

SHANE TOMALINAS

Statement

La Marca del Vejigante explores the cultural oppression of the Puerto Rican community by celebration of identity and tradition. Colonial influence has stripped away aspects of Boricua culture, pressuring a sense of conformity. The coins act as a symbol of preservation and resistance, as personified by the Vejigante, the festival demon of Puerto Rico used to ward off evil. His mark and image left in the coin serve as a way of safeguarding the island's heritage against outside influences.

I was honored to have been selected for "More Than Touch, a Connection". The emphasis of touch as the primary sense in this exhibition was an exciting opportunity to explore the work in more than just a visual experience, allowing for the audience to engage with the texture and symbols present for something much more meaningful. That interaction of holding and feeling the coins further pushes the theme of cultural preservation through a shared, connected experience. This

work became a journey of self-discovery in exploring parts of a culture that I had little to no exposure to. The artists, the festival life, but most importantly, the political neglect of Puerto Rico as a US territory all became very apparent. It completely changed the trajectory of my work within the last two years, pushing me to look at how far the voice of the Puerto Rican community has been suppressed within just the last decade.