

The Pitch

Edra Soto's 'the place of dwelling' is Kemper's 10 year atrium project finale
By Samantha Russell | January 30, 2026

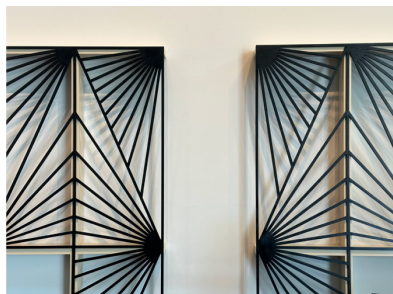


Artist Edra Soto with Bad Bunny and her dog, Fiesta // Photo by Samantha Russell

The Kemper calls the museum's entryway an atrium. Soto sees a chapel.

Soto's commissioned works line the atrium with depth and dimension in this 10th-year installation, highlighting Latin American artists. She interprets the stalagmite-type fixture that adorns the ceiling behind the front desk in a church-like vestibule, and the architecture itself as a homing beacon for her pieces. They furnish the walls in devotion to the working class of Puerto Rico.

Resemblance of a cross made with stacked and fixed fans and a wall built in the style of a tabernacle grate continues the religious motif. Made of widespread Puerto Rican objects like plastic lawn chairs and box fans, there is a hint of imperialist overture the island community's pervading religion. Soto grew up attending Catholic grade school and high school and now examines the dogma of her youth.



Wooden rejas // Photo by Samantha Russell

Curator Kevin Moore has followed Soto's work for some time. He appreciates her approach regarding colonization: there's a certain severity in her works. Where many Latin American artists employ tropical bursts of color, her collection is muted tones of subdued earth amidst black grates that feather into the wall.

Muted tones—with the exception of color splash on a plastic lawn chair upholstered with a Bad Bunny blanket. She speaks beautifully about her inheritance of the Spanish language from her grandmother, and says of Bad Bunny, "Seeing such a young person using the language in that way, it really

speaks about the resilience of a place."



Angles under construction // Photo by Samantha Russell

Her choice of angles extends into architect Gunnar Birkerts' building design. In communication with the original 1992 architecture, she presents a dichotomy both highlighting the unfolding interior and acutely observing cultural boldness in her own artwork. Shelves extend up the main wall and accentuate slitted windows in the restaurant behind the atrium with their angular trajectory. Eyes are drawn down the hallway where more windows sing in harmony with Soto's works before they open into the Kemper galleries.

Many of the pieces are made with ornate wooden elements that evoke rejas, the iron bar fences prominent throughout Puerto Rico's islands, which provide protection and ventilation for houses and balconies. The wall of the tabernacle is composed only of these.

You will be able to peer into a small box to view a handful of select images from Soto's photography archive. From a personal collection of her journeys to Puerto Rico, she has only ever used them as reference photos. To peer in is like looking through a balcony grate at the people gathered inside.

Much of her heritage is contained in these works. On an adjacent wall there are molds of a ceramic shell her mother created. Her family owned a commercial ceramic business. Soto has a childhood memory of her mother shaping the ridges of this shell with an orange sponge. Soto cherishes this shell. "It's the first time I realize the value of a common object placed in my home. It represents a part of the family history I'm trying to honor." She replicated the shell at her Koehler Co. Factory residency in Wisconsin.

Select artworks from the prior nine years of The Atrium Project's commissioning series can currently be seen in a gallery alongside the atrium. 10 years, 10 stories, concluding with 'the place of dwelling' imagined by Edra Soto.

Edra Soto 'the place of dwelling' is on view January 30, 2026 to March 7, 2027