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## Once upon a time in Bayamón: A conversation with Héctor López, PhD.

Stories have the power to transform our lives. They serve as tales of caution and inspiration for adventure. At times, we use stories to remind us of the past and guide us through the present.



This month I had the chance to hear [Héctor López's](#) story, an artist, teacher, and historian who uses art and storytelling to elevate Puerto Rican culture. From Colombia to Kenya and all the way to Switzerland, Héctor has taken Puerto Rican art, culture, and history with him and shared them with the world.

**"Arts are a natural human capacity and we need to protect that. It gives good results."**

As we dove into a conversation on the role of art in society, it became clear that Héctor is a huge believer in its power. To him, art has the ability to teach us how to be observant, how to be creative and how to problem solve. More importantly, art teaches us to be inclusive, patient, and understanding. Héctor believes that art can develop our self esteem and cultural identity; for this reason, art belongs to all of us and can transform individuals and entire communities.



Héctor with his family in Aguada, Puerto Rico

Héctor's life was transformed by art as a young child. The little boy drawing on the back of a classroom chair in Bayamón, would become an artist, teacher, and storyteller creating stunning art exhibits in Switzerland and representing his culture all over the world. Growing up he remembers stories of his Tío Jose, aka Cheo and his incredible artistic abilities. Cheo's paintings and the stories of his life set Héctor on a journey that he never imagined. But Hector didn't get where he is over night, before making his way across oceans, Héctor dedicated himself to learning. From studying history and humanities at the University of Puerto Rico to earning his doctorate in the History of America, Héctor has been passing on knowledge and the appreciation of Puerto Rican heritage at every turn. After teaching mosaics as a professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Héctor found new and exciting adventures around every corner. When his time with his students came to an end, Héctor headed to Colombia to work with indigenous

communities on an art project that promoted peace in Arauca. Soon after, he made his way to Nairobi, Kenya teaching salsa and cultural awareness at a United Nations Recreation Center.



Living his life as a cultural Ambassador, Héctor has traveled to over 30 countries! Now living in Switzerland, he has been collaborating with Swiss writer Noémie Pétremand, to create captivating tales that have the feel of myth and legend. While the stories are fictional, they inspire the reader to investigate Puerto Rico's true history and pass on her traditions. ["Borinquen, A Puerto Rican Story"](#) and ["The Indigenous and the shell"](#) are short stories paired with illustrations that create a narrative around Puerto Rican traditions. The moment I read 'Borinquen, A Puerto Rican Story' I fell in love with it. It is a tale of a whimsical creature that loved the sea and danced in the water. Fisherman marveled at her beauty and one traveler from a distant land fell in love with her. The story comes to a close with the traveler taking ink to paper and writing down everything he learned from the fisherman

on the legend of La borinquen, daughter of the sun and sea.



"My artistic objective is not only the documentation and analysis of cultural values, but also the expression of the values that are personally important to me."

Reflecting on his creative approach and process, Héctor shared how much of his art is a response to the world around him. Héctor describes his work as "a reflection, conscious or unconscious, of life experiences over the years, inherited traditions, and appropriate cultural values. The need to create is a reaction to social frustration, the fruit of my personal aspirations, the product of my critical vision of the scenes I lived and places I lived." A recent reflection are the pieces "[Justicia](#)" and "[Lucha](#)", created by Héctor in response to the protests in Puerto Rico.

Flags raised and a massive crowd marching forward, these stunning pieces capture a critical moment in Puerto Rican history. With the words 'lucha' and 'justicia' written above, the prints symbolizes the resilience and tenacity of this generation. The pieces also captures the energy and essence of all of Héctor's work. You can't look at Hector's art, without wanting to know more and there is no doubt that behind every piece is a great story.

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To learn more about Héctor's art or to purchase piece visit his [website](#) or [Instagram](#).

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