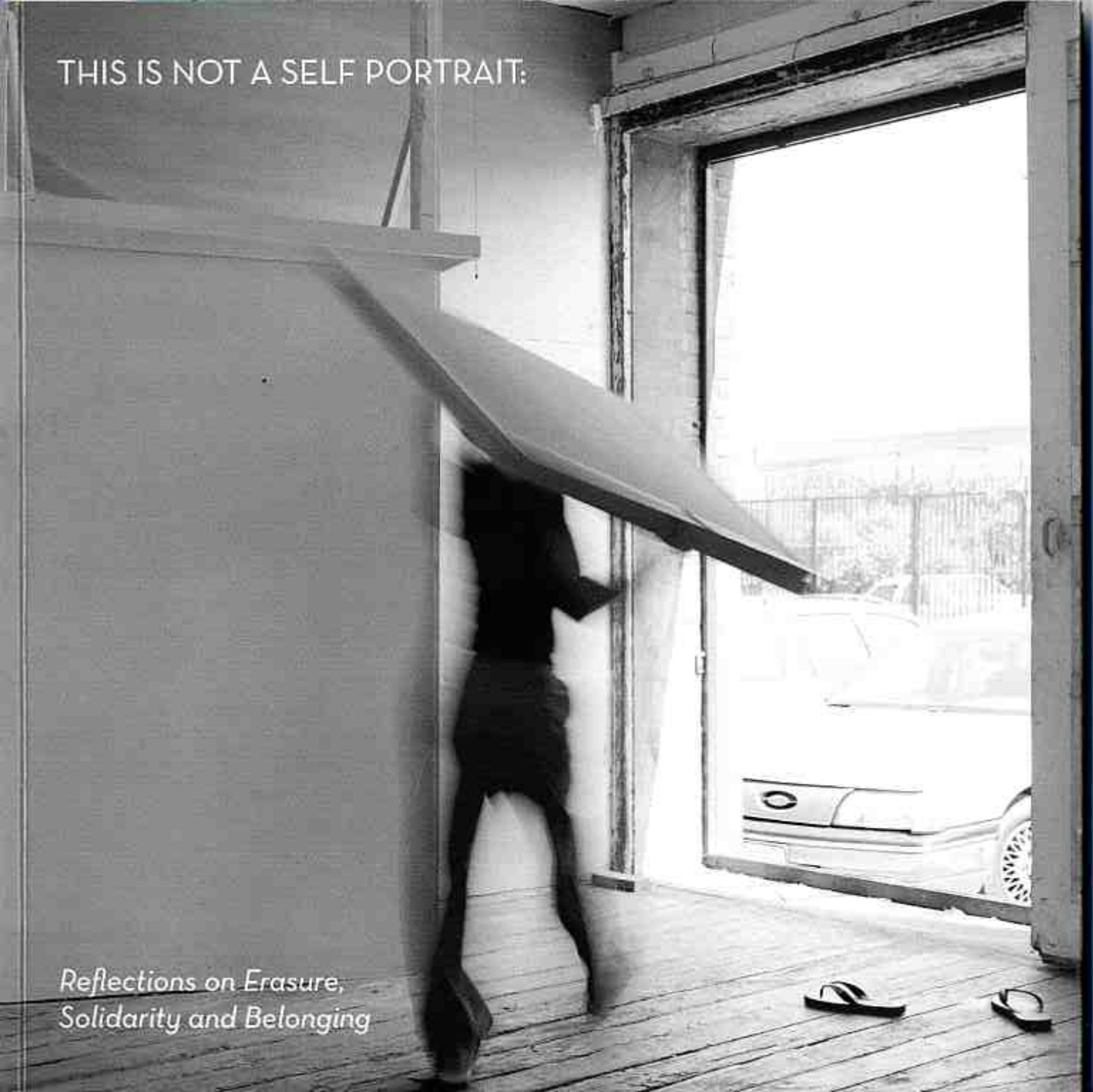
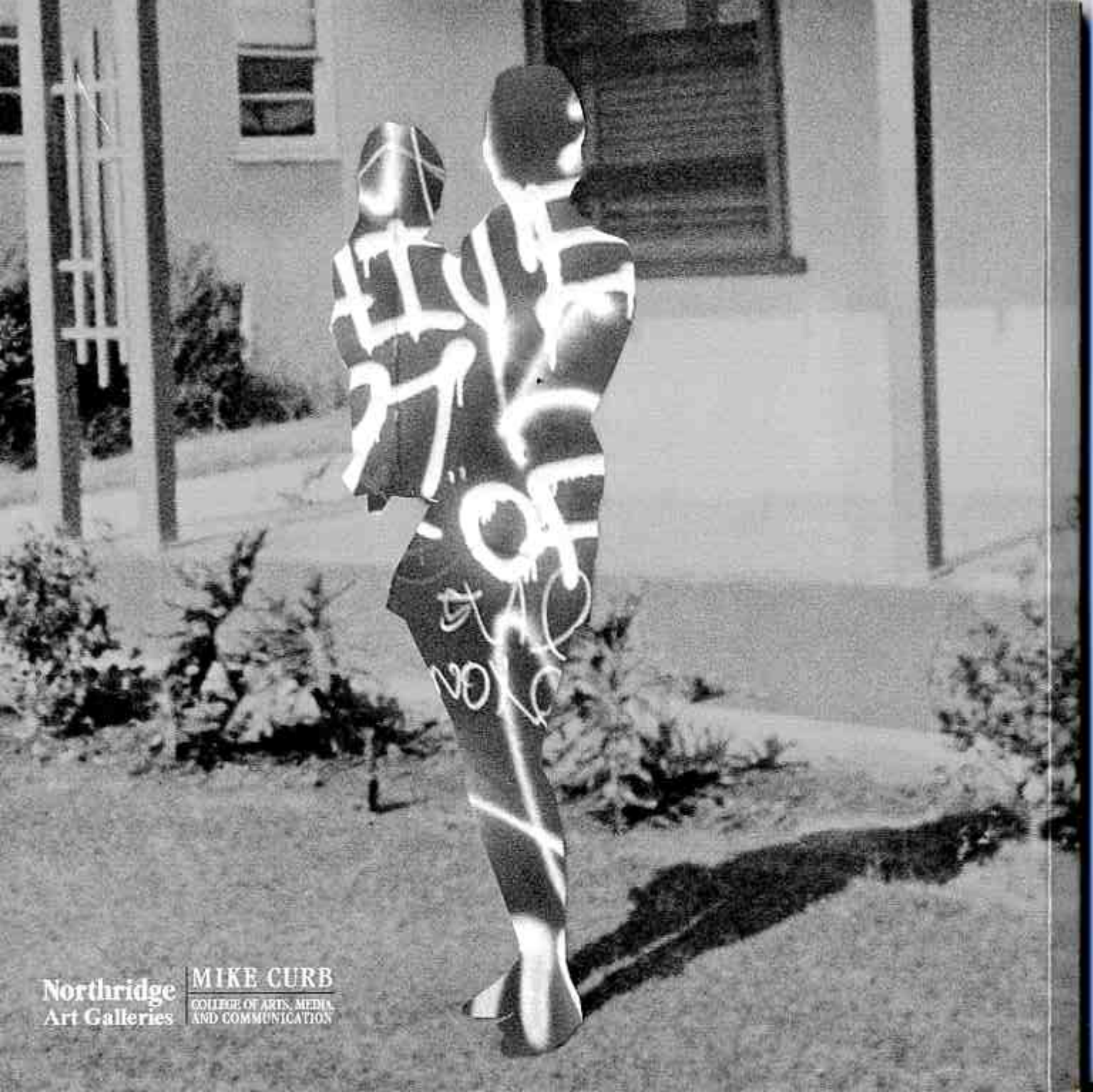


THIS IS NOT A SELF PORTRAIT:

*Reflections on Erasure,
Solidarity and Belonging*





Northridge
Art Galleries

MIKE CURB
COLLEGE OF ARTS, MEDIA
AND COMMUNICATION



Curatorial Statement

Self-Portraiture Otherwise: An Affective Engagement Between the Self and the Urgencies Everyday Life

This is Not a Self-Portrait... Reflections on Erasure, Solidarity, and Belonging focuses on eight Los Angeles-based artists who reconfigure the genre of self-portraiture: Mario Ybarra, Jr., Ana Serrano, Shizu Saldamando, Sandra de la Loza, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Christina Fernandez, Yreina D. Cervántez, and Michael Alvarez. While each grapples with the complicated and often conflicted project of self-imagining, they do not always identify with a longstanding notion of the self-portrait as a site uniquely suited for self-reflection, self-analysis, or even self-adulation. This exhibition considers the ways in which these artists push against the traditional expectations of the self-portrait, and how they reconfigure what self-portraiture constitutes as a practice.

The artists in this exhibition transform the discourse and formal practice of self-portraiture from focusing on the self as a singular subject to emphasizing the formation of the self as entangled in a complex array of contexts—social, political,

institutional, to name a few. The transformation allows their work to address pressing aesthetic, ethical, and geopolitical challenges, such as migration and labor, capitalism and exploitation, intolerance and acceptance, power and resistance, the abject and the humorous, collectivity and collaboration, love and bare vulnerability. The production and materiality of their work also conveys this change. From the brittleness of cardboard, to the enveloping security of bed sheets, to the scribbles scratched into paper, to the dizzyingly fast and fleeting videos, to the selfie weighed down by acrylic, to the blurry and nearly empty photographs, their materials intensify a sense of how forces and conditions shape the self. In the exhibition space, the interludes between the artists' works and the affinities between forms and concepts might raise questions in viewers about their own lives: I find myself here, how? Or, why am I not there where I had anticipated or desired to be? This transformation of form allows their work to offer an affective engagement between the self and the urgencies of everyday life, and between the artists' self and a world as it changes around them.

The central questions raised in this exhibition are: How can self-imaging offer an investigation into the concept of representation? How does this self-imaging linger somewhere between its construction in response to material, psychic, and sociopolitical conditions and those personas that one imagines, shuns, desires and/or with which one perhaps seeks affinity? How might deploying one's body, one's likeness, or the intimately personal allow for unflinching criticality? And an overarching question: How does their work hold open a space for understanding subjectivity as multi-constructed? Within the context of the exhibition space, the artists' work allows a glimpse of a complex politics of self-scrutiny. When situating the work in a larger context of the artist employing her/his likeness and the intimately personal, their work also offers an opportunity to consider just how precarious the formation of artistic identity can be.

Another makeover of the concept of self-portraiture emerges within the collaborative curatorial process. The artists actively contributed to the selection of their work. Some of them created new projects to reimagine the concept of self-portraiture. Still others utilized the exhibition's theoretical framework as an opportunity to restage and re-illuminate past work. Individually and collectively, they provide an opportunity to consider the exhibition as a space for self-reckoning, making visible a vast terrain of identities that are at once biting

humorous, melancholy, assertive, empowering, and absurd. In work diverse in form, conceptual approach, and methodology the artists demonstrate how employing self-resemblance engages the urgencies of everyday life, affirms desires, engenders solidarity, and creates a sense of belonging, suggesting a new function for portraiture in contemporary culture.

This is Not a Self-Portrait is loosely organized around keywords—erasure, belonging, and solidarity—based on concepts developed in relation to the issues raised in the artists' projects, discussed in interviews and e-mail exchanges with them, and in response to their artist statements (reproduced in this exhibition catalogue). These keywords are intended to animate questions about their work and to provide an interpretive framework for thinking about the formation of the self (and our other-selves) in a sociopolitical context. The exhibition serves as a critical encounter with select works by each artist and not to give an account of their overall artistic project. It affords viewers an opportunity to activate a complex crisscrossing between the artists' work, the spaces and pauses between the works, the overall exhibition space, and this exhibition catalogue. In all aspects of *This is Not a Self-Portrait*, the primary goals have been to curate alongside the artists and to provide a reflective and analytical space for viewers to engage their work.

MARIO ONTIVEROS

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Curator's Notes: The artist, her/his representative, and/or Mario Ontiveros contributed to the biographies. Each artist contributed statements that either addresses her/his specific work included in the exhibition and/or provides an overview of her/his artistic practice. While the statements vary in tone, scope, and length, they emphasize the issues raised in the artists' work and also highlight their formal and conceptual concerns.

Sandra de la Loza





Sandra de la Loza is a Los Angeles based artist whose work critically investigates questions of power and representation within contemporary political, social, and cultural landscapes. She is the founder of The Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History, an on-going project that engages the subject of "History" through critical inquiry and artistic processes. Through collaborations with specific communities she finds strategies of making invisible histories visible through transdisciplinary research based projects that result in multi-media installations, video, photographic work, publications and public interventions. In *Mural Remix*, a solo exhibition that was part of the Getty's PST initiative, she took the role of a performative archivist to expand on existing understandings of 1970's Chicana/o murals. As an artist entering the archive, she occupies the position normally held by historians, curators and scholars to interrogate the power embedded in the act of history making. By gathering, slicing, blowing up, and remixing archival material, she explores History as an elastic space of practice, one that can be shaped, stretched and expanded while making visible the processes in which dominant narratives are created.



Comadres
from the
series *Mi
Casa Es Su
Casa*, 2003.
B/W archival
inkjet print,
11 x 16 inches.
Courtesy of
the artist.



*Mother and
Child* from
the series
*Mi Casa Es Su
Casa*, 2003.
B/W archival
inkjet print,
11 x 16 inches.
Courtesy of
the artist.

Statement

Mi Casa Es Su Casa: The notion of the photograph as a visual text that could be read and analyzed along with the understanding of the family photograph as a form of self-representation were guiding ideas as I viewed my own family photographs. Thumbing through countless images of birthday parties, weddings, baptisms and anniversaries, I became aware of patterns in the photos. The images were often taken during special occasions in which we wore our nicest clothes and carefully posed for the camera. In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes observes: "Now once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes. I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body of myself. I transform myself in advance into an image."^[1] The family photos were fabrications. We posed and turned ourselves into images, yet they revealed so much. In those old photos, I saw the other body we collectively created. The level of conformity struck me. We turned ourselves into the archetype of the family, which we had seen a million versions of in mass culture. I was struck by the vast distance between the constructed image within the photos and my personal knowledge of what we had lived. The photos were a surface, a recording of the face we put on, that masked a much more complex world that lay underneath. Fanon writes, "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle."^[2] I was struck by how we began to imitate the images of what a family was supposed to look like. The facade bothered me, because with historic insight, I knew what brewed beneath: my parents' self-consciousness of their "Mexicaness" when we entered non-Mexican parts of town, my father's anger, the economic tensions, which these images sought to erase. I reflected on what was "absent" as much as what was "present." I wanted to undo the photo; those figures dressed in starched Sunday shirts did not tell me of the present nor did they speak accurately of the past. I desired to deconstruct the photo to uncover what brewed beneath those perfect lawns and the sensuous curves of those old/new Chevy's. They told me of something that never truly existed the way it appeared; they did not tell what lurked beneath those perfect lawns and the stiff taffeta.

[1] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (New York: Noonday), 16.

[2] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 18.



Children from the series Mi Casa Es Su Casa, 2003. Inkjet print, 4.25 x 4.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Mother from the series *Mi Casa Es Su Casa*, 2014. Inkjet print, 12 x 10 inches. Courtesy of the artist.