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GRUPPO

ALDA

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We are a collective whose initial goal was to document the agro-ecological movement in Puerto Rico. This movement was inspiring because of the many people involved in it. We realized that this movement, developing in a specific environment, served as a model transferable to other contexts. How can this long term goal of food sovereignty in Puerto Rico be used in other locations so communities (usually of color and/or disenfranchised) can begin to escape health issues and food apartheid, a perpetuated inaccessibility to fresh, healthy foods. Additionally, we want to show our fundamental dependence on the land to exist, as well as the ties between the exploitation of nature and exploitation of people, and how one facilitates the other. We seek to aid the overall movement to end food apartheid. We want to find solutions to environmental racism.

Goals

As a collective we strive for:

- Relearning our fundamental relationship to the land.
- Prioritizing farmers.
- A Non-privatized biosphere. An Earth healthy enough to produce food without industrialized greenhouses and constant input of nutrients & resources.
- Reconnecting with our food. Learning more about the seeds that grow into the food we eat. Understanding how long it took to grow. Getting to know the people who worked so hard to make it.
- Understanding that our current food system is constructed. Seeing that it was made this way, not that it needs to be this way.
- Exposing the unjust balance of power between large agro-tech companies, distributors, farmowners, farmers, and workers.
- Centering and promoting agro-ecological narratives and discourse in the varied and diverse forms that they come.
- Pushing whole systems thinking, therefore systemic solutions; no patch-work solutions. Ending the false human conception of “waste.”
- We aspire for prison abolition. Within prison abolition is the potential for a new structuring of how we value all life.
- Reducing food waste, improving farmers’ quality of life, diminishing the transportation chain.
- Help connect people working towards these same goals.

Mission

As a collective, we work together to create meaningful interactions based on the ideas of agroecology. Whether we are in New York, South Florida, or Puerto Rico, we want to promote diversity of thought and accessibility. We want to extend our thoughts and actions beyond academia. We want to aid in the long term solutions to these structural problems. We acknowledge the violence of past agricultural models, as well as the violence of the current American food system. We want to bring to light the domination of corporate interest over the intergenerational knowledge of agriculture, and expose better ways of living and doing agriculture that is regenerative to the Earth. We work to expose the toxic conventional practices promoted by corporate food companies such as Bayer (Monsanto), Syngenta, DowDuPont among others.. Through using the model and history of documentary film, we want to use film as a means for documenting agricultural narratives, the history of agroecology, and food sovereignty. What is possible if we begin to eliminate the divisions between agricultural workers, artists, and politicians? How can we begin to look at the Earth as an entity to work and care for, not for exploitation? We seek to find answers to these questions as artists.

Who Are We?

El Grupo Aida is a three person working artist group. We met while going to college at the Cooper Union, and were all raised in South Florida, by Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Colombian families. Our names are Jessica Martinez, Ana Hierro, and Christien Vargas.



Photograph taken at Guakia Collective Farm in Dorado

We started from conversations we had with one another. With Jessica's passion for sustainable practices, Christien's knowledge in legacies of extraction, and Ana's dedication to narrative gestures and metaphors, we came together as a group. We then decided to focus on interviewing agro-ecological farmers in Puerto Rico, where Jessica's family is from. Through The Benjamin J. Menschel Fellowship, offered by the Cooper Union, we got the funds to start filming. From there, we have seen the possibilities that agroecology has in terms of community building, gentrification prevention, and (food) sovereignty on a wide scale and small scale. We chose to apply what we learned from conversations in art school on a broader, more accessible level.



Las Primeras Lluvias de Mayo

As recipients of the Benjamin Menschel Fellowship we participated in their exhibition in January 2020. The exhibition included projects by other groups including Juan Carlos, Danny Polonsky, and Cheung Lun Jeremy Son and Shuqing Zhan. Two of the other three projects also investigated seed collections and food practices. These were “Endurance of a Breathing Archive,” by Danny Polonsky A’20, and “On Exchange,” by Juan Carlos Javier AR’21, respectively.

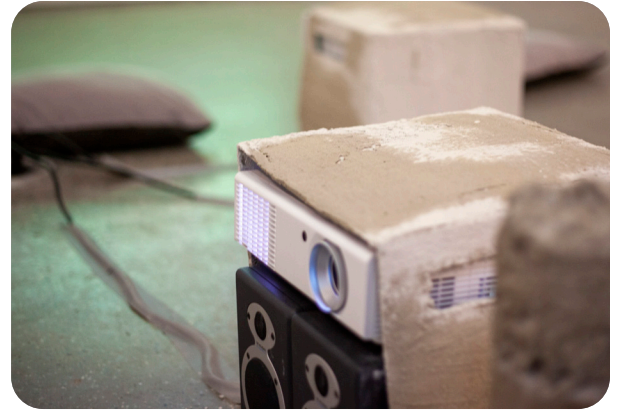


Project Description

We went to Puerto Rico to discover the changing attitudes about food consumption and its connection to the land. After Hurricane Maria in September 2017, Puerto Rico started importing 95% of its food. We wanted to meet with people working to address this problem—persons creating sustainable, localized food models. In this work we met farmers, we interviewed professors of agronomy, and we threw ourselves into the hard work of growing and protecting the land.

Part of the background to Puerto Rico’s troubles in becoming food self-sufficient is the history of the island’s experience as U.S. territory. Recently, for example, Puerto Rico’s main import partner is the U.S, accounting for almost half of its imports. In 1950, Operation Bootstrap, a series of development projects that eased access for private capital to the labor and economy of the island, pushed Puerto Rico from a primary agrarian export economy to an industrial economy. Through tax incentives and low labor costs, the country turned from producing tobacco, sugar, and leather to being a manufacturing hub, and eventually to producing pharmaceuticals.

A documentary focused on centering farmers; motivated by the physiological stress of the impending collapse of our planet and by the understanding that extractive greed is the root of so many injustices



Details of 3-channel documentary installation

Presently, the systems that measure economic wealth devalues, even overlooks, small farmers. We wanted to meet with these people and find out their role in feeding the country. Before setting out, Jessica Martinez's mom, Carmen Lamb, who grew up in Puerto Rico, told us about the first rains in May. It was a tradition for everyone to go out and soak their hair and absorb the beauty from the rain that came without fault every 1st of May. Later on, we met Franco, a farmer, who told us those rains do not happen anymore. He deeply impressed upon us what these climate changes meant for him and his farm. He told us that just years ago, the rains were consistent. Puerto Rico was part of a larger constellation of natural forces. He told us the rain now does not come until late May, extending the dry season for almost a month. These erratic weather patterns leave him without reliable no plans.

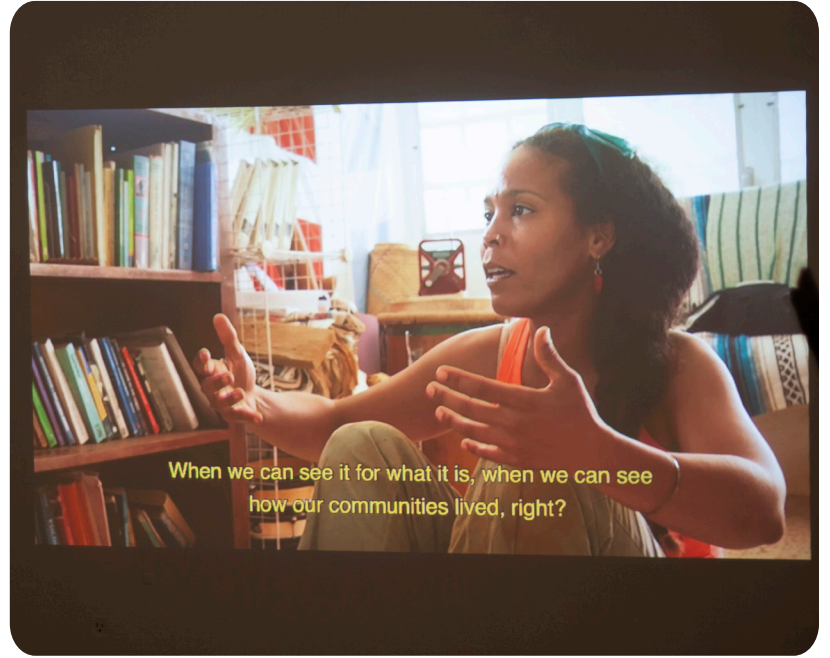
Towards the end of our trip, which took us almost everywhere on the island, we met with other farmers who invited us into their homes and taught us about agroecological practices: we woke up before the sun, we learned to listen and to sow, to make pancakes out of breadfruit. We discovered how potato plants smell and to notice differences in leaves. We ate mangoes from a tree planted long before we existed, by people thinking about the future. Seeds have a political history as well. They took us to the Plaza at Lares, where the revolution against Spain in 1868 started but failed, and where insurrection against the U.S. was planned as well. We looked at the tamarind tree planted in 1932 by Pedro Albizus Campos from a seed brought from



*Installation for 3-channel documentary
screened at 41 Cooper Gallery*

Simon Bolivar's tree; this vision, solidifying the unity across the continent that we already felt.

Our main goal was creating a docu-film that tells of the regenerative healing that farming practices can have and have had in Puerto Rico. Through a cohesive narrative of film, we want those who we interviewed to speak to their own experiences. Our documentary was created from our six weeks of exposure to these methods, revisiting them afterwards from our home in New York with the message that persisted: by taking care of the land, the land in turn took care of you, and the land is extremely resourceful.





Who we met

Francisco

Guakia Collective

Michelle, Anjolie y Gabriel

UPR Utuado Students

Tara

Finca Otra Cosa

Aixa and Gus

Proyecto Agroecologico Campesino

Maga

Pachamama Forest Garden

Dr. Patricia Ortiz-Bermudez y Cacimar

Ramos

UPR Mayaguez, Professors of Biotechnology

Dr. Gladys Gonzalez-Martinez

UPR Mayaguez, Professor of Agroecology

Adolfo Gonzalez

CARICOOS

Daniella

Siembra Tres Vidas

Franco

Cosecha Tierra Viva

Jorge and Digna

His house

Gino

Rossi Naturals

Rosa Torrens

Mercado de Caguas, organized by El

Departamento de Agricultura

Bill

Casa Mucaro

Marvin

Finca Guzman

Douglas Candelario

Feria Agricola

Sebastian

Farm in San Sebastian

Elvia Melendez-Ackerman

UPR Rio Piedras, Professor of Ecology

Aida Lamb

Su casa

Hilda

Reserva Natural Humedal Punta Tuna

Georges Félix

UPR Utuado, Professor of Agroecology

