La Chicana

By

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My current work of art contains a great amount of influences, one of them being a trip I took to Mexico in 2016. When arriving to Mexico there were a couple of checkpoints I needed to go through till I was able to see my family. During one of the checkpoints I remember being stopped by an employee. The employee preceded by asking questions about my visit and whether or not I was Mexican; in confusion I said yes, she glanced over my passport and told me otherwise. For a moment I didn't understand nor knew how to respond. I immediately became aware that I'm not just Mexican but a person of multiple cultures being that I am also American.

This experience of culture shock soon inspired my studio practice and paintings. I was able to convey my subject matter through Iconography, symbolism and mediums. During my last visit to Mexico I was able to grasp the most of my Mexican culture. I remember being in constant awe, everything around me was saturated in color. Many of those colors were bright terracotta, greens, pinks etc. It was such a vivid color palette nothing I could compare to in NY. The intensity of color inspired me to expand my color choices in my own paintings. I was able to explore color through multiple mediums, for example acrylic, oil, oil pastel and spray paint. Every medium reacted differently and created interesting and unique surfaces.

Iconography is another aspect I ritually use in my paintings. I found that both Mexico and my neighborhood in NY share similarities and differences in icons and symbols. Some examples would be La Virgin de Guadalupe, she is a religious icon that many look up to in need of guidance. She is a well known figure in the Mexican community. Household items also play a role in my paintings, they represent the daily objects I was constantly around growing up. Other attributes include clothing and patterns.

In bringing in my concepts and compositions together I use abstraction and references from other artists. In my research I included Chicana artists; Judithe Hernandez, Yolanda Lopez and others. Mediums, iconography and symbolism played a role in the majority of their work and has inspired many of my pieces.

An example would be my painting *Abuela*. The painting is a representation of my grandmother and the things I associate her and Mexico with. My abuela was one of the few people I could connect to Mexico with, her presence and company was warm and humble just like Mexico and its people. In the painting I have my grandmother centered while wearing the Virgin's cape. The color palette in the painting involves patterns and bright complementary colors. She is also surrounded by objects and household items I grew up associating to Mexico. This painting was originally inspired by a well-known icon La Virgen de Guadalupe, and Chicana artist Yolanda Lopez.

During the time of this painting I came across Yolanda Lopez a well-known Chicana artist. Yolanda is well known for her series *Virgin de Guadalupe* which also derived from the icon Virgin de Guadalupe. In Yolanda's series she illustrates three generations of Mexican American females in her life, which includes her mother, grandmother and herself. The way she represents her subjects are in simple compositions portraying domestic scenes. For example her mother sewing the Virgin's cape while her grandmother gracefully sits on the cape. By doing so she was demonstrating types of Chicana role models, she was also honoring and drawing attention to the working class women. Similar to Yolanda's concepts my painting *Abuela* also draws attention to the working women in my life which was my grandmother in this case. Unfortunately my grandmother passed away when I was young and I only recall a few memories

of her. One of them being my grandmother setting up her food stand outside the house. By night she would sell to neighbors while during the day she sold ice cream. Years later I realized this was her method of supporting herself and the loved ones around her. Just like in Yolanda's series, I soon then used myself as a subject in bringing attention to my search of identity.

An example would be *La Chicana* which is a representation of two cultures and self-portraits. In this self-portrait I intentionally used my side profile to emphasize my strong features, which includes my ethnic nose. I intentionally used the side profile of my nose because this feature is frequently associated to Mexican culture. On the left section of the panting I am wearing a traditional Mexican dress. The dress is normally worn during special occasions and celebrations, and also come in a variety of bright colors. I also integrated words onto the dress which say "No soy Mexican, I'm not American, Soy Chicana" which translates to "No I'm not Mexican, I'm not American, I'm Chicana".

The right side of the painting I am also in side profile while wearing my studio clothing. The jacket I'm wearing consists of a distinct camo design. This outfit represents the artist I am in the studio.The Bald Eagle placed in the center of the painting is in between both figures. The eagle is used as an icon to represent both Mexico and U.S.A. The Bald Eagle represents freedom in the U.S.A, and in Mexico it represents loyalty, honor and much more. To intertwine my composition I used Judithe Hernandez painting *LA MANO NEGRA* as a reference. The blue leaves in Hernandez inspired me to use this element to literally bring together my composition and concept. I depicted blue vines and leaves in both figures and the eagle, they travel through the picture plane. Like Judithe Hernandez and Yolanda Lopez I was constantly using references that revolved around my ideas and identity.

The inspiration for the large scale of my work also derives from exhibitions. The L.A exhibition “¡Murales Rebeldes! L.A. Chicana/o Murals under Siege” reflects the stories of Chicano historical contributions, controversy and much more. Murals between 1960-1970’s became an essential form of expression and public voice for the Chicano Movement, specifically in a time when other channels of communications were limited for the Chicano community. The murals challenged cultural norms and also created historical narratives. The exhibition included artists, Alma Lopez, Barbara Carrasco, Yreina D. Cervántez and many more.

Alma Lopez is a Mexican born Chicana, her body of work often portrays historical and cultural Mexican figures, for example La Virgen de Guadalupe. Her content is filtered through a radical Chicana feminist lesbian lens. The medium of digital art and muralism enabled her to mix different aspects like catholicism, indigenous art, women, and issues such as rape, gender violence and racism. Barbara Carrasco in the other hand is a Los Angeles based muralist and also works in a variety of other medias. Barbara is known for given visual representation to the social justice movements of the late twentieth century, from banners to large public art projects.Yreina D. Cervántez is a third generation Chicana, and is currently based in Los Angeles. Yreina works primarily in painting, printmaking and muralism. Her content combines imagery and ideologies from indigenous cultures and urban Los Angeles. My work currently consists of similarities to these Chicana artists, In which I’m depicting my identity through my lens of memories and experiences, while also painting in large muralist scale.

Besides large scale I’ve also used objects in my work that have represented different aspects of Mexico, which includes indigenous statues. The exhibition“Visualizing Language: Oaxaca in LA” celebrates the Zapotec language and culture of Oaxaca, Mexico and Los Angeles.

Zapotec is an indigenous language in Mexico's southern state of Oaxaca. Los Angeles is home to the largest population of indigenous Oaxacans outside of Mexico. This exhibition explores and recognizes the importance of Oaxacan presence and the contemporary realities of indigenous culture. This project included Oaxacan artist Tlacolulokos and Oaxacan filmmaker Yolanda Cruz. Tlacolulokos's work consists of a variation of different styles from street art, murals and screen printing. Tlacolulokos offers a reflection of local reality and the problems and challenges of their place and origin.

I came across Tlacolulokos accidentally on social media; the first thing I noticed was their imagery and color scheme. The narrative scenes that were created were a blend of modern day culture with a mixture of an indigenous aspect. With that being said, my approach towards my paintings have a similar mixture of indigenous and Mexican objects around modern day concepts and depictions.

Another example would be "Judithe Hernandez and Patssi Valdez: One Path Two Journeys" which celebrates the work of the two Latina Artists. Both artists have a history of being a part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Judithe was the fifth artist and the only woman to be invited to join the collective Los Four and Patssi was one of the founding members of the ASCO group. Los Four and ASCO were the only two major Chicano artist collectives to include a woman. Their painting practices are similar to their approaches, yet are distinct in their subject matter and emphasis on aspects of the feminine. Both painters create a dichotomy where Hernandez's paintings reflect a concern for nature and exterior states of emotion, and Valdez's works are interior and domestic. Like the work of Hernandez and Valdez I was able to paint

through the lens of my emotional passion towards my search of identity and growing up in a Mexican household.

Gradually more female artists are being recognized. For example the exhibition “Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985” included over 100 female artists from 15 countries. The exhibition featured 250 works of art that varied in media from photography, painting, video and other experimental mediums. 1960-1980’s was a time of radical aesthetic experimentation in art and explosive activism in the women’s rights movement. According to the exhibition, the works were realized under the harsh political and social conditions some due to the U.S. interventions in Central and South America. Exhibitions like “Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985” have opened doors and given an opportunity for female artists in the art world. Being a female artist attending visual art courses, I’ve noticed the majority of my fellow classmates are females. Now times are changing and females have a greater opportunity to expand their artistic voice. The past two years attending SUNY Purchase College has impacted the way I perceive myself and my artistic ability as well as growing up in a first and second-generation Mexican neighborhood.

Location can also play a major role and can influence the creation of a culture itself. For example“MEX/LA: Mexican Modernism in Los Angeles 1930-1985”. Highlights during 1945 to 1985, a known moment in which Los Angeles established itself as a leading cultural center in America. It is often thought that the Mexican culture arrived full formed from outside Los Angeles but in fact the culture originated within the city itself and Southern California. MEX/LA digs into the bi-national and hybrid forms of artistic practices, popular culture and

mass-media arts that have so uniquely shaped Los Angeles. Similar elements have shaped my experiences in New Rochelle.

The final source of my inspiration was Social media and Podcasts. These have played a role in connecting myself to current artists directly expressing similar confounding ideas on identity. Two Podcasts that I'm currently listening to and using as references are "Chicano Shuffle" and "Latinos Who Lunch". Both podcasts mention a variation of different topics and perspectives.

The Podcast "Chicano Shuffle", consists of three Chicanos named Ramon, Esteban and Fernando, who currently live in California. Their conversations range from nostalgic childhood memories to present day experiences. This podcast typically switches back and forth in English and Spanish. The podcast overall is humorous and relatable. The podcast "Latinos Who Lunch" consist of Justin and Emmanuel. Justin is a Las Vegas native artist who works in mediums of painting, sculpture and performance. His work is an extraction and or reaction to art history, pop culture and his Guatemalan/Mexican heritage. Emmanuel is a recent PH.D in Ibero-America colonial art history from the University of New Mexico. Since 2007 he has explored themes of violence, identity, race and class difference in colonial Latin American Art. The podcast reflects the intersectionality between Queer, Latinx, and Spanglish voices in an Anglo dominated podcast world.

In all together through the use of references from Chicana/o artists, exhibitions, texts, social media and podcasts I was able to channel my interest and exploration of what it means to be a Chicana. While during my studio practice I learned the most of myself, which then encouraged the work I produced. The work of art that was created depicted variation of elements

and ideas. With that being said it has been a year long journey that has brought me to a better understanding of myself and work of art.

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