

**One Take:** Following PONCILÍ CREACIÓN's recent presentation of *No gods only flowers* (2022) at MoMA PS1 in New York, *Eva Díaz* looks at the group's 2020 work *Somxs Podemx*

# Puppet Masters

**IN THE SUMMER OF 2020**, the collective Poncilí Creación, founded by identical twin brothers Efrain and Pablo Del Hierro, staged a performance in which they walked portions of the 11-kilometre Avenida Ponce de León in San Juan, Puerto Rico, wearing an enormous menagerie of puppets. The 25-minute video *Somxs Podemx* – which translates to ‘we are, we can’ using the genderless ‘x’ form – documents that epic walk. Generally a busy thoroughfare, the Avenida was largely empty at the time of their action due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

*Somxs Podemx* begins with a man tapping out a beat on a drum he wears in a holster, as a masked figure in a black-hooded outfit is harnessed into an elaborate apparatus with long black poles projecting up to three metres around his body, akin to the enormous feathered costumes worn by dancers at Carnival. At the end of each flexible rod are pink and green creatures: snakes, butterflies, narwhals, llamas, jellyfish and monkeys. Among

the two dozen or so beasts, some brandish little placards with slogans such as ‘BLM’, ‘basta ya’ (enough), and ‘ni una menos’ (not one woman more). The charmingly cartoonish fauna is crudely carved from cast-off upholstery foam and, as the puppeteer manoeuvres the animals using the poles, they form a joyous troupe of protestors bopping along vacant city blocks. The rare pedestrian claps and cars honk in time to the beat of the drum as the ersatz festival strolls by.

The cast of characters enters the yard of an abandoned school – an all-too-familiar reality due to the island's ongoing fiscal crisis – where the puppeteer parades his peacock display. Later, arriving at a beach in Condado, he falls to his knees, exhausted, and bows to the ocean. Heaving himself up to resume his march, he descends to a small beach under the old city's south fortification wall. The film ends as the puppeteer laboriously removes his armature of animals, disrobes and jumps naked into the bay.

Poncilí Creación,  
video stills from  
the performance  
*Somxs Podemx*,  
2020. Courtesy:  
the artist

In previous works, Poncilí Creación have turned cars into fantastical mobile parties teeming with flamboyant beasts. Revitalizing older models of street performance, their weird and wonderful aesthetic of found materials and cheerful bricolage offers a creative new approach to public art. The marcher in *Somxs Podemx*, with his crowd of whimsical creatures, captures the spirit not only of the mass protests that led to the resignation of Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rosselló, in 2019, but also points to the urgent problem of how resilience and forbearance have become exhausting clichés applied to Puerto Ricans in a time of continuous civic disinvestment. Poncilí Creación root their performances in what good art has always done: radical reinvention ●

**Eva Díaz** is the author of *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). Her new book, *After Spaceship Earth*, will be published in 2024.