



Carlos Betancourt, *In the Pleasant Sand*, 2015, acrylic paint on wood panels, sand, glitter, glue, and video, dimensions variable.

SAN JUAN

Carlos Betancourt

MUSEO ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO DE PUERTO RICO (MAC)

Av. Juan Ponce de León, esquina Ave. Roberto H. Todd, Parada 18

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“Looks like fun,” said my companion at Carlos Betancourt’s capacious retrospective “Re-Collections,” looking up at a projection of the artist writhing naked in a room-size pile of glitter for the video *En la arena sabrosa* (In the Pleasant Sand), 2004. The other half of this installation—dated to 2015—is a grid of several hundred concrete bucket-sand-castle-style cylinders, also smudged in purple sparkles, giving the impression of a weirdly abstract, geometric favor from the artist’s one-man party. “Fun” may be a fitting word for the exhibition’s attitude, whose knowing exuberance in treating often fucked-up subject matter counters Brecht’s strenuously dour suggestion that “he who laughs / has yet not received / the terrible news.”

We’ve all received the terrible news and do laugh anyway. Take for instance Betancourt’s blue monochrome sculptures *Bizcochos atómicos* (Atomic Cakes) and *Carrito de compra atómico* (Shopping Cart Atomic), both from 2011, depicting the titular objects as nuclei to be divided by birthday celebrations or at an ordinary meal. The self-unexplanatory addition of some small bananas gives the

The tone fades to an ironic warmth and things become more troubling in Betancourt's translation of Taíno imagery into photographs of himself in quietly erotic poses, particularly *Domingo en la tarde en El Yunque* (Sunday Afternoon in El Yunque), 2008, in which, tied up shirtless by red flowers with the rainforest at his back, he purses his eyes against strong sunlight. Here, in a museum reputedly struggling under the weight of what Wall Street calls the colony's debt, I couldn't help but think of what our times still have in common with the turn of the sixteenth century, when any Taíno failing to produce the Spanish gold quota would have his hands cut off.

— Abraham Adams

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