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Shows That Matter: The Young Lords in New York

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Maximo Colon's "Untitled," c. 1970, currently on view in the "¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York" exhibition at the Bronx Museum.

WHAT: ["¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York"](#)

WHEN: Through October 15

WHERE: Bronx Museum (with two other components at the Museo del Barrio and the Loisaida Center)

In the upper precincts of Manhattan, Lady Liberty presides over a trash-strewn street, as if an immobile witness to the city's dereliction. The street is real — East Harlem, or El Barrio, in the summer of 1969 — but the juxtaposition is doctored, the tableau sandwiched between a tartly ironic slogan: "AMERIKKKA / THE BEAUTIFUL." The work appears in the [Bronx Museum's](#) "¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York," a vital three-part exhibition in the Bronx

at the Bronx Museum, in Harlem at the [Museo del Barrio](#) (July 22-October 22), and on the Lower East Side at the [Loisaida Center](#) (July 30-October 10) tracing the political and aesthetic legacy of the Young Lords.



Fred W. McDarrah's
"Pablo Guzman, Yoruba of
the Young Lords" c. 1968

Inspired by the Black Panthers of Chicago, the Chicano-based group established itself in New York in the summer of 1969, and it was here that they launched “Palante,” a newspaper dedicated to chronicling the Young Lords Party’s activities and ideology. Faced with the metropolis described by Don DeLillo in the opening pages of 1973’s “Great Jones Street” as “a sadistic gift of the sixteenth century, ever on the verge of plague,” the Lords promulgated a 13-point platform that was a blend of militant Puerto Rican nationalism, internationalist socialism, feminism, and domestic social justice. Reproduced in a large wall text at the entrance of the exhibition gallery, this text underwrote such [actions](#) as the “Garbage Offensive,” in which the group protested Department of Sanitation neglect in East Harlem by cleaning the streets themselves and installing the refuse in five-foot barricades on Third Avenue, or their 12-hour occupation of the decrepit Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx in a demand for better health services.

The archives of “Palante” — a contraction of the Spanish “para adelante,” or *forward* — form the bedrock of the Bronx Museum’s exhibition, with covers and contents gracing one wall and printed matter displayed in two tabletop cases. But the show, curated by scholar Johanna Fernández and Yasmin Ramírez, stakes its claim on aesthetics in period and contemporary works related to the activities of the Young Lords, both personally and thematically. In 13 labeled sections that wrap around the long gallery, these linkages are probed with artworks, photographs, film, and printed matter, like connections to the Art Workers Coalition, a group active in the New York art-world from 1969 to 1971, and whose member Jan van Raay also served as a photographer for the Young Lords. (Another Young Lords photographer, Hiram Maristany, was the subject of a recent exhibition at the Hunter East Harlem galleries [reviewed](#) by ARTINFO, and his work will figure prominently in the El Museo [component](#) of this exhibition.)

Not all works in the show are constrained to the actual — a large, abstract sculptural work by Raphael Montañez Ortiz, “Archeological Find #21: The Aftermath,” 1961, is perhaps the strongest inclusion — while others, like an asinine homage print by Shepard Fairey, are not quite formally interesting enough to succeed outside of the exhibition’s context. But it is nonetheless a sensitive commingling of documentary and artistic visions, one that tells a vividly contemporary story about activism, aesthetics, and the unfinished business of social change.