



SALON 94

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Visual Art Culture of Chicago and Beyond

EXPO Chicago 2018: Critic's Picks

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Joyce Foundation/Salon 94 (New York), 435

This installation by Chicago artist Carlos Rolón offers the best visual approximation of the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Maria that I could imagine. A blown-up photograph of a destroyed home—absent a roof and a front wall, so the viewer can peer in as if it were a lifesize diorama—takes up the entire back wall, setting the stage for the detritus piled in front of it. Tree branches lie among clothing, a wooden chair, kitchen utensils, a broken window screen and a boxy TV tuned to white noise. As Rolón's wall text makes clear, this disaster was made worse by United States imperialism at every step of the way. Decades spent decimating Puerto Rico's environment for development helped destroy the defense systems needed in times of natural disaster. Not to mention the harm caused by the weakened economy and the ineptitude of FEMA and the Trump administration to offer aid in any meaningful way. Yet for Rolón there is always hope, as a pink neon sign hanging on the left wall makes clear. It reads "siempre pa'lante," a popular rallying cry from the Young Lords, which means forever onwards.