

Edra Soto Open 24 Hours		JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL Your work seems deeply connected to a sense of place. You were born in Puerto Rico and have lived in Chicago for many years: How do you think about place in terms of that history? EDRA SOTO I came to Chicago to pursue a master’s degree in painting and have since been in Chicago for nearly two decades, almost the same amount of time that I lived in Puerto Rico. Everything that I do now considers these two places and my two very different lives there and now here. JPA: You have talked about becoming a conceptual artist during your time at the School of the Art Institute. What does that term mean to you? ES: To me, being a conceptual artist is being able to focus on shaping ideas, regardless of who is constructing or performing them. It is almost like being a director or a producer. This genre freed me from expressing everything through a single channel. I was able to shift gears, stop painting, and start pursuing my ideas. It was messy at the beginning. For my thesis exhibition, I did my first immersive installation—titled <i>Spotlight</i>—composed of a big, round	public; this is especially apparent in the project you have created for the Commons, <i>Open 24 Hours</i>. Tell us a bit about the genesis and form of this project. ES: <i>Open 24 Hours</i> was motivated by the excessive amount of littering in sectors of my neighborhood. The title refers to the public boulevard, alleys, and side streets where garbage is visible at all times. Littering is everybody’s problem to face and address, so I felt that by bringing my found materials and placing them in others’ hands, a transaction could become an acknowledgement. In the Commons, the collected glass bottles are available to members of the public, who are invited to transform the bottles into artworks in collaborative crafting workshops. Through a creative process, people decide if they are willing to own an object once deemed garbage. What surprised me is the historical connection that my gatherings of discarded objects—specifically glass bottles of liquors—revealed. Moreover, I attribute value and relevance to this historical connection in relation to our	 Photo documentation, found bottles on 8-31-17, East Garfield Park, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist. shells—symbols of Puerto Rican culture—onto the bottles, which have become icons of the culture that you experience as a Chicagoean. ES: The layering functions as a reflection of my geographic relationships—with Chicago, my neighborhood, and Puerto Rico. In the early stages of the project, I started thinking about my role as an artist archiving material. By applying a crafting language to the archived objects, I aim to bring public awareness to issues such as littering that surround us on a daily basis. A friend who happens to be a tremendous curator and writer, Ruslana Lichtzier, drew a connection between my boulevard in East Garfield Park and the beach. She recognized how the gesture of picking up a shell mimics my gesture of picking up glass bottles. Seashells are the outer skeletons of mollusks. The outer skeletons provide shelter, sometimes camouflage, for the animals inside. For <i>Open 24 Hours</i>, I thought about the housing qualities of a shell and about how to build a symbolic shelter—a space associated with support, refuge, sanctuary—or a safe house. JPA: You speak a lot about democracy in public spaces. In the Commons, you ask visitors to insert their own voices into the space at writing stations. The writing becomes a material for the artists you’ve and organizations to participate, focusing on artists who create social music experiences. But the program comprises a variety of programs, including comedy, video, performance, poetry, and workshops. I am excited to work once again with Damon Locks, a DJ, visual artist, and musician. Locks will present a musical essay on race in America in a two-hour DJ set of black American music that spans all genres. Records are aural history books, and Damon Locks will thumb his way through the pages in song. In <i>Social Music</i>, artist, DJ, curator, and educator Sadie Woods will attempt to excavate “anthems” and “mantras” that take on sociopolitical proportions, becoming a call to arms asking listeners to remember times of resistance. JPA: What will members of the public come away with from your project? ES: Art can be the source for social change. All we can do is invite visitors to engage through our work. I started from a personal experience. I took action and prompted others to expand the conversation. I hope participating audiences have an experience that affects their daily lives and that sparks their curiosity and sense of awareness. I see the social value and participate in the act of drinking; at the same time, I recognize the potential harms of drinking on our society. Providing a platform
Oct 21, 2017– Feb 25, 2018	The Commons	 Photo documentation, Portrait of Edra Soto and her dogs at Franklin Blvd, Chicago, 2017. Photo: Daniel Sullivan (dan@navillustvoodsvvorks.com). platform echoing the round shape of a projected light. I placed metal pieces from tap shoes under the platform to provoke sound that then activated the light in the space. The audience response was overwhelming, and I felt a great sense of accomplishment. I had finally made something that appealed to all kinds of people. JPA: The Franklin, created in collaboration with your husband Dan Sullivan, is an art space and program platform in your backyard. How does your process as a curator relate to your practice as an artist? ES: The Franklin—which consolidates my desire for bringing my peers, my communities, and the general audience into the foreground of my work, helping to complete it—was motivated by my relationship with Chicago’s artist-run communities and by the challenge of producing a less explored model that continues giving visibility to artists. Exhibitions in the Franklin are initiated in an organic and spontaneous way. I don’t promote open calls, but it is an open process. I think that artists are motivated to work with us because they care about what we do and what we provide. I operate in a similar way: my creative motivation comes from a sincere place. I have to care deeply to stay involved for a significant period. JPA: Your practice invites collaboration with other artists and with the	current issues of race, equality, and the environment. JPA: <i>Open 24 Hours</i> features liquor bottles that you have collected in your neighborhood of East Garfield Park. What are the cultural and historical learnings that have emerged from the project? ES: In the morning while walking my dogs around the block, I encounter anywhere from two to ten (or more) empty bottles of alcohol. The numerous bottles of cognac (Hennessy and Rémy Martin) began to stand out to me. This led me to research the connections between US culture and cognac, specifically in relation to the history of my neighborhood. I learned that this connection has its genesis in the 1930s, when cognac was introduced to US soldiers stationed in France during W/WII. The welcome black soldiers received in France (at the time, French culture celebrated black musicians and artists such as Josephine Baker, who filled Paris clubs) stood in strong contrast to the disenfranchisement they experienced on the home front. I consider this a poetic, tragic, and grandiose way of exercising democracy. Since the late 1990s, references to cognac in hip-hop and rap lyrics have bolstered the drink’s popularity in popular culture. JPA: Over the course of the project, you will collaborate with audiences to create art objects. Tell us about the layering of	
Edra Soto’s works begin with an invitation to members of the public to gather, collaborate, and consider the nature of civic space and personal responsibility. <i>Edra Soto: Open 24 Hours</i>, the inaugural artist commission for the Commons, presents liquor bottles that, in an act of documentation, the artist collected over the course of two years in her neighborhood of East Garfield Park. These objects will become art materials for Soto, as she collaborates with visitors over the course of the project to graft remembrances of her Puerto Rican heritage upon the bottles. Custom display cases that evoke a public gathering space, such as a gazebo or porch, house the bottles, which have been scrubbed of identifying commercial labels. Visitors are encouraged to take part in a series of writing stations, talks, performances, and workshops that consider the nature of urban space, cross-cultural dynamics, and the legacy of colonialism. As we prepared to launch our new, civically engaged space, we asked Soto to share more about her background and the research behind the project.		 Photo documentation, Franklin Super Food and Liquor, Franklin Blvd, Chicago, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist. invited to create performances on Friday nights, many of whom incorporate the writings in their work. What will these public programs bring to the project? ES: The events organized for <i>Open 24 Hours</i> will provide audiences an opportunity to connect, support, and become active participants in the space. I invited a group of local artists	to engage in conversations through art is one way to frame all the issues that these found bottles have unveiled.	

Edra Soto: Open 24 Hours is organized by January Parkos Arnall, **Curator** of Public Programs.

Programs organized by Edra Soto

ARTIST WORKSHOPS

Sat and Sun, Oct 21 and 22, 2017, 11 am–4 pm

Sun, Nov 12, 2017, 11 am–3 pm

Sun, Dec 10, 2017, 11 am–3 pm

Sun, Jan 14, 2018, 11 am–3 pm

Edra Soto hosts monthly workshops in the Commons as part of *Open 24 Hours*, inviting visitors to transform discarded liquor bottles—in addition to refuse from their own neighborhoods—into beautiful art works.

SOCIAL MUSIC BY SADIE WOODS

Fri, Oct 27, 2017, 6 pm

Sadie Woods examines celebrated voices in pop culture and highlights the cultural aspirations and struggles encoded in music. Woods DJs a set of anthems and mantras while verbally excavating sociopolitical meanings and calls for resistance.



Photo documentation, street refuse—East Garfield Park, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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CHICAGO, IL 60611

RIGHT ON, BE FREE—A SOUND ESSAY BY DAMON LOCKS

Fri, Nov 10, 2017, 6 pm

Damon Locks investigates music as an outlet for African Americans to express frustration, sadness, joy, love, hate, and creativity. Locks, proposing record albums as aural history books, presents a music essay on race in America by way of a two-hour DJ set that spans many genres.

VARIETY HOURS—T/HERE AND THE/N

Fri, Dec 1, 2017, 6 pm

Join the costars of *Worldplay*—Alberto Aguilar, Alex Bradley Cohen, and Jesse Malméd—in an audience-engaged variety show that addresses the various themes brought up in Edra Soto’s *Open 24 Hours*. Guest performers include Christopher Santiago, Jessica Campbell, Danielle Rosen, Erin Hayden, and Alejandro Jimenez Flores.



Shelled bottles, air dry clean found bottles, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist.

EDRA SOTO WITH JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL

Fri, Dec 8, 2017, 6 pm; 7:30 pm, *Open 24 Hours*:

“Wassup w/that ‘YAC?!” with Felicia Holman

Edra Soto discusses *Open 24 Hours* with curator January Parkos Arnall. Following the talk, artist Felicia Holman presents “Wassup w/that ‘YAC?!” —an original performance centered on the perspective of a black, Gen X, cis-female cognac consumer unpacking the connection between African American culture and cognac.

ARRIVER & BOMBA CON BUYA WITH AMANDA ROSCOE MAYO

Fri, Dec 15, 2017, 6 pm

A presentation of Puerto Rican bomba music, which originated in the musical tradition of enslaved Africans, is paired with metal music, largely popular in the 1960s and 1970s. The performance explores the nature of cross-cultural influences.

MYKELE DEVILLE AND JEFFREY MICHAEL AUSTIN

Fri, Dec 22, 2017, 6 pm

Join Mykele Deville and Jeffrey Michael Austin as they produce spoken word and musical performances using content and testimonials gathered from visitors throughout *Open 24 Hours*. These works consider, amplify, and react to the public’s shared thoughts and concerns about topics of community.

SWEETER SIDE OF THE POND WITH DJ CATIE O AND E.S.TORIAN

Fri, Dec 29, 2017, 6 pm

DJ catie O and E.S.torian present an interactive musical performance, DJ set, and spoken word recitation, using custom percussive instruments as well as the bottles from Edra Soto’s project.

THE SPACE I CAN’T GET IN V.2 BY CHIN-TING HUANG

Fri, Dec 29, 2017, 7 pm

Chicago-based Taiwanese artist Chin-Ting Huang extends the sonic environment using amplified bottles. The resulting experience is at once intimate and expansive, as these tiny, inaccessible spaces elicit ethereal sounds and messages.

POETRY IS THE ONLY WAY TO TALK ABOUT WHAT HASN’T HAPPENED YET BY SEAN WARD, COMPOUND YELLOW, AND THE POETRY FOUNDATION

Fri, Jan 19, 2018, 6 pm

Inspired by Sean Ward’s *Night Bloomers*, Compound Yellow in collaboration with Poetry Foundation leads a series of exercises that reflect on *Edra Soto: Open 24 Hours*.

LINE OF FIRE BY JEFFERSON PINDER

Fri, Feb 2, 2018, 6 pm

Jefferson Pinder investigates the idea of the museum as a safe space. The project speaks to random violence in Chicago neighborhoods as visitors’ points of view begin to shift in order to avoid a performative “line of fire.”

UNTITLED, (AFTER RALPH AND LOUIE) BY ALEXANDRIA EREGBU

Fri, Feb 9, 2018, 6 pm

Alexandria Eregbu performs a scene from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*—reinterpreting Louis Armstrong’s simultaneous playing and singing of “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue.”



1-4-17: Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Patron, Jose Cuervo, D’Ussé, Budweiser, Miller, Bud Ice, Paul Masson, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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