

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO PRESENTS

## RAPHAEL MONTAÑEZ ORTIZ: A CONTEXTUAL RETROSPECTIVE

The largest exhibition to date dedicated to the artist, activist, educator, and founder of El Museo del Barrio

**April 14 to September 11, 2022**

**PRESS PREVIEW | Wednesday, April 13th from 10am - 12pm**

**NEW YORK, NY, MARCH 9, 2022** - El Museo del Barrio is pleased to present *Raphael Montañez Ortiz: A Contextual Retrospective*, from April 14 to September 11, 2022, the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to the artist, activist, educator, and founder of El Museo del Barrio, since 1988. Curated by El Museo's chief curator, Rodrigo Moura, and guest curator Julieta González, the exhibition spans several decades of his production, from the 1950s to the early-2020s, in different media such as film, painting, photography, video installations, documents, and assemblages. This is the largest exhibition-to-date dedicated to the artist.

"This show offers an especial opportunity to experience a full arc of Montañez Ortiz trajectory and attests the radicality of his oeuvre. Throughout his career, this true pioneer bridged his artistic practice with a unique vision as an educator and activist, of which El Museo is the most lasting result," says Moura.

Raphael Montañez Ortiz is a central figure in U.S. Post-war art, whose pioneering practice began with trail-blazing experimental film works in 1957. In the 1960s, he was a key figure in the international Destruction Art movement, with performative actions that would result in powerful sculptures made from destroyed objects. His practice expands art historical references, from U.S. Abstract Expressionism and Dada to identity references and his upbringing in a Puerto Rican family in New York. At the same time, his work was informed by an ongoing interest in psychoanalysis and anthropology, which resulted in his exploration of shamanic practices and the therapeutic and healing potential of art, parallel to his research into pre-Hispanic cultures. This is a constant concern that runs from the early destruction pieces such as the *Archaeological Finds* to his later performative actions and works addressing the indigenous cultures of the Americas.

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

In a text wrote in 1977, Montañez Ortiz stated:

“What purpose does art exist for? For whom does art exist? Is there such a thing as a mainstream in art? What is the relationship of race and class and art? In the culture of the West, is there such a thing as modern and contemporary art that is distinct from the larger world history of native and folk art? What relationship does race and class have to the larger world history of art? What distinguishes the role of patriarchy from matriarchy in all this? These and many more questions are posed and need to be answered to clear the air of the great hoax perpetuated by the institutionalization of racism by Eurocentric European and American historians and art historians.”

These words by the artist define a practice that, for over sixty years, has been devoted to dismantling the hegemony of Western knowledge, that this exhibition sets out to explore.

“At Bank of America, we value how the arts help economies thrive, educate and enrich societies, and create greater cultural understanding,” said José Tavarez, President, Bank of America New York City. “It’s a privilege to partner with El Museo, an institution that shares these values and demonstrates them through rich programming and wide-ranging exhibitions, including this comprehensive survey on its founder – a true NYC pioneer in celebrating, sharing and preserving culture.”

The exhibition is divided into four sections exploring the contributions of Montañez Ortiz to art of the 20th and 21st Centuries. These include *Destruction*, that focus on his early films and assemblages and a large group of “Archaeological Finds,” with works from different American and European Museum collections seen together for the first time; *Decolonization and Guerrilla Tactics*, which addresses his Puerto Rican background and related activism, including his participation in the foundation of El Museo del Barrio and his engagement with other groups at the time, such as the Art Workers Coalition, the Guerrilla Art Action Group, the Taller Boricua, and the Judson Gallery; *Ethnoaesthetics*, referring to a term coined by him and dealing with forms of resistance to cultural ethnocentrism; and *Physio-Psycho-Alchemy*, which explores the core concept of his doctoral thesis and the works he made in this direction, where meditation, ritual, and breathing practices are at the center of a series of performative and participative works. In addition, the section presents his videos produced in the 1980s where cutting and editing are employed to produce almost hypnotic effects.

As guest curator Julieta González states, “the notion of an *authenticating art*, as referred to by Montañez Ortiz, provides the framework for this exhibition – a singular concept that takes on a range of interconnected meanings in his practice, pointing to a series of issues, experiences, and epistemological constructs that inform his

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

production: from ethnoaesthetics as arising from a decolonial impulse to the healing dimension of art he explored with his physio-psycho-alchemy.”

Emerged in the context of US neo-avant-garde Postwar art and exploring his Indigenous, Latin-American, and Puerto Rican backgrounds, Montañez Ortiz brings a unique voice to the art of his time, influential to successive new generations of younger artists. Contextual presentations are interwoven throughout the exhibition, placing his work in dialogue with other practitioners across chronologies, geographies, and aesthetic affiliations.

Following the presentation at El Museo, the retrospective will travel to Museo Tamayo in Mexico City, where it will be on view from October 15, 2022 through April 2, 2023.

## SPONSORS

Bank of America is the Lead Sponsor.



Leadership support is provided by Tony Bechara. Major support is provided by the Terra Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Additional support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA).

## ABOUT RAPHAEL MOÑTANEZ ORTIZ

Raphael Montanez Ortiz was born in a Puerto Rican household in Brooklyn, New York, where he grew up experiencing the transformation in the city after World War II. He started painting in the vein of Abstract Expressionism, but soon turned his work into a particular synthesis of object-making and performance. His upbringing as a child of Latino immigrants is fundamental to his practice and especially informs the way he conceptualizes his ritualistic destructive process in the late 1950s, referring to his indigenous ancestry. His work has been included in several international exhibitions, such as the Destruction in Art Symposium in London, in 1966, when he presented a piano destruction concert. In 1988, he was the subject of the retrospective *Rafael Montañez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche, 1960-1988*, at El Museo. Important museum collections include Tate, London, the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. Recent exhibitions include the opening of a career survey at LAXART in Hollywood and the group show *Home — So Different, So Appealing*, at Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

## ABOUT EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

El Museo del Barrio is the nation's leading Latinx and Latin American cultural institution. The Museum welcomes visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic landscape of these communities through its extensive Permanent Collection, varied exhibitions and publications, bilingual public programs, educational activities, festivals, and special events.

The Museum is located at 1230 Fifth Avenue at 104th Street in New York City. The Museum is open Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11:00am – 5:00pm. Pay-what-you-wish. To connect with El Museo via Social Media, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. For more information, please visit [www.elmuseo.org](http://www.elmuseo.org).

###

## PRESS CONTACTS:

Rose Mary Cortes, El Museo del Barrio  
T: 212-660-7102 | E: [rcortes@elmuseo.org](mailto:rcortes@elmuseo.org)

Hunter Braithwaite, Cultural Counsel  
E: [hunter@culturalcounsel.com](mailto:hunter@culturalcounsel.com)

Emma Frohardt, Cultural Counsel  
E: [emma@culturalcounsel.com](mailto:emma@culturalcounsel.com)