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Ad Feminam:

Martine Gutierrez and the Language of Advertising

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the Master of Arts

in Art History

by

Ezequiel Delgadillo Amador

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Ad Feminam:

Martine Gutierrez and the Language of Advertising

by

Ezequiel Delgadillo Amador

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Charlene Villaseñor Black, Chair

Martine Gutierrez (b. Apr. 16, 1989, Berkeley, CA) is a Guatemalan American artist, a trans woman of Indigenous Maya descent, and the cover girl of artworks that pass as advertisements. At the age of thirty-four, her billboards, bus shelter ads, and fashion magazine spreads have caught the attention of major media outlets. Often branded as a “Latinx artist,” it is striking that the media never discusses Gutierrez in relation to other Latina/x artists. In this paper, I situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists, such as Ester Hernández (b. 1944, Dinuba, CA) and Patssi Valdez (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA). I draw on cultural theorists, such as Sianne Ngai and Chela Sandoval, to consider how Gutierrez’s glamorous adaptations of mass media form part of an ongoing liberatory practice, one that uses art to combat the idealization of whiteness, critique gender norms, and call out systemic racism.

The thesis of Ezequiel Delgadillo Amador is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2023

For my parents, Ezequiel and Adela Amador.

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Ad Feminam: Martine Gutierrez and the Language of Advertising

By Ezequiel Amador

Martine Gutierrez (b. Apr. 16, 1989, Berkeley, CA) is a Guatemalan American artist, a trans woman of Indigenous Maya descent, and the cover girl of artworks that pass as advertisements. At the age of thirty-four, her billboards, bus shelter ads, and fashion magazine spreads have been featured on the streets of New York and in world renowned art institutions, such as the Whitney Museum of American Art. They have also caught the attention of major media outlets: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, and *Aperture*. Media outlets typically compare Gutierrez to contemporary artist Cindy Sherman (b. Jan. 19, 1954, Glen Ridge NJ), but they also liken her to Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951, Osaka, Japan), and Zanele Muholi (b. 1972, Umlazi, South Africa). These comparisons situate Gutierrez within a lineage of artists who engage with self-portraiture and signal an effort to diversify mainstream art history. The emphasis placed on diversification is particularly apparent in headlines like “A Trans Latinx Artist’s High-Fashion Critique of Colonialism” and “A Trans Latinx Artist’s Incredible High-Fashion Self-Portraits,” which highlight Gutierrez’s gender and racial identities.¹ Often branded as a “Latinx artist,” it is striking that the media never discusses Gutierrez in relation to other Latina/x artists.² This oversight prompts me to ask, how does

¹ Miss Rosen, “A Trans Latinx Artist’s Incredible High-Fashion Self-Portraits,” *Vice*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/9kvaey/martine-gutierrez-trans-latinx-artist-indigenous-fashion-photography> and Andrea Scott, “A Trans Latinx Artist’s High-fashion Critique of Colonialism,” *The New Yorker*, October 20, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/a-trans-latinx-artists-high-fashion-critique-of-colonialism>.

² Latinx is a gender-neutral term that refers to individuals of Latin American descent. It has gained popularity in academic circles; however, it is also being contested. I will use the terms “Latino/x,” “Latina/x,” and “Latinx” to recognize the new terminology and the preferences and identities of the artists I focus on. As in the aforementioned case of Latinx, Chicanx is a gender-neutral term that refers to Mexican Americans. I cite scholars who use variations such as Chicana, Chicano, Chicana/o, Chican@, and Chicane. Throughout this paper, I will preserve the

Gutierrez's artistic practice compare to that of other Latina/x artists who draw on the language of advertising, and how have the comparative practices that pretend to promote inclusivity failed to recognize the artistic contributions of Latina/x artists?

In this paper, I situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists. I draw on cultural theorists, such as Sianne Ngai, Rey Chow, and Chela Sandoval, to consider how Gutierrez's glamorous adaptations of mass media form part of an ongoing liberatory practice, one that uses art to challenge power structures to promote social justice.³ I pair critical theory with a close reading of three of Gutierrez's best-known artworks and series to examine how she utilizes advertising techniques to critique the *ad feminam* rhetoric featured in advertising. I deploy the term *ad feminam*—a term used to describe language that attacks and discredits women—to refer to advertising practices that invalidate women who deviate from the ideals of whiteness and cisness.⁴ Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists have long adapted the language of advertising to combat the idealization of whiteness, critique gender norms, and call out systemic racism. In the 1970s, Patssi Valdez (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA) utilized performance and photography to contest the absence of Chicanxs in film. She posed in film stills called No Movies (nonexistent movies) to portray Chicanxs in glamorous settings. Like

terminology used in direct quotes, use the term “Chicano” when referring to the Chicano Movement, and use the terms “Chicanx,” “Chicana/x,” and “Chicano/x.” My decision to use the terms “Chicana/x,” “Chicano/x,” “Latino/x,” and “Latina/x” draws from the work of performance studies scholar Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa. For more information, see: Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, “Metamorphic and Sensuous Brown Bodies,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2019): 59. <https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2019.120005>.

³ My thinking is inspired by Chela Sandoval's conceptualization of methodology of the oppressed, which consists of five technologies/theoretical tools that oppressed peoples use to seek liberation, such as semiotics. Sandoval introduces semiotics as “the perception of signs in culture as structured meanings that carry power.” Sandoval considers how oppressed people reconfigure signs in culture to promote social justice. Similarly, Gutierrez reconfigures advertisements to critique oppressive practices. For more information, see: Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 82.

⁴ Cisness refers to the quality of being cisgender, a term that is applicable to individuals whose gender identity/expression matches the sex that was assigned to them at birth. Throughout this paper I will use the shorthand term “cis” to refer to cisgender.

Gutierrez, Valdez drew inspiration from fashion advertisements and films, deviating from conventional portrayals that framed Chicanxs as criminals. Ester Hernández (b. 1944, Dinuba, CA) has also utilized the language of advertising to protest the criminalization of Chicanx and Indigenous communities. Between 1981 and 2008, Hernández repurposed the Sun-Maid Raisins logo to protest the unjust deportation and labor practices that her community faced. I position Valdez and Hernández as precursors to emphasize that Gutierrez’s artistic practice is exemplary of the strategies that Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists have used to survive, obtain recognition, and seek liberation.⁵

Whereas Valdez and Hernández have been the subjects of numerous publications by Latinx and Chicanx studies scholars, Gutierrez has received little attention within the academy. I consider how her artistic practice draws from the images that she encounters in mainstream media. Throughout the years, she has “compiled binders full of [her] favorite fashion magazine pages...”⁶ She has studied the logos, slogans, color schemes, fonts and poses within them, becoming fluent in the language of advertising. Gutierrez utilizes this language to reconceptualize a medium that has traditionally misrepresented and excluded trans women and

⁵ My understanding of liberation is influenced by decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo, who calls for epistemic disobedience, a form of resistance that opens one up to ways of knowing that have been discredited and hidden. I posit liberation as the decolonization of thought. I consider how Latina/x artists seek liberation by combatting oppressive forms of media representation, but I do not equate mere media representation to liberation. As American studies scholar Leticia Alvarado has noted, media representation can entail cohering to a dominant majority. I argue that Latina/x artists use the language of advertising not to seek normative inclusion, but to challenge the conventions that the media imposes and imagine life beyond structures of oppression/coloniality. For more information, see: Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” *Transmodernity: A Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 46. <https://doi.org/10.5070/T412011807> and Leticia Alvarado, “Introduction,” in *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production* (Durham and London: Duke University Press): 3-9. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv123x6z2.4>.

⁶ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans,” interview by Houda Lazrak, *International Studio & Curatorial Program*, March 3, 2016, <https://iscp-nyc.org/journal/martine-gutierrez-on-her-first-billboard-jeans>.

Indigenous women.⁷ Conscious of this lack of representation, Gutierrez states, “[n]o one was going to put me on the cover of a Paris fashion magazine,” so she published her own. In 2018, she shot and modeled in a series titled *Indigenous Woman*, which was formatted as a 124-page fashion magazine and loosely based on Andy Warhol’s publication titled *Interview Magazine*.⁸ Gutierrez succeeds in mimicking the glamour and gloss of fashion advertising, but to different ends, to combat misrepresentation and erasure. She exerts her agency as an artist stating, “I am confronting control to have ownership over my body and how it is used as an underrepresented identity—and to have authority over what I’m selling and what the advertisement looks like.”⁹ This being one of the first in-depth analyses of Gutierrez’s art, I examine how she adapts advertising techniques to reconfigure conventional forms of representation like the Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists that came before her.

Gutierrez’s 2016 billboard titled *Jeans* mimics and modifies advertising techniques to combat the marginalization of trans women. Gutierrez based the billboard on recognizable advertising campaigns. At the time, she “was looking at makeup ads, such as Maybelline or [CoverGirl], and saw a lot of lime greens and hot pink colors,”¹⁰ so she placed herself against a hot pink backdrop. Gutierrez felt that the pop of color was necessary to entice New Yorkers

⁷ To cite just two examples, *Vogue México* did not feature an Indigenous Mexican woman on the cover until December of 2018, and American *Vogue* did not feature a trans woman on the cover until September of 2021. For more information, see: Jessica Booth, “Everything you need to know about Yalitza Aparicio from ‘Roma,’ the first indigenous woman to be nominated for a best-actress Oscar,” *Insider*, January 22, 2019. <https://www.insider.com/everything-need-to-know-yalitza-aparicio-from-roma-2019-1#she-was-also-the-first-indigenous-mexican-actress-to-appear-on-the-cover-of-vogue-mexico-9> and Celia Fernandez, “Ariel Nicholson makes history as the first transgender model on the cover of Vogue,” *Insider*, August 6, 2021. <https://www.insider.com/ariel-nicholson-transgender-model-vogue-cover-2021-8>.

⁸ Nadia Rivera Fella, “Searching for an Indigenous Fashion Star, Martine Gutierrez Casts Herself,” *Aperture*, September 28, 2020, <https://aperture.org/editorial/martine-gutierrez-indigenous-woman/>.

⁹ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans.”

¹⁰ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans.”

passing the corner of 9th Avenue and 37th Street to look up, but she also “wanted the image to be black and white, which is very classic, very Calvin Klein 1990s...”¹¹ Calvin Klein’s campaigns are considered “classic” because the advertising techniques they employ have been repeated over time. Specifically, *Jeans* resembles Calvin Klein’s 1992 campaign, which featured a topless Kate Moss straddling Marky Mark. (fig. 2) This campaign is significant in pop culture because it launched Moss into international stardom.¹² Gutierrez adapts a recognizable image that was also displayed on a billboard in Times Square. She emulates Moss’s appearance by lowering her jeans below her waist, revealing her derrière in lieu of a branded, elastic underwear band. The similarities in content and placement foster a sense of brand recognition, a concept in advertising that measures a brand’s success by how easily consumers are able to associate it with visual cues. Logos, slogans, and color schemes are typically used to render a brand distinguishable from competitors, but Gutierrez alters their purpose so that her artwork can blend into a cityscape that is already studded with billboards.¹³ The sleek, sans-serif letters that form the “MARTINE JEANS” logo encourage consumers to view *Jeans* like any other advertisement and to view her like any other woman. Consumers would not have known that Gutierrez used male pronouns two years prior to producing *Jeans*. Gutierrez asks, “[w]hen do we ever say, ‘Kate Moss, white model, born female,’”¹⁴ drawing attention to the way that the media normalizes whiteness and

¹¹ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans.”

¹² Daniela Elser, “‘I Had a Nervous Breakdown’: Sad Truth Behind Iconic Kate Moss Image,” *New Zealand Herald*, November 09, 2019, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/i-had-a-nervous-breakdown-sad-truth-behind-iconic-kate-moss-image/LHSNVOEUNFH264L2DJPSD4M2Y4/>.

¹³ I consider Gutierrez’s use of advertising techniques in relation to Sianne Ngai’s conceptualization of the gimmick. Ngai considers the gimmick as a recognizable aesthetic category. She asserts that techniques are recognized as gimmicks when they are rendered questionable, deemed cheap and fraudulent, for they fail to deliver on what it promised. Gutierrez renders the techniques used to distinguish a brand questionable and fraudulent, placing into question the idea of authenticity. For more information, see: Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 3.

¹⁴ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans.”

cisness as “ideal” identities that need not be named. Utilizing advertising techniques and campaigns, Gutierrez combats a discriminatory practice that is used to invalidate trans women of color that deviate from these “ideals.”

As the maker of this image, Gutierrez determines which aspects of her identity are revealed and concealed. She wraps her arms around her chest to conceal her breasts, but she is not shying away from the camera. She seductively gazes into it, her eyes accentuated with dark eyeshadow. Her manicured thumb grazes against her parted, glossy lips. With her disheveled hair and arched back, Gutierrez positions herself as the object of sexual desire, but she is actually the producer of it. She strikes the poses, shoots the images, and sets the limits. Initially, Gutierrez photographed herself with her jeans fully buttoned up, but she chose to lower them for the final frames. She states, “I feel the need to nurture and protect myself as I am only budding—my derrière at the moment is the most familiar currency I have to showcase.”¹⁵ Gutierrez asserts full control over how her body is presented and validates her identity by refusing to reveal herself in excess or distinguish herself from a cis woman.

At first glance, *Jeans* does not appear to deviate from the norm, but the artistic techniques that Gutierrez deploys hint at a slippage between binaries, such as artwork and advertisement and male and female. Gutierrez simulates brush strokes and collage, an art form that is typically associated with the concept of hybridity because it combines a variety of materials onto a supporting surface.¹⁶ Her black and white body appears to have been cut and pasted onto a hot pink background. The uneven shade of magenta that bleeds out from her jagged white outline

¹⁵ “Martine Gutierrez: Jeans.”

¹⁶ Critical theorist Homi Bhabha discusses hybridity as a mutation that results from the cultural collision of fixed identification, resulting in something that is neither this nor that. Whereas Bhabha seeks to probe a liminal space for newness, Gutierrez seeks to challenge the practice of categorization. For more information, see: Homi Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 49. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>.

resembles glue residue, but closer inspection reveals that *Jeans* is a single image that has been digitally altered, as strands of Gutierrez's hair pass through each color. Gutierrez's *Jeans* is neither an amalgamation of disparate materials nor a metaphor for hybridity; it is a celebration of ambiguity. Gutierrez challenges the need to define artistic genres, race, and gender. She resists the categorization of gender identity by using the illusion of paint and posing to subvert the hyper femininity of fashion and cosmetic advertising. The heavy white brushstrokes that mark her bicep, shoulder, and hands were applied with Photoshop and contrast with the darkened patches of body hair on her forearms. As previously noted, Gutierrez uses her forearms to shield her breasts, drawing attention to a stereotypically masculine attribute while concealing a stereotypically feminine attribute. Her pose and shading, much like her use of collage, resist the viewer's gaze and traditional forms of categorization. Combined with the visual cues of advertising, the artistic techniques in Gutierrez's artwork subtly unsettle gendered binaries.

Gutierrez's artworks consistently challenge viewers to consider how the images in mainstream media demarcate "acceptable" gender and racial identities. In 2018, she placed herself on the cover of the *Indigenous Woman* fashion magazine to unsettle notions of celebrity that are rooted in cisness and whiteness. The cover is based on *Interview Magazine*, a publication that was founded in 1969 by contemporary artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987), who often addressed fame and celebrity in his artworks. (fig. 3 and fig. 4) Both magazines feature logos that are written in a cursive font. The handwritten quality of the font and the repetition of the letters "In" again foster a sense of brand recognition. By associating her series with *Interview Magazine*, Gutierrez likens herself to one of the most prominent Pop artists and elevates herself to celebrity status. For Gutierrez, celebrity was once a path towards recognition. She states,

“[w]hen I was younger, I thought if I were famous people would finally accept me,”¹⁷ but media representation does not necessarily entail acceptance; it often stipulates conforming to the “acceptable.” Rather than reproduce/normalize cisness and whiteness, Gutierrez seeks recognition for trans women and Indigenous women on her own terms.¹⁸

Indigenous Woman begins with a cover that diverges from conventional portrayals of whiteness while challenging stereotypical portrayals of indigeneity, which frame Native peoples as static remnants of the past. Gutierrez demonstrates how Maya traditions have transformed over time by posing with a *muñeca quitapena* (worry doll). In Guatemala, *muñecas quitapenas* are commonly gifted to children, who are encouraged to share their worries with them before they go to bed to awake with the knowledge to face their dilemmas. This practice stems from the Maya legend of Princess Ixmucane, who received a gift from the sun god that enabled her to solve any problem. To viewers who lack cultural knowledge, Gutierrez is simply portraying a doll, but she is actually embodying the continuation of an Indigenous tradition.¹⁹ Like the *muñeca quitapena*, Gutierrez’s hair is braided and decorated with purple and green pom poms. Gutierrez’s pom poms are metallic, resembling those used by cheerleaders. She repurposes decorative accessories that are typically used by women in gendered, performative displays of

¹⁷ Osman Can Yerebakan, “How Martine Gutierrez Turned Herself into Cleopatra, Mulan, and Other Historical Heroines for a Public Art Project in Bus Shelters Across the U.S.,” *Artnet*, September 7, 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/martine-gutierrez-public-art-fund-2004044>.

¹⁸ My interpretation is influenced by cultural theorist Rey Chow, who asserts that a non-white culture must use the language of white culture to be or speak while resisting complete normalization by white culture. For more information, see: Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁹ This interpretation draws on Francisco J. Galarte’s discussion on *placas*, which he describes as floating signifiers that mark a space for the purpose of laying a symbolic claim. *Placas* are not readily apparent to viewers who lack cultural conditioning. Similarly, Gutierrez’s allusion to Maya legend requires cultural conditioning. For more information, see: Francisco J. Galarte, “Introduction: Thinking Brown and Trans Together,” in *Brown Trans Figurations: Rethinking Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Chicanx/Latinx Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021). 7. <https://doi.org/10.7560/322123>.

support and celebration. Gutierrez's cover is a performance and celebration of indigeneity that presents the traditional as contemporary, responding to past and present.

Posing on the cover of *Indigenous Woman*, Gutierrez asserts the vitality of Native peoples. She pinches the stiff *muñeca quitapena* with her right hand and places it in the center of the composition, against her chest. The doll's head rests against her shoulder, but Gutierrez's expression does not reflect the tenderness that a child might show to a precious toy. Gutierrez pouts her red lips and stares directly into the camera, contrasting the doll's blank expression. Whereas the doll appears to glance towards the left, Gutierrez confronts the viewer with intensity. She angles her body towards the right and leans forward, distinguishing herself from the lifeless, motionless doll. Gutierrez utilizes her pose within the cover to assert her presence and existence as a contemporary Indigenous woman.

While *Indigenous Woman* is indeed a self-exploration of identity, Gutierrez does not position herself as an object of study, but as a woman worthy of praise. Gutierrez's cover must be understood in relation to a history of ethnography, which utilized photography to document and inspect Native peoples. She uses self-portraiture to reconfigure a method of invasive knowledge extraction. As the photographer and model, Gutierrez sets the boundaries of her exposure/display.²⁰ She resists ethnographic inspection by concealing her breasts with the *muñeca quitapena*, but she also embraces her body and sexuality as sources of power. Posing nude, she draws attention to the brownness of her skin to subvert the idealization of whiteness and cisness in mainstream media. Magazine covers typically exalt cis, white women and shape

²⁰ I draw from decolonial theorists such as Audra Simpson and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who conceptualize ways of decolonizing research practices. For more information, see: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Introduction," in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 1-18 and Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (December 2007): 67-80. <https://www.junctures.org/index.php/junctures/article/view/66>.

the notion of an idealized beauty.²¹ Gutierrez's cover rejects the notion of an "ideal" by drawing attention to how the "ideal" has been used to oppress those that deviate from it. Using self-portraiture, Gutierrez combats a history of oppressive ethnographic and media practices to valorize herself and her identities.

Gutierrez's series underscores how the idealization of whiteness and cisness in mainstream media foments the marginalization of trans women, particularly trans women of color. This is apparent in Gutierrez's fashion spread titled *COVERTGIRL* (2018). (fig. 5) The title appears on the work in a font that matches the one used by American cosmetics brand CoverGirl. The term "cover girl" is used to refer to female models that are highlighted on magazines, but "covert" is an adjective that describes what is not openly acknowledged or displayed. The *COVERTGIRL* logo nearly blends into Gutierrez's hair because she appears in a dimly lit space. The sliver of yellow light that partially falls across her eyes suggests that she is hiding, peeping through a window blind. Posing with her index finger against her cheek, Gutierrez stares towards the English and Japanese taglines that read "PASS AS A WOMAN IS." Gutierrez directs attention to the concept of passing, which refers to the ability to be perceived as a cis woman.²² Trans women shift their bodies and appearance to pass as cis women because

²¹ I consider magazine covers as a form of portraiture. American artist and art historian Ace Lehner recognizes that portraiture has historically reified ideological value systems and argues that self-portraiture can be used to intervene in the legacies of portraiture we have inherited in the Western art-historical context. For more information, see: Ace Lehner, "Trans Self-Imaging Praxis, Decolonizing Photography, and the Work of Alok Vaid-Menon," *Refract* 2, no. 1 (2019): 68. <https://doi.org/10.5070/R72145857>.

²² In 1963, Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman coined the term passing to describe the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self. Ethnic and gender studies scholars have identified passing as a technique that is used to modulate visibility "in order to be perceived as belonging to a particular category, such as a racial group or gender. For more information, see: Valli Kalei Kanuha, "The Social Process of "Passing" to Manage Stigma: Acts of Internalized Oppression of Acts of Resistance?," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 26, no. 4 (December 1999): 28. <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/shifting-futures-micha-cardenas/index> and micha cárdenas, "Dark Shimmers: The Rhythm of Necropolitical Affect in Digital Media," in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2017), 170.

passing entails survival; passing can be key to avoiding violence and persecution.²³ In *COVERTGIRL*, passing is presented as a call to action, an action that marketers want consumers to take. Gutierrez's artwork sheds light on how the media uses *ad feminam* rhetoric to invalidate women that deviate from the "ideal."

In *COVERTGIRL*, Gutierrez examines the emphasis that the media places on passing. She critiques the standardization of femininity by conceptualizing a product that guarantees the ability to pass. The T3X mascara brush offers consumers "CAPTIVATING VOLUME. ELEGANT FEMALE BEAUTY. AUTHENTIC CURVES." This value proposition implies that authenticity is predicated on gender norms and biological distinctions. Gutierrez alludes to the sex chromosomes that are used to biologically distinguish between males and females by incorporating the rounded "x" shaped structure of a chromosome into the T3X logo. The logo appears to the left of her face and on the mascara brush, which intersects with the tube behind it. By repeating the letter "x" throughout the image, Gutierrez calls out how the mainstream media continues to uphold the idealization of cisness by stipulating passing as a requirement for womanhood.²⁴

In addition, Gutierrez's artwork explores how whiteness factors into passing. Gutierrez appears several shades lighter than she did on the cover of *Indigenous Woman*. The blackness of

²³ Visual artist and ethnic studies scholar micha cárdenas recognizes that trans women of color shift their body and appearance to survive. In recent years, trans women of color have gained increased media exposure, but they remain the number one target of murder and violence among LGBTQ people. For more information see: micha cárdenas, "Shifting Futures: Digital Trans of Color Praxis," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, no. 6 (2015).

²⁴ I consider the failure to pass according to the ideals of cisness and whiteness in relation to Jillian Hernandez's discussion of the label "fake," which is used to "discipline women and girls of color into performing sexually respectable racial authenticity by deriding their potential to signify radical modalities of gender, race, class, and sexuality through their body aesthetics, as these reveal the contingency of the normative order." Similarly, Gutierrez considers how "authenticity" is based on the notion of gendered and racial respectability. For more information, see: Jillian Hernandez, "Rococo Pink," in *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 148. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdct2.10>.

her slicked-back hair, sculpted brows, and thick eyelashes contrasts with the whiteness of her skin. Gutierrez is, in fact, half white, and she recognizes her ability to pass as a white cis woman by including the tagline “Maybe she’s born with it. Maybe it’s white privilege.” This tagline alludes to American cosmetics brand Maybelline, which adopted the tagline “Maybe she’s born with it. Maybe it’s? Maybelline” in 1991. Maybelline’s tagline suggests that there is an ambiguity between “natural” and commercial beauty, that is beauty that can be purchased as a product and applied.²⁵ Gutierrez’s artwork suggests that whiteness and womanhood are ambiguous categories, which are performed and constructed through passing. Rather than simply reproduce these categories, she uses her art to recognize that passing is not an option for all trans women of color, who remain the number one target of murder and violence among LGBTQ+ people. *COVERTGIRL* demonstrates that the *ad feminam* rhetoric of advertising has elevated those who can pass as cis and white above those who cannot, contributing to the marginalization of trans women of color.²⁶

Throughout *Indigenous Woman*, Gutierrez embodies characters to explore the body as a place of testimony that sheds light on oppression, erasure, and resilience. On page 93, she poses as the Maya demon Chin, a figure associated with lust and homosexuality, who is—at times—presented as male.²⁷ (fig. 6) Gutierrez uses makeup, accessories, and hair styling to present

²⁵ Sheets, “A Shape-Shifting Woman.”

²⁶ Cárdenas considers how the increasing visibility of transgender people in mainstream media has differentiated between the “acceptable trans person” and the “disposable trans person.” The “acceptable trans person” adheres to notions of sanitary/cultural citizenship, which required adherence to norms and a willingness to repudiate the “disposable trans person” for failing to adhere to norms. Gutierrez’s artwork voice a refusal to enforce norms and critique advertising practices that do so. For more information, see: micha cárdenas, “Dark Shimmers: The Rhythm of Necropolitical Affect in Digital Media,” in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2017), 170 and Alvarado, “Introduction.” 3-9.

²⁷ Joshua Mark, “The Mayan Pantheon: The Many Gods of the Maya,” *World History*. July 07, 2012, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/415/the-mayan-pantheon-the-many-gods-of-the-maya/>.

herself as the trans descendant of this gender fluid demon.²⁸ She rests her chin on her palm and grazes her cheek with thick, yellow acrylic nails. This gesture is often used in cosmetics advertisements to draw attention towards the face. Gutierrez uses it to draw attention to her chartreuse-colored, hawkish eyes. These birdlike qualities are significant because the Maya associated the quetzal bird with divinity, using its tail feathers to decorate headdresses for royal ritual performances.²⁹ Gutierrez structures her hairdo like a headdress, using thick black braids to encircle a replica of a quetzal bird. Its blue green plumes graze her right shoulder, matching the feathers that jut out of both sides of her head. Gutierrez's appearance establishes her divine connection to Chin, situating her trans identity within Maya tradition.

Gutierrez turns to Maya mythology to recover knowledge of the past and explore her relationship with it. Initially, Gutierrez sought to portray goddesses from her ancestry because her community refers to trans women as "goddesses." After conducting research, Gutierrez was shocked to learn that the deities in Maya literature were referred to as *demonios* (demons). Recognizing that coloniality shaped her understanding of the term "demon," Gutierrez decided to reclaim it.³⁰ American art historian Claire Raymond asserts that Gutierrez "reembodies the

²⁸ Gutierrez's portrayal of Chin reminds me of Gloria Anzaldúa's conceptualization of *recobrando* and Amber Musser's discussion of citations. Anzaldúa describes *recobrando* as the act of recovering "our ancient identity, digging it out like dry clay, pressing it to our current identity, molding past and present, inner and outer." Similarly, Musser asserts that citation in self-portraiture "produces plural selfhood in this reference to the past while also illuminating the multiplicity of the present. To be in time, to inhabit a moment, is to be made legible through that which came before." Gutierrez's self-portrait connects past and present, destabilizing the idea of a knowable self by presenting the "I" as other to itself. For more information, see: Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Duke University Press, 2009), 117 and Amber Musser, "Introduction," in *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University press, 2018), 3-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvwrn5ws.3>.

²⁹ Nicholas Carter and Alyce de Carteret, "The Capped Body," in *The Adorned Body: Mapping Ancient Maya Dress*, ed. Nicholas Carter, Stephen D. Houston, and Franco D. Rossi (Austin: The University of Texas, 2020), 53.

³⁰ Gutierrez refers to the Maya concept of *Xibalba*, an underworld that is home to deities. *Xibalba* is referenced in Mayan texts, such as the *Popol Vuh*. Gutierrez recognizes that these texts were translated by Westerners, which impacts the meaning that they carry today. Literary scholar Edgar Garcia notes that Spanish missionaries used the term demon to transplant "European belief into Maya minds." For more information, see: Rosen, "High-Fashion

erased texts of Indigenous American deities...”³¹ Gutierrez uses her body to reconnect with Maya cultural traditions. The red and black markings that appear on her hands, face, and bicep allude to the Maya practice of tattooing the body to honor the divine.³² By marking her body, Gutierrez converts it into a religious text, one that can be read in relation to and in honor of Chin. In addition, she directly references Mayan texts by sporting a jade-colored jaguar glyph as a nose ring. The Maya associated jade with the divine, so Gutierrez’s marked body is made even more sacred by wearing the glyph and several stacks of jade-colored rings on each finger.³³ Gutierrez carefully adorns her body to reference Maya mythology, resisting the erasure of Indigenous history and belief systems. She explores her relationship with the past by using her body as a source of knowledge production and preservation.

Embodying Chin within a fashion spread, Gutierrez connects the struggles that Native peoples faced in the past with those that they face in the present. She utilizes the language of advertising to draw a parallel between the erasure of Maya mythology during the colonial period and the erasure of Native peoples in mainstream media. Drawing from cosmetic advertisements,

Self-Portraits.” And Edgar Garcia, “Demons,” in *Emergency: Reading the Popol Vuh in a Time of Crisis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 50-52.
<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/chicago/9780226818610/html#contents>.

³¹ Maya codices were objects of veneration that played a major role in religious practices. Spanish missionaries such as Franciscan friar Diego de Landa (1524-1579) were suspicious of these texts and ordered their destruction. For more information, see: Mark Evan Davis, ““The Evangelical Prophecies over Jerusalem Have Been Fulfilled”: Joachim of Fiore, the Jews, Fray Diego de Landa and the Maya,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 5, no. 1 (Jan. 2013): 86-103. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17546559.2012.749580> and Claire Raymond, “Reclaiming History,” in *Photography and Resistance* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 176, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96158-9>.

³² Mesoamerican scholars such as Eric Thompson and Cara F. Tremain have argued that tattooing was practiced by members of the Maya elite to emulate deities and demonstrate divine power. For more information, see: Cara G. Tremain, “A Multidisciplinary Approach to Ancient Maya Adornment and Costume: Mobilizing the Body and the Senses,” *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 19, no. 1, (2011): 67-80. <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/uwoja/article/view/8909/7103>.

³³ The Maya viewed bearing the weight of heavy jade ornaments as an embodied part of ritual work. Maya rulers wore them to demonstrate their dedication to the gods that they served. For more information, see: Christina T. Halperin, Zachary X. Hruby, and Ryan Mongelluzzo, “The Weight of Ritual: Classic Maya Jade Head Pendants in the Round,” *Antiquity* 92, no. 363 (2018): 758–71. <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2018.65>.

Gutierrez poses before a gradated background that transitions from deep red to soft pink. Light appears to emanate from her otherworldly upper body, which floats in an otherwise empty space. In this fashion spread, Gutierrez represents Chin not as a demonic figure from the underworld who incites fear, but as a model who is worthy of worship. Models are idolized for their appearances and—at times—presented as superhuman. Within advertisements, models form part of fantasies that idealize and deify whiteness. Within this artwork, Gutierrez draws from the models in mainstream media but to different ends, to challenge the misrepresentation and erasure of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Utilizing the format of the fashion spread, Gutierrez underscores that the problems of the present are rooted in the past.

Throughout the *Indigenous Woman* series, Gutierrez draws on fashion spreads and magazines to imagine a way forward that looks back and looks different, that recognizes the vitality of Indigenous women and the identities of trans women. She craftily adapts a format that consumers are accustomed to casually flipping through to critique forms of representation that foment the marginalization of these identities. Drawing from the familiar, from brands and publications, Gutierrez's artworks challenge consumers to question preconceptions, stereotypes, and the power dynamics behind the conventional portrayals they encounter in mainstream media.

In 2021, Gutierrez partnered with the Public Art Fund on a series titled *ANTI-ICON*, which addresses these themes. The series consists of ten images that were displayed across 300 JCDecaux bus shelters in New York, Chicago, and Boston.³⁴ Each image features a reinterpretation of a mythological or historical figure: Aphrodite, Atargatis, Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth I, the angel Gabriel, Lady Godiva, Helen of Troy, Judith, Mulan, and the Queen of

³⁴ Sheets, "A Shape-Shifting Woman

Sheba.³⁵ Gutierrez identifies these figures as symbols in culture that have been reproduced over time. She considers how history has shaped their portrayals, observing that “no one thinks of Aphrodite or Cleopatra as a child or as aged.”³⁶ Gutierrez publicly portrays these figures as they have never been seen before, with costumes crafted out of the materials that she found around her mother’s home in upstate New York. Gutierrez’s bus shelter ads deviate from conventional modes of representation, destabilizing the public’s perception of iconic women, the everyday, and the luxurious.

Gutierrez’s portrayals diverge from traditional indications of status and wealth to reflect the state of the world. Gutierrez shot the series in an empty pool during the summer of 2020. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and a seasonal drought, Gutierrez felt that it was “wrong to make something decorated” and chose to make do with plaster, gauze, trash bags, cardboard, and zip ties.³⁷ Gutierrez’s portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I reflects this stripped-down approach. (fig. 7) Traditional portrayals of the British monarch, such as *The Armada Portrait* (c. 1588), feature voluminous gowns, lavish strings of pearls, and perfectly coiffed hair. (fig. 8) In contrast, Gutierrez poses nude behind a sheer red curtain. She substitutes pearls with metallic rings and sports an orange wig made of unruly potted moss. Gutierrez’s *Elizabeth* (2021) presents the

³⁵ “Martine Gutierrez: ANTI-ICON,” Public Art Fund, accessed September 18, 2022. <https://www.publicartfund.org/exhibitions/view/anti-icon/>.

³⁶ Yerebakan, “Public Art Project in Bus Shelters.”

³⁷ Gutierrez’s approach is comparable to *domesticana*, a Chicana/x feminist revision of *rasquachismo*. In 1989, literary scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto theorized *rasquachismo* as a type of Chicana/x taste, an underdog perspective, a resourcefulness that makes do with what is on hand. In the 1990s, Chicana/x artist and curator Amalia Mesa-Bains used the term *domesticana* to describe artistic practices that emulate the daily practices of women, such as gathering household objects and personal styling/glamorization. For more information, see: Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Rasquachismo: a Chicano Sensibility,” in *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo* (Phoenix: MARS, Movimiento Artístico del Río Salado, 1989), 5, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/845510#?c=&m=&s=&cv=2&xywh=-248%2C718%2C3030%2C1695> and Charlene Villaseñor Black, “Rasquachismo, Domesticana, and Chicana Conceptualism,” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 47, no. 2 (2022): 3-10. <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/csrc/aztlan/2022/00000047/00000002/art00002> and Yerebakan, “Historical Heroines.”

queen without her worldly possessions, a queen who is no longer in possession of the world. *The Armada Portrait* features Elizabeth clutching a globe. She sits beside her crown and before a fleet of ships. The sixteenth-century painting celebrates imperial expansion and commemorates the defeat of the Spanish Armada. In contrast, Gutierrez's 2021 photograph presents the dissolution of empire. She poses before a backdrop in which sky, land, and sea melt into each other. There are no ships, there is no crown, there is only a queen, whose bare body and make-shift accessories reflect the crumbling state of the world rather than its domination.

Gutierrez's nude self-portrait not only departs from traditional indications of status and wealth, but also from conventional depictions that suppress women's sexualities. Images of Queen Elizabeth I have traditionally celebrated her chastity, as the monarch remained unmarried throughout her 45-year long reign. In *The Armada Portrait*, a pearl dangles over the Queen's pelvis, symbolizing her virginity. The "Virgin Queen" was framed as a "good woman." Chicana studies scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba observes that the "good woman" and "bad woman" stereotypes form part of a "discourse of identification, valuation, and domination that frames women's bodies across time, place, and culture."³⁸ Gutierrez's bus shelter ad confronts this discourse of identification by presenting an unabashedly nude version of the "Virgin Queen." She leans forward with her hand on her hips to accentuate her derrière and pouts her red lips, which match the sheer red veil that swoops across the frame. While Gutierrez defies traditional conventions, she complies with contemporary advertising laws, using the veil to strategically conceal parts of her body. Gutierrez reframes a woman who has been desexualized throughout history while navigating the limitations that the media places on women's bodies today.

³⁸ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]framing the Bad Woman: Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 21.

By framing mythological/historical figures as “anti-icons” in bus shelter ads, Gutierrez reflects on the role that images, history, and the media play in oppressing women while questioning how they should be represented and by whom. Before beginning the series, Gutierrez wondered if she was “allowed” to represent these figures as a trans woman and continues to ask herself “[a]m I a woman? What does being a woman mean?”³⁹ Gutierrez uses a space that is typically reserved for advertisements to explore womanhood not as a fixed category, but as a product that has been manufactured for the purpose of control. Her bus shelter ads imagine liberation not simply as representation but as a reconfiguration of the conventional, as a life beyond the structures of oppression.

Responding to the world around her, Gutierrez’s art is a product of the times, and it is also highly representative of the strategies that Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used since the 1970s to critique gender norms and systemic racism. Gutierrez converts advertising techniques into tools for social justice, so I consider her art in relation to that of Valdez. Born and raised in East Los Angeles, Valdez drew inspiration from Hollywood films, yet she never saw herself reflected in them. When she did encounter Chicanxs in mainstream media, they were often portrayed as criminals. In 1972, she formed the Chicana artist collective Asco, collaborating with Harry Gamboa Jr. (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA), Glugio “Gronk” Nicandro (b. 1954, East Los Angeles, CA), and Willie Herrón (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA) on various artworks that protested the erasure and misrepresentation of Chicanxs in mainstream media. Asco conceptualized No Movies, artworks formatted like film stills that were released internationally to print media.⁴⁰ Each No Movie featured an implied narrative, which drew

³⁹ Sheets, “A Shape-Shifting Woman.”

⁴⁰ Terezita Romo, *Patssi Valdez: A Precarious Comfort = Una Comodidad Precaria*, ed. Terezita Romo (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1999), 15.

inspiration from pop culture.⁴¹ Performing in *No Movies*, Valdez adapts the language of advertising to deviate from conventional, oppressive modes of representation.

In the *No Movie* titled *Take One* (1978), Valdez draws from fashion and film to appropriate the aura of stardom and reframe Chicanxs in a glamorous light. (fig. 9) She sports a sun hat and a pair of oversized, circular shades. While celebrities utilize accessories such as these to avoid recognition, Valdez uses them to obtain recognition. American art historian C. Ondine Chavoya compares Valdez to Sophia Loren, for the Italian actress was often photographed wearing the same accessories.⁴² By associating herself with Loren, Valdez elevates herself to the level of a world-renowned actress. She shifts her identity, turning to fashion to “act out roles as an actress would do.”⁴³ However, Valdez is not simply portraying a persona. She uses fashion to assimilate the appearance of an “acceptable” actress while critiquing the norms that determine “acceptability” and how they have been used to discriminate against and stereotype Chicanxs.⁴⁴ Posing against a polka-dotted curtain with Billy “Star” Estrada, Valdez reframes Chicanxs in a glamorous light. She turns her body towards the left, exposing part of her back to the camera. Her shoulder blade presses against the strap of her fitted black dress as she raises it to meet her

⁴¹ Marci McMahon, “Self-Fashioning through Glamour and Punk in East Los Angeles: Patssi Valdez in Asco’s Instant Mural and A La Mode,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 2 (2011): 39. <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/csra/aztlan/2011/00000036/00000002/art00002#>.

⁴² C. Ondine Chavoya, “Pseudographic Cinema: Asco’s No-Movies,” *Performance Research* 3, no.1 (1998): 12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.1998.10871583>.

⁴³ McMahon “Glamour and Punk,” 34.

⁴⁴ Mesa-Bains considers how Valdez turns to fashion as a form of contestation. This interpretation is similar to Néstor García Canclini’s work on consumption. The Argentine anthropologist considers how consumption is a political matter because consumers define what is publicly valuable and consume in order to integrate/distinguish themselves in society. Valdez turns to fashion/consumption to mimic the “acceptable” portrayals of celebrity. For more information, see: Amalia Mesa-Bains, “Patssi Valdez: Glamour, Domestic Ruin and Regeneration,” in *Patssi Valdez: A Precarious Comfort = Una Comodidad Precaria*, ed. Terezita Romo (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1999), 34 and Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*, tr. George Yúdice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 20.

downwards-tilting chin. With her parted, full lips, Valdez appears to have been caught off guard. Captured in the moment, she reaches towards her companion and places her hand on his chest. Star covers her hand with his, extending his fingers over her wrist. Star's gesture does not appear possessive. He is not clutching onto Valdez, rather he is attempting to shield her. Leaning against her breasts, Star stoically stares into the camera, clenches his jaw, and flexes the muscles in his forearm, as if confronting the photographer. The two resemble a celebrity couple being pursued by the paparazzi. Valdez draws on mainstream media to mimic glamour and present a Chicana couple in the limelight.

Valdez's appearance and apparel play a crucial role within this narrative, but her role within Asco and the agency that she asserted within No Movies is often misconstrued. She is framed as a model and a muse, terms that position her as a passive object of observation and sexualization.⁴⁵ These terms are inaccurate because Valdez collaborated with Asco members, such as Star and Gronk, on the poses that she performed. She fondly referred to Gronk as Mr. DeMille,⁴⁶ alluding to American film director Cecil DeMille. Gronk supported Valdez as a director, providing input behind the camera, but these roles were not static. Gronk also starred in Asco's No Movies. *À La Mode* (1977) features Gronk, Gamboa, and Valdez. (fig. 10). Within this narrative, Gronk and Gambo play supporting roles, facing the left and gazing longingly at Valdez, respectively. Valdez is the central figure, the star of the scene. Sitting on a table, she

⁴⁵ Film studies scholar David E. James observes that Asco mimicked film studios by dividing labor. Gronk and Gamboa were writers and directors. Valdez was the star. American journalist Lorenza Muñoz echoes this assessment; she describes Valdez as a muse. For more information, see: David E. James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective, 1972-1987*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita González (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 187 and Clipping of calendardlive.com article "A Painter's Great Escape" by Lorenza Muñoz, Mar. 7, 1999, CEMA 119, box 48, folder 30, Finding Guide for the Shifra M. Goldman Papers, The California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA (hereafter cited as Clipping of "A painter's Great Escape," Finding Guide for the Shifra M. Goldman Papers).

⁴⁶ McMahon "Glamour and Punk," 34.

crosses her legs at the ankles and places her hand against her thigh to prevent her dress from riding up. This is not an act of modesty, but an act of control. Like Gutierrez, Valdez asserts control over her body and sexuality. She uses her plunging neckline to draw attention to her chest, proudly pushing it outwards, and she stares into the camera, defiantly tilting her chin upwards. Valdez's agency is found within her self-presentation, which played a key role in Asco's No Movies.

Valdez's performance within *À La Mode* shapes a narrative in which Chicana/xs can challenge societal and patriarchal norms. Chicana/x Studies scholar Marci McMahon argues that Valdez used posing to resist and exploit the male gaze. McMahon contests previous interpretations of *À La Mode*, which assert that Valdez was objectified. Critics have pointed out that the artwork is named after a phrase that is used to describe someone stylish or a dessert served with ice cream. Indeed, Asco chose the title because Valdez was posing next to a piece of pie in Phillipe's, a famous Los Angeles diner. However, McMahon demonstrates how Valdez's pose embraces sexuality as a source of power, drawing attention to the fact that Valdez places her hand on Gronk's shoulder.⁴⁷ Valdez's gesture is an assertion of power, possession, and choice. It implies that—within this love triangle—she has chosen the man on her right. By placing her hand on Gronk's shoulder, she converts him into a prop within this No Movie and establishes her dominance as the leading lady. Gronk passively stares off into the distance and tilts his chin upwards, mimicking her pose to confirm that he has accepted his role within this union. Performing the ability to choose within a love triangle, Valdez challenges the sexist norms that oppress Chicana/xs.

⁴⁷ McMahon "Glamour and Punk," 40.

Valdez is an important precedent for Gutierrez, as both use the language of advertising to mimic glamour and assert control over their bodies, challenging the conventional portrayals of their respective communities. Mimicking the glamour of film stars and fashion advertisements, Valdez turns to stylish apparel and craft to combat the erasure and criminalization of Chicanxs in mainstream media. Like Gutierrez, Valdez fashioned the illusion of glamour out of inexpensive materials: found fabric, glitter, paper, foil, plastics, and netting.⁴⁸ Valdez states, “I knew I could create an illusion... Something fabulous out of nothing.”⁴⁹ Collaborating with Asco, Valdez imagined opportunities for the Chicana/x community beyond the impoverished streets of East Los Angeles, beyond Hollywood’s stereotypical portrayals. She recognizes that her interpretation of the citizens “of Los Angeles may appear glamorized, colored and detached but it is in fact an expression of the solitude and alienation of a Chicana.”⁵⁰ Like Valdez, Gutierrez uses her art to critique the misrepresentation of trans women and Indigenous women, as well as the erasure and invalidation of these identities. Placing these artists in dialogue demonstrates how Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used the language of advertising to mimic and critique mainstream media, how they have challenged misrepresentation, erasure, and systemic racism. Gutierrez’s artistic practice forms part of an ongoing liberatory practice.

The strategies that Gutierrez uses to seek liberation for her communities are comparable not only to those that have been used by Valdez, but also by Hernández. Like Gutierrez, Hernández uses the language of advertising to reflect on personal experiences and advocate for her community. Hernández was raised by farmworkers in Dinuba, California. While visiting her

⁴⁸ McMahon “Glamour and Punk,” 35.

⁴⁹ Mesa-Bains, “Patssi Valdez,” 34.

⁵⁰ Clipping of article “Artist’s Career Narrative,” 1987, CEMA 119, box 48, folder 31, Finding Guide for the Shifra M. Goldman Papers, The California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.

mother, Hernández learned that the pesticides used in grape farming had contaminated her community's water source. Shortly after, she spotted a Sun-Maid Raisins logo at the end of a field and "had an 'aha' moment."⁵¹ Hernández decided to adapt the logo, drawing from the satirical cartoons of Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), which often featured skeletons. She states, "I saw I could draw on Posada and bring it together with what was going on in the San Joaquin Valley."⁵² Like Gutierrez, Hernández turns to the past to evaluate problems in the present. Her print titled *Sun Mad* (1982) features a grinning skeleton carrying a brown, woven basket that is noticeably larger than its shoulders. (fig. 11) It is overflowing with green grapes, which underscores how farmworkers continue to perform backbreaking labor in deadly conditions. Placing the grinning skeleton within a circular, yellow sun, Hernández casts a spotlight on the victims of unjust labor practices. She draws from recognizable brands, using the language of advertising to advocate for her community.

The Sun-Maid Raisins logo has been described as a vision of Californian sunshine and prosperity, but Hernández's print exposes the artificiality of that vision.⁵³ (fig. 12) Gone is the "timeless and trusted" value proposition. Hernández's tagline underscores that this product is "unnaturally grown with insecticides, miticides, herbicides, fungicides." Whereas the original logo features lush, green leaves, Hernández's print features teal-colored leaves and vines. This change in color suggests that these products have been tainted. In addition, Hernández demonstrates the impact that chemical usage has had on farmworkers by transforming the smiling sun maiden into a grinning skeleton. A potent subversion of corporate branding,

⁵¹ Maylei Blackwell, "Women Who Make Their Own Worlds: The Life and Work of Ester Hernández," in *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, ed. Dionne Espinoza, Maria Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 148, <https://doi.org/10.7560/315583>.

⁵² Blackwell, "Women Who Make Worlds," 148.

⁵³ Rowan Bain, "Ester Hernández: Sun Mad," *Art in Print* 3, no. 6 (2014): 28.

Hernández's *Sun Mad* is considered one of the first images to link the plight of farm workers to the effects on consumers and the environment.⁵⁴ Her politically charged print reconfigures a brand that consumers know and trust to reveal hazardous production practices.

Hernández's print relates to broader trends in artist-activism. Throughout the 1980s, artists emulated the gallows humor that was prevalent in the antiracist art that Chicana and Puerto Rican artists produced in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁵ Chicana artists turned to existing circuits of commerce, media, and politics to combat the racially charged notions of high art and low art that excluded them from the museum. They incorporated the language of advertising into their works, blending Pop art with Mexican graphic art to address systemic racism.⁵⁶ Chicana artist-activists such as Rupert García engaged with Pop art, for it reflected "the hopes, interest, spirit, and will of a people to continue to struggle against the social forces of exploitation."⁵⁷ Similarly, Hernández draws on the language of advertising to raise awareness around the struggles that her community faces.

Throughout her career, Hernández has drawn from the language of advertising to protest the unjust treatment of migrant farmworkers. In 2008, Hernández returned to the Sun-Maid logo

⁵⁴ Bain, "Ester Hernández: Sun Mad," 28.

⁵⁵ Clipping of article "Mixed Blessings" by Lucy Lippard, 1990, CSRC.0047, box 1, folder 1, Finding Aid for the Ester Hernández Papers 1972-2005 CSRC.0047, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, CA.

⁵⁶ American art historian Esther Gabara notes that Chicana artists, such as Rupert García, engaged with the print traditions and techniques of Mexico, Cuba, Chile, and the African American civil rights movement. For more information, see: Esther Gabara, "Contesting Freedom," in *Pop América 1965-1975*, ed. Esther Gabara (Durham: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2018), 10 and Exhibition catalogue essay for El Museo del Barrio's *Pressing the point: parallel expressions in the graphic arts of the Chicano and Puerto Rican Movements* "From Populist Art to Pop: Graphic Arts of the Chicano and Puerto Rican" by Henry Estrada, 1999, CSRC.0047, box 1, folder 5, Finding Aid for the Ester Hernández Papers 1972-2005 CSRC.0047, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, CA.

⁵⁷ Rupert García, "The Politics of Popular Art: 1978," in *Chicano and Chicana Art*, ed. Jennifer A. González, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega and Terezita Romo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv120qrm6.19>.

to produce a new print titled *Sun Raid*. (fig. 13) The grinning skeleton in *Sun Raid* sports a yellow device on her wrist, which features the word “ICE.” Still carrying the overflowing basket of grapes, it is evident that she is being monitored by Immigration Customs Enforcement on the job. Hernández issued this print at a time when the George W. Bush administration was being widely criticized for its high level of workplace raids.⁵⁸ To underscore her opposition to these deportation practices, Hernández converts the “Made in the USA” slogan into “MAD IN USA.” She places this slogan on the far right, juxtaposing it with the “HECHO EN MEXICO” slogan on the far left. The grinning skeleton straddles the space between these slogans, like a migrant caught on the border between the United States and Mexico. Centered beneath the grinning skeleton, Hernández includes the words “BY-PRODUCT OF NAFTA,” referencing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was enacted in 1994. NAFTA severely impacted Mexican farmworkers, forcing many to find work elsewhere and submit to hazardous working conditions. Hernández again hints at the latter by including the words “UN-NATURALLY HARVESTED” towards the top of the print. Utilizing the language of advertising, Hernández critiques the labor practices that farmworkers have been subjected to and the political factors that have forced them to migrate to the U.S.

Hernández uses her art to advocate for marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous peoples. Hernández references four Indigenous groups towards the bottom of the print: Mixtecos, Zapotecos, Triques, and Purepechas. Her tagline notes that these groups are “GUARANTEED DEPORTATION.” While Hernández is not a member of these groups, she does possess Indigenous Yaqui heritage, and feels that “...it is very important to share our vision and

⁵⁸ “Sun Raid,” Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed September 10, 2022, <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/sun-raid-86376>.

struggles... for in unity there is strength and understanding.”⁵⁹ Hernández presents the grinning skeleton as a representation of Native peoples. She dresses her in a *huipil*, a garment worn by Indigenous women in Mexico and Central America. The pink and white patterns that cover the *huipil* are a marker of indigeneity and a testament to the vitality and resilience of Indigenous traditions, which have survived centuries of oppression. Hernández highlights these groups and their traditions to raise awareness about the discriminatory practices that they face.

Like Hernández, Gutierrez turns to the language of advertising to advocate for Indigenous peoples and uses strategies that have been used since the Chicano Movement to promote social justice, but her activism tackles today’s discourses surrounding representation and authenticity. Whereas Hernández’s politically charged spoofs of corporate logos utilize gallows humor to raise awareness around the hazards and discrimination that migrant and Indigenous farmworkers face, Gutierrez’s realistic adaptations of mass media diverge from static portrayals of indigeneity. Gutierrez utilizes advertising techniques to foreground the oppression that Indigenous peoples have and continue to face, but she also explores “what signifies a real, authentic, native-born woman.” When asked if she could speak about the Indigenous perspective, Gutierrez responded “[t]hat’s part of the question: Do I have that... I’ve been called every iteration of a ‘half breed,’ and it’s no doubt the origin of my questioning.”⁶⁰ Gutierrez’s response is a form of ethnographic refusal, a refusal to reveal excessive details about one’s ethnic identity in order to authenticate or validate it.⁶¹ It is representative of current discourses on gender and

⁵⁹ Clipping of newsletter “South and Central American Indian Center Newsletter Vol. 2, No. 3,” Spring 1986, CSRC.0047, box 1, folder 1, Finding Aid for the Ester Hernández Papers 1972-2005 CSRC.0047, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, CA.

⁶⁰ Rosen, “High-Fashion Self-Portraits.”

⁶¹ Native Studies scholar Audra Simpson describes ethnographic refusal as “a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in.” Simpson is quoted by Native Studies scholar Andrea Smith, who claims

race, which challenge the colonial practice of categorizing and defining a subject. In addition, her refusal to speak to the Indigenous perspective marks a shift from Hernández's multiculturalism. Hernández's call for unity among Indigenous peoples is reflective of the multicultural discourses that peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s. While Gutierrez also celebrates indigeneity, she focuses on her self-exploration of it, noting that "[m]y truth thrives in the gray area, but society doesn't yet allow an open consciousness to celebrate ambiguity, and we are told who we should be."⁶² While Gutierrez diverges in the way that she uses her art to explore and embrace her relationship with indigeneity, she uses the same advertising techniques that Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used to combat the marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

Despite these clear similarities, most media outlets compare Gutierrez to Sherman, though some liken her to Morimura, Muholi, and Kahlo. Indeed, Sherman addressed gender norms by portraying stereotypical Hollywood heroines in a series of photographs titled *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80), but this comparison fails to address the emphasis that Gutierrez places on systemic racism.⁶³ Like Gutierrez, Morimura and Muholi address race with self-portraiture.

Whereas Morimura uses it to situate the East Asian body within the Western art historical canon,

to be of Cherokee descent. However, this claim has not been substantiated. Smith is not an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation. Smith has been investigated for ethnic fraud. While I do not support ethnic fraud, Smith's scholarship is useful for considering how Gutierrez has been positioned as a self-confessing subject, one that has been asked to define and categorize her identity as an Indigenous woman. For more information, see: Andrea Smith, "Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 210 and Sarah Viren, "The Native Scholar Who Wasn't," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/magazine/cherokee-native-american-andrea-smith.html>.

⁶² Rosen, "High-Fashion Self-Portraits."

⁶³ Hillarie Sheets, "A Shape-Shifting Woman Who Plays All the Parts," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/13/arts/design/Martine-Gutierrez-bus-shelter-photos.html> and David Velasco, "Project: Martine Gutierrez," *Artforum* 57, no. 5 (January 2019). <https://www.artforum.com/print/201901/project-martine-gutierrez-78007> and Kat Herriman, "Martine Gutierrez Lets Heroines Loose on City Streets," *Cultured Magazine*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2021/09/01/martine-gutierrez-lets-heroines-loose-on-city-streets>.

Muholi uses it to foreground the Black body and the LGBTQ+ community. Placing Gutierrez in dialogue with a nonbinary artist such as Muholi or a trans artist such as Juliana Huxtable (b. Dec. 29, 1987, Bryan-College Station, Texas) could provide a fruitful discussion about trans representation and the lack of trans discourse with art history.⁶⁴ However, it is also necessary to consider the implications of a comparative approach that overlooks the contributions of Latinx artists. While Kahlo is arguably one of the best-known Latin American artists, she was a Mexican national whose privileged background differs greatly from Gutierrez's experience living as a minoritized Latina/x in the U.S.

I place Gutierrez in dialogue with Hernández and Valdez to recognize how Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have consistently used the language of advertising to promote social justice and underscore why it is striking that media outlets never discuss her work in relation to other Latinx artists.⁶⁵ At the start of this essay, I noted that Gutierrez has received a considerable amount of media exposure. She has been exhibited internationally and acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Gutierrez operates within a shifting art world, with a level of visibility that was not afforded to Asco or Hernández four to five decades prior. As previously noted, Chicanx and Latinx artists often operated outside of the museum due to systemic racism; their works were deemed too political and subjected to the racially charged categorization of high and

⁶⁴ In an *Art Journal* article from February 2022, art historian David Getsy and cultural theorist Che Gossett reported that the term “transgender” has only appeared in 36 *Art Journal* articles/reviews, which is significantly lower than the 135 articles/reviews that use the term “queer.” For more information, see: David J. Getsy and Che Gossett, “A Syllabus on Transgender and nonbinary Methods for Art and Art History,” *Art Journal* 80, no. 4 (Winter 2021). <https://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=16500>.

⁶⁵ In her 2020 monograph titled *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, and Politics*, American anthropologist Arlene Dávila reports that art institutions rarely describe Latinx artists as such. They are typically described as Latin American or American, and they are typically likened to prominent white artists or international artists. Dávila refers to this comparative approach as a whitewashing strategy and considers how this approach risks overlooking the issues that guide the work of Latinx artists. Whereas Dávila focuses on how museums, galleries, and artist estates attempt to assimilate Latinx artists into the predominantly white art market, I observe how media outlets attempt to assimilate Gutierrez into the Western canon. For more information, see: Arlene Dávila, “Whitewashing at Work, and Some Ways Out,” in *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, and Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 133.

low art. In recent decades, Asco has received increased exposure within the museum, largely in part to the work of Chicana art historians and curators such as Rita González and C. Ondine Chavoya.⁶⁶ However, Asco was not always included within discourses on Chicana art history or the Chicano Movement because their conceptual artworks did not adhere to the tenets of Chicano nationalism. Similarly, Hernández recalls a time when her work was not widely accepted. “When I did *Sun Mad*, I had zero money. I couldn’t afford paper! I printed it in my kitchen, and my ten-year-old son helped me. When I presented it to the public, I couldn’t sell it for \$20. Nobody wanted it. It wasn’t clear, nobody could make sense of it.”⁶⁷ Today, Hernández’s work is featured in prominent museums, such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum.⁶⁸ The shift in museum exposure coincides with broader discussions on representation, Latinx population growth, and a call to diversify museums, which has been driven by social media. Gutierrez’s visibility within the art world reflects the shift towards diversity, but the way that her art has been discussed by media outlets suggests that Latinx and Chicana artists remain in the margins.

By failing to situate Gutierrez’s artistic practice within a broader history of Chicana and Latinx artist activism, media outlets reveal a lack of familiarity with Latinx art. While the field of Latinx art history has grown in recent decades, scholarship is lacking in comparison to subfields such as Latin American art, particularly at the graduate level. Each year the College Art Association publishes a list of dissertations in progress. In 2020, only four graduate students in

⁶⁶ In 2011, Rita González and C. Ondine Chavoya organized the exhibition titled *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987*, which was part of the Pacific Standard Time arts initiative in Los Angeles, California.

⁶⁷ Pamphlet of the Galería de la Raza exhibition titled “*Everyday Passions: Ester Hernandez*” with interview conducted by Jaime Cortez, Aug. 9, 2001, CSRC.0047, box 1, folder 4, Finding Aid for the Ester Hernandez Papers 1972–2005, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, CA.

⁶⁸ Hernandez’s *Sun Mad* was featured in *¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now*, which was held at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2020 and organized by art curators E. Carmen Ramos and Claudia Zapata.

the U.S. and Canada were writing dissertations on Latinx art. The lack of graduate level scholarship can be attributed to the fact that few scholars focus on Latinx art. In 2014, American art historian Adriana Zavala found that few art history departments in the U.S. offered courses on the subject.⁶⁹ In 2016, Rose Salseda, who was then a graduate student, echoed Zavala's concerns at the College Art Association's annual conference, noting that—on average—only 7.2 papers and 1.4 sessions held between 2012 and 2016 discussed Latinx art.⁷⁰ The media's tendency to compare Gutierrez to white and international artists is no mere oversight, rather it is indicative of Latinx arts's marginalization within and beyond the academy.

My attempt to situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists stems from a question that Queer Chicana theorist Emma Pérez posed in 1999, “what will we choose to think again as our history, the history that we want to survive as we decolonize a historical imaginary that veils our thoughts, our words, our languages?”⁷¹ The comparative practices used to familiarize audiences with Latina/x artists have the potential to combat their marginalization within the Western canon, but they can also foment it. Situating Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x artists prompts us to interrogate the practices that pretend to promote inclusivity, to consider how the Western canon has overlooked Latinx artists, and to imagine

⁶⁹ In comparison, Zavala found that ninety-five art history departments in the U.S. offered courses on Latinx art, signaling an imbalance in the field. For more information, see: Adriana Zavala, “Latin@ Art at the Intersection,” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 1 (2015): 12. <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/csarc/aztlan/2015/00000040/00000001/art00008> and “Latinx Dissertations in Progress by Subject, 2020,” CAA.Reviews, accessed June 16, 2023, http://www.caareviews.org/dissertations/718/in_progress.

⁷⁰ Each year, the CAA hosts roughly 200 panels. Salseda analyzed the abstracts and panels that were presented between 2012 and 2016. She called for an increase in “the presence of Latinx art at CAA to foster the recognition of the field by the art historians and museum professionals who comprise a majority of CAA's membership base.” For more information, see: Maximiliano Durón, “Study: Latinx Art Underrepresented at College Art Association's Annual Conference,” *ARTnews*, September 20, 2016. <https://www.artnews.com/artnews/news/study-Latinx-art-underrepresented-at-college-art-associations-annual-conference-6992/>.

⁷¹ Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 27.

what a more inclusive art history looks like. Latina/x artists have repeatedly adapted the language of advertising to promote social justice, to expose the *ad feminam* rhetoric that is used to attack and marginalize trans women and women of color and combat it. Gutierrez's artworks are a call to action; they ask us to reconsider representation and who it serves, to rethink our history and who has been excluded from it, and to reimagine the Western canon and how we approach broadening it.

Illustrations



Fig. 1 – Martine Gutierrez, *JEANS*, 2016



Fig. 2 – Herb Ritts, Calvin Klein advertisement featuring Mark Wahlberg and Kate Moss, 1992

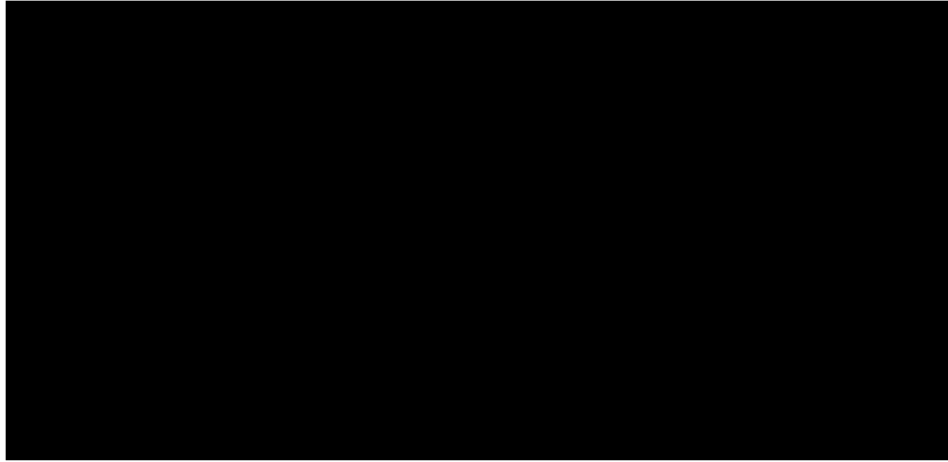


Fig. 3 – Martine Gutierrez, *Indigenous Woman* cover, 2018

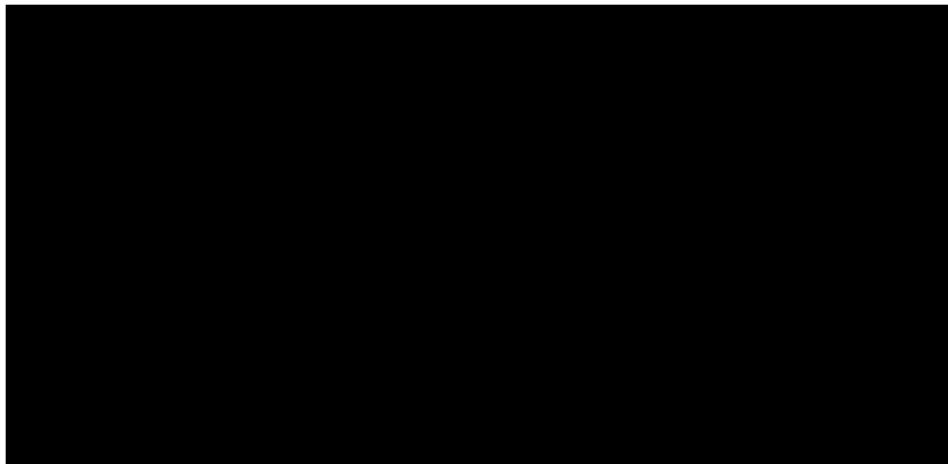


Fig. 4 – Herb Ritts, Front cover from *Interview Magazine*, 1990. Off-set printed on coated paper, 27.5 x 37 cm

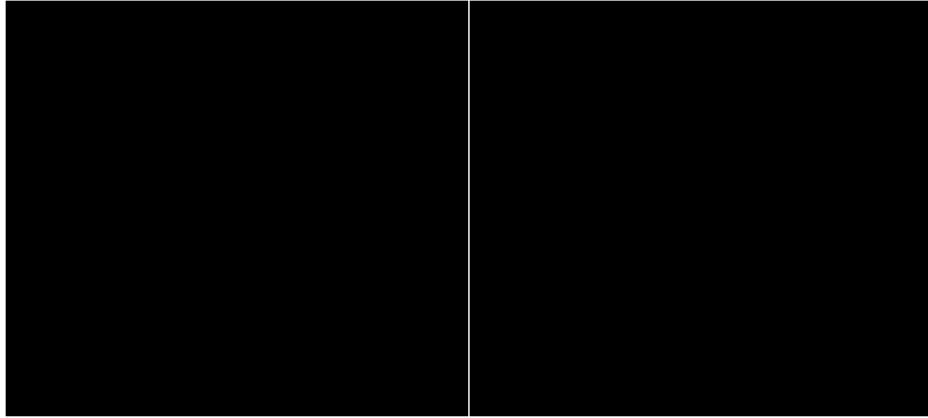


Fig. 5 – (Left) Martine Gutierrez, *COVERTGIRL* Page 44 from *Indigenous Woman*, 2018.
(Right) CoverGirl advertisement featuring Pink, 2012

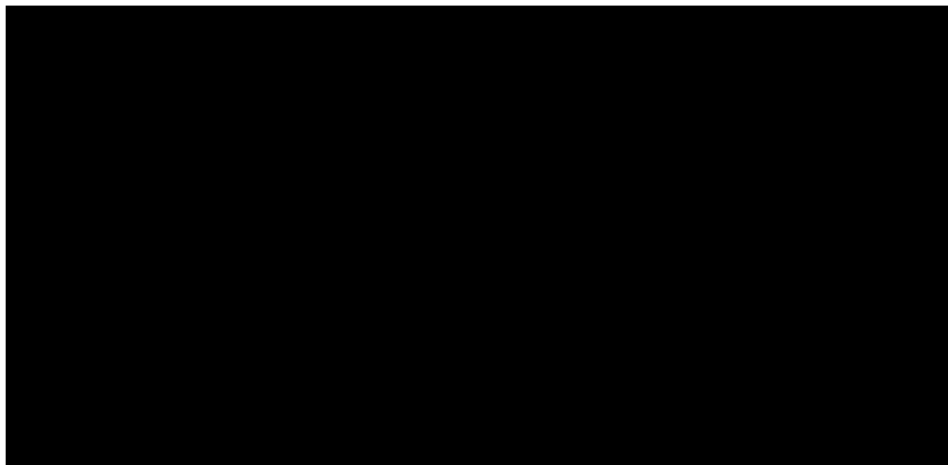


Fig. 6 – Martine Gutierrez, *Demons, Chin 'Demon of Lust,'* p. 93 from *Indigenous Woman*, 2018

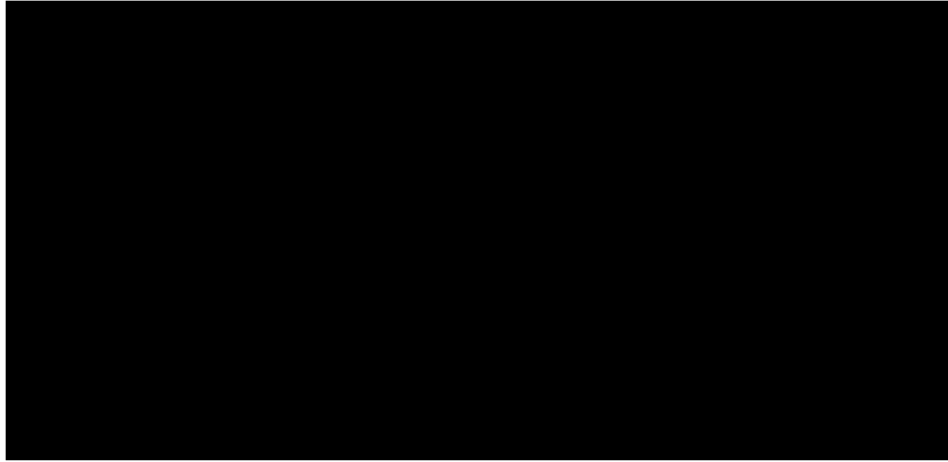


Fig. 7 – Martine Gutierrez, *ANTI-ICON, Queen Elizabeth I*, 2021. Installation view of Public Art Fund exhibition in New York

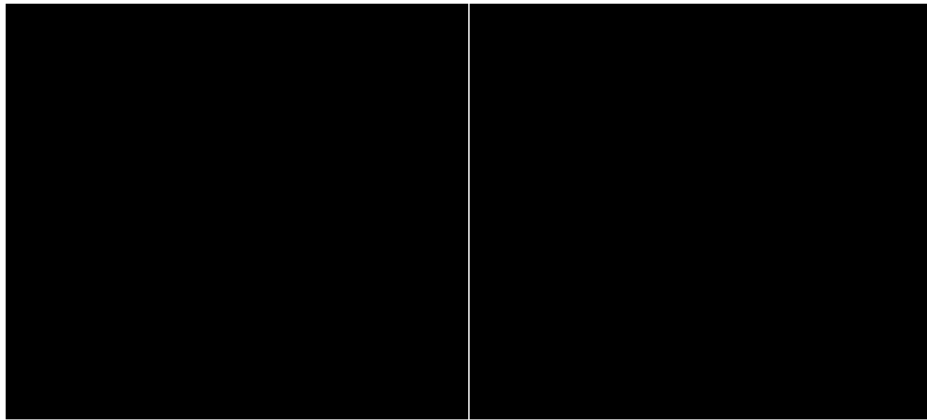


Fig. 8 – (Left) Martine Gutierrez, *ANTI-ICON, Queen Elizabeth I*, 2021. (Right) Unknown English artist, *The Armada Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I*, c. 1588. Oil on panel, 97.8 x 72.4 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London

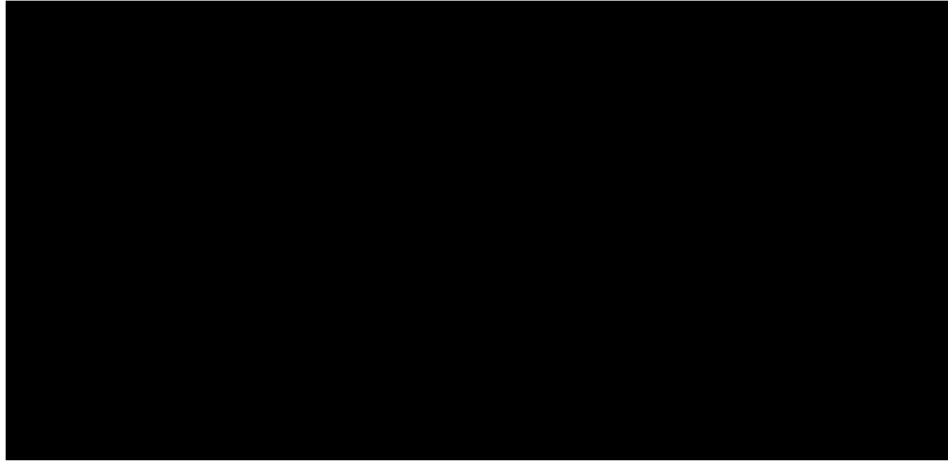


Fig. 9 – Asco, *Take One*, 1978

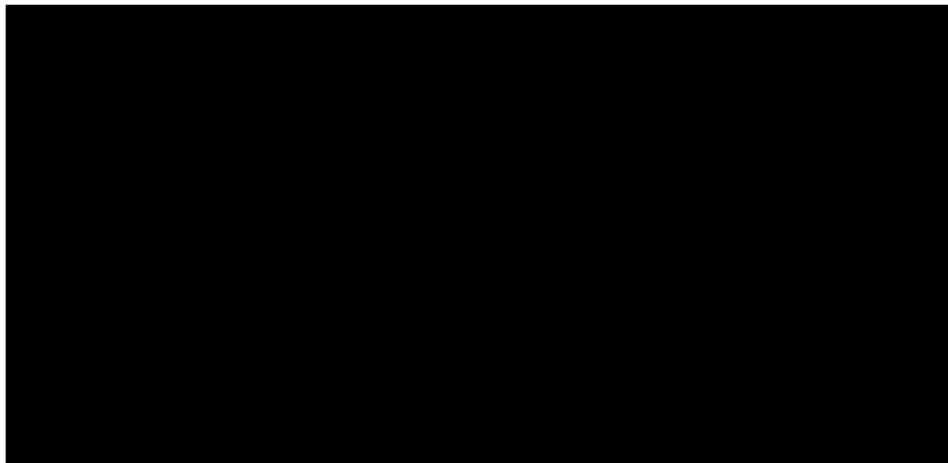


Fig. 10 – Harry Gamboa Jr. *A la Mode*, 1976 from the Asco era. Performers (l-r): Glugio “Gronk” Nicandro, Patssi Valdez, Harry Gamboa Jr.

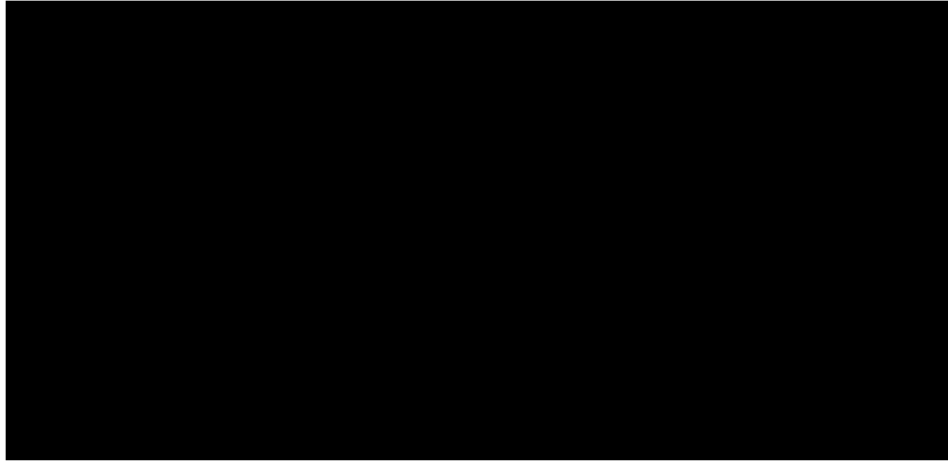


Fig. 11 – Ester Hernández, *Sun Mad*, 1982. Screen-print on paper, 50.7 x 38.1 cm

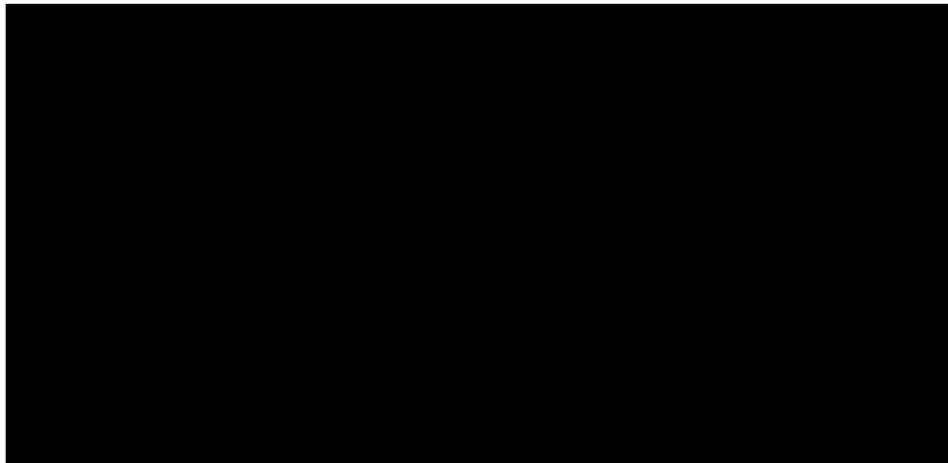


Fig. 12 – Image of Sun-Maid Raisins logo and box

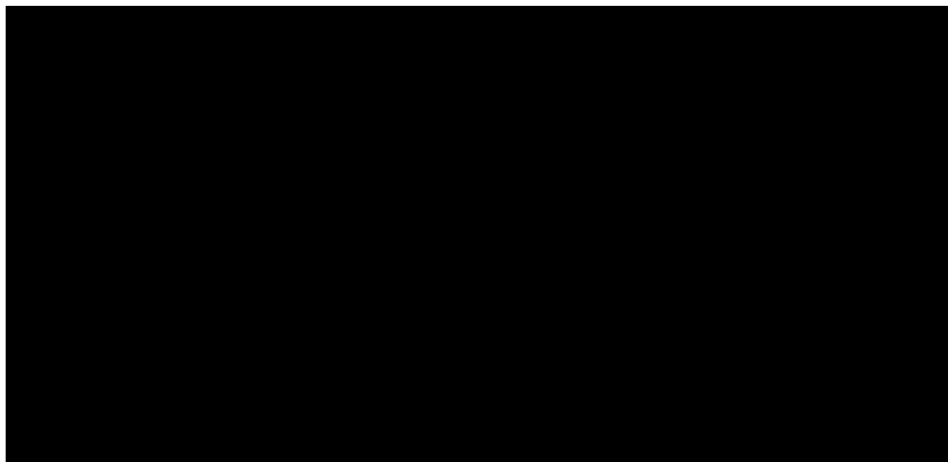


Fig. 13 – Ester Hernández, *Sun Raid*, 2008. Screen-print on paper, 50.2 x 38.1 cm

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