

University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Edra Soto: Manual GRAFT* through April 2, 2017.



- Performance: February 21, from 5 to 7pm
- Artist lecture: March 21 at noon

Edra Soto is a Chicago-based artist, educator, and curator who “aims to challenge the boundaries between audience, artist, and the work itself to amplify the democratic potential that art has to offer.” She uses both traditional and unconventional materials—including plastic chairs upholstered with beach towels or pineapple upside-down cake—to create sculptures, installations and architectural interventions that foster accessibility and encourage public participation. Soto, who often incorporates the visual culture of her native Puerto Rico, identifies issues of “class, race, cultural origins, hierarchies, and myth” as integral to her work. The works on view in this exhibition evidence both the artistic process and the labor of the artworks’ making. During the opening reception on February 21, Soto will partner with Illinois State University students to make a new version of her 2016 *Manual GRAFT* performance. The artist and her collaborators will use metallic adhesive to create a geometric design in the windows of the east gallery based on the iron *rejas* (screens) she cites as ever-present in the architecture of post-war Puerto Rico due to their provision of security and cross ventilation. Soto points out that the screens also incorporate Spanish design elements. The work’s title alludes to multiple meanings of the word “graft”—transplanting something to another location or engaging in political corruption—to acknowledge both diasporic identity and the influence of colonialism on the island.

Soto will also create a new version of a 2015 work entitled *Dominodomino*, a table at which visitors are invited to sit and play dominoes. She will make clay seashells and attach them to the table and chairs as a nod to Caribbean souvenirs like shell-encrusted boxes. Visitors will be invited to make and add seashells to the furniture as well. Soto and her husband, Dan Sullivan, made the original wooden table after seeing a concrete domino table in a public plaza in Puerto Rico. With that piece, the two cited their interest in the power conveyed by “dominate,” a root word for “domino,” as well as in “various power plays embedded in ideas of collaboration,” and “the ambiguous nature of work versus leisure time.”

Through grafting the windows and shelling the domino table at University Galleries, Soto will temporarily fix her presence in the space. She also wants others’ hands to play a role. Visitors are invited to participate in the construction of the exhibition in a variety of ways—participating in the *Manual GRAFT* performance; playing dominoes and having conversations; creating air-dry clay seashells and gluing them to the table and chairs; and even making their own wall-hung pieces of artwork by attaching clay shells to their used refreshment plates at the opening reception, which will then become a part of the installation.

Soto’s work was recently featured in the 4th *Poly/Graphic Triennial of San Juan and the Caribbean* in Puerto Rico, and was also exhibited at Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space, New York; Hunter East Harlem Gallery at Hunter College, New York; and The Arts Club of Chicago. Her work will soon be exhibited at Museo de la Universidad de Puerto Rico; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Pérez Art Museum Miami. Through a commission from the Chicago Transit Authority, *GRAFT*, her architectural intervention made in collaboration with Dan Sullivan, will be featured at the Blue Line Western Avenue stop on the train line to O’Hare Airport in 2018. Soto has been awarded residencies at Project Row Houses, Houston; Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin; Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito; and Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Captiva, Florida. She participated in

the Robert Rauschenberg Residency Program through a 3Arts Foundation Fellowship. In 2016, Soto received the Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellowship. She was also featured in *Newcity's* annual *Art 50* issue. Soto is co-director of the THE FRANKLIN, an artist-run outdoor project space. With artist Josue Pellot, she recently co-curated *Present Standard*, a group exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center. Soto received her Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She also attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine, and Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Edra Soto's exhibition is organized by University Galleries' Senior Curator Kendra Paitz and is co-sponsored by the Harold K. Sage Foundation and the Illinois State University Foundation Fund. Programs at University Galleries are funded in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.