

ARTIST STATEMENT

Art as a Tool for Self-Love and Community Empowerment

Crystal Galindo

I am a Xicana of Yaqui descent currently living on the east coast of the U.S. I am California born and raised, growing up amongst lush scenery and living a distinctly Xicanx lifestyle. I now translate what it means to be an urban Indigenous femme by illustrating my truths and the truths of many others like me. In creating work that spotlights womxn of color, I hope to pass down our stories and produce a lasting legacy for years to come.

My academic art career started with me aspiring to become an impeccable hyper-realistic painter. People were my favorite subjects to draw, and I felt that if I could achieve true realism in my work, I could establish myself as a master painter. This had a direct correlation to the influence of art history books and the “classical” artists we had to study in school. Yet, I realized quickly that my role models in realism and fine art were exceedingly Eurocentric. Studying classical art was enjoyable and enlightening, but where were the women artists? As a Brown womxn, whose example could I follow besides Frida Kahlo? Although the cholo-style ink drawings and tattoos circulating in my community captivated me, I noticed that the womxn used for reference in these images were either white famous celebrities or ambiguous white womxn who had no connection to the Xicanx culture or aesthetic. I was disillusioned by drawings of Marilyn Monroe or Megan Fox as representatives of Xicanx women, as I could not relate to them, nor did I want to perpetuate the fatphobic, misogynistic practices that dominate the art world and create

stigmas for people who look like me. Instead, I chose to create a body of work that celebrates people whose beauty and power is distinct and inspiring because it diverges from the mainstream's dominant unattainable beauty standard. I began to understand that shifting the images that surround us was crucial in order for muxeres to navigate and counter these confidence-crushing ideals society imposes. Seeing ourselves through the lens of cis-heteropatriarchy creates an unnecessary pressure to perform whiteness, thinness, and respectability not only for the dominant narrative, but also within our communities. I strived to dissect this feeling within myself and use my work to examine the multiple layers in which I lived and hid myself in.

Using large-scale wood panels, I experimented with a mixture of reality and surrealism. With my aggressive style of work, I quickly learned that wood, rather than canvas, could support my heavy hand, and I could also easily experiment with multiple materials. I painted my subjects as close to a painted photograph as I could, while allowing myself the intuitive space to produce imaginatively layered backgrounds that swirled around the central figure. My goal was to invite the viewer to take a closer look at the meticulous details and landscapes bursting with bold colors and hues. Infusing the dreamscapes with bright colors created an undeniable tableau that commanded attention. I used this method to draw people into my work so I could then convey the stories of the featured individuals I needed to tell. I found the time and space to create these dreamlike works as a student at Sonoma State University, where I had a studio space and resources to study and practice my craft.

As an undergraduate, my body of work first consisted of a series I call "Selfies," with medium- to large-scale paintings of myself. In these early pieces, I explored the complex realities and perceptions I faced as a Brown womxn. Remarkably, I learned that while these large-scale renderings reflected my

truths, many other muxeres related and connected to my art in powerfully personal ways. Showing my work at galleries and group shows yielded much-needed exposure and increased my confidence as an artist as I listened to the testimonies of people who saw my work. I continued building my self-confidence through my art, and after years of focusing on my journey to self-love and acceptance, I decided to finish the series off with *29: Dolor* (2012).

This painting capped off the numerous pieces that spoke to my experiences, while also serving as a tribute to the transformation that happens as a result of losing a loved one. In this piece, I convey how grief and pain can alter our perspective on what is truly important in our limited time on earth. This personal loss also helped me realize that life is too fleeting to produce art that appealed people who didn't have my best interests at heart.

After finishing this series that captured grief, I decided to create artwork that addressed injustice by uplifting those on the margins who are overlooked and passed over. I was ready to let go of the journey of self-portraiture and shift gears by painting the people I hold dear. I transitioned to using other womxn as models for my portraits, the next evolution of my craft. While still using colorful backdrops and imaginative landscapes, I embed culturally relevant icons and symbols to represent my subject's history and inner workings that showcase the idiosyncrasies that make the individual featured beautiful, powerful, and memorable. *Coatlicue State* (2011) was a perfect example of how I spotlight friends in my art in order to both celebrate their individuality and depict a recognizable person. In this way, I reveal the stories of my community amidst the backdrop of my surrealistic interpretations.

I completed my undergraduate program in 2013, simultaneously finishing multiple series of works within the span of a few years. My work shifted once

more, this time marking milestones in my life, such as becoming a mother and navigating mental health challenges. Series such as *Multifacetica* (2011-2014) sought to break down the homogenization of our culture and what it means to be a Xicana. My eight-piece series, *Dulceria* (2016), encouraged womxn/femmes of color to celebrate self-indulgence, while my 72-piece series, *Pink Teardrops* (2018), addressed depression and feelings of impending doom. These established my brand and aesthetic as an artista, and, ironically, allowed me to challenge the tenets of my own design. For instance, *Yalitza* (2019) and *Mascaras sagradas* (2017) celebrate Indigenous beauty by featuring native women enveloped by solid backgrounds, allowing for an uncluttered setting compared to my original teeming landscape-based settings. *Sirenita bonita* (2019) offers a voluptuous, sultry, brown-skinned spin to challenge traditional interpretations of mermaids with Eurocentric attributes.

Currently, I am working on finalizing a large portrait series that celebrates badass womxn, femmes, and gender fluid/non-binary folks of color who make the world a better place, deeming them “Xingonxs.” In this collection is *I’m Not Your Puppet* (2014), which showcases a queer femme who uses a bold aesthetic to expose and upend misogyny within the Chicana/o/x community. *Nopalconcha* (2017) celebrates indigeneity, playfulness and quirkiness while maintaining a sense of whimsical magic. Lastly, *Carita de azucar* (2018) shows a beautiful trans womxn arming herself with makeup and sweetness to face the ills of our society and the numerous layers of oppression that remain.

By continuing to create artwork that carves a path for representation, storytelling, celebration, and activism within our community, I hope to inspire others to use their voices. I urge womxn, femmes, and non-binary people of color to speak about our experiences, to pass down our tales of resilience, and celebrate stepping into our power for generations to come.