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Art in the
Caribbean Diaspora,
1990s–Today

Freddy Rodríguez

b. 1945, Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros,
Dominican Republic; lives in New York, NY

In *Mulato de tal* (1974), bold lines coalesce into zigzagging geometric forms that together suggest a twisting head, chest, and legs — an evocation that is heightened by the work's almost life-size, rectangular-shaped canvas. Despite a resemblance to hard-edge painting, which aspired to a more impersonal, systematic geometry, Freddy Rodríguez's strokes are far more gestural, leaving traces of his brush that evidence his hand's movements. *Mulato de tal* is part of a larger body of work inspired by the writings of Latin American authors on the politics of freedom and its potential. This work takes its title from Miguel Ángel Asturias's 1963 novel *Mulata de tal* [*A Kind of Mulatto*], which revolves around a poor farmer who makes a deal with the devil. Imbued with Catholic and Mayan references as well as descriptions of fissures in the landscape, twisting bodies, and a rhythmic earth, the novel alludes to the colonization of Guatemala and its dictatorship.

Rodríguez painted *Mulato de tal* in New York, eleven years after he left the

Dominican Republic following dictator Rafael Trujillo's assassination. New York offered a distance that, as Rodríguez reflects, "gave me an objectivity which would have been impossible in the past."²⁰ As suggested by its title, the artwork responds to the racial taxonomies imposed by Trujillo's brutal anti-Blackness campaign. If the painting's forms recall a person, then its muddy-red and deep-blue color fields might evoke a landscape of bloodshed, illuminating how genocide, racialization, and colonialism repeat into the present, across geographies, and are held within the body and the land. At the same time, the painting's forms vibrate within a canvas that constrains them, perhaps suggesting Rodríguez's own yearning for freedom in the context of his displacement and racialization in the United States. IC





Freddy Rodriguez, *Guarao*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas; 68 × 96 in.
(172.72 × 243.84 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Hutchinson Modern &
Contemporary.