



## REPEATING GRANADAS

Michelle Peraza

Curated by Karly Boileau

Photo: Michelle Peraza, *Interstices* (detail), 2020, coloured pencil and 23k gold leaf on amate/amatl paper. Photo by Lisa East. Courtesy of Artist.

“By sending our voices, visuals and visions outward into the world, we alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors” – Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>1</sup>

Surrounded by glints of silver and gold, rich browns, patterns, and allegory, Michelle Peraza’s solo exhibition, **Repeating Granadas**, visualizes the ambiguity and complexity of identity within the LatinX community. Peraza’s deliberate choice of colour, materials, imagery, and stylization in her artistic practice prioritizes contemporary LatinX bodies. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s theoretical framework of *mestiza consciousness/the new mestiza*,<sup>2</sup> Peraza’s research-based artistic practice critically examines the Western Art History canon and

deconstructs the Spanish colonial project of ‘Latin America.’ Through her high-realism portraits, site-specific installations, and non-representation drawings, Peraza engages with themes of transculturation, postcolonialism, feminism, identity, extraction and relocation, image dissemination, gender politics, materiality, representation, and resilience.

In **Repeating Granadas**, visitors witness a fuller picture of history. Often presenting her work in diptychs,<sup>3</sup> Peraza’s use of this format reflects her and her

family’s experience negotiating different societal frameworks based on their colonized-colonizer dichotomous identity.<sup>4</sup> Painting portraits in a Baroque style acknowledges the prevalent style during Spain’s Golden Age (1492 – 1659),<sup>5</sup> which coincided with, and was subsequently funded by, Spain’s colonization of South and Central America, Mexico, and parts of the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> These portraits strategically insert the voice of Peraza and her family into the narrative, creating a space where being ‘in-between’ becomes a form of resilience and strength.

Botanical imagery and the use of gold and silver leaf recurring throughout Peraza’s work is indicative of the commodification of the Global South (both historically and

contemporarily) through the extraction and relocation of natural resources.<sup>7</sup> Equally layered with meaning is her use of repeating Mesoamerican and Spanish imagery. At once referencing how the Spanish Empire used similar tactics of repeated imagery, architecture, and oil painting as tools for colonization;<sup>8</sup> the repetition of these symbols in Peraza’s work is an allusion to the repetitive patterns of history and the fallout of the colonial project in present times.<sup>9</sup>

Peraza’s use of amate/amatl paper for her drawings embodies the heart of her artistic practice. This unique Mesoamerican tree bark paper becomes an analogy of survival, renewal, strength, and hope. When amate paper becomes torn, it can be patched and

strengthened. When manufacturing amate was outlawed, artisans secretly kept the tradition alive.<sup>10</sup> The paper, despite obstacles, survives.

In **Repeating Granadas**, Peraza creates new pathways of understanding through her artwork. Grounded in her personal experiences and her family’s oral histories, Peraza deftly illustrates what it means to live in the margins, where no two experiences are alike. Art becomes a way to navigate and try to make sense of the complexities of identity and of the world.

- Karly Boileau, curator

My practice speaks back to the history of Baroque painting, colonial botanical explorations, the dissemination of drawn and painted images and the role of “Art” in perpetuating the relentless extraction of natural resources in the so-called Latin American region. I continue to explore and raise questions on the complexity of the LatinX experience by oscillating between painting, drawing and installation.

Photo: Michelle Peraza in Studio

## ARTIST STATEMENT

As a second-generation Latin American Canadian visual artist, I explore the LatinX identity through large-scale figure paintings in oil of individuals close to me, people often dismissed from the art historical canon. Through figuration and a research-driven practice, I explore post-colonial realities, refusal, resilience, repetition in history, layered identities, ambiguity, colonial structures and strive towards a decolonial praxis. In tandem with painting, I explore a material-based practice working with gold leaf and amate/amatl (tree bark) paper as an-other method of deconstructing the colonial narrative of power.

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Photo: Michelle Peraza in Studio

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Michelle Peraza is a visual artist of Cuban and Costa Rican descent. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies from Western University and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ontario College of Art and Design University. Most recently she completed the Master of Fine Arts program at York University where her research-creation project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Canadian Graduate Scholarship. The Nancy Petry Award funded her recent two-month research trip to Spain and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation is supporting her current painting project. The Canada Council for the Arts is supporting her next research-creation project. She would like to acknowledge the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council and Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation for their generous support for this body of work.

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Curated by Karly Boileau

**Cambridge Art Galleries, Queen’s Square**  
1 North Square, Cambridge, ON  
[ideaexchange.org/cambridge-art-galleries](http://ideaexchange.org/cambridge-art-galleries)

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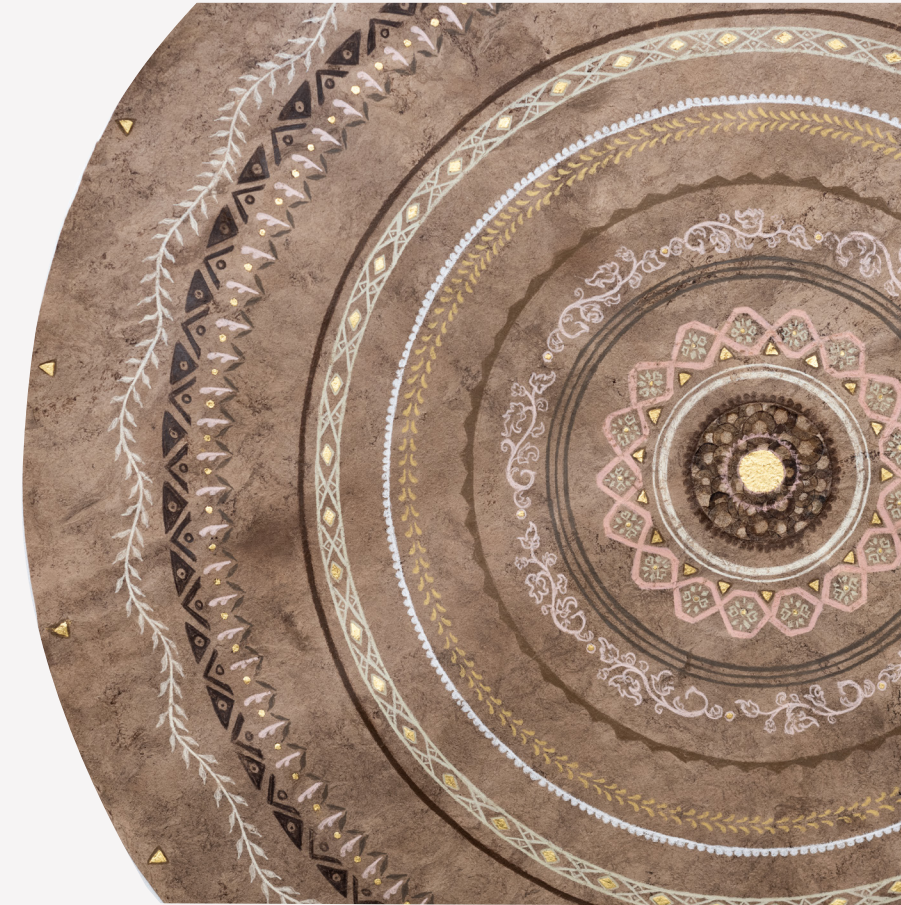
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Cambridge Art Galleries acknowledges that the place on which we gather is the traditional land of Indigenous peoples dating back countless generations. We recognize that it is part of the Haldimand Tract, the traditional land of the Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Cambridge Art Galleries acknowledges the support of the City of Cambridge, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Ontario Arts Council.







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Foto: Michelle Peraza, **Interstices** (detalle), 2020, lápiz de color, hoja de oro en amate/amatl papel. Foto por Lisa East. Cortesía de la artista.

“Enviando nuestras voces, visuales y visiones al exterior en el mundo, nosotros alteramos las paredes y hacemos los marcos para nuevas ventanas y puertas”

– Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>1</sup>

Rodeada de destellos de plata y oro, abundante color café, patrones, y alegoría, la exhibición individual de Michelle Peraza, **Repeating Granadas**, presenta su trabajo artístico en forma de instalación en un sitio específico, pinturas, y dibujos como una manera de procesar la ambigüedad y complejidad de su identidad dentro de la comunidad LatinX. La deliberada elección de color, materiales, imágenes y estilización de Peraza en su práctica artística prioriza el trabajo contemporáneo de los LatinX. Inspirados por el trabajo

teórico de la conciencia mestiza/ la nueva mestiza de Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>2</sup>, la investigación y práctica artística de Peraza críticamente examina el canon de la historia del Arte Occidental y deconstruye el Proyecto Español colonial de América Latina. A través de sus retratos de alto realismo, instalaciones en sitios específicos y dibujos sin representación Peraza participa en temas de transculturación, post-colonización, feminismo, identidad, extracción y relocalización, la disseminación de imágenes, política de género, materialidad, representación y resiliencia.

En **Repeating Granadas**, los visitantes son testigos de una pintura más amplia de la historia. A menudo Peraza presenta su trabajo en dípticos.<sup>3</sup> El uso de este formato refleja la experiencia de ella y su familia negociando los diferentes marcos basados en la identidad dicotómica de

colonizados-colonizadores.<sup>4</sup> Pintando los retratos en un estilo Barroco reconoce la prevalencia del estilo durante El Siglo de Oro de España. (1492-1659)<sup>5</sup> que coincidió con, y fue posteriormente fundado por la colonización del Sur y América Central, México y partes del Caribe.<sup>6</sup> Estos retratos estratégicamente insertan la voz de Peraza y su familia dentro de la narrativa, creando un espacio donde estar ‘en el medio’ se convierte en una forma de resiliencia y fuerza.

Imágenes botánicas y el uso de hojas doradas y plateadas

recurren a través del trabajo de Peraza e indican la modificación del Sur Global (ambos histórico y contemporáneo) a través de la extracción y la relocalización de recursos naturales.<sup>7</sup> Igualmente, envuelto con el significado es el uso de la imagen Mesoamericana y Española. Al mismo tiempo haciendo referencia como el Imperio Español usó tácticas similares de imágenes repetidas, arquitectura, y pinturas de aceite como herramientas de la colonización;<sup>8</sup> la repetición de estos símbolos en el trabajo de Peraza es una alusión a los patrones repetitivos de la historia y la caída del proyecto colonial en la actualidad.<sup>9</sup>

El uso del papel Amate/amatl por Peraza para sus dibujos personifica el corazón de su práctica artística. Este papel único Mesoamericano de

corteza de árbol se convierte en una analogía de sobrevivencia, renovación, fuerza y esperanza. Cuando el papel amate se rompe, puede ser reparado y fortalecido con parches.<sup>10</sup> Cuando la producción del papel de amate fue prohibida, los artesanos mantuvieron la tradición viva en secreto.<sup>11</sup> El papel, a pesar de los obstáculos, sobrevivió. En **Repeating Granadas**, Peraza crea nuevos senderos de entendimiento a través de su arte. Basada en su experiencia personal y las historias orales de su familia, Peraza ilustra hábilmente lo que significa vivir en el margen, donde dos experiencias no son iguales. El arte se convierte en una manera de navegar y tratar de hacer sentido en la complejidad de identidad y el mundo.

- Karly Boileau

<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa. “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” in *Making Face, Making Soul. Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed: Gloria Anzaldúa, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxv.

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement*, from *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed.: AnaLouise Keating, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009) 203 – 216.

<sup>3</sup> Un díptico es un trabajo de arte compuesto de dos paneles relacionados el uno al otro y a menudo usado durante el período Renacentista y Barroco para representar escenas religiosas.

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Peraza (la pintora) en discusión con K. Boileau (Autora y Curadora de arte), junio 22, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Peraza (la pintora) en discusión con K. Boileau (Autora y Curadora de arte) julio 21, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> “List of countries in Latin America.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, marzo 10, 2017. [www.britannica.com/topic/list-of-countries-in-Latin-America-2061416](http://www.britannica.com/topic/list-of-countries-in-Latin-America-2061416)

<sup>7</sup> Londa Schienbinger and Claudia Swan, “Introduction,” *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Claudio Nieto Rojas, “The City and the Spanish Colonial Project,” *Projective Cities*, marzo 20, 2017. <http://projectivecities.aaschool.ac.uk/portfolio/the-citys-essentially-to-the-spanish-colonial-project/>

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Peraza (Pintora) en conversación con K. Boileau (Autora / Curadora) octubre 13, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Peraza (Pintora) en conversación con K. Boileau (Autora / Curadora) mayo 2, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> “Amates Corteza de Identidad” from *The Mexican Museum*, consultado en octubre 12, 2023, [www.mexicanmuseum.org/amates-corteza-de-identidad](http://www.mexicanmuseum.org/amates-corteza-de-identidad)

## DECLARACIÓN DE LA ARTISTA

Como segunda-generación la artista visual Latinoamericana Canadiense, yo exploro la identidad LatinX a través de pinturas de figuras en gran escala de individuos cercanos a mí, personas generalmente rechazadas por el canon de la historia del arte. A través de la práctica investigativa y la figuración, yo exploro la realidad, rechazo, resiliencia, repetición en la historia postcolonial, la identidad en capas, ambigüedad, estructuras coloniales y el esfuerzo para descolonizar la práctica. Al mismo tiempo que pinto, yo exploro la práctica basada en materiales y trabajo con hojas de oro y papel amate/amatl (corteza de árbol) el papel usado como otro método para deconstruir la narrativa del poder colonial. Mi práctica le habla a la historia de la pintura Barroca, colonial exploraciones botánicas, la disseminación de imágenes en dibujos y pinturas en el enmarco del arte de perpetuar la persistente extracción de recursos naturales en la región llamada América Latina. Yo continuo explorando y haciendo preguntas sobre la complejidad de la experiencia LatinX oscilando entre la pintura, dibujos e instalaciones.

## BIOGRAFÍA

Michelle Peraza es una artista visual de descendencia Cubana y Costarricense. Ella tiene un Bachillerato en Bellas Artes en Estudios Clásicos de Western University y un Bachillerato en Bellas Artes de Ontario College of Art and Design University. Recientemente Michelle completó el programa de Maestría en Bellas Artes en York University, donde su proyecto de investigación-creación fue financiado por una beca de Social Sciences and Humanities Canadian Graduate Scholarship. El premio Nancy Petry ha financiado sus dos recientes viajes investigativos a España y la fundación Elizabeth Greenshields está financiando su proyecto actual de pintura. El Canada Council for the Arts está financiando su próximo proyecto de investigación-creación. A Michelle le gustaría agradecer al Ontario Arts Council, el Toronto Arts Council y la fundación Elizabeth Greenshields por su generosidad y apoyo en esta obra de trabajo.

Foto: Michelle Peraza en el estudio



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