

THE RADICAL IMAGINATION

A retrospective portfolio
by Favianna Rodriguez





Photo by Israel Alemu, 2020





Photo by Bobby Gordon, 2022

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Introduction

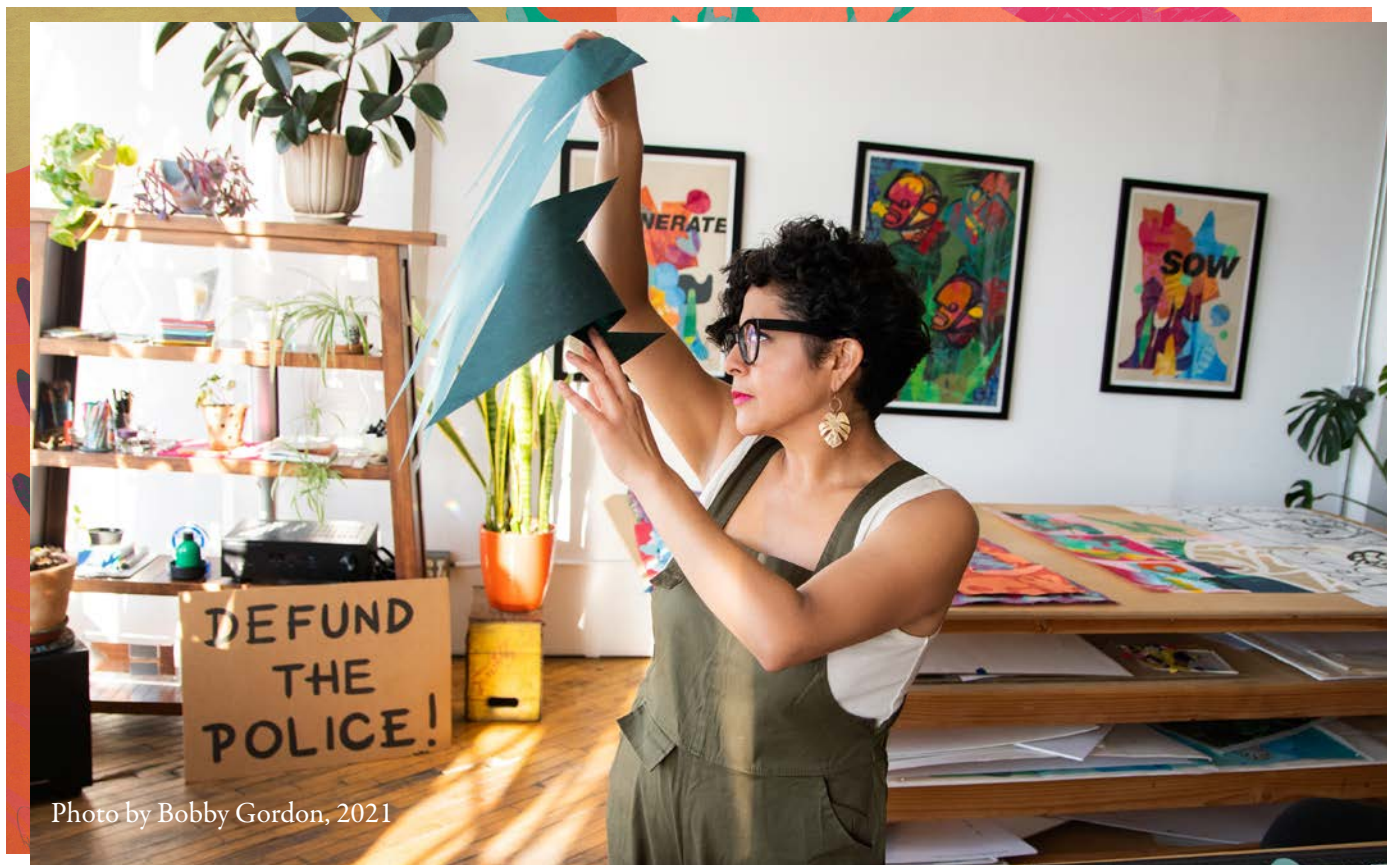


Photo by Bobby Gordon, 2021

I'm thrilled to unveil my debut print portfolio, as it encapsulates the essence and diversity of my artistic journey. I create art, stories, and institutions that shift worldviews toward justice, liberation, and ecological harmony. My roots as an artist and cultural leader were formed growing up in the immigrant neighborhood of Fruitvale in Oakland, California. I come from a community that was directly impacted by the war on drugs and that has been poisoned by the fossil fuel industry for decades.

I'm also a living witness to the legacy of the Black Panthers and Chicano Movement, and saw firsthand the birth of hip-hop. It was Latine muralists in the Bay Area who taught me to leverage symbols and culture to transform the imagination. Art was my lifeline through the hard years of my childhood, as mainstream media failed to represent my community. Latine people were virtually absent, and when depicted, were vilified as criminal immigrants.

Key political moments in California during my teens—such as the end of affirmative action in 1996 and the birth of state-based anti-immigrant legislation in 1994—shaped my desire

to become involved in social movements. I became a youth artist-activist at age fifteen and quickly learned how culture shapes policies.

As a woman of color artist, I encountered systemic barriers that hindered my progress at every turn. Art was not presented to me as a viable career option. My parents, newcomers to this country, viewed art as a hobby rather than a legitimate career path. Yet I participated in after-school art programs and received mentorship from numerous artists of color, particularly Latine artists within my community. Today, I'm grateful for the availability of community funding that facilitated free access to art programs in my neighborhood. Without this support, I would not have had the opportunity to engage with the arts.

Through these experiences, I gained insight into the transformative potential of art as a means of self-expression and cultural empowerment. I learned how art serves as a tool for conveying messages of resilience and power, countering the erasure and oppression experienced by BIPOC communities.

I strongly believe that artists have a unique potential to change systems. I create art about the issues that have most affected me—racial, gender, climate, and reproductive justice. My artistic practice leverages the catalytic power of images and stories to challenge ingrained narratives and portray a joyful future where ALL thrive. Over the past two decades, I have explored the mediums of visual art, storytelling, film, social media, and public speaking and developed cultural strategy partnerships with social movements, national parks, entertainment companies, and philanthropic organizations.

I not only create objects, I also build institutions. Since 2001, I have co-founded and led organizations that empower artists engaged in social change, such as the Eastside Arts Alliance and The Center for Cultural Power.

The foundation of my practice is to express collective truths about impacted communities, to build narrative power, and to generate art and experiences that transform the imagination and increase the public will for social and cultural change. My work engages with a wide range of themes, from climate justice to abortion, from supporting unions to standing in solidarity with migrants, from healing to liberation.

Celebrating twenty-five years as a professional artist, my commitment to autonomy and radical social change remains constant. This portfolio serves as a testament to my evolution—an amalgamation of introspection, experimentation, and unapologetic dedication to amplifying marginalized voices and driving collective liberation.

Many thanks to my incredible studio team who made this project possible. Nichol Markowitz, Master Printer; Jay Katelansky, Communications Manager, and Carolina Aguirre, photographer and designer for the interior of this catalog. Gratitude to Nick James, cover designer, and Addy Rabinovitch, copyeditor. And finally, a tremendous thank you to Marshall Weber at Booklyn for his encouragement and support in bringing this body of work to fruition, offering a glimpse into the depth and breadth of my artistic vision.



“Survivor Justice” (2018)
Monotype Collage and Acrylic on Wood
Panel, 40 x 30 inches



Favianna standing at her public art installation, Ancestral Futurism, at the Presidio Tunnel Tops Park, San Francisco, CA. Photo by Craig Lee, 2022.

Portfolio Contents

THE RADICAL IMAGINATION is a retrospective print portfolio that documents a fifteen-year span of my artistic practice. I am a culture keeper of various forms of resistance art, including linoleum block, screen printing and stenciling. My mark making consists of the blending of traditional printmaking techniques with modern digital tools. Color plays a very strong role in my work. My palette is inspired both from Latin American visual culture and the 1980's Bay Area graffiti palette.

I create art that delves into issues deeply personal to me, including racial, gender, and climate justice. Recognizing the transformative power of culture, I understand that it's not solely about reacting to oppression but also about envisioning alternative worlds. In 2012, after more than a decade of producing bold, confrontational art that directly addressed pressing issues, I made a conscious decision to shift my focus towards creating art that reflected the world I aspired to see and the healing journey I was undertaking.

In this transition, I gravitated towards more intricate mediums, seeking to convey themes beyond the immediacy of the moment. My art became a means of healing from generational trauma and dismantling the narratives of colonialism and white supremacy. Through my work, I aim to facilitate conversations, inspire reflection, and foster collective healing and transformation.

The pieces in the collection range from powerful protest pieces editioned globally in the thousands, to the most intimate, complex, and unique linoleum block and screen-printed collages. The works address themes of racial justice, immigrant rights, abortion, decolonization, climate change, food sovereignty, sexual freedom, and wellbeing.

Boxed Set: Limited Edition of 15

Contains: 20 prints and posters (ranging from 2008- 2024), one printed, Ben & Jerry's ice cream pint-sized container

Mediums: Collage, Screen Print, Linoleum Block, Digital Art and Offset

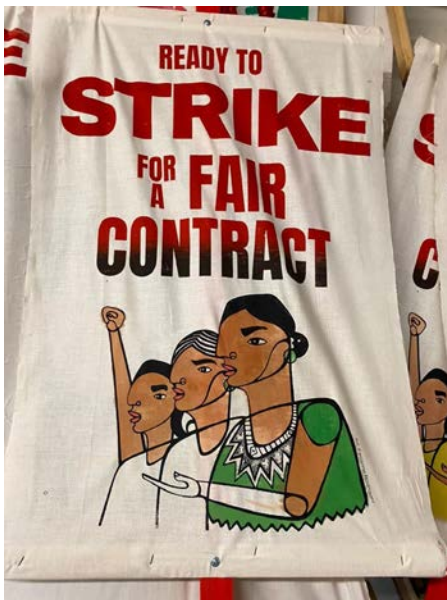




Favianna at an art build that she organized with CultureStrike for the *Until We Are All Free* project. 2015, Oakland, CA.



"Migration is Beautiful" butterfly painted on banners for pro-migrant march with Voces de la Frontera, Milwaukee, WI. 2016.



Favianna's art painted on banners for the Oakland Teacher's Strike in 2019 during a community art build, Oakland, CA.



"Migration is Beautiful" community art workshop with Latine community members in Telluride, CO during 2018 Mountain Film Festival.



Children and youth visit Favianna's installation at the Oakland Museum of California, 2017



Favianna's "Migration is Beautiful" butterfly on banners for pro-migrant march with Voces de la Frontera, Milwaukee, WI. 2016.



Members of the National Educators Alliance proudly display Favianna's "Dreamers Welcome" poster during Action Summer 2013, Washington DC.



"Migration is Beautiful" butterfly used on children's signs for pro-migrant march with Voces de la Frontera, Milwaukee, WI. 2016.



Members of Justseeds Collective displaying Favianna's "Defend Our Mother" poster to promote the People's Climate March, 2014.



Favianna's "Occupy Sisterhood" art reprinted on a banner to protest anti-abortion laws. 2018.



A climate protest against big oil by Northern California Climate Mobilization features Favianna's art on posters and banners. Oakland, CA, 2015.



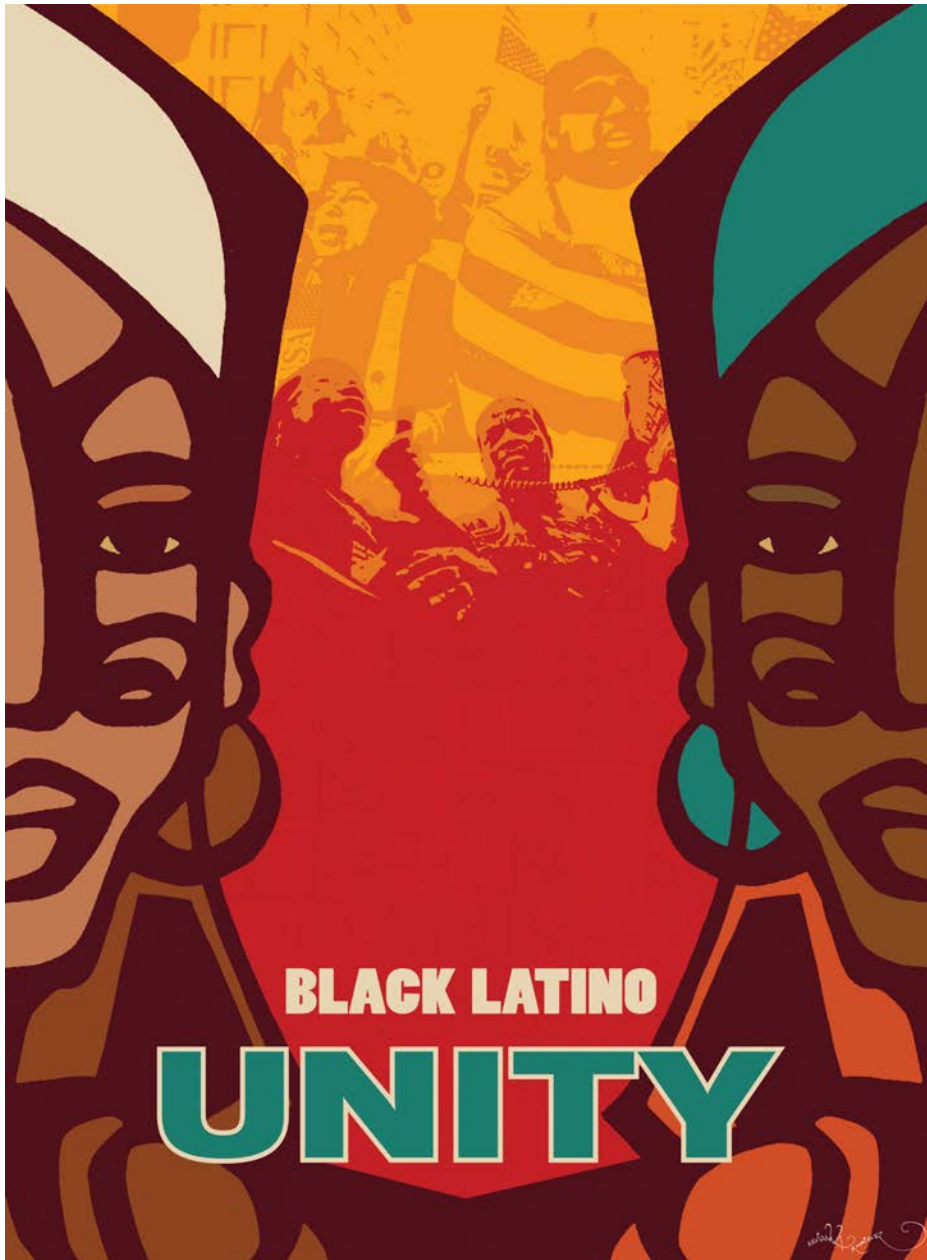
Favianna making signs about eco-feminism in preparation for the 2014 People's Climate March, New York.



"Migration is Beautiful" pro-migrant art printed by the California Endowment on shirts and distributed to kids groups, 2017.



Favianna and friends at reproductive justice rally demanding safe and legal abortion access. Oakland, CA, 2017.



Black Latino Unity

2008

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

This piece celebrates a groundbreaking Black and Latino Summit that took place in Los Angeles in 2008, organized by the groundbreaking organization, Policy Link. The images depict the parallels between the social injustices faced by Latine and Black communities in the United States. Both communities face structural racism, family separation, economic inequity, and mass incarceration. Despite these monolithic challenges, both communities are resilient and are organizing around their self-determination. The piece serves as a call for unity and solidarity among all people of color.

Additionally, many Latine people are also Black, yet this truth is not always embraced due to colonization and racism. Slavery was prevalent throughout Latin America, even more so than in the United States. Yet many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have moved slowly—or failed entirely—to recognize the deep impacts of racism and continue to promote a white-centric culture. This piece also serves as a call for Latine people to recognize their African roots and engage in anti-racism work.



Make Out Not War

2008

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

This poster was originally commissioned by Code Pink and launched at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. It was designed to interject an eye-catching, pro-peace statement about love into the convention where Barack Obama was selected as the Democratic candidate. The peace signs in the woman's sunglasses represent the need for us to work together to build a better future.

It was critical to create this art piece as Obama first entered the Democratic landscape as a viable candidate. There was a women-led movement that demanded that Obama not continue the atrocious policies of his predecessor, George W. Bush, who led Americans into believing that Iraqis were hiding weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Through this fabricated narrative, former President Bush set the tone for an apocalyptic approach to the WMD issue that justified a failed global war and the massacre of over 4,400 Americans and nearly 100,000 Iraqis through his eight-year tenure.



El Maíz Es Nuestro

2009

18" x 12"

Digital Print

I developed this piece to expose how the planting of transgenic corn (maíz) in Mexico was a crime against farmers, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. The domination of genetically modified seeds, along with unfair trade agreements such as NAFTA, destroyed biodiversity and forced many farmers all over Latin America into poverty.

As a child of the diaspora, I was raised in a culture that revered corn. My family migrated from Peru, yet I grew up surrounded by Chicanos and migrants from throughout Mexico who used this ancient grain for making tortillas, tacos, tamales, atole, and much more.

Corn has shaped my identity since I was a newborn. Inspired by the loving guidance of my Mexican caretakers, this artwork pays homage to the rich heritage of maíz and its significance in our lives. When I became a teenage activist, I started learning about the threats to the ancestral Mexican corn seed that GMO seeds posed. Standing in solidarity with food sovereignty movements, I witnessed the power of Mexican food protectors in their fight against corporate giants. Their unwavering spirit led to monumental victories, including a ban on GMO corn in Mexico.

As of January 31, 2024, it is illegal to grow genetically modified corn on Mexican soil. In 2020, Mexico expanded the prohibition to ban all GMO corn, including imports, to protect its food security, its rural communities, its food heritage, and the health of its people.

The corn does not belong to corporations. The corn belongs to the people. The corn is ours! El Maíz Es Nuestro!



Tu Lucha Es Mi Lucha

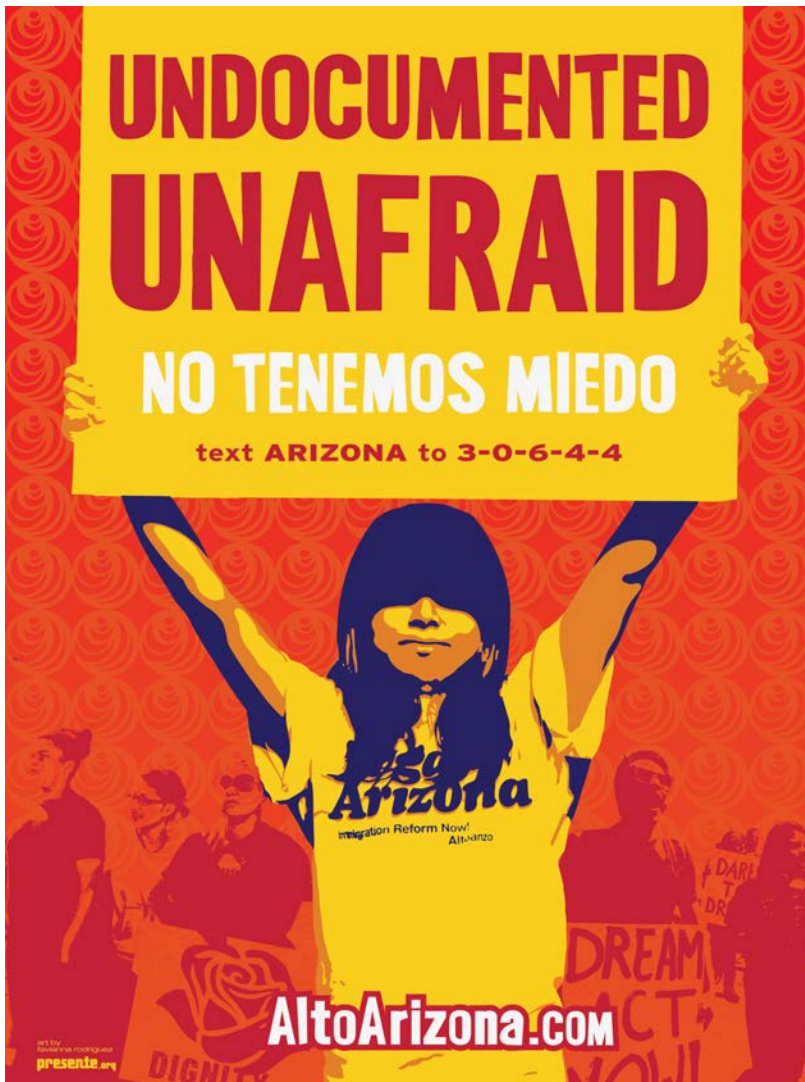
2010

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

This piece reads "Tu Lucha es Mi Lucha," which translates to "Your Struggle is My Struggle." On the left is a farmer reaching out toward the planet, which is represented by a seed. The woman on the right is singing and sharing her truth. The two figures at the top are looking to the future. I placed a plant inside the seed as a metaphor for our ecosystem, to show how all forms of life are dependent on each other. This piece was originally designed for the United States Social Forum in 2010.

The design for this poster was heavily influenced by the Cuban posters created through The Organization in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). OSPAAAL was established following the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966. OSPAAAL was formed to promote "solidarity with the Third World people's struggles, claims and most precious desires." They supported African struggles against colonialism and apartheid and produced many posters related to Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Cuba, the United States, and Puerto Rico. I was deeply inspired by these posters in their bold but limited color palettes and their simple approach to representing figures.



Undocumented Unafraid

2010

24" x 18"

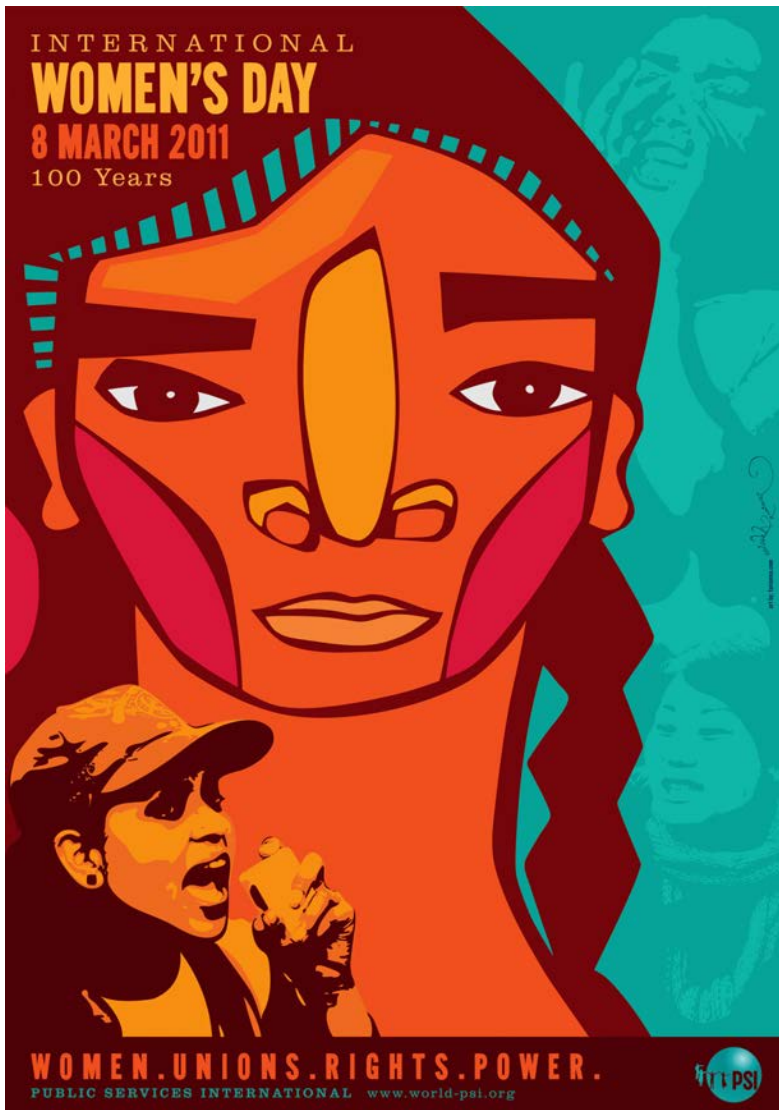
Offset Poster

In 2010, the Arizona senate introduced and eventually passed a horrific anti-immigrant law, SB1070—the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” which became known as the “show me your papers law” for targeting brown people. A powerful movement of organizers around the country rose up to fight it, including artists, musicians, and writers.

Chicano activist musician Zack de la Rocha from Rage Against the Machine organized Sound Strike to boycott Arizona. It inspired a handful of musicians to stop playing in Arizona because the state had become a laboratory for several racist policies. Inspired by them, I traveled to Arizona as part of an artist delegation to document the impacts on women and children. At one of the marches, I photographed a young

Latina girl in the crowd and developed this poster.

Around 2009, the phrase, “Undocumented and Unafraid” emerged as a slogan for a new immigrant youth movement. No longer living in the shadows, undocumented students began organizing and advocating for change in immigration policy, building a new civil rights movement as they rejected respectability politics and owned their lived experiences as a source of power. Their organizing led to the passing of DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which gave young undocumented immigration temporary relief from deportation. This poster was originally commissioned by AltoArizona.com, an initiative of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON).



International Women's Day

2011

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

This poster commemorates the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day (March 8), a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality. The image depicts a Latina worker organizing her community. Behind her is a depiction of a feminine figure symbolizing both Mother Earth and every woman on the planet.

In my art practice, I intentionally draw women as powerful, bold, and inspiring beings. One of the greatest challenges for me growing up was to gain my self-esteem as a young woman of color in a culture that centered whiteness. I became an artist to claim my voice, and to show BIPOC women in our fullest capacity.

This piece was commissioned by Public Services International (PSI), a union based in Geneva, Switzerland, that represents 650 public sector trade unions and their 20 million public sector workers—the majority of whom are women. It was distributed to unions throughout the world.



Migration Is Beautiful

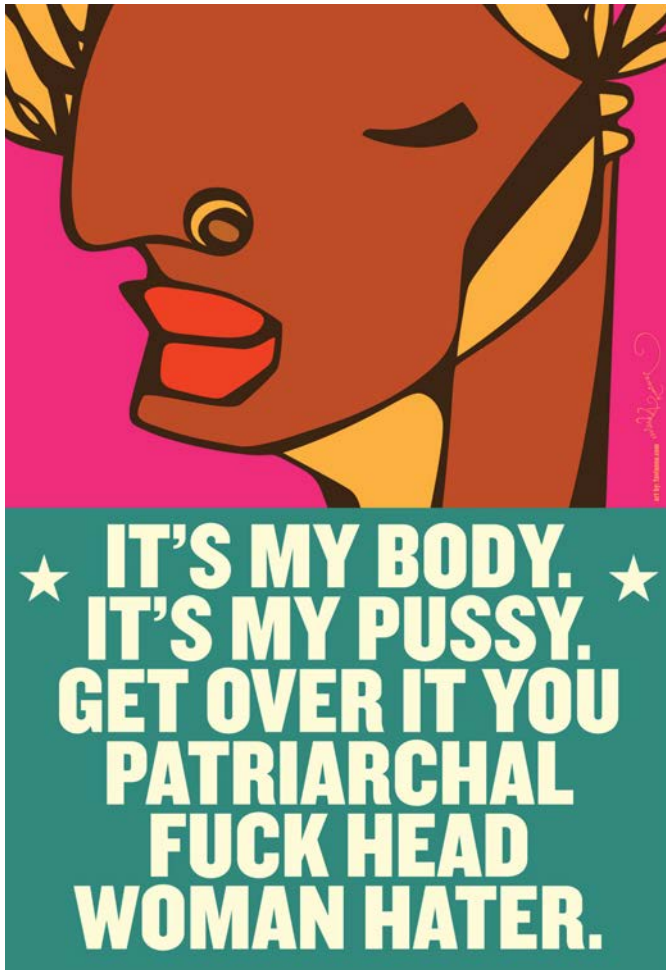
2012

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

The monarch butterfly represents the beauty of migration. We belong to nature, and nature has no borders. The butterfly is a symbol for the right of all living beings to move freely. Like the monarch butterfly, human beings cross borders in search of safer habitats to survive. In this figure, each wing shows a human profile. The phrase, "Migration is Beautiful," celebrates the resiliency, courage, and determination of migrants who come in search of their dreams.

I launched the "Migration is Beautiful" campaign in 2012 at the Democratic National Convention in collaboration with the UndocuBus. At the time, former President Obama was deporting over 1,100 immigrants a day. Since then, this symbol has become a popular symbol of the global immigrant rights movement and one of my most prominently circulated works.



It's My Body It's My Pussy

2012

17" x 12"

Digital Print

These two posters are part of a series of feminist reactions in 2012, as politicians and conservatives waged an all-out war on women's bodies—threatening our access to healthcare, our right to birth control, and our right to free, accessible, and safe abortion. 2012 was a special year for me because it's when I came out about my abortions. The harmful policies of 2011 inspired this poster series, as thirty-six states enacted a then-record ninety-two new laws that restricted legal abortions and targeted abortion providers. The attacks on abortion continue today with the overturning of *Roe V. Wade*.



I'm A Slut

2012

17" x 12"

Digital Print

I came out about my own abortion to break the silence and to shed the shame. By telling my story as a Latine woman, I put a face to the debate and complicated the narrative. I was unapologetic in how I told my story and celebrated my sexuality. I was fed up with misogynist politicians who were working to further limit our bodily autonomy. The right to control your own reproduction is the most fundamental right we have as human beings.



You Are Welcome Here

2017

24" x 18"

Offset Poster

This piece is a reinterpretation of my classic *Migration is Beautiful* poster. Five years after the original work was created, this pro-migrant affirmation was needed more than ever as anti-immigrant hate and legislation were exacerbated under the racist presidency of Donald Trump.

The monarch butterfly represents the natural act that is migration. Human beings have been migrating since the beginning of time. We are a part of nature, and it's in our human nature to move, just as all other species move. Borders were created by governments to keep people in or out—they are not a natural part of our environment. This artwork imagines a world without walls and borders; this butterfly symbolizes the rights of all living beings to move freely.

This design was originally created for the Oakland Unified School District (California), a sanctuary school district, in the summer of 2017. The district distributed posters to all their schools to create a more welcoming environment for students.



Photos Courtesy of Ben & Jerry's

Pecan Resist

2018

Approximately 4" x 3.9"

Printed ice cream pint from collaboration with Ben & Jerry's

In October 2018, I collaborated with Ben & Jerry's to launch a limited batch ice cream flavor, Pecan Resist, in response to the racist and divisive administration of Donald Trump. I created a design that centered women of color and conveyed an environmental message. The flavor was designed to lick injustice and champion those fighting to create a more equitable nation for us all. With the intention to lift up the activists who were leading the resistance to Trump's regressive agenda, Ben & Jerry's donated \$25,000 each to four organizations: Honor the Earth, the Women's March, Neta, and Color Of Change. The Pecan Resist pint reads: "We honor & stand with women, immigrants, people of color, & the millions of activists and allies who are courageously resisting the President's attack on our values, humanity & environment."



Embrace Your Softness

2022

15" x 11.25"

Collage with Linoleum Block and Screen Print Elements on Cotton Rag Paper

Edition Varie of 50

This series is about my ongoing commitment to be soft with the people that I love and the folks in my community. As I reflected on lessons learned from a past unhealthy relationship, I noticed that I was making decisions that were based in anger and resentment. My approach was to punish. However, this behavior was not aligned with my values and it wasted my energy.

I realized I needed to focus on myself—my own choices and my boundaries. I had made the choice to put myself in situations despite seeing red flags, and the changes needed were changes within me. With my somatics coach, I worked on establishing boundaries and becoming softer. I recognized

I had gone through some tough experiences, but I didn't want to close my heart. I wanted to let the past go and stay open.

To remain soft and release what doesn't serve me allows for me to align more with my feminine side. Being a leader and activist sometimes requires me to show up with masculine energy because our work cultures have been shaped predominantly by men. But this prioritization of masculinity is shifting, and I am feeling much more called to be in my feminine energy and to lead while being clear, having boundaries, and staying soft.



Listen to Your Body

2022

15" x 11.25"

Collage with Linoleum Block and Screen Printed Elements on Cotton Rag Paper

Edition Varie of 51

This print series reflects a lifelong lesson that I've been normalizing for myself: to *listen* to my body. I grew up with immigrant parents who had a very strong work ethic out of necessity, and they would rarely prioritize rest. I was encouraged since childhood to be highly productive and to be the best at everything. Being great at everything, of course, requires tremendous sacrifice. Throughout my teens, college, and well into my thirties, I pushed my body to its limits. The words of my parents, "sleep when you die," were etched into my imagination.

Through my own decolonization and healing work, I learned that the myth of "productivity" is harmful, and that capitalism

pushes that narrative while not promoting rest, recovery, and overall slowing down. I am naturally a very energetic person and I love the things I do, but I am also releasing the habits of self-exploitation, learning how to become attuned to what my body needs and wants and to create pleasurable periods of rest for myself.

This art piece is about honoring the messages that my body gives to me. My body lets me know when it's time to rest. It lets me know who the right people are for me. Tuning into my body's wisdom, I can make the best decisions for myself. My body guides me in the right way.



Coyote 2023

2023

22"x 15"

Collage with Linoleum Block and Screen Print Elements on Cotton Fine Rag Paper

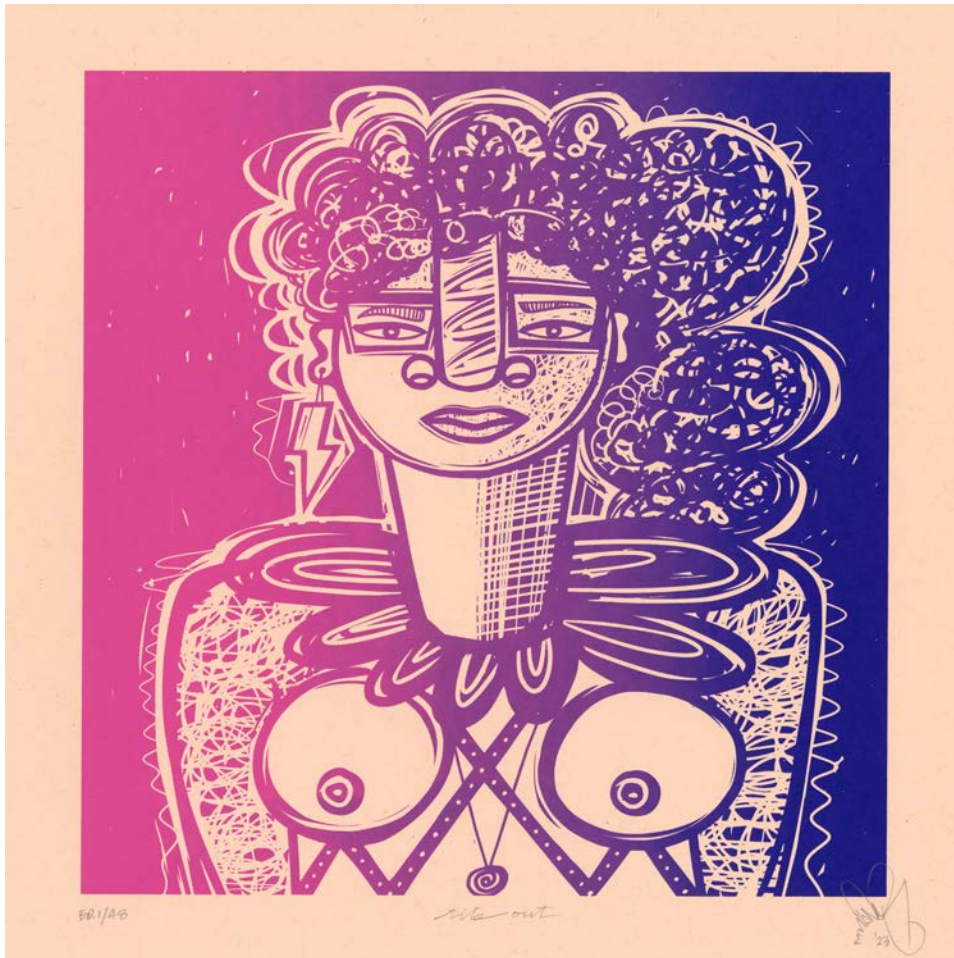
Edition Varie of 24

This print is part of a collection that celebrates the remarkable coyote, a creature that has captivated my interest as I've collaborated with the Presidio National Park in San Francisco. As the largest predator in the Presidio, the coyote holds a significant role in the ecosystem.

What makes Bay Area coyotes truly special is their exceptional adaptability to urban environments. They have established their territories in parks, open spaces, and even suburban neighborhoods, demonstrating an impressive ability to coexist harmoniously with humans.

The diverse ecosystem of the San Francisco Bay Area has shaped these coyotes, enabling them to thrive in various habitats, from coastal areas and grasslands to forests and wetlands. Their adaptability allows them to utilize the available resources and flourish in different environments. Thanks to dedicated conservation efforts in the region, these coyotes have found increasing protection and support.

In this suite of prints, I infused vibrant colors and pop-inspired patterns to pay homage to this magnificent creature. Through this work, I have gained a deeper understanding of the diverse array of plants and animals that once thrived in the San Francisco Bay Area before colonization.



T1TS OUT

2023

12" x 12"

Screen Print on French Paper

Edition of 50

This art piece was inspired by a trip to San Francisco's Folsom Street Fair in 2022. I loved how many folks were wearing harnesses and leather outfits that are popular in kink and BDSM culture. I felt so lucky to live in an open place like the Bay Area. That day, I got myself a cute harness and wore it with my breasts out, and that moment inspired this work.

Over the last decade, I've learned to really be in my body. I enjoy being in spaces clothes-free, the same way that I came to earthside. Throughout my childhood, I received negative messages about my body and was forced to cover myself in ways that did not feel authentic to me as a girl and young woman. I learned to only see my body through a predatory lens.

Growing up in the queer Bay Area, a place where sexual expression was encouraged, I would dress in ways that made me feel confident, sexy, and empowered. I was punished and

shamed for that in painful ways, but this only strengthened my drive to be authentic. Being nude or topless became a way for me to fully express myself. Today, I feel thankful to have the freedom to be expansive in my gender identity and wear things that make me feel playful, joyful, and sensual.

It's important to question the dominant narratives in our society. Why is it that cis male bodies get to walk around showing their chest, while so many of us are told we have to cover our breasts—these fascinating body parts that help nourish babies, literally ensuring the survival of our species? Why do we have laws that legislate how a mother can breastfeed their kids in public? These patriarchal policies are rooted in colonial thinking and serve to limit the expression and enjoyment of our bodies.



Freedom Flight

2023

22" x 15"

Collage with Linoleum Block and Screen Printed Elements on Cotton Rag Paper

Edition Varie of 15

Throughout 2023, my artistic practice was deeply inspired by the vibrant ecosystems of the San Francisco Bay Area, where I call home. It became a year of immersion in the ecological tapestry of this region and inspired me to create art pieces that paid homage to its natural wonders, specifically focusing on the majestic Redwoods and the wetlands of the South Bay.

I often have to divide my focus between my art projects and my social justice activism. During this time, I found myself not only delving into the avian world, learning about magnificent creatures like the American avocet, the marsh wren, and the long-billed curlew, but also collaborating with activists and grassroots leaders who work for justice and freedom.

As I explored various species of birds, I marveled at their singing styles, their protective instincts, and the care they took in constructing nests for their young. These birds became a metaphor for freedom.

In this collage series, I marry two of my core artistic practices: the use of text to convey bold social and political messages, and the incorporation of vibrant natural elements as a form of biomimicry.



Liberate the Land

2023

15" x 11.25"

Collage with Linoleum Block & Screen Print Elements on Cotton Rag Paper

Edition Varie of 53

The land does not belong to us, we belong to the land. This print honors the movement to FREE THE LAND!

Through this art, I celebrate Indigenous efforts to rematriate the land and return it to the stewardship of Indigenous people, such as the work led by Sogorea Te' Land Trust, an urban Indigenous women-led nonprofit rooted in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The phrase "Free the Land" has its roots with the New Afrikan Independence Movement, which called for an independent Black nation on the North American continent. To "Free the Land" means to support Black land reparations.

Much of my education as a climate justice activist comes from Movement Generation, an organization that recognizes that people of African descent have a unique struggle in reimagining and reclaiming relationships with the land of this continent—doing so in ways that honor our ancestors from the African continent, our enslaved ancestors, and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

In order to solve the climate crisis, we must work toward land-based revolutions everywhere. We must work to liberate the land for all people. When we say "free the land," we mean free it all. Liberate the gardens! Liberate the forests! Liberate the cities!



Slow Down to Create Something Different

2023

15 x 11.25"

Collage with Linoleum Block & Screen Print Elements on Cotton Rag Paper

Edition Varie of 35

This print symbolizes the need to slow down in a culture that is always pushing us to move fast. It serves as a reminder that creating meaningful change requires a regenerative relationship to time, as well as a shift in how we create, collaborate, and navigate the unrealistic standards we set for ourselves and others because of capitalism.

Our hyper-productive, hyper-capitalist system demands inhumane speeds from us as creatives, hindering our ability to

question ingrained systems. By slowing down, we can connect with our bodies and with each other, and can reject old paradigms to open our hearts to different ways of being.

This piece features a banana slug, common in the Santa Cruz region near my home. The collection introduces a new dimension with a gradient text—a reflection of the evolving nature of our contemplations.

SHUT IT DOWN FOR PALESTINE



AP 1/4

1/2

Shut it Down for Palestine

2023

12" x 18"

Screen Print

Edition of 95

This work pays homage to the movement in support of a Free Palestine that is literally shutting down roads, streets, and airports and standing against genocide. The piece celebrates the direct action for Palestine that took place on Thursday, November 16, 2023, at 7:45 a.m. on the San Francisco Bay Bridge during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) global conference. The action demanded a ceasefire and called out President Biden to do more for the Palestinians and to end military aid to Israel.

The print celebrates the activism that exploded in defense of Palestine in the Bay Area in the fall of 2023. Organizers from the Bay Area led powerful political actions, including blocking weapon shipments to Israel at the Port of Oakland and working with city electeds to pass resolutions in support of a ceasefire.

We in the Bay Area have a long and fruitful history of direct action and unapologetic activism, and we inspire the world. Through my art, I immortalize powerful moments of resistance, so that they may remain alive in our collective consciousness—visual records in our shared imagination.



No Genocide

2024

20" x 16"

Screen Print

Edition of 50

This print connects the dots between militarism, occupation, genocide, and gender violence in Palestine. It features a figure holding up a hand in a gesture of cessation above silhouettes of a crowd of protesters. The female figure is boldly saying NO to ongoing settler-colonial gender violence.

This piece was my second collaboration with INCITE! Radical Feminists of Color Against Violence and the Palestinian Feminist Collective. The piece was reproduced in the thousands, distributed and wheat-pasted in the streets of major cities throughout the United States.

Through my work, I immortalize powerful moments of collective resistance and create visual tools for communities to express their outrage. The composition of this piece was inspired by a 1970s Vietnam poster that features a female character expressing resistance.



Photo by Bobby Gordon, 2021

Interview with Favianna Rodriguez



Photo by Bobby Gordon, 2022

A Conversation with Favianna Rodriguez: World-Making through Decolonial Feminist Artivism¹

By Xamuel Bañales

Excerpts from Bañales, Xamuel. "A Conversation with Favianna Rodriguez: World-Making through Decolonial Feminist Artivism." 35:1 (2023), 154-194. © 2023 Feminist Formations. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

1. The term *artivism* in US English has its roots in a 1997 gathering of Chicano artists from East Los Angeles and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. The words "Artivist" and "Artivism" has since been popularized through a variety of events, actions, and artworks via artists and musicians such as Quetzal, Ozomatli, and Mujeres de Maiz, among other East Los Angeles artists, and at spaces such as Self Help Graphics & Art.

I met Favianna Rodriguez at the beginning of the fall 1997 semester at Casa Joaquín Murrieta, a residential housing cooperative for UC Berkeley undergraduates founded in 1970 by Chicano/Latino student activists. At Casa Joaquín, Favianna and I worked together as kitchen cooks, often having critical conversations or dancing and singing along to cumbia, merengue, or other Latinx musical genres, while we boiled large pots of beans, stirred rice in oiled pans, and zealously prepared the dinner menu of the evening. We lived on the same floor in separate rooms and often saw each other in the hallway on the way to or from campus. Since then, my feminist friendship with Favianna continued as we crossed paths in political/cultural spaces in the Bay Area.

Favianna is an award-winning transdisciplinary artist, cultural organizer, and social justice activist based in Oakland, California. Her art and activism address a variety of social topics, such as migration, gender justice, climate change, racial equity, and sexual liberation. Favianna's collaborations include Ben & Jerry's anti-Donald Trump-inspired ice cream flavor "Pecan Resist," public art commissions with the City of San Francisco, and a partnership with Joey Soloway, TV director and writer, that helped create the Disruptors Fellowship for marginalized voices in the entertainment industry.

In addition to co-founding and serving as president of The Center for Cultural Power, Favianna helped initiate various cultural and political organizations, like EastSide Arts Alliance and Presente.org. Additionally, Favianna coedited *Reproduce & Revolt/Reproduce y Rebélate* (MacPhee and Rodriguez 2008), which offers a prominent collection of graphics by artists from around the planet. Favianna has overcome many structural challenges both personally and professionally—especially in the art world in the United States, where Latinx artists deal with erasure and whitewashing.

As an Ethnic Studies professor, over the years I have used Favianna's artwork as teaching material. There are several online podcasts and interviews that showcase Favianna and her work, and academic books have featured her art on their covers. In addition, scholars have analyzed Favianna's artwork through multiple angles, such as her feminist contributions to decolonial thought and influence on contemporary social justice efforts. However, I had not come across a scholarly essay about her life and activism that I could use in courses for a general student population. To address this gap, in 2018, I brought up the possibility of conducting an interview to Favianna. While many professional commitments and limited time halted the process, we had the opportunity to complete the project a few years later.

In Conversation with Favianna Rodriguez

Xamuel Bañales (XB): As Angélica Becerra underscores, you are one of several twenty-first century activists who are changing contemporary social justice efforts. Please describe your work as an activist.

Favianna Rodriguez (FR): My work presents a vision of what's possible, and I do it through images, art forms, and various mediums. My activism is about a practice of truth and reconciliation around what has happened to us as marginalized people and imagining what the future can be. In the past, I often called myself an interdisciplinary visual artist, but I think that what I do is more than that; it is world

shifting through objects and experiences. I make things, but I also create experiences through actions, like when I grow weed or cook for people.

I just harvested my first weed plant and there is an art to its cultivation. I see weed as medicine, so how I grow it will impact the healing experience it facilitates. I've been doing Fed by Favi pop-ups in Los Angeles, California, where I talk about cannabis, masturbation, and being vegan. I create an experience where I dress slutty or super sexy, prepare food, and take people through a four-course meal, while I witness the participants' reactions. It's been off the hook! I've also been



“Ancestral Food Legacies IV” (2021)

Collage with Phototransfer, Linoleum Block, and Screenprint Elements on Cotton Rag Paper,
22.5 x 30 inches

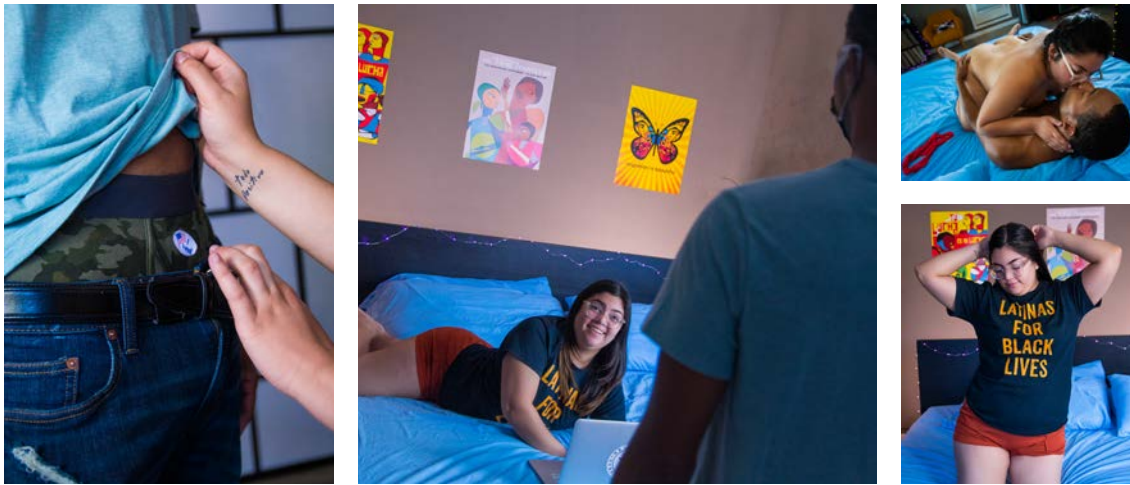
taking erotic photos of myself naked, and I was the executive producer of my first porn video that I launched for the 2020 US presidential election.

XB: Wait a minute! [laughs] I thought that maybe we would end the conversation with such topics, so it’s exciting that we are just beginning. It seems that your *Fed by Favi* project is partly about reclaiming the power of the erotic, and that you view pornography in a similar light as critical scholars who analyze the subject through feminist/queer/trans studies or approaches. Please say more about the porn you mentioned and why you created *Fed by Favi*.

FR: I am world building. As an artist-activist, or activist, sometimes the things I talk about—like masturbation—or whenever I pose naked on my social media, elicit an anti-sex vibe. So, I feel I have to create a separate body of work where I can be explicit and take people through a sex positive experience. This is one part of my art. Then there is another part where I train artists and activists, and that’s why I run a non-profit organization that involves building people power.

I try to create different worlds and see how they intersect, and I feel these spaces can be very regenerative.

Regarding the film—I don’t even like the word “porn” because it puts my creative work in a loaded category. I want to make explicit, more accurate depictions of sex that feel joyful and sexy—that are part of a good story. When I was working on the 2020 US presidential elections, I wanted to find new ways to encourage people to vote. I thought, can we reach people politically through sex by making porn? We did. The short film is called “Putting the ‘O’ in Voting” and it was done in collaboration between Favianna Studios, Lotus Lain, and Gordon B Productions. The film blends civic engagement and sexual pleasure and is about two young voters of color who are a couple: a Latina woman and a Black man. In a bedroom scene, the couple talk erotically about voting early, “giving a fuck” about democracy, and then proceed to have sex. The well-known porn site Pornhub featured “Putting the ‘O’ in Voting” on their webpage. I had a reporter hit me up and say that the piece was “really good.”



Film stills of “Putting the ‘O’ in Voting (2020)

XB: In many aspects, your activism creates openings and spaces that serve as an invitation to travel into other worlds, pointing to new horizons and ways of being. You mentioned that there have been negative reactions to the topic of sex and sexuality in your activist public life and work. Can you talk more about this?

FR: Consent is very important to me. Given that some people are in a transition towards being more accepting of sex and sexuality, I think that the best thing I can do is be explicit about the subjects. However, if I post a photo on social media of myself with a zucchini, for example, and I hold it as if it was my cock, people report it. Many react negatively to content they consider provocative or controversial. Because this happens, I create another “world” that people can enter with an affirmative “yes.” This world is about psychedelics, cannabis, and food, where I tell the story of how these things are medicines that are from the earth to heal.

My art is in adrienne maree brown’s book *Pleasure Activism* (2019), and I really love her framework of combining erotic and emotional desires with organizing work against oppression. I think about how we can fully be in our bodies in our activist work, and how pleasure can activate this.

Colonial capitalist thinking makes people believe that they first work hard and then play later; that one can only have pleasure or enjoy it after it has been earned. It is ingrained in people to view pleasure as a privilege. I was brought up with this belief, and it’s fucking bullshit! It is a right to be able to

feel joy and pleasure in one’s body, and there are many ways one can incorporate them. It doesn’t mean you have to buy sexual toys or expensive books to engage. Pleasure is really all around us and available. How do you create space to love yourself, know your body, and experience all the wonderful things that it can do? I think pleasure and joy are fundamental principles for social justice work. For example, the fight to unionize or for fair wages is partly so that workers can have more joy in their lives and with loved ones. I reject the notion that our bodies are made only to work. We have a body that we should be able to fully enjoy, and that involves pleasure and joy.

XB: You raise several important points. For example, you mentioned consent—when a person agrees to the desires or proposal of another in mutual approval. This makes me think about how consent, then, challenges heteropatriarchal colonialism/coloniality, which is based upon stealing land, enacting violence, and oppressing people across race, gender, and sexuality.

FR: Absolutely! The current social and political context is about domination and extraction, controlling, and taking. This has been normalized in Western culture. We must move towards a way of life in which we are aligned with nature, in balance and not dominating, to have a regenerative relationship with earth in which we think about how we are being good stewards, replenishing, and giving back. I learned this through gardening, which is why I grow my food and cannabis medicine. They are very much a part of my



Photo by Bobby Gordon, 2020

artform because they activate all parts of my body to engage in a decolonizing somatic practice.

I've done several prints celebrating pussies that are inspired by exploring my body, leading with pleasure—not with fear, shame, or guilt—and getting in touch with my orgasms. I think that surrendering to orgasm and feeling our bodies in their fullest joy is healing. Unfortunately, colonialism has attempted to take this joy away from us!

XB: Please talk about the path that led you to your current activism.

FR: I was born in 1978. Growing up in the 1980s and '90s in east Oakland, California, shook me up. It was the era of AIDS and when former President Ronald Reagan expanded and reinforced many of Nixon's War on Drug policies, which had racist

consequences. For example, there were harsh penalties targeting people of color for nonviolent drug crimes that led to a massive increase in incarcerations. Drugs—like crack cocaine—devastated urban communities of color and Oakland was one of them.

As a kid, I witnessed heavy police presence, gang violence, and how addictive drugs devastate communities. I often felt unsafe, but I knew that it wasn't normal to be so scared. I was a young creative kid and made a lot of art that my dad would hang on walls at home. He taught me how to express myself, to read, and to speak in Spanish. My immigrant parents were entrepreneurs who didn't go to college. They were supportive of me having a voice, but they also wanted me to follow a traditional route. I was an honor roll student with a 4.2 GPA and was awarded prizes for

academic achievements. I was a high achiever, and I think it had to do with my parents working all the time. My accomplishments were due to hyper productivity—which I eventually came to realize was not healthy.

I excelled academically and practically got a full scholarship to attend UC Berkeley. My mom was a travel agent at some point, so we had opportunities to take trips while I was growing up. Seeing other parts of the world really helped me to realize that feeling unsafe in Oakland wasn't normal and that I had options. I lived in Mexico City for about three years as a teenager. There is an expansiveness of culture in Mexico City that differs from what I learned in schools in the United States, where white supremacy clouds everything. For example, the history I was taught in the United States mostly centered white people and their experiences.

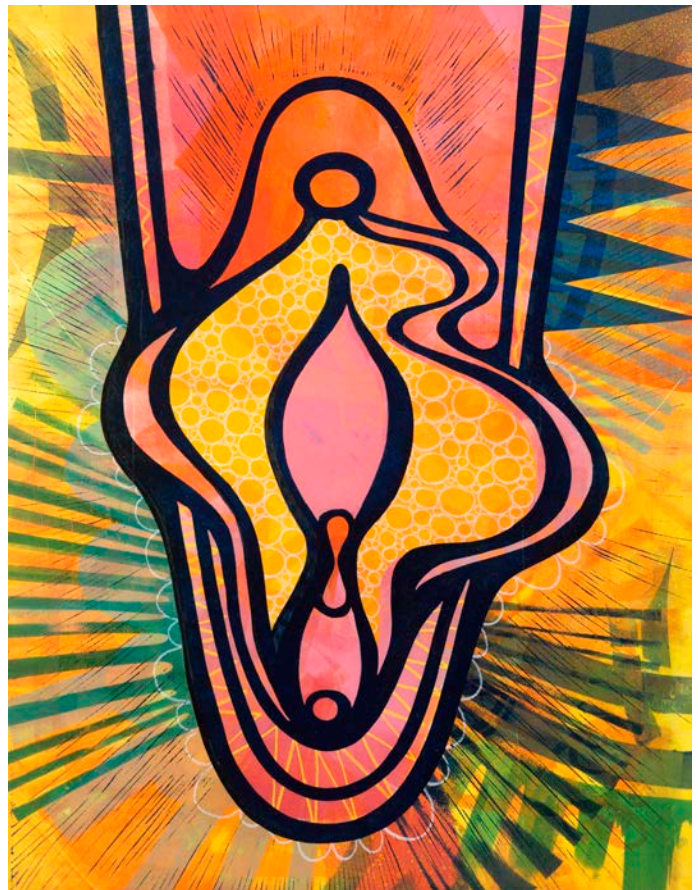
Although Latin America also tends to privilege colonial knowledge, I was exposed to different things in Mexico City, such as muralism, revolutionaries like Simón Bolívar and Che Guevara, and Nueva Trova, which is a movement of Cuban music with political content that emerged after their revolution of 1959.

Being in Mexico City helped me to understand the spectrum of a Latin American experience in a way that I never have in the United States. Then in 1992, I came back to Oakland. The Fruitvale neighborhood that I grew up in had a strong Chicano movement, cultural murals, and hip hop was happening. I started organizing and created the first Latino student club at my high school. I also helped to walk out students at my school in protest of racist propositions in California at the time. I was a young activist because I knew that things were unjust.

When I went to college and moved to Casa Joaquín, I met other artists, like Jesús Barraza—co-founder of Dignidad Rebelde—who at the time was learning about the internet. This changed my life and opened the doorway to new technologies. I taught myself how to build my own website and how to code when the internet was very basic. I studied architecture in college but then I got more involved with student organizing. For example, I got involved with the 1999 hunger strike to save Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley from budget cuts. The same year, I got an internship with the Center of the Study for Political Graphics in Los Angeles.

It was the first time that I looked at political and solidarity posters of the Black Panthers, Cuban revolution, and feminist activism. They opened my mind! I thought, “Wow, I could be making political posters of things that are important to me. That’s what I want to do!” Afterward, I had the opportunity to get an internship with Self Help Graphics and Art in East Los Angeles. Being in Los Angeles nourished my ties with the creative and activist scene in the area, which included Chicano organizing and arts.

In 1998, I took Dr. Laura Pérez’s Chicano Studies art class at UC Berkeley. She had invited the artist Yreina D. Cervántez to class, who is known for her murals, printmaking, and multimedia painting. Yreina saw my work—she really saw me—and encouraged me to continue to develop my artistic



“Deliberate Orgasm AP 1/2” (2015)

Monotype with Color Pencil & Linoleum Block Elements
on Hanji Paper, 25 x 19.25 inches



“Decolonize Pussy Power
ED 8/20” (2014)
Monotype with Woodblock
Elements on Hanji Paper,
25 x 39 inches

I continued to be involved in the arts and organizing, like co-founding the EastSide Arts Alliance, which is a multiracial cultural center in Oakland, California. I got to meet and interact with important historical activists like Emory Douglas, Kathleen Cleaver, Amiri Baraka, Bobby Seale, and Yuri Kochiyama. I was surrounded and part of a vibrant political community. I continued to create art, and in 2009, worked with journalist Roberto Lovato to co-found Presente.org, which became one of the largest Latinx online organizations that advances social justice with culture, media, and technology. The organization helped to remove Lou Dobbs—a racist white American political commentator—from mainstream television at the time. We challenged racist violence and helped to activate people to support the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the Supreme Court.

Then, in 2010, the Arizona senate introduced and eventually passed SB1070—the “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” which became known as the “show me your papers law” for targeting brown people. Chicano activist musician Zack de la Rocha from Rage Against the Machine organized The Sound Strike to boycott Arizona. It inspired a lot of musicians to stop playing in Arizona because it had become a laboratory for designing several racist policies. What happened in Arizona then was similar to the racist legislation in California during the 1990s, like the passing of Propositions 187, 209, and 21.

XB: Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, community members created several cultural political organizations throughout the United States that are still active. In California, examples include Self Help Graphics in Los Angeles and Galería de la Raza in San

Francisco. Despite such spaces, did you believe there was a void in the cultural political arts in Oakland at that time?

FR: I think that there were not enough investments, resources, or spaces for cultural arts for my generation. I was all about a movement, but one that centers culture, because there are so many underserved artists. I found resources, raised money, and the CultureStrike project was born in 2011, led by me and co-founded with Jeff Chang. The first thing we did was to go to Arizona to connect and meet with folks. We wanted to bring a delegation of artists there and that’s what we did.

We brought folks like Teju Cole, dream hampton, W. Kamau Bell, EL MAC, Daniel Alarcón, Jessica Hagedorn, Emory Douglas, and Maxine Hong Kingston! From this work, CultureStrike was born, and has since become the Center for Cultural Power.



“Defend Our Mother” (2014)
Digital Print, 8 x 12 inches

In time, I realized that it was important to tell my story and how culture can help move things, why art is essential, and why we should be talking about artists. Then I started getting involved with labor, reproductive, and climate justice movements. For example, through my organization, I supported Walmart workers with their efforts to unionize and fight for fair wages in 2013, and I did creative work with the People’s Climate March in 2014 in New York City. By bringing art to actions, I can help people to think about the importance of culture and to see artists. We don’t want to just have transactional relationships—we want to be part of an ecosystem that understands how to pay artists.

That’s why I started The Center for Cultural Power: to move resources to BIPOC and other marginalized artists. I know that I have my superpower through creating, and I feel like I need to inspire other artists to see their superpowers.

XB: Perhaps in the future, all your projects will combine. It makes me think of your unapologetic Pussy Power digital prints and *Pussy Power Imaginary* project that you announced in 2015. Not only did this work affirm “sluttiness” and womxn’s bodies, but it also called attention to misogynist politicians who work to limit or end access to health, birth control, and abortions. These issues are pressing given that the Supreme Court of the United States overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the summer of 2022, taking away federal protection for abortion rights. In many ways your work enacts a decolonial feminist imaginary and futurity that challenges heteropatriarchal coloniality by creating new narratives in society and moving away from survival towards cultivating horizons of desire and in which we thrive. Folks who are “already there” understand the interconnections, but mainstream audiences may not yet.

FR: The Pussy Power social justice posters were part of a series of feminist reactions to the political and conservative attacks on abortions during that time. In 2011, I had a second abortion, and I publicly spoke about it to shed the shame and break the silence, as well as to put a face to the debates and complicate the narratives around the subject. Given the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, as a cultural worker I realize that there is more work to do to normalize abortions, to see them as standard medical procedures not weighed down by “moral” values. Political conservatives—who are majority white hetero cisgender men—control politics, and we see how they polarize critical topics, like abortions and trans rights. Many young people are identifying as non-binary and there is more trans visibility in pop culture, but mainstream politics may not reflect this. Cultural moves on a different track than politics.

I have experienced several personal challenges before arriving at a space where I could thrive. In 2014, I met a person who I would romantically be involved with for four years but, unfortunately, was abusive and violent. During this time, I took care of my father when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2015. He died the following year, which was a big turning point. In 2017, I realized that I was in an abusive cycle with

my partner, and I didn't tell anybody about it. It was so bad that I had to plan my exit for safety purposes and because I couldn't get rid of him. He was manipulative and would say alarming things like that he was going to cut his veins, and he would pull out knives, pull his hair out, or scream at me. It got to a point where I didn't want to come home.

My career was exploding, so I hardly had to be home; I was traveling like once a week. I could be numb from productivity, and I was still healing from my dad's death. I was finally able to execute my exit plan from the relationship in 2018, and October became very significant because it was when I ended a major cycle. When I looked at the history and patterns of my relationships and upbringing, I realized that I was reenacting trauma bonds. So, in 2018, I began to intentionally address this issue. As I recovered from the abusive relationship, I became curious about using natural medicines or what we call "psychedelics," so I did ayahuasca for the first time for my healing.

What followed was another bad relationship, and I had my third abortion in October of 2019. The person who I was sleeping with at the time disappeared after I got pregnant, which is what happened the first time I had an abortion in 2000. I realized that I was enacting womb trauma and needed deep healing around this and the relationship choices I was making that were taking a toll on my body.

I realized that I inherited generational womb trauma from both sides of my family. In a ceremony, I could see and feel that pain, so I knew that my next journey would be womb healing. In 2019, I decided to have an abortion with a doula at my home. Feeling this abortion deep in my body was a healing experience. The first two abortions I didn't feel; I was numbed out on my back in a clinic. This one in 2019 I did feel, and it was what I needed to reclaim my body. I consider myself an educated and conscious woman, but much of my healing work was learning how to re-parent, reclaim, and protect my body, and not put it in dangerous situations.

XB: The body is often central in your work, and art has the power to heal and transform pain. Furthermore, embodying activism and joy are ways to reconcile social injustice or intervene in colonial domination. Because carrying intergenerational trauma in the body has dire consequences,



"I'm Healing For Myself" (2019)

Collage with Monoprint Elements on Cotton Rag Paper,
22.5 x 30 inches



"Dear Body" (2019)

Collage with Monoprint Elements on Cotton Rag Paper,
30 x 22.5 inches



“Come Out About Your Abortion” (2012)

Digital Print, 18 x 12 inches

healing from oppression through decolonial practices is especially critical. For example, you mentioned that your last abortion with a doula provided a healing experience that contrasted your numbing one through Western medicine. Can you elaborate on this healing experience?

FR: My abortion experience through Western medicine was detached, sterile, and oppressive. A doula helps with the healing because they can provide care before, during, and after the abortion. I contacted a friend who is a doula and part of a network of birth workers and abortion providers. She said I could do the process at home with abortion pills, so she came to my house and helped to prepare me. The spiritual aspect

of this abortion included talking to my womb and vulva, and a ceremony around the process. The first night when I took the pills, the grief and pain kept me up as I thought about my grandmother, mother, and upbringing in a culture where sex or womb trauma were not talked about openly.

About two days later, the embryo came out as blood and tissue. It was a very moving experience, and I had a ceremony where I buried the embryo in the backyard. I realized that I hadn't fully grieved my first two abortions, but the ceremonial burial of my third one allowed me to heal. This healing process is very important because I do believe we are making a choice to end life, even if it may not be fully developed, and that is our right as womb carriers. I also believe people who have abortions must have the option to grieve. If we don't have spaces to grieve, the pain sometimes cannot move.

By sharing our stories, we can heal ourselves and our communities. Given that the right wing has coopted the notion of life and turned it against those of us who fight for abortion, I must clarify that I do believe it is the decision of the womb carrier—to determine if it is the appropriate time or not. It's very important to keep abortion accessible and safe, but I also think that some critical feminist frameworks—like reproductive justice—must decolonize their views because they were developed through a lens of white supremacy. We must also embrace our ancestral ways of healing. Curanderas—or birth workers—many of whom colonialism has attempted to silence or erase, carry traditional knowledge around abortions and can serve as our guides.

XB: The contemporary socio-political context involves many critical movements and issues, such as: Black Lives Matter; Land Back; #MeToo; Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; anti-Asian racism, hate, and violence; ICE arrests, detentions, and deportations; Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions; COVID-19; and climate change. You mentioned your coalition work and solidarity efforts with artists, activists, and activists, as well using social media with your activism.

FR: My socio-political analysis is informed by several frameworks, like Black Liberation practiced by the Black Panthers or Black Lives Matters, so it's been such a gift to apply what I have learned. How is anti-Blackness showing

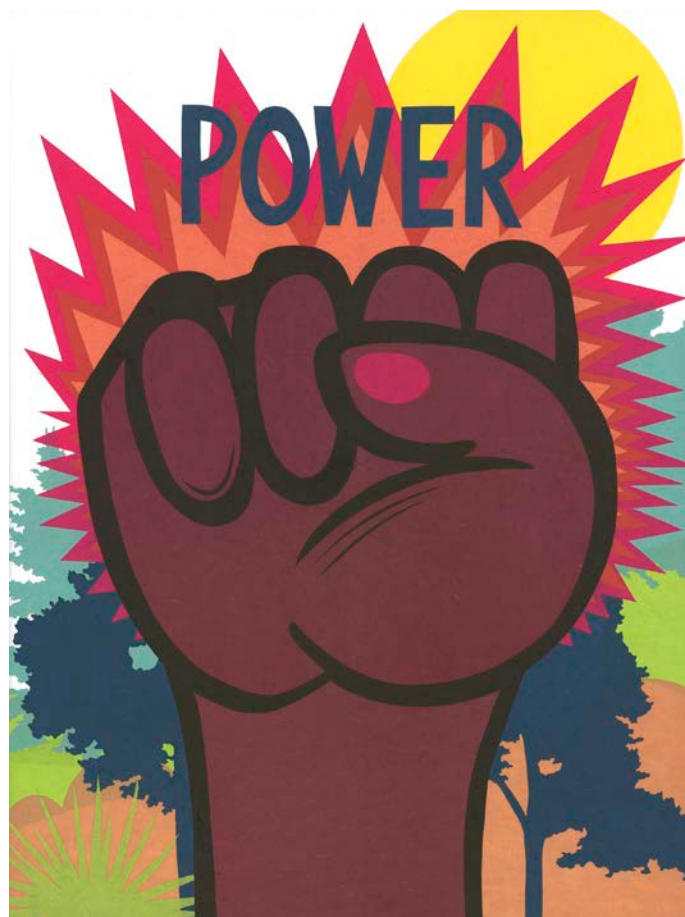
up in how we work? How do we call anti-Blackness into question? How do we demonstrate solidarity? In my organization, I get to do this with so many collaborators. With climate justice work, we are intentional about collaborating with BIPOC-led groups. We look at Indigenous sovereignty and related issues, such as moving away from extractive practices and moving towards regenerative economies. Our gender justice work breaks binaries by including folks from all genders. Our electoral work is about activating Latinx and Black folks, figuring out how to tell stories that invite us to think differently about our elections.

For me, art is not a privilege only for the elite. Cultural expression comes in many forms, and my life's work is about demanding that all communities can access art and express themselves. My art is about creating in multiples. I don't make one painting to hang in a museum. Instead, I make prints because they're accessible and I can make many of them. Emory Douglas, who was the minister of culture for the Black Panthers, taught me that my art did not have to exist in elite places. My art could live in a newspaper or poster, multiplied in many places at once, reproduced over and over.

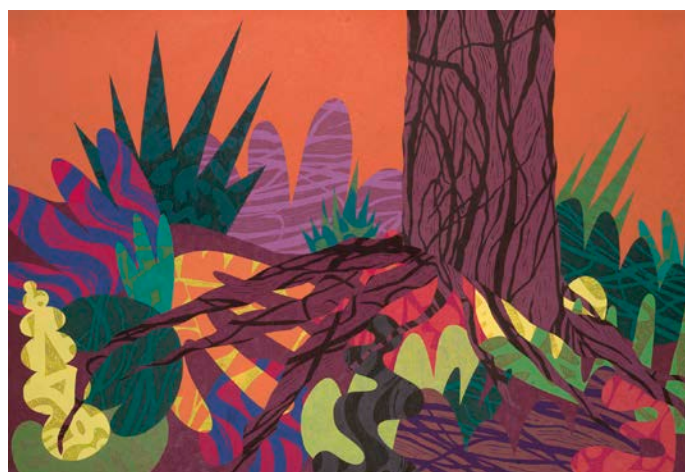
I like the idea of influencing culture as a form of social sculpture. In my workshops, I talk about how culture is like water that creates ripples. I believe we must be more intentional about creating ripples with momentum. We must invite a vision of the future and bear witness through art because it can facilitate healing and transformation.

XB: We have covered so much in this conversation! Thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience of your decolonial feminist work. May your activism inspire others to enact change. Any closing thoughts that you would like to share?

FR: To conclude, I want to share a little bit about my experience participating at the 27th annual United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC), commonly referred to as COP27. The conference took place in Egypt during November 2022, and I talked about the role of culture, art, and entertainment as it relates to climate change. It was a powerful moment in my career because it was a global platform to help shape critical dialogues around urgent matters that I care about and affect a lot of our people. I was



“Power 2020” (2020)
Collage on Cotton Rag Paper,
30 x 22.5 inches



“The Language of the Forest” (2023)
Collage on Cotton Rag Paper,
24.5 x 36.25 inches

in community with this movement that includes multigenerational representatives from throughout the world. For example, there were leaders from the Amazon rainforest and the African continent. It felt like a once in a lifetime opportunity to contribute to shaping important global conversations. It was a humbling experience for me, and I felt very blessed to witness and participate.

One of the major takeaways from COP27 for me was the crisis of climate chaos. I have done a series of prints that focus on planet earth, so this topic was especially important to me. Western imperialism, colonization, and white supremacy caused the climate crisis. The crisis began when Europeans invaded and ravaged the Americas and other places on the planet. For hundreds of years—especially over the last several decades—certain powers have accelerated the exploitation of natural resources and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Corporations, like gas and oil companies, are getting richer and causing irreparable damage to the planet, humans, and ecosystems. Many countries are raising the question of who should be paying for reparations. Obviously, it should be the United States, England, and the other colonizer nations.

There were also conversations at COP27 about how the earth exists because of the power to create life, and the problem of heteropatriarchy that empowers cisgender men to make harmful decisions about the planet. This is connected to the global sexual/gender violence crisis against womb carriers and people whose gender and sexual identities don't fit heteronormativity and cismativity. Indigenous women who participated at UCOP27 regularly stated: when women heal, so does the earth; when the earth heals, so do women. Guided by the principles of decolonial pleasure and joy, my activism is deeply connected to restoring the planet and creating conditions for women and marginalized folks to heal and work towards social change.



Favianna at COP 27, Egypt.
November 2022. Courtesy of
the Artist.

Xamuel Bañales is an associate professor and former chair of the Ethnic Studies Department at California State University, Stanislaus. Bañales completed their doctorate degree from UC Berkeley and has authored essays in many critical anthologies and journals, including *Ethnic Studies Review*; *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*; *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*; *The Bilingual Review/Revista Bilingüe*; and North American Congress on Latin America.



Photo by Carolina Aguirre, 2024

Interview with Nichol Markowitz



Photo by Carolina Aguirre, 2024

Ink, Paper, and Activism: A Conversation with Nichol Markowitz, Master Printer and Art Director at Favianna Rodriguez's Studio

By Jay Katelansky

March 2024

Jay Katelansky (JK): Nichol, please share a brief background about your creative practice and your role at Favianna Studios.

Nichol Markowitz (NM): My creative practice is based in traditional printmaking techniques. I specialize in etching, mokuhanga woodblock printing, and Japanese scroll mounting techniques, but I also do archival collaging, screen printing, monoprinting, linoleum block printing, drawing and painting—all kinds of works on paper. I have my BFA in printmaking from RISD and my master's in art history and I've been working for Favianna for the past decade in the role of production manager, master printer, and studio manager. I oversee the fine art production in the studio and do the printing and the technical fabrication of the works.

All the decisions about color, composition, and subject matter are made by Favianna. We work together to determine what process is best for her vision and how that's going to come together and then I execute the finished product.

JK: Looking at Favianna's older work, I can see a shift since you started collaborating with her. From your perspective, how and why has the work changed over the years since you became the master printer and art director?

NM: Favianna is very open about being a mostly self-taught artist. She didn't attend art school and while she had mentors in the community, a lot of the processes she used in making the work were centered around making it quick and cheap. That meant a lot of offset posters, a lot of digital

posters, and of course, a lot of screen printing—all of which are really useful tools, particularly for social justice posters and things that just need to be produced in large numbers and disseminated quickly, used in protest, used to really spread a specific message. When I came on board, I provided Favianna with a new technical toolbox. My specialty in fine art printmaking and limited-edition prints provided her with new ways to express herself through new processes, such as archival collaging, monoprinting, etc. Also, my love of unique Eastern papers came into play. I introduced her to hanji paper, which is a type of Korean mulberry paper that has become the base material for a lot of the work that she's been making in the past couple of years.

JK: You spoke briefly about why Favianna was using specific processes before you started with her. Why do you think these new processes that you introduced have become so integral to her work?

NM: Good question. I think the newer works are more process heavy, so they naturally take a little bit longer to come together. And because collage has become such an important part of the process, her approach has become a little more modular and a little more intuitive. For example, we often start with colored paper that's been printed with patterns, she decides on her subject matter and a vocabulary of shapes and imagery, then those shapes are cut out from these printed patterns and she can play with all these shapes to form her composition. I think the opportunity for her to be more involved in the physical process of making has informed the types of aesthetic decisions that she's making and has inspired her to explore new directions that she might not have if she had stayed within screen printing and offset poster media.

JK: You've been working for Favianna for over a decade now—do you remember the moment or the piece that you worked on that became the catalyst of change in her work?

NM: I think it was the “*Defend Your Home, Defend Your Planet*” piece. It was a monoprint and linoleum block collage and it introduced this way of working and of using collage to combine the Japanese mounting and backing techniques that I use and her graphic approach to imagery. That one stands out in my mind as the beginning of a new aesthetic direction



“Defend Your Home. Defend Your City. Defend Your Planet. EV 3/3” (2014)

Monotype, Collage & Stencil on Japanese Paper,
71 x 45.75 inches



Photo by Carolina Aguirre, 2024

for her. It was also much larger scale than any fine art prints she had done previously. I think that piece opened so many possibilities for combining different techniques.

JK: You spoke about process and how the works are made, and I know Favianna's work is very process heavy. Oftentimes the labor of those processes is overlooked, especially by people who may not have the knowledge about printmaking like you do. Even without that knowledge, they admire and love her work, but these works are so layered and special, I would love to offer some insight to the process. Can you talk about the steps that are taken from beginning to end in the making of her collage work?

NM: Favianna starts by creating different patterns that I then hand carve out of linoleum. Once those blocks are carved, I print them in a variety of different color inks on different colored hanji paper. Once this library of printed patterns has been created, then, depending on the subject matter, Favianna comes up with a visual language of shapes and figurative imagery for whatever the series is. So sometimes it's plants, sometimes it's landscapes, sometimes it's connections to her ancestors through traditional food practices. For series that involve specific representational imagery, I'll typically screen print a variety of elements chosen by Favianna. These are also printed in an array of different color inks on different colors of hanji paper to represent elements like flowers, animals, a mortar and pestle, or the textures of food. After I print everything, Favianna

provides me with basic line outlines of the shapes that she wants, and then the colors and patterns that she wants these shapes cut out of. I cut these shapes out by hand with an X-Acto knife. Once she has a large enough library of shapes for a specific body of work, she arranges the elements on a larger sheet of paper—either a Western cotton rag paper like Somerset, which sometimes has been covered with a layer of colored hanji, or for the larger collages, directly onto large sheets hanji. Once she has arranged the shapes how she wants, she pins them in place with map pins. After everything is pinned, I come in and I glue everything down with wheat paste, which is a completely archival, organic, and reversible glue that's used in Japanese scroll mounting. Once everything is pasted, I flatten the work. If it's on the Western rag paper, I'll put it in a damp pack and flatten it in the print dryer. If it's on the hanji paper, I will back it with another sheet of Japanese sekishu paper and dry it directly on a large board. Once it's dried, the collage is perfectly flat and can be peeled off and trimmed down.

JK: Thank you for explaining that lengthy process. Can you speak about the history of printmaking and how printmaking and activism have historically gone hand in hand?

NM: Printmaking wasn't originally considered an art form. It was a craft that had really practical and utilitarian roots. In Asia there are forms of woodblock print dating back to the sixth century. In Western culture, printing has an especially deep connection to the Enlightenment. It's

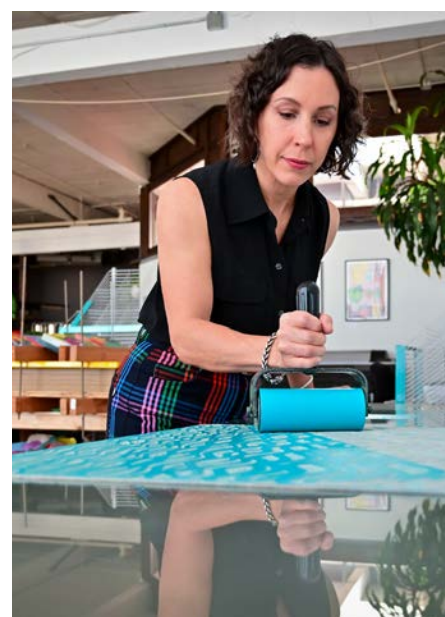


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what made books accessible to the masses and resulted in a radical shift in the demographics of literacy. The common thread running through all printmaking methods developed and used before the nineteenth century was that they provided a way to get information to people cheaply, for people to know what was going on in town. It was also a really important tool for government propaganda and the practice and expansion of religions like Christianity and Buddhism. And then it wasn't until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century that printmaking started to be regarded as a legitimate art form that was valued for its specific aesthetic effects.

So, while we typically think of political posters and activism as being part of an art form, they're actually continuing in the original tradition of printmaking—the dissemination of information. Printmaking has historically, and still does, give people a way for people to

express themselves and to be heard, particularly people that have been voiceless under oppressive or hierarchical systems—government systems, religious systems, political systems. So, although the function of printmaking has expanded over time to include incredibly complex, conceptual, and unique iterations, at its core, it will always be an inherently democratic artistic medium. It's still, to this day, one of the most powerful mediums for giving people a voice, giving people access, spreading information, and ultimately bringing people together.

JK: The final question that I have for you is about Favianna's role as an institution builder in addition to being an artist. How has her entrepreneurship inspired you? And I hear you're growing your own institution. Can you tell us about that?

NM: The way that Favianna has brought her vision to fruition has been really inspiring to me. When I started working with her, I was just so impressed that she was able to run her own nonprofit and have a full studio practice, with a beautiful 2000 plus square foot studio. And after working for her for a year or two, I remember saying to myself, "How old is she? She's 38. Okay, when I'm 38, I want to be building my own

business." I could see just how much autonomy she had in her life and how she really was controlling her own fate. Her clarity of vision, and the way that she sets goals and then slowly and diligently works towards them in small steps, really showed me that you don't have to have it all figured out, you just need to have a really clear vision of what it is that you're working towards and why.

Over the years, seeing her manifest her vision for her art career has helped me to refine my own vision by asking myself important questions like: What do I want my career to look like, long term? How do I want to impact the world around me? What values do I want my business to reflect? And for me, autonomy has always been at the top of the list, as well as a deep love of printmaking and the ability to have a sustainable creative practice and work with other artists. I've known since I finished undergrad that I wanted to have my own print shop, but I didn't feel like I was really ready until recently.

Watching Favianna grow her business, watching her make connections and network and build community...I've absorbed all that through osmosis. In our end-of-year reviews,



Photo by Carolina Aguirre, 2024



Favi would show us the structure of the business, and that was really helpful because with a fine art background, I don't have any formal business training. Also, she has a very holistic view of business, in my opinion, that goes beyond a corporate or capitalistic approach where the end goal is just to make money. For me, it's much more about asking how you structure your job around things that bring you joy, and how you provide a service to people that not only allows you

an income to sustain yourself, but can also support the other people that you work with and benefit the greater community. All these things were really important influences on me through the process of building my own business over the past two years. And now, I have my own business, Moonlight Press, which is a fine art printing press based out of West Oakland, where we do artist projects, workshops, and contract printing and plate making—and I feel like the possibilities are endless.

Nichol Markowitz, Master Printer and Art Director for Favianna Rodriguez, is an Oakland-based artist and master printer specializing in mokuhanga woodblock printing, copperplate etchings, collage, and Japanese scroll mounting techniques. She earned her BFA in Printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2007 and completed her Master's in Modern and Contemporary Art History from Azusa Pacific University in 2022.

Jay Katelansky an interdisciplinary artist and Creative Director of Digital Strategies & Store Manager for Favianna Rodriguez. She earned her BFA from Moore College of Art and Design and her MA and MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Through the mediums of textiles, painting, and printmaking, her work questions how Black bodies, including her own, navigate space and safety in the United States.

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