

A VERY ANXIOUS FEELING

VOICES OF UNREST IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

20 Years of The Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection

MARÍA FRAGOSO

I believe that focusing on the intimacy of our lives matters. Through the depiction of figures and their interactions between them, intimacy turns into a moment of transcendence. The figures are simultaneously observing themselves and trying to reach to the other; mirroring each other while looking for an all-consuming relationship. Juxtapositions between beauty and the uncanny are an invitation to question ourselves and complicate (literally, wringing and twisting) what we understand as identity. Introducing confusion in social dynamics is how I try to unsettle their regularity, distort their traditional form. I like to represent coupling, eating, touching; actions that epitomize the intrinsic longing for human connection. This emphasis on plurality and heterogeneity in my paintings is meant to posit challenge on the idea of an unequivocal, oversimplified Latin American identity.

When I started living and working in America for the first time, I was struck by a whole new context. My practice was marked by the influence of other artists who engaged with issues of race, culture, and sexuality in the attempt to transgress existing delimitations of identities. I comprehended, for example, how extremely diverse, mutable, and protean Latinx experiences are. It must also be said that my arrival in America coincided with deep sociopolitical changes in this country, which was crucial to my experience. I arrived to Baltimore in 2015 after the protests over Freddie Gray's death; that same year I started painting. Two years later, Trump's presidency started. The question of limits became tangible with all the violence that has always accompanied the urge to draw clear and crisp borders between countries, identities, and ultimately families. During this period, a very derogatory narrative started spreading around Latin American identity. Under these circumstances, raising one's voice is a necessity to oppose the implementation of rigid colonial,



María, Skowhegan, 2019

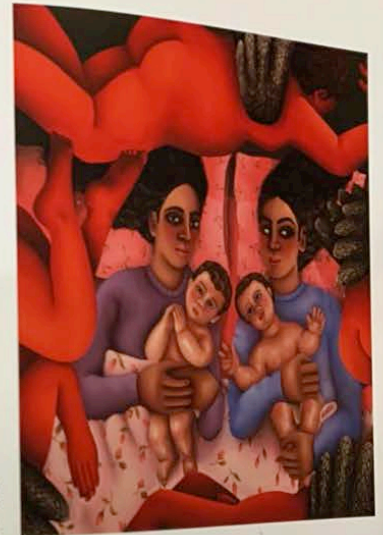
patriarchal, racist, and binary structures, structures that resonate in the very bodies they are trying to control.

My work represents some aspects of the myriad of coexisting identities in Mexico; my paintings celebrate Mexican culture, of course, but they also try to offer a critical look into Mexico's conception of gender, sexuality, human relations, and national belonging. Mexico City is full of life, creativity, and beauty. But it is also suffused with a violence that oftentimes feels invisible and quiet, lurking behind

the scenes: an oppressive macho culture, class inequalities, and the consequences of colonialism. The need for survival and resilience that emerge from fear and unrest are similar necessities that I have encountered in America.

A duality that has always pervaded Mexican culture and everyday life is the complicated relationship of struggle and joy. I always think about it as an important duality in my paintings. I try to convey this bond of celebration and tragedy by portraying scenes of lustfulness and

hedonism in bright and fiery colors while also including some disturbing elements that question the coherence of the seemingly familiar. Questioning what is happening allows for the existence of unexpected and alternative narratives; a personal and imaginary world influenced by anxieties, desires, and hopes, that reflect the contemporary ethos and express a yearning for solidarity and empathy within the uncertainty and of the future.



María Fragoso
De nuestro jardín de frutas falsas
(From Our Garden of False Fruit),
2018, oil on canvas