



# The Pregones Traveling Theater

## The Bronx, New York

2019, Acrylic on wood  
36" w x 48" h

**Collaborative team:** Alberto Justiano, Jorge Merced, Janilka Glorimar Romero, David Feinberg, Nora Doyle, Jordan Smelter, Steve Smith, Kimchi Hoang, Peter Lommen, Olivia Nortwen, Miki Schumacher. Sara Feinberg and Adolfo Menendez, video.

This piece was a collaboration between two Puerto Rican theater artists based in the Bronx in New York City and Alberto Justiano, director of Teatro del Pueblo, who sponsored Pregones Theater. The initial format was a large white board with thin lengths of wood overlaid across it, created by first-year students Jordan Smelter and Nora Doyle. When they created the board, they did not know whose story it was going to tell. The three storytellers took turns painting and drawing on the board to create a work that combines their stories.

### **Alberto Justiano, Director of Teatro del Pueblo:**

Alberto made the first mark on the painting, selecting green because to him, it is the color of life. It signifies a lot of the things in life he likes, like walking in nature, where he finds his inspiration to write. As he painted the green line, he thought of the strips of wood as obstacles and led his line to find the path of least resistance. He broke the steadiness of the line with the triangle, and also included the circular pattern. To him this represents how you often find yourself in circular paths and have to go over your path again before you find your way out. He also connects this to writing, and explains how you have to get complicated before you get simple.

### **Jorge Merced, Associate Artistic Director of Pregones Traveling Theater:**

Jorge liked the idea of using two colors to show the duality of who they are as Puerto Rican: a side Spanish & a side English, a side on the island & off the island. The colors interact with each other and follow paths and bridges. He chose red and yellow because of their playful nature, representing one of their joker characters along with the colors of their theater in New York. He also explained that yellow means creativity in the Yoruba tradition, for the goddess of love and creativity, so to him, the yellow flows like a river.

Another element that Jorge added to the piece was fingerprints. He felt it was important, and it made him think of if we each have a "soul print" in the same way we have unique fingerprints. To Jorge, the soul print is like what they do as artists, they "get a sense of the pulse of the society and environment" and then they ask questions about this with their art.

This is also what he was thinking as he created the pattern in the bottom left corner: he thought that along with Janilka's eye, this part was the mouth and voice coming out in the soul print. It was covered in colors, just like how their people use art to fill the spaces even after being colonized and mistreated over and over. He also enjoyed that the entire Voice to Vision process can be a metaphor in that while there is structure (like the board given to them), the soul within it flows to become the art and story that they create.

**Janilka Glorimar Romero, Stage Manager of Pregones Traveling Theater:**

Janilka first chose blue because it reminded her of the open space of the Puerto Rican sky, which contrasts greatly to the sky in New York always obstructed by something. She also chose pink because it is one of her favorite colors. When she first started painting, she felt really comfortable just going with it, and wanted to keep expanding the color to make it large like the sky, and free it from being so narrow.

As she followed the red line, she turned her head and it looked like an eye, so she drew an eye in. She wrote "*ausencia*" (absence) in because it's the name of a song she loves. Then she wanted to draw more eyes, and when they started looking like fish, she added the rod, just going with the flow and letting whatever came to her appear on the board. As Janilka finished, she and Jorge found together that their parts could also represent a hurricane, which is something very significant to them. Jorge wrote "*patria siempre patria*" (homeland, always homeland) at the top because they always have something to say about their country and this story. Janilka explained that she thinks it is beautiful how they all want to represent PR, but they do it in different ways. She even felt she was representing it when she was drawing eyes because everything she does is her homeland, or her *patria*. She finished by saying "Puerto Rico is me and I am Puerto Rico."