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100 Seconds to Midnight

Melissa Medina

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MASTER'S OF FINE ARTS IN STUDIO ART California State University, San Bernardino

Melissa Medina May 21st, 2022

Graduate Coordinator: Katherine Gray

Graduate Committee:

Brad SPeNce

Brad Spence Committee Chair

Thomas McGovern Thomas McGovern

Art Faculty

Artist Statement

My artistic practice focuses on the concept of mortality and investigates the human condition. Through my work, I often personify the concept of death and investigate the several forms that it may take across several cultures. The skull is most often used as a symbol of mortality, and it serves as one of the key elements in my work. I am drawn to the elements portrayed in classical memento mori paintings, and as a result, I have borrowed certain objects commonly used in these works and have paired them alongside more modern elements to create a new narrative. With this reincorporation, the figures in my work serve as vessels that evoke feelings of distress and grief.

What makes mortality a unifying concept is that it's an inescapable experience shared by everyone. At its core, it's the many perspectives on the subject that fascinates me. The ability to see beauty in what comes after the physical is one aspect that reflects the mystery of life's fleeting moments. While it may be difficult to come to terms with death, it's something we must all acknowledge. This is why I tend to avoid portraying figures in my work with distinguishing facial features. By focusing on these characters that lack a clear identity, my intention is to provide my audience with a vessel with whom they may empathize and imprint upon.

ARTIST STATEMENT/ MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER IN STUDIO ART Final Review and Approval MFA in Studio Art

California State University, San Bernardino

Date_03/14/2022

Name_Melissa Medina

I have reviewed the above student's Artist Statement/ Master's Research Paper and find that it meets my approval for graduation with a M.F.A. in Studio Art.

Brad SPeNce Advisor_ signature

Committee Member	Thomas	McGovern
	signature	0

Brad Spence name

Thomas McGovern name

Committee Member	
	signature
Graduate Coordinator	signature

name

Alison Ragguette name

binder

MASTER'S PROJECT IN STUDIO ART Final Review and Approval MFA in Studio Art California State University, San Bernardino

Date_03/14/2022

Name_Melissa Medina

I have reviewed the above student's Master's Project and Exhibition and find that it meets my approval for graduation with a M.F.A. in Studio Art.

Brad SPeNce Advisor signature	Brad Spence
Committee Member	Thomas McGovern
Committee Member	name
Committee Member optional signature	name
Graduate Coordinator	Alison Ragguette

binder







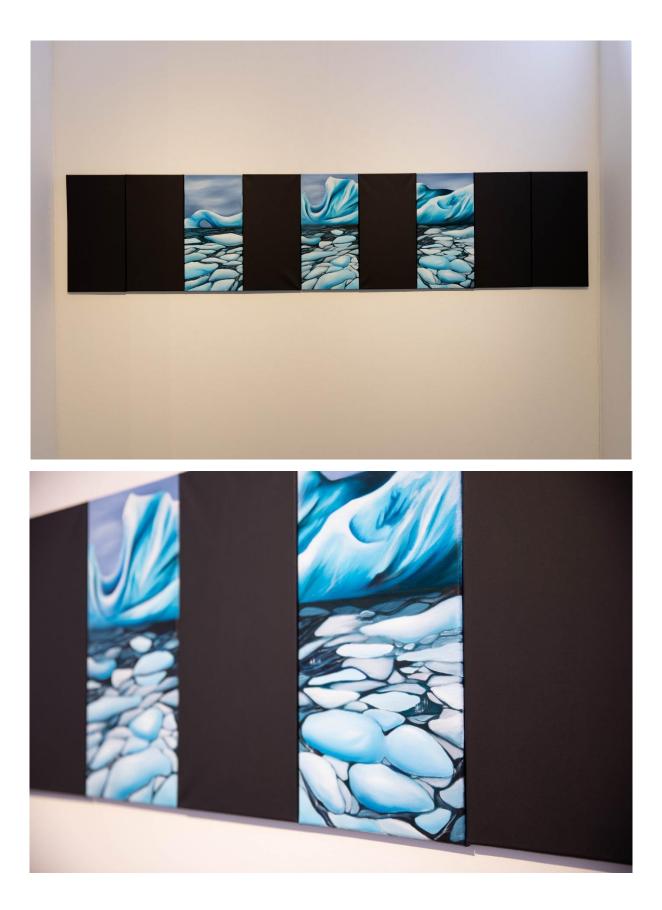




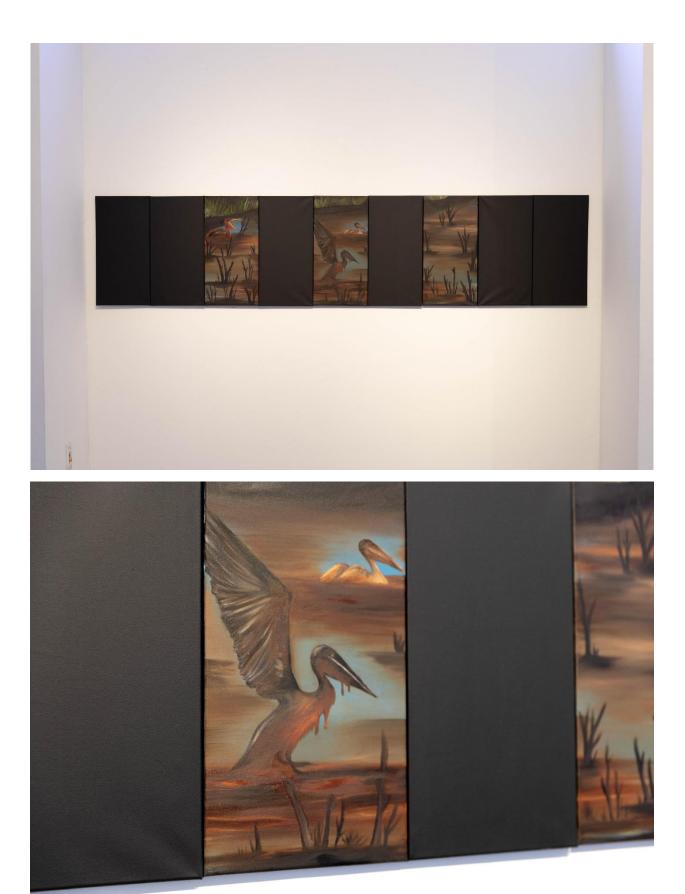
























Melissa Medina- Image List



1.

2.

Skull Portrait, 2020. 8 x 10in. Oil on Canvas



Skull Portrait, 2020. (Close Up) 8 x 10in. Oil on Canvas



Atrophy, 2020. 24 x 30 in. Oil on Canvas



Atrophy, 2020. (Close Up) 24 x 30 in. Oil on Canvas



5.

Life After Death (Series), 2020. 16 x 20in. Mixed Media on Canvas



Life After Death (Series), 2020. 16 x 20in. Mixed Media on Canvas



7.

Life After Death (Series), 2020. 16 x 20in. Mixed Media on Canvas



Life After Death (Series), 2020. 16 x 20 in. Mixed Media on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022. (Close Up) 20 x 90in. Oil on Canvas



10.

100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022. (Close Up) 20 x 90 in. Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90 in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.(Close Up)20 x 90 in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90in.Oil on Canvas





100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022. (Close Up) 20 x 90in. Oil on Canvas 100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 90in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022.20 x 180in.Oil on Canvas



100 Seconds to Midnight (Series), 2022. (Close Up) 20 x 30 in. Oil on Canvas Theory and Methodology:

An Examination of Michèle Magema's, Kiss of Narcisse(e) (2010)



Melissa Medina ART 6617: Graduate Seminar in Critical Theory and Methodology

May 18, 2021

Abstract

Michèle Magema's, performance *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010) addresses several intersections of sex, gender, and race, while challenging the gaze established through colonialist practices. The screen split performance serves to address the colonial implications that are imbedded in the history of Black women and serves to redefine the notion of power. Findings from the several intersections observed in the critical investigation of this performance support the complex relationship of power expressed from the oppressed and the oppressor. Texts such as Anibal Quijano's *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America* and bell hooks' *The Oppositional Gaze Black Female Spectators* are utilized to support the implications presented in Magema's performance.

Through the examination of art history and its various components, one notion that is a defining factor of art is that of its ties to colonial history. These ties are connected to the concept of collective and shared memory in the institution space and serve to construct the basis of how certain types of art are viewed. For some time now, artists of varying backgrounds have challenged the notions of collective memory outlined by coloniality and have in turn created visual responses with their unique voices to speak on the injustices they face. Michèle Magema's *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010) addresses multiple intersections of theoretical frameworks including that of sex, gender, race, the gaze, and colonialism. There are several layers to Magema's performance and each serves to contest a particular notion that relates to the oppression of Black people.

Michèle Magema's *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010) shows a split screen black and white performance a few seconds shy of three minutes, accompanied by soft instrumental piano music. In both videos, we see Magema walking in a white dress—the video on the left (video 1) shows Magema approaching the camera from afar as she walks up a pathway. As she walks, she takes several pauses and stands completely still in the middle of the pathway until she ultimately comes face to face with the viewer. Upon reaching the viewer, it becomes apparent that she is wearing a white mask that covers the bottom portion of her face. This video ends with the image of Magema making direct eye contact with the viewer.

On the video on the right (video 2), Magema walks away from the viewer but pauses at three white masks that are firmly placed on the wall. Upon coming face to face with each mask, she stops, places her hands gently on the sides, and kisses the mouth. The video then ends with Magema walking away until she is completely out of view. It is important to note that the music in this performance is melancholic, which serves to set the tone for the piece. The pace in the

performance through Magema's movements is also slow, which corresponds with the pace of the music. There is a sense of serenity in Magema's demeanor and it serves as a beautiful pairing with the musical piece included in the performance.

The location of both documentations of the performance is identical and does not allude to one specific place in particular but is established as an urban and modern scene. This reinforces the idea that the context of the performance serves more purpose than the scenery. The very notion that these two videos take place in the same location however, communicate the idea of two perceived perspectives when confronted with the question of the power associated with a Black body versus a white body. This raises the question of power dynamics and how they are perceived in society within these races.

A reference to Greek mythology is made by the very title of the work. *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010) loosely refers to the Greek mythology of Echo and Narcissus. This mythology includes themes relating to unrequited love and emotional pain. The story of Echo states that she was a nymph that often caused problems for others' romantic relationships. As a result, she was punished and her voice was taken away. She became capable of only repeating words that others had stated first, thus receiving the name Echo. Narcissus was a handsome mortal that many considered to be one of the most beautiful beings, but one day he caught sight of his own reflection in a lake and became enamored with the image he saw. He did not realize however that this being that he had gazed upon was his own reflection.

The stories of both Echo and Narcissus overlap; according to this mythology, Echo became entranced by Narcissus and sought to get close to him. Due to Echo's inability to communicate properly, she was not able to speak her true feelings and Narcissus did not accept her affections. Over time, Narcissus realized that the reflection that he had fallen in love with was that of his own, so he became extremely upset and this led to his ultimate death. All the while, Echo watched him from afar, and became depressed after being unsuccessful at communicating her love to him. Sometime after Narcissus' death, Echo followed and the mythology states that Echo's voice can still be heard in the forest where she encountered Narcissus.

In relation to *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010), some themes from the Greek mythology can be seen in Magema's performance. The white masks mounted on the wall as shown in the video hold a resemblance to the artist and this reinforces the connection to the mythological story of Narcissus. The masks appear to be molds of a particular face, and all three are identical. Although they are painted white, they do not present clear Eurocentric features. Upon close inspection, it can be noted that the white masks include facial features that are similar to that of the artist. In reference to the mythology however, Narcissus was not aware that the subject of his affection was himself. In contrast, Magema was aware of the implications in her performance and utilized this detail to communicate her message to the viewers.

The white masks in the work allude to the image of white colonizers, and Magema takes on the role of the oppressed Black individual that has been affected by the actions of this group in question. It can be speculated that perhaps Magema did not want to portray faces of white colonizers and instead served as a stand in for those individuals and played both parts to empower herself and create her own narrative. In relation to the subject of sex and gender, Judith Butler discusses the notion of politics and how they are undeniably connected. In the text *Gender Trouble*, Butler states, "the question of the subject is crucial…for feminist politics in particular, because juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not show once the juridical structure of politics has been established."¹ Here, Butler emphasizes the importance of proper representation and inclusion of feminist theory in politics. When approaching a subject as broad and expansive as politics, it is vital to consider intersectional factors such as Magema did in her performance. She not only considers her race, but also her sex and gender identity in the context of her performance.

Through her actions in both videos, Magema serves as a vessel that encompasses Black bodies, more specifically those of Black women, and establishes herself both with a lack of power, and reclaimed power. Within the scope of the colonization of Black individuals, Anibal Quijano touches on the subject and states that, "as time went by, the colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color, and they assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of racial category."² With this statement, Quijano outlines the implications imprinted upon a Black body. These same implications would then serve as the basis of what many colonizers would utilize to make assumptions.

Additionally, Quijano states, "the coloniality of power based on the imposition of the idea of race as an instrument of domination has always been a limiting factor for constructing a nation-state based on a Eurocentric model."³ Here, Quijano elaborates on the notion that ongoing colonial power has been the basis for the formulation of preconceived models of individuals. Quijano then notes, "domination is the requisite for exploitation, and race is the most effective instrument for domination that, associated with exploitation, serves as the universal classifier in

¹ Judith Butler. "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" in Gender Trouble (1990), 2.

² Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000), 534.

the current global model of power."⁴ This statement exemplifies the power dynamics within race and demonstrates how monumental such classifications can be. Despite that Quijano's text was written over two decades ago, the arguments presented in his writings continue to be relevant in today's society.

A similar notion is outlined by Paulo Freire in his text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire notes that "dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human."⁵ Here, Freire speaks on the idea of dehumanization and this supports the ideas highlighted by Quijano in his text. Through the colonial framing of those categorized as the "other", these individuals become less humanized and are as a result viewed as less than human. The very act of stealing one's humanity has several forms that it may take but exists at its core as a method utilized to make others seem less than. Through this action, colonizers have implemented their ideas not just to each other but on the oppressed individuals themselves. "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves.

It is important to note that both videos included in this split screen performance are void of all color. This may have been completed for several reasons, but one reason may have been to emphasize certain components of the video and to not draw focus to other details that are not as significant as the presence of Magema and the masks. The inclusion of the black and white

⁴ Ibid, 572.

⁵ Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Edition 30th anniversary (New York: Continuum Publication, 2000), 44.
⁶ Ibid, 44.

images also alludes to marking a specific time period and serves to evoke a feeling of nostalgia within the viewer. To have created this performance in full color would have given the videos a much livelier presence, but this was not the intention of the artist. The black and white colors then, serve to make a direct connection to the presence of a Black body to that of a white body.

The notion of liminality or in-between subject/historical positions as discussed by Homi K. Bhabha in the text, *Border Lives: The Art of the Present* and it serves as one that is pertinent in this work. Bhabha states, "the stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white."⁷ With this statement, Bhabha communicates the idea of identity within the context of class and race. As demonstrated in Magema's performance, she draws a symbolic line distinguishing a black body from a white one.

Kiss of Narcisse(e) (2010) possesses a strong quality of duality when viewing both videos together. The duality of a repressed voice, attempting to be heard and thus challenging the spectator, and the voice which reclaims power directly from the colonizer. In the movements made by Magema, it is noted that while she moves toward us in video 1, she moves away from us on video 2. The pace of her movements however, are different in the two videos depicted. Video 1 where Magema wears the white mask includes several moments where she has stopped walking altogether and faces the direction of the viewer, all the while the image of Magema as shown in video 2 does not have her make eye contact with the viewer at all. The pace in which Magema walks in video 1 has a subtle sense of urgency shown by the manner in which her movements are made. When compared to the pace of the movements made in video 2, it

⁷ Homi K. Bhabha. "Border Lives: The Art of the Present," In *The Location of Culture*, 1112.

becomes clear that the video where she kisses the masks has an implication that time has been slowed.

The power of the gaze is one that is represented strongly in *Kiss of Narcisse(e)* (2010) in the actions of Magema. The concept of the gaze is one that is tied to that of an individual that holds power over another, and is most commonly associated with a white body as opposed to an individual of color. In the text, *The Oppositional Gaze Black Female Spectators* bell hooks describes the gaze as a "site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" to document, one that is oppositional."⁸ Hooks' perspective serves to address the ongoing struggle of what is termed as the gaze, and explains that there are two sides. What is not always addressed is the notion of the oppositional gaze and the power that it can hold, and it is this very detail that is illustrated in Magema's performance.

hooks adds, "spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see."⁹ Here hooks explains that there exist several spaces where it was deemed safe to practice the concept of the gaze. The gaze is a very powerful tool that one possesses, and for this very reason, it can be an intimidating quality to possess. The intimidation behind the gaze is most often used to serve as a means of expressing power. Figures of authority will often times ask others to meet their gaze when they have made a mistake or need to be disciplined.

⁸ bell hooks. "The Oppositional Gaze Black Female Spectators" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: south End Press, 1992), 116.

Race is also an undeniable factor that plays a vital role by Magema. It becomes very clear that the artist has taken on a number of roles that operate as several players—the colonizer and the oppressed, specifically speaking on the histories of colonial contact between France and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the history between France and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there were several instances where France expressed colonial power. The Congo River for example, served as one of the main sources of commerce and means of expansion. Exploitation of the region and a depletion of the land's sources became a dominating factor and in turn supported the colonization of the land and its inhabitants.

"One way to investigate the lived experience of the black is to consider what it is to be the dangerous—because one is, because we are. Who volunteers for this already given imposition? Who elects this imposed affinity?"¹⁰ In this statement made by Fred Moten in his text *The Case of Blackness*, he poses a question that directly relates to the lived experience of individuals pertaining to the Black community. Moten also addresses these questions posed and asks who decides what these different experiences consist of. When forming narratives around a given group, it is vital that proper information is allocated. This however is not always the case. This further supports the intentions behind Magema's performance by creating a platform for her to voice her concerns pertaining to race and inequality faced as a result of colonialist views and acts.

The concept of femininity is one that is addressed in the piece through the clothing worn by Magema, and serves as one of the many layers to this piece. The clothing utilized is intentional for the several connotations that such a piece of clothing can carry. Although the

¹⁰ Fred Moten. "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism*, Volume 50, Number 2, Spring 2008, 88.

performance is void of color, it is clear that the dress worn by the artist is white. This is a color that is most often associated with purity, innocence, and virginity. The action of Magema kissing the white masks mounted on the wall alludes to a relationship of sorts that she has with those objects. Whether that relationship is voluntary or out of obligation is uncertain. The manner in which Magema kisses the masks is very tender, and with the contextual clues in the performance, it can be concluded that she may be kissing these masks symbolically, marking the end of the relationship between the Black individual and the white oppressor. By being the individual that makes the decision to initiate a kiss, it becomes clear that Magema serves as a vessel to reclaim power from the oppressor and shift the meaning of who in fact holds power.

Video 2 shows Magema reclaiming her voice and then walking away, which alludes to the concept of freedom. In the *text Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, Kimberle Crenshaw notes that the "intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles."¹¹ Although Crenshaw is referring to violence inflicted upon women of color on a different scale, it is important to address this detail because Magema's performance also carries subtle undertones that communicate a notion of violence. The performance itself is calm, but it reads more as a calm that has taken place after a disastrous storm.

"We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which

¹¹ Kimberle Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", 1246.

fears this same depth too much to examine the possibility of it within themselves.¹¹² This powerful statement is from Audre Lorde's text, *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. Here, she explains the importance of sex and gender and their relation to problems as faced in society. The notion of power is one that has been dominated predominantly by men, so it is with artworks such as that of Magema's that this notion can be challenged. Lorde goes on to say that, "of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So, we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives…".¹³ Lorde explains that the action of a woman utilizing her sexuality as means of expressing power is threatening. Although Magema's performance is not explicit, it does possess sensual undertones that seek to highlight her femininity in her attempt to reclaim and establish power.

There has been a certain perspective on Black women by colonizers, that suggests Black women hold a sense of mystification and exotification. With the inclusion of contemporary art, Black female artists have been able to escape this perspective and reclaim their voice. The article The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought, by Kevin Ochieng Okoth poses the question, "how can Blackness be separated from white supremacy, neocolonialism, or imperialism...when these are the mechanisms that structure the experience of most people racialized as Black on a global scale?"¹⁴ This question is especially important to consider when examining the impact that marginalized groups of women have experienced throughout the course of history. Addressing history and all of its complexities is a challenging

¹² Audre Lorde. "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power". (2006), 88.

¹³ Ibid, 88.

¹⁴ Kevin Ochieng Okoth. "The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought" (January 16, 2020), SALVAGE.

https://salvage.zone/issue-seven/the-flatness-of-blackness-afro-pessimism-and-the-erasure-of-anti-colonial-thought/

task, but only by examining all details of history can the reframing of preconceived colonial thought be altered.

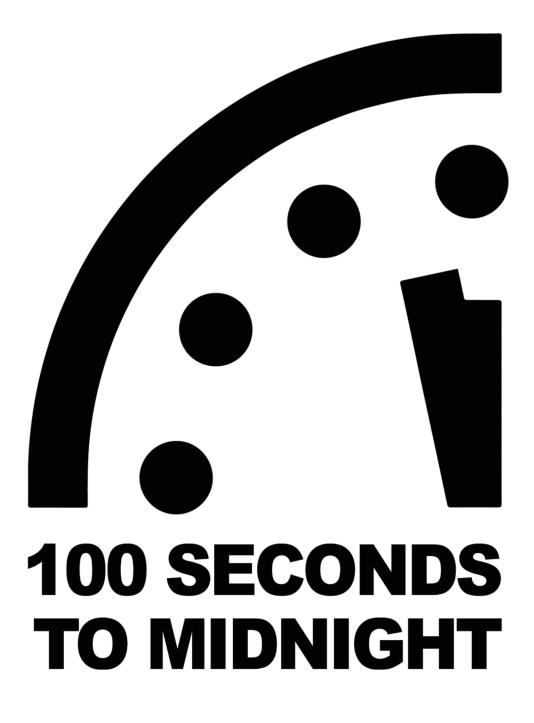
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- Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views* from South 1, no. 3 (2000): 534, 569, 572.



Melissa Medina MFA Thesis Exhibition

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 3, 2022, 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.

On Display: March 3 - March 9, 2022



5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397 (909) 537-7373 | raffma@csusb.edu | raffma.csusb.edu

Melissa Medina

Melissa.MedinaReza@gmail.com / www.melissamedinareza.com / (951)-533-6979

Education	
Expected 2022	California State University, San Bernardino, CA Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Studio Art
2019	California State University, San Bernardino, CA Bachelor of Arts in Art, with an emphasis in Visual Studies – <i>Cum Laude</i> . Minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies.
Work Experience	
January 2021- May 2021	 California State University San Bernardino, CA <i>Position:</i> Graduate Instructional Assistant- ART 1120 (Foundation, Line, Color, and Composition) <i>Duties:</i> Provide direct assistance to CSUSB professor in 2-Dimensional art course through ZOOM. Give feedback to students during class critiques and provide a comfortable environment. Track student attendance and participation.
September 2020- December 2020	 Kind Art Collective, San Bernardino, CA <i>Position</i>: Virtual Art Instructor <i>Duties</i>: Draft lessons for K-12 students and facilitate art lessons virtually, through ZOOM. Interact with students and keep them engaged with the lesson/activity. Coordinate with staff present at the school site.
August 2019- July 2020	 CSUSB Public Art Fellowship, California State University, San Bernardino, CA Position: Artist Lead- Collaborative Mural Project Duties: Design a mural to be permanently displayed at the College of Education located on the CSUSB campus. Collaborate alongside another artist and make edits as needed, while ensuring that the central theme of the mural is highlighted through the imagery depicted.

	 Engage with CSUSB campus advisors, staff, and Associated Students Incorporated and consider feedback provided in the production of the design.
March 2018- January 2019	Levi Bemis Elementary School, Rialto, CA <i>Position</i> : Art Instructor <i>Duties</i> :
	 Create lesson plans and co-teach art lessons to K-12 students. Ensure that objectives are being met and that lesson plans are meeting state mandated standards.
Additional Teaching Exp	erience
March 2021	Collage & Color Theory Presentation California State University, San Bernardino, CA
May 2018	Watercolor Activity California State University, San Bernardino, CA
Publications	
August 2020	Dot Photozine: Journal of Photography, Issue 10
October 2016	Dot Photozine: Journal of Photography, Issue 6
November 2020	The Little Gallery of San Bernardino Mosaic: A Collection of Art & Writings from San Bernardino
Exhibitions	
2022	National Orange Show All California Juried Art Exhibition San Bernardino Art Association
2022	MFA Thesis Exhibition, 100 Seconds to Midnight Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art Dutton Family Gallery
2021	SBAA Virtual Art Exhibition San Bernardino Art Association
2021	SoCal MFA Virtual Exhibition Claremont Graduate University
2021	Revolving Virtual Art Exhibition Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art

Dutton Family Gallery

2020	SBAA Virtual Art Exhibition San Bernardino Art Association
2020	Visual Frequency Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art Dutton Family Gallery
2019	49 th Annual Student Art Exhibition Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art
2019	Kataware Doki Collaborative Art Exhibition CSUSB Student Gallery
2018	48 th Annual Student Art Exhibition Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art

Scholarships & Awards

2021	Honorable Mention SBAA Virtual Art Exhibition San Bernardino Art Association
2021	Sam and Beverly Maloof Art Scholarship Endowment
2018	Departmental Honors in Art
2017	Dean's List, Fall Quarter, Spring Quarter, Winter Quarter
2013	Inland Empire Scholarship Inland Empire Scholarship Fund (IESF)

Community Service

March 2022- Present	The Garcia Center for the Arts, San Bernardino, CA Community Garden
April 2022-	Music Changing Lives, San Bernardino, CA
Present	Hunger Relief Program