



WAVE HILL HOUSE

April 20–August 4, 2024

RUBEN NATAL-SAN MIGUEL

Nature Finds a Way

RUBEN NATAL-SAN MIGUEL

Lives and works in New York, NY

It All Comes Out in the Wash (Nykki), 2019, East Harlem, NYC

Friday, September 20, 2019. 5:27 PM. 79 Degrees

Dye sublimation on aluminum photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Since the cataclysmic events of September 11, 2001, Ruben Natal-San Miguel has committed his photographic lens to the resilience of cultural identity and human connection in the dense urban environment of New York City. The exhibition *Nature Finds a Way* brings together portraits, with a particular focus on the Bronx, showcasing individuals in both real and synthetic nature. Here, tropical murals, artificial plants and floral prints also find a way to be seen, bringing a semblance of the natural environment into the picture. Through these images, Natal-San Miguel challenges aesthetic and cultural norms by foregrounding the diverse tapestry of urban life, and how city dwellers both seek and are affected by nature in their lives.

A former architect and an unabashed people person, Natal-San Miguel conveys stories from the streets and in public spaces through direct encounters, thoughtful composition, sensitivity to detail, and dye sublimation printing, which amplifies the boldness of his images. Through heavy contours, vibrant colors, sharp contrasts, and a stark focus on the messaging of attitude, tattoos, and accessories, he memorializes individual expression—an increasingly radical presence in a rapidly changing city.

In the face of rampant development, gentrification, a sharp right turn in politics, and a surge in legislation and policies that stifle freedom of expression and body autonomy, Natal-San Miguel's work challenges assumptions about what is "natural" and honors the bodies we inhabit, particularly those of Queer, Trans, and creative subcultures. His often quirky titles subtly critique Eurocentric art history and riff on popular culture, while also recording the place, date, time and temperature. His expansive body of self-described "environmental photography" serves as an archival time capsule of a city's life and the transformative force held by many of the people who call NYC home.

Natal-San Miguel's photographs are in the permanent collections of esteemed institutions including El Museo del Barrio, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Studio Museum in Harlem, School of Visual Arts, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, Museum of the City of New York, The Center for Photography at Woodstock and Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, all in NY; The Contemporary Collection of the Mint Museum in Charlotte and North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, NC.; Fitchburg Museum of Art, Provincetown Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston and Griffin Museum of Photography, MA, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Krizenga Art Museum at Hope College, MI, and Newark Museum of Art, NJ.

PUBLIC PROGRAM: SAT, AUG 3, 1:30 – 4:30 PM, Portrait Photo Session with the artist on the grounds of Wave Hill. Rain date: Sun, Aug 4, 1:30 – 4:30 PM.

Ruben Natal-San Miguel: Nature Finds a Way is organized by Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, Curator of Visual Arts, with Gabriel de Guzman, Director of Arts and Chief Curator, and Afriti Bankwalla, Curatorial Administrative Assistant.

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#wavehill #rubennatalsanmiguel

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