Asha Ramirez

Dr. Bayles

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For my museum field trip, I visited the Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art or the RAFFMA, which is adjacent to the visual arts department at California State University, San Bernardino. While at the RAFFMA, I was able to see a number of different exhibits, but for the sake of this essay, I will focus on the one entitled “Brown Baroque: Objects of Opulence”, which is a collection of works by artist Linda Vallejo, who also gave an artist talk that I attended a week before my visit to view the installation. Vallejo is a self described Chicana artist who uses a combination of statistics, pop culture, her love of Victorian aesthetics, and her lived experiences as a ‘brown woman, as her inspiration and driving force behind her creative process. Over the decades spanning her life, she has been painting everyday pop culture objects brown. The installation is a combination of Victorian Baroque era room installations and ordinary objects of pop culture, all of which are painted brown. The highly detailed room installations are displayed in a multitude of scales, from miniature dollhouse size to life size collections of Baroque era furniture, rugs, and decorative items that would have been seen in affluent ‘white’ womens homes during that era. By painting all of it brown and decorating them all in shades of brown, Vallejo questions where the Latino/x people were in the 1900’s and what role they played in building this nation and its opulence.

On display alongside the Victorian style dioramas and parlor settings, are a collection of beautifully detailed mandala paintings in monochromatic browns that represent statistics that involve Latino/x people both throughout history and into modern day, within the United States. She creates these works on paper by plotting and graphing the statistical points and then connecting them with lines to create the patterns that she then fills in with various shades of brown and cream colors to represent the population density of 'Brown People' within that area. I found them to be very complex and beautiful, but to make a close study of each and every one in order to fully understand, would have taken more than hours, it would have taken me days of intense study. With that in mind, I chose to view them from the lens of aesthetic beauty and make a mental note of the meaning behind each of the paintings.

The installation also sprinkled some sculptural work that Vallejo has created by painting found and thrifted items that represent white pop culture, in various shades of brown. One of my favorite pieces from this series of sculptures are the characters from the popular Flintstons cartoon, Fred and Barney. In her artist talk, Vallejo told the story of the day she found them and just knew that they needed to be painted brown, so she took them home and painted them. When once questioned about whether or not she was concerned about being criticized for 'cultural appropriation' by painting symbols of white culture brown, she told them something along the lines of: 'No, I'm not concerned about that. White people have been culturally appropriating us forever, why not "appropriate their asses back!". I think that hearing her say that during her talk made me really appreciate seeing the brown Fred and Barney up close and in person.

The sculptural work also included another work that was made up of several vintage mirrors, all painted brown, including the mirrored surface itself, although the reflection was still

visible through the thin layer of brown paint. Viewers were invited to gaze at themselves in the mirrors in order to see a 'browner version' of themselves. Additionally, each mirror had hand written notes and numbers, again referencing social statistics as they relate to brown people in the United States. I think the concept behind this work within the greater context of the entire exhibit, was really poignant and powerful, because it encourages an interaction between the viewer and the artist in a way that asks us to put ourselves into the metaphorical shoes of the brown person.

The RAFFMA was also exhibiting an anthology of printed community flyers and signs that have been designed and used over the past fifty years by Self Help Graphics to promote a community and cultural celebration of Dia De Los Muertos, the Mexican holiday for honoring their dead loved ones. The Dia De Los Muertos exhibit was featured in the main gallery of the museum and was made up mostly of framed posters and prints hung along the walls. There were only a couple of sculptures included in the display, but I can only remember seeing two. The prints were dated each year and were all designed by artists from the community of Boyle Heights, where Self Help Graphics is located. Boyle Heights is a community in Los Angeles known for its rich cultural public art and has a very high Latino/x population, but it has also been a hot spot for the fight against gentrification by outside investors who would see those murals painted over in favor of modern aesthetics in order to draw in residents who will pay a higher price for the homes in the area. The biggest issue with gentrification like this is that the longtime residents of the community are being priced out of their own neighborhoods where their families have lived for generations.

I make mention of the "Dia De Los Muertos" exhibit that is currently on display at the RAFFMA in order to contextualize the museum and analyze my thoughts on the intended audience and where the RAFFMA stands on decolonizing art. I believe that a number of factors contribute to the choices that the RAFFMA makes when selecting artists whose work is put on display. The first of which is likely the source of funding since the RAFFMA is affiliated with a state university. I also believe that because our university is a Hispanic serving institute, and San Bernardino has a high population of Latino/x people, the RAFFMA ensures that the artists that they exhibit represent the region in which the museum is located. Of course, this brings into question the matter of accessibility to the community with entry fees and location.

In her book, "Nature in the Museum", Mary Kosut writes:

> "Until recently, curatorial authority was buried—under tradition, wealth, family lineage, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. Museums have long been contested arenas but have especially come into the spotlight after the civil rights and women's liberation movements and the subsequent development of critical race and gender studies." (Kosut, p. 286)

Because of the lack of curatorial authority given to underrepresented groups of people in traditional museum settings, historically, artists like Linda Vallejo would have, and still are excluded from many privately funded museums.

Vallejo was born in 1951, so she has lived through both the Civil Rights Movement as well as the Womens' Rights Movement. Her father was in the military, which resulted in their relocation to many different places both in the United States and Europe, so she has had the

opportunity to experience her identity as a Mexican-American woman and artist and how she fits into the world with her multicultural perspectives.

Sky Cubacub is an artist and fashion designer who launched a line of clothing called "Rebirth Garments", which makes custom fashion for disabled and queer people. Cubacub wrote a manifesto that calls for 'radical visibility' which they explain as "a call to action: to dress in order to not be ignored, to reject 'passing' and 'assimilation'.". (Cubacub) Linda Vallejo has been practicing her own form of "Radical Visibility" through her exclusive use of the color brown. Although she does not fit the call that Sky Cubacub puts forward for Queer, Trans and Disabled people to make themselves radically visible through the use of bright colors and highlighting her body, Vallejo has made brown people radically visible by painting objects of white supremist culture, brown. As an artist who has lived through so many movements and in so many places, Vallejo made brown bodies radically visible within the social constructs of an ever changing society with an intense focus of 'identifying' and categorizing people based on their race and gender.

In the introduction to her book, "Fantasies of Identification, Ellen Samuels gives a brief overview of the history of how those in power, the dominant white society, have constructed rules and assumptions about what is 'normal' and what is not when it comes to identifying and categorizing people. I find it interesting that Linda Vallejo has such an attraction to the Victorian aesthetics that were adopted by elite, white women in the mid 1800's and early 1900's, the same era that produced 'Medical Authority', 'The Clinical Gaze' and the "rise of eugenic practices". (Samuels, p. 2) Samuels also notes that although the "Civil Rights Movement overturned long-entrenched racial, gendered, disabled and sexualized hierarchies of power…such

movements have not functioned, either historically or in their current incarnations, to significantly disrupt or dilute the influence of fantasies of identification in American or Global power structures." (Samuels, p. 10) The fact that Vallejo has experienced life before and after the Civil Rights Movement, as a woman of color, gives her a profound collection of lived experiences from which to draw inspiration. She has found a way to challenge the dominant culture through the use of Baroque objects that signified the opulence and wealth acquired in this country by white Americans. By painting these items brown, Vallejo brings attention to the reality that all of the wealth and privilege was built on the backs of brown labor and exploitation.

Ellen Samuels may not believe that there has been a disruption or dilution of the fantasies of identification that have long dominated American institutions such as art museums. But I believe that artists like Linda Vallejo are continuing to dismantle the hierarchies that exist within art history. In fact, I think that they are examples of contemporary art history in the making and although progress is slow, there has been progress and if you ask those who remember what it was like before the social justice movements in the 1960's, they'll tell you that things are far better than they were, but there is still a lot of work to do.

# Works Cited

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