

THE ACTIVIST LEGACY OF PUERTO RICAN ARTISTS IN NEW YORK AND THE ART HERITAGE OF PUERTO RICO

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Galvanized by the African-American Civil Rights Movement, Puerto Rican activists took part in numerous demonstrations and waged political campaigns to improve the quality of health, housing, employment, and education in New York City during the 1960s and 1970s. Among the most important victories achieved was the establishment of bilingual education and ethnic studies programs in New York's schools, two mandates that provided new opportunities for Puerto Ricans to gain meaningful employment in the public sector. New York's cultural arena also experienced an influx of new talent at that time. The Puerto Rican struggle to obtain power and visibility in New York's public sphere engendered a cultural renaissance (or a revolution, depending on one's perspective). Puerto Rican artists formed collectives and founded an array of multidisciplinary art centers, cafes, galleries, and museums in East Harlem, the Lower East Side, Lower Manhattan, and the South Bronx throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The notable institutions created during this era include El Museo del Barrio (1969); Taller Boricua (1970); The Institute of Contemporary Hispanic Arts (1973); The Nuyorican Poets Cafe (1973); En Foco (1974); The Association of Hispanic Arts (1975); The Caribbean Culture Center (1975); The Alternative Museum (1975); Cayman Gallery (1976); Charas/El Bohio (1979); Longwood Arts Project (1982); and Exit Art (1982).

With the exception of Lucy Lippard and Julie Ault, North American art historians have not addressed the emergence of Puerto Rican artist collectives in accounts of postwar art movements in New York.¹ The International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) database, *Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art*, will contain primary documents that have the potential to revise current scholarship in the field of modern and contemporary art in the United States. The following chronicle of the early history of Puerto Rican artist collectives in New York was reconstructed from primary and secondary documents that I have collected from the archives of artists involved in the founding of El Museo del Barrio and Taller Boricua. First, these documents bear witness that Puerto Rican artists were critical participants in a citywide movement to reform the exclusionary practices of museums in New York and establish artist-run galleries that offered "alternatives" to working within the mainstream art market. Second, a suite of documents articulating critical reactions to *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*



Fig. 1. Art Workers Coalition Demonstration at the Museum of Modern Art, c. 1970. Photograph: Jan Van Raay.

(1973), the first major survey of Puerto Rican art in New York, illuminates that artists were not invested in simply "affirming" their ethnic identity, but engaged instead in debate with their peers regarding the construction of this identity.

The Puerto Rican Art Movement in New York: A Legacy of Activism

Founded in El Barrio/East Harlem, the cradle of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, El Museo del Barrio and Taller Boricua are the oldest and most prominent Puerto Rican/Latino visual arts institutions in New York. The circle of artists who founded El Museo del Barrio and Taller Boricua were active in multiple Puerto Rican social struggles and vanguardist art movements in the late 1960s. Rafael Montañez Ortiz, the founder of El Museo del Barrio, the first "Puerto Rican" museum in the United States, was an internationally recognized figurehead

in the Destruction in Art Movement (DIAM), Fluxus, and the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG).² The cofounders of Taller Boricua—Marcos Dimas, Adrián García, Manuel "Neco" Otero, and Armando Soto—were young and less established than Ortiz.³ Otero, an architect and a painter, was employed in the Real Great Society Urban Planning Studio (RGS/UPS), an experimental community-based urban planning group in El Barrio. Dimas, García, and Soto were art students and began working together in 1968 on organizing Puerto Rican art exhibitions in colleges and community centers in New York. Dimas, García, Otero, and Soto were also quite active in Puerto Rican societal struggles. Indeed, to support the Puerto Rican empowerment movement, the artists began Taller Boricua as a printmaking workshop in which they produced posters that publicized sociopolitical concerns, events, and demonstrations.

Ortiz and the Taller Boricua artists cofounded the Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition in 1970; this activist group made inroads for Puerto Rican artists in the early 1970s. The Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition (PRAWC) was affiliated with the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), an umbrella organization comprised of different factions within the New York arts community.⁴ As the name suggests, the AWC was loosely based on the model of a labor union and championed artists' rights and other causes. Active between 1969 and 1971, its members consisted of artists engaged in the antiwar movement, women and minorities who sought to end institutional discrimination, and also artists who wanted greater control over the display and sale of their works in galleries and museums. The AWC's "9 Point List of Demands" called for policy changes in museums that would encourage sharing cultural assets, resources, and administrative powers among artists, museum staff members, and the public at large:

- (1) Museum Board of Trustees to be made up of one third staff, one third patrons, and one third artists;
- (2) free admissions at all times and extended hours to accommodate working people;
- (3) decentralization of all major museums through the creation of branch museums and programs that Black, Puerto Rican and other communities can identify with and control;
- (4) the reservation of gallery spaces in all museums for exhibitions of Black and Puerto Rican artists;
- (5) equal representation of the sexes in all exhibitions and acquisitions;
- (6) public access to artist registries;
- (7) museum personnel's responsibilities to include protection of artists rights and welfare;
- (8) exhibitions programs that prioritize artists not currently represented by commercial galleries;
- (9) artists' retention of control over their work whether owned by them or not to ensure that it is not altered, destroyed or exhibited without their consent.⁵



Fig. 2. Art Workers Coalition Demonstration at the Museum of Modern Art, c. 1970. Photograph: Jan Van Raay.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1970, the PRAWC participated in AWC meetings and demonstrations. A major protest organized by the AWC on May 22, 1970, drew 500 artists to participate in an "art strike" in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art (fig. 1). The May 22 protest was followed by a "takeover" of the office of Thomas Hoving, then-director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁶ The PRAWC worked closely with the African-American artist-activists Faith Ringgold and Thomas Lloyd on guerrilla action. As representatives of the AWC's decentralization committee, Rafael Ortiz and Faith Ringgold organized a follow-up meeting with Hoving after the art strike to evaluate how the Metropolitan Museum was proceeding on the AWC's demands that the museum: (a) hire African-American and Puerto Rican arts professionals, (b) exhibit works by women and minority artists, and (c) develop mechanisms to make the museum accessible to underserved audiences, such as co-sponsoring exhibitions at community-based museums like El Museo del Barrio and the Studio Museum of Harlem. Ortiz and Ringgold surprised Hoving by bringing additional members of the PRAWC to the meeting. The artists held Hoving hostage in his office until he agreed to the AWC's reforms. Ortiz continued to put pressure on New York institutions by staging



Fig. 3. Limited Edition Silkscreen Poster for *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*. Designed by Lorenzo Homar, 1973.

demonstrations at the American Association of Museums' conference in New York on June 2, 1970 (fig. 2).

The PRAWC protests effected policy changes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with respect to the Puerto Rican community. In 1971 the Metropolitan Museum of Art hired Irvine MacManus, of Puerto Rican descent, to join the museum's community outreach and education department. MacManus was instrumental in building a working relationship for the Metropolitan Museum with El Museo del Barrio.

Mission statements, reviews of exhibitions, manifestoes, and other early documents pertaining to El Museo del Barrio, Taller Boricua, and the Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition are included in the ICAA digital database. Equally important to understanding the socioaesthetic ethos adopted by Puerto Rican artist-activists in New York is the Young Lords Organization's "13 Point Program" for social change. Perhaps the most radical of the Puerto Rican groups that emerged in the late 1960s, the Young Lords Organization gained notoriety by initiating uprisings against institutions like hospitals and churches that failed to

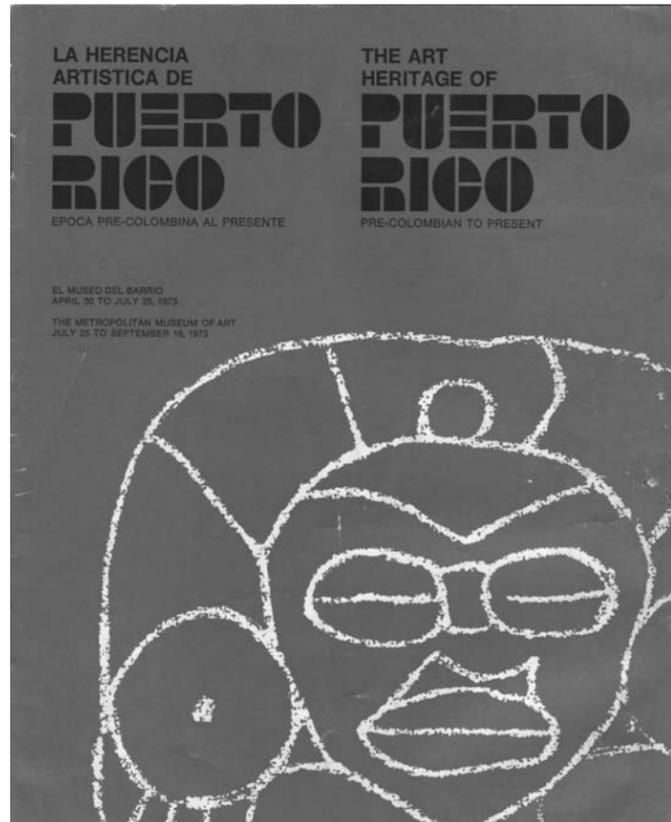


Fig. 4. Cover of *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* exhibition catalogue. Designed by Tomás Vega, 1973.

serve the local community and by beginning grass-roots programs to distribute food, clothing, health services, and educational resources to New York's barrios. The iconography and education programs that were developed at El Museo del Barrio and Taller Boricua reflect Point 7 of the "13 Point Program," which called for Puerto Ricans to learn the "true history" of their African and Native American heritages.⁷

The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico: Triumph and Tragedy

In 1972 MacManus and El Museo del Barrio's second director, Marta Moreno Vega, collaborated on an exhibition proposal to produce *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* (1973), a major survey of Puerto Rican art dating from the Pre-Columbian era to the 1970s (fig. 3). A suite of documents articulating critical responses to *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* offers illuminating accounts of the reception of Puerto Rican art by North American critics and the debates that occurred within the Puerto Rican arts community with regard to the exhibition's representation of Puerto Rican identity. In total, the documents convey how the bridging of art, political action, community organization, and strategic deployments and deconstructions of ethnic essentialism informed the praxis of Puerto Rican artists in the early 1970s.

The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico was the product of a yearlong collaboration among El Museo del Barrio, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, the Museo de Antropología, Historia y Arte de la Universidad de Puerto, and the Colección del Arzobispado de Puerto Rico. The exhibition's 150 objects spanned 500 years of Puerto Rican history, which were divided into four sections. The Pre-Columbian gallery contained Taíno artifacts that were augmented by a photography exhibition documenting extant ceremonial ball courts and petroglyphs in Puerto Rico. The folk art gallery displayed musical instruments and wooden statues of religious figures (*santos*) carved by self-taught artisans. The gallery dedicated to Spanish Colonial art featured José Campeche's paintings dating from the eighteenth century. The galleries covering art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contained works by the Impressionist painter Francisco Oller and examples by thirty-five contemporary painters and printmakers (fig. 4).⁸

The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico opened at El Museo del Barrio on April 30, 1973, to great fanfare. Aside from the artists and staff members from all the institutions involved, the opening reception drew local politicians and officials from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the New York Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), and the New York State Council of the Arts (NYSCA). These agencies pledged to support the future endeavors of El Museo del Barrio.

The Spanish-language newspaper *El Tiempo* proclaimed that *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* represented a triumph for Puerto Rican people: "Constituye un Éxito Exposición de Arte Boricua."⁹ The hyperbolic headline underscored that progress had been made. *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* provided Puerto Rican cultural activists in New York with evidence that their bid to gain recognition and financial support from mainstream institutions was worthwhile for the public at large. First, the exhibition demonstrated that Puerto Ricans had a cultural legacy that merited scholarly research, collection, and exhibition. Second, its high attendance proved that Puerto Ricans constituted an untapped audience for cultural programs. The Metropolitan Museum of Art reported that 18,000 people visited *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* at El Museo del Barrio, and that number doubled at the Metropolitan Museum itself.¹⁰

Peter Schjeldahl's extensive review in the *New York Times*, "Surprise from Puerto Rico," attests that *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* was turning heads in the New York art world at that time. Schjeldahl's acerbic wit made him a popular art critic, and the review was peppered with backhanded compliments. The "surprise" that he revealed to his readers was that Puerto

Ricans actually had an art heritage; Schjeldahl was under the impression that the island "has never known a sustained national movement" and "had never been clear in its cultural identity." The exhibition did not completely disabuse him of those preconceptions. Schjeldahl found the Taíno artifacts "splendid" but not "remarkably unique;" considered Francisco's Oller's paintings to be "interesting" but lacking "real individuality;" and judged that the contemporary painting section was "mostly pretty bad." His praise was reserved for the "extraordinary vitality" he saw in José Campeche's paintings and in the polychrome wooden santos carved by folk artists, which he stated were "as sublime in their perfections as the visual aspect of a present-day New York Puerto Rican neighborhood is joltingly garish." Schjeldahl concluded that *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* contained "some fine works, some surprises, and it's something to think about."¹¹

The *New York Times* review of *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* was clearly not a rave, but it was far from a pan. Schjeldahl's comments indicate that he was taking a serious look at Puerto Rican art and was encouraging others to do the same. Near the end of the review he criticized the curators for overlooking the work of conceptual artist Rafael Ferrer, arguing that the absence of the "best living Puerto Rican artist" from the exhibition left the story of Puerto Rican contemporary art "incomplete unless reference is made to him."¹²

Rafael Ferrer was not the only artist who was notably absent from *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*. The exhibition represented a victory for the Puerto Rican art movement in New York and a personal blow to several key members of the Puerto Rican arts community there. Ironically, the pioneer artist-activists who had fought for inclusion of Puerto Ricans and other minorities in mainstream museums were excluded from the very exhibition that their actions had set in motion. Rafael Montañez Ortiz, the founder of El Museo del Barrio, was also missing from the exhibition checklist, and so were the artists who had organized the Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition and founded Taller Boricua: Marcos Dimas, Adrián García, Martín Rubio, Manuel Otero, and Armando Soto.

Taller Boricua Protests *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*

Marcos Dimas, Martín Tito Pérez, and Jorge Soto organized a demonstration at El Museo del Barrio to protest the exclusion of Taller Boricua's artists during the opening of *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*. "It would have been cowardice not to do that," stated Dimas in a 2001 interview with the author.¹³ The letter that was distributed to museum visitors alerted visitors to the exhibition's shortcomings:

What is happening with El Museo del Barrio?

El Museo del Barrio is supposed to be an alternative to the cultural problems faced by the Puerto Rican community. According to its expressed objective, El Museo deals with the aesthetic goals, cultural and ethnic experiences of the Puerto Rican community residing in New York... Is this exhibit (*The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*) true to its purpose?... Since its inception Puerto Rican artists have participated and helped El Museo del Barrio in its activities and exhibits... The Metropolitan Museum of Art, recognized for its centralizing policies and lack of interest in the communities of New York is a co-sponsor of this exhibit. Where are the community 'painters' now? All along we Puerto Rican community artists seemed to be a part of El Museo del Barrio. Why isn't there a substantial amount of Puerto Rican community painters in the present exhibition? At this time we would like you to come to your own conclusions, or if not, ask El Museo del Barrio about their version.

Yours truly, Puerto Rican Community Artists
at El Taller Boricua.¹⁴

The artists had good cause to question the selection process. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the institutions in Puerto Rico marginalized Moreno Vega's role as the originator of the exhibition. One possible explanation was that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had previously suffered embarrassment over *Harlem on My Mind* (1968), an exhibition that received severe criticism from African-American artists and art historians for being of questionable scholarship and aesthetic criteria. Accordingly, the Metropolitan Museum of Art took precautions with *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*. Moreno Vega, who was trained as an arts educator, was relegated to serving on the exhibition's advisory panel. Meanwhile, curators in Puerto Rico and Henry Geldzahler, curator of 20th-century art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, played a substantive role in defining the exhibition's content.

Henry Geldzahler was among the most influential curators in New York in the 1960s and 1970s. Being a great supporter of Pop, abstraction, and minimalist art, Geldzahler selected Puerto Rican artists who were working in styles that he championed. According to Marcos Dimas, Geldzahler never conducted studio visits at Taller Boricua, where he might have seen Dimas's Pop art posters of Puerto Rican political prisoners like Lolita Lebrón, Martín Tito Pérez's abstract body prints, or Jorge Soto's transformations of European masterpieces into Afro-Taíno icons.¹⁵ Discounting the possibility that artists who had taken part in demonstrations against Metropolitan Museum of Art were being blacklisted, the artists at Taller Boricua held El Museo del Barrio's administration ultimately responsible for their exclusion from *The Art Heritage of Puerto*

Rico. From their perspective, El Museo del Barrio was founded as an artist-run, community-based museum, and the staff had a responsibility to ensure that its constituency at El Barrio was represented.

"What Is Happening to El Museo del Barrio?" Questions and Controversies, 1974–1975

El Museo del Barrio's staff members were sympathetic to the artists' criticism. Indeed, the museum's arts education staff was comprised of artists such as Nitzá Tufiño, Adrián García, and Manuel Otero, all of whom were members of Taller Boricua. The kind of institution that El Museo del Barrio was, and how the museum should evolve in the future, became the subject of an ongoing debate among the staff and the Puerto Rican arts community. In contrast to other museums in New York that were founded by philanthropic art collectors from elite families, El Museo del Barrio's initial funding source was the Community Education Center, a state-financed agency that sponsored the creation of educational enrichment programs for adults and youth in poverty-stricken areas. When Moreno Vega succeeded Ortiz as director, she continued to organize exhibitions based on the premise that El Museo del Barrio's mandate was to educate the Puerto Rican community, primarily its children, about their history through the visual arts.¹⁶ But it was also obvious that El Museo del Barrio was emerging as a prominent "fine art" exhibition space for Puerto Rican artists who had few opportunities to display their work in any other museum or gallery in New York. Undoubtedly, *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* opened many doors for El Museo del Barrio and for Puerto Rican artists, but some of them were trap doors.

Channeling the AWC: CAP Calls for Reforms at El Museo del Barrio

The exclusion of many New York-based Puerto Rican artists from *The History of Puerto Rican Posters*, an exhibition that took place at El Museo del Barrio during the summer of 1973, subjected the museum to criticism that lasted into the next year. On May 29, 1974, an ad-hoc committee calling itself the Colectiva de Artistas Puertorriqueños (CAP) sent a six-page letter to El Museo del Barrio. The letter demanded that the museum engage in open dialogues with New York's Puerto Rican artists regarding its programming, mission, and direction. CAP's membership was comprised of thirty-five individuals culled from Taller Boricua and other Puerto Rican artists' collectives, such as The Society of the Friends of Puerto Rico.¹⁷ The letter began by accusing the museum of presenting an island-centric view of Puerto Rican heritage that abetted discrimination against the expressive forms emerging from the Puerto Rican Diaspora in New York:



Fig. 5. *Los puertorriqueños y la cultura: crítica y debate*, 1976. Report of the "Taller de Cultura: Conferencia de Historiografía," held at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies in April, 1974. Archives of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York.

Unfortunately, some of the people involved in directing community museums uphold the policies set by the major institutions and proceed in isolation. In the specific situation of the Puerto Rican in New York, it is the responsibility of the community museum, in this case, El Museo del Barrio, to make the community conscious of our cultural heritage, as well as the reality that we face living in this city...If we can succeed in creating a community museum in which there is input and feedback of community resources on all levels, then the museum would become a progressive, living and cultural force. It would play an important and effective role in maintaining direction and demanding democratic process from all public cultural institutions. This cannot be achieved if a limited view of Puerto Rican art and culture is being presented. It is not only important to show what is being done in Puerto Rico, but it is also necessary to show a total experience of what is being done here in New York. In other words, the museum has to stimulate the community to become aware of our struggle. This is the goal of art when it is community oriented.¹⁸

To put CAP's letter into a wider social context, we must take into account that, during the time that artists were proposing guidelines for community-based Puerto Rican institutions, academics in New York and Puerto Rico were issuing curricula for the Puerto Rican Studies departments that were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s at several campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY), notably Lehman College, Brooklyn College, and Hunter College. For example, in April 1974, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, a research center established by CUNY in 1973, sponsored "Culture and the Puerto Ricans: Critique and Debate," a conference that invited artists and academics from the island and the U.S. mainland to examine Puerto Rican culture from a transnational framework (fig. 5). Several artists who had signed the CAP letter participated

in the conference roundtables. The published conference report reiterates the position taken by CAP members who denounced the idea that authentic expressions of Puerto Rican culture are found only on the island: "We attack the false emphasis placed upon idealized island experience as the sole source of Puerto Rican culture by bringing into view the contributions and importance of the cultural experiences generated by the migration and life in the U.S. This working class culture is a source of internationalism, struggle and national resistance in the face of North American imperialism."¹⁹

When one considers that Puerto Rican artist-activists were clamoring for exhibitions on Puerto Rican culture in 1970, CAP's letter to El Museo del Barrio may seem quibbling and self-serving. Were the artists justified in requesting that "community artists" participate in all exhibitions at El Museo del Barrio? CAP's request that the museum enact a formal process for feedback from the surrounding community and reserve spaces for community artists on its exhibition roster was supported by a stronger ideological argument that a politically progressive "alternative" or "community-based" Puerto Rican institution must ensure that the perspectives of artists be taken into account. Indeed, the letter echoes the "9 Point List of Demands" issued by the Art Workers Coalition, which called for the museum's Board of Trustees to be made up of staff, patrons, and artists.

Our responsibility as artists is to participate in the growth of El Museo del Barrio; therefore contributing to its becoming a major artistic institution in our community as well as New York. We have followed closely the development of El Museo del Barrio. The time has come when El Museo must expand or it will crystallize into another of the many institutions insensitive to the economical, educational, political and social needs of the communities they are in. We recognize the accomplishments of the staff, Board of Directors and the Amigos of el Museo del Barrio. However, they cannot work alone. The artists' support and the community's backing is an essential interaction for the survival of a community museum. It is the community through its artists that directs the policies of a museum, which in turn must respond directly to the immediate needs of that community.²⁰

CAP's letter of May 29, 1974, suggested that El Museo del Barrio was straying from its founding principals. But to be fair to the staff at El Museo del Barrio, larger systemic forces made it practically impossible for the museum to enact the reforms that the artists demanded.

From 1971 to 1973, El Museo del Barrio's organizational structure abided by the AWC's guidelines for museums. El Museo del Barrio was free at all times; exhibited works by artists who were not represented by commercial galleries; used its influence to advocate for minority artists and women; and had a Board of Trustees comprised of staff members, artists, and barrio residents. Nonetheless, the collective work model that had served well enough in the past gave way to a hierarchical chain of command in order to accomplish the task of organizing a large exhibition like *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*. The staff was willing to sacrifice for the sake of presenting *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*, but it expected to return to a collective work mode afterward. However, Moreno Vega understood that preserving funding from sources like the National Endowment for Arts would require a stricter form of administration at the museum and that the old ways would have to be abandoned. The staff disagreed, and an internal power struggle ensued.²¹

Conflicts between Moreno Vega and the museum staff escalated throughout 1974 and 1975. However, the staff had an advantage over Moreno Vega. Staff members Carmen Bocachica, Hilda Arroyo Gillis, and Nitza Tufiño were also members of El Museo del Barrio's Board of Trustees and could overrule Moreno Vega's decisions. In January 1975, Moreno Vega retaliated by dismissing them from the board. In turn, the dismissed board members brought a lawsuit against Moreno Vega. Bocachica, Gillis, Tufiño, and Moreno Vega all resigned from the staff of El Museo del Barrio in the spring of 1975. However, the legal battle over control of the museum's Board of Trustees continued into the next year.²² CAP's proposal to set aside seats on the museum's Board of Trustees for artists and patrons and to implement a transparent process for community feedback could not be considered during this turbulent period in the museum's history.

Aftermath: What Happened to El Museo del Barrio?

El Museo del Barrio's community-based, collectively-run mode of operation was an early casualty of New York State's regulatory policing of oppositional/alternative art spaces. From a fiscal standpoint, El Museo del Barrio functioned as a "community-based" institution whose operations could be overseen by "the people" of El Barrio via freely elected governing bodies like the local school board between 1969 and 1973—the time period when the museum was funded by the Community Education Center and the New York City Department of Education. By 1974, however, El Museo del Barrio was largely funded by the same agencies that sponsored mainstream institutions. As Brian Wallis argues in "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," agencies like the National



Fig. 6. Front page of *Siempre: el periódico de nuestros barrios*, New York City, July 16-August 5, 2002. This edition of the bimonthly publication documented one of the latest waves of protesters at El Museo del Barrio.

Endowment for the Arts created special grant programs for alternative galleries and community museums but required them to adopt standard, hierarchical modes of administration. Alternative museums and galleries that depended on public funding were therefore stymied in their efforts to maintain collective institutional structures.²³

The legal battle over control of El Museo del Barrio's Board of Trustees ended in 1976 with a New York Supreme Court Ruling specifying that museum staff members could not serve also as museum trustees. A new board was elected and Jack Agüeros, a playwright who had been successfully running Cayman Gallery—a not-for-profit Puerto Rican/Latin American exhibition space in Soho—was appointed the third director of El Museo del Barrio, in 1977. The strained relationship between artists associated with CAP, Taller Boricua, and El Museo del Barrio was repaired during Agüeros's tenure, but the utopian dream of re-establishing El Museo del Barrio as an artist-run, community-based museum was not realized.²⁴

The lost opportunity to implement a formal process for community and artist input in El Museo del Barrio's administration in 1974 has come back to haunt the museum on a cyclical basis. Between 1998 and 2003, it was the target of three campaigns to revise the museum's mission statement and democratize the structure of the museum's Board of Trustees. In 2003, members of Nuestro Museo Action Committee negotiated with museum officials to dedicate one seat on the Board of Trustees to a resident artist in El Barrio.²⁵ But despite the best efforts of stakeholders in the Puerto Rican/Latino arts community who have periodically called for reforms at El Museo del Barrio (fig. 6), the museum appears determined to maintain a rather conventional course. The fact is that El Museo del Barrio has persevered and prospered because of its adoption of mainstream modes of museum administration, solicitations of support from elite sectors, and collaborative ventures with major art museums to present innovative work by Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American artists. If the museum can be faulted for distancing itself from its radical origins, it can be said that El Museo del Barrio at least, on occasion, exhibits the work of radical artists. For this reason, even venerable prognosticators who have warned of and mourned the demise of El Museo del Barrio since the 1970s celebrate its survival. El Museo del Barrio is dead! Long live El Museo del Barrio!

NOTES

- 1 See Lucy Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York Since 1969," *Alternative Art New York*, 1965–1985, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 79–114. Julie Ault, "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artist Groups and Organizations in New York, 1965–1985," in *Alternative Art New York*, 19–36.
- 2 See Kristine Stiles and Rafael Montañez Ortiz: *Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1989).
- 3 See Diógenes Ballester, "Annotated Chronology," in *Taller Alma Boricua: Reflecting on Twenty Years of the Puerto Rican Workshop* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1990), 63–74.
- 4 Marcos Dimas, interview by author, 10 March 2001, New York. Dimas's account of the creation of the Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition was confirmed by interviews with Rafael Montañez Ortiz and Adrian García.
- 5 Art Workers Coalition, "9 Point List of Demands," Archives of the Museum of Modern Art. The AWC's demands to museums have been reproduced in various anthologies, including *Alternative Art New York*.
- 6 Raphael Montañez Ortiz, interview by author, 3 March 2001, New Brunswick, N.J., digital video-recording. Ortiz's account of holding Thomas Hoving hostage is confirmed by a similar account in Faith Ringgold's autobiography; See *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 7 The Young Lords Organization's "13 Point Program" was frequently reproduced in its newspaper, *P'alante*. Original issues of *P'alante* can be found in the archives of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York.
- 8 See the Metropolitan Museum of Art and El Museo del Barrio, *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973).

- 9 "Constituye un Éxito Exposición de Arte Boricua," *El Tiempo*, 6 May 1973, 2.
- 10 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Press Release," August 1973.
- 11 Peter Schjeldahl, "Surprise from Puerto Rico," *The New York Times*, 5 August 1973, 25.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Marcos Dimas, interview by author, 10 March 2001, New York, video recording.
- 14 Puerto Rican Community Artists, "Letter," Archives of Diógenes Ballester, New York.
- 15 Marcos Dimas, interview by author, 10 March 2001, New York, video recording.
- 16 See Marta Moreno Vega, "Marta Moreno Vega Arts Administrator," interview with Lowery Sims in *Artists and Influence* (1996), 136–54.
- 17 Colectiva de Artistas Puertorriqueños to El Museo del Barrio, 29 May 1974, TMs (photocopy), Archives of Diógenes Ballester, New York. The following individuals signed the document: Carlos Ortiz, Roberto Betancourt, Américo Casiano, Victoria Colón, Petra Cintrón, David Cottes, Héctor Del Valle, Ángel Domínguez, Sandy Esteves, Miguel Guzmán, J. Jiménez, Juan Maldonado, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, Víctor R. Mojica, José Morales, Rafael Colón Morales, René Oleda, Martín Tito Pérez, Geno Rodríguez, Myrna Rodríguez, Fernando Salicrup, D. Michael Sánchez, Jorge Soto, Zoraida Torres, and José Falcón.
- 18 Colectiva de Artistas Puertorriqueños to El Museo del Barrio, 29 May 1974, Xerox from original, Archives of Diógenes Ballester, New York. The following individuals signed the document: Carlos Ortiz, Roberto Betancourt, Américo Casiano, Victoria Colón, Petra Cintrón, David Cottes, Héctor del Valle, Ángel Domínguez, Sandy Esteves, Miguel Guzmán, J. Jiménez, Juan Maldonado, Jesús "Papoleto" Meléndez, Víctor R. Mojica, José Morales, Rafael Colón Morales, René Oleda, Martín "Tito" Pérez, Geno Rodríguez, Myrna Rodríguez, Fernando Salicrup, D. Michael Sánchez, Jorge Soto, Zoraida Torres, and José Falcón.
- 19 Culture Task Force, *Culture and the Puerto Ricans: Critique and Debate* (New York: Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, 1976).
- 20 Colectiva de Artistas Puertorriqueños to El Museo del Barrio, 29 May 1974, TMs (photocopy), Archives of Diógenes Ballester, New York.
- 21 See Marta Moreno Vega, "Marta Moreno Vega Arts Administrator," 136–54.
- 22 See Yasmin Ramirez, "Timeline of El Museo del Barrio," in *Voices from our Communities: Perspectives on a Decade of Collecting at El Museo Del Barrio* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2001), 6–37.
- 23 "The NEA guidelines also served to bureaucratize the alternative spaces, particularly in ways that could serve the economy...Most alternative spaces were reconstituted as non-profit organizations to qualify for NEA grants, matching grants, and tax benefits; this meant they were compelled to have a formal hierarchy and a board of directors and to be legally and fiscally accountable...the NEA sought to foster new artistic developments, yet it provided little encouragement for the odd or unrecognizable—that is, alternative—business structures. Instead, the agency encouraged alternative spaces to become more like other cultural organizations; small groups were urged to adopt conventional structures like the ones they had been founded to oppose." See Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," in *Alternative Art New York*, 175.
- 24 See Yasmin Ramirez, "Timeline of El Museo del Barrio," 6–37.
- 25 See Arlene Dávila, "El Barrio's 'We Are Watching You Campaign': On the Politics of Inclusion in a Latinized Museum," *Aztlan*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 153–78.