



## **CAROLINE GONZÁLEZ**

Photos by Carlos Rodríguez

Interview conducted in Harlem, November 6, 2016

**Ana:** So the questions I was asking the artists are: “What is your history in New York City?” “What are your thoughts about the role of art in social change?” but because I’m thinking of you as an art critic and someone who is in engagement with all these artist and the history of art, I would love to first hear your history here in New York and then enter in the conversation about what you understand the role of artistas Dominicanas in New York City is.

**Carolina:** I was born here in New York in 1966 in Manhattan. My family lived in Queens, away from -- as my mother called it -- “la chusma” in Washington Heights. We grew up in a middle class context. My parents sent me back to DR when I was nine months old so mi crianza is first in Santo Domingo and then I came back here when I was eleven. I have actually spent a lot thinking about those very early years in New York because [that time between] eleven and fifteen shaped who I was. I had older brothers and sisters. We lived in Queens in what was then called a double fair zone which meant you had to pay a fair for the bus and then a fair for the train to get to civilization a.k.a Manhattan.

**Ana:** You were almost out in Long Island!

**Carolina:** Oh my god I was so mad at my parents. I was like “Why couldn’t you be like civilized people and get an apartment in Manhattan?” even if it was in

Washington Heights because then we could get into New York via subway. My brothers and sisters were all significantly older. So, I was getting all of this cultural influence from my brother who was going to the Disco and pub clubs and my sister who was going to see New Wave. I was getting their influence and their records and they would bring home the SoHo News and the Village Voice. By the time I was fourteen or fifteen I was like "I need to go to Manhattan on Tuesday afternoon because that is when the Voice was out--" because you could not find it in Queens. By the age of fourteen I was already this little snob who said, "I read *real* literature." Stupid crap like that. But my aspiration was that downtown scene. Having a Dominican mother meant I could not go out at night and do all the stuff I wanted to do until my senior year in high school. Then I got a boyfriend and we would go every weekend. We'd get on the train and go downtown and be back home before dark. We mostly went to book stores, movies, museums. At the time I was trying to fit into this downtown persona- the cool downtown person.

**Ana: What did that mean at the time? This is the early 1980s.**

Carolina: What that means...Yes, there are other brown people, but that was not what you were focused on. You were not focused on ethnic identity. When I was in high school being Dominican was backwards. I didn't know any Dominican artists. The only ones I knew [about] were Cándido Bidó and the stuff that is naïve or folkloric and I thought, "This is Third World art." However, there were things that I was always impressed by. When you used to go to the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) and when you used to go to the coat room in the old MOMA Wilfredo Lam's "The Jungle" was there and I knew he was Cuban. There was all this stuff that was proximate to my identity that I knew was real art, but Dominican was just this weird ass back water and nothing that was cool ever came out of that or was not downtown. The only cool downtown person I knew was my brother. He was not a real artist, but he hung out around a lot of artists. I did not realize this until later, but he has something he picked up at Keith Haring's studio and he was like "Oh you know, cute boys, we all hung out." He had a David Wojnarowicz and things that he had picked up because he was *de ese ambiente, en ese ambiente*. But he was ten years older than me and I was a teenager.

**Ana: What museums did you go downtown?**

Carolina: When I got into college was when I started seeing more stuff. When I was a junior I did an internship that later turned into a paying job at The Association of Hispanic Arts (AHA). In 1986, when I was twenty years old, I started working for AHA. I started working for Dolores Prida, who to me is still one of these insanely undervalued Latina artists of New York. Dolores was queer, butch, Cuban, but she always at the same time very pan-Latin and her work and her kind of take on a lot of this stuff was, "New York is the place where we all come together and can be these people together that we would have never been at home." At the time I was treating it like, "Oh, this is about living in New York." It wasn't until later that I thought, "Oh, maybe that has to do with her queerness too." Dolores, I miss her. She taught me a lot about writing, a lot about art. When I was at the Association, one of the many things that was funny about it was...so the organization was all

women. We never had more than one man on staff at a time and it was a great environment to the point that we would sometimes go to the bathroom with the door open. Because, you know? That was my education on Latino arts in New York – being and working there. At the time it was a very different funding structure from what we have now. This is before the NEA Four. After the NEA Four, you have no more individual grants to artists from the NEA. Before that, there was funding at the national level from the NEA, there was funding at the state level through NISCA, there was funding at the municipal level with the DCA. Now it feels like, “Oh my god there was so much money back then.” But, back then it did not feel like a lot. There were these funding streams that artists could use to make a living and that small organizations could use to survive. Because AHA was an art service organization it meant that they did capacitación, grant workshops and re-grants. Everybody came through there. All of a sudden I’m seeing Pepe Osorio. I’m seeing Max Ferrá and everybody who went through INTAR [theatre]. I’m seeing so many artists. And my job was to do the newsletter for the organization. I would write it, typeset it and design it with Dolores. That was the job. The idea that in 1986 you had three museums that were dedicated to Latino art - el Museo del barrio, MOCHA – the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, and I’m trying to think of what the third one is. MOCHA was in SoHo, okay? Here we thought, “This is just the beginning of our entry into being included.” This is after all these fights that people like Marta Moreno Vega and all these people have been having with the MET (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and with MOMA and with all these other places. I missed those fights. They happened before I came onto the scene, but you are having these people that are creating institutions.

**Ana: I found some of the documents from the 1970s when AHA is fighting the New York Arts Council that they needed funding, and calling meetings telling artists to show up at the legislative Council meetings so that we can show we have the need for funding. You are there a decade later.**

**Carolina:** Yeah, when you are seeing all that stuff play out thinking that it was good and thinking it was only the beginning without knowing it was almost the end. After that period of money and viability for a number of organizations that lasted from the early 1980s to early 1990s, the entire funding structure changed and made it very difficult for organizations to survive. There is still some of the same stuff from then that you see now. You have artists that are community-based and are not coming up through the MFA or the art school systems, and they don’t know how to do stuff to get money. They still don’t. We had a staff that could help them to do that, that could do the workshops. That was an incredible education for me; and all of a sudden people that are like me are doing interesting crazy art and they are downtown people and this thing that I thought I had to crack other people having already been cracking it! The fact that in that space there was this whole range of stuff from experimental work to folkloric preservation and the fact that there was this vision of seeing this on a spectrum - that changed me. I realized that being Dominican doesn’t have to be in opposition to the fact that I’m interested in being the cool down town kid.



**Ana: So you were seeing Dominican artist passing through?**

Carolina: Josefina was probably the most prominent one I saw pass through there. Visual artists I still wasn't seeing a lot, but honestly I was paying less attention to Dominicans. I think the ones who were Dominican weren't always explicitly

Dominican. It was like, "Oh, I thought you were Puerto Rican, and they're like, "No, I'm Dominican." "Oh - okay." I saw it more in the performance and I would say in the musical stuff and in the literary stuff. For example, somebody that was not coming through AHA, but people that were affiliated with AHA knew him, though I did not, was somebody like Luis Diaz. Luis Diaz is somebody I learned about much later because of my musician friends, but he was around here. At that same time that I am at AHA, he's doing some of his most radical work in New York. Everybody is kind of on the same wavelength, but again I was a little younger. I was still living at home, so I still couldn't go to the parties or couldn't go to any of this things, so I had to experience stuff within the context of events we would have at work or things that we got invited to after work and I would have to run home - like Cinderella - afterwards.

**Ana: That would definitely shape your experience of the city to be with family. Where was AHA located at that particular moment?**

Carolina: When I first started working with them they were on East 87th Street and then they moved up to 116<sup>th</sup>, on the east side, east Harlem. They were in a very random location I don't remember why but it was super cheap. The thing is that people came to us from all over the city so it's like we were just as easily involved with Thalia Theater that is in Sunnyside, Queens -- which still exists thank god -- and we were involved with some of the organizations in the Lower East Side and we were involved with people in the Bronx and we were involved with people in Washington Heights. There wasn't a central location. Artists lived all over the city. When AHA moved to 116th it's because they wanted to be in a place that was more identifiably Latino, but in the end people were coming from different places.

**Ana: It almost mirrors the movement of into identity politics on the 1980s and early 1990s where people tried to cement some identity politics through geographical location.**

**Carolina:** But it's funny because a lot of people that worked there were artists. You know who I met there? Charo Oquet.

**Ana: I don't know who Charo Oquet is.**

**Carolina:** Charo Oquet is this amazing installation artist who now has a gallery in Miami. It was hilarious because she is a Dominican with an Australian accent because she had lived in Australia many years so her English had the accent. In Spanish she had a pure Dominican accent, and in English an Australian accent, which cracked me up. Our accountant used to date one of the first people to consistently bring capoeira to New York – Jelon Viera. He is Afro-Brazilian and we would say “Yeah, sure come on in, you are a part of this – bring it.” And Elba Cabrera, who used to be the Deputy Director when I was there and who I am still very good friends with, she has very deep roots in a lot of the art scenes in the Bronx. I mean multi-generational roots in activism and arts in the Bronx. Everybody in the Bronx is like, “Madrina.” And then Dolores. It was this environment that, when I look back to it right now, I realize I was really lucky. Jane Delgado, who has also worked a lot in sort of nonprofit service work, but also in the arts with a great mix of people – she was there.

**Ana: That is like your start in the work world, in the art world and New York. From there you have done journalism and you know like a million artists and writers everywhere from Santo Domingo, from here you went and worked with writers and artists in Santo Domingo so, what are your thoughts on the role of Dominican artists in New York? What are your experiences and observations?**

**Carolina:** For a long time I was trying to find myself based on this idea I had of what I was going to be. So if I was reading Julio Cortázar or reading Gabriel García Márquez I'd be like, “Ok, where is our dude?” And thinking about the experience of Dominicans here is very different. This is a very duh thing to say now but in 1986 -- and I still have the program -- there was the first interdisciplinary conference on Dominicans in the United States in Newark and I went with the other Dominican at Columbia, Miguelina Rodriguez. The two of us went there, and Juan Luis Guerra performed at the conference Milly y los Vecinos performed. When I look at the program now I'm like, “This is everybody.” What I remember is: there are all these people here who are nascent Dominican academics. Ramona was there, Daisy was there and Ramona Hernandez is the head of the Dominican Studies Institute and Daisy Cocco de Filippis did some of the early work on Dominican writers in the U.S.. Silvio - I'm trying to remember if he was there. I'm not sure. I didn't know who any of these people were and what I remember was that the conversation was very focused on the Dominican Republic and I remember that in some session I stood up and said what about us?

**Ana: Here in New York, here in the states?**

**Carolina:** Where are we in this conversation?

**Ana: How was that received?**

**Carolina:** I don't remember I think I was really unhappy with whatever the answer was. I remember being very dissatisfied. I don't know if anybody else remembers

somebody asking. They don't need to remember me, but I remember coming away from that feeling really frustrated because I was at that stage in the mid-1980s. There wasn't a space for people who saw themselves as both-and as opposed to being either/or. There weren't that many. When I was in college, late teens early twenties, if you were in any sort of artistic or intellectual context a lot of people would still be like "Dominican Republic? Where is that?" If it wasn't a Latino Caribbean context, a Spanish Caribbean context, people would be like where's that? And, if they knew, they would ask if you considered yourself Dominican or American and you still had to be in that either/or binary kind of definitions and I found those super frustrating because if I was forced to choose, I would choose American. But I don't feel American, and so I have always defaulted to New Yorker because that is my nationality. I still feel that way. Every time I go to anywhere else in the United States I say I'm not an American, I am a New Yorker and that's my nationality. I also think that this is why the artists that I have been most attracted to, who have a history in New York, are the artists who are more willing to contain multitudes, the people who aren't just hanging out with other Dominicans. Whenever I've done research or looked at scenes that are interesting -- like the Black Arts Movement -- when I look at the black arts movement or look at downtown club scenes in the 1980s, I am always looking to see where we are, because I know we were there.

**Ana: You were there, somewhere.**

**Carolina:** Right! It's actually really funny. Martha Rosler, who has done a lot of photos of the early hip hop scene, I found my brother in a couple of her photos. He is there in this club called Negril, it was on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, and they would do shows and there is a picture of him right in front looking adorable with a crazy shirt and a big afro. It's him. I knew that there were Dominicans, I was always hoping that I would find Dominicans who were doing stuff that I found interesting or experimental or challenging. I often did not find it in literature and that was sort of my main bag but when I find somebody like Josefina I say, "This is my person." She is taking things in from different traditions, but the fact that she is taking things from different traditions doesn't make it more or less Dominican.

**Ana: Tell me about your encounter with Josefina. How did you come to her work? What are the pieces that she has done that have really done what you describe?**

**Carolina:** There was a period after I graduated from college in 1987, when I left NYC. I moved to California and one of the things that happened to me over there was that I was actually forced to define my Dominicanness because I go to California and all of the sudden people are like "What are you?" I go like, "I'm a Dominican," and they would say "What is that?" And I would respond, "I am a Latina," and they would say, "No you are not," and I was like, "Yes, I am." So I end up having to define that. When I end up in grad school I ended up deciding to study Dominican literature because I realized I knew nothing about it. When people would ask me, "What is Dominican literature?" I had no explanation for people. I was still fairly dissatisfied with the stuff I was finding because it was all Eurocentric. Finding anybody who I felt understood my experience and the

experience of a lot of people like me in New York, I still wasn't seeing it. It wasn't there. It was Pedro Henriquez Ureña or Los Poetas Sorprendidos, which turned out to be more interesting than I thought, but very weird. So I had heard of Josefina when I was at AHA, but I had never seen her work. I'm trying to remember if it was a trip I took to New York before finishing grad school or if it was when I moved back to NYC in 1996. I would have to go back and try to figure it out, but what I remember is that I was much more involved in the academic world. I came back and Arnaldo Cruz Malavé, a professor at Fordham, had hosted one of Josefina's "Casate y Apartate." She used to do this performance called "Casate y Apartate" and the difference between the two was if it was in somebody's house or apartment. If it was in a casa it was casate and if it was en un apartamento era apartate. And that was really mind blowing for me, going to see her.

**Ana: What was casate like?**

**Carolina:** Well "Casate o Apartate" was the same thing. It was always the same and it was always different. If you were the host you were responsible for getting the audience together and you could get together whoever you wanted and then you had to host. She would come in and do this performance that was part kuchipudi dance, part gestures with some very minimal props. I remember one prop was like a tool and sometimes it was water and then she would also have these texts that were repetitive, incantatory, but also bilingual. It was kind of like a run up to Dominicanish in some ways. A lot of things you saw were already there, but it was a lot looser obviously. Because it was a different performance depending on whose house it was. And then at the end of the performance she would have a discussion with the people there. I remember one of the performances I went to was -- because I think I went to see three -- the first one was in Arnaldo's house. There were a lot of academics, so that was one kind of discussion. Then I went to someone's apartment on the Grand Concourse and I think the owner of the apartment was a Puerto Rican Cop, so that was a much more mixed audience. There was this older Dominican gentleman who completely had some reading of the performance that I had no clue about -- I was like, "I don't know where he's getting that" -- but it was really interesting because he was engaging with the work very deeply in a way that was completely different than the rest of us. The fact that we were there in the same space and having this experience together was great. All of a sudden I was like, wait a second, you can develop a language that is not a rational language to talk about our experiences because in fact our experiences are not rational and understanding our experiences cannot be done through rational means. That for me was the moment that I am like "ok!" I could draw this direct line between Josefina and Rita Indiana, it's a direct line to me. It's a direct line.

**Ana: That is the first time I have heard that.**

**Carolina:** That to me is a direct line. Because the way that Josefina engaged with the music of our vernacular is definitely a direct predecessor to how Rita engages with the music of our vernacular.

**Ana:** I see what you are saying in her music. I could see that in Chochueca.

**Carolina:** Or *Papi*. There are all these phrases that I'm like, "I didn't remember that that expression exists, but yes, it is an expression that exists." The ability to mine. The thing that I love about Josefina is the way she would not give a crap about whether she was being fully understood by either the academics or el señor campesino. It's like, "Here is my thing, here is the way I understand it and I have processed it a lot and whichever way you wanna come at it is cool by me." That was incredibly liberating. In terms of visual arts, I think that it is probably Scherezade Garcia. Looking at Scherezade's work for the first time was a little bit like watching *Daughters of the Dust*. *Daughters of the Dust* came out when I was in California. I was doing all of these studies of pan-Caribbean literature and popular culture. I was totally obsessed with the Black Atlantic and the continuity of the black experience in all of these different places and then probably part of what is going on with me is that I am feeling guilty and I am thinking "My people are deficient in their connection to blackness." I feel differently now, but at the time it was so clear in certain other places and it felt so obfuscated in Dominican culture for me. You can't go the same path [to get there]. But when I watched *Daughters of the Dust* I was like, I had never seen half of what was there, and yet I recognized it. I remember there were a couple of moments where I was like, "I don't know why I know this, but I know this." Now, I want to re-watch the movie because I feel like I am wondering how much of it was about what I felt at that time and how much of it would reach me now that I have more than twenty years of knowledge about this stuff. How much of it is true. I don't meet Scherezade until I come back to New York in the mid-1990s. There is a period from my entire time in California that I would hear about things, but I wasn't as in touch. I went Santo Domingo in 1992 on a Fulbright because I was feeling a lack of context and I wanted to have more dots to make the connections.. That was when I meet Daisy Coco de Filipis, through Chiqui Visioso and I meet Angela Hernández, and a whole lot of people. Mateo Morrison, one of the great Cocolo poets, he was the head of the Cultural Division of the UASD (Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo), so he actually had a good budget and power and he was really very kind to me and would take me to events, send me home with his driver, very nice man. Out of all those people that I met there, the person who was a link back to New York was Chiqui.

**Ana:** Right because she was here and there.

**Carolina:** So Chiqui did write some about living in New York. Is it the most profound work ever written about New York? Probably not, but again it's a dot that needs to be connected and she was here during a particularly rough time.

**Ana:** The late 1970s.

**Carolina:** For me seeing somebody like Chiqui felt like a flip side of me, or the things I was looking for. I was like, "Okay - You can have New York experience and still be a Dominican artist." But, what I was looking for was: could you be a Dominican artist and still be a New York artist? That is the thing I kept looking for. That is what



somebody like Josefina is for me and Luis Diaz in some ways is to me and that is what Scherezade is to me and Rita Indiana and some of those people.

**Ana: What does that mean to be a New York artist?**

**Carolina:** For me what that means is that sort of openness to multiplicity. Sometimes the thing about immigrant artist is that you can have somebody who is an immigrant artist who is here in this big city and yet, mentally and aesthetically, they are somewhere else. For me if you don't have this skin that is permeable to the City and not just permeable to the City... like Garcia Lorca sitting in Colombia talking about how the trees there look like stumps and he is very depressed and later you find out he was having a bad love affair at the time. For me being a New York artist is like, yeah you can be alienated once in a while. New York can be a very alienating place, but if that is the only experience you have as an artist from another place then you are not a New York artist because you are just a depressed exile. Danny [Mendez] writes really well about Pedro Henriquez Ureña's depression in New York. I would never think about Pedro Henriquez Ureña as a New York artist as opposed to Camila, his sister, who I find more as somebody who really lived here and saw herself as somebody who was living here as opposed to her brother who was like, "I'm going to review Broadway shows and say they're crappy." For me when you have artists for whom their point of reference is the Dominican Republic or Spain or France, then that to me is not a New York artist. Your point of reference has to be other stuff that is happening around you, that projects out to the rest of the world. That to me is the value of New York. As annoying and as hard as this city is, I no longer think New York is the center of the world, but it is where a lot of thing cross and where you have the opportunity to be something that is the plus/and, not the either/or. The fact that you can really be in an African American community does not take away from being Latino, the fact that you are deeply a Bollywood freak does not take away from being Puerto Rican, that these things are not contradictions. That to me is what being a New York artist is, as opposed to an immigrant artist who happens to live in New York.

**Ana: For you Scherezade and Josefina and Luis, they manage that transcendence of identity and just experience to be able to engage a conversation.**

Carolina: Yes, it's the conversation. Because what ends up happening when you engage with these other people and these other cultures? It helps you define more clearly the questions about your own culture that drive you. For me that happened when I was in California. When I was in California I had to really come to grips with the questions of what it really means for me to be Dominican and my obsession became that. What is the thing that... I don't want to say that's authentic because authenticity is a trap. I am extremely inauthentic and I don't care. I have studied Dominican history, I have studied Dominican art and I have studied the relationship of empire to Dominican Republic, so in a way I know more about the Dominican Republic than many people that have never left there. I don't care about authenticity and the fact that you have these artists who are not trying to be authentic... Somebody who is a predecessor to Scherezade who I did not know very well but got to know more of recently is Freddy Rodriguez. He is also

trying to play in the New York City art world but also has his issues. I am not going to speak to them because I have never had those conversations with him, so I am just observing. He was somebody who I remember when I looked back. He was in a number of exhibits in the 1980s in New York and for whatever reason I wasn't really into his work. I think it's probably because at the time he was doing these geometric abstracts, and I wasn't really into it. I have become a lot more appreciative of abstraction and the relationship of abstraction in working out identity issues, but back then I thought it was a bunch of squares.

**Ana: But from your experience and perspective what do you think are the more important contributions of Dominican women artists to the New York art scene?**

**Carolina:** Somebody that we started talking about earlier before you started recording was Ada Balcacer. Ada Balacacer is one of the first black women who graduates from the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Dominican Republic. She is here in the 1940s, which is fascinating because how could she be here? How did she come? What did she do? I have so many questions. She seems to be moving in this circle of people. Some of them are artists but a lot of them are fashion and design people. She goes back and forth and moved around a lot. I think about somebody like that. What happens to Dominicans a lot is that if they are white they get completely moved to the side and if they are black they get confused with African Americans, but nobody knows quite what to make of them. They always end up at the back of the picture, you know: unidentified person in the back of the group shot. In the 1980s the people from the 40's 50's or 60's or 70's, they were involved but were not necessarily identified by their ethnicities. So they were part of the scene but not protagonists in the scene. For example, there were Dominicans in the Young Lords. Who knew that? I think that what happens is that there are a lot of people who are participating in a number of scenes. Josefina, whenever I talk to her about who she knew and who she was hanging around with, it is always an interesting set of people that you would never know. If you had to come up with a list of who she was hanging out with, that is not the list you would come up with. I think what happens is that because Dominican women artists end up being secondary characters then, one they are not part of the stories and two, they are often playing these supportive roles that don't get any acknowledgment or they are not around enough or are not self-promoting enough to really get written into the scheme of things. I keep mentioning Josefina...

**Ana: You are not the only one. Every single artist names her as significant to their own trajectory because how could you not be?**

**Carolina:** The fact that we all name her and that outside certain circles nobody knows who she is, is very telling about one: the kind of work she does, two: the kind of context that she was moving in and three: how we write these histories. How do we write these stories? Whenever we are writing these stories from the perspective of an individual there are a lot of people that are not going to make that cut and be protagonists, but when you are telling the story from the idea of a scene then there is more room for how these people have a powerful plate tectonic influence

on others. One of the things I love about Josefina is the fact that, even as frustrating as her career trajectory has been, she is still here and still making work and still trying to push herself to make things that are different. There are certain artists that I look at their work and I am like "This looks exactly like something they made twenty years ago." It's boring. Somebody like Freddy, he is experimenting with things. He is in his seventies but he is trying things out and I deeply appreciate that. I appreciate people who don't sit on their creative work.

**Ana: Who push themselves and ask new questions?**

**Carolina:** Maybe it does not work but maybe you are asking a new question and doing a new thing.

**Ana: Who in the last ten years has stood out to you, that you respect as a Dominican artist?**

**Carolina:** I'll tell you some people whose work I have found to be great. Rita Indiana Hernández. Even though Rita has abandoned New York I still will say that she wouldn't be who she is if she hadn't been here for the period she was here. The period she was here she was doing the wackiest experimental stuff.

**Ana: When was that?**

**Carolina:** I had actually heard about her in the early 2000s. And she had this project with her then- girlfriend called "Miti Miti" and it was weird and very half-baked, but I loved it. To the point that I went on a radio show and I was asked my top five favorite things for the year in Latin music and one of the things that I named was one of their songs because it was so whacky but interesting and new and exciting. Rita, even though she has abandoned us, I say she has been interesting over the last ten years or so. I think that some of the work that came out of Dominican York Proyecto Grafica is interesting. Rider Ureña has some of the more technically accomplished stuff, for sure. Even though his work is less technically accomplished, one of the things I always appreciate about Reynaldo Garcia Pantaleon is that he really lives this working class artist thing. By that I mean that he has always been art working with movements, art working with activism. He also worked with Luis for a while, like he played in one of Luis's bands for a while. He is somebody who lives out this bohemian ideal. I find it interesting. Some of his most recent work is more developed. Just in terms of how he lives it out, that he is not interested in the high art world, I totally respect that. There were some very short lived bands that I used to really like. There was a band called "La Sovietica". It was punk rock but like un merengue ahi medio sucio, it was really great. For a time, they had a regular gig at The Shrine here in Harlem. To me it was finally a coalescence of different circles in a different spectrum. It was like, it's finally happening. I don't even know where Firelei Báez situates herself but I have seen her included in some exhibits. And then I don't know whether she is a Dominican artist from there or from here and the fact that I can't tell you that is great. I don't know if she studied here or there or where she's based, but it's like you are starting to see some of the younger people that can speak these different languages in

their work. I find her super interesting, but don't know her very well. Other artists that I am talking about are people that I have had *i* with so it's a little different. I have a context for them and a context for their work. And then I am trying to think of other people that have really caught my attention because the thing is ---- going back to what we were talking about earlier -- I think one of the things that happened is that we have lost this ability to have community. We lost the arts institutions that had enough resources to nurture people. So then you end up with this bifurcated artistic realm where you have people who have connections to resources through universities and art schools who can make it work and can speak the language of galleries even though it's always a struggle for them too. When Exit Art closed...that was like a big institution from the 1980s that survived for a long time. There used to be this, I don't remember the name, I think it was called Galeria Cocodrilo... There were these outposts in the art world that were physically located within these other places and you don't see that anymore. Everything has gotten very segregated. There are the people that know how to speak art world and the people who are staunchly or stubbornly community based but sometimes that means that their work isn't really rigorous and that they are not necessarily in conversation with anybody outside of the community

**Ana:** And they are not cross-pollinating because of lack of institutional spaces.

**Carolina:** That is where we are at now. There are very, very few spaces where people can come together. It ends up being a lot about individuals, but [we have to remember] that it's also about institutions and space and structures that allow you to have a certain kind of life. *Enfoco* is still operating, but it used to be more than a magazine. The Caribbean Cultural Center, I am happy they still have a space. And, if they weren't there, there are a whole lot of exhibits that wouldn't happen. Now that they are uptown they can be in conversation with the Studio Museum of Harlem. Caribbean culture centers are a super important space that have been in conversations with Afro institutions. Having librarians at the Schomburg, for example. The Schomburg is named after a Puerto Rican. And yet for a long time, Afro-Latinos, who? The irony of one of the greatest collections of Afro materials probably in the world having been done by a Puerto Rican and for a long time there was not a lot of expansiveness in their vision until they started getting Latino librarians. A lot of us would go do research at the Schomburg.

**Ana:** And how does that appear in history?

**Carolina:** Right.

**Ana:** Thank you so much, I really appreciate everything you shared today. Do you have any questions for me? Or is there anything really important for me or us to be thinking about, collectively?

**Carolina:** Every time I was doing my research there was a certain story that I wanted to see and there was never any documentary evidence. Sometimes I would get to the people too late or I would just get to them with enough time to ask them. When I would get to people I would ask them, "Who did you used to

hang out with? What parties did you go to?" That would reveal so much more interesting stuff than "What exhibits were you in?" or "Where did you study?" I don't care where you studied but I do want to know who your friends were when you were in school. When I started asking those kinds of questions in my own work I ended up with way better material because looking for people in the archives was impossible, it was really hard. When I got to hang out with Dona Aida Cartagena, and she told me, "Oh yeah, I know Aimé Césaire..." She was living in Paris in the mid-1940s and he was there in the mid-1940s and they went to the same parties. Have I ever found any other documentation that she was there? No. So, I know there is this intersection between this woman poet from the D.R from the 1940s who then in the sixties identifies herself as black and writes more explicitly about blackness and the father of Martiniquaise surrealism and *négritud*, and I'm like, "Okay, this happened. And now what do I do with that?" It opens up the story a little bit on how Caribbean artists and intellectuals have crossed paths. Did you know that when Wilfredo Lam got kicked out of Paris and he was in that boat with Andre Breton and they end up in Martinique and they meet Césaire, did you know that Lam lived for a few months in the D.R.? He had a studio.

**Ana: Not at all. How did you find out?**

**Carolina:** I found out because I saw little tiny notes in books that were mentioning him and then I found an article en el Archivo General de la Nación mentioning el pintor Cubano Wilfredo Lam and there's a picture. He didn't stay there very long, but he was there. And, I'm like, "Okay – what does that mean? Where was he staying? Who was he hanging out with? Who saw him?" Those are the questions I am more interested on now. Who did people hang out with, what parties did they go to? Seriously – because that's where you interact with people. I think about parties that I went to in the 1990s in San Francisco and I think, "Where are all those people right now?" I went to parties with some very interesting people. That's where I met all the Culture Clash people, Marga Gomez, all the people that were doing very interesting film work and we were all babies. Ricardo Bracho who then ends up having a son with Cherrie Moraga. There were all these people doing interesting work, but because we were all young or broke and living in the same neighborhood we were going to the same parties. Artist parties are always mixed up.

**Ana: Do you find that that defines artists' worlds here in New York?**

**Carolina:** No. Well, what do you mean? That that only happens in New York?

**Ana: If I ask the artists that I have been talking to and I ask them "What parties did you go to, who have you hung out with..."**

**Carolina:** If you are looking at Dominican artists in New York, I ask myself, "Are they going to quinceñeras with their families and not going to artist parties, or are they ending up in a party with Isamu Noguchi or Yoko Ono?" There have been recent exhibits about people that I did not even realize lived in New York in the 1970s. In Pittsburgh, they did this retrospective of Helio Oiticica, who is this amazing Brazilian

artist of the 1960s and 1970s. I had heard of his work because he did all of this pop stuff and all these sort of happenings, but I didn't realize he had lived in New York. There was a project here when he lived in New York that was interesting that I had never heard about. He left Rio because of the dictatorship and he ends up here, and there are all of these questions that he is trying to work out that are a continuation of the questions that he had there, but he is here in the 1970s along with gay liberation. So there is stuff from that. Not that he wasn't free in Rio, but it was different. I'm like, wow, this guy was here. And I'm looking at a reproduction of his notebook and there is Gordon Matta Clark, and Phillip Glass and I'm like, wait, "How are all these people intersecting? Where are they intersecting?" So that's what the party question gets at for me.

**Ana:** It's a great question.

**Carolina:** It's a versatile question, you know? There are variations. Who do you hang out with? Who did you spend time with? Are you the artist in a room full of normal people, or are you in a room full of artists who are not weird, who are taking their kids to kindergarten and holding down a job with the city.

