



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

## TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: Yolanda Lopez

### THEMES:

- Religious imagery in contemporary art
- Significance of Virgen de Guadalupe icon in Mexican-American culture
- Latina women's issues / *Marianismo*
- Motherhood / female genealogies
- Creating tableau

### FEATURED WORKS:

*Virgen of Guadalupe Series* (1978); image of traditional Guadalupe icon for reference; *Portrait of the Artist: Tableau Vivant* (1978)

### RESOURCES:

#### *Links to images*

- <http://www.csupomona.edu/~plin/women2/lopez.html>
- [http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/lopez\\_toc.html](http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/lopez_toc.html)

#### *Books*

- *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* by Laura E. Perez (2007): Duke University Press
- *Yolanda Lopez* by Karen Mary Davalos (2008): University of Minnesota Press

### DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Are there any religious icons in your house or that of family / friends? Where are they located? How are they displayed? What function do you think they serve?
- Do you think that artists have a right to use religious images in their work and transform them?
- What women in your family (or friends) would you honor the way that Yolanda honored her mother and grandmother?
- Do you think that mothers are respected in society or only on occasions such as Mother's Day?
- Do you feel a closer connection to the women or men in your family?
- Have students compare and contrast Lopez's different approaches to representing the women in her family and herself in the series. Prompt them to examine the different poses of the women and how they communicate activity / passivity. Do they attribute these approaches to generational differences?
- Have students compare and contrast the divergent relationships between the women and the snake and cherub symbols in the work.

## **MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Yolanda Lopez**

### *Altar to Myself*

This project is based on Lopez's *Portrait of the Artist: Tableau Vivant* (1978) in which she stands in front of a backdrop of the Guadalupe's radiating halo wearing a running outfit and raising up a bundle of paint brushes. The image of this work is not available online. A reproduction can be found in the article: "Yolanda Lopez: Breaking Chicana Stereotypes" by Betty LaDuke in the journal *Feminist Studies* Volume 20: Issue 1 (1994): p. 117. The article is available via library database. Contact Jillian Hernandez at [jillian.hernandez@gmail.com](mailto:jillian.hernandez@gmail.com) if you encounter difficulties locating it.

- Camera (digital or film)
- Tripod
- Backdrop of colorful radiating design or "aura"
- Short stool draped in fabric
- Assortment of student's personal objects

### **PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:**

- Students will be instructed to bring in an assortment of small objects that hold significant meaning to them to class (e.g. framed photographs, decorative objects from room, etc.)
- Students will be instructed to wear an outfit / uniform that is symbolic of their personality
- Instructors will create tableau backdrops of colorful auras inspired by female icons such as Guadalupe, Isis, Kali, etc.
- Students will choose a backdrop for their photograph and arrange objects in the foreground
- Students will assume various poses while a partner student uses the camera
- Images will be returned to students as the final work (instructors may choose to have students further embellish these photographs or create triptychs)

### **APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):**

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA—VA.5-8.4 (9-12.4): Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures



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## STUDENT HAND OUT: Yolanda Lopez

### Yolanda Lopez (born 1942--California)

Yolanda Lopez grew up in household run by her single mother who worked as seamstress. Lopez studied art at San Francisco State University in the 1960s where she participated in activism for civil and student rights.

Her best-known body of work is the *Virgen de Guadalupe* series in which she transforms the traditional image of the *Virgen* who is believed to have appeared to a Mexican Indian named Juan Diego in 1531. Lopez used the Guadalupe **icon** to portray herself and the women in her family because she felt that everyday women also deserve a place of honor.

Mexican and Mexican-American households often have images of La Virgen in their homes. Lopez's desire was not to disrespect or distort the image, but to draw attention to the heroism of Chicanas facing struggles in the U.S. such as trying to support themselves as single women, getting citizenship, and helping their families back in Mexico.

Yolanda was also referencing the issue of **Marianismo** in the Guadalupe series. Marianismo is a word used to describe how Latin women are burdened with the high expectation to be like the *Virgen*, who never commits sin and takes on the responsibility of caring for men and children. The artist wants to show how women can honor La Guadalupe while being strong, confident, and independent. Other artists such as Esther Hernandez and Alma Lopez have also used the Guadalupe icon as an empowering symbol for Latinas.

The reactions to Yolanda's work have not always been positive, some religious Chicanos have mis-understood the intention of her Guadalupe works and think that they are disrespectful. For example, the offices of the women-run Chicana magazine titled "Fem" received a bomb threat in response to a cover image Yolanda created that featured the Guadalupe wearing a pair of heels, which was referencing the Virgen as a modern Chicana.

Yolanda is still creating work in a variety of mediums that deal with issues such as discrimination against Mexican-Americans and immigration issues. Her work has been shown in numerous galleries and she is invited to discuss her projects at colleges and universities across the country.

#### Vocabulary

**Icon**— An image that is commonly used in art to represent a "sacred" or famous figure/object.