

## Review: Carlos Rolon's Puerto Rico and New Orleans

The artist presents *Carlos Rolon: Outside/In at NOMA*

By D. Eric Bookhardt



**Where did cities come from?** They seem to have happened as travelers at crossroads began trading what they had for what they needed. Some stuck around, and one thing led to another. That process has been infinitely repeated, especially in places with active street life such as Latin America, the Caribbean and New Orleans. When Carlos Rolon's parents moved from Puerto Rico to Chicago, their living room became his mother's nail salon while his father taught boxing in the basement. Later, in his travels as a widely exhibited artist, Rolon noticed how much New Orleans reminded him of Puerto Rico, and this *Outside/In* mixed-media installation at the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) explores what they have in common, from tropical plants and architecture to the enduring tradition of street vendors. His *Nomadic Habitat – Hustleman* (pictured) is a kind of 21st-century pushcart outfitted with life's essentials: trays of street food, sunglasses, salsa and hip-hop CDs, memorial portraits of Prince, customizable ID cards, you name it. Designed to be interactive, it features ongoing contributions from local arts and community activists and hosts tarot card readers and others. Visit NOMA's web site for details.

Much of the show reminded me of the way the families of the Cuban refugee kids with whom I grew up with turned living spaces and backyard cabanas into mini-Havanas with touches like ornate iron lattices and hanging baskets of flowers. Rolon also uses the decorative ironwork found on windows and doors in New Orleans and the Caribbean to frame mirrors so our reflections appear as time travelers traversing portals into the vestigial visual legacy of Spanish colonialism. A swirling

vortex of crescent-shaped mirrors also comprises a powerful wall sculpture, *Maria*, named after the hurricane that devastated Puerto Rico like an even more apocalyptic version of Hurricane Katrina. Here again, mirrors bring us into the picture, reminding us that climate change is what we inflicted on ourselves by choosing dollars over the health and well-being of the world that sustains us. Throughout this show, Rolon's mirrors allow us to see the true nature of "otherness" quite clearly and realize that it is us. *Through Aug. 26. New Orleans Museum of Art, 1 Collins C. Diboll Circle, (504) 658-4100; [www.noma.org](http://www.noma.org).*