

aquí y allá: una manera de ser (here and there: a way of being)

Michelle Peraza

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN VISUAL ARTS
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

April 2022

© Michelle Peraza, 2022

Abstract

This thesis support paper explores a body of work based on drawing and painting representing my LatinX family. In this paper, I intend to probe, contest, address, and resist our colonial history to contribute to resilience, empowerment, and a nuanced LatinX identity in a visual format. In this paper I contextualize my family within a post-colonial Latin American history, investigate the role of painting in perpetuating dominant colonial tropes, as well as engage with theories of the center and marginality. I also discuss the aesthetic strategies of *haciendo caras* (making faces), performing brownness, and parody, concluding with a discussion on mimicry/ambivalence and a method of healing the colonial wound. The artistic practice I outline in this thesis paper fluctuates between research and creation to engage with decolonial strategies in figurative painting and non-figurative drawing. This practice creates resistance against coloniality through visual creations.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the land on which this project has developed, the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. It is now home to many Indigenous Peoples from numerous First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. I acknowledge the current treaty holders as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region. I am grateful to be working on this land.

My sincerest gratitude to my committee members Janet Jones, Michel Daigneault, and Tammer El-Sheikh for their support, feedback, and encouragement in bringing this project together. I immensely appreciate your guidance.

I am thankful for the support and feedback of Barbara Balfour.

This project became possible with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the York University Graduate Fellowship.

I dedicate this paper to my mom who continuously gives me the courage to paint and create a project like this.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	v
<i>En el espacio</i> (in the space)	1
Introduction.....	3
<i>Es una invención, no un descubrimiento</i> (It is an invention, not a discovery)	4
<i>Manera de ser</i> (way of being)	8
Oil Painting and colonial tropes.....	9
Subverting colonial tropes.....	13
<i>Los márgenes como lugar de empoderamiento</i> (The margins as a place of empowerment)	15
<i>Haciendo caras</i>	18
<i>Actuando</i> (Performing) brownness.....	21
Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the politics of the brown body.....	22
Parody and the carnivalesque: <i>relajo</i> , <i>rasquachi</i> and <i>chusmería</i>	25
Mimicry and ambivalence.....	30
<i>Mestizaje</i>	34
Healing the colonial wound.....	35
Conclusion.....	40
Works Cited.....	41
Appendix: Thesis Exhibition Documentation.....	43

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Peraza, Michelle. Painting studies, acrylic on watercolour paper, 2020.	7
Fig. 2: Kim, Byron. <i>Synecdoche</i> , oil and wax on wood, forty parts, 1991-2001. https://whitney.org/collection/works/12073	7
Fig. 3: Juárez, Juan Rodríguez. <i>Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva, Duke of Linares</i> , oil on canvas, 208 x 128 cm, ca. 1711-16 in <i>Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From Conquest to Independence</i> , edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, 159. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.	11
Fig. 4: Ruiz, Juan Patricio Morlete. <i>Portrait of Man with Clocks</i> , oil on canvas, 198 x 106 cm, c. 1755- 65, in <i>Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici</i> , edited by Ilona Katzew, 326. Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C., 2017.....	11
Fig. 5: Peraza, Michelle. <i>Mi mamá con la silla</i> , acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72’’x60’’, 2021.....	14
Fig. 6: Peraza, Michelle. Close-up from <i>Mi mamá con la silla</i> , 2021.....	15
Fig. 7: Morisot, Berthe. <i>On the Terrace</i> , oil on canvas, 29’’x 26’’, 1874. <i>WikiArt: Visual Art Encyclopedia</i> . https://www.wikiart.org/en/berthe-morisot/on-the-terrace-1874	17
Fig. 8: Peraza, Michelle. <i>Yo con el jarrón</i> , acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72’’x72’’, 2021.....	20
Fig. 9: Peraza, Michelle. Close-up from <i>Yo con el jarrón</i> , 2021.....	21
Fig. 10: Peraza, Michelle. Close-up from <i>Mi mamá con la silla</i> , 2021	21
Fig. 11: Photograph of <i>Border Brujo</i> , performance, 1988-1989. The Official Website of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. https://www.guillermogomezpena.com/works/	23
Fig. 12: Peraza, Michelle. <i>Mi hermana pinchando el globo</i> , acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72’’ x65’’, 2022.....	26
Fig. 13: Peraza, Michelle. Close-up from <i>Mi hermana pinchando el globo</i> , 2022.....	27

- Fig. 14: De Aguilar, Cristóbal. *Pedro de Peralta y Barnuevo*, oil on canvas, 165 x 123 cm, 1751, in *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From Conquest to Independence*, edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, 371. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.....29
- Fig. 15: Holbein, Hans (the Younger). *The Ambassadors*, oil on oak, 207 cm x 209.5 cm, 1533. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-holbein-the-younger-the-ambassadors>.....29
- Fig. 16: Galque, Andrés Sánchez. *Los Mulatos de Esmeraldas (The Mulattoes of Esmeraldas)*, oil on canvas, 92 x 175 cm, 1599 in *Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits*, by Elizabeth P. Benson, 114. San Antonio, Tex: San Antonio Museum of Art, 2004.....31
- Fig. 17: Peraza, Michelle. *Mi hermana en tres espacios*, acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 48’’x 60’’, 60’’ x 60’’ & 48’’ x 60’’, 2022.....31
- Fig. 18: Kahlo, Frida. *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I*, oil and tempera on zinc, 30.7 cm x 34.5 cm, 1936. <https://www.fridakahlo.org/my-grandparents-my-parents-and-me.jsp>.....32
- Fig. 19: Peraza, Michelle. Close-up of central panel from *Mi hermana en tres espacios*, 2022...33
- Fig. 20: Peraza, Michelle. *Círculos*, coloured pencil and gold leaf on *amate* paper, 46’’ diameter each, 2022.....37
- Fig. 21: Anonymous. *Codex Barbonicus* (fourteenth *treneca* showing *Xipe Totec*), ink and pigments on *amatl* or *amate* paper, ca. 39 x 39.5 cm, ca 1520, *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From Conquest to Independence*, edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, 74. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.37
- Fig. 22: Photograph of a Costa Rican ox-cart wheel in “Ox herding and oxcart traditions in Costa Rica,” <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/oxherding-and-oxcart-traditions-in-costa-rica-00103>.....39
- Fig. 23: Close-up from *Círculos*, 2022.....39
- Fig. 24: Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....43
- Fig. 25: Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....43
- Fig. 26: Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....44
- Fig. 27: Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....44

Figure 28: Installation view of <i>aquí y allá: una manera de ser</i> (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....	45
Figure 29: Installation view of <i>aquí y allá: una manera de ser</i> (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....	45
Figure 30: Installation view of <i>aquí y allá: una manera de ser</i> (here and there: a way of being), 2022.....	46

En el espacio (in the space)

Cuando entras (when you enter) the gallery space you will find a space of *empujando* (pushing) back, an imagination of an-other way of being, and a method of moving *adelante* (ahead). *Este espacio* (this space) is a space of contestation and resilience. *Te encontrarás* (you will encounter) a large painting of a woman with a Cuban cigar in hand, wearing a white dress, and red patent leather heels. Coming closer, your eyes will move around the folds, creases, and wrinkles of her white dress, over the texture of her bare arms and skin, the detail of her *aretes de argolla* (gold hoop earrings). *Todas ellas llevan aretes de argolla* (all of them wear gold hoops) in this space. With our hoops, *nosotras no toleres nada* (we do not put up with anything). You will rest on her face and see her age, her beauty marks, her *haciendo una cara* (making a face) and follow her gaze. She is staring down at a baroque style chair represented as a white diagram, void of the fullness of the figure, but as intricately treated. *Ella se niega a sentarse* (she refuses to sit on) the chair.

You will come across another large painting, a younger woman, in a bold, light purple t-shirt and black cotton joggers. Your eyes will move through her complicated braided hair into her made up face of ink black winged eyeliner, peach eyeshadow, drawn-in eyebrows, and highlighted cheeks. *Ella también está haciendo una cara* (she is making a face too). Looking at her clothes you will not only notice the light hitting the folds, the detail of the drawstring waistband, but also her stance. *Una postura de rechazo y preguntas* (a stance of rejection and questioning). With her nail polished blue middle finger, she is holding the white diagrammatic baroque style *jarrón* (vase).

Entonces encontrarás (then you will find) another larger-than-life painted figure. In a high blond streaked ponytail, heart-shaped oversized gold hoops, red lipstick *y un outfit para salir* (and an outfit to go out) she is about to pop a balloon. This balloon is it not just any balloon,

es un globo del lado de las supuestas Américas (it is a globe on the side of the supposed Americas). Below the balloon you will see the white framework of intricately drawn colonial navigation devices along with an hourglass, books and a painted ink and quill atop of a drawn ornamented table.

Then you will come to a triptych. It is a triptych *de una mujer en tres espacios* (of a woman in three spaces). In the outer panels your eyes will move through her striped outfit of bright blues, peaches, yellows and purples into the *lechuguillas* ('little lettuces' or collars) she is adorned in. Both *resistiendo and aceptando* (resisting and accepting) the *lechuguillas*, they gaze towards the central panel. In this interspace the woman is *fuerte y resistente* (strong, resilient) as she gazes back at you with her hands on her hips. Mirroring the striped quality of the outfits of the outer panels, this woman's clothing *tiene algo más* (has something more). You will notice a brown palette of Baroque patterns amongst Mesoamerican patterns.

Finally, *vas a ver* (you will see) two large circles, filled with patterns. It is on a thick *amate* paper, a paper *los conquistadores quemaron cuando vinieron a silenciar lo que había sobre ellos* (the conquerors burned when they came to silence what was on them). Seeing a palette of browns, you will move from ring to ring, pausing on each to observe the colonial and Indigenous patterns co-existing but never touching.

In this gallery space *nosotras tenemos* (we have) the agency to push back. We need spaces like this. *Mi mamá me dijo que vinieron con sus armas, enfermedades y religión por el oro y la tierra* (my mom told me they came with their guns, diseases, and religion for the gold and the land) and this project will dismantle, interrogate, and reframe the residues of the colonial project.

Introduction

Nosotros somos LatinX (we are LatinX). My immediate family and I are LatinX, people of the so-called Latin American region, living outside of our land of origin. We are Latin, bound to the colonial past, together with capital X, bringing “dual-directional semiotics” into a word that “sounds like the future” while holding the past and present.¹ In other words, the past of Indigeneity and Africanity that have been subjugated by the colonial presence and persist today. The X calls us to reflect and *preguntar* (question) our present by looking to the trauma of the past. The X “forces us to probe” into our beginnings, not as linear, but as repetitive processes.² It is through reflecting on the weight of my LatinX identity that a practice-based research approach developed wherein I am undertaking a body of work based on drawing and painting, representing my LatinX family to probe, address, contest, resist our history and contribute to resilience, empowerment, and a nuanced identity in a visual format. This thesis paper will outline this pursuit beginning by contextualizing my family within a post-colonial Latin American history. This will be followed by investigating the role of painting in perpetuating dominant colonial tropes with a focus on viceroy and *criollo* portraiture. From there I engage in theories of the center and marginality which inform my paintings. I will discuss the artistic strategies of *haciendo caras* (making faces), performing brownness, and parody. I will conclude with a discussion on mimicry/ambivalence and a method of healing the colonial wound.

In conjunction with this academic research, my thesis project visually articulates an exploration of various shades of brown on watercolour paper, large-scale figurative panel paintings and geometric drawings on *amate* paper. The objective of my research/creation project is to understand the underlying colonial structures that have kept my family marginalized,

¹ Claudia, Milian. *LatinX*, United States: University of Minnesota Press (2019): 4-11.

² *Ibid*, 4.

othered, and inferior by developing strategies that represent contestation and resistance through drawing and painting.

Es una invención, no un descubrimiento (It is an invention, not a discovery)

Tu abuelito trató de conseguir un trabajo una vez y le dijeron que era de piel demasiado oscura. ¿Puedes creerlo? (Your grandpa tried to get a job once and they told him he was too dark skinned. Can you believe that?) My dad recently told me this story about my Costa Rican grandpa. Of course, I believe it. I could also believe it when he told me that it was mentioned to my blond, green-eyed, light skinned Costa Rican grandma that she was fixing the race when she married my dark-skinned grandpa. I understood all of this because skin colour and social hierarchy were not new to me. This hierarchy is embedded in me. It was inherited from colonial Latin America's over five-hundred-year-old history. I am reminded of this history every time I am with my sisters, one of whom is called *negra* (dark/black), the other *huevo* (egg) and in my case *mi piel esta en el medio* (my skin is in the middle). Through academic research, in tandem with a visual articulation of my LatinX experience, I have come to understand my art practice as *una manera de ser* (a way of being) in the world. It is a navigation into the complexities of the LatinX experience, which is constituted by multiple, and at many times conflicting histories and worldviews.

Embarking on an MFA program, it was critical for me to explore Latin American history as a method to provide deeper insight into and contextualization of my LatinX identity. It is an identity that has a violent beginning. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano outlines, in one of his essays the first fifty-year period of forced labour, *conquista* violence, and disease and the extermination of sixty-five million Indigenous inhabitants of the present-day Latin American

region.³ More abhorrent within colonial Latin America under the Spanish Crown is that approximately 1.6 million Africans were forced into slavery with another 5.5 million under Portuguese rule in Brazil.⁴ This history is vital to comprehend the destructive magnitude of the colonial endeavor and why the implications of the colonial period continues to reverberate in us today. First, with the conquering of Latin America began the “constitution of a new world order,” a world order in which a European politics, social customs, and cultural practices rooted themselves across the globe.⁵ To this day colonial power structures persist, a persistence which Quijano refers to as *coloniality*, and we, LatinX’s, continue to live within this system. Second, *coloniality* also functions to ascribe a name to people who are “defined by the colonial wound” or “those whom [Frantz] Fanon called *damnés de la terre* (‘the wretched of the earth’).”⁶ My family and I embody the colonial wound; we are the living legacy of Spain’s colonial project, a mixture of the colonizers and the colonized. I began my research within a post-colonial/decolonial framework because as Gabriela A. Veronelli insists, this frameworks’ intention is to describe the “living legacy of 16th century colonialism in contemporary societies.”⁷ Colonialism lives on, and its echo continues to be part of the LatinX experience.

I turn also to Walter Mignolo, an Argentinian semiotician and contributor to post-colonial theories, Mignolo provides a history of Latin America by illustrating the region as an *invention* as opposed to a *discovery*. Taking a Fanonian or a non-European approach to the conquering of

³ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 170. doi:10.1080/09502380601164353.

⁴ The Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American slave trade database, “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Estimates,” Rice University. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>

⁵ Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” 168.

⁶ Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub. (2005): 8.

⁷ Gabriela A Veronelli, "The Coloniality of Language: Race, Expressivity, Power, and the Darker Side of Modernity," in *Wagadu* 13 (2015):

109.https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A627689876/AONE?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=745c8a11.
109

the Americas, Mignolo illustrates the colonial project through the perspective of the African slave-trade and Indigenous genocide, meaning an illustration of silenced peoples and histories.⁸ He attempts to uncover the “idea” of Latin America as a foundation set in the colonial period in order to “unravel” dominant colonial structures that continue to exist.⁹ Mignolo therefore engages with the colonial past to explain the contemporary lesions which remain open. These are lesions I recognize and *motivarme a crear* (motivates me to create). In response to Quijano and Mignolo, I began to conceptualize my palette for a series of paintings, a critical step in my process as a painter (Fig. 1). This stage, priming acrylic paint onto watercolour paper is not only a preparatory step, but the base colour for small studies of my family as well as references for larger paintings. My palette developed into various shades of brown as the result of reflecting on the trauma of Latin American peoples, *el dolor del pasado y del presente* (the pain of the past and present). Although prior to entering the MFA program, I was predominantly a large-scale portrait painter who at the beginning stages of my research-creation project, could not visually articulate the weight of coloniality in a figurative form. What I was reminded of at that time was that *mi familia* (my family) and I, visually embody two sides of history, *ellos y el otro* (them and the other). Although stylistically similar to Byron Kim’s *Synecdoche* (1999-2001) (Fig. 2.), wherein the artist assembled a grid of various skin colours painted by examining and replicating people’s skin, my brown studies composed of six by six-inch squares serve instead as a documentation of and reflection on Spanish, Indigenous, and African bodies.

⁸ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, xi-xv.

⁹ *Ibid*, xi.



Figure 1. Painting studies, acrylic on watercolour paper, 2020

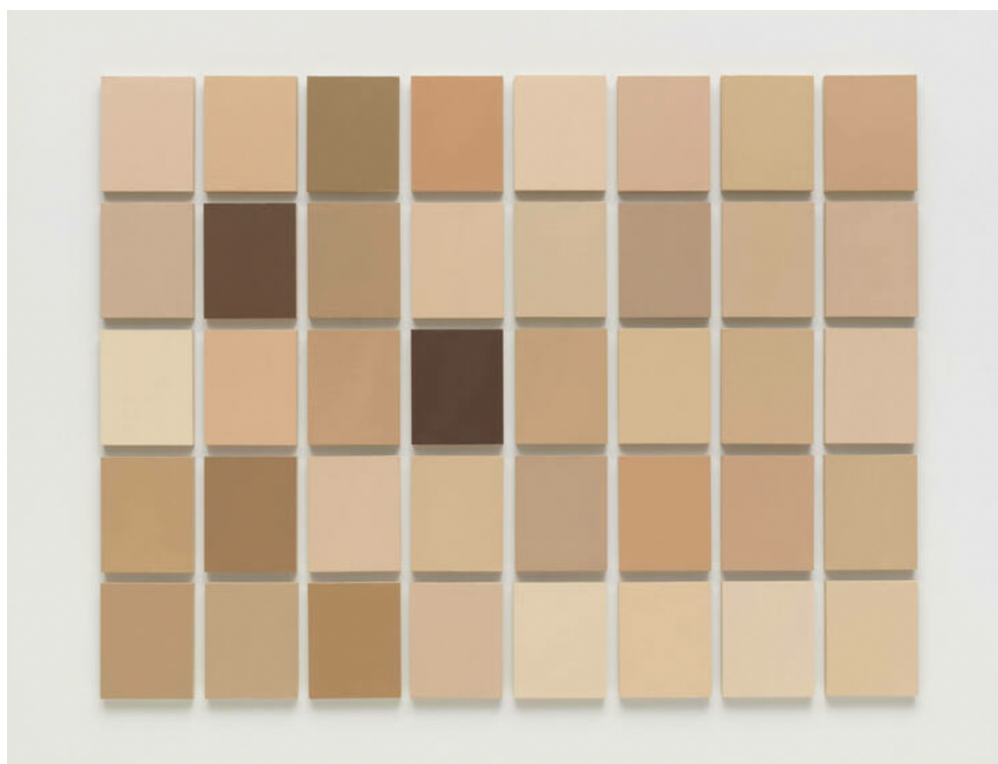


Figure 2. *Synecdoche*, Byron Kim, oil and wax on wood, 1991-2001

***Manera de ser* (way of being)**

Reconsidering my brown paper studies, I realized that the skin tone values were not only palette samples, but an attempt to understand my cultural traits. The Cuban-American art critic and queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz in his book *The Sense of Brown* defines this realization as the “brown commons,” meaning the “process of thinking and imagining...in the face of [a] shared wound.”¹⁰ By exploring LatinX theatre and performance, Muñoz theorizes on brown affect (which he also refers to as the “*manera de ser*” [a way of being])¹¹ arguing the *brown commons* signifies the shared commonality of those that have suffered together but also flourished “under duress and pressure;”¹² that which Muñoz also compares to W.E.B. Du Bois’ “feeling like a problem.”¹³ At this stage of my practice-based research, I was not able to create a figurative representation of *mi manera de ser* (my way of being), *pero entendí sentirme como un problema* (but I did understand feeling like a problem). In Muñoz’s interpretation of process and thinking, I was able to find a shared commonality in our LatinX brownness by creating equally sized papers representing people without specificities. *Pero necesitaba seguir adelante* (but I needed to push forward) as *brownness* is not only the collective experience of harm and suffering, even more, “it is also the potential for refusal and resistance to that often-systemic harm.”¹⁴ With the intention to paint a figurative representation to question and resist our colonial history, my next step was to investigate the role of painting itself, its legacy and ties to the colonial past in order to re-imagine a figurative representation of contemporary LatinX bodies that navigates through coloniality.

¹⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, Joshua Chambers-Letson, and Tavia Nyong'o, *The Sense of Brown*, Durham: Duke University Press (2020): 6.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 39.

¹² *Ibid*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

Oil Painting and Colonial Tropes

Certainly “art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class,” but as John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing* (2008), oil painting within European art between 1500-1900 held extreme importance.¹⁵ In this 400-year span, oil painting became a critical *way of seeing* the world in a way that no other visual art form could do.¹⁶ Why was oil paint so evocative in this time? Oil paint “defines the real” with its distinctive capabilities of rendering tangible qualities of what it is depicting.¹⁷ Turning to Latin America, with the Spanish colonial encroachment aligning with the glory of oil painting, it became an instrumental medium for the Spanish Crown and Spanish descendants. *Conquistadores*, arriving with religious zeal, hunger for gold and conquest, ushered in Baroque and Rococo styles in a display of their “aspirations and hopes” with minimal interest in the “aspirations and hopes of the people who already lived there.”¹⁸ Actually, by appropriating land and exploiting African and Indigenous peoples, Europe and its colonies generated a huge amount of wealth through gold and silver mining and running plantations thereby funding this period of “splendor in arts and ideas.”¹⁹ It is vital then to investigate Spanish viceroys and *criollos*, Spanish descendants, and the manner in which they created an identity and envisioned themselves through painting to investigate colonial tropes perpetuated in early colonial Latin America.

Since “no Spanish king ever set foot on American soil,” the viceroys, who were for the most part military aristocrats, churchmen, and lawyers, represented the Spanish Crown.²⁰

Spanish colonial Latin Americas elite society was occupied by *peninsulares* or those born in

¹⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, England: Penguin Classics (2008): 86.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 86-87.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

¹⁸ Gauvin A. Bailey, *Art of Colonial Latin America*, London: Phaidon (2005): 41-43.

¹⁹ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 61.

²⁰ Bailey, *Art of Colonia Latin America*, 51.

Europe, and *criollos*, “each of whom thought themselves superior to the other.”²¹ *Peninsulares* and *criollos* transplanted European ethos into the Americas, particularly through painting. For example, as viceroys emulated the “highest standards of courtly European taste and opulence,”²² in the painting *Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva* (Fig. 3), the sitter dons a powdered wig and elaborate European clothing while proudly standing beside a table, clock, and baton in front of drapery, a coat of arms, and biographical inscription. With *criollos* being amongst the wealthiest people in the world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,²³ one can see the lavish life of the *criollo* sitter depicted in *Portrait of Man with Clocks* (*Retrato del hombre de los relojes*). With his embellished outfit, the sitter very similarly to the viceroy, stands beside a table, clock, and quill while holding a pocket watch and walking stick in front of dramatic drapery. According to Mignolo, it was the *criollos* who translated the colonial Baroque ideology into a *criollo* ethos, ergo becoming both the new “master” of Latin America as well as the “slave” to Spain.²⁴

²¹ Ibid, 67.

²² Ibid, 313.

²³ Ibid, 313.

²⁴ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 47/60.



Figure 3. Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva, Duke of Linares*, oil on canvas, 208 x 128 cm, ca. 1711-16



Figure 4. Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz, *Portrait of Man with Clocks*, oil on canvas, 198 x 106 cm, c. 1755- 65

As can be noticed, viceroy and *criollo* portraiture mirrored elite Spanish aesthetics and ideals, albeit in a distorted manner. *Criollo* Baroque was a “Baroque pretending-to-be of the Spanish elite.”²⁵ In considering Baroque seventeenth century art as the “Golden Age” of painting in Spain, Luisa Elena Alcalá argues that the seventeenth and eighteenth century also marks the “triumph” of painting in Latin America, communicating “an extraordinary variety of ideas, beliefs, and identities.”²⁶ As opposed to Europe, colonial Latin American was distinctly divided into race, along with class, in a constantly evolving and unstable mix, thus *criollos* were “highly sensitive to issues of purity of blood, lineage, and social status.”²⁷ For this reason, portraiture became a strong visual asset for *criollo* elite to assert status and power in Latin America. Indeed, with the expansion of the *criollo* population, *criollos* became an intensely active group in the arts and so recent scholarship has begun focusing on the “identity-formation processes” of *criollos*.²⁸ Therefore, it is critical to examine *criollo* consciousness to trace the way in which European aesthetics, ideals and ethos became so imbedded into Latin America culture.

Delving into both viceroy and *criollo* portraiture became pivotal in my creative process to investigate colonial representations of body gesture, clothing, adornment, décor, and objects which functioned as tools of status and power. As seen, often in these paintings (but also “depending on the pretensions and activities of the sitters”), is a coat of arms, a red curtain “denoting wealth and dignity,” and an accompaniment of “props” such as tables, books, writing implements and clocks.²⁹ Consequently, the most important part of these portraits is not likeness, but that the sitter is “project[ing] the appropriate image;” an image of the high-status Spanish

²⁵ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 62.

²⁶ Luisa Elena Alcalá, “Painting in Latin America 1550- 1820: A Historical and Theoretical Framework,” in *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From Conquest to Independence*, edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, New Haven: Yale University Press (2014): 19.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

²⁹ Bailey, *Art of Colonial Latin America*, 161-162.

ethos.³⁰ Although there are portraits of *criollo* women, I am focusing my analysis on men and drawing inspiration from these paintings for my own body of work. Why? With an expansion enacted by the conquistadors and missionaries), roles distinctly for men, a staggering ninety percent of those who ventured into the “New World” were men.³¹ The ethos transplanted into Latin America was not only a Eurocentric, but a Eurocentrism focused on the male gender. The legacy of European patriarchal culture is identifiable more immediately in LatinX society in the concept of *machismo* or “an exaggerated masculinity”³² The paintings I created for this body of work question and subvert the continuity of the male Eurocentric ideal representation. Choosing to depict only contemporary women allows me to *empujar* (push) back at the colonial representation.

Subverting colonial tropes

My first large-scale panel painting (Fig. 5) is a painting representing my mother. With a background in acrylic paint based on my brown colour studies, my mother appears to be sneering and staring down at a baroque style chair while holding a Cuban cigar. *Con un vestido para verse y sentirse bien bajo el sol, tacones rojos y cigarro para tener poder* (in a dress to look and feel good under the sun, red heels, and cigar for power), she stands dignified. Engaging with viceroy and *criollo* elite portrait paintings, the figure is emulating a stance of power, looking down at the colonial chair, critiquing its power and history. The chair is depicted as a white diagrammatic form (Fig. 6) as a reminder its framework holds strong, but it is empty of the colour and the fullness of the figure to attempt to deconstruct and dismantle the Eurocentric ethos the object represents. A high-realism approach to the figure brings to the forefront the contemporary

³⁰ Ibid, 162.

³¹ Ibid, 58-59.

³² Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Machismo,” accessed February 14, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/machismo>.

LatinX body in the picture plane. *El poder de la silla aún resuena, pero ella lo desafía* (the chair's power still reverberates, but she is challenging it.)



Figure 5. *Mi mamá con la silla*, acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72''x 60'', 2021



Figure 6. Close-up from *Mi mamá con la silla*

Los márgenes como lugar de empoderamiento (The margins as a place of empowerment)

Not only do the subjects have vital importance in the painting, but so too does the composition. The baroque chair is emphasized as the focal point of the painting, whereas my mother is in the margins. In my engagement with the notion and compositional device of centering, I first turned towards a feminist art historical perspective. Griselda Pollock argues in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* that through a feminist historical perspective, we are able to interpret that “knowledge is shaped in relations of power,” thus knowledge has *centered* around the “canonical legend of Western masculine Christian creativity.”³³ But how exactly did the “West” become the center of existence? According to Mignolo, in a linear path, the Christian empire received the framework of knowledge, social

³³ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Routledge (2003): xix.

order, and the unification of the church and political life from the Greco-Roman world and so, the Christian Empire was west of the original centre, Jerusalem.³⁴ It was with the emergence of the Americas that Western Europe became the “locus of observation,” placing itself in the center of the world for observing, describing, and classifying.³⁵ Therefore, art history, too, has centered and been defined by the Eurocentric, Christian male. Pollock is critical in investigating the centre in that she presents the necessity of a paradigm shift, guided by feminist theory. Pollock writes, in veering from the centre, “we have to imagine the worlds we inhabit from perspectives in which some people are centered, and some are decentered in a perpetual movement of shifted centres of experience.”³⁶ It was Pollock’s theory on the center, decentering and reorienting perspectives that provoked me to make use of my line system for scaling, shifting the line-work to emphasize the baroque chair as the center point and placing my mother off-centre.

Another aspect of Pollock’s research that has influenced me is her analysis of women painters of the Modernist period wherein the centre comes into effect in their paintings. With a scholarly aim of “see[ing] art as a social practice, as a totality of many relations and determinations,”³⁷ Pollock investigates Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, two women Impressionist painters. She argues that we can identify the asymmetrical gender difference in their paintings’ representation of Parisian society and therefore the role of an artist’s practice and of art history as “structures *in* and structuring *of* gender power relations.”³⁸ Pollock observes that Morisot and Cassatt structured their paintings based on space; space in terms of the domestic sphere as opposed to the public sphere, but also spatial arrangement within the picture plane. For

³⁴ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

³⁶ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, xxvii.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 3-7.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

Pollock, Morisot's 1874 painting *On the Terrace* (Fig. 7) juxtaposes two systems of space through the fractured and obvious presence of the balcony as well as "literally squeez[ing]" the woman in the painting, in a way that compresses her "within a box of space."³⁹ For Morisot, the placement of the figure both represents and perpetuates the gender structures at play in nineteenth-century Paris, but in my practice, my aim is to critically engage with the center and subvert the centre point. I was persuaded that other accounts of the notion of centring are necessary, specifically accounts from those who occupy the margins. Gloria Anzaldúa, a sixth generation Chicana scholar on Chicana Cultural Theory, Feminist Theory and Queer Theory writes "what is considered theory in the dominant academic community, is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-colour," thus, as women-of-colour, "we need *teorías* [theories] that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world."⁴⁰



Figure 7. Berthe Morisot, *On the Terrace*, oil on canvas, 29''x 26'', 1874

³⁹ Ibid, 81-85.

⁴⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Haciendo caras, una entrada," in *Making Face, Making Soul =: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, xv-xxviii, written by Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books (1990): xxv.

He venido a concluir de que los márgenes significan algo más (I have come to conclude that the margins mean something more). My mother is not just compressed in the margins, the margin can actually function as a method of empowerment. As bell hooks, feminist writer and social activist writes on black lives in the United States, although the margins have been a “site of deprivation,” they are also a “site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.”⁴¹ In reflecting on hooks, I realized that placing the figure in my painting within the margins can offer an alternative story, not as space of deprivation, but as a space of resistance. Further, hooks argues that the margin can function as a “space of refusal” in which “one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor” creating resistance through a “counter language.”⁴² Encouraged by this, I consider *mi madre como una persona empoderada en los márgenes* (my mother as an empowered person in the margins.) Although bell hooks is pivotal in addressing issues related to marginalization, I turned to Anzaldúa to provide a method of the counter-language bell hooks refers to. This method is *haciendo caras* (making faces), the reason why my mother wears a sneer.

Haciendo caras

“Art is a sneak attack while the giant sleeps, a sleight of hands when the giant is awake, moving so quick they can do their deed before the giant swats them. Our survival depends on being creative.”⁴³

A second painting (Fig. 8), a self-portrait wherein I am holding a baroque inspired *jarrón* (vase) away from my body, also considers the margins, although in a less overt manner, eliminating the quadrant line-work and more importantly evoking *la idea de hacer caras* (the idea of making faces) (Fig. 9). With a similar sneer as in my mother’s painting (Fig. 10), I am

⁴¹ bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>.

⁴² Ibid, 21.

⁴³ Anzaldúa, “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” xxiv.

engaging with what Anzaldúa considers to be “*haciendo caras*,” making faces or expressing feelings by “distorting that face” in a “piercing look that questions or challenges.”⁴⁴ Following Anzaldúa, this is not simply a facial expression, but a “politically subversive gesture.”⁴⁵ As a portrait painter for years before this particular research-creation project, I have understood the face as the most emblematic feature of our body to express our stories. For Anzaldúa, the face is the part of the body that is the “most noticeably inscribed by social structure;” it is “carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience.”⁴⁶ It is through channeling the experiences of myself and my family into the representation of our faces that I am seeking to resist a dominant and colonial paradigm represented by the object. Anzaldúa’s words are a reminder that I am not creating “mere aesthetic exercises.”⁴⁷ Rather, “creative acts are forms of political activism” that employ “definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms.”⁴⁸ *Estoy pintando las figuras haciendo caras en los márgenes junto con el marco blanco del objeto colonial. Este marco continúa manteniéndose fuerte, pero estoy tratando de desmantelarlo aquí* (I am painting the figures making faces in the margins together with the white framework of the colonial object. This framework continues to hold strong, but I am trying to dismantle it here.) These are all aesthetic strategies resisting coloniality that also open a discussion on the performativity of the subject represented.

⁴⁴ Ibid, xv.

⁴⁵ Ibid, xv.

⁴⁶ Ibid, xv.

⁴⁷ Ibid, xxiv.

⁴⁸ Ibid, xxiv.



Figure 8. *Yo con el jarrón*, acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72''x 72'', 2021



Figure 9. Close-up from *Yo con el jarrón*



Figure 10. Close-up from *Mi mamá con la silla*

***Actuando* (Performing) brownness**

In relation to ethnicity, Muñoz suggests that we “move beyond notions of ethnicity as fixed,” instead, understanding it as “performative (what people do.)”⁴⁹ I would argue that my painting of my mother and my self-portrait engage with the notion of performance; we are navigating coloniality through body gesture and facial expression, and pushing back at our Spanish colonial selves. Expanding on Muñoz’s theory, he considers performing *whiteness* as occurring on an “affective register,” meaning acting white is a particular performative practice, grounding the subject in a “normative white lifeworld” - a world in which LatinX people are unable to accomplish regularly.⁵⁰ Therefore, *ethnic difference* can actually be described as *affective difference* and performance can then “serve as powerful theoretical lenses to view the

⁴⁹ Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

social sphere.”⁵¹ With this in mind, my paintings can then be considered a visual form of affective performativity in which I am aiming to achieve *brownness*; *brownness* as a *manera de ser* (way of being), as a struggle, as a contestation of our colonial past, as a site of refusal of the dominant colonial paradigm. Muñoz’s theory of brown pays homage to the “history of brown power” in the United States; the brown power seen in the “Chicano walkouts of 1968, in their refusal of dominant logics and systems of thought,”⁵² and essentially my paintings pay homage to this as well. Muñoz’s ideas nicely set up a relation between my body of work and the *manera de ser* of a Chicano performance artist.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the politics of the brown body

As previously considered, contemporary LatinX culture is fraught with the hyper-masculinity inherited during the conquering of the “New World” and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a self-proclaimed hybrid, border-crosser, Mexican/Chicano performance artist is committed to using his body as a site for an artistic practice that explores the politics of the brown body and disrupt the binaries of LatinX culture. Performance art, although traditionally referred to as a particular art form beginning in the 1960s and 1970s is considered by Diana Taylor as actually emerging from various histories therefore we must not “fetishize notions of its origins, specific practices, locations and authorships.”⁵³ What we can say though, is that performance art is “radically concentrated in the body of the artist” and the 1960s and 1970s stands out specifically due to performance art playing a vital role in the breakdown of the social barriers that restricted access to art institutions.⁵⁴ A Chicano, Gómez-Peña began his career in the United States in 1979

⁵¹ Ibid, 12.

⁵² Ibid, 3-4.

⁵³Diana Taylor, "Performance Histories," in *Performance*, trans. Abigail Levine, Durham; London: Duke University Press (2016): 46. doi: 10.2307/j.ctv11smgbg.5.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 46-47.

as a performance artist precisely because of feelings of marginalization as a racialized artist. Taylor writes that Gómez-Peña's performance practice is an ontology, it "is not simply an act, or an action, but an existential condition."⁵⁵ Gómez-Peña's oeuvre can be understood as a continuum, an ongoing performance, repeatedly engaging with what Muñoz would consider the affective difference, but I am turning to a particular performance, *Border Brujo* (1988 to 1989) (Fig. 11), to consider my paintings as a performance of brown affect.

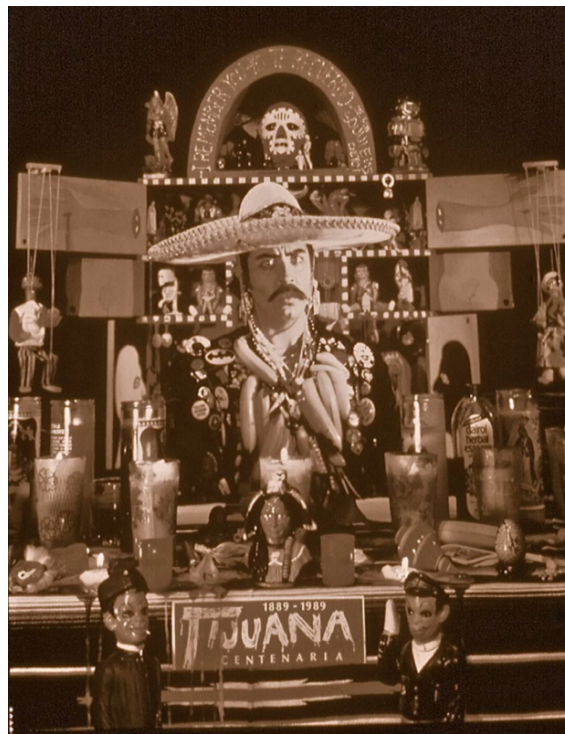


Figure 11. Photograph of *Border Brujo*, performance, 1988-1989

In tandem with Muñoz's notion of ethnicity as unfixed, anthropologist Jonathan Xavier Inda also argues in "Performativity, Materiality, and the Racial Body," that the racial body is a

⁵⁵ Diana Taylor, "Framing [Performance]," in *Performance*, trans. Abigail Levine, Durham; London: Duke University Press (2016): 3. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11smgbg.5.

“socially constructed category of knowledge.”⁵⁶ This can be compared to Judith Butler’s argument that gender is performatively constructed through a repetition and recitation rather than a biological given.⁵⁷ Vital to Inda’s argument is that race is an “embodied spectacle” inscribing differences to the body through never ending, repetitive, and iterative- acts and gestures understood discursively.⁵⁸ In turning to *Border Brujo*, a multilingual monologue performance in which Gómez-Peña changes costumes fifteen times at an altar filled with kitsch cultural items, the artist is able to accomplish what Inda calls the “possibility of resignification.”⁵⁹ Inda proposes that there is always a possibility in undermining and subverting racial identity as it is an unstable construct that requires constant reiteration.⁶⁰ Against Inda’s argument that the racialized body is constructed “through the force of reiteration,” and therefore open to “being constituted otherwise” through that same reiterative process,⁶¹ we can see how *Border Brujo*, a three-hour long monologue of reciting Mexican stereotypes and phobias, undermines, subverts and creates a rupture in which Gómez-Peña is able to critique the fixed discourse of the Mexican body. Seated at an altar full of candles, dices, a bottle of Clairol Herbal Essence shampoo, marionets, skeleton statues, masks and dolls, Gómez-Peña begins the performance lighting candles and goes on to speak in English, Spanish, Spanglish, Nahuatl and in tongues of Mexican stereotypes and phobias. The costume changes include a patrolman jacket with a necklace of bananas, a wrestling mask, a pink feathered boa, black wig, a red bandana and a mariachi mask in a way to “critique that a stable and coherent identity is a merely optical illusion,” according to Michelle A. Holling

⁵⁶ Jonathan Xavier Inda, “Performativity, Materiality, and the Racial Body,” *Latino Studies Journal*, vol. 11 (2000): 75.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 86-87.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 80-88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 93.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 93.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 98.

and Bernadette Marie Calafell.⁶² *Border Brujo* is a performance that refuses a fixed LatinX identity, critiques colonial trauma, but also uses parody.

Parody and the carnivalesque: *relajo*, *rasquachi* and *chusmería*

Border Brujo is an exemplary performance to explore my paintings because of its parodying of the “ravenous gringo romantic” together with “spectacular, but nonthreatening images of the other.”⁶³ Consider a painting of my sister (Fig. 12). The figure, popping a balloon of the world with the Americas facing forward, exudes parody, meaning “to imitate...for purposes of ridicule or satire.”⁶⁴ Holling and Calafell consider Gómez-Peña’s practice as an emancipatory practice and relate it to three strategies within ChicanX cultural performance and Mexican oral tradition (*relajo*, *rasquachi* and *chusmería*). These can also be identified in my paintings. For instance, *relajo* is mockery or ridicule in a performance. It is a strategy to “subvert authority” by way of body movements and verbal dialogue.⁶⁵ Often in conjunction with *relajo* is *rasquachi*, or an attitude. A word stemming from and reflecting the lower/working-class perspective, it is a way for artists to “confront the world from the perspective of the downtrodden, the rebel, the outsider.”⁶⁶ Further to be *rasquachi* is have a “carnavalesque topsy-turvy vision where authority and decorum serve as targets of subversion.”⁶⁷ Finally, the last term to consider within ChicanX performance is *chusmería* or excess. *Chusmería*, again a political and aesthetic strategy that resists dominant ideology, displays imitation but is so excessive that it

⁶² Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette Marie Calafell, “Identities on Stage and Staging Identities: ChicanoBrujo Performances as Emancipatory Practices,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 71-72. doi:10.1080/10462930601046053.

⁶³ Stacy Alaimo, “Multiculturalism and Epistemic Rupture: The Vanishing Acts of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Alfredo Vea Jr.” *MELUS* 25, no. 2 (2000): 173. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468225>.

⁶⁴ Dictionary.com, s.v. “Parody,” accessed December 30, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/parody>.

⁶⁵ Holling and Calafell, “Identities on Stage and Staging Identities,” 62.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 62.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 62.

“opens the space for critique, revelation, or reflexivity.”⁶⁸ *Relajo, rasquachi, and chusmería*, found in Gómez-Peña’s work, are all strategies of decolonial practices within performance and strategies I consider as being employed within my painting. They are employed in the mockery of the colonization of space and time by the popping of the balloon globe, in the over-the-top exaggeration in her disgust of the object, and in the imitation of a Latin American baroque painting style that is subverted through the drawn objects (Fig. 13).



Figure 12. *Mi hermana pinchando el globo*, acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 72” x 65”, 2022

⁶⁸ Ibid, 62.



Figure 13. Close-up from *Mi hermana pinchando el globo*

This painting was first inspired by a particular *criollo* portrait (Fig. 14), wherein the sitter is arrogantly standing amongst his books and navigation globe and then by Hans Holbein the Younger’s *The Ambassadors* (1533) (Fig. 15). It is particularly interesting to observe that in *The Ambassadors*, most of the objects on the table between the two men consist of tools for navigation, a globe, a book on arithmetic, a hymn book, and a lute. Objects that were “intended to supply – to the few who could read the allusions – a certain amount of information about their position in the world.”⁶⁹ For Berger, whether or not the two men were directly involved in the colonial project is not important here, what is important is that “here is a stance towards the

⁶⁹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 94-95.

world; and this was general to a whole class.”⁷⁰ Consequently, the objects allude to colonization, Christianity and science; objects that exemplify that European culture and society is “*the* most advanced in the world.”⁷¹ My painting responds to the hubris of the 1494 *Treaty of Tordesillas*, a treaty wherein Pope Alexander VI drew a demarcating line on a map, giving the Spanish Crown “everything west of that point, and the Portuguese everything east of it,”⁷² I am employing the strategies of *relajo*, *rasquachi* and *chusmería* to consider the persistence of colonial structures. This includes colonial domination of space (globe and navigation quadrant), time (hourglass), spirituality (*El Libro de las Profecías*), peoples (the books *El Orinoco Ilustrado y Defendido* and *Relación Acerca de las Antigüedades de los Indios*) and finally history/knowledge (ink and quill). However, although I have indexed colonial tropes, sourced from historical paintings, I have yet to consider how *nosotros somos de aquí y allá* (we are from here and there) and so my LatinX family embodies the colonized *and* the colonizer as well. Navigating this dichotomy and the ambiguity of these two identities, became a critical issue in my research-based practice, and generated the development of a work in the form of a triptych.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 96.

⁷¹ Ibid, 95.

⁷² Bailey, *Art of Colonial Latin America*, 33.



Figure 14. Cristóbal de Aguilar, *Pedro de Peralta y Barnuevo*, oil on canvas, 165 x 123 cm, 1751



Figure 15. Hans Holbein the Younger. *The Ambassadors*, oil on oak, 207 cm x 209.5 cm, 1533

Mimicry and ambivalence

“Our strength lies in shifting perspectives, in our capacity to shift, in our ‘seeing through’ the membrane of the past superimposed on the present, in looking at our shadows and dealing with them.....”⁷³

¿Qué sucede cuando estás en dos espacios a la vez? (What happens when you are in two spaces at once?) The LatinX experience for me is complex in that there are dual, opposed, and conflicted inner selves at play. Anzaldúa calls this space *los intersticios* (the interstices), the space between two worlds that womxn of colour experience.⁷⁴ Returning once more to Latin American history and examining it through a post-colonial framework in *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, Magali M. Carrera considers New Spain in relation to Homi Bhabha’s concepts of *mimicry* and *ambivalence*. Carrera outlines *mimicry* as the “intense desire and drive to make the colonized appear, act, and be like the colonizer,” and *ambivalence* as the “unstable relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.”⁷⁵ By applying Bhabha’s framework to colonial Latin America, we see it is *mimicry* that generates the need to emulate a Eurocentric ethos and *ambivalence* that interrupts this process of fully adopting a Eurocentric ideology. It was in contemplating myself, hovering within ambiguous and liminal space of colonizer/colonized, and reflecting on my mixed ancestry while looking at the 1599 painting *Three Mulatto Gentlemen of Esmeraldas* (Fig. 16) that inspired me to create a triptych of my sister (Fig. 17).

⁷³ Anzaldúa, “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” xxvii.

⁷⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, Fourth Edition., 25th anniversary., Aunt Lute Books (2012): 42.

⁷⁵ Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. 1st ed., Austin: University of Texas Press (2003): 17.

Three Mulatto Gentlemen of Esmeraldas is a painting commissioned as a gift for the king of Spain, Philip III, wherein the conquered leader of an Ecuadorian Afro-Indigenous group, Francisco de Arobe stands along with his son and a companion. It was in contemplating the two outer sitters gazing at Francisco in the centre, all of them confined to the *lechuguillas* (Spanish collars or “little lettuces”), that I was incited to paint a triptych that considers clothing as element of performativity together with the feeling of ambiguity.



Figure 16. Andrés Sánchez Galque, *Los Mulatos de Esmeraldas* (*The Mulattoes of Esmeraldas*), oil on canvas, 92 x 175 cm, 1599

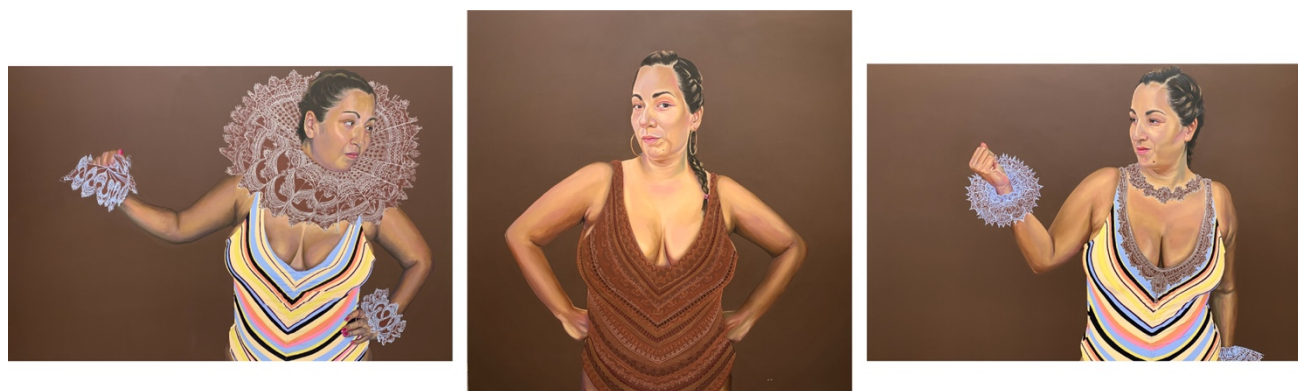


Figure 17. *Mi hermana en tres espacios*, acrylic, oil and charcoal on panel, 48'' x 60'', 60'' x 60'' & 48'' x 60'', 2022

Exploring a mixed ancestry is not a novel venture undertaken by a Latina artist as can be seen in Frida Kahlo's *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I* (1936) (Fig. 18) - a painting Mey-Yen Moriuchi critiques through Bhabha's framework as an "artistic synthesis," an appropriation of European and Indigenous visual and cultural sources.⁷⁶ What I am presenting here, by contrast, is using clothing itself to perform ambiguity and the co-existence of two worlds; as a method of disrupting a fixed LatinX identity as seen in Gomez-Peña's *Border Brujo*. Painting my sister in three spaces with the outer two versions gazing at the central figure, the outer figures both accept and resist the *lechuguillas*. In the central panel, she is wearing an outfit that resignifies the colonial patterns; the patterns are redrawn from colonial decorative elements in my previous paintings amongst Mesoamerican patterns (Fig. 19). The latter patterns being within the scope of the colonial "systemic repression" of Indigenous "beliefs ideas, images and symbols" that were deemed useless to the *conquistadores*.⁷⁷



Figure 18. Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I*, oil and tempera on zinc, 30.7 cm x 34.5 cm, 1936

⁷⁶ Mey-Yen Moriuchi, "Casta, Costumbrismo, Kahlo." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 1996), vol. 95, no. 7, UK: Liverpool University Press (2018): pp. 770, doi:10.3828/bhs.2018.45.

⁷⁷ Veronelli, "The Coloniality of Language," 169.

Although within Bhabha's framework this could be identified as *hybridity*, a term that "extends the concept of ambivalence and stresses the *interdependence* and mutual construction of the colonizer/colonized binary,"⁷⁸ I would not refer to this as a representation of hybridity but as *mestizaje* (literal translation is "mixed race"). I do not think there is an interdependence here but a co-existence of binaries and as Diana Taylor reminds us in "Memory as Cultural Practice: Mestizaje, Hybridity, Transculturation," *hybridity* is actually a "botanical term that refers to the engineered (asexual) grafting of two dissimilar entities."⁷⁹ Consequently, with its connotations of eugenics, the term is not as productive a term as *mestizaje*; a term that considers the *embodiment* of history.



Fig. 19 Close-up of outfit in central panel from *Mi hermana en tres espacios*

⁷⁸ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 17.

⁷⁹ Diana Taylor, "3. Memory as Cultural Practice: Mestizaje, Hybridity, Transculturation," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 79-109. New York, USA: Duke University Press, (2003): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822385318-005>.

Mestizaje

“I am a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew,
A product of the ghettos of New York I have never known.
An immigrant and the daughter and granddaughter of immigrants.
I speak English with passion: it’s the tongue of my consciousness,
a flashing knife blade of crystal, my tool, my craft.

I am a Caribeña, island grown. Spanish in my flesh, ripples from my tongue, lodges in my hip:
The language of garlic and mangoes, the singing in my poetry, the flying gestures of my hands.
I am of Latinoamerica, rooted in the history of my continent:
I speak from that body.

I am not African. Africa is in me, but I cannot return.
I am not taína. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back.
I am not European. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there.
I am new. History made me. My first language was Spanglish.
I was born at the crossroads
And I am whole.”⁸⁰

According to Mexican folklore, the first *mestizo* (mixed) was the son of the Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés and La Malinche, a Nahuatl woman. The term *mestizo* therefore conveys a history of “unequal power relations, racial and sexual domination, and rape,”⁸¹ however, *mestizaje* has begun to “connote more varied and richer meanings” in the modern period.⁸² Beginning to shift during the Mexican Revolution with José Vasconcelos's notion of *la raza cósmica* (the cosmic race), the term began to function as a metaphor that encapsulates the “racial, cultural, social and linguistic mixing that characterizes life in the borderlands” within ChicanaX cultural theory.⁸³ Most importantly for Alicia Arrizón in *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*, and to my project, *mestizaje* is a performative form of transculturation that “helps to imagine the racialized body and the elements of cultural/colonial

⁸⁰ Morales, Levins Aurora. “Child of Americas” Reprinted in *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* by Alicia Arrizón, University of Michigan Press (2006): 79.

⁸¹ Taylor, “Memory as Cultural Practice,” 95.

⁸² Rafael Pérez-Torres, *2. Mestizaje (Part I: Identities)*, edited by Bost, Suzanne, Frances R. Aparicio. Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (2013)
<http://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/2-mestizaje-part-i-identities/docview/2137954642/se-2?accountid=15182>.

⁸³ Ibid.

difference” through “contradictions, cultural negotiations, and resistance.”⁸⁴ My triptych functions as a representation of the embodiment of my *mestiza* experience. It is an aesthetic strategy emerging from the border. It is a representation of coping or coming to terms with the history embedded in me of colonial trauma and encounters. Indeed, the term *mestizaje* has the potential to explain that race and culture are continuous processes that happen “on the bodily scale.”⁸⁵ Our body is a “microcosm in which these conflicts were lived.”⁸⁶ Further, *mestizaje* considers how we transmit knowledge and culture through the body as “memories and survival strategies are transmitted from one generation to another through performative practice.”⁸⁷ Essentially then, this triptych is a representation of a decolonial practice; it is a visual strategy that represents the co-existence of multiple histories that my sister and I embody. It has been important to paint this *manera de ser* within figurative works of my family to represent the embodied experience of colonial trauma at a microcosmic level; at a level in which we can also transmit our experiences of resilience.

Healing the colonial wound

“Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking at it. When it begins to fester, I have to do something to put an end to the aggravation and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where it’s rooted in my skin and pluck away at it, playing it like an musical instrument – the fingers pressing, making the pain worse before it can get better. Then out it comes. No more discomfort, no more ambivalence.”⁸⁸

Inspired by Vasconcelos’ *la raza cósmica*, Anzaldúa contributes to womxn of colour theories about an in-between space in what she calls *mestiza consciousness*. This space is a way

⁸⁴ Alicia Arrizón, *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*, University of Michigan Press (2006): 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 108.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 108.

⁸⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 95.

of being and navigating through the world. It is a liminal position that I identify with. Anzaldúa's *auto-teoría* (auto-theory) which is in constant flux, not only shifts from European philosophy to Mixtec/Aztec systems of thought, but also oscillates between English, Spanish, and Nahuatl. It is a Nahuatl word then, *nepantla* that can describe the struggle one faces when they reside in a liminal space. It is being "torn between ways;" it is the "struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war."⁸⁹ *Nepantla* for me is *el espacio de estar aquí y allá* (the space of here and there), *de ver dos mundos al mismo tiempo* (of seeing two worlds at the same time), *de ser una figura en las fronteras de diferentes cultura* (of being a figure on the borders of different cultures.) For Anzaldúa, and within my own artistic practice, in the space of *nepantla* we can "experience a radical shift in perception, *otra forma de ver* [another way of seeing]" by interrogating our history.⁹⁰ In my interrogation of our colonial selves in *Mi mamá con la silla, Yo con el jarrón, Mi hermana pinchando el globo*, I created *una otra forma de ver* (another way of seeing) the residues of coloniality by *empujando* (pushing) back. Even more, within this same space of *nepantla*, I created *una otra manera de ser* (another way of being) in *Mi hermana en tres espacios* first in the inner struggle depicted on the outer panels and second in the convergence of colonial decorative patterns and Mesoamerican patterns in my sister's outfit in the central triptych. I realized this outfit became a vital visual expression of *nepantla*, and I expanded on this by creating a diptych of large circles (Fig. 20) drawn with coloured pencil on *amate paper*, a paper traditionally used for Mesoamerican codices (Fig. 21).

⁸⁹ Ibid, 100.

⁹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, *Light in the dark = Luz en lo oscuro : rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*, New York: Duke University Press (2015): 16-17.



Figure 20. *Círculos*, coloured pencil and gold leaf on *amate* paper, 46'' diameter each, 2022



Figure 21. Anonymous, *Codex Barbonicus*, ink and pigments on *amate* paper, ca. 1520

Cuando miras con cuidado, todavía hay una guerra interna aquí (when you look carefully, there is still an inner war here). Inspired by the shape and stylistic hybridity of Costa-Rican Ox-cart wheels (Fig. 22) with its mixture of colonial and Indigenous patterns, my diptych incorporates baroque colonial decorative patterns sourced from my figurative panel paintings along with Mesoamerican decorative patterns. *Pero ellos no están fusionados* (but they are not fused together), the patterns are depicted as separate rings, existing within the same composition, but never touching (Fig. 23). The diptych re-imagines the liminal space I occupy by integrating two world views, both existing in the same space, but one not dominating the other. There are two circles as a reiteration of two world views, a reiteration of the tension in *nepantla* and an opportunity to reconfigure the pattern work. Therefore, the diptych is my process of restructuring and reframing our past as a method of healing. Anzaldúa's refers to this process as the "Coyolxauhqui Imperative" and through this process, *conocimiento* (knowledge) or a transformation can occur.⁹¹ By integrating colonial decorative patterns with Mesoamerican patterns, patterns that have been historically elided, I have created una *otra manera de ver* (another way of seeing) visually as an artist on the border.

⁹¹ Ibid, 17-20.



Figure 22. Photograph of a Costa Rican ox-cart wheel



Figure 23. Close up from *Círculos*

Conclusion

As Anzaldúa writes: “My job as an artist is to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the pattern in these events (personal and societal), and how we can repair *el daño* (the damage) by using the imagination and its vision. I believe in the transformative power and medicine of art.”⁹² I too believe creativity and imagination has the potential to develop a transformative practice or a way of healing. This entire body of work is a method of healing. It is a method of healing through the process of contestation, of disruption, of challenging colonial power structures, of restructuring and reframing the co-existence of two worldviews. The body of work serves as my reconstruction of LatinX history, transformed into another way of seeing and imagination of my identity. *He creado una imaginación de la frontera* (I have created an imagination on the border), an imagination of brownness. And *brownness* has an “uncanny persistence in the face of distressed conditions of possibility.”⁹³ For Gomez-Peña, a border artist can perform multiple roles from the “intellectual *coyote* (smuggler of ideas)” to “intercultural translator” to “political trickster” to be able to “trespass, bridge, interconnect, reinterpret, remap, and redefine” and remind us that we all contain multiple selves and at times, they can be contradictory.⁹⁴ I am using a personal narrative to challenge and rewrite a dominant paradigm and figure painting has been a powerful tool with its potential for performativity. This body of work engages with liminal space, border space, ambiguity, otherness, and being both *aquí y allá* (here and there).

⁹² Ibid, 10.

⁹³ Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, 4.

⁹⁴ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, & Loqueras for the End of the Century*. City Lights (1996): 11-13.

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. "Multiculturalism and Epistemic Rupture: The Vanishing Acts of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Alfredo Vea Jr." *MELUS* 25, no. 2 (2000): 163-185. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468225>.
- Alcalá, Luisa Elena. "Painting in Latin America 1550- 1820: A Historical and Theoretical Framework." In *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From Conquest to Independence*, edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, 15-68. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Arrizón, Alicia. *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. Fourth Edition., 25th anniversary., Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Haciendo caras, una entrada." In *Making Face, Making Soul =: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, xv-xxviii. Written by Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, and AnaLouise Keating. *Light in the dark = Luz en lo oscuro : rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*. New York: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Bailey, Gauvin A. *Art of colonial Latin America*. London: Phaidon, 2005.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London, England: Penguin Classics, 2008.
- Carrera, Magali Marie. *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. 1st ed., Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Dictionary.com, s.v. "Parody." Accessed December 30, 2021. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/parody>.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, & Loqueras for the End of the Century*. City Lights, 1996.
- Holling, Michelle A., and Bernadette Marie Calafell. "Identities on Stage and Staging Identities: ChicanoBrujo Performances as Emancipatory Practices." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 58–83. doi:10.1080/10462930601046053.
- hooks, bell. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 15-23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>.
- Inda, Jonathan Xavier. "Performativity, Materiality, and the Racial Body." *Latino Studies Journal*, vol. 11 (2000): 74-99.

- Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*. Routledge, 2003.
- Quijano, Aníbal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 168–78. doi:10.1080/09502380601164353.
- Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Machismo." Accessed February 14, 2022.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/machismo>.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2005.
- Milian, Claudia. *LatinX*. United States: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.
- Moriuchi, Mey-Yen. "Casta, Costumbrismo, Kahlo." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 1996)*, vol. 95, no. 7, Liverpool University Press (UK), 2018, pp. 767–82, doi:10.3828/bhs.2018.45.
- Muñoz, José Esteban, Joshua Chambers-Letson, and Tavia Nyong'o. *The Sense of Brown*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *2. Mestizaje (Part I: Identities)*, edited by Bost, Suzanne, Frances R. Aparicio. Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.
<http://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/2-mestizaje-part-i-identities/docview/2137954642/se-2?accountid=15182>.
- The Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American slave trade database. "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Estimates." Rice University. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>
- Taylor, Diana. "Framing [Performance]." In *Performance*. Translated by Abigail Levine (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2016): 1-42. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11smgbg.5.
- Taylor, Diana. "Performance Histories." In *Performance*. Translated by Abigail Levine (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2016): 43-72. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11smgbg.6.
- Taylor, Diana. "3. Memory as Cultural Practice: Mestizaje, Hybridity, Transculturation" In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 79-109. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822385318-005>
- Veronelli, Gabriela A. "The Coloniality of Language: Race, Expressivity, Power, and the Darker Side of Modernity." *Wagadu* 13 (2015): 108+. *Gale Academic OneFile*.
(https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A627689876/AONE?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=745c8a11).

Appendix: Thesis Exhibition Documentation



Figure 24. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022



Figure 25. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022



Figure 26. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022



Figure 27. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022



Figure 28. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022

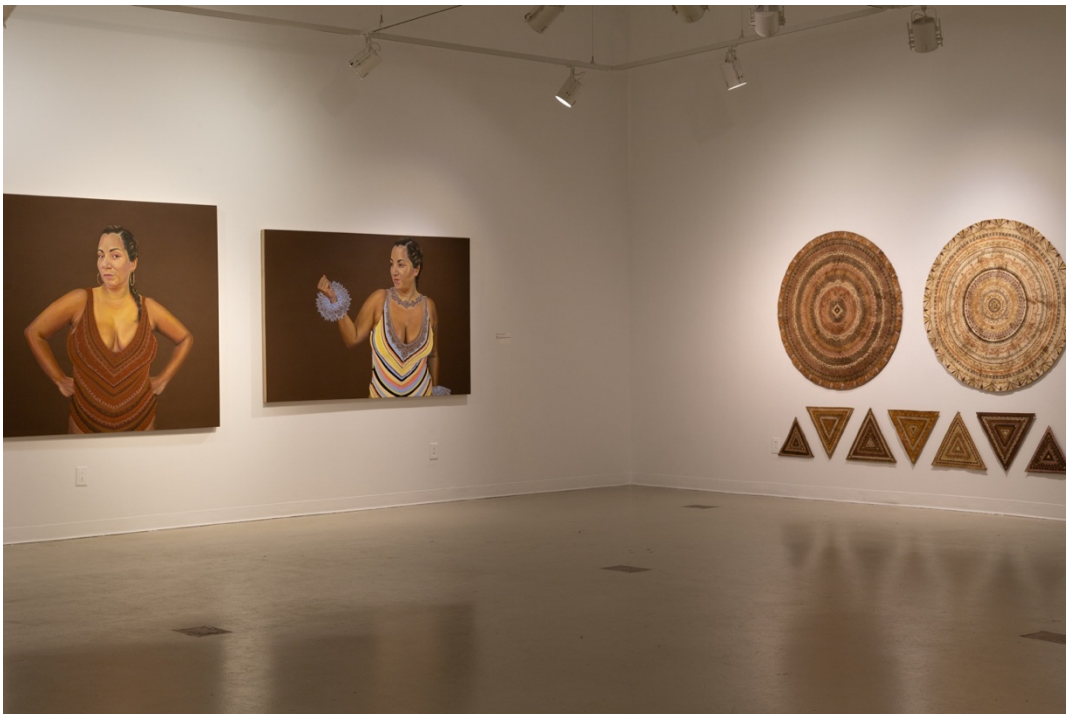


Figure 29. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022



Figure 30. Installation view of *aquí y allá: una manera de ser* (here and there: a way of being), 2022