

Lawrence University

Lux

---

Richard A. Harrison Symposium

---

2022

## I picture you, Puerto Rico: a Trigueñita's love letter to PE-ERRE

Meralis N. Alvarez-Morales

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lux.lawrence.edu/harrison>

© Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Lux. It has been accepted for inclusion in Richard A. Harrison Symposium by an authorized administrator of Lux. For more information, please contact [colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu](mailto:colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu).

## **I picture you, Puerto Rico: a Trigueñita's love letter to PE-ERRE**

In summer 2021, I completed two research projects; the first focused on Puerto Rican art in museum and exhibition spaces and the second on the Puerto Rican feminine body as a space of discourse. Environmental disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for me to visit museums that showcase renowned artworks in Puerto Rico, but I was thankful for the opportunity to redirect my focus on nonconventional exhibition spaces. The exterior walls of homes, businesses, and abandoned buildings are transformed into revolutionary art spaces that display murals and mosaics made by local artists. These artworks capture expressions of nationality, history, identity; political and social justice movements; and the effects of U.S. imperialism it continues to transform 21<sup>st</sup>-century Puerto Rico.

The island of Puerto Rico has been a colony since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it remains an unincorporated territory of the United States today. During Spanish settlement, people with Indigenous, African, and Spanish ancestries were placed in racial categories defined by skin tone, most famously portrayed in *casta* paintings. As a result of this complex history, there are many terms used to refer to someone's racial identity. On the island of Puerto Rico, I would be considered *trigueña* (light-skinned), whereas my grandmother and great-grandmother would be considered *morena* (brown-skinned) or *negrita* (dark-skinned).

Like many Caribbean island-nations, Puerto Rico relies on its tourism industry for revenue; a vacation there comes with Instagram-worthy beach moments, TikTok snapshots of local culture, and a growing interest in "Puerto Rican Street Art" and "Local History" tours. My research focused on the ways Puerto Ricans today use street art to visually display their identity and history, and to begin conversations within their neighborhoods about a myriad of topics. These photographs capture artworks that could have deteriorated, been replaced, or taken down since I last visited them, and each of them is a love letter to Puerto Rico and Boricuas everywhere. These public artworks rewrite our collective history, national identity, and consciousness and the photographs document an enduring and unwavering image of *Puertoricanness* as displayed by the island's people.

- Meralis Alvarez-Morales '22