



# Exhibits Newsline

Have you seen an interesting new exhibition lately – something that touched you, made you laugh, or moved you to action? Consider writing about it for Exhibits Newsline! Entries should be brief (300 words max), breezy (tell what made it so great), and include three to four high-res images.

For more information, email: [NAMENewsline@gmail.com](mailto:NAMENewsline@gmail.com).

INSTITUTION Arts + Industry Building, Smithsonian Institution

LOCATION Washington, DC

## The Unabashed Optimism of Smithsonian's *FUTURES*



MICHAELA WRIGHT

**Fig. 1.** Soo Sunny Park's sculpture *Expanded Present* welcomes and entices visitors into the Smithsonian's historic Arts + Industries Building. Closed to the public since 2004, the Smithsonian is reimagining the building as a national space for future thinking.



**Fig. 2.** The Rockwell Group design combines surreal pastel colors and unvarnished elements such as exposed wood and bolts referencing the building’s industrial, unfinished interior.

A sculptural cloud of green mirrored glass – a spectacular work by artist Soo Sunny Park – hangs weightlessly above the Smithsonian’s Arts + Industries Building entrance on the National Mall (fig. 1), luring visitors into the building’s new exhibition: *FUTURES*. Inside, the exhibition (fig. 2) explores different avenues of future-thinking through four thematic sections: “Futures Past,” “Futures That Inspire,” “Futures that Work,” and “Futures Unite.” I found “Futures that Work” most compelling, as it weaves together alluring large-scale tech prototypes (Virgin’s Hyperloop Train, fig. 3, and Hypergiant’s carbon-sequestering BioReactor) with meaningful grassroots projects (fig. 4), such as artist Beatriz Cortez’s Mayan-inspired space-time capsule for preserving ancestral indigenous seeds and environmental engineer Tega Brain’s coin-operated laundry that recycles water in and out of a wetland ecosystem. A spotlight on Porfirio Gutiérrez, a Zapotec textile artist working to preserve textile traditions in Oaxaca, Mexico, is a refreshing nod to futures not driven by tech.

Throughout, *FUTURES* imagines a world in which diverse individuals will work alongside global corporations, apparently on equal footing, to champion inclusive technology that creates equity and enriches human life. *FUTURES* unapologetically rejects the grim future narratives of the present, and instead asks what *could* be. Lab equipment on display from the Baltimore Underground Science Space, a “biohacking” lab that produces affordable insulin for those who can’t afford the commercially produced stuff, does not purport to be a solution to the healthcare crisis. Instead, it is a testament to the possibilities of community collaboration.

Quippy quotes about the future from famous figures like novelist Toni Morrison, singer-songwriter Dolly Parton, and the fictional Doc Brown from the 1985 film *Back to the Future*, printed on walls throughout, ground the exhibition with a bit of lightheartedness. I retain my skepticism for the future but am convinced on one account: where else but a museum might we be so thoughtfully reminded that



**Fig. 3.** The Virgin Hyperloop, with the right infrastructure, has the potential to transport people from New York to Washington, DC in only 30 minutes – a tantalizing prospect. However, the question of who will have access to use this technology, and its costs, goes unspoken.

the future *could be* compassionate, thrilling, and perhaps even fun?

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**Michaela Wright, Interpretive Specialist, New York Botanical Garden**



**Fig. 4.** The exhibition features both large-scale tech prototypes and smaller art objects like these posters of Caesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, renowned labor leaders and activists. Set against the exhibition’s delightfully luminous set pieces, these posters advocate the importance of activism and community organizing in demanding a better future.

INSTITUTION Museo de las Américas

LOCATION Old San Juan, Puerto Rico

## Visiting Puerto Rico, Martorell's Exhibition Grounds



ALL PHOTOS BY LORIE CAVAL

**Fig. 1.** *Retratos pandémicos* (Pandemic Portraits) – *Retrato de Alejandra* (Portrait of Alejandra), 2020. In the aftermath of hurricanes, earthquakes, and throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, the artist turned to email, texts, and cellphone photos to capture the people who he couldn't see in person, creating an “illusion of company” during an isolated time.

In October 2021, I visited *Entretelas: Antonio Martorell y sus amigos* (*Interfaces: Antonio Martorell and His Friends*) created by artist Antonio Martorell and collaborators during the forced isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Raised in his father's woodworking store and his mother's dry goods store, much of Martorell's work draws on wood and fabric to create pieces that touch on many of the issues affecting Puerto Rico and its communities. It reaches for a “state of grace” and recovery after four years of tragedies – political, environmental, geological, and viral, from Hurricane Maria to a swarm of earthquakes to the onset of COVID.

One meaning of the word *entretelas* is ins and outs, and the location and design of the show reflect this sense of juxtaposition. Ironically, the landmark, 19th-century military barracks in Old San Juan that house the exhibition were still under repair from Hurricane Maria damage, unintentionally (but evocatively) reflecting the exhibition's themes of the intersections of socio-political history, climate change, and their ongoing effects on communities, friends, and families. In the first gallery, walls painted mustard yellow created the perfect dramatic backdrop for *Entretelas*

(Interfaces), a series of large portraits of family members and historical figures painted onto heavy tapestries. Generously spaced, these portraits could easily be taken in individually.

Next, the walls changed to dark blue and the paintings on tapestries chronicled the account of the first Puerto Rican tried for murder by a military court in *ONCE tesis sobre un crimen de 1899* (ELEVEN Theses on a Crime of 1899). Primarily black and white, the portraits were accompanied by elegantly hand-painted descriptions. This simple but powerful technique created a graceful presentation that was in tension with the question of justice around the trial. Then, in the following galleries, small installations and assemblages led

up to more tapestry paintings hung on vibrantly painted walls, including *Retratos pandémicos* (Pandemic Portraits) (fig. 1).

Last were Martorell's installation of colorful hanging fibers in *El muro mortal* (The Mortal Wall). Visitors could walk through the fibers (fig. 2), which were actually funeral wreath ribbons. Both artwork and immersive exhibition element, this viscerally confronted me with the devastation of recent years, and prompted me to remember the friends, family, and community members who have been lost. At the very end, found wood and fallen tree branches from Hurricane Maria's devastation keep company with silhouetted portraits (fig. 3), in a piece titled *El árbol geneológico/Camafeos* (Family

Tree/Cameos). From the artist's work, to the exhibition site, to the choreography of the show, *Entretelas* movingly lives up to its name.

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**Lorie Caval**, New York City-based artist, writer, arts advocate, administrator, and blogger about the Puerto Rican diaspora (*Travesía Artística*)



**Fig. 2.** *El muro mortal* (The Mortal Wall), 2020. A colorful curtain of funeral wreath ribbons invites viewers in to read messages written on gold glitter and walk through to the final section of the exhibition. This permeable wall responded not just to people lost but to the U.S. border walls and calls for exclusion of immigrants during COVID-19.



**Fig. 3.** *El árbol geneológico/Camafeos* (Family Tree/Cameos), 2017–21. In the last gallery, painted tree branches collected in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria frame a wall of cameo portraits. These black silhouettes on wooden disks refer to family – personal, chosen, and global – who are struggling through so many adversities.

INSTITUTION Lisson Gallery

LOCATION New York City, New York

## A Trinity of Rooms Uninterrupted



IMAGES COURTESY OF LISSON GALLERY © HUGH HAYDEN

**Fig. 1.** *Good Hair I*, 2021, installation photo. Part of a body of work made from wood and industrial bristles, this particular installation of found oak church pews simultaneously entices and rejects the viewer in this church-like space.

*Hugh Hayden: Huey* opens with a pew-lined sanctuary framing chapel-like archways ([fig. 1](#)): a stark juxtaposition to the large, modern glass doors I walked through to enter the Lisson Gallery, located in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. The drama of the scene was not interrupted by any object labels; a sign at the entrance

directed me to download an object list through a QR code. Closer to the installation, I noticed intensely red nylon bristles lining each pew seat – a surrealist fusion of concept and materials that continues throughout the exhibition.

Walking into the next gallery through the first archway, I felt a difference

in mood as the space opened up into a large, sparsely-adorned room. Six captivating and towering basketball hoops hung, one on each wall ([fig. 2](#)). Without any indication of titles or medium, each handwoven piece invites the viewer to closely examine the intricate details and variety of materials before referencing the object list.

From *Rapunzel*, a cascading basket fashioned from synthetic hair extensions that grazed the floor, to *Cinderella*, made of rattan and gnarled greenbrier vine, I was struck by the importance of material and identity, and the tension between athleticism, masculinity, and domesticity.

Whereas the first two galleries were airy and stark white, the final room is an enclosed space with black painted walls lit only by the dappling daylight from a single skylight. Sculptures made from Gabon and Texas ebony, including a Lincoln Logs house and a modified flax wheel, directly reference the history of slavery and urge quiet contemplation as the objects shift in and out of the light (fig. 3).

The decision to create three different, highly evocative spaces for Hugh Hayden’s sculptures – pieces which explore both the American experience and the tensions of conformity – made the experience feel like an immersive journey into the artist’s visceral, Gothic fairytale world. Uninterrupted by labels that would have told me what to see, it was a powerful invitation to directly confront Hayden’s representations of Black identity, cultural and gender expectations, and his own life experiences.

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**Greta Metz Rymar**, Exhibitions and Collections Coordinator, Demuth Foundation, Lancaster, Pennsylvania



**Fig. 2.** *Rapunzel and Cinderella*, 2021, installation photo. These handwoven pieces that recall one of the most recognizable objects in sports hang alone on individual walls in a large gallery, inviting the viewer to confront each piece on its own.



**Fig. 3.** The dim light and the dark gallery encourage visitors to examine these dark ebony wood sculptures closely.