

LUCIA HIERRO

THE COST OF LIVING/EL COSTO DE LA VIDA



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The Cost of Living

You are being judged for every dollar you spend. You are judged on how, what, where, and on whom you spend your money. Whether by the watchful eyes of market analysts, or your friends and family, what you do with your money is open for debate. You judge yourself on how you navigate spending and try to make the choices expected of you. These decisions are often a debate of quality over quantity and need over want. Lucia Hierro's exhibition, titled "Cost of Living," plays on the economic concept that quantifies the maintenance of a certain standard of living. This term, when taken out of its economic context and placed in a community-run art space in the Bronx, stirs up more questions about its impact and definition. In a borough with a shifting demographic, retaining a certain standard of living might mean giving up the home you grew up in (1). Mirrored in Spanish, "El Costo de La Vida" is a simultaneous exhibition presented at the art fair, Independent, where the artist creates a dialogue between these opposing locations



Currently working in the Bronx, Lucia Hierro's work uses personal and specific narratives that explore broader economic structures (2). Large oversized receipts from chain stores such as CVS and Fine Fare stream down from the gallery ceiling, exposing personal purchases that most are shy to reveal. Through this humorous colloquial reference to the size of the CVS receipt, Hierro demands attention to the items she has bought. Purposefully highlighting ideas around maintenance of the body, in health and quality of life, it allows the audience to judge her personal expenditure decisions. In this instance, literal references are made to the cost of living in survival against

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One of the collage fabric pieces, "Torrejititas de Yuca" portrays the ingredients used for a yucca dish—common items available in the Bronx that could disappear as traditions change. Fundita Que Pasa, on view at Independent, a bag pinned against that wall holding images of corner shop owners indicates that awareness of the shifting tide. When thinking of the context of the making of these colorful and exaggerated objects, there is a sinister undertone implied by where and who is making them. Hierro's placement and intention is not fate or contingent on her upbringing, but deliberate and a chronicle of the city.



The shifting demographics in the Bronx has been the focus for the new wave of housing developments and, as a result, rising living costs (3). Many of these developers attempt cultural outreach and investment in community arts to lessen the blow of their presence⁴. However, is this line item a genuine concern for the neighborhood or to make it more palatable for incoming residents? (4) It still does not change the fact that current residents are feeling a steady rise in their cost of living. (5)

Presented in the gallery is a sculpture of a mattress leaning on the wall with an image of a couch printed onto it. The presence of this sculpture brings to mind a common image of discarded mattresses propped up along the streets. The couch preserved in plastic evokes memories of homes that the artist visited growing up in the Bronx and Washington Heights. The object aptly stirs up conversations about the shifting demographics in the Bronx. While these shards of modernist architecture poke through the fabric of the community, a new language of lifestyle and aspiration is presented. (6)

Though focal on her community and up-bringing, Hierro is not shy to discuss the realities of aspired living—aspirational living in a sense of how we are told to live, what we should want to be, and how we should present that. Glowing back at us is a constant bombardment of lifestyle ideals communicated through our phones, not only by calculated targeted marketing, but also by our friends and people we admire online.

One of the still life works presented depicts a pair of OFF-WHITE designer shoes placed on top of an overdue utility bill. The shoes hint at a visual representation of wealth and style, while the utility bill the unseen representation of a living cost. This shows a conscious choice to appease to how one wants to be seen against dealing with basic needs. The works seem to ask ‘Why are these decisions made and who are they catered towards’?

It seems that almost every quarter an article is written about millennial expenditure. The usual tell-all about how this market segment decides to spend their money. (7) A common trend is to think that this market segment is concerned with preserving their digital self. Carving out experiential hungry characters, these reports suggest that this demographic only finds meaning in satisfying their online persona. However, is this not how our market functions? Are we not beholden to our digital selves to allow us to access to our aspired lifestyle? How we decide to present ourselves online could make our career. You cannot escape from the fact that we are judged by these factors, and that established firms are molding themselves around it.



Indulging our nonphysical self for survival is not only beholden to millennial expenditure on digital presence but also caters to the spiritual self. The mural created for the Independent Art Fair presents a common depiction of Jesus as a white man and an intercom; though an ordinary scene, it surfaces ideas of access and permission. The presence of religious symbols and ritual ephemera in these exhibitions introduces another concept of expenditure related to maintaining a standard of living. Hierro highlights this generational similarity in her community by depicting these realities together, whereby one's spending and involvement in the community-based religious activity are also a method of self-preservation.

By Tahir Carl Karmali

Visual artist born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya based in Brooklyn, NY.

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For Tia, Morir Soñando

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Digital Print on Brush Suede, Cotton, Felt on foam
22 x 22 x 2 in



Rank

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Digital Print on Brush Suede, Cotton, Felt on foam
22 x 22 x 2 in



Mandao 1

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Polyorganza, Digital print on suede, Felt & Foam
52 x 38 x 6 in



Mandao 1

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Polyorganza, Digital print on suede, Felt & Foam
52 x 38 x 6 in



FINE FARE
Supermarkets

FineFare
4211 Broadway
New York NY 10033
646-864-0021

SALE

MID: 542929807226261
TID: 223247

12/09/2018 14:19:10
Entry Method: C
Seq #: 011333
Approval Code: 796343

US DEBIT
CARD #: XXXXXXXXXXXX5494
ATD: A0000001980640
TVR: 8000348000
IAD: 06010A03402000
TSI: 6800 ARC: 796343
IC: 20104C12D3368831
kwn: 011333

Total: US\$ 77.64

APPROVED BY ISSUER

CANTILIA RICE 10LBS	\$9.89	F
OVEN GOLD TAX	\$6.65	F
GROCERY	\$1.99	F
ALPINE MUNSTER	\$3.29	F
ORG BABY ROMAINE	\$4.29	F
APPLE GALA		W
1.21 lb @ \$2.49/ lb	\$3.01	F
PLANTAINS GREEN		W
5 @ .75 FOR \$2.00	\$2.00	F
CENTO BALSAMIC V	\$4.19	F
TOMATO GRAPES		W
1 @ 2 FOR \$5.00	\$2.50	F
SPRITE	\$3.89	F
BOTTLE DEPOSIT .30	\$0.30	F
SPRITE	\$3.89	F
BOTTLE DEPOSIT .30	\$0.30	F
BRM GF TRIC QUINOA	\$9.69	F
REDUCED MILK GAL		W
1 @ 2 FOR \$5.00	\$2.50	F
PERDUE W CHICKEN	\$8.48	F
GOYA CHECK PEA L/S	\$1.29	F
GOYA ORG BLACK BEANS	\$1.69	F
BANANA YELLOW		W
2.40 lb @ \$0.68/ lb	\$1.63	F
GOYA CHICK PEA L/S	\$1.29	F
GOYA CHICK PEA L/S	\$1.29	F
EARTH BALANCE SO	\$5.89	F

24 BALANCE DUE \$79.64
Debit Card \$79.64
(S) *****5494
EXP. DATE: 00/2000
Auth Code = 796343

SUB TOTAL \$78.95
TOTAL TAX \$0.69
TOTAL \$79.64
CHANGE \$0.00
SAVINGS \$0.49

CASHIER NAME: Milagros
C0116 #1858 14:19:13 9DEC2018
S00000 R601

Thank You for shopping @
Fine Fare Supermarket
Returns must be within 7 days with
original receipt. All Perishable must be
returned within 24 hours with original

Constancia Fine/Fare

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Brushed suede
125 1/2 x 32 1/2 in



Andreas Couch

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Digital print on cotton fitted sheet, Twin Mattress
38 1/2 x 74 x 6 in



Analogo

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Digital Print on Brush Suede, Cotton, Felt on foam
22 x 22 x 2 in



Warm Sigh

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Watercolor on paper
12 x 9 in



Dominicano but he doesn't drink coffee?

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Digital Print on Brush Suede, Cotton, Felt on foam
22 x 22 x 2 in



Ruby Red

LKG

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Digital Print on Brush Suede, Cotton, Felt on foam
22 x 22 x 2 in



El Costo de la Vida

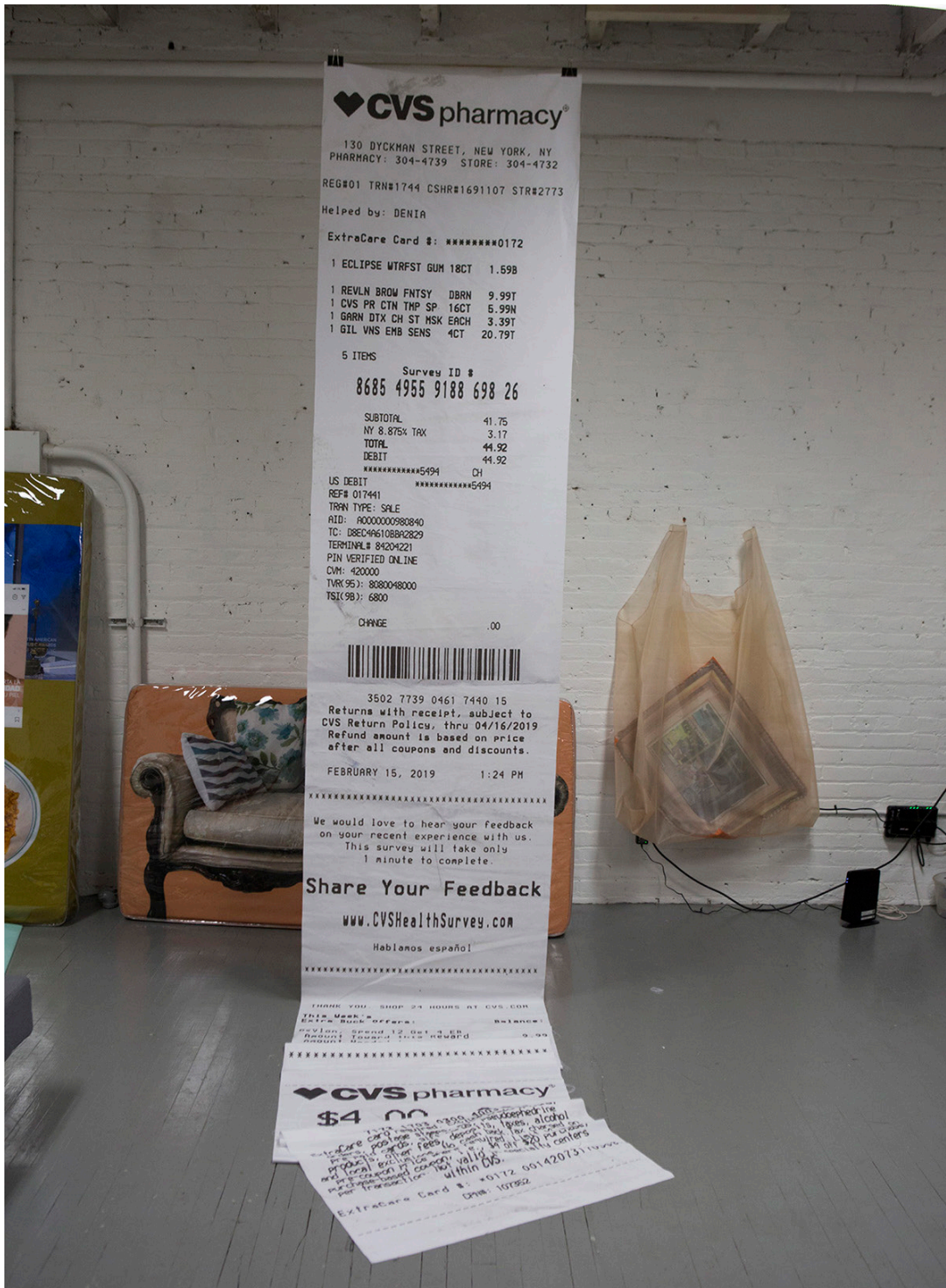
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Digital print on cotton fitted sheet, Twin Mattress
74 x 38 1/2 x 6 in



Caso Cerrado



Constancia/CVS

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Brushed suede
223 1/2 x 34 in

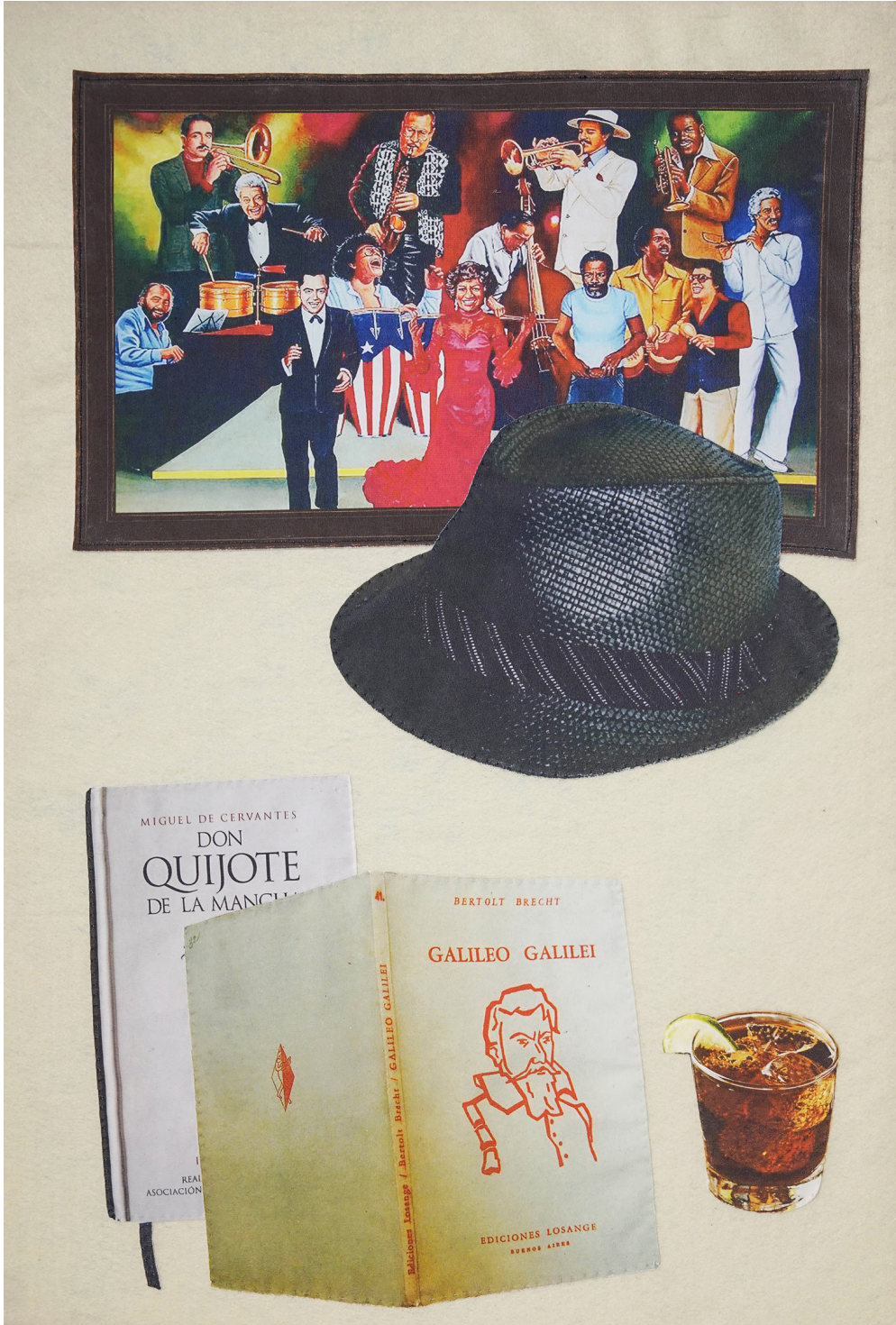


Vivo en un Pais Libre

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Digital Print on fabric, felt, cotton & foam
24 x 36 in



Tio Willie

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Digital print on brushed nylon, felt, cotton & foam
24 x 36 in

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PRESS

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[Lucia Hierro](#)  Follow

B. 1987, New York. Lives and works in New York.

Dominican-American artist Lucia Hierro's recent work explores sticky issues of culture, class, and taste via familiar objects in explosive proportions. At her recent solo exhibition at [Elizabeth Dee](#) (and her first ever), monumental soft sculptures of candy-colored shopping bags hung from the ceiling. The gauzy, poly-organza fabric totes were filled with digitally printed versions of the sorts of commercial objects populating the Washington Heights neighborhood where the artist grew up: Vicks VapoRub, Air Jordans, baseball cards, and bags of pork skins.

"She's the only female artist of this generation who's engaging in a visceral conversation with the history of [Pop art](#), utilizing objects that are familiar to her and her community," says Larry Ossei-Mensah, an independent curator and the organizer of Hierro's show at Elizabeth Dee. "Since graduating from Yale in 2013, her work has really shifted and evolved," he continues. "In the last five years, she's developed a singular language. I expect a lot from her in the years to come."

Meanwhile, Hierro has been burnishing her résumé with a stint at the Saratoga Springs artist retreat Yaddo in 2013, as well as the Fountainhead Residency in Miami in 2016. Most recently, she was one of three resident artists at the Red Bull House of Art in Detroit, a program that culminated with an exhibition at the space in April (on view through May 28th).

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FALL 2018 "Being an Artist"

Family Business

by Lucia Hierro | Dec 21, 2018



New Yorker collage series (2012-present). Image provided by the artist.

Now, being an artist also means creating a platform to monumentalize the wide range of cultural histories.

I grew up hearing the music of [La Gran Manzana \(The Big Apple\)](#) blaring from bodegas, six-floor walk-ups, and taxicabs. Henry Hierro, my father, is the singer/songwriter for the group, a fixture in the merengue movement popular in New York City in the 1980s. Raised in Manhattan at Dyckman and Riverside, aka Little Dominican Republic, I grew up in a basement apartment with an attached music studio. Music and creativity was all around me; being home was so much fun that I never wanted to leave for school. Around the dinner table, we spoke openly about life, and our voices were always heard. I knew I was destined for a life in the arts, but visual arts was something my family knew little about.

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For her new residency at Red Bull House of Art in Detroit, opening today, Hierro has edited the bags into framed still lifes, reminiscent of museum or curiosity boxes. She also chose specific items from “Mercado” to interrogate even further, as objects of beauty and/or utility, taking inspiration from Donald Judd’s aluminum stacks as she suspended huge bags of potato chips, bodega-style, from a succession of clips on a rack. It’s work that transforms Warhol-style pop-critical pieces for the Internet era, with high irony but also, crucially, optimism.

Hierro talked with *Vogue* on the phone from Detroit about her family’s New York history, getting inspiration from her young studio assistant, growing up in an immigrant community, and her love-hate relationship with consumerism.

Have you always been in New York?

I was born and raised in New York. I lived most of my life back and forth between Washington Heights and Inwood. I always joke with my friends that I grew up hood-adjacent. I knew there was stuff going on over there. My parents are from the Dominican Republic, and I lived there also for eighth, ninth, and 10th grades. I come from an art family, and my father is a well-known musician in the Dominican Republic [Henry Hierro]. We were sort of a kooky, *Partridge Family* kind of thing.

I was always a bookworm, and I was into art. My senior year I was pushed to apply to the Cooper Union Saturday program, which is a portfolio-prep program for students who are not in an arts-intensive high school. I had just come back from the Dominican Republic, and it was the first time I took the train that far downtown by myself, and I was so intimidated by the process. But it was just really wonderful. I enrolled from there into undergrad, which I didn’t go to right away. I worked as a waitress and I worked at Cooper Union, and then the school helped me apply to SUNY Purchase.

What was it like becoming a part of the art scene in New York?

My family has been hustling here since forever. I felt a sense of obligation to stay and make it in New York because my grandmother came to the city via the garment industry. She wanted to be a designer, but she didn't get the chance. She was incredible; I think she could have rivaled Givenchy if she wanted to. So I feel like I always had a sense of "I have to make it here. I'm not going anywhere else."

What's the inspiration behind "Mercado"?

This has been one of those little moments that I feel like artists dream of, where it's like, "Man, I really love this work." At first, I didn't want to work with fabric. I had this crazy thing with not engaging with the labor that brought my family here to the U.S. It was a psychological break, where I just didn't want to learn to sew or do any of that. But I had ordered paper to make collages, and I got fabric instead. I got a bunch of felt by mistake, and I started working with that. And then my mom was like, "Aha, now you have to learn how to sew." She actually helped make the bags. I brought her into the studio and it was sort of like a mini art history lesson for my mom, like, "Look at [Claes] Oldenburg and look at these people," and she got it, you know, it clicked. I realized that I was making these funny, soft, irreverent photo paintings. And then they started to grow into a different idea, which was making a tiny tote bag first, and I put objects into it. And then when my mom came in, she said, "You should make this really big, like this." But I was scared to do it. I didn't have the space for it. And then Larry Ossei-Mensah—the curator of the show; he's been following me since grad school—would come in and visit and just look around and point at things that he really liked that stood out to him, and we would have these long conversations about them. He agreed with my mom that the bag should be really big. So I made one really big one, and the images are still sort of flat-layered inside, and that's one of the ones that is in the office at Elizabeth Dee.

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How have you transformed “Mercado” for Detroit?

This project is now really [about] delving into constructing these still-life narratives, and the bags all have a personality, and they are all sort of like a person or related to a person in my head. At the [Red Bull] residency, I was able to sit down and think of this past year and think of the people whom I’ve met and the things that are happening in the world, so I made these smaller still lifes here. And then I took a few of the objects, the potato chip bags that were in the bags, and now they’ve been separated into a row on a giant chip rack. It’s my abstracted design of the thing that you find at the store.

Tell me about the still life with the Glossier lip balm and green juice—and the copy of *Teen Vogue*.

Yeah. So the title is *Sienna-The Chamaquitos Are Gonna Be Alright*.

Chamaquitos is a word for young teens that Latinx communities use. I don’t know if all Latinos do, but Dominicans, definitely. That was the title of this specific [piece]. [This still life is] totally a portrait of my studio assistant, who is 18, and she has the most gorgeous face. She does her eyebrows, like all penciled in and beautiful, extreme cat-eye. And what I love is that it’s not the image that you normally see represented as an artist in the art world or in the history of art. If we think of an artist, we have a very specific view in our head: They have interesting glasses or interesting jewelry, or they have big, black, geometric clothes. And she’s not any of those things, and I love that about her. She’ll come to the studio with a Mason jar with green juice in it, and I’m looking at her like: You’re this young Puerto Rican girl who lives a block from me here; I’m not expecting you to bring this giant Mason jar of green juice. And then I added a little of myself into it, which is that I grew up loving comics.

Especially as a young person, the stuff that you can buy yourself has so much meaning, but it can also be dangerous.

It's really a love-hate relationship with consumerism. On the one hand, I didn't grow up in a household where brands and things meant anything to us—that was not how I was raised. But I definitely understood it later in high school. In [*Sienna-The Chamaquitos Are Gonna Be Alright*] there is also an image of a young man talking to Nancy Pelosi on CNN—he asked her about capitalism, if it's the only model, questioning if it's working here. And she basically shut him down and said that this is a capitalist country, period. That's it. And it was such a crazy moment, because I was like, you can't even have a conversation with this young man to discuss possibilities. And those are the conversations that I have with my assistant. She's in this moment, and I love that she gets sort of pulled in both of those directions: She really cares about this stuff, but then she's all about whatever the hyped object is of the moment.

And what about this piece with the bodega sandwich?

That's quintessential New York kid, especially uptown kid, breakfast—or lunch, for that matter. It's cheap. It's like \$1.50 at a bodega, and it definitely is something you can afford. And then mango juice. The background is a screenshot of *The Cosby Show*. There's a scene [from *Cosby*] where Clair and Cliff go and help out at a community center, and the center is run by a Puerto Rican. It was the first time I saw a reality of where I lived on TV. People don't understand how together communities of color are. I think because we mostly see depictions of “the ghetto” or that there's a lot of animosity. That's not the case. So it was really cool to see this well-off black family meeting with a smart, informed Puerto Rican guy and working together.

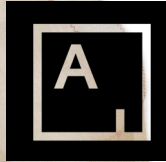
Why do you think designers are suddenly putting plastic bags on the runway?

I think there has always been a fascination between two societies that are systemically kept apart, and the curiosity that that breeds. As a young teenager, I had friends who lived on Park Avenue, and then I would have to take the long, one-hour train ride back home, and I always loved seeing the different faces that got on the train. So I always think that those moments in fashion are those train rides.



AfterSchool Special, 2018, by Lucia Hierro
Photo: Matthew Eaton / Courtesy of Red Bull House of Art Detroit





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