

# Slow Look: **LUIS ARNÍAS**



WAGNER ARTS

OCTOBER 11, 2024 – MARCH 28, 2025

WAGNER FOUNDATION GALLERY



Through his experimental films and interdisciplinary practice, Luis Arnías’s work is an exploration of his experience as an immigrant person of Afro-Caribbean descent living in America and connecting that to an examination of Black and African diasporic consciousness.

Originally from Venezuela, and currently living and working in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston, Luis uses 16mm film to visualize everyday life, traversing hyper-local to global dimensions of neighborhood, home, wilderness, borders and boundaries seen through the lens of race, immigration and identity. His work includes his multigenerational household, where his family participates in the making of his films, to contested social spaces for communities of color in Boston, to street life in Brazil, Senegal, Venezuela and elsewhere.

In his solo exhibition, *Slow Loops*, Arnías examines the connections between two recent films, *Bisagras* (2024) and *Noise Cloud* (Work in Progress — 2025) through an installation that loops both works together through sculpture and drawings. *Bisagras*, a high contrast black and white film where Arnías finds connection through the film’s emulsion and his skin, is an impressionistic experience of his visits to the House of Slaves in Gorée Island, Senegal and the port of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil and an imagining of his ancestors’ history. *Noise Cloud* is an experimental film started during the pandemic, which finds inspiration in the shared spaces of public parks, formal and informal, and how they became heightened ground for protest, partying, and leisure across racial lines in a time of crisis. The two come together in his enduring study of Black life in all of its exuberance and expansiveness as well as the slow and ongoing effects of structural racism, colonization and the transatlantic slave trade across locations, contexts and time.

In this interview, Arnías and curator Abigail Satinsky discuss key elements of his practice and this exhibition.

COVER, ABOVE  
Still from *Noise Cloud* [WIP-2025]  
RT: 42 / 16 mm / Color / Stereo  
Courtesy of the artist

COVER, BELOW  
Still from *Bisagras* [2024]  
RT: 16 / 16 mm / B&W / Stereo  
Courtesy of the artist

# INTERVIEW

AS Can you describe a bit of your path of becoming an artist?

LA I’m originally from Caracas, Venezuela. Half of my life I’ve been in Venezuela, half of my life here, and this is the year that I’ve actually been one year longer in the United States. So it’s leaning more to the other side now. This is important because it’s how I see the world and how I can connect to not only my homeland, but actually where I live in the United States as well. How did I start it as an artist? When I was little, I was a strange kid. I never thought that I wanted a job. I just wanted a vocation. My parents are both educators, and I felt like I needed to find something at a social level, to dedicate myself, and art became that for me.

Before I started working in 16mm film, as a student I studied writing and philosophy, but then I fell in love with the medium of photography, specifically street photography. Initially I was influenced by people such as Nan Goldin and William Eggleston, and I was captivated with this idea of just people out there taking photos, not only of just their environment, but also their friends and their lives, and I was thinking about moving my body in the streets and capturing what caught my eye. I’m not really good at making up stuff, but I’m really good at editing things out, of saying not this, not that, not this. And then with exercise and practice, over and over and over and over, I understood, oh, I’m attracted to these things, I’m attracted to these elements. And it just became my labor, really.

AS Why and how do you begin a film? What attracts you to particular subjects, ideas and ways of thinking?

LA I’m very physical in terms of how I understand things, walking is very habitual and important to me as part of my process. So I take my camera and I’ll go outside and start walking and I move towards borders, frontiers and waters, either geographically or not, to the places where one thing becomes something else. Like physical borders when you go really close to the river or the street ends at the ocean, or social borders like redlining in Boston, or where you should be or not should be if you’re a person of color. It’s transitional spaces that I’ve been attracted to all my life. So I just naturally intuitively go walk to get to one of those spaces.

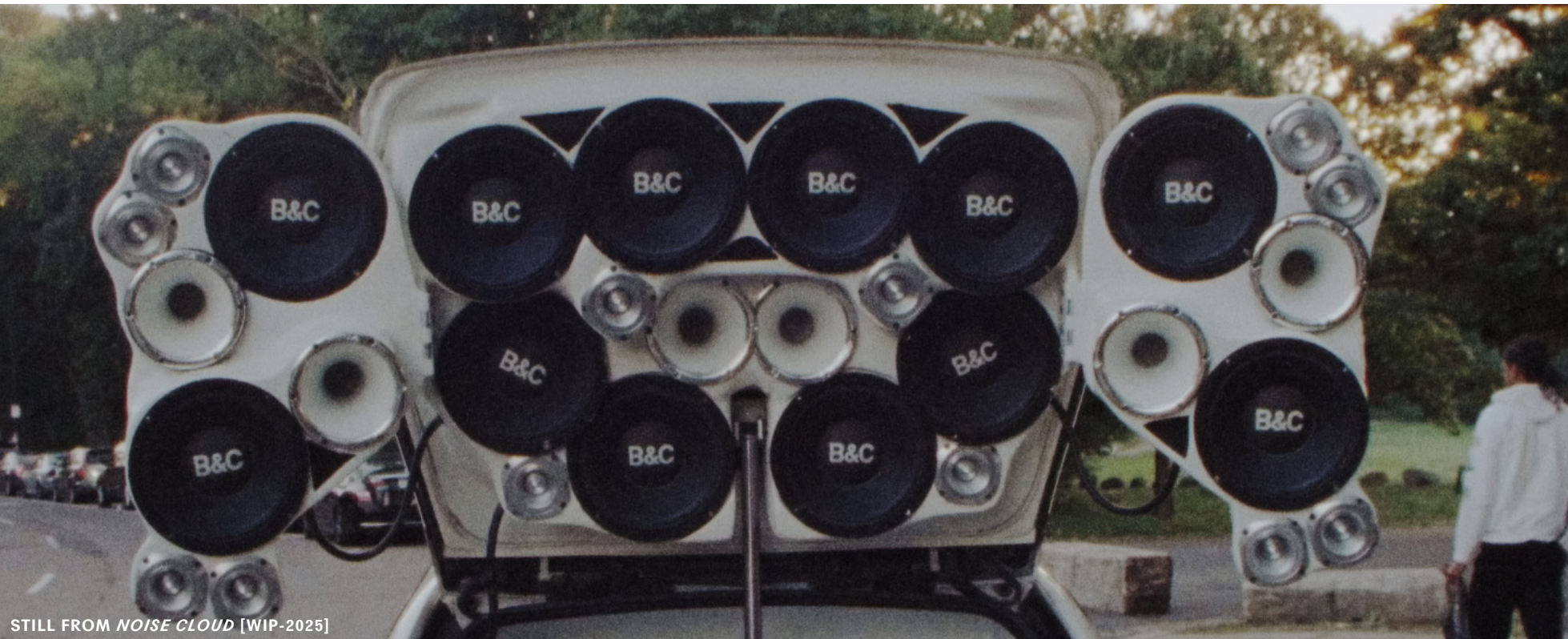
And then certain themes emerge, whether it be about immigration, identity, and especially about people that are mutiracial or multicultural like myself. The idea of Blackness is a part of this as well because growing up but then when I came here, somehow I wasn’t that anymore, I was a “Latin” person and not Black. But authorities, especially cops, they see me as Black, which made me a suspect to them. And I had this encounter here, when I was out taking pictures in one of these in-between spaces and the authorities were called on me because I was seen as suspicious and a threat. And this all made me understand this idea that there are two systems of Blackness and both are somehow similar, but the levels of violence in them are completely different. I’m still figuring these things out for myself.

AS Who do you make your work with and who do you make your work for?

LA I shoot my own films, do the sound and everything else but my family helps a lot. My daughter, Eva, who is 11, for the past three films, she helped in production. My mother-in-law, my mom, and my wife have appeared in my films. And in terms of audience, I make art just to understand the world and my connection with the world. And this element of care extends



Stills from *Bisagras* (2024)



STILL FROM *NOISE CLOUD* [WIP-2025]

to the idea that, if I understand this, perhaps my daughter can understand this. Perhaps I can understand my family better. And then that nucleus extends in such a way that I feel like from that, it will perhaps go to this idea of the Black and African diaspora.

And also, I’m like a basketball player who loves basketball. I’m just in love with the game, you know? Because I’m first and foremost an artist and I love it. And then it is not only my labor, but the tool that I use to negotiate my existence within not only the American context, but also a global context.

AS How did you come to make *Bisagras*, what brought you to Dakar and Salvador de Bahia? What did you discover about yourself there?

LA My economy as an artist is that I’m always trying to work things simultaneously to make my films. I’m an educator, I work as a teacher of film and media in different universities around the New England area. That’s where my main income is coming from, but I also do cinematography for people, especially the people that I care for, which is a great privilege. So, I was invited to go to Dakar and then Popenguine in Senegal to film a documentary for a friend of mine on the Senegalese director, Moussa Sene Absa. He’s amazing. His films are great. And he let us stay in his house for like two and a half weeks or so, and it was really close to the ocean. So while we stayed there, I told my friend like, yo, I just need lunchtime in order to film my own thing. At the beginning, just going to Africa for the first time was like a shock moment because I associate this so much with my identity. And I was debating before the trip, should I take the camera or not? It felt stupid not to do it.

So I was just gathering stuff for myself while I was filming these things for this other director. And I was incredibly surprised by the similarities and how welcoming the people were. It was a beautiful experience for me and then I came home and I started looking around. But I was just there for such a short amount of time, it felt meant to be in some ways but you can’t know a place or make a statement after being there for two weeks so I didn’t know at first how to use the material.

And then I started writing about it for grants and received support from the Film Center Studies at Harvard University, where I proposed going to Salvador de Bahia and finding a connection to my heritage. If Dakar was a point of departure, the point of arrival would have been Bahia, related to this idea of the slave trade, of course, but then this idea of my own Blackness and ancestry. Though this has some fictionalized elements, where my family comes in. In my own personal life, we don’t know much. We only know what my grandmother used to tell us. We don’t have things. We don’t own things. There are no photos. It’s just barely nothing. And then this idea to recreate a possibility of a history that is personal, it felt like the right thing to do. And trying to just dive into the possibilities and trying to just understand those things. So you start to just go to those points of departure and arrivals, of Bahia and just trying to find a lineage or a line through me.

AS Can you talk about the choices you made with the film stock, which reverse throughout the piece. How did that connect with this idea of connecting these two locations and finding a heritage and language for yourself in this process?

LA The idea of film emulsion is very important to me as it’s the medium that I use primarily. Kodak is famous now for this yellow, and the idea that when you film with it, your skin, your memories will be golden, right? Like it will be glowing like the sun. But that color balance is associated only with white skin which completely disregards all the kinds of skin. If your skin is a little darker or not pale or white, it is not color balanced at all. So I started thinking about what kind of film stock I should take to these places. And I decided to go the opposite spectrum, so instead of using, like, any regular film stock, I’m using something called Hi-Con, but it’s usually used for title sequences, especially in black and white and has super, super saturated blacks and super, super saturated whites. And within the film, I use the negative and the positive and I go back and forth between these two elements, because Bisagras means hinges in English, and so creating this connection between these two contrasts, between Senegal and Bahia.

AS Lets talk about the pacing and soundtrack of the work, you said that you were thinking about Blue Note and Polyrythmic theories as informing the work, which are fundamental to Black musical traditions and Western music deriving from African heritages.

LA The editing came together really quick, thinking about music as a really important part within these two places. Bahia, they call it the capital of music within Brazil, but then also Dakar which is just so saturated with music as well. It’s impossible not to hear people practicing music, or hearing music on the street, because the speakers are very loud and its a constant thing. So I started thinking about a call and response with the drums, which is not only about a fictional line that it goes through me, like me calling generationally to the possibilities of my ancestry, but it’s also this idea that Bahia and Senegal calling each other as a possible aid.

There was a beautiful map of Pangea, which you often see in these two places, of when the world was only one mass of land, and West Africa and Brazil were connected. And then when they broke apart, like they’re still cousins, right? There are these sculptures, a few of them in Dakar, and a huge one in Bahia, which appear in the film, that are two hands that are interlocking. And then one of those hands has the map of West Africa, and then the other one has the map of Bahia. So this idea of the two hands joining together, this idea of like a fraternity, and then like there is always this consideration between these two places.

And I was also thinking about this idea of polyrhythms, these two rhythms played simultaneously, right? One with the left hand, one with the right





STILL FROM *NOISE CLOUD* [WIP-2025]



STILL FROM *BISAGRAS* [2024]





Still from *Noise Cloud* [WIP-2025]



Still from *Bisagras* [2024]

Brazil. And then, it's also voodoo, if you are in an American context. This is not unknown to us. It is just like a thing that we always have, right? So for me, this symbolizes the idea of Bisagras, a kinship moment between the realms of the past and the present, through brotherhood or cousins or likeness, between these two geographical places that are divided by this ocean, you know?

And my inspiration for the sculptures and drawings that link the two works and move the viewers between the two spaces, was that also in the end sequence credits there are these drawings of tiny little cars, inspired by the bus in Bahia. They're beautiful, beautiful things because they are hand-painted and they are super decorative. And then, also in Bahia, there is this coffee car that comes out in the afternoon. And it's like a tiny little bus that has a little wheel and it has speakers and they have coffees and lollipops so you can get sugar or tea if you want and then you come in playing your music and then you sit around drinking your coffee. So these are moments of transportation. And so I'm making relief drawings out of plaster of these things, and the cars in Senegal, and the 32 bus, the one that I take every day in order to get to my part of my neighborhood within Boston, and then this idea of this public transportation in which we as a community move and like globally move people from one place to another place.

AS This brings us to *Noise Cloud* in which you're also exploring who gets to take up space, make noise, and feel safety and levity in public, but this time in an American context and specifically within the pandemic and thinking about the racial uprisings and reckonings that ensued. How does this work engage in these questions of sound, sociality and public space?

LA *Noise Cloud* is divided in three sections, one part in Acadia National Park in Maine, Franklin Park in Boston, and the lot next to my house. So I was thinking in terms of geography, in Maine there is this beautiful park that I went to with my family, like everybody should go there, it's amazing, but while I was there I saw this Nazi flag next to the American flag in someone's garage while I was driving around. And when it happened, I felt dumb, because I felt like when I was there, I was in a safe space. It felt like I let my guard down and I shouldn't have done so. And also too, emotionally, we were all a wreck, you know, because they just had killed George [Floyd] like a week ago. So everything was like a super out there, plus the pandemic. So it was an emotionally, socially intense moment that we were living in. After that happened, I started seeing those same dynamics within the park that I go to all the time, which is Franklin Park, where the golf course is right next to where the Bocineros hang out, which are like speakerheads with these super loud sound systems, and I'm like damn this is like the space that we all use right and I start feeling

these elements of collision. And on Saturdays and Sundays, it's really fun, people hanging out playing dominoes, being with family, playing music. But the people at the golf course, the sound matters to them. And then they call the cops and the cops come in and say, you cannot do it. And then they move. And then they come back and then they move and then they do this game, like a back and forth, like a constant experience all the days over. So this idea of transgression and then assertion, and then this idea of perhaps this idea of how culturally you understand or see the loudness of this music, right? Because yes, it's an interruption. But then it's also festivity, community, and sharing. So I see both simultaneously at the same time. And it feels like a very interesting, bold dynamic that it happens, especially in public spaces, right?

The third section takes inspiration from Alberto Santos-Dumont, who was a Brazilian navigator at the turn of the century, and he used to have these sky high dinners, in which he had a table that was like six feet high with waiters climbing up staircases, in order to just gather funds in order to just keep making these airplanes, aerodynamic machines. So I got a table, put some good food on it that I made with my family that we cooked together in the lot. We did a performance and I made sculptures that were decapitated heads of famous statues of colonizers within New England and that get smashed during the course of the dinner.

And that felt like a moment. Sometimes I have the belief it's like a sunset in those clouds, it's like what I was hearing as the diaspora, these solutions and possibilities about racism within the United States. But there are multiple possibilities, but somehow its presented as if one element is supposed to just turn the table and reset things. And it's not necessarily that I know the answer. I'm just trying to just navigate these things as much as everybody else, you know. And both in a joyful way and in a frustrating way and also sometimes it's scary.

Portions of this interview also are published in *Fortunately* Magazine, a print and online platform connecting art, culture, and solidarity economies, a project of Boston Ujima Project.

F I N

Luis Arnías is a filmmaker from Venezuela. He first moved to Boston for the diploma program at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and then received a Masters in Film/Video from Milton Avery Graduate School at Bard College. His work has screened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York Film Festival, Punto de Vista, Berlin Critics' Week (Woche Der Kritik) and BlackStar Film Festival. He was a Fellow at The Film Study Center at Harvard University, recipient of the Herb Alpert/MacDowell Fellowship 2022 and most recently a Boston Artadia Awardee in 2023.

... this symbolizes the idea of *Bisagras*, a kinship moment between the realms of the past and the present, through brotherhood or cousins or likeness, between these two geographical places that are divided by this ocean...



STILL FROM *NOISE CLOUD* [WIP-2025]

LUIS ARNÍAS



**SLOW LOOPS: LUIS ARNÍAS**  
October 11, 2024 –  
March 28, 2025

**Wagner Gallery**  
485 Massachusetts Ave. 2nd Floor  
Cambridge, MA 02139

**Wagner Foundation Gallery**  
is open to the public by appointment only on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 12–5 p.m. Please email [info@wfound.org](mailto:info@wfound.org) to schedule an individual visit or group tour. Admission is free and this venue is fully accessible.

[info@wfound.org](mailto:info@wfound.org)  
[wagnerarts.org](http://wagnerarts.org)



P  
R  
O  
G  
R  
A  
M  
S

1 Opening program  
Thursday October 10, 6 PM  
Wagner Gallery

A conversation between artist Luis Arnías and scholar Adriana Zavala

Adriana Zavala is Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture and Department of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora at Tufts University. She specializes in modern Mexican and contemporary U.S. Latinx art and is founding co-director of the U.S. Latinx Art Forum, an organization dedicated to the art and art history of the U.S. Latinx community. Video recording of the program can be accessed via our website.

2 Shorts Film program  
Thursday January 16, 7 PM  
Institute of Contemporary Art Boston  
Harbor Shore Drive, Boston, MA 02210  
Free and open to the public

A curated shorts program, guest curated by Maori Karmael Holmes, Chief Executive & Artistic Officer at BlackStar, followed by a talkback with Luis Arnías and Holmes. This program is presented in partnership with Boston Ujima Project.

Maori Karmael Holmes is a filmmaker, writer, and curator. She founded BlackStar Film Festival in 2012, an organization based in Philadelphia that creates the spaces and resources needed to uplift the work of Black, Brown and Indigenous artists working outside of the confines of genre. They do this by producing year-round programs including film screenings, exhibitions, an annual film festival, a filmmaker seminar, a film production lab, and a journal of visual culture. They prioritize visionary work that is experimental in its aesthetics, content, and form and builds on the work of elders and ancestors to imagine a new world.



A  
B  
O  
U  
T

Wagner Foundation Gallery is a part of Wagner Arts, a platform for an on-site gallery, grantmaking, and other related initiatives of Wagner Foundation, a Cambridge, MA-based organization that supports initiatives at the intersection of health equity, economic prosperity, and cultural transformation across the globe.

T  
E  
A  
M

CARISA BOBSKILL  
Office Engagement Manager  
& Executive Assistant

CAROLINE EASLEY  
Deputy Director

DAVID DEMOSTHENES  
Grants & Impact Manager

KAREN HARRISON  
Director of Communications

BRIDGET MISKELL  
Senior Finance  
& Operations Manager

RUWIMBO MUSHAVI  
Program Officer,  
International Partnerships

LILY SARGEANT  
Program Officer,  
US Partnerships

ABIGAIL SATINSKY  
Program Officer & Curator,  
Arts & Culture

CHARLOTTE WAGNER  
Founder & President



LEFT & ABOVE  
Stills from *Noise Cloud* [WIP-2025]