

## EL CORAZÓN ARTIST BIOS + STATEMENTS / APRIL 2021

**SHEY RIVERA RÍOS**

ARTIST/CURATOR + STOREFRONT ARTIST

**YADILETTE RIVERA-COLÓN  
MADELINE MEDINA  
CHELVANAYA GABRIEL**

ARTIST: STOREFRONT COLLABORATOR  
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**MICHELLE FALCÓN FONTÁNEZ  
C. YOLANDA GONZALEZ  
EMMA MESA-MELENDEZ  
DREAMCLUB**

ARTIST: LARGE SCALE BANNER  
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**FRANKIE BORRERO**

ARTIST: PAINTED MURAL

### ARTIST/CURATOR + STOREFRONT ARTIST

#### **SHEY RIVERA RÍOS**



Shey Rivera Ríos (they/them) is an interdisciplinary artist, cultural strategist, and arts administrator. Their artistic creations span a myriad of topics, from home to capitalism to queerness and magic. Rivera has 11 years of experience in the nonprofit arts sector where creative practice interests with urban planning and racial equity. Rivera is the former Artistic/Co-Director of AS220, a renowned arts organization and creative incubator in Providence, RI. After 8 years at AS220, Rivera became Director of Inclusive Regional Development at the Community Innovators Lab (CoLab), in the Dept of Urban Studies and Planning of MIT. Rivera has a BA in Psychology and Sociology from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR-Rio Piedras), and graduate studies in Contemporary Media and Culture from the University of the Sacred Heart, Puerto Rico. Rivera serves on the Board of Directors of the Alliance of Artist Communities, the Advisory Committee of the Puerto Rican Institute for Arts and Advocacy, and the City of Providence's Design Review Committee of the Dept of Planning, appointed by Mayor Jorge Elorza of Providence. Rivera has completed artistic residencies at: BOOM Concepts Gallery and City of Asylum in Pittsburgh, PA; Colectivo Próceres in Santiago, Chile; and RISD Museum Open Studio micro residency for the REPAIR and Design Futures exhibit 2019. Key artistic projects are the LUNA LOBA performance series and the FANTASY ISLAND transmedia project. Their work has been exhibited at: Loisaida Arts Center, NYC; AS220, Providence, RI; Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latina (MACLA), San Jose, CA; NY School of Visual Arts, NYC; Boston Center for the Arts, MA; and others. | [sheyrivera.com](http://sheyrivera.com) | FB/IG: @SheyRiv



#### STOREFRONT INSTALLATION:

**¡Arriba, corazones!** is a multimedia installation and tribute to AfroBoricua artist and civic leader Ruth Fernández. It consists of a digital art portrait of Ruth Fernández printed on a large hanging canvas, alongside an original design LED neon sign with her famous quote “¡Arriba, corazones!”. Ruth Fernández was an inspiring woman and artist that achieved many firsts in Puerto Rican history as an internationally renowned singer and later serving as Senator representing the municipality of Ponce in Puerto Rico in the 70s. She is known for opening doors and creating systems of support to improve the lives of artists and Puerto Ricans in the island and in the U.S. diaspora. The digital portrait of Ruth is an adaptation of a photograph of her in her older years, with her large jewelry and her bright wardrobe, making a pose that conveys the drama and passion she brought to many aspects of her life. Ruth was known for her chant of positivity and resilience: “¡Arriba, corazones!”. These words become a spell of hope during hard times, during our multiple pandemic of COVID-19 and racial oppression. Ruth calls us back into our heart and spirit so lift up from the grief and the pandemic, reawaken like spring and emerge into the world again with new hope and energy to keep moving forward and build more just and joyful communities. This work includes a collaboration with artists Yadilette Rivera-Colón and Madeline Medina. Yadilette’s vejigante masks and Madeline’s flower installation serve as symbols of hope and resistance that honor Ruth Fernández and our Boricua heritage.

#### STOREFRONT INSTALLATION COLLABORATORS:

##### YADILETTE RIVERA-COLÓN



Dr. Yadilette Rivera-Colón is a researcher and educator who found her calling working in research laboratories. She is a native of Puerto Rico and a first-generation college graduate with a strong personal drive to connect with Latinas and other underserved populations to share her love of science. On any given day, you can find her in one of the labs at Bay Path University helping students with their research projects, teaching a class in biochemistry, or visiting Holyoke Public Schools to expose students there to the wonders of the scientific world. Yadilette believes there is power in storytelling and that everyone has a story. In her art, she combines traditional elements with more modern scientific approaches. Yadilette’s Vejigante masks tell the stories of her ancestors. She combines the traditional mask-making methods –the use of flour and cloves– with contemporary materials and colors like bright pink. The designs and colors might not always be what you would expect in a Vejigante, but they still serve the same original purpose: to scare people! Vejigante masks are a mix of Spanish, African, and Taino influences. They are a Boricua symbol of resistance against colonialism.

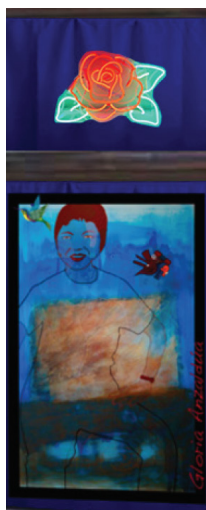
## MADELINE MEDINA

Madeline Medina is an entrepreneur that loves to create beauty with her hands. She was inspired to begin this work during the pandemic in 2020. She noticed that as she started to create artworks made with artificial flowers, they brought her joy as well as smiles to those around her. She is inspired by the many different colors and the vibrant energy the flowers provide. Madeline brings to life the splendid beauty that secretly lies within each and every one of them.



## CHELVANAYA GABRIEL

Chelvanaya Gabriel (they/them) holds many intersecting identities directly impacted by systems of oppression and through their work tells their stories with vulnerability and a mission of taking up space and making space for others. They invite all to join them on a journey of building community, imagining and creating new worlds as we travel together. Chelvanaya is a multimedia art activist and resilience facilitator with a science background. A self-taught artist, they found an Audre Lorde-inspired form of self-care and healing-survival in creating visual work after the 2016 election. This art practice has since expanded to become interwoven with their social justice facilitation and community-building work. They facilitate space where stories of wellness, intergenerational trauma, disability, and neurodiversity, especially of QTBIPOC folx, can be witnessed and collectively processed. Their work is guided by decolonizing contemplative/somatic practices and an embodied awareness of ancestral knowledge and healing. With an AfroqueerFuturist and Disability Justice lens, they ask "Whose stories aren't being told?" They pose this question with an interdisciplinary and intentionally collaborative approach to take up and hold space with audacity for all the complex stories that must be told. For the storefront installation art piece, they created a homage to Gloria Anzaldúa, queer chicana activist who is considered a foundational writer in the field of Latinx philosophy.



### ARTWORK TITLE/DESCRIPTION:

Shapeshifter

Chelvanaya Gabriel

2020

original digital collage mixed media painting and illustration

## ARTISTS: LARGE SCALE BANNER



### MICHELLE FALCÓN FONTÁNEZ

Michelle Falcón Fontáñez is an award winning storyteller from Holyoke, working in photography, film, theater, and installation art. Michelle has witnessed and personally experienced injustices that have shaped her views of the world, motivating her pursuit of making change through art. Her artistry has primarily focused on social issues, where she has created work to illuminate voices that have not been heard. Michelle holds a Bachelor's Degree from Hampshire College with concentrations in Business Management and Film. Currently, she is strengthening her artistry as a candidate in the MFA Film and Media Arts Program at Emerson College. Michelle has received grant awards and support from: Art Workspace Easthampton (AWE) Studio Residency, ECA Artist Grants Initiative, New England Foundation for the Arts' Public Art for Spatial Justice with funding from The Barr Foundation, the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture, City of Boston, Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, 2020 ValleyCreates Rapid Response, The Ethics and the Common Good Project, CBD Project Grant, The Sander Thoenes Research Award, Elma Lewis Community-Centered Grant, and the Cambridge, Holyoke, Northampton, Springfield, South Hadley Cultural Councils. To learn more about her work visit [falconfontanezfoto.com](http://falconfontanezfoto.com) | FB & IG @falconfontanezfoto

### ARTWORK TITLE/DESCRIPTION:

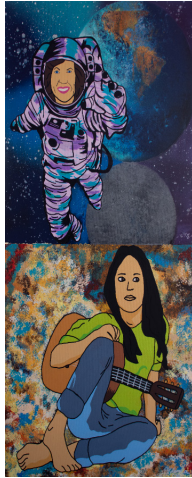
A Call to our Ancestors  
Michelle Falcón Fontáñez  
2020-2021  
Nikon D850



### ARTWORK STATEMENT:

A Call to Our Ancestors is a multimedia series dedicated to honoring the ancestors that came before us. The project portrays various generations of Puerto Rican women, each symbolizing a different element of the culture as well as their roles in society. This project is a large photo collection, an art installation and a community engagement workshop that are all part of the series. A Call to our Ancestors will be touring in Easthampton, Holyoke and Cambridge, within the Puerto Rican diaspora. Each piece in this project features a woman that represents a different element of the culture as well as their roles in society. The generations of women are: La Primera (the first) as the Healer, Abuelita Juana (great-grandmother) as the Protector, Abuela Eva (grandmother) as Wisdom, Valeria (mother) as Courage, Titi Clarita (aunt) as Hope, Xiomara (daughter) as Consciousness. This women-centered project recognizes the women in our past and present whose trajectories are too often forgotten. For El Corazón, this large photographic banner is a portrait of La Primera featuring artist Brendaliz Cepeda | @bomba\_de\_aqui





### C. YOLANDA GONZALEZ

C. Yolanda Gonzalez is a self taught artist who discovered a passion for painting and creativity at the age of 5. Yolanda has expanded her creative talent across mediums, from acrylic to oil paint, wood burning, spray paint, and more. Her practice also includes building life-sized pop-up designs with foam, cardboard, and wood, and turning rooms into places of fantasy and whimsy. She is currently the owner of Yolanda's Creativity Events/Art, a creative business. C. Yolanda Gonzalez is originally from Newark, NJ, and moved with her family to Holyoke MA at the age of 5. As an artist, she works hard to achieve that "OMG, WOW" feeling and occasional happy tears as people walk into a hall that's been transformed into a fantasy.

ARTWORK TITLE: Dr. Ellen Ochoa + Joan Báez



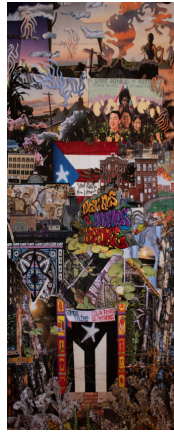
### EMMA MESA-MELENDEZ

Emma Mesa-Melendez is a Springfield-based artist who has been honing her skills in Black Caribbean fine art and graphic design for several years now. Emma uses vivid color and portraiture to explore relationships between identity, race, voice, and movement. Through her artwork, Emma addresses the ancestral history of Caribbean Americans and the rich cultures they bestow upon their newfound neighbors in the North. Emma grew up in the Springdale neighborhood, attended Dean Vocational, and was married in Wistariahurst Museum to her high school sweetheart of 26 years.

ARTWORK TITLE/DESCRIPTION: "Boricua" conveys the conviction with which Puertorriqueños present themselves in new spaces. They bring with them cultural elements that permeate neighborhoods and enrich the lives of all around. In this mural, a young woman confidently carries her identity and marks her place in her own way up against City Hall, the bandera backing her up. No matter where she goes she is forever and always BORICUA!

### DREAMCLUB

*Un dicho* that keeps us grounded in our values and bodies to do the work from a space of change, love, and compassion. Dream Club is an ever evolving collective of Trans and Queer people fighting for liberation for all, particularly Black, Indigenous, Trans and Queer People of Color (QTBIPOC). We are a collective aspiring to be in coalition with other groups to provide mutual aid in healing, creative, joyous, and militant ways. Our work transforms, bends, and flows to the needs of the moment and community. Our mission is to heal and transform ourselves and the communities we are a part of through love, creativity, accountability, and versatility. We aspire to use both the history of movements within the context of our lives and those before us to inform our place in the fight today.



#### ARTWORK TITLE/DESCRIPTION:

"Poco a poco / Paso a paso." Using photographs, we collectively wove a vertical narrative of the city of Holyoke. This piece is a mixed media collage of photos we've individually taken around the city, highlighting its nature, murals, life, history, and culture. Through the making process, we were able to reflect on our relationships to the city and the elements and art of Holyoke. At the bottom are plants that can be found all over, -mugwort, yarrow-, as well as plants and trees from The Ashley Reservoir. Moving upwards, we situated different landmarks and murals of the city. The collage reflects sky, light, buildings, texture, sight, and emotion. Through this work, we hope people feel inclined to explore the different elements they recognize and can reflect on their own relationship to these landmarks and elements in the city, the experiences or connections that we have in common.

#### ARTIST: PAINTED MURAL

##### FRANKIE BORRERO



Frankie Borrero is a self-taught, color blind artist who began drawing at the age of 5. He is originally from New York, but was raised in Worcester, MA and later relocated to Springfield, MA as an adult. As a teenager, Frankie explored graffiti art and this transitioned into other artforms. Frankie is a Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor, which inspires him to explore art as a therapeutic tool to help cope with PTSD and to motivate other people with disabilities. Frankie is a professional working artist and his main creative mediums are graphite, pastels, and acrylic. Through his artwork, he explores the everyday struggles and success of multicultural communities. Frankie has been a part of several public artworks and community projects in Springfield, including Fresh Paint Springfield, the "Preacher Man" mural on State Street, and the Black Lives Matter mural that has become a statement in the city. His work has been exhibited in gallery shows all over Massachusetts. Frankie has also shown his work on Channel 22's Mass Appeal, and helped with fundraising money for the Hurricane Maria Relief Fund.

#### ARTWORK TITLE/DESCRIPTION:

Transición de las antepasadas

2021

Acrylic on Dibond Panels



#### ARTWORK STATEMENT:

My artwork is inspired by who I am and my Puerto Rican, European, African and Taino roots. I am very proud of my heritage and feel that others who share the same roots as myself should be proud of where their foundations are rooted. I am trying to convey the importance of cultural identity while inspiring new generations to be proud of who they are no matter how much the world changes around them.

## ARTIST: WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

### JASON MONTGOMERY



Jason R. Montgomery, or JRM, is a Chicano/Indigenous Californian writer, painter, and playwright from El Centro, California. In 2016, along with Poet Alexandra Woolner, and illustrator Jen Wagner, JRM founded Attack Bear Press in Easthampton, MA. Jason's work engages the cross-section of Chicano/Indigenous identity, cultural hybridization, post-colonial reconstruction, and political agency. His writing and visual art bridges the aesthetics and feel from the early cubist collage movement and the Russian abstract movement of the 1920s with living and historical Native/Indigenous Californian and Chicano art traditions to explore the Post-colonial narrative through active synthesis and guided (re)construction. Along with numerous grants from the Masscultural Council and the Community Foundation of Western Mass, Jason is the recipient of both the New England Foundation for the Arts Spatial Justice for Public Arts, and Collective Imagination for Spatial Justice Grants. JRM's art has been displayed at the Augusta Savage Gallery, the Creative Arts Workshop, Umass Boston and many others. JRM's work has appeared in Split Lip Magazine, Storm Cellar, Ilanot Review, and other publications.

### WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION:

Holyoke High School Workshop: The practicum introduced Holyoke High School students to the 2nd Annual Holyoke Community Ofrenda. Students were invited to engage in the construction process of the Ofrenda space at the Readywipe Gallery at 532 Main St in Holyoke, and to learn more about the Dia De Los Muertos holiday through interaction with the ceremony.