

Basic Detail Report

ANGEL SANCHEZ ORTIZ VEJIGANTE HANDCRAFT MAN

Angel Sánchez Ortiz was born in Ponce and raised in Barrio San Antón in Puerto Rico. He grew up living the traditional Carnival festivities in February each year. During this time, family and friends were immersed in the celebration heralding the beginning of Lent. These festivities are more vibrant in the poorer areas of Ponce. He participated in the making of masks and costumes as they got ready for the Carnival in the Cuatro Calle, Bélgica, Cantera and Playa de Ponce. These masks are made out of papier-maché and depict animals with fantastic imagery. **Sánchez Ortiz** continued his craft after immigrating to the Pioneer Valley in 1989, teaching children and adolescents this cultural tradition through workshops and other activities. He has exhibited his work at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, the Spanish American Union, Worcester Art Museum, Wheeler Gallery at Umass, and Holyoke Community College among other places.



The use of masks to perform religious and secular rituals has been present for thousands of years in various cultures. Masks often represent gods, ancestors, animals or historical characters. Today's Puerto Rican masks are the result of a blend of the African, Spanish and native Taíno cultures. The Africans who were forced to come to the island as slaves, brought with them a rich and ancient tradition of wearing masks during rituals. Throughout the centuries mask-making adapted to the island's unique Caribbean culture, especially in the coastal towns where the African population predominated. In places like Loíza Aldea and Ponce the influence of traditional masks and their preparation continues to be strong. While the masks from Loíza are created using coconut shells, the ones from Ponce use papier-maché. Vejigante masks, as they are called, along with costumes, are still used during festivals. **Sánchez Ortiz** embraces his Puerto Rican roots through the creation of colorful masks in the style of his beloved Ponce. He has brought his inspired work to his birth community of Ponce, and now to Latinos in Holyoke and Springfield. His goal is to keep this tradition alive and relevant to Puerto Rican generations today.

Sanchez Ortiz took **Lydia Perez** from Rhode Island, as an apprentice and is currently teaching her a new technique for creating masks. Soon we will see **Lydia** and **Angel** expand this art to Rhode Island.



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to Lydia Pérez & Angel Sanchez OrtizAngel Sánchez Ortíz. Flyer for Angel

Sánchez Ortíz.