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## Anthropo-scenes

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Ibel Sinohuiz

MFA Thesis

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### Artist Statement

The desert, music, culture, and mythology are themes that dominate my artwork. My insatiable appetite for the unexplored in both medium and philosophy has led to the development of ideas and concepts with some interesting conclusions. The dark, almost apocalyptic nuances in my work are remnants of my past, my upbringing, and a reminder of a sort of heaviness within me. Although most of my work tends to appear dark, the conceptual elements are, I hope, universal. The mythological aspects in the work are constructs of a desert life, a unique perspective that can only come from a person from that region. I have concluded that one's own *mythology* is shaped by cultural reincarnation. Nothing is totally new, and our experiences seem to have been predicated by the experiences of our ancestors.

Born in Indio, California, a small desert town located in the Coachella Valley, I have always felt the need to escape the heat, my history, my future, and the stifling suffocation of small-town life. Today, I never would have imagined that the place I call home would become a source of inspiration, cultivation, and nostalgia. The youngest of seven children in a single-parent household, I have always sought refuge in images. My earliest memory of becoming "lost" in images was from a velvet landscape painting, painted with intense phthalo blues and fluorescent green and orange. The act of seeing this image was like looking at an oversized cereal box. I would take a plate of whatever I was eating and gaze at the painting until I was done. That memory has stayed with me and often reminds me to always look at the world with an act of wonderment.



Fantasy is an important aspect in my work. I choose to create images that seem benign at first, but eventually these images come to life and pull me in as an active spectator. Memories of my youth such as staring at the popcorn ceiling in our apartment and watching what seemed like faces of angels and demons coming forth, would sometimes dictate my dreams and nightmares. More recently in a series of large charcoal drawings I express this theme by creating expansive landscapes of the desert. In these drawings the sky is dominant, almost enveloping the earth. Scenes begin to play out like old black and white silent movies driven by my active imagination. Sometimes a youthful image of my deceased father can be seen with a cluster of ghouls surrounding him fighting a deranged clown and cherub. Sometimes the scenes are quiet, apart from the locomotive cutting across the scorched desert sands.

The desert, as much as I wanted to escape it, never escaped me. There is a sort of beauty there, narratives that must play out. When I was younger, monotonous long car rides were often subdued by staring out the back windshield. I would watch the clouds transform with every mile on the odometer; mountainous terrain rippled with deep shadows formed stony characters, permanent landmarks for my restless mind. The wind turbines that blanketed the desert became soldiers standing guard, warning visitors to proceed with caution. Nearby electrical towers shaped like seamstress mannequins became mothers and wives of the weary *soldiers*, “At ease!” they seem to allude. My refuge came in the winter months when black nights were punctuated by bright pulsating specks of light and often falling stars. The colors of the early morning peeked over the mountains, burning with hues of orange and yellow. The cool sunrise became saturated with cerulean blue and French ultramarine, remnants of a cool night trying to suppress a waking giant. Twilight was just as impressive when the sun tucked itself away behind the San Jacinto Mountains, soldiers, their wives and mothers watching, waiting, “At ease.”

These memories helped fortify my imagination and creativity. The desert was my first muse and it provided a plethora of inspiration. The dramatics of my childhood imagination were no easy match for the reality of my existence. Trapped between two worlds, my Mexican culture and my American one, has forced me to look back, way back. I was raised by television, a single-mother, and the haphazard babysitting by my siblings. While my mother worked the graveyard shift at a date processing plant, I was entertained by the characters of seventies television shows such as “Good Times” and “One Day at a Time.” These popular shows help cultivate my education of the outside world, and ultimately the world I was living. They depicted struggling families, honest families, and had become a nanny in my latchkey life.

Juxtaposed with countless hours of solitude and self-rearing, was the confusion of my cultural identity. Today, being seen as a Mexican artist or a Latina artist is a label I feel I have to stay clear of, not because I was ashamed to be Mexican, but because my ethnicity never really played a part in my artwork, not genuinely anyway. I never felt culturally rooted. My identity as artist seemed to stem from the experiences of growing up in a small-town straddling two worlds and music, which was a constant theme in my life. As a colicky infant, I was soothed by my father’s drunken renditions of ranchero music on his Spanish guitar. As I grew older I was surrounded by the sounds of Motown, classical rock, heavy metal, and new wave, but what seemed to lure me the most was the rock music of the seventies and eighties. If I were fortunate enough to be allowed to sit quietly in the corner of the room, while my brother or sisters listened to music, I would find myself mesmerized by the scary album covers from bands like Ozzy Osbourne and Iron Maiden. Led Zeppelin’s song, *Dazed and Confused* painted surreal images of folklore and fantasy in my mind.

Creating work that is both culturally and universally tied to the human experience and ultimately, my personal experience, has compelled me to execute a series of mixed-media collages that is inspired by music and their performers. The purpose of this work is to create a new visual language, a personal mythology that is connected to my history, culture, and identity. Within that language are figures; real and ghostly. The figures sometimes are of my alter ego, the rock heroes I admire, animals, and “Frankensteined” collaged images of autonomous figures. Within these scenes, music is subliminally or blatantly superimposed. The work may represent a particular music band, which at some point in my life inspired me, directed me, or healed me.

My work expresses particular desires that are not just personal, but can hopefully translate and be relevant in today’s culture. I want to evoke a sense of nostalgia, so that the viewer feels like they have seen the image before or have a feeling of *déjà vu*. The concepts of time and space are manipulated through the use of various materials, mediums, and context, melding the experiential with the physical world. The viewer should have a sense that they are being pulled into the space through the act of seeing, their gaze weaving in and out of the space between the figures and objects.

It is important to me that a dialogue happens between the viewer and the artwork. In a culture of visual commodity where a slew of images are created by anyone with a camera, comes with it the detachment of the physical object. As the artist, I want to stop time for the viewer and have their minds linger a while as they try to make sense of the material within the space of the work. The various media and materials provide a platform for active engagement and dissuade the viewer from becoming a passive spectator. Theorist Michael Fried has an interesting theory by insisting that the object is more important than the spectator. What Fried advocates is that

literalist art is theatrical. It is a form of art that requires a space in which the object performs for the viewer.<sup>1</sup>

As an artist, I have taken this theory a step further by becoming the “Subject” and the “Object” of power. According to French philosopher and theorist Michael Foucault power is generated within the object just as it might have been with objects that were created thousands of years ago. Objects embody power through their subjects or audiences that instill or believe in that power. In my current work, I have created a persona that takes on many material forms. She is a time-travelling drummer that is a hybrid of a lamb and human, and sometimes machine, her name, Baby Lamb. Baby Lamb is a manifestation of my truest desires. She is a fierce and talented drummer that has no fear when it comes to performance and display. To me, she is a product of my upbringing and early influences. She exists because I believe in her. As the artist and creator, I want my audience to believe in her too. Foucault might agree that believing in the power of an object may have a direct correlation to the powerlessness of the Subject.<sup>2</sup>

Baby Lamb exists as a by-product of my culture. Mythologist Joseph Campbell may argue that our culture lacks a personal narrative or mythology.<sup>3</sup> Without these narratives, ancient or otherwise, will leave us, humans, having to sort through the complexities of life by ourselves, never really knowing what to keep or throw away. The “stuff” we keep may be of some importance in the short run, but most definitely of little importance in the long run. In my case, music became my only stability and comfort in a turbulent world. My fears were manifested in dark shadows cast by benign light. Religious cults such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, the religion adopted by my brother Gabriel, and ultimately by me as well, instilled a fear in me that today I am still trying to shake off.

After abandoning religion, and in search for a greater truth, I became an atheist. Handcrafting my own mythology seemed to be a better choice in my personal growth and wellness. Baby Lamb is a coping mechanism as well as a personal mythology. She comforts me, speaks for me, and acts for me through artwork, sculpture, and eventually performance art. She is my voice and with thoughtful consideration, I will make her a part of this world from her inception to her eventual death, if she is to have one. Her legacy, I hope, will continue to inspire musicians and artists alike.

Baby Lamb's introduction began with the debut of her first self-titled album, *Baby Lamb*. It is a series of four 36" x 36" wood panels whose shape is reminiscent to vinyl album covers. The scene depicts a galaxy with a nebulous gas cloud forming the image of Baby Lamb. Acrylic sheets cover the wood panels and the first and fourth panels display the title of the album and the song titles in gold silk screened acrylic paint. The middle panels depict a spaceship drawn with acrylic pens in rapid gestural lines. The spaceship allows Baby Lamb to travel back and forth in time.

Additionally, a series of two drawings of Baby Lamb at her peak are painted in ink, gouache, and acrylic paint. These images depict fast gestural drawings that highlight the performance, Baby Lamb playing drums. The line quality suggests movement and kinetic energy brought about by her playing. In another work, a ceramic sculptural bust of Baby Lamb shows her softer side, a portrait that hints to her femininity and contrasts the tough almost masculine demeanor of the ink drawings. This duality of masculinity and femininity highlights the male dominated music world especially in regards to percussionists. The feminine aspects of Baby Lamb imply a sexuality that exists through her physique. Her eyes are intense and focused, and her sexuality is exuded through them. The animal parts of Baby Lamb suggest the animalistic

qualities that lie within us, raw, powerful, and unbridled. She is a symbol of sacrifice, something she does every time she performs in front of an audience. Will she be accepted? Will she be understood? Will she be heard? Baby Lamb is my surrogate for free speech, freedom of expression, and freedom from the constraints that are a part of my everyday life, work, family, and school.

My MFA thesis show *Anthropo-schenes*, is Baby Lamb's second album release. Her "album" *Time Machine* is a 36" x 36" four panel velvet wall painting, homage to my childhood memories and place of birth. *Anthropo-scenes* is a series of vignettes depicting Baby Lamb's continual evolutionary transformation captured through a variety of materials that include ceramic sculpture, glasswork, paintings, and musical objects such as a bass drum and Paiste cymbal, brand name instruments played by my two favorite drummers, John Bonham and Jon Theodore. The exhibition will consist of a shrine-like space displaying Baby Lamb's relics and souvenirs. *Anthropo-scene* is a story of a real person whose love and passion for percussion and performance has physically altered her appearance so that she has become a symbol and icon for all drummers of both genders. She is essentially the "sacrificial" lamb, vulnerable to misogyny, hate, criticism, and musical elitism. The show also introduces Mama Lamb, an ethereal drum Goddess, a derivative of ancient rhythm masters from all spectrums of the universe and into the unknown. Mama Lamb is a symbol personified through earthly materials that helps guide Baby Lamb into her full-authenticate self.

In future shows, Baby Lamb will perform in front of a live audience or as a music video. This will be determined as the evolution of Baby Lamb continues in real-time. As the artist Ibel, I hope to have a true record-release with a real album on display. The next series of shows, installations, and performances will hopefully solidify Baby Lamb as an icon of popular culture.

She will continue to manifest herself in a variety of ways that simulate modern trends of the period. With her creation, I hope to begin a new visual narrative and dialogue. I want people to question how culture plays in one's own mythology and the ways in which art can be used to guide us to creating new paths to understanding our world.

Notes

1. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153-154.
2. Michael Foucault, "The Subject and Power", *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982) : 781.
3. Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 2.



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Campbell, Joseph and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Foucault, Michael. "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982) : 777-795.

Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.



Ibel Sinohuiz, *Relics*, 2017. Stoneware, glaze, glass, underglaze, spray paint, enamel, black gravel, assemblage.



Ibel Sinohuiz, *Retrograde*, 2017. Stoneware, glaze, enamel, underglaze, 6' x 4' installation.





Ibel Sinohuiz, *Bass Drum*, (frontal view), 2017. Bass drum, acrylic, acrylic paint, chrome, spray paint, 18" x 28".



Ibel Sinohuiz, *Time Machine*, 2017. Velvet, acrylic paint, (4) 36" x 36".



Ibel Sinohuiz, *Vestments*, 2017. Stoneware, porcelain, glaze, acrylic paint, spray paint, enamel, brass cymbal.





Ibel Sinohuiz, *Angel Baby*, 2017. Stoneware, porcelain, glaze, underglaze, acrylic paint, 6' x 4' installation.





Ibel Sinohuiz, *Mama Lamb*, 2017. Stoneware, acrylic paint, spray paint, glass, 36"h x 22"w x 14"d.