



YVETTE MAYORGA GREAT AGAIN

September 10 – October 27, 2019, Foyer Gallery





Great Again by Yvette Mayorga is a video of collaged images set to the song *Que Tal America* by the group Two Man Sound. The video is a visual and auditory cacophony of contrasting ideas, creating a platform for Mayorga to position herself as a Chicana creator, choosing to have fun with the iconography that reminds her of her upbringing and speaks closely to the trials and tribulations of Americans of Mexican heritage, also known as Chicana/o/x, living in the United States.

In *Great Again* Mayorga rewards the viewer with growing intimacy, depending on how closely a viewer is willing to look, understand and empathize. The first thing viewers are asked to consider with Mayorga's work is the title, *Great Again* — most certainly a reference to Donald Trump's presidential campaign catchphrase, "Make America Great Again." On two occasions an image of Trump is visible with a caption below him saying, "I will build a great wall. And no one builds walls better than me, believe me." Mayorga starts a push and pull of comfort by, on multiple occasions, building and unbuilding her own neon pink brick wall in the video.

Contrasting notions of comfort and discomfort in the United States are furthered by Mayorga with her choices of audio that accompany the moving images of *Great Again*. The song, *Que Tal America* is a light-hearted disco era piece from 1977 that speaks about how much the singer enjoys the moment with America. Interspersed with *Que Tal America* are short clips of a speech given by the civil rights leader Cesar Chavez

in 1984 about the importance of farmworkers being able to cast votes in a fair election. The audio can be heard saying that unless free and fair elections are brought to California for farm workers that several fatal results will occur for these people. It can be heard, early in *Great Again* that without free elections, "malnutrition among children will continue. It means the short life expectancy and the inhuman living and working conditions will continue." That is followed with

"In 1982, corporate growers gave Deukmejian one million dollars to run for governor of California. Since he took office, Deukmejian has paid back his debt to the growers with the blood and sweat of California farm workers. Instead of enforcing the law as it was written against those who break it, Deukmejian invites growers who break the law to seek relief from governor's appointees. What does all this mean for farm workers? It means that the right to vote in free elections is a sham!"

This referencing of Cesar Chavez connects *Great Again* to Mayorga's biography as the daughter of immigrants and the importance she places on the rights of those in the United States that work many of the high labor jobs that are taken for granted in this country.



For much of the visuals of *Great Again*, Mayorga uses what appears to be cake icing to illustrate the domestic scenes throughout the video. The metaphorical sweetness of the icing made of colored building caulk, in Mayorga's video acts in contrast to the distasteful xenophobic political messages, and guns, while embracing the celebration of a young girl's bedroom, full of doll house domestic scenes.

When looking at the individual domestic iconography that is present throughout the video: emojis, mickey mouse, fabuloso house cleaner, wrought iron gates, vacuum cleaners, home pools, and a baby Jesus that might be found in a *ofrenda* (alter), we can see how Mayorga has taken these quotidian objects and brought each into the fine art realm, much in the way that the Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains has written about in her essay, "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana *Rasquachismo*." In the essay, Mesa-Bains describes how within Chicano culture women — due to the lack of support from their male counterparts — have had to create with left over bits of household objects like tires, broken plates, and plastic containers. Mesa-Bains goes on to say that an item like the baby Jesus can be used in an *ofrenda*, a practice that dates to pre-Hispanic times, marking the dual nature of indigenous and colonized ancestry of those that take part in the creative ritual.ⁱⁱ

These domestic icons are interspersed in *Great Again* with other symbols that speak to and/or about a Chicana/o/x audience, including people walking through a field, either walking towards

the United States or working as immigrant labor, referencing the previously discussed Cesar Chavez quotes. Along with this we see flashes of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) agents and President Trump on a television screen. With all of these images set to the catchiness of the disco era *Que Tal America*, the viewer is at once lulled into a sense of excitement and celebration and placed in a state of fear with images of President Trump, I.C.E. agents and bedazzled automatic weapon... if the viewer allows themselves to see how many of these images are daily dangers for a Chicana/o/x person.

And therein lies the duality of what Mayorga presents in *Great Again*. For members of the Chicana community there is an unguarded intimacy, a semi-secret language of icons, messages, and figures that are common around the house and the community. For those not in the Chicana community, a viewer is allowed a window into what it is to experience life, with both joy and worry, music and tears, all while trying to find a place as women, pushing against the gendered expectations of traditional Chicano and American culture.

ⁱCesar Chavez, "Cesar Chavez: Commonwealth Club Address," Delivered November 1984, Transcribed Speech, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworker/movement/essays/essays/CESAR%20CHAVEZ%20COMMONWEALTH%20SPEECH.pdf>

ⁱⁱAmalia Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana *Rasquachismo*," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega and Terezita Romo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 92-95.

The Freedman Gallery at Albright College, named after former Albright trustee and alumna Doris Chanin Freedman, is located on the ground floor of the Center for the Arts. Since its inception, the gallery focuses primarily on contemporary, living, American artists and hosts approximately twelve exhibitions each year rotating in the Main Gallery, Project Space, and Foyer Gallery. Freedman Gallery is located at 13th & Bern Streets, Reading, PA 19612. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 1-4 p.m. The gallery is closed on Mondays, holidays, breaks and summer. **(See Albright.edu/calendar).**

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Curated by Alana J. Coates Text written by Isabel Servantez

Isabel Servantez earned his MA in modern and contemporary art history from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work focuses on Chicano/o/x art, Latina/o/x art, institutional critique, and curation. Servantez is a contributing author to Unfiltered.

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All images: **Yvette Mayorga** *Great Again*, 2017 Single channel video, 3:12 minutes