# *Ad Feminam*: Martine Gutierrez and the Language of Advertising

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Amador, Ezequiel. "*Ad Feminam*: Martine Gutierrez and the Language of Advertising". *Camino Real*, vol.14, no.18, 2023, pp. 187-211

Recibido: 1 de febrero de 2023

2º revisión: 25 de septiembre de 2023

## ABSTRACT

Martine Gutierrez (b. Apr. 16, 1989, Berkeley, CA) is a Guatemalan American artist, a trans woman of Indigenous Maya descent, and the cover girl of artworks that pass as advertisements. At the age of thirty- four, her billboards, bus shelter ads, and fashion magazine spreads have caught the attention of major media outlets. Often branded as a "Latinx artist," it is striking that the media never discusses Gutierrez in relation to other Latina/x artists. In this paper, I situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists, such as Ester Hernández (b. 1944, Dinuba, CA) and Patssi Valdez (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA). I draw on cultural theorists, such as Chela Sandoval, to consider how Gutierrez's glamorous adaptations of mass media form part of an ongoing liberatory practice, one that uses art to combat the idealization of whiteness, critique gender norms, and call out systemic racism.

KEYWORDS: Latinx art, Chicanx art, art activism, Latina artists, Martine Gutierrez.

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Martine Gutierrez is a Guatemalan American artist, a trans woman of Indigenous Maya descent, and the cover girl of artworks that pass as advertisements. At the age of thirty-four, her billboards, bus shelter ads, and fashion magazine spreads have been featured on the streets of New York and in world renowned art institutions, such as the Whitney Museum of American Art. They have also caught the attention of major media outlets: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, and *Aperture*. Media outlets typically compare Gutierrez to contemporary artist Cindy Sherman (b. Jan. 19, 1954, Glen Ridge NJ), but they also liken her to Frida Kahlo (1907-1954, Mexico City), Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951, Osaka, Japan), and Zanele Muholi (b. 1972, Umlazi, South Africa). These comparisons situate Gutierrez within a lineage of artists who engage with self-portraiture and signal an effort to diversify mainstream art history. The emphasis placed on diversification is particularly apparent in headlines like "A Trans Latinx Artist's High-Fashion Critique of Colonialism" and "A Trans Latinx Artist's Incredible High-Fashion Self-Portraits," which highlight Gutierrez's gender and racial identities (Scott, Rosen). Often branded as a "Latinx artist," it is striking that the media never discusses Gutierrez in relation to other Latina/x artists[1]. This oversight prompts me to ask, how does Gutierrez's artistic practice compare to

that of other Latina/x artists who draw on the language of advertising, and how have the comparative practices that pretend to promote inclusivity failed to recognize the artistic contributions of Latina/x artists?

In this essay, I situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists. I draw on Chela Sandoval's conceptualization of the five technologies of the methodology of the oppressed to consider how Gutierrez's glamorous adaptations of mass media form part of an ongoing liberatory practice. I pair critical theory with a close reading of three of Gutierrez's artworks to examine how she utilizes semiotics, deconstruction, meta-ideologizing, democratics, and differential movement to critique the *ad feminam* rhetoric featured in advertising. I deploy the term *ad feminam* —a term used to describe language that attacks and discredits women— to refer to advertising practices that invalidate women who deviate from the ideals of whiteness and cisness. Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists have long adapted the language of advertising to combat the idealization of whiteness, critique gender norms, and call out systemic racism. In the 1970s, Patssi Valdez (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA) utilized performance and photography to contest the absence of Chicanxs in film. She posed in film stills called No Movies (nonexistent movies) to portray Chicanxs in glamourous settings. Like Gutierrez, Valdez drew inspiration from fashion advertisements and films, deviating from conventional portrayals that framed Chicanxs as criminals. Ester Hernández (b. 1944, Dinuba, CA) has also utilized the language of advertising to protest the criminalization of Chicanx and Indigenous communities. Between 1981 and 2008, Hernández repurposed the Sun-Maid Raisins logo to protest the unjust deportation and labor practices that her community faced. I position Valdez and Hernández as precursors to emphasize that Gutierrez's artistic practice is exemplary of the strategies that Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists have used to survive, obtain recognition, and seek liberation.

My understanding of liberation is influenced by decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo, who calls for epistemic disobedience, a form of resistance that opens one up to ways of knowing that have been discredited and hidden (Mignolo46). I posit liberation as the decolonization of thought. I consider how Latina/x artists seek

liberation by combatting oppressive forms of media representation, but I do not equate mere media representation to liberation. As American studies scholar Leticia Alvarado has noted, media representation can entail cohering to a dominant majority (Alvarado 3-9). I argue that Latina/x artists use the language of advertising not to seek normative inclusion, but to challenge the conventions that the media imposes and imagine life beyond structures of oppression/coloniality.

Whereas Valdez and Hernández have been the subjects of numerous publications by Latinx and Chicanx studies scholars, Gutierrez has received little attention within the academy. I consider how she practices semiotics by drawing from the images that she encounters in mainstream media. Sandoval introduces semiotics as "the perception of signs in culture as structured meanings that carry power" (Sandoval 82). Throughout the years, Gutierrez has "compiled binders full of [her] favorite fashion magazine pages..." (Gutierrez). She has studied the logos, slogans, color schemes, fonts and poses within them, becoming fluent in the language of advertising. Fluency in the language of advertising is essential to deconstruction, which Sandoval defines as challenging dominant ideological forms (Sandoval 132). Gutierrez utilizes this language to reconceptualize a medium that has traditionally misrepresented and excluded trans women and Indigenous women[2]. Conscious of this lack of representation, Gutierrez states, "[n]o one was going to put me on the cover of a Paris fashion magazine," so she published her own. In 2018, she shot and modeled in a series titled *Indigenous Woman*, which was formatted as a 124-page fashion magazine and loosely based on Andy Warhol's publication titled *Interview Magazine* (Rivera Fella). Gutierrez succeeds in mimicking the glamour and gloss of fashion advertising, but to different ends, to combat misrepresentation and erasure. She exerts her agency as an artist stating, "I am confronting control to have ownership over my body and how it is used as an underrepresented identity-and to have authority over what I'm selling and what the advertisement looks like" (Gutierrez). This being one of the first in-depth analyses of Gutierrez's art, I examine how she adapts advertising techniques to reconfigure conventional forms of representation like the Latina/x and Chicana/x artist-activists that came before her.

Gutierrez's 2016 billboard titled *Jeans* mimics and modifies advertising techniques to combat the marginalization of trans women. (fig.1) Gutierrez based the billboard on recognizable advertising campaigns. At the time, she "was looking at makeup ads, such as Maybelline or [CoverGirl], and saw a lot of lime greens and hot pink colors," so she placed herself against a hot pink backdrop. Gutierrez felt that the pop of color was necessary to entice New Yorkers passing the corner of 9th Avenue and 37th Street to look up, but she also "wanted the image to be black and white, which is very classic, very Calvin Klein 1990s…" (Gutierrez).

**Figure 1– Martine Gutierrez, *JEANS*, 2016. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.**

Calvin Klein's campaigns are considered "classic" because the advertising techniques they employ have been repeated over time. Specifically, *Jeans* resembles Calvin Klein's 1992 campaign, which featured a topless Kate Moss straddling Marky Mark. This campaign is significant in pop culture because it launched Moss into international stardom (Elser). Gutierrez adapts a recognizable image that was also displayed on a billboard in Times Square. She emulates Moss's appearance by lowering her jeans below her waist, revealing her derrière in lieu of a branded, elastic underwear band. The similarities in content and placement foster a sense of brand recognition, a concept in advertising that measures a brand's success

by how easily consumers are able to associate it with visual cues. Logos, slogans, and color schemes are typically used to render a brand distinguishable from competitors, but Gutierrez alters their purpose so that her artwork can blend into a cityscape that is already studded with billboards. Gutierrez deconstructs the language of advertising to appropriate and transform dominant ideological forms, actions that Sandoval refers to as meta-ideologizing (Sandoval 82). The sleek, sans-serif letters that form the "MARTINE JEANS" logo encourage consumers to view *Jeans* like any other advertisement and to view her like any other female model. Consumers would not have known that Gutierrez used male pronouns two years prior to producing *Jeans*. Gutierrez asks, "[w]hen do we ever say, 'Kate Moss, white model, born female,' drawing attention to the way that the media normalizes whiteness and cisness as "ideal" identities that need not be named (Gutierrez). Utilizing advertising techniques and campaigns, Gutierrez combats a discriminatory practice that is used to invalidate trans women of color that deviate from these "ideals."

As the maker of this image, Gutierrez determines which aspects of her identity are revealed and concealed. She wraps her arms around her chest to conceal her breasts, but she is not shying away from the camera. She seductively gazes into it, her eyes accentuated with dark eyeshadow. Her manicured thumb grazes against her parted, glossy lips. With her disheveled hair and arched back, Gutierrez positions herself as the object of sexual desire, but she is actually the producer of it. She strikes the poses, shoots the images, and sets the limits. Initially, Gutierrez photographed herself with her jeans fully buttoned up, but she chose to lower them for the final frames. She states, "I feel the need to nurture and protect myself as I am only budding—my derrière at the moment is the most familiar currency I have to showcase" (Gutierrez). Gutierrez asserts full control over how her body is presented in *Jeans* and validates her identity by refusing to reveal herself in excess or distinguish herself from a cis woman.

Gutierrez's *Jeans* and her artistic practice as a whole demonstrate how the technologies of the methodology of the oppressed build off each other. Through semiotics, Gutierrez recognizes advertisements as signs in culture. She obtains fluency in the language of advertising, and she deconstructs it to produce an artwork that passes as an advertisement while deviating from the ways that the media invalidates trans

women. In this sense, Gutierrez orients semiotics, deconstruction, and meta-ideologizing to bring forth egalitarian social relations. Sandoval would describe this as democratics: the fourth technology. Furthermore, Sandoval describes the transition between these technologies as differential movement: the fifth technology. With this technology in mind, let us examine how Gutierrez extends her practice to other types of advertising placements, other spaces that typically exclude indigeneity and transness.

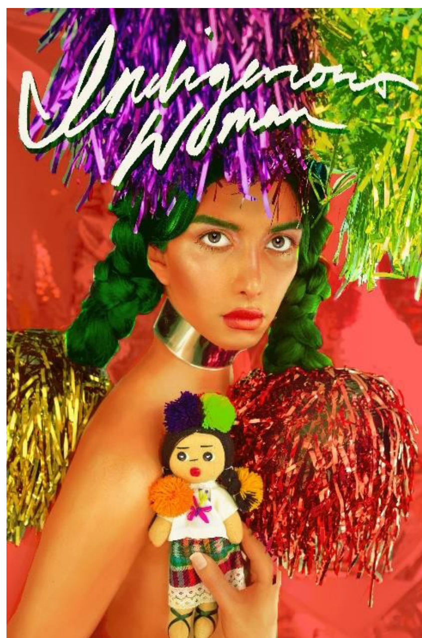


**Fig. 1 – Martine Gutierrez, *Indigenous Woman* cover, 2018. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.**

Gutierrez's artworks consistently challenge viewers to consider how the images in mainstream media demarcate "acceptable" gender and racial identities. In 2018, she placed herself on the cover of the *Indigenous Woman* fashion magazine to unsettle notions of celebrity that are rooted in cisness and whiteness (fig. 2). The cover is based on *Interview Magazine*, a publication that was founded in 1969 by contemporary artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987), who often addressed fame and celebrity in his artworks. Both magazines feature logos that

are written in a cursive font. The handwritten quality of the font and the repetition of the letters "In" again foster a sense of brand recognition. By associating her series with *Interview Magazine*, Gutierrez likens herself to one of the most prominent Pop artists and elevates herself to celebrity status. For Gutierrez, celebrity was once a path towards recognition. She states, "[w]hen I was younger, I thought if I were famous people would finally accept me," but media representation does not necessarily entail acceptance; it often stipulates conforming to the "acceptable" (Yerebakan). Rather than reproduce/normalize cisness and whiteness, Gutierrez seeks recognition for trans women and Indigenous women on her own terms[3].

*Indigenous Woman* begins with a cover that diverges from conventional portrayals of whiteness while challenging stereotypical portrayals of indigeneity, which frame Native peoples as static remnants of the past. Gutierrez demonstrates how Maya traditions have transformed over time by posing with a *muñeca quitapena* (worry doll). In Guatemala, *muñecas quitapenas* are commonly gifted to children, who are encouraged to share their worries with them before they go to bed to awake with the knowledge to face their dilemmas. This practice stems from the Maya legend of Princess Ixmucane, who received a gift from the sun god that enabled her to solve any problem. I consider the *muñeca quitapena* as a *placa*, a floating signifier that marks a space for the purpose of laying a symbolic claim. Gender studies scholar Francisco J. Galarte notes that *placas* that are not readily apparent to viewers who lack cultural conditioning (Galarte 7). To viewers who lack cultural knowledge, Gutierrez is simply portraying a doll, but she is actually embodying the continuation of an Indigenous tradition. Like the *muñeca quitapena*, Gutierrez's hair is braided and decorated with purple and green, metallic pom poms. She repurposes decorative accessories that are typically used by women in gendered, performative displays of support and celebration. Gutierrez's cover is a performance and celebration of indigeneity that presents the traditional as contemporary, responding to past and present.

Posing on the cover of *Indigenous Woman*, Gutierrez asserts the vitality of Native peoples. She holds the stiff *muñeca quitapena* with her right hand and places it in the center of the composition, near

her chest. The doll's head rests against her shoulder, but Gutierrez's expression does not reflect the tenderness that a child might show to a precious toy. Gutierrez pouts her red lips and stares directly into the camera, contrasting the doll's blank expression. Whereas the doll appears to glance towards the left, Gutierrez confronts the viewer with intensity. She angles her body towards the right and leans forward, distinguishing herself from the lifeless, motionless doll. Gutierrez utilizes her pose within the cover to assert her presence and existence as a contemporary Indigenous woman.

While *Indigenous Woman* is indeed a self-exploration of identity, Gutierrez does not position herself as an object of study, but as a woman worthy of praise. Gutierrez's cover must be understood in relation to a history of ethnography, which utilized photography as a colonial collection practice to document and inspect Native peoples. Native studies scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith considers how collection relates to re- arrangement, representation, redistribution and gives shape to colonial historical narratives (Tuhiwai Smith 62). Gutierrez uses self-portraiture to reconfigure a method of invasive knowledge extraction. American artist and art historian Ace Lehner argues that self-portraiture can be used to intervene in the legacies of portraiture we have inherited in the Western art-historical context (Lehner 68). Magazine covers are forms of portraiture that typically exalt cis, white women and shape the notion of an idealized beauty. Gutierrez's cover rejects the notion of an "ideal" by drawing attention to how the "ideal" has been used to oppress those that deviate from it. As the photographer and model, Gutierrez shapes the narrative sets the boundaries of her exposure/display. She resists ethnographic inspection by concealing her breasts with the *muñeca quitapena*, but she also embraces her body and sexuality as sources of power. Posing nude, she draws attention to the brownness of her skin to subvert the idealization of whiteness and cisness in mainstream media. Using self-portraiture, Gutierrez combats a history of oppressive ethnographic and media practices to valorize herself and her identities.

**Fig. 2 – Martine Gutierrez, *Demons, Chin 'Demon of Lust,'* p93 from *Indigenous Woman*, 2018. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.**

Throughout *Indigenous Woman*, Gutierrez embodies characters to explore the body as a place of testimony that sheds light on oppression, erasure, and resilience. I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's conceptualization of *recobrando* to analyze Gutierrez's portrayal of the Maya demon Chin (fig. 3). Anzaldúa describes *recobrando* as the act of recovering "our ancient identity, digging it out like dry clay, pressing it to our current identity, molding past and present, inner and outer" (Anzaldúa 117). Chin is a figure associated with lust and homosexuality, who is —at times— presented as male (Mark). I argue that Gutierrez uses makeup, accessories, and hair styling to present herself as the trans descendant of this gender fluid demon. She rests her chin on her palm and grazes her cheek with thick, yellow acrylic nails. This gesture is often used in cosmetics advertisements to draw attention towards the face. Gutierrez uses it to draw attention to her chartreuse-colored, hawkish eyes. These birdlike qualities are significant because the Maya associated the quetzal bird with divinity, using its tail feathers to decorate headdresses for royal ritual

performances (Carter and de Carteret 53). Gutierrez structures her hairdo like a headdress, using thick black braids to encircle a replica of a quetzal bird. Its blue green plumes graze her right shoulder, matching the feathers that jut out of both sides of her head. Gutierrez's appearance establishes her divine connection to Chin, situating her trans identity within Maya tradition.

Gutierrez turns to Maya mythology to recover knowledge of the past and explore her relationship with it. Initially, Gutierrez sought to portray goddesses from her ancestry because her community refers to trans women as "goddesses." After conducting research, Gutierrez was shocked to learn that the deities in Maya literature were referred to as *demonios* (demons)[4] . Recognizing that coloniality shaped her understanding of the term "demon," Gutierrez decided to reclaim it (Rosen). American art historian Claire Raymond asserts that Gutierrez "reembodies the erased texts of Indigenous American deities..." (Raymond 176). Gutierrez uses her body to reconnect with Maya cultural traditions. The red and black markings that appear on her hands, face, and bicep allude to the Maya practice of tattooing the body to honor the divine (Tramain 67-80)[5]. By marking her body, Gutierrez converts it into a religious text, one that can be read in relation to and in honor of Chin. In addition, she directly references Mayan texts by sporting a jade-colored jaguar glyph as a nose ring. The Maya associated jade with the divine, so Gutierrez's marked body is made even more sacred by wearing the glyph and several stacks of jade-colored rings on each finger (Halperin, Hruby, and Mongelluzzo 758-71). Gutierrez carefully adorns her body to reference Maya mythology, resisting the erasure of Indigenous history and belief systems. By embodying Chin within a fashion spread, Gutierrez draws a parallel between the erasure of Maya mythology during the colonial period and the erasure of Native peoples in mainstream media to underscores that the problems of the present are rooted in the past.

Responding to the world around her, Gutierrez's art is a product of the times, and it is also highly representative of the strategies that Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used since the 1970s to critique gender norms and systemic racism. Gutierrez converts advertising techniques into tools for social justice, so I consider her art in relation to that of Valdez. Born and raised in East Los Angeles,

Valdez drew inspiration from Hollywood films, yet she never saw herself reflected in them. When she did encounter Chicanxs in mainstream media, they were often portrayed as criminals. In 1972, she co-founded the Chicanx artist collective Asco, collaborating with Harry Gamboa Jr. (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA), Glugio "Gronk" Nicandro (b. 1954, East Los Angeles, CA), and Willie Herrón (b. 1951, East Los Angeles, CA) on various artworks that protested the erasure and misrepresentation of Chicanxs in mainstream media. Asco conceptualized No Movies, artworks formatted like film stills that were released internationally to print media (Romo 15). Each No Movie featured an implied narrative, which drew inspiration from pop culture (McMahon 39). Performing in No Movies, Valdez meta-ideologized the language of advertising to deviate from conventional, oppressive modes of representation.

Valdez's role within Asco and the agency that she asserted within No Movies is often misconstrued. She is framed as a model and a muse, terms that position her as a passive object of observation and sexualization (James 187, Muñoz ). These terms are inaccurate because Valdez collaborated with Asco members, such as Gronk, on the poses that she performed. She fondly referred to Gronk as Mr. DeMille, alluding to American film director Cecil DeMille (McMahon 34). Gronk supported Valdez as a director, providing input behind the camera, but these roles were not static. Gronk also starred in Asco's No Movies. À La Mode (1977) features Gronk, Gamboa, and Valdez. (fig. 4). Within this narrative, Gronk and Gamboa play supporting roles. Valdez is the central figure, the star of the scene. Sitting on a table, she crosses her legs at the ankles and places her hand against her thigh to prevent her dress from riding up. This is not an act of modesty, but an act of control. Like Gutierrez, Valdez asserts control over her body and sexuality. She uses her plunging neckline to draw attention to her chest, proudly pushing it outwards, and she stares into the camera, defiantly tilting her chin upwards. Valdez's agency is found within her self-presentation, which played a key role in Asco's No Movies.

**Fig. 3 – Harry Gamboa Jr. *A la Mode*, 1976 from the Asco era ©1976, Harry Gamboa Jr. Performers (l-r): Glugio Gronk Nicandro, Patssi Valdez, Harry Gamboa Jr.**

Valdez's performance within À *La Mode* shapes a narrative in which Chicana/xs can challenge societal and patriarchal norms. Chicana/x Studies scholar Marci McMahon argues that Valdez used posing to resist and exploit the male gaze. McMahon contests previous interpretations of À La Mode, which assert that Valdez was objectified. Critics have pointed out that the artwork is named after a phrase that is used to describe someone stylish or a dessert served with ice cream. Indeed, Asco chose the title because Valdez was posing next to a piece of pie in Phillipe's, a famous Los Angeles diner. However, McMahon demonstrates how Valdez's pose embraces sexuality as a source of power, drawing attention to the fact that Valdez places her hand on Gronk's shoulder (McMahon 40). Valdez's gesture is an assertion of power, possession, and choice. It implies that —within this love triangle— she has chosen the man on her right. By placing her hand on Gronk's shoulder, she converts him into a prop within this No Movie and establishes her dominance as the leading lady. Gronk passively stares off into the distance and tilts his chin upwards, mimicking her pose to confirm that he has accepted his role within this union. Performing the ability to choose within a love triangle, Valdez challenges the sexist norms that oppress Chicana/xs.

Valdez is an important precedent for Gutierrez, as both use the language of advertising to mimic glamour and assert control over their bodies, challenging the conventional portrayals of their respective communities. Mimicking the glamour of film stars and fashion advertisements, Valdez turns to stylish apparel and craft to combat the erasure and criminalization of Chicanxs in mainstream media. Like Gutierrez, Valdez fashioned the illusion of glamour out of inexpensive materials: found fabric, glitter, paper, foil, plastics, and netting (McMahon 35). Valdez states, "I knew I could create an illusion… Something fabulous out of nothing" (Romo34). Collaborating with Asco, Valdez imagined opportunities for the Chicana/x community beyond the impoverished streets of East Los Angeles, beyond Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals.

Like Valdez, Gutierrez uses her art to critique the misrepresentation of trans women and Indigenous women, as well as the erasure and invalidation of these identities. Placing these artists in dialogue demonstrates how Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used the language of advertising to bring forth egalitarian social relations, how they have repeatedly challenged misrepresentation, erasure, and systemic racism. Gutierrez's artistic practice applies the technologies of the methodology of the oppressed and forms part of an ongoing liberatory practice.

The strategies that Gutierrez uses to seek liberation for her communities are comparable not only to those that have been used by Valdez, but also by Hernández. Like Gutierrez, Hernández uses the language of advertising to reflect on personal experiences and advocate for her community. Hernández was raised by farmworkers in Dinuba, California. While visiting her mother, Hernández learned that the pesticides used in grape farming had contaminated her community's water source. Shortly after, she spotted a Sun-Maid Raisins logo at the end of a field and "had an 'aha' moment." Hernández identified the logo as a sign in culture that carries power, and she meta-ideologized it by drawing from the satirical cartoons of Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), which often featured skeletons. She states, "I saw I could draw on Posada and bring it together with what was going on in the San Joaquin Valley" (Blackwell 148). Like Gutierrez, Hernández turns to the past to evaluate problems in the present. Her print titled *Sun Mad*

(1982) features a grinning skeleton carrying a brown, woven basket that is noticeably larger than its shoulders (fig. 5). It is overflowing with green grapes, which underscores how farmworkers continue to perform backbreaking labor in deadly conditions. Placing the grinning skeleton within a circular, yellow sun, Hernández casts a spotlight on the victims of unjust labor practices and pesticide poisoning. She draws from recognizable brands, using the language of advertising to advocate for her community.

The Sun-Maid Raisins logo has been described as a vision of Californian sunshine and prosperity, but Hernández's print exposes the artificiality of that vision. Gone is the "timeless and trusted" value proposition. Hernández's tagline underscores that this product is "unnaturally grown with insecticides, miticides, herbicides, fungicides." Whereas the original logo features lush, green leaves, Hernández's print features teal-colored leaves and vines. This change in color suggests that these products have been tainted. In addition, Hernández demonstrates the impact that chemical usage has had on farmworkers by transforming the smiling sun maiden into a grinning skeleton. A potent deconstruction of corporate branding, Hernández's *Sun Mad* is considered one of the first images to link the plight of farm workers to the effects on consumers and the environment (Bain 28). Her politically charged print reconfigures a brand that consumers know and trust to reveal hazardous production practices.

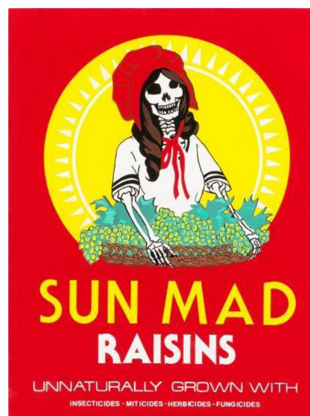


**Fig. 4 – Ester Hernández, *Sun Mad*, 1982. Screen-print on paper, 50.7 x 38.1 cm. © 1982, Ester Hernández.**

Hernández's print relates to broader trends in artist-activism. Throughout the 1980s, artists emulated the gallows humor that was prevalent in the antiracist art that Chicanx and Puerto Rican artists produced in the 1960s and 1970s (Lippard). Chicanx artists turned to existing circuits of commerce, media, and politics to combat the racially charged notions of high art and low art that excluded them from the museum. They incorporated the language of advertising into their works, blending Pop art with Mexican graphic art to address systemic racism (Gabara 10). Similarly, Hernández draws on the language of advertising to raise awareness around the struggles that her community faces.

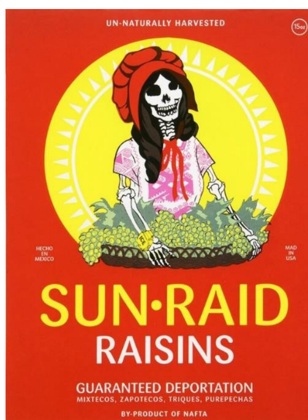


**Fig. 5 – Ester Hernández, *Sun Raid*, 2008. Screen-print on paper, 50.2 × 38.1 cm. © 2008, Ester Hernández.**

Throughout her career, Hernández has drawn from the language of advertising to protest the unjust treatment of migrant farmworkers. In 2008, Hernández returned to the Sun-Maid logo to produce a new print titled *Sun Raid* (fig. 6). The grinning skeleton in *Sun Raid* sports a yellow device on her wrist, which features the word "ICE." Still carrying the overflowing basket of grapes, it is evident that she is being monitored by Immigration Customs Enforcement on the job. Hernández issued this print at a time when the George W. Bush administration was being widely criticized for its high level of workplace raids ("Sun Raid"). To underscore her opposition to these deportation practices, Hernández converts the "Made in the USA" slogan

into "MAD IN USA." She places this slogan on the far right, juxtaposing it with the "HECHO EN MEXICO" slogan on the far left. The grinning skeleton straddles the space between these slogans, like a migrant caught on the border between the United States and Mexico. Centered beneath the grinning skeleton, Hernández includes the words "BY-PRODUCT OF NAFTA," referencing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was enacted in 1994. NAFTA severely impacted Mexican farmworkers, forcing many to find work elsewhere and submit to hazardous working conditions. Hernández again hints at the latter by including the words "UN-NATURALLY HARVESTED" towards the top of the print. Utilizing the language of advertising, Hernández critiques the labor practices that farmworkers have been subjected to and the political factors that have forced them to migrate to the U.S.

Hernández uses her art to advocate for marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous peoples. Hernández references four Indigenous groups towards the bottom of the print: Mixtecos, Zapotecos, Triques, and Purepechas. Her tagline notes that these groups are "GUARANTEED DEPORTATION." While Hernández is not a member of these groups, she does possess Indigenous Yaqui heritage, and feels that "…it is very important to share our vision and struggles… for in unity there is strength and understanding" ("South and Central American Indian Center Newsletter"). Hernández presents the grinning skeleton as a representation of Native peoples. She dresses her in a *huipil*, a garment worn by Indigenous women in Mexico and Central America. The pink and white patterns that cover the *huipil* are a marker of indigeneity and a testament to the vitality and resilience of Indigenous traditions, which have survived centuries of oppression. Hernández highlights these groups and their traditions to raise awareness about the discriminatory practices that they face.

Like Hernández, Gutierrez turns to the language of advertising to advocate for Indigenous peoples and uses strategies that have been used since the Chicano Movement to promote social justice, but her activism tackles today's discourses surrounding representation and authenticity. Whereas Hernández's politically charged spoofs utilize gallows humor to raise awareness around the hazards and discrimination that migrant and Indigenous farmworkers face,

Gutierrez's realistic adaptations of mass media diverge from static portrayals of indigeneity. Gutierrez utilizes advertising techniques to foreground the oppression that Indigenous peoples have and continue to face, but she also explores "what signifies a real, authentic, native-born woman." When asked if she could speak about the Indigenous perspective, Gutierrez responded "[t]hat's part of the question: Do I have that... I've been called every iteration of a 'half breed,' and it's no doubt the origin of my questioning" (Rosen). Gutierrez's response is a form of ethnographic refusal, a refusal to reveal excessive details about one's ethnic identity to authenticate or validate it[6]. It is representative of current discourses on gender and race, which challenge the colonial practice of categorizing and defining a subject. In addition, her refusal to speak to the Indigenous perspective marks a shift from Hernández's multiculturalism. Hernández's call for unity among Indigenous peoples is reflective of the multicultural discourses that peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s. While Gutierrez diverges in the way that she uses her art to explore and embrace her relationship with indigeneity, she uses the same advertising techniques that Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have used to combat the marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

Despite these clear similarities, most media outlets compare Gutierrez to Sherman, though some liken her to Morimura, Muholi, and Kahlo (Sheets, Velasco, Herriman). Indeed, Sherman addressed gender norms by portraying stereotypical Hollywood heroines in a series of photographs titled *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80), but this comparison fails to address the emphasis that Gutierrez places on systemic racism. Like Gutierrez, Morimura and Muholi address race with self-portraiture. Whereas Morimura uses it to situate the East Asian body within the Western art historical canon, Muholi uses it to foreground the Black body and the LGBTQ+ community. Placing Gutierrez in dialogue with a nonbinary artist such as Muholi could provide a fruitful discussion about the lack of trans discourse within art history[7]. However, it is also necessary to consider the implications of a comparative approach that overlooks the contributions of Latinx artists. While Kahlo is arguably one of the best-known Latin American artists, she was a Mexican national whose privileged background differs greatly from Gutierrez's experience living as a minoritized Latina/x in the U.S.

I place Gutierrez in dialogue with Hernández and Valdez to recognize how Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists have consistently used the language of advertising to promote social justice and underscore why it is striking that media outlets never discuss her work in relation to other Latinx artists. In her 2020 monograph titled *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, and Politics*, American anthropologist Arlene Dávila reports that art institutions rarely describe Latinx artists as such. They are typically described as Latin American or American, and they are typically likened to prominent white artists or international artists. Dávila refers to this comparative approach as a whitewashing strategy and considers how this approach risks overlooking the issues that guide the work of Latinx artists. Whereas Dávila focuses on how museums, galleries, and artist estates attempt to assimilate Latinx artists into the predominantly white art market, I observe how media outlets attempt to assimilate Gutierrez into the Western canon.

At the start of this essay, I noted that Gutierrez has received a considerable amount of media exposure. She has been exhibited internationally and acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Gutierrez operates within a shifting art world, with a level of visibility that was not afforded to Asco or Hernández four to five decades prior. As previously noted, Chicanx and Latinx artists often operated outside of the museum due to systemic racism; their works were deemed too political and subjected to the racially charged categorization of high and low art. In recent decades, Asco has received increased exposure within the museum, largely due to the work of Chicanx art historians and curators such as Rita González and C. Ondine Chavoya, who organized an Asco retrospective at LACMA in 2011, but also thanks to being included in the 2017 exhibition, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A*. However, Asco was not always included within discourses on Chicanx art history or the Chicano Movement because their conceptual artworks did not adhere to the tenets of Chicano nationalism. Similarly, Hernández recalls a time when her work was not widely accepted. “When I did *Sun Mad*, I had zero money. I couldn’t afford paper! I printed it in my kitchen, and my ten-year-old son helped me. When I presented it to the public, I couldn’t sell it for $20. Nobody wanted it. It wasn’t clear, nobody could make sense of it” (Cortez). Today, Hernández’s work is

featured in prominent museums, such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The shift in museum exposure coincides with broader discussions on representation, Latinx population growth, and a call to diversify museums, which has been driven by social media. Gutierrez's visibility within the art world reflects the shift towards diversity, but the way that her art has been discussed by media outlets suggests that Latinx and Chicanx artists remain in the margins.

By failing to situate Gutierrez's artistic practice within a broader history of Chicanx and Latinx artist activism, media outlets reveal a lack of familiarity with Latinx art. While the field of Latinx art history has grown in recent decades, scholarship is lacking in comparison to subfields such as Latin American art, particularly at the graduate level. Each year the College Art Association publishes a list of dissertations in progress. In 2020, only four graduate students in the U.S. and Canada were writing dissertations on Latinx art ("Latinx Dissertations in Progress by Subject"). The lack of graduate level scholarship can be attributed to the fact that few scholars focus on Latinx art. In 2014, American art historian Adriana Zavala found that few art history departments in the U.S. offered courses on the subject (Zavala 12). In 2016, Rose Salseda, who was then a graduate student, echoed Zavala's concerns at the College Art Association's annual conference, noting that —on average— only 7.2 papers and 1.4 sessions held between 2012 and 2016 discussed Latinx art (Durón). The media's tendency to compare Gutierrez to white and international artists is no mere oversight, rather it is indicative of Latinx arts marginalization within and beyond the academy.

My attempt to situate Gutierrez within a lineage of Chicana/x and Latina/x artist-activists stems from a question that Queer Chicana theorist Emma Pérez posed in 1999, "what will we choose to think again as our history, the history that we want to survive as we decolonize a historical imaginary that veils our thoughts, our words, our languages?" (Pérez 27). The comparative practices used to familiarize audiences with Latina/x artists have the potential to combat their marginalization within the Western canon, but they can also foment it. Situating Gutierrez within a lineage of Latina/x artists prompts us to interrogate the practices that pretend to promote inclusivity, to consider how the Western canon has overlooked Latinx artists, and to imagine what a more inclusive art history looks like. Latina/x

artists have repeatedly adapted the language of advertising to promote social justice, to expose the *ad feminam* rhetoric that is used to attack and marginalize trans women and women of color and combat it. Gutierrez's artworks are a call to action; they ask us to reconsider representation and who it serves, to rethink our history and who has been excluded from it, and to reimagine the Western canon and how we approach broadening it. They ask us to partake in a decolonial movement through and with the technologies of the methodology of the oppressed to seek social transformation.

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## NOTES

1 Latinx is a gender-neutral term that refers to individuals of Latin American descent. It has gained popularity in academic circles; however, it is also being contested. I will use the terms "Latino/x," "Latina/x", and "Latinx" to recognize the new terminology and the preferences and identities of the artists I focus on. As in the aforementioned case of Latinx, Chicanx is a gender-neutral term that refers to Mexican Americans. Throughout this paper, I will preserve the terminology used in direct quotes, use the term "Chicano" when referring to the Chicano Movement, and use the terms "Chicanx," "Chicana/x," and "Chicano/x." My decision to use the terms "Chicana/x," "Chicano/x," "Latino/x," and "Latina/x" draws from the work of performance studies scholar Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa.

2 To cite just two examples, *Vogue México* did not feature an Indigenous Mexican woman on the cover until December of 2018, and American *Vogue* did not feature a trans woman on the cover until September of 2021. For additional information see: Celia Fernandez and Jessica Booth.

3 My thinking is influenced by cultural theorist Rey Chow, who asserts that a non-white culture must use the language of white culture to be or speak while resisting complete normalization by white culture (Chow 12).

4 Gutierrez refers to the Maya concept of *Xibalba*, an underworld that is home to deities. *Xibalba* is referenced in Mayan texts, such as the *Popol Vuh*. Gutierrez recognizes that these texts were translated by Westerners, which impacts the meaning that they carry today. Literary scholar Edgar Garcia notes that Spanish missionaries used the term demon to transplant "European belief into Maya minds."

5 Mesoamerican scholars such as Eric Thompson and Cara F. Tremain have argued that tattooing was practiced by members of the Maya elite to emulate deities and demonstrate divine power.

6 Native Studies scholar Audra Simpson describes ethnographic refusal as "a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in."

7 In an *Art Journal* article from February 2022, art historian David Getsy and cultural theorist Che Gossett reported that the term "transgender" has only appeared in 36 Art Journal articles/reviews, which is significantly lower than the 135 articles/reviews that use the term "queer."