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BUILDING A NEW BRIDGE:
JUSTIN FAVELA'S *PUENTE NUEVO*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Humanities
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Art History
at
Lindenwood University

By

Kelley Yost

Saint Charles, Missouri

May, 2023

ABSTRACT

BUILDING A NEW BRIDGE
JUSTIN FAVELA'S *PUENTE NUEVO*

Kelley Yost, Master of Arts in Art History, 2023

Thesis Directed by: Prof. Trenton Olsen, PhD.

This thesis analyzes an installation work, *Puente Nuevo*, created in 2019 by artist Justin Favela at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. In this large-scale, piñata-like mural, Favela asserts his Latinx identity while questioning cultural stereotypes and viewer expectations with a sense of humor and irony. The unique materiality of Favela's work, based in the folk art forms of *papel picado* and *cartonería*, transforms spaces into immersive environments that are fun and provocative, and capable of housing darker associations as well. He builds layers of meaning into his pieces by revising historic works, such as picturesque landscapes by Casimiro Castro, that, in conforming to European models, referenced a visual language that normalized colonial incursions into the Americas at the displacement of Indigenous figures and traditions. Favela brings these embedded associations forward to critique the colonial fallout evidenced in greater absences of Latinos in the landscapes of museums and art hierarchies. Favela does this by vividly altering art works and space to mark presence. *Puente Nuevo* was further contextualized by its relationship with a site on its own journey to define and expand the meaning of being a museum of "American" art in terms of diversity and access. An additional piece created for the installation, Favela's sculpture *Nacho Calder*, parodied a canonical work in the museum's collection, demonstrating Favela's varied approaches to questioning status, and the status quo. These pieces disrupt the conventional flow and power structures in the museum, reshaping space and perception as a subversive exercise in relandscaping these.

Dedication

I want to express my gratitude to artist Justin Favela, whose creativity and body of work inspired this paper, and who graciously shared his time and insights during the writing process. Likewise, Professor Emmanuel Ortega’s research and willingness to share ideas are greatly appreciated. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Olsen, Dr. Nicewinter, and Dr. Walz, for lending their expertise and perspective, and to Dr. Hutson for his leadership and ongoing support in the MA program. Above all, I thank my family, who’ve made many sacrifices, and were my biggest cheerleaders. And thanks to my friend Zoe, who unfailingly said, “You got this.”

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Introduction

Justin Favela's *Puente Nuevo* (fig. #1-#2) installation extended from floor to ceiling and down both walls of a long corridor at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2019. Fringed layers of turquoise and verdant green tissue paper, interspersed with lavender, citrine, magenta, and earth tones, created a lush pixelation of imagery relatable as sky, plant, and earth, cut through by the sharper linearity of a bright orange trestle bridge mirrored on both sides of the mural. Reading as a sort of energetic, paint-by-number landscape from a distance, then giving way to abstraction up close, the vivid color, monumental scale, and ambiguity of this piece drew viewers in, and the thickly layered, mysteriously fluttering textural qualities invited closer looking. Thousands of overlaid sheets of tissue paper covering the white walls of a gallery linking older and newer parts of the museum, evoked wonder, uncertainty, amusement, and deeper contemplation.

This paper examines *Puente Nuevo* as a contemporary reconstruction of chromolithographs by Casimiro Castro (1826-1889) (figs. #3-#5). Castro's romanticized views of the Mexican railroad line emulated European visual traditions that encouraged colonial expansion in the Americas by portraying landscapes as expansive but controllable.[1] The "picturesque" exoticized and normalized views of landscapes and Indigenous figures, legitimizing dominance and exploitation for some, displacement and erasure for others.[2] Favela draws on the implications embedded in this construct and these prints, as well as Castro's own

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[1]Emmanuel Ortega, "The Mexican Picturesque and the Sentimental Nation: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Landscape," *The Art Bulletin* 103, (2021): 134.

[2]Ortega, 131-134.

muted presence in the Carter Museum holdings, as corollaries to decreased visibility and for Latinos in collections and canons. Favela's enlarged, piñata-esque altering of both Castro's idyllic imagery and the familiar terrain of the museum, shakes up the underlying tenets of the picturesque through unexpected, even pleasantly disorienting, color, texture, and blocky scenery. The viewer's own sense of displacement in this created environment can inspire thinking about who and what belongs. Likewise, Favela's hyper-stereotyped assertion of identity, achieved mainly through a distinct materiality, is suggestive of absence by registering overt presence. Favela's unique program to assert presence and identity in the museum landscape is further contextualized by the evolving character of the Carter Museum itself.

Like many institutions, this museum has grappled with a less-inclusive past but is committed to change. Originally featuring a collection of Western art, the freshness and accessibility of Favela's work in a transitional gallery was in line with the museum's stated goal to achieve greater diversity in artwork, artists, and viewers.[3] Any perceived incongruity of Favela's materials or forms in this space was itself suggestive of imbalanced systems of value, and mainstreamed expectations. Author Jill Casid suggests that "relandscaping" exercises like Favela's that alter symbolic imagery and physical space, act as subversive counterings of colonial pasts, turning them against themselves by reasserting mastery over real and metaphorical terrains, and altering the discourse of landscapes by questioning the dominant forces at work in them.[4] The way Favela's piñata-like layers spread happily over walls and even ceilings, "softens their edges," but viewed through a slightly different lens, could reverse as

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[3]"Our Story: The Vision of Amon G. Carter." Amon Carter Museum of American Art, accessed February 25, 2023, https://www.cartermuseum.org/about/our-story.

[4]Jill Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 197.

reflections of uglier associations with cultural movement.[5] Favela's characterization of his pieces as "fluffy versions of the fluffy versions," reference the romanticization of Castro's originals, but also a queering of the landscape that constitutes a further reshaping of social and institutional terrains.[6]

The Castro prints were not the only pieces in the Carter Museum subject to Favela's alterations. A companion piece, *Nacho Calder*, (fig. #6), disrupted conventional lines of sight and interactions between mainstream works as it hung from the ceiling at the end of the mural corridor, parodying Alexander Calder's, *Untitled*, ca. 1942, (fig. #7), a piece that enjoys iconic status and visibility in the museum.[7] The tongue-in-cheek but pointed word play, Favela's humorous reimagining of Calder's triangles as cardboard nacho chips, and the piece's conspicuous proximity to works created mainly by white male artists, questioned status and visibility, while diffusing created tension with humor. Favela's materials gently mocked as much as mimicked the whimsical modernism of Calder's aluminum, steel and wire.

Favela's work with tissue paper, glue, paint, and cardboard connects to Latin American folk art forms *papel picado* and *cartonería*, and his own Mexican and Guatemalan heritage. By setting up comparisons between pieces, such as the frilly mural next to Castro's idyllic scenery, or contrasting *Nacho Calder* with *Untitled* sets up examinations of low and high art binaries, The enlarged scale and amplification of these in Favela's pieces also suggest cultural stereotypes and

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[5]Favela, "Live your Heritage."

[6]Justin Favela, "Interview with Justin Favela," Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, December, 2020. Video, 7:09. https://massmoca.org/event/interview-with-justine-favela/

[7]Justin Favela,"Live your Heritage–Justin Favela," produced by Siete Foods, October 12, 2022, video, 2:50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl3PBQZyj44

appropriation, "culture reduced to decoration," as he puts it, and are wryly observant, he asserts, of expectations for what a "brown" artist *should* create.[8]

Favela describes his art as documenting and responding to differences in representation and visibility.[9] Growing up in Las Vegas, Nevada, Favela observed in its false fronts the commodification and manipulation of global art history, and the forgotten stories of the people working behind them who "built the city and maintained it."[10] Favela's family came to the United States for the opportunities it offered, and though Favela is defined by his own unique experiences as a first generation American, queer, Latinx artist, his work is deeply reflective of his family's history here, and his roots in Las Vegas.[11]

He studied art and earned a BFA at the University of Las Vegas, NV, and was both repelled and inspired by the preponderance of work by white, male artists in the art history classes he took in college–"the great whites," he calls them.[12] This is where he was initially cognizant of the "absences" for Latinos that drives much of his work. Though he initially hesitated to push back against disproportionate representation by making "identity works," or doing something "too cheesy," he finally decided that making murals and objects that look like piñatas "breaks down barriers," and, "mashing up symbols makes new meaning."[13]

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[8]Justin Favela, "New Monuments for a Future Generation," Nevada Museum of Art, October 8, 2021, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb6z_Pxd_0o

[9]Favela, "New Monuments."

[10]Favela, "New Monuments."

[11]Favela, "New Monuments."

[12]Justin Favela, "Artist Lecture," Des Moines Art Center, August 19, 2021, video, 1:24:50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_C9eht_0qg

[13]Favela, MASS MoCA interview.

Before installations like *Puente Nuevo*, Favela experimented with many forms, and his explorations, coupled with the economies of being a young artist, led to continued work with everyday, found, and traditional materials in pieces invoking his background while poking fun at mainstream conventionality. Early pieces included a gessoed and repainted *Floor Sombrero* after Carl Andre, full-scale cardboard lowriders covered in tissue paper, a limply hanging piñata donkey form, and a remake of iconic Vegas signage called *Estardas*, invoking Favela's grandmother's pronunciation of the casino's name. That some might raise an eyebrow at the cartoony appearance of these pieces, the play on *mal gusto*–intentional bad taste–also brings that vocabulary into the "formal" space of the gallery to question value judgments and hierarchies.

The kitsch and humor of Favela's work diffuses the gravity of the issues confronted. Materiality, underlying motivations, and vacillations between familiarity and uncertainty connect these early works to later evolutions like *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder*. The ephemerality of Favela's chosen materials, the environments and occasional performative actions he engages in, afford temporary contemplation and more lasting "emotional resonance," for a wide audience, while mirroring the shifting natures of identity and presence.[14] Favela has exhibited work across the United States and overseas, and currently manages a residency program in Springdale, Arkansas.

The following literature review examines scholarly arguments around the main ideas at work in Favela's pieces. Absence, presence, and expressions of identity for Latinos in art canons and institutional spaces is discussed, along with the significance of engaging with landscape

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[14]Miwon Kwon, "The Becoming of a Work of Art: FGT and a Possibility of Renewal, a Chance to Share, a Fragile Truce," in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, edited by Julie Ault (Gottingen, Germany: Steidldangin, 2006), 287.

forms. Cultural connections, symbolic qualities, and the charged nature of Favela's distinct materiality is also considered.

Literature Review

Absence, Presence, Identity

In a recent video, Justin Favela discussed some of the primary motivations behind his work, including his desire to raise awareness about differences in institutional accessibility and inclusion for Latinos, as well as the complexities of expressing identity:

> Every time I get the chance to work with these institutions, I'm always thinking about my Grandma, or my youngest cousin, like, how would they feel in this space? That's why I like to cover gallery walls in colorful paper, you know, to soften the edges of these really sharp, pointy institutions. Because I realize going to these big museums with my family, that maybe have never been to a museum, or only a few museums here and there, in their life. I realized that those spaces were not really made for them. They weren't really made for *us*. For a long time I did feel the pressure to be the Latinx representation that I didn't see. And, you know, I realized that it's not possible to represent a whole community of people, right? We're all Latinos, but we all have very different experiences. [...] My name is Justin Favela, and I'm Guatemalan, Mexican, and American.[15]

Here Favela discusses absence, presence, and identity in different ways. He notes the differences he's observed in terms of presence, and even physical and emotional ease for Latino artists and viewers in institutional spaces. He alludes to how his artwork is meant to take up space and "soften" the edges of these spaces, attracting a diverse audience.

In an interview for *American Craft* magazine, Favela expands on these aspects, discussing the roots of his work in questions around equity and visibility for Latinos, and the complexities of expressing identity. He shares his initial hesitation to work with these concepts, explaining, "People of color, we're not allowed the same opportunities as everybody else, so

[15]Justin Favela, "Live Your Heritage–Justin Favela," produced by Siete Foods, October 12, 2022. Video.

once you're making work about your trauma–'cause white people love that–there's no turning back. I didn't want to be pigeonholed."[16] Julianne Escobedo Shepherd describes Favela's journey, noting, "...it wasn't until Favela decided to 'f— these hierarchies' and center his work on his own experiences, rather than hiding them from the art world's overwhelmingly white gatekeepers, that he found his voice."[17] As Favela commented, he would like his voice to speak for those who feel they don't fit into institutional spaces, or simplistic definitions.

In *Latinx Art*, Arlene Dávila discusses many levels and forms of absence and inequity for Latinx artists, and she addresses the usage and politicization of identifiers like "Latinx," a subject constituting another arena where battles for control and expression are waged. Dávila states, "I use 'Latinx' [...] to index an openness to gender, sexual, and racial inclusivity," and to "index that most contemporary 'Latino' projects generated within culture industries [...] are too co-opted and whitewashed to fully represent any sense of progressive Latinidad, and to mark a break toward more inclusive definitions."[18] Dávila cites comments by art historian and author Adriana Zavala from a 2019 conference, who frames "Latinx" in the context of presence/absence, and silence/voice–binaries that relate directly to Dávila's observations and figure into Favela's narratives.

Zavala states: "To me, the X in LatinX is about addressing structured absence. But it also marks presence. It says I am here and will be counted. The X also insists on queering structures of knowledge in order to make this presence visible."[19] In his discussions of "taking up space,"

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[16]Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, "Piñata Pride," *American Craft* (June/July 2018), 68-69.

[17]Shepherd, "Piñata Pride," 68-69.

[18]Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art : Artists, Markets, Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 5.

[19]Dávila, 6.

making his presence visible, as Zavala suggests, Favela ties the purposeful visual and physical aspects of his work to pride in his Las Vegas roots, Latin American heritage, and queer identity.[20]

But Dávila also warns that categorizations and identifiers can oversimplify or lose meaning, as, "like Latinx identity itself, Latinx artists span differences along the lines of nationality, citizenship, race, gender, language, and more."[21] Dávila further acknowledges that categories like 'Latinx' (like Latino/a/o and Hispanic) are "not exempt from erasures and challenges," and quotes artist Ronny Quevedo, who clarifies it as a "'term of entry, not a term of closure'."[22] Similarly, in a recent interview, Favela spoke directly to the ever-shifting use of "Latinx" and other identifiers, as well as to their constraints, and the inability of any one term to really define the complexities of identity. He describes feeling that the term "Latinx," even if originally intended to be more encompassing and fluid in terms of ethnicity and gender, is still a term that was "kind of imposed," and doesn't always seem comfortable.[23] "Latine" may be a more accurate, expansive descriptor, but even this identifier now carries the baggage of a divisive political climate. In Arkansas, where he manages an artists' residency program, the use of "Latinx" was recently banned from "official state documents," but "Latine" is still accepted, and even somewhat prescribed.[24]

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[20]Justin Favela, "Interview with Justin Favela," Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA, 2020, video.

[21]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 5.

[22]Dávila, 9.

[23]Justin Favela, interview by author, February 27, 2023.

[24]Favela, interview by author.

In a recent newspaper article, Nathien Shae Rodriguez, associate professor and associate director for the School of Journalism and Media Studies at San Diego State University, spoke about the ban, but more generally about gender and identity markers, saying that no single term works, "for every single Latino, Latina, Latinx, Hispanic, Chicano, or whatever label they want to use," and that to try to delineate or impose one is "extremely flawed."[25] Rodriguez's research focuses on "identity negotiation of traditionally excluded and marginalized populations in the media, primarily with Latinx and Latine (another gender-neutral version of the term considered to better adhere to Spanish language rules) populations and LGBTQ populations, by looking at how they use media to negotiate their identity and how their identities are represented, misrepresented, or altogether absent in media representations," relating closely to Dávila and Zavala's assertions about presence/absence and understanding as they apply to artists and institutions as well.[26] Rodriguez continues, explaining:

> Identity is something that is not monolithic, and it's something that is fluid. People kind of identify with different facets of their identity; it's very intersectional. For individuals, especially those from Latin American heritage, their ethnicity, their race, their country of origin, or their parents or grandparents' country of origin, might be something that is very salient to them. To them, their kind of ethnic marker is going to be a very strong identity that they use, so for some individuals to use a term like Latino, Latina, Latinx is very strong for them because that's very salient for them. For others, maybe another facet of their identity may take more precedence, so they may not care to partake in surveys or even engage in a conversation of what these identity labels are.

This passage mirrors Favela's quote at the beginning of this section, and in other interviews, about the complexities of defining identity. As Rodriguez observes, language itself bears the histories of oppression:

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[25] Lisa Deaderick, "Hispanic, Latino or Latinx? Arkansas Ban on Gender-Neutral Term Misses the Mark on Inclusion," *The San Diego Union Tribune*, January 22, 2023.

[26] Deaderick, "Hispanic, Latino or Latinx?"

> A lot of arguments against the term Latinx (and I also use the term Latine as a Spanish-language version of it) is that it takes away from the Spanish language. The Spanish language itself is very gendered with the O and the A, it genders inanimate objects when you talk about it in Spanish. I think my argument against that is that Spanish, in and of itself, is a colonial language. It was inflicted and imposed on indigenous peoples in what is now Mexico and other Latin American countries, so Spanish is not indigenous to Latin American people. To say that it's ruining Spanish, Spanish ruined indigenous languages. So, when we use the term Latinx, when we use the term Latine, it's an evolution of language that becomes more inclusive as people start to learn about their own identities and the identities of others.[27]

Rodriguez's comments connect again to the complex narratives and cultural erasure that relate not just to terminology, but to the wider historical and more contemporary issues Favela seeks to address in his work. Another clarification is that when asked about "claiming indigeneity," and the idea of "re-indigenizing spaces," Favela states that he is not really comfortable centering race or identity in these terms, or claiming these "as central to [his background or visual vocabulary],"[28] though he acknowledges, and Dávila discusses as well, that this is important to many Latinx artists.

Claiming and reclaiming space is important to Favela. As Dávila notes, Latinos are historically underrepresented in "white canon institutional art history and collection" and more current exhibitions; in curatorial and critical positions, and in the "educational pipeline" that feeds into art-related jobs; and in art markets where Latinos earn less than their white counterparts, or artists geographically centered in Latin America.[29] Along these lines, Zavala notes, "US Latin@ art lags alarmingly behind the booming interest in Latin American art. At the

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[27]Deaderick.

[28]Favela, interview by author.

[29]Dávila, 49.

same time, Latin@ art is not entirely accepted as part of the history of American art either."[30] Zavala similarly suggests the "dismissal of Latin@ art is surely undergirded by race and class biases and by assumptions that it is monolithically concerned with identity politics and/or is lacking in aesthetic and conceptual experimentation."[31] Favela often mentions that the only spaces, and particular genre, Latinos have been afforded are walls for murals.[32] This observation, coupled with Favela's installation format, use of everyday materials, and art historical classifications of landscape as a "low art" form, reminds viewers of systemic subordination, but also combine as powerful tools for reinscription and marking presence.

In "The Latino Presence in American Art," Ramos discusses decades-long efforts to "challenge and redefine the hemispheric and national parameters of American art" to recognize and rectify the "marginalized status of Chicano and Latino art," particularly in museums and canons. As Dávila notes, "Ramos was one of a few Latinx curators hired in the aftermath of the infamous '*Willful Neglect* report' (Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues 1994)," a study documenting historical patterns of discrimination at a large, symbolic institution like the Smithsonian, and one that called for greater Latino representation in "research, collections, and exhibitions."[33] While progress is being made, sometimes the effort to create opportunities and space specifically for Latino artists has led to a different type of isolation and dumbing down, by simply lumping diverse artists together, regardless of distinctions and nuances in race, ethnicity, and gender.

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[30]Adriana Zavala, "Latin@ Art at the Intersection," *Aztlan: Journal of Chicano Studies* (2015): 125.

[31]Zavala, 16-17.

[32]Justin Favela, "New Monuments."

[33]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 49.

Dávila uses the example of "ten Latinx photographers [...] packed into a third of [a] gallery space," while the rest of the museum was devoted to one white, female, contemporary artist.[34] At the conclusion of the *Puente Nuevo* installation, Favela noted that there were just three Mexican artists with works on display. And Dávila observes a noticeable skew towards exhibitions where "Hispanic" artists are "stereotyped and reduced [..] to color, expressionism, tradition, and loudness," though Favela likewise embraces, plays on, and refutes the groupings and labels Dávila highlights through his hyper-stereotypes that serve as complex signifiers of absence or presence.[35] In reference to how Favela's manipulations affect interpretation, Ortega remarks, "To pause is to contextualize the place of a Latinx artist in a type of space where a voice like Favela's is usually brushed under the politics of the exotic–never underneath the critical lens of history."[36]

While Dávila and others believe that "visibility is the first step to recognition," she also acknowledges that visibility alone "has very little to do with equity," and that making space for Latinx art and artists demands deeper structural changes, in the places where Favela seeks to exert a presence: museums, galleries, education, and art markets.[37]

Engaging with Landscapes

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[34]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 49.

[35]Dávila, 49.

[36]Emmanuel Ortega, "Collapsed Tropics: Justin Favela's *Central American*." In *Justin Favela*: *Central American,* edited by Sheila Mauck (Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 2021), 48.

[37]Dávila, 13.

There is a good deal of commentary describing the charged nature of working with landscape as a genre and politicized physical form. Favela's work invokes landscapes in many ways, from the historical imagery he sources, to the museum spaces he transforms, and the landscape-like experience of moving through the environments he creates. As landscapes bear the marks of presence and absence, identity and ideology, as outlined by authors in this section, landscape-based art like Favela's exceeds narrower definitions of the genre to act as something with greater agency and transformational potential.[38]

In their discussion of art "in and from the landscape," authors Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum note that humans associate landscape with inherent contradictions: stability and instability, connections and "insurmountable divisions."[39] These qualities, and naturally occurring cycles of "growth, decay, and renewal," are concepts that seem to lend themselves to the "processing and negotiating" of issues such as space, place, identity, and equality that Favela and viewers interact with through his installations.

Favela says he turns to landscapes as a resource, and works with enlarged, abstracted versions of them, because of their accessibility: "Who hasn't looked at a landscape painting, or doesn't have one hanging in their home?," he asks.[40] He reports being impacted by the visual experience of growing up in Las Vegas–the monumentality and veneers of the architecture contrasted with the relative emptiness and contours of the surrounding desert left their imprint. The capacity of landscapes to house ideas and memories, Favela observes, allows them to act as

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[38]Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, "Art in and from the Landscape," In *Anthropology of Landscape: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 234.

[39]Tilley and Daum, 235.

[40]Justin Favela, interview with the author, February 27, 2023.

powerful "cultural touchstones," and the "spatial, experiential" aspects of installation art afford similar communicative opportunities.[41]

Since landscapes, both real and metaphorical, are ever-changing, and Favela doesn't feel that the physical artworks themselves must always be "precious," the ephemeral nature of his materials and format also mirror these realities, as well as the mutability of culture and identity.[42] And landscapes, Favela explains, have taught him about composition. He says to look closely even at sculptural pieces like *Nachos supreme* to see mountains and valleys formed by the overlapping, thinly glued layers of translucent tissue paper, as literal and figurative traces of landscape modeled after the environment, inscribed ironically onto culturally symbolic forms.[43]

Emmanuel Ortega asserts that landscapes are "inscribed with ideologies," and in historic examples, such as those Favela references, inscription often goes hand in hand with erasure.[44] As one entity exerts control, another may be displaced, a reality Favela confronts and reverses in his re-inscriptions. Ortega also discusses landscape as a "verb" with a unique capacity to embody and transmit past and present actions, to define states of being and becoming, making it an inherently powerful form to manipulate.[45]

According to Ortega and other authors, European landscape traditions–present as influences in Favela's pieces, and as a looming presence in traditions and canons–constituted

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[41]Favela, interview.

[42]Favela, interview.

[43]Favela, interview.

[44]Emmanuel Ortega, "New Monuments for a Future Generation with Justin Favela & Emmanuel Ortega," virtual lecture, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, Nevada, 2021.

[45]Ortega, "New Monuments."

visual conversions of "open spaces into controllable places" as they applied to capturing the Americas.[46] The asserted supremacy of European conceptions of harmony and beauty relegated traditional art forms, and imperial eyes cast Indigenous figures as folksy or less capable fixtures in the scenery, precedents that function as contemporary allegories for inequity and subjugation in Favela's work.

Ortega's essays "Collapsed Tropics: Justin Favela's *Central American*," and "The Mexican Picturesque and the Sentimental Nation: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Landscape," delve into the politics and colonial legacies embedded in landscape painting traditions, such as the sublime and picturesque. These sources, and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, specifically link imagery and writing to European travelers who employed "strategies of representation whereby the European bourgeois sought to secure their innocence in the same moment they asserted European hegemony."[47] Various authors featured in *Picturing the Americas* similarly reveal the symbologies that may be referenced through landscape imagery: ideologies of the "landed elite," "evolving identities of emerging nations," the "harnessing and exploiting of riches," which Favela alludes to and manipulates in his distinct recontextualizations of selected sources.[48]

Ortega describes the influence of European Romanticism via sublime landscapes, the magnitude of which inspired spiritual, contemplative interaction with the viewer, often depicted

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[46]Ortega, "New Monuments."

[47]Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*," (London: Routledge, 2008), 9.

[48]Peter John Brownlee, Valéria Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, in *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra Del Fuego to the Arctic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 13-15.

as a solitary traveler overwhelmed by nature. Even by European standards, however, this construct had classist, racist implications, as not everyone was afforded the same opportunity for travel, or was understood as having the "rational capacit[y] to understand beauty," or to act as "moral agents," power imbalances that were extended through travel to the Americas and elsewhere.[49] Similarly, the transformative experience of privileged figures could be twisted when applied to similar representations of Indigenous figures.

Pratt and Ortega both discuss the dissemination of such images through travel writing and illustration by figures like Alexander von Humboldt, whose accounts, and others like them, made the landscape of the Americas and Indigenous peoples appear undeveloped, ripe for the taking, and inferior in many ways. Pratt refers to the "seeing-man," an "admittedly unfriendly label for the white male subject of European landscape discourse–he whose imperial eyes look out and possess." Pratt notes indigenous figures were not just diminutive, but often erased in the expansiveness of landscape illustrations, where only the presence of the traveler's gaze was registered.[50] Under this gaze, landscape occurs as more of a backdrop to a quest, its inhabitants "[deculturated]" and "taken for granted," assertions that could extend more broadly and chillingly to Favela's observations about the presences of Latinos in the "landscapes" of art and socioeconomics.[51]

In an example used by Ortega, a clothed European traveler gestures as if explaining something to a naked local. Ortega points out how this sets up visual binaries of "civilized" versus "wild," and motion/moral agency versus fixed/subordinate, ideas Favela explores in his

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[49]Emmanuel Ortega. "The Mexican Picturesque and the Sentimental Nation: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Landscape." *The Art Bulletin* 103, (2021): 122.

[50]Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 9.

[51]Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 51.

confrontations of the exotic, accomplished through hyper-exoticizions.[52] Ortega also discusses how such figural depictions served as "anchors to imperialistic [...] fantasies of *space*, *time*, and progress."[53] Favela refutes these constraints through the accessibility of his forms and materials, and offers alternative experiences of space, time, and progress through his curious, awe-inspiring constructions. In Favela's collaged reconstructions of landscape imagery, Indigenous figures are removed or blurred in opposition to the confines of the fixed, subjugated positions Ortega and Pratt describe in historic landscapes. Favela's constructs afford a broad, inclusive definition of "traveler" and "contemplator."

Ortega defines the "Mexican picturesque," evinced in Castro works, in some ways as evolutions of "the same canonical tropes" seen in the European models.[54] However the adoption of European "canonical concepts of beauty and harmony" associated with picturesque landscapes were seen as rectifications of the assumed "*mal gusto* (bad taste)" of more traditional, indigenous art forms and production.[55] Ortega argues that Mexican versions of the "imperial picturesque" became expressions of nationalistic pride and nation building for artists like Castro, intended to "[dismantle] myths of Mexico as a wild frontier," not necessarily to appeal to imperial eyes, but to right what were seen as skewed interpretations of prolific travel images.

Thus, Castro was caught in an artistic double whammy, in modeling himself after the superiority of European aesthetics, at the expense of Indigenous forms and figures–a kind of Catch-22 also embedded in Favela's imagery. Castro's lithographs naturalized and promoted

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[52]Pratt, 125.

[53]Ortega, "The Mexican Picturesque," 142.

[54]Ortega, 121.

[55]Ortega, 142.

exotic but attainable views of the landscape and figures as they would be seen traveling on the Mexican railroad. Ryan Mead and Cristina Purcar, in separate articles, discuss the intersection of landscape art with railroads, cartography, and expansion. Mead would include imagery connected to advertising Castro's idyllic views of identifiable landmarks as complex expressions of space, place, identity, and artistic agency, but also as responses to exhortations to build newer conceptions of a "national art," often intended for European audiences.[56] Though the specific imagery is not meant to be recognizable in Favela's works–the blurry pixelation of it plays into the power of his revision–it is about weaving the past into his layers to both acknowledge and reconfigure it.

Another contemporary artist, Kent Monkman, is well known for his powerful manipulations of landscape. The abundant commentary surrounding Monkman's work, the similarities of his large-scale, re-contextualized landscapes, and the humor and parody that help process and "lighten [...] very dark subject matter," can be used comparatively in exploring subject matter and methods in Favela's work.[57]

Kate Morris and Linda Morris note that Monkman, like Favela, shows a certain reverence for the mastery of the traditions and works he uses as the basis of his paintings. Monkman's "nearly exact reproductions of scenes from Albert Bierstadt and Hudson River School paintings attest to his fondness for majestic nineteenth-century landscape traditions, despite their elision of Native subjects."[58] However, the authors note, "Monkman intervenes in these grand narratives by

[56]Fausto Ramírez Rojas, "From Urban Metropolis to Cosmic Spectacle: The Valley of Mexico in Landscape Imagery," in *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra Del Fuego to the Arctic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 23.

[57]Kate Morris and Linda Morris, "Camping Out with Miss Chief: Kent Monkman's Ironic Journey," *Studies in American Humor* 6, no. 2 (2020): 265-284.

[58]Morris and Morris, "Camping Out," 269.

inserting subversive actors that disrupt the seductive pleasures of such works." Favela similarly describes his sources as "beautiful," but also a bit "sinister" below the surface, in their capacity to act as "embellishments" that promote stereotypes and subjugation.[59]

Though Favela moves away from the representation and figural work that typify Monkman's work, he shows a certain reverence for his sources by using them as the basis of his pieces, before disrupting them through materials, abstraction, and relocation, the resulting makeovers acting as interventions themselves in the spaces they take up.

Dávila describes museums and galleries as the new spaces of colonialism in the continued dominance and acceptance of some groups and individuals over others.[60] These, then, become the landscapes that invite disruption and reinscription, which Favela accomplishes mainly through the distinctive materiality of his installations.

Materiality

The surface textures and colors of tissue paper, cardboard, glue, and paint used to create intricate cut-paper designs, piñatas and other papier-mâché forms common in Latin American folk art, are immediately evident in the look and feel of Favela's installations. In addition to creating a unique aesthetic, Favela's allusive materiality is intrinsic to his program of revealing and subverting expectations and stereotypes while honoring his heritage.

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[59]Justin Favela, "Interview with Justin Favela," Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. December, 2020, video, 7:09. https://massmoca.org/event/interview-with-justine-favela/

[60]Zavala, 15.

Favela recounts that when initially considering how to make pieces about his identity, he asked himself, “What is the hackyest thing I can do as a brown artist?”[61] Constructing piñata-like forms was the answer–a process and style he thought would be a one-off, but one that evolved into a series of works. In an interview through MASS MoCA, Favela states that he originally invoked the piñata as an object, but gradually started to consider it a material for building forms, covering surfaces, and creating texture and color.[62] Even as these materials took the form of landscape installations, the implied *object's* associations with “culture reduced to decoration,” became the basis of his commentary on the “reductive simplicity” applied to things and people.[63] Combined with the politicized histories of the landscapes he utilizes, his distinct materiality, and use of irony and humor discussed later, work together to create layers of meaning.

Favela also links the etymology of his materials to experiences as a student and up-and-coming Latinx artist that piqued his interest in connecting kitschy materials to identity, and eventually to expressions of presence and absence. He tells the story of attending a “Mexican-themed” birthday party for a white curator at a museum where he was preparing to install work, and finding it a bit confusing and disrespectful, but not uncommon, that a different culture could boil down his heritage to accessories at Party City.[64] The museum party inspired

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[61]Justin Favela, “New Monuments for a Future Generation with Justin Favela & Emmanuel Ortega,” virtual artist's talk, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV, 2021.

[62]Justin Favela, “Interview with Justin Favela,” virtual interview, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA, 2020.

[63]Richard William Hill, “I am an Artist Who Happens to Be an Indian: Working Through Modernism in the 1970's and Early 1980's,” in In *Art for a New Understanding: Native Voices, 1950's to Now*, edited by Mindy N. Besaw, Candice Hopkins, and Manuela Well Off Man (Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 51.

[64]Favela, “New Monuments.”

Favela's "Family Fiestas"–celebratory, performative activities that accompany some of his works, and seem equal parts heartfelt and wryly reactive in confronting the "copy" and the "real," and as evocations of familiar cultural rituals.[65]

Favela's strategies relate to Richard William Hill's assessment that an ethnic artist's use of materials or styles associated with a particular group can play on "[the response] and expectations of [...] patrons," which likewise figure into efforts to use materiality and other devices to overcome the "language and conceptual structures [of modernism]," and "to transform it and create space for difference."[66] But rather than being "pigeonholed" as one thing or another, the most successful contemporary artists, Hill argues, are those, like Favela, who are able to "[draw] on Indigenous traditions and [revitalize] them through the recognition and artistic mobilization of their own experiences."[67]

Favela's conspicuous materiality acts as a subversive hyper-stereotype, creating a superficially "hacky," subliminally complex expression informed by his ethnicity, American experience, the flash and fringe of Vegas, and the gender fluidity of the Latinx identifier. While Favela does not discuss it at length, in some interviews and talks he touches on what he sees as queer aesthetics of Latino visual culture that he finds a funny counter to the *machismo* and patriarchal structure commonly associated with it.[68] Ortega also mentions this in an exhibition commentary, stating that displacement was best expressed by "queer artists" who "[challenged]

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[65]Favela, "New Monuments."

[66]Hill, "I am an Artist," 55.

[67]Hill, 55.

[68]Favela, "New Monuments."

notions of *Mexicanidad*," through the color, ephemerality, and associative properties of their materials.[69]

In "Collapsed Tropics: Justin Favela's *Central American*," Emmanuel Ortega further describes how the appearance and embedded meanings behind Favela's materials influence ways of seeing. He describes the unique allure of Favela's tissue paper constructions as "kaleidoscopes of color and paper fluff" whose "baroque nature [...] demands an energetic gaze."[70] Ortega argues that the "dazzle" and "spectacle" of the work's materiality, however, has more to do with *absence* rather than *presence* in how the apparent incongruity of materiality and location reminds viewers of the exclusion of Latin American traditions and Latinx artists from museum spaces.

A limiting aspect of Favela's materials also plays into an advantage according to Ortega. Though the placement of fringy, overlapping paper sections is meticulously planned and executed, there is an inherently reduced capacity for fine detail. The resulting abstraction avoids the "[trap of representation]," according to Ortega, thus engaging and disrupting the viewer's eye simultaneously, and undermining "scrutiny and overt control" so that the viewer is forced to look deeper, or differently.

This pixelated visual quality of Favela's imagery, presented in a contemporary installation format, sets up provocative contradictions. The slightly digitized look belies the work's hand-crafted origins, and simultaneously presents its own slick interrogation of both technological primacy and assumed primitivism. Favela states that this breaking down of the original imagery allows easier insight to its symbolic quality, as the viewer looks into and behind

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[69]Emmanuel Ortega, "Mi Tierra: Contemporary Artists Explore Place." *ASAP Journal*, October 12, 2017. https://asapjournal.com/mi-tierra-contemporary-artists-explore-place-denver-art-museum-emmanuel-ortega/

[70]Emmanuel Ortega, "Collapsed Tropics," 48.

it, almost as though looking at its code.[71] Applying Hill's methodology, the fuzz and frill of Favela's colorful paper scapes subverts the universalist demands of modernism. Hill discusses the types of binaries Favela presents as crucial to showing how Indigenous art forms and materials have been categorized and polarized. Hill points out that indigenous versus modern conveniently followed constructions of "savagery (noble or otherwise) versus civilization," legitimizing the devaluation of Indigenous materials and forms.[72] And, Hill continues, "within the logic of modernism, "primitivism" denoted ethnography, not artistry, again sorting tradition and indigeneity out as "charming folk cultures," rather than part of the Western art canon. The fallout was the exclusion of such materials and forms from museums and canons, or in other cases, as Hill points out, the modernity of an artist's work "canceled out their Indigenous heritage," a balancing act Favela seems to manage.[73]

Jessica Horton also asserts that traditional materials coupled with an installation format like Favela's can mitigate the dichotomies of tradition versus modern, describing these as "[utilizations] of hybrid visual languages [to forge] mediated connections to ancestral arts alongside other global influences."[74] In talks and interviews Favela connects the materiality of his pieces to both his roots and his agency as a contemporary artist; many authors detail how this strategy encapsulates the intrinsic value and relegation of traditional materials and art forms. In "The Politics and Ecology of Indigenous Folk Art in Mexico," David Caruthers describes Latin

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[71]Justin Favela, artist talk DesMoines Art Center, DesMoines, Iowa, September 13, 2021.

[72]Hill, "I Am an Artist," 51.

[73]Hill, 52.

[74]Jessica L. Horton, "Inclusivity at Midcentury, " In *Art for a New Understanding: Native Voices, 1950's to Now*, edited by Mindy N. Besaw, Candice Hopkins, and Manuela Well Off Man (Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 34.

American art traditions and artists as "among the world's most diverse, creative, and original, [perpetuating] ancient and mixed-modern expressions of culture and identity," and as having "primordial ties to place, nature, culture, memory."[75] Conversely, Caruthers continues, they are almost entirely absent from scholarship and participation in historic or contemporary definitions of "fine" art, associations Favela puts to work in his expressions of cultural pride juxtaposed with exclusion and erasure.[76] In *Arts and Crafts of Mexico*, Chloe Sayer also points to the cultural mixing and colonial histories embedded in materials and art forms like cut paper designs and papier-mâché sculptures. According to Sayer, many indigenous crafts, such as designs and figures cut from bark paper, evolved in "pre-Conquest history," but were later replaced or altered by Spanish influence, and the trade routes that delivered "exotic merchandise from the Orient," such as different types of paper, or "papel china," as Favela says.[77]

Similarly, Edward J. Sullivan's comprehensive discussion of the language of objects of the Americas tracks the influence of a skewed "European context" used to understand and value objects.[78] Sullivan notes that objects were used, no matter how inadequately, to communicate ideas about "new" lands, related again to the colonial histories Favela investigates.[79] Sullivan outlines how Europeans "coveted objects of wonder," and likewise "scrutinized them from a scientific point of view," paralleling a later discussion of the imperial gaze that so influenced

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[75]David V. Caruthers, "The Politics and Ecology of Indigenous Folk Art in Mexico," *Human Organization* 60, no. 4 (2001): 357.

[76]Caruthers, "The Politics and Ecology of Indigenous Folk Art," 357.

[77]Chloe Sayer, *Arts and Crafts of Mexico*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990), 7.

[78]Edward J. Sullivan, *The Language of Objects in the Art of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xiv.

[79]Sullivan, 263.

views of landscapes and their inhabitants.[80] Objects and materials, Sullivan describes, "served as surrogates for the actualities of their cultural circumstances," and thus the "strange" or "exotic" acted as "proxies for the 'essence' of their land and origin;" stereotypes, as such, were accepted as a basis of understanding.[81]

Sullivan links this cultural simplification and exoticization to later responses by contemporary artists, who, like Favela, turn histories around, often in the purposeful selection and manipulation of objects and materials. Sullivan highlights artist Betsabeé Romero, who, by carving and printing Aztec reliefs from cast off tires "recovers iconography erased by the technology of speed," harnesses the importance of car culture, and touches on socioeconomics by referencing the automobile's role in public transportation, and even its use as storage units or dwellings on the street.[82] Like Favela, Romero's manipulations of materiality offer, according to Sullivan:

> …so much more than easily understood evocations of place or time. [They reject] any allusion to the worn-out clichés of "typical" Mexican culture, replacing them with bolder statements about contemporary life and its complex permutations in an age of globalism, in both its positive and negative senses. Through her tire objects [Romero] actively engages with some of the most salient realities of her own society, employing basic elements of commodity culture to wryly comment on economic adversity, the need for recycling resources, and the fixation upon the automobile as metaphor for both mobility and stability. In her work Romero creates a compelling poetics of banality while simultaneously constructing a paradoxical commentary on the nature of beauty inherent in the prefabricated object.[83]

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[80]Sullivan, 263.

[81]Sullivan, *The Language of Objects*, 263.

[82]Sullivan, 263.

[83]Sullivan, 263.

Sullivan's critique applies to Favela's use of everyday and craft materials, his invocation of objects with particular connotations for the purpose of constructing meaningful paradoxes, and his ability to expose and turn around clichés while making bold statements about the past and present.

Analysis

Favela's work with the colonial histories embedded in Castro's prints, and the artist's somewhat relegated position in the Carter Museum and canons more generally, suggests a postcolonial analysis. Likewise, Favela's hazy collaging of imagery, injection of culturally symbolic and likewise kitschy materials into an institutional space, and the way *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder* challenge canonical metanarratives–both relying on humor and gravity in their delivery–relates these works to postmodern frameworks.

Though these methodologies are commonly applied to contemporary art, this analysis is also mindful of arguments like Dávila's that, "the tendency to position all art within the same European frameworks: modernism, minimalism, pop art, conceptual art, and so on," is problematic.[84] "Modernism itself," she argues, "is European whiteness," and whiteness, "remains the unspoken neutral against which art criticism is taken for granted, mirroring the racial politics that are everywhere marked in the exhibition of Latinx art."[85] Similarly, in Richard William Hill's discussion of Indigenous engagement with modernity, he suggests that many contemporary Native artists have also "struggled too over what postmodernism was, and whether what they were doing could be contained within it."[86] Hill continues, observing that these artists have not

[84]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 57.

[85]Davila, 56-57.

[86]Richard William Hill, "I Am an Artist Who Happens to Be an Indian," In *Art for a New*

just been influenced by postmodern interpretations, they help to "define and actualize" what it can look like."[87] So it is perhaps more fair and productive to think about the new and interesting ways Favela's work might also be redefining critical mindsets and possibilities.

Dávila further asserts that describing work in "formal ways," and in relation to "dominant art tendencies," while ignoring the larger issues guiding the work, is another form of whitewashing.[88] And though Dávila and other authors do discuss Latinx art in terms of colonial fallout and in relation to art hierarchies and movements, she quotes art critic Seph Rodney, who observes that what is needed are critical assessments of "how artists engage with matters of race or difference, or about the history and cultural registers that may inform the work," instead of trying to fit "POC artists into art history terms."[89] Consequently, this analysis attempts to honor these concerns by looking comparatively and more independently at Favela's unique integration of subject matter, history, and materials to form a commentary on institutional equity.

Reframing the Picturesque

The Castro prints Favela selected, *Puente del Atoyac,* and two versions of *Barranca de Metlac*, reflect the varied landscape between Veracruz and Mexico City. These are taken from a larger album, *Album del Ferrocarril Mexicano*, 1877, featuring Castro's illustrations of different sections of the newly completed Mexican railroad line, and accompanying descriptions by

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Understanding: Native Voices, 1950's to Now, edited by Mindy N. Besaw, Candice Hopkins, and Manuela Well Off Man (Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 58.

[87]Hill, "I Am an Artist," 58.

[88]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 147.

[89]Dávila, 57.

Antonio Garcia Cubas. The compendium acted almost as an elaborate pamphlet made to promote travel by rail; the fact that the text is in both Spanish and English speaks to an intended audience outside local parameters. Castro and Cubas' interpretations couple topographic accuracy with sentimental detail to present an idealized, normalizing view of the landscape that fits into picturesque frameworks. The dutiful inclusion of railroad signifiers–trains, track, bridges, and their specifics–gently suggest efforts to surmount and sell the landscape. The use of the picturesque to draw outsiders in is an ironic contradiction to the mitigation of people and culture that went along with it, histories Favela seeks to reconnect with and re-present in a way that asks for closer looking and consideration.

Also utilized in *Puente Nuevo* is the album's title page, *Untitled (Introductory Picture)*, in which the publishing information appears as engraved lettering on a boulder-like outcropping, flanked by oversized flowers and broadleaf plants that tower over traditionally-clad figures posed off to one side. This scene, ushering viewers into the larger compendium of landscapes, fades from a vividly detailed foreground into an expanse of sky and desert; the soft contours of mountains interrupted only by a train and long trestle bridge chugging forward at an angle from a hazy, distant point. Castro's work takes on a picturesque quality via the detailed but affectionately mannered depictions of specific flora thriving in rocky terrain ranging from arid, mountainous panoramas, to cultivated farmland and the tropical outskirts of villages. His inclusion of landmarks like volcanic peaks, the architectural contours of towns and stations, and individualized bridges and tunnels, lends familiarity. Castro shows the countryside, in reality a huge challenge to build a railroad through, as appealing and approachable. Wide rivers flow softly across broad plains, and creeks meander in plunging ravines, but bridges span them, carrying steam-puffing trains and travelers safely above. Railside villages are quaint and inviting,

and Indigenous figures appear as accoutrements to the scenery. Even the waterfall on the title page is happily diverted by the written inscription.

Pratt describes this as a melding of the "detached, bureaucratic, and scientific" with that which is "sensory and dramatic," thus incorporating the artist or author's agency, whether a feeling, or necessary response given Castro's railroad connections, into the landscape representation.[90] Cubas writes passages that show, like Castro's illustrations, a need for accuracy but a desire for intimacy. Here he describes an area near the Atoyac bridge, pictured by Castro and reworked in Favela's collage: "After passing the Atoyac bridge the line describes two curves; the first with a radius of 122 meters and the second of 304, 8 metres, and thus successively passing over others and leaving cuts and earthworks behind, we reach a place called Salsipuedes, remarkable for the density of its woods."

Related to the same stretch, Cubas strays from precise reporting to share more personal insights about a specific river and mountain in the region between Atoyac and Cordoba:

> The Rio Seco takes its rise between the hills of Huilango and the heights of Chiquihuite, sometimes narrowing and again widening at different depths, its banks appearing to be covered with woods and brambles. Trees with their twisted trunks and loaded with beautiful orchideas bend over the depths of the ravine, some of them caressing with their foliage the limpid surface of the stream, which sweeps tranquilly along, opening its way over rocks or leaping over the elevated and natural mountain steps.
>
> Like to an advanced sentinel of the mountain of Chiquihuite, an enormous rock of limestone is seen amidst plants and flowers, which has given its name to the place called Penuela. Groups of palm trees, mango–trees, ceibas and chico–zapotes, the volcano of Citlaltepetl, which appears afar off overlooking the successive eminence of the grand cordillera, and the plantations of sugar cane and the marshes observed near at hand give an amenity to the scene, agreeably animated by a group of 'amatecos'…"[91]

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[90]Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 76.

[91]Antonio García Cubas, *Album Del Ferrocarril Mexicano*, 26.

Who wouldn't want to visit? Castro's images are like visual conversions of Cubas' elaborations, or vice versa, each modeled after the picturesque precedent that reframed landscapes and their inhabitants as not only desirable places to see, but ripe for the taking. As Ortega observes, "the history of colonization depended on a visual culture that reduced the Americas to an exotic, fruitful, and lush land [ready] for domestication."[92]

Matt Johnson traces the roots of the picturesque to "touristic" images first describing important destinations and monuments to the European aristocracy, which later expanded to include visual narrations of travel in the Americas.[93] The classist, prejudiced aspects of the construct were in how it "presupposed a set of touristic interests, including an aesthetic appreciation of landscape scenery, that required a level of cultural education and disposable time and income," implying those assets were unavailable or presumed absent for many, including the Indigenous cultures so impacted by the travel and resulting colonization the images encouraged.[94] Within this ideology, people who did not have the means to travel, or the "right" education and background, were not "qualified" viewers, a supposition Favela seeks to turn on its head through the accessibility of his materials and format. Forms that grew out of the European picturesque, including ethnographic studies to "manage" Indigenous populations, and travel and transportation guides as in Castro's imagery, expanded on the form but adhered to its basic confines.

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[92]Ortega,"Collapsed Tropics," 50.

[93]Matt Johnson, *Narrating the Landscape: Print Culture and American Expansion in the Nineteenth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 277.

[94]Johnson, 277.

Johnson explains how picturesque promotions of transportation, such as "railroad narratives" like Castro's, were particularly powerful in that they evoked an altogether different notion of history, progress, and pecking order.[95] The railroad, Johnson argues, is "a major protagonist in the myth of Manifest Destiny and a powerful symbol of a new era," linked to "expansion, industrialization, and commercial culture [if not] modernity."[96] The machines themselves, Johnson continues, "were formidable examples of modern technology and engineering, and riders were taken up and swept along by them, literally and dramatically 'progressing'," though within the same metaphor individuals and groups could be left behind to experience a "subordination to the order of the machine."[97]

Ortega notes that the artistic conventions used to articulate modernity, and present landscapes and people as under control, suggested "Native Americans' supposed lack of technologies in the management of their own lands; effectively erasing the immemorial relationship Native peoples have had with their ancestral lands."[98] To clarify, in his essay Ortega refers to all Indigenous peoples of the Americas as "Native Americans." Their visual erasure, he continues, was naturalized through conventions like the picturesque, rendering real displacement more acceptable. Both Ortega and Mead describe the hazy reframing of the unfamiliar as an imperial fantasy, or a "mystification," a way of simplifying and controlling it. Mead elaborates, "the picturesque construction [...] mystified capitalist relations with the material environment, and through such mystification, helped to legitimate such relations as they physically

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[95]Johnson, 472.

[96]Johnson, 472.

[97]Johnson, *Narrating the Landscape*, 490.

[98]Ortega, "Collapsed Tropics," 50.

transformed the western landscape."[99] Mead continues by identifying the visual transformation and simplification of landscape and people as a means for "dominant powers [to] manipulate the land, and the social relations embedded within the material landscape," simultaneously naturalizing "the way in which people think and act inside the environment," even if that meant violence or exploitation.[100]

It is in these frameworks that Ortega defines the Mexican picturesque calling it the "product of European imperialism," and one that "aesthetically and ideologically situated Native Americans in the middle ground, at a distant point between explorer and the landscape explored," echoing Favela and Dávila's observations around the postcolonial positioning of Latino artists and people in metaphorical and more concrete landscapes in the viewer's sight lines, yet somehow diminished or overlooked. Ortega argues it is this gaze, achieved through the visual tools that "permit" the creation of "neocolonial fantasies" that have allowed viewers to shape what is seen or unseen in the landscape–advantageous for some, and obliterating for others. Similarly, and more currently, Dávila refers to this gaze as a "narrowing of the look," in which the viewer is complicit in furthering a particular aesthetic grounded in whiteness.[101] This is the gaze Favela seeks to disrupt and reverse.

In many ways, Castro is both an obliged and willing participant in the picturesque, as the devaluing of Indigenous art forms and preference for European models went hand in hand with the displacement of colonization. Castro and other Mexican artists in the second half of the nineteenth emulated European artists, like Daniel Thomas Egerton, Frederick Catherwood, and

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[99]Mead, "Framing Manifest Destiny," 50.

[100]Mead, 34.

[101]Dávila, Latinx Art, 15.

Alexander von Humboldt, who traveled through Latin America illustrating the land, people, and monuments.[102] These artists "foregrounded the sublime power of mountains and ruins;" views of volcanoes and Mexico City beckoned to outside viewers, and were sources of pride and identity for Mexican artists.[103] Castro himself may have studied with an Italian painter at an academy, and made lithographs based on Mexico City that were later sent as both a gift, and sort of guidebook, to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian.[104]

Oles notes that Castro's illustrations, enhanced by the use of binoculars and photographs for accuracy, "shaped a vision of Mexico for ever-wider audiences at home and abroad both by what was included and what was left out," such as images of the concurrent French invasion that were specially included for the Emperor.[105] And Ortega describes the *sentimentalismo* of picturesque images as a way to negotiate complex binaries related to the meeting of Indigenous and European cultures that continues even now.[106] Without emulating European conventions, Castro could not expect to be taken seriously, and by ascribing to them, he participated in the conventions Ortega argues have been used to "control *place* in order to suspend Native peoples in *space*," allowing the figures who traveled through, settled in, and "[occupied] *time*," to maintain domination over "political, artistic, and scientific discourses." Dávila similarly quotes George Lipstiz's assessment of the continuation of such constructs, observing that they provide "resources, power, and opportunity to those who have historically benefited" from them, so that

[102]Oles, *Art and Architecture in Mexico*," 181.

[103]Oles, 181.

[104]Oles, 181-182.

[105]Oles, 182.

[106]Ortega, "The Mexican Picturesque," 138

contemporary Latinx artists face the choice of fitting into these frameworks or challenging them, at the risk of being excluded, overlooked, or labeled almost either way, as Dávila sees institutional space as the province of neocolonialism.[107]

If the picturesque construct is symbolic of normalizing delineations and subjugation, Favela's reworking of it is a gentle but determined dismantling of those traits, and an assertion of. It is not Favela's intention to capture the "bureaucratic detail" of Castro's lithographs. Rather, the "fluffiness," pixelation, and color-right-out-of-the-bag qualities of his version are what interrupt the picturesque narrative.

Encapsulated in the materiality and visual qualities are both stereotypes, and snippets of Favela's vibrant identity. The way Favela's work "beckons" with "ordinariness" but simultaneously reveals distance through unfamiliarity, is a destabilizing tactic that makes every viewer a "marked subject," so that "anyone who is paying attention can experience something intimate, yet remain a stranger."[108] This kind of dynamic positioning of the viewer as a democratizing element flies in the face of the mainstreaming of space and place as "[white, male, literate, propertied, and heterosexual]," additional constructs with which Favela deliberately engages and subverts through his alternately pleasurable and assertive style.[109]

Exercises in Relandscaping

Leaning into the idea of museums and galleries as inscribed spaces, Favela's covering the white walls of the corridor at the Carter Museum first with brown paper, then overlaying it with a

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[107]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 3.

[108]Kwon, "The Becoming of a Work of Art," 286.

[109]Kwon, 282-284.

bright tissue paper collage of abstracted Castro imagery, transformed and reinscribed the space by uniquely inserting signifiers of his heritage, identity, and his awareness of history and its implications. Within the frameworks of Casid's arguments around reshaping colonized spaces as subversive acts, Favela's re-presentation of Castro's work, deconstruction of the picturesque, and modification of the gallery, may be thought of as an exercise in "relandscaping" content, physical space, and embedded ideologies.

To clarify, Casid discusses "relandscaping" as the action of colonizers moving into and altering landscapes, and identifies responses to it in the covertly countercolonial potential of slave gardens in the Caribbean in the 18th and 19th centuries. The argument presented here concerning Favela's installation piece does not use the term "relandscaping" to reference the colonizer, but rather looks at "re-landscaping" as a tool to challenge the hierarchical ordering of institutional space, and the "neocolonial" realities of museums and canons Dávila describes. Likewise, this is not to suggest in any way a direct comparison between Favela's artwork and Casid's context. Rather, this discussion borrows from Casid's more general argument that physical and visual revisions are forms of resistance in altered spaces that may privilege some at the relegation of others, so that Favela's actions in this space, where Latino artists and viewers have had less representation until recently, performs as such.

Like many authors cited previously, Casid discusses the colonial alteration of landscapes as both a visual and physical means of rendering people and places more familiar and controllable. She views the insertion of colonial signifiers into "foreign" places as attempts at an integration that could ease understanding and normalize behavior–dominating, subjugating–in these landscapes. Casid describes such imposed interactions as efforts in "commixing" and

hybridization that externally seem aimed at harmony and balance, but again have been used to legitimize power imbalances:

> The instruments of colonial landscaping were not limited to the plow, the hoe, the mill, and the sugar refinery. Print and their artifacts–natural histories, topographical maps, drafts of plantation terrain, botanical illustrations, scenic landscape views–worked to produce imperial power as colonial landscaping and were in turn critical instruments in the conversion of the colonial landscape machine into a vision of picturesque intermixture. [...] Colonial intermixing and imperial picturesque worked together to make a visual argument for rightful possession of land in actuality worked by slave labor.[110]

Again, a direct comparison is not proposed here, but the passage is eerily reminiscent of Favela's observations about the prominence of Las Vegas facades, and the unseen labor behind them. The discussion also relates to Favela's comments about mainstreaming and appropriating Mexican culture–"culture reduced to decoration," in his Party City example, or "industrialized" versions of Latinidad, like the Doritos Locos Taco at Taco Bell (which he admits are part of his ongoing documentation to eat and offer commentary on tacos wherever he encounters them).[111] These stereotypes afford consumption and enjoyment, but also oversimplify culture to make it "easier," and assert incomplete forms of understanding and dubious ownership of it. Casid explains the grafting of European elements onto the "lush" and "exotic" as an effort to render them more cohesive and manageable, desirable outcomes she also extends to the effects such actions were meant to have on colonized people.[112] She further describes these as efforts to 'compose an embroidery' of unrivaled color–a fabric of the familiar, cut against the grain by the unfamiliar, but ultimately to be taken at face value as "local color."[113]

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[110]Casid, *Sowing Empire*, 14.

[111]Favela, Des Moines Art Center Talk.

[112]Casid, *Sowing Empire*, 10.

[113]Casid, 10-11.

Here are the stereotypes and "grafts" that Favela uses to challenge taking his work at "face value," as a presupposed notion of "Latino" color, texture, and materials familiarized through appropriation, yet firmly attached to the idea, and displacement, of "other." On the other hand, his simultaneous awareness and participation in these contradictions are woven into his work and identity as well, and are a huge part of what makes it funny, approachable, provocative, and insightful.

Casid relatedly discusses visual reordering using terms like "dream work[s]" and "utopian fantasies," indicative of their housing perfected familiarities as well as underlying anxieties about the unknown and potentially resistant.[114] These echo Ortega's comment that Favela's "heterotopic paper collage" compresses "500 years of fantasies in which land and its fruits center the 'civilized' spirit of Europeans, the incivility of Natives, the erasure of local epistemologies, and above all, the articulation of an American empire."[115] Favela's fantasized version of imperial dream works and fantasies is what in turn "collapses" them, exposing the underlying realities and conditions, though by outward appearances Favela's surfaces cover and conceal.

It is into the gaps of useful discomfort that Favela inserts his revision of the "mixed vision" Casid describes, a strategy she also argues has already proven to have "menaced colonial authority from within its own representational system."[116] Within Casid's frameworks, Favela's hazy, fluttering reimaginings act as decentering exoticizations of the exoticized that question what is seen and unseen, and unfocuses the viewer's gaze to recalibrate it. In this way, Casid

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[114]Casid, 192.

[115]Ortega, "Collapsed Tropics," 50.

[116]Casid, *Sowing Empire*. 192.

concludes, that which is meant to "signify internal difference turns out to be the common ground and contested terrain."[117] Who belongs in this space or doesn't, Favela's pieces ask, and why?

In the short film, "The Making of *Puente Nuevo*," Favela's process of transforming Castro's pieces and the museum space are documented, revealing different aspects and sources of power in his work. The walls are lined with paper, and Favela's drawings of collaged sections of the chromolithographs are projected onto them, then marked out in elliptical shapes with a black sharpie, and labeled by color in a paint-by-number fashion (fig. #8-#9). Favela shares narrative details, such as the use of over 40 colors in this particular work, how the paper is cut into fringes along one edge, and the way the image is built from the base up, like "brick work," he says (fig. #10).[118]

Favela and many volunteers glue layers and sections into place over a two-week period, and though the installation format itself, recontextualization concept, and quirky use of everyday materials are contemporary in nature, the communal, hands-on nature of the work, labor and meticulousness involved, purposefully reference many aspects of Favela's Mexican and Guatemalan heritage (fig. #11). The result of their efforts was an amazing transfiguration of this space, immersive, fun, contemplative, inspiring–an inclusive revision of the picturesque and sublime landscapes.

Watching this is reminiscent of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein's superficially laissez-faire approach, the kitschy qualities of their work, and seemingly "easy" readings that bely the underlying complexity of the concept and processes behind them. Lichtenstein pinpointed the important tension between the overtly "object-directed" qualities of his work,

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[117]Casid, 192.

[118]Favela, in "The Making of *Puente Nuevo*."

presenting as simple industrial enlargements, and the actual "ground-directed" nature of it, found in the deliberate nature of his applications and insight.[119] Lichtenstein described the humor and meaning made by creating anything predictable like a sign, billboard, or eyebrow–the larger commentary in opposition to the mundanity of the images themselves.

This observation relates well to Favela's invocation of something "obvious" like the piñata, and the shortsightedness of attending only to the surface of his pieces, or searching for concrete images. And Favela reports that his early worries about making "identity" pieces has been supplanted by wanting to "tell stories, share my experience, make art about my family, my upbringing."[120] He continues, saying, "A lot of people find my work too easy, accessible," but, he asks, "What's the point of making art for the art world? Is that interesting? Who's that for?"[121] He says it is:

> Really gratifying to see people looking at my work, and taking selfies in front of it–just to see people smiling when they walk into a museum, or laughing even, or wanting to touch the piece because they don't understand what it is, because usually people are used to seeing oil paintings or metal sculptures. It has a special meaning to me because now at this museum, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, there's three Mexican artists on display: Gabriel Dawe, Casimiro Castro, and myself. Which I think is really cool, really powerful.[122]

And while accessibility may draw people in, a combination of much more complex strategies are at work in Favela's pieces, as can be observed by looking comparatively at criticism and examples.

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[119]Roy Lichtenstein, 1963 interview with G.R. Swenson.

[120]Favela, in "The Making of *Puente Nuevo*."

[121]Favela, in "The Making of *Puente Nuevo*."

[122]Favela, in "The Making of *Puente Nuevo*."

Dávila's commentary about artists like Carmen Argote and Judy Baca parallel Favela's work in many ways. Argote grapples similarly with matters of identity, class, and accessibility in her work, and Dávila sees in the gravity of the everyday materials the artist uses, both a referencing and parody of canonical movements like Pop Art.[123] Argote's *720 sq. ft. Household Mutations* installation is composed of blocks of reconfigured, partially painted blocks of carpet from the cramped apartment her migrant family shared for 20 years. At first glance, the Minimalist appearance of the installation's forms–white rectangular shapes edged with dark marbled patterns, the actual carpet stains forming a part of the 'painting'–seem commonplace in the gallery set in a recently gentrified neighborhood, Dávila notes.[124] On closer inspection, the reality of what the materials are, and the family history they speak to–economic instability, an uncomfortable living environment, the layout of a larger space cut into individual "apartments"–is at first unrecognizable, and then laid bare.[125] In another piece, *Pyramid*, Argote embellishes chain link fencing with pine needles to form a commentary around unequal access to the spaces of leisure, and the time and means to utilize them.

As in Favela's pieces, Dávila asserts that Argote's are not simply about landscape, but the economy and accessibility of landscapes, and about borders and demarcations of space, which extend to real, invisible, and hierarchical embodiments of these.[126] There is a great photo of a viewer standing in front of another of Favela's installations, *Mi Tierra*, who seems simultaneously overwhelmed and contemplative, free to move and look, but also boxed in by the

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[123]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 32.

[124]Dávila, 32.

[125]Dávila, 32.

[126]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 33.

colorful, fluffy solidity of Favela's form. Again, the monumentality and provocative qualities of Favela and Argote's installations seem to get about as close to postmodern guttings of Minimalism or the picturesque as an artist might hope to. Like Argote, Favela's work appears to participate in the metanarratives of movements and canons while questioning and subverting them.

Dávila highlights the superficial kitsch and familiarity of Judy Baca's *The Pancho Trinity* (1993), and the darkness of its underlying narrative. Referencing critical commentary around this work, Dávila also underscores the lack of Latinx curators and critics to offer "greater texture and better analysis" of Latinx artists and art.[127] She points to Maximilíano Durón, noting his "long overdue and unprecedented write ups" on artists like Baca.[128] In his 2017 of an exhibition including Baca's work, Durón describes three Styrofoam sculptures that comprise *The Pancho Trinity*, as "stereotyped dozing Mexican men ("panchos" in the lingo of the art-for-tourists trade) painted with scenes–a graveyard, a chain-link fence–depicting the perils faced by Mexican migrants."[129] Durón also includes an exhibition description explaining how Baca's piece "reinvents the iconic kitschy image of the 'sleeping Mexican' to comment on the struggle of immigrant groups."[130] By engaging directly with the tropes, Baca and Favela turn them around to, as Casid suggested, menace them from within.

Favela similarly utilizes the form of the piñata, and the format of a mural, which both he and Baca note has traditionally been the space given to Latinos to make art. As the conveyances

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[127]Dávila, 56.

[128]Dávila, 56.

[129]Maximilíano Durón, "Concrete History: Chicana Muralist Judith F. Baca Goes from the Great Wall to the Museum Wall." *ARTnews*, April 19, 2017.

[130]Durón, "Concrete History."

of his narratives, the familiarity of these forms turn around to challenge what the viewer sees and knows, if derived solely from surface qualities and stereotypes. Dávila also rejects the categorization of Favela or other artists' materials as strictly "ethnic," citing work by Lucia Hierra whose "oversized pop art assemblage sculptures of shopping bags filled with the grocery items that Latinxs grow up consuming, such as plantain chips, malta bottles, and other Goya staples," make use of these prosaic items just as legitimately as "Warhol or any other white artists used in their pop art."[131] Dávila quotes Hierro, who asks, "Why is it that when Latinx artists draw from their lived experiences, they are seen as 'ethnic'?"[132]

Dávila sums up how this question joins larger demands "to see and valorize Latinx art as *American* art," reinforcing similar statements made by Favela.[133] Dávila continues, observing: "These artists are resourceful and resilient. They are experimenting and eschewing formal guidelines for what makes up a 'professional artist' artist. Their works engage with topics as varied as their inner feelings and their everyday lives and proudly express and validate new narratives. They shout: we're here and our voice matters–we are doing art history."[134] Dávila's insights tie into some final comparative analyses connected to commentary around how Native artists have worked within and outside methodological frameworks and canons, and the strategies employed to make their voices heard.

In his essay, "I Am an Artist Who Happens to Be an Indian," Richard William Hill states that Indigenous artists should not be thought of as just "influenced by postmodernism," but as

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[131]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 47.

[132]Dávila, 47.

[133]Dávila, 47.

[134]Dávila, 47.

thinkers who "define and actualize what postmodernism" can, and perhaps should, be. In a statement about contemporary Native artists, who Favela and Dávila state have faced similar challenges to their Latinx contemporaries, Hill observes, "in their efforts to challenge, decenter, and difference the canon; in their critique of institutions and institutional power relations; in their critical analysis of the simulations of colonial discourse," the space of postmodernist art is expanded and deepened–an assessment that seems to apply to Favela's work as well.[135]

Frequently referenced for "troubling" colonial frameworks, and challenging relegation, stereotypes, and erasure, is Swampy Cree and English/Irish artist Kent Monkman.[136] Like Favela, Monkman interferes with the narratives of historic landscape works and traditions, and engages in performative actions, and similarly uses "hyper-stereotyped signifiers" to "enunciate his presence."[137] As noted by Morris and Morris, "presence always signals a disruption in the narrative fabric of settler colonialism," which both Monkman and Favela use to form critiques that are both rooted in the past but extend to the present.

Monkman's "drag queen alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle," appears in public performances and as a figure in meticulous works that suggest grand nineteenth century landscape paintings in the style of the sublime and picturesque.[138] In one performance, *Taxonomy of a European Male*, (2005), she sits "aside a horse, wearing a large 'Indian' headdress and a fringed loincloth with a spirit catcher hanging on her naked chest. These signifiers are countered by shiny white platform heels and arrows in a quiver decorated with colored Louis Vuitton

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[135]Hill, "I Am an Artist Who Happens to Be an Indian," 58.

[136]Jones, "Indigenous Bodies," 85.

[137]Jones, 84.

[138]Besaw, "*History is Painted by the Victors*," 158.

logos."[139] In Monkman's recontextualization of Albert Bierstadt's *Mount Corcoran* (1876-77), he injects Miss Chief, wearing "thigh-high neon pink platform boots," and naked members of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry into the formerly figureless, expansive space.[140] Through his mastery of the form, Monkman "problematizes the assumptions of Manifest Destiny and other ideologies embedded in the original."[141] By "scrambling and reversing roles," in these works, "traditionally dominant white culture has become the passive object of the gaze."[142] Monkman, like Favela, notes that the use of humor lightens "very dark subject matter," and the turning around of stereotypes as corrections to misrepresentations.[143]

Favela and Monkman's reproductions of nineteenth century paintings "erode the authority of the originals," through "ironic structural inversion[s]," and humorous parodies and subversions of tropes, like a Native drag queen painting naked cavalry men, or a mural "painted" with a piñata, or the triangular shapes of a mobile reimagined as nacho chips.[144]

The Museum Landscape

Favela's work is often contextualized through the space where it occurs, expressed through the artist's choice of subject matter, and the forms his pieces consequently take. His transformation of the corridor gallery at the Carter Museum in 2019 coincided with the museum's reopening, following physical renovations as well as ongoing efforts to reshape

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[139]Jones, Jones, "Indigenous Bodies," 85.

[140]Besaw, 158.

[141]Besaw, 158.

[142]Besaw, 158.

[143]Morris and Morris, "Camping Out with Miss Chief," 266.

[144]Morris and Morris, 270.

collections, featured works and artists, and viewership. The *Puente Nuevo* installation complemented, but also highlighted the need for, the museum's own project to expand the meaning of being a museum of "American art." The Carter Museum's past and evolving character consequently provides an important reference point for looking at Favela's work in this space. Some background information about the museum sets the stage for thinking about the purposeful choices Favela made during the process of making *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder*, and the way these pieces functioned at this site as temporary and more lasting modifiers of place and perspective.

Founded in 1961 as the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, the museum's original collection was anchored in paintings and sculptures by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, nineteenth century American artists well-known for their romanticized depictions of the American West. Bequeathed by the museum's namesake, Amon G. Carter, these pieces have an underlying connection to the wealthy, white, Texas businessman, known primarily as president and publisher of a Fort Worth newspaper, an airline and radio mogul, and later in life as an art collector. The Carter Museum's stated mission was to make these works available "for the benefit of the public and to aid in the promotion of cultural spirit in the city of Fort Worth and vicinity, to stimulate the artistic imagination among young people residing there."[145]

Though an admirable undertaking, there was initially not much diversity in the artwork or artists represented at the museum, and the heterogeneity of visitors early on is perhaps equally debatable, though specific statistics and details about this were not available. The original collection of Remington and Russell's cowboys, "Indians," gunfighters, and western landscapes, beloved by many as positive symbols of the "blood, sweat, and tears shed in the [settling of the]

[145]"Our Story: The Vision of Amon G. Carter."

frontier of the West," may also be read as images of "conquest and expansion," opposing viewpoints that can turn the museum space into a political battleground.[146]

For the Carter Museum, it proved difficult to separate "American" from more negative connotations of "Western," so in 2010 the museum dropped the "of Western Art" portion of its title, and rededicated itself to attracting a wider spectrum of artists and visitors, and taking a more inclusive approach to collecting and representing American art.[147] As part of its "enhancement project," the museum closed for renovations in 2018, involving physical changes mirroring ideological shifts that Favela encountered when he arrived to create his installation pieces. New galleries and updated older spaces, and the corridor linking them that Favela would eventually work in, could accommodate a wider variety of exhibitions, projects, and other public activities.

There were also significant changes to the organization of the museum's collections. "The hang," as related by Brett Abbott, Director of Collections and Exhibitions, was reconfigured to be more "elegant, dynamic, and thought provoking," to "sing" in ways "it has never done before."[148] Curator Gerald McMaster echoes the advantages of this strategy, observing that displaying works that "sit outside the narrative" in non-linear configurations shakes up viewing and perception, although it could be argued that defining works as "outside the narrative" could

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[146]Nathalie Massip, "Staging the American West: 'The West as America': National Museum of American Art, March-July 1991," *South Atlantic Review* 76, no. 2 (2011): 8.

[147]"Our Story: The Vision of Amon G. Carter."

[148]Press release, "The Amon Carter Museum of American Art Debuts Renovated Galleries and a Reimagined Collection Installation," September 5, 2019, cartermuseum.org

be problematic it terms of setting up binaries between what is "normal," or acceptable, and what is outside those parameters.[149]

Favela was among a number of artists invited to be a part of the museum's reopening, in part an acknowledgement of the "unequal terrains" of collections, space, and stakeholders, and efforts to make these more inviting and equitable.[150] Dávila views such actions as positive steps toward diversification, opening up opportunities and space for projects like Favela's. When visiting the Carter Museum to do preparatory work and create the installation, Favela describes walking through the different spaces, visiting the archives, and looking through what seemed like the museum's entire collection.[151]

When he came across Castro's series of prints in storage, he thought, "This is it!"[152] The picturesque images and their embedded ideologies, and the fact they were created by a relatively unknown Mexican artist tucked away in storage, made them ripe for reflection and revamping. Moving through the main galleries in the museum, Favela spotted Calder's *Untitled*, and relates, "The moment I saw it, it was a bunch of triangles, and I, I just started laughing, and I said, 'This looks like a bunch of nachos hanging from the ceiling. I need to recreate a Calder as nachos!"[153] The resulting *Nacho Calder* sculpture was part of Favela's regular program of making over objects from "the great white" canon, and another form of flexing presence in hierarchies and

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[149]McMaster, "Art History Through the Lens of the Present?," 220.

[150]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 45.

[151]Justin Favela, in *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, directed by Erik Clapp (Fort Worth Texas: EC Films, 2019), documentary.

[152]Favela, in *The Making of Puente Nuevo*.

[153]Justin Favela, in *The Making of Puente Nuevo*.

disrupting the "normal" flow in the museum space. While all of the installation activities around *Puente Nuevo* were in motion, Favela set about recreating a piece in the Carter Museum's permanent collection.

He formed tortilla chips out of cardboard, decoupaging them with tan tissue paper, and adding shreds of tissue paper cheese, lettuce, and chunks of painted cardboard tomato and jalapeños. He originally attempted to balance the suspended pieces on black clothes hanger wire, but this proved too flexible, and was later replaced with something more rigid. It was a harder balancing act than he originally thought (fig. #12).

Nacho Calder became another aspect of the wry but incisive critique that was happening–who and what usually get included in such spaces. Calder's background as a white artist born to a family of successful artists in Philadelphia, and the museum's determined search for and showcasing of the piece with particular lighting and location, echo many aspects of this paper's discussion and analysis, and the major impetus behind Favela's work–to highlight institutional imbalances, and do his part to offset them.

In a short video about the Calder piece, Amon Carter's daughter, Ruth Carter Stevenson, one of the driving forces behind the museum from its beginning, says, "It was so obvious we did not have a major Calder."[154] Her description of acquiring the piece, and its special place near Stuart Davis' *Bass Rocks no. 2*, 1939, communicate a great fondness and appreciation for it, but also treat it as somewhat of a status symbol, or necessary completion to the collection–a box to be checked off, which also begs a question Favela might ask: how many other boxes weren't?

Carter discusses the proximity of *Untitled* to *Bass Rocks no. 2*, noting that the two pieces "seem to be having a conversation," highlighting again the particular presence of some in the

[154]Ruth Carter Stevenson, in "Masterpiece Memories with Ruth Carter Stevenson: Alexander Calder," 2006, produced by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

conversation, and those who haven't been part of it as much. Looking at photos of the *Puente Nuevo* installation, *Nacho Calder* is seen in the background, hanging somewhat ironically at the end of the corridor next to the idealized form of Augustus Saint-Gaudens' idealized female form *Diana,* 1894 (fig. #13-#14).

In some ways, the base sources for *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder* represent opposite ends of a spectrum, and different ways of coming at an "unequal terrain" needing to be acknowledged and leveled. Calder is a well-known, white, male American artist who has several pieces on display at this museum of American art. Castro is a Mexican artist whose work is not well known generally, and whose works in the Carter Museum are more difficult to access. The prominence of Calder in what Dávila describes as a "mostly white canon institutional art history," is a terrain Favela likes to tear up generally, whether in or outside a particular context.

The difference in location and accessibility of Castro's prints compared to Calder's mobile and other works paints a subtle picture of status in the museum landscape, and plays into the power of Favela's choice to feature Castro's imagery as the main focus of his installation mural. Likewise, the humorous recasting of Calder's piece as tortilla chips spoofs the prestige of the original, and addresses another part of the space–hanging in viewers' line of sight–complementing and contrasting with both Favela's wall work and the other more conventional pieces in the area.

In terms of accessibility and visibility, Lauren Cannon, Head of Research Library at the Carter Museum, explains that Castro's prints can be accessed in these ways:

> The Carter's Casimiro Castro holdings can be viewed online. If you're ever interested in viewing these works in-person, they can be requested for viewing in the Study Room. We could also pull any library materials, but specifically pull rare books and folio for viewing in-person. The Carter's Archives host fellowship opportunities for researchers utilizing the Carter's collections. Although they're closed for

22-23, I wanted to mention them.[155]

Though it is possible to view Castro's work, it is probably not done by many casual viewers, so his work remains relatively hidden for most. Perhaps more telling is the description of another curator, who states: "Castro is a bit of an outlier for us. We primarily have his work because of our interest in transcontinental travel but otherwise he is outside of our scope — we are a museum of US art/artists."[156]

Here, Castro's relative obscurity seems normalized by categorizing him as "outside" a specific "scope," and one that is perhaps valued more than others, though this is not explicitly stated. The emphasized connection between "American" and "U.S." also appears to legitimize Castro's relegation, and these are the types of allusions Favela likes to draw attention to in his work. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto also argues that it is crucial to attend to such discrepancies in order to build a "more expansive narrative of American art."[157] According to Ybarra-Frausto, it is important to recognize "so-called outsider artists," and "regional figures" as keys to contextualizing historic and contemporary art.[158] And as Favela asserts, "The idea of America is so U.S.-centric. America–the word means *all* of America, North, Central, and South America. So to have a Mexican artist on display means institutional inclusion, and acknowledging our history here in Texas.[159] As a side note, some of the original route of the Mexican railway line illustrated

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[155]Lauren Cannon, email message to author, October 3, 2022.

[156]Jonathan Frembling, email message to author, September 14, 2022.

[157]Tomás Ybarra Frausto, "Imagining a More Expansive Narrative of American Art," *American Art* 19, no. 3 (2005): 9.

[158]Frausto, 9.

[159]Justin Favela, in *The Making of Puente Nuevo*.

in Castro's prints reached one of its terminal points at the border crossing between Piedras Negras, Mexico, and Eagle Pass, Texas, a few hours drive from the Carter Museum.

Favela's enlarged revision of Castro's work, though abstracted, brings this artist out of the archives and into the public eye and conversation, altering physical space and art historical trajectories. His parody of a Western work, *Nacho Calder* hanging nearby, likewise called attention to more mainstream focal points in the museum, like Calder's mobile, while redirecting viewers' gazes to something different and compelling. Favela's bright, textural disruption of the "normal" landscape of the museum says, "*We* are here," as suggested by Zavala's quote about assertions of Latinx identity: "We are here, and The two pieces can be seen as working with the Carter Museum's dedication to greater diversity, but also highlighting and exploiting to a degree the dominance of the original collection, and drawing attention to the position of works, artists, and viewers relative to it.

As Dávila asserts, the tasks of reworking canons and altering institutional spaces are "daunting" ones.[160] Ybarra-Frausto argues similarly, that the terrain of archives, canons, and museum spaces, should be leveled and broadened.[161] Works like Favela's that disrupt expectations can be viewed as "politically charged interventions," exactly the role Favela wants to play.[162] McMaster similarly describes how mixing up pieces from different artists and time periods, adding new pieces, and bringing pieces out for reviewing, as in Favela's installation, reinvigorates both the works and the museum space. New intersections between pieces lend a

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[160]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 49.

[161]Frausto, "Imagining a More Expansive Narrative," 9-11.

[162]Dávila, *Latinx Art*, 49.

freshness and "novelty" that disrupt linear interpretations of history, and reframe power relationships.[163]

Novel to a degree in any space, *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder*, through their unique material and physical presences, are complex signifiers of identity, and the "difference" of experiencing them in this space also marks previous absence. The positioning or juxtaposition of *Puente Nuevo* and *Nacho Calder* with more mainstream Western works in the collection, echoes McMaster's argument.

Conclusion

Favela's tactics for pushing back against institutionalized canons and spaces, and changing the landscapes of inclusion and access for Latinos and others, can only be seen as steps in a positive direction. Frausto argues that "laying the ground" for understanding the "dimensions, depth, and historical trajectory" of Latin American art informs our understanding of American art, for "that is what American art is all about, [...] all these stories calling and responding to each other.[164] The complex stories Favela weaves into his colorful layers–a sense of his Latinx identity and heritage communicated through materials and form, representations of Castro's past and present, and the context of the museum space itself–seem to function in the ways Frausto suggests, interacting with other works and calling to viewers to expand possibilities and deepen understanding.

[163]McMaster, 220.

[164]Frausto, 11.

Figures

Figure 1. Justin Favela, *Puente Nuevo*, tissue paper and glue, 2019, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 2. Justin Favela, *Puente Nuevo* (detail), tissue paper and glue, 2019, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 3. Casimiro Castro, *Untitled (Introductory Picture)*, 9 7/16 x 13 15/16 in., 1877, chromolithograph, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 4. Casimiro Castro, *Puente del Atoyac*, 9 3/8 x 13 13/16 in., 1877, chromolithograph, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 5. Casimiro Castro, *Barranca de Metlac*, 9 3/8 x 13 15/16 in., 1877, chromolithograph, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 6. Justin Favela, *Nacho Calder*, cardboard, tissue paper, glue, and paint, 2019, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Figure 7. Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, painted aluminum sheet, steel sheet, and steel wire, ca. 1942, Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

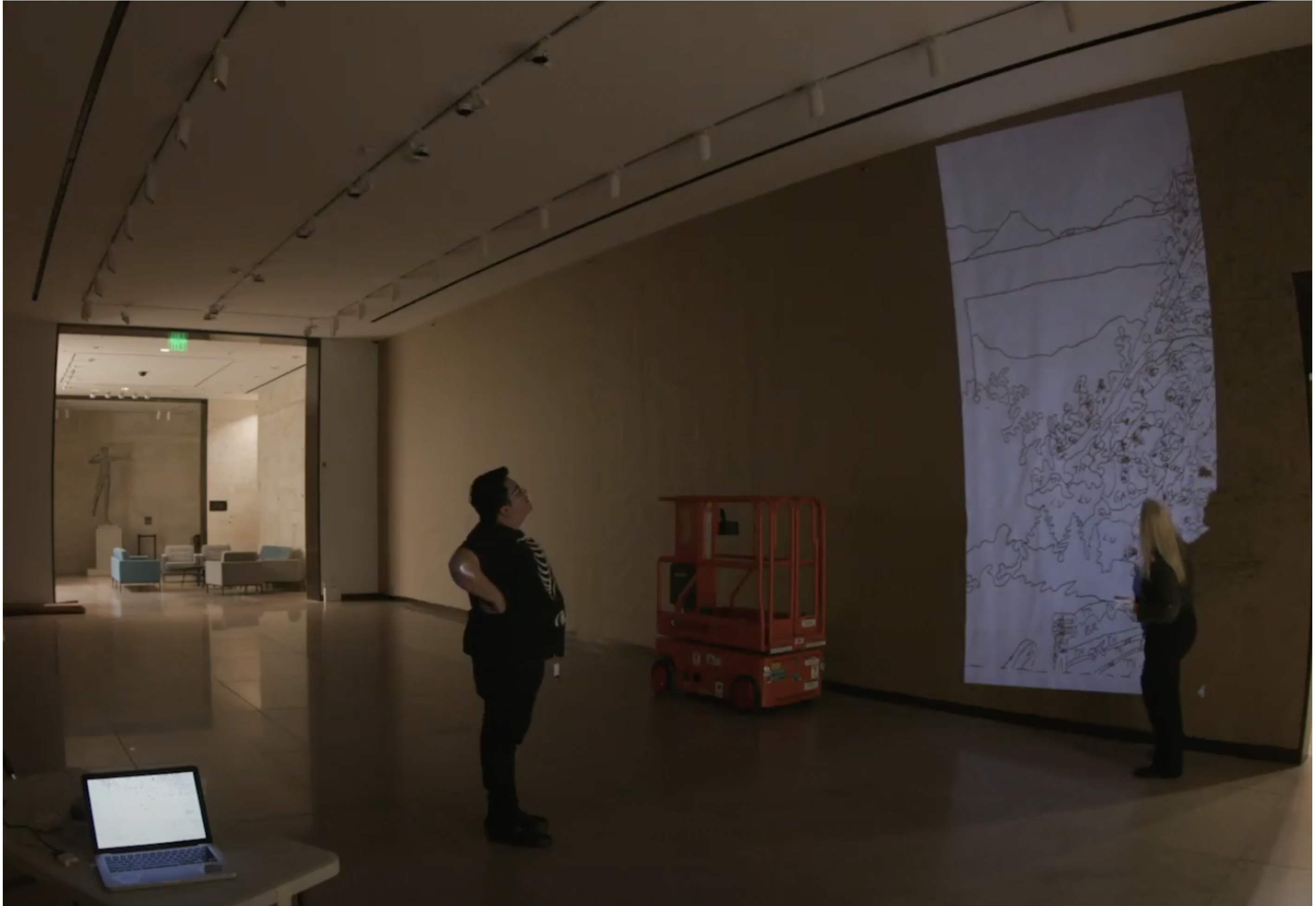

Figure 8. Process photo of the collaging/transfer process, from the short film *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, 2019.

Figure 9. Process photo showing the paper covered wall, pattern layout, and beginning of installation process, from the short film *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, 2019.

Figure 10. Process photo showing Justin Favela gluing tissue paper from the ground up to form the collaged revision of Casimiro Castro’s chromolithographs.

Figure 11. Process photo of the nearly completed mural, from the short film *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, 2019.

Figure 12. Process photo of the construction of *Nacho Calder*, from the short film *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, 2019.

Figure 13. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Diana*, bronze, gilt, 1892-93, cast 1928, The Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

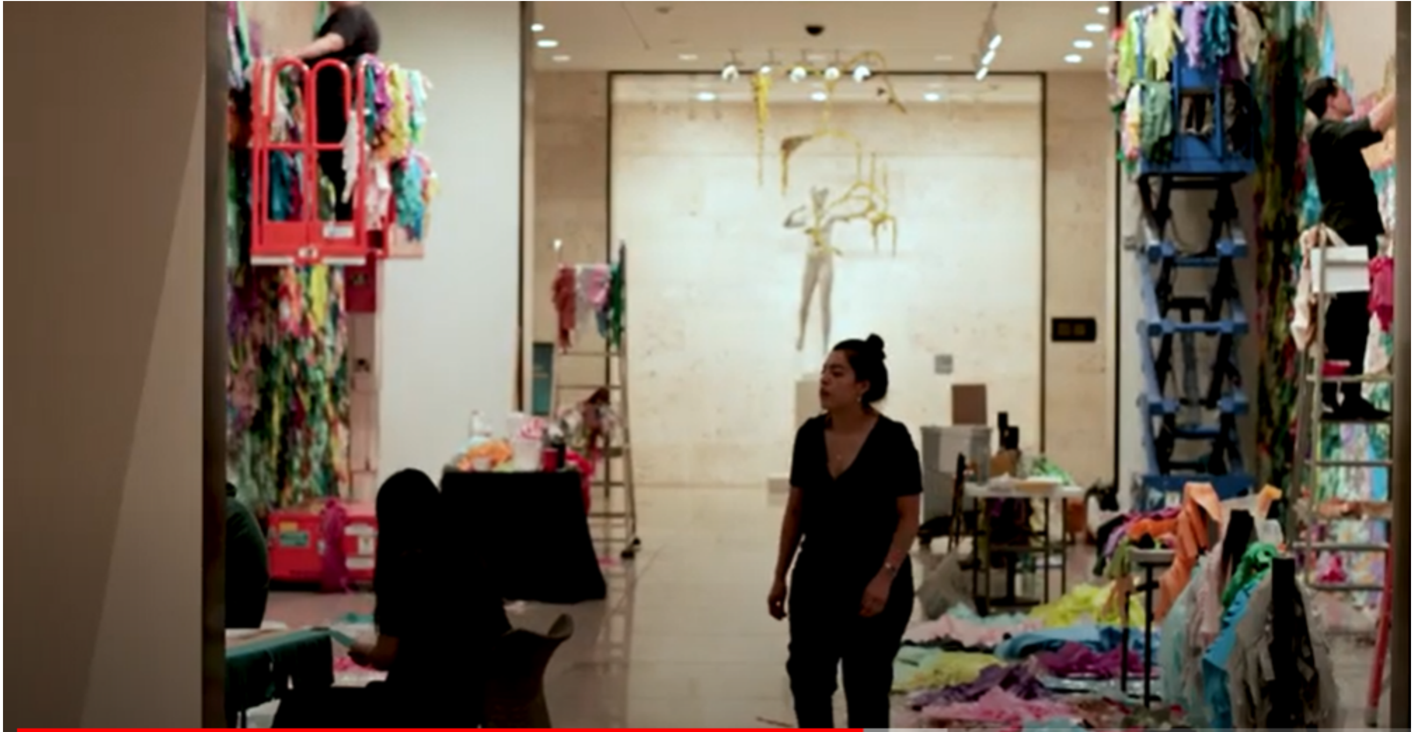

Figure 14. Process photo showing *Nacho Calder* in relation to the *Puente Nuevo* mural and the *Diana* statue, from the short film *The Making of Puente Nuevo*, 2019.

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