For a new Magnum Foundation project, "Building Dignified Worlds: Narratives of Diversity in Housing and Property Ownership in Latin America," photographers are invited to reflect upon communal life, especially in places that have long been overlooked or oppressed by powerholders. This initiative supports photographers who are exploring communities that have found their own ways to resist the harmful legacies of colonialism and modern economic pressures.

In his projects, a Puerto Rican artist and photographer Christopher Gregory-Rivera often addresses the role power and control play in shaping people's lives. His past work *Las Carpetas* studied systematic state surveillance in Puerto Rico and focused on how the state has tried to silence its own people. For the upcoming project, Chris is turning his attention to Fideicomiso de la Tierra Caño Martín Peña in Puerto Rico, a community that has faced more than its fair share of challenges.

Caño Martín Peña isn't just another neighborhood; it's a place where people have been battling against neglect and policies that seem almost designed to push them out. Chris's work here is about telling the stories of people who are standing up to a system that often feels like it's working against them.

Hatred, in this context, isn't always the overt, violent kind. It can be subtle and systemic, embedded in the very policies and practices that govern who gets to live where, who has access to resources, and who is left to fend for themselves in the face of disasters—both natural and man-made. As Chris mentions in the interview, the neglect faced by the people of Caño Martín Peña after hurricanes Irma and Maria was a stark reminder of how these systems fail those who are deemed less important, those who exist on the margins. This kind of institutional disregard is a form of hatred, one that strips people of their dignity and denies them the security of a place to call home.

In this interview, Chris talks about how he plans to work with the community, not just to document their lives but to create something that challenges the usual narratives of marginalization and exclusion. His approach is all about collaboration, making sure that the people of Caño Martín Peña are not just subjects in his photos, but partners in creating a new story—one that's rooted in their strength and resilience.

By sharing this work, we hope to shed light on how hatred and discrimination can be baked into the very structures of our cities and environments, and how art can play a role in pushing back against those forces. Chris's work in Caño Martín Peña is a powerful reminder that even in the face of systemic injustice, communities can—and do—fight back, and their stories deserve to be told.

Forty three students vanished from Iguala, Mexico in 2014. Since Edgar Estrada Reyes' wife disappeared, he has moved to the countryside to protect his family. Chris Gregory-Rivera, *Evidencia*, 2014.

Arina
Can you describe your photographic approach for this project, and how do you plan to balance documenting the challenges and strengths of the community?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
I've been more and more frustrated with the verticality of documentary work, where a photographer goes in somewhere and takes pictures. The difference between taking a picture and making a picture might seem like a silly distinction, but it's an interesting framework for what I'm interested in doing—making work that involves some collaboration with the people I'm photographing. I've gravitated towards portraiture and documenting processes in a way that removes some of the editorializing or perspective, trying to capture things in a more straightforward, evidential way. For this project, I'm really interested in working with El Caño, both the organization and the community. The political structure conditioning them has been set up by themselves, which presents unique challenges and resistance.

Arina
How do you ensure that the voices of the community members are central in your work when you are the one making the pictures? What is the core of the collaborative work you're aiming for to make sure they are central?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
For this project, I'm interested in collaborating with the community, something I haven't done before on this level. I'm looking to identify people who are interested in recreating or being photographed in ways that highlight their experiences. For example, documenting the process of moving a resident away from the water, which is a big issue in El Caño. I want to position myself within the community as a useful tool, bringing my artistic expertise into the process and seeing what happens. I think this project is unique in allowing me to do so because there's this literal entity, organization but also an organization within the community itself. It is made up of individuals, but they see themselves as part of this broader ecosystem, and being able to ask them for collaboration is an interesting way to create a portrait of that ecosystem, if you will.

Arina
Are you more interested in making pictures together with the community, or observing their life from the side?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
Traditionally, I've been more of an observer, going into a community, having conversations, and then making pictures based on those interactions. But now I'm interested in identifying how we can collaborate and bridging that gap between the camera and the person. It still exists, but I think that there is no conceptual difference: the person in front of the camera and the one behind it are both participating in the creation of the image. That would be the ideal outcome—if it's something the community finds helpful or interesting. It remains to be seen how it will work in practice, but I'm interested in this approach as an experiment against the traditional, top-down documentary style.

Vivian Reyes and her daughter Gladys Rivera posing in the room destroyed by Hurricane Maria while they were hiding there. Chris Gregory-Rivera, *Hurricane María*, 2017–2018.

Arina

How do you envision this project contributing to a shared vision of the future for El Caño? In what ways will you work to facilitate the community's connection to the land and to the future of this land?

Chris Gregory-Rivera

I see two main characters in this story: the land itself—El Caño, this body of water—and the people who inhabit it. My photographic approach will involve walking around, looking at the physical space, and documenting the work of the organization, as well as the personal stories of the people. My hope is to capture the psychological space and aspirations of the community, exploring how they see their future. From what I've discussed with the organization, a lot of what I want to photograph hasn't been documented before, so there's an opportunity to create a body of work or a small archive that hasn't existed until now. This project allows me to photograph everything and anything, and then see where there are opportunities for more participatory or imaginative collaborations.

Arina
Are there any visual or textual references or inspirations that are guiding your photographic approach?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
One influence is Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, a collaborator and friend who works with video, installation, and theater. She creates participatory plays, where the script and performance are developed by the people themselves, using the process as a therapeutic tool.

I find this approach intriguing, especially when considering how it might translate to photography. Historically, theater was often a way to process collective experiences, serving as a therapeutic reckoning after wars or significant events. Greek tragedies, for instance, weren't just stories of kings and queens—they were meant to help soldiers and communities process, grieve, and understand what had happened. Applying this concept to photography, I wonder what happens if the process of creating the photo becomes more important than the photo itself. Can we achieve a lasting impact through participation and creation, similar to what theater accomplishes? I'm not sure, and I recognize it's an ambitious goal, but it's something I'm exploring.

Reflecting on my previous project, *Las Carpetas*, I spent ten years photographing, only to realize that the perpetrators' photographs were more powerful in conveying the message I wanted to discuss—the system itself. This realization led me to be more rigorous in removing ego and authorship from my work, aiming for results that feel more organic and true to their origins. I think bringing that into the photograph as much as possible is an interesting challenge. Traditional documentary or photojournalistic photography often doesn't allow for that because of concerns about bias or control. But I'm not interested in creating a definitive narrative about a community I'm not part of. So the challenge here is: How do I involve the community members as much as possible in the image-making process, even if the image becomes something totally unmoored from reality? For example, if someone wants to be portrayed as a famous K-pop singer, let's create a stage and photograph them in that space. How does it feel to be represented this way? What is this imaginary that they have, and how can we document and express it as part of the psychological landscape of a place? I'm really interested in this alternative concept of landscape photography—what is the psychological landscape, the archival landscape? How do these elements create a topological map, a geography or atlas? These are concepts I often explore in my work, and I'm interested in bringing them into my exploration of El Caño, which coincidentally is also a physical space.

1. Woman after a protest at the University of Puerto Rico, 1980. Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan
2. The carpeta of Providencia Pupa Trabal, a cofounder of the Pro-Independence Movement. She had been surveilled round-the-clock and only found out when the files were declassified. Chris Gregory-Rivera, *Las Carpetas*, 2014–.

Arina

How do you perceive the role of hate and hatred in perpetuating this vulnerability in El Caño, or perhaps in Puerto Rico more broadly? This seems connected to the larger issue of Puerto Rico not being fully integrated into the United States, dealing with a colonized past, and needing to rethink and redevelop its future.

Chris Gregory-Rivera

I think that the whole panorama is central to my work. A lot of the ideas I've developed stem from rejecting the way Puerto Rico has traditionally been portrayed. For example, when the hurricane hit, I initially refused to go on assignment. Eventually, I took an assignment for The New Yorker because I felt it was worth it, but for a long time, I didn't see how I could make work that would contribute meaningfully. I didn't want to add to the narrative of showing people

suffering and being vulnerable without addressing the deeper systemic issues that create those environments.

Most people died after the hurricane, not during it, because the U.S. didn't provide robust systems of help. Puerto Rico doesn't have the same access to federal assistance, and the local government, being poorly administered, couldn't respond effectively. When I went down there, I decided to only take portraits, ensuring that everyone I photographed understood that their image was being taken with their consent. I wanted to present the people who were still there and tell their stories. That approach allowed me to start breaking down the traditional narrative.

Everything in Puerto Rico is conditioned by its colonial situation. Food is expensive, and many people are returning to the land, driven by a crushing economic reality and U.S. policies that crippled local agriculture. El Caño is a perfect example—controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because it's a waterway. Dealing with such issues means constantly facing limits on what can be done in terms of community and individual living in Puerto Rico.

I try to make work that, while visually interesting, focuses on visualizing the invisible churn of the colonial project. For example, I did a project for National Geographic that differed significantly from what I initially proposed. I wanted to explore the history and ask, "How do I photograph the genocide of the native population?" There hasn't been a native population in Puerto Rico for hundreds of years, so how do you capture that? Similarly, the surveillance program in Puerto Rico ended over 30 years ago, but I aimed to make it visible again to help people understand the current situation.

My work, especially *Las Carpetas*, isn't meant to provide definitive answers but rather to serve as a tool for deconstructing history. The book is essentially a surveillance manual with images of people being surveilled, as well as the police who were surveilling them. It's meant to show the system and help people understand the state's gaze toward them. Another example is how the government would strike deals with airlines to make airfare cheaper so that Puerto Ricans would leave the island, a deliberate colonial process to create cheap labor.

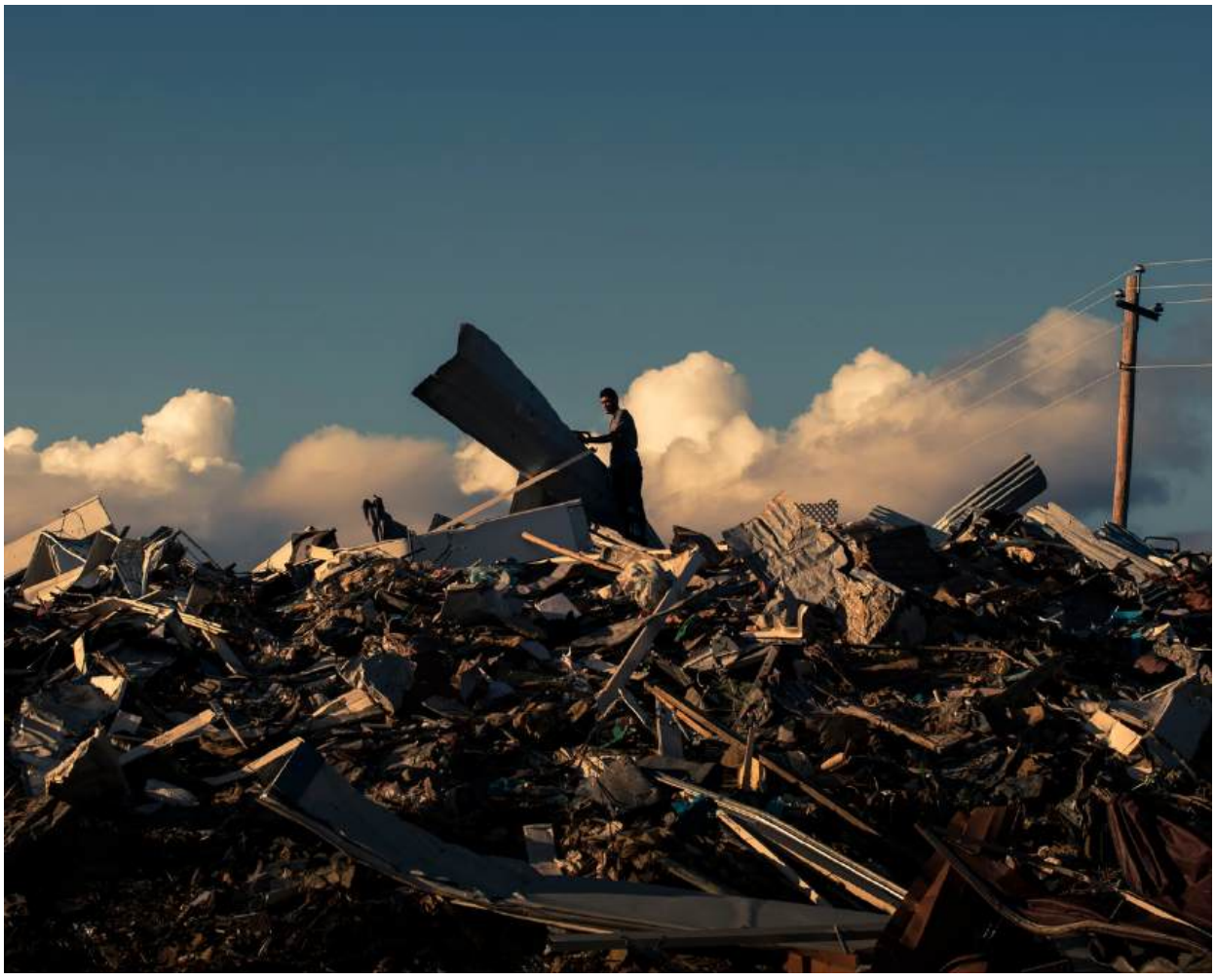
This project, like my others, looks at the relationship between the government and its people. How does the government view its people, and how can I provide tools for Puerto Ricans to understand their history and rethink it? For instance, when my book was reviewed in a local newspaper, someone commented that I was just a "communist writer" who wanted Puerto Rico to be like Cuba, where people spy on each other and create files. I had to ask, "Did you even read my book?" This literally happened in Puerto Rico, but there's such political blindness that prevents a frank conversation about how these processes really occur and who they affect.The government created an environment that was good for them, not for the people. That's something I try to highlight in my work.

Arina

It makes me think about how this mode of exploitation has shaped the current state of things and how it's integrated into people's lives and their self-perception. What you said earlier about not just taking pictures of destroyed houses and bodies after a hurricane reminds me of Susan Sontag's idea about the anesthetization of images, especially those depicting war and

destruction. Seeing too many graphic images can make people insensitive to the real suffering behind them. I'm reflecting on how important it is to translate not just the visible consequences of disasters, whether natural or man-made, but also the deeper, more vulnerable aspects of what people are going through and how you communicate that to others who may not have experienced it.

Chris Gregory-Rivera
I think that's key. From an archival standpoint, AP photographers are capturing the news, but I'm interested in creating something different—an alternative counter-history or counter-archive to those stories. The big, dramatic events are covered, but I want to create images that offer a different perspective, that highlight a different texture, or bring attention to something that might otherwise be overlooked.



Javier Cabrera inspects a temporary junkyard in Aibonito, Puerto Rico, after Hurricane María struck. Chris Gregory-Rivera, *Hurricane María*, 2017–2018.

Arina
Do you think there's systematic hatred in urban development, urban policies, or environmental restoration in Puerto Rico?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
It depends on how we define hate. Certainly, many people in Puerto Rico, who I would argue are part of the mainstream, are outside of the system. When we think of the mainstream, we think of centers of power—people who pay taxes, live in cities or near urban centers, work for companies, and are somewhat close to the government. But the people who control power have traditionally kept many others on the margins, constantly threatening their housing, well-being, or access to resources.

In El Caño and similar communities, people have often given up on relying on the government and have decided to take matters into their own hands. These community initiatives, like the movement to create solar panels in Puerto Rico, are often seen as a threat by the government. The government imposes taxes and regulations to disrupt these efforts, even though they're just communities trying to improve their situation.

El Caño is an example of a community that has managed to navigate this balance between government and self-sufficiency successfully. However, there are other communities and organizations that haven't been as successful and remain in a state of uncertainty because of these challenges.

Arina
I think neglect, discrimination, displacement, and even gentrification could be included as forms of hate and hatred toward a local community that struggles to survive.

Chris Gregory-Rivera
Exactly. That's why my book is called *The Government Hates You*. They passed a tax law allowing rich Americans to move to Puerto Rico and not pay taxes. Meanwhile, if you're Puerto Rican, it's much harder and more expensive to own a house here than it is for someone from outside. That's all you need to know. They keep letting these people off scot-free and have no intention of regulating Airbnbs or any businesses that threaten communities. It's as if they're envisioning a Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans. There's this discrimination or this view of progress as something inherently wealthy or American, however you want to define it.

But Puerto Rico is rich in initiatives and in what I would call tenacity—though "resilience" is a controversial word. This tenacity and response to the colonial project is really useful and interesting on a global level as a way to resist colonialism and create tools to counteract these issues. That's why I think El Caño is so special—it's one of these success stories.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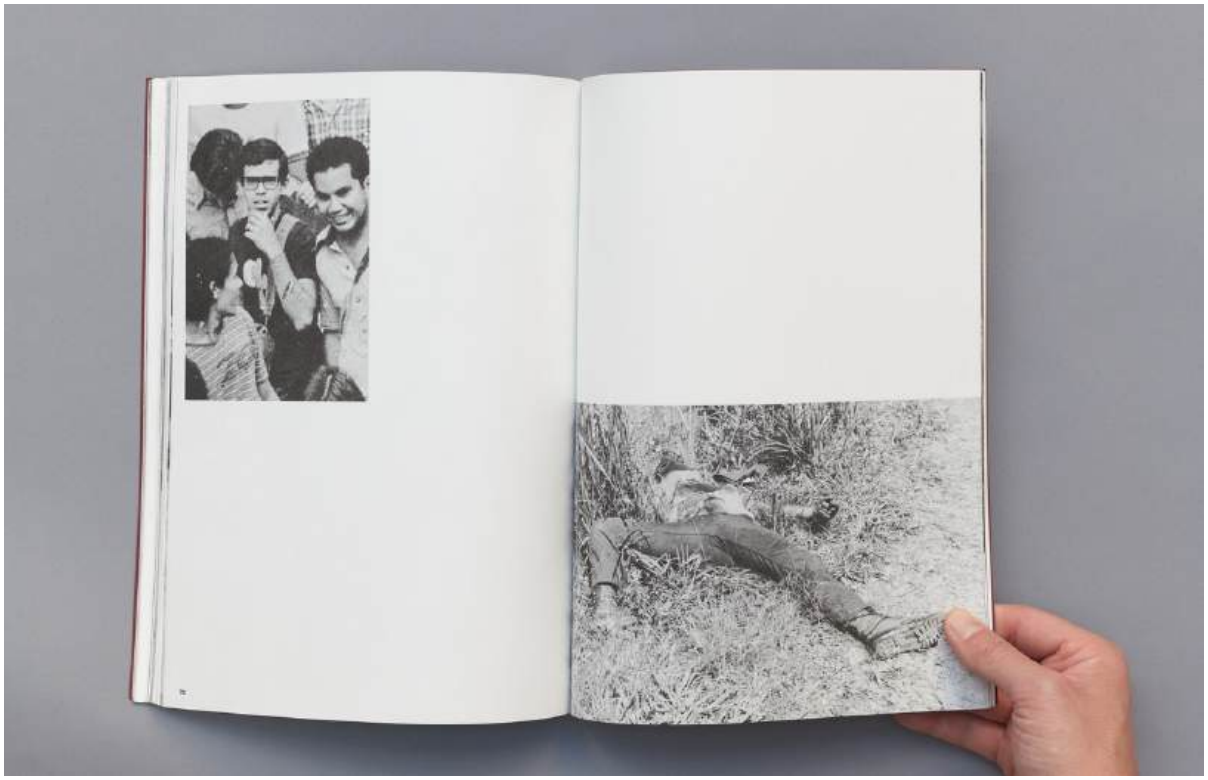

1. El Gobierno Te Odia [The Government Hates You] (Second Edition) by Chris Gregory-Rivera. “The book recontextualizes this largely forbidden and forgotten political history using the very receipts of its criminalization at a crucial time as Puerto Rico grapples with the suffocating effects of its colonial reality.” - Publisher
2. Book spread. Photo by Printed Matter, Inc.

Arina
How did the community's experience of neglect after hurricanes Irma and Maria affect their recovery process?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
It is a huge issue. The organization that responds to these hurricanes is FEMA, the federal government. The local government has some resources, but they’re limited. To receive FEMA assistance, you have to either own or rent your home, and your landlord has to apply on your behalf. But what happens if, 100 years ago, your relatives filled in a piece of swamp and built a house there? They don’t have a title, but they’ve been living there ever since. The federal government, because of its rules, couldn’t help these communities. For example, El Caño is unique because they have land leases, so there’s a way to prove ownership. But in many other communities, like Isani Ciudad, the recovery was incredibly slow or nonexistent because the government didn’t consider their housing legitimate. Despite having funds available, they couldn’t spend them because so many people had undocumented housing situations.

Arina
Do you think there's a balance between hate, hardship, resilience, and hope within El Caño or

Puerto Rico in general? How do you plan to capture these contrasting narratives in your photography?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
I don't think Puerto Rico would exist without communities of resistance. There are interconnected communities of resistance, and El Caño is a significant leader in that. For example, organizations like Apostal Bravo teach people how to grow their own food, and even the political projects, like the alternative third parties running for election now, are part of this resistance.

The more colonialism tries to suppress these efforts, the more resistance grows and becomes visible. The hurricane was a major moment when the veil of colonialism was lifted. People had to fend for themselves because neither the local nor the federal government was going to help them. That moment was incredibly powerful.

I've always been interested in these centers of resistance, whether through the independence movement or my projects. My focus is on highlighting these efforts and saying, "Look at this—this is a tool, something we can hold onto to fight against these challenges and create alternatives."

Arina
Are you directing your project more towards the people in the community, or towards those outside of it who you want to tell their story to?

Chris Gregory-Rivera
Ideally, it's for both. I want the project to be multifaceted—useful for the community, allowing them to see themselves represented, but also reaching an outside audience and saying, "Look, this is a way of living." I hope it can resonate within Puerto Rico and beyond. If I let the local community collaborate and create something they're interested in, my own curiosity and vision will help round out the project for other viewers as well.

I'm interested in creating something that's not only useful for the local community but also speaks to universal truths, like the struggle for political self-determination or the violation of privacy through surveillance. It's also about rescuing the history of political movements that were criminalized and never fully seen. So, with this project, I'm saying, "Look at this community." The community gets to see themselves represented, and then I can take that and show it to others, saying, "Pay attention to this—it's important." Hopefully, it becomes a tool for understanding your own communities and urban development, and a chance to learn from these successful community initiatives. Ultimately, the project is about the sense of belonging—where we belong and what we consider home. I believe that's a universal feeling, and that's the idea behind the project, hopefully.