

## *rhythm and (p)leisure*

In my ongoing investigation into the fruit and labor of working-class people, specifically of Central American and Caribbean diasporas, rhythm and (p)leisure is an attempt to confront and unpack the legacy and histories of exploitation, precarity, unemployment, homelessness, dislocation, and debt specific to these diasporas. The modern labor market has been and continues to be designated by gender, class, and race; perpetuating the status quo of authority, masculinity, and uneven distribution of wealth, power, and resources. From the unique position of an intergenerational migrant (from a family of agricultural workers), I seek to invert established discourse by re-claiming and charging our subjugation as a site for agency, autonomy, and potentiality. The aim is to shed light on and elevate the value of our im/material labor, and challenge the dominant and negative depictions of migrant, working-class, and queer people of color.

Taking into account both physical labor and cultural production, the video installation brings the two to the foreground simultaneously blurring the line between work and play/leisure. What is generally considered play such as music and dance, is actually work, as they are living forms of history that have stood the test of time and the violence of colonialism. The production, preservation, maintenance, performance, and passing on of these cultural traditions and forms – is work itself.

My previous work experience in retail/supermarket, office, and assembly line environments, have all influenced my interest and observation of the human body in movement during labor and in relation to space/land and other bodies. Bodies of various ages and body types, and in particular womxn of color, as a way of bringing in to consideration the human body as it ages and becomes "obsolescent" within the capitalist structure we exist in. Are we complicit with our bodies and our labor within this framework? Is it out of pure necessity for survival or have we been programmed to be "productive" or both? How do we define being productive and how does its meaning change depending on whose body is performing what? How do we re-claim ownership of our own bodies?

Through a series of video portraits of several individuals performing various tasks of labor (that simultaneously reflect my own labor as an artist), the installation serves as an homage to not only those depicted in the videos but workers all around the world. The collective portraits avail us to snippets of workers' routines: giving us insight into cultural traditions, how things were once made, manual labor, and the rhythms of daily life.

Wooden pallets and piles of clothes that have each experienced their own global circulation, in this configuration at the center of the gallery, welcome the viewer and offer up a place to repose. But only for this fragment of time in their life before getting deinstalled and continuing on their individual journeys. The handmade crates function in a similar way except they are only just beginning their journey as this multipurpose object (as portable shelter for the monitors and as pedestal) that will hopefully begin getting marked wherever/whenever they get shipped.

This circulation of pallets and clothes – essentially commerce – interests me in the way it mirrors the circulation of people/communities offering up their bodies/labor, and by extension, the circulation of culture(s) and how it's consumed, appropriated, repackaged and resold.

While rich with culture and traditions, and a vast wealth of knowledge, abilities, and experiences, these communities find themselves at a precarious moment in the midst of unstable economies, environmental negligence, drug-trafficking related violence, a polarized socio-political climate, etc., and therefore at risk.

Those that own land or property are more capable of self-sustaining while those who have experienced the loss of land/property or have a history of displacement are far more disadvantaged and typically work their way to the cities in search for opportunities. Younger generations struggle with this directly as they are expected to contribute to society yet have limited access to education, and are increasingly becoming disinterested in learning and maintaining cultural traditions having been exposed to the leisurely lifestyles of excess in the West. At the same time, older adults in their thirties and forties are considered too old and too slow, resulting in them becoming replaced and/or overlooked in the job market when in search for employment.

As a result, many of them work their way north to major cities in North America, primarily the US, to offer the very same types of labor depicted in these videos, but without the same pride, dignity, and autonomy they held back in their homes. Rather than working directly for their families and/or communities, these same types of labor are instead in service to a dominant majority made up of various intersecting levels of privilege (including but not limited to gender, class, race, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, education, age, physique, and ability). The intense and physically demanding labor that they provide is labor that average citizens reject and typically look down on for its harsh conditions, stressful environments, precarity, and poverty-level wages. Even more disturbing and hypocritical is that often times the same people who vilify immigrant laborers, completely lack the ability, endurance, and capacity to fill those roles and/or have already benefited from this discriminative and exploitative system in place whether in the West or in their respective home countries (and sometimes both).

Despite this rat race conundrum, these videos show different ways in which these communities navigate these circumstances and come up with creative (and sometimes clandestine) ways of working in order to make ends meet such as making counterfeit Nike cleats or taking pleasure in exerting one's culture in an informal public space. In the latter half of the video installation, you get a snapshot of a vibrant nightlife led by Garifuna musicians right in front of the entrance to a restaurant. This informal congregation and reclamation of public space draws more people than the club-like environment inside the actual building. Therefore, both the establishment and the group of Garifuna musicians mutually operate in creating this "black and brown space" for dance, celebration, and pleasure (even if just temporarily) simultaneously enabling and nurturing the practice, overlapping, and cross-pollination of cultures.

Unlike other forms of dance where you dance to existing/live music, in punta, the dancer takes on the role of conductor, often times speeding up the tempo and dictating when pelvic thrusts align with and are emphasized through drum flams. Naturally, as the celebration progresses, the musicians and dancers are encircled by a growing and cheerful crowd where only up to two dancers are allowed at a time. A reversal of roles also occurs in this mimetic cock-and-hen mating dance whereby the womxn often times take the lead and the men need to receive approval in order to dance with them. The womxn - specifically black womxn - emboldened through this dance, take ownership of and embrace their bodies and their sexuality, simultaneously setting a radical and empowering example of autonomy, endurance, and pleasure to other womxn.

Having been formed through the integration of their Arawakan, Carib, and Maroon (of West and Central Africa) descendants on the island of St. Vincent, the Garinagu people maintain a rich culture and language that reflects their complex history of displacement. As one of the few extant languages remaining from the Arawakan language family, the Garifuna language is an atypical one being primarily spoken outside the Arawakan language area of northern South America, but also having been largely influenced by Carib languages, followed by French, English and Spanish, and to a lesser degree African languages. The (dis)placement of Maroon people from Africa to St. Vincent (and the Caribbean at large) intersected with Arawakan and Carib migrations at the time. Later on, as the Garinagu people, they were exiled/deported by the British from St. Vincent to the island of Roatán from where over time they migrated to mainland Honduras, Guatemala, Belize and Nicaragua.

Today, they form part of the Central American exodus resulting from the region's violent destabilization caused by continued American imperialism and economic policies of extraction. It is at this juncture where

their history of migration overlaps with mine which I am still continuing to research and discover. While I don't know what indigenous peoples my ancestors came from (as so many of us forming the diasporas of this region also don't know), it is this piecing together of parallel histories that comforts me and could potentially even get us closer to discovering our past, in order to better understand our present, and spearhead our own futures.

In many ways, these individuals and communities (I have had the honor and privilege of spending time with), echo amongst each other a reclamation of culture and identity, and this insistence is their resistance. On the one hand preserving their histories, traditions, and collective memories, and on the other hand, disrupting the status quo, subverting and inverting the flow of capital, and most importantly reminding us of the power and potential in decolonial imaginary and reconciliation. The intersecting of these trajectories in time and space emphasizes the importance of recording our own histories and of continuing to preserve our cultures, but with an openness and solidarity against racism/anti-blackness, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, etc. We clearly have a lot of work to do but let us use the Garinagu people who embody a stoicism and camaraderie exemplified through their music, dance, and willingness to share, as an example of how and where we can start.