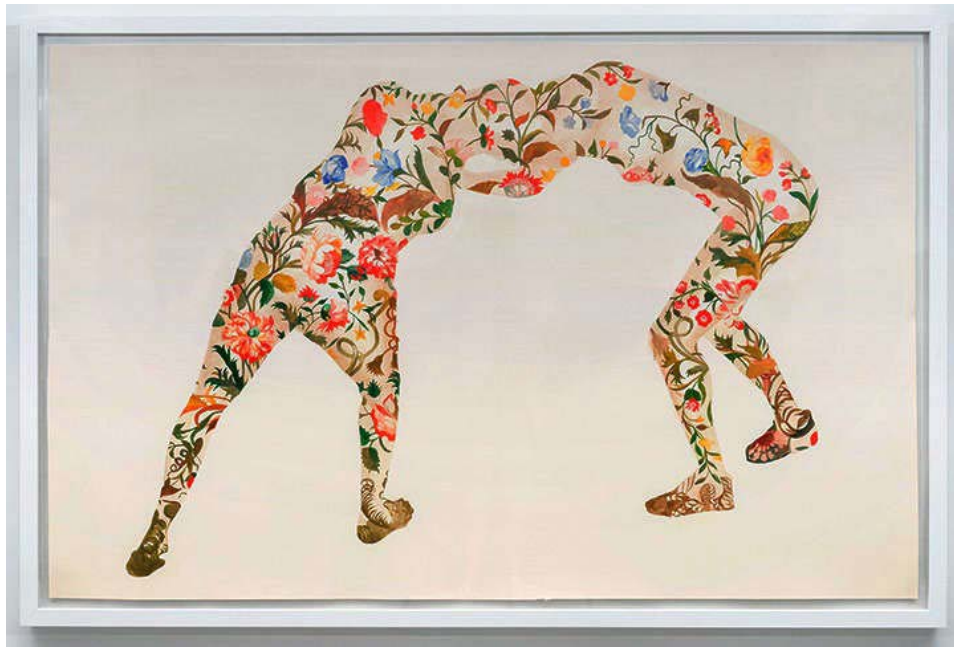


"BLOODLINES" AT PAMM TAKES A LOOK AT REPRESENTATION OF CARIBBEAN BODIES AND CULTURE

BY NEIL VAZQUEZ MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2015



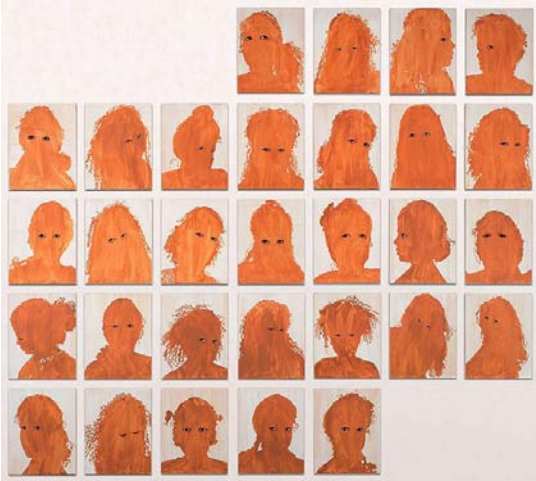
Crewel, 2013

Firelei Báez is a Dominican artist interested in making work endemically tied to the sociological, cultural, and historical roots of her homeland and native region. In "Bloodlines," her first solo museum show currently on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the artist has laid bare the aesthetic underpinnings and representational effects of the Caribbean. For centuries a region rife with exploitation by colonialism of various forms, Báez unpacks the harsh narrative of exploitation by way of bright, colorful, and flowery prints in her multi-media works.

"Báez's new works embody a provocative investigation on decorative elements, textiles, hair designs, and body ornaments that explore methods of resistance in black communities within the United States and the Caribbean. Her exceptional paintings show a profound appreciation of diasporic histories, as well as new contemporary approaches towards painting," said María Elena Ortiz, the exhibition's curator and an assistant curator at PAMM.

The works vary from traditional canvasses to collage installations and large-scale sculptural pieces. Despite the variety of pieces, each work is touched by Báez's signature style, a blend of Afro-Caribbean colors that seem to claim a piece of the visual landscape while in diaspora.

Her figurative canvasses often border on abstraction. The mouth-less women she depicts gaze back at the viewer in a seeming display of victim-hood; powerless, their only recourse is to stare back at the very agents of their objectification.



Yet, while some are ostensibly helpless in her depictions, Báez clearly notes that other women use the same instruments as sources of power. Marked by vibrant headdresses, and brimming sartorial fetches, these women represent the other side of colonialism. Women are so imbued with an inner strength and confidence, the harshness of the immediate circumstances they inhabit bare no effect on their stalwart constitutions.

Can I Pass? Introducing the Paper Bag to the Fan Test for the Month of June (2011)

In all cases, Báez explores the relationship between representation and abstraction. No matter how figurative, each canvas notes a hint of abstraction; whether a colorful print that makes its way from fabric to flesh — an obvious play on race — or a backdrop than bends with the figure in the forefront. In some cases, the colors take full force bringing form and line to its knees and taking the appearance of a pastel color field rather than a portrait.

Don't be distracted by the colorful prints, there's an element of decay throughout her work. It's that same element that ties the pieces to the past and to a historical reality that while buried in memory, strongly resonates with everyday life. That precise interplay is what lies at the heart of *Bloodlines*, an endless tug of war between past and present played out in a tropical context.



"Bloodlines"

On view at PAMM through Sunday, February 28, 2016. For more information regarding schedule and hours visit pamm.org.