

# **GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ**

**2024 MFA THESIS EXHIBITION**

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**DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES**

# 2024 MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

5th Floor Student Center May 6–28, 2024

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*The 2024 MFA Thesis Exhibition* features the thesis works of the MFA candidates in Columbia College Chicago's Art I Design and Photography Departments. The exhibition, which includes paintings, prints, drawings, photography, sound, and installation, captures the extensive research, exploration, critical analysis, creative inquiry, productivity, practice, and achievement these emerging artists have maintained throughout their time in the programs. With varied approaches to subject matter, distinct methods of creation, and a unique blending of personal, political, and historical narratives, the artists in this show weave together the nuanced strands of the contemporary moment.

**Participating Artists:** Andre Barker Jr, Nora Benjamin, Callie Clark Wiren, Noah Fodor, Eli Giclas, Ash Huse, Hillary Irene Johnson, Adam MacArthur, Giselle Mira-Diaz, Grace Papineau-Couture, Arrietta van der Voort, and andrew vogelpohl

*The 2024 MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), the Art I Design Department, and the Photography Department.

# GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ

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*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 workers and their families, and the destruction of the land and environment through the harmful malpractice of Banana monocultures.

**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)



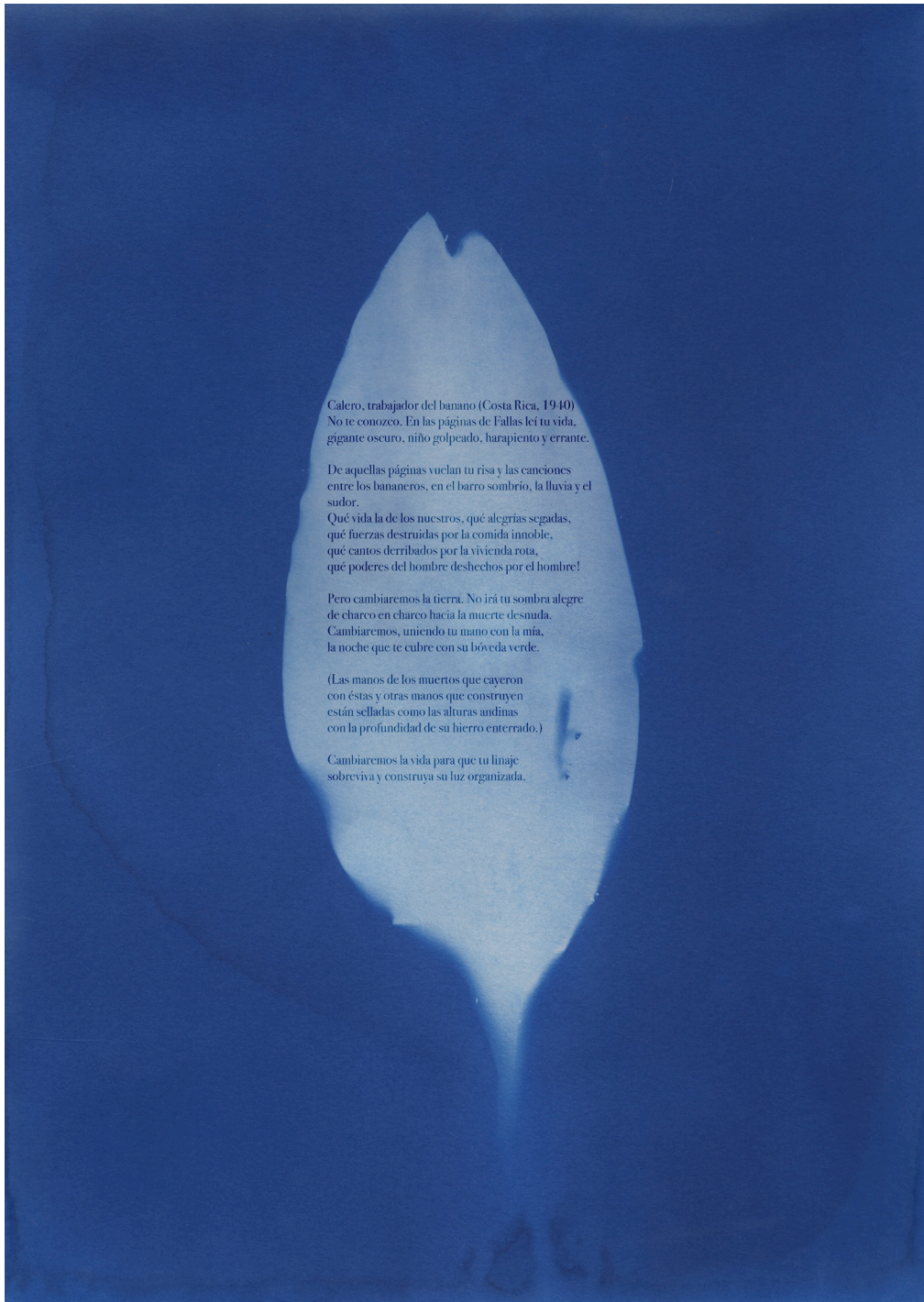
*United Fruit Company Map, 2023, image printed on fabric, embroidery floss, 35" x 35"*



*Treasures of the Tropics*, 2023, digital collage from cyanotype and archival map, 14" x 40"



*Banana Leaf on Fabric*, 2023, cyanotype printed on fabric, 44" x 54"



Calero, trabajador del banano (Costa Rica, 1940)  
No te conozco. En las páginas de Fallas lei tu vida,  
gigante oscuro, niño golpeado, harapiento y errante.

De aquellas páginas vuelan tu risa y las canciones  
entre los bananeros, en el barro sombrío, la lluvia y el  
sudor.

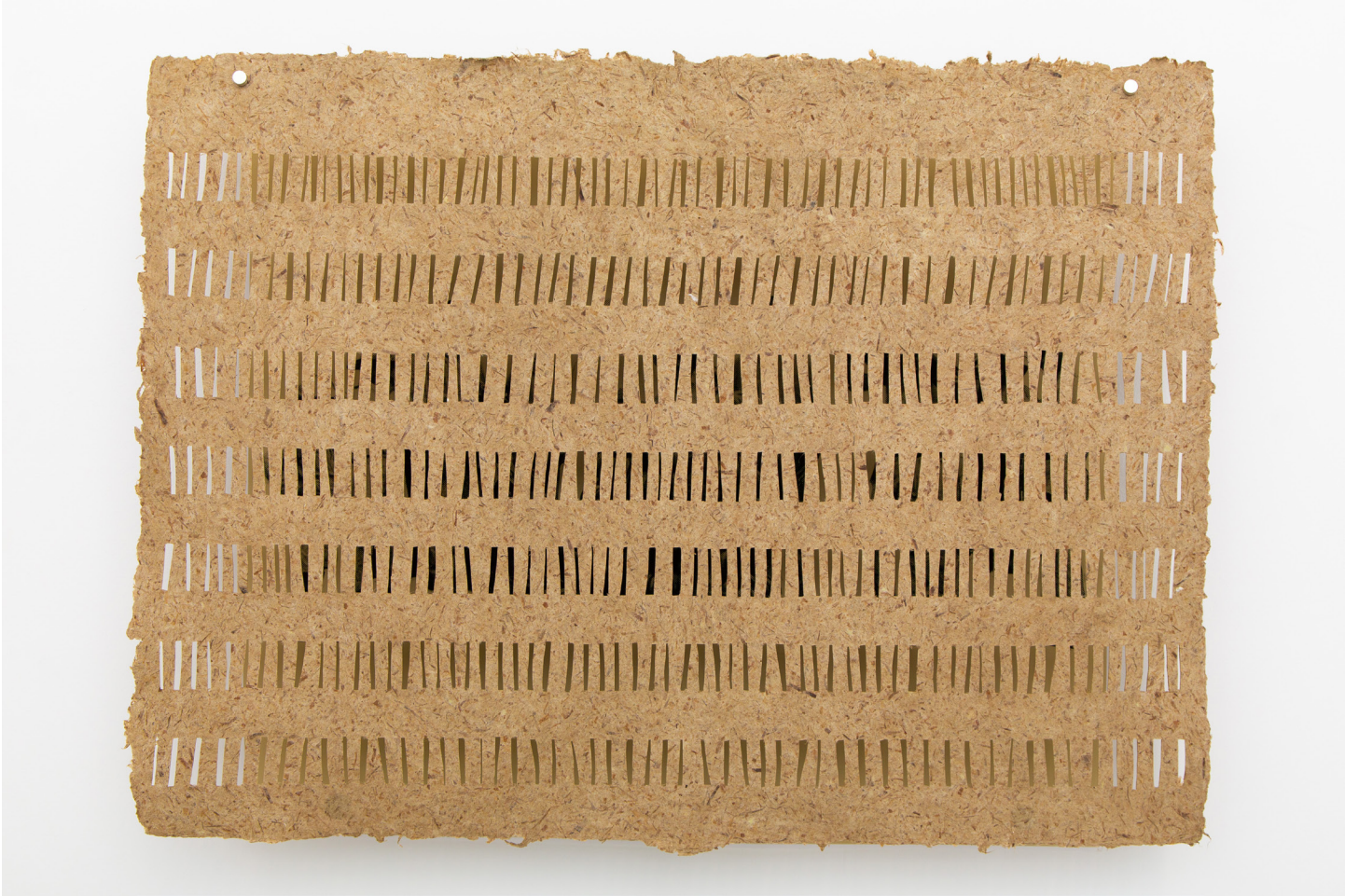
Qué vida la de los nuestros, qué alegrías segadas,  
qué fuerzas destruidas por la comida innoble,  
qué cantos derribados por la vivienda rota,  
qué poderes del hombre deshechos por el hombre!

Pero cambiaremos la tierra. No irá tu sombra alegre  
de charco en charco hacia la muerte desnuda.  
Cambiaremos, uniendo tu mano con la mía,  
la noche que te cubre con su bóveda verde.

(Las manos de los muertos que cayeron  
con estas y otras manos que construyen  
están selladas como las alturas andinas  
con la profundidad de su hierro enterrado.)

Cambiaremos la vida para que tu linaje  
sobreviva y construya su luz organizada.

*Pablo Neruda Trabajador Bananero, 2023, digital collage from cyanotype, 20" x 28"*



*Forgotten Workers 2*, 2023, paper made from banana leaves, 30" x 22"

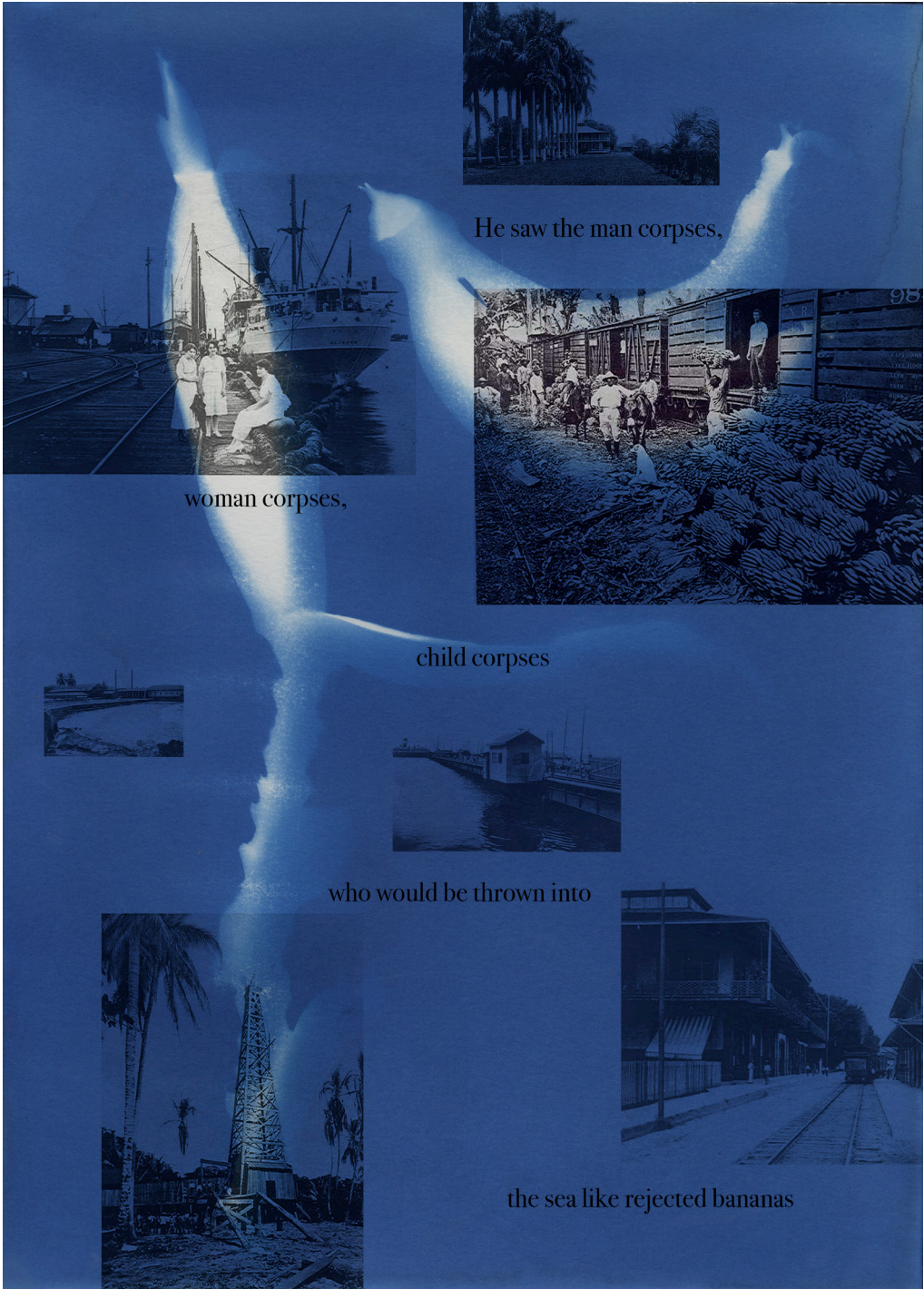




*Beach Of Limon, 2023, digital photo*



Treasures of the Tropics, 2023, digital photo collage with archival map of Limon, 41" x 23"



*Like Rejected Bananas, 2024, 20" x 28"*

# INTERVIEW WITH GISELLE MIRA-DIAZ

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

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**Rachel Manlubatan:** Where does your interest in the United Fruit Company's growth in Central and South America stem from? How does utilizing multiple mediums in this project allow you to connect more with the topic, and how does each medium speak to individual parts of the concept?

**Giselle Mira-Diaz:** I originally learned about the history of the Banana in South and Central America by reading "One Hundred Years of Solitude" by Gabriel García Márquez in high school as a way to connect to my Colombian heritage while living in Canada. I didn't realize then that while this work was a piece of fiction, it was based on the actual "Banana Massacre" in Ciénaga, Colombia, on December 5–6, 1928. As I got older, I started learning more about the topic on my own.

The multitude of materials I work with is my way of learning and experimenting with new strategies. I read about the history while reflecting and making in the studio, either by producing plaster bananas, banana leaf paper, making prints, collages, or editing videos.

**RM:** What process did you go through when studying documents and photographs from South and Central America?

**GMD:** I initially started by doing research into the archives accessible online from the US. I found quite a lot through the Library of Congress. However, they presented a very colonial worldview of the places where they harvested bananas. Even some of the texts that the United Fruit Company commissioned presented themselves as saviors or "creating opportunities" for workers in the global south. We now know it is the opposite; the United Fruit Company treated the local workforce poorly, not even paying them in local currency but instead paying them in Company vouchers to be used in company stores.

The narrative was very different when I traveled to the Costa Rican and Colombian archives. They documented everything that happened, including the deaths and lands that the Company bought. It was the evidence I was looking for that is absent from US-based archives and historical memory.

**RM:** What inspires the composition, scale, and material of your pieces? How does presenting photos or text in wide format or within natural shapes relate to your research in Costa Rica and Colombia?

**GMD:** The scale depends on the space. I scaled down my 'Beach of Limon' panorama due to the smaller space for the thesis show. I have been working on the materials, such as the paper making with the banana leaf material, for almost a year and a half. Columbia has a beautiful paper-making studio where I learned from Mel Potter. The scale came to fruition as I slowly learned what was possible with the paper-making facilities.

**RM:** What questions do you want audiences to consider when viewing your work?

**GMD:** I want the audience to consider why specific stories or histories are unknown or not taught in schools. I want them to think about how the US, unfortunately, is responsible for a lot of imperialistic practices around the world, and these actions still have repercussions today. Countries where the US invested in banana farming allowed them, as foreign countries, to buy land and take control of power and infrastructure and even military coups, such as the Banana Wars in Central America and the Caribbean and 1954 CIA backed coup in Guatemala. History repeats itself, and due to this destabilization of power, many of these countries still struggle today. Present-day banana farming is also not environmentally sustainable. Monoculture farming is terrible for the environment, and

## INTERVIEW CONTINUED

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modern pesticides create a lot of health issues for workers and their families. The pay for this labor is still meager, and workers still struggle.



## 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](http://colum.edu/deps)

Contact information: Mark Porter, [mporter@colum.edu](mailto:mporter@colum.edu) / 312.369.6643

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Columbia College Chicago Student Center  
754 S. Wabash Ave., Fifth Floor, Chicago, IL 60605  
Gallery hours: Monday–Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.