

ENGAGE Projects

Announcement for Immediate Release:

ENGAGE PROJECTS
864 N ASHLAND
CHICAGO, IL 60622
GALLERY HOURS:
GALLERY WEBSITE:

(p) 310-415-5516
INFO@ENGAGE-PROJECTS.COM
WED, THURS, FRI & SAT 12-6
WWW.ENGAGE-PROJECTS.COM

La Distancia / The Distance

EDRA SOTO

Saturday, October 29 - Friday, December 9, 2022

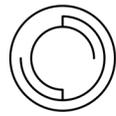


La Distancia | The Distance, 2022, photo composition digitally produced on archival paper

"To address longing, grief, and life journeys—La Distancia is a portrait of migration."

ENGAGE Projects is excited to announce *La Distancia*, our upcoming solo show by buzzing Chicago artist Edra Soto. Elaborating on her series *GRAFT*, Soto will intermingle the aesthetic languages of Puerto Rican visual culture and American architecture in the gallery. Born in Cupey, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Soto migrated to the United States bringing her cultural heritage with her. Extracted from a Yolandita Monge song written by Anthony Rios in 1983, the title *La Distancia* refers to the pain and sorrow of love from a distance—a sentiment close to the Puerto Rican diaspora. Soto reckons with the United States' relationship with Puerto Rico and its history of colonialism during her frequent commutes from her childhood home in Cupey to her mother's home in Paraiso Dorado. *La Distancia* is a visual journey through the grief and joy of migration, a nod to home, and a gesture to create space here in the United States.

Rejas, translating to grids or iron screens, are the wrought iron gates ubiquitous in post-war Puerto Rico. Offering security, cross-ventilation, and architectural flair, Soto transplants the aesthetic staple of the reja to communicate nostalgia and a sense of belonging wherever she goes. While this style is most commonly seen in the gates lining driveways, staircases, and properties, Soto uses reja patterns to create three-dimensional roofed structures similar to small houses. In doing so, she transforms the reja from something that is meant to keep people out to something that invites people in. Soto harnesses an ethos of welcoming and inclusion all while claiming space with patterns of home that respond to the landscapes that surround them.



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Not only is the series *GRAFT* an architectural intervention, it also utilizes the nostalgia of family photographs and contemporary performance to animate the structures. Soto often works in collaboration with performance artists, dance companies, and emerging photographers to create multi-faceted installations. Visitors may find images embedded in viewfinders attached to the CNC-cut designs that tell stories of family life in Puerto Rico. Other structures such as *Screenhouse* in Millennium Park house site-responsive performances by professional dancers and choreographers. In this way, Soto uses *rejas* as a lens into Puerto Rican culture.

Venues presenting Soto's work include Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art's satellite, The Momentary, AK; Albright-Knox Northland, NY; Chicago Cultural Center, IL; Smart Museum, IL; Museum of Contemporary Photography, IL, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, IL. Soto completed the public art commission titled *Screenhouse* on view at Chicago's Millennium Park until Spring 2023. Soto's installation *Casa Isla | House Island* was recently on view at the Chicago Botanic Garden for *Flourish: The Garden at 50*, a summer long program commemorating its 50th anniversary. Soto has attended residency programs at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Beta-Local, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency, Headlands Center for the Arts, Project Row Houses and Art Omi among others. Soto was awarded the Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellowship, the Illinois Arts Council Agency Fellowship, the inaugural Foundwork Artist Prize and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant among others. Between 2019-2020, Soto exhibited and traveled to Brazil, Puerto Rico and Cuba as part of the MacArthur Foundation's International Connections Fund. Soto holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a bachelor's degree from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico.

For further information, please contact info@engage-projects.com