



# QUEENS MUSEUM

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

***The Queens Museum presents Julia Weist: 17.(SEPT) [By WeistSiréPC]™***

*The first solo museum show by Queens Museum Jerome Fellow Julia Weist who collaborates with Cuban artist Nestor Siré to investigate informal networks in Cuba and the country's underground, offline version of the web: El Paquete Semanal*

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Julia Weist and Nestor Siré, 1mberto (Santa Clara), 2016. Fujifilm instant film. Courtesy the artists

**Queens, NY** – In her first solo museum exhibition, New York-based artist and Queens Museum-Jerome Fellow Julia Weist collaborates with Cuban artist Nestor Siré to analyze creative social strategies in Cuba that have developed in place of internet connectivity. The most significant of these phenomenon, *El Paquete Semanal* or "the weekly package," is a

1 terabyte digital media collection of movies, TV shows, mp3s, and music videos, as well as PDFs of magazines, recorded sports events, games and more, distributed weekly via in-person file sharing throughout Cuba.

Though a few public wifi hotspots exist, Cuba's internet penetration rate is one of the lowest in the world. *El Paquete Semanal*, which is the only national media format outside of government control, serves as a stand-in for the web.

The centerpiece of *17.(SEPT) [By WeistSiréPC]™* is a 64 terabyte super server containing 52 weeks of the *Paquete* from August 2016 to August 2017. It is the only comprehensive archive of the *Paquete* and its construction and deployment was designed around the legal and logistical restrictions of the changing US-Cuba relations over the last year. The artists contacted every copyright holder represented in the *Paquete* from the week of August 8, 2016, in an attempt to legalize its contents. Where possible, they secured the rights to distribute the same material circulating in Cuba to Queens Museum visitors, free of charge. The archive will be installed in the Museum with fully visible hardware and mechanics as an interactive work that allows viewers to access any file from the full year of content.

The exhibition presents the results of the artists' search of the *Paquete*, who traced its distribution routes, from the offices where it is secretly made in Havana to the far ends of the country. For the past decade, Weist has been studying information systems, specifically systems of circulation, and creating art that is driven by an interest in how the internet distributes knowledge and shapes it. "We are not simply interested in the nature of systems, how they function technically and socially, but also how media and content is transformed by systemic norms," says Weist. "Every artwork presented in this exhibition engages directly with, and has been modified by, cultural, legal and technical systems in both Cuba and the US."

The price for a full download of the *Paquete* at the beginning of the week is USD 2. Users may choose not to purchase the full collection, and can pick and choose files instead. Prices correspond to the file type and format: TV episodes cost 5 cents each and films are 25 cents each. Filling up a 16GB USB stick costs 50 cents and 32GB is 75 cents. Rental prices have fluctuated with the value of the national currency over time and by geographic region. Before the advent of the *Paquete* other media formats circulated underground in Cuba through similar physical networks. The average the price for the rental of a paperback novel from 1970 to 1975 was less than a cent, and from 1976 to 1980, prices rose to 5 cents. In the 1990s, the cost jumped to approximately 25 cents, an incredibly high price considering the economic crisis that marked the decade.

In the mid-2000s, Siré became interested in informal social networks and micro phenomena that exist outside of aboveground public life in Cuba. Since 2015, he has been curating contemporary art into the *Paquete* through a project called *!!!Sección A R T E (!!!A R T Section)*, a series of folders, including a virtual gallery, updated monthly with an artistic intervention by a national or international artist. This was made possible due to the inclusive nature and policies of the *Paquete's* managers who are interested in integrating new content. The folder follows the rules of the *Paquete*: it can be no more than 5GB, and must contain no pornography and no political content. In early 2016, Siré invited Weist to contribute an artwork, marking the beginning of an ambitious partnership that relied on weak communication channels between the US and Cuba. Over the subsequent year the pair met with *Paquete* distributors or *matrices* in every province in Cuba. In these talks they gained an understanding of current national and local trends, including *who* and *what* is popular. Weist and Siré also came to know the depth and intricacy of the *Paquete's* networks, including the extent of its economic impact; it also includes a form of media that has been largely absent in the country for the last half-century, amidst a political regime of aspirational socialism: advertising.

For *!!!Sección ARTE*, Weist envisioned a conceptual and political insertion: an original video featuring internet browsing that captures the aesthetic and habitual norms of contemporary internet culture. To abide by the strict “no politics” regulations of the *Paquete*, Weist and Siré sought out several celebrities, including the actor Mark Ruffalo, who is well known in Cuba as the Hulk and instantly familiar to American audiences for wide-ranging roles as well as his political activism, to star in the piece. The choice to feature celebrities rendered the content chiefly pop cultural and thereby acceptable for inclusion.

Weaving in and out of contrasting political, geographic, economic, cultural, and technological circuits, *17.(SEPT) [By WeistSiréPC]™* represents a complex examination of the invisible and visible forces that shape our contemporary cultural perspectives.

### **About Julia Weist**

Julia Weist (b.1984, New York, NY) holds a BFA from the Cooper Union School of Art and a MLIS from Pratt Institute. She is the recipient of the 2016 Net Based Audience Prize from Haus Der Elektronischen Künste, Basel, and the 2015 Media Plan Award from the Outdoor Advertising Association of America. Weist is the author of several artist books, including the novel *Sexy Librarian* (2008) and most recently *After, About, With* (2015). Her recent exhibitions include *Know Yourself*, The Luminary, St. Louis (2016), *Art in the Age of...Planetary Computation*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2015), and a solo exhibition, *Parbunkells*, 83 Pitt Street, New York City (2016). Her work has been covered by NPR, The New Yorker, Artforum, Frieze and many more. Weist currently lives and works in New York.

### **About Nestor Siré**

Nestor Siré (b.1988, Camagüey, Cuba) participated in the Havana Biennial (2015), the Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Cuba (2013), the Oberhausen International Festival of Short Film, Germany (2016), and the Asunción International Biennale, Paraguay (2015). Siré was the winner of the 2016 “Visa for Creation” from l’Institut Français. He has also participated in residencies including Dos Mares in Marseille, France, and The Ludwig Foundation and LASA, Havana. His works has been exhibited at other venues including the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana; Hong-Gah Museum, Taipei; UNAM Museum of Contemporary Art, México City; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, among other venues. Siré currently lives and works in Havana.

### **Funding and Support**

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## About the Queens Museum

*The Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park features contemporary art, events of hyperlocal and international impact, and educational programs reflecting the diversity of Queens and New York City. Changing exhibitions present the work of emerging and established artists, both local and global, that often explore contemporary social issues, as well as the rich history of its site. In November 2013, the Museum reopened with an expanded footprint of 105,000 square feet, a soaring skylit atrium, a suite of daylight galleries, nine artist studios, and flexible event space. The Museum works outside its walls through engagement initiatives ranging from multilingual outreach and educational opportunities for adult immigrants, to a plethora of community led art and activism projects. The Museum's educational programming connects with schoolchildren, teens, families, seniors as well as those individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The Queens Museum is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.*

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