

Open Studios - Artists in Residence

emilia beatriz



**villa
arson**

March 6, 2025

Studio 1

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Emilia Beatriz is an artist from the Puerto Rican diaspora living in Glasgow, Scotland, whose multidisciplinary practice is based on sensory narratives composed of still and moving images, texts, immersive installations and performances.

During this residency, from February 1st to March 30, 2025, the artist expands on their practice of “sensory storytelling” by creating new characters for speculative narratives reflecting on grief and resistance. Their project includes 16mm film hand-developing, processing oral histories, live-collaging of film, text, vibration and experimental character-building within Villa Arson’s context.

Emilia Beatriz is a laureate of Magnetic 3, a Fluxus Art Projects program initiated by the Institut français du Royaume-Uni.

Gil Lekh: Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your artistic journey?

Emilia Beatriz: I am from the Puerto Rican diaspora and currently live in Glasgow, Scotland. My artistic journey began with documentary practices, particularly photography and film. As a child, I wanted to be an astronaut. As a teenager, I turned to photojournalism, but I became deeply disillusioned with how Hurricane Katrina was documented in the U.S. mainstream media — it felt completely disconnected from the mutual aid and solidarity efforts I witnessed and participated in.

That’s when I began to see art as a tool for social transformation. My first artistic project was developed with youth displaced by the hurricane, exploring the notion of “home” in the aftermath of this crisis that was both a climate catastrophe and a political failure. This led me to a practice where documenting memory and dreams, exploring relationships with land, and activism intersect. I later studied in Scotland. Staying in Glasgow after my studies allowed me to engage with DIY communities and to begin deepening connection with Puerto Rico — a long, intergenerational process that informs my practice.

G.L.: In a work note that you shared with me, you mention exploring phenomena “at the limits of the sensible.” How do you concretely work to capture these imperceptible sensations and translate them artistically?

E.B.: Translation is a key concept. My work questions perception and the imperceptible. About five years ago, I started working on BARRUNTO, a project rooted in a word from Caribbean Spanish that does not have a literal translation into English.

“Barrunto” is often translated as an omen, usually with a negative connotation. But as I understand it, it’s more a way of sensing — a signal transmitted from the land to the body or vice versa. It announces something that has happened, is happening, or will happen, but in a way that escapes rational senses.

Translating this concept cinematically meant experimenting with poetics, the materiality of hand-processing 16-mm film in ‘grief tea’, and even quantum physics. The project involved approaching cinema as something beyond visual and auditory perception. It was

crucial that BARRUNTO’s primary language was Spanish so that Puerto Ricans could experience it with minimal labours of translation, de-centering an English speaking audience. In collaboration with Collective Text, a Deaf and disabled-led working group I’m part of, the film’s sound was transposed into text, animation and vibration. These translation processes guided the editing, and were a way to reach towards accessibility through multiple sensory modalities. I’ve used light, scent, bass and tea tastings to expand the work beyond the screen into immersive atmospheres, a technique I’m exploring beyond screening contexts.

G.L.: Your work often involves creating characters. How do they emerge?

E.B.: My practice connects oral histories, archival research, and speculative storytelling. Some characters emerge naturally through research; others appear unexpectedly. For example, the character Uran(i)o is a fusion of uranium (a pollutant in militarized lands) and Uranus (a planet with an unpredictable orbit, barely visible to the human eye). Uran(i)o embodies a queer, anti-militarist, and subversive figure.

Other characters, such as The Great Yellow Bumblebee and Deep Rumbling Vibration, emerged from visitations to and conversations within precarious coastal and tidal ecosystems in Puerto Rico and Scotland. These sites in different ways are affected by colonial displacement, military occupation, and are shaped by traditional land practices, as well as tourist industries.

Right now, I am letting these characters guide my work in residence at Villa Arson, exploring their narratives through material experimentation.

In my approach, it’s not just about representing these beings but translating their presence and importantly their absence within the environment. For instance, Deep Rumbling Vibration was born from listening to whale stranding stories, often caused by military sonar or seismic disturbances. These stranded whales are witnesses to invisibilized violences, death that leaves traces from the Atlantic to the Caribbean, from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. The artist and American scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs speaks of the need to “listen with the bodies of whales.” This is an approach I try to embody in my practice.

G.L.: How do you apply these concepts during your residency at Villa Arson?

E.B.: I am exploring the characters through vibrations, immersion and materiality. I am continuing a collaboration with sound artist Claude Nouk to experiment with sub-frequencies, buzzing, humming and vocal resonances to come close to the rhythms of bees and underwater disturbances.

Wax has become an essential medium, connecting the body of the bee to the sperm whale’s skull, which contains a waxy substance that aids both in their buoyancy and capacity to dive deep. This led me to consider wax as a navigational element — I think about how we use melting wax candles to enable us to see in the dark.

I have also begun working more closely with honey, carbon, salt water, coastal plants and clay, exploring their sensorial and memorial qualities; how these materials record traces, hold imprints. How they smell, how they subtly interact, how they exist in reciprocal relationship — or not, how they congeal, separate or transform under pressure, how they are affected by heat or UV light or sub-frequencies. For example, I am playing with vibration as an agent within casting processes.

Recently, I have been studying the 'cellular memory of honey'. It is said that when honey vibrates in water, it briefly forms the hexagonal pattern of a honeycomb before disappearing. It's a sticky, fleeting record that resists formal documentation, much like oral histories and ecological imprints.

G.L.: You are also interested in astronomy—how does this connect to your work?

E.B.: Deep ocean and deep space are interlinked; I am interested in how we connect with times and spaces that can feel distant from the scale of our day-to-day lives or human perspectives. In BARRUNTO, I explored planetary elements, particularly Uranus, in parallel with oceanic depths. Uranium, found deep in the earth's crust and oceans, is thought to have been formed billions of years ago through explosions following the death of a star. Stars themselves are archives of the past, luminous traces of events that happened thousands of years ago. I am particularly interested in how satellites are now outshining certain stars, disrupting our relationship to the cosmos. It is another form of colonial occupation—this time of the sky, a disturbance of celestial archives.

G.L.: How do you approach people in your fieldwork?

E.B.: My ethics are based on attunement and honoring the pace of my — and my collaborator's — body, nervous system, health or ill health. Relationships are built over years. While the topics faced are urgent, I reject manufactured urgency as a guiding principle within art practice.

I also work with the idea of informed and iterative consent — consent that is not just ongoing but continually re-assessed, especially when I borrow material for my works. For example, a scientist I am in conversation with discovered a species of moss that was previously thought to be extinct. She resists disclosing its location because the act of conservation — whether through science or art — can lead to capture or destruction. I deeply respect this decision — the shape of this necessary refusal is fertile ground for storytelling, relating to the world in non-extractive ways.

Where desired and appropriate, oral histories recorded as part of my process are deposited within local community archives so they remain rooted in and accessible to their localities.

I also do my best to practice consent with the land - natural materials are gathered in line with local foraging codes. I have learned from traditional landworkers to always ask permission and always be ready to hear 'no'. An essential part of the process involves composting wherever possible,

returning materials to the earth, or transforming them into other works.

G.L.: Is there a message you'd like to share with the readers of this interview?

E.B.: Something Olúfẹ́mí O. Táíwò said in a recent talk has stuck with me. "I think the role of art in social change is maybe less about getting people to imagine ... what a better world would be; I think it's more ... to make the distance between this world and other [worlds] smaller." What if instead of turning away from loss, we cultivate forms of being present with grief and mourning as tools for collective transformation? And finally, and always, *viva Palestina y Puerto Rico libre!*

This interview was conducted and translated by Gil Lekh.

Thursday, March 6, 2025

• 6 - 8 pm
Open Studio Émilie Beatriz
Studio 1

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