



## MEMORIES OF THE VETERAN

Nick Quijano Torres (b. 1953)

Old San Juan, Puerto Rico; 1984

Lacquered gouache on paper; 12 ¼ × 12 ¼"

Gift of Dorothy and Leo Rabkin, 1984.2.1

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mixing of patterns and the blending of cultures come together in this domestic scene illustrating Nick Quijano Torres's personal experience of Puerto Rico. The rhythm and sensuality of Torres's homeland—diverse, vibrant, and creolized—is illuminated in this small, innocent rendering of a family portrait. Painted with gouache, it shows the artist's grandmother sitting in between the artist as a young boy and his sister. Above them and looking down over them is a symbolic rendering of Uncle Juan, an army veteran. The three sitters look out at the viewer from a highly baroque decorated interior.

Torres aims in his artwork to depict the story of the mixed-race culture of Puerto Rico. Inspired to do this after seeing a Puerto Rican art exhibition that expressly celebrated, in his words, “high society, the Anglo experience,” Torres decided to “paint what he knew” and what was not typically portrayed in works at other art venues. The confluence of cultures is echoed in the interaction of designs; flowery wallpaper, a patterned carpet, and a doily-rich couch seem to symbolize the interface between cultures.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Lippard, Lucy. *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.

Martinez, Elizabeth (Betita). “Looking for Color in the Anti-War Movement.” *Z Magazine* (November 2003): [www.zmag.org/ZMagSite/Nov2003/martinez1103.html](http://www.zmag.org/ZMagSite/Nov2003/martinez1103.html).

Sinaiko, Eve. *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with National Vietnam Veteran's Art Museum, 1998.

# HOME LEAVE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on in this picture?
- What can we say about the figures?
- What can we say about the family dynamics in this painting?
- What can we say about this time and place?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- How would you characterize the mood of the painting? What do you see that suggests this mood?
- The artist Nick Quijano Torres sought to depict the multicultural aspect of Puerto Rico in this painting. How does he communicate a blending of American and Caribbean cultures?
- Torres has discussed his desire to paint themes with which he is intimately familiar. In this painting, one of his subjects is Puerto Rico, the artist's homeland. What does he reveal about his social class, value systems, and cultural background in this painting?
- This painting is a self-portrait of the artist, who sits on the sofa with his sister and grandmother. How does the artist address ideas of presence and absence?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What is the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States?
- How do different cultures memorialize absent loved ones?
- In what wars has the United States participated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? How have Puerto Rican citizens been affected by these wars?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create their own family portraits, depicting each individual holding an object that reveals an aspect of his or her personality. Ask students to present their works to the class, illuminating the significance behind each object. How do the objects give us insight into these individuals and their family as a unit?
- Ask students to interview a family member or close friend about a time that a loved one was absent. How do families cope with separation?
- Have students contact a local veterans' association to ask about support systems for veterans and their families. How does military service affect those serving? How does it affect their families?