

RYAN LEE

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Martine Gutierrez

VR EXHIBITION: *CHINA DOLL*, Rated R

Artist's Statement:

We betray ourselves by denying the complex accounting of our identities. How do we unburden ourselves of the limits of language? We seem to re-name every time a new label is propagated. Like a distinctive melody commercialized into a jingle. Everyone will have their 15 minutes of fame in the commerce of Identity. We are trapped in a labyrinth of our own making, an inescapable power structure. Unnatural blondes, re-born into the proximity of power, are marked by tragedy. Another ingenue, another era of Marilyn, Anna, Diana, Candy, Britney, JonBenet. Another beautiful obituary for us to aspire to.

China Doll is the experience of wanting to be “the image” so badly that you sacrifice what you really need. Consume until you are. Touching the flame, becoming the mold to break her. It wasn't until manifesting into this bombshell, that I could see my aspirations for what they truly are. The child inside has to say “I am not more beautiful as Britney Spears.” What does it take to recognize our stars are voids, inherently as blank as mannequins? This famous aspiration of perfection—whether a personal or public impulse—is a piling of references. The exercise of those references is art directed, archived into media is the perpetuation of our colonial hierarchies. Blonde is the cheapest privilege you can buy.

Press release

Long interested in the study of society's nuanced and deceptively complex eye on gender, culture, and race, Martine Gutierrez furthers her investigation of the intricacies of identity in three sets of new works coalescing in a virtual reality: *CHINA DOLL*.

The artist re-brands herself as blonde in a series of photographs in which she poses various scenarios, exploring her proximity to blonde ambition—a foil to her previous *Indigenous Woman* project. Sought after by women across the cultural and socio-political spectrum, the blonde that Gutierrez studies and embodies is hyper-visible and over-exposed. With an eye on the simultaneous desirability and tragedy of Hollywood's innumerable “fallen” blonde starlets, Gutierrez delivers an inquisitive, if not irreverent look at the cultural trap society has laid out for a specific, narrow, and ultimately infeasible idea of womanhood.

Gutierrez investigates this theme across three new projects, including *Body En Thrall*, *Blonde*, which extends the artist's previous series on mainstream narratives of luxury, desire, and power; and *Plastics*, a new series of photographs that toys with impersonation, violence, and idolatry through the styling of these personas.

In conjunction with these projects, the artist produced, directed, and stars in a film by the same title as the VR experience, *China Doll*, that bases its narrative on a poem only visible upon entrance to the exhibit.

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Martine Gutierrez (b. 1989 Berkeley, CA) is an artist, performer, and musician who produces elaborate narrative scenes that employ pop culture tropes in order to explore the complexity, fluidity and nuances of both personal and collective identity in terms of race, gender, class, indigeneity, and culture. Working across performance, photography and film, Gutierrez simultaneously acts as subject, artist and muse. She asserts control over her own image by executing each stage of the creative process herself, including staging, lighting, makeup, costuming, modeling and photography.

Gutierrez's earlier bodies of work—*Real Doll* (2013), *Girl Friends* (2014) and *Line Up* (2014)—explore gender, intimacy and fantasy, often incorporating mannequins as ambiguous characters in constantly shifting realities. Her semi-autobiographical film, *Martine Part I - IX* (2012 - 2016), is a meditation on personal transformation that begun while she was an undergraduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design, and was finished years later as a young artist in New York City. The episodic video work follows the eponymous character from Providence to New York via Central America and the Caribbean, communing with urban architecture and natural elements such as sand, water and air. Martine negotiates the permanent and the fleeting, moving from place to place, as she journeys to self-discovery.

In 2018, Gutierrez produced *Indigenous Woman*, a 124-page magazine replete with fashion spreads, product advertisements and a Letter from the Editor all dedicated, as Gutierrez describes it, to “the celebration of Mayan Indian heritage, the navigation of contemporary indigeneity and the ever-evolving self-image.” Through the style and construct of the glossy magazine, Gutierrez subverts conventional ideals of beauty to reveal how deeply sexism, racism, transphobia and other biases are embedded in our culture. This body of work has been exhibited all over the world, including the 58th Venice Biennale.

Gutierrez received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2012. She is also a published musician and has produced several commercial videos. Gutierrez lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Gutierrez has been included in exhibitions at the Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston (2020); Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College (2019); Hayward Gallery, London (2019); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art (2019); the New Museum, New York (2018); Arnot Art Museum, Elmira (2017); Lowe Gallery at Hofstra University (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (2017); Vincent Price Art Museum, Monterey Park (2017); Boston University Art Gallery (2016); and the McNay Art Museum, (2015).

Her work has been acquired by the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME; Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, Stanford, CA; The Frances Lehman Loeb Museum, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX; Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, Providence, RI; Rockwell Museum, Corning, NY; and The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.