

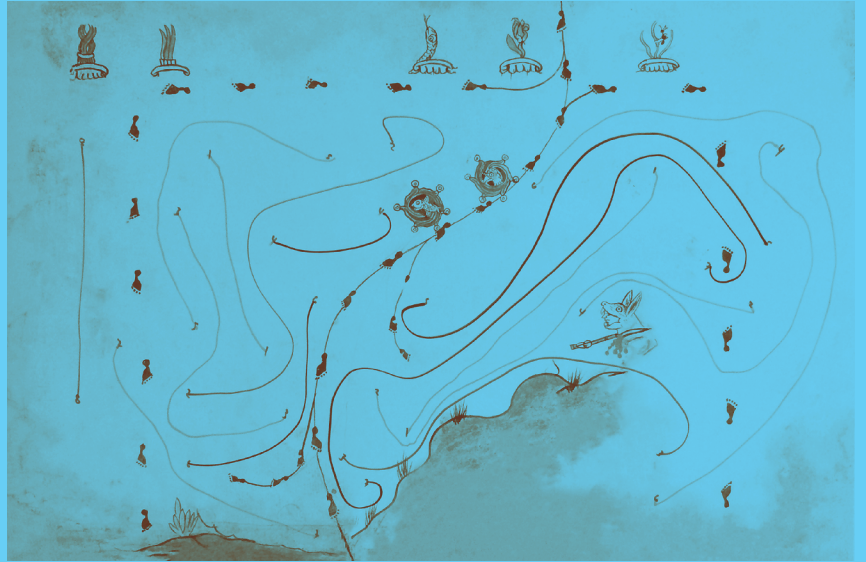
A view from the studio of Ignacio González-Lang, showing his work *Antisocial* (2017) in process



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A view from the studio desk of Firelei Baez



Irvin Morazan, from the series *Requiem for a border crossing of my undocumented father* #4 (2016), Archival Inkjet Print, 20 x 30 inches

### Firelei Baez:

I've moved around so much I can't recall any neighbors, really. Never asked for sugar or asked peoples' names. One year, I moved seven times in New York. I mostly went to school here, since I was young, to a different school each year. However, I remember that when I was 7 or 8 years old, in the Dominican Republic, all the neighborhood kids would come to me to make them paper dolls. I would make these beautiful, idyllic paper dolls with really pimped-out dresses. It made me proud. People would come to me asking something different, something special, and every time it was a new challenge. This one would want frilly lace; that one would want to have a pattern that is different from all the rest. I always wanted to do something special for each one. I also remember how I wanted to do the best possible job for them. Dominicans are very diasporic, so we all moved around a lot, and I never stayed in touch with them.



### Ignacio Gonzalez Lang:

Some years ago, I had a studio on the Bowery around Canal Street. It was in a building located on one of the liveliest blocks in Chinatown. During the day, the sidewalk was always full of people walking in and out of the 99-cent stores that lined the block. Within that anonymous rush, I started noticing a man in his sixties who stood in front of my door almost every day. He did not speak to anyone. He just stood there, for hours at a time. Sometimes he blocked my doorway and I had to ask him to step aside so I could unlock the front door. From the direction I approached him, he always had his back turned to me. He reminded me of a man portrayed in a Bruegel painting from the Louvre pictured in a book I had at my studio.

The Bruegel painting is “The Beggars” (1568), and it depicts a group of men in a grassy brick courtyard. Despite their physical impairments, the men are engaged in a mock dance, crutches and sticks on hand. They all wear carnival hats that reference different social classes: a cardboard crown for the king, a paper hat for the army, a beret for the bourgeoisie, a cap for the peasants and a white bishop's mitre for the church. It was the figure on the lower right of Bruegel's painting—the one wearing the paper bishop's cone on his head and turning his back to the viewer—that resembled the man outside my door.

The man at my doorstep also wore the most bizarre headgear, day in, day out. Over his long gray locks, he wore a dirty brown headband holding a white plastic bag that hung over his right ear. Sometimes he replaced the plastic bag with sheets of paper towels or toilet paper. For a while I thought maybe his ear was hurt and that he was trying to cover it as an haphazard form of protection against the elements. But at some point I realized there was nothing physically wrong with him. The headgear was only a talisman.

He always wore the same clothes: tan shirt, beige pants, army green jacket, and black shoes. In one hand, he held four or five bright red plastic bags from Chinatown shops. In his other hand, always outstretched, five coins were stacked between his thumb and index finger. I never saw anyone give him any money. With his daily presence, his relentlessness and perseverance, it seemed to me that he belonged to the old Bowery that was soon disappearing, the

seedy neighborhood of tenements and flop houses. It seemed to me that he was the last man standing of his kind.

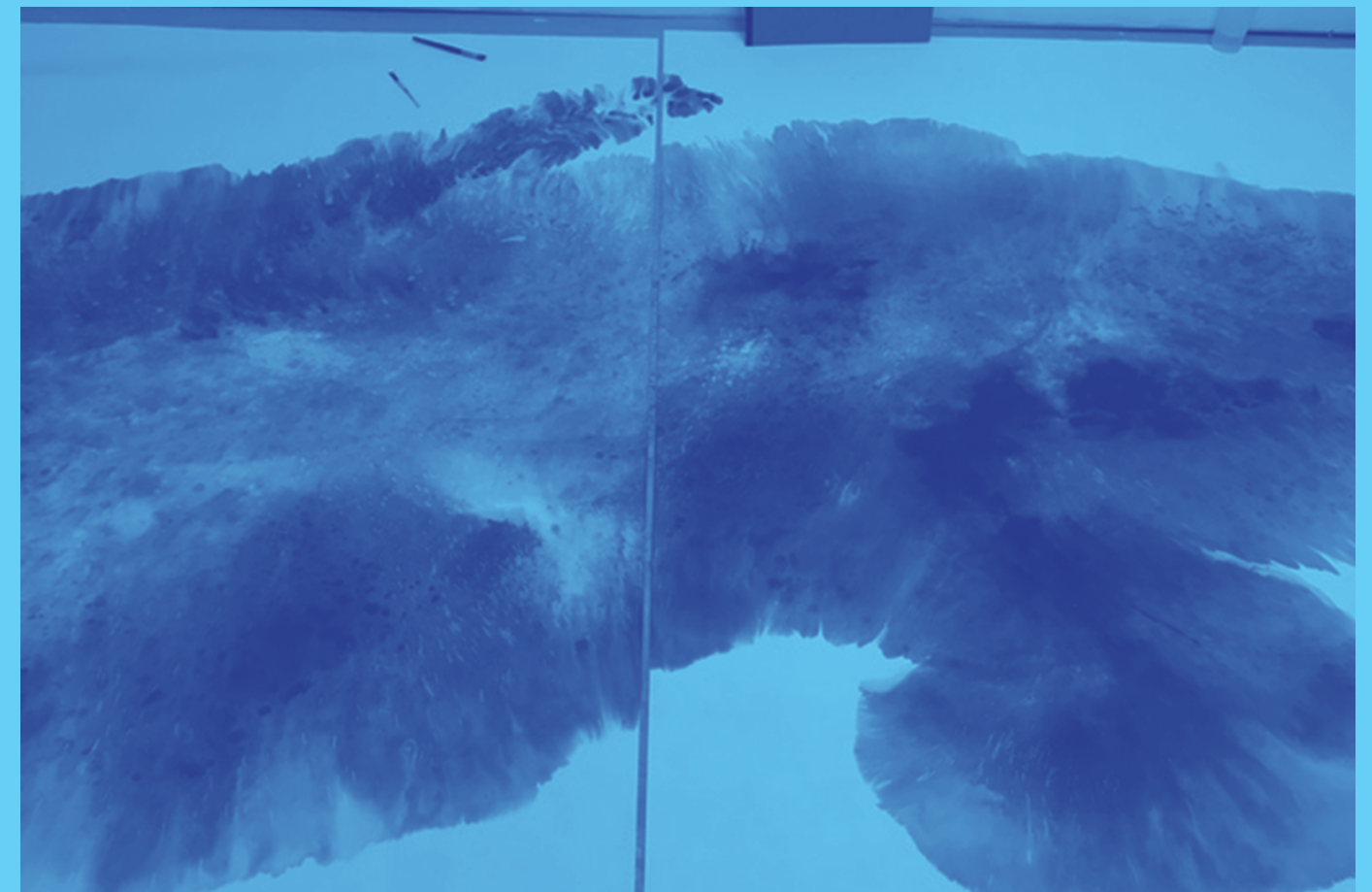
Months went by. Then, one summer day, I went to the Thai restaurant next door to get an iced coffee. While at the register, I noticed a group of men seated in the back of the otherwise empty restaurant. The man from my doorstep was with them. This time, however, he was wearing a dark suit and a tie. His hair was slicked back; his beard was neatly combed. I was still waiting for my iced coffee to arrive from the kitchen when his group stood up to leave. As he walked by me, I noticed he held a briefcase in one hand and an umbrella in the other. He did not look at me. He was deep in conversation with his companions.

Soon after that day, my landlord told me he was terminating my lease. I never saw my Bruegel neighbor again.

### Irvin Morazan:

The first apartment I ever rented on my own was located in Newark, New Jersey. That was in the early 1990s. I lived on the second floor; on the first floor, my landlord had a business where plastic flowers were sold. Even though the flower business was slow, there was a lot of activity in the backroom of the shop. My landlord was a blind Puerto Rican man in his 70s. He was extremely sharp. Nothing could get by him. He knew who was going to come in the shop minutes before they would actually enter. He sat around in front of a small table with a deck of braille tarot cards that were custom made for him.

On my first pay-rent day, I went downstairs and knocked on his door. But no one answered. There seemed to be a party in the shop, so I simply let myself in. I then realized this was no party. I had walked into a Santeria ceremony. There were about 20 people in the room playing drums and chanting. Everyone was wearing white. As soon as I stepped further into the room, I witnessed someone twisting the neck of a chicken and its blood flew everywhere. At that moment, the landlord walked behind me, covered my eyes with his hands, and said to me, “Oye, chico, a veces el mundo no es lo que parece.”



★ Film-stills drawn from *Nueba Yol III: Bajo la nueva ley* (1997) by Ángel Muñiz, and resequenced by Gerardo Madera for the purpose of this leaflet.



Irvin Morazan wearing the sculpture *Border Crosser Headress* (2013-2017), while rehearsing for his new performance *Volver, Volver*, presented as part of *Love Thy Neighbor*



Pieter Bruegel, *The Beggars* (1568), oil on panel, 7 ¼ x 8 ½ inches