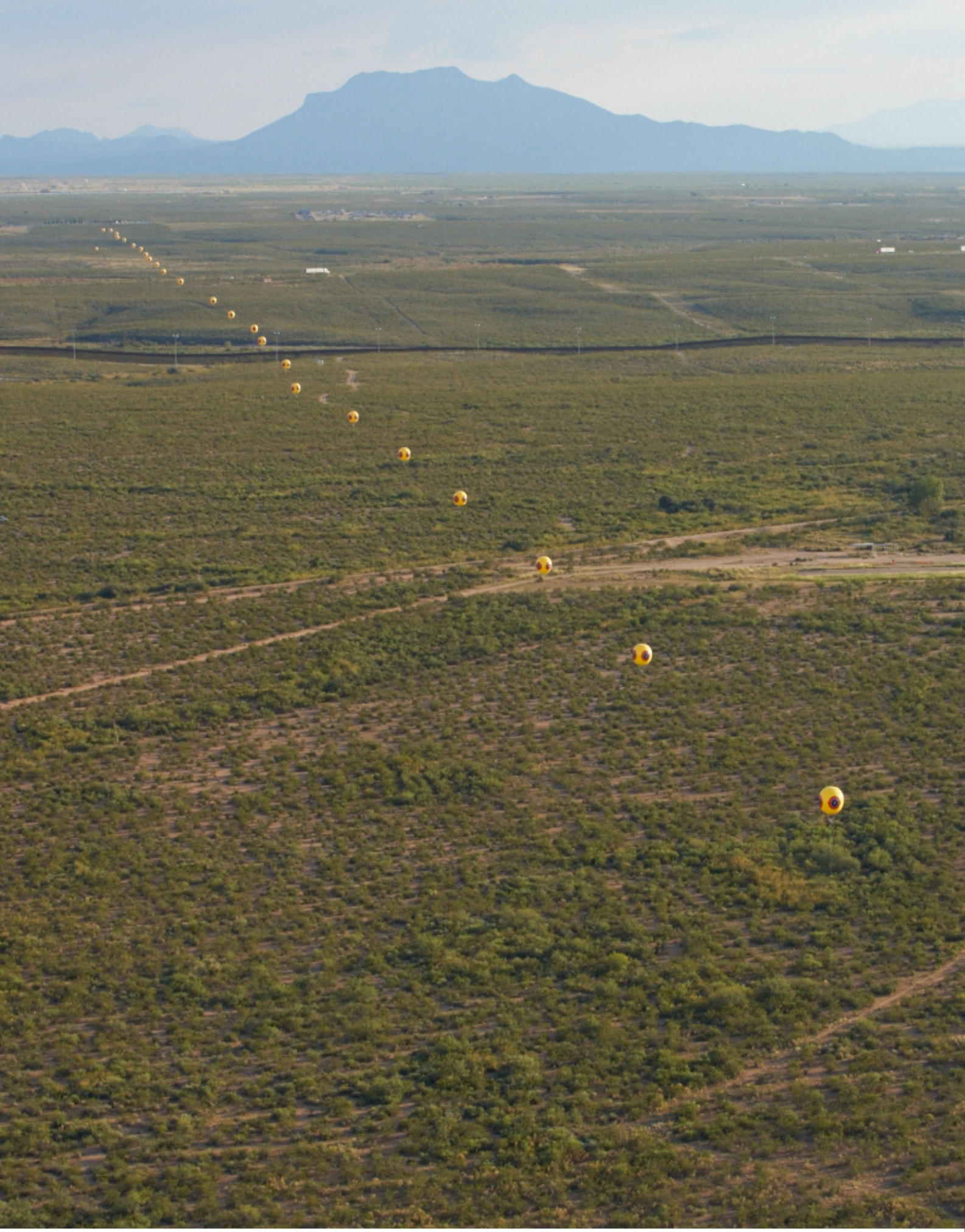


On the threshold

We acknowledge that the Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory and the University of British Columbia is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the *xwməθkwəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwx̱wu7mesh* (Squamish), and *səl̓ilwətaʔɬ* (Tsleil-Waututh) nations. This journal, the university, and academia in general perpetuate colonial legacies even as they attempt to address and counter these legacies. It is our mission to support anti-colonial scholarship and promote Indigenous resurgence.

On the threshold

From the Editors

Dear readers,

The theme of *Wreck's* first issue since 2013, thresholds, came into vogue at the height of a public health emergency that continues to wreak certain havoc. In hindsight, it has become apparent that notions of an idealized communion between scared people and the performative valorization of the essential worker have structurally yielded little of note. Rising inflation, the housing crisis, and the battle for a liveable wage have never ceased. Our shared frustration at being suspended in a matrix of structural failures, and the punch-drunk confusion that came of watching a crisis unfold at a relative distance from the public sphere (perhaps "social" is a better term: the commercial marketplace was as active as ever), is what initially drew us as editors to the idea of the threshold. What is a threshold, after all, if not an opportunity for transformation?

Though the utopian impulse of those early days of the emergency has proven itself to be somewhat of a misfire, a record of a wish inheres in that particular moment. The concept of the threshold retains a glimmer of hope, and for that reason it remains worthy of serious consideration. The compounding crises of the twenty-first century leave little room for it, and yet, possibilities for transformation continue to pulse in the texts we have collected in this issue. Hana Nikčević demonstrates the ways in which colonialism and contemporaneous notions surrounding Indigeneity and race in the Spanish Americas operate in the portrayal of the sitters in *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* (c. 1670). Yoobin Shin considers *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* (2018) by King Cobra (Doreen Garner), situating the work within a history of medical experimentation on people of colour in the United States as well as representations of Black women in visual culture. Notions of heteronormativity and class come into play in Marcus Prasad's incisive analysis of James Wan's *Insidious* (2010). Finally, in her work on the artist collective Postcommodity, Kristina Parzen examines border politics, Indigenous sovereignty, and the regulation and control of people and discourses. In all of their texts, these authors find ways to harness their respective methodologies and shed new light on the artworks in question, ferreting out openings and hewing new paths forward. We, the editors, tip our hats to them.

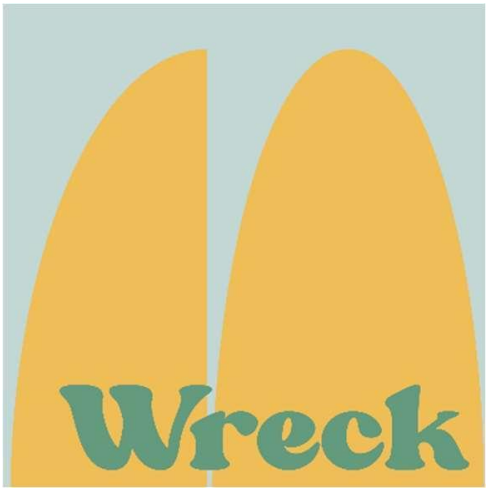
We wholeheartedly thank our contributors, our perpetually dedicated Advisory Board (Dr. T'ai Smith, Dr. Saygin Salgirli, Dr. Erin Silver, Dr. Joseph Monteyne, and Alison Ariss), the faculty members who provided invaluable feedback at every stage of the process (Dana Claxton, Dr. Ignacio Adriasola, and Dr. Rachel Boate), and AHVA's Graduate Program Coordinator, Bryn Dharmaratne, without whom the issue would not have seen the light of day. We also deeply appreciate the time and effort of our Editorial Board (Catherine Volmensky, Erika Kindsfather, Eileen Wu, and Johnny Willis) in editing the selected texts. We are indebted to all members of the

past and present AHVA graduate cohorts who have contributed to the journal's revival as valuable sounding boards, cheerleaders, and brainstorming partners. We offer our appreciation and thanks to Stephanie Savage, UBC's Scholarly Communications and Copyright Services Librarian. Finally, to Davin Luce, once-managing editor, always a friend, who is now pursuing his PhD at McGill, you dove headfirst into this project and it is only through your dedication and perseverance (i.e. your ability to corral the cats that are your fellow grad students) that we have an edition to publish.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Our very best,

The Wreck Editorial Team,
Emily Cadger, Julia Trojanowski, and Tim McCall



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory
Faculty of Arts

On the threshold

In recent decades a number of disparities have underscored inadequacies of justice, capital, medical, and sociopolitical conditions that we now must grapple with as our relationship to space and time has been upended. We remain in a space of negotiation within society and are at a threshold for how we want to continue forwards. For this comeback issue of Wreck, we contemplate the generative possibilities of what a threshold is and what comes after it as we mediate this new world that the events of this new decade have ushered in.

In *Wreck's* newly revived issue we want to explore this idea of what a "threshold" is and the possibilities of transition as our own journal transitions into a new phase of its history. The space of a threshold and what it represents is difficult to define, especially as the "other side" is often undetermined and in flux. What does it mean to be on a threshold? How have images and other artifacts of visual culture responded to thresholds in present and past times, and how have these been framed historically?

A marker of time, space, and ideas, the threshold is a place of transformation; a marker of metamorphosis from one state to another. However, it can also function as a limit, a border marker where "things" can be held back or pushed through into a different state. How do two vantage points (or things) become thinkable through the space between them? How have thresholds, such as the change of a century, been communicated visually? How do anxieties of the unknown on the other side of a threshold become visualized? What imaginative possibilities do the unknowns of thresholds offer artists? How do thresholds provide spaces of negotiation for artists in times of difficulty?

Cover image: Postcommodity, *Repellent Fence / Valla Repelente*, 2015, land art installation and community engagement (Earth, cinder block, para-cord, pvc spheres, helium), Douglas, Arizona, U.S.A. and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, https://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.

On the threshold

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Signaling Spanishness: Communicating peninsular Spanish identity in Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán's *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* (c. 1670)

Hana Nikčević

Abstract

In the early modern Spanish Habsburg world, preoccupied with the attempted colonization of the Americas, the Atlantic Ocean functioned as a threshold of identity. Spaniards born in the Americas, as well as those who simply relocated overseas, were thought to be fundamentally, negatively altered by their new environment. In this paper, I argue that Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán's *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* (c. 1670) seeks to communicate its sitter's 'pure' Spanishness by both associating her with Spanish royalty (through deploying a conventional Spanish mode of court portraiture) and emphasizing her whiteness (by contrast with the darker complexion of the Indigenous woman, in a historical moment wherein white skin was associated with Spanish purity and superiority). First, I outline the history of hosting and portraying little people at the Spanish court, concluding that, in deploying this established pictorial genre, María Luisa's portrait associates her with historical Spanish royalty. I also summarize the intended utility of the genre as a means of communicating physical contrast. Second, I discuss Spaniards' perceptions of Indigenous American, African, and mixed-race people as well as creoles (*criollos*, Spaniards born in the Americas) in the Spanish Americas to explain the rationale behind my overall conclusion: within the context of Spanish colonialism and emergent, racially-inflected notions about Spanish superiority, *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* is intended to portray its sitter as 'purely' Spanish, an identity not only communicated through the association with Spanish royal portraiture, but also keyed to whiteness and, thus, emphasized in this painting via María Luisa's physical (namely, epidermal) contrast with her Indigenous companion.

Upon the deaths of Don Joseph de Silva y Mendoza in 1682 and his son Don Manuel Joseph de Silva Toledo in 1696, both in Madrid, inventories of their possessions revealed their ownership of an abundance of objects originating in the region then known as New Spain.[1] Officially the Viceroyalty of New Spain, this territory was established by Habsburg Spain in 1521 upon the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire (marked by the fall of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital).[2] As numerous scholars have discussed, objects from colonial Mexico regularly made their way to Europe and often featured within the curiosity cabinets of the royal, noble, and wealthy.[3] Goods such as ceramics, clay, feather mosaics, and furniture in the collections of Don Joseph and Don Manuel Joseph indicate these histories of transatlantic travel, but neither of these two men had ever set foot across the Atlantic—so whence came these goods from abroad?[4]

The vector of this collection's overseas relocation was Doña María Luisa de Toledo y Carreto (1656–1707), wife of Don Joseph, mother of Don Manuel Joseph, and daughter of the Marquis de Mancera, Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, viceroy of New Spain between 1664 and 1673 (fig. 1).[5] As a result of her father's office, María Luisa spent her childhood and early adolescence in Mexico/New Spain, and it was during this period of her life that her portrait was painted by, most likely, the artist Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán, lauded as the "Titian of this new world."[6] In this portrait (fig. 2), today held by the Museo del Prado, Madrid, but currently located at the Museo de América, Madrid, María Luisa is depicted wearing a sumptuous, lace-trimmed dress, patterned with floral motifs and the occasional dragonfly. The lacy end of one voluminous sleeve meets with the frilly cuff of a delicate, ochre-hued glove; in this gloved hand, she dangles her other glove (which, somewhat eerily, retains

[1] Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos and Rocío Bruquetas Galán, *La hija del virrey: el mundo femenino novohispano en el siglo XVII* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, Dirección General de Bellas Artes, Subdirección General de Museos Estatales, 2019), 65.

[2] Myles Hudson, "Battle of Tenochtitlán," Encyclopedia Britannica, May 15, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Tenochtitlan.

[3] See, e.g., Byron Ellsworth Hamann, "The Mirrors of Las Meninas: Cochineal, Silver, and Clay," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 1/2 (2010): 6–35; Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism, and the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 246; and Isabel Yaya, "Wonders of America: The curiosity cabinet as a site of representation and knowledge," *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, no. 2 (2008): 173–188, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhm038.

[4] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 65.

[5] "María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion," Museo del Prado, https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/María-luisa-de-toledo-with-her-Indigenous/37b4ea69-5647-4493-8793-55c0c07c2c0c.

[6] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 310; quoting Fray Matías de Escobar, *Americana Thebaida*, 1729. Antonio Rodríguez was born in Mexico around 1635; his lineage was Spanish, so he was a Creole. In his early teens, he became a disciple of the painter José Juárez (1617–1661). Interestingly in relation to the ideas of race and hierarchy explored in this paper, Antonio Rodríguez appears to have been one of several painters engaged in dealing with certain perceived issues to do with the profession of painting in New Spain—excessive numbers of untrained artists, these artists claimed, were reflecting poorly on the profession as a whole. Per Susan Deans-Smith, "In 1674, thirteen master painters (including Antonio Rodríguez and Juan Correa) of Mexico City granted power of attorney to two of their colleagues, the master painters Sebastián López Dávalos and Cristóbal Caballero, to represent them in 'all matters and affairs related to painting and its defense.'" These artists produced "a set of revised guild ordinances" for the consideration of the Mexico City council; in this document, a "new clause, number fifteen, proposed that once the reformed clauses became effective no master painter could agree to train and accept apprentices who were not Spanish. Although other than the term *español,* no specific racial categories were used in this instance, the all-encompassing 'not Spanish' extended the exclusionary clause to blacks and *castas* as well as Indians." Susan Deans-Smith, "'Dishonor in the Hands of Indians, Spaniards, and Blacks': The (Racial) Politics of Painting in Early Modern Mexico," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, ed. Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 60.

the shape of the hand that once filled it). Indeed, María Luisa's left hand is bare, and it rests upon the head of a woman of short stature who stands alongside her. This woman is identifiably of Indigenous Mexican origin based on her skin tone, intricately tattooed face and hands, and *huipil*, decorated with a geometric pattern of triangles and pineapples.[7]

When María Luisa returned to Spain—at the end of her father's term as viceroy and to wed Don Joseph—the Indigenous woman most likely did not accompany her.[8] This painting, however, did, preserving the woman's image and serving as a memento of María Luisa's time in New Spain.[9] Per Gutiérrez Usillos, whose foundational research on this painting underpins this paper, María Luisa's portrait was likely painted to mark her transition into a marriageable age and anticipate her impending marriage: she was engaged to Don Joseph de Silva y Mendoza, the third-born son of the Duke of Pastrana.[10] The proffering of their youngest son to María Luisa—the eldest was engaged, but the second-oldest was unattached—may have indicated some reservations on the part of Don Joseph's parents about the status of the viceroy's daughter.[11]

In this paper, my aim is to contextualize *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* within a pictorial tradition and a historical milieu: the convention in Spanish court portraiture of depicting royals alongside individuals of short stature and the racially-inflected social hierarchies of Spain and the Spanish Americas during the colonial period. Given the painting's date of creation, my focus is on the seventeenth century, but material is occasionally drawn from the eighteenth century. This paper is accordingly organized in two main sections. First, I outline the history of hosting and portraying little people at the Spanish court, concluding that, in deploying this established pictorial genre, María Luisa's portrait associates her with historical Spanish royalty. I also summarize the intended utility of the genre as a means of communicating physical contrast. Second, I discuss Spaniards' perceptions of Indigenous American, African, and mixed-race people as well as creoles (*criollos*, Spaniards born in the Americas) in the Spanish Americas to explain the rationale behind my overall conclusion: within the context of Spanish colonialism and emergent, racially-inflected notions about Spanish superiority, *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* is intended to portray its sitter as 'purely' Spanish, an identity not only communicated through the association with Spanish royal portraiture, but also keyed

[7] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 300; Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, and Clara Bargellini, *Painting a new world: Mexican art and life, 1521-1821* (Denver: Frederick and Jan Mayer Center for Pre-Columbian and Spanish Colonial Art, Denver Art Museum, 2004), 220. A *huipil* is a straight, tunic-like garment, worn as a blouse or dress depending on its length, consisting of one piece of fabric folded in half; it has been worn by women in Mesoamerica since at least the 1st century BC.
[8] María Luisa had actually already married Don Joseph while she was in New Spain (Don Joseph was not present for the proceedings), but a second, representative ceremony was to be held upon her return to Spain.
[9] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 296.
[10] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 53.
[11] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 50.

to whiteness and, thus, emphasized in this painting via María Luisa's physical (namely, epidermal) contrast with her Indigenous companion.

First, however, I should clarify the state of knowledge pertaining to the identity of the Indigenous woman depicted. Gutiérrez Usillos identifies the woman as belonging to one of the Chichimec nations. "Chichimeca" was the term used by the Nahua, or Nahuatl-speaking, inhabitants of central Mexico to designate the various peoples who lived in the region "La Gran Chichimeca," north and west of the Valley of Mexico, corresponding to the regions known as Nueva Galicia, Nueva Vizcaya, and Nueva León; the term was adopted into Spanish around the 1520s and understood to denote a "barbarous," nomadic people.[12] Gutiérrez Usillos's identification is based on contemporaneous documents attesting to the Chichimeca practice of facial tattooing, typically used as an identifying marker of an individual's nation; the frequent enslaving of individuals from this region, many of whom ended up serving in New Spain; and certain later paintings that depict similar facial tattooing on subjects described as Chichimeca.[13] Given both the dearth of visual evidence of the various Chichimeca nations' unique tattooing practices and the possibility that the artist did not render the woman's tattoos with any degree of accuracy, it is not currently possible to identify the woman's precise background.[14] It is for this former reason, however, that this painting both represents such a remarkable artifact of seventeenth-century Mexico and demands further investigation in continuation of this paper.

[12] See, e.g., Charlotte M. Gradie, "Discovering the Chichimecas," *The Americas* 74, no. S2 (2017): 67–88.

[13] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 279–280. In the early eighteenth century, Spanish-born but Nuevo León-based military commander and landowner Antonio Ladrón de Guevara described the Chichimeca facial inscriptions as "a variety of blue stripes and signs, with whose differences one nation can be distinguished from another," and Mexico-born Alonso de León, then Governor of Coahuila and Texas, wrote in 1690 that the Chichimecas "paint the faces in general, each nation with different stripes, and others the whole body" featuring "stripes crossed, straight, or waved." The two paintings that depict facial tattooing on individuals identified as Chichimec are New Spain-based painter Manuel Arellano's *Rendition of a Chichimeco, Native of the Province of Parral* and *Rendition of a Chichimeca, Native of the Province of Parral*, both 1711, oil on canvas, held at the Museo de América, Madrid; the facial tattoos depicted on this man and woman are much less intricate than those shown on the short-statured woman accompanying María Luisa. It is also worthy of note that two of the groups inhabiting the region referred to as La Gran Chichimeca, the Zacatecas and the Guachichiles, are postulated to have been named (by the Nahua) in relation to their use of body paint. The Zacatecas, according to late sixteenth-century writer Gonzalo de las Casas, were named in relation to grass (*zacate* in Mexico), but another contemporary account proposed that the term meant "black head" in the language of the Zacatecas (Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and silver: the northward advance of New Spain, 1550-1600* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 237, no. 27). A sixteenth-century Augustinian missionary, Friar Guillermo de Santa Maria, wrote that the Guachichiles were thus named because "guachichil" means "redhead," and these peoples painted their hair with annatto, "wore red bonnets," and kept "caged sparrows that have red heads" (Olivia Kindl, "The Colors of the Desert: Ritual and Aesthetic Uses of Pigments and Colorants by the Guachichil of Northern Mexico," in *Painting the Skin: Pigments on Bodies and Codices in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica*, ed. Élodie Dupey García and María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual [Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019], 103). These characterizations support the identification of the Indigenous woman as one of members of the nations comprised under the term "Chichimeca" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not possible with this limited evidence to postulate that the Indigenous woman portrayed alongside María Luisa is, e.g., Zacateco.

[14] While Gutiérrez Usillos comes to this same conclusion, and it is not possible within the scope of this paper to further pursue this line of inquiry, I do not wish to foreclose the pursuit of more information on this subject. Another project, or an extension of this one, could attempt the identification of the Indigenous woman's specific origins; on-site research in Mexico would undoubtedly be necessary.

People of short stature at the Spanish court

The pictorial tradition within which I would like to situate *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* is that of depicting individuals of short stature in Spanish court portraiture, a genre that evidently provides the model for this painting. The Spanish Habsburgs had 'kept' people with dwarfism at the court since at least 1446, choosing short-statured people as royal companions likely for their appeal as so-called "monsters" and "marvels." The former term claimed a more multivalent meaning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it does today, denoting not exclusively the horrifying but also, and primarily, the wondrous or anomalous.[15] Although little people at the courts were in some sense 'attractions,' they, simultaneously, lived and worked at the most esteemed location in the kingdom. Because little people were thought to be genuinely physically inconvenienced—while other entertainers' "strange" behaviour was considered artificial, short statured individuals' exceptional states were perceived as the work of God—they provided an opportunity for the royal family to assert their fulfilment of their charitable duty to protect the members of their domain.[16] Little people were brought into the palace and supplied with residence therein; they were furnished with food, dress, and other necessities and, sometimes, given an allowance.[17] Indeed, alongside those termed "giants," little people were the most common of those individuals perceived as physically anomalous at the early modern European courts.[18]

One well-known proponent of the practice of keeping so-called "court dwarfs" was Spanish Habsburg king Philip IV (r. 1621–1665), whose court allegedly comprised at least 110 little people.[19] Indeed, little people were most highly, and thus characteristically, desired at the Spanish court, and they were brought to court from across Spain, as well as from France, Germany, England, the Spanish Netherlands (1556–1648), Poland, Milan (then under the Spanish Habsburgs), Italy, Portugal, and even more distant regions.[20] The Habsburgs also received and gave little people as gifts, and, suggesting the high value placed on these human presents, there is evidence that different courts competed over them. Isabella Clara Eugenia, sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands and daughter of Philip II of Spain, noted in a letter that "Twice the French had wanted to steal" from her an unidentified man of short

[15] Fernando Bouza, *Locos, enanos y hombres de placer en la corte de los austrias: oficio de burlas* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 1996), 51; Janet Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs—and a Loca—as Ladies' Maids at the Spanish Habsburg Courts," in *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-waiting across Early Modern Europe*, ed. Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 147.
[16] Bouza, *Locos*, 23; Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 148.
[17] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 150.
[18] Christopher William Wells, "Court 'Monsters': Deformity in the Western European Royal Courts between 1500 and 1700," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 7, no. 2 (2018): 188.
[19] Betty Adelson, *The Lives of Dwarves* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 149.
[20] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 150.

stature, whom she intended to send to her family in Spain.[21] Simultaneously, though, and perhaps underlining the evident objectification of these individuals when conceived of as gifts to be sent from court to court at a royal's whim, Isabella elsewhere refers to the short-statured Bonamí (whose name translates to "good friend") as the s*abandija,* or louse, that she was sending to her brother.[22] Indeed, little people at the courts were often given nicknames that highlighted their small size, such as louse (*sabandija*), worm (*gusano*), flea (*pulga*), sparrow (*gorrión*), lap dog (*perrillo de faldas*) and shrew (*musaraña*).[23] As Janet Ravenscroft has suggested, it is perhaps not possible to identify whether these epithets were purely patronizing or to some extent also terms of endearment, but they likely highlight the special roles often occupied by little people at court: close companions of the typically Spanish royal family, identified initially on the basis of their unique stature.

People of short stature in Spanish court portraiture

People of short stature at the Spanish court have been an area of some interest for art historical studies on the basis of their appearance in portraits of the Spanish royal family. While the first portraits of the Spanish court emerged at the end of the fifteenth century, little people began to be included in these paintings only slightly later, in the middle of the sixteenth century.[24] The earliest extant Spanish painting of a little person is Anthonis Mor's 1550 *Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf* (fig. 3), depicting a man who apparently served Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–1586), a cardinal patronized by the Spanish Habsburgs.[25] This painting is the model for later works depicting little people alongside dogs or other animals, a convention postulated to associate little people with animals on the basis of not solely size but position in society.[26]

Of more direct relevance to *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* is the tradition of double portraits featuring little people, in which members of the Spanish court are depicted alongside people of short stature. King Philip IV, for instance, was depicted on multiple occasions with people of short stature; in a painting by Gaspar de Crayer, for example, Philip appears next to an unnamed man of short stature (fig. 4), while, on a canvas by Rodrigo de Villandrando, Philip stands alongside

[21] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 150; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Isabella Clara Eugenia, archduchess of Austria," Encyclopedia Britannica, November 27, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isabella-Clara-Eugenia.
[22] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 150.
[23] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 150.
[24] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 152.
[25] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle," Encyclopedia Britannica, September 17, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antoine-Perrenot-Cardinal-de-Granvelle.
[26] Ravenscroft, "Dwarfs," 147; Joanna Woods-Marsden, "A Vision Of Dwarfs," in *Dreams and Visions,* ed. Nancy van Deusen (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 335; see also Angelica Groom, *Exotic Animals in the Art and Culture of the Medici Court in Florence* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 158.

the named Miguel Soplillo, who was sent to Philip by his aunt Isabella Clara Eugenia as a gift (fig. 5). Isabella Clara Eugenia, likewise, was represented some years earlier alongside a woman of short stature (fig. 6); notably, in this portrait of Isabella as well as in Villandrando's portrayal of Philip IV, we can see the pose that prefigures that assumed by María Luisa, in which the royal figure places a bare hand atop the head of the little person depicted alongside them. Art historian Leticia Ruiz Gómez has interpreted this pose as one of benevolence and protection, suggesting that, in these paintings, the short-statured individuals represent the Spanish citizenry, offering a visual synecdoche of the depicted royal's rulership.[27] As Gutiérrez Usillos has suggested, the gesture may also function more literally and underline María Luisa's competence as the head of a household, mingling—and, perhaps, tempering–her evident authority with an element of gentleness.[28]

This is the first comparison that should be drawn between *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* and the visual tradition in which it follows. Whether benevolence necessarily inheres in this position may be questionable or impossible to confirm, but by depicting María Luisa in the recognizable image of Spanish royals, Rodriguez communicates her status as adjacent to royalty as the daughter of the viceroy of New Spain. As the name implies, the viceroy is the 'alternate' to the king. The Kingdom of Spain was composed of a number of independent sovereignties, united by their common ruler; when the Americas were inducted into this unified collection of sovereignties, it was as another such state. Just as the Spanish king had viceroys in Valencia, Aragon, and Navarre, so, too, did he appoint one to oversee the kingdom of the "Indies," which was eventually divided into separate kingdoms, one of which was New Spain.[29] María Luisa's father thus held "all the powers and prerogatives" that the king would have had had he been there in person, and this portrait communicates that royal association. Clearly, the identity of the woman depicted alongside María Luisa is key to this symbolism: if the short-statured people in the Spanish royal portraits represent the Spanish citizenry, this woman evidently represents the Indigenous population of the Americas, specifying the purported domain of the viceroyalty and possibly indicating its benevolent rulership thereof.

In addition to aligning María Luisa with Spanish royalty, this image also communicates, like those other royal portraits with people of short stature, the wealth of the royal (or viceregal) individuals depicted. The presence of those employed by the court, of course, connotes that the royal family has the financial means required to support a retinue, a message that is here perhaps underlined through

[27] Leticia Ruiz Gómez, *El retrato español en el Prado: Del Greco a Goya* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2006), 68–69.
[28] Gutiérrez Usillos, *La hija del virrey,* 261.
[29] Donald E. Smith, *The Viceroy of New Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1914), 110; see also Alejandro Cañeque, *The King's Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the Indigenous woman's 'hybrid' outfit. The clear affinity between the pattern, sleeve form, and lacy cuffs on María Luisa's dress and the Indigenous woman's green dress, which sits underneath her *huipil*, is, presumably, not accidental. It may suggest a common origin for the two garments, consequently pointing to the viceregal court's contributions to her attire.[30]

Other pictorial antecedents suggest the multivalent specificity with which María Luisa sought to be painted into the Spanish tradition. Firstly, María Luisa's portrait is not the first to deploy its compositional convention in an overtly colonial context. The painting in which the 'hand-on-head' gesture is thought to have originated, Cristóvão de Morais's 1553 portrait of *Juana de Austria with her Black Slave Girl* (fig. 7), offers a model for the communication of the sitter's dominance over a colonized region. As Carmen Fracchia and Janet Ravenscroft have proposed, de Morais's portrait indicates the "social position of Juana as the next Queen of Portugal" as well as her acquisition of riches from Portugal's overseas colonies: both the fan in her hand and the small Black girl, who was likely a wedding present from Juana's husband, Prince João.[31] So, too, does María Luisa's portrait suggest colonial authority and wealth—through her possessive gesture of touching a hand to the Indigenous woman's head—and it thus does so by referencing specifically the means by which a Spanish royal woman had formerly communicated her colonial power. Another point of comparison is Alonso Sanchez Coello's 1585 *Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia y Magdalena Ruiz* (fig. 8), which exhibits the most striking compositional similarities to the portrait of María Luisa. In Coello's painting, the Infanta stands in the centre of the painting and gazes out at the viewer; Magdalena Ruiz, a long-time servant of the family, is to her proper left, standing only as tall as the Infanta's waist. While Isabella Clara Eugenia supports a cameo of her father, Philip II, between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand, her left hand rests possessively atop the head of Magdalena Ruiz. The positioning of these two figures is nearly identical to that of María Luisa and her Indigenous companion. In, seemingly, recalling this

[30] It could also be suggested that the idea of wealth drawn from this colonial enterprise is embedded within this painting. One element in this characterization could be the bevy of pearls adorning María Luisa. These oceanic gems—amongst other earthly resources like silver—were much desired and lucratively traded by the Spanish, who sought and came upon them in abundance in the Americas. Pearl fishing was, however, a dangerous occupation, and the Spanish employed and enslaved both Indigenous South Americans and West African individuals for the task. Indeed, many years earlier, in 1570, French philosopher Michel de Montaigne commented on the devastation wrought by Europeans on the so-called New World as a result of their consumerist desires: "So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic of pearls and pepper." See Molly A. Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700*. Williamsburg, Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. The history of mining silver in Mexico may also be key to drawing out all of the nuances in this painting; the conflict known as the "Chichimeca War" (1550–90) was instigated by the Spanish encroachment into Indigenous lands in pursuit of silver; the Spanish established mines and sought to enslave the Indigenous Mexicans in order to operate these mines. Warfare ensued and continued until the Spanish determined to assimilate the Chichimecas 'peacefully' to Christianity as well as to a sedentary and agrarian lifestyle as opposed to nomadism. (See Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and silver.*) The inclusion of a woman identifiably of the Indigenous nations termed Chichimeca, then, may also reference this history and assert both the Spanish conquest of Mexico *and* the Spaniards' ostensibly benevolent resolution to a lengthy conflict.

[31] Carmen Fracchia, "The place of African slaves in early modern Spain," in *The Place of the Social Margins, 1350-1750*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 155; Janet Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends: questioning the representation of the court dwarf in Hapsburg Spain," in *Histories of the Normal and the Abnormal: Social and cultural histories of norms and normativity*, ed. Waltraud Ernst (New York: Routledge, 2006), 43.

image of Isabella Clara Eugenia, daughter of Spanish Habsburg King Philip II, María Luisa's portrait also likely seeks to present its sitter as, specifically, a Spanish bride-to-be. As Gutiérrez Usillos has noted, María Luisa's portrait was likely produced in anticipation of her marriage; likewise, when Coello painted Isabella's portrait, Isabella was referred to as the "Bride of Europe" for her numerous potential royal engagements.[32] Notably, *Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia y Magdalena Ruiz* also evinces the transoceanic trade central to Iberian colonialism; Magdalena Ruiz carries two monkeys, likely native to Portuguese territories in the Amazon.[33] In deploying a conventionally Spanish mode of royal portraiture as well as specifically recalling earlier images within that tradition that accord with its sitter's situation, María Luisa's portrait asserts her identity as that of a Spanish royal.

Physical contrast

It is not solely through recalling a Spanish tradition of royal portraiture, however, that María Luisa's portrait asserts its sitter's Spanishness. Within the colonial context to which the portrait refers through its inclusion of the Indigenous woman, there arise specific reasons for which María Luisa may have wished to insist upon her Spanishness as well as visual cues via which that Spanishness could have been communicated: respectively, peninsular Spanish superiority over the diverse inhabitants of the Americas and whiteness of skin. If Coello's portrait of Juana of Austria brings up the relevant context of paintings in which white sitters are shown alongside nonwhite individuals, generally indicating the context of slavery and imperialism, the double portrait *Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia with Magdalena Ruiz* evidences the tradition of depicting royals alongside people of short stature for the effect of physical contrast. Indeed, Magdalena Ruiz was most likely *not* a person of short stature, so this portrait suggests the royal family's reluctance to be depicted alongside those in contrast to whom they might not have appeared markedly physically superior.[34] This second element is the one to which I first turn: understanding that people of short stature were depicted alongside Spanish royals to emphasize the 'ideal' physical form of the royal body by contrast, we can contextualize the idea, which I develop later, that the Indigenous woman alongside María Luisa was depicted to also emphasize María Luisa's skin colour (and associated Spanishness) by contrast.

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[32] Catherine Closet-Crane, "Dwarfs as seventeenth-century cynics at the court of Philip IV of Spain: a study of Velazquez' portraits of palace dwarfs," *The Free Library*, June 1, 2005, https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Dwarfs+as+seventeenth-century+cynics+at+the+court+of+Philip+IV+of...-a0170372826; Laura R. Bass, *The Drama of the Portrait: Theater and Visual Culture in Early Modern Spain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 155, n. 26; see Trinidad Antonia, "La Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia," in *Felipe II: Un monarca y su época*, 688.

[33] "Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia and Magdalena Ruiz," Museo del Prado, https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/infanta-isabel-clara-eugenia-and-magdalena-ruiz/f5bad972-2c95-4b8d-8f73-6ed6151cc0b8.

[34] Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends," 43.

The tradition of including little people in royal portraits has been discussed by scholars as primarily a project of contrast.[35] It is accepted that the short-statured body is intended to accentuate the height of the royal body, the desirability of which emphasis has been attributed to a few interrelated, contemporaneous philosophies of the body. Firstly, as Roy Porter has noted, height may have been tied to health and prestige.[36] Secondly, and more specifically, there existed an esteem of the average as it pertained to the royal body. In his sixteenth-century *Book of the Courtier*—translated into Castilian in 1540 by Juan Boscan—Italian diplomat Baldassare Castiglione describes the ideal courtier as "neither too small nor too big, since either of these two conditions causes a certain contemptuous wonder and men built in this way are stared at as if they were monsters. . . . So I wish our courtier to be well built with finely proportioned members."[37] Political philosopher Fadrique Furió Ceriol, writing a treatise in 1559 dedicated to Spanish king Philip II, likewise defined the ideal courtier's body through negations and oppositions. The ideal courtier should be not over the age of thirty, neither melancholic nor phlegmatic, and of "medium height and weight, as any extreme in this part looks bad, and takes authority away."[38] Similarly, later, in his 1633 *Diálogos de la pintura*, artist and art theorist Vincente Carducho associated physiognomy with morality, and he described the "just man" as, above all, "well-proportioned."[39] The value placed on both the average and the proportionate in early modern conceptions of beauty meant that individuals with achondroplastic dwarfism—as opposed to those with proportionate dwarfism—were doubly removed from the corporal ideal.[40] It is thus on the basis of not simply height but also proportionality that a little person with achondroplasia, such as the woman depicted in the portrait of María Luisa, could serve to characterize by contrast the body of an accompanying individual as the royal ideal. It is also noteworthy that, as Gutierrez Usillos points out, María Luisa is likely accentuating her own proportions and height by sporting *chopines*, a type of platform shoe.[41] We can infer, then, that the inclusion of the Indigenous woman is intended to assert María Luisa's 'average' size and proportions by contrast. In addition, however, I would propose that this visual tradition of somatic contrast, presumably comprehensible to any (noble) Spanish viewer of

[35] E.g., Maximilian Derksen, "Induction and Reception of Dignity in Diego Velázquez's Portraits of Court Dwarfs," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 14, no. 2 (2020): 188; Andrew Edgar, "Velázquez And the Representation of Dignity," *Medicine, Health Care & Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2003): 117; Barry Wind, *A Foul and Pestilent Congregation: Images of Freaks in Baroque Art* (New York, 1998), 3; Joanna Woods-Marsden, "A Vision of Dwarfs," 331. Woods-Marsden notes that the French sixteenth-century chronicler Brantôme wrote: "In the portrait of a very beautiful and pleasant-looking lady, place next to her an old hag, a moorish slave or a hideous dwarf, so that the ugliness [*laideur*] and blackness [*noirceur*] may give greater luster [*lustre*] and brilliance [*candeur*] to her beauty and fairness."

[36] Roy Porter, "History of the Body," in *New Perspectives in Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 210; Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends," 43.

[37] Wells, "Court 'Monsters,'" 185, citing Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier; from the Italian, done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, anno 1561* (London: D. Nutt, 1900); Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends," 30.

[38] Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends," 30.

[39] Colin C. Sanborn, *Destierro and Desengaño: The Disabled Body in Golden Age Spanish Portraiture* (Oberlin: Oberlin College Honors Papers, 2019), https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/honors/135, 18.

[40] Ravenscroft, "Invisible friends," 46.

[41] "María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion," Museo del Prado.

the time period, serves also to underpin another contrast present in the painting: that of skin colour. In emphasizing María Luisa's whiteness through contrasting her skin tone with the darker complexion of the Indigenous woman, this portrait, I suggest, emphasizes María Luisa's Spanishness. To explain why this may be the case, I first need to outline some notions of race and hierarchy in the Spanish Americas.

Race and hierarchy in colonial Mexico

Understanding the intersections and significance of such notions as race, lineage, skin colour, and hierarchy in the context of early modern colonial Mexico, and Spain's colonial territories in the Americas more broadly, requires, as Magali M. Carrera pointed out in her 2003 *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings,* that we refrain from the uncritical importation of present-day perspectives on these issues.[42] It is not sufficient to assume that there existed a hierarchical ordering of the three primary 'groups' in the Spanish Americas—the Spaniards, the Indigenous Americans, and the Africans—that was *based* on skin colour as opposed to *corresponding* to it. The notion of homogeneous, superior 'whiteness' is thought to have been constructed around the late seventeenth century alongside and in opposition to the idea of Blackness that was weighted down with oft-Biblical meaning to contextualize and justify the slave trade, but to imagine a colourist hierarchy in the Spanish Americas by simple extrapolation is clearly inadequate. [43]

As is visually documented in the well-known eighteenth-century genre of casta paintings, however, there did exist a preoccupation with genealogy and race in the Spanish Americas. Typically produced as either a set of sixteen individual canvases or a single image divided into a grid of sixteen rectangles, casta paintings feature serial imagery in order to portray the diverse progeny of the 'interracial' couplings possible in the Spanish Americas. One such image, for instance, visually and textually informs us that *De Español y d India; Mestiza* ("from a Spanish man and an 'Indian' woman, a Mestiza child") (fig. 9); another may demonstrate that *De Español, y Mulata; Morisca* ("from a Spanish man and a mulatto woman, a morisca girl").[44] The genre's taxonomic impulse (suggested by its ostensible genetic underpinnings, systematic ordering, and carefully labelled 'identities') has led some

[42] Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
[43] Erin Kathleen Rowe, "Visualizing Black Sanctity in Early Modern Spanish Polychrome Sculpture," in *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America,* ed. Pamela A. Patton (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 58; see also David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).
[44] Carrera, *Imagining Identity,* 27, 72.

scholars to read casta paintings as accurate anthropological or ethnographic documents.[45] More recently, however, it has been argued that these paintings are much more likely to have been fanciful, intended to wishfully construct racial identity as fixed and legible—because racial identity was, in practice, ambiguous and beyond categorization or control.[46] Indeed, although casta paintings include numerous terms for specific identities, only some of those classifications appear in colonial records such as parish registers, tax lists, and censuses; present in the textual records are primarily "Spaniard," "Indian," "black," "mestizo," "mulato," "castizo," "morisco," and "zambaigo," and, in the eighteenth century, "lobo," "coyote," "pardo," "moreno," and sometimes "chino" also appear.[47]

Despite a certain degree of artificiality, the casta paintings do reflect a *sistema de castas* that was central to societal structuring in the Spanish Americas. The fixation on lineage was an importation from Spain, where it had originally pertained to the ideology of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood). Since the mid-1400s, honorable "Old Christians" (*cristianos viejos*) were those without any Jewish or Muslim blood, and this distinction afforded them access to the highest echelons of Spain's hierarchically organized society.[48] As the qualifier "old" implies, there was a temporal, genealogical factor in determining *limpieza de sangre*. While some of the earliest laws decreed that the absence of Jewish and Muslim ancestry needed only to be verified through the four grandparents (meaning, thus, that it took three or four generations of piety to establish Old Christianity), laws by the 1550s had been unburdened of these limitations: *limpieza de sangre* had come to refer to lineages that claimed to be Christian since "time immemorial."[49] As Elizabeth Kuznesof notes, what began as an issue of religious purity evolved into one of *raza*, or lineage, and this preoccupation was one factor in the classificatory impulses present in the Spanish Americas.[50]

This religious basis for Spaniards' genealogical queries inflected notions of lineage in the Americas. Appointing themselves responsible for converting Indigenous Americans to Christianity, Spaniards located themselves as the aristocracy of Mexico, thus instating another schema of hierarchy from Spain, that of nobles versus plebeians.[51] Indigenous Americans—except for their own nobility––became agricultural laborers and payers of tribute. But because the Indigenous Americans were thought to be neophytes, eventual "New Christians," they were still protected by the Spanish crown

[45] Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 5–8.
[46] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 5–8; Carrera, *Imagining Identity,* 44–105 (chapter 3).
[47] María Elena Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of 'Race' in Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, ed. Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 35.
[48] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39; Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of 'Race,'" 27.
[49] Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of 'Race,'" 27.
[50] Carrera, *Imagining Identity,* 10; Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4, no.1 (1995): 160; Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of 'Race.'"
[51] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39.

(and the internal hierarchies of their own societies were recognized).[52] This was not the case for Africans, who were imported for their labour and deemed incapable of converting to Christianity.[53] A hierarchy of 'races' did, thus, exist, with the colonizing Spaniards at its apex and Indigenous Americans as well as Africans distinctly 'below.'[54]

Not everyone, of course, 'fit' precisely into one of these categories, as the aforementioned casta paintings sought to emphasize. Miscegenation between Spaniards, Indigenous Americans, and Africans took place from the sixteenth century, and the "racially-mixed" people born of these unions were termed "castas."[55] The common term "mestizo," for example, referred specifically to those born of one Spanish and one Indigenous American parent, and, because many such relations occurred outside of marriage, the term began to be associated with illegitimate birth and a lack of cultural affiliation; consequently, mestizos were often banned from prestigious positions.[56] In the late sixteenth century, mestizos' rights were further diminished; colonial laws decreed that they were not allowed to employ Indigenous Americans for labor (i.e., partake of the *encomienda* system), bear arms without special permission, claim to be Indigenous American nobility, work as public notaries, or be ordained priests, amongst other restrictions.[57] "Mulattos," meanwhile, referring to those with one Spanish and one African parent, were also associated with illegitimacy and their rights were similarly curtailed.[58] The increased intermarriage from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards inspired an increased awareness of New Spain's "racial types," and those of 'mixed' parentage were stereotyped as "rowdy and morally lax." This view was widely held by most colonial officials, and, notably with regards to the painting at the centre of this paper, the Viceroy Marquis de Mancera (María Luisa's father) himself identified the castas as "an expanding, vile mob that contributed to the colony's social obfuscation."[59] In sum, the preoccupation with lineage as it pertained to religion (and purity as it pertained to Christianity) evolved in the Spanish Americas into a concern with racial lineage, locating 'pure' Spaniards above those whose genealogy involved, entirely or partly, Indigenous American or African heritage.

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[52] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39.
[53] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39; Martínez, "The Language, Genealogy, and Classification of 'Race,'" 31.
[54] Differing opinions are sometimes offered on the comparative statuses of Indigenous Americans and Africans in the Spanish Americas. While historians John K. Chance and William B. Taylor suggest (as most do) that Africans were far less respected that were Indigenous Americans, Ilona Katzew proposes that, in practice, Africans may have received some more esteem—part of her reasoning, however, is that Africans were esteemed as wealth-signalling possessions, so it is likely still the case that any additional admiration afforded to Africans was not rooted in any morally rigorous sentiments. Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39.
[55] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.
[56] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.
[57] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.
[58] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.
[59] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40. The Marquis de Mancera also, notably, asked to leave New Spain and surrender his viceregal office after his first three-year term, but his request was denied by the Queen and he was compelled to remain abroad for another six years (Usillos, *La hija del virrey*, 39).

Visual art and phenotypic identification

These anxieties about non-Spanish and mixed-race individuals are thought to be manifest in the aforementioned casta paintings, which delineate the results of interracial relations, and the use of this visual medium to demonstrate this issue suggests that phenotype was central to ideas about castas' identities. While Carrera importantly insists that skin colour *alone* was not used as *the* marker of one's identity (and that casta paintings additionally make use of sartorial and vocational signification, constructing more holistic representations of *calidad,* or status/quality), documents suggest that it did count as one factor amongst several.[60] As mentioned, constructions of skin colour as indicators of superiority or inferiority arose in relation to slavery and often drew on pre-existing religious connotations ascribed to whiteness (or lightness) and darkness. Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval (1576–1652), for instance, wrote a treatise on slavery, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (first published in Seville in 1627 and republished with additions in 1647), that aligned whiteness with Christianity; blackness, accordingly, was associated with sin.[61] Such clear distinctions do not seem to have informed Spaniards' perceptions of Indigenous Americans,[62] but certain sources suggest that skin colour was, indeed, a relevant index of identity. For instance, in 1735, the stratification of Mexico's inhabitants was described by one observer as follows, suggesting that colourism, with whiteness privileged, did factor into social hierarchy:

> No distinction is made other than that between whites and those of *mano prieta* [dark hand]. The first are the Europeans and their offspring known as creoles… the term *mano prieta* refers to *mestizos*, coyotes, mulattos, lobos, zambaigos, moriscos, salta atras, tente en el aire, gibaros, chinos, and the Indians—who comprise the majority in this kingdom. The Indians who enjoy esteem are the *caciques* [nobles], and the Tlaxcalans who so much aided Cortes during the Conquest. The mulattos are the domestic servants of the Spaniards…[63]

While various timeframes have been postulated for the development of the *sistema de castas*, Katzew suggests that it was likely fully established in Mexico City by the middle of the seventeenth century, and strongest between 1660 and 1720.[64] The *sistema,* she writes, relied in part on racial labels. By the seventeenth century, official colonial documentation—law texts, parish records, Inquisition

[60] Carrera, *Imagining Identity*.
[61] Grace Harpster, "The Color of Salvation: The Materiality of Blackness in Alonso de Sandoval's De instauranda Aethiopum salute," in *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, ed. Pamela A. Patton (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 86.
[62] Notably, English sources, and especially those pertaining to the casta paintings, are not nearly as explicit or clear on this subject (whiteness and colourism as they affected perceptions of Indigenous Americans in colonial Spanish America) as one might expect. Further research is required.
[63] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 42.
[64] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 42.

trials, criminal cases, censuses, and the *Relaciones geográficas* (Geographical Accounts)—evinced attempts to define individuals' phenotypes, frequently referring to a person's skin color and the traits commonly associated with an ethnicity.[65] Likewise, for example, in 1728, a man whose lineage came under scrutiny was identified as "a Spaniard because he was white and blond" and evidently not of "broken" color.[66] Indeed, the term "*color quebrado,*" meaning "broken colour," was used to refer to those of mixed ancestry, indicating that skin tone was understood to be an indicator of lineage and, thus, that different skin tones were understood to be associated with different 'races'; those of *color quebrado* were also associated with bad habits (*malas costumbres*).[67]

Given this perceived association between skin colour and racial identity, it can be suggested that the casta paintings seek to key racialized and mixed-race identities to skin colours. Furthermore, the idea that genealogical becoming-Spanish *and* whitening was 'progressive' while becoming-Indigenous-American or -African *and* darkening was 'regressive' is exemplified in the terms denoting the progeny of certain interracial pairings. If a mestiza married a mestizo, their child was deemed *tente en el aire*, or "suspended in the air," indicating that they had not moved away from either of their parents' status; if a mestiza married an Indigenous American, though, their offspring was termed *salta atras*, or "jumping backwards," indicating that the child had regressed, or moved away from Spanishness and whiteness.[68] This ties in with my suggestion, introduced earlier and elaborated below, that María Luisa's portrait emphasizes her whiteness and thus 'superior' Spanishness by contrast with the darker skin of her Indigenous companion.

***Criollos*, *peninsulares*, and the climate**

Before returning to María Luisa's portrait, I should address one more related discourse at the intersection of social hierarchy and race, this time involving not solely genealogy as a determining factor in one's identity but also climate. I mention this context because it, too, may have informed María Luisa's desire to be—and method of being—depicted as Spanish. Historian R. Douglas Cope suggested that the *sistema de castas* may have resulted from the Spanish creoles' (*criollos*, meaning those of solely Spanish descent but born in the Americas) desire to distinguish themselves from the non-

[65] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 42.
[66] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 46.
[67] Norah L. A. Gharala, *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 83; Ben Vinson, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 48–49. It must be clarified, however, that a *direct* link between skin colour and 'bad habits' is not unambiguously evident. For instance, those of "*color quebrado*" could have been deemed suspect due to the association of *mestizaje* (mixing) with illegitimacy, while skin colour may have been secondary.
[68] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 48.

Spanish 'races' of the Americas.[69] As Katzew has stated, there existed a "legendary antagonism between Spaniards and creoles," largely due to the fact that Spaniards did not have a high opinion of those born in the Americas.[70] The resultant *criollismo* (pride in being creole), which became established in the second half of the seventeenth century, was written about by authors in the eighteenth century.[71] In 1712, French explorer Amédée-François Frézier travelled to South America and, four years later, published *Relations du voyage de la mer du sud*; in this text, he made note of "the antipathy between American and European Spaniards."[72] Some years later, in 1755, scholar and bishop Juan Jose Eguiara u Eguren (1696–1763) published *Biblioteca Mexicana* to "counteract European denigration of the peoples and cultures of the Americas."[73] The peninsular Spaniards (amongst which the viceroy's family would be counted) are thought to have looked down on the creoles because of, firstly, their place of birth: identity was thought to be not solely genetic but also a function of climate. Since the sixteenth century, Europeans had suggested that Spaniards' move to the New World changed them, affording them the negative characteristics allegedly possessed by the Indigenous Americans (a theory based on classical notions of climate and constitution).[74] Throughout the entire colonial period, it was believed that the tropical climate of the Americas caused not only the resident flora but also the human inhabitants, *as well as Europeans who transferred there*, to "ripen" and "spoil" quickly, to "degenerate."[75] Crucially, it was also proposed that climate affected skin colour: in his late eighteenth-century *Gazetas de literatura de México*, Spanish priest José Antonio de Alzate y Ramírez rehearsed the widely-held belief (mentioned, too, by Spanish authors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) that humankind had 'originally' been white, but various circumstances including climate had established a wider range of colors (and which could only be changed via *mestizaje,* here meaning racial mixing with those who were white).[76] It is in light of these beliefs that María Luisa's voyage to the opposite shores of the Atlantic functioned as a passage across threshold of identity; her identity was not an immutable characteristic keyed to her place of birth, but rather something subject to environmental change.

Additionally, Spanish concerns about creole identity were not based exclusively on climatic factors. It was also suggested that creoles were inferior because they *were not* simply Spaniards born

[69] R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 22.
[70] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 43.
[71] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 87.
[72] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 66.
[73] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 93.
[74] Ilona Katzew, "'That This Should Be Published and Again in the Age of the Enlightenment?' Eighteenth-Century Debates About the Indian Body in Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, ed. Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 77. See also Anna Herron More, *Baroque Sovereignty: Carlos De Sigüenza Y Góngora and the Creole Archive of Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 8.
[75] Katzew, "'That This Should Be Published,'" 82.
[76] Katzew, "'That This Should Be Published,'" 95–96.

abroad—instead, miscegenation was so common in the Spanish Americas that those purporting to be creole were more likely to be castas. One of the *Biblioteca Mexicana*'s featured authors wrote of the need "to clarify the purity of blood of creole literati; because we must be wary that the preoccupation that they have in Europe that we are all mixed (or as we say, *champurros*), contributes not little to the indifference in which they hold the works of the worthy."[77] When Jesuit missionary Joseph Gumilla laid out the relationships via which Spanishness and whiteness could be achieved (in four generations of intermarriage with Europeans, for instance, an Indigenous American bloodline could become fully white), his aim was to discredit the European notion that the entire populace of the Americas was "hopelessly mixed," per Katzew, and thus inferior to peninsular Spaniards and the rest of Europe. Gumilla's proposed method of redemption for the Americas was the gradual becoming-white of the entire population.[78]

In sum, Spaniards largely looked down on and restricted the privileges of any non-Spanish 'races' in the Spanish Americas, including those of mixed parentage; as is apparent in various sources, including casta paintings, these distinctions were *associated with if not expressly based on* skin colour.[79] Europeans and peninsular Spaniards, meanwhile, were suspicious of creoles who, despite being 'purely' Spanish, were born in the Americas *or even* those Spaniards who had spent a significant amount of time in the Americas; both of these latter states also had associations with skin colour: climate, it was believed, could and did change humans' constitutions and appearances, and even those purporting to be Spanish could actually be castas (who are depicted in the casta paintings, at least, with darker skin). Given María Luisa's imminent return to Spain and anticipated marriage to a Spaniard (from a noble family that may have harbored some doubts about her status) at the time of this portrait's production, it may be the case that this portrait was intended to assert her Spanishness not solely via association with a Spanish tradition of court portraiture but also via accentuating her whiteness.

Communicating Spanishness via whiteness in *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion*

Taking into account the Viceroy Marquis de Mancera's stated derision for the castas (as well as his desire to return to Spain much earlier than he was ultimately compelled to); the broader issue of peninsular Spaniards' and Europeans' disdain for creoles based on their imagined affinity, climatic

[77] Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 93.
[78] Katzew, *Casta Painting,* 48.
[79] My aim is not to suggest that people were discriminated against *on the basis of* the colour of their skin; I instead wish to suggest that whiteness was *associated with* Spanishness.

and genetic in origin, to the Indigenous inhabitants of the Spanish Americas; and María Luisa's anticipated marriage to a peninsular Spaniard; I propose that the inclusion of the Indigenous woman alongside María Luisa is intended to rehearse the convention of physical contrast—already embedded in the pictorial format of the Spanish royal flanked by the person of short stature—to emphasize not just María Luisa's royal 'proportionality' but also her white skin. A seventeenth-century Spanish viewer (and, perhaps specifically, one from the noble audience María Luisa would entertain) would be accustomed to reading somatic difference between a royal and a person of short stature in such a painting, and María Luisa's portrait makes use of this learned vision: the viewer is expected to contrast María Luisa with her Indigenous companion, thus comparing María Luisa's white skin to the darker skin of the Indigenous woman. Other compositional strategies emphasize this reading. María Luisa's face and neck, firstly, appear to be lighter in hue than not solely those of the Indigenous woman, but also all other elements of the painting—in other words, María Luisa's complexion is made to appear lighter by ensuring that it is the lightest element of the image. The intricate tattoo adorning the Indigenous woman's face may have been included to further darken her complexion.[80] Additionally, the prominent blush across María Luisa's cheeks may recall an older 'observation' about Spaniards versus Indigenous Americans: the former blushed easily, indicating a morally correct capacity for shame (at such situations as, for instance, nudity), while the latter was deemed incapable of blushing, due to the ostensibly correlated factors of dark skin and a morally suspect lack of shame.[81] Lastly, María Luisa rests a bare hand as opposed to a gloved one atop the Indigenous woman's head, serving to bring María Luisa's pale skin still closer in spatial proximity to the complexion of the Indigenous woman, making the contrast in tone appear more obvious and stark. Given the foregoing discourse regarding Spanishness and whiteness (visualized, too, in the later casta paintings), I propose that María Luisa's emphasized whiteness entails an assertion of her supposedly superior, 'pure' Spanishness.

The motif of the removed glove may also tie directly into the portrait's marital undertones, if Rodríguez Beltrán was familiar with the symbolic conventions of Dutch marriage portraiture. In this tradition, a glove could connote the confirmation of the marriage contract, and some Dutch pendant portraits of couples feature each lover wearing one glove from a single pair; a removed glove could

[80] I do not intend to suggest that the tattoo was not actually present on the woman's face. I mean instead to suggest that in electing to paint the tattoo (as opposed to, as might have been possible, leaving it out) the artist *may* have intended to emphasize the darkness of the woman's skin. Also worth considering is the extent to which such intricate ornamentation might have endowed the 'otherness' (to Spaniards) of the Indigenous woman with other associations. For instance, Michael Gaudio's, "Making Sense of Smoke: Engraving and Ornament in de Bry's *America*," the second chapter in Gaudio's *Engraving the Savage*: *The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), argues that the overtly intricate rendering of smoke in engravings (by Theodor de Bry, after John White, in 1590) of Indigenous Americans in colonial North Carolina was intended to reference the intricate engraving traditionally used to represent scenes of witches and witchcraft.

[81] Brian Cummings, "Animal passions and human sciences: shame, blushing and nakedness in early Modern Europe and the New World," in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002): 26–50.

also indicate the idea that the glove was to be given as a gift to a lover.[82] Additionally, however, the removal of the glove may harbor another meaning. Placed at the same level on the canvas as the Indigenous woman's face, the gloves are similar in hue to her skin tone and positioned such that this comparison is noticeable. Grace Harpster has addressed the aforementioned painting by Cristóvão de Morais of *Juana de Austria with her Black Slave Girl* with reference to the symbolism of sartorial darkness: in that painting, Juana's bare white hand is intended to contrast not only with the dark skin of the Black girl (upon whose head she lays her hand) but also with the darkness of her own clothing; the effect, per Harpster, is a racially-coded message, wherein a "noble" and "Christian" whiteness is set off by an "antithetical" blackness.[83] I would like to suggest a similar reading of the bare hand and the gloves in María Luisa's portrait. One immediately noticeable feature of this painting is the eerie corporeality of the dangling, unworn glove: it hangs not limply from María Luisa's hand but, instead, stiffly, as though it were still stretched around a spectral hand.[84] I would suggest that this corporeality of the glove indicates the association of its material with skin and, thus, its colour with skin colour; consequently, I propose that the removed glove is intended to communicate María Luisa's casting off of any similarities with Indigenous Americans, castas, and even *criollos* in advance of her return to Spain: despite her time abroad, she has protected and maintained an unassailable Spanish purity, symbolized here by her bright, white skin. Indeed, this may even tie into the above mentioned eighteenth-century use of *mano prieta* (dark hand) as a colour-coded synecdoche for the non-Spanish inhabitants of the Americas.

In conclusion, I have proposed that *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion* seeks to communicate its sitter's 'pure' Spanishness by both associating her with Spanish royalty (through deploying a conventional Spanish mode of court portraiture) and emphasizing her whiteness (by contrast with the darker complexion of the Indigenous woman, in a historical moment wherein white skin was associated with Spanish purity and superiority). Based on Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos's suggestion that this painting was likely made to anticipate María Luisa's marriage to peninsular Spaniard Don Joseph de Silva y Mendoza, the third-born and thus not most highly esteemed of the Duke of Pastrana's sons, I have suggested that the assertion of María Luisa's Spanishness may have

[82] David R. Smith, *Masks of wedlock: seventeenth-century Dutch marriage portraiture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 80–81; Bianca M. du. Mortier, "De Handschoen in de Huwelijkssymboliek van de Zeventiende Eeuw," *Bulletin van Het Rijksmuseum* 32, no. 4 (1984): 195.
[83] Harpster, "The Color of Salvation," 101. Harpster also notes that "In the early modern period, black skin was often referred to as a fabric, livery, or cloak. Several missionary descriptions of the New World and Africa use the metaphor of clothing to account for the diversity of the world's populations. In the sixteenth century the Spanish chronicler Peter Martyr d'Anghiera describes the variety of skin colors in his Decades of the New World as 'diverse liveries.'"
[84] My thanks to those who confirmed my suspicion that this element was, in fact, noticeably strange and worthy of further consideration: Dr. Angela Vanhaelen, Tara Allen-Flanagan, and Caroline LaPorte-Burns.

been related to perceived or actual peninsular doubts about her status, in light of her nine-year stay in New Spain/Mexico.

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Figures

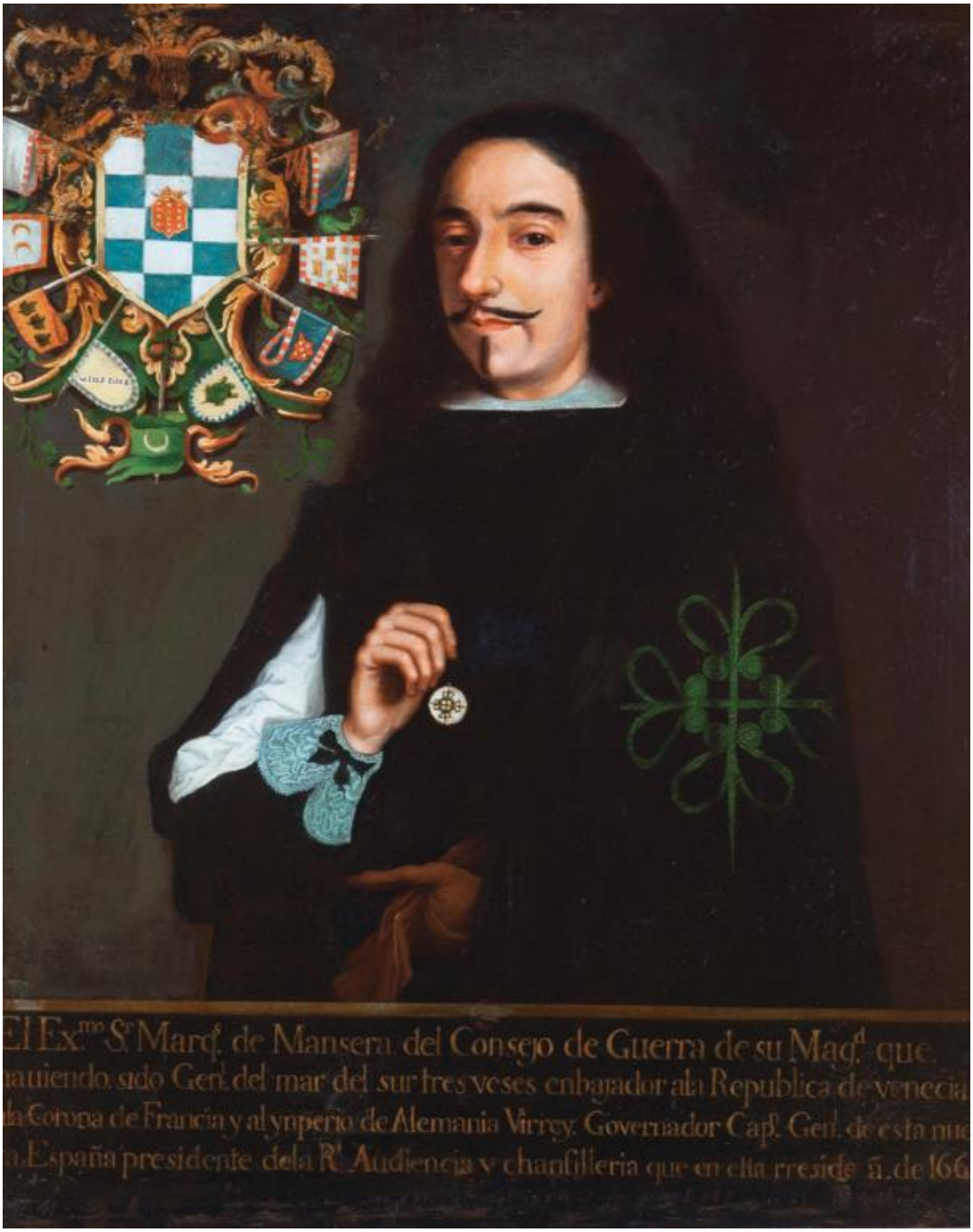

Figure 1. *Portrait of Viceroy Don Antonio Sebastián de Toledo*. Salón de Cabildos, Ayuntamiento de México. ©Salón de Cabildos, Ayuntamiento de México.

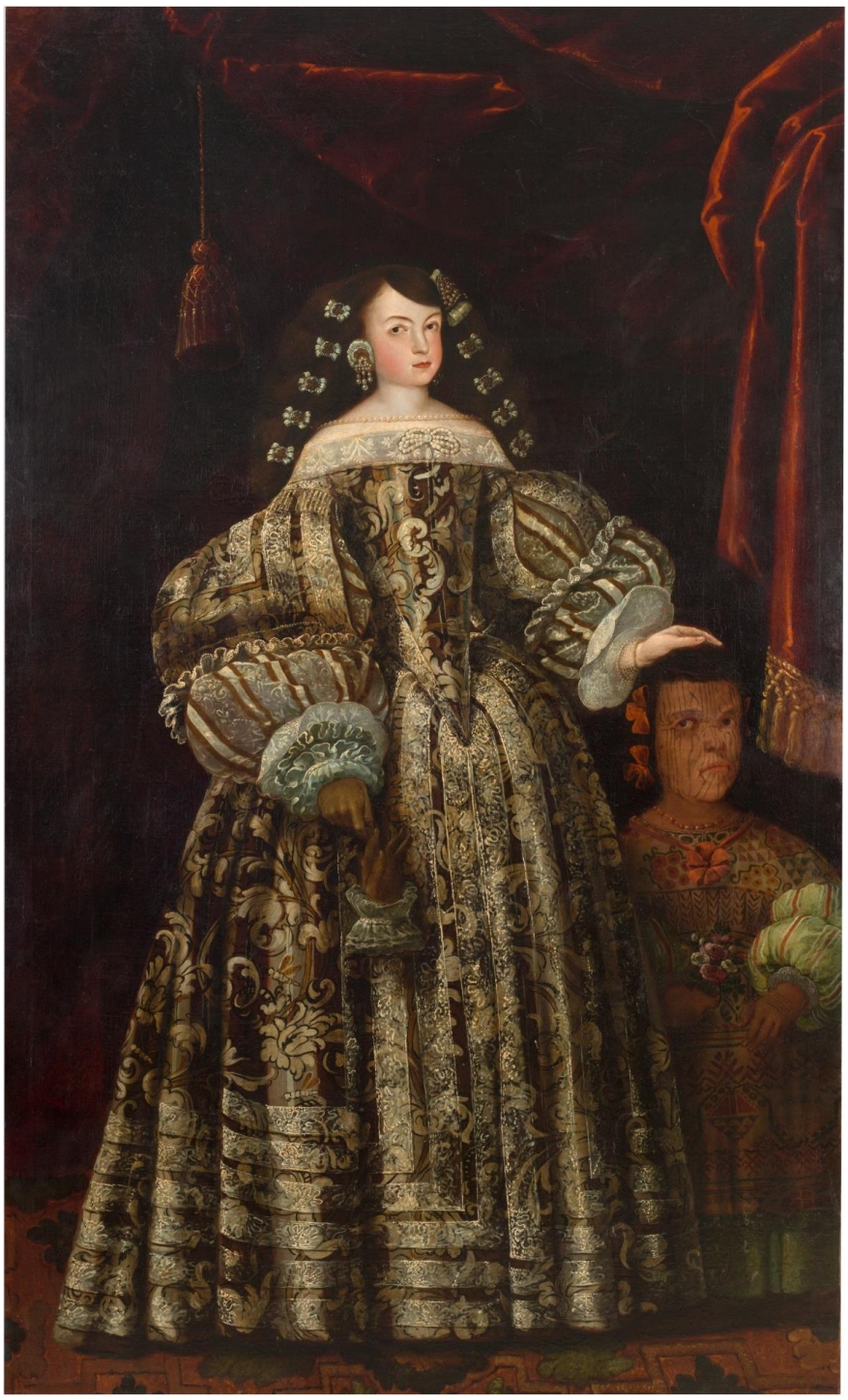

Figure 2. *María Luisa de Toledo with her Indigenous companion*, c. 1670, Antonio Rodríguez Beltrán, oil on canvas, 209 x 128 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; currently at Museo de América, Madrid. ©Museo Nacional del Prado.

Figure 3. *Cardinal Granvelle's Dwarf,* c. 1560, Anthonis Mor, oil on wood, 126 x 92 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. ©Musée du Louvre.

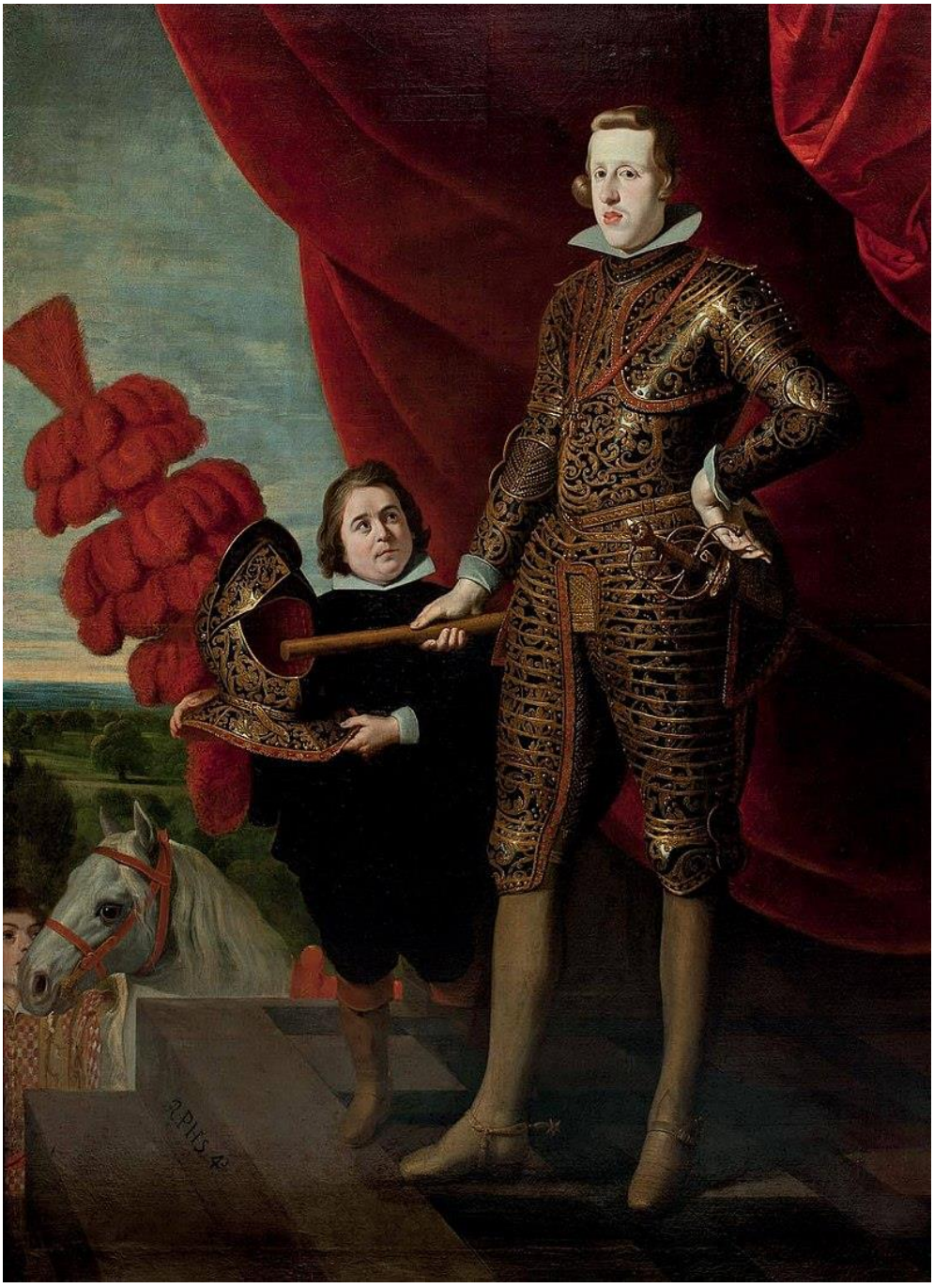

Figure 4. *Felipe IV junto a dos servidores (Philip IV with two servants),* c. 1627-1632, Gaspar de Crayer, oil on canvas, 215 x 163 cm. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación (Madrid). ©Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación.

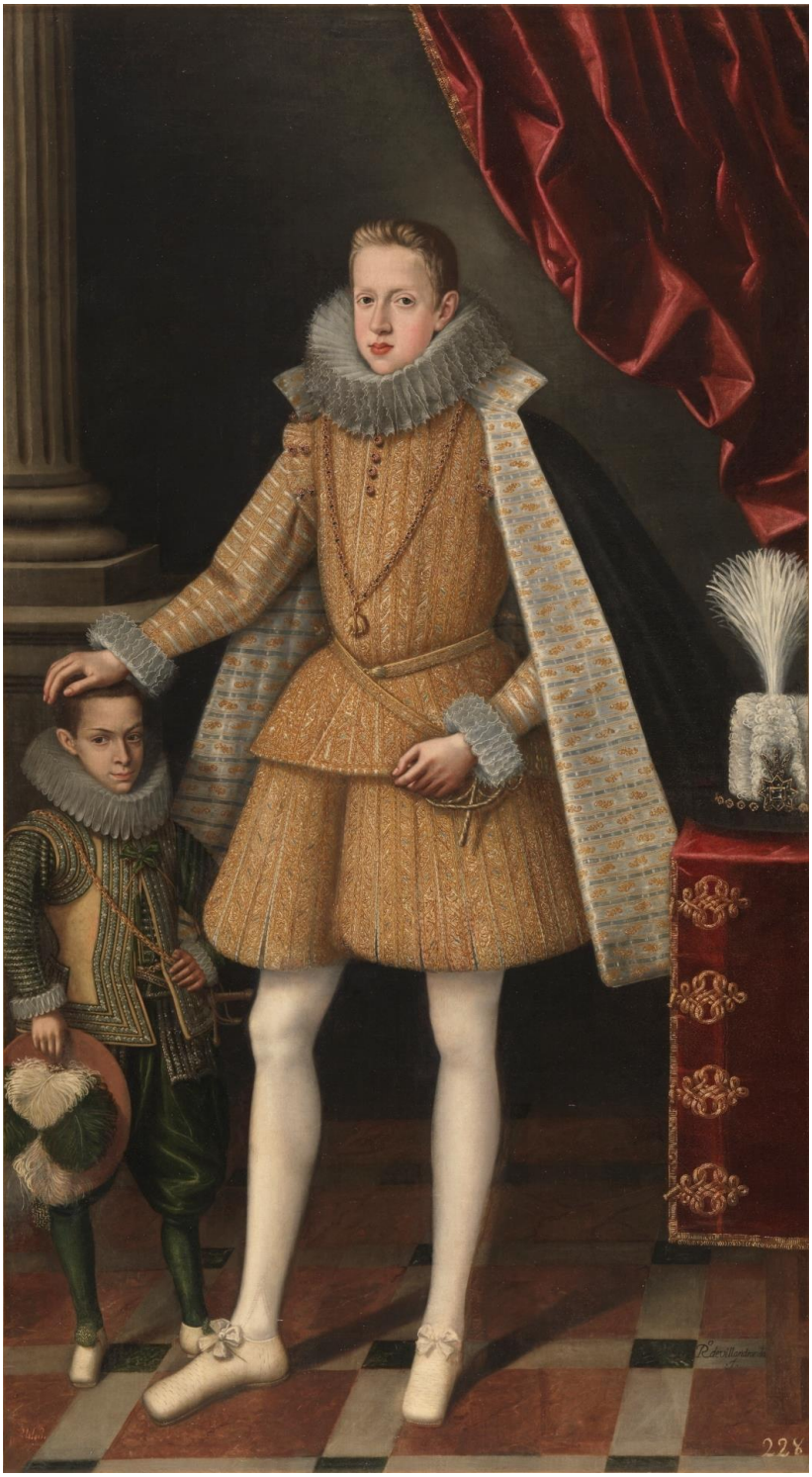

Figure 5. *Prince Philip and the Dwarf, Miguel Soplillo,* c. 1620, Rodrigo de Villandrando, oil on canvas, 204 x 110 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. ©Museo Nacional del Prado.

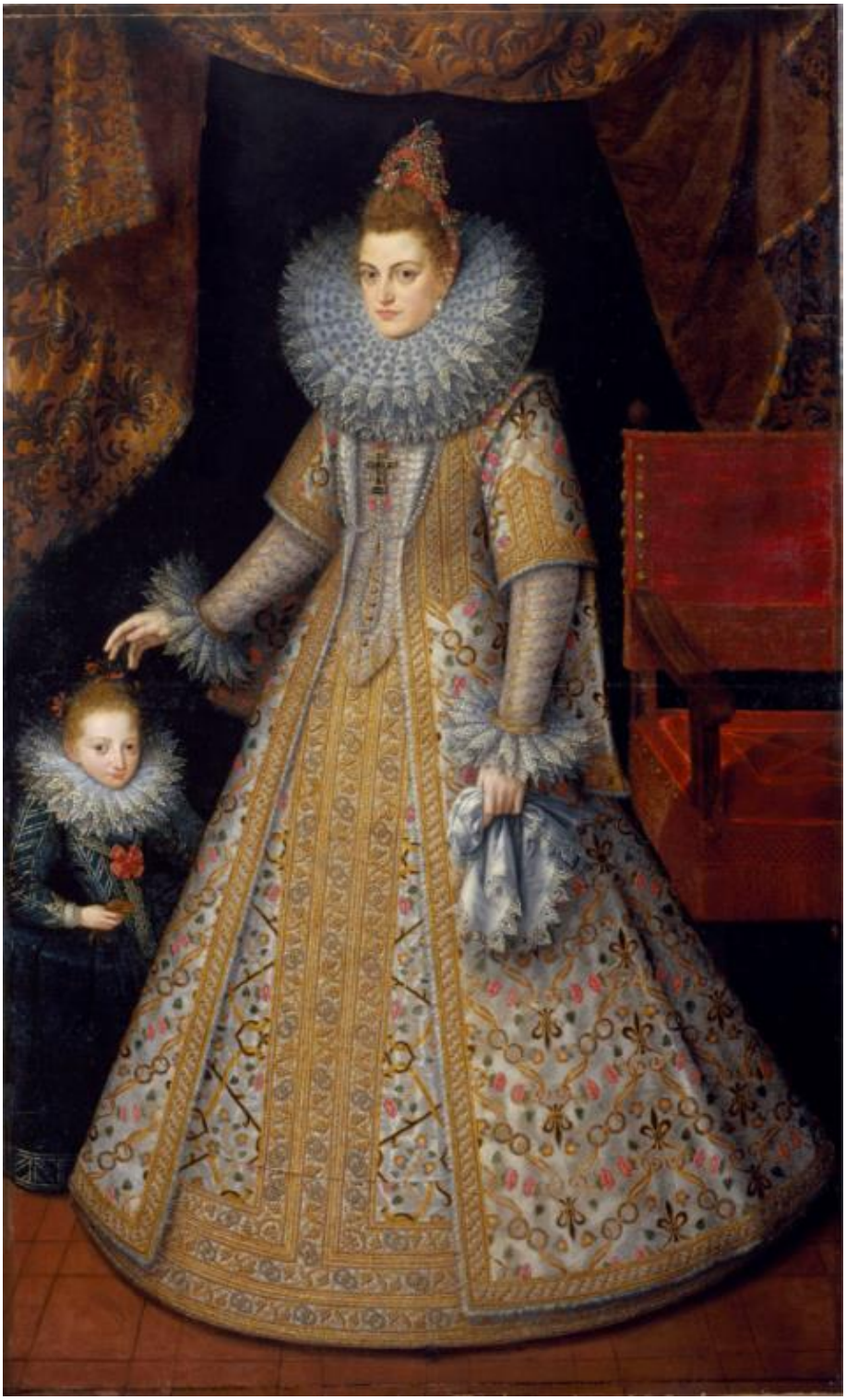

Figure 6. *Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia and Her Dwarf,* c. 1599–1600, Frans Pourbus the Younger, oil on canvas, 217.5 x 131 cm. Royal Collection Trust. ©Royal Collection Trust.

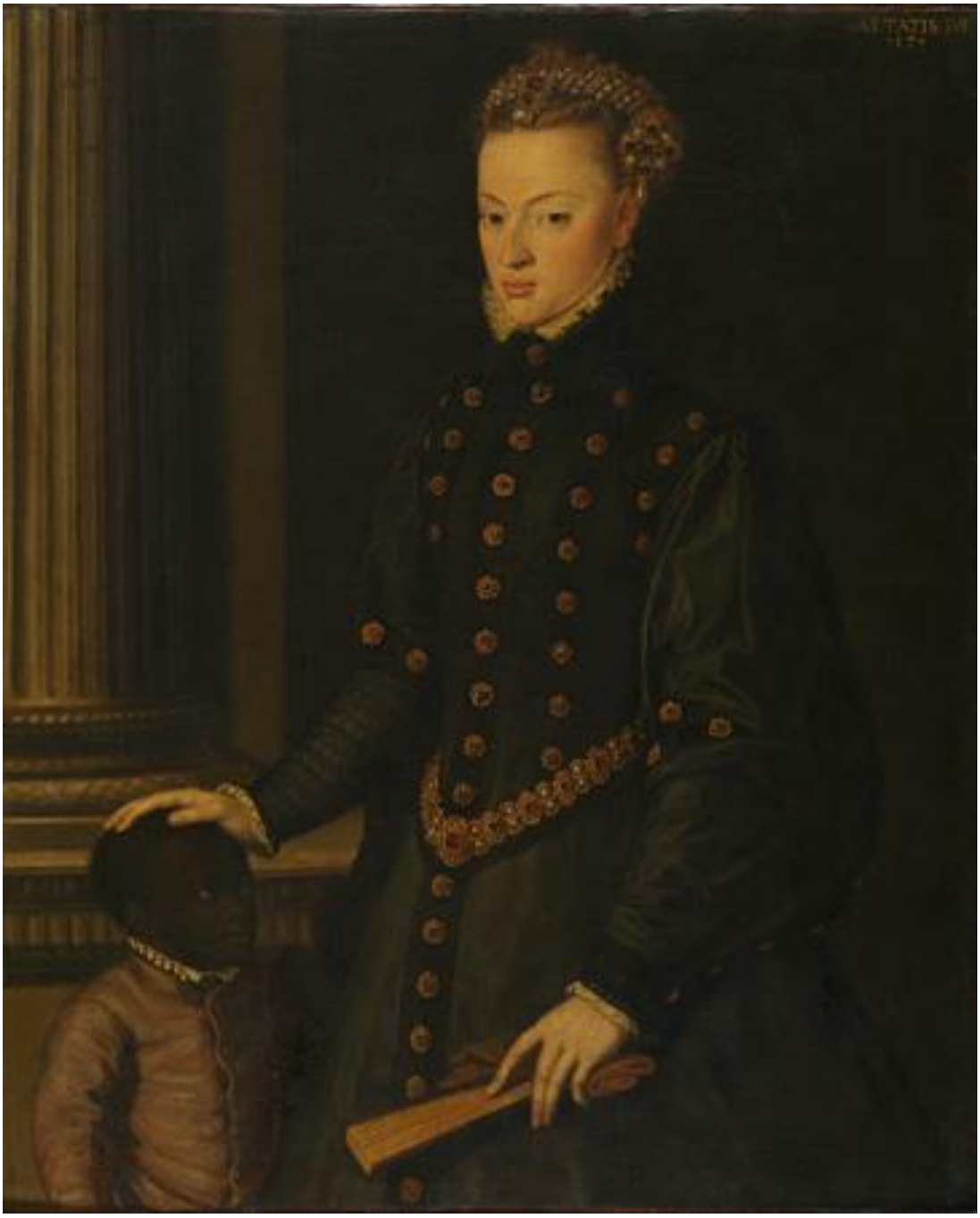

Figure 7. *Juana de Austria with her Black Slave Girl,* 1553, Cristóvão de Morais, oil on canvas. Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. ©Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

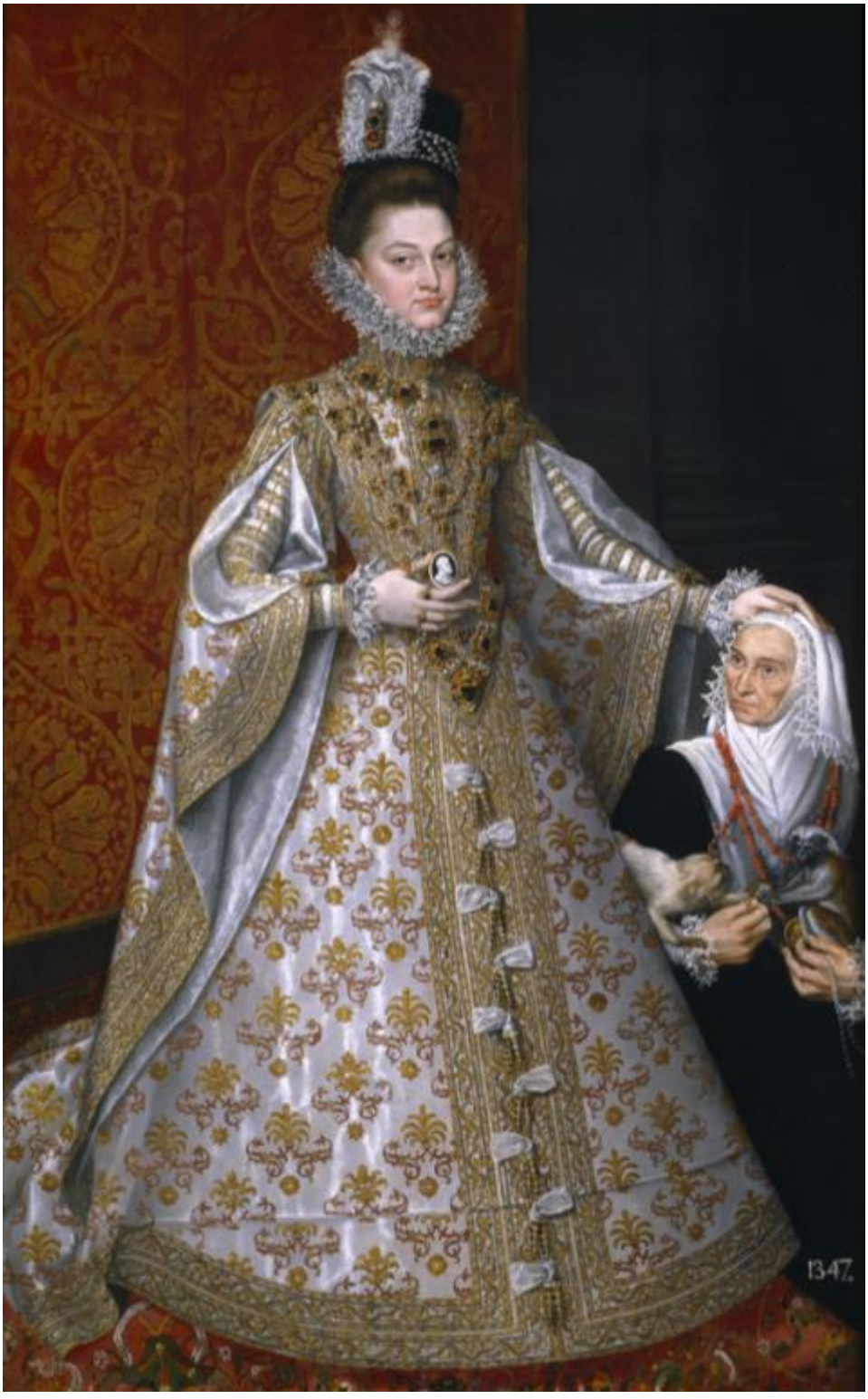

Figure 8. *Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia y Magdalena Ruiz,* c. 1585, Alonso Sánchez Coello, oil on canvas, 207 x 129 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. ©Museo Nacional del Prado.

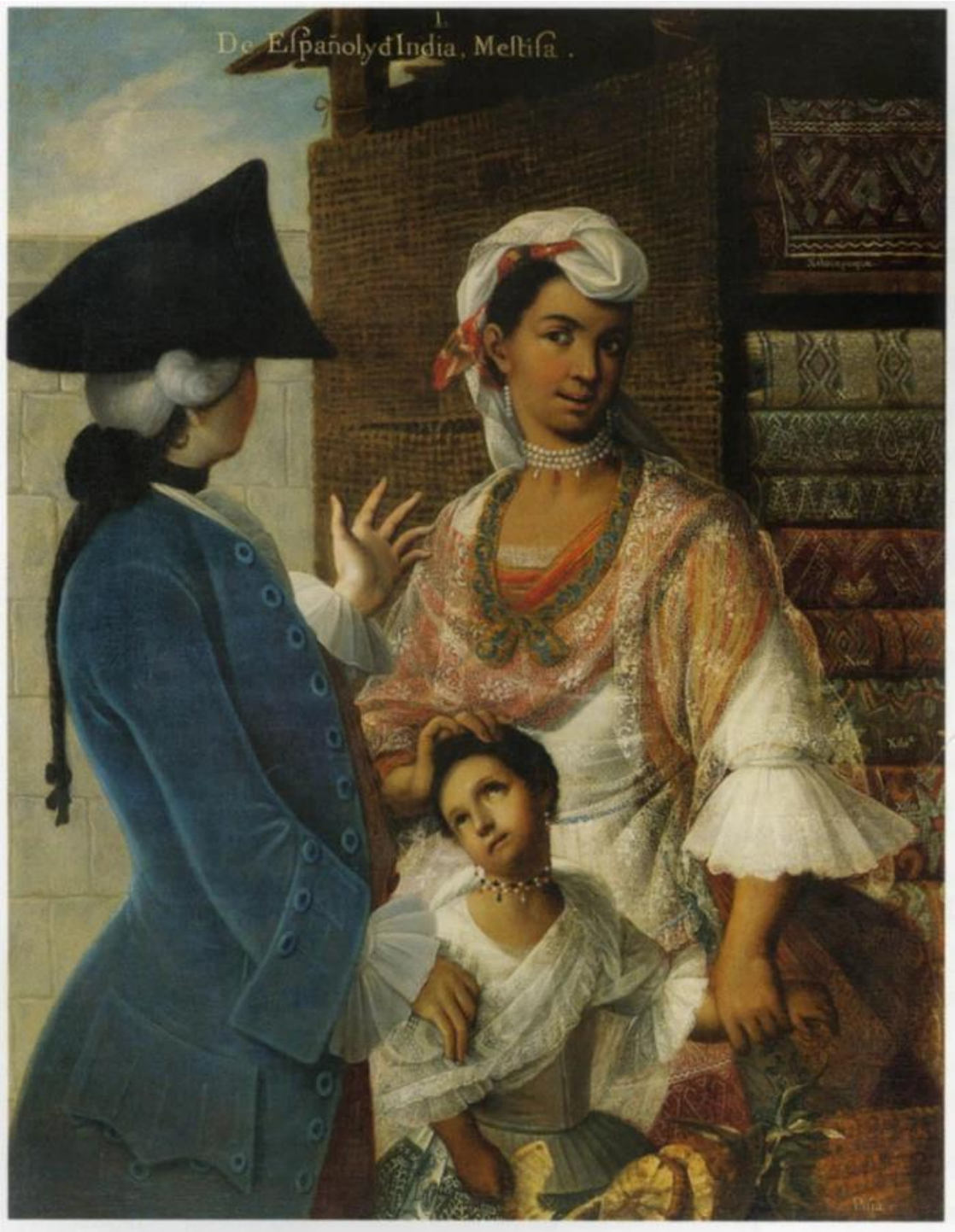

Figure 9. *De Español y d India; Mestiza,* 1763, Miguel Cabrera, oil, 135.5cm x 103.5 cm. Museo de América, Madrid. ©Museo de América.

Abjection and Intersectional Identity in King Cobra's *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*

Yoobin Shin

Abstract

Brooklyn-based artist King Cobra's (documented as Doreen Lynette Garner) (b. 1986) sculptural assemblage, *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* (2018) visually reiterates the history of inhumane medical experiments on Black enslaved women's bodies in the United States from 1845 to 1849. In many website contents that deal with King Cobra's oeuvre, the term 'abjection' frequently appears. The motive behind this overuse of the term mostly comes from the sculpture's mode of presentation that is difficult to look at and evokes the improper/unclean defilement that becomes the site of contestation of 'I.' Similarly, works of other contemporary women artists who use grotesque, bloody imagery, are often labelled as "abjection." Approached from a feminist perspective, their works are understood to be a confrontation to white male norms, shaking the boundaries of patriarchal 'I,' as described in Julia Kristeva's abjection theory. Instead of taking a different theoretical approach to King Cobra's work, the paper rather takes up the term in order to determine the applicability of the concept. By doing so, King Cobra's work is situated in the theory, expanding our interpretation of the historical representation of Black women that she hopes to discuss with her audience today. However, the history surrounding this theory discloses the limit of application leading to larger questions of claiming the artist's subjectivity.

Disclaimer of Language Use:

Due to the subject matter of this paper, it contains some of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century's terms such as "Hottentot," "uncivilized," "apelike," and "savage" that are offensive to contemporary readers and modern sensibilities.

The sculpture *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* (fig. 1) by Brooklyn-based African American artist King Cobra (documented as Doreen Lynette Garner) creates an uncanny experience while observing its formal composition. Twelve red fluorescent bulbs are joined together to form a metallic, skeletal cube structure of 162.6 x 288.9 x 81.3 cm, with twelve red fluorescent bulbs installed around the borders of the three-dimensional rectangle.[1] Projecting inward, the red fluorescent light surrounds seven elongated objects hung at the centre of the prism from steel hooks attached to the top steel bars. This arrangement with the steel bars and red fluorescent bulbs simulates meat-hanging practices at local butcher shops and meat factories in North America, where processed animal meats are hung with metal hooks to improve tenderness and be displayed as products to customers.

Unlike the animal meats whose blood, internal organs, and inedible tallow were removed, the carcasses presented here are unusual. The fat and bloody innards are still intact, presented through meticulously arranged pearls and colouring on the silicon and insulation foams with yellow and red paints. The carcass is abruptly handled to the extent where it becomes challenging to recognize different cuts. The most perplexing thing about this sculpture is the remains of skin imprinted with human hands. Along with the hair and breasts, it is the skin–brown and black–that grabs the viewer's attention. Human hands appear on the skin of body pieces, exerting their strong presence as if crawling out from a crevice in the carcass. This strange representation of "meat" opposes our expectation leaving us to ask: *What are these animals? Whose bodies are these if this carcass was human?*

This visual ambiguity is a deliberate choice made by the artist as she re-literalizes the history of medical exploitation on enslaved Black women's bodies by American physician, Dr. James Marion Sims (1813-1883) in the 1840s.[2] In the medical field, Sims had been designated as the "father of gynecology," with his research on surgical techniques for the repair of *vesicovaginal fistula*, an abnormal opening between the bladder and vagina that obstructs childbirths. To honour Sims' discoveries, three statues of Sims were erected in recognition of his contribution: one at the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery (1939), another at the South Carolina State House in Columbia (1929) and the last one in Central Park in New York City (1894).[3] Over recent decades, this commemorative view of Sims has been repudiated by many - It is because Sims' experiments were mostly conducted on enslaved Black women, including those named as Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsy. Sims' choice not to use anesthesia on

[1] The size and materials of *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* (2018) for my visual analysis are referenced from the website, Basel: https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/70989/Doreen-Garner-Red-Rack-of-Those-Ravaged-and-Unconsenting.
[2] Martia Graham Goodson, "Enslaved Africans and Doctors in South Carolina," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 95, no. 3 (March 2003): 225. The detailed history of Dr. James Marion Sims can be found in this article.
[3] Goodson, "Enslaved Africans and Doctors," 229.

the Black women he performed his experiments on has exacerbated the controversy of his legacy. This decision was premised on Sims' belief that Black women are better able to withstand pain due to their "coarser constitution" compared to white men and women.[4] It became clear that his medical distinction was achieved at the expense of vulnerable individuals.

The years 2017 and 2018, when King Cobra produced this sculpture and other sculptures with the similar form and subject matter, mark the momentous downfall of Sims' reputation in the United States. In August 2017, Steve Benjamin, the mayor of Columbia, called for its removal in light of ongoing protests.[5] In February 2018, the Medical University of South Carolina, which Sims had attended, quietly renamed the endowed chair honoring him.[6] The bronze statues in New York became a site for protest by an activist group, Black Youth Project 100, against the continued commemoration of Sims.[7] On April 16, 2018, the statue was removed from Central Park under the New York City Public Design Commission and relocated to Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, where he is buried.[8] Amidst growing backlash against Sims, King Cobra's *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* sculptured in 2018 can be read as a participation in this series of protests, honouring those who were victimized by the colonial violence of the nineteenth century. Other works made in 2017 and 2018 were executed in a manner similar to *Red Rack*. King Cobra's *A Fifteen Year Old Girl who would never Dance Again; A White Man in Pursuit of the Pedestal* (figs. 2 and 3) presents a leg whose skin is partially flayed and is placed on a stainless-steel medical table, referencing physician W.H. Robert's unnecessary amputation of a fifteen-year-old Black girl's leg. Her performance, *Purge* (2017) is more explicit in condemning Sims for his unethical, racist treatment on enslaved people. During the performance, King Cobra and other six Black women conduct a *vesicovaginal fistula* repair on a silicon model of Sims' skin. A gallery description of the piece describes the piece as showcasing "King Cobra's commitment to portraying an *abjection* of the Black body."[9] Her work is often grouped together with other women artists regardless of the cultural or racial background who present discharging and visceral motifs and which are accompanied by the term "abjection."[10] How does this term operate in relation to King

[4] Goodson, "Enslaved Africans and Doctors," 229-230.
[5] Cynthia Roldán, "Steve Benjamin Says Monument at SC State House 'Should Come Down at Some Point," *The State*, August 17, 2017, https://www.thestate.com/news/local/article167458697.html.
[6] Sarah Zhang, "The Surgeon Who Experimented on Slaves," *The Atlantic*, April 18, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/04/j-marion-sims/558248/.
[7] Mirian Zoila Pérez, "New Target for Statue Removal: 'Father of Gynecology' Who Operated on Enslaved Black Women," *Colorlines*, August 30, 2017, https://www.colorlines.com/articles/new-target-statue-removal-father-gynecology-who-operated-enslaved-black-women.
[8] William Neuman, "City Orders Sims Statue Removed from Central Park," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/nyregion/nyc-sims-statue-central-park-monument.html.
[9] My emphasis. "Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting, 2018," ArtBasel, accessed October 2, 2021, https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/70989/Doreen-Garner-Red-Rack-of-Those-Ravaged-and-Unconsenting.
[10] Tess Thackara, "Why Contemporary Women Artists Are Obsessed with the Grotesque," *Artsy*, January 19, 2019, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-contemporary-women-artists-obsessed-grotesque. The author includes

Cobra's piece? And why should King Cobra's work be understood through "abjection"? The concept of abjection was developed by psychoanalytic philosopher Julia Kristeva in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980), published in English as *Powers of Horror* (1982). According to Kristeva, abjection is a feeling of physical revulsion and disgust that the subject/"I" experiences when confronted with anything that cannot be clearly distinguished as neither inside or outside of oneself such as spoiled food, bodily fluids, and/or other corporeal wastes.[11] In attempting to maintain a stable sense of self by expelling such experience, the boundaries between the subject/"I" and objects/"Other" that constitute oneself are unsettled.[12] Therefore, it "disrupts the identity, system, and order" of society and impacts the social and political constitution of inclusion/exclusion which establishes the foundations of social existence.[13]

A significant amount of academic scholarship in English-speaking countries, mainly the United States, Britain, and Australia, has adopted Kristeva' theory of abjection.[14] Scholars in gender studies in particular have used the theory as an enabling concept for feminist research owing to Kristeva's premise of psychic matricide.[15] For Kristeva, to be a subject is not only to embody lived experience but also to establish oneself as a constitutor of meaning.[16] For individuals to function as subjects and to claim subjectivity, it is necessary for them to separate from their infantile and corporeal attachment to the maternal body/origin and then identify with the father-figure for socialization with

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Garner's Red Rack piece, Jana Euler's *detail of Global warnings (people who are over 100 years old)* (2018), Cindy Sherman's Instagram posts, and Jala Wahid's *Broken Lining* (2017).

[11] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2-3.

[12] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

[13] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4. On page 4, Kristeva elaborates how the abject causes disruption in "identity, system, order" by stating, "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order… The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior… Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject… Abjection, on the hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady." In addition to this, Kristeva writes, on page 136, "any political commitment [for others] … it settles the subject within a socially justified illusion" These two Kristeva's phrases acknowledge the abjection's influence in the structuring of the social predicament of what is immoral and unlawful.

[14] Imogen Tyler, "Against Abjection," *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 1 (April 2009): 78. The author quotes Winfried Menninghaus's writing *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (2003:365) to explain the sudden stardom of Kristeva's abjection theory in the theoretical discourse of the 1980s: "In the 1980s, a new buzzword entered political and critical discourse… The word is 'abjection,' and it represents the newest mutation in the theory of disgust. Oscillating in its usage, between serving as a theoretical concept and precisely defying the order of conceptual language altogether, the term 'abjection' also commonly appears as both adjective ('abject women,' 'abject art') and adjective turned into a substantive ('the abject')."

[15] Tyler, "Against Abjection," 81. In terms of Anglo-feminists, Tyler listed theorists who appropriated Kristeva's abjection theory in their writings from the feminist perspective, including Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis (*1993), Kelly Oliver's *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double Bind* (1993), Christine Bousfield's *The Abject Space: Its Gifts and Complains* (2000), and Rosemary Betterton's *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (1996).

[16] Stone, "Against Matricide: Rethinking Subjectivity and the Maternal Body," *Hypatia* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 120. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41328901. In order to better understand how/why Kristeva considers matricide as a necessary step for becoming a subject, the author also references Kristeva's other publications, mainly her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984).

others.[17] The father is signified as the symbolic moment of separation from one's affective, instinctual bond with mother, and therefore he is regarded as the signifier of autonomy and agency.[18] Thus, that bodily and psychic dyad of the mother and child must be abjected in order for a child to be born as an independent speaking subject. Reading maternal bodies as the primary site of abjection, scholars have not only attempted to probe the origins of misogynistic representations of women and women's bodies but also to disrupt patriarchal social structure by subordinating the paternal role under a maternal one.[19] The work of woman artists that engage with grotesque, nauseating, violent and gory representations of female bodies have been read in conjunction with Kristeva's abjection as a feminist strategy in order to deconstruct the Western patriarchal notion of femininity and to reclaim their own embodied subjectivities.[20]

This paper examines King Cobra's *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting* through Kristeva's theory of abjection. My engagement with abjection theory in reading King Cobra's work is neither because of the representation of abject material nor locating abjection in the supposed otherness of Black and female bodies. Rather, I consider the term's parameters by testing if abjection is the appropriate term and theory to use in representing King Cobra's work. I argue that the application of Kristeva's abjection in reading King Cobra's piece helps us navigate through the work and the artist's motivation. She wishes to demonstrate contemporary issues associated with her race and gender that have been developed through the colonial enslavement of Black individuals. It reveals, however, that it is challenging to further interrogate her own claim of agency and subjectivity due to the limit of abjection theory, whose fundamental premise was to foster white western subjectivity by dehumanizing Black people and disrupting the quest for a free subject position.

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[17] Stone, "Against Matricide," 120. Again, the author references another of Kristeva's works published in 1996, *Interviews*.
[18] Stone, "Against Matricide," 121.
[19] Tyler, "Against Abjection," 84. For instance, Australian feminist theorist Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1993) questions the depiction of maternal bodies, often her womb with blood, as alien and horrific in Hollywood horror films. In her analysis, Creed argues that images which show women as monstrous and violently punished are "to reinforce the phallocratic notion that female sexuality is abject."
[20] Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October* 78, (Autumn, 1996): 112-114. In this article, Hal Foster did not state himself that his analysis is based on a feminist perspective in investigating Cindy Sherman's artworks ranging from 1975 to 1991. He approaches Cindy Sherman's abject photographs such as *Untitled #190* from Kristeva's notion of abjection. Here, he argues that such extreme conditions of disaster and damages by Sherman may read as the impulse of the observer's subjective gaze and attempt to question the representation of the human figure as a subject in western art practice. However, his article is leaning more toward criticizing the slippage of Kristeva's abjection. Yet, this article provides the ways in which the art historians in the 1990s viewed feminist abject art.

Black Slave as *Flesh*

To fully delve into King Cobra's work, we must have a proper understanding of the social context of the nineteenth century during which Sims and other medical practitioners performed their experiments on enslaved Black people. During the thirty years prior to the Civil War (1861- 1865), there was a huge demand of human bodies from medical institutions throughout the United States in order to train students, experiment with new techniques, and perform autopsies to reveal the effects of diseases.[21] Due to this rising demand for human bodies as teaching specimens, enslaved people were targeted for medical demonstrations and surgical practice. As "the greatest and most important part of [the owners'] property" and labour force, maintaining the physical health of enslaved people was a top priority for owners of plantation fields and small farms as one of the rules enforced on the rice estate of P.C. Weston of South Carolina in 1857 demonstrates:

> The Proprietor, in the first place, wishes the Overseer most distinctly to understand that his first object is to be, under all circumstances, the care and well-being of the negroes…
>
> *Sickness* – All sick persons are to stay in the hospital night and day, from the time they first complain to the time they are able to go to work again.[22]

Therefore, enslaved people unable to work due to "sickness" provided a source of patients for medical students and practitioners. Medical and academic institutions had incentive to secure a source of enslaved people for research purposes since successful medical studies leading to publications and institutional prestige required test subjects. A number of American medical schools in South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Alabama, and Virginia-even encouraged owners to send sick and injured Black people in for use as experimental subjects through newspaper advertisements.[23]

The underlying impulse that had permitted such a reciprocity between American medical institutions and slave owners was grounded in the racist, systemic dehumanization of Black people. Considered to be part of property of owners, the Black body was treated as a commodity, with enslaved people being deprived of agency and legal personhood. The decision made by Chief Justice

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[21] Todd L. Savitt, "The Use of Blacks for Medical Experimentation and Demonstration in the Old South," *The Journal of Southern History* 48, no. 3 (August 1982): 322. Savitt argues that this rising interest in human bodies in the Southern states of America as the medical use was inspired by the "ideas of the French school of hospital medicine," quoting Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York, 1973). See also Martha Carolyn Mitchell, "Health and the Medical Profession in the Lower South, 1845-1860", The Journal of Southern History 10, no. 4 (November 1944): 431, where the author claims, contradicting to Savitt that the rise of the medical profession in the South was due to the rising health concerns followed by various diseases including yellow fever "appeared on the plantations."

[22] J. D. B. De Bow, "Management of a Southern Plantation—Rules Enforced on the Rice Estate of P. C. Weston, Esq., of South Carolina," *De Bow's Review* 22, no. 1 (January 1857): 38.

[23] Savitt, "The Use of Blacks," 334.

Roger Taney of the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) codified this commodified status of Black people:

> [African Americans] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order … so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an *ordinary article of merchandise* and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it. This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race.[24]

Under constitutional law, Black people were labeled as a *thing*, conflated with the colonial ideas of natural resources as extractable, replaceable, and exchangeable. Blackness was associated by the colonial worldview with a supposedly animalistic nature.[25] Through the propagation of these racist stereotypes, Black peoples were dehumanized and silenced by Western colonial ambitions. The corporeality of Black peoples was encoded with meaning, the Black body came to be defined as inherently commodifiable and other-than-human by a Western colonial worldview that would then ruthlessly exploit generations of African people and their descendants. Returning our attention to King Cobra, I will incorporate Hortense J. Spillers' distinction between "flesh" and "body" made in her seminal essay *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*, to infer what such notion of corporeality outlined above meant for Black women. Additionally, Selamawit D. Terrefe's interpretation on Spillers' "flesh" in relation to Kristeva in her recent article, *Speaking the Hieroglyph*, will be taken into consideration for my argument on how King Cobra's work can be situated within abjection theory. For Spillers, the "body" is integral in imposing symbolic meanings and ideological paradigm from a subject position whereas the "flesh" exists in captivity, constituting an antithetical position to the "body."[26] The "flesh" is a "primary narrative" which tells physical wounds that are marked through violence. It is also marked for violence, as if "a kind of hieroglyphics" that the skin color of the flesh determines what sort of violence would come. Black male and female flesh, according to Spillers, are thus ungendered in the New World and that the violence of the transatlantic slave trade separates them from "motive will" and "active desire."[27] In an interview with *Art21*

[24] Cecil J. Hunt II, "Feeding the Machine: The Commodification of Black Bodies from Slavery to Mass Incarceration," *University of Baltimore Law Review* 49, no. 3 (2020): 324]e. *Dred Scott v. Sandford* is the court case in 1857 which an enslaved Black man, Dred Scott, sued for his freedom, claiming his free status since his owners brought him into Illinois where slavery was forbidden. The Supreme Court of the United States, however, ruled that he and other African Americans should not be considered as 'citizens' under the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, Scott lost in the case and was not able to claim for his freedom.

[25] Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 2002), 17. See also Jennifer L. Morgan's "*Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770* featured in the same book.

[26] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 67.

[27] Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 67.

magazine, King Cobra explains what she hopes for her audience when engaging with her work. "If Sims could see me, a young Black woman, cutting up [a silicone cast of his statue] as a means of entertainment for not only Black people but also White people, I think he would be horrified."[28] King Cobra addresses her act of giving pleasure– "as a means of entertainment *for* not only Black people but also White people"–in regard to her performance *Purge*. The enjoyment that King Cobra conjures up comes from mutilating the body of the target of the audience's hatred (Sims). Then, how can this act of cutting bodies be read in *Red Rack*? Her interview from a YouTube video made by *Art21* helps us further:

> I try to create a traumatic experience. I want the audience to walk away feeling like they can't unsee what they just saw. Something that is burned in and lasts, and you can never get rid of it. I use the body in my work mostly because of the trauma that I have, watching how one small thing can make the entire body fail.[29]

In contemplation of *Red Rack*, the audience would be empathetic to Black women's bodies who were abused for Sims' and the medical profession at large. It is certainly shocking to see such fragmented pieces of the body. But what makes a "traumatic experience" or "feeling like they can't unsee what they just saw" is King Cobra's strategic positioning of viewer relative to the perspective of Sims: the audience of *Red Rack* is to look at the bodies of nameless and dismembered Black women hung like chunks of meat, commodified as purchasable and replaceable flesh. The presentation made by King Cobra forces us to absorb the position of Sims. And there, Kristevan abjection comes into play. For Kristeva, the abject possesses the properties of both subject and object and through the abjective process, the subjectivity is formed:

> The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I … I experience a gagging sensation … all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire… "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*.[30]

'I' (the audience) expels, spit, and abject *myself* (Sims).

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[28] Brian Redondo, "Teaching History by Sculpting Experience: An Interview with Doreen Garner," *Art21*, March 16, 2018, https://magazine.art21.org/2018/03/16/teaching-history-by-sculpting-experience-an-interview-with-doreen-garner/#.YXwyk9nMI0t.

[29] Art21, "Doreen Garner Sculpts Our Trauma," YouTube Video, 0:15 – 0:31. February 21, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjOUk4p3bo8.

[30] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 3.

Those who continue to praise and defend Sims' medical experimentations to the present day in the medical journals or other media platforms are further implicated in this perspectival shift to Sims. In spite of their acknowledgement of the pain that enslaved Black women had to endure, they justify his practice base on his personality of which "Sims was known by colleagues and patients alike as a kind-hearted" or they blame the history of European colonialism so that he is "a product of his time."[31] Those who neglect the violence inflicted by Sims in an attempt to preserve the status of Sims as "one of the most gifted of American surgeons" now face this reality and question Sims and his monuments as the artist intends.

> My work helps me to question why White men are on pedestals. Sims's monument stands as a symbol of acceptance of hate and of racism. It's as if his horrific acts don't matter because we have benefited from his medical advances. But it's not healthy to ignore the horror. I like the idea that we can deconstruct his statue.[32]

For her Black audience, the re-enactment of Sims' practice that deprives the victims' own sense of agency over their own bodies through the viewership complicates Spillers' notion of 'flesh.' -The idea of 'flesh' on Black bodies proposed by Spillers is now unsettled. If the 'flesh' is a site of marked violence, marking of violence is enacted on 'flesh' by the hands of the artist, a young Black woman. The distinction between the captive/captor – that is body/flesh - becomes a murky terrain. Such disconcerted feeling functions as a mnemonic device for recalling the history. For contemporary Black people, the history of slavery in America may feel distant to them like Saidiya Hartman's confession early in her journey along the Atlantic slave route:

> "Of course, I knew Black people had been enslaved and that I was descended from slaves, but slavery was vague and faraway to me, like the embarrassing incidents adults loved to share with you about some incredulous thing you had done as a toddler but of which you had no memory. It wasn't that you suspected them of making it up as much as it concerned some earlier incarnation of yourself that was not really you. Slavery felt like that too, something that was part of me but not me at the same time. It had never been concrete before, not something as palpable as my great-grandfather in his starched

[31] MJ West and LM Irvine, "The Eponymous Dr James Marion Sims MD, LLD (1813-1883)," *Journal of Medical Biography* 23, no. 1 (2015): 43. This article by West and Irvine gives a biography of Sims and his practice. Though the authors acknowledge the controversy surrounding his use of slave patients, the language they used here is worth to note as it seems to defend his practice. In page 43, it requires our critical attention and speculation when reading their wording, including "Sims at least demonstrate his preparedness to try to alleviate the slave women of a miserable existence, leaking urine and frequently faeces. Their lives would have been even more wretched without surgery and the knowledge and skills gained have subsequently been applied to achieve successful fistula repairs for thousands of women … Surely Sims was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to improve the life and wellbeing of his slave patients and later the poor women of New York, equal to many nineteenth century pioneers who have laid the foundations of current surgical practice … Sims clearly expressed his compassion for the young slave women, already segregated and shunned. "
[32] Redondo, "Teaching History."

> cotton shirt sitting next to me in a brown Ford, or a parched red clay country road, or a horse trader from Tennessee, or the name of a girl, not much younger than me, who had been chattel."[33]

Hartman reminds that the contemporary issues on Black people such as "limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" are residue of slavery as what Hartman coined as "the afterlife of slavery."[34]

Black Female Sexuality

During an interview with King Cobra organized by Berlin Art Link in 2016, an interviewer, Penny Rafferty raised a question in regard to her portrayal of the painful history of Black enslaved women: "You said in a recent interview that you wonder if the works would be read the same if a white woman made them. Can you elaborate on that?" In reply, King Cobra responded as following:

> "Well, if I was a white woman I could create work about my race, but it would never be talked about because being white is seen as neutral, normal and standardized. Because I'm a Black woman, my work is often seen to be sexual and illicit and that becomes my practice."[35]

In the same interview, she pointed out that "the art world and society are making Black women into sexualized objects: just look at the media for confirmation."[36] What is implicit in both of her responses is her concern over the *representation* of Black women in contemporary art and visual culture. According to King Cobra, being a Black woman causes her and her work to be read in sexualized terms and then perceived in that way. Indeed, this has long been a collective concern among Black women in America. Numerous Black intellectuals in various fields of study have – investigated the origins of such sexualized projection/gaze on Black women and worked against these currents towards empowerment. Therefore, it is important to trace their studies in order to examine how this scholarship has influenced King Cobra's sculpture and whether or not the theoretical apparatus of abjection can be applied in relation to her work.

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[33] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 10.

[34] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 6. In her book, Hartman addresses that contemporary American society is still affected by the slavery system by stating, "If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery – skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery."

[35] Penny Rafferty, "Body//Re-Examining the White Supremacist Gaze: An Interview with Doreen Garner," *BerlinArtLink*, April 06, 2016, https://www.berlinartlink.com/2016/04/06/body-re-examining-the-white-supremacist-gaze-an-interview-with-doreen-garner/.

[36] Rafferty, "Body."

In case of Black enslaved women, their corporeality was bound together with female sexuality that was marginalized as a sexual object of men as what Lisa Collins remarks as "exoticism frequently meshes with eroticism."[37] Treated as animal, Black women were used as pornographic images, depicted as having an animalistic sexual appetite.[38] According to Patricia Hill Collins who referenced Alice Walker's distinction between "object" and "animal," it is necessary for western colonialism to place the Black female as animals and white women as objects. Objects are 'creations of culture' from the subject position of white men. Operating on the binary of culture (civilization) and nature, the connotation of animals strengthened whiteness to be a symbolic representation of civilization and total conquest over nature.[39] The beginning of such pornographic treatment of Black female intertwined with this ideological movement can be identified with Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman born in 1790, famously known as "Hottentot Venus."[40] Her physical body and images of her were not only circulated and exhibited as a study of scientific enquiry but portrayed in an overtly sexualized manner that served as a source of entertainment and wonder to a public audience.

With this racial and sexual displacement, both white Western male and female artists of the nineteenth to early twentieth century established visual conventions on Black female body. Surviving images reveal a persistent attitude that reinforces the frame of a savage, bestial and oversexed Black female body. Art historian Charmaine A. Nelson identifies some conventions that artists utilized to portray the Black female nude in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by examining Canadian artist Dorothy Stevens's *Coloured Nude* (1933). First, it manipulates pubic hair to signify Black women's "animal sexuality and carnal desire."[41] Second, the pose of unwillingly revealing her breasts and pubic area as sexual spectacle highlights her obedient position under master/owner.[42] Created in 1877, a marble statue by the Italian artist Giacomo Ginotti, *Abolition of Slavery*, exhibits these visual topoi. While rendering a recently freed young Black woman, her hands are still bound together with irons. Her position of bounded hands accentuates the presence of her breasts. Avoiding eye contact by gazing downwards, the "sexual availability" of the young Black woman's body is emphasized through

[37] Lisa Collins, "Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 2002), 103.
[38] Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 212. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343468.
[39] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 138-139.
[40] Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic," 18-21. See also Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of "Hottentot" Women in Europe, 1815-17* featured in the same book.
[41] Charmaine A. Nelson, " Coloured Nude: Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy," in *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art.* (London: Routledge, 2010), 113.
[42] Nelson, "Coloured Nude," 115-116.

the bodily positioning, allowing the viewer to contemplate the nubile body unabashedly.[43] Another painting, *Black Girl in a Stream* (1867-70), by the Swiss artist Frank Buchser depicts a young Black woman like that of Ginotti's statue. She is looking sideways. Her body fully exposes her breast and belly and is turned towards the viewer. The model is presented in the middle of a forest, marking her closeness to nature. Besides those artistic conventions, the colonial gaze through which "Black women are defined *by* their sexuality and *as* their sexuality" also produced the hypersexualized stereotypes on Black women such as the Jezebel.[44] Originated during the slavery, the image of Jezebel, which branded Black woman as a seductive and promiscuous was constructed by white owners to claim complete ownership over their agency and sexuality through rape and other sexual assaults.[45]

These tropes continued to dictate the representation of Black women in the twentieth and twenty-first century. In a 1995 study Carolyn M. West addresses how stereotypical images of Black women result in a greater risk for sexual victimization. Black women were more vulnerable to attempted sexual violence than white women and often the myth of Black women's supposed lewdness justified their victimhood.[46] The recent research by Leath and others examines the influence of the Jezebel stereotype on Black women's sexual agency. The authors suggest that most participants of their interview who are Black women believe the Jezebel stereotype to be a contributing factor to negative representations of Black women's sexuality and experiences of sexual violence.[47] The portrayal of Black women in media also has become a site of scrutiny among intellectuals. Collins, West, and hooks criticize the oversexed display or exploitation of Black women's bodies.[48] Others,

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[43]Collins, "Economies of the Flesh," 105.

[44] Akeia A. F. Benard, "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism: Feminist and Human Rights Perspectives," *Sexualization, Media, & Society* (October-December 2016): 3. DOI: 10.1177/2374623816680622.

[45] Carolyn M. West, "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and Their Homegirls: Developing an "Oppositional Gaze" Toward the Images of Black Women," in *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, ed. Joan C. Chrisler and Carla Golden (Illinois: Waveland Press, 2018), 294.

[46] Carolyn M. West, "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and Their Implications for Psychotherapy," *Psychotherapy* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 462-3. In referencing a community sample reported in Wyatt's 1992 study, "The sociocultural context of African American and white American women's rape," *Journal of Social Issues,* 48 (1), it shows that the rate of attempted sexual assault on Black women was 27 % whereas 17% for white women. As well, West provides that the conviction rates of Black-on-Black is far lower than White victims based on the studies from 1985.

[47] Seanna Leath, Morgan C. Jerald, Tiani Perkins, and Martinque K. Jones, "A Qualitative Exploration of Jezebel Stereotype Endorsement and Sexual Behaviors Among Black College Women," *Journal of Black Psychology* 47, no. 4-5 (2021): 261 – 262. DOI: 10.1177/009579842199721. Their project investigates the socialization experiences by interviewing fifty individual Black women (ages 18-24 years old), enrolled at predominantly White U.S. universities. The participants were asked to answer whether a list of questions deemed relevant to them or not.

[48] This point has been addressed by many Black scholars. In West's "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire," she addresses the challenges when the artists in music industry have attempted to express sexual liberty or subjectivity by stating in page 295, "The difficulty, however, lies in telling the difference between representations of Black women who are sexually liberated and those who are sex objects. Are rappers like Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown victims of the hip-hop industry, examples of repackaged Jezebels, or savvy businesswomen who freely exploit their sexuality for personal financial gain?" One of the participants with her pseudo-name as Gabrielle in Leath and others' study also demonstrates her issues with

however, address a positive aspect that their control over their own bodies and sexuality provides a sense of personal empowerment and sexual agency to young Black women.[49]

Then how can we interpret the history of Black women's representation in relation to Kristeva's abjection theory? In the sculptural assemblage, *Red Rack*, King Cobra enlists the materiality of silicone, fiberglass insulation, beads, artificial pearls and Swarovski crystals that are used for the presentation of bodies in the work (detail 1). According to her, the glossy silicon surfaces "conjure up ideas of masturbation and sexual fetishization" akin to sex toys while beads and crystals catch one's eyes because of their reflective surfaces and association with wealth.[50] At the same time, King Cobra shows the utter destruction of bodies to the point where the bodies were dehumanized to the fullest extent, signaling the inability to return to the wholeness. Such treatment signals the extent of the violation as they endure this merciless dismemberment that reveals gory remains of blood and innards. Only the bony fingers and its tightened grasps refuse to be relegated to obscurity. Then, the bodies rearranged in a serial manner. The practice of assembling fragmented bodies recalls Lorna Simpson's Polaroid images of a Black model, *Guarded Condition* (1989). Combined with the repeating texts of "Sex Attack" and "Skin Attack" under the images, the artist depicts a serialized image of the back of the model whose hands are held behind her. In comparing King Cobra's work with that of Simpson, the physically fragmented bodies obscure the viewer's identification of the bodies' gender and even our identification of them as human beings. The organs that make up the female anatomy such as uterus and vagina, or female attributes such as hairstyle or dress are lacking. It is only King Cobra's work's historical context that allows us to identify them as female through their identification with the violent medical experiments performed on Black women. In addition, the hanging of bodies with red

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rap videos in page 265: "Rap videos emphasize the Jezebel thing . . . because when they rap, that is what it sounds like. Some people might say it makes being expressive with your sexuality and being open to having sexual relationships is okay. Some people might say that it encourages people to be focused on those things and to think about those things and not really value their body as they should, but to just let other people intrude all the time. You see a lot of domestic violence in these movies and broken families. Even though they were good movies, I don't think that they had the best representation." See also Chapter 4 of Patricia Hill Collins' book*, Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, which provides a similar line of argument.

[49] Leath, Jerald, Perkins, and Jones, "A Qualitative Exploration," 246-247. The authors reference Nylah Burton's post, *Megan Thee Stallion's Hot Girl Summer is A Movement, Not A Meme,* published on Bustle magazine on July 17, 2019. https://www.bustle.com/p/megan-thee-stallions-hot-girl-summer-is-a-movement-not-a-meme-18200567. See also Akeia A. F. Benard, "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism: Feminist and Human Rights Perspectives," *Sexualization, Media, & Society* (October-December 2016): 1-11. DOI: 10.1177/2374623816680622. Bernard talks about the feminists who argues for "Hip Hop Feminism." They celebrate public Black women such as Nicki Minaj and Rihanna for their creative work which invites new interpretation on representation. See Durham, A., Cooper, B. C., & Morris, S. M. "The stage hip-hop feminism built: A new directions essay," *Signs*, 38 (2013): 721–37.

[50] Doreen Garner, "Sculpture artist Doreen Garner on vanitas still life and the history of medical experimentation in America," interview by Jasmin Tsou, JTT, September 29, 2020, audio, 7:58-9:44, https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/jtt/sculpture-artist-doreen--BI_YMhf4Cp/#transcript.

fluorescent bulbs and steel bars reminds the viewer of animal meat at a market that confuses our expectation of proper burial or treatment for dead human bodies.

King Cobra's piece thus hyper-visualizes binaries that have been imposed on Black women: ungender/gender, animal/human, and life/death. This reckons with Spillers' notion of Black female flesh as "ungendered" during enslavement, objectified as property equal to chattel, lived under the constant threat of death and exposure to sexual violence.[51] However, those binaries also reflect the causes of individuals' abject response in Kristeva's theory of abjection. She states that the corpse that is prone to decay is "the utmost of abjection" because individuals' ultimate "Other" is death which signifies the end of one's identity and integration into the symbolic order of language as living, human subject.[52] When seeing the corpse, it makes a viewer's own death palpably real, on the border of "I" and "Other." In addition, Kristeva discusses the role of animal as the main source of abjection that makes the importance of borders fragile. According to her, the animal was once more powerful than humans in early human societies.[53] Thus, this primal confrontation with the animal threatens human subjects who distinguish themselves from the realm of the animal by defining the symbolic order of law. By stimulating an abjective response through visual presentation, King Cobra's work acts as an oppositional gaze, deflecting and resisting a white scopophilic, fetishizing, and controlling gaze. Engaging with her work through abjection theory demonstrates the possibility of subverting the theory from within rather than being subjugated into it.

Kristeva's Abjection as an Appropriate Methodology?

In a conversation with *Dazed* magazine in 2016, King Cobra explains her style of art: "It seems that feminism mostly represents the white female experience. I think Black feminism has a lot more issues to be discussed and dissected because we have very unique experiences that aren't being

[51] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67-68.
[52] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3-4. I am referencing here Kristeva's passage on page 3 and 4 to support my interpretation: "The corpse (or cadaver: cadre, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance… refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live... The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life."
[53] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12-13. We can find her understanding of animal in abjection with her statement: "The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the *territories of animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals of animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder. The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling."

represented properly."[54] Having acknowledged this, I would like to take a warning from Corrie Claiborne. For Claiborne, academic theories fail to take into account the lived experience of Black people because their coded languages are born out of white "European modes of knowledge in order to understand themselves."[55] This position has been discussed by a number of Black women thinkers and writers. The feminist studies propagated by Anglo-feminist theorists has put an emphasis on claiming female subjectivity through applying theories. Their practice, however, has been problematic for non-white scholars. It is because their demands for a subject position have hinged on rights and civil liberties that only white men have been allowed to embody and retain.[56] According to Sabine Broeck, during the period of enslavement in Europe, the free human citizen subject—defined by "mastery of his destiny by the creation of a mental, physical, political, economic, legal, and social border around the free human"—was made, marked, and maintained through "the existence of the slave/Black."[57] Moreover, the "master-slave dialectic" moved into Lacanian theory upon which Kristeva's abjection is based, translating into the masculine "subject" and feminine "object."[58] For Clairborne, Black subjectivity claimed through theories such as Kristeva's abjection can repeat and reinforce stereotypical representations of Black women that have historically been marginalized for the white subject. Therefore, leaving abjection behind to distance from this "Otherness" on Black women can create spaces for their voice over centuries of silence.

As we have seen, her piece serves as a reminder of brutal atrocities that Black women underwent to her audience, as a forum to critically respond to the appraisal of Sims' practice in our time, and as an oppositional gaze that resists the conventional representation of Black women in an overtly sexualized manner. Now, we need to think further about other questions as well: what does it mean for the artist herself and her Black audience to create and engage with dismembered Black bodies? Is King Cobra reproducing and reinforcing such stereotypical imagery on Black women like what Clairborne says when understanding her piece through the theory of abjection? The fundamental problem lies from reading contemporary works easily through Kristevan abjection. It disregards *who* is making and *what story* is embedded. Nevertheless, Claiborne urges the future generation of scholars to explore a way to bridge the gap between theory and reality of Black people: "where we are excluded in the discourse, we should include ourselves, wherever we are misrepresented we should set the

[54] Anna Freeman, "Should art created by women be called feminist art?" *Dazed*, April 6, 2016, https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/30552/1/should-art-created-by-women-be-called-feminist-art.
[55] Corrie Beatrice Claiborne, "Quiet Brown Buddha(s): Black Women Intellectuals, Silence and American Culture" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 3 – 4.
[56] Sabine Broeck, *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness*. (New York: State University of New York, 2018), 39.
[57] Broeck, *Gender*, 68.
[58] Broeck, *Gender*, 69.

record straight."[59] It is not to say the approach itself is problematic. Indeed, it is to say we must be careful in applying any theoretical concept, recognizing an interwoven complexity of gender, race, and history that constitutes intersectional identity.

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[59] Claiborne, "Quiet Brown Buddha(s)," 15.

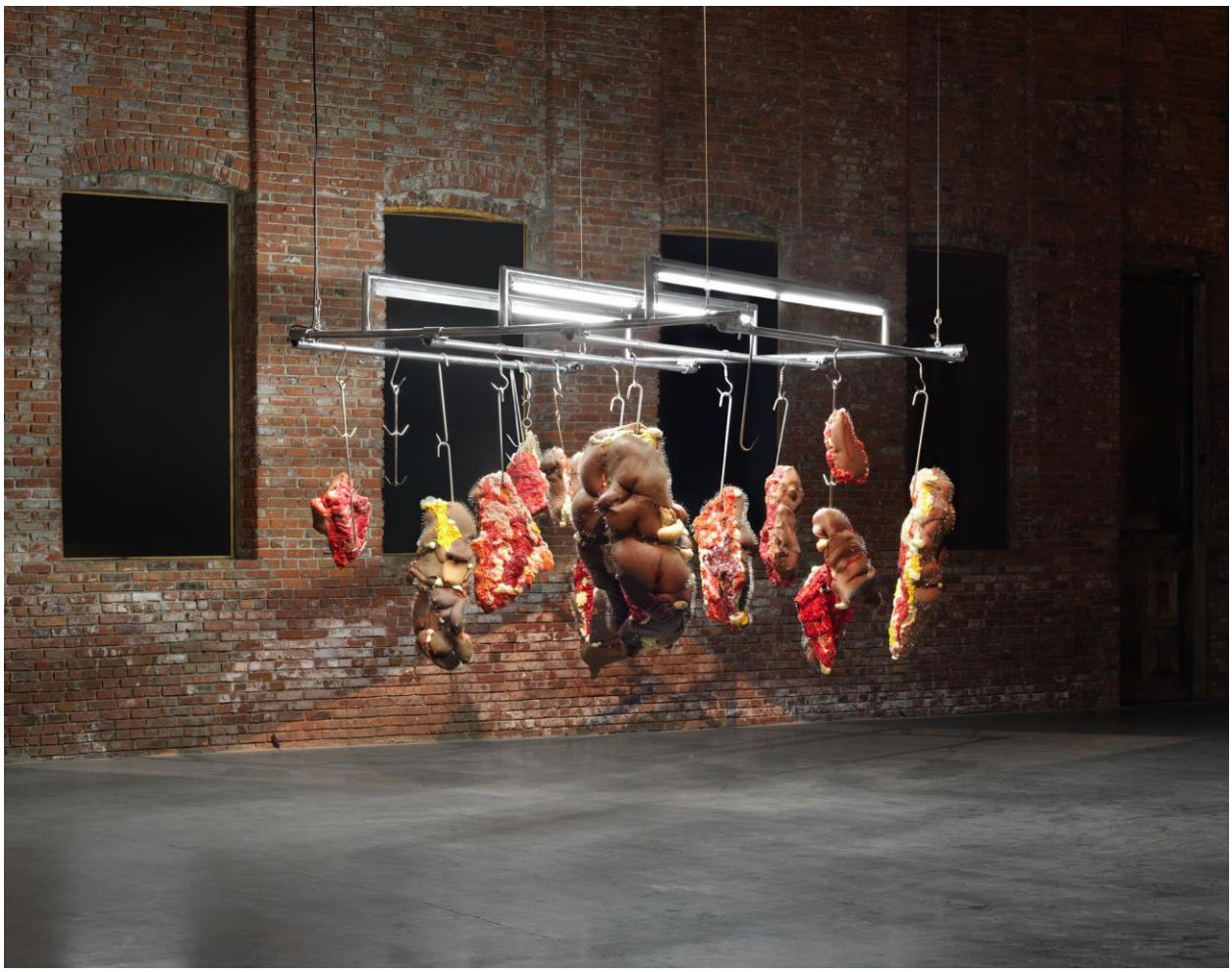
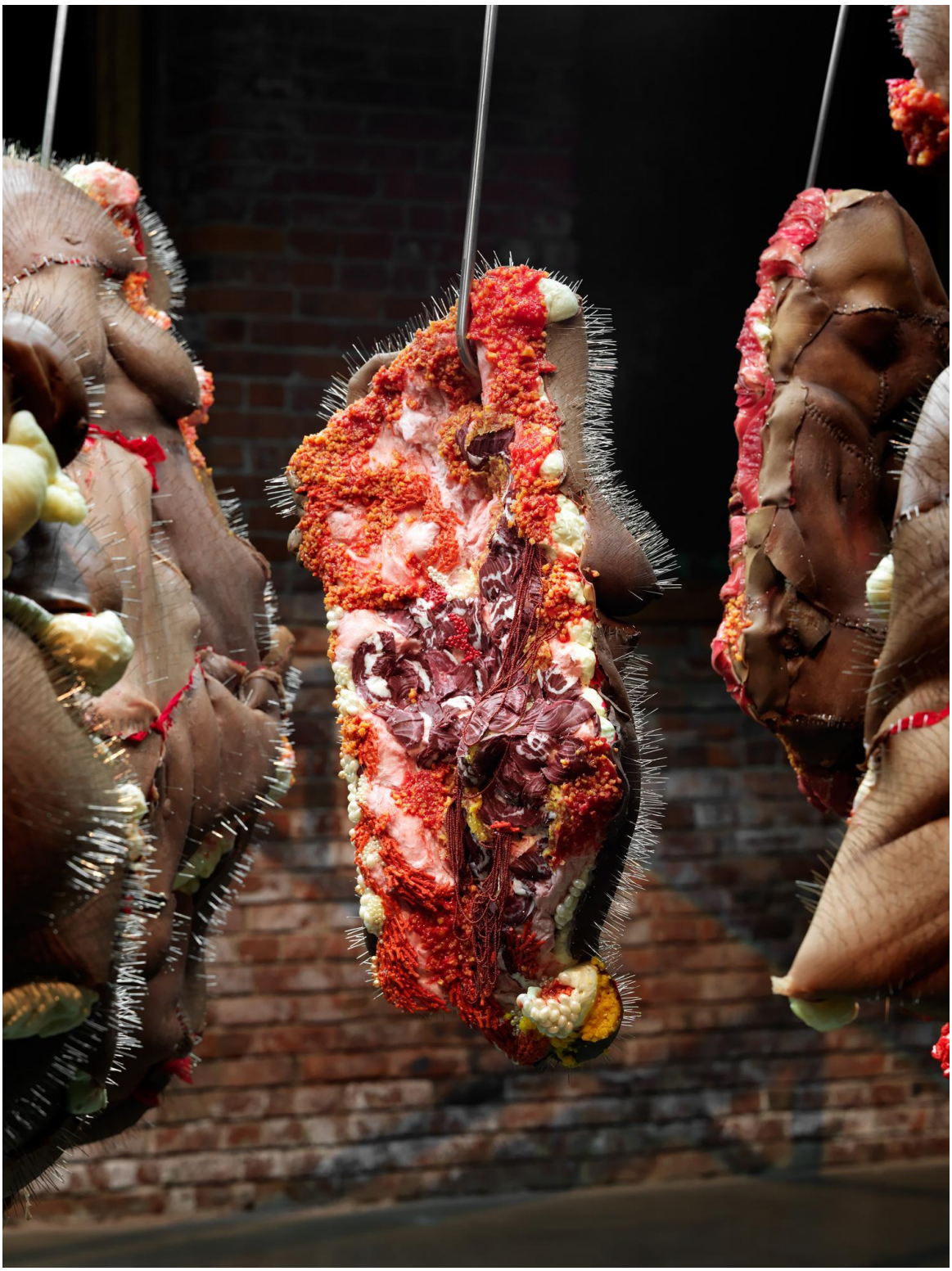


Figure 1. King Cobra, *Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Pioneer Works. Photo by Dan Bradica.

[*Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2017, is not the same artwork discussed in the paper, which is *Red Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2018. — Eds.]



Detail 1. King Cobra, *Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Pioneer Works. Photo by Dan Bradica.

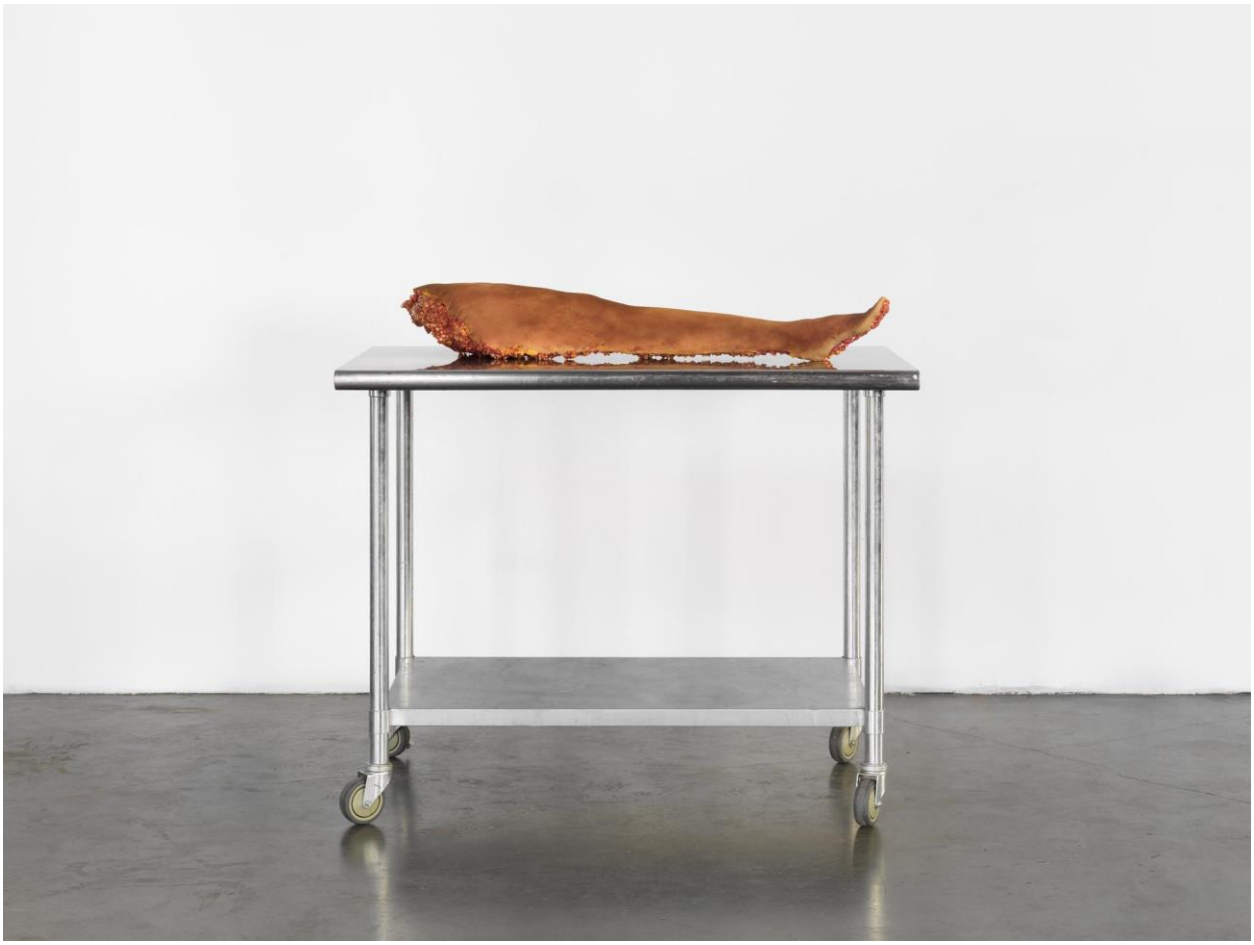


Figure 2. King Cobra, *A Fifteen Year Old Girl Who Would Never Dance Again; A White Man In Pursuit of the Pedestal*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Pioneer Works. Photo by Dan Bradica.

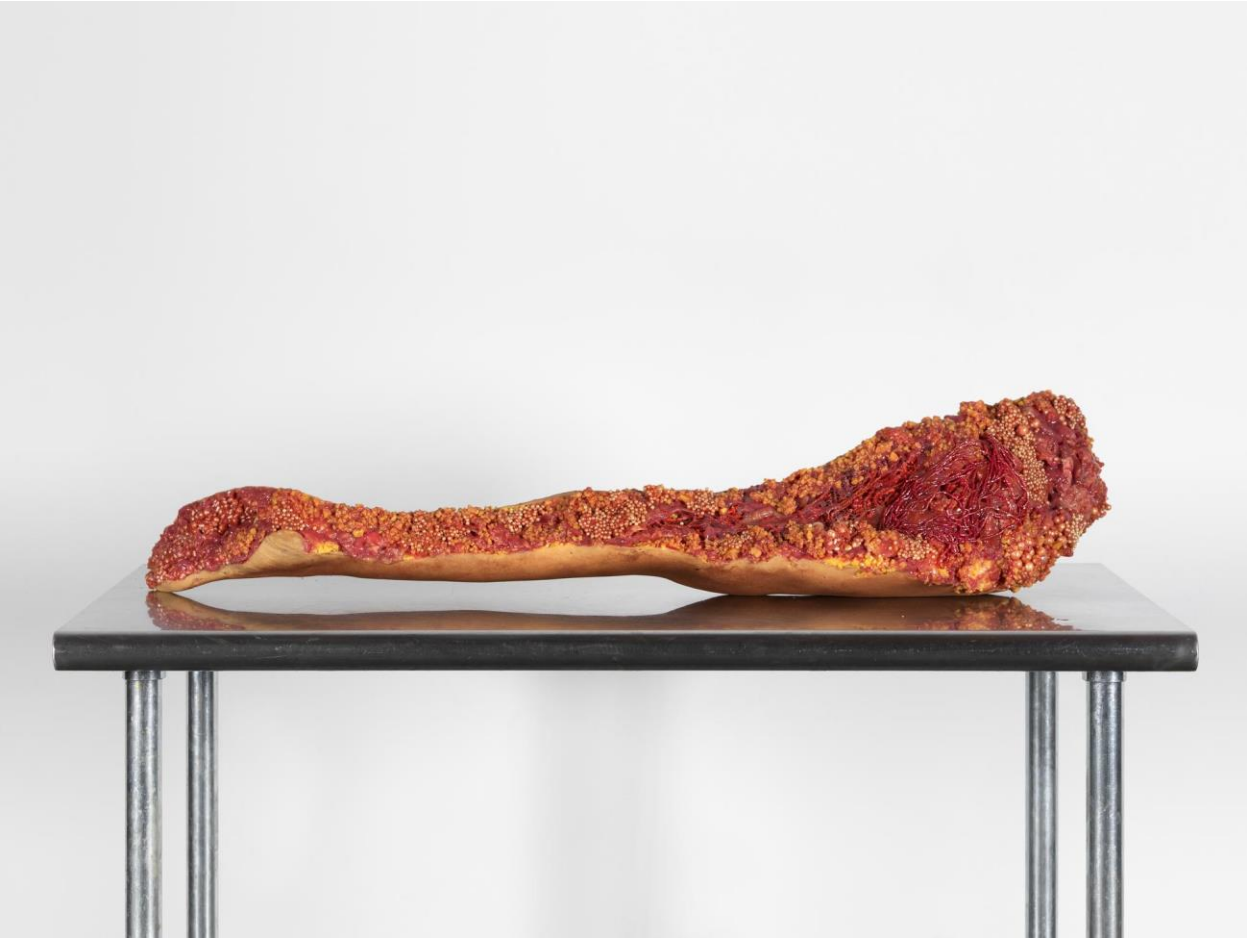


Figure 3. King Cobra, *A Fifteen Year Old Girl Who Would Never Dance Again; A White Man In Pursuit of the Pedestal*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Pioneer Works. Photo by Dan Bradica.

Spaces Unknown: Queer Articulations in James Wan's *Insidious* (2010)

Marcus Prasad

Abstract

This article explores the representation of the suburban house and the concept of suburbia as a space of social normativity in the American context following World War II. I pursue this line of investigation by analyzing a work of horror film that questions and disrupts this distinct space: James Wan's *Insidious* (2010). The following reveals the unique means through which this work exposes a decades-long disdain held toward postwar suburban development and its deep ties to normativity by closely examining how Wan represents the space of the home and its subsequent undoing. I thread works of queer theory within my analysis to act as a guiding framework through which the productivity of the film's represented ulterior space may be read and understood. Primarily drawing from spatial and temporal theory, I articulate how normativity is formed in the space of the suburbs through structured rhythms, movements, and gestures that become attributed to the heterosexual, white, middle- to upper-class family. This investigation is followed by a methodology that adopts from queer theory a process of estrangement, a deviation from the normative space of the suburbs that seeks to disrupt and challenge existing scripts within dominant social frameworks unique to horror film. As such, this article provides a new method through which contemporary horror film may be analyzed, away from canonical or genre prescriptions, and toward the productive potential of spaces considered to be ulterior.

Revealing the more sinister flipside to American suburbanization, the suburban gothic is a subgenre of horror films whose narratives centre upon the peculiar social and physical space of postwar American housing. Foregrounding the manifold latent concerns surrounding unprecedented growth within suburban neighbourhoods at this time, this subgenre includes films such as Carpenter's *Halloween,* Hooper's *Poltergeist,* and Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street*, all of which hone in on notions of mindless conformity, rampant materialism, and oppressive familial roles that this emergent space had come to embody. Suburbia rapidly became a locus of collective social normativity responding to a need for order after the war, but the resulting exposure of its utopic attributions as such began to distinguish the wide-scale national housing movement as fraught and foundationally ill-advised. While this subgenre has specifically commented on the postwar American context, I am interested in the persistence of its implications and its grasp at a wider scale to contemporary horror film in and after 2010. I therefore center my analysis around James Wan's *Insidious* (2010) to elucidate a critical engagement with suburban space, the cultivation of normativity that has become attached to it, and the imposition of queer space as an opportunity for reformation.

One central question I consider throughout my investigation is how postwar ideals surrounding the structure of the nuclear family and home have persevered, given the continued desire to own a house in the suburbs by the white middle- to upper-class. More specifically, however, I am interested in the ways in which horror film possesses a critical acuity toward the notion of suburbia by its conflation of danger and fear as situated within the perceived comfort and safety of the home. The valence of these concerns increases when considering the deep-seated relationship between suburban development and the formation of national identity amidst the postwar climate. With the suburban gothic's distinct attention to foregrounding the destabilization of familial and domestic space, it becomes apparent that the subgenre aims to critique these developments and their induction into the dominant mode of American culture.

In the resulting dissolution of these suburban values, it is also necessary to consider and question what might take their place. I therefore mobilize queer theory for its focus on spaces of alterity and otherness to illuminate the tears within the fabric of the nuclear family. The process of othering familiar domestic space by an uncanny mechanism in *Insidious* signals a rupture of the normative framework it has come to emblematize, and begins to insinuate that forms of alterity exist just beneath, behind, and within what is seen at first glance.

Rather than falling back onto a conception of queerness as monstrous or abject as many queer analyses of horror film have, however, I intend to reorient my focus to the productive nature of its inherent difference, as a force of destruction that carries with it a restructuring potential. As Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, ideology and sexuality in kind epitomize and influence broader social relations of power, and each mediate between myriad structures of social experience.[1] Adhering to such a methodological parallelism between ideology and sexuality, my exploration will be premised upon the impetus to reformulate sociological interpretations of suburban space through the perspective of non-normative sexuality by its relegation to realms deemed ulterior.

An immense amount of cultural production has addressed what we might consider to be a suburban gothic ethos. Several modern and contemporary artists have dedicated their work to engaging with similar questions surrounding the idea of the suburbs and the promotion of allegedly idyllic postwar housing developments. One canonical example is Dan Graham's 1966 work, *Homes for America*, which explores the alienating effect of these spaces and exposes an inherent unsettling contrast to their supposed desirability. Similarly, Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting* from 1974 explicitly critiques the mindless replication of American domestic space by slicing through an old frame house in New Jersey—a transformation that he calls "anarchitecture." Extending these concerns decades forward, Gregory Crewdson's *Twilight* series from 1998 and Holly Andres' *The Fallen Fawn* from 2016 equally investigate the psychological underside of the American suburban vernacular, confronting the normal with the paranormal and the secretive, and transforming the suburban landscape into a space of anxiety. Discourses adhering to a gothic mode in their thought-provoking representation of domestic space are rife amongst modern and contemporary artists through a variety of media including sculpture, architecture, and photography. My aim with this project specifically is to investigate how a related inquiry into the spatio-temporal realm of suburbia occurs in contemporary horror film via Wan's *Insidious*.

Wan's family-centered narrative has been revered for its revitalization of many classic tropes from the haunted house prototype, brought into a distinctly contemporary context. Harkening back to its postwar precedents in the horror genre, *Insidious* fills its haunted house setting with dark and ominous corridors and corners, shadowy figures darting around peripherally, and inexplicable noises that turn the haven of the house into a space of danger. The narrative follows father and husband Josh Lambert and stay-at-home mom Renai Lambert (Patrick Wilson and Rose Byrne) who have just moved into a new house. When one of their sons, Dalton (Ty Simpkins), encounters an unknown supernatural spirit while exploring their attic, he falls into an inexplicable coma-like state, unable to wake up for months. As Dalton's vital processes are stable, doctors struggle to figure out what

[1] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 13.

condition he suffers from. He is able to be cared for at home after some time at the hospital, but upon his return, further supernatural occurrences start to take place in the Lambert's home—doors opening by themselves, voices stirring in dark corners, and apparitions of unknown individuals making themselves present in increasingly violent and terrifying ways. They then decide to move into Josh's mother's house in another suburban neighbourhood, but the spectral occurrences continue to intensify. Josh and Renai hire supernatural investigator Elise (Lin Shaye) to help find some resolution, who is later revealed to have had a long history with Josh's family. Elise discovers that Dalton is trapped in "the further," a supernatural realm containing a mass of spirits and demons existing in a dimension that is spatially and temporally superimposed onto the real space and time of the Lambert house.

Wan's particular visual approach pays careful attention to obscuring the space of the home, making its architecture into something unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and dark for the Lambert family, as well as his audience. Throughout the length of the film, the setting of the house is placed in an increasingly close confrontation with its opposing spatial articulation in "the further" (fig. 1 and 2). The peace and comfort of the domestic, familial space is forcibly made foreign by the dangerous closeness to this ulterior dimension, a territory completely unknown to the family despite its shared visual attributes.

Insidious can be situated within an extensive legacy of suburban horror films, which usually features suburban settings, preoccupations, and protagonists. Robin Wood asserts that the gothic genre broadly consists of a three-pronged thematic core: normality, figured by the dominance of heteropatriarchal capitalism, the other, figured by a threatening antagonistic force, and the relationship between the two.[2] A mechanism reminiscent of Freud's theorization of the uncanny is integral to this interplay of normativity and the other, and is amenable to the invocation of a queer reading which intends to disrupt the heterosexual status quo. As such, queerness, positioned as that which is unfamiliar, sets in motion a questioning of that which has been established as normal.[3] The rampant promotion of suburbia as the foundation of postwar normativity placed the suburban house and its embedded social network in the crossfire of the gothic mode, and consequently opened itself up to a disruptive queer potential.

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[2] Robin Wood, *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) quoted in Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.
[3] Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet*, 5.

Reflecting the notion that a neighbourhood of identical houses, white picket fences, and well-manicured lawns is hiding a terrible secret, Bernice Murphy asserts that such a negative outlook on this space emerged from the rapid change in lifestyle that accompanied its development, forcing residents to break ties with old patterns of existence that characterized the everyday during and before the war.[4] One facet of this shift was the simultaneous rigidification and disempowerment of the nuclear family's constitutive roles—the breadwinning father was now subject to additional hours of commuting, leaving the mother in charge of a house of unruly children—forming a wealth of emotional and psychological problems as a result. Robert Beuka explains that the movement toward the suburbs in concert with the baby boom created an entrapping space for women of the postwar years, forcefully relocating them to isolated and child-centered environments. This resulted in a sense of dislocation and purposelessness, even as the culture at large was celebrating them as the central symbols in a new cult of domesticity.[5]

A second facet of this break from old patterns was the flight of the white middle- to upper-class away from the urban center, which entailed an inherent escape from, and consequent repression of, identities considered to be deviant or other. Lizabeth Cohen notes that while extreme housing growth in new suburban areas accommodated the influx of veterans after World War II, they were distinctly geared toward white families, leaving 53 percent of married Black veterans to live with relatives, to live in trailers, or in small, rented rooms.[6] Emergency facilities such as the Veterans Affairs (VA) mortgage insurance program required vets to initially qualify at private banks and loan associations, which were known to discriminate against Black folk on several fronts. As such, Black families were relegated to specifically delineated "red zones," which were usually urban, old, and perceived as deteriorating simply by virtue of hosting predominantly minority residents.[7] The practice of red-lining formed barriers around the suburban neighbourhood and insulated white families from contact and interaction with members of the Black community who hoped to buy within these areas.

The negative implications of such an emphatic domesticity, as well as the notion of escaping the city which itself was rooted in racist imperatives, articulate two of the many concerns that come to threaten the integrity of suburbia as a space of equal opportunity, a utopia for all. Driven by a deep-seated fear of otherness, the motivations fuelling the nuclear white family and their newly deployed domestic space became troubled, allowing the repressed alterity to emerge through a wealth of family

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[4] Bernice Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 2.
[5] Robert Beuka, *SuburbiaNation* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 18.
[6] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008), 170.
[7] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 170.

problems in the resulting sociological formation of normativity. This destabilization had far-reaching effects on cultural production and was responded to by a lurking anxiety to be mined by the gothic mode. The shift allowed the source of fear emerging from the other, characteristic to the gothic tradition, to be repositioned to a place closer in proximity to oneself—fear and danger were now thought to come from one's own family and home, rather than from external threats.

The purpose of such a historical delineation is to outline the ways in which forms of cultural, artistic, and filmic production adhered to the gothic mode to articulate the many transformations occurring in the American socio-economic realm at this time. Levittown, New York is one of the most famous suburbs that sprang up in a notoriously short amount of time. Designed and built by the real estate firm Levitt & Sons, the innovation of this development was attributed to their assembly line method, constructing two-floor, two-bedroom houses quicker and more efficiently than any housing initiative that preceded it.[8] Between 1948 and 1958, 11 million new suburban homes were established in America—83 percent of all population growth during the 1950s took place in the suburbs.[9] The 1946 architectural plan of Levittown was key to creating a visual lexicon of American futurity, as developers followed its inaugural structure in the development of subsequent suburban neighbourhoods. The living conditions in North America were undergoing a seismic shift by the rapid onslaught of modular housing, which was establishing its own role in the formation of national ideology equally as fast.

National ideology in the American postwar sphere was developed through a lens that heavily encouraged consumption on the home front. Lizabeth Cohen notes that the central importance of consumption to the smooth operation of the home meant that women, who were now perceived as the main force behind purchasing under the guise of "homemaking," gained a new political authority in America as the war came to a close.[10] At the same time, businesses argued that a flourishing of a mass consumption economy with a newly competitive and unregulated pricing of new cars, suburban homes, and products to fill them would better protect the general good than the state controls then in place. A higher and more equitable standard of living for all derived from economic growth was posited to be the best way to fulfill the nation's longstanding commitment to equality and democracy.[11] The convergence of personal and national fulfillment via consumption accordingly incited the intertwining of postwar purchasing power on the home front with a national and political identity.

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[8] Alexander Garvin, *American Cities: What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 397.
[9] Garvin, *American Cities,* 397.
[10] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 77.
[11] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 101.

This was exacerbated by a shift from the preliminary gendering of the consumer during the war as specifically female to the notion of "the couple" after the war, as men returned to their families.[12] A consequent consuming unit was formed, constituted by the heterosexual couple that was encouraged to purchase a house and products for it under the idea that together, through a consumerist ethos, they were simultaneously staking their claim and contributing to the greater good of America.

As consumption began to structure the American ideal of postwar home life, horror film and the suburban gothic were growing and crystallizing their arsenal of critical tools. The subgenre specifically exploits a set of contradictory attitudes, which Bernice Murphy outlines as a set of binary oppositions. It rests between two poles: the suburban dream, articulating the utopic hopes of a well-adjusted and comfortable space for the family to be nurtured, and the suburban nightmare, a revelation of the darker realities of conformity, consumption, and isolation underlying the mandate of this dream.[13] This bifurcation creates an ideological link to the actual geography of suburbia as existing physically and philosophically between the urban and the rural, in what Beuka calls a borderland space.[14] The wider gothic tradition asserts that fear and anxiety often emerge from the gaps between what something is and what it is not—suburbia can accordingly be positioned within this indeterminate gap both literally and figuratively. The subsequent indeterminacy of suburbia's physical and conceptual existence gives it a porous texture, its fabric permeable to a multitude of shaping forces.

Foregrounding the fabric of nuclear heteronormativity and the malleability of its existence, the force of alterity that pushes against the perceived dominance of its social structure assumes a particular visual representation via the gothic mode. *Insidious* presents this space explicitly by its visual rendering of "the further," the uncanny supernatural realm premised upon the architecture of real space that is both familiar yet strange to the characters that travel through and around it. "The further" is accessed through a sleeping or hypnotized state and possesses a dream-like quality as characters within it meander from place to place, without an established network between them. Each location in this space, like the Lambert's house, is rendered in a familiar way, possessing visual similarities to its actual representation, but obscured by a looming darkness, coldness, and unknown vastness, deplete of any homely attribute.

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[12] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic,* 147.
[13] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 3.
[14] Beuka, *SuburbiaNation,* 14.

In such a duality of space that is grounded by the singularity of the Lambert's house, I introduce Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* as a methodological underpinning to envision the production and reproduction of normative social structures, as well as deviations from it. Considering "the further" and its visual replication of normative domestic space into something strange, the social structures produced by the house fall under a clear form of critique. Bourdieu asserts that the *habitus*, a system of durable and transposable dispositions, is produced by structures that constitute a particular type of environment. The *habitus* is seen as a principle of generation and a structuring of practices and representations which can become objectively regulated.[15] By this specific constitution of normativity, the operations of the *habitus* visually manifest themselves within the suburban house, which privileges the social practices, embodiments, and movements of the heteronormative, nuclear family, and is built to optimize production and consumption on the home front. Endowing the domestic space with this particular form of normativity accounts for one of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of the *habitus*: the consensus on the *sens,* or meaning of practices and the world, and its continuous reinforcement.[16] Following this logic, the social dynamics of the nuclear family become the practices that perpetuate and reinforce the form of the *habitus*, all of which fall under the architectural emblem of the suburban house.

Recalling the postwar environment in which these normative structures of the nuclear family were formed, the histories surrounding the suburban enclave reveal the performances and embodiments that have come to constitute normativity—namely, a white, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual subjectivity. The deliberate exclusion and red-lining of minority communities and the positioning of the monogamous heterosexual couple as primary consumers on the homefront was integral to the ethos of suburbia. Both of these collective alignments directly informed what it meant to identify as a contributor to the greater good of America amidst the murky postwar climate, and articulated that a specific performance of nuclear normativity was key to achieving a widespread utopian aspiration of human experience.

Bourdieu, however, is adamant in pointing out that the objective structures producing the *habitus* and the concept of normalcy are themselves products of historical practices and are constantly subject to reproduction and transformation.[17] In what appears to be a lapse in the creation of a normative structure emerges the critical potential of suburban gothic film in this context. A disruption within the continuity of producing normativity suggests that the forces of alterity characteristic to the

[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.
[16] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 80.
[17] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* 72.

suburban gothic have a role in shaping the system that reproduces these practices. Additionally, Sedgwick notes that a break from the formulation of normativity as such creates a contingent space of indeterminacy, a notion of place that shifts over time in which the boundaries between the political and sexual become a fertile space of ideological formation.[18] Characterizing this space of repressed alterity as encompassed by a variety of non-normative sexualities and identities, the potential for the development of queer frameworks emerges. The represented estrangement, abstraction, and ultimate obfuscation of domestic space made visible by "the further" directly threatens the *habitus* of nuclear normativity that had been established by the social practices of the heteronormative family. In *Insidious*, Josh and Renai are threatened by elements of the supernatural realm that violently impose themselves onto their family. The resulting dissolution of the heterosexual couple, suggested by the film's ending in which Josh returns from "the further" not as himself, but rather as a supernatural entity that had been following him since childhood, insinuates a break with the objective structures of the *habitus* governing the social space of the home.

"The further" is an ontologically intangible and ephemeral space that automatically registers as unsafe, as if a threat from the darkened corners of what was once a comfortable living space is imminent. This ulterior realm of fear and danger is home to demons and evil spirits of all kinds that seek out and want to consume those who are alive in order to absorb their power. In *Insidious*, the father and the son are primary targets. At the point in the narrative where Josh enters "the further" to find Dalton, Elise reveals Josh's own history with astral projection into the supernatural plane from his childhood, an experience that he had repressed and forgotten. This generational secret was passed on to Dalton unknowingly and is the reason for their encounters with evil forces in this secondary space.

The revelation of this secret ability acts as a reversal of the family line's continuation, precisely as that which attempts to destroy it entirely. This notion recalls Lee Edelman's concept of the evocation of the Child, in which the biological reproduction of children has come to embody the chronological progression and perpetuation of a heteronormative social order. He argues that as an emblem of futurity within cultural texts and politics, the Child is imbued with nationalistic idealism that carries with it the promise of a healthy continuation of the nation, as well as an inherent requirement of the heterosexual couple to uphold and reproduce it.[19] Queer sexual identities, by contrast, do not have as much of an oppositional emblem to counter this heterosexual dominance,

[18] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 15.
[19] Lee Edelman, *No Future*: *Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

since they exist outside of the trajectory of biological reproduction entirely. As such, queerness is given a role of dissolution, one that can break into and redefine notions of civil order that rely so heavily upon equating the future with the Child.[20]

As the film frames Dalton's inherited ability to astral project as the source of their unwanted engagement with "the further," the prospect of reproducing such an ability is tarnished and renounced. Interfering with the biological and social reproduction of the nuclear family to then present it as the cause and locus of this cursed ability metaphorizes the interventionist framing of queerness by Edelman; the ghostly forces of "the further" become threats to the order and logic of heterosexual reproduction and the ultimate configuration of the nuclear family.

Moving away from the centrality of children in Edelman's analysis as well as in *Insidious*, it is also important to consider Michel Foucault's exploration of repressed sexuality and its spatial manifestation as an arrayed refraction. He asserts that modern society has attempted to reduce sexuality to the heterosexual, and therefore legitimate couple, but in so doing, created and proliferated groups with multiple elements and a circulating sexuality.[21] Questioning the definitive nature of the monogamous space of the nineteenth-century family, Foucault posits that familial space, in its incessant promotion of heterosexuality *as* normativity, created a network of pleasure and power linked together at multiple points and according to a variety of transformable relationships.[22] In the specific construction of the family house, heterosexuality and monogamy figured prominently through the deliberate separation of space for adults via the polarity between children's and parents' rooms as well as the segregation of boys and girls. By prohibiting and rendering secret the dangers of masturbation, promoting the importance of puberty, as well as implementing methods of surveillance by parents, Foucault suggests that the supposed heteronormativity attributed to housing architecture in fact suggested that the family, when brought down to its smallest dimensions, was revealed to be made of a complicated network, saturated with multiple, fragmentary, and mobile sexualities.[23] Encountering the twofold valence of the family house as such, a diametric opposition appears in Foucault's analysis that is similar to Bernice Murphy's. This suggests that the house engages simultaneously with a notion of a suburban dream, a space of monogamy, heterosexuality, and non-deviant sexual activity, as well as a suburban nightmare, a space of refracted sexual performances and identities. The house, therefore, counters the intended formulation of social normativity. By this split act, the threatening presence of

[20] Edelman, *No Future,* 17.
[21] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 45-46.
[22] Foucault*, The History of Sexuality*, 46.
[23] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 46.

deviant sexuality can be visualized as a space of alterity that presses against the façade of the nuclear suburban realm, which has historically prioritized the heterosexual couple.

The notion of spaces of alterity which hinge upon the dominant mode of sociality can be further expanded upon by turning to Elizabeth Freeman's work on queer temporality. She introduces a video work called *K.I.P* by Nguyen Tan Hoang (2002) to articulate how the medium of video can produce a specific form of sexual disorientation. The way in which this piece fragments its depicted sequence of intercourse is argued to possess the ability to open up gaps in the sexual dyad.[24] Hiccups in sequential time as such can connect groups of people beyond monogamous couplehood, and Freeman suggests that this perception of temporality forges an important link to queer politics and theory.[25] The fragmentation of time, represented in this film by visual glitches and unexpected lapses in sequence, exposes how time itself binds social space. Also drawing from Bourdieu, Freeman inaugurates the concept of *chrononormativity*, outlining how the body is bound into socially meaningful configurations through temporal regulations.[26] *Chrononormativity* can be further understood as "a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts."[27] Things like schedules, calendars, and time zones constitute inner rhythms that nestle themselves beneath the surface, manifesting as temporal experiences that "seem natural to those whom they privilege."[28] Mobilizing the concept of *chrononormativity* for this analysis can begin to account for the temporal aspect inherent to constructing and perpetuating the *habitus* and its operative reproduction of normative social structures.

Freeman lists a series of experiences that counter or exist outside the dominant temporality, including mourning, maternal love, domestic bliss, romance, and even bachelorhood, all of which entail "sensations that move according to their own beat."[29] Specifically, regarding domesticity and the development of such an ideal, love, security, peace, and harmony were figured as timeless and primal. They were experiences that were exclusive to the home while simultaneously being located in and emanating from the psyche's interior. She argues that emotional, domestic, and biological tempos are, though culturally constructed, somewhat less amenable to the speeding up and micro-management that increasingly characterizes industrialization.[30] Positioning the domestic outside of dominant temporality as such recalls the spatio-temporal gap addressed by Murphy, who asserts that the gothic

[24] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.
[25] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.
[26] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.
[27] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.
[28] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.
[29] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 5.
[30] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 7.

gains its power from the liminality of suburbia's geography as situated between the urban and the rural, as well as phenomenologically, and by this understanding, temporally, between its perceived aspirations and lived reality.[31] As suburbia emerged from a modern shift in temporality characterized by the postwar environment, Freeman posits that sexual dissidents did as well, possessing a temporal ethos that is equally aligned with the forces of modernization. She stresses that the moment of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrialization was identified as a double-time, which evoked signs of fractured temporality.[32] Queer identities and those considered to be non-normative are consequently products of this temporal wound, acting as agents of these seismic cultural shifts. Where queer theory aligns itself here with deconstruction, the play of signifiers, and the possibilities of understanding identities as relational and constructed, Freeman encourages us to see that traumatic experiences, perhaps brought about by significant shifts in temporality at an individual or larger societal level, can productively bolster new epistemological modes of knowing, being, and existing.[33]

Insidious interacts with the concept of *chrononormativity* by a specific sonic mechanism. As we understand the supernatural space to be increasingly interwoven with the real space of the house, diegetic sound in the film exaggerates the ticking of a clock, the beeping of a heart monitor, or the constant strokes of a metronome immediately before a character's encounter with the supernatural. This gestures toward an idea of "real" temporality and reminds us that the supernatural in this context exists to threaten it. At the climax of the film when Josh is hypnotized in order to enter "the further" to save Dalton, Elise plays a metronome, so he knows that when its consistent ticking is slowed down or abstracted, he has left the real world. As such, the represented departure from markers of *chrononormative* time insinuate an interaction with the ulterior space of "the further," which is itself constructed by deviant forms of sociality.

The interdimensionality of the supernatural realm tangled with the real produces a new body of social relations within the home that are marked by alterity. A wealth of implications begin to present themselves by this mechanism. Positioning the suburban house as a visual and social structure of the *habitus* itself, the embodiments, movements, and performances of the nuclear family have been shown to reproduce and perpetuate a specific form of social normativity established by the heterosexual couple, under a set of nationalistic prescriptions articulated by the postwar environment. The reinforcement of this particular social space was integral to the construction of national ideology in America, whose inherently fraught utopian notions of everyday life placed the white, heterosexual,

[31] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic,* 3.
[32] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 3.
[33] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 10.

product-consuming couple on a pedestal. As artists and filmmakers mobilized the gothic mode to articulate their critiques of the suburban neighbourhood, a repertoire of pejorative attributes to this "idyllic" space emerged, including the dissolution of the heterosexual couple and family, which had built its reputation on a myriad of social disengagements including the red-lining of minority communities. By positioning the feared other in the assumed safety and comfort of the home, Wan's *Insidious* taps into a particularly suburban gothic ethos to suggest that these repressed forms of alterity—specifically those that challenge the cultural dominance of the nuclear family *as* normativity—are closer than perhaps previously anticipated. This is articulated specifically by the existence of "the further," a realm that threatens the spatial and temporal constitution of the suburban house to insinuate the deconstructive potential of non-normative sexuality emblematized by this ulterior space. The normativity that the home had once represented is now threatened by an unknown other whose ulterior social configuration builds a foundation for the reproduction of non-normative practices to enter the space of the home. *Insidious* therefore marks a starting point for many other contemporary gothic films to explore the threat of alterity on the dominant order through the destabilization of the suburban house and its representative valence.

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Figure 1: James Wan, *Insidious,* 2010. Screenshots by author. © FilmDistrict

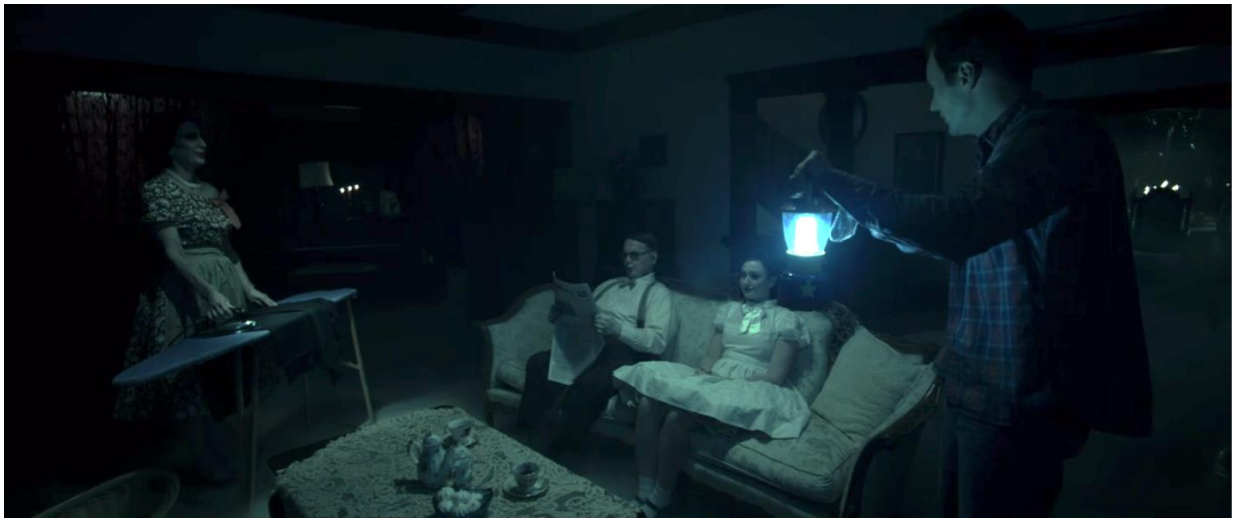

Figure 2: James Wan, *Insidious,* 2010. Screenshots by author. In these images, the Lambert's house is shown in "the further." © FilmDistrict

Indigenous Sovereignty and the Border: Postcommodity's Borderlands

Kristina Parzen

Abstract

Borders are thought of as geographical and political lines that separate two independent territories from one another. However, they are also responsible for creating physical and ideological divisions between cultures (Leza, 2018). In effect, they have contributed to reinforcing social, political, and cultural binaries between groups based partly on their geographic positionality as either "inside" or "outside" of a given territory. As the border maintains this dichotomy, the experiences borderland communities have with territory and their own identities are caught up in the politics of migration, nationalism, trade, and social knowledges. This paper engages with the ongoing challenges and critiques around the impact borders have on Indigenous peoples and other borderland communities living in the areas of what are now referred to as the southern United States of North America and northern Mexico. Taking up this conversation through three works by the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity, it investigates how the U.S.-Mexico border has disrupted Indigenous knowledges, controlled historical narratives, and is a physical and abstract manifestation of settler colonial ideologies. Ultimately, it argues that this physical and ideological border dividing collective bodies from each other is a complex structure that functions to strengthen the sovereignty of the dominant nation-state whilst simultaneously opposing Indigenous sovereignty. By engaging with the border, Postcommodity's works demonstrate the need for creating and renewing ideas about complexity of structures in society that the settler colonizer mind tends to oversimplify without consideration for the peoples these structures impact most severely. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about borders in the hopes of finding additional avenues that work towards new possibilities of thinking about how borderland communities – and all communities – can move forward in dialogue, in respect, and in relationship with one another.

A vacillating line of twenty-six balloons sways back and forth at Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora, along the border between the United States of America and Mexico. The balloons, measuring just over three metres in diameter, float thirty metres above the vast desert land below. This land-based installation artwork by the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity was installed in 2015 as a symbolic suture, stitching "the peoples of the Americas together" by spanning a length of 3.2 kilometres across this border space.[1] In the words of the artists Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist, the project titled *Repellent Fence / Valla Repelente* comments on and critiques "the oversimplified border rhetoric of mass media and bi-partisan politics," and is simultaneously intent upon creating an interconnected system of interchange or dialogue between the Mexican, American, and Indigenous publics and their respective governments (fig. 1).[2] In this collective exchange between these groups and across the border, Postcommodity's work and land-based practice demonstrates a push toward the recovery of Indigenous knowledges and an engagement with conversations around the land's significance for Indigenous identities and the colonial border's impact on these identities. Their work comments on the reality of binary discourse, which aims to control and regulate social knowledge by holding hostage knowledges outside of colonial American ideologies. In other words, when the mainstream system of social knowledge or that which is particular to the ideologies of the dominant culture is reliant on thinking about and constructing the world in terms of dichotomies, a hierarchy with a specific set of goals is created.[3] Its goals involve maintaining control over knowledge through a championing of "Western" concepts, imagery, and ideologies, and the erasure of knowledges that do not align with its agenda and particular values. The border, like the one dividing the United States and Mexico, is an example of this kind of Western concept, image, and ideology of control that reinforces binary division. For instance, borders are designed to differentiate between spaces of inclusion and exclusion – what Chicana scholar and poet Gloria E. Anzaldúa identifies as "places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them."[4] While the general function of a border

This research was conducted on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwx̱wu7mesh* (Squamish), and *səl̓ilwətaʔɬ* (Tsleil-Waututh) nations. I am grateful to have been able to work and live on these lands as a settler-Canadian scholar and uninvited guest. I would like to thank the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity for their amazing works and interventions, which have impacted my own critical thinking about the complexity of border spaces and the potential to change them. Thank you to Dr. Michelle McGeough for her feedback on this paper. Thank you also to all my peers who provided generous input and suggestions. I graciously acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholarship, which supports my ongoing research.

[1] Postcommodity, "Repellent Fence – 2015," Postcommodity, accessed April 20, 2020, http://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.
[2] Postcommodity, http://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.
[3] Parzen, Kristina, "The Space In-between Cultures: Site-Specific Meeting Places of Indigenous and European Knowledges," M.A. Thesis, (University of British Columbia, 2020): 3.
[4] Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Fontera, The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987): 3.

is to create a separation between two nation-states, the impact of the border on the borderlands (the area in and around the border) goes beyond political and geographic division. The creation of this border and its ongoing enforcement has resulted in significant changes impacting Indigenous communities who have lived on the land for thousands of years, long before the colonial invasion from Europe. Yoeme-Chicana activist scholar and linguistic anthropologist Christina Leza notes some of these impacts in her book *Divided Peoples: Policy, Activism, and Indigenous Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Ecological destruction, threats to sacred sites, blocked access to spiritual and cultural areas, and the restriction of movement across traditional Indigenous territories are just some examples of the effects borders and border policies have on Indigenous border communities.[5]

In this paper, I will examine three successive works of Postcommodity's that engage with border politics and the impacts above. They are part of the ongoing challenge and critique of the effect borders have on Indigenous peoples and other borderland communities in what is now referred to as the southern United States of North America. These works, *Repellent Fence* (2015), *A Very Long Line* (2016), and *Coyotaje* (2017) focus on border and borderland spaces. Each work engages with different political, economic, and social impacts that borders have, both historically and in the contemporary moment. The movement of people across borders through migration, the border as a site of and for American nationalism, the border as part of a trade network (globally, locally, and historically bound to traditional Indigenous trade routes), and the border as a space that weaponizes Indigenous knowledges are just a few of the conversations Postcommodity engages with in these works.

In my analysis of these works, I will explore the border as related to its disruption of Indigenous knowledges, historical narratives, and as a physical and abstract manifestation of settler colonial ideologies. I argue that the physical and ideological border, which divides collective bodies from each other simultaneously works to oppose Indigenous sovereignty, which Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says, "is not just about land… it is also a spiritual, emotional, and intellectual space."[6] It is "the freedom and the means to live fully and responsibly."[7] This idea is viewed, in part, as a threat to the sovereignty and security of the United States nation-state, which understands the term sovereignty in a very different way. Some of its more common conceptualizations in the context of the United States include its definition in relation to security,

[5] Christina Leza, *Divided Peoples: Policy, Activism, and Indigenous Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019): 3.
[6] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "The Place Where We All Live and Work Together: A Gendered Analysis of "Sovereignty," in *Native Studies Keywords*, eds. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015): 19.
[7] Simpson, "The Place Where We All Live and Work Together," 21.

control, and authority in a society, and the control over trans-border movements.[8] Also, in Mexico, sovereignty has had "multiple manifestations" over time. But the concept itself, generally speaking, is understood to be intrinsically connected to identity.[9] Political theorist Arturo Santa-Cruz argues that Mexican sovereignty is diverse in how it comes to manifest throughout history.[10] However, most recently, while this sovereignty is concerned with having a distinct "future-oriented national identity" separate from its ties to its northern neighbour, the complicated history between Mexico and the United States plays a key role in the development of anti-American sentiment among the Mexican public that is moderated over time, but has nonetheless influenced the expression of Mexican sovereignty.[11] This view remains present in Mexico's sovereignty narrative and is particularly visible when its Revolution governments interpret United States political "concern" as an "interference in its domestic affairs," which is a "violation of Mexican sovereignty."[12] Alternatively and in addition to Simpson's explanation of Indigenous sovereignty, Native American activist Winona LaDuke notes that it is "an affirmation of who we are as Indigenous peoples."[13] These differing and interrelated interpretations of sovereignty are important to understanding border relationships and their impacts on Indigenous sovereignty. Throughout my analysis of Postcommodity's works, I will explain my argument by unpacking and exploring this term as it is understood socially and on the terms of Indigenous knowledges.

Furthermore, there has been much scholarship discussing the impact of international borders on Indigenous identities and the formation of the self in North America. Leza has made significant contributions to this conversation throughout her scholarly career. For instance, she notes that borders have created physical and ideological division between Indigenous peoples belonging to the same nation because of the cross-border differences of "economic and material conditions, influence of the dominant national cultures," and education.[14] Likewise, Anzaldúa also contributes to this conversation through her discussion of the experience of borderland inhabitants through different issues such as identity and colonialism.[15] This paper aims to continue some of these conversations

[8] Stephen D. Krasner, "The durability of organized hypocrisy," in *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept*, eds. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 96; Thomas S. Hornbuckle, "A Definition and Explanation of Sovereignty in the Polity of the United States," *Houston Law Review* 3, no. 3 (1966): 369-370.
[9] Arturo Santa-Cruz, *Mexico–United States Relations: The Semantics of Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 2-3.
[10] Santa-Cruz, *Mexico–United States Relations*, 44.
[11] Santa-Cruz, *Mexico–United States Relations*, 158, 168.
[12] Santa-Cruz, *Mexico–United States Relations*, 132.
[13] *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States: Restoring Cultural Knowledge, Protecting Environments, and Regaining Health*, eds. Devon A Mihesuah and Elizabeth Hoover, foreword by Winona LaDuke (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019): xvi.
[14] Leza, "Indigenous Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Journal of the Southwest* 60, no. 4 (2018): 915.
[15] Anzaldúa, 3.

with a focus on the relationships between border impacts, Indigenous sovereignty, and identity. In doing so, I will contribute to the overarching conversation while providing further insight into the border's disruption of Indigenous sovereignty and identity as well as how Indigenous artists such as Postcommodity are responding to and working to resist this disruption. However, before I address some of Postcommodity's major works about the borderlands and how they are disrupting border politics and ideology, I turn my attention to the historical context of the U.S.-Mexico border and the conceptualization of the border and borderland.

Treaties and the Creation of U.S.-Mexico Border

Three major treaty agreements between the secular governments in the region of Southern North America were signed between 1819 and 1854, which led to the creation of the internationally recognized U.S.-Mexico border. Beginning with the Transcontinental or Adams-Onís Treaty signed between the United States and Spain in 1819 that came into effect in 1821, the Spanish-occupied territory of both East and West Florida was ceded to the Americans.[16] While this treaty did not end ongoing disputes between these governments, nor with the newly established independent nation-state of Mexico, it may be argued to be one of the major events leading up to the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border.[17] Following the American War with Mexico from 1846 to 1848, which ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the Republic of Texas was annexed into the United States and a new border was established pushing the territorial control of the U.S. further south.[18] Along with Texas, California, Nevada, and portions of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado were ceded to the United States resulting in the "transfer" of approximately one-half of Mexico's territory.[19] Professor of Law M. Isabel Medina notes that this "transfer" of lands from Mexico to the United States caused many landownership disputes and did not endow "U.S. citizenship on persons of Mexican descent residing on or owning that land."[20] While the use of treaties in resolving land disputes is common practice among many cultures and nations, the interpretation of

[16] J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier, 1776–1821* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2009): 202-203.
[17] This border is *international* because it functions to delineate the presence of two or more nation-states in geographic and political space. For more information see Vladimir Kolossov, "Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches," *Geopolitics* 10: no. 4 (2005): 612. See Kolossov's article for further reading on how different understandings and approaches to borders and border politics have changed since the early 20th century.
[18] M. Isabel Medina, "At the border: what Tres Mujeres tell us about walls and fences," *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice 10*, no.2 (2007): para. 6., accessed April 20, 2020, https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=LT&u=ubcolumbia&id=GALE|A163050922&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon.
[19] Medina, "At the border," para. 6.
[20] Medina, "At the border," para. 6.

making treaty differs across them. For instance, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo interpreted by the United States and Mexico as a kind of transaction demonstrates how the land was thought of by these nation-states as an object to be possessed. This language of possession by settler colonial governments and peoples continues today. Alternatively, when looking to Indigenous perspectives on treaty-making, they are described as an essential way of beginning a relationship between a tribal nation and the United States government authority.[21] However, more importantly they are promises between nations that mark the beginning of long-term, forever, agreements.[22] Other Indigenous perspectives interpret them as "adoptions of one nation by another."[23] My view of these Indigenous understandings of treaties is that treaty-making is viewed as a relationship where both parties involved benefit equally. However, Tseshaht/Nuu-chan-nulth professor Charlotte Coté writes, in reality and "through the treaty process, Indigenous peoples relinquished control over vast areas of their traditional territories in return for protection of smaller portions of their lands from non-Indian settlement."[24] This demonstrates that while benefits on both sides were stipulated, because they were defined under the terms of the settler colonial American governmental body, they would be regulated by this system of authority. The settler colonial language of possession and ownership further points to the governmental policies and violence enacted upon borderland communities and their identities when they suddenly find themselves forced under the control of a foreign government whose position of power was not earned through the consent of their communities. This reflects these governments' tendencies to disregard the knowledge systems and culture of border communities when their own worldviews differ or are seen to come into conflict with the settler population and its colonial government.

The final major event and treaty that led to the creation of the U.S.-Mexico border, was the Treaty of La Mesilla, also known as the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. This purchase of territory by the United States from Mexico included the land South of the Gila River and west of the Rio Grande River (present-day Arizona and New Mexico). What is most significant about this Treaty is that the land was purchased to allow the United States to patrol the land and increase state-sanctioned enforcement along the border.[25] Patrolled enforcement and the militarization of borders plays a

[21] Amy E. Den Ouden and Jean M. O'Brien, "Recognition and Rebuilding," in *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. Robert Warrior (New York: Routledge, 2015): 221.
[22] Parzen, "The Space In-between Cultures," 18.
[23] Harold Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd., 2007), 13. While this is an interpretation of treaty that is particular to Harold Johnson, law scholar and member of Montreal Lake Cree Nation, I included it in this section to demonstrate the importance of *relationships* in Indigenous treaty-making.
[24] Charlotte Coté, "Food Sovereignty, Food Hegemony, and the Revitalization of Indigenous Whaling Practices," in *The World of Indigenous North America*, ed. Robert Warrior (New York: Routledge, 2015), 244.
[25] Monica Muñoz Martinez, "Recuperating Histories of Violence in the Americas: Vernacular History-Making on the US-Mexico Border," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 665.

significant role in regulating and preventing the free movement of people across the border. This type of border enforcement is specifically addressed in Postcommodity's 2017 work *Coyotaje* and will be discussed in more detail following.[26]

By situating the border within its historical context, it is clear that treaty agreements were an integral part of the process of its creation, both physically and in the imaginary of local and global communities. However, some questions that arise with this history in mind are what role did Indigenous nations and peoples have during these events and how were they impacted by treaty processes? How does the creation of the U.S.-Mexico border and its enforcement affect Indigenous communities and their identities today? These questions have been widely addressed by scholars such as Leza and Anzaldúa, as well as others on both sides of the border. Their works point to the complexity of the borderland and its physical and ideological role in shaping identities as they are constructed in relationship to nationality, Indigenous community, ethnicity, politics, and economics.[27] What treaties demonstrate in relation to this scholarship, is how the border manifested both physically and ideologically as part of a settler colonial American governmental policy to solidify the status and sovereignty of the American nation-state. In combination with the Northern U.S.-Canada border, the United States asserted its independence as separate from the British Empire through its control of land and territory. Today, the U.S.-Mexico border manifests conceptually, visually, physically, and ideologically on a global stage as the dividing line between the United States and Mexico. However, this border also maintains a presence in the realm of social knowledge where it is reinforced and realized through mainstream and dominant ideology. It is this presence in physical, ideological, and social space that creates disruptions in Indigenous sovereignty and identity. For instance, one such area of social knowledge where the border is widely discussed is in the field of geography.

The Border, the Transborder, the Borderland, and Sovereignty

The border, within the discourse of geography, is a concept used to designate a physical and intangible line or boundary around and / or through a territory including land and water. It is often talked about with the notion of separation in mind to distinguish between two or more collective bodies.[28] For

[26] It is important to note that there were many additional events not mentioned that contributed to the creation of this border; and the colonial occupation of lands by European settlers is far more complicated in this regard.
[27] Leza, "Indigenous Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Journal of the Southwest* 60, no. 4, (2018): 914.
[28] For further reading see Etienne Balibar and Erin M. Williams, "World Borders, Political Borders" *PMLA 117*, no. 1 (2002): 71. Balibar discusses the complexity of the term border in the context of Europe. The definition I offer here is one that I have developed from my readings and how I understand it to be discussed generally by mainstream society.

example, in Professor of International Security Nick Vaughan-Williams book *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*, he makes the comparison of a border to that of a compass. A border enables a positioning or orientation of a common group of people, a history, a nationality, an identity, a language, and a culture that converge in a designated territory.[29] As such, the border "is a pivotal concept that opens up – but can also close down – a multitude of political and ethical possibilities."[30] In this way, the border demarcates the limits of territory at the domestic and international level based on a view of territory as an inside / outside space. This space comes to be defined by the internal dominant group in contrast with those who are positioned externally (often minority groups). The border maintains this dichotomy which impacts the experience borderland communities have with both territory and their own identities that are either included or excluded from the border space. As such, Vaughan-Williams notes that everything residing within the border space becomes a "citizen-subject," whose freedoms are bordered by the law within the boundary of the nation-state.[31] Upon this view, the citizen-subject is determined to be any individual subject residing within the physical border of the nation-state. What implications does this have for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous sovereignty when the border represents the boundary that possessively holds hostage not only the land and everything on it, but also regulates the identities formed and maintained over generations by the traditional stewards of the land?

Furthermore, borders exist physically in environments as human-made structures such as fences, roped areas, roads, buildings, etc. They exist naturally as rivers, tree lines, mountain ranges, oceans, lakes, etc. They also exist in an abstract capacity in imagination, ideology, social experience, etc. all of which may be said to be part of human systems of knowledge about the world. At the abstract level, the border does not have a material form. It is a part of an imaginary in the realm of social knowledge; it is the way we think about an understand a phenomena. In this paper, I look to the work of Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson who talks about the dominant culture as reflecting a European-descended, Eurocentric, Christian, heterosexist, and male-dominated way of thinking that pervades society and its ideologies.[32] I suggest that this dominant culture comes to have significant control over social knowledge. In maintaining this control, the dominant culture constricts or limits knowledge production, which is transmitted to individuals and collectives. This knowledge becomes mainstream and particular to the thinking and ideologies of the dominant culture, which in the context of the United States is a Western settler colonial way of thinking and understanding. Settler

[29] Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 3.
[30] Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics*, 3.
[31] Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics*, 3.
[32] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008): 35.

colonialism seeks the permanent occupation of the land through the forced removal, assimilation, and repression of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges.[33] While this particular conceptualization of the border exists within social knowledge, it is not contained nor isolated within it. Rather, its complexity varies and is fluid as it moves between different systems of knowing and understanding much like the concept of sovereignty.

Also important to the concept of the border, which further complicates our understanding of it, is that of the transborder, a term which Postcommodity utilizes in their work to point out the complexity of borders and borderlands. The transborder refers generally to a crossing or space extending across two different nation-states. This definition also includes the space extending across two different collective bodies or groups including territories within nation-states, cultures, and between public and private space, etc.[34] This transborder space is the place where border communities interact with one another and come together. It is the meeting place that has the capacity for what Cristóbal Martínez calls "Indigenous re-imagined ceremony" to which I will return to in the following section.[35] The transborder and border itself tends to indicate the space that is represented physically either in the real world (e.g. a fence) or on a document (e.g. map), but this border space also comes to manifest in an abstract way through ideology and without material form.

Alternatively, following Indigenous ontologies of the land, Simpson argues that borders for Indigenous peoples are about sharing rather than lines that divide.[36] They are not, she says, "rigid lines on a map but areas of increased diplomacy, ceremony, and sharing."[37] In my reading of this perspective, the land is not a space that is owned as it is thought of in settler colonial discourse. As part of this conversation, sovereignty is often discussed in relation to borders. While the concept of sovereignty in the United States is defined by settler colonial discourse – as the legal authority of the state over a territory as the governing body and the state's inherent right to self-government without the interference from other states – it also exists as a concept among Indigenous peoples and is integral

[33] Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013): 5.
[34] A transborder is a crossing between two distinct spaces, bodies, or groups. I have expanded this definition to include the crossing space between nation-states, between cultures, and between public and private space as these are also distinct bodies.
[35] Bill Kelley Jr, "Reimagining Ceremonies: A Conversation with Postcommodity," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 39 (2015): 28.
[36] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "The Place Where We All Live and Work Together: A Gendered Analysis of "Sovereignty"," in *Native Studies Keywords*, eds. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015): 19.
[37] Simpson, "The Place Where We All Live and Work Together," 19.

to their nations rights to self-determination.[38] Lenape scholar Joanne Barker discusses Indigenous sovereignty as consisting of the right to self-government, territory wholeness, and cultural autonomy, but as a discourse it is limited in its ability to capture Indigenous meanings about law, governance, and culture.[39] Self-determination in turn may be thought of as "a legal category that came to be defined by both group and individual rights not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or mental ability, and to determine one's own governments, laws, economies, identities, and cultures."[40] As such, the way sovereignty is thought of in both settler colonial and Indigenous ideological perspectives is interrelated, but these concepts maintain a difference from one another. Therefore, while the American settler colonial concept of sovereignty is very much related to the concept of the border as a line separating two or more sovereign bodies from one another, the Indigenous concept of sovereignty is more about territory wholeness in relation to the more widespread borderlands, the land, the water, the earth, and everything that characterizes it as a shared space. The idea of the borderlands, while directly related to the "border," is discussed by Anzaldúa in her 1987 book *Borderlands: La Fontera, The New Mestiza*:

> A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants… The only "legitimate" inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger.[41]

According to this definition, the borderlands is a space of contestation and one that is hostile to that of communities who are not white. Hostile to Indigenous communities among others. However, this thinking of the borderland places this space in a very negative context, which cannot necessarily "escape" from the colonial control of for example, the dominant government. This is one way of thinking about the borderlands. As an alternative, Postcommodity's work and art practice offers another where the borderlands become a productive space for learning and sharing while critiquing the impact of the U.S.-Mexico border on borderland communities.

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[38] "Sovereignty," *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2020), accessed April 22, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *sovereignty* as the capacity for a state to have supreme power over a political body and is free from external control.
[39] Joanne Barker, *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006): 18.
[40] Barker, *Sovereignty Matters*, 19.
[41] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Fontera, The New Mestiza*, 3.

Postcommodity: Non-combative Art Practice and the Permeable Border

When we think of the U.S.-Mexico border today, often images of American military men armed along a chain-link fence comes to mind. On the southern side of the border, we may picture the Mexican migrant, viewed by the American Government as a foreign threat. These are the images and language that the American settler colonial authority reinforces in the imaginary and minds of the public through mass-media, journalism, film, popular culture, and politics as part of the system of social knowledge, produced and re-produced by the ideologies of the nation-state. However, while the dramatization of some of the images are not accurate, but rather work to reinforce the idea of the foreign threat, the lived reality of border communities, especially on the southern side which are so labelled is very real. What is also very real along the border is the border fence or wall that works to physically separate two nation-states. Ramon Resendiz, Rosalva Resendiz, and Irene J. Klaver trace part of the border wall history in their article "Colonialism and Imperialism: Indigenous Resistance on the US/Mexico Border."

> In 2005 the US Congress began enacting legislation for building a physical fence along the US-Mexico border. The proposed "border wall" sought to fence a total of 700 out of the 1,954 miles of the international boundary between Mexico and the United States. As of January 8, 2010 the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deemed the construction of the border fence complete…[42]

The border fence / wall, still present today, has significantly impacted border communities who live along the border. Not only is their movement affected, but so too are their identities. Indigenous peoples who have faced border challenges and impacts throughout colonization continuing today are among these communities who are affected.

In 2015, Postcommodity installed the *Repellent Fence*, which ran perpendicular to the U.S.-Mexico border as a culmination of eight years of work to critique and explore the impacts of the border on Indigenous and border communities, whilst reinvigorating and reinforcing the interconnectivity of these groups of people. The vacillating balloons which are constantly moving in different directions point to the complexity of movement around, on, through, and between the border and the borderlands. The intention of this project was to establish "a network of dialogues between Indigenous, United States, and Mexican publics" to facilitate the recovery of transborder knowledges in support of border communities.[43] The balloons themselves are enlarged replicas of a

[42] Ramon Resendiz, Rosalva Resendiz, and Irene J. Klaver, "Colonialism and Imperialism: Indigenous Resistance on the US/Mexico Border," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology 16* (2017): 16.
[43] Postcommodity, "Repellent Fence – 2015," Postcommodity, accessed April 22, 2020, http://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.

visual bird deterrent or "scare-away" balloons that are often used to prevent birds from nesting in specific sites or to keep predator birds away. While ineffective in their use, these bird repellents are used symbolically by Postcommodity to critique how borders represent a physical space to deter the movement of people in, out, and through one place to another. I argue that the transformation of these balloons through Indigenous iconography and medicine colours further pushes for a shift in the rhetoric toward a productive dialogue of healing and engagement with critical questions regarding colonial histories and the ongoing challenges of border politics (fig. 2). A dialogue that is "respectful of Indigeneity upon which borders and trade policies have been fabricated."[44]

In an artist talk at Bockley Gallery as part of the Artist Op-Ed Series put on by Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Postcommodity discussed the *Repellent Fence* and explained this eight-year journey and evolution of the project as resulting in "an ephemeral grounds for Indigenous reimagined ceremony." When talking about what Indigenous reimagined ceremony is, Martínez notes:

> Indigenous reimagined ceremony is not "reimagined indigenous ceremony"… [in practice] we recontextualize and adapt contemporary art to reflect the values and the knowledge systems by which we were raised. We spent eight years both fundraising and engaged in very focused bi-national diplomacy to co-intentionally, with peoples of the borderland, build a grounds for four days of Indigenous reimagined ceremony, which is what repellent fence was.[45]

Through the community engagement aspect of this project, Postcommodity worked to generate dialogues between community leaders and city administrations in both Douglas and Agua Prieta. While the project only lasted 4 days, the years of work to arrive at *Repellent Fence* demonstrates the importance of Indigenous community involvement in border politics and ongoing relationships among border communities and their respective governments. The borderland communities participated in this project over the eight-year course of its development by discussing and collaborating on what form the final shape of the project would take.[46] Raven Chacon notes the importance of only having *Repellent Fence* exist as a temporary place-specific installation because "we didn't want to stamp our place into the land and disrupt the land in that way. We didn't want to carve out our names into the dirt. We didn't want to put steel rods into mother Earth."[47] The temporary nature of this project demonstrates the impermanence of human created objects like borders. The act of drawing a line through the land does not erase the peoples who live there nor their territorial and land relationships. And while the

[44] Postcommodity, "Repellent Fence – 2015".
[45] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity," March 10, 2017, Bockley Gallery, MPEG4, 1:20:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or0nsRZoFyw&t=2220s.
[46] Nikki Otten, "Focus on the Collection: "Repellent Fence," *Weisman Art Museum*, February 7, 2018, https://wam.umn.edu/2018/02/07/focus-on-the-collection-repellent-fence/.
[47] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity," March 10, 2017, Bockley Gallery, MPEG4, 1:20:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or0nsRZoFyw&t=2220s.

colonial government's intention may be to weaken relationships between and within Indigenous nations and other peoples divided by this border, these relationships will always remain regardless of whether there is a physical and imaginary border line to divide them. This is not to say that borders do not impact Indigenous communities, but rather what Postcommodity's work demonstrates is that the relationships between and specifically within Indigenous nations along the border and in general are so powerful that they cannot be severed by a fence or wall. But this wall does indeed negatively impact communities. *Repellent Fence* made visible the interconnected relationships between border communities by stitching a path across the border rather than parallel to it. In the process of doing so, the artists of Postcommodity revealed not only these connections, but also how they have been hindered by the border. For example, as their name suggests, much of Postcommodity's art practice engages with the global market of capitalism and the effect its economic, social, and political systems have on geographies and Indigenous peoples. The border as a part of this system is a mediator of capitalism as some goods and people are permitted to move through it, while others are not. The shared space between Indigenous nations that Simpson describes becomes disrupted by the border, which disregards traditional Indigenous trade networks, intellectual spaces of sharing and understanding. Therefore, access to place is an integral issue in border spaces.

Moreover, I have noted that borders often conjure up images of militarization. As such, borderlands are often thought of as combative areas where groups are in conflict and disagreement with one another. However, as they trace the evolution of their own project, Postcommodity notes that *Repellent Fence*, although it started out as a project of protest and one that was ready for a fight with the border, was realized over time as a non-combative project seeking to generate productive conversations about the issues involved.[48] Kade L. Twist describes the non-combative nature of their art practice during this time:

> The art at the border tends to be very didactic and preachy and have an us vs. them mentally and that was a framework we were trying to break out of by organizing postcommodity in the first place. We were trying to get away from that type of degenerative process…balloons capture the imagination. It takes people into a framework where it's not combative. It's almost like the conversation, when the balloon is present, takes on that gentleness and honesty of an object being pushed by nothing but wind. The readymade that we chose to work with was structured to be disarming and that was something that we didn't learn until much later in the process.[49]

The community involvement was an integral part of the non-combative nature of this project. "[The communities] were telling their story through this work, through the organizing efforts and all these

[48] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity."
[49] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity."

economic efforts, political efforts, cultural identity-based efforts in order to build this transborder capacity," Martínez emphasizes when discussing the work.[50] This story-telling occurred through collective discussions and sharing conversations when the artists (who are Indigenous) and other Indigenous peoples were present together.[51] Much like many Indigenous art practices today, these efforts are intended to remain as part of the communities involved long after an installation is removed from the land. Thus, the symbolic suture remains, maintaining relationships between communities, with the land, and with their cultural practices and protocols. The encompassing and lasting project and community involvement, demonstrates an active present of Indigenous sovereignty that is reflected through practice, tradition, contemporary tradition, language, etc. all part of the Indigenous identities of Indigenous border nations / communities.

The Line and the Spatial Vocabulary of Colonialism

Following the installation of *Repellent Fence*, in 2016 border politics continued as a theme of focus for Postcommodity's artistic practice in *A Very Long Line* (2016). This work consisted of a four-channel video installation on an infinite loop (fig. 3). Different views of the land in the same area where the *Repellent Fence* (2015) was installed, zoom past the viewer. Each image of the land is superimposed by a border fence that runs across the channel screens at various speeds, accompanied by a dissonant soundtrack, and leaving the viewer unsettled and disoriented. As a critique of their nationalist implications through the reinforcement of the sovereign border of the nation-state, Postcommodity points to the violence of the border as "a very long filter of bodies and goods," through its mediation of imperialism and market capitalism.[52] Simultaneously, the artists emphasize that all Indigenous peoples are intermeshed in the current immigration crisis, which the current border fence acts as a filter to prevent what is termed "illegal immigration," into the United States.[53] When viewing the video, the viewer may find that the speeding up and slowing down of both the images and soundtrack reflects a symbolic connection to how goods and people may move through the border. Some goods and people pass easily and quickly, while others are questioned, slowed down, and even prevented from passing to the other side. But who decides who and what passes? Much like the treaty processes that occurred between 1819 and 1854 to finalize the U.S.-Mexico border, the facilitation of goods and

[50] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity."
[51] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity."
[52] Postcommodity, "A Very Long Line – 2016," Postcommodity, accessed April 23, 2020, http://postcommodity.com/AVeryLongLine.html.
[53] Postcommodity, "A Very Long Line – 2016".

people through the border is controlled by the nation-state(s) who manage this space to secure their own interests and possessions, real and imagined. Indigenous nations and border communities are left out of the historical and contemporary border rhetoric much like the treaty negotiations previously discussed that helped solidify this border because their consent is not viewed as necessary. If consent is not acquired and made to be a requirement, then exploitation occurs where one group benefits more or solely at the expense of the other. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), Simpson talks about the importance of consent in building relationships:

> The word consensual here is key because if children learn to normalize dominance and nonconsent within the context of education, then nonconsent becomes part of the normalized tool kit of those with authoritarian power. Within the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples are not seen as worthy recipients of consent, informed or otherwise, and part of being colonized is engaging in all kinds of processes daily that given a choice, we likely wouldn't consent to.[54]

Postcommodity's critique of the border as a part of the system of capital flow, which mediates the exchange of commodities and resources, points to this idea of non-consent with the exploitation of these resources and their extraction from the land that has been demarcated by a boundary line. This exploitation comes at a great cost to Indigenous peoples who cannot, for example, access spiritual and cultural sites nor move freely across the land.[55] The land is further exploited when physical border walls and fences are constructed causing ecological disruptions to animals that can no longer move freely across the border. Plants are also negatively impacted because they rely on animals to propagate and increase in diversity as a natural process to protect themselves from diseases and extinction.[56]

Other iterations of the border and its impacts are discussed by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. She say the Western conception of space including boundaries as part of the "spatial vocabulary of colonialism," consisting of the line, the centre, and the outside.[57] The line is important because it is used by colonial powers to map territory and mark the limits of their power.[58] In *A Very Long Line*, Postcommodity points to the line as a disruptive and violent part of this spatial vocabulary of colonialism through its framing of

[54] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 161.
[55] Sarah Maddison, "Indigenous Peoples and Colonial Borders: Sovereignty, Nationhood, Identity, and Activism," in *Border Politics: Social Movements, Collective Identities, and Globalization*, eds. Nancy A. Naples and Jennifer Bickham Mendez (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 157, 171.
[56] Margaret Wilder, "Exploring the Ecosystem of the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Scientific American*, December 6, 2018, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/exploring-the-ecosystem-of-the-u-s-mexico-border/.
[57] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999): 52-53.
[58] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 53.

nationalism and its fabrication and facilitation of settler colonial constructed trade networks while opposing traditional Indigenous ones. It is also through the reinforcement or strengthening of this line that simultaneously works to oppose Indigenous sovereignty. The line on a map representing a border may function to organize the space being represented by acting as a marker which distinguishes two places from one another. Australian author and scholar Sarah Maddison notes that the desire to organize space by creating "tidy" new spaces simultaneously created chaos for Indigenous nations.[59] In other words, through the use of the line or border to organize the land and separate the nation-state from the foreigner and foreign lands, colonial governments are able to impose their systems of control over everyone and everything who are contained within their borders and even maintain a level of control over those who are without. However, Maddison stresses that "contemporary Indigenous nations are no less sovereign because they have been subsumed within a colonial nation-state, with new borders and boundaries inscribed over the top of existing borders."[60] This is an important point because Maddison is acknowledging that Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of its status in the eyes of the colonial nation-state. It is up to the nation-state to move away from settler colonial formations of social knowledge and come to a meeting place that is open to learning about Indigenous ontologies of knowledges in a way that is respectful, attentive, and consensual. This nation-state and American settler colonial "authority" must meet Indigenous peoples in their own spaces because this is a way in which Indigenous peoples are able to exercise self-determination for their own cultures.[61] And as Tuhiwai Smith notes, Indigenous self-determination is necessary for processes of transformation, decolonization, healing, and mobilization to occur.[62] She also says self-determination is further interconnected to Indigenous sovereignty and identity as well as a wider complex movement of Indigenous cultural "revitalization and reformulation."[63]

Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge in the Borderlands

In the 2017 work *Coyotaje* (2017), Postcommodity created an inflatable sculpture of a chupacabra, or mythical creature coming from the oral traditions of Indigenous cultures in the regions of Latin America and Southern United States, which is named for its sucking the blood of goats and livestock

[59] Maddison, "Indigenous Peoples and Colonial Borders," 156.
[60] Maddison, "Indigenous Peoples and Colonial Borders," 155.
[61] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 7.
[62] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 120.
[63] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 114.

in legend (fig 4).[64] This canine-like creature has been described as hairless with large, sharp teeth, a figure of horror and nightmare appropriated by popular culture in film and stories.[65] In *Coyotaje*, Postcommodity utilizes this Indigenous creature from community stories in the borderlands of the Upper Sonoran Desert to comment on the appropriation of Indigenous storytelling by, for instance, border patrol agents whose night-vision goggles resemble the eyes of the chupacabra. A description of the work and its significance follows as:

> This monster speaks to migrants in camouflage, beckoning them to safety — a deceptive lure to captivity. *Coyotaje* demonstrates how decoys and mythic metaphors function as mediators of strategic expectation. By rendering the intersection of decoy and myth, within this particular work, Postcommodity hacks these mediators, as they are being operationalized in the borderlands and within our larger society.[66]

The sculpture is situated under a green light and closed-circuit video feed surveilling the visitors who enter the space. A soundtrack in Spanish calls out to the viewer. "Ten cuidado!" (be careful), "puedes morir aquí" (you can die here), "escuche, ven conmigo" (listen, come with me), and "mira! la policía" (look! the police). Each phrase thoughtfully chosen to lure the viewer closer to the chupacabra, mimicking the use of "decoys" by United States border patrol as a tactic to deter individuals from crossing the border. Yet, once the viewer arrives close enough, they are shocked to find the green light is reflecting an image of themselves onto the sculpture, transmitted by the closed-circuit surveillance camera hanging above. Writer for Canadian Art, Valérie Frappier notes that the experience of *Coyotaje* evokes fear, which points to the very fear the United States border regime instills as migrants try to cross the border into the United States at night only to be met and apprehended by the border patrol agent.[67] The visitor, like the migrant, becomes subject to the weaponization of Indigenous knowledges and their own self image, becoming the subject under the surveillance of the state and its ideologies as they enter a borderland or border space. The accompanying photograph of two dogs standing over a horse carcass titled "Es más alcanzable de lo que se imaginaban" and translated to "It is more reachable that you imagined," further marks the border as a site of ongoing contestation of territory

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[64] *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1988): 95. Much literature about the chupacabra now exists in the public realm. However, while Indigenous voices on this mythology are sparse in literature, the chupacabra is a well-known creature in the oral traditions and stories of Latin American and Southern United States Indigenous cultures. The chupacabra's presence in written literature of settler colonial writers is reflective of the appropriation of Indigenous cultural stories into social knowledge. While I cannot speak of these stories directly, I may offer a brief visual description of a chupacabra. However, this description from the text referenced here is equally an example of an appropriation of Indigenous stories into literary descriptions.

[65] *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters,* 96.

[66] Postcommodity, "Coyotaje – 2017," Postcommodity, accessed April 25, 2020, http://postcommodity.com/Coyotaje.html.

[67] Valérie Frappier, "Postcommodity," *Canadian Art* 35, issue 2 (2018): 122.

(fig. 5). As the viewer passes by the two dogs one stares attentively, while the other looks elsewhere, claiming the space where the carcass lies, and yet restricted by the border fence in the background.

The border, which has become a line of separation in colonial North America has contributed to the continued physical control of particular groups of people in spaces that have been redefined by colonial governments. This physical control also manifests as a tactic to regulate social knowledge, but also results from the production of a particular worldview and its ideologies. Postcommodity uses both the story and representation of chupacabra to disrupt the settler colonial appropriation of Indigenous knowledges by turning the viewers attention to how Indigenous knowledge is used by patrol agents along the border against Indigenous peoples and migrants throughout the borderlands. By relating the viewer's position to the experience of Indigenous peoples and migrants crossing the border, they are forced to confront the realities of border enforcement, the fear and anxiety of militarization and apprehension, the restriction of movement in the borderlands, and misuse of Indigenous knowledge through appropriation to maintain control over specific groups of people. In *Coyotaje*, the artists point to the issues surrounding the appropriation of Indigenous knowledges. They further problematize how these appropriations along the militarized border have serious consequences for borderland communities and crossing migrants. As border patrol agents actively enforce the prevention of movement across territories at the direction of their governments, they assert the authority of the nation-state over the land, disregarding Indigenous sovereignty. Thus, *Coyotaje* further demonstrates how the weaponization of Indigenous knowledges like the legend of the chupacabra, is transposed out of a nationalistic tendency to "protect" the security of the American nation-state.[68] However, Postcommodity's use of chupacabra is both a turning of the gaze and a reclamation of an Indigenous story. While the American settler colonial government through its border patrol agents' attempts to other Indigenous knowledges by placing them outside or foreign to mainstream social knowledge, Postcommodity reclaims Indigenous stories and uses them to communicate the realities of the borderlands and border impacts to a wide audience. While colonization as Mohawk and Anishnaabe scholar Vanessa Watts argues has "endangered Indigenous agency," I suggest that this agency has the capacity to be resituated in Indigenous identity and communities through works like *Coyotaje*.[69] As the viewer confronts the chupacabra, their experience with fear is personalized while

[68] I use the term weaponization to demonstrate how Postcommodity is showing how the legend of chupacabra is being first, appropriated and second, misused by United States border patrol agents to instill fear in migrants crossing the border who are familiar with chupacabra as a figure of fear coming from traditional oral stories. Border patrol agents thus weaponize chupacabra to assist them in deterring people from crossing the border and create fear, anxiety, and consequence if they do.

[69] Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 2*, no.1 (2013): 23.

related to migrants and Indigenous peoples, connecting them to the effect border violence has on all borderland communities.

Where does this leave Indigenous sovereignty?

In the beginning of this paper, I asked what effect international borders have on Indigenous communities and their identities. In examining the work and art practice of Indigenous art collective, Postcommodity, borders can be explored in a way that complicates current discourse of border politics and its rhetoric. *Repellent Fence* (2015), *A Very Long Line* (2016), and *Coyotaje* (2017) demonstrate a resistance to the binary discourse in the realm of social knowledge that is regulated by settler colonial ideologies. The signing of treaties during the nineteenth-century worked to assert and expand the sovereign territory and authority of the United States nation-state while simultaneously diminishing the nation-state of Mexico. Yet, in doing so Indigenous voices were ignored as colonial governments failed to acquire proper consent for the creation of a border as well as changes made to it over time. These governments still fail to acknowledge Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, especially when these views are seen to conflict with their own. For instance, while the concept of land may, in part, be viewed as a space for sharing and understanding from one perspective, it may be viewed as a possession from another perspective. This is exactly the kind of binary discourse that Postcommodity is trying to move away from, advocating instead for the consideration of the complexity of structures like borders to create a more productive and nuanced conversation. These conversations are needed and necessary in order to educate society on the real impacts borders have on Indigenous cultures, migrants, and borderland communities outside of the dominant ideological discourse and mainstream social knowledge. Once this happens, more productive conversations about Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty can occur on the terms of Indigenous peoples, but with a wider public engaged in these conversations.

I have demonstrated that borders are complex structures that are defined within geography and the realm of social knowledge as lines (physical and imaginary) used to separate two or more groups or collective bodies from one another. Yet while the sovereignty of the nation-state is strengthened by the border, the physical and ideological border line simultaneously works to interrupt the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. This occurs through upsetting and restricting access to the land, cultural sites, limiting the movement of people and ecological communities, as well as the overall disregard for traditional territories and their occupants. By engaging with the border rhetoric, Postcommodity's works demonstrate the need for creating and renewing the complexity of structures

in society that the settler colonizer mind tends to oversimplify without consideration for Indigenous peoples. In *Repellent Fence*, this rhetoric is complicated by revealing the connections between and among border communities by temporarily drawing a line that constantly shifts position through fluctuations in nature. Despite its temporality, these connections remain after the physical installation is removed from the land. In demonstrating the impermanence of human-made objects like borders, *Repellent Fence* simultaneously emphasizes the strength of human and community relationships. While a temporary installation, *Repellent Fence* revealed the relationships between Indigenous peoples (of the same nation divided by the border) that transcends the physical and ideological barrier of separation created by the border. Its suture remains even without a physical object showing its place. As such, *Repellent Fence* resists the physical and ideological U.S.-Mexico border through an assertion of Indigenous presence and by challenging the very presence / absence binary relationships created by borders.[70] *A Very Long Line* communicates a need for questioning the extent to which the border mediates imperialism and market capitalism. It further demonstrates the effect this exploitive economic system impacts Indigenous nations and their traditional trade networks. In 2017 with *Coyotaje*, Indigenous knowledges were reclaimed at the border by implicating the role of the military, the public, and popular culture in holding hostage these knowledges as they assert the sovereignty of the colonial nation-state.[71]

The complexity of the border is why it is so important to continue finding additional avenues to investigate to examine new possibilities of thinking about how borderland communities – and all communities – can move forward in dialogue, in respect, and in relationship with one another. Likewise, this conversation is not unique to the United States. It exists in Canada and other nation-states produced through colonization. The colonial legacy still continues today of which borders are a prime example. As such, the discussion of borders within these different contexts is still needed. I end with these words of Cristobal Martinez who advocates for such conversations and interventions:

[70] I suggest here that the border seeks to establish a binary relationship between the presence of American settler colonial culture and the absence of Indigenous culture, by dividing Indigenous traditional territory and nations. However, Postcommodity resists and disrupts this binary narrative created by the settler colonial nation-state by making visible the seemingly invisible connections between Indigenous peoples across the border. When the installation is removed, the presence of these connections remains, demonstrating the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples while simultaneously disrupting and rupturing the permanence of the border and the authority of the settler colonial government and system of social knowledge.

[71] I would like to note the complexity of Postcommodity's works and artistic practice and as such, there are many avenues yet to be explored regarding these three pieces and their critique of border politics. Postcommodity's art practice is significantly engaged with global market capitalism and its impact on Indigenous communities. In particular, *A Very Long Line* with regards to its critique of capital trade through the border. The effects of capitalism on Indigenous sovereignty is a topic that I was unable to address in this paper. While just scratching the surface of this topic with the border and border politics in mind, this analysis is far more complicated and requires a significant amount of additional research.

> We entrench ourselves within the entanglements and in many ways create ever more entanglements, because what we're interested in doing is not creating these simple models. We're trying to mediate the complexity, not simplify it, because the simplification is creating social stratifications that are polarizing. We're not so much interested in the nodes as much as we are interested in the connections between nodes…We are hoping we can mediate a more nuanced conversation.[72]

This artistic practice is an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty.

Kristina Parzen is a Ph.D student in Art History at Concordia University in Montreal. Her dissertation research examines the history of anthropomorphic maps produced in Europe since the 14th century. She questions how anthropomorphic maps represent and characterize place and engages with scholarship across the disciplines of art history, geography, literature, and political science. Her research is currently funded by a Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholarship provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Kristina completed her M.A. at the University of British Columbia in Art History & Theory resulting in a thesis titled "The space in-between cultures: site-specific meeting places of Indigenous and European knowledges." This work was supported by a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship Master's Award and is intended as an alternative way of understanding knowledge in settler colonial nation-states away from Eurocentric perspectives toward a system based on inclusion. Kristina completed her B.A. at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon in Art History.

[72] Walker Art Center, "Artist Talk + Op-Ed Launch: Postcommodity," March 10, 2017, Bockley Gallery, MPEG4, 1:20:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or0nsRZoFyw&t=2220s.

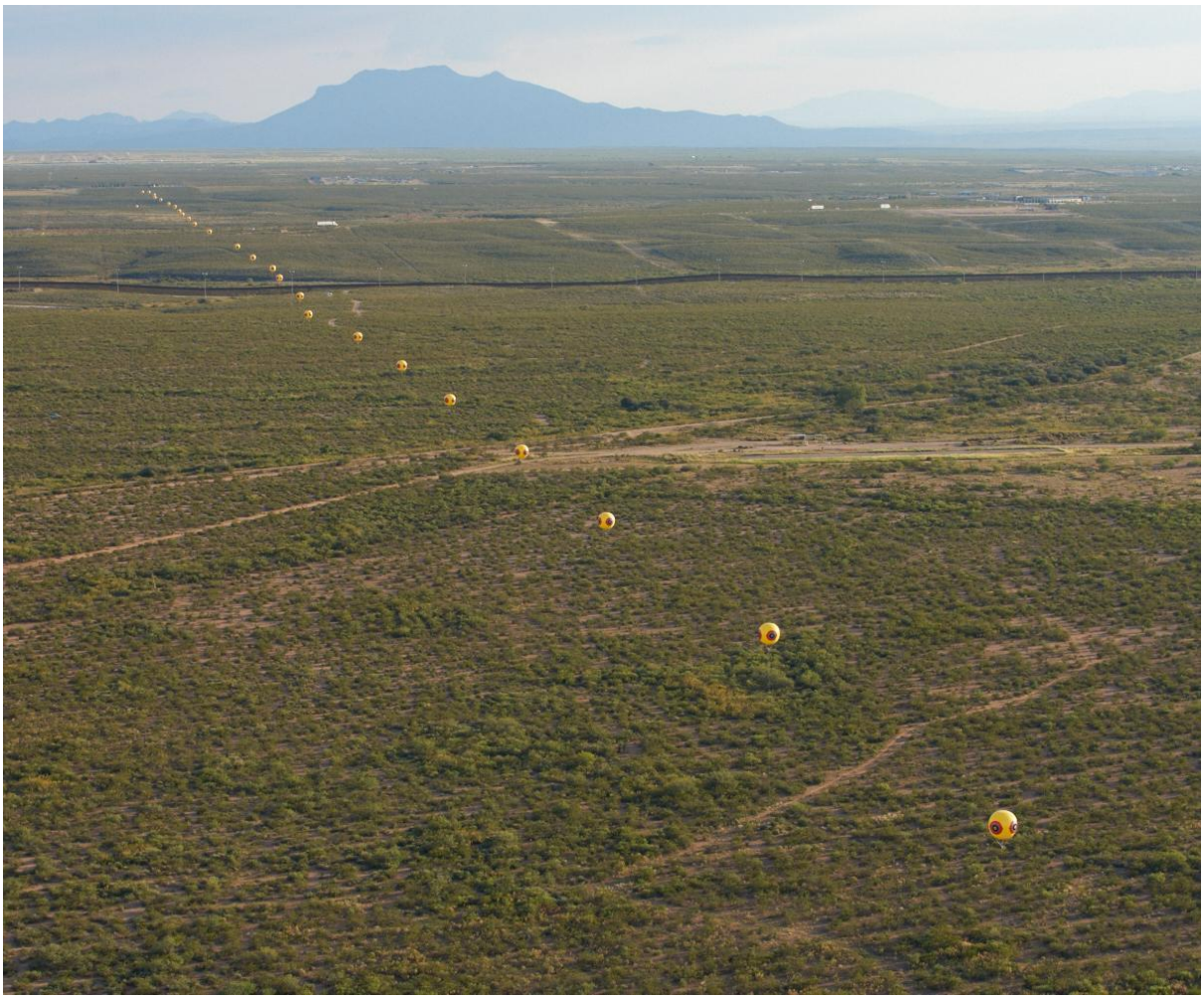

Figure 1: Postcommodity, *Repellent Fence / Valla Repelente*, 2015, land art installation and community engagement (Earth, cinder block, para-cord, pvc spheres, helium), Douglas, Arizona, U.S.A. and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, https://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.

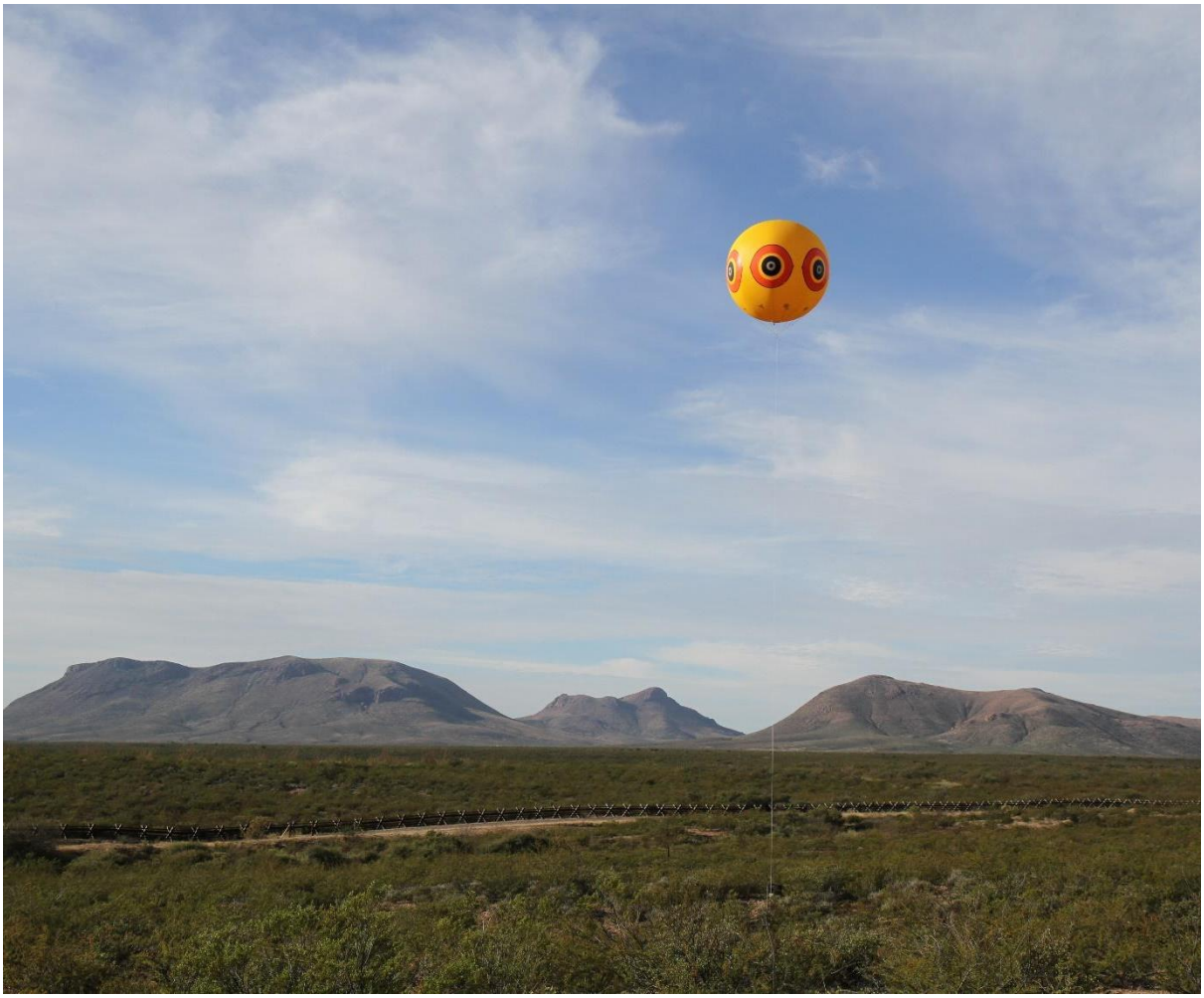

Figure 2: Postcommodity, *Repellent Fence / Valla Repelente*, 2015, balloon close-up, land art installation and community engagement (Earth, cinder block, para-cord, pvc spheres, helium), Douglas, Arizona, U.S.A. and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, https://postcommodity.com/Repellent_Fence_English.html.

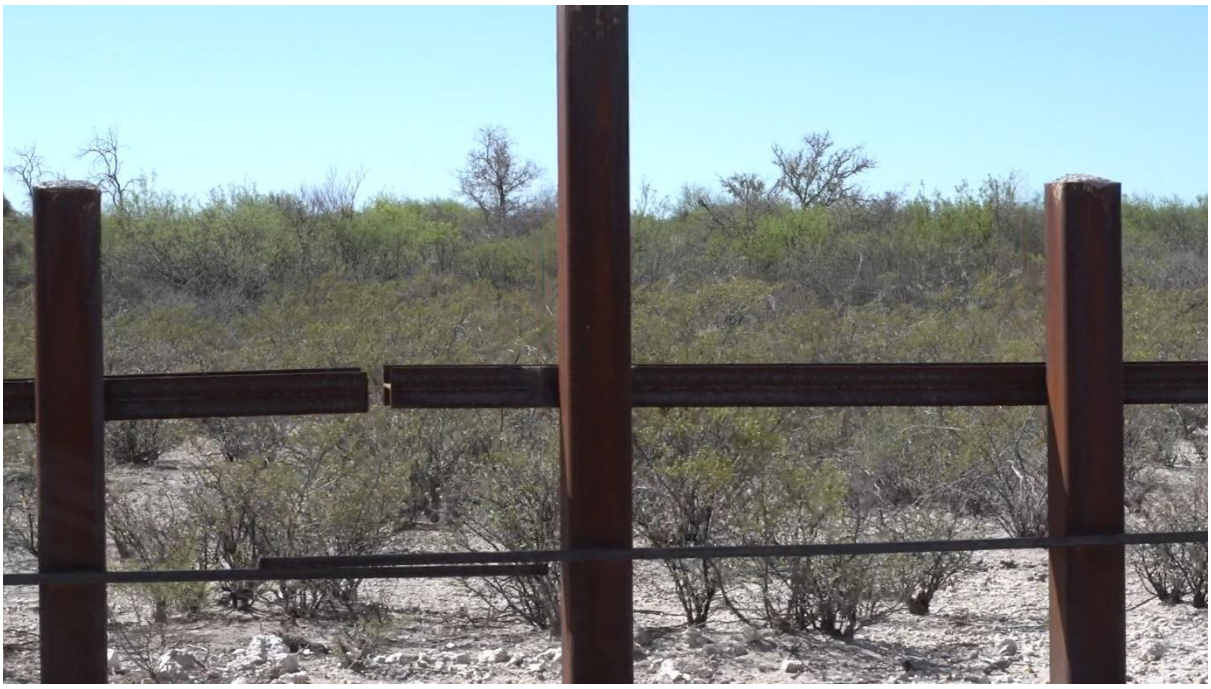

Figure 3: Postcommodity, *A Very Long Line*, 2016, video still, four channel video with sound, Whitney Biennial, 2017, New York City, New York, U.S.A, https://postcommodity.com/AVeryLongLine.html.

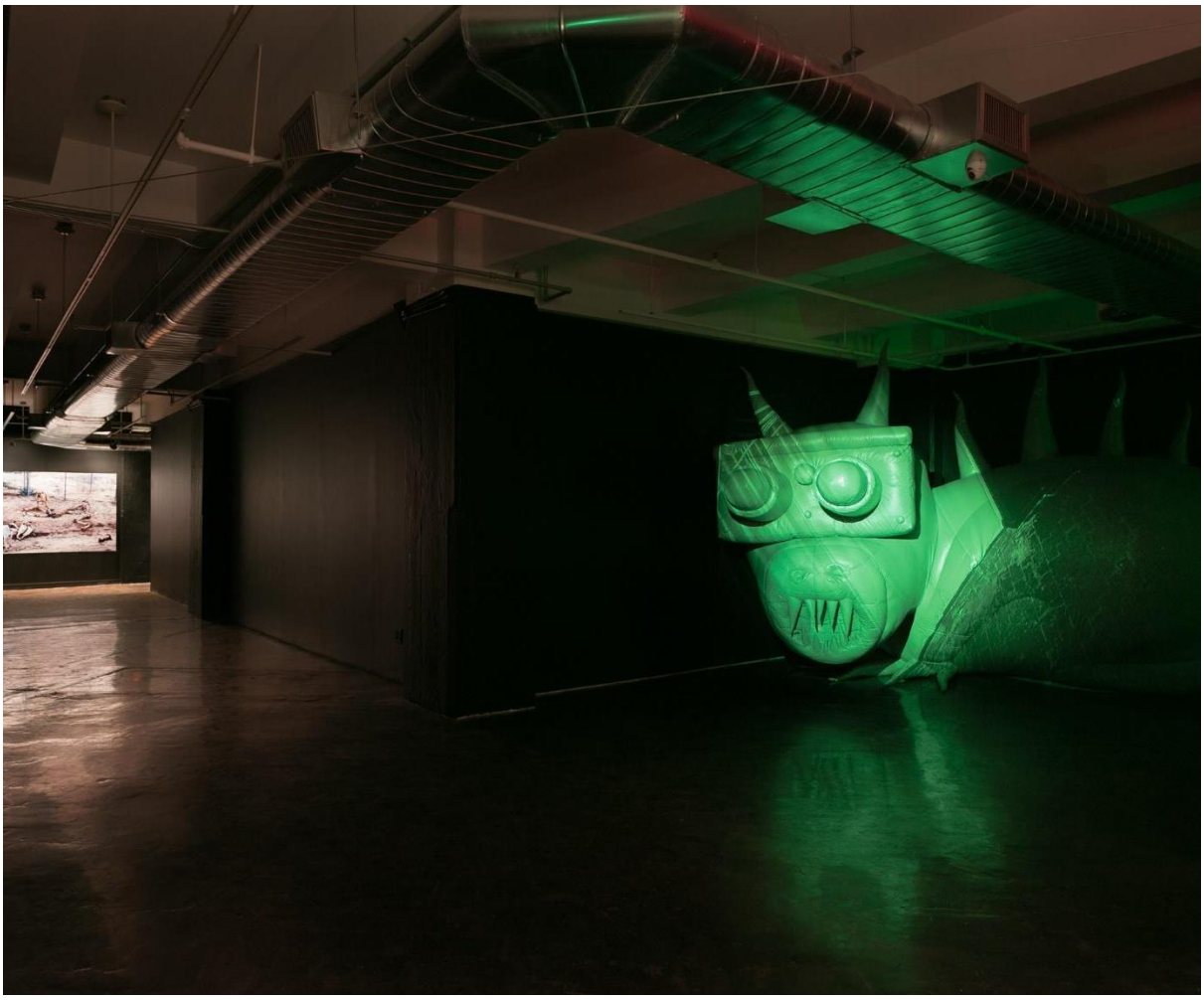

Figure 4: Postcommodity, *Coyotaje*, 2017, inflatable sculpture, close circuit night vision video, sound, and photograph, Art in General, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A, https://postcommodity.com/Coyotaje.html.

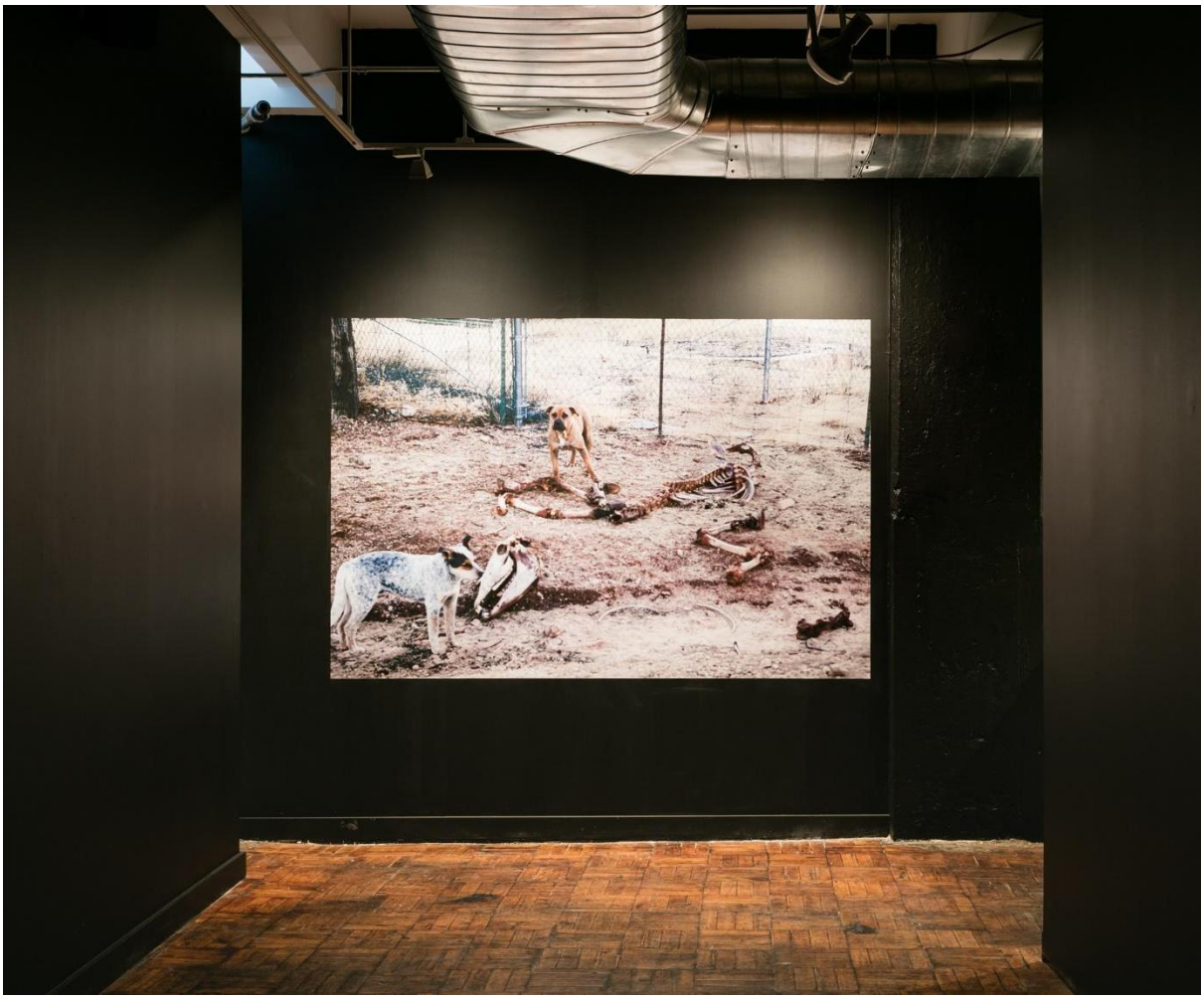

Figure 5: Postcommodity, *Coyotaje*, 2017, photograph close-up, inflatable sculpture, close circuit night vision video, sound, and photograph, Art in General, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A, https://postcommodity.com/Coyotaje.html.