



ARCHIVOS VIVOS: ADRIÁN VIAJERO ROMÁN

March 8, 2025 – January 17, 2026

[Adrian's Website](#)

Exhibition Guide + Reflection

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our exhibition featuring the compelling works of Adrián Viajero Román, an artist who explores his Puerto Rican heritage through a dynamic artistic practice. Román's work spans drawing, painting, sculpture, and socially engaged art, creating immersive environments that delve into themes of **identity, memory, and migration**. His work invites critical engagement with the social and political narratives that have shaped Puerto Rican communities—both on the island and in the diaspora.

Román places significant emphasis on materiality, often incorporating found and reclaimed materials such as wood, photographs, and textiles. Many of these materials come from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria or are heirlooms tied to crucial cultural figures. He believes these personal items **"tell important stories of lineage and migration that must not be forgotten or erased."** By integrating these elements, his art transcends traditional mediums, offering a tangible and intimate connection to personal and cultural histories that are often overlooked.

His work also highlights the importance of **archiving and storytelling**—whether through oral histories, objects, or artistic representation—to engage and educate the next generation about the Puerto Rican diasporic and colonial experience. **Without documentation, the stories of our ancestors, their struggles, and their triumphs risk being lost.** Román's work challenges viewers to confront the complex realities faced by Puerto Rican communities, including the lingering effects of colonialism, economic hardship, and natural disasters. By blending cultural symbols, historical artifacts, and personal narratives, he fosters a dialogue between past and present, urging contemplation on migration, identity, and belonging.

This exhibition honors the life, memory, and spirit of a people whose stories continue to resonate. It underscores the resilience, strength, and pride inherent in Puerto Rican identity, while also reinforcing the urgency of preserving and sharing these histories so that they are never erased.

"As a whole, I want my body of work to tell Puerto Rican stories that otherwise wouldn't be told. And by telling them, I hope to inspire empathy, respect, action, and justice for Puerto Rican communities on the island and throughout the diaspora."

— Adrián Viajero Román

Caja De Memoria Viva III: The Importance of Remembering Digna Quiles (2018)



SCAN TO HEAR DIGNA'S STORY
(en Español)

Caja De Memoria Viva III is more than an artwork—it is a testament to the resilience of Digna Quiles and the survivors of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico in 2017. But what if no one documented Digna's story? What if her struggle, her survival, and her loss went unnoticed?

Digna, a resident of the Culebrinas neighborhood of Villa Sofia, lived through one of the worst natural disasters in Puerto Rican history. The hurricane's catastrophic impact caused the river to overflow, submerging her home under more than 8 feet of water. Swept away by the floodwaters, Digna was rescued by a neighbor, but tragically, her beloved dog did not survive.

When artist Daniel Román visited Digna's home, he saw firsthand the extent of the devastation—ruined belongings, waterlogged walls, and the daily struggle for survival. With no access to clean drinking water, Digna was forced to collect rainwater in buckets. Román took action, making multiple trips to deliver aid and support to Digna and her community.

What Happens If We Don't Document These Stories?

Without art, history, and storytelling, stories like Digna's risk being forgotten. The struggles of marginalized communities affected by natural disasters could remain invisible, and their resilience unrecognized.

Discussion Questions:

- How do natural disasters disproportionately affect marginalized communities, and what happens when their experiences go undocumented?
- What is the artist's role as a social advocate, and how does art preserve the stories that history might overlook?
- How does the use of reclaimed materials and artifacts in this artwork reinforce themes of loss, survival, and resilience?

Mi Caridad / My Charity

(2010)

Graphite on wood, Mixed Media



"*Mi Caridad*" examines the generational expectations placed on young girls in Latino/e culture, where domestic, spiritual, and emotional labor take precedence over childhood. The piece highlights how women are expected to give selflessly, with these burdens passed down from mother to daughter. A **worn steam trunk serves as a symbol** of these inherited responsibilities, reflecting cultural traditions, migration experiences, and the emotional weight carried through generations.

The artwork encourages viewers to reflect on the tension between tradition and personal agency, questioning the continuation of these cycles.

Discussion Questions:

- How does "**Mi Caridad**" challenge or reinforce traditional roles assigned to women?
- What are some ways these expectations of women are passed down through generations? Do you see any shifts in these roles today?
- The steam trunk symbolizes the weight of generational responsibilities. If you were to open this trunk, what symbolic or personal items do you think would be inside?
- How can individuals and communities support young girls in reclaiming agency over their roles and responsibilities?
- How does Adrián use symbolism to communicate the themes of sacrifice, labor, and generational inheritance?
- In what ways can art like "**Mi Caridad**" inspire social change regarding gender roles and cultural expectations?
- If you were to create an artwork inspired by your own experiences with cultural expectations, what imagery or symbols would you use?

Citicien (2017)

Vintage mixed media



Citi-cien: Documenting Our History and Identity

Citi-cien examines the complex identity of Puerto Ricans shaped by the Jones Act of 1917, which conferred U.S. citizenship upon them. This dual identity often leaves individuals feeling "neither from here nor there," caught between two worlds. The artwork serves as a powerful testament to the importance of documenting our history—ensuring that Puerto Ricans' struggles, triumphs, and resilience are preserved and understood.

The installation incorporates:

- **Pan-Am Airlines memorabilia:** Symbolizes the journey of searching for new opportunities in the mainland United States.
- **Personal artifacts:** Family photographs and letters capture the emotional landscape of migration.
- **Historical documents and everyday items:** Shedding light on the harsh realities migrants faced, including racism, economic hardship, and substandard living conditions.
- **A birth certificate:** Highlight the paradox between legal citizenship and the lived experience of marginalization.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to **document our history**, and how does it shape collective memory?
- How does the concept of citizenship, within the context of colonial legacies, influence Puerto Rican identity?
- In what ways does **migration impact an individual's sense of identity and belonging** on an emotional and psychological level?
- How can **personal artifacts serve as powerful tools** for conveying broader socio-political themes?

Perhaps Home Is Not a Place but Simply an Irrevocable Condition (2016)

(Portraits of My Grandfathers)

Charcoal on wood, Mixed Media



“Home lives in our memories and is passed down through generations...”

Archiving Our Migration Stories: The Legacy of Fernando Román and Felix Pérez

This work honors the migration journeys of Román's grandfathers, **Fernando Román and Felix Pérez**, who left Puerto Rico for New York during **The Great Migration** of the mid-20th century. Like so many Puerto Ricans of their time, they were driven by economic hardship, leaving behind their homeland in search of better opportunities. Their experiences reflect a broader history of struggle, resilience, and adaptation—one that must be archived and shared to ensure that future generations understand the sacrifices made before them.

Upon their arrival, they faced immense challenges, including:

- **Poverty and limited economic opportunities** forced them into low-paying, labor-intensive jobs.
- **Discrimination** due to their ethnicity and language barriers which restricted their access to education and social mobility.
- **Harsh living conditions**, often in overcrowded and underserved neighborhoods, where they had to rebuild a sense of community far from home.

Felix Pérez later served on the **Constitution State Merchant Marine ship** during the Korean War, contributing to U.S. efforts abroad. Meanwhile, **Fernando Román migrated aboard the SS Marine Tiger in 1947**, one of the key vessels that transported thousands of Puerto Ricans to the mainland in the post-WWII wave of migration.

The Importance of Archiving and Telling Our Stories

If we do not document and pass down these histories, the sacrifices and resilience of our ancestors risk being forgotten. Archiving our families' migration stories is essential—not only to honor those who came before us but also to provide future generations with a deeper understanding of their roots, identity, and place within the broader Puerto Rican diaspora.

Discussion Questions:

- How does migration reshape the concept of **home**? Is home a physical place, or does it live within us through memory and shared experiences?
- In what ways do **family stories and oral histories** help preserve identity across generations?
- How does understanding the historical context of Puerto Rican migration inform our perspective on contemporary issues affecting the diaspora today?

Niño Santo, Holy Child (2011)

Graphite on wood / Mixed Media



The Rooster: A Symbol of Puerto Rican Resilience and Heritage

In this piece, Román delves into **Puerto Rican history and cultural symbolism** by depicting a **rooster**, a longstanding emblem of **resilience, strength, and national pride**, particularly in rural Puerto Rican traditions. The rooster has been a powerful symbol in the island's history, representing the spirit of perseverance among Puerto Ricans, especially those who have faced economic hardship, colonial rule, and migration struggles.

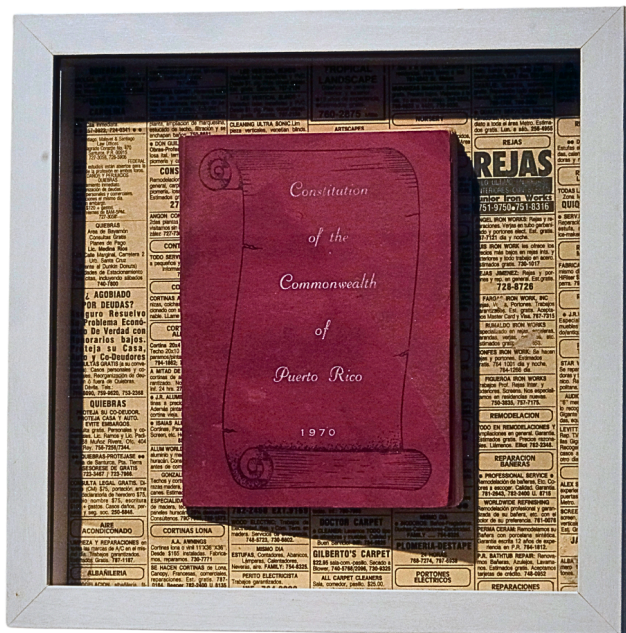
The backdrop—featuring elements such as a **sun or halo**—infuses the image with **spiritual significance**, elevating the rooster beyond a mere cultural icon to a **sacred status**. This imagery connects to Puerto Rico's deep-rooted spiritual traditions, blending **Afro-Caribbean, Indigenous Taíno, and Catholic influences** that have shaped the island's identity over centuries.

Discussion Points:

- How have cultural symbols, like the rooster, been used throughout **Puerto Rican history** to express resilience and collective identity?
- In what ways do **spirituality and cultural heritage** intersect in Puerto Rican art and traditions?
- How does symbolism serve as a powerful tool for **conveying complex ideas**, particularly in Puerto Rico's historical and social narratives?

"La Promesa" / "The Promise" (2016)

Vintage Puerto Rican Constitution Book and vintage Puerto Rico newspaper



This artwork features a printed book of the **Puerto Rican Constitution** mounted on vintage classified ads from the "Jobs and Services" section, offering a critique of the disparity between governmental promises and the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans.

The Constitution embodies the ideals and aspirations of governance, while the classified ads underscore the struggles of everyday life, including economic uncertainty and limited opportunities. The juxtaposition of these elements invites viewers to **reflect on the tension** between aspirational principles and the practical realities of survival.

The title, *La Promesa* (The Promise), alludes to the P.R.O.M.E.S.A. Fiscal Control Board, established to address Puerto Rico's financial crisis. Despite its intent to stabilize the island's economy, the board has deepened hardships rather than delivering the promised recovery. This work questions the **persistent gap between policy ambitions and tangible outcomes**, illuminating the broader challenge of aligning systemic reforms with the genuine needs of the people.

Discussion Points:

1. In what ways does this artwork challenge the idea of "**The American Dream**" in the Puerto Rican context?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to mount **the Constitution on classified ads** rather than another background? How does this choice affect the message?
3. How does this piece reflect broader **historical patterns of colonialism** and economic dependency in Puerto Rico?
4. How can **art be used as a tool** to advocate for economic justice and political change?

REFLECTION

As you navigate the exhibition, we invite you to reflect on the significance of **preserving and sharing Puerto Rican history**—through **oral histories, archives, personal objects, and artistic expression**—to engage and educate the next generation about the **Puerto Rican diasporic and colonial experience**. Consider the following questions:

Material Significance

- How do the **reclaimed and personal materials** used by Román enhance the storytelling and emotional impact of his artworks?
- What role do physical objects—such as photographs, letters, and everyday items—play in **preserving history and fostering connection** across generations?

Identity and Memory

- In what ways do the themes of **identity, memory, and migration** resonate with broader human experiences?
- How do these themes relate to contemporary discussions on **diaspora, belonging, and cultural preservation**?
- What would be lost if these histories were not documented and shared?

Art as Advocacy

- How does Román's work function as a form of **social and political commentary**, particularly in the context of Puerto Rican colonial history and migration?
- What responsibilities do artists have in **addressing and archiving issues** affecting their communities?
- How can art serve as a tool to **preserve oral histories and amplify marginalized voices**?

Cultural Representation

- Why is it important to **represent marginalized voices and histories** in art, museums, and historical archives?
- How does Román's work contribute to a **more inclusive narrative of Puerto Rican history and the diasporic experience**?
- How can we ensure that future generations continue to **learn from, engage with, and add to these historical narratives**?

By capturing and sharing our history through art, storytelling, and archives, we ensure that the experiences of **Puerto Ricans—both on the island and in the diaspora—are not erased** but instead remain a vital part of the larger historical record.

Conclusion

Adrián Viajero Román's art invites a deep engagement with the enduring stories of Puerto Rican communities. His integration of personal narratives and cultural artifacts offers a poignant exploration of resilience in the face of adversity. We hope this exhibition enriches your understanding of the complexities surrounding identity, migration, and memory and inspires thoughtful dialogue.

Thank you for visiting!

The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture