

GEARY



Homeland Promised Land , 2019, Acrylic piping on canvas, 24 x 24 in.

A PART OF US

YVETTE MAYORGA

NOVEMBER 7-

DECEMBER 20, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION

NOVEMBER 7, 6-8PM

Geary is pleased to present Chicago-based artist Yvette Mayorga's first solo exhibition in New York City, *A Part of US*. In her paintings and sculpture, Mayorga tempts with a saccharine and cloyingly sweet presentation of cake-like canvases at surface level. Using acrylic paint piped onto stretched surfaces, Mayorga's work offers sobering revelations about the contradictions inherent in the notion of the "American Dream".

In the essay accompanying *A Part of US*, Emmanuel Ortega points to the link between the history of the flamboyant style of French Rococo and Mayorga's commentary on consumption and the American dream:

The ethics of beholding los pasteles de Mayorga rest in the ways in which sentimentality is denied via her work; in her own words, "I'm interested in having the viewer think that they're going to experience something [...] sensory or decadent, but then, through being attracted to the colors, to the smell, they discover that the work is about something else, something more profound, something darker." If one is not attentive, Mayorga's work may unfold like a seductive ornate medusa, instead of a much necessary call to action. The formal lushness of rococo aesthetics is a tool for the artist to entice the viewer to scrutinize their complacency in these systems of oppression.

In *A Part of US*, Mayorga presents a number of acrylic piped works for the first time, along with a small selection of ceramic sculptures and a large swath of wallpaper designed by the artist. With the help and influence of Rococo historical artifacts, Mayorga draws comparisons to the United States' proud history of consumerism and waste, while many people go without, and continue to fight for a seat at the table. Mayorga asks the question with her work, how many times must history repeat itself?

Yvette Mayorga is a Chicago-based artist who navigates the intersection of feminism, immigration, and post-colonialism. A first-generation Mexican-American, she works with subject matter specific to personal accounts of border crossing and border politics within the United States. Recent projects include solo exhibitions at Roman Susan Gallery (Chicago), and a solo presentation in collaboration with the Chicago Artists Coalition at EXPO Chicago in 2017. Recent fellowships and residencies include a MAKER Grant from the Chicago Artists Coalition (2018), a Fountainhead Residency (2017), ACRE Artist Residency (2017), and a BOLT Residency at the Chicago Artists Coalition (2016). Mayorga holds an MFA in Fiber & Material Studies from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA in Painting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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Of Cakes and Rococo Fantasies; The edicts of Mayorga's Pasteles
by
Emmanuel Ortega

At first impression, the canvases of Yvette Mayorga radiate an innocence that allows for further unwary examination. The piped brushstrokes with *pastel*¹ colors and rich surfaces recall the vacuous formalism that reigned supreme in Marie Antoinette's Versailles court. However, her overwhelmingly sweet surfaces erase the imperial cogitative "let them eat cake," and instead, challenge this rhetoric through a different narrative. Upon closer inspections her images appear to melt into unpolished sugary scenes that problematize a superficial encounter with her art as solely an extension to her Latinx heritage, femininity, legal status, and expectations of childhood amidst all these markers of identity. It is at the intersection of these expectations where these images come to life, not as 18th century French fantasies, but as windows into contemporary reality.

Kirsten Pai Buick in "No exit? Deborah Roberts and the Liberation of Black Childhood," argues that children must be separated from the concept of "childhood" given that, "historically, the representation of childhood has been rooted in adult projection and fantasy..."² At present, the *sentimentalization* of Latinx children in concentration camps has turned them into torchbearers for the amendment of a broken U.S. immigrant system. It is through the constant flow of photographs in news outlets and social media where childhood ceases to perform its duty as innocence and begins to symbolize the weight of our justice system. Understanding how Latinx kids are the embodiment of "childhood of the Trump era" allows us to better comprehend Mayorga's work.

At every turn, small green plastic soldiers and ICE agents frame saccharine rococo fantasies. Surfaces flooded with everything from Cheeto bags to Coca-Cola charm bracelets recall a seemingly innocent upbringing in the United States. Her references to systematic violence via toys of war and capitalist fetishes sediment the rupture between children and the expectations of childhood. For Latinx kids, the moral prospects always fluctuate in a liminal transitory stage between Latin American Catholic principles and U.S. capitalist morals. Mayorga understands the nuances of this liminal stage, and as a response, has created a body of work that subverts the sentimentality of all the identity markers that a life in this country has placed upon her.

The ethics of beholding *los pasteles de Mayorga* rest in the ways in which sentimentality is denied via her work; in her own words, "I'm interested in having the viewer think that they're going to experience something [...] sensory or decadent, but then, through being attracted to the colors, to the smell, they discover that the work is about something else, something more profound, something darker."³ If one is not attentive, Mayorga's work may unfold like a seductive ornate medusa, instead of a much necessary call to action. The formal lushness of rococo aesthetics is a tool for the artist to entice the viewer to scrutinize their complacency in these systems of oppression. Further, the luxuriant vases encapsulate an immigrant world in which good taste is rooted in replicas of French material culture. Her approach to such objects also exposes a reality in which the capitalist tendencies of *buen gusto*⁴, which derive from 19th century Mexican culture, are intercepted by reminders of a failed American dream that many of us have to confront everyday. Mayorga's piping is not constructed out of sugar, but deconstructs the politics of sugar; her toy soldiers are not made out of frosting, but are modeled out *ICE*-ing; and, in a similar gesture, we are meant to consume her pastel edicts as supposed to thinking that she is simply letting us eat cake.

¹ I am using the word pastel here as the Spanish word for cake

² For more information on the politics of Buen Gusto in Mexico please read the following compilation: Niell, Paul B., and Stacie G. Widdifield. 2013. Buen gusto and classicism in the visual cultures of Latin America, 1780-1910.

³ Kirsten Pai Buick, "No exit? Deborah Roberts and the Liberation of Black Childhood," in Deborah Roberts The Evolution of Mimi, ed., Brownlee, Andrea Barnwell, and Valerie Cassel Oliver Georgia Museum of Fine Art, University of Georgia for the Spellman College Museum of Fine Art, 2019.

⁴ Cardoza, Kerry, "The American Dream in the Frosting of Yvette Mayorga." Chicago Reader, April 25, 2018. October 10, 2019. <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/yvette-mayorga-american-dream-mexican-immigrant/Content?oid=46391835>