations.

**Self-governance** : self-ˈgə-vər-niŋ  
having control or rule over oneself

**Self-determination:** self-di-tur-muh-ney-shuhn  
determination by oneself or itself, without outside influence.

**Colonization:** kōl'ə-nī-zā'shən  
the act of taking control of an area or a country that is not your own, especially using force, and sending people from your own country to live there.

**archipelago:** ɑ:r.kə'pel.ə.gou  
a group of small islands or an area of sea in which there are many small islands

**cultivation:** kuhl-tuh-vey-shuhn  
in agriculture and horticulture, the loosening and breaking up (tilling) of the soil or, more generally, the raising of crops.

### **Brief history of Puerto Rico and Caribbean colonization:**

Originally inhabited by indigenous peoples, Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico were claimed by Spain in the late 1490s, leading to Spanish colonization. European powers vied for control of the Caribbean through the 16th to 18th centuries. The United States took control of Puerto Rico in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. Puerto Rico is now an unincorporated U.S territory.

### **About the Artist**

**Leila Mattina** is a Puerto Rican artist/farmer based in Aibonito, Puerto Rico. She is co-founder of TRAMA Antillana, a farm space focused primarily on producing and processing natural dyes and fibers. Trama is a place for research and development of different practices to grow or source natural raw materials for arts and culture. It also provides a space for continued education and access to a variety of raw materials for the community.

### **About the Curator**

**Natalia Viera Salgado** is a Puerto Rican curator and curatorial consultant based in New York City. She is also the founder of :Pública Espacio Cultural, an independent art space in Alto del Cabro, Santurce Puerto Rico. Her art historical research focuses on contemporary art in relation to decolonial practices, architecture, social and environmental justice, and new media with a keen interest in hybrid and interdisciplinary projects. She has worked at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, El Museo de Barrio, Art in General, Socrates Sculpture Park, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Americas Society. Viera holds a MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts and is currently the Associate Curator at the National Academy of Design and curatorial Resident at the Abrons Arts Center.

### **Exhibition Background**



“Like seeds, Puerto Ricans have experienced a lot of migration/displacement and assimilation/naturalization in the U.S specifically. To me the act of planting a seed that does not belong to a place is a political choice. Indigo didn’t become as profitable as sugar cane, tobacco or other crops but it was brought to the island with the purpose of commercialization. The resurgence of this practice is a poetic example of the power of agriculture and self determination in a place that has been colonized twice and has many restrictions regarding importing/exporting goods.” – Natalia Viera Salgado

“The Lower East Side, *Loisaida*, has been the home for many diasporicans (Puerto Ricans in the diaspora) and it is a parallel to Puerto Rico. Through community based organizations it has served as a bridge to preserve social, cultural and political history. This platform and initiative allows us to have an exchange between Publica espacio and Abrons Arts Center and it has been very enriching and exciting.” – Natalia Viera Salgado



“Since 2014 my artwork has focused on the exploration of fiber as an art medium. I majored in painting so it was only natural that by 2016 I was already naturally sourcing and growing some dyeing plants. Through this exploration of Where do colors come from, I came across the color blue and its origin. Since 2018 I have been growing different *Indigofera* plants and processing them. I hope that the audience takes away a sense of how our complex relationships with materials shape us collectively as humans. In the modern globalized and

capitalistic society we live in, this relationship is reduced to breaking open a plastic bag with a ready made product inside. A gap has grown between us and nature, and I feel that it is our responsibility to ask ourselves where materials come from and how they impact our ecosystem.” – Leila Mattina

## **Recommended Questions for Discussion**

### ***Before Your Visit***

1. Does the color indigo have any importance to you? How do you think it’s made?
2. Where do you find indigo in your daily life?
3. How do you think particular colors impact you and your family?

### ***During Your Visit***

1. How much awareness of cultivation or farming processes do you carry in your daily life?
2. Interacting with the raw materials on the table, did it change your perception of the works installed on the gallery walls? What was it like interacting with the pigment?
3. In what ways does blue, the color that indigo produces, connect to you?

### ***After Your Visit***

1. What did you think of the indigo production process? Are you surprised by any part of it?
2. How does the decline of traditional cultural traditions brought about by colonization connect to the problems encountered by immigrant populations, especially in places like New York City? What can we learn about cultural preservation and self-determination from these experiences?
3. How else can we preserve important cultural practices?

## **Syllabus**

Salgado, Natalia Viera, Amanda Hernández, Leila Mattina, and Steve Maldonado Silvestrini. *Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil Material Suplementario (Reader)*, 2023. La Impresora. Published for the exhibition

*Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil*, co-presented by Abrons Arts Center, Artists Alliance Inc, and Publica at Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space, New York. Edition of 300

"About Caribbean Yet To Come", <https://caribbeanyettocome.wordpress.com/>

"About Barrioization", <https://www.barrionization.org/>

"About Campamento Tabonuco", <https://www.camptabonuco.com/>

"How Artisans in Puerto Rico Sustain Native Culture", June 2023, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/artisans-puerto-rico-sustain-native-culture-180982110/>

Forster, K. (2015). *Arts for Living: A Guide to the Visual and Performing Arts*. Common Books.

*River Rail Puerto Rico*. edited by Iberia Pérez González and Natalia Viera Salgado, Phong H. Bui, 2023

Agrelo, Justin. "How a Change of Color for the Puerto Rican Flag Became a Symbol of Resistance." *Motherjones*, 4 July 2019.

## *Accessibility Information*

### **Visitors Who Are Deaf/ Partially Hearing/ Or Have Sensory Sensitivity**

The current exhibition gallery includes the main room and a smaller room that can be accessed through the opening in the left-hand corner of the gallery. Both spaces include large street-facing windows. This exhibition includes art works both on the left and right side walls of the gallery. There is also a table in the center of the space that includes some interactive materials. In addition to the artwork on walls, there is a TV display with a short video work in the backroom of the gallery space. The video work includes ambient sound of water sloshing as indigo leaves are being fermented in a water bath. This work could be mildly difficult to enjoy for those who are deaf or sensitive to sound.

### **Facility Accessibility**

Baby strollers are welcome in Both Essex Market and Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space. Both facilities are wheelchair accessible and service animals on a leash are permitted.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space or attending programs, please contact Jodi Waynberg at [jodi@artistsallianceinc.org](mailto:jodi@artistsallianceinc.org) or call 212-420-9202.

### **Restrooms**

Restrooms for visitors are located on the second floor of Essex Market, which is accessible via elevator or stairs.

### **Visitors on the Autism Spectrum**

The current exhibition gallery includes the main room and a smaller room that can be accessed through the opening in the left-hand corner of the gallery. Both spaces include large street-facing windows. In the gallery, there is an artwork that implements tactile interactions including interaction with raw indigo pigment.

Please refer to the pages below for a visual guide to accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space:

## Visual Guide: Accessing Cuchifritos Gallery

Hello, today we will be going to visit the Cuchifritos Gallery in Essex Market at 88 Essex Street in New York City. Walking down the street, you may be able to recognize us! At Artists Alliance Inc., we show contemporary artworks by new and emerging artists.



Installation View. Coralina Rodriguez Meyer, *Santuarios Gestion Desmadres*, 22 September-18 November 2023. Cuchifritos Gallery, New York. Photo: Brad Farwell. Courtesy of Artists Alliance Inc

We are currently hosting two exhibitions, *Geografía(s) del Jiquilite al Añil* inside of the gallery, and *Santuarios Gestion Desmadres* in our storefront windows (pictured above). *Santuarios Gestion Desmadres* is a project by artist Coralina Rodriguez Meyer presented in collaboration with The Immigrant Artist Biennial. Meyer's multimedia practice and community organizing celebrates doulas that deliver lifesaving reproductive healthcare and matriarchal interdependence.

Our Cuchifritos gallery is located inside Essex Market, where there are a lot of shops indoors. This means that there are many people walking and touring the shops, as well as the people who run them. You will most likely hear the sounds of chopping from the vendor's food prep, the smell of food, and the voices of people talking and interacting with the stores. It is a comfortable social space, and entering our gallery is just as open and welcoming.

This is the entrance to the Essex Market facing Broome Street between Essex and Norfolk streets.



Once we enter through the glass doors, we should head to the right. We can check if we're heading in the right direction by following the vendors: Top Hop, Puebla Mexican Food, Cafe D'Avignon, Dominican Cravings, and Zerza (in that order). Once you hit Zerza, you can take a left turn and we should be right next to the gallery!







Now, we can enter the gallery through the glass doors (which are always open during visiting hours!). There will be someone at the desk to greet you, but we can freely walk around the space to see what we like. On the desk you'll find a stack of paper that includes the names of the Curator and/or Artist(s) in the show. We can take these with us to better understand the artwork.

Upon entering the gallery, there will be a table in the center of the space on which you will find materials related to the cultivation, harvesting and processing of the indigo plant. There are three fabric-based works hung on the left wall and, on the opposite wall, you will find tools used on the artist's indigo farm, along with four other works composed of varying materials. Behind the table there is a central piece composed of maple wood harvested in Puerto Rico. On the wooden structure are cotton threads dyed with indigo harvested and processed by the artist. In the backspace of the gallery, there is a video documenting the fermentation process used to produce indigo pigment.



When we're ready to leave, we can exit through the gallery doors and retrace our steps to the large glass doors of the market. Or you can explore the rest of the amazing Essex Market shops and installments as well!

I hope we can meet again at the Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space.



### Guide to the Bathrooms

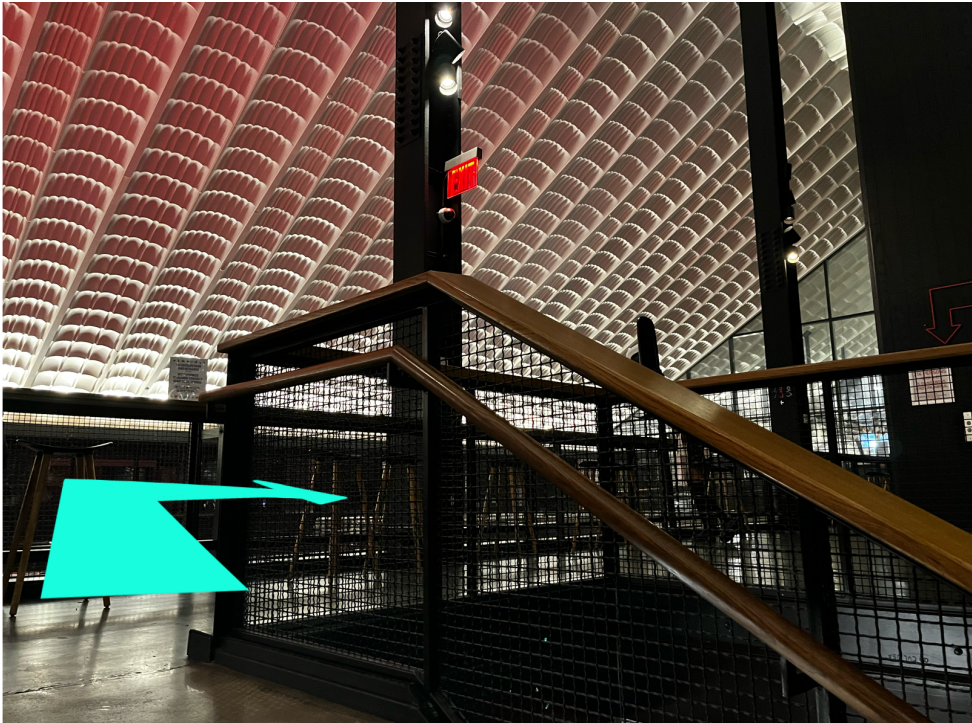
To enter the bathrooms, we can head back toward the entrance we came through in the very beginning. Just beyond that, we should be able to see a staircase leading up to the mezzanine. We can walk up these, or...



We can use the elevators, which you might have noticed on the right side when we first entered the market.



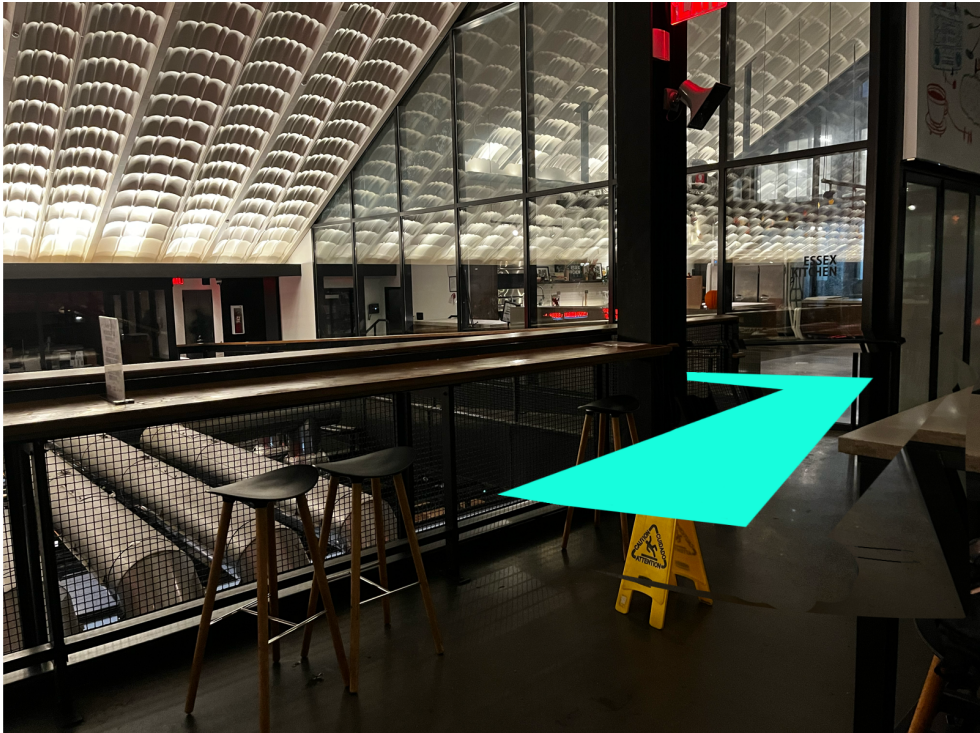
If we took the stairs up to the mezzanine, we can head toward the right.



If we took the elevator, we should make two right turns



Then, we should keep walking along the counters and stools to the left, until we see a long, declining ramp. We can follow it straight down until we reach the end of it by the multiple doors and a glowing exit sign overhead.



Once we reach this area, you can take a right turn toward the hand sanitizer dispenser.





There are the bathrooms! The one on the left with red is for women, and the one on the right with blue is for men. To use them, you will need to put in the bathroom code: 80220#

