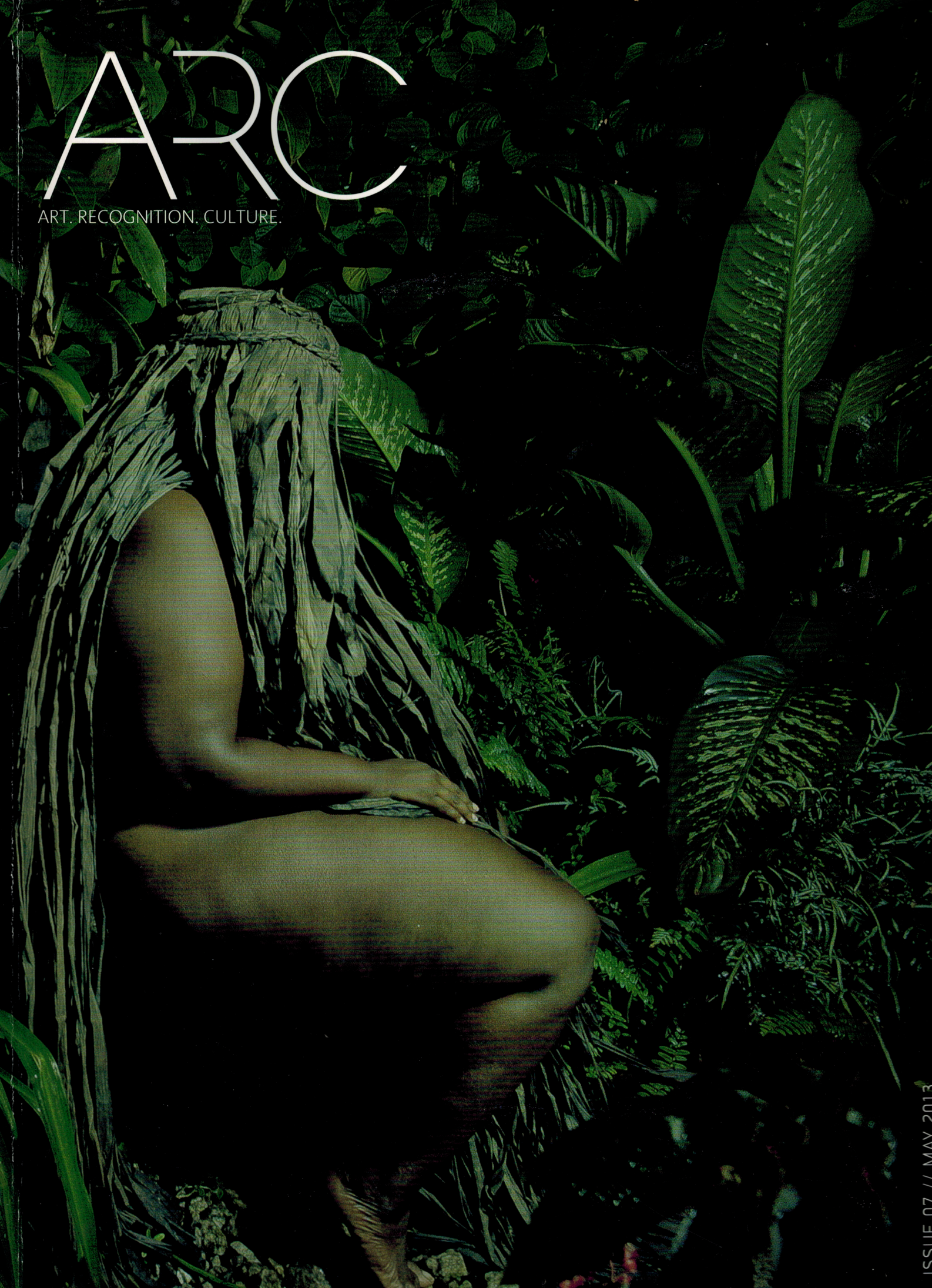


# ARC

ART. RECOGNITION. CULTURE.



---

# Navigating the Rhizomatic Archive: Temporal Leaps and Loops in Nayda Collazo-Llorens' Recent Works

By Virginia Allison Harbin

---

Visual artist Nayda Collazo-Llorens' work explores the intricacies of memory, time and information through drawings, prints, video projections and installations. Of particular importance is the theme of networks, and the noise and detritus one experiences through the expansive system of cyber-networks on a daily basis. In an interview with Kathleen McQueen, Collazo-Llorens defines 'detritus' not as "waste or trash, but as leftovers and scraps of information, be it visual or textual." This excess data is part of her conception of a collective 'rhizomatic' archive that is a collection not of hierarchical information, but rather an experiential archive of the everyday. Her work destabilizes our notion of linear time and exposes our mental processing of everyday events as anything but straightforward. In her works, the present tense collides and expands the past and mapping does not simplify our reality, but rather complicates and challenges it. In pieces such as *Unfolding the Triangle*, geographical maps become metaphysical ones that allude to the mingling of fact, fiction, myth and rumour. Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Collazo-Llorens received her MFA from New York University and is a 2012 recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Her work has been reviewed in the *New York Times*, *Art Net*, *Art U.S.*, *Art Nexus* and *Art News*.

**Virginia Allison Harbin:** Many of your works, such as *Unfolding the Triangle*, involve a mapping of what you term 'psychological territory' as well as physical movements through space. Can you tell us a little more about the narratives of movement that appear in your creative pieces?

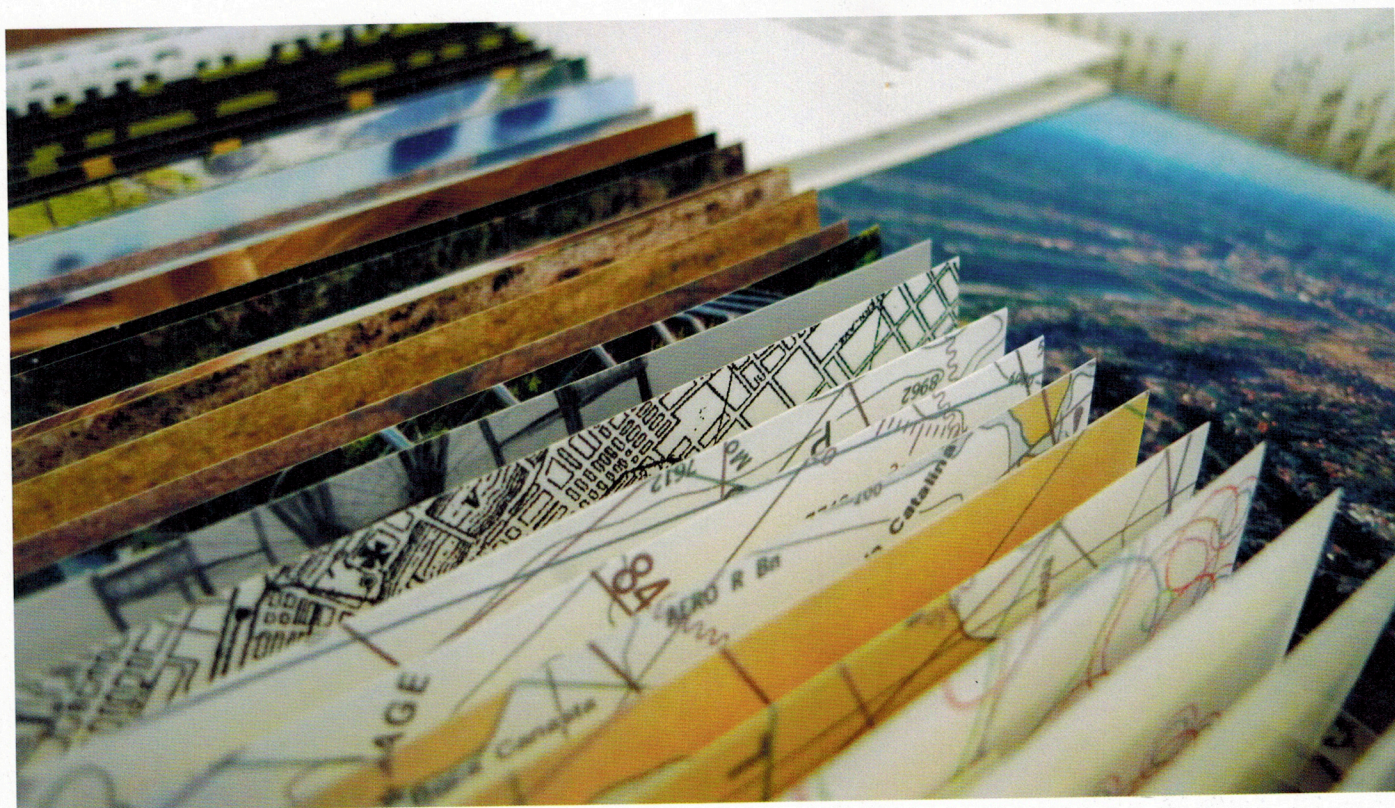
**Nayda Collazo-Llorens:** My work deals with navigation, whether it is optical, mental or physical; often all three are at play. In installations such as *Unfolding the Triangle*, the large expansive map that takes over the space functions as a structural device to be navigated not as an actual site but as a space of dislocation through a free-flowing connection of photos, diagrams, non-objective drawings and textual information. As in other works, multiple and often disjointed narratives range from factual data to personal ramblings dealing with location, memory and storytelling. The mapping structure allows for a physical navigation while simultaneously leading us through a mental one. I'm not interested in a linear narrative because ultimately the mind doesn't work that way. You don't construct your memories and identity linearly. For example, memories of the past are triggered by present events, causing you to jump backwards in

time and then forward into the present. Linear narratives have very little place in how we perceive the world.

**VAH:** Your conception of memory, of leaping between past and present, has a wonderful parallel with your work on the overabundance of information that we are bombarded with through the internet and mass media. We experience the same data over and over during the day, which is similar to repetitive thoughts and memories.

**NCL:** Our mind is in constant flux, whether from thoughts and memories, the physical world, or everything that comes through our digital devices, constantly pushing information. This hyper-connectivity is too much, but fascinating. My most recent exhibition, *An Exercise in Numbness & Other Tales*, dealt with the paradox that we're so ultra connected at so many levels that we have to distance ourselves emotionally as a way to cope with it. That would explain how we can deal with so much tragic or violent news and images in media while continuing with our everyday life. We are excited by the constant flow of information and communication but it takes a toll – we live a highly fragmented and dissociated life. My parents' generation used to think in a more personal mode of exchange. I'm curious about how we've evolved – is it to our benefit or demise? I'm not critiquing technology nor supporting it; rather, exploring the contemporary reality it has produced.

One of the works in that exhibition is *Comfortably Numb*, an archive of over 1,500 framed images collected from printed matter such as magazines and newspapers. As we move or 'scan' through the grid of randomly placed images and texts, we encounter areas that are violent, poetic, trivial or even out of focus, as if our vision were impaired or the images were disintegrating. This archive functions as detritus or bits of data, which confronts us as much as invites navigation. It talks about media overload and the way in which we are able to process information, the multiple layers and hyperlinks that move us in countless directions with no one focal point. I decided to use collected printed matter in this work for two reasons: the visual richness in terms of its printing, imagery and colour saturation – particularly when using magazines – which speaks of media manipulation, but also because it points to this specific historical period, the images we are still seeing on paper before all publishing goes digital.



Nayda Collazo Llorens. *Unfolding the Triangle*, archived material (mixed media on paper), variable dimensions, 2009.

**VAH:** I love your characterization of the 'rhizomatic archive', which suggests an archive not based on linear time, but rather a far-reaching collection of information that spreads out horizontally through connections, or roots. I am especially fascinated by three drawings titled *Archive 79-01*, *Archive 79-03* and *Archive 79-02*, respectively.

**NCL:** Those drawings are related to the 'Numbered' series; I began working on them in 2003. They were all given a serial number, but it was never my intention to have them viewed as a sequence. They're deliberately out of order and they are never exhibited all together. They do not exist as a single archive in the same space. It is an archive that scatters across disparate materials with no regard to linear or hierarchical time.

This also applies to how I work with found texts, which I've been working with for the past few years. The more research I do, the more I find that I'm not interested in linearity; I'm more interested in how a sentence or word can trigger other connections. Such is the case with my series 'Random Triggers', exhibited in *Across Doom Hopes the Guiding Fever*, my recent show at LMAKprojects in New York in 2012. Those works deal with randomness even in the way text is generated. I'm interested in the different meanings and interpretations that could surface from these poem-like works.

In terms of video, for the past few years I have been producing multichannel installations with many loops and layers, such as *Reverb*. That was a site-specific video installation dealing with the architecture and history of the building that houses the Museo Universitario del Chopo in Mexico City. It was part of a larger exhibition in 2012 titled *Medios y Ambientes*, curated by Tatiana Flores and Laura Roulet. In this work, as in others, the idea of the loop is taken further by the fact that there are

My work deals with navigation, whether it is optical, mental or physical; often all three are at play.

multiple video loops of different lengths that are engaged by the installation's video feedback. This effect repeats the video images exponentially and infinitely. I'm interested in the way these repetitions layer and decay with every loop, to the point of being un-viewable/unreadable.

**VAH:** Can you tell us more about your two-channel video projection and installation about code-switching titled *Channels V4/Canales V5* from 2004?

**NCL:** Yes. In linguistics, code-switching refers to the switching between two or more languages in the same sentence. My process of writing text for that video work involved a stream of consciousness approach. I was paying close attention to interferences, anything that interrupted my thought, whether internal or external. When writing for an Anglophone audience there are many internal interferences that would appear in Spanish. That made me interested in seeing what that was about, how was that switch triggered? Was it emotional? I have continued to push that further in other works, as is the case with *ESCaperucita & Little Flying Hood*, where code-switching really becomes a constant, like a dance in a way, a dialogue within itself.

**VAH:** There seems to be an intimate trigger that causes the transition – that I have witnessed – usually in personal conversations where bilingual speakers transition into another language.

**NCL:** That's certainly what I noticed, and the opposite happened when I was writing in Spanish. Some of my video works, including *Channels V4/Canales V5*, have an English and a Spanish version, because they were exhibited in both contexts. In the Spanish version the words or phrases that appear in English would be those related to the 'system', a lot of found texts such as computer messages and errors.

In the case of Puerto Rico, code-switching becomes a hybrid language, like Spanglish, which we use in the diaspora as well as on the island. Some of the words we use don't formally exist. I've always found that our use of those hybrid words is an example of creativity, but also a tool of resistance – a contemporary hybrid language that is neither the Spanish of our first colonizers nor the English of our second.

I'm also interested in the hybrid language of texting or chatting, which often becomes post-alphabetic. That's when letters and punctuation marks are used in a graphic or visual way to suggest something other than its language-based meaning. *ESCaperucita & Little Flying Hood* was produced for the Havana Biennial in 2009. At that time, though limited, Cubans had some access to online chatting and texting through cell phones. The limitations in terms of the amount of characters used when texting, if you are paying for each text, or the limited amount of online time when chatting triggered a very creative use of language through the use of symbols, abbreviations, shortcuts, etc. That is inherent to those types of communications, and it's a worldwide phenomena. In the case of Cuba, these hybrids have the potential of not being perceived by a word recognition programme. That makes me think of coding and its relationship to noise, fragmentation and layering, something that I use often in my works.

**VAH:** What's your relationship to mapping in your works?

**NCL:** I think the concept of mapping exists in all of my works, such as the 'Unfolding the Triangle' series. Earlier you mentioned the drawings *Archive 79-01*, *Archive 79-03* and *Archive 79-02* – those are based on data from the National Hurricane Center's archives from the '70s. My drawings are the most intimate of all of my works; they are less edited and more intuitive, whether working with the hurricane archives in creating new maps, or scribbling ideas and marks in the previously mentioned 'Numbered' series. The idea that conceptually the entire archive is a map of communication is very central to my work. These works on paper offer me the opportunity to be in one spot, one hyperlink so to speak, while allowing me to move and shift, perhaps in a purely visual way, through a network of marks and patterns or through written notes, which are often the source of my narratives.

**VAH:** Can you tell us more about your installation *Unfolding the Triangle*, which was a site-specific installation shown in *Gestures: An Exhibition of Small Site-Specific Works* at the Mattress Factory

in Pittsburgh, PA in 2009. It was then shown two more times in New York and then in Michigan. How does this piece relate to your concept of mapping? The Bermuda Triangle is between Puerto Rico, Florida and Bermuda where ships and planes were known to have disappeared. In popular culture their disappearance has been attributed to either paranormal or extraterrestrial beings. Do you think of the Bermuda Triangle as a place where maps fail or as an imaginative space?

**NCL:** I had been researching the Bermuda Triangle for quite a few years and some of the research that came out of it had been included in other works that dealt with navigation or traveling. I found press releases from airline companies regarding airplane malfunction or turbulence in the area; no one knows what causes these and other phenomena, although there is much speculation. Growing up in the '70s in Puerto Rico I heard about so many sightings and rumours of UFOs and you still hear about them today, so this dimension of the Triangle is very much part of our popular culture. I see the Bermuda Triangle as an imaginary space that is also based on actual geographic and scientific data. I am interested in the layering of the scientific or pseudo-scientific data with other popular, psychological, mythical or emotional aspects. There is both fear and exotic allure of the unknown.

When invited by the Mattress Factory to do a site-specific work, I decided to see what would happen if I were to flip the triangle on the map. When I did that it almost pointed to Pittsburgh, the site of the exhibition and where I was living at the time, so I found a personal connection beyond Puerto Rico's geographical location within the Triangle. *Unfolding the Triangle* led the viewer through a navigation of the space while encountering information on wall labels that ranged from scientific data to abduction stories, as well as charts and drawings. Within the installation some areas were rational and factual, but others would be zones of fragmented and traumatic information.

The second installment, *Unfolding the Triangle (NYC)*, stretched the Triangle and the research onto the New York City area, and also included several small video screens. But the most recent installment, *Unfolding the Triangle: Lake Michigan*, has been by far the largest and most complex to date. It was exhibited at the Richmond Center for Visual Arts in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2012, as part of my solo exhibition, *An Exercise in Numbness & Other Tales*. For this work, we built a central room in the middle of the gallery that allowed for a more labyrinth-like navigation of its external space. The internal space consisted of a multi-channel video installation with mirrors; it suggested an underwater tunnel connecting the Caribbean with Lake Michigan. In my research, I found that there is also a Great Lakes Triangle, with similar phenomena and disappearances attributed to it. All the texts in the installation came from unconfirmed sources. The point, ultimately, is that all the information around us comes from unconfirmed sources. How do we interpret all that noise? And how we can create something new with it.

Through my work I try to make sense of the world we live in, as I also try to understand my own existence. That is what I believe my work is really about. It's about trying to make sense of so much noise, because that seems to be the loudest thing we hear.