VISUAL ESSAY

Clear Messages, Part One

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The summer of 2019 was historic in Puerto Rico. A Telegram chat between the governor and members of his cabinet was leaked to the press and its content unraveled a wave of indignation. Given the dire economic situation the island has been in for years, Puerto Ricans felt this was the last straw, which sparked one of Puerto Rico's biggest collective discontents, resulting in 15 days of consecutive protests in order to get the governor to resign.

Most of the protests took place in Old San Juan, where the governor's mansion is located. After the events, Old San Juan was left with overwhelming amounts of graffiti. These marks are the remnants of this historic event that will remain in the urban fabric of San Juan until they are washed out. In order to preserve the graffiti that was going to be removed, my partner and I set out to photograph Old San Juan a few days after the protests. The documenting process led to discussions of not only the importance of the physical presence of the graffiti, but the significance of the different processes around them.

Throughout, residents and store owners of Old San Juan collectively set out to prepare for the increasing numbers of protestors. These preparations involved moving cars out of the streets, setting up panels to cover the doors and windows, informing customers about store schedule changes, etc. Out of all these preparations, I was drawn to the wooden panels that were placed over almost every door and window of Old San Juan. These intended to keep protestors from damaging glass doors or windows in case the events got out of hand. Store owners worried about their property and tried to avoid incurring in reparation expenses that would bring an additional dent in their already affected economic state, as the protests paralyzed the economy.

Interestingly, the panels were used by protestors as expression boards during the event, and in this way they served a double purpose. Some of the wood panels even had the words “Tablón de Expresión” (Expression Board) written at the top, encouraging protestors to use the panels to express their anger and demands. The panels protected the interior of the stores from damage, while at the same time gifting the exterior facade to the protestors.

The incidents that sparked the protests of the Summer of 2019 were detrimental and immoral. They are circumstances that Puerto Ricans will forever look back on with indignation, but one of the things that was remarkable about these events was the disposition of every Puerto Rican to leave differences aside in order to stand up for what citizens agreed was crucial at the moment. This treatment of graffiti among the store owners in Old San Juan embodies that same spirit.
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Ricky  Debiiste ser una puñeta

Dictador!  Y no Polvo Cabrón

Eres una  Vergüenza

Vergüenza  Para el país

BPPR  Complice

Terror
Pal Cargas tu juego Cabron

IRICKY Debiiste ser una puñeta

DICTADOR Y no pudo Cabron

Eres una vergüenca

PPDR

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PEDDO

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