

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

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EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO PRESENTS

## REYNIER LEYVA NOVO: METHUSELAH

A digital artwork that prompts intercultural exchange through the journey of the monarch butterfly

IN-PERSON EXHIBITION

October 27, 2022 to March 26, 2023

PUBLIC PROGRAM AND PROJECT LAUNCH

Thursday, September 22, 2022 at 7PM EST | [RSVP here >](#)

**NEW YORK, NY, AUGUST 23, 2022** - El Museo del Barrio is pleased to present *Reynier Leyva Novo: Methuselah*, from October 27, 2022 to March 26, 2023. Conceived by the Cuban-born and Houston based artist Reynier Leyva Novo, the digital artwork virtually reproduces the 5000-kilometer transnational migratory journey of a single monarch butterfly, tracking its travel from southern Canada across the United States to Mexico. Embodied through the life of a virtual avatar, the epic journey is hosted and reproduced in real time on a specially designed, open-access, dedicated website. Commissioned by El Museo del Barrio with the support of VIA Art Fund, the in-person mixed-reality presentation at El Museo debuts in conjunction with the upcoming Fall exhibition, *Juan Francisco Elso: Por América*.

Working with butterfly experts, taxidermists, animators, computer modelers, and software designers for over a year, artist Novo translated the monarch butterfly from an analog specimen into a digital animation. Accessible online, the virtual avatar can be observed 24 hours a day during a one-year cycle as it flutters, flies, feeds, and rests with the ease and delicacy of a real insect. At any given time, the software program determines the butterfly's movements in space, drawing upon numerous data points related to monarch migration patterns. No single observed motion is the same. This presentation offers viewers a privileged and unprecedented look at a day in the life of a single monarch butterfly, a phenomenon that until recently was impossible to observe or track.

The title of the work, *Methuselah*, refers to the fourth generation of monarchs in each annual cycle. Weighing less than one gram each, and living only two-to-six weeks, monarch butterflies take four generations of offspring to complete their annual migration. Born furthest North, the Methuselah generation lives longer than the other travelers born further south. With this extended life span, it is able to complete the epic transcontinental migration each year, allowing for its species' survival.

In tracing the monarch's flight across the Americas, *Methuselah* addresses larger contemporary issues related to migration, climate change, and the necessity of transnational cooperation, as expressed in the life of a singular specimen. Calling attention to the false security of borders, the artwork offers a critical metaphor for

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twenty-first-century existence, made all the more poignant by the monarch's recent categorization as an endangered species.

## **PROJECT LAUNCH AND CONVERSATION | SEPTEMBER 22, 2022**

*Methuselah* launches online to the public on September 22nd (in-person October 27th), coinciding with the Fall equinox and the start of the monarch's migration. Beginning on this date, viewers can observe the virtual avatar 24 hours a day, as it makes its way south across changing terrain, weather patterns, and other variable physical conditions. To celebrate the event, artist Reynier Leyva Novo will join curator Olga Viso in an online conversation and project demonstration moderated by El Museo organizing curator Susanna V. Temkin.

Free and open to the public, this event is held in partnership with a community of nearly 20 international cultural organizations, whose transnational locations echo the monarch's pathway across the Americas. To RSVP, visit [elmuseo.org](http://elmuseo.org).

## **THE INSTALLATION | OCTOBER 27, 2022 - MARCH 26, 2023**

Opening October 27th at El Museo del Barrio, *Methuselah* will be presented in Room 110 as an immersive mixed reality installation. There, museum visitors will be able to observe and experience the monarch's movements and behavior in a shared environment, where they can follow the butterfly as it flies around them. Along with the specimen's flight pattern, viewers will have access to up-to-date data, such as the butterfly's geographic coordinates, time, and weather.

Visitors are invited to experience the monarch's movements and behavior in a shared environment through the use of a holographic device. As the technology responds to movement in each space, guests will be allowed to enter the installation space four people at a time.

## **ABOUT REYNIER LEYVA NOVO**

Reynier Leyva Novo (b. 1983, Havana, Cuba, and based in Houston, Texas) is one of Cuba's leading conceptual artists. Novo's practice challenges ideology and symbols of power, challenging notions of an individual's ability to affect change. His multidisciplinary practice includes mining historical data and official documents, the content of which he transforms into formally minimalist and conceptually charged sculptures and multimedia installations. Novo's artwork has been presented at the Liverpool Biennial (2010), Venice Biennale (2011, 2017), Havana Biennial (2015, 2019), Shanghai Biennale (2018), Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (2019), Aichi Triennial (2019), among others. His art is collected by international museums and arts institutions such as the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Bronx Museum of Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Museo de Bellas Artes de Habana; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, among others.

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Following the presentation at El Museo, the digital artwork will travel to the Phoenix Art Museum, where it will be on view from May 6, 2023 through September 17, 2023, later to the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami in late fall/winter 2023.

## SPONSORS

Reynier Leyva Novo: Methuselah is commissioned by El Museo del Barrio through the generous support of VIA Art Fund.

The project is presented in relation to the exhibition, Juan Francisco Elso: Por América, which is made possible thanks to major support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support is provided by Tony Bechara; Celso Gonzalez-Falla; Craig Robins; Steven and Judy Shank, and John Thomson. Commissions are made possible by VIA Art Fund and the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation. Supported in part with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.

## 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).

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