

**A Space of Their Own:**  
*Creating Liminal Spaces of Inclusiveness*

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*What happens to a dream deferred?*

*Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.*

*Or does it explode?*

"A Dream Deferred"  
Langston Hughes

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"Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve as independent reality."

Hermann Minkowski

The artists *Latitudes* present bring the aspects of space and time together to create an independent reality. Unlike time and place commonly presented in the Chicano Imaginary, which is typically stagnant, holding the artist and viewer prisoners of the past, *Latitudes* present a fresh perspective. Edward Said points out that the "oriental" or in our case, the non white "other" is a prisoner of time. They are a prisoner of a time that they neither control, nor can they actively participate in. It is this temporal castration that robs whole peoples of efficacy over their collective and individual

destinies. It lures them into longing for a return to a past that never was, holding them captive and unable to imagine alternate futures that break free of a past neither they nor their ancestors scripted. Unable to progress unfettered, their cultural production is forced to recreate cyclical images of self that feed a false identity. Joseph Cambell points out, "[m]yths are so intimately bound to culture, time, and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, the life just slips away from them." Some escape this paradigm and offer up alternative metaphors of being. *Latitudes* is such a space.

Instead, here we find fluidity, an open ended dialogue, an exploration and investigation into what it means to be human, here and now. Gone are the days of racial purity. We live in an age of multi racial societies who reside in what was once considered the "border badlands." What may seem "un-finished" or "drafts," to the unaware eye in these works, is merely an incarnation of the dynamic metamorphosis the human family is undergoing. This work resides at the nexus of this endeavor and beckons the viewer to visit, if not take up residency. *Latitudes* breaks away from tribalism and moves towards sharing human experience. As Brian Swimme points out, we are in between stories. We are at a point in human history where the human story is transitioning into something new; yet we do not know what that new narrative will be. We are in a nebulous place filled with possibilities.

The late 1800's closed an old chapter. Cultural production was changing. As Whistler pointed out, the photograph freed the artist from a 1:1 ratio representation of subjects and allowed for the possibility to explore beyond the mere representation of a tree. The photograph allowed for the exploration into what a tree is, or what is the essence of a tree. The photograph allowed for the question to be asked "what is a tree" rather than what a tree looks like. The creators of cultural production, artists, always served in the role of scripting the human story, but with colonization, many artists were unable to act as the visionaries of their societies. Those who attempted to were swiftly dealt with since empire follows art and not vice versa as Said stated. We are witnessing a reclaiming of cultural leadership by non-whites to define who they are and what the human story will be. They are not asking for the pen, they are crafting it out of what ever material is available.

Although *Latitudes'* artists moved away from the figurative, their aesthetic is not divorced from material reality. As benefactors of the Chicano Movement they do not apologetically seek acceptance. They create their own spaces of inclusiveness. The world we reside in is an expression of colonial expansion that brought the world closer together. One of the primary ways the West continues to exert its holds on the rest is via economic bondage. Yet the rest continue to resist this bondage through expressive culture and cultural production. *Latitudes'* aesthetic is part of that movement. It is an aesthetic that does not provide dominate society with the ability to reduce it into a caricature or what I term *piñata* culture. It does not offer iconographic expressions that are easily manipulated or co opted. Said pointed out that, that process becomes destructive and establishes a paradigm that creates "images of what [one] supposes themselves to have been prior to . . . colonization." *Latitudes* is a show that extends from a rich artistic tradition, but does not necessarily borrow from what is typically thought of as the Chicano Imaginary. Instead it is another chapter of a text unfolding.

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"To transgress I must move past boundaries, I must push against to go forward. Nothing changes in the world if no one is willing to make this movement. Everyone I know talks about border crossing these days, as though it were a simple matter not to stay in one's place, not to stand still. All this talk does nothing to change the reality that there are so many barriers blocking us to any space of fulfillment that it is impossible to go forward if one lacks the will to transgress." bell hooks

*Latitudes* does not offer a stagnate reality, but struggles with the difficulties of transgression that hooks discusses. It produces a release for those who are not willing" to stay in their place," which is a reoccurring theme in various other cultural productions, most notably in the plays of the English Renaissance playwrights. Writers such as Christopher Marlow, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare were such people to transgress the socially allocated hierarchy. An alternate vision is what minority cultures offer and once upon a time, these men were considered alternative voices. Prior to that, their voices were excluded because of their class standing. Shakespeare was the son of a glove maker and Marlow was a scholarship recipient at

Cambridge. John Dryden said of Shakespeare that "[h]e had the largest and most comprehensive soul," and "he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found here there." The artist presented in *Latitudes* share a kindred soul with the spirit of Dryden's words, for they too looked inward and found truth there. These sons's of working class men assisted and one may argue, defined our human story at that time.

However, the notion of not staying in ones place is not the sole property of the Renaissance man, but was a sentiment that ran rampant in the 1970's in the United States among ethnic minorities. Both struggled to eliminate boundaries. What minorities offer is a perspective of the world whose time has arrived. They create porous spaces where the viewer is allowed to transcend and that is where the drama of their work lies. Their aesthetic bears witness to the formation of liminal spaces of inclusiveness that are not locked into formal notions of space or time. Their aesthetic is rooted in the lyricality of boarder culture and does not allow for a settling or a homecoming. Their work goes beyond national narrative and locates culture in each of us and reminds us that the borders that exist in our minds are what prevent us from connecting with the larger human experience. Their aesthetic breaks down those barriers. They provoke us to examine who we are in hopes to teach us how to be in this world.

Traditionally Chicano Aesthetics are thought of as land based and with dealing with physical borders, returning home and places situated on a map. *Latitudes* does not allow for an easy homecoming because there is no home to return to. Where this show is universal is that we are all experiencing this as a human family. The viewer is asked to consider what or where is home or our space, the place where we are comfortable. These terms are being redefined.

Art acts as catalyst. It enables people to imagine possibilities outside of the ordinary and re-examine the everyday. When one thinks of Chicano Art, what is the question it poses? It asks: what does it mean to be Chicano? This crop of new artists asks: what does it mean to be human in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Brian Swimme points out that as a human species our relationship to the universe is being redefined. How we live on this earth and how we interact as individuals and as a collective human organism is altering and makes urgent the question-who are we?

The overtly political is that-overt and didactic and does not engage the viewer in a dialogue. *Latitudes'* works includes the use of mundane objects displaced and ask the viewer to look and consider reality differently. When one is not part of a dominate society, for any reason, the world view is much different.

The aesthetic also embraces enormity and the unfinished feel of the work touches on the unfinished nature of man's soul and the evolving nature of human society. The aesthetic also is a layering and intermingling of pigments, ideas and images and acts as the nexus of the cultural code-switching taking place in our world. It also includes a mix of the grand and the absurd. It is not about who we were or where we have been. This body of work asks who are we and what do we want to become and where do we want to go?

Moreover the viewer is not coerced into a voyeuristic encounter in a foreign liminal landscape. The viewer is invited in to share, in a very profoundly evocative moment that transcends the personal, allowing the space to belong completely to each viewer. The space becomes a sanctum for exploration into one's own identity. Moreover it requires an interrogation into who we are.

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Our story is changing. That is clear. What lacks definition is what direction that story will lead. The artists *Latitudes* offers are actively shaping and giving that story form. The peoples of the world were waiting on a dream deferred. A dream that all too often dried up like a raisin in the sun or exploded into the superlative of violent action. Abandoning a worthy and achievable dream or turning to violence did not lead to the attainment of that dream. It only manifested in partial fulfillment. This partial fulfillment lead to further frustration. The imagination can not create when fettered with frustration, which ultimately leads to self loathing.

This show is not about the phantasmal dream of freedom, but the longing for justice. What does justice taste like? What does it feel like? As psychologist Marla Freedman points out, if we can not imagine it, we can not make it happen. To weave spaces of inclusiveness for oneself is to move closer to justice. A space where you belong is a place where one feels accepted and safe. It is a place where one can engage in an active dialogue with one's self and it is this dialogue that leads to that transcendent moment we are discussing. Thoughtful cultural production, art, provides that forum. Without those porous forums of inclusiveness, humanity can not go forward.

The story of the last five hundred years was the story of injustice. It was a landscape of bondage and oppression where all of humanity felt the soul squelching effects of colonization. This also does not mean that we should think that justice reigned freely in the world prior to that. The world seldom tasted justice. We did glimpse it in fleeting moments that dissolved like gossamer before our eyes. It is also not utopian. A utopian society implies a false reality of "perfection" that does not require a legal code of justice. We too are not so naive to search out such a reality. Our new story is moving towards the story of justice and an integration of a world organism that includes all kingdoms of beings. In the words of the late poet June Jordan "if not now, then when? If not us, then who?" *Latitudes* is a page in our new book, a page whose ink is still wet and full of possibilities.

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