

commemoration. Olivier's sculptures mobilize what the black feminist geographer Katherine McKittrick terms "plantation pasts and futures," nonlinear temporal flows acknowledging that our present is grounded in innumerable histories of global exploitation and dehumanization. The first work on view that attends to such subjugated narratives is *Fortified*, 2017–20, a brick wall that bisects the room. On the front, bits of clothing peek through the bricks—a mortar of plaid boxers, tie-dyed tank tops, and novelty T-shirts. On its verso, the brick wall begins to lose its semblance of solidity, forming a ceiling-to-floor waterfall of quotidian fabrics. Despite the work's commanding scale, it reads as recalcitrant. Is it meant to honor refugees across time and space, the clothing a surrogate for all the bodies violently refused and constrained by walls? This border facilitates mobile contemplation over immobilizing constraints and is notably porous, suggesting a promise to dissolve distinctions between privileged centers and disenfranchised peripheries.

Car Cover and Export Shoes, 2018, similarly undercuts monumentality's tendency to manifest as a material and reverential gestalt. This precarious assemblage is constructed of used shoes arranged to overflow a gray Audi car cover. The idea for the work struck Olivier after a trip to Dakar, Senegal, where she came across a market for second-hand shoes exported from America. Tracing the scene's disparate geographies, she endeavored to underscore the visible relationships to global wealth, encapsulated here by the used shoe, a symbol of Western charity, and the automobile, a luxury possession in the "developing world"—both items often produced in that region. Together, the two goods point to a collision of capitalist impoverishment and excess. Yet a glimpse of this inaccessible profusion of shoes did not overtly explain or critique the conditions that engendered this geopolitical divide.

Olivier's engagement with postcolonial legacies is most explicit in *Moving the Obelisk*, 2019–20. Produced during her recent fellowship at the American Academy in Rome, the work refers to the divine ancient Egyptian commemorative pillars she would have encountered as plundered artifacts in the Italian city. Unlike the traditional form, Olivier's sculpture counts dirt and cardboard among its materials; it has only the *look* of lapidary permanence. The dirt, poet Trapeta Mayson explains in an accompanying video, stands in for memory and place. As the video progresses, Mayson narrates the work's fabrication and transportation across the Atlantic, from the artist's studio in Rome to the ICA, against a long shot of the open ocean. She suggests that the obelisk's transatlantic journey—understood as an African symbol's transportation to the new world—could imbue the object with the capacity to memorialize African diasporic experiences during the Middle Passage. Speaking over footage of the work's reinstallation in Philadelphia, Mayson expands on the significance of the work's mutability, its spatial transience, narrative ambiguity, and material impermanence. "The past, or more accurately pastness, is a position." The phrase supplies a fitting beginning, in the guise of a conclusion, for an exhibition that hinges on the politics of time and space across scales, from that of the obelisk to that of the carnation.

—C.C. McKee

CHICAGO

Candida Alvarez

MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY

When Candida Alvarez unveiled her monumental public work *Howlings—Soft Paintings* in August 2017 as a part of Chicago's Year of Public Art, the tropical storm that would become Hurricane Maria had

not yet coalesced over the Atlantic Ocean. Alvarez, who was born in Brooklyn to Puerto Rican parents in 1955 and moved to the Windy City in 1998, had recently celebrated a major exhibition, "Here," at the Chicago Cultural Center, and the display of her latex-on-PVC mural on the banks of the Chicago River represented a high point in her long-running efforts to make abstract painting relevant for a wide audience. Yet by late September Hurricane Maria had struck Puerto Rico with catastrophic force. When the US government reneged on its responsibility to provide comprehensive disaster relief, many Puerto Ricans took matters into their own hands. People's assemblies, formed in the spirit of *autogestión*, or self-management, provided social services that the government had forgone. At the same time, Alvarez, working in Chicago and waiting to hear this exhibition's titular phrase—*estoy bien* (I'm fine)—from her relatives on the archipelago, continued to model a painting practice of insistent mutability, one that echoed both seasonal cycles and the drastic shifts brought about by climate change and showed her carrying on with her commitment to painting in multiple visual idioms. Between late 2017 and summer 2019, Alvarez transformed some of the proofs for *Howlings—Soft Paintings* into the seven large double-sided paintings presented in "Estoy Bien," her overdue first solo commercial gallery show in Chicago.

Each piece, made of a PVC-mesh material more often used for awnings, construction scaffolds, or fencing, was suspended from a free-standing aluminum frame and set in the middle of the gallery floor. Printed directly onto the mesh were collages of digitally manipulated pictures from Alvarez's decades-long studio practice. She further modified the prints by adding latex ink, glitter, and acrylic and enamel paints to the surface, producing enthralling fields of painterly gestures. On one side of *Here to There, from Air Paintings* (2017–2019), 2018, a thickly poured slab of an alizarin crimson hue streaked with blacks, grays, and whites abuts a field of yellow chevrons and a bright blue blur. On the reverse, most aspects from the front are recognizable, but purples, pinks, and other small surprises divulge the many worked layers that underlie the final composition. In *Jellow, from Air Paintings* (2017–2019), 2018, a black-and-yellow passage evokes camouflage, a recurring formal device for Alvarez, as much as aerial photographs of an island archipelago. In this work especially—though it holds true for all—the translucent support allowed viewers to simultaneously see the works that stood behind it; distant compositions became shifting, ghostly grounds for the one before the viewer.

Alvarez has long contested the false binary of figuration and abstraction, and her work rebuffs the institutional tendency to recognize female artists of color only if their work legibly connects to their biographies. Alvarez asserts her right to paint as she wishes, constantly experimenting with a wide range of visual vocabularies. "I've begun to see that it's not just one self," the artist says in an interview included in *Candida Alvarez: Here. A Visual Reader*, an important resource



View of "Candida Alvarez," 2020. Foreground: *Jellow, from Air Paintings* (2017–2019), 2018.