



Poncili Creación, 2023. Image: Sourwhat Yun.

## PONCILI CREACIÓN

Started in 2012, **Poncili Creación** uses puppetry, sculpture, experimental sound, and performance-creation to bring fictional, almost absurdist worlds into reality. Spearheaded by twins Efraín and Pablo Del Hierro, the Puerto Rican collective embraces a decentralized approach by inviting various artists, musicians, and performers to form part of their events and public interventions. This commitment to inclusion is a testament to their community-centered and collaborative ethos.

Characterized by an experimental and raw performance-style, the group's presentations combine object-making and improvisational techniques that make each activation a one-of-a-kind experience. With their punk, DIY orientation and distinct visual language, they move seamlessly between formal settings like experimental galleries and artistic institutions, as well as grassroots environments such as community centers, underground music venues, or the streets.

The presentation of **Poncili Creación's** work in Montreal takes the form of a two-part event on April 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The program begins on Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, with a conversation between the collective and Concordia University professor Mark Sussman, centering the artists' experimentation with sound, movement and giant puppetry as forms of resistance and community collaboration. On Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup>, the twins present their latest work *Brain of Grandma Skin of Stone* accompanied by live, local musicians.

**Poncili Creación's** improvisational approach to performance-creation reveals what they term as "reality hacks," wherein their work is anchored in reality yet intertwined with fantastical elements. Describing their artistic process, they note, "[i]mprovisation is more like a visceral animal with tuned senses and sharp instinct. The objects or puppets are the script; their mechanisms are the storyboard; our bodies react to the environment, consume the architecture, smell the energy, and execute at will in the moment."<sup>1</sup>

Despite creating works sourced from fantastical universes, **Poncili Creación** grounds their practice in political performance to combat Puerto Rico's colonial status and the multitude of issues it engenders in the archipelago. During the 2019 '*Verano Boricua*' massive protests, where millions of Puerto Ricans, both on the island and in the diaspora, rallied for 12 consecutive days to oust then-governor Ricardo Roselló, the collective was touring outside of the country. They joined the 'diasporicans' in the streets by making space for discussions at the end of their performances, unpacking the situation that the island was facing and drawing attention to the ongoing revolution back home.

- Bettina Pérez Martínez

This two-part program is co-organized by the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery and the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture (CISSC) at Concordia University.

<sup>1</sup> Poncili Creación, "Poncili Creación by Ruby Brunton," interview by Ruby Brunton, *BOMB Magazine*, 24 January 2020, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2020/01/24/poncili-creaci%C3%B3n-interviewed/>.

# PONCILI CREACIÓN

## PRESENTATION AND CONVERSATION

THURSDAY APRIL 25, 5:30 PM

VA-114 CINEMA, 1395 BLVD. RENÉ-LÉVESQUE OUEST

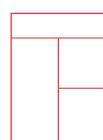
## PERFORMANCE: BRAIN OF GRANDMA SKIN OF STONE

SATURDAY APRIL 27, 7:00 PM

ESPACE TRANSMISSION, 5435 AV. DES ÉRABLES

**Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery**  
Concordia University  
1400 boul. de Maisonneuve West, LB 165  
Montreal (Quebec) H3G 1M8  
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## ESSAY

To begin this text by describing the work of **Poncili Creación** would inevitably take us into the slippery territory of metaphor and comparison: examinations of cultural references and formats, methodological discussions on the differences between theater and performance, questions about how contextual perspectives affect the reception of the collective's puppetry works. These conversations are necessary, but they lead us astray from the elusive political and spiritual nature of Efraín and Pablo Del Hierro's project, which voluntarily remains distant from discursivity and structural analysis of forms.

**Poncili Creación's** approach diverges from the more forward-facing and reflexive strategies of Brechtian and Boalian political theatre, which rely on method, formula, and structure to provoke conversations about social conditions and transformations. Instead, the brothers and their collaborators aim at another important facet of socially engaged theatre, one that we might term the 'pre-political.' The 'pre-political' could be seen as the congealment of what cannot be expressed in words but must be felt in communion with others. In this space, a specific type of relationship is fostered, where meaning is not predetermined but collectively deliberated *in situ* by all involved. Expressions of surprise, awe, joy and fear; states of distraction; a burst of laughter far too loud for the prior silence; the atmospheric conditions; the number of dogs watching these giant foam creatures with us; what happened to the child that saw blazing swords in tree branches—these are the types of conversations that we are sustaining when we witness the artists' rituals together.

The collective's work is deeply rooted in collaboration and improvisation. Local musicians are asked to improvise live with no rehearsal. Sculptures and puppets are rigged to each space and its unique possibilities. The performances are choreographed to their most basic components. It is about the devout faith in the possibility inherent in spontaneity and the sense of communion that the dragging contemporary conditions have taken away from us. These are the ingredients that Efraín and Pablo believe are crucial for nurturing a new form of imagination.

Their work invites us to reach a world with a different kind of viscosity, one shaped by the dimensions of magic and ritual. These ideas may be pejoratively labeled as pseudo or discussed appreciatively as pre-signifying. For the sake of this discussion, let

us consider them as preceding our current era. Depending on our relationship to the world (our politics), ritual is either an ancestral heritage passed down through generations or stripped from us in ways that have left significant voids in our identities.

As colonized subjects and descendants of genocide and slavery, our connection to ritual in Puerto Rico is fraught with complications. One prevalent debate within our community often conflates ritual with some sort of detached folklore, reducing it to a relic of the past preserved solely for entertainment. The problem with this approach is that it fails to acknowledge the important social, political, and human dimensions of ritual in our lives and communities. Ritual, in this sense, should not be confined to strict formalities but rather understood as a human endeavour to come together under different conditions. A vital interruption in the tedium and constant flow of life, reminding us to honour that which is necessary to keep along. The moment to take off our uniforms and dance with the intangible, embracing each other not as fixed forms of individuality, but as the potential for new emergences and relationships. On these terms, ritual becomes the political work of communal engagement that **Poncili Creación** revels in. This engagement is not predicated on knowledge, social or economic status, or other factors that constrain and limit our positions in the world; instead, it actively challenges and transcends these positionalities.

The artists' performances create and sustain an aperture that allows us to imagine new worlds, ways of being together, and forms of resistance. Worlds where giant monsters are happy to smell us in a dive bar; where friendly flowers sprout from mouths and rectums in an outdoor auditorium under moonlight; where we can feel safe to play and laugh with each other outside any prescribed narratives.

Another intangible dimension of the work lies in its ability to reinforce the importance of community in building such performances. Everything is left, not to chance, but to the trust in the magic that emerges when one engages deeply with all involved. In ritual, there is no hierarchy or distance; there are interconnected roles that support each other. Someone holds a musical instrument, performers and puppets move and gesture to tell us a story, and then there is us—bearing witness to what deserves our attention and our imagination.

- Luis Rivera Jimenez

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Bettina Pérez Martínez** (she/they) is a curator, writer, and researcher based in Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal. Her work focuses on Caribbean identity and relationalism, Puerto Rican history and its current politics, decoloniality, diaspora, ecology and climate change in the Caribbean region. Their recent research focuses on artists that explore Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States as the pivotal agent for the country's growing economic and social crises.

**Poncili Creación** (unknown) is a soft sculpture and performative collective that ambiguously started around the 2010s in the soon-not-to-be colony of Puerto Rico. They have dedicated all their life to bending the ancient art of puppetry into a community-building tool in pursuit of a different world. Mixing trash with colour, dance with existentialism, and life with death, their practice stays at the fringes of anarchist lunacy and contemporary intellectualism. Currently on a never-ending world tour, they present their work in schools, festivals, backyards, galleries, houses, museums, bathrooms, and weddings. If you see them feed them, they are always hungry.

**Luis Rivera Jimenez** (he/him) is a Dominican/Puerto Rican artist, writer, and researcher based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He is a founding member and co-coordinator of Albania Galería. His artistic practice takes digital global society and the history of race as starting points, and borrows language and forms from contemporary art, anarchist political thought, psychoanalysis, and the Caribbean quotidian. Recent exhibitions include his first institutional solo exhibition *A Brief Proposal on Race and Cosplay* at the ASU Art Museum with CALA Alliance in Phoenix, Arizona, as well as the group exhibition *Puerto Rico Negrx* at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico in San Juan.



Poncili Creación, 2018. Image : Sourwhat Yun.