

**“Hard Times Makes Strong Mens, Strong Mens Make Good Times, Good Times Make Weak Mens, Weak Mens Make Hard Times - Papi said that not me aka Sweet Beans”** is a performance based work that utilizes video, photography and organic sculpture. Organic sculpture is whenever parts of my body or excretions are changed or affected by the world outside of my body. For example, menstrual blood crystallized in sugar that has been used to “pack” for my “masquerade”. These are particularly significant to the project and my practice because they reiterate that the body is both an art object and a source of material. Sweet Beans is not a fixed performance, it occasionally results in the combining of explored actions into final presentations.

I am interested in studying an aspect of Puerto Rican masculine culture that binges on overwork as escapism, while utilizing grief as material for ecstasy in moments of escape. I find this most obviously in songs like Hector Lavoe's "no me llores mas." The content essentially is a request to loved ones to dance rather than mourn simply because he's not worth tears. This is an ecstatic song that highlights self loathing, grief and escapism presented in a format to bring pleasure to the listener. This is the essence of the culture I am trying to observe.

This project tracks personal oral histories that document the relationship between exploited labor and domestic/familial violence and queer ostracism through poetry. As well as self neglect or self betrayal as gender affirmation and an aspect of Diasporican identity. I explore the possibility that social identities are authenticated by shared behaviors.

Sweet Beans discusses how gender, like all political and social identities, are accompanied by imposters syndrome. I utilize **“masculine masquerade”** as a way to explore Nuyorican cultural insecurity as well as consolidating the role of non binary bodies as the linchpin to explore the inevitability of gender abolition in anti imperial/independence movements. By reframing the action as masquerade rather than drag, I hope to confront the effect of gender construction under European colonialism. Masquerade is effective in referencing an African tradition that arises in Puerto Rican performance ( see La Loca, vejigantes etc) rather than engaging in gender illusion - I embody a masculine energy that is present and is being stoked into awareness.

I do this by selecting behaviors that seem gender specific but are actually unisex, like spitting razors.

This project, like most of my practice, is ongoing, and is informed by Ana Mendieta “Earth-Body” series and Adrian Piper’s “The Mythic Being”. Elements of both are found in representing the body in its absence and conversely using the actual body to undermine the myths within Black and Bori masculinity. Being adept at protecting oneself is considered masculine, as a female bodied person masculinizing the body and behaviors also provides some forms of safety. It also is worth highlighting that the act of “spitting razors” is also a femme sport and highlights an interesting theme of necessity is genderless.

My performance is really exploring how gender has been designed around relationships to power, and how the compartmentalizing of gender and the expression of gender in Black and Puerto Rican culture reflects the needs of capitalism. I blur who I am representing because I am pulling from oral histories from my Male family members, intimate partners, masculine peers and myself. We become a singular masculine entity, which highlights an ongoing theme in my work that explores the individual self vs. the collective self. By doing this I explore how gender is inheritance, and that the past is active in the present.

I've recorded myself in a number of actions that include using sugar to pack in bloodied briefs, while in the background an old news reel discusses the sugar industry in Puerto Rico. My Paternal grandfather

worked a number of agricultural jobs. Sugarcane cutters are grossly underpaid and overworked. The job is very hard on the body and supervisors are very abusive. I imagine how this affected the self esteem of my grandfather. I imagine that this was precarious because having work and being a good provider was very important to his identity as a man. Yet still not having enough money after back breaking work and being berated by other men could make someone feel impotent. So I pour this sugar to pack to give the illusion of a "manhood" while menstruating, which in itself is evidence of a failure to fertilize an egg.

This is referencing castration as a universal feeling, as well as drawing a connection to identity through land, labor and intimacy.