THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Art | In Conversation

Edra Soto with Robert R. Shane

"If you are curious enough, and you get close, you will see that there's more to the work than just the fence."

Edra Soto. Pencil on Paper by Phong H. Bui

Like transplanting skin, interdisciplinary artist Edra Soto inserts her replicas of vernacular Puerto Rican architectural forms, namely the wrought iron *rejas* screens and concrete *quiebrasoles* ubiquitous on the island, into new spaces throughout the Americas in her ongoing *GRAFT* series. The migration of these forms becomes a metaphor for literal migration, raising issues of colonization, identity, and family in works that stretch wall-to-wall across galleries spaces or become free-standing structures, such as *Screenhouse*—her public commission for Chicago's Millennium Park on view through April 2022.

The Puerto Rican born artist, represented by Luis de Jesus in Los Angeles, co-directs the outdoor project space The Franklin in Chicago where she lives and works since attending the School of the Art Institute for her MFA. From 2019 to 2020, the MacArthur Foundation's International Connections Fund supported iterations of Soto's work at Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan; the Smart Museum, Chicago; and Salvador, Brazil.

I spoke with Soto on the occasion of her solo show at Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, and the concurrent exhibition of her work in El Museo del Barrio's *Estamos Bien—La Trienal 20/21*. We talked about her efforts to make visible the role that African diasporic traditions have played and continue to play in Puerto Rican architecture, what it was like to make art after the trauma of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and her new "Casa-Islas | House-Islands" series of conceptual drawings that reflects on isolation and home in a time of pandemic.

Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, 2021. Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Robert Shane (Rail): So I thought we could start by talking about *GRAFT*. It's your latest and ongoing project in which you transplant vernacular architectural forms from Puerto Rican houses built in the 1950s and '60s, into gallery spaces. Could you tell us a bit about how you came to this work?

Edra Soto: Yes, it was by visiting Puerto Rico. I travel frequently to visit my elderly mother. On that particular visit I came with my husband [Dan Sullivan, Navillus Woodworks, Chicago] and we were walking in the neighborhood of my upbringing, and we started discussing the *rejas* and the *quiebrasoles* patterns. At first glance, they look very mid-century modern, the kind of furniture he makes is sort of that style as well.

Rail: *Rejas* are decorative iron screens that one finds on many homes in Puerto Rico and the *quiebrasoles* are the concrete equivalent.

Soto: Yes. We were discussing this, but also I was wrestling with a project that I needed to resolve creatively. And it ended up being the first iteration of *GRAFT*. That was in 2013 at Terrain in Chicago, the house of the late Sabina Ott, where she invited artists to create interventions. As we were walking, I think the first thing—because when I have a project, I tend to obsess about the project—I started thinking about the space and its proportions. What will be the best possible thing that I can do in the room? So I guess I attribute *GRAFT* to being in Puerto Rico, but also to my tendency to be very excited about creating site-specific or site-responsive work.

Also, I think that being an interdisciplinary artist, it's something that I learned in school. Initially, when I studied here in Puerto Rico, during my Bachelor's [Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño], I had a conservative type of practice. And I chose to become a painter. I think I was not a very good painter, but I was very—I had a lot of energy, creative energy, and I was very sincere. There was no irony in me at all. [*Laughter*] I learned about sarcasm and irony when I moved to Chicago. To me, I associate that with something American, because living 27 years in Puerto Rico, I never used sarcasm or cynicism, or anything like that. I didn't express myself like that. So the kind of paintings that I made were very sincere. But I felt limited by what I was doing, by the rectangular and square format of painting. Eventually, starting painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, it felt that painting was very much about an elite; it speaks to a particular group. And I love painting so much, but it didn't really cover my needs at the time. It didn't supply my needs as an artist, I needed a bigger playground—

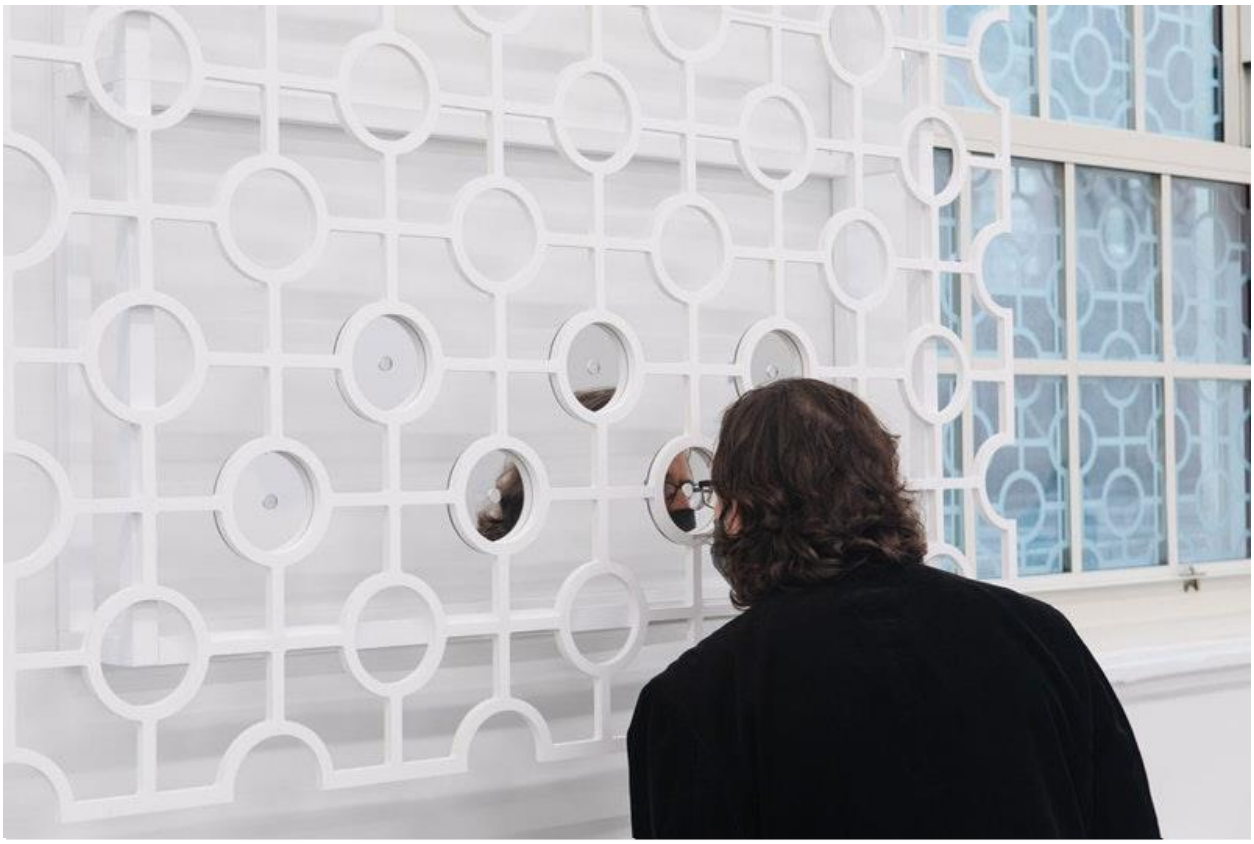
Rail: Yes—

Soto: —to express myself. Candida Alvarez, who was my mentor at SAIC, was the only Puerto Rican or Latinx person working on their faculty at the time, and I told her about a project I did, which was also a type of site responsive project, in which I was gathering objects from Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago, objects that were sold at this very strange kind of dollar store-hybrid. They had a mix of materials and things from different parts of the world. I was fascinated by this place

because I'd never seen these stores in Puerto Rico, and I was decorating my room in Wicker Park where I had a house with two roommates.

And I decided to create an installation in my bedroom. When I met Candida after the summer, she asked me what I was up to? And I told her, “Well, I've been doing this painting here, check it out, and I've also been making this installation in my bedroom with things from this place on Milwaukee Avenue,” which was really close to the house. And she saw so much excitement in my bedroom installation idea that she told me, “Edra, I think you should maybe think about that as your art. You're so excited about it.” And that was a real shift for me. A life-changing shift. Because her reaction to it validated all that I had repressed, you know, gave me permission for the freedom of expression for something that I just didn't recognize, as something that I hadn’t even considered.

Rail: So you've replicated *rejas* and *quiebrasoles* in various iterations and grafted them into new environments, gallery and outdoor spaces, such as your public commission *Screenhouse* for Chicago’s Millennium Park. You’ve grafted them in Brazil, now in New York. When I hear that term “graft”—and I think this is what you're thinking about—I think of a skin graft. Susanna V. Temkin, one of the curators of *Estamos Bien—La Trienal 20/21* at El Museo del Barrio, which includes your work, had also mentioned an association with corruption, like the idea of political graft, which I hadn't thought of. What are your thoughts on the title *GRAFT*, and what might those many associations mean about the kind of intervention that you're making by inserting these architectural forms into new spaces?



Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, 2021. Commissioned by El Museo del Barrio. Installation detail Courtesy the artist and Muse del Barrio. Photo: E. Aaron Ross.

Soto: Well, in crafting the project *GRAFT*, “transplant” was the first word that came to mind. But I didn't like that word as a title. That word feels very medical and made me think about medical procedures. So I couldn't use “transplant,” even though I do use that word all the time to describe what I'm doing. But “graft” felt more like—even though maybe the work doesn't associate too much with grafting—I can possibly put it in the terms of architecture. I'm grafting something. But also, I was looking for a word that reflected what I was thinking about with the project, which is: How do you represent migration, the humanity of migration, and the humanity in architecture? So I'm definitely thinking about the technical aspects of architecture and the humanity of architecture. And I think they're really different things.

I guess, one important thing that I should remark about *GRAFT* is that the *rejas* and *quiebrasoles* are representations. They are representations of something that already exists. So, I am highlighting something that already exists. I’m pointing to an archive, the reality of

a particular object or a particular design, architectural design that exists here on the island. And so grafting, in my case was to—it can almost sound corny when I want to describe this, because I'm thinking about the humanity of architecture. I want to think about it as a living organism or something that exists. And—as I embody the *rejas* and *quiebrasoles*—how do I integrate myself in that space?

Rail: Yeah, it's like an antidote to Le Corbusier's famous idea of the house as a machine for living. Instead of thinking about architecture as a machine, you're thinking of it as this living being. And even that word "graft"—I think of grafting plants together. I seem to remember something like that from high school biology. [*laughs*]

Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, 2021. Commissioned by El Museo del Barrio. Installation detail Courtesy the artist and Muse del Barrio. Photo: E. Aaron Ross.

Soto: Yes. Well, the meaning that resonates the most, to me, is the skin transplant. And that's what sold me, I was like, "Oh, yeah, you have to be called *GRAFT*." It's about this visceral thing that makes you

think about the humanity of what is behind the scenes. But I guess in terms of the political, you were talking about…?

Rail: Oh, yeah. Susanna had mentioned political graft. Like the idea of political corruption.

Soto: Yeah, I think that's associated with a how things were acquired, like these particular wrought iron patterns, the concrete patterns and the *casa criolla*—where they came from, where they were appropriated from, and how ethical was that transaction. In *GRAFT*, the multiple meanings became prompts for literary contributors, because I always think that I address these kinds of difficult questions that are impossible to answer. But I think the benefit of taking that kind of risk is that you're forced to consult others, you know, and work with others.

Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, Installation views, Chicago Cultural Center, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, Installation views, Chicago Cultural Center, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Rail: And you're referring to writings by contributors that will often accompany your exhibitions. I'm thinking of the iteration of *GRAFT* at the Chicago Cultural Center (2019) for *Forgotten Forms*. That one even included a representation of a Puerto Rican bus stop shelter and viewers could sit and read these texts that various contributors had written, responses to your work, like reading a paper while waiting for the bus.

Soto: Yes, and it becomes a more expansive practice when you can involve others. I'm always thinking that the purpose of making this is, hopefully, to connect with all kinds of people, and it would be very limiting to create something that is just for a particular group. … All the multiple meanings of "graft" if there's the political meaning it can be addressed by bringing political issues in from the island and connecting it to the concept of this project. And how does that connect, you know? It's a journey. A creative journey. Because I think eventually those conversations converge, but it's through time that *I* get to learn. I acknowledge: "Oh, this contributor made me think about a new dimension of *GRAFT*."

Rail: I just want to go back to one thing you said: that your work, *GRAFT*, is a representation of something that exists, that it points to a reality. I was thinking about the reality and ubiquity of the *quiebrasoles* and the *rejas* throughout Puerto Rico. For you, they've really become a marker of Puerto Rican culture, and a kind of alternative to the colonial tower *La Garita* as an image of Puerto Rico found, say, in tourist advertising and reproduced on all sorts of products.

Soto: Yeah, I actually started documenting *Garita* representations in Puerto Rico wherever I find them: in a logo, on a tourist bag, on a stage for television, in advertising. The *Garita* becomes a symbol of identity. It's almost an identifier or logo for Puerto Rico. And I think it's very hard when you are raised in that particular mindset, in that kind of dependency—I'm thinking about being ruled by Spain for over 400 years or so—and how that affects people's minds. It's accepted and in this case, celebrated: "Yeah, this is the symbol, this is the logo." As I arrive from the airport, I see it everywhere. And to me it's such a connection to the condition of being of a colony, and I'm actually surprised how it's been so embedded in our culture that it's almost like people don't see it, or don't recognize the connotations of that structure.

When I'm here in Puerto Rico, I have to stay here in the house, taking care of my mother, so I turn on the TV. I watch a lot of TV in the bedroom. I have documented many of the local channels, there are not

that many, and they will have an intro to their channel with a jingle. And the *Garita* will appear in some form, some graphic, something grandiose, like: “Yeah, you're arriving in Old San Juan.” It's incredible to me. If people were aware of what that means—it’s like, “I am settled with the fact that I was colonized for 400 years.” And this particular structure in person is so disappointing. Because when you visit an actual *garita* in Old San Juan, you know, it's just a terrible place to visit. You don't want to go in there. It smells terrible. Yeah, it's not a good place.

So I don't understand why. Why settle for that particular structure when you have so many other things that speak more accurately about our identity? And I think about the *rejas* as that particular design element that has the potential of being representative of Puerto Rico because Puerto Ricans recognize them. They are a part of people’s homes. … It's a part of the visual culture of Puerto Rico; it's recognized by and replicated by artists. And it exists in many other parts of the world, as well. But in Puerto Rico there's this particular roster; there's a particular group of designs and those are the ones that I've been trying to document throughout the years. Those are the ones I replicate in my work. I really don't make representations of *rejas* and *quiebrasoles* that I haven't seen before.

Rail: As you were decolonizing *La Garita*, I was thinking also of the original sources for these *rejas* and *quiebrasoles*. You've discovered in your research that the patterns have ties to Sub-Saharan Africa, an art history that's whitewashed.

Soto: I taught high school for almost 10 years, in Chicago. And during those years, I was very excited to teach about African art and design. And we use the African patterns to make work. And I couldn't help thinking about the similarities of these patterns to the patterns of the *rejas* and *quiebrasoles* of Puerto Rico. And so that led me to a monograph by Puerto Rican architect, Jorge Ortiz Colom, titled *The African Influence in the Design Build Edification of Puerto Rico* [*La influencia de Africa en el entorno edificado de Puerto Rico*] (2013), that talks about the *criollo* architecture and how it incorporates the *rejas* and the *quiebrasoles* that originated in Sub-Saharan Africa.

He argues that a lot of this African influence was overlooked by historians, with the assumption that Africans could not transplant their ancestral ways of life under the inhumane conditions of the transfer, and the lack of freedom in their home. And this is coming from his essay. And so connecting with this information was fascinating. And also acknowledging that the largest contingent of Africans in Puerto Rico came from places like Ghana and Nigeria, and Dahomey (Guinea's Coast). And many were Yoruba and Ashanti and Fon, and Igbo from Nigeria. So there's factual evidence that this was happening. And he also talks about the style of the *criollo* architecture, and Ortiz Colom thinks that sometimes these elements were outright purchased as entire homes and relocated to the United States.

Rail: So much of what you've been talking about is trying to make visible the colonial connotations of *La Garita* and trying to make visible the history of African influences that have been ignored. Visibility and invisibility come up so much in your work, and probably most overtly with the viewfinders that have made their way into *GRAFT*. Viewers come up to the installation and look through small holes in circular mirrors through which they can see photographs of your source material—photographs of *rejas* and *quiebrasoles* in situ in Puerto Rican homes. There are images from television, like you were talking about earlier. And also, the aftermath of Hurricane Maria: scenes of everyday life and of devastation.

Soto: I did document my experience with Hurricane Maria [Sept 20, 2017]. When I was here in Puerto Rico, and it was surprisingly announced: this is happening. And there was a hurricane before Maria, called Irma [Sept 7, 2017]. I came to Puerto Rico soon after to check in, and soon after they just announced this other hurricane, so I didn't have an option but to stay and help. I did document it all I could with my phone, and I kept it and thought, "Well, I don't know if I'm comfortable sharing this, but maybe someday I'll be comfortable with it," but I wouldn't even know how. I just find that it's not the kind of work that I even find ethical. It's hard to share others' tragedies, you know? What I decided to do was to focus on the landscape, because it was visibly—if you live in Puerto Rico, and you know the landscape,

the changes of the landscape were unbelievable. I just thought it was something unique to the experience of the environment. … Because you're a human confronting nature, and you're like, “Wow, this is kind of incredible,” and also sad, of course. It's very traumatic. I couldn't talk about it without crying for a long time.

And so I kept these images and I do attribute the viewfinders to providing additional context to the viewer. I was really interested in giving audiences something that went beyond the aesthetic experience. And to me that was the literary component. And I felt that it wasn't enough at some point. I thought, well, maybe this is too abstract for somebody that is passing by, so, and it being my goal to create work that really speaks to people that are sensitive to art practices, understand art, but also people that don't know or don't even care about art—I want to engage everybody. So I thought, okay, this could be something that will create an intimate view, and also that's when the visibility and invisibility of *GRAFT* became very palpable to me.

I did my first iteration of *GRAFT* integrating the viewfinders at UNTITLED art fair (Miami Beach, 2018). I was invited by Luis De Jesus to create a facade for his gallery booth. Then at the Chicago Cultural Center (2019), I had the opportunity to create a site-responsive piece at this kind of enormous wall. I think it was a 30-foot wall. And making a decorative fence, to me, was not enough. That gallery at the Chicago Cultural Center had blocked windows. And I asked the curators, if it was possible to remove the walls that are covering the windows of the gallery? … And they told me no, we cannot remove these walls from here at this time. … So it prompted me to think, “Oh, I can integrate the viewfinders and create my own windows.”

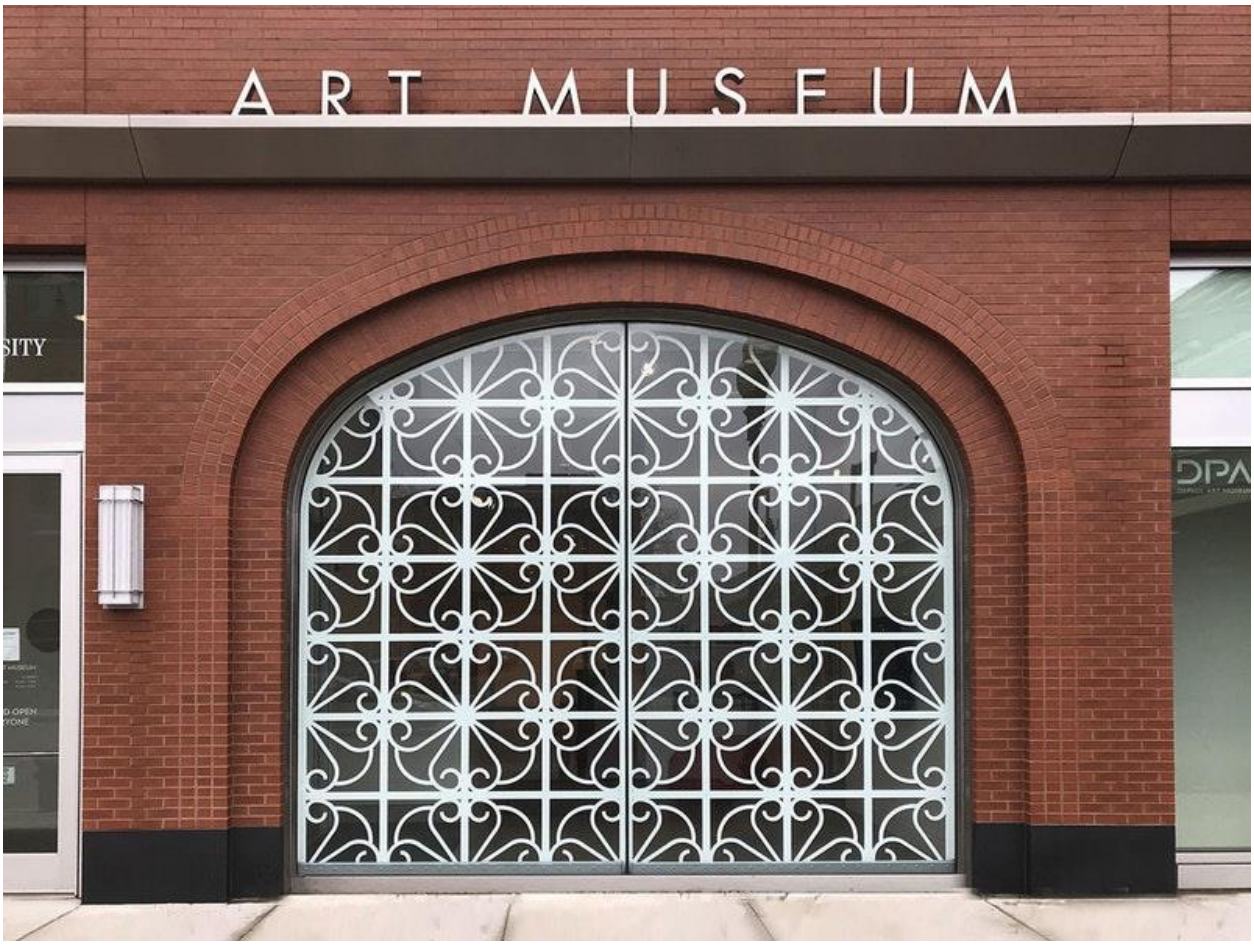
Also, I’m obsessive; I document everything. And I stopped doing it because I just don't have enough memory on my phone to document every, every single part of my life. [*Laughter*] That'd be impossible. But I do have so much documentation. And it was a great opportunity for me to integrate that part of my practice. And they're also connecting to forms of reaffirming identity or cultural attributes. But,

yeah, it was an opportunity to expand the narratives for GRAFT. And providing personal views was important. I'm making myself responsible for my actions.

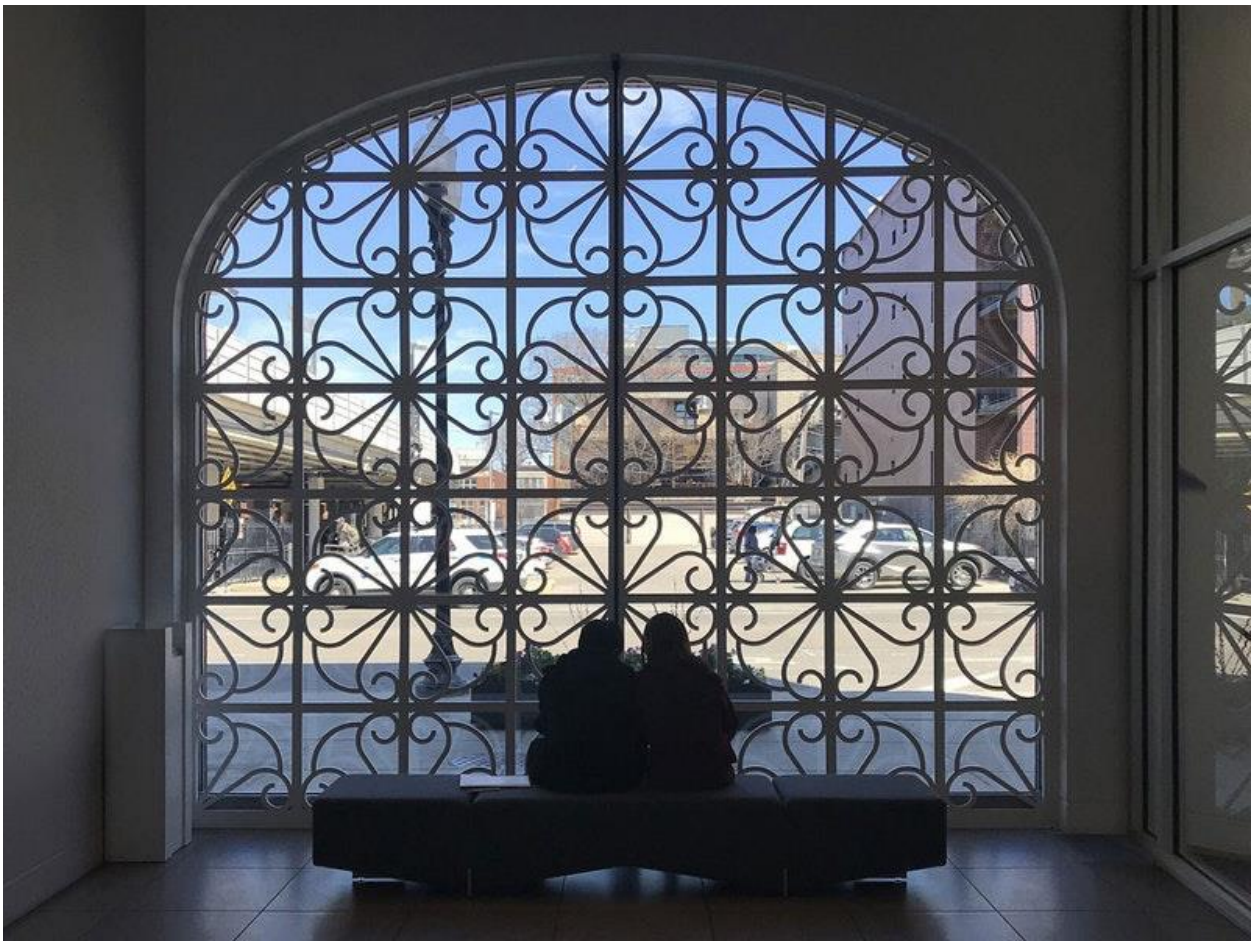
Rail: By providing your own personal views, you mean, like family photos?

Soto: Yes. So willingly sharing personal things that I consider relatable in lower middle-class homes, or middle-class, lower-middle-class citizens, Puerto Ricans. [*Laughs*] The best responses that I get on *GRAFT* are from Puerto Ricans. The amount of emotional reactions that people, especially Puerto Rican people expressed to me about the project is quite satisfying to me, because I feel like, well, I don't know about the rest of the world, but if they respond to it in that way, I feel like I'm leading this project in the right direction, I hope.

Rail: I'm interested in the viewer's physical and bodily experience of the work. One thing I was thinking about looking at one of the photos in *GRAFT*—I think it's from your childhood home: we're in a shadowed living room, there's a glass coffee table in the middle ground, and then a couch, and then we're looking at *quiebrasol* wall in the background. And I started to think about all these installation shots of people engaging with *GRAFT*: they're bending over, peering into the viewfinders. And I wonder, is that comparable to the experience of being inside one of these homes and looking out through the *quiebrasol*? I could imagine, say, you hear something outside and you want to see what's going on, so you would go up and try to peer through the openings of the *quiebrasol*. Because in terms of the visible and the invisible, it's really interesting that that *quiebrasol* lets in light, it allows for visibility, but it also offers privacy for the occupants.



Edra Soto, *GRAFT* at *Out of Easy Reach*, 2018. Curated by Allison Glenn at the DePaul Art Museum. Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.



Edra Soto, *GRAFT* at *Out of Easy Reach*, 2018. Curated by Allison Glenn at the DePaul Art Museum. Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Soto: Yeah, absolutely. Here in my house, I have a series of *quiebrasoles* that frame all the sides of the balcony and part of the frontal view. So these are the only architectural elements of the house that make the outside world accessible to view. In most of these houses, the *rejas* exist in the facade of the houses, so all their outdoor views will be framed by the pattern of the *rejas*.

Also, the part about invisibility comes when we think about vernacular architecture as something that doesn't need to be acknowledged. It's something that is acknowledged for its function, it’s practical. It’s an architectural element that beautifies and provides ventilation, and security and light, but it's not meant to become a point of reflection. In a gallery setting or a museum setting, depending on where they are located, sometimes they can be acknowledged as a part of the

exhibition, and sometimes they can be completely dismissed. The viewer is like, “Oh, they are part of the exhibition. I had no idea.” This happened to me a few times actually. A curator friend who went to see the exhibition told me, “I saw the exhibition, and as I’m leaving I start wondering, where is your work?” My work was the largest piece of the exhibition, in the front window of the gallery. It’s one of my goals, to integrate this pattern into the existing architecture. That was the experience that I had at the DePaul Art Museum, where they invited me to do an iteration of *GRAFT*—this was Allison Glenn's exhibition, titled *Out of Easy Reach* (2018). The pattern that I chose I guess was integrated so well to the window that some people assumed that it was a part of the building. It wasn't in question. We did a great job, like it looked really great and convincing, you know, but [*laughter*] to the point of not acknowledging that it's part of the exhibition—that then maybe created a different problem. But it also kind of feeds into that idea of visibility and invisibility that's beyond the aesthetics of the project.

Rail: And I like how you implicate the viewer in this play of visibility and invisibility. I'm thinking particularly of the mirrored surfaces on your *GRAFT* viewfinders as I just experienced them at El Museo del Barrio in *Estamos Bien—La Trienal 20/21* and at Morgan Lehman Gallery. I see part of my face as I look into the viewfinder, but to really look into the viewfinder, I have to close one eye. And as I do, I can't see my other eye anymore. There was something a little disquieting about it.

Edra Soto, *GRAFT*, 2021. Aluminum tube, foamed PVC, mirrored acrylic, plastic, inkjet prints Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery. Photo: Dan Sullivan

Soto: [*Laughs*]

Rail: You know, I've never looked in a mirror and not been able to see myself looking back at me [*Laughter*]. So I see part of my face, but then I see this "something else" in the photograph: a *quiebrasol*, something from your home, something from the landscape. And it, yeah, I guess it required sort of giving up a bit of my ego as a viewer and really empathizing with what it is that I was looking at. But I'm curious why you choose to incorporate the mirrors into your pieces.

Soto: Well, it ended up having multiple functions. Immediately I thought, oh, people might respond to the mirror in all kinds of ways, they might get close and try to photograph their reflections. Or they might try to avoid it all at once. But my purpose of bringing in the mirror was to create a hiding place for the viewfinders, a place to position the viewfinders that didn't compromise the proportions that I wanted to use for the design of the *rejas* and *quiebrasoles*. So then the

mirror kind of solves that problem because in any room a mirror sort of makes things look bigger, but it also kind of disappears. It kind of integrates itself into the space. And I needed an element that just hides what is behind. And if you are curious enough, and you get close, you will see that there's more to the work than just the fence. But you have to be curious enough to acknowledge that part as well. So, I love providing experiences to the viewer. But I also design these experiences in a way that allows me to be playful with them. It's like, now you're going to have to lower your back [*laughter*] to look through, or you have to maybe use your phone to reach up to the higher parts that you cannot reach. … I think that's the role of the artist: to design how people will navigate the work.

Edra Soto, "Casas-Islas | Houses-Islands" series, 2021. Commercial tabloid digital press print on 90 gsm paper. Edition of 4. Each work 11 x 14 in. Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Rail: At your Morgan Lehman show, *Casas-Islas | Houses-Islands*, you have a series of drawings you consider conceptual drawings, in

which we see *quiebrasoles* and *rejas* patterns forming larger geometric shapes that we could read as a plan or elevation for a house, or as an island floating in a bright field of color. And I couldn't help but think of the word “island” as a metaphor for isolation, and coupled with the house imagery, I think about all of that in relation to COVID and stay-at-home orders. I was wondering if that work was shaped by the pandemic at all?

Soto: Yes, yes, but mostly, I should say, I produce all of those drawings here in Puerto Rico in my mother's bedroom. I come here, I will spend, I don't know, all the time, many days, days and hours in her bedroom. And I have been making all my conceptual drawings in Photoshop on my computer for many years. But I never showed them. These are interpretations of the way I've been working for years. And as I thought of this series and the title *Casas-Islas*, it is an island and incredibly enough it aligns with the general experience of COVID—how people had to isolate for self-protection.

But in my particular case, as I live here in my house, I'm confronted with mental illness through my mother's condition. So I think about how she kind of forcefully isolates herself for her own protection. And I start thinking about this parallel, like the isolation became convenient for everybody at some point. I live in the house and, well, I'm so glad that she's here. And she will never get COVID because she's terrified of outdoor life. And it comes from a very lonely and sad place. I feel like maybe if it wasn't for COVID—and what it means to set boundaries with isolation—maybe I wouldn't have come up with this idea.

And then I started thinking about Puerto Rico and its topography, and being the smallest island in the Caribbean, being sort of outside, being a property of the US, but being so far from it geographically—this all made me think about the shape of the island in relation to the shape of the house, and the representation of the island in a map, and how when I make a representation of a home, how that would look like. So the irregularities of all the shapes are responding to the idiosyncratic attributes of domestic architecture. Puerto Rican domestic architecture can be pretty random, and it can have really quirky and

weird solutions that were hand-built. It's like this thing kind of looks like it's falling apart, but it's still standing. It's also that the architecture is punished by the weather, by the excessive amounts of rain, and the excessive amount of sun here. There's no happy medium. It's raining really intensely or *the sun*—like you will burst into flames, you know? I actually experienced some of that, burns, after Hurricane Maria. I had to walk to the gas station to get gas to provide energy here for the house. And it was brutal for my skin. I protected myself, but my neck really suffered from the sun and the heat. There's a certain intensity to this little island that is kind of remarkable, actually.

Edra Soto and Dan Sullivan, *Remnants / Restos*, 2021. Glass and maple. Dimension variable. Edition of 7. Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Edra Soto and Dan Sullivan, *Remnants / Restos*, 2021. Glass and maple. Dimension variable. Edition of 7. Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Rail: In the exhibition *Casas-Islas | Houses-Islands* there are a number of components. There's the *GRAFT* installation on two walls. There are the conceptual drawings that we were just talking about on a third wall. And then there are two more components: two chairs from your larger "Tropicalamerican" series—one older one and one made for this exhibition—and a new piece *Remnants | Restos* (2021) that's presented as a glass coffee table, and the pieces supporting the glass are negative shapes of various *rejas* designs. And then there's smaller shapes resting on the glass that can be used as a kind of game. I guess a game without rules, like Gabriel Orozco's *Oval Billiard Table* (1996) or even Lygia Clark's 1960s *Bichos* series, and it struck me that this wasn't the first time you've dealt with games in your work. For example, *Dominodomino* (2015), a piece in which you recreated the domino tables that one finds in public parks in Puerto Rico, again, a collaboration with Dan Sullivan. When I've spoken to you before about *Dominodomino* and its exhibition at Hunter East Harlem Gallery, you've told me about the many Puerto Rican neighbors of the gallery who were all there playing and it created a sense of home, belonging. The exhibition *Casas-Islas | Houses-Islands* becomes a kind of home, a kind of living room—you had mentioned earlier that you're almost working as an interior designer in some of these projects. So I am interested in getting your thoughts not only on this idea of the game that seems to recur, but also that sense of home that seems to be associated with games in both *Remnants | Restos* and *Dominodomino*.

Edra Soto, *Dominodomino*, 2015. Installation in collaboration with Dan Sullivan. Jatoba wood, Corian inlay, limited edition prints. Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Edra Soto, *Dominodomino*, 2015. Installation in collaboration with Dan Sullivan. Jatoba wood, Corian inlay, limited edition prints. Courtesy the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Soto: I think that *Remnants | Restos*, my collaboration with my husband, Dan Sullivan, for this exhibition, is not that different from *Dominodomino*, in terms of what it's trying to negotiate. It is a type of strategy game between two, or however many people want to get involved. This one in particular has no rules. The shapes come from the negative spaces, as you said, of the *rejas* from the *GRAFT* pattern exhibited at the gallery. This kind of material treatment is very much like the part of the work that Dan does. In his company [Navillus Woodworks] most of the work that they produce is high-end furniture that is either custom-made or they design it and it's inspired by mid-century modern design. I love collaborating with them and I appreciate his talent, his ability to build things that I design. And also, intellectually he's such a remarkable person. It's always a thrill for me to have an opportunity to collaborate with my husband. And it also speaks very much about my relationship with the United States. Because I say, to me he's almost like an archetype.

When I moved to Chicago, he represented my “American experience”… *Remnants | Restos* is a game of strategy that is about negotiation and the potential of this particular trade—there's an infinite amount of solutions that can be found when you connect them, and/or pile them, or position them. Because I was thinking about how gains are encouraged: to encourage players to detach things or stack things or engage in endless possibilities of configuring or provocations. And that's what a relationship is about, you know, and I saw it as an opportunity to talk about my relationship with him and my relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. I think of it as such.

Contributor

Robert R. Shane

Robert R. Shane received his PhD in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University and is a frequent contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.