

# caribbean living™

beyond the beach

A View of **St. Thomas** and **St. John**...  
Distinctively **Undiscovered** **Cat Island**  
Top **Hole** **Golf** **Sandy Lane**  
Then There Were Two... **ALLURE**  
Celebrating **Day of the DEAD**  
Puerto **Rico** Through Their **Eyes**

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# Through Their Eyes



## PUERTO RICO

*I love Caribbean people and their take on life. After approaching artist Carlos Betancourt for a feature on his native Puerto Rico for a piece entitled "Through Their Eyes," his humble response was, "Thanks for this opportunity!"*

**Carlos Betancourt** definitely defies categorization in his work, but not as a person. Despite having artwork in the public collection at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C., The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and numerous other prestigious museums around the globe – as far afield as Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in the Canary Islands – he certainly is defined by me as a beautiful soul.

Here is a snapshot of Puerto Rico through his eyes.



**Are there any galleries or museums you recommend?**

Museo de Arte de Ponce, probably the most significant museum in Latin America, holding some masterpieces of the Pre-Raphaelites as well as from Puerto Rican master Oliba, not to be missed, specially the quiet ones. Also exciting is their expanding contemporary collection. Established by the visionary Ferré family and currently directed by other visionaries like Cheryl Farhup, Argusm Asteagsa and Maria Luisa Ferré, the museum building (just opened its doors after a detailed full renovation) is a tropical-modern architecture masterpiece. The trip to Ponce from San Juan is always inspiring. In San Juan, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico is offering challenging and stimulating contemporary exhibits. I am honored to exhibit in these museums. The masterpiece of Puerto Rican Culture I always visit when I am in old San Juan. They offer the best prints by Puerto Rican artists, a tradition perfected, collected and recognized worldwide. There are plenty of exciting alternative exhibit spaces in San Juan, as well as museums that dig into the pre-European history, with precious collections of Taíno Indian artifacts in unforgettable archeological sites. I enjoy Tibes near Ponce and Caguana near Utuado.

**Which city in Puerto Rico do you know best?**

Cahuy. In El Yunque rainforest; Cayey-Guatabe in the heartland; Carolina Pinarés and siempre San Juan. I also enjoy Vieques and Culebra. Last year we drove the perimeter of the island in a one day photographic adventure. Try it.

**When friends want recommendations for their trips to the island, what advice do you give?**

I usually tell them they are going to the "continent" of Puerto Rico. So diverse and vast it is. A warning! This is not just another island... It's rich in contrasting landscapes, delicious food, influential music, and a head-to-tooth contemporary awareness and culture that has been able to retain our respect, their unique traditions. A most important piece of advice is also to enjoy its people. They are full of joy and enthusiasm and ready to share it! Like to say that in a one-hour elevator ride in Puerto Rico, you get to know more people than in a year anywhere else in the world. Puerto Ricans enjoy people, are very social, and are very curious in a humble way. Simply put, they are mostly very happy people.



**If you had a weekend in Puerto Rico, only 48 hours, what would you do?**

I will pick up some friends, head to Fitness and eat some fresh *ataqueguas* and *bacalaitos* and drink an *agua Fanta*. Then head to a quiet lodge in El Yunque National rainforest (or a friend's house) surrounded by lush vegetation, "Jurassic" flowers, waterfalls, coquina (tree frogs) and infinite views of the Caribbean Sea. Camera and friends on hand of course, I seize the opportunity to do some artwork, something I have been doing in this same setting for about a decade now. Oh, the way to the rainforest, however, we do a quick stop in the Luquillo *bandolones* (beachfront kiosks) for the best fried chicken in the whole known world and to stock the car for a BBQ meal – yes in the rain forest (Puerto Rico is a lot about the ritual of eating, as you can tell.) The rest of the hours will be spent in complete bliss, absorbing the surroundings in awe, being grateful and inspired.

**If you had only one night, where would you recommend that a visitor go, or what would you recommend they do?**

A visit to the Ebluminiscent Bay in Vieques. Life-changing. Or a coconut ice cream from a street vendor in old San Juan. Or an elevator ride. Or people-watching at night in the lobby of Hotel El San Juan.

**Out of all the popular sites in Puerto Rico, which one do you call a "must-see?"**

A hike in El Yunque rainforest. And I can tell you where to find some Taino petroglyphs.





**What is your best insider's tip to Puerto Rico?**

Have a conversation with a local and they will tell you what they think is the best...

**Is there a section that inspires you?**

My artwork deals mostly with memory, so growing up in Puerto Rico has been very influential. I continue to be inspired by its natural surroundings, and as mentioned before, the rainforest more specifically. Besides that, and more conceptually speaking, I am informed by the contemporary edge experience in Puerto Rico and the constant overlapping of cultures and images of the past and present; there is also an endemic sense of humor that transcends boundaries. I can see that in my artwork for sure.

**Is there a gallery that is a definite top for you whenever you go?**

Of course, Walter Otero Contemporary. He represents my artwork and that of a small group of contemporary artists like Alvaro & Calzadilla, Budek, Arnoldo Roche and others. I enjoy visiting the galleries in old San Juan that exhibit artesanias de Puerto Rico, sell local books, and ARTY antique shops.

**If you spent the day outside and could not make it a beach day, where would you go and why?**

A waterfall; the Cuevas del Rio Camuy; Museo de Arte de Ponce. Because they all have the possibility of inspiring.

**When you think of Puerto Rico, what color comes to mind?**

The color of the fireflies' light, or candles in Spanish.

