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# CHIMERA rising

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CHIMERA rising

by

Rosana Ybarra

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the supervision of Professor Aaron Holz

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## CHIMERA rising

Rosana Ybarra, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Aaron Holz

Chimera has three definitions, each so equally fitting of my work that this word has come to embody what I consider my own holy trinity. One: a fire-breathing female monster in Greek mythology, often read as an omen for disaster. She was a hybrid animal made up of three – lion, goat, and serpent. Two: an unrealizable dream, a fanciful illusion composed of discordant parts – improbable but dazzling, wild. Three: an organism formed by multiple sets of distinct DNA, human, plant or animal.

Chimera – a hybrid monster, an impossible dream, a harmonious organism composed from disparate origins.

There is family folklore I was told from a young age about generations of my grandfathers in Hawaii serving as *Kahuna ninau 'uhane*. Kahuna means “keeper of secrets” and ninau 'uhane is “one who speaks with spirits.” The story goes that one ancestor generations back had contacted a bad spirit and made a deal he could not keep. As punishment, the spirit laid a curse upon our family line and promised to torment every generation to come.

Throughout my childhood my family casually, even playfully, referred to “the curse” as explanation for anything going wrong. I deeply internalized this story as an adolescent, but I came to see the curse a bit differently: as a metaphor for cyclical generational trauma. I wanted to be the one to break this supposed curse for good, but that seemed like another impossible dream - a chimera.

This has led me to think of my practice as a demonstration of my own self-exorcism. I have become preoccupied with the potential of objects to act as a site for human projection. An object can be a channel for something just out of reach to the conscious mind. An object can be a conduit: a family heirloom can channel the once-familiar comfort of a lost loved one; a mattress consumes our sleep, our sex, and we take renewed energy back. It is possible to create an object that helps exorcise a deep-seated idea, like the belief in a curse? Can emotional labor be the function of a thing? I have come to consider my paintings and sculptures as quasi-functional in capacities I describe in the subtitle of each piece: some are keepers of secrets; some give protection from emotional harm. *CHIMERA rising* has a quality of ritual animism that is both whimsical and totemic. I’ve pushed each work until it attains what I consider a symbolic quality – forms that retain visual association with real objects, plants, animals or symbols, but hybridize and convolute any literal definition.

Drawn from the legacy of Surrealism and Women’s Spirituality in art, material exploration and free association are fundamental aspects of my practice. Each sculpture is constructed in sections so that it may be easily dismantled or

recalibrated in the future, giving them the potential to continuously evolve and transform. I search for inspiration from a range of sources – recycled goods, construction materials, ubiquitous objects that are often overlooked – for a component's aesthetic qualities as well as social implications. This lends an idiosyncratic nature to my use of materials. For example, I use rope as a formal tool but also because it is meant to save one from physical harm, carry a heavy load, or suspend something in space. Dirt is mixed into paint to create texture, but also to form a connection with an object's inception and the earth. It is important to my philosophy that everything I use is fundamentally cheap, accessible, and pedestrian. This removes the preciousness and class exclusivity typically associated with fine art and allows me room for risk and discovery. The resulting works are enigmatic, obscure, and dwelling in the realm of irrational possibility.

*Cry, Baby: Absorber for Tears of Joy and Sorrow* is constructed from a diverse array of sources: wood, casters, card board, wire, vinyl, insulating foam, joint compound, papier Mache, paint, found objects, aquarium rock, window screen, dried petals, sand, bird seed, crushed walnut. Although in a list the materials seem discordant, in the work there is harmony like a true chimera. The tiered sculpture references cathedral glass, wedding cakes, aviaries and shrines all at once. Conceptually, I've made *Cry, Baby* to fulfill a theoretical function – to behave as shock absorber, but for tears. The casters on the base allow this sculpture to be mobile so it can be easily pushed to any public or private site. I imagine that the more tears *Cry, Baby* is offered via proximity, the more its power is increased. If

*Cry, Baby* is recharged regularly, those who find themselves unable to cry can visit it and osmose catharsis otherwise unavailable to them.

*CHIMERA rising* formed through dream logic, instinct, and play. The works are amulets, totems, votive objects – their intended function is an offering to you, the viewer. Regardless of each unit’s actual supernatural powers (or lack thereof), they aim to physically manifest impulses just beneath the arena of the conscious, where there exists tension between mysticism, emotion and rational thought. They want us to know that what we believe is always our own.





















