

**El Sovereign State of Mind  
of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico**

hereby *suplica a todos*, whom it may concern, to permit  
*el ciudadano / national of Loisaida, aquí nombrado*, to pass *sin*  
*algún delay or impedimento* and, in case of need, to *darle*  
all lawful *ayuda* and protection.



*Adal Maldonado*

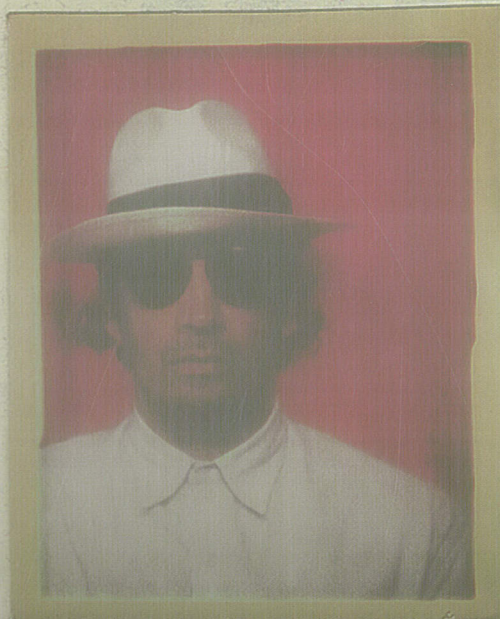
FIRMA DEL PORTADOR / EL SIGNATURE DEL BEARER

*No es válido until signed*

**EL SPIRIT REPUBLIC DE PUERTO RICO**

EL PASSPORT

EL PASSPORT NO. / NO. DE PASAPORTE  
EPRE 95



Tipo                      Fotografo

Apellido                Maldonado

Nombre                ADAL

Nacionalidad        Boricua


Fecha de Nacimiento 11/1/48    Sexo    M

Lugar de Nacimiento    Utuado

Fecha de Expedición 12/1/95    Fecha de Caducidad Nunca

Autoridad    El Passport Agency

**BLUEPRINTS FOR A NATION**



Robert Mapplethorpe, Portrait of Adal, 1979

### About the Artist

"ADAL's Out of Focus Nuyoricans plays on the political implications of lack of focus for a marginalized group. They begin as "passport photos" for his Puerto Rican Passport project and haven't lost a bit of their satirical bite."

Vince Aletti  
Village Voice

"ADAL's disorienting images present photographically credible visions although their information cannot be reconciled with common sense. His symbology is highly personal, often biographical, and his attitude ironic. Self-contained and authoritative, his images seek to provide in his own words: the evidence of things not seen."

A.D. Coleman  
The Grotesque in Photography  
Ridge Press/Summit Books

"La trayectoria artística de ADAL, uno de los fotógrafos contemporáneos más originales, ha sido siempre un acto surrealista y provocador, desde su primer libro, *The Evidence of Things not Seen...* En su serie de retratos de personajes desenfundados, *Out of Focus Nuyoricans*, una forma de expresar la irrealidad política y social de todo un pueblo, concepto que incorpora a su obra una etapa de arte conceptual, en colaboración con poetas, dramaturgos y coreógrafos."

Javier Martínez de Pison  
Crítico, Revista MEDICO Internacional

"Pour preuve, celle, ravageuse, du "nuyoricain." ADAL laisse à son auteur toutes les capacités de s'interroger dans le plus pur style surréaliste sur sa vie d'artiste: les images où il se transforme en cible, en assassin ou en noyé-n'est-ce pas M. Bayard? - sont irrésistibles. Une ironie qu'on retrouve dans les photos de passeport imaginaires (forcément) de ses compatriotes: elles sont complétement floues, aussi devance-t-il notre étonnement en ricanant: "On ne peut pas être un Portoricain net..."

Jean-Marc Bodson  
La Libre Belgique

MADE IN  
EL SPIRIT REPUBLIC  
DE PUERTO RICO



## NATALITY IN ADÁL'S WORKS

What does it mean to belong to a community? What are the legal and cultural meanings of citizenship? What is indeed specific to the Puerto Ricans and to the Puerto Rican diaspora in a changing social and geographic landscape? Those seem to be the central questions asked by the exhibit/installation *Jíbaro* and *Blueprints for a Nation*. And the answer to those questions is primarily that a community involves the body and the spirit, language and memory. The body is my place in a changing world I share with others. Others participate in making me who I am. Because we live, we must strife. But conflicts are subdued by a sense of belonging to a language or to shared myths and memories. Moreover, collective life is marked by rituals, such as end-of-the-year celebrations or the *Promesa de Reyes*, rituals which release energy to establishing a new foundation and which perhaps escape colonial control.

On the other hand, in the case of Puerto Ricans we are confronted with many contradictions concerning community and citizenship that have not yet been sufficiently clarified. The paradoxes of Puerto Rican life are striking: second-class "American" citizens since 1917 and subjects under colonial rule who have nevertheless become agents of their own life and have created a specific culture both in the island and in the

diaspora. Colonial relationship, diaspora, modernity and citizenship are deeply intertwined in this complex story.

The contradictions of second-class citizenship and colonial experience require extensive treatment, and of course they can be read historically, politically and culturally. Artists, however, provide their own texts, images as well as some rules of interpretation in order to make intelligible the particular complexity of this experience. Adál Maldonado, for instance, goes back to the tradition of the *Promesa*, a peasant or Jíbaro tradition which was very important to him, and to many others, during his formative years. It is a tradition that he considers deserving of preservation and memory.

The *Promesa* is a source of new life and its success can be measured by the new community it creates or renews, a symbolic inclusion in the world. Maldonado's photographs illustrate the totemic connections with the place. One might read the *Promesa* as a ritual that compellingly illustrates the value of language and speech in the community. Somebody began the tradition of offering songs and promises to the *Tres Santos Reyes*, The Three Kings, a mode of self-enactment for the community, and a recognized time and place in the rhythm of public life in peasant and isolated communities of rural Puerto Rico. The blending in the historical *Promesa* of oral

Christian traditions, *décimas* (ballads) and music, and the expectation of a response in the sense of forgiveness, a favor from the Kings or even a miracle, suggest a very complex relationship with the sacred. Hannah Arendt's concept of *natality* comes to mind. Her well-known book, The Human Condition, refers to *natality*, that is how, "with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and how this insertion is like a second birth," which means that the unexpected can be expected. The effect of the *Promesa* is to create essentially an alternative state by deeds and words. The fact that it is an elaborate collective ritual also suggests the importance of the reciprocal interdependence among the members of the community. Furthermore, it demonstrates the role of a special use of poetic language and of the wooden images of the *santos*, as the locus of exchange. The frequent gesture of touching or kissing the *santos* literally places the participants in contact with a piece of the highest, most sacred space in the community. The religious framework in which the *Promesa* was embedded indicates that the *santos* were superior in status to worldly political authorities.

This power of the image indicates perhaps the continuity with modern and secularized forms of *Promesa*, such as the alternative passport. The Puerto Rican passport proposed by Adál Maldonado contains a vast potential for building a society precisely as old rituals tend to vanish or are weakened by modernization. It draws attention to the

symbolic aspects of legal documents and to the connections with old rituals.

There is an utopia implicit in this exhibit, and it is the utopia of reconciliation. The sacred images constitute one of the ties that bind an individual to his community. The overlap between the religious and the political lies not only in the use of images but in the socially beneficial aspects of this experience. The *Promesa* has a rich history in its own right, and the artist is concerned that it might simply be lost or radically changed in its meaning. But he is also concerned that Puerto Ricans be excluded from a place in the citizen body, since the secular form of citizenship has failed to fulfill the social and religious functions played by the *Promesa*.

What connections are possible between Puerto Ricans' past and their present? In the end, the troubling question raised by Adál Maldonado's exhibit is whether Puerto Ricans can preserve their integrity, even when challenged by both the welcome changes of modernity and by the contradictory hostility of colonial and exclusionary practices that at the same time preach new promises. His hopeful answer seems to be an island of affirmation in a sea of harsh denigration: *natality* is possible; and, therefore, a shared future and a shared memory.

Arcadio Diaz-Quíñones  
Emory L. Ford Professor of Spanish  
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