

GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ

ROTTEN FRUIT



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

February 7 - 28, 2024

Rotten Fruit

Rotten Fruit is a research artist project that peels back the layers to reveal the United Fruit Company's growth into Central and South America; the work addresses the complicated colonial history of those regions. Giselle Mira-Diaz refers to the discernible realities of conceptual thought surrounding archived materials that disappear between Western and European colonized narratives.

Mira-Diaz received the Stuart Abelson Graduate Research Fellowship from Columbia College Chicago to travel to Costa Rica and Colombia throughout the summer of 2023. Her purpose was to obtain exclusive access to documents, photographs, and oral histories that are specifically housed in archives located in South and Central America. By interrogating these materials, Giselle produces a contemporary response through photography, video, performance, and other mixed-media interventions. The work aims to reveal forgotten historical narratives that are connected to the social frameworks and imperialistic hegemony of American corporations, which have historically and presently maintained authority over land, economic output, and labor in Central and South America. These pieces cover the loss of life sanctioned by The United Fruit Company (now known as Chiquita Banana), resulting in the murders and disappearances of banana plantain workers and their families, and the destruction of the land and environment through the harmful malpractice of banana monocultures.

GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ

Giselle Mira-Diaz's exhibition *Rotten Fruit* is an art research project that peels away at the surface to reveal the United Fruit Company's expansion into Central and South America; the work alludes to the complicated colonial history of those regions. Mira-Diaz utilizes archival materials to create a contemporary response combining photography, film, performance, and paper-making. *Stuart Abelson's Graduate Research Fellowship from Columbia College Chicago enabled Mira-Diaz to travel to Costa Rica and Colombia over the summer of 2023.*

Giselle Mira-Diaz is a first-generation Latinx lens-based artist and arts educator currently residing in Chicago, IL. Giselle's work explores the complexity of immigration, hybrid cultures, heritage, and Latinx identity through various mediums, including photography, performance, experimental video, and paper-making. Her passion is to promote equality and social justice through her collaborative art practice. Giselle's artwork has been exhibited internationally, including in Canada, the US, Argentina, Finland, Germany, Slovakia, South Korea, and Japan; some of the galleries include Gallery 44, Purple Window at Mana Contemporary Chicago, OFF_Festival Slovakia, Artscape Youngplace Toronto, and Osaka University of Arts, among others. Giselle has a BFA from OCAD University and a Master of Arts in Art Education from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently working on an MFA in Photography at Columbia College Chicago and works as a museum educator at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Website: <https://www.gisellemiradiaz.com/>

Instagram: [@giselle_miradiaz](https://www.instagram.com/giselle_miradiaz)



Beach of Limon, Costa Rica, 2023, Phototex, 27' x 5'



Limon Banana Farming, 2023, Phototex, 25'



Untitled (Cyanotype Collage), 2023, Inkjet print, 11' x 7'



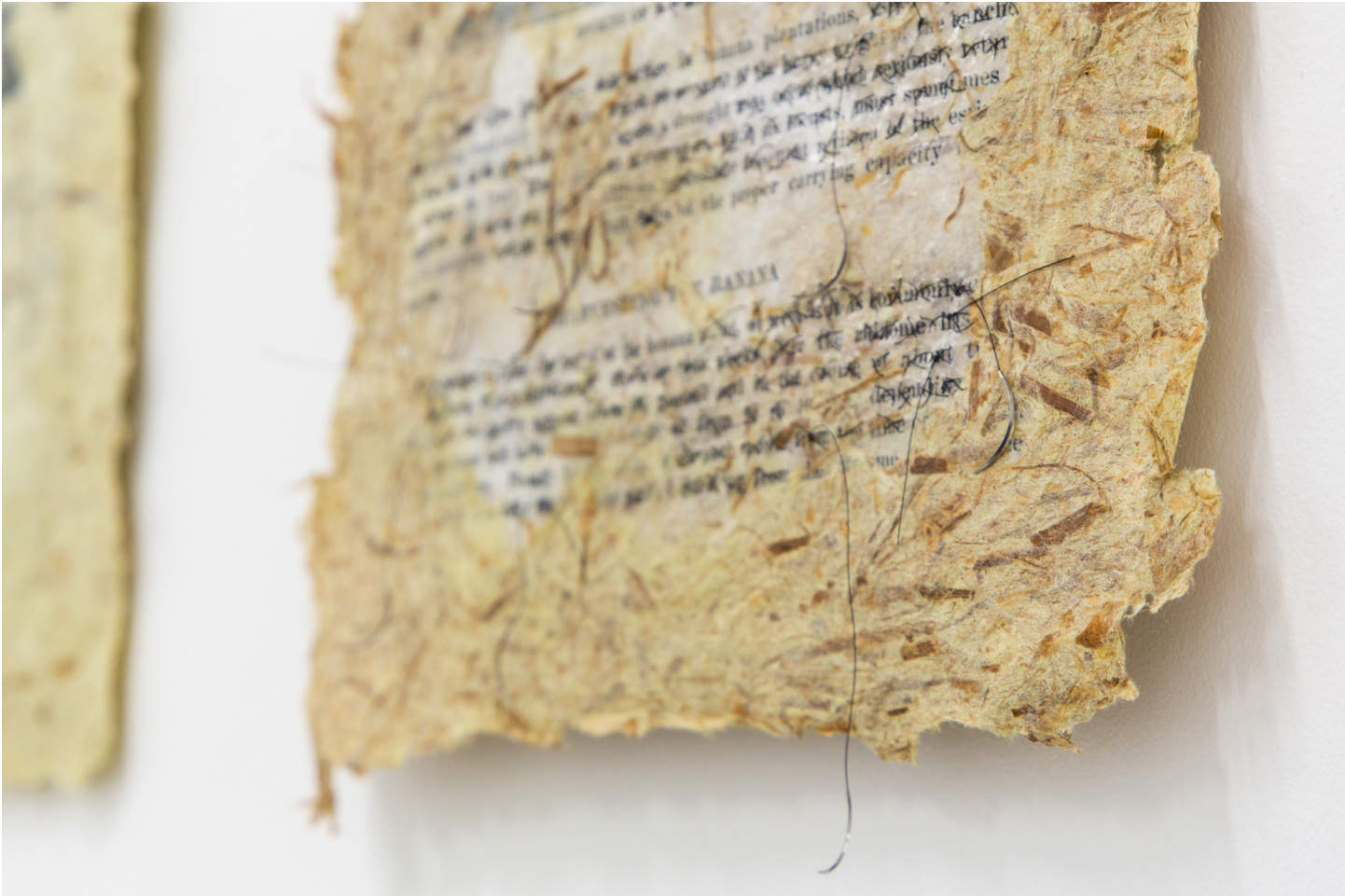
Untitled (Cyanotype Collage), 2023, Inkjet print, 11' x 7'



Untitled, 2023, Cyanotype print on cotton, dimensions?



Treasures of the Tropics, 2023, Paper made from banana leaves, Medical sutures, 11" x 15"



Treasures of the Tropics (Detail), 2023, Paper made from banana leaves, Medical sutures, 11" x 15"

INTERVIEW WITH GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

Rachel Manlubatan: How did traveling to Costa Rica and Colombia aid your research on the United Fruit Company? Did it challenge your initial plans for this project, and if so, how did that influence the production of your pieces?

Giselle Mira-Diaz: Traveling to Costa Rica and Colombia was a great opportunity to expand my research. It allowed me access to archives not available to me living and working in the United States. It also allowed me to see how the landscape and the people in these places have been affected by the legacy of the United Fruit Company and Imperialism. The wonderful archivists greatly aided me in San Jose, Costa Rica's National Archives, and Bogota, Colombia's Archivo General de la Nación. This unique travel opportunity allowed me to gain a deeper connection to this history as I reinterpret it through various methods of making. Even now, I still have hundreds of archival materials that I have not been able to interpret yet. Still, I can see myself continuing to explore the work in future iterations. The work is never indeed done, and I can see myself returning to these locations for further research and artistic interventions.

RM: How does using different media, such as photography, video, performance, and papermaking, transform the message behind each of your pieces? How does your art utilize documents, photographs, and other materials from Central and South America to open up the conversation of colonialism? What do you want viewers to take away from your research and body of work?

GMD: To answer the first part of your question, I am a multimedia, interdisciplinary artist who centers on the interpretation or making of images or lens-based media. I am also fascinated by histories that I can reinterpret and envision as moving or still images or

sounds. Papermaking also became a way to get closer to the material: the banana leaf. I could easily obtain something in a Latin American grocery store since it's hard to access a banana tree in Chicago. Due to that lack of access (the banana tree and the archives), I could start to unpack the heaviness of colonialism. Colonialism, at its core definition, is the control of another country through the occupation and exploitation of its economic or natural resources. We have access to cheap bananas in the middle of winter in North America because there is a more extensive system in place that exploits people in the global south to work for meager wages under sometimes dangerous conditions. What I hope the viewer takes away is to question why we have access to certain products for cheap. To start questioning these more extensive systems of power. I'm not telling you not to eat bananas ever again, but maybe be more conscious about your consumerism and purchasing power, which can affect other people's lives.

RM: Do you feel the different scales and dimensions you showcase in introduce anything new to your stylistic voice? Can you speak on your typical creative process, such as how you decide on color palettes, form, and composition?

GMD: This is the first time I am doing a large-scale mural panoramic photograph of the landscape. I have done large-scale installations in the past but have never used my own photography. In terms of the color palette, I usually let the work slowly reveal itself to me, and slowly, that visual style becomes more refined. When I was in Costa Rica, I was able to do a two-week artist residency where I edited photos and worked a lot in cyanotype. It was the only photographic method available to me at that moment, and I used the banana leaves that grew naturally in the area to create these large-scale sun prints. The blue of the

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

cyanotype tied into the blue of the water, and later, I discovered these amazing large-scale “blueprints” or maps made by the United Fruit Company over 100 years ago. Before large-scale digital printing, these cyanotype blueprints were the easiest way to get a copy or reproduction. It’s a lucky coincidence to have blueprints from the archives and the large-scale cyanotypes. The rest of the color palette that naturally came to light was a lot of earth tones from the contemporary photographs of banana farming and the green and brown tones from the handmade paper.

RM: How does your background as a first-generation Latinx artist serve as motivation toward your projects? How has your culture defined your overall aesthetic? How do you ensure your vision is understood when your artwork is shown internationally or in various galleries?

GMD: Sometimes, as an artist, when you announce you are Latinx or any other identity marker, it can be a double-edged sword; people start making assumptions about your background or experiences, or you get pigeonholed into limited categories you are “allowed” to address in your work. Just because I’m Latinx doesn’t mean I only want to talk about migration or issues in class or race. I do and have addressed these topics in the past, but due to my own interests and my own terms. I want to be recognized for my work regardless of my identity. However, at the same time, women and femme people of color are disproportionately absent from contemporary art spaces. Recently, studies still indicate that there is a very slow change in the contemporary art world. Therefore, on the other hand, I am proud to identify as a first-generation Latinx Artist. I didn’t have role models in my family who were artists or anywhere close to the life I have built for myself.

My culture is also very much North American Culture. I was born to Colombian immigrants but grew up in Canada and the US. My pop culture references were a mix of North American and Latin American references. If I were to define my culture, it would be a third-culture individual, not from here or there. Ways this might emerge in my work in the bilingual aspects. I may include audio or text in one language but not the other. Allowing some to have access to parts of the story I am telling. This also disrupts how the work is viewed; if you want to understand all aspects of the work, you need to look up the translation of a phrase or word.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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C33 Gallery: 33 E. Ida B. Wells Dr., First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.