

# Jennifer Méndez Alba

## What Grounds Me(an)

Memories are strongly linked to places, and homes represent a refuge for most. I've spent part of every year in the Dominican Republic. My family home there has served as a protective and peaceful place set apart from where I grew up in the United States. Although my time in Santo Domingo was spent with family, I was always a visitor and could distinctly note changes in the air after months away from the architecture, smells, language, and traditions.

This installation reproduces Dominican design and crafts in the hope of capturing their essence before they fade from the modernizing urban landscape of Santo Domingo. I present a piece of home as a shelter for daydreaming and as a space for connecting with others.

Reduction of detail is an expected outcome when recalling a space. This installation is housed in a welded frame in the shape of a generic home—a pitched roof and square frame. Hanging from the frame like walls are merely unbleached muslin panels. Direct acetone transfers of Dominican paintings adorn these panels. The 64 square feet of flooring is comprised of 144 laminated risograph prints, which mimic cement tile designs common in the Dominican Republic and other Spanish-influenced, Afro-Caribbean countries. Three handwoven, recycled-fiber rush seats humbly furnish the space.

In reproducing traditional crafts and materials I opted for environmentally conscious methods that reduced the material costs. The paintings and floor patterns were designed digitally from archival references and recreated one layer of color at a time, and the rush seats were created following traditional practices, although with recycled consumer material. The welded framework and space was directly taken from historical references of the pre-Colombian natives, the Taino, or “good people,” whom Columbus met. In recreating these tokens of a specific culture and place I sought to understand their historical underpinnings.

The idea of home is pivotal in formulating identity as it offers those who migrate, beyond invisible borders, a sense of belonging and cultural grounding. Home can mean more than literal ground; it can be an attitude or an aesthetic (there instilled) that makes you who you are no matter where you are. A home can connect you to other times and different people.