

# VISIÓN | doble

REVISTA DE CRÍTICA E HISTORIA DEL ARTE

**Título:** La belleza de la decadencia

**Title:** Beauty In Decay

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**Resumen:** El 20 de octubre se inauguró la exhibición *Transitorios*, en la que se muestra al público la reciente producción de la artista Karen Santiago Torres. En ella, docenas de perros realengos se convierten en metáfora de los problemas sociales y económicos que afectan al país, desde la pobreza al peligro, hasta la marginalidad y el desamparo. Originalmente publicado en español en octubre de 2016, y traducido a inglés por el Programa Graduado de Traducción de la UPRRP.

**Abstract:** *Transitorios*, an exhibition on artist Karen Santiago Torres' most recent works, opened to the public on October 20th. In the show, dozens of stray dogs become a metaphor for the social and economic problems that affect the country, including poverty, danger, marginalization and neglect. Originally published in Spanish in October 2016, and translated into English by the Graduate Program in Translation, UPRRP.

**Palabras clave:** Karen Santiago Torres, Pintura, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico, Transitorio, Decadencia, Ramón López Colón

**Keywords:** Karen Santiago Torres, Painting, Pontificia Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Transitorio, Decay, Ramón López Colón

**Sección:** Inglés / **Section:** English

**Publicación:** 15 de noviembre de 2016

**Cita recomendada:** López Colón, Ramón. "Beauty In Decay", *Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte*, 15 de noviembre de 2016, [humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble](http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble)

**Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte**  
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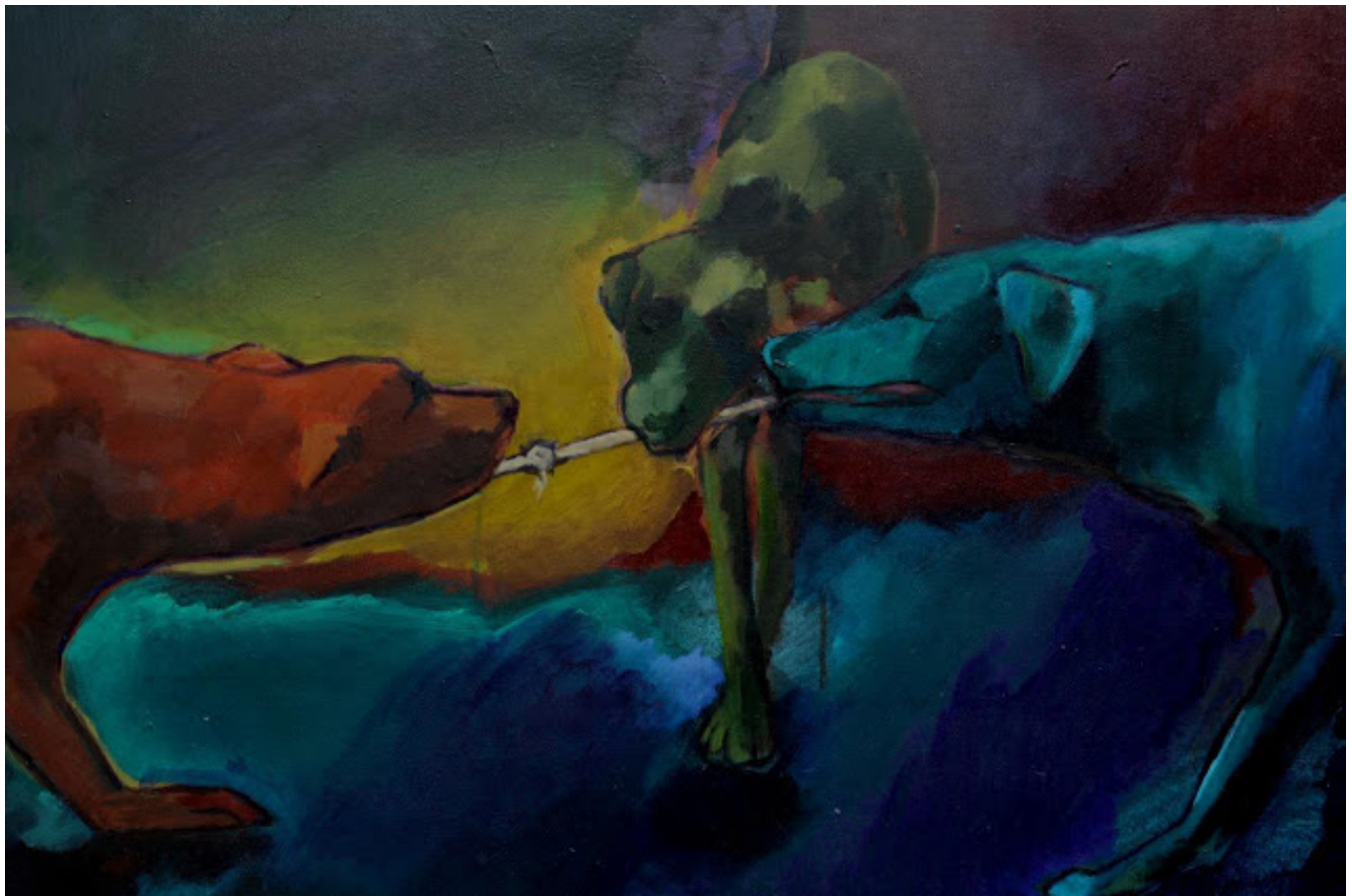
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## *Beauty In Decay*

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Karen Santiago Torres, *Tensión*, 2016.

Centering on the use of canine figures, Karen Santiago Torres develops metaphors about the state of the country through a rich gestural treatment of animal forms and outlines. At times alone and dying, other times violently fighting one another, some of these animals draw us closer to the desperate reality of the many Puerto Ricans who live under constant threat of losing their jobs, while others mirror the erratic social, economic, and political realities of the country.

*Mapa y ciudad* [Map and City], *Invisible*, and *El viaje* [The Journey] are paintings that share a frugal palette, one defined by chromatic greys that verge on funereal purple, applied in a way that produces blotches and splashes over the surface of the canvas. This chromatic treatment evokes dilapidated, solitary and inhospitable spaces. Having experienced it firsthand, the artist

also evokes the harsh treatment of the countless employees of foreign companies in Puerto Rico through her use of formal resources. The dogs depicted in these images appear alone, with seemingly little capacity for movement. These works constitute the artist's first stage in exploring the dog as an artistic leitmotiv.



Karen Santiago Torres, *Progreso*, 2013.

Santiago Torres was a disciple of Jaime Carrero during his last years as a professor. Fully aware of Carrero's use of the dog as a morose metaphor for the Puerto Rican condition, Karen sought to incorporate it into her visual discourse in 2013. However, her pictorial rendition is entirely original and full of new interpretative possibilities. In the second stage of this body of work, Karen depicts scenes in which the dogs roam through areas that seem more enclosed than those of the first stage. In these paintings, the interaction between two or more dogs is tempered by mutual exhibitions of violence, disdain, or apathy. These signs of social decay are successfully reflected in the use of a gestural drawing of great freedom and expressiveness, supported by an exquisite palette of purples, browns, blues, and ochres that build an evocative yet darkly negative space of alleys and other domains where marginality prevails.



In the works titled *Queja* [Complaint], *Conflicto* [Conflict], and *Ladran y nadie escucha* [Bark and No One Listens], the metaphor of the dehumanizing way in which we interrelate with our fellow inhabitants on this island might make anyone blush with shame, even those who might otherwise be unaffected by the inherent political messages in a painting. In other works, such as *Progreso* [Progress, featured at the beginning of this review], and *Tres* [Three], the contorted foreshortenings of the canines are employed to explore the possibilities of movement as well as the reactions of these figures in antagonizing situations that are rendered in dramatically contrasting tones. As part of the research for her graduate studies in painting and drawing at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, Karen Santiago conducted field studies in communities such as Ponce's Playa and the town of Guánica in search of wandering or abandoned canine muses, which were no doubt very useful and which also reveal her very refined eye.



Karen Santiago Torres, Exhibition: *Transitorios*, 2016.

The painting titled *Tensión* [Tension] is one of the most outstanding in this collection. The work depicts three dogs fighting over a rope, ruthlessly pulling at it with their teeth, creating a visceral tension over the disputed object that radiates throughout the pictorial plane. The dogs, each rendered with a uniquely hued coat of fur—red, blue and green, respectively, reflecting the colors of Puerto Rico’s main political parties—are intended to expose the scheming and in-fighting that occur in determining the country’s political future.

**Translated by Brandice Walker and Joan Pabón. Edited by David Auerbach.**