SORRY FOR THE MESS

JUSTIN FAVELA & RAMIRO GOMEZ

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People of color built Las Vegas; however, the monuments that commemorate their labor are almost nonexistent. From the days of the construction of the railroad, to the latest mega-casinos inaugurated on the Strip, the memory and monumentality of physical labor in Las Vegas has been erased in order to glorify the capital that sustains it. Justin Favela and Ramiro Gomez have built careers on the dignity, discipline, and persistence of labor as both a fleeting memory and undeniable reality. Both create art aiming to deconstruct the silences of history that seek to suppress their own narratives.

Here they step outside their comfort zone to immerse spectators in the nuances of the Las Vegas immigrant labor experience. *Sorry for the Mess* aims to transcend the physicality of the "monument" and face the personal, the familiar, and the uncanny in the experiences of growing up as children of immigrants in the United States. The space is structured as a poetic prose meant to offer viewers a window into the artists' personal experiences with Las Vegas.

Instead of highlighting the already too-familiar tropes of POC tragedy, Favela and Gomez recall moments from their childhood via an intricate web of memories. They embrace everything from the popular TV show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* to Michael Gondry's 2006 feature film *The Science of Sleep,* in which the main character fantasizes an alternate world built of cardboard. From Gomez's recollections of soccer fields on Boulder Highway to Favela's increasingly large yellow "wet floor" signs, this exhibition develops within a dream-like narrative.

To borrow from psychoanalytic language, condensation and displacement are anchored here via the ephemeral nature of the chosen materials. For instance, in *Untitled (Muppet Pile)* Favela condenses memories of his favorite *Sesame Street* characters into a pile that recalls the Luxor's pyramid, as well as the Mayan pyramids of his beloved Guatemala. A floating dolphin, placed above UNLV's infamous logo of Beauregard the

wolf, as well as the original placement of the Ichthyosaur skeleton when the Barrick was a natural history museum, challenges the viewer to consider the layers of both geological and institutional history. As a result, the history of the Mirage, UNLV, and the casinos' high priced public art collections (Damien Hirst at the Palms casino) are all aligned here with the personal, yet displaced within this space, pushing viewers to confront their own attachments to this chain of significations. In other words, *Sorry for the Mess* intends to displace the viewer in a web of historical recollections and personal implications.

Gomez's cardboard portraits and Favela's paper paintings not only erase the boundaries of medium hierarchies established by the art world, they also embrace the transitory visibility of laborers in the ever-changing façade that is Las Vegas. With *Seven Tire Mountains*, (2019) Favela creates a direct reference to Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains* (2016) subverting the meaning of land art into towers of toxic painted rubber that reference used tire stores throughout the valley. Similarly, Gomez creates a new type of equestrian landscape in *Los Jinetes (East Bonanza Rd. and North Nellis Blvd),* (2019) that recall the paintings of artists such as Peter Snayers (1592-1667), by way of an apparent new urban take on horsemanship in North Las Vegas. Both artists have constructed the space into a make-believe universe in which the discernable incongruent juxtaposition of art historical references, abstract painting, and paper mosaics evoke the memories and painful realities of a collective past.

Monuments seek to defeat death and transcend history, and in this installation both artists offer an ephemeral and metaphysical monument made out of cardboard and found-objects in order to re-define the memory of labor beyond the constraints of history. The traditional everlasting nature of the historic monument is here subverted into a dream sequence, whose resilience will linger in the memory of its visitors and not in the permanency of its physicality.

EMMANUEL ORTEGA RODRÍGUEZ, PhD

Emmanuel Ortega Rodríguez (PhD, Art History, University of New Mexico) is a curator, podcaster and a Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Ortega has lectured nationally and internationally on the topics of images of autos-de-fe, nineteenth-century Mexican landscape painting, and visual representations of the New Mexico Pueblo peoples in Novohispanic Franciscans martyr paintings. An essay titled "Hagiographical Misery and the Liminal Witness: Novohispanic Franciscan Martyr Portraits and the Politics of Imperial Expansion," was published by Brill in the spring of 2018.

JUSTIN FAVELA

Known for large-scale installations and sculptures that manifest his interactions with American pop culture and the Latinx experience, Justin Favela has exhibited his work both internationally and across the United States. His installations have been commissioned by the Denver Art Museum in Colorado and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas. His latest major project, *Recuérdame*, will be on view in New York City at the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling until September 8th, 2019. Favela hosts two culture-oriented podcasts, *Latinos Who Lunch* and *The Art People Podcast*.

RAMIRO GOMEZ

Ramiro Gomez uses the visibility of contemporary painting and sculpture to distinguish the workers whose everyday labor goes unrecognized by the society they serve. He focuses in particular on the lives of migrants in Los Angeles. Gomez's work has been exhibited in institutions across the United States, among them the Smithsonian Portrait Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Denver Art Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. A participant in the 2017 Whitney Biennial, he featured in three exhibitions across the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, including LACMA's important international group show, *Home – So Different, So Appealing*.

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