

Daniel Lind-Ramos Transforms Waste into Totemic Assemblages

Lind-Ramos emphasizes perseverance in the face of catastrophes like Hurricane Maria.



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Daniel Lind-Ramos, "El Viejo Griot (The Elder Storyteller)" (2022–2023) (all photos by Steven Paneccasio, courtesy MoMA PS1)

The title of Daniel Lind-Ramos's captivating MoMA PS1 summer exhibition, *El Viejo Griot — Una historia de todos nosotros*, translated as *The Elder Storyteller — A Story of All of Us*, got things half right. The artist's bricolage sculptures of humanoid forms do tell a story with universal implications. But that story succeeds because its particulars are rooted in the life and history of Loíza, a Puerto Rican town of marginalized African-descended people, or Afrodescendientes. That rootedness, the way Lind-Ramos transforms found objects from his hometown into totemic

assemblages, differs from the way many contemporary artists utilize found objects to convey material and cultural alienation, and helps account for why audiences respond so well to his work.

The easiest way to perceive what distinguishes Lind-Ramos's practice from many similar ones is through comparison to artworks made from waste materials. In the latter, the repurposed objects' provenance generally remains unknowable, which results in artworks that comment on post-consumer alienation (such as Duke Riley's fishing lures made out of discarded tampon applicators), artworks that delight in aesthetic transmogrification (such as Elias Sime's colorful wall-hanging abstractions, fabricated from electronic waste), or both.

Lind-Ramos's sculptures also contain surprising material transformations. "El Viejo Griot (The Elder Storyteller)" (2022–23), for example, features a wooden box that evokes a torso, adorned with a bugle and oars where the face and hands would be, atop a salvaged boat bow. Yet the artwork's constituent objects — from the blue FEMA tarp used to portray water to the burlap sacks, or *talegas*, stamped with key years in Puerto Rican colonial history — emphasize, rather than elide, their own place-based histories.



Daniel Lind-Ramos, "Centinelas de la luna nueva (Sentinels of the New Moon)" (2022–23)

The defiant circle of mythopoetic humanimal figures in Lind-Ramos's "Centinelas de la luna nueva (Sentinels of the New Moon)" (2022–23) — outfitted with tools such as a welding mask, a hoe, and a machete — appear to emerge from an embattled past to stand guard over a precarious

future. The artwork's repurposed implements tell a story of perseverance and togetherness, rather than despair and dissolution, in the face of recent catastrophes such as Hurricane Maria and COVID-19, as well as ongoing historical catastrophes such as colonialism and climate change.

That story of community resolve, while not sugar coated, nonetheless feels different in tone and content from doomsday US news stories of intensifying climate change and right-wing anomie. Lind-Ramos tells it with sincerity, humor, and an oracular touch, and those of us not from Loíza listen because his work is clear-eyed about where it's been and what that means for where all of us might be going.



Installation view of Daniel Lind-Ramos *El Viejo Griot — Una historia de todos nosotros*

Daniel Lind-Ramos: El Viejo Griot — Una historia de todos nosotros continues at MoMA PS1 (22-25 Jackson Ave, Long Island City, Queens) through September 4. The exhibition was co-organized by Kate Fowle, guest curator, and Ruba Katrib, Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, MoMA PS1, with Elena Ketelsen González, Assistant Curator, MoMA PS1.