

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Malcriada Aesthetics/Bad Girl Realities

Delilah Montoya

Born in Texas and raised in the Midwest I returned to New Mexico, the ancestral home of my mother's family. My work is grounded in the experiences of the Southwest and brings together a multiplicity of syncretic forms and practices—from those of Aztec Mexico and Spain to cross-border vernacular traditions—all of which are shaded by contemporary American customs and values.

My work explores the unusual relationships that result from negotiating different strategies of understanding and representing the rich ways of life and thought found in the Southwest. Whether investigating spiritual rituals or questioning gender traditions my intention is to confront the viewers' assumptions.

My artistic journey has taken me from New Mexico to France, from Smith College in Massachusetts to the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe. At present, I am a Professor who teaches digital imaging and photography on a graduate and undergraduate level in the School of Art at the University of Houston.

I received my M.A. in printmaking and my M.F.A. in studio art from the University of New Mexico. My teaching experiences combined with a ten-year medical photography career along with awards uniquely prepared me for my current teaching and artistic careers.

My teaching appointments in a variety of settings have afforded me the opportunity to teach printmaking and photography to youth and students in various community and institutional settings, including the Working Classroom Storytellers in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Hampshire College, California State University in Los Angeles, and the University of Houston.

Teaching is central to my commitment to art-making. As an educator, I realize the classroom thrives when the ambition for self-invention is kindled. Also central to my vision is a realization of the potential of historical symbols. Not only must students learn formal concerns but they must be introduced to an ever-expanding world vision. The incipient artist develops an intimate expression by understanding styles, ideology and the sagacity of symbols as well as metaphors. The art history discourse is a potent source for this kind of awareness. Because image interpretation endows the artist's vision, concepts should be used as a creative springboard in the pedagogy.

One of the most important projects I produced with young artists was exploring the *El Sagrado Corazon/Sacred Heart* series as a historical symbol in 1994. My goal was to involve the community in a contemporary manifestation of the heart as a cultural icon. Young aerosol artists from the community painted murals on my studio walls to serve as backdrops for the *Sagrado Corazon* portraits.

El Sagrado Corazón/ the Sacred Heart was produced in 1993 as my MFA thesis at the University of New Mexico. The series has been exhibited in venues such as the Smithsonian International Gallery and FotoFest 1994; it has also traveled with international shows to Japan, Russia, and France. The work is part of numerous permanent collections, such as the Smithsonian, the

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Julia J. Norrell collection. The work was reviewed by Asta M. Kuusinen in her doctoral dissertation, *Shooting from the Wild Zone: A Study of the Chicana Art Photographers Laura Aguilar, Celia Alvarez Muñoz, Delilah Montoya, and Kathy Vargas*.

This collection of collotypes portrays Albuquerque's Chicano Community. The series explores the manifestation of the Sacred Heart as a cultural icon that is embedded in the religious fabric of Chicano culture. Based on my research and my Mestiza perspective, it is concluded that this Baroque religious symbol expresses shared cultural religious patterns that connote a syncretic relationship between European Catholicism and Aztec philosophy. The Baroque Sacred Heart in the Americas is an icon that resulted from an encounter. It is not purely Indian in content and never completely European in its form. Rather, it is a hybrid of two diverse cultures that clashed and bonded at a particular historic moment and created the foundation for religious syncretism.

This visual investigation of a cultural icon moves away from the traditional "objective" approach to reveal the hand of the photographer in relation to the community that was being depicted. I believe photography majors should understand that the camera's capability for indexing suggests the medium provides "contiguous imprints" of the tangible world. These imprints realize time-based visual memories, which are distinct from objective reality. The construction and interpretation of the photographic image arises as a joint project between the photographer and observer's interpretation of the image. My position is the viewpoint of the photographer as the photograph's author and its interpretation by the viewer is a mix of insight and blindness, reach and limitation. Impartiality and bias together do not achieve omniscience or the unified master narrative of "reality." Rather, the photograph spurs complex understandings of an ever-changing multifaceted existence. Since culture

shapes reality or, perhaps, it is reality shaping culture, we must recognize that the photographic representation is bracketed by the artist's and viewer's own perceptions.

In representing the Sagrado Corazón, the community was invited to collaborate in the realization of the project. This collaborative project documented the manifestation of the heart as a cultural icon within the participating community. The alliance resulted in a magnificent display of creative interdependence that validates the *Sagrado Corazón* as an integral part of the Chicano collective conscience (See *El Sagrado Corazon: Misterio Triste #3*, 20" x 24", silver gelatin print, 1993, on page 151 and *El Sagrado Corazon: Malinche*, 20" x 24", digital colorized archival ink jet premium luster, 2000, on page 63).

My own work has taken me from the inspiration of Cartier-Bresson's notion of decisive moment (a documentary approach) to alternative approaches incorporating mark-making and graphic skills with photographic processes. These images range from large, colorful photographs to intriguing assemblages comprised of painting, printing, and photography. My interest with Malcriadas, those women who just will not conform to the social norm, started by looking at the folklore of Doña Sebastiana—a Northern New Mexican death figure—and turned towards women boxers.

San Sebastiana: Angel del La Muerte is a DVD video installation first shown at the Andrew Smith Gallery and later in *Ahora: New Mexican Hispanic Art* at the Art Museum of the National Hispanic Culture Center and in *!PicARTE! Photography Beyond Representation* at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. In 2014 it was installed at the Fowler Museum in the exhibition *Sinful Saints and Sainly Sinners*, curated by Patrick Polk.

The movie character sketches Doña Sebastiana, a New Mexican folk icon, traditionally used in northern New Mexico by the Penitential Brotherhood. Doña Sebastiana, known simply as La Muerte, is the allegorical icon for death.

According to my mother, Mollie Garcia, Sebastiana never wanted to be Death. Really, all she wanted was love and—if not love—at least respect. So that we all can die, it is up to God to convince Sebastiana that she is the right woman for the job. As He proceeds, she starts to barter with God for the upward mobile position of sainthood.

What Sebastiana brings to the deathbed is good old fashioned humanity—that is, she loves gossip, and time can be gained by occupying her with a little seedy personal history. This gives way to her self-righteous nature as she uses a satirical wit to comment on the chisme of human folly. Certainly she never understands why people fear her, for when she looks at herself in the mirror, she sees a beautiful diva, but when we look at her she is a skeleton: a *calaca*. The interactive video stream at <http://www.uh.edu/~dmontoy2> allows the viewer to choose between watching her as a diva or as a *calaca*. *San Sebastiana: Angel de la Muerte* portrays a woman empowered and is the ultimate malcriada—that is, she is a very Bad Girl (See *San Sebastiana: Lengua Negra*, 24" x 20", digital colorized archival ink jet on canvas, 2002, on page 24).

Women Boxers: The New Warriors, an exhibition and book project, portrays professional female boxers as our modern day malcriada. Funded in part by the University of Houston Small Grants Program and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County, this work was exhibited during FotoFest 2006 at Project Row House and later at the MacKinney Avenue Contemporary in Dallas, Texas, where Dee Mitchells reviewed the show for *Art in America*. Three prints from the series were purchased by the Sheldon Museum of Art for their

permanent collection and published in *Encounters: Photographs from the Sheldon Museum of Art* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013). Two prints, *Terri 'Lil Loca' Lynn Cruz* and *Pink*, were selected for the traveling exhibit, *Infinite Mirror: Images of American Identity*, produced by Artrain Inc. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston acquired the print *Audrey in Her Corner* for their permanent photography collection.

By crossing the ropes and getting into the ring, these professional athletes enter into the bastions of manliness to confront a brutal sport. Many individuals, in fact, are appalled by the violent sport of boxing and believe it should be banned. But these women, determined to box, turn their backs on such opinions. Title IX of the Civil Rights Act and the feminist movement gave them the right, and they have taken it willingly. Female boxers fight because they can—they are professionally trained, and the boxing rules are now modified to allow women athletes to participate in this sanctioned combat (See *Storm*, 29" x 24.5", Pieziography on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag 310, 2005, on page 97 and *Stephanie "Golden Girl" Jaramillo*, 26" x 35", Pieziography on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag 310, 2004, on page 19).

Smile Now, Cry Later, the title of a print published by Coronado Studio in 2008, comes from an old barrio saying that refers to a person's feelings when doing something they shouldn't be doing. Initially, one will enjoy the feeling and smile, but eventually the consequences will cause one to "cry later." The female boxer in the image has this tattooed on her arm, which I chose to make the focus of the print. The image was taken from a photograph taken as part of a series on female boxers, a subject I feel deserves recognition as an emerging sport. I do not believe in an "innate female nature," but rather that, although a softer nature is encouraged in women, they don't have to be that way. I play with this idea with the quinceañera sign in the background, celebrating the

Serie Project's fifteenth anniversary, and implying that "a little bit of a boxing match goes on" in quinceañera (See *Smile Now Cry ~ Cry Later*, 20" x 16", serigraph, 2008, on page 9).

As a Chicana artist, my own personal quest in image-making is the discovery and articulation of Chicano culture, and the icons that elucidate the dense history of New Mexico. As a Chicana artist, my work—interpreted as an alternative to the mainstream—stands as a personal statement that evokes an identity. My visual investigation of the cultural and biological forms of hybridity, *Contemporary Casta Portraiture: Nuestra "Calidad,"* looks at this concept as a signifier of colonialism; the artwork projects the aesthetic and cultural markers formulated by the Mexican casta paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onto portraits of individuals from multicultural communities. The idea is to witness the development of colonialism as a substructure to our contemporary environments through the practice of portraiture. Like Mexican casta painting, the portraits denote ethnicity and race through the subject's domicile, biology, and consumption. The intention is to use contemporary tools such as DNA testing to depict a family's migration and genetic heritage. By constructing a digital portrait, I believe this study explores our biological connection to one's learned community. Currently this project has been accepted for publication through Arte Publico Press (See *Casta #2*, 32" x 36", archival inkjet on e-satin, 2015, on page 177).

Given the array of exhibited pieces and museum lectures, my work has found audiences around the world. Currently, I am exploring a formal interest, which is to incorporate computer and graphic skills with photo processes that together form a photographic printing technique. I feel that this composite skill—a result of experimentation with printmaking, computer technology and photography—allows for the interjection of conceptual Chicana expression onto the photo image.