

VISIÓN | doble

REVISTA DE CRÍTICA E HISTORIA DEL ARTE

Título: Naufragado y ahogado: los puertorriqueños de Adál Maldonado bajo el agua / **Title:** Shipwrecked and Drowning – Adál Maldonado's Puerto Ricans Underwater

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Resumen: El libro *Puerto Ricans Underwater*, de Adál Maldonado, publicado a fines del año pasado con un diseño de Bold Destrou, reúne una serie de fotografías que el artista ha tomado desde 2016 y que han aparecido de manera intermitente en las redes sociales. En este proyecto, Adál ha retratado una colección de personajes, tanto amigos como extraños, inmersos en la bañera de su hogar en Santurce. Aunque Adál inicialmente intentó explorar tanto la condición colonial de Puerto Rico como su difícil situación socioeconómica, es inevitable vincular estas imágenes con las circunstancias actuales de la isla dada la devastación causada por los huracanes Irma y María en septiembre de 2017.

Abstract: The book *Puerto Ricans Underwater*, by Adál Maldonado, published late last year with a design by Bold Destrou, brings together a series of photographs which the artist has been taking since 2016, and which have appeared intermittently on social media. In this project, Adál has portrayed a collection of characters—friends as well as strangers—immersed in the bathtub of his Santurce home. Although Adál initially sought to explore both the colonial condition of Puerto Rico and its difficult socio-economic situation, it is inevitable to link these images with the island's current circumstances given the devastation brought by hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017.

Palabras clave: Adál Maldonado, Adriana Santiago, Alexandra Soliel, Andrea Pilar, Bold Destrou, Hyppolite Bayard, Ozzie Forbes, Photography, *Puerto Ricans Underwater*, Saribel de Palma, Mercedes Trelles / **Keywords:** Adál Maldonado, Adriana Santiago, Alexandra Soliel, Andrea Pilar, Bold Destrou, Hyppolite Bayard, Ozzie Forbes, Fotografía, *Puerto Ricans Underwater*, Saribel de Palma, Mercedes Trelles

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Ahogados y náufragos

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Puertorricans Underwater: Ozzie Forbes

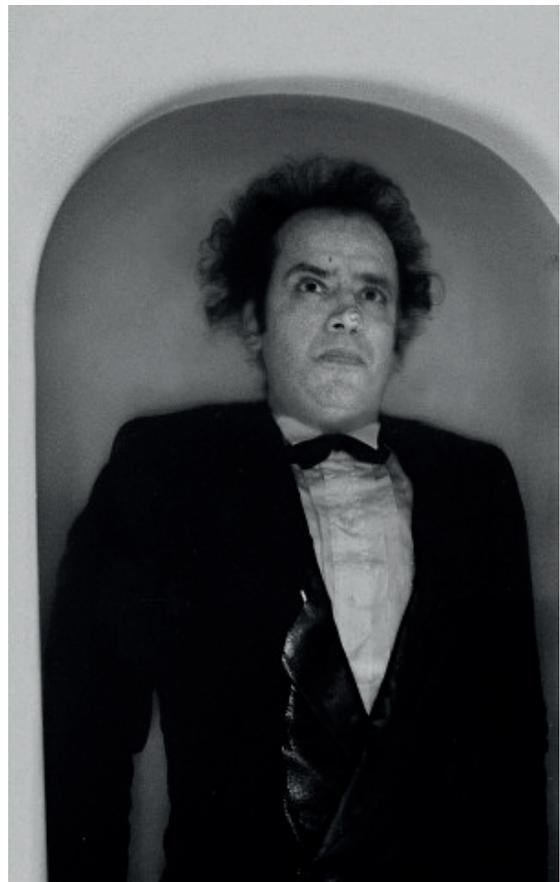
One of the pioneers of photography, the Frenchman Hippolyte Bayard, invented a technique—photogenic drawing—which is a form of direct positive paper printing. A contemporary of Daguerre, Bayard understood photography's ability to spark the imagination of an era. He also produced one of the most renowned photographic self-portraits in existence: *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840). In the image, Bayard is seen shirtless, his eyes shut, reclining slightly to the viewer's right, creating the impression of being one of those unclaimed corpses at the Paris

morgue. On the back of the photo, Bayard included a spurious suicide note. The photo series *Puerto Ricans Underwater* or *The Drowned* (*Los Ahogados*), as Puerto Rican artist Adál Maldonado has titled it in Spanish, began with a self-portrait. The artist hailing from Utuado was photographed dressed in formal attire, with his eyes wide open, in a bathtub full of water. The photo is taken from a bird's-eye view, and the man, in his quiescence and elegance, emits an intense aura of the absurd. This first photo, part of Adál's investigations into the in/visibility of Puerto Ricans in New York, took almost three decades to produce its offspring, not on the island of Manhattan, but in Puerto Rico. Beginning in 2016, Adál began taking photos of friends and, later, perfect strangers in the bathtub of his Santurce apartment. This series, which appeared in regular installments on social media, has now surfaced in physical format with the publication of the book *Puerto Ricans Underwater*, designed by Joshua Camacho Sánchez (*Bold Destrou*).

Adál first spoke with me about this book project, to which I wrote the prologue, in the spring of 2017, when the University of Puerto Rico was embroiled in a general strike. It seems ironic that this should see the light of day now, in this Common(un)wealth(y) of Puerto Rico. In his photo series, Adál explores the colonial conditions of Puerto Rico and the individual reactions to this political situation. What certainly triggered the series was the economic crisis that continues to plague Puerto Rico. But the sensation of confinement, powerlessness and claustrophobia which many of these photos evoke, seems even more relevant after our recent experiences. After Hurricane Maria, it feels like we've been holding



Hyppolite Bayard, Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man, 1840.



Hyppolite Bayard, Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man, 1840.



Puerto Ricans Underwater: Saribel de Palma.



Puerto Ricans Underwater: Alexandra Soliel.

our breath for an extended period of time. If anything, our collective anguish is even greater now than when the series was first conceived.

The people who appear in Adál's images play the role of accomplice. His subjects brought their own props to the photo shoots, seeking self-representation, submitting themselves to Adál's lens, and participating in the series' concept, yet while still remaining curators of their own image. Seeing the photos printed in the *Puerto Ricans Underwater: Adal Maldonado* book, it's evident that the project also involved spirited teamwork, and some degree of comic mischief. Despite the crisis, and the sense of political and social anxiety, the photographed subjects



Puerto Ricans Underwater: Bold Destrou.



Puertorricans Underwater: Adriana Santiago



Puertorricans Underwater: Andrea Pilar.

play, as Bayard did, with the viewers' perceptions by pretending to be dead. Bayard used his landmark photo as a way of informing the public that France had decided to buy the photography patent from Daguerre, despite Bayard's earlier claim, and share it with the world. Bayard, one of the groundbreaking visionaries of photography, was simply left out of the picture. On the back of his photo, Bayard inserted this handwritten message:

"The body that you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you. Given what I know, this tireless experimenter has been occupied for more than three years with his discovery. The government, which has been so generous with M. Daguerre, has said that it can do nothing for Bayard, and the poor man has drowned himself. He has been in the morgue for several days, and no one has either recognized or claimed him. Ladies and gentlemen, you'd better pass along, for fear of Puertor Ricans Underwater: Saribel de Palma. offending your sense of smell, since, as can be observed, the face and hands of the gentleman have already begun to decompose."

Translated by the students of the Translation for Museums Class, Graduate Program in Translation, University of Puerto Rico