

GALLERY SPACE AT WAGNER



re:tratos urbanos

rodríguez calero



Commemorating
Women's History Month 2023



COVER: *Mártir Urbano (Urban Martyr)*, 2015

OPPOSITE: *The Vulnerable Man*, 2021 (detail)



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The Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University is home to the Gallery Space at Wagner. Our mission is to bring artwork into a public-accessible workspace to further engage the NYU community and local audiences in dialogues on contemporary art, culture, and public service. In exploring this intersectionality, we prioritize partnerships that foster social justice, human rights advocacy, and political activism, as well as projects that promote Wagner’s commitment to IDBEA values—inclusion, diversity, belonging, equity, and access.

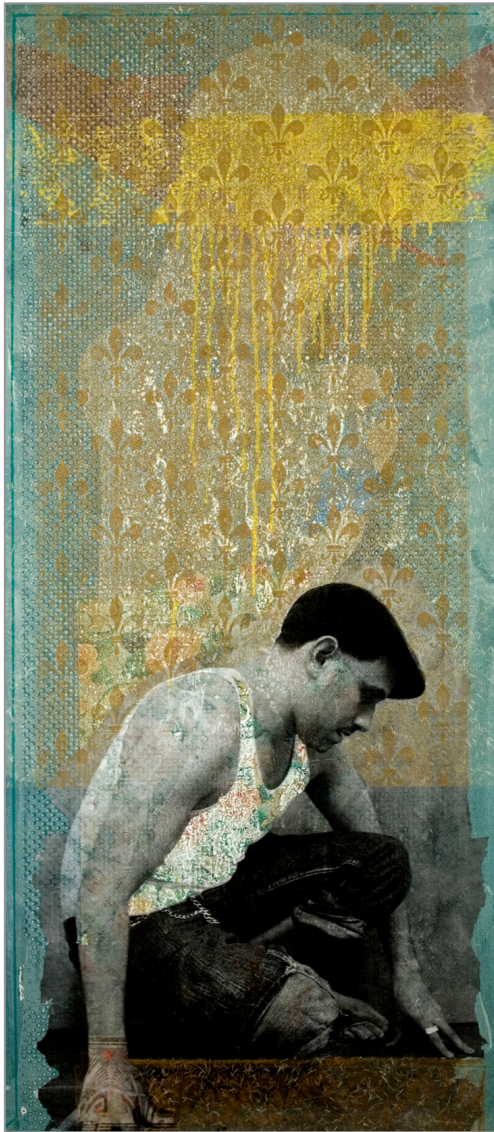
Since its debut in 2005, the Gallery Space has hosted a variety of dynamic and innovative exhibits featuring both established and emerging artists. Painting, drawing, photography, pottery, collage, textiles, printmaking, digital video, and mixed media are among the multifarious disciplines showcased in the space. Frankie Crescioni-Santoni, Communications & Design Manager, curates the three annual exhibits held at the gallery.

Located on the second floor of the historic Puck Building, the Gallery Space is comprised of two main display areas measuring 10 feet wide by 6 feet tall and 29 feet wide by 6 feet tall, in addition to two auxiliary walls. These spaces are primarily reserved for NYU-affiliated artists with a focus on fostering partnership among the diverse University constituents. Additionally, we host special exhibits by guest artists, curators, and practitioners whose projects align thematically with the School’s academic mission and curricula.

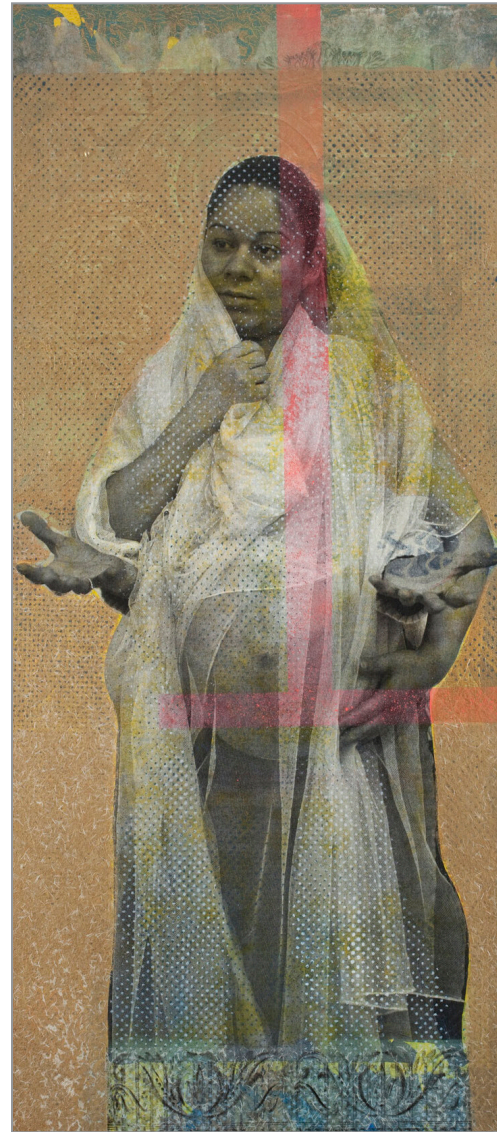
For more information about the Gallery Space, including exhibition schedules, proposal submissions, and viewing hours, please visit us at wagner.nyu.edu/contact/gallery. □



Memorias Reflectivas (Reflective Memories), 2019



El Llanto (The Crying), 2007



La Madonna Negra (The Black Madonna), 2007



Target of Prejudice I, 2022



Target of Prejudice II, 2022

Proudly marking Women’s History Month, *re:tratos urbanos* (*urban portraits*) highlights the work of celebrated Nuyorican painter and collage artist Rodríguez Calero (affectionately known as RoCa). With a focus on portraiture, this two-decade survey exhibit showcases RoCa’s signature *acrollage* and *fotacrolé* techniques, two innovative processes that blend painting, printmaking, photography, and collage to spellbinding effects. Meticulously layering paper, acrylic paint, and recycled materials, among a rich variety of mediums, the artist presents an intriguing collection of portraits that masterfully combine religious iconography, classical and Byzantine patterns, and elements of hip hop and street art. Bold colors, compositional balance, texturing, and ornamentation are the visual means to the thematic depth and gravitas behind each portrait.

Describing RoCa’s technique for her critically acclaimed exhibit *Urban Martyrs & Latter Day Santos* (Museo del Barrio, 2015), William Paterson University’s art history professor Alejandro Anreus observed: “The diversity of materials that Rodríguez Calero fuses together reflects the hybridity of her world: multi-racial, multiethnic and urban, they are charged with visual rhythms evocative of salsa, jazz, hip hop, and rap. This dynamic also frames the quirky, unorthodox spirituality that infuses her content.”

Rodríguez Calero’s work is predominantly influenced by her Puerto Rican upbringing and the diverse communities that enrich New York City’s Lower East Side, the neighborhood where she has lived and forged her career for the past 30 years. The subjects of her canvases—often oppressed and marginalized within the urban and institutional spaces they navigate—emerge defiant, dignified, and soulful in her portraits. The pieces depict what the artist considers to be the innate divinity of the common folk, in the process exploring the racial, gender, and socioeconomic biases that permeate urban life.

The most recent works included in the show, *Target of Prejudice I* and *Target of Prejudice II*, tackle xenophobia in both subtle and overt



Hijra, 2016
(detail)

ways. RoCa created the companion pieces as an act of allyship in the wake of the anti-Asian violence exacerbated by misinformation and propaganda during the COVID-19 pandemic. The female figures that dominate the canvases are regal in their presentation, while Target logos are cleverly placed to emphasize the themes of persecution and cultural commodification.

UrbanHood II and *Metamorphosis* are the works on display that perhaps more immediately summon feelings of urbanity. The first is an imposing two-tone diptych: the young subject is viewed in profile, facing a mirror image of himself; his eyes are obscured by his hood and bright green netting covers the remainder of his face. (Not coincidentally, a similar face covering occurs in the contemporaneous work *Mártir Urbano*.) His casual attire, a dark-colored hooded sweatshirt, is a recognizable symbol of the profiling that many urban youths confront in their everyday lives—encounters where their identity and worth can easily be assigned (or stripped away) based on an interpretation of a simple piece of clothing. The netting masking his face amplifies a sense of concealment and

anonymity, alluding to the social invisibility that makes so many communities of color targets of police brutality, violence, and other forms of social injustice.

The power of attire also features prominently in *Metamorphosis*, where the central figure sports over-ear headphones and the iconic Adidas tracksuit, which was ubiquitous in the '80s and '90s and emblematic of hip hop culture and street style. The subject's face and torso are covered by a lace application and a semicircular gold leaf pattern adorns his head, creating a halo-like effect. While in *UrbanHood II* attire conceals the identity of the subject, in *Metamorphosis* it reveals it. For the artist, the outfit serves as a statement of belonging, a social identifier placing the young man within an urban setting and specific cultural context. The gold ornamentation around his head transforms him from ordinary urbanite into a beatified figure, one with an aura of sanctitude. The use of lace offers a contrasting touch of femininity to the visible masculinity of the subject. This interplay of gendered elements is one of several dichotomies that are recurrent themes in RoCa's work. Whereas in *Metamorphosis* a female/male duality is more indirect and subject to interpretation, in pieces like *Hijra*, *Preternatural*, and even *UrbanHood II*, gender ambiguity and deconstruction are more conspicuous and intentional. For the artist, celebrating the diversity of the gender spectrum is as vital as advocating for racial justice and socioeconomic equity.

The masculine and the feminine, the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the quotidian, the vulnerable and the defiant—in Rodriguez Calero's artwork, they all effortlessly coexist as part of a rich visual vocabulary. By casting her subjects as the mystical protagonists of her pictorial narratives, RoCa has created a body of work that is as visually arresting as it is thought-provoking and one that powerfully embodies the social justice agenda at the center of her artistic practice. □

— Frankie Crescioni-Santoni
Curator, Gallery Space at Wagner



UrbanHood II, 2014 (diptych)



RODRÍGUEZ CALERO



Born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, Rodríguez Calero studied at San Juan’s prestigious Escuela de Artes Plásticas, where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Affectionately known as RoCa, she furthered her studies at the famed Art Students League in New York, where she focused on painting and collage under the tutelage of master artist Leo Manso. While at

The League, she received the prestigious Edward G. McDowell Travel Scholarship, which allowed her to visit Spain and France to pursue her interests in art and continue her training.

RoCa has been the recipient of multiple awards and scholarships, notably from The New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her multiple residencies include the historic Taller Boricua (NY, 1980-1982), Provincetown Art Association (MA, 1985-1986), Galeria Bonaire (PR, 1987-1988), the Brandywine Workshop Center for the Visual Arts (PA, 1999), and Rutgers Center for Innovative Print & Paper (NJ, 2000).

Her painting has been recognized with the Brooklyn Arts & Culture Association Painting Award from the Brooklyn Museum and The National Association of Women Artists’ Belle Cramer Memorial Prize for Abstract Painting. In 2008, she received the prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in painting.

Rodríguez Calero has exhibited at numerous venues both nationally and abroad. Her critically acclaimed 2015 retrospective exhibit *Rodríguez Calero | Urban Martyrs and Latter-Day Santos* at El Museo del Barrio received an honorable mention from *Hyperallergic* as one of the 20 best NYC exhibits of the year. RoCa's works can be found in both private and public collections. □ rodriguezcalero.com



Pretermatural, 2008

AN ARTISTIC CONVERSATION WITH RODRÍGUEZ CALERO

Written by uzomah ugwu

Originally published in *artrealizzata.com*, Sept. 20, 2022

UZOMAH: You have worked under the tutelage of many great master artists. What has each artist taught you that has enhanced your work as an artist?

ROCA: To be insatiable, passionate, and uncompromising regarding one's work.

U: What is the last exhibit you have seen by another artist that made you appreciate art?

R: *Faith Ringgold: American People* is a testament to the complexity of her life, struggles, self-awareness, and convictions.

U: How do you envision yourself as a person of art?

R: I envision myself as one who is subtle in manifesting provocative ideas.

U: Why is art so appealing to all regardless of age, race, and gender?

R: Art is not judgmental and permits understanding that unifies,

inspires, and influences humanity. Art is pivotal and speaks volumes in changing the world and changing the way people feel and think not only about themselves but the problems of the world at large.

U: What do you do in terms of preparing materials for your projects?

R: Frame of mind is more important than the physical materials. My mental state is best when I allow myself to be impulsive and act on instinct. This openness permits a fluidity in choosing the material which is best suited to achieve the visual image.

U: What do you hope people see in your work and understand about your artistic statement?

R: That we are connected to the universal spirit, thru self-reflection, acceptance, and celebrating similarities and differences in one's origin.

U: Can you explain the process of making collages to someone who has never heard of it or is not familiar with it but has admiration for the



Orelac Studios. Rahway, New Jersey

style and medium?

R: The basic definition for collage is “the art of sticking various materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric onto a backing.” Like anything creating is personal, and if committed to the process, collage can take you on an evolutionary journey of development.

U: What is the most challenging part of being an artist, and why?

R: Vulnerability is the most challenging part of being an artist. It ensures a commitment to fully experi-

ence and embrace those moments of creativity and make ideas flourish.

U: What is the most significant benefit of being an artist?

R: The knowledge that one's creative perspective, can inspire, make a difference, influence, and have an emotional connection with another person is rewarding.

U: How do you choose specific images to reveal the symbolism of the emotions you convey in your artwork?

“We are connected to the universal spirit, thru self-reflection, acceptance, and celebrating similarities and differences in one’s origin.”
—RoCa

R: Mixed with immediate issues that need to be addressed and thru visual and subliminal perception, mutual consent unfolds in the selection of a specific image.

U: How has art helped you find a voice and a sense of self?

R: Art has given me a place of sanctuary, that safe place of non-judgmental acceptance and filtering.

U: Please expound on your love of the art.

R: Art is the connecting structure and universal language, that transcends the spoken and written. □





Cuerpo y Alma (Body and Soul), 2007



Mythological Mystic, 2007

R*e:tratos urbanos* represents a long-awaited return of exhibitions at the Gallery Space at Wagner after a pandemic-related three-year pause. In bringing this project to fruition and resuming our mission, we owe deep gratitude to featured artist Rodríguez Calero. It is an honor to have her celebrated work on our walls. The exhibition was also made possible with the generous support of our partners at the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies, as well as the dedicated assistance of our co-sponsoring student organizations—the Association of Latinx Students & Allies in Public Service, the Arts & Culture Network, and the Puerto Rican Student Association. Their individual and collective contributions were paramount to making *re:tratos urbanos* a reality. □

CO-PRESENTER

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Founded in 1966, the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CLACS) was the first area studies center at New York University. Today it is considered one of the premier centers of its kind in the United States. Its international reputation derives from the strength of a research-active faculty and a prestigious interdisciplinary MA program. One of the oldest and most successful in the field, CLACS's MA program offers joint degrees with Global Journalism, Museum Studies, Law, and Library Science. Its graduates have gone to work for leading organizations, including the Americas Society, the Washington Office on Latin America, Human Rights Watch, HuffPost, and the UN. The Quechua language program, launched in 2008, provides rigorous language training and has earned media attention from local, national, and international news agencies. CLACS is also home to the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), whose quarterly report is a long-standing voice in foreign policy analysis. □ clacs.as.nyu.edu

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CO-SPONSORS



The Association of Latinx & Allies Students in Public Service (ALAS) enhances the educational and social experience at Wagner by creating platforms from which the NYU community can engage and advocate for issues at the intersection of our fields of study and topics relevant to Latinx and their Diasporas around the world. ALAS provides a community-based space for exchanging knowledge, networking, and making cultural connections. □

wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/engagement/organizations/groups/alas



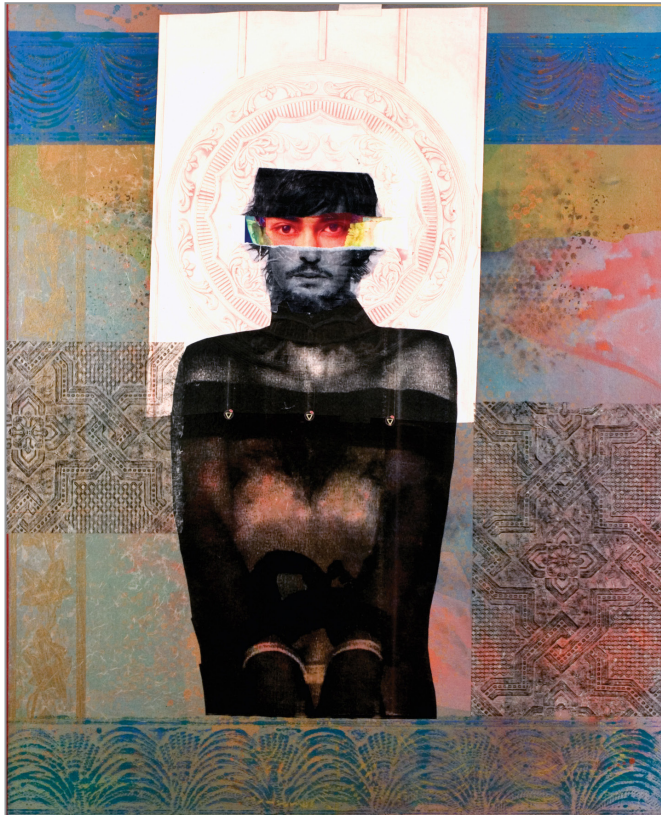
The Arts & Culture Network (ACN) promotes discourse on cultural policy and arts management within NYU Wagner, and more broadly, throughout the NYU community and New York City. It fosters professional development and leadership within various cultural industries including, but not limited to, visual and performing arts, fashion and design, digital media, arts-in-education, civic engagement, nonprofit arts management, and arts philanthropy and development. □

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The Puerto Rican Student Association (PRÁ) provides a space for Puerto Rican and all students interested in Puerto Rican culture to network, connect, and learn about Puerto Rico. Seeking to unite the diaspora and the island into an open and conscious community, we discuss issues of identity, current and historical events, as well as celebrate our culture. We create a community in and of the city and in and of Puerto Rico. □

engage.nyu.edu/organization/puerto-rican-student-association-all-university



Prisionero De Todas Las Guerras (Prisoner of All Wars), 2006



Transcendent, 2013



EXHIBITION CATALOG

- COVER: *Mártir Urbano (Urban Marthyr)* | fotocrolé mixed media on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2015 (detail)
- Page 03: *The Vulnerable Man* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2021 (detail)
- Page 05: *Memorias Reflectivas (Reflective Memories)* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2019
- Page 06: *El Llanto (The Crying)* | acollage painting on canvas | 54 x 24 in | 2007
- Page 07: *The Madonna Negra (The Black Madonna)* | acollage painting on canvas | 54 x 24 in | 2007
- Page 08: *Target of Prejudice I* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2022
- Page 09: *Target of Prejudice II* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2022
- Page 11: *Hijra* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2016 (detail)
- Page 13: *Metamorphosis* | acollage painting on canvas | 68 x 44 in | 2001
- Page 14: *UrbanHood II* | fotocrolé mixed media on canvas | 48 x 72 in | 2014 (diptych)
- Page 17: *Preternatural* | acollage painting on canvas | 52 x 42 in | 2008
- Page 21: *PersuAsian* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2020
- Page 22: *Cuerpo y Alma (Body and Soul)* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 48 in | 2007
- Page 23: *Mythological Mystic* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 48 in | 2007
- Page 26: *Prisionero De Todas Las Guerras (Prisoner of All Wars)* | acollage painting on canvas | 52 x 42 in | 2006
- Page 27: *Transcendent* | acollage painting on canvas | 48 x 36 in | 2013

Transcendent is part of a private collection. All other artwork is courtesy of the artist. For information on Rodríguez Calero's work, please email:

rodriguezcalero.com



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The Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service prepares public service leaders to translate ideas into actions that have an effective and lasting impact on the public good. We ensure that students learn critical analytic skills and frameworks, understand the distinct context in which they are working, and take full advantage of the connections and opportunities within New York City. Ranked eleventh nationally among all schools of public affairs, NYU Wagner has been teaching rigorous methods of management, policy, and planning for over 75 years. We offer Master of Public Administration, Master of Urban Planning, Executive Master of Public Administration, and Doctor of Philosophy degree programs. Learn more at wagner.nyu.edu.