

RAMIREZ-LAMOS, DANIEL. M.F.A. MEJANTE LOCAS [semejante locas]. (2024)
Directed by Professor Jennifer Meanley 27 pp.

I'm making a conscious effort to disregard what should be expected of me. Saving face at the expense of myself and in fear of what others may see or say. My exhibition is a declaration of my own narrative and my expression of acceptance as a queer and quirky effeminate boy. Through the language of painting, music, crochet, and costuming, I am taking control of my own story and alleviating the hard-to-talk-about topics of being an individual with multifaceted identities in a world that is not all that accepting. Through color, play, love, and clowning, I can show what I'm really feeling without the use of difficult-to-source wording and academic jargon. I honor myself and my culture by being unapologetically authentic. I hope that authenticity resonates with others who unapologetically stand by their truth and power. My show is for those who may be outcast, othered, or weird; for people who seek visibility and love. For those that get it and for those that don't, I hope the message will resonate with all.

What a lovely idea it is to be a person.

To dance among others and to participate in the choir.

Not to stand in the shadows and wait their turn.

MEJANTE LOCAS [SEMEJANTE LOCAS]

by

Daniel Ramirez-Lamos

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Approved by

Jennifer Meanley
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

I want to thank everyone who has helped me get to this point in my academic career. Let it be known that without my community, I would not have been able to achieve anything that meant anything to me.

Firstly, I thank my parents, my father Israel Ramirez-Balderas, the man who has uplifted me through the process and guided me and giving me his words of wisdom. I thank my mother, Maricel Lamos, the woman who consoled me through the battles of this adventure as well as the encouraging voice of this entire experience. I thank my brother Jonathan Ramirez-Lamos, my creative collaborator, for the latter half of this thesis journey and for being my motivator. Thank you, my sister Beatriz Muñoz, for helping me begin my journey through the master's program and inspiring me to pursue higher education. I thank Barbara Campbell Thomas, Daniel Hale, Sunny Spillane, and Jennifer Meanley for having faith in me and my artistic vision and reassuring me through the process. I thank Karrington Gardner, Sam Machia Keshet, Erin Fei Humphrey, and Jason Lord for being the best cohort and my team through this experience. I'd like to thank Susan Chavez and Hayden Carter for being the friends that I couldn't have done this without. Furthermore, in no order, Nikki Blair, Tremaine Wilkes, Steisha Pintado, Nicole Scalissi, Caitlyn Scrader, Jessica Dupuis, Skye Parker, Juno Blue, Quan Apollo, and Shenilla Smith, Celena Michelle Amburgey, and Paul Stanley Mensah.

Thank you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Daniel Ramirez-Lamos has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Jennifer Meanley

Committee Members

Sunny Spillane

Barbara Campbell Thomas

Daniel Hale

April 19th, 2024

Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Fuck Y'all

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OVERTURE: FAGGOTS, CLOWNS, AND BROWNS, OH MY!

I divide this part of my thesis to further articulate the context for who and how I am. I hope that this guides the reader to further understand the artist and person I express myself to be.

Faggots

For the longest time, I was very timid and hesitant to declare my sexuality and even my femininity. For my personal journey, it took going and exposing myself to the arts, and within the program being able to identify with other queer people who openly express themselves unapologetically. The saying “fake it till you make it” really helped me come out of my own and stand in my truth as a queer person. For my culture as well as my familial upbringing, this is something so foreign to us. Being very forward and upfront with our emotions, as well as confronting the taboo. Especially a family coming from a completely different country and generation. And through immersing myself in the community and meeting other people like me, I have embraced my truth. For this exhibition and thesis work, I decided to make work based on things that I, in the past, have chosen not to talk about, and bear it all in the hopes I am understood.

Clowns

In this aspect of my work, my clown is an expression of my innermost anxieties about being an individual who is perceived as idiotic, silly, or plainly othered. And in taking those insecurities that otherwise belittle me, I choose to express them outwardly as playful and expressive through my costume, makeup, and performance. Navigating through these white spaces I often feel out of place and ridiculed. It is so interesting to depict myself this way. I feel as if I'm giving the viewer and insight to how I am feeling within uncomfortable settings while also curating how I want people to interpret my appearance and my presence. I am commanding

and pulling focus and choosing to depict myself. In this costume I feel that it is a liberating characterization that allows me to be able to express myself however I want to. In many Latin American countries clowning is a big form of entertainment within many aspects of how we consume media. For many of these countries like Colombia clowning is a method of escaping the harsh and cruel nature of our life in society. In the text *Clowning as Social Performance in Colombia: Resistance and Ridicule* Barnaby King interviews the clowns and artist Lucho Guzman and asks him a series of questions regarding his practice. Guzman was asked the question what does this practice of clowning mean to him. In the introduction King recounts “Not only is the circus a means for Lucho to imagine a different future, he tells me, but clowning in particular has provided a way for him to deal with the sadness of his own personal loss” (King1). And in beautifully poetic way the act of escapism and performance complements the dramatics and playfulness of the act of clowning. For me I also identify with the means of this artistic expression in my clowning practice. This character is both a stranger and acquaintance. I don the costume and let my inner mind and actions take control of my movement actions and performance. I never know how I act in the costume but let the feeling and intuition guide me. Told to me by my mother I’m in a trance like state. Daniel the artist is the body whereas the clown is the host letting me further express myself confidently and securely.

Browns

Most of my work, if not all, has, in some capacity, been influenced by black and brown culture. Being an individual with a rich and significant cultural upbringing; that of being a Mexican Colombian American from the south. I want to make it very apparent in my practice that I am creating work for my culture and for my people. It brings me great joy to know that I can help people feel identified with their culture and aid people in representation in the art world,

especially in the educational setting. For me in my childhood, of course, cultured in my home, once I passed the threshold, I was met with little to no Latin representation. I want to be able to represent my culture and heritage and show that Latinidad is not a monolith and that we are multifaceted and intersectional in our identities. The genre of artwork that I have been primarily focused on that references my identity is what I would categorize as Rasquachismo, or the art of resourcefulness and character. Coined by writer Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, he says that this idea or mentality is one that is culturally significant and one that oftentimes is synonymous with Mexican American or Chicano nationality. Considered the poor man's artwork or of the working classes' rasquachismo is a way of beautifying and embellishing common-day materials and making them into pieces that hold value to us as people. Rasquaje displays playfulness and beauty within materials otherwise discarded or common. As Ybarra-Frausto puts it, "Limited resources mean mending, re-fixing, and reusing everything. Things are not thrown away but saved and recycled, often in different contexts."(Frausto 6). And this mentality is one that really resonates with me, especially with my current work.

When I start my creative process, these three concepts always fester in my mind. If I create a piece of art, the finished product more than likely has some aspects of all these contextual pillars in my work. At times, some may be more apparent than others, but I believe that all are present, especially within this thesis show.

From the very beginning, when I first got the acceptance to become a graduate student at UNCG. I had envisioned everything that was to come and everything I expected to create. My undergraduate experience was a beautiful one in which I met a multitude of phenomenal individuals, professors, and students that molded me into the artist that I was initially. When I did arrive, I was met with numerous adversities, challenges, and insecurities that flooded my

mind, work, and life in numerous ways, even beginning with the initial introductions on day one. Room one at the Greensboro Project Space is an example of everything that I had created before and up until the day of acceptance. As you can see, a lot of my work consisted of beautiful women, beautiful people, and beautiful bodies of people that weren't me that held strength and power attributes that I beforehand did not believe that I possessed. For me, this was playing safe and not challenging myself to think introspectively and to do further personal reflection on my character and my creative practice. Initial critiques: when I first got here, I had no clue what to expect, and it was a whirlwind of abundant information that stayed with me as I continued within the semester and year, but for some reason, I couldn't get the negative thoughts outside of my head. My first pivotal and important piece, in my opinion, was the series of three "nudes" that I decided to create in response to one of the comments that I had received within the program. Pervert. To me, this word pierced my ear, invalidated my character as an individual, really hindered me as a creative, and hurt my personal image even further. In an act of passion, anger, and frustration, I decided to create these images in response, both proving and disproving to individuals that I indeed am a pervert, but in the same breath, I am not.

Figure 1. Nudes Series



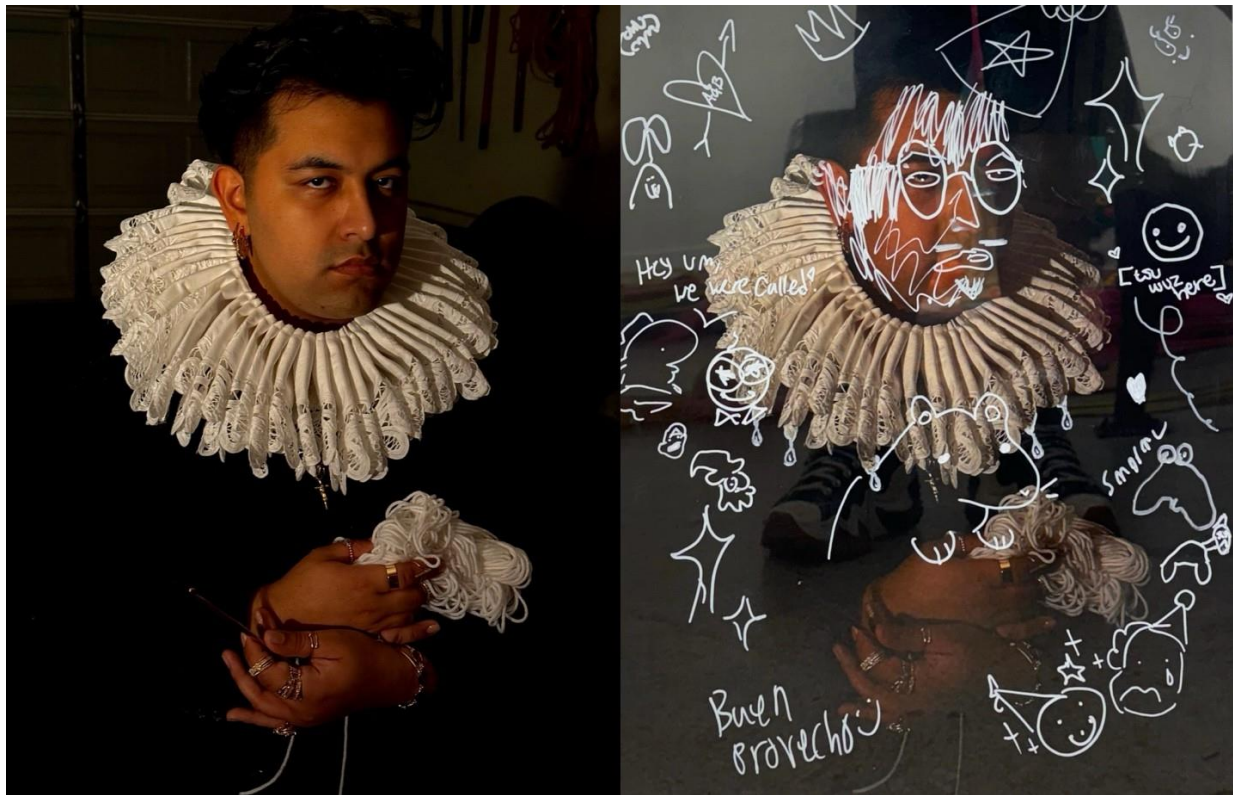
This liberating depiction of myself further influenced me to create more work that was autobiographical, commanding, and narrative of my own experience and no one else's, and in doing so, I could truly see how others viewed me and how others treated me. In the same room there is a carpet that lays on the floor as a visual depiction of how I am as an individual, letting others walk all over me.

Figure 2. Carpet



On the nose, I choose to get the visual story across to let people know that I understand the emotional damage that I'm putting myself through and what I'm allowing others to facilitate. This piece is the promise that, though others may walk on this portrait of me, I will not allow them to continue to walk over me in life. The portrait of me in chiaroscuro and ruffle is a visual depiction of how I view myself as an intellectual, lover, artist, and creative to be taken seriously. In contrast, I introduced the white marker and allowed others to deface my image similarly to how individuals who have never met me can hold prejudices against me without even knowing me as an individual artist or discrediting me and my practice.

Figure 3. Ruffled Collar with Defaced



ACT I: RED - BLISTERED

I begin my act narratively with the color red. I chose to compartmentalize my thesis and my show within capsules of colors. Initially, I wanted to create the entire Rainbow but feasibly I didn't think I was going to be able to complete everything I wanted to create, especially with the variety of the colors withing said rainbow. Thus, I chose to focus more on the primary colors. Of course, there are some outliers that will be grouped in with the rest. I began to briefly look up the significance and meaning of these colors by simply looking them up as well as referencing their meanings as associated with the pride flag. For red it was considered life which correlates also with indigenous ideologies for red also meaning life.

Just beyond the second room and the beginning of the third room of G.P.S. (Greensboro Project Space) is the red clown, the catalyst for all my sickness, negativity, isolation, lust, love, and anger. Red is a physical manifestation of the stranger that possessed my body and acted in my place causing me to do thing in my life leading me to actions completely out of my character.

Figure 4. Red Installation



In the song corresponding with the costume, Red recounts my actions and takes the listener on a journey. Narratively throughout the choices that I take in my past as a response to my insecurities, critiques, and relationships. In the outro of the song, my clown breaks character, and my voice carries through to the listener. I plead to forget and beg to be forgiven for my actions or sins. I wanted to focus on the growing pains and some of the negative experiences that comes from queer people having to grow up late in their life due to not being able to freely express themselves openly and out. And because of the lack of experience many of us can lead ourselves to awful and problematic decisions. Keeping within my artistic themes the clown costume of red is reminiscent of ruffles that are consisted with the piñata. The ruffles obscure my body and create a shape that lends to mystery as well as the heavily painted clown white face.

Similar in theme, the peep show puppet show that I have set up is an exaggerated visual representation of my regretted actions a play of being forced against my personal will and made to move, act, and react to the puppeteers' whims.

Figure 5. Peep Show



All be it visually cute, a darker narrative is told, one in which I chose to mask through something charming like puppeteering or theatre. The contrast of childhood themes and serious topics. This piece possibly being the hardest one to create because it really took a lot of energy and vulnerability to include within the show or even thesis in its entirety. The idea of creating the visual language to express traumatic experiences is something I have never done before but, in some way, helped me process a lot of my baggage and insecurities.

ACT II: BLUE - CONFINEMENT

Blue in this act, deals with sickness, sadness, and at times magic I lean, heavy into the aspect of sickness in being physically sick and emotionally sick, or sick of the current situation. I'm in sick of the actions that have plagued me thus far sick of myself. The blue clown is a depiction and a manifestation of my sickness, physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

In the second room, I wanted to imply the scene of me in my room, lying lifeless in bed, surrounded by blue and blue motives. I chose the second room at G.P.S. because it is much smaller than all the others, and it can lend itself to the feelings of smallness, similarly to how I feel when in my room in solitude. I could no longer get out of bed and continue with my life, but just rot in place away from others. In the song displayed beneath the arch, I reflect on my actions and overall past, while the chorus is the reassuring voices of people in my life, trying to comfort me but inadvertently causing me more stress, pain, and turmoil.

Figure 6. Screenshot from Blue Music Video



In this scene, I wanted to depict me at my lowest of lows: the clown who could not get out of bed with his arms weighed down by a heavy ruffled coat that was tattered yet beautiful. The degradation of the fabric, as well as the trash and discarded images around me, clue the viewer to my deterioration.

Figure 7. Room 2 Clown in Bed



The main influence for the costuming for this outfit was the Idea of heavy limbs or a heavy body that is tired from the weight of their own mind manifested physically. The obnoxious sleeves were a visual aid to the concept of this. The pattern of the sleeves was inspired by ribbon skirts adorned by native women of the Americas for ceremonial purposes. Though the coat of the clown is very ornate I wanted to keep the main under layers of the costume very simple and like regular Aguste or French clowns but a bit different. My Blue clown has an undershirt and velour pants like pajamas with white socks. Simplified and common to show that the character is at home in comfortable clothes like how someone would be when they are rotting at home of course contrasted by the dramatic makeup and clown accessory.

ACT III: YELLOW - SUNNY

But beyond these trials are light and love. The yellow part of the third room is a fresh and exciting outlook on life in which I acknowledge my past, my faults, and claim progression as well as healing, encouraging the listener to do so as well. After a while of wallowing in my sadness and pain I made the effort to change my habits and to change my outlook on life and truly take command. Because I finally was able to see all the blessings that surrounded me, I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel and the clouds parting to reveal the sun. And finally, one of my final creations for the exhibition was my yellow clown. I wanted to create a character that aligns with my happiness and current ideas. I modeled his costume to look like an oversized huipil or indigenous shirt like the ones from Mexico and instead of the textiles typically adorned I chose to border the bottom with stars and crochet. I also wanted my character's silhouette like a star, so I cinched the wrists and ankles while keeping the form hidden as well as donning a clown hat in three.

Figure 8. Screenshot from Yellow Music Video



The yellow clown's face is painted much more closely to mine, in contrast to the red in the beginning. This creative choice was to depict the stark difference of the white face being different from me, i.e., red's face being mostly white, blue having spots of white with my complexion apparent showing what remains of my decisions, and yellow, where the color of my skin is more visible and complimented with yellow, a color of happiness and sunshine on the middle of my face. A journey of battle and inner saboteur that comes to a conclusion of clarity and peace.

Figure 9. Detail of Yellow Clown Makeup



In the same third room I also highlight my pink clown. And in the same corner there are examples of family and my love for them.

Figure 10. Pink Room Corner



Figure 11. Family Portraits



My pink clown is a representation of baptism or resurrection, more narratively than spiritually. In Latin America, children, especially in this case in Mexico, would wear similar outfits or regalia during a christening or baptism. My Pink clown adorns this uniform and signifies a rebirth, the breaking of cycles, and the ending of the trauma that had bound me in place. Enamored by the outfits when I visited the museums in Mexico I in response created this outfit. Both a mix of the boys and girls baptism outfit I created one that better suits me and my nuanced identity. Next to the clown are portraits of my family styled similarly to those of the late artist Fernando Botero, in which they are depicted as their past selves in current locations ones in which I am more familiar with. I've always been told stories of my family's upbringing and their lives before me, but I have only ever really known my home and my space. Seeing pictures of them in the past I funnily imagine them young in our current home. And in some way, we individuals may stay the same, but our surroundings change, which is an example of how we are

still young and full of life no matter what age we are at. Both this concept is change and familiarity.

Bridging my third and fourth room there's a piñata.

Figure 12. Piñata



I declare my truth as a queer person or as a “festive” individual and reappropriate the saying, “Eres lleno de maricadas,” or you are full of faggotry, a saying that was told to me as a child. The point of the saying was that it signified that I was always filled with anxieties and fear, or “maricadas”. For Colombians, marica and maricadas is a word that is thrown around like nothing. The word both signified everything and nothing. In this case, I was being told to stop

worrying about everything especially over the little things. But to me, it signified that I was gay, and it showed. I took it in a negative way, and it stayed with we accidentally doing the exact opposite of what I was told to do. The piñata is broken with vessels filled with streamers. The vessels casted from fabric and glue and in the shape of things I enjoy as an individual. The visual language of color aligns the colors of the rainbow, and in the middle is a baton fashioned like a fairy wand held in my severed hand. I break the vessel of my body to show the color, love, and fun inside me for others to share, like at a fiesta.

And in my final room, is a retelling of my quinceañera, a portrait I created for my first show in Greensboro titled Marica.

Figure 13. Marica 2024



Now akin to religious holy imagery the figure is representative of my queerness, femininity, and that the fact that my body is holy, something to be cherished, and something that is important to me. Something that isn't to be watered down and diminished for others, but to be propped up, honored, and worshiped for the bravery and persistence of my character. I wanted to include this reconstruction to show how far I have come from initially coming into the program and where I have finished. The progress labor and efficiency.

And similarly, I chose to redo my white clown costume from my first year and adorn myself in a new vision of the previous idea.

Figure 14. White Clown (Picture from Show)



My white clown is the sum of all my experiences and all my journeys of hardship, loss, love, and persistence. Just like the color white is the sum of all colors. The icing that tops off the cake at the end of the day.

Up until this point, I thought of this thesis exhibition as a retrospective. All this work is the indexical mark of my presence within this program and a marker of my dedication to my work and artistry. And constantly adding in more work to the gallery, having restless nights tiring over miniscule details that I can only see in fear that I have met the end of my artistic journey and that there is nothing for me to continue onto. But in fact, this should be a manifestation, and it is the manifestation of what is to come to me. The abundance of blessings that are to come my way and the fruits of my labor I am soon to see.

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