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## Puerto Ricans, Now En Vogue, in NYC

By Lorie Caval



Brooklyn Museum member's opening reception for *Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World* .

Well apparently it's National Hispanic Heritage Month and while I've never paid it much mind before, I have recently been more aware of "Hispanic" goings-on around town, especially in the art world. I just Googled it and found that the month runs from September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup>, which is kind of weird and interesting – overlapping between two different months and in fact two different seasons, summer and fall. The "month" is composed of multiple elements, much like one might say Hispanics are? I don't think the reasoning was that poetic. I read online that the dates were stretched in order to include Columbus Day (as he "discovered" many of the Latin American countries [pause here for a look of stunned disbelief]). By the way, I am not a fan of the term *Hispanic* - but I will save that for a different blog post. For now, I would like to report on a few events that I've recently found out about and/or attended and around town, as they relate to this *Travesia Artistica* blog in general, and to Puerto Rican art and culture specifically.

Firstly, there is the tri-pronged exhibit, *¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York* located at [El Museo Del Barrio](#), the [Bronx Museum of the Arts](#) and the [Loisaida Center](#). The exhibits have been running since the summer, but this month, I've noticed a few other institutions linking in on the Young Lords theme. Specifically, [the Shomberg Center for Research in Black Culture](#) with a panel discussion event entitled, *Conversations in Black Freedom Studies - The Young Lords Party, Part 1*, which took place on October 1st (part 2 to be scheduled for 2016), and the [Queens Museum](#) hosting an "offsite" event (actually at El Museo, not QMA) called *Puerto Ricans in New York and the Young Lords in El Barrio* on October 10th. Besides those, I came across information for a food festival called, [Puerto Rico Meets NYC](#) (September 30th to October 4th) featuring a multitude of top chefs at tasting events culminating in a Lechon Asado Block Party (yes, an old fashioned pig roast!).

Another major event that kicked off this month is the retrospective exhibition of Puerto Rican master artist Francisco Oller at the [Brooklyn Museum](#), entitled, *Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World* (running from October 2nd, 2015 through January 3rd, 2016). Being a museum member, I was thrilled to receive an invitation to the members-only advance preview and reception for the exhibit, which I attended on October 1st. Ann Pasternak (the museum's recently appointed director) gave a welcoming speech before introducing a lovely Latin Jazz band and inviting members to partake in the open bar which included Puerto Rican rum drinks - and there were even plantain chips to snack on, not to mention gorgeous table arrangements made of tropical plants reminiscent of the island (a nice touch!). The Oller exhibit is extensive, 85 works - Oller's, as

well as some of his contemporaries and predecessors. Even though the exhibit rightfully points out how Oller was influenced by his time and study in Europe, I thought they also did a great job at illuminating the fact that his Puerto Rican/Caribbean influence was maintained throughout his career and how it shows through his aesthetic, for example, in *Still Life with Coconuts* (circa 1893). Moreover, Oller's works featuring people - from portraits to scenes - give a sense of the complicated spectrum of race and class in Puerto Rican culture; for example in his well-known work; *Maestro Cordero's School* (circa 1890). Another iconic piece featured in the exhibit is *The Wake* (circa 1893), which is actually a reproduction (that seemed to be a big disappointment for some visitors). But even though the museum was unable to obtain the original for whatever reasons, I think that they would have been remiss had they not offered some reference to this important work.

I'm not sure if all of the aforementioned events were specifically programmed to revolve around Hispanic Heritage Month or not. But in addition to the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican-centric institutions like El Museo and Loisaida Inc., it's wonderful to see Puerto Rican culture - from fine art, to culinary to political and historical influences - brought to light at a wide array of venues across NYC. In any case, I hope to see this appreciation continue well beyond National Hispanic Heritage Month.

*To see more photos of the Francisco Oller exhibit and lots of other arts and cultural events check out my Instagram: @whippedhoney.*