

Empowering Women, Migrants, Immigrants, and the Disabled Through Art
By Laura Blanco



Hecho a mano / Handmade from the Costureras Project 2018/Courtesy of Maria Lino

From pencil and paper to audio-visual projects, artist Maria Lino has been able to capture many different stories via her multidisciplinary abilities.

Lino's dream of being an artist started at a really young age. "When I was three, I told my parents that I wanted to be an artist." As a working-class family from Havana, Cuba, her father responded, "you can be an artist as long as you get a university degree, [and] you don't end up in a factory."

The Costureras project (pictured above) has a lot of inspiration from Lino's family as they worked as seamstresses, gem cutters, carpentry, mechanics, and shoemakers. Lino says, "in my family, we are all very good with our hands, working with our hands."

Lino went to New York University and graduated as Cum Laude with her Bachelor of Science in Studio Arts on a full ride scholarship. During her time at NYU, she became interested in Spanish

and French literature which would spark her passion for storytelling and give her a wealth of knowledge for her future pursuits.

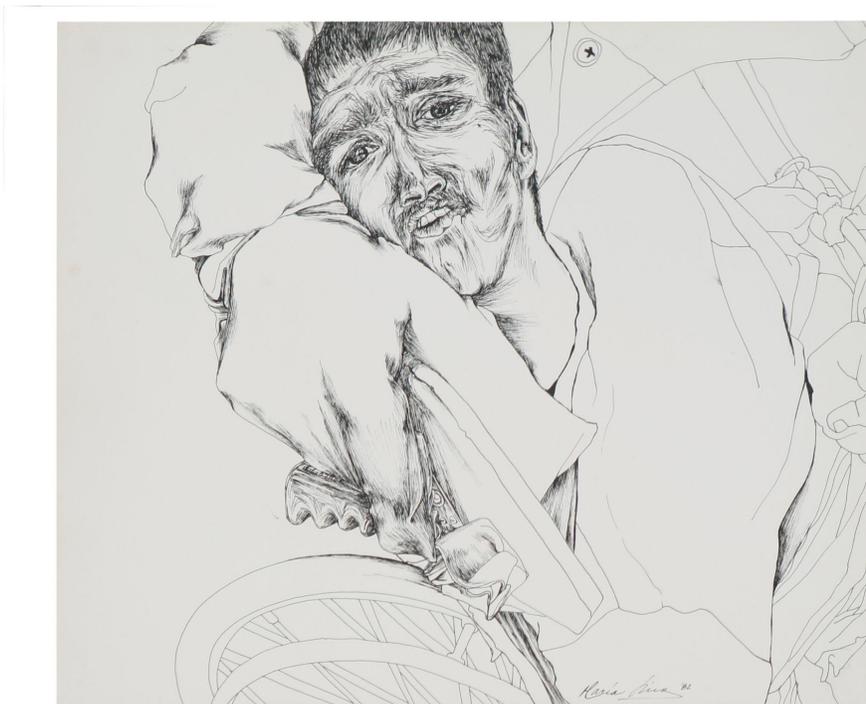
While in New York, Lino met a couple who were teaching video production from their Chinatown loft. The woman noted her good composition and Lino was flattered, “Yes, well, I'm an artist. That's why I have good composition,” she says smiling.

The workshops went so well that Lino would become the couple’s first employee. This is where Lino was able to expand her artistic capabilities and learn how to film and edit.

Years later, she would move back to Miami and earned her Master in Fine Arts from Florida International University. Here, she would continue working on sculptures and bronze casting.

Lino would also reintegrate her video production knowledge into her work many years later. “Many of them [the videos] have this element of combination documentary and art, some documenting something, but what I'm emphasizing is the repetition and the rhythm of that action,” says Lino.

An example of this kind of work are the dance collaborations between Lino and Karen Peterson which were inspired by the drawings of IGNACIO, her brother, who had Cerebral Palsy.



Ignacio Portrait from IGNACIO Project 1982/Courtesy of Maria Lino

The Karen Peterson & Dancers Company is “a physically integrated dance company” with “dancers with and without disabilities.” “I’m not documenting her dance, I’m actually adding an element that’s integral to the performance,” says Lino. Now, the two are working on another collaboration.

Lino was named a Fulbright U.S. Scholar in 2011 and went to Peru to tell the stories of Peruvian women who were once child domestic workers or “trabajadoras del hogar.” Prior to being awarded this opportunity, Lino met a woman named Juana Portalino Callán who she met through friends.

“When I met her she had this knowledge of life,” says Lino and began filming her as she cooked. “I was fascinated when she cooked and when she looked at it she said “Manos Trabajadoras”, so “Working Hands”.” This is where the inspiration behind Lino’s proposal to return to Peru came from.



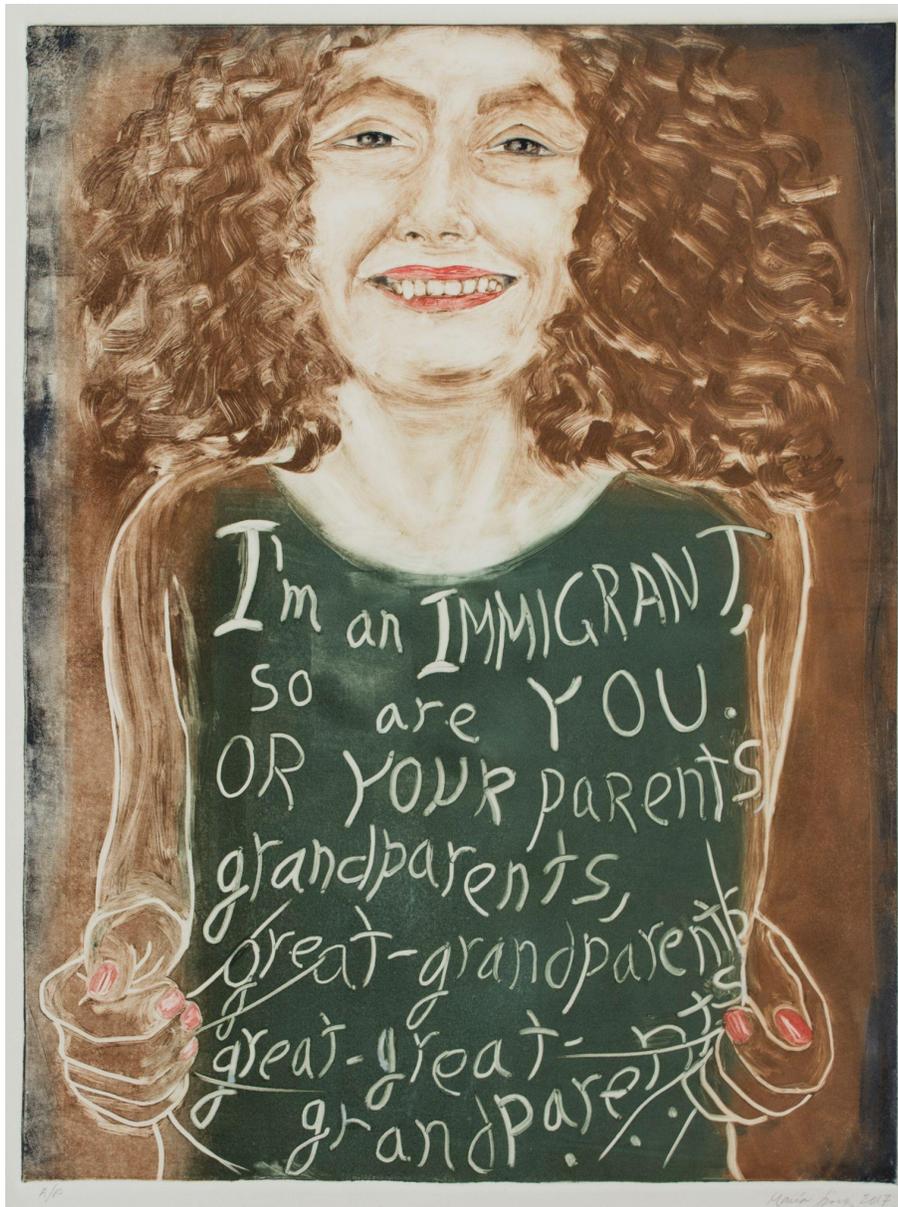
*Camino al Mercado / Walking to Market from Manos Trabajadoras / Working Hands
2019/Courtesy of Maria Lino*

The woman pictured above, Sofía Mauricio Bacilio, was a domestic worker starting at the age of seven. “She’s the community leader, and they’ve been working on trying to eradicate child domestic work, which 80% are girls...so the fact that they can have a global place to tell their story...that makes me very happy,” says Lino.

Three video portraits of the women from this project were featured on CENTERPOINT NOW as a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. “Just for them to be there, it makes me very happy,” says Lino. Being featured on the World Council of Peoples for the United Nations is not only an honor, but it also gives these women and countless others who are in their position a platform for change to happen.

“My dream with that whole series is to have a one-person show in Lima or in some of the main cities in Peru.” Lino would host the women as guests of honor, has been close to having the event, and is still working with a curator to develop the show.

Lino’s work strives to give a voice and visibility to those who aren’t able to advocate for themselves. With work that surrounds women, people with disabilities, migrants, and immigrants, she is able to do just this. One example is the oil paint monotype below.



I'm an IMMIGRANT 2017/Courtesy of Maria Lino

As for what's next for Lino, "I would love to do a project of just seamstresses." This project would highlight and return to Lino's roots. Although she has not decided on a location for it, she is highly anticipating working on this as soon as she can safely.

Maria Lino is a wonderful artist who empowers women, migrants, immigrants, and the disabled through her art. She is an inspiration to other Hispanic and Latin artists and encourages them to follow their dreams just as she did. View her work [here](#)!