

Educator Resource: Michelle Peraza, *Repeating Granadas*

Cambridge Art Galleries, Queen's Square, January 20 to April 21, 2024.
Curated by Karly Boileau.

The Artist

Michelle Peraza is a visual artist of Cuban and Costa Rican descent who completed her MFA at York University. She states: "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."

In this exhibition, Michelle Peraza features large scale paintings representing people in the LatinX community as well as a series of repeating patterns. Using the style of Baroque paintings, Peraza places her self and her family into the art historic narrative. By doing so, she is able to challenge notions of Latin America as told through Spain's colonization and highlights an in-between space for multi-layered identities to exist.

Peraza's choice of materials is very particular - the botanical imagery and use of gold and silver leaf in the exhibition makes reference to the extraction of precious resources from the Global South. The paper that she uses in her artwork is amate/amatl paper. This unique 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. 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

Let's Create

Michelle Peraza's artworks often feature repeating patterns and imagery. In this activity we will be creating our own stamp that can be used to create an artwork that uses the same elements!

Materials

- Foam sheet or thin Styrofoam
- Drawing tools
- Paint Paper
- Instructions

Consider what image you might want to use over and over again in an artwork. You could be inspired by Michelle Peraza's use of plants in her art or choose something totally different like an abstract squiggle,

its totally up to you and your imagination! Using a pen or pencil draw your idea on a piece of paper first. Remember that the image will work like a stamp, so it will only be one colour. Once you have your idea, use a pencil or pen to draw your design on the foam. The drawing needs to be deep into the foam so that the paint will only get on the parts you haven't drawn on. Next, test out your stamp by sponging on some paint - make sure to not use too much or it will get in the crevices you made. Once the paint is applied, flip your stamp over and press it on a piece of paper. If you don't like your design you can wash it off and add to it! Now you have your very own stamp to use in your artwork! Try placing it in different patterns on a piece of paper. You can use the same colour or experiment with different paint colours!

Key Words

Amate/Amatl Paper: A handmade paper from the bark of the Amate, Nettle and Mulberry trees. It dates back to pre-Columban times and was used in the creation of the codices, which recorded important historical, legal, and religious texts in Mesoamerica. When the Spanish arrived, they ordered the destruction of the codices and outlawed the production of amate/amatl paper. However, the creation and production of amate/amatl paper persisted and is still made by artisans today using many of the same methods as their indigenous ancestors.

Analogy: A comparison made between things that may be unlike each other but share some similarities. Often used to communicate or explain a point. For example, from the movie Forrest Gump, "Life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're gonna get."

Baroque: Refers to a cultural and art movement that characterized Europe from the early seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century. The style featured dramatic movement, deep colour and grandeur.

Colonization: The act of taking control of an area or a country by another country or nation, often displacing indigenous populations, especially using force in order to establish settlements.

LatinX: Latinx is a gender-neutral or nonbinary term used to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity who reside outside of Latin America.

Reading List

Acevedo, Elisabeth. *Family Lore* .

Aiden, Thomas. *Cemetery Boys*.

Allende, Isobel. *Violeta*.

Alvarez, Julia. *Afterlife*.

Al-Solaylee, Kamal. *Brown*. "What Being Brown in the World Today Means (to Everyone)".

Bleichmar, Daniel. *Visual Voyages: Images of Latin American Nature from Columbus to Darwin*.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*.

Escandón, María Amparo. *L.A. Weather*.

Ferrada, María José. *How to Turn into a Bird*.

Gala, Marciel: *Call Me Cassandra*.

Hernandez, Jessica. *Fresh Banana Leaves*.

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Moraga, Cherrie. *The Bridge Called My Back*.

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia. *Gods of Jade and Shadow*.

Neruda, Pablo. *Poetry of Pablo Neruda*.

Reclaim the Stars: 17 Tales Across Realms & Space. Edited by Córdova, Zoraida.

Rey-Rosa, Rodrigo. *Country of Toó*.

Vasquez-Lavada, Silvia. *In the Shadow of The Mountain*.

Weaver, Lila Quintero. *My Year in the Middle*.

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