



Xandra Ibarra: Forever Sidepiece

August 29 – October 27, 2019

Opening Reception: August 29, 6- 9pm

Xandra Ibarra: Forever Sidepiece is the first NYC solo exhibition of Oakland-based artist and performer Xandra Ibarra, who also works under the alias La Chica Boom. The exhibition is rooted in Ibarra's performance practice, extending to sculpture, video, and photographs made between 2012 and 2019, some of which are view for the first time. Using charged signifiers like Tapatío bottles, nipple tassels, and cockroaches, she exposes how entangled notions of desire and respectability are bound to racialized and gendered schema. Embodying and exploiting states of abjection, exhaustion, pleasure, and excess, Ibarra explores the condition of the sidepiece.

A sidepiece is a woman on the side – her relationships privilege the physical and take place on the periphery. For Ibarra, however, the sidepiece's position in the margins enables her to sidestep grand narratives; she exceeds a univocal reading. Ibarra describes her body and her work as "an unresolved split of juxtaposed meanings; a fleshy border encountering the interplay of humor, erotics, language, aesthetics, and time in halves." Her visual vocabulary – which incorporates sex acts, cruising, refusal, and withholding – claims the sidepiece as not just a figure, but as a charged position from which to act.

Ibarra's first performance works were burlesque acts the artist calls "Spictacles," which she performed as La Chica Boom between 2002 to 2012. The title of this performance series collapses the term "spic," a slur deployed to identify and degrade Spanish-speaking people in the United States, with "spectacle," reflecting the nature of the performances. These acts exploit and subvert stereotypes of Mexicanidad and femininity through spectacle, parody, and camp, and are represented in the exhibition by a suite of videos made after the La Chica Boom persona was retired.

In the videos, Ibarra embodies three caricatures of Mexicanidad through the figure of a dominatrix with a donkey, a housewife flipping tortillas, and an erotic take on a virgin saint. ***Spictacle I: Dominatrix of the Barrio*** (2014) shows Ibarra whipping and penetrating her "submissive" – a donkey shaped piñata. Wearing a Luchador mask, she makes exaggerated, raunchy expressions as she penetrates, and eventually beats, the piñata. Performing as a dominatrix – a figure which holds great power – Ibarra confronts mainstream notions of the hypersexual and exotified Latina figure, while enacting the "erotics of the border," evoking the myths of donkey shows. As Ave Maria plays in the background during ***Spictacle III: La Virgensota Jota*** (2015), Ibarra portrays the iconic Virgin de Guadalupe who gives immaculate birth to a Hitachi Wand vibrator, transforms into the Statue of Liberty, and proceeds to pleasure herself with the vibrator while chewing gum, calling into question pervasive stereotypes of the pious, submissive Latin woman. In ***Spictacle II: Tortillera*** (2015), Ibarra toys with the trope of the Mexican housewife and the "spicy" Latina. Her expression oscillates between amusement and exhaustion as she flips tortillas and dances a border corrido, eventually finishing off her tacos, filled with thongs, using Tapatío hot sauce spilled from a custom strap-on.

Spic Jouissance Bottle (Tapatío Cock) (2014) along with ***Mexi Strap-On Harness*** (2015) are sculptural objects that repurpose the Tapatío hot sauce bottle as makeshift strap-on in order to further probe the eroticization of race and essentialist fantasies that prop up stereotypes of the spicy Latina. Ibarra's ***Spic Jouissance Bottles (Tapatío Cock)***, replaces the label of the popular hot sauce with her face bearing a forced grin, and includes an assortment of affects and bodily fluids such as "Armargura (misery), commodified negation, dedicated invader subjectivity, toilet water, and cucaracha logic

preservative” as ingredients. Ibarra puts the Tapatío strap-on to work in the video *Untitled Fucking* (2013), made in collaboration with artist Amber Hawk Swanson. In this work, Ibarra is the dominant sexual partner and Swanson assumes the submissive role, confronting racial hierarchies and staging a deeply rooted interplay between the performance of white feminism and the feminisms of color that whiteness erases. Through speech and sex acts, Hawk Swanson and Ibarra rehearse the queer and feminist contradictions that arise when explicit sex, performance, and racial tropes collide.

Though often humorous, parodic, and pleasurable, Ibarra's embodied performances as La Chica Boom, which were meant to expose and “undermine her audience’s Mexiphobic gaze,” took an emotional toll on the artist. Over time, white audiences’ responses to the work indicated that the performances were in fact reinscribing the same stereotypes Ibarra was working to confront. The video *Fuck My Life* (2012), titled after a theater performance of the same name, marked a turn away from the camp and burlesque and toward the figure of the cockroach. In *Fuck My Life*, Ibarra listlessly moves through the morning routine in another day in the life of La Chica Boom. In the end, she emerges in a full body cockroach costume, shedding her burlesque persona and aligning instead with the cockroach – an insect bound to associations with race, class, and immigration. A suite of performance photographs, *Molting Showgirl* (2014), *Carcass* (2014), and *Molting in Pool* (2014), illustrate her identification with the cockroach’s process of molting – when the insect sheds and regenerates its exoskeleton it looks exactly as it did before. In the photographs, the empty and flacid “shed skins” of her various costumes lay beside Ibarra, or on their own, to demonstrate how her body is rendered an empty signifier, embodying ongoing states of stuckness, failure, and exhaustion.

Engaging her own internal process of shedding excess bodymatter, Ibarra produces a series of Rorschach prints titled *She’s on the Rag* (2013 - ongoing), using her menstrual blood as medium in a mischievous take on abstract painting, as a means for Ibarra to engage her audiences with her body while refusing identitarian transparency. Prints for this ongoing series are made monthly, and sold to anonymous buyers on the online marketplace Etsy, who have the option to receive a psychodynamic reading from Ibarra about the viewers associations while looking at their print. *Menstrual Rorschach Interpretation* (2016) is a video of one of these consultations, and Ibarra’s absurd and comical interpretations plays against blinking geometric menstrual blood patterns.

A recent body of work extends the thrust of Ibarra’s performance-based work to sculptural form. Processes of displacement, fragmentation, and assemblage serve to anthropomorphize an assortment of found objects and personal materials like nipple tassels, stripper heels, and jewelry that express Ibarra’s sidepiece condition on aesthetic and material terms. In *Ellie Jante Dementia Pleaser Reflections* (2018) a collection of the artist’s visibly used stripper heels spills out from an abused purple locker, while *Thank you, It’s Versayce* (2019) suspends a dense and precarious entanglement of items like a dial-up modem cable, mylar, a microphone, tarnished jewelry, and hair from the ceiling. *Se Termino* (2019) comprises a pair of giant neon-green nipple tassels – an exuberant rendering of an accessory that reappears throughout the exhibition – adorned with mylar and leather pieces, complete with horse-hair tassels. *Strobelight Honey* (2018) also alludes to the human figure; a plump plaster torso blooming gray with rot is adorned with silver pasties and perched at the top of a ladder donning a fur coat. Protruding from the plaster abdomen is an antitheft device used to secure car steering wheels – an intimidating apparatus that makes the figure appear at once prepared for combat or possibly enduring a strike, while *Ass Tassels* (2018) displays a twinned pair of plaster tail-light casts embellished with nylon tassels.

Ibarra's body reappears, fragmented or in a state of refusal, in the recent video works *Ya Estuvo* (2017) and *Turn Around Side Piece* (2018). These pieces capture the artist performing actions that are typically at work for an outside gaze extended into never-ending loops. For *Ya Estuvo*, a stacked pair of televisions renders a fragmented body bouncing endlessly. The bottom screen shows a pair of yellow heels clicking to support the torso displayed on the top screen, breasts bouncing and nipple tassels twirling to indicate the concluding moments of a striptease, the final reveal, stuck on repeat. *Turn Around Side Piece* references the exhibition's title, and Ibarra's claims for the sidepiece as "an object at the sidelines of history." Moving continuously to conceal her face from the viewer's gaze atop a large, rotating, marble slab against a serene landscape wearing only sneakers, Ibarra cites the nude figures rendered in 20th century impressionist paintings to assert the sidepiece status of these subjects within the art historical canon. Ibarra's constant state of movement also points to social distinctions between the nude body in static and kinetic states: while the static nude is considered respectable, the nude body in motion is considered provocative and unruly.

Coursing through this multifaceted body of work is a nuanced conversation that employs humor to address race, sex, and gender. Ibarra's denial of a singular read and ongoing refusal of finality are strategies that allow her to exhaust, undermine, and sometimes exceed representation, creating pathways for the radical and not-yet-known potentials that are waiting on the sidelines.

Organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Director of Exhibitions and Live Art. Exhibition and text support by Daniella Brito, Programs Assistant.

About the Artist

Xandra Ibarra, who sometimes works under the alias of La Chica Boom, is an Oakland-based performance artist from the US/Mexico border of El Paso/Juarez. Ibarra works across performance, video, and sculpture to explore abjection and joy and the borders between proper and improper racial, gender, and queer subject.

Ibarra's work has been featured at El Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Bogotá, Colombia), Broad Museum (LA, USA), Popa Gallery (Buenos Aires, Argentina), Joe's Pub (NYC), PPOW Gallery (NYC), Anderson Collection (Stanford) and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (SF) to name a few. She has been awarded the Queer Art Prize for Recent Work, Art Matters Grant, NALAC Fund for the Arts, ReGen Artist Fund, and the Franklin Furnace Performance and Variable Media Award. Her work has been featured in Artforum, Paper Magazine, Hyperallergic, Huffington Post, ArtNews and in various academic journals nationally and internationally. Ibarra's work has also been featured in several recent and forthcoming books by Juana Maria Rodriguez, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Leticia Alvarado.

As a community organizer, Ibarra's work is located within feminist immigrant, anti-rape and prison abolitionist movements. Since 2003, she has actively participated in organizing with INCITE!, a national feminist of color organization dedicated to creating interventions at the intersection of state and interpersonal violence. As a lecturer, Ibarra has taught Ethnic Studies, Sexuality Studies, and History and Theory of Contemporary Art courses.

About Knockdown Center

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 2 PM to 6 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 7 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378.

