



September 16, 2022

---

## Chicago's NMPRAC Sponsors ENGAGE Conference and 6th Annual Raíces Gala

September marked a huge milestone for The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture (NMPRAC), beginning with its second annual Engage Conference. Twenty-six organizations from around the Puerto Rican diaspora, from Hawai'i to Puerto Rican-based organizations like the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) and the Titín Foundation, attended the two-day conference in Chicago. This breadth of organizations provided an entirely new set of panel discussions, all centered around this year's conference theme: "Reimagining the Puerto Rican Community."

The conference began with a panel entitled "Reimagining The Puerto Rican Community," led by panelists Professor José E. López, Marisa Alicea, Ph.D., and moderated by Dr. Maura Toro Morn, that discussed what reimagining a community entails. The panelists promoted actions as small as collecting oral family histories to cultivating mentorship within younger generations of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Other panels at the conference included conversations on how to engage with audiences through social media, raise funds and advocate for sponsorships, and even how to overcome adversity through community connections and cross-cultural solidarity. The conference and its variety of new panels created a sense of pride in engaging in community work and a sense of eagerness for a future full of collaboration between organizations, cities, and cultures throughout the diaspora.

However, despite the conference looking onward to the future, there was also a sense of nostalgia for Puerto Rico's physical and cultural landscape. The first night of the conference closed with a private viewing of NMPRAC's newest exhibition, entitled "*Nostalgia for My Island: Painting from the Museo de Arte de Ponce 1786-1809.*" This once-in-a-lifetime exhibit features twenty-one paintings by prominent Puerto Rican artists Jose Campeche (1751–1962), Francisco Oller (1833–1917), Miguel Pou (1880–1968), Myrna Báez (1931–2018), and many more. Organized around three central themes: *Mi Isla* (My Island), *Mi Gente* (My People), and *Mi Hogar* (My Home), the exhibition, curated by MAP's curator, Iraida Rodríguez-Negrón, aims to engulf the senses in remembrance of every aspect of La Isla del Encanto. Significant scholarship in the history of art has long excluded artists of color in favor of Western artists. This collection of El Museo de Arte de Ponce's (MAP) paintings has never traveled outside of Puerto Rico as a unit. Thus, this exhibition gives physical access to an integral part of Puerto Rican history.

The exhibit will coincide with the five-year commemoration of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico, and The Museo de Arte de Ponce (MAP) on September 20th, 2017. Following Hurricane Maria, earthquakes in Ponce damaged El Museo's structure, and they have been steadfast in keeping their museum accessible through collaborations while most of their building is still closed to the public. The partnership between The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture and El Museo de Arte de Ponce marked a significant step toward creating more accessible, dynamic, and collaborative museum spaces throughout the diaspora. The exhibition officially opened to the public on September 20th, 2022, and will be on view until June 09th, 2023. After the exhibition opening, Engage Conference attendees left with an incredible sense of reflection as they both looked back on their history and looked forward to what was to come, including the endless possibilities that the Puerto Rican diaspora could continue to accomplish.

The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture ended the educational events of the week with the 9th annual Raices Gala on Thursday, September 15th at which Hispanic Information Telecommunications Network (HITN) was the Presenting Sponsor. The evening began with an outdoor reception filled with the familiar sounds of coquis, Afri-caribe music, Bomba dancers, and the smell of roasted Lechon. As the night progressed, the annual *Ceiba Award* that honors distinguished community members was given to two distinguished honorees for the first time: El Museo de Arte de Ponce for their collaborative work with the Boricua diaspora, and Ana Belaval, a four-time Emmy Award winner and Puerto Rico native, for her work as WGN's "Around Town" segment Host. The El Museo de Arte de Ponce award was accepted by the museum's director, Cheryl Hartup, and a descendant of Luis A. Ferré, the museum's founder, Catalina Meduña Ferré. They were also supported by the museum's Board Members in attendance. NMPRAC also presented the first-ever *Plantado Bandera Award* to Boricua Influencers Rebeca Nieves Huffman, Omallys "Omi" Hooper, and Ivelissa Rios for dedicating their social media platforms to their Puerto Rican roots and creating a long-lasting community. Live Salsa music and cross-organizational collaboration filled the rest of the night. By the end of the week, The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture had brought together the various corners of the diaspora to envision the future of Puerto Rico and its history.

Story provided by: Anaís Cezanné Caro, National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture

***HITN-TV*** is a leading Spanish-language media company that offers educational and cultural programming for the whole family. It reaches more than 44 million homes in the US and Puerto Rico via DIRECTV, AT&T U-verse, AT&T TV, DISH Network, Verizon FiOS TV, Comcast Xfinity, Charter Spectrum, Mediacom, CenturyLink Prism and Altice, Liberty Cable & Claro (Puerto Rico). Download the "HITN GO" Everywhere App available on Apple, Android, Apple TV and Roku® with a cable subscription. For more information visit: [www.hitn.org](http://www.hitn.org) and follow [@HITNtv](https://twitter.com/HITNtv) on social platforms.