



art21.org/fireleibaez



Firelei Báez

ABOUT

Born

1981 (Dominican Republic)

Education

Cooper Union, BFA
Hunter College, MFA

Lives and Works

New York, New York

About the Artist

Firelei Báez creates paintings that draw upon the rich folklore and colonial history of the Caribbean. Challenging fundamental ideas around beauty and agency, Báez's paintings of dramatically shapeshifting figures assert the power of the female form.

Raised on the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the artist recounts her early creative experiences making hand-sewn books and paper dolls, activities which her family members largely perceived as trouble-making behavior. Today, the artist evokes a similarly misunderstood character from Dominican folklore — the *ciguapa*, an evasive and cunning female figure. Báez regards the *ciguapa* as a beacon of the "highly independent, self-possessed," a deeply feeling woman who she hopes to see in the world.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

dance
installation
painting

Key Words and Ideas

beauty
body
cycle
empower
folklore
history

mosaic
mythology
narrative
power
race
subversion

Related Artists

Marina Abramović
John Akomfrah
Eleanor Antin
Janine Antoni
Ida Applebroog
Jordan Casteel
Nick Cave
Abigail DeVille
Marcel Dzama
Doreen Garner
Oliver Herring

Loie Hollowell
Maryam Hoseini
Graciela Iturbide
Jamian Juliano-Villani
Liz Magic Laser
Tala Madani
Kerry James Marshall
Zanele Muholi
Wangechi Mutu
Mika Rottenberg
Yinka Shonibare

"The freedom that I offer in each painting is the mutable body." — Firelei Báez

How to Use This Guide

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Firelei Báez into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

Before Viewing

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① How do our bodies tell stories? What kinds of stories can they tell?
- ② What is a myth and how does mythology play different roles in art?
- ③ How do artists go about deconstructing or subverting historical narratives?
- ④ When can the concept of beauty allow us to critically examine or look closely at the things we take for granted?

While Viewing

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① Describe the bodies depicted in Báez's work. What kinds of words and phrases come to mind?
- ② How does Báez use the ciguapa, a misunderstood character from Dominican folklore, to inform her work?
- ③ Why is Báez interested in examining and subverting narratives initiated by the scientist Carl Linnaeus?

After Viewing

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① Báez states, "I don't want to create narratives of victimhood. I want to flip it." What kinds of narratives does she "flip"?
- ② What stories do the female figures in Báez's work tell?
- ③ Compare Báez's research and work with fellow New York Close Up artist, Doreen Garner. How does each artist use research to inform their work? Compare the scientists each artist researched and the work that was created in response.
- ④ From your perspective, how does beauty play a role in Báez's work and why is it so important?

Related Activities

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Create, or recreate, a mythological character. What does this character stand for and how are they represented? Compare finished work with one or more classmates and discuss what each person's character symbolizes or is responsible for.
- ✓ When we empower someone we help make them stronger or more confident. Write a story or create a performance about someone who is empowered. Read the story aloud and record it or create a video of the performance to share with others.