La Sangre LLama

Alicia Perez

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd

Part of the Fine Arts Commons

Recommended Citation

Perez, Alicia, "La Sangre LLama" (2012). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 8.
https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/8

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.
ABSTRACT

LA SANGRE LLAMA is an exhibition of paintings featuring works by Alicia Perez. The series of paintings are acrylic on canvas, all 24”x 36”, and explore the contemporary Latino immigrant experience that often involves instability, acculturation, and loss of identity. The attire found on the subjects all vary in patterns and colors to represent different nationalities that fall under the umbrella of Hispanic Culture. Intentionally concealed faces in the paintings emphasize the belief that many Hispanic immigrants are frequently viewed as stereotypes, rather than individuals. LA SANGRE LLAMA, which translates to “the blood beckons”, affirms the notion that regardless of geographic location, a person’s roots will always remain where they began.

LA SANGRE LLAMA

by

ALICIA R. PEREZ

BFA, Armstrong Atlantic State University. 2009

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2012
LA SANGRE LLAMA

by

ALICIA R. PEREZ
Esta exhibicion es dedicada a mis padres: Rolan y Nuria Perez. Soy lo que soy y he logrado lo que he logrado por ustedes.

“No Venimos de tan lejos para hacerlo mal...”

– Nuria Perez
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Aside from my own effort, much of the success of any project depends largely on the encouragement and guidance of others. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people who have been key in the successful completion of this thesis and exhibition. I would like to show my greatest appreciation to Professor Patricia Walker. I can't say thank you enough, for teaching and helping me grow as a painter throughout my whole MFA candidacy. You taught me many things that I can apply to life outside of the studio. Without your guidance this project would not have been possible. The guidance and support received from Professor Elsie Hill and Professor Tiffanie Townsend, who contributed to this thesis and exhibition, were also vital for the success of the project. I am grateful for your constant support, help, and encouragement. I would also like to extend a thank you to Vicky Robles for taking time out of her busy schedule to answer questions and give me insights to my thesis. Last, but definitely not least, to my family Rolan Perez, Nuria Perez, Carolina Perez, and Cesar Perez. Thank you for being there through thick and thin and for believing in me in times when I didn’t. You are my rock, mi mazorca de maiz. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.................................................................................................................. 6

LIST OF FIGURES......................................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................................................... 9

2 UNSEEN FACES......................................................................................................................... 16

3 ARTISTIC INFLUENCES AND RESEARCH............................................................................ 24

4 MEDIA CHOICES AND TECHNIQUES..................................................................................... 39

CONCLUSION............................................................................................................................... 53

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................................................. 65
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Cyril Powers, The Tube Train, 1934 ................................................................. 34
Figure 2: Gustave Sorbet, Stonebreakers ........................................................................... 34
Figure 3: Honore Daumier, The Third Class Carriage ......................................................... 35
Figure 4: Maceo Montoya, Grapeworkers Series ............................................................... 35
Figure 5: Our Town, By Kerry James Marshall .................................................................. 36
Figure 6: Reflective Blurry Memory, By Yeqing Wang ...................................................... 36
Figure 7: Gourma-Rharous Mali, By Sebastiao Salgado .................................................... 37
Figure 8: Orphanage Attached To The Hospital At Kibumba Number One Cam, By Sebastiao Salgado .................................................................................................................. 37
Figure 9: Kitchen Table Series, By Carrie Mae Weems ..................................................... 38
Figure 10: Silueta Series, By Ana Mendieta ....................................................................... 38
Figure 11: Dios Va A Proveer/ God Will Provide .................................................................. 53
Figure 12: Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que/ I Do It So You Don’t Have To ........ 54
Figure 13: Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que (Draft) .......................................... 55
Figure 14: Abre Puertas Donde Esten Cerradas/ When God Closes A Door He Opens Another .......................................................................................................................... 55
Figure 15: Despierta Ya Es Hora/ Wake Up It Is Time ......................................................... 56
Figure 16: Al Que Madruga Dios Le Ayuda/The Early Bird Gets The Worm ....... 57
Figure 17: Ponte En Mis Zapatos/Put Yourself In My Shoes .............................................. 58
Figure 18: La Mazorca De Maiz/ The Corncob .................................................................. 59
Figure 19: No Seas Candil De La Calle Y Oscuridad De Tu Casa/You Start From Within ...... 60
Figure 20: De Aqui, De Alla, De Ningun Lado, De Todas Partes/ From Here, From There, From Nowhere, From Everywhere .............................................................. 61
Figure 21: No Venimos De Tan Lejos Para Hacer Las Cosas Mal/ We Didn’t Come From So Far To Not Do Things Right .................................................................................. 62
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

LA SANGRE LLAMA is a saying that in Hispanic/Latino culture literally translates to “the blood beckons,” meaning that no matter where one is, there will always be a strong link to one’s roots. My works are based on a mixture of memories that relate to the time my family and I migrated to the United States. As Rebecca Rupp says in her book, *How We Remember and Why We Forget*, “What can be remembered never entirely disappears.”\(^1\) While working on my painting, each memory is rekindled as I remember colors, smells, and music as well as the struggles and the culture shock of stepping on foreign land. Depicting these memories helps me understand them better.

One of the primary themes that underpin the imagery in my MFA exhibition is acculturation and how during that process a certain loss of identity is reached. Acculturation has been defined as “the process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when individuals from different cultures come into contact.”\(^2\) The article “The Role of Identity in Acculturation Among Immigrant People” states that social and cultural identities underlie acculturation.\(^3\) Personal identity anchors the immigrant person during cultural transition and adaptation. My MFA Thesis Exhibition *LA SANGRE LLAMA* is a series of paintings that depict how immigrants are viewed by non-

---


2 (Schwartz, Montgomery, Briones, p. 2); Acculturation can also be described as “when two cultures come into contact and both cultures may experience some change. In reality, however, one cultural group will often dominate the other group” in “Migration, Cultural Bereavement and Cultural Identity” (*World Psychiatry* 4.1, 2005), 134.

3 Ibid.
immigrants as stereotypes and how immigrants experience instability, acculturation, and loss of identity through adaptation and immigration.

In her book Rupp states, “Our personal memories distinguish us from one another; our communal memories bind us together.”4 Though some paintings in LA SANGRE LLAMA are directly based on my memories, this exhibition depicts experiences of Hispanic immigrants, when coming to the United States, no matter which nation they are from. My intent is to use my memory to help create depictions of a universal experience of immigration and recorded communal memory that Hispanic immigrants undergo. The figures in my paintings and the experiences depicted can be recalled by many who have undergone this process of immigrating to a different land where language, perspectives, and customs collide with that of their own. Immigrants come from all over the world, yet the feelings of isolation, of not belonging: many of the struggles are the same. However, I am Hispanic and I can only speak from that point of view. Therefore, all my images are focused on the Latino immigrant experience. The titles in the paintings are in Spanish but also have English translations because this exhibition represents the fusion of two cultures: the one we come from and the one we come to.

All immigrants essentially experience a loss of identity as they are forced to embrace a new culture and society. Lyon Phoebe in her article “Culture Shock and Adapting to Life in Your new Culture” states: “The culture that we come from shapes

4 Rupp, Rebecca. P. xiv.
our identity; it shapes our expectations and beliefs and teaches us cues with which to facilitate communication.” Lyon’s article further summarizes the five stages of culture shock: The Honeymoon phase, the Rejection phase, the Regression stage, the Recovery phase, and the Reverse Culture Shock phase. *LA SANGRE LLAMA* mainly deals with the three initial stages of shock: the Honeymoon Phase, the Rejection Phase, and the Regression Phase. Going through these phases is not easy. It can be painful both emotionally and mentally. The Honeymoon phase, as described in the article, is the phase in which the individual is excited about the new place and enjoys everything about it. “Although there may be a few problems that arise in daily life, you accept them as part of the package.” Immigrants come to a new country and start out doing jobs that are lower in status than what they did back in their home countries because even lower status jobs in the new country pay more than the one they once had. The next phase is The Rejection phase where the individual is tested. This is the phase in which all the problems with communication, cultural differences, and day-to-day problems start piling up; they become homesick and start criticizing everything about the new culture they are in. The Rejection Phase is the phase in which many decide to go back to their home; only the strong stay and see it through. Problems of everyday life multiply because, as immigrants, they are in an unfamiliar land with a different language, customs, and laws. If immigrants are illegal they have to add to their original worries the fact that they could be apprehended any minute and get sent back. The only consolation many have is their

5 Lyon, Phoebe, “Culture Shock and Adapting to Life in Your New Culture” (Web, 2010).
6 Ibid.
faith and religion, and this is something that they teach their children at a very young age. Those who have children also want to keep their culture alive by teaching their children their hereditary beliefs, customs, and traditions. This leads to the third stage of Culture Shock, the Regression Stage. The Regression Stage is the phase, “where one starts to embrace everything from your own culture”7. The individual starts remembering their homeland with this utopian idea of perfection. “You start to embrace everything from your own culture. You may start to remember it as a place where everything was perfect and where you never had problems.”8 The Recovery Phase is the fourth stage where you eventually accept the new culture and understand the language better. The last stage, which is the hardest of all, is the Reverse Culture Shock. “This is the stage that arises when you have been away from your own country for a prolonged period of time.”9 This article clearly summarizes, in steps, the confusion and the overwhelming feelings that immigrants go through which leads to a certain loss of identity.

“Individuals who migrate experience multiple stresses that can impact their mental wellbeing including: the loss of cultural norms; religious customs and social support systems; adjustment to a new culture; and changes in identity and concept of

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
The new language, customs, social activities, and values are mentally exhausting to process and understand. Emotionally, immigrants also deal with the sadness over the loss of those they have left behind, the people that they love. Meanwhile they attempt to understand the new world around them, while also living on a day-to-day basis. A job must be found to provide for both the family here and also to send money back home to the rest of the family that were left behind. I depict acculturation in my paintings in different ways. The process of acculturation, to me, starts as soon as the immigrant decides to leave his/her country. As soon as they step foot outside of what they know, new ideas, new beliefs, new cultures begin to meet. My painting, *La Mazorca de Maíz/The Corncob* (Fig. 18), is about the very first step every immigrant takes: leaving everything behind. In this painting, the angles are exaggerated to depict a feeling of instability and unbalance, the culture shock endured when immigration is illegal. This painting shows the action of leaving; it portrays instability with the use of exaggerated angles and thus foreshadows an uncertainty of what is to come. In my paintings, I portray this feeling of unstableness by exaggerating the angles of walls, windows, doors, and the mirrors that surround the figures. *La Mazorca de Maíz* also shows how vulnerable this family is. Only by staying together are they strong and can survive the pain of leaving everything behind and the challenge of what is to come. All of these are sacrifices made for the greater good of the family rather than to better themselves as individuals. This example of immigration resonates with my experience. A better life and better opportunities for my siblings and I were what pushed my parents to make the decision to

---

move to the United States. Like most immigrants, we came in search of “The American Dream”, for a better education and life. As hard as it was for my parents, they knew that we had better chances at succeeding if we left our homeland El Salvador and started over.

Life for an immigrant is unstable and their future is very much uncertain, especially if they are in their new country illegally. This uncertainty was something my family and I went through. We did not know what was going to happen from one day to the next, whether we were going to continue living our lives the way we were or if we were going to be sent back to El Salvador with nothing but the clothes on our backs. For this reason, my mom would home school us in Spanish after we came from our regular American public school. She did not want us to be behind in El Salvador’s educational curriculum if we were to be sent back. “The individual alien himself…lives outside of the law, on the fringes of society, in constant fear of being apprehended. Invariably he leads a life of hardship, and he is at the mercy of those who would exploit him.”

Every immigrant can feel instability, uncertainty, the process of acculturation, and loss of identity through adaptation, but it is worsened if the immigrant is illegal. My MFA exhibition shows the viewer how uncertain life can be for an immigrant, keeping in mind that for an illegal immigrant life is much more challenging. The intent of this exhibition is to show the Hispanic immigrants from a human perspective rather than a political one. The series of paintings that form my MFA exhibition, LA SANGRE LLAMA is not only a reminder to Hispanic immigrants that they are not alone in what

they undergo, but it also depicts what immigrants go through in order to achieve a better life.
CHAPTER 2: UNSEEN FACES

The article “Migration, Cultural Bereavement and Cultural Identity” by Dinesh Bughra and Matthew Becker, classifies immigrants as being sociocentric (meaning that individuals are more focused on their social group) and egocentric (those who view themselves as the focal point). “A new hypothesis is proposed suggesting that when sociocentric individuals from sociocentric cultures migrate to egocentric societies they may feel more alienated.” Many immigrants, as mentioned by Bhugra, which come from a sociocentric society, such as Hispanics, find it very difficult to fit in or to adapt completely to an egocentric society such as the United States. Both, sociocentric and egocentric societies have their pros and cons. For example, in a sociocentric society the whole family is involved when raising a child, the grandmother, the aunts, the uncles, and the cousins…they are all there. Therefore, a person is guided to behave in a certain way because the community and family are always there. When thrown into an egocentric society, these children get to experience a liberty and freedom that they are not used to (example: college life). Some can handle it, but sometimes this freedom of choice can be too overwhelming and can lead to making the wrong decisions. A person from an egocentric society is usually brought up thinking about what is good for his/her well-being. They are trained to use this freedom of choosing for themselves, by themselves. Many immigrants who were brought up in sociocentric societies eventually go back sooner than they had planned because the pressure of loosing communal guidance in an egocentric society is too much.

Adapting to a new culture is a process of “give-and-take,” in which a loss of identity takes place. In the course of adapting to a new culture and place, immigrants
have to expel ideas from their own culture, creating a need to fuse what they know with the expectations of the new society and culture. This fusion takes place throughout all aspects of their lives. For the children of immigrants, culture becomes a fusion of foods, of family (for example, inter-racial and transcultural marriages), and even of languages. Some immigrants find their true self when they are emerged in a new culture, whereas others become more confused and are left in limbo, not knowing where they belong.

“Identities are transformed, posing highly provocative questions about how to negotiate new personal, local, national and transnational identities simultaneously.”

In Bughra’s article, he explains how cultures mix and describes acculturation and how it occurs. This is very relevant to understanding the culture shock experienced by immigrants. “Racial, ethnic, and cultural identities form part of one’s identity, and secondly, the development of identity and the resulting changes owing to migration and acculturation will change the construction of identity.” Deculturation, unlike acculturation, is when there is a “loss of cultural identity, alienation and acculturative stress” which also happens during this adaptation period. In my paintings I conceal the subject’s personal identity by intentionally selecting compositions that conceal the faces. However, their cultural identity is still very apparent to the viewer through the attire. I approached this loss of identity in my paintings at first by erasing the subject’s face


13 Bhugra and Becker “Migration, Cultural….” 135.

altogether such as found in *Despierta, ya es hora/Wake up, its time* (Fig. 15). Stripping away the facial features from the faces was a way of erasing the immigrant’s identity. It was also a reference to illegal aliens and how they have to go about their daily activities without people really knowing their real names or their real life story. They are people without faces, without an identity, without a “number” that identifies them as “somebody” in this country. However, by erasing the faces I realized that my viewers were interpreting a message that I did not intend. In a critique, it was pointed out that my faceless figures looked dehumanized, mannequin-like, and cold. By obliterating the face and facial features completely, I made them look weak, which is the opposite of what defines an immigrant because it takes courage to leave behind everything and everyone you know. Stepping into a new world with a different culture, society, and different ideas is a frightening undertaking. At the same time, the figures in my paintings became very monotonous and repetitive because all of the figures were painted in the same faceless manner. Thus, I decided that I would not continue wiping away the faces or facial features. Instead, I would hide them, maybe show certain things, like a nose, or a blurred face behind a mirror, or a little boy’s face concealed mostly by a scarf. My paintings began to focus on other parts of the body such as the hands and arms, which relate more to the labor force that the Hispanic immigrants are associated with. Hidden profiles helped me to instill some mystery into who this person is as well as make reference to illegal Hispanic immigrants and their need to hide their identity. The depiction of loss of identity through unseen faces is in all of my paintings, such as in *Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que* *I Do This So You Don’t Have to* (Fig. 12) with a Hispanic cleaning lady in the bathroom of a wealthy American employer. The figure’s face is cut
off from the composition. Instead of the face, I emphasize the arm and hand, which is in action. Although the reflection of her face is in the mirror, it is blurred and half of it is hidden behind the towel that wipes the mirror. The viewer is made to question who she is and her state of emotion. Is she wiping away her old self in order to become something new? Is she confused or perhaps sad? This painting (Fig.12) depicts my memory of my mother cleaning houses when we first came to America. That woman cleaning the mirror is not the owner of the place or of the items depicted, which is made obvious by the blonde hairs on the hairbrush. They do not belong to the person cleaning since her reflection clearly shows she has black hair.

I left my country, El Salvador, when I was seven years old. When my family and I arrived in the United States, the only Salvadorians we knew were our family. Therefore, I never really had the opportunity to spend time with other Salvadorians. Even though I spent most of my life sharing with Americans, I did get to associate with Hispanics from different nationalities. Therefore, as I create my images my focus is on depicting subjects that could refer to experiences any Latino/Hispanic immigrant might have. Hiding the faces in my images opens the possibility for others to relate to the depiction while also helping to emphasize that Hispanic immigrants are viewed as stereotypes, not as individuals. “The mantle of invisibility—under which migrants at times shelter or at times are cloaked—has been reinforced by the types of jobs available to them and is interwoven through human disinterest throughout major segments of United States
The people in my paintings are Hispanic immigrants with economic difficulties that forced them to leave their country in pursuit of a more financially secure life.

The article “The Role of Identity in Acculturation among Immigrant People” compares and contrasts the differences between identity and acculturation. It also describes how social, cultural, and personal identity work to mold an individual, and provides definitions for the terms acculturation, identity, and culture. Adams and Marshall define identity as:

“(a) the structure for understanding who one is; (b) meaning and direction through commitments, values, and goals, (c) a sense of personal control, (d) consistency, coherence, and harmony between values, beliefs and commitments, and (e) the ability to recognize potential in future possibilities and choices”.

Adams and Marshall are describing how all the changes that immigrants go through that occur during this period of adaptation affect their identity and how they carry themselves overall in society. Their everyday living in their new environment is affected, whether through imitating others or through their own experimentations. In my paintings, the subjects’ colorful textiles represent their cultural identity, an identity which they cannot hide and will always be with them no matter where they are or what the situation may be. The textiles symbolize this and at times stand out more than the subjects themselves because many times as immigrants we are only seen through

---

stereotypes of being Hispanics or “Mexicans” instead of persons. I juxtapose the colorful textiles on the figures against sometimes cold, unwelcoming environments to show in a subtle way the difference between the place the figures are in and their attire to give a sense of their not belonging.

The clothes we wear designate our individuality and cultural identity. The focus on objects or textiles around or on the figures in my paintings depicts each person’s cultural identity. The different traditional patterns used in textiles are representative of the Hispanic culture in general and becomes a stereotype. The patterns in the fabrics used in my paintings are from clothes I have seen or from pictures found in the Internet of folkloric apparel. I tie all of my pictures together with this thread of cultural Latino/Hispanic identity.

Cultural identity is only part of what makes a person whole. Cultural Identity refers to, as the name states, the culture in which one is raised, or “how” one is raised; it is sometimes confused with racial identity. Racial identity is more of the “where” one was born or skin color and is more superficial in a way. For example, a person can be a Hispanic but be reared within an American culture. Hispanic, therefore, is the racial identity and the fact that this person has been brought up with American culture values and beliefs is the cultural identity of this individual. Since my figures are Hispanic both culturally and racially, the textiles in my paintings represent both cultural and racial identity, as can be seen in Al Que Madruga Dios Le Ayuda/ God Helps Out Those Who Wake Up Early (Fig. 16) where only one of the two children on the mattress is dressed up in these colorful textiles.
There are many factors that can make it hard for immigrants to succeed. Something that makes the situation even more difficult for legal or illegal immigrants is that children, as well as adolescents, sometimes have a tough time adapting without losing their self-identity. This depends largely on their life style and the strength of their family unit. The saying *Al Que Madruga Dios le Ayuda/ God Helps Out Those Who Wake Up Early* (The Early Bird Gets the Worm) emphasizes the mentality that an immigrant comes to the new society with, the mentality of seizing the day and working hard to achieve the dreams for which they sacrificed so much. In this painting, I show one of the children still sleeping while the other one is up and ready to go. Not everyone is ready for a change, and unlike adults, children usually do not have a choice in making those decisions. *Al Que Madruga Dios le Ayuda/ God Helps Out Those Who Wake Up Early* illustrates instability visually represented by the angles used for the mattress. The mattress cover is filled with flower print. In this image the floral pattern on the mattress used is not used to indicate any particular culture; this pattern is more generic. However, the pattern is bright colored and lively to represent the youth of the children. The placement of the mattress creates spatial ambiguity where the viewer does not know if the children are going to slide off the canvas or if they are floating. The social status of the children is referred to in several ways: with the dirty floor, the mattress not having a cover, the fact that both children are sharing the mattress, and that it is on the floor and not on a bed frame.

I experienced this struggle of being raised at home one way and going out into a society that at times expected a behavior that contradicted with the way I was being brought up. This creates a culture shock, a question in identity. To all the non-
immigrants you fall under the “Mexican” umbrella no matter what nationality you are. You are seen through the stereotypes that “define” Hispanics/Latinos rather than seen as an individual person.

The main focus of my MFA Exhibition is the loss of identity, that stage of confusion and instability that come through the process of adapting. The first three stages of culture shock as described in the article by Lyone Phoebe illustrates and breaks down the conflicts going inside a person as he/she is absorbed in a new culture. My paintings hide the personal identity of my subjects to represent the loss of identity. At the same time their cultural identity is represented through their attire. There comes a time when one begins to have this double identity that tears you apart and the original identity gets lost. The fusion and acculturation begin when one starts to bring both cultures into one, making a whole new identity, a hybrid of the two cultures. In the next chapter I will reference the work of other artists researched for my MFA where I depict the conflicts of identity, acculturation, and immigration.
CHAPTER 3: ARTISTIC INFLUENCES AND RESEARCH

All of the paintings in LA SANGRE LLAMA are acrylic paintings on canvas. I chose realism as the style that would best show the reality of the immigrant experience though I do slightly adjust this reality to emphasize the emotional journey more, as well as show the cultural stress that Hispanic immigrants go through.

At the beginning of my MFA research I explored German Expressionism. I looked at artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner for his intense use of color. I also researched the work of Cyril Power because his painting The Tube Train (Fig. 1) caught my attention for its use of unstable exaggerated perspective. German Expressionism influenced me to paint my memories as they came, based solely on the emotion felt at the time. I started using family photographs depicting our time in El Salvador, of our journey to America, and our first experiences as newcomers to the United States. I realized that though these were real events from my life, they were also experiences most immigrants go through at some point. To depict the strong narratives in my photos, I began researching paintings such as Gustave Courbet’s Stonebreakers (Fig. 2) and Honoré Daumier’s work The Third-class Carriage (Fig. 3) for inspiration because their paintings revolved around the “common folk”, the laborers, and most Hispanic immigrants are just that: laborers. These genre images of working class people were very helpful to the development of my thesis.

One of the members of my committee directed me to a Chicano artist named Maceo Montoya. After communicating with Maceo Montoya, he directed me to a couple of other artists. His suggestion was to take a look at the exhibition catalog for Caras Vemos Corazones No Sabemos: The Human Landscape of Mexican Migration. He also
directed me to Sebastiao Salgado’s work; his book *Migrations* is a book of his photographs that deal with immigrants all over the world. As my research evolved, I also looked at artists such as Kerry James Marshall, Yequiang Wang, Carrie Mae Weems, and Ana Mendieta.16

Maceo Montoya is both a novelist and an artist. His work mainly deals with Mexican immigrants. In his artist statement Montoya states:

“My goal is not to represent an overarching experience or identity; rather I try to give a specific human face–as a meditative portrait or elaborate as a series of intertwining compositions – to those with whom I identify and feel intimately connected.”17

This is precisely what I do with my paintings, I am relating my story to other Hispanic immigrants that have shared similar encounters or felt the same way. But, unlike Montoya, whose works are specifically about Mexicans, my paintings are about the Hispanic experience whether it be Salvadoreños, Mexicanos, Guatemaltecos, or Peruvians. Maceo Montoya’s *Grape Workers Series* (Fig. 16) does communicate and runs parallel with my work. This series shows Mexican immigrants working in grape fields in the middle of the day. These paintings are an insightful connection to the daily life of most Hispanic immigrants. Seeing his work I realized that working in a more realistic style would give me better control over what the viewer sees. At the same time, I

---


17 Montoya, Maceo
could create images that were more open-ended, that allowed the viewer to use their imagination to understand my body of work.

*Caras Vemos Corazones No Sabemos* means *Faces Seen, Hearts Unknown* and was the title of an exhibition of Chicanos (Mexican-Americans, not Mexicans living in Mexico) where Malaquias Montoya (Maceo Montoyas father) exhibited with a group of Hispanic artists. Most of the titles for the art pieces shown in this exhibition are from *dichos* (popular sayings in Spanish, *dichos* are words of wisdom mostly passed down by elders; verbally shared most of the time). “Los dichos are a vital part of the vernacular wisdom of these [Hispanic] cultures and remain current to the extent that they find practical application in daily life.”18 I grew up with such *dichos* from my mother and father. The importance of the *dichos* in my life is such that viewing this exhibition influenced me to choose the ones that have made the biggest impact for the titles of my paintings, as well as the title for my MFA exhibition. The exhibition *Caras Vemos Corazones No Sabemos* inspired me to paint from my own experience. Before this, I had an idea of what I wanted my MFA exhibition to be, but looking at the works in *Caras Vemos Corazones No Sabemos* made it solidify because it provided me with ideas for the titles of my works which are just as important and hold as much information as the image itself.

---

Sebastiao Salgado is a photographer who devoted six years of his life to traveling to forty countries around the world. His book, *Migrations*, is a book of photographs from his travels of the many immigrants from all over the world he met. In his travels he worked with “fugitives, on the road, or in the refugee camps and city slums where they end up.” Unlike me, Sebastiao deals with immigrants who migrate all over the world, not just to the United States. His photographs are mostly about seeing the immigrant’s faces and the emotions they produce. The figures in his work vary in age, sex, race, and place. His images really spoke to me, in particular *Gourma-Rharous Mali* (Fig. 7) because in this image he emphasizes the hands, which is something I do in my paintings. Rather than focusing on the face, I use arms and hands to identify the individual. The way the hands are framed around this elderly woman show signs of distress, weariness, and fatigue. Even though in this particular photograph there are no patterns on the shawl covering this woman, the fabric plus the way it covers her head, shows that this woman is from a different culture than American. Another one of his photographs that relates to my paintings is *Orphanage attached to the hospital at Kibumba Number One cam* (Fig. 8). The blanket covering the three babies is not as intricate or bold in design as in my images, but it is still evident and indicative of a particular culture. Most importantly, the sheet covers most of the babies’ faces. One does not have to see their whole face for the viewer to understand their expressions. Some of his photographs are shot outdoors with

---


20 See Figure 28.
laborers in the outskirts of the cities, in refugee camps, and some in domestic homes. Salgado’s photos are all taken at the time the events happened, most of them in action, at the very time of the incidents. Therefore, the feeling of instability is highlighted in their faces and their expressions. Both of our works depict narratives of the immigrant experience. Though my works are paintings, they are based on photographs mainly from my personal history. Salgado says his main goal is that “as individuals, as groups, as societies, we can pause and reflect on the human condition at the turn of the millennium.”

Our works can be viewed individually, but when the entire series of images are seen together as a group (in his case, a book; in mine, an exhibition) they have more power and leave a more resounding message.

Kerry James Marshall was the first artist I researched whose work directly influenced my imagery. His use of the color “black” as the skin color to all of his figures was what captured my attention. “Through the repetition of this one intense tone, Marshall seems to identify that blackness (as a color and a concept) is a fundamental to what it means to be African American.” Like Marshall, I embrace the color of skin that represents us as Hispanics. Unlike him though, the skin color for me is not one, even, solid straight tone. My images are more realistic and therefore have shadows and light. Not only are there tints and shades in the skin tones I paint, there are also other colors

21 See Figures 29 and 30.

22 Salgado, Migrations: Humanity in Transition, 15.


24 See Figure 21.
added as can be seen in *No Seas Candil de La Calle y Oscuridad de Tu Casa/ You Start at Home* (Fig, 19). The skin at first glance is a red brown, with beiges and raw sienna, but with a closer look at the skin there are some greens, blues, and violets mixed into it. Even though to achieve the “Latino” skin tone I use a mixture of colors, I still use the stereotype “brown skin” to “celebrate” the beauty of my racial skin tone like Marshall celebrates his “blackness.”

Yeqiang Wang’s inspiration came from the novel *Through the Looking Glass* by the English writer Lewis Carroll. In his artist statement he compares his experience of his journey from China to the United States as a search for his “wonderland.” Upon arriving as an immigrant he experienced culture shock and was confused at first with all of his new surroundings, culture, and people. Even though over time things have gotten easier to digest and comprehend Wang says that there will always be difficulties and questions raised as to identifying and understanding this new culture. “I’m still experiencing difficulties in perceiving the whole picture of the new culture, as if there were a piece of glass between the world and me.”

His *Reflection* painting series was really inspiring to me because he uses the distortion of the reflections on glass windows to make a metaphor of how he views this culture: at times clear, at times blurry. Just like Alice, he is looking through a glass at this new world to depict his “wonderland.” Like him, I too still have difficulty understanding the American culture because my roots are from a different society. Even though one becomes accustomed to the ways of the culture and accepts certain things that does not mean that we fully agree, comprehend, or

25 www.yepaintings.com/abouttheartist.htm

29
that we have forgotten where we came from. That is where the struggle lays, the push and pull of new ideas and new points of view. Culture and heritage will always be with a person and call out to from time to time, hence the name of my series LA SANGRE LLAMA (the blood beckons). My figures wear their culture for the world to see, whether they realize it or not, they stand out because of these vibrant colors and intricate patterns they wear. Wang’s imagery directly inspired my painting Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que/ I Do It So You Don’t Have To (Fig. 12). The reflection of this woman is not as intricate and involved or abstract as those in Wang’s works, but the concept is still the same. She is looking through glass, seeing her reflection, cleaning this glass and cleaning her reflection. In his painting (Fig. 6) the girl’s surroundings are reflected on her and Wang plays with the push and pull of planes while I play with angles and different perspective points. I believe we are both arriving at the same place with these techniques: expressing instability and confusion.

Carrie Mae Weems is a contemporary artist whose works influenced my decision to make my thesis paintings interact as a series of images that depict the experiences shared by a collective group of Hispanic immigrants. In her Kitchen Table Series (twenty untitled photographs) she deals with the theme of identity. She poses the question “who are we as members of groups?” rather than “who am I as an individual?” Looking at her pictures, I started asking myself similar questions. It was because of this that I started making my paintings more into “communal experiences and memories” rather than just about me. She is present in all of her twenty photographs. When seen

together, her photographs show the viewer who this woman is in relation to her surroundings and the people around her. Figure 9 shows two images from her *Kitchen Table Series* that stood out to me. In these images she is seen, not only in different attires but also in different circumstances. With each situation her personality and they way she carries herself changes. On the right hand side image (Fig. 9), she is seen interacting with other females, little girls to be more precise, whereas on the left and side she is having a romantic dinner. In both, her demeanor changes because of her surroundings and her experiences. At this time, I started making my subjects wear folkloric attires from other Hispanic countries. The way my figures interact, their surroundings, and their clothing tell the viewer who and where these people are from. The patterns from the clothes hung to dry on *No Seas Candil de la Calle y Oscuridad de Tu Casa/ You Start from Within* (Fig. 19), for example, are mostly found in Latino culture. The light in this painting depicts that both of the figures are outdoors. Their activity, taking a bath outdoors, is something that is not commonly seen in a country like the United States but would be common in third world countries like El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama. The way my figures interact, their surroundings, and their clothing also inform the viewer who and where these people are from.

Ana Mendieta is another influence in my series. She uses a various array of artistic media, including nature and her own body, for her works of art. Her series of work *Siluete Series* focuses on cross-cultural archetypes and themes of identity and gender. She caught my attention as an immigrant. Reading her biography and artist statement, as well as studying her images, helped me think more about how this struggle with identity that immigrants go through is due to displacement. Her father sent her to
live in the United States in 1961 from Cuba. “She did not identify with a particular homeland and adopted various sites for her performances and their documentation.”

Her work is a summation of her travels between Iowa and Mexico. She uses the body, or the space it left behind, in different natural environments to speak about issues with displacement. Figure 10 illustrates an image from her Siluete Series. She camouflages her body to look like the bark to blend in with the tree. Even though she manages to be somewhat camouflaged, the viewer can still make her shape out. In my images, my subjects are doing regular activities such as working, sleeping, praying, and playing. Though they want to blend into a new society their attire makes them stand out. No matter where they are, or what they are doing, their clothing gives away who they are and where they come from; it does not let them blend in. This is demonstrated in Ponte En Mis Zapatos/ Put Yourself in My Shoes (Fig. 17) where the little boy is enclosed in this cement corner to evoke the feelings of instability and uncertainty that come with displacement. Studying Mendietta not only helped me develop these ideas with my work but also opened up a door for future projects. The subject of displacement and how experiences leave their mark is something that continues to expand how I view this series. The narratives I can depict on this subject continue to expand, and deepen. It has becomes a topic I look forward to being able to explore for some time.

Researching these artists not only helped me develop my ideas and content, it also gave me this sense of communal experience and communal memory. I encountered a sense of shared reminiscences while researching the work of artists like Maceo Montoya,

Sebatiao Salgado, Yeqing Wang, Carrie Mae Weems, and Ana Mendietta. We all approached this subject of immigration and focused on different aspects of it, but in the end we shared the understanding of acculturation, instability, and loss of identity. Artists such as Kerry James Marshall helped me embrace my uniqueness, for him it was his blackness, for me it is my culture. Carrie Mae Weems allowed me to see myself, and my experiences, from a group perspective rather than just my own, and how I could use environments to make these experiences more communal so others could relate to it. Every one of these artists inspired me to make very precise decisions reflected in each of my paintings. Each decision helped me to grow and deepen.

Chapter four will focus on the painting techniques and media I used to focus viewers of my art on the shared experiences of instability and loss of identity found in the immigrant community.
Figure 1: Cyril Powers, *The Tube Train*, 1934. Linocut, 31x31 cm

Figure 2: Gustave Courbet, *Stonebreakers*
Figure 3: Honoré Daumier, *The Third-class Carriage*

Figure 4: Maceo Montoya, “Grapeworker Series,” 2007, acrylic on canvas, 32" x 24"
Figure 5: Kerry James Marshall, “Our Town,” 1995, acrylic and collage on unstretched canvas, 100”x124”.

Figure 6: Yaquing Wang, “Reflective-Blurry Memory,” oil on canvas, 39” x 26”. 
Figure 7: Sebastião Salgado, “Gourma-Rharous Mali,”

Figure 8: Sebastiao Salgado, “Orphanage attached to the hospital at Kibumba Number One cam.” Goma, Zaire, 1994.
Figure 9: Carrie Mae Weems, “Kitchen Table Series”

Figure 10: Ana Mendieta, “Silueta Series”
CHAPTER 4: MEDIA CHOICES AND TECHNIQUES

LA SANGRE LLAMA was arrived at through many stages. My images started out solely based on memories, without knowing where this would lead, these memories triggered me to understand what it was I wanted to paint. I went on to experiment with both media and with different styles to find what would best depict my content. Through some experimentation with German Expressionism, I explored emotionalism through marks and color. Rather than depicting reality I focused on the feeling of the raw memories as can be seen in Dios Va a Proveer/ God Will Provide (Fig.11). This particular painting was a pivotal piece in my research because with this painting I realized that some of my strongest memories were from my family’s journey to the United States.

Rebecca Rupp mentions in her book, How We Remember and Why We Forget, “Memories are like fingerprints, not one of them is the same.”28 It was through the expressionistic painting of my memories that I started recollecting in more detail the time of my family’s journey to the United States. As I started painting memories that I recalled the most, the ones that were more prominent were my memories as a newcomer in the United States. All of these first paintings were small, to make the memory more intimate. I painted the first series of works on small canvases with acrylic paint and modeling paste based on photographs. The modeling paste gives a chalky washed out texture that made my memories look old and blurry which was a success because my paintings appeared

28 Rebecca Rupp, How We Remember., p. iv
more like foggy memories. However, because all of my paintings were approached the same way, they became very repetitive.

Many of the first paintings ultimately became studies for the larger images and the compositions were changed to fit the size of the canvas to make a stronger painting. The initial studies were small, dark, and repetitive in value and media. By enlarging the imagery I not only made the composition less cluttered but the memory depicted became less personal and more ambiguous allowing the viewer more room to relate to it.

Depierta, Ya Es Hora/ Wake Up It Is Time (Fig. 15), transferred to the larger size without needing compositional changes in Al Que Madruga Dios Le Ayuda/ The Early Bird Gets the Worm (Fig. 16). Lo Hago Para Que No Tengan Que Draft (Fig. 13) however, changed significantly into Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que/ I Do It So You Won’t Have To (Fig. 12). The larger images adopted the same ideas used in the smaller paintings, but angles were changed and exaggerated and the placement of my subjects was adjusted as well to achieve to a stronger composition. To create instability in my paintings I emphasize angles, sometimes with only a slight amplification as seen in the doorway of Abre Puertas Donde Esten Cerradas (Fig. 14) or other times through exaggerated points of view as shown in Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que (Fig. 12). In La Mazorca de Maíz (Fig. 18) the angles are more intensified and distorted as is also found in Al Que Madruga Dios Le Ayuda (Fig. 16). With the additional space of larger canvases, I had room to add more color and patterns, such as textiles, to vivify the painting and to reinforce my concept. The larger paintings also have more details and became more realistic in nature. As I worked my style became more representative which allowed me to describe better the reality that immigrants undergo; a reality that I
experienced first hand. To depict the power of these narratives my images needed to look real also.

Paint can create surface textures that support the content depicted. Flexible modeling paste, gloss gel, matte gel, varnish, fine pumice gel, absorbent ground, and heavy gloss gel are mediums I have used to create more variety in texture in my works. Flexible modeling paste became the medium I used most because it makes the colors matte and chalky which neutralizes colors used on the background and provides texture. Gloss gel as well as varnish is seen mostly on my depictions of transparent surfaces such as glass, water, and mirrors. Using all these different paint media give variety to my works. With all of these changes in composition, in size, and in use of media, my series of paintings has become stronger and more cohesive.

**LO HAGO PARA QUE USTEDES NO TENGAN QUE/ I DO IT SO YOU WON’T HAVE TO (Figure 12)**

This painting is a memory of my family’s first years in the United States in Fort Smith, Arkansas where my mother worked as a housekeeper for a wealthy family. I would go with my mother to her job and watch her clean houses and help her with her work from time to time, but I mostly sat, tried to decipher my homework since I barely knew English at the time. As I watched her clean, I remember thinking, “I never imagined my mom working like this in America.” Back in our country she had graduated with what is equivalent to an Associate’s Degree in the United States. She was to become a secretary for an important firm when she got pregnant and married. She changed her priorities and, instead of her career, she focused on my success and my brother and sister’s. This was one of the reasons that we decided to move to the United States. While
my mother cleaned, I started noticing the differences in American culture between “the
good” and “the better” material goods, the cheap and the expensive. All I had known
until then was that we needed clothes on our backs, food on the table, a roof over our
heads, and a bed in which to sleep. As far as I knew, Wal-Mart was where rich people
shopped. In this wealthy home, I began noticing brands and how they were an important
part to this culture. My understanding of this was reinforced in eighth grade when we
moved to Richmond Hill, Georgia. I started to believe that this culture was all about
appearances and what brands you wore, or more importantly, “who” you wore. All
through middle school and high school I felt like I was starving: the buffet was laid out in
front of me, but I could not even touch it because of my lack of monetary resources.
Many immigrants feel this way when they come to America and as they are introduced to
new things, situations, and points of view. Their state of mind begins to change and they
question things more. This most specifically applies for immigrant children.

*Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que* is about the difference in status
between a woman cleaning and the woman who owns the home. I placed Dolce &
Gabbanna and Channel perfumes as large items in the front of the image. These products
are elegant, stoic, even arrogant, looking down at the viewer. The sense of smell is
triggered visually when I intentionally place the perfume bottles up front and placed the
Windex bottle in the lady’s hand. There is a difference between the perfume fragrances
and the fragrance of the cleaning woman spraying chemicals such as Windex. The
person cleaning smells of cleaning solutions; those very expensive perfumes are not for
her. There is a clash between the working arm and the very smooth, very chic perfume
brand bottles for which I used heavy gloss gel with varnish. Heavy gloss gel medium is
used for all the reflective surfaces (such as the mirror, the perfume bottles, and the silver jewelry box) in order to highlight the contrast of these surfaces to the arm and the towel. The glossy surfaces are painted in higher detail to show the distortion of shapes and colors from their environment, which allows the viewer to see the mass and the volume of the Channel No. 5 Bottle. For the Dolce & Gabanna perfume bottle I use a Satin varnish because that particular bottle was not as reflective. The change in medium gives more variety to the image; not all glass is transparent and glossy. Both bottles have very defined edges whereas the person’s arm is shown to be more organic and natural, from the way it bends to the flower pattern on the sleeve (Fig. 12). I highlight the folkloric apparel the figure is wearing to show culture. The patterns and the warm colors used on the sleeve show that the person is from Latin American country. In order to mimic the texture of textile on the sleeve, I use fiber paste. The arm and hand were both painted with extra heavy modeling paste and flexible modeling paste to depict greater volume and mass. Using these highly textured materials also brings the arm out towards the viewer. For the towel used to clean the mirror, I use Fine Pumice Gel in the paint so that the towel has yet another texture, from the mirror and the hand, which gives even more variety to the painting. The overall composition creates eye movement that replicates the circular movement of the hand when cleaning a mirror.

**ABRE PUERTAS DONDE ESTEN CERRADAS/WHEN GOD CLOSES A DOOR, HE OPENS ANOTHER** (Figure 14)

This painting shows a mother praying with her children, a little boy and a little girl. It seems like a peaceful time, but upon close inspection the mother’s posture and the way she is praying, shows anguish and lets the viewer know that her family is under
serious stress. However, this family unit is shown to be stable since the mother and her two children are praying on a very steady bed depicted with the strong horizontal lines. The only thing that shows any sign of exaggerated angles is the doorway.

Modeling paste was also the medium I used most for this image, especially for the blanket on the left side of the painting and the wall and door behind them. I wanted this blanket to be white, almost dead in color, uncovering the different patterned textiles underneath it, uncovering their true colors. The subjects are in their home and therefore can uncover their cultural identity more. In order for a better balance in the composition, I decided to place very detailed fabrics beneath the boy to lead the eye around from one pattern to the next. This was necessary because of the heavy patterns in the mother’s attire and the intricate pattern in the little girl’s shirt. The little boy is the only one without a pattern on his clothing. He is there to represent a child born in the new country or a child that has quickly adapted to the new society. Either way, he is still part of the culture that runs through his veins, therefore, he is praying on top of the different patterned blankets, still in touch with his cultural identity at home.

**AL QUE MADRUGA DIOS LE AYUDA/ THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM**

(Figure 16)

This painting is based on a child’s experience, and is intended to convey the instability children feel as they go through the immigration process. The angles of the mattress and the floor project this instability creating the sensation that the children may fall, or slide, right off the edge of the canvas. This represents the uncertainty that immigrant children feel because most of the time they do not know what is going on. The edges of the mattress not only frame both figures but also work as implied lines that
move the eye around the composition. The children are the main focus and therefore I placed them around the brightest parts of the painting: the white blanket, the colorful jacket, and the pattern in the mattress. I chose lively, pastel colors for the pattern on the mattress to represent the youthfulness of the children. I neutralized the colors on the mattress with modeling paste just enough for the jacket’s pattern to stand out. Fiber paste was also used for a grainier texture in this particular part of the image. The sleeping child, the oldest of the two, with the bright-colored outfit represents a child that is not ready to let go of the familiar customs and not ready for a change. This older child is still wrapped up in the warm, colorful jacket from home and wants to hold to her initial culture a little bit longer. The child who is wide awake in the green shirt is the younger of the two children on the mattress and is a child that finds it easier to adapt to the new culture. The younger a child is when a family moves to a new place, the faster they can adapt.

For this painting I used only two media: modeling paste and fiber paste. The white blanket represents purity and innocence. I used modeling paste on the blanket to achieve volume and have a different surface texture from that used for the children. The mattress is a mixture of both modeling and fiber paste to create more surface variations. By mixing the paint with the modeling paste, I achieved a more pastel-like palette with neutral colors that would sit in the background and not compete with the children. To achieve the intensity of the colors for the children, especially the older one with the patterned jacket, I used colors straight from the tube for more saturation in pigment and did not add any mediums.
Ponte en mis zapatos/ Put Yourself in My Shoes (Figure 17)

This painting represents the collective experiences of all immigrant children. Many of these children have to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age. They have to “fill the shoes” of their mother or father, and sometimes both. Their identity as children is lost to their new role. In the painting the child wears some worn-down, old worker’s boots and is trapped in a corner, to represent he does not have a choice, or say, in the direction his life is taking, not even in what shoes he can wear. Children have to adapt to survive which sometimes means putting on their “big boy shoes” even though they are not ready to wear them. The perspective used in this image is from an adult’s point of view looking down at this child in a corner. The angles are exaggerated and all point to the main subject, which is the child. The walls are painted in cooler tones mixed with modeling paste as well as fine pumice paste to add a gritty texture and show the coldness of this place. In contrast, the warmth of the colors in his attire represents his culture. He is wearing a bright orange sweater, a Peruvian hat that has colorful geometric patterns, and a pair of blue pants. His attire is painted mostly using fiber paste with some modeling paste to imitate the texture of the textile. The paint applied for the hat does not have any media; therefore the colors are brighter and the pattern on the hat stands out. The tassels are painted with a palette knife with modeling paste so that they visually pop from the canvas to look three-dimensional and seem more real.

La Mazorca de maíz/ The Corncob (Figure 18)

“Nosotros somos como la mazorca de maíz, somos fuertes si estamos juntos. Una vez cae un grano, la mazorca se desborona.” These are the words my mom would repeat over and over again: “We are like the corncob, together we are strong. Once a grain falls
from a corncob, it is easier to get torn apart.” Sticking together as a family has been the most important thing in our lives. Family comes first. This is true for most Hispanics; however, most Hispanic male immigrants cross the border alone because it is too dangerous to cross with wife and children. My family crossed the border together, as a family unit.

This painting is personal, depicting more about my family’s journey than the other images, in that it depicts a family unit leaving. This family unit, which in this case is represented by a mother, a father, and a child, are all huddled up in a corner on the back of the pick up truck. Their home is seen at a distance and gets further away from them. The angles in this painting are the most exaggerated of any used in this series of paintings to represent a time where our change really began, our first and most unstable moment of our move.

When an immigrant is migrating as an illegal, they do not want to draw attention to themselves, which is why this family leaves their house behind and begins their journey at night. They are all together, so that no matter what happens or how much turbulence there is, they are strong and protected. The colors from the sky and all around them are dark, deep blues and violets to represent that it is the middle of the night and it is cold, which is why they have wrapped around them this bright magenta blanket. For the ground behind them, I used absorbent ground medium to dim the colors just enough to dull their vibrancy and make them sit in the background. The deep blues in the sky achieve a late night effect. The reflective blue on the ground creates illumination that would appear as light from the moon.
Both mother and child have colorful traditional patterns in their clothing, but they are hidden. The colorful patterns they wear are semi hidden under dull neutral-colored jackets so that only part of their attire can be seen in an attempt to hide their cultural identity. To achieve neutral tones I mixed grays and blues with modeling paste. For the patterns on the woman’s shirt and the little boy’s hat, I used paint straight from the tube to create patterns as bright as possible. I used fiber paste and modeling paste interchangeably for variety in texture and opaqueness of color to make them stand out.

The father, instead of wearing colorful patterns, is dressed in worker’s clothing: plain jeans and a red t-shirt. He is the head of the household, the worker, the provider, and the strength depicted by focusing attention on his arm and leg and by painting them closer to the viewer. I used heavy modeling paste to give his arm a thicker texture to make it look strong and to concentrate even more attention on it.

NO SEAS CANDIL DE LA CALLE Y OSCURIDAD DE TU CASA/ YOU START FROM WITHIN (Figure 19)

This painting portrays the humble life of immigrants in their home country or in barrios (a rundown poor neighborhood, or ghetto) where they have limited resources. For this particular painting I did not use any medium in the paint. I wanted this image to be much brighter than all the others in this series and have more detail with more defined edges, because the subjects are still in their home country. While researching this subject I realized that acculturation begins in their home country when other immigrants come back either to visit or to stay and they share their stories. To make this image I stepped back in time, backtracking the immigrants’ journey to where they began. The idea of leaving and starting over is already infiltrated in their heads and they start to change their
points of view and want to have the experiences that the other immigrant had. The figures in this image are vulnerable, their attire (representational of their cultural identity) are hanging on a clothesline for the world to see. This image depicts washing. Clean clothes hang to dry as a father washes his child. The act of bathing is an act of cleansing oneself. I would like this painting to be seen as a baptism, making reference to religion and faith: a rebirth in a way, symbolizing a new life in a new land that awaits them.

The two figures (the young man and child) are the main focal point. The lines of the *pila* (a big cement sink outside of the house), move the viewer’s eyes to the figures. The patterns on the clothes hung on the line intensify, as they get closer to figures. Early on in the process of making this painting, the right side of the image was too heavy and held most of the focus. I decided that the left side needed to be a little brighter to balance the composition. A pink blanket hangs on the left side of the clothesline (which still has lines leading to the two figures), and the red plastic pail on the bottom left corner of the painting gives the balance and warmth the painting needed.

The young man’s skin is executed in layers of color and value to give his skin more defined edges. When seen closely, the skin tones contain green, reds, purples, blues, and yellows. His arm has distinct edges to depict a more defined muscular forearm and hand, which are the parts of the body that he uses more for labor. The younger boy’s skin is darker and gets even darker when the shadow of the other figure falls on him as his protector and guide.
The point of view in this particular image is the most extreme in the series. Two children are interacting in a very quiet and calm way. They are outside a suburban American house. The viewer is looking down at the children as they play beside an ornate window that would be found in a wealthy home. One can see that it is about to rain or it already has. The misty weather is shown with the blues, greens, and purples reflected on the sidewalk. Furthermore, the sidewalk is painted to look like a ledge where the children are precariously perched. This tells the viewer that the situation is unstable. The mixture of the two cultures is shown most clearly in this painting in the clothes the children wear. On their shirts are pictures of Snow White and Superman, icons of the American culture with Snow White as the first Disney Princess and Superman being the superhero of all time. What little girl does not want to be a princess? What little boy does not aspire to be a superhero? This country, the United States, gives everyone an opportunity to be a “superhero” or to be a “princess.” In order to achieve this, the immigrant must first acquire financial stability, a house, a job, and other things required in the new culture to be middle class. In the beginning things will clash and mismatch as shown in the attire both these children wear. Since they are children, they probably do not realize this, but it becomes apparent as they learn the ways of this culture.

In this image, I use modeling paste, especially to create the ledge they are sitting on and the sides of the window. I achieve a more reflective quality in the window with gloss gel medium and used gold medium for the lines that decorate the glass.
The perspective used for this image is one of a grown up looking down onto the children. The angles are naturally exaggerated because of this perspective, which directs the eye to the children. The children are placed in the composition to create a figure eight motion from her left foot, to the little boy, to his hand with the car, and back to her. Even though they are interacting in a very quiet way, there is still energy between them because of the motion created by these compositional lines.

NO VENIMOS DE TAN LEJOS PARA HACER LAS COSAS MAL/ WE DIDN’T COME FROM SO FAR TO NOT DO THINGS RIGHT (Figure 21)

This painting is represents the hardships and the sacrifices made in search of the “Promised Land.” More people are in this image than in any other painting out of this series, truly representing a group experience. The faces of figures are not seen, except for the only woman who sits in the back of the truck. From the partial features on her face, one notices that she is worried, distressed, and sad. However, the fact that she is the only woman along side all the other men demonstrates to the viewer that she is strong and brave. She is sacrificing everything for that child in her arms, to provide a better life with more options and opportunities. This image is about helping each other improve their situations, and the act of helping is seen with the two men closest to the viewer as one is helps the other to climb into the back of the truck. The time of day is early in the morning, a new day.

The composition in this painting is very active. The way the truck is placed it seems as if it were rolling over, but the figures seem stable as they are either sitting or standing up while helping another get on the back of the truck. Through the instability of
their situation they find strength by being together making them stand firm and not fall off.

For this painting the mediums added to the paint were modeling and fiber paste. The fiber paste was used on the shirt of the standing male since he is one of the closest figures to the viewer. The modeling paste was mixed into the paint to depict the sky. It was also used for parts of the truck to make it appear duller in color.

All of my paintings show an array of paint media mixed into the paint to give the surface of the images more variety in texture. Modeling paste creates a very tactile texture and was therefore the medium I used most. The patterned textiles are all intricate and unique from one another in patterns and color, all representing the different nationalities. The compositions vary from one image to the next but always with slightly exaggerated angles or perspectives to represent instability. There is always movement within these images because of the unstable angles. With each painting I learned something new that I was able to apply to the next painting.

The paintings in this series act as a reminder to other Hispanic immigrants that many of us undergo the same situations. Many have the same feeling of not belonging, of being a stereotype. We share many of the same hardships as we feel the push and pull of cultures that, at some point, lead to a loss of identity. These images are my way to give insight to the non-immigrant so they may better understand the difficulties experienced by those that leave everything behind in hope of a better future.
CONCLUSION

My body of work in *LA SANGRE LLAMA* focuses mainly on educating the viewer about the human emotions and to depict real things that Hispanic immigrants encounter. This subject of immigration, particularly the Hispanic/Latino immigration, is a very relevant topic in today’s society. Each painting in this series gave me new ideas and taught me ways to approach using formal elements to compose each next image. At the same time they helped me to understand my intimate connection to these images and how there is always a connection to the place where we are born. For many years, I tried to avoid painting anything that had to do with my Hispanic –Salvadorian heritage, not because I was embarrassed of where I came from, but because there is so much that needs to be said, making the task feel overwhelming. By working on this MFA Exhibition I was able to organize my ideas and just start from the very beginning using my memories as a guide. I focused on the subjects of acculturation, instability, and loss of identity. Acculturation, the mixing of two cultures, can lead to instability and a certain loss of identity felt by those who migrate. Those feelings eventually go away and adapting to the new life becomes easier. Through acculturation and the push and pull of living between two cultures eventually a new identity is formed.

My MFA thesis is only the beginning of my work on this subject. I see myself working on many more projects about Hispanic Immigration. My thesis work remained focused on the first three stages of culture shock Phoebe Lyon refers to in her article, “Culture Shock and Adapting to Life in Your New Culture”, the Honeymoon Phase, the Rejection Phase, and the Regression Phase. The next group of images will concentrate on illegal immigration. Eventually, the figures in my paintings will show their faces as I
begin representing the fourth stage of culture shock, the Recovery Phase. It is my intent to continue working through the fifth stage, the Reverse Culture Shock Phase when the immigrant has been away from their home country for a prolonged period and no longer identifies with the culture found there. I have much I want to portray on the role of identity underlying the immigrant experience. Continuing to draw from my own memories each image takes me into a deeper level of understanding. My current MFA series represents the tip of the iceberg with this subject matter. I have many more images to make before revealing the cultural transitions that lead to adaptation. Just as it takes years for an immigrant to integrate cultural differences it will likewise take years for me to expose the many phases of progression that lead finally to assimilation.
Figure 11: Perez, Alicia, “Dios Va a Proveer/ God Will Provide,” 2010, acrylic on black foam board, 12”x7”
Figure 12: Perez, Alicia, “Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que/ I Do It So You Don’t Have To,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”x 36”.
Figure 13: Perez, Alicia, “Lo Hago Para Que Ustedes No Tengan Que draft/ I Do It So You Don’t Have To,” 2011, DRAFT acrylic on Canvas, 12” X 24”

Figure 14: Perez, Alicia, “Abre Puertas Donde Esten Cerradas/ When God Closes a Door He Opens Another,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”x 36”
Figure 15: Perez, Alicia, “Despierta, Ya Es Hora/ Wake up, It’s Time,” 2011, DRAFT acrylic on canvas, 12” x 8”
Figure 16: Perez, Alicia, “Al Que Madruga Dios Le Ayuda/ The Early Bird Gets The Worm,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24” x 36”.
Figure 17: Perez, Alicia, “Ponte En Mis Zapatos/ Put Yourself In My Shoes,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”x 36”.
Figure 18: Perez, Alicia, “La Mazorca De Maiz/ The Corncob,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24” X 36”.
Figure 19: Perez, Alicia, “No Seas Candil De La Calle y Oscuridad De Tu Casa, Se Empieza en Casa/ You Start at Home,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”X36”.
Figure 20: Perez, Alicia, “De Aqui, De Alla, De Ningun Lado, De Todas Partes/From Here, From There, From Nowhere, From Everywhere,” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”x36”.
Figure 21: Perez, Alicia, “No Venimos De Tan Lejos Para Hacer Las Cosas Mal/ We Didn’t Come From So Far To Not Do Things Right” 2012, acrylic on canvas, 24”x36”.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


