

Science is all around you: Agustín Stahl's Watercolors ^[1]

Submitted by [José R Almodóvar](#) ^[2] on 30 April 2014 - 11:15am



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José: "Greetchen, our "Ciencia Boricua" has had illustrious scientists in its history. One of them is [Dr. Agustín Stahl](#) ^[3]. This month our guest, [Dr. Pedro Acevedo](#) ^[4], shares images that are part of a project to digitize the work of this prolific Puerto Rican medicine doctor and scientist. "

Greetchen: "José, our guest also has a successful career in science. Pedro, tell us about yourself and your work."

Pedro: "I am a native of Rio Piedras. I obtained a Bachelor of Science from the University of P.R. Mayaguez (UPRM, 1977) and a Ph.D. in 1989 from City University of New York (CUNY) in collaboration with the Botanical Garden in New York. Since then I work as a researcher and curator in the Department of Botany from the Natural History Museum of the [Smithsonian Institute](#) ^[5] in Washington, DC. My work is

focused on taxonomy and phylogeny of Sapindaceae ^[6] (quenepa family) and other neotropical plants. Most of my work is performed in the West Indies ^[7] and the lowland forests of South America ^[7]. "

José: " How and when did the Agustín Stahl's project started? What's your role? "

Pedro: "The project about the botanical legacy of Dr. Agustín Stahl ^[8], has a long history dating back to the days of high school at Mayagüez. In 1976, the UPRM received a donation of 585 botanical watercolors made by Dr. Stahl. This event was accompanied by a small exhibition in the hall of the Puerto Rican Library Collection. I attended this show without knowing who this illustrious Puerto Rican was. I remember I left the room admired for the delicacy of his work, which has inspired me throughout my career. In 2003, through a grant from the Smithsonian, I took the task of scanning Dr. Stahl's watercolors, both the 585 found in Mayagüez and the 180 that are in the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture ^[9], with the aim to disseminate his work through the internet ^[10]."



Greetchen: "How many paintings have been digitally restored?"

Pedro: "With a grant from the Department of Agriculture, I obtained funds to continue the restoration. Currently 165 out of 760 have been restored (40 of these are non-restorable)."

José: "Pedro, tell us more of what we see in these pictures."

Pedro: "The figures are watercolors of the pineapple. The first image shows the deterioration of the original watercolor and the second is a restored image. The original watercolor is deposited in the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in San Juan".

Greetchen: "Do you have any future plans for this project?"

Pedro: "We want to continue displaying this work throughout the Island, and continue the restoration work to raise awareness about the need to restore the original watercolors and publicize the work of Dr. Stahl. We hope to publish a facsimile edition of the book "Studies on flora of Puerto Rico" by Dr. Stahl that was published between 1883 to 1887, and include the restored watercolors for the first time. "

José: "In your opinion, what does Dr. Agustín Stahl represent for the Puerto Rican science and around the world?"

Pedro: "Stahl is the pioneer and father of the natural sciences in Puerto Rico. His intellectual curiosity and dedication are an example to be emulated not only in science but also in any other profession. His life is an example of honesty and uprightness and a symbol of universality."

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- [acuarelas](#) ^[18]
- [watercolor](#) ^[19]
- [Museo Nacional de Historia Natural del Instituto Smithsonian](#) ^[20]
- [ciencia a tu alrededor](#) ^[21]
- [botany](#) ^[22]
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