Mes-ti-zo

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Aleen Jacinto Artist Statement

I believe that as an artist I can express the sentiments that usually go widely unsaid. My work is intended to awaken people’s social consciousness and bring awareness to political and environmental issues that we are experiencing in this contemporary era. I feel the need to express my views of sociopolitical issues that affect life around the world today. Given the current state of economic inequality that exists not only in the United States but also globally, there is a need to give a voice to those who have none. At this point, we as the human society need to comment and express the need for real change to protect life and the planet from the destructive greed of others.

I was born in Guatemala, which is a rainforest tropical paradise. My work continues to be influenced by this environment. The richness in culture within its people contributed to my interest in crafts, such as knitting. The Maya indigenous textiles are elaborated with their ancestral knowledge, which has been passed downs through the generations. As a child, I perceived how the Maya culture was an influence within my household, and those of my friends. For instance, our homes would be decorated with tablecloths made by the Maya weaver. The ideas are expressed through painting and knitting sculptures. I search for inspiration from the patterns and colorful pallets I see around the places I have visited and experiment with new techniques to reflect my heritage and art tradition. I pre-visualize the art object before creating one. An example of this is a recent sculpture; where I cut the canvas fabric from previous paintings into strips and use it as thread to crochet the painting into a domestic object that will become a large hanging sculpture. I want this sculpture to represent the struggle and evolution within my work by convening the two mediums of painting and sculpture together. I was
introduced to art at a young age as an obligatory subject in school. I will always remember my first painting lesson. I was in the 3rd grade, when my teacher Ms. Martha showed my class how to mix color with only primary colors. I remember being very impressed by the chemistry of color and the fact that colors can be mixed into different hues. I also recall going home that day and teaching that lesson, like I would continue to do from that day on, to my sisters and brother who also enjoyed and discovered their own artistic talents. My siblings and I would spend hours painting and drawing, while I was also taking care of them. Another memory of my early artistic influences is my grandfather’s art encyclopedia. I recall that as a kid I would read it extensively, looking at each page, thinking of all the artists who had created the paintings pictured in it. My favorite, of all the paintings in this encyclopedia was Jacques-Louis David The Death of Marat. I was impressed by the realistic, almost photographic style that the artist had applied to the painting. Years later, I was able to attend an exhibition of Jacques-Louis David’s paintings at the Getty Museum in 2005. At this show, I remember seeing The Death of Marat, which reminded me of my childhood and my connection to art. I was amazed by the massive amount of people that visited the show at the time that I was there. I thought it was absurd that people keep his image alive by visiting his shows and continued interest in his work even though he passed away long ago. I felt at that moment as if I wanted to keep myself just as immortal and interesting as Louis David and his work. To do this I would need to make art. After that show, I decided to go to school to pursue a career in the field of art.

The political unrest in my country of origin continues to impact the subject matter of my work. As a child I was exposed to annual protests against the corrupt capitalist governments in Guatemala. My mom, who has socialist beliefs, would take me to the annual march in Guatemala City aimed at protesting government policies. Each year students protest and
demonstrate their concerns against their governmental leaders and comment on current issues that affect all Guatemalans and their environment. The students march with slogans and sculptures, which are crafted by the students themselves. This encounter also influenced and marked my art conceptually and politically because I saw how the sculptures that were carried by them represented their concerns about the politics in our country. Through this experience I became aware of how art can positively impact society. I saw that this event would open people’s consciousness through the reflection of their sculptures and slogans.

I identify with French philosopher Henri Bergson. In his book, Matter and Memory, Henri Bergson states that:

“I see plainly how external images influence the image that I call my body: they transmit movement to it. And I also see how this body influences external images: it gives back movement to them. My body is, then, in the aggregate of the world, and images which act like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives.”¹

In Bergson’s philosophy external images are being stored in the artist’s memory, these recollections are then transferred to the artwork through the movement that their body creates from pure memory. His concept makes me think of the many influences I had in Guatemala. The color pallet I use in my artwork is often as colorful as the rainbow. I remember that as a child I experienced rainbows almost every day throughout the rainy season and I would watch endless clouds drift by while using my imagination to form them into objects. Remarkably, these

¹ Henri Bergson, “Matter and Memory,” Book, 1896: 4-5. Print
seemingly small events impacted my personal artwork and the colorful patterns I use in my work today. I feel the effects of the social, political and economic problems that Guatemala faces every day; for at a young age I was able to recognize and differentiate the social classes around me as a survival mechanism. This fact brings me to speak up about the negative effects of capitalism as a government-backed policy on this planet and humankind.

The concepts and ideas in my work come from events and personal experiences; as well as events that have affected people globally. Through my experience as a Guatemalan born artist, I also draw inspiration from the hardworking indigenous Guatemalan weavers. I want my work to communicate this aspect and awareness of the existence of these Maya people. Through my knitting techniques and color, I want to evoke the presence of the Maya weaver. One of my paintings, called *Corporate Theft*, is about capitalist corporations appropriating textiles from Maya weavers in poor regions of Guatemala. The way I presented this issue was by showing a native woman weaving a textile which has been cut right in the middle so that the weaver becomes alienated from her cloth. The cut is intended to bring awareness of the separation that occurs once corporations appropriate from the vulnerable and poor, in this case a Maya woman.

My artworks incorporate both abstraction and realism. I start with a method of abstraction; a process of painting repetitive patterns on canvas with its roots in “action painting” and more recent “marbling painting.” After this process, I decide if the painting is complete or if I want to paint in response to the patterns, adding realistic imagery that emerges from what I see within the abstraction. I also express my perspective on contemporary events because I tend to be aware of what is transpiring in global politics. I speak to the realities of what humans inflict upon others and our environment. An example of this is one of my paintings called *Women’s Day*, which represents the death of forty-one female teens who were burned to death as a punishment
in an orphan institution in Guatemala. This barbaric event made me ponder the criminal neglect of the government in my country. These orphan girls were trying to report to the authorities that they were being sexually assaulted and as a result they were killed with the government having full knowledge of it and doing nothing. I painted forty one skulls to indicate the forty one girls that died in this horrific event. The skulls are surrounding a map like shape of Guatemala emphasizing the location this took place.

It is important for me to speak up about how negatively our way of living impacts the entirety of the world today and perhaps even offer alternatives and other possibilities that we should strive for. One of my artworks titled Hurricane comments on the negative impact that humans have through climate change. I created this piece in response to recent tropical hurricane seasons that have affected many countries throughout South and North America and the Caribbean. My concept in Hurricane is that people are cannibalizing the earth through consumption and the result is that our ecosystem is dying. I demonstrate this idea through a hurricane-like crocheted sculpture, which appears to consume the canvas from strips using a torn apart painting that is meant to imply mother earth. This past summer the tropical seas in the Americas experienced a catastrophic hurricane season. The main reason for this is that the oceans are getting warmer due to heat-trapping gases released by the burning of fossil fuels and causing the storms we normally get to intensify causing much more damage.

The history of my work reflects on my consciousness and mind as a whole. When I was an undergraduate student, I was diagnosed with social anxiety which led me to see art as a therapeutic response. My therapist recommended that I put myself in public situations so that I can become more confident and overtime free myself of social anxiety. In one undergraduate painting class, my professor gave us a performative assignment in which I was able to perform
with the marbling painting process, while my peers watched me. This painting process gave me more confidence to approach people in large groups. This led to me developing a public painting process, which I performed in a number of art and community venues. In graduate school, I realized that I have been working with a colorful pattern approach influenced by my culture, specifically by the colorful and elaborate textiles of the native people and natural ecological beauty of my homeland. An example of this is one of my works titled *Irradiance*, which was inspired by the colorful Maya textiles I grew up with. This work is comprised of a sheet like surface made of only acrylic paint, which I use a marbleized pattern to suggest Maya textile patterns and colors. This is hanging on a piece of rope suggesting an outdoors clothesline.

The artists who have inspired and influenced my artwork includes Ruth Asawa, an American crochet artist who makes huge wire sculptures using only crocheted wire. Asawa’s work gives me license to make my sculptures large in scale. Another artist I was influenced by is Tanya Aguiniga, a designer and yarn sculptor from Tijuana, Mexico. Aguiniga is known for her large-scale yarn and thread knitting sculptures and installations. Aguiniga is also famous for the use of the Mexican indigenous folklore in her work. Aguiniga has not only inspired my artistic view on my sculptural work but she has also inspired me to embrace my cultural heritage. Finally, I feel compelled by the activism of Lynda Benglis, who is known for her wax and latex poured painting and sculptures and her reaction to women’s under-representation in a male dominated art world. I am encouraged by her activism and ability to solicit reaction from her audience. Within my practice, I tend to confront an issue that has affected or is affecting life on our planet and attempt to bring awareness to my viewer that will hopefully encourage action and change.
My art reflects contemporary art issues since I tend to engage modern societal issues in order to raise awareness. Issues of gender, as they relate to women’s work and stereotypes are addressed in my artwork through my use of array of colors and the knitting process. The knitting process and my color pallet reflect on the importance of women in our society; which in the case of my art indicates the construction of gender by the norms that society has established.

I have also felt the need to communicate within my artwork the excessive and exploitive use of our natural resources. As corporations have “developed” parts of Guatemala, the natural environment and culture have suffered. This has led to the destruction of natural biological systems of beauty. The native culture is also losing its identity as international capitalist monoculture spreads into Guatemala, causing younger generations to be ashamed of their ancestral culture and to identify with western pop culture. I believe this is the time for humanity to deviate from our conspicuous consumption if we are to survive as a species. I see my work evolving to huge sculptures created with found and recycled materials; emphasizing my concerns for the fragile and changing ecological environment that we live in. I seriously consider the materials I work with and have made lifestyle changes to reduce my carbon-footprint. I want to share my experience as an eco-friendly and conscious individual who has an intimate awareness and understanding about environmental and social issues that affect humanity as a whole.

In conclusion, according to Bergson, artists are influenced by images that are being stored in our brains, the imprints and memories of our time within our environment. I use my art work as a tool to express my recollections and experiences as an individual that grew up in a country naturally and culturally rich, but politically and economically fraught with corruption and greed. I also want to convey a sense of the Maya through color, tactility, craft and texture.
My work comments on what is affecting life on our planet and inspires viewers to bring about a change in thought and action for the betterment of all humankind.
Mestizo (me' stē-zō)

In Latin America - a person of mixed race, having Spanish and Indigenous descent.

Aileen Jacinto
MFA Thesis Exhibition

Mestizo is an exploration of the artist’s identity as an individual born and raised in Guatemala; which is a country rich in natural resources where the majority of the population is native Maya yet the ruling class is majority white and poverty is widespread. The artist takes on this stunning contradiction using her own influences and views which were shaped by the political and economic upheaval and instability of her youth in Guatemala. The artist comments on her own identity as a person of mixed ancestry, a Mestizo, and because of her own family’s involvement in the capitalist government that has marginalized the Maya indigenous to this day.
Aeleen Jacinto
My Blood, 2018
Weaved Canvas on Stretcher Bars, Wooden Needle
46 in. x 22.5 in. and 44 in. x 28 in.
Aeleen Jacinto
*Window to my Memory, 2018*
Acrylic Paint, and Purple Heart Wood
20 in. x 76 in.
Aeleen Jacinto
*Self-Portrait, 2018*
Acrylic and Oil Paint on Canvas
41 in. x 73 in.
Aeleen Jacinto
*Echoes from Guatemala, 2019*
Photography, Clothspins, and Rope
176 in. x 36 in.
Aeleen Jacinto
*Tight Bonding*, 2018
Monoprint on Raw Canvas
44 in. x 15 in
Aeleen Jacinto

*Help! Soon to be Extinct (don’t touch)*, 2019

Guatemalan Handmade Thread
17 in. x 26 in.
Aeleen Jacinto

*Te Abrazo?, 2019*

Crochet Wire

36 in. x 96 in.