

WITHOUT GOODBYES



HALLWALLS

GeoVanna Gonzalez



In her new film *Without Goodbyes*, addressing ideas around time, love, loss, and mortality, GeoVanna Gonzalez unfolds a love story around two queer protagonists who seem to hover in an otherworldly and spiritual realm. Buttressed by a lush, evocative setting—filmed along the northwestern coast of Puerto Rico—we are introduced to characters who are engaged in a series of rituals around death. Intimate gestures of preparation are presented at the outset as one character, adorned in lace, attends to the second, floating with the apparent demeanor of the newly deceased. Throughout the piece, our characters enact personal moments of intimacy—sometimes together, sometimes drifting apart—until one's face is adorned with funereal gems, sitting lifeless with their partners head in their lap. Finally, they literally fade away into the darkening sky and the sense of loss is completed.

The tropical setting of the piece exquisitely evokes an ethereal quality, seemingly real but equally suggestive of a netherworld or a passage between realms. Natural, ambient sounds intertwine with an arresting musical score that amplifies the unearthly sensation that we are in a space of transition,

elongated in its queer temporality as a space apart from time as it is heteronormatively or conventionally presumed to exist. Despite the realism of certain shots, our sense of time here is disrupted and suspended into a dream state. Even the most realistic shots in the film—water flowing, for example—confound easy explanations. There are no markers to designate location and nothing that fixes time within the narrative. Water flows, yes, but rather than delineate time, it moves with an abiding, indefinite quality. It feels as though it is eternally flowing and it is never clear where and when we are.

Gonzalez utilizes a presentation of adjacent frames that sometimes widens a single shot, amplifying the lush tableaux. Sometimes the space between frames disrupts that panorama. Sometimes the double frames emphasize a vacant emotional space through the occasional absence of information. Throughout, the vertical line centered between the frames operates as a persistent demarcation and frequently suggests the sense that our characters are simultaneously so close and yet so far away. This notion is given particular emphasis during a passage where the performers utilize contact improvisation



as they appear to move toward an embrace that is never fully realized, their bodies gently sliding across one another without ever firmly grasping. It is the corporeal body conjuring the impending sense of loss. They are actions triggered by love but beset by fate.

Inspired by the artist's great aunt, who is dealing with dementia, sensations of grief are comingled with suggestions of memory slipping away—a condition not merely of dementia but one that textures the thoughts of those who remain about those who have passed. Grief is a kind of dementia and plays havoc with memory as we attempt to hold on to those we have lost. Through the persistent splendor of its visuals, *Without Goodbyes* manages to achieve a mournful sensation without depicting despair. In this manner, the piece draws inspiration from Francisco Oller's *El Velorio*, one of the most important works in Puerto Rican art history. Depicting a wake for a deceased child, the work introduces celebration within its sorrowful scene as a baptized child is presumed to ascend directly to heaven. There is the reminder that death is a passage from the transient to the eternal.

Queer love here exists within the presence of specific cultural traditions such as espiritismo, which allows for the spiritual world to affect the corporeal and the cosmology of Yemayá, the water spirit. These nuances allow for the notion of a continuation of the sense of spirit. Ritualized actions, specifically dance, serve to deconstruct the embodied experience and provide emotional weight to the situation. Nothing is more eloquent or articulate about the isolating sense of loss than when the adjacent frames each depict one lover, draped supinely across the rocks. But *Without Goodbyes* is never despairing or absent hope. Its title suggests that closure is not the goal. Rather, the rituals around memorialization and memory are potent forces that prolong and nurture love beyond death and outside time.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator.

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Director GeoVanna Gonzalez
Cinematographer Juan Luis Matos • Producer Sotiris Tsiganos
Performers Angel Blanco, Rafael V. Cañals Pérez
Music GGSI • Sound Engineer Ian Mercel
Special Thanks Sotiris Tsiganos, Juan Luis Matos, Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, Edwin Cardé



GeoVanna Gonzalez is a Miami-based artist. She was born and raised in Los Angeles, California where she received her BFA at Otis College of Art and Design. Her work has been shown at various institutions including The Institute of Contemporary Art, Station Contemporary Arts Museum, NSU Art Museum, The Bass Museum, Fringe Projects, and The Corcoran School of the Arts and Design. Gonzalez received awards and residencies from South Arts' Southern Prize and State Fellowship, WaveMaker Grant, The Ellies Visual Arts Award, The South Florida Cultural Consortium, Santa Fe Art Institute Residency Santa Fe, Franconia Sculpture Park, Bemis Center For Contemporary Arts, and CAMPO. Her work is in permanent collections at Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places and University of Maryland Art Gallery. www.geo-vanna.com

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