

## Willie Perdomo



Miguel would often invite poets from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe to visit his creative writing classes at Rutgers University. On the day that I visited, I met Miguel by the Alamo, or the "The Cube " on Astor Place in the East Village. I still remember what he ordered from Starbucks that morning: an almond croissant and a cappuccino. On the ride to New Jersey, he started to point out the industrial landscape of New Jersey, the towers, train yards, and didn't understand how anyone could find Jersey toxic. To this day, when I'm on the New Jersey Turnpike or taking an Amtrak train to Boston or DC, I think of his poet's eyes at work. After the class, he would take the visiting poet out to an early dinner, which was accompanied by a bottle of wine or a few beers,

and Miguel would field all my questions about the early years of the Nuyorican School, about Lucky Cienfuegos or Shorty Bon Bon, or the day he and Miky met William Burroughs, or his interest in Shakespeare, and he would tell tale after tale. What I was looking for were anecdotes to accompany the legends, lineages to a tradition that I proudly claimed. The ride back to New York City was death-defying. He blasted Frankie Ruiz (the song that played on the return trip was, *Tu Con El*) and was jumping dividers at almost 80 miles per hour and then looked at me and smiled that cherubic, but mischievous smile. He paid me when we arrived at "The Cube" and drove off. Miguel, as are most of us Nuyorican Poets, is a literary outlaw, and like Hamlet, which he could recite by act, he knew that two crafts can meet in one line because sometimes it just "be's that way."

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**Willie Perdomo** is the author of *Smoking Lovely: The Remix*, *The Crazy Bunch*, *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon*, and *Where a Nickel Costs a Dime*. Winner of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Cy Twombly Award for Poetry, and the PEN Open Book Award, Perdomo was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Poetry Society of America Norma Farber First Book Award. He teaches at Phillips Exeter Academy.