



Video still of Edison Peñafiel, *MARE MAGNVM*, 2021. © Edison Peñafiel.



EDISON PEÑAFIEL: MARE MAGNVM **(A Floridian Odyssey/Una Odisea en la Florida)**

August 24 - October 26, 2024

Harbor Hall Gallery, USF St. Petersburg

Presented by GENERATOR: USF Contemporary Art Museum

CONTACT: caminfo@usf.edu or 813-974-4133. **HOURS:** M-F noon-6pm and Sat noon-4pm. Closed Sun + USF Holidays (Sept. 2). **ADMISSION:** Free and open to the public. **ADDRESS:** Harbor Hall Gallery, USF St. Petersburg - 1000 3rd St S, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 (Gallery entrance on South end of building) **PARKING:** Visitor parking is available in lot 9, south of Harbor Hall. Accessible parking is available in both lot 9 (south lot) and lot 10 (north lot). Wheelchair accessible entrance is on the north side. USF parking permits or payment by ParkMobile smartphone app are required. On street parking is also available on adjacent streets. **LINKTREE:** For all the latest visit <https://linktr.ee/irausf>.



Video stills of Edison Peñafiel, *MARE MAGNUM*, 2021. © Edison Peñafiel.

EDISON PEÑAFIEL: *MARE MAGNUM* (A *Floridian Odyssey/Una Odisea en la Florida*)

Edison Peñafiel is an interdisciplinary artist who manipulates drawing, sculpture, photography, and video to decontextualize and then reconstruct absurd scenarios; these, in turn, question poverty, prejudice, exploitation, and myriad forms of abuse of power. His immersive work uses various forms of advanced media to create empathy by highlighting unlocatable stories that affect the oppressed—global narratives that question the assumptions of Western societies as they mismanage, often cruelly, multiple world-girding crises.

His latest large-scale project, *MARE MAGNUM* (A *Floridian Odyssey/Una Odisea en la Florida*) consists of a panoramic video installation featuring a stylized, iterative, monochromatic sea populated by 14 boats, each ferrying its own unique collection of figures caught in a perpetual loop. Every 30 minutes on the dot, the film's characters arrive back where they began. Like the Greek myth of Sisyphus, where the legend's protagonist was eternally condemned to roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll down again, Peñafiel's anonymous figures appear trapped in a cycle of struggle, near success, and failure. Despite their being projected larger than life, their boats are contrived from various found objects, including wood, oil drums, and tires, suggesting scenarios of human migration across bodies of water akin to situations both contemporary and historical.

MARE MAGNUM, the title Peñafiel selected for his installation, comes from the Latin for "Great Sea"—a term the Romans used to describe the Mediterranean Sea as part of a liquid ring they believed encircled the earth. Additionally, the word "mare" has a complicated history: it has long been associated with evil spirits and terrors in various cultures and languages, including in Old Irish and Old English. Today, the waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, along with other well-trod telluric

sites of mass migration, reflect an ongoing horror, as millions of migrants flee war, instability, and climate change. In this sense, *MARE MAGNUM* fails to cite any single one migration event, but rather metaphorically expands the idea of mass displacement to encompass migration at a planetary scale. A mesmerizing artwork that is also designed to be an enveloping experience, *MARE MAGNUM* steeps viewers in the eternal slough that is crossing borders, while alerting this same public to a future in which rising waters will push unprecedented numbers of people away from the places they call home.

Because *MARE MAGNUM* does not refer to a single, locatable group of people or event, no extraneous information is provided about the history or place of origin of the artwork's principal characters. With their faces purposefully hidden by papier-mâché masks typical of Peñafiel's native Ecuador—think the use of masks in Greek and Japanese Noh theater—the film's figures are both redacted and humanized by their use of face coverings. Eschewing any single religion, ethnicity, or nationality, they appear identified instead by their anonymous striving: boatloads of unnamed and faceless individuals, everywoman and everyman, who are thus transformed into representatives of diasporic populations throughout history.

"The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits," Albert Camus wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (a book that served as a touchstone for generations looking for meaning during two world wars and the subsequent ongoing threat of atomic extinction). Camus began work on the volume in 1940 as France fell and millions of refugees emptied out European cities like Warsaw, Brussels, and Paris. Like Camus, Peñafiel also taps into the memory of these 20th century refugees. His ultimate purpose: to recover the sense of absurdity attendant to large scale

human suffering, as well as the fellow feeling that appears increasingly necessary to engender human sympathy. *MARE MAGNUM* (A *Floridian Odyssey/Una Odisea en la Florida*) brings these and other ideas home to South Florida. The installation serves as a wakeup call—for everyone, but perhaps especially for those long on shame and short on memory.

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Christian Viveros-Fauné, Curator-at-Large, USF Contemporary Art Museum

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ARTIST BIO

Originally from Ecuador, Edison Peñafiel moved to the United States in 2002. Since graduating from Florida International University's Fine Arts program in 2016, he has concentrated his practice on numerous large-scale projects, site-specific immersive installations, and solo exhibitions. Notable exhibitions include *Barrio Alto* (2024, Coral Springs Museum of Art, Coral Springs, Florida), *Run, Run, Run Like the Wind* (2023, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, Florida), *MARE MAGNUM* (2021, Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid, Spain, and MAD Arts, Dania Beach, Florida), and *Ni Aquí, Ni Allá* as part of the Florida Prize in Contemporary Art exhibition (2019, Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, Florida). His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including *Trienal Poli/gráfica: Bajo Presión* (2024, Antiguo Arsenal de La Armada, San Juan, Puerto Rico), *BIENALSUR: Punto de Fuga* (2021, Centro de Arte Universidad Nacional de la Plata, La Plata, Argentina), *Make America What America Must Become* (2020, Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, Louisiana), and *Life During Wartime: Art in the Age of Coronavirus* (2020, USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, Florida).

Peñafiel has received prestigious awards including the Florida Prize in Contemporary Art and the Knight Foundation Award (2019), the Ellies Creator Award (2021), two Individual Artist Project Awards from the State of Florida Division of Arts and Culture (2021 and 2023), and the Premio ARCO Comunidad de Madrid (2022). He has participated in art residencies including Anderson Ranch (2021, Snowmass, Colorado), Oolite Arts (2022, Miami Beach, Florida), and MASS MoCA (2022, North Adams, Massachusetts). His work is part of various collections, including Elsewhere Museum (2018, Greensboro, North Carolina), Oolite Arts (2022, Miami Beach, Florida), and Centro de Arte 2 de Mayo (2022, Madrid, Spain). Peñafiel's work is represented by Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid, Spain.

INSTALLATION INFORMATION

Edison Peñafiel
MARE MAGNUM (A *Floridian Odyssey/Una Odisea en la Florida*), 2021
9 channel video installation
10 x 32 x 40 feet
Courtesy of the artist. *MARE MAGNUM* was produced with the technical and creative support of MADLABS and Immersiva.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

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