

*The “weird nostalgia” of whiteness:  
Genevieve Gagnard and Martine Gutierrez’ self-portrait photography*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice, California College of the Arts

by  
Meghan Smith  
Spring 2023

Copyright by  
Meghan Smith  
2023

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

We certify that this work meets the criteria for a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice at the California College of the Arts.



Ann Tartsinis  
Primary Thesis Advisor

05/22/2023

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



Jacqueline Francis, P.h.D.  
Thesis Mentor

05/23/2023

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



Glen Helfand  
Chair, Curatorial Practice

5/22/23

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been realized without the support of my advisors, supporters, and loved ones.

Thank you, of course, to artists Martine Gutierrez and Genevieve Gaignard for their inspiring, challenging, beautifully uncategorizable practices. I'd like to thank Genevieve for taking the time to speak with me and share her insights, as well as her studio manager Felicia Biondo for her kindness and dedication throughout this process. My appreciation goes out to their gallery teams at Vielmetter, RYAN LEE GALLERY, and Fraenkel Gallery, in particular Frish Brandt, who extended a warm welcome to me and encouraged my deep reading of Gutierrez' gorgeous *Indigenous Woman* publication.

Thank you to my partner Luke Williams who was there for me throughout this process, providing feedback and provocations along the way; and to my friends and CCA alum Hannah Waiters and Selam Bekele, who provided encouragement, love, and appreciation in times when I faltered.

Finally, I'd like to thank my advisor Ann Tartinis for her thoughtful guidance as this project took shape and ongoing emotional and intellectual support. I am also indebted to Jackie Francis for inspiring me before I even moved to San Francisco to start this program; for believing in me, chatting with me, and challenging me. Her writing, teaching, and general enthusiasm encouraged me to stay the course.

*The “weird nostalgia” of whiteness:  
Genevieve Gaignard and Martine Gutierrez’ self-portrait photography*

**Abstract**

In *Nobody Knows My Name*, 1961, James Baldwin describes how white people long for a bygone era, caught in a “weird nostalgia.” Contemporary American artists Genevieve Gaignard and Martine Gutierrez address this nostalgia in their work. Looking to critical discourses in whiteness studies and feminist theory, as well as contemporary pop culture, I conduct close readings of Gaignard’s and Gutierrez’ photographic self-portraits made between 2014 and 2022. Gaignard, a white-passing biracial woman who uses her body to explore racial and cultural identity, exposes legacies of American white supremacy. Gutierrez, a light-skinned Latinx transwoman of indigenous descent, subverts the glamorous aesthetics of Old Hollywood. Through elaborate costuming, subtle self-transformation, and careful staging of the photographic scene, both artists critique the artifice of heteronormative femininity by evoking the “weird nostalgia” of whiteness. I argue that their work provides new insights into racial performance, stressing the urgency of deconstructing racial nostalgia.

**Key Words**

nostalgia, memory, identity, whiteness, femininity, glamour, self-portrait photography

## Introduction

Bound inside a light wooden frame, a pale, pink-cheeked woman twirls in a green floral dress. Its airy chiffon skirt blurs in motion, floating into the foreground and consuming a third of the composition. The woman's face, by contrast, comes sharply into focus as she gazes upon a single white rose. She holds it delicately by the stem in her silk-gloved hand. Her expression is entranced, fixated, with peach lips held slightly open and brow slightly furrowed. Her yellow hair sits unnaturally on her scalp in tight, coiffed curls. A pink ribbon matching her gloves, choker, and belt gathers in a perky bow where her hair parts. Behind her we can discern the fuzzy contours of a white plantation-style mansion. Grand white marble columns are stained and chipped with disrepair. Its façade, brick painted white, blends into a lifeless glass entrance with drawn white curtains. The woman's presence here is unsettling, almost ghostly: is this abandoned structure her home? Who is she dressed up for? Is she merely a relic of the past?

This scene is a carefully composed self-portrait photograph titled *Off With Their Heads: And Just Like That*, 2022, by contemporary artist Genevieve Gagnard [fig. 1]. Born in 1981 in rural Orange, Massachusetts, and now based in Los Angeles, Gagnard uses her own body as a site for exploring racial identity, beauty norms, and socioeconomic status. Her practice is both symbolic and autobiographical, pulling from historical and personal references to challenge racial perceptions.<sup>1</sup> In this recent series of chromogenic prints, *Off With Their Heads*, 2022, Gagnard transforms herself by adopting popular tropes of the antebellum Southern plantocracy.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, contemporary artist Martine Gutierrez stages elaborate self-portraits that subvert

---

<sup>1</sup> Genevieve Gagnard, "About," [genevievegagnard.com](http://genevievegagnard.com).

<sup>2</sup> Other prints in the series interrogate class, whiteness, and femininity through Marie Antoinette-inspired styling and embodiments of Royal Doulton figurines—porcelain collectibles of early twentieth-century English "ladies" in ball gowns.

cultural tropes of white Western celebrity as circulated in popular media to explore the multiplicity of gender and racial identity.<sup>3</sup> Born in 1989 in Berkeley, California and now based in New York, Gutierrez produces glossy and often surreal photographs that cross boundaries between fashion photography and *critiques* of fashion photography.<sup>4</sup> In recent works including the *Body En Thrall* series, 2018-2020, and the *Plastics* series, 2020, the artist breaks open the suffocating ideals of American womanhood promoted by popular media.<sup>5</sup> Both Gaignard and Gutierrez act as director, artist, subject, and muse in their photographic work, fully conceptualizing and controlling their compositions.<sup>6</sup> I focus on these two artists, neither of whom has received significant scholarly attention yet, because the imagery they produce updates and complicates contemporary understandings of whiteness. As light-skinned people of color, they approach these series at a distance from *and* in proximity to whiteness, offering nuanced visions of selfhood. Both create at the intersection of racial and gendered representation by appropriating frequently used symbols of American whiteness: the Hollywood star, the blonde bombshell, the suburban housewife, the mythologized plantation mistress.

Scholars engaging critically with the concept of “whiteness” acknowledge the difficulty of defining it. As I expand upon later in this essay, the 1990s and early 2000s saw critical race scholars, art historians, and artists engage whiteness as a social, historical, political, psychological, and aesthetic concept. The emergence of critical whiteness studies as a discipline is often credited to bell hooks and Toni Morrison, rooted in earlier works by W.E.B. DuBois and

---

<sup>3</sup> Fraenkel Gallery, “Martine Gutierrez,” [fraenkelgallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez](http://fraenkelgallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez).

<sup>4</sup> Ryan Lee Gallery, “Martine Gutierrez Biography,” [ryanleegallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez](http://ryanleegallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez).

<sup>5</sup> Ryan Lee Gallery, “Press Release: Martine Gutierrez *VR EXHIBITION: CHINA DOLL, Rated R*,” February 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Though their photographic techniques and themes overlap, Gaignard and Gutierrez have otherwise distinct practices. Gaignard works in sculpture and installation, often incorporating her printed photographs into larger, immersive artworks. Gutierrez exhibits her photography as large-scale prints, in magazine format, and digitally, as seen in her curated online exhibition, *VR Exhibition: CHINA DOLL, Rated R* through Ryan Lee Gallery. She is also a filmmaker, performance artist, and musician.

James Baldwin.<sup>7</sup> In his 1961 collection of essays *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin remarks: “I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order.”<sup>8</sup> He describes whiteness as preoccupied with its own innocence and survival—in a manner that Gagnard’s blonde persona, fixated on the pure white rose, communicates. Baldwin’s observation is just as relevant today. Since the 1980’s, slogans of white nationalism such as “make America great again” have been trafficked in popular discourse. Sociologists describe this as racial nostalgia, a reactionary response to increasing population diversity of the American nation and the white majority’s perceived losses of power.<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon can be leveraged as propaganda towards an “active reconstruction of the past” when white people “dominated” American institutions.<sup>10</sup>

Both Gagnard and Gutierrez appropriate symbols from the idealized past to bring them into the present. They seek to reveal the lasting impacts of American racial nostalgia on contemporary Western culture. Through elaborate costuming, subtle self-transformation, and careful staging of the photographic scene, they critique the artifice of white femininity by evoking what Baldwin might call the “weird nostalgia” of whiteness. This essay takes an intersectional approach to their self-portrait photography through the lenses of critical whiteness studies and feminist theory. I approach this topic through close visual readings of artworks, engagement with secondary sources, and analysis of new and existing interview material from

---

<sup>7</sup> Notably, bell hooks’ *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* and *Black Looks: Race and Representation*; Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*; W.E.B. DuBois’ “The Souls of White Folk”; James Baldwin’s *The Price of the Ticket* and “On Being White... And Other Lies,” and for a relevant example in the realm of fiction, Nella Larsen’s *Passing*.

<sup>8</sup> James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Christine Reyna, Kara Harris, Andrea Bellovary, Angel Armenta, Michael Zarate, “The Good Ol’ Days: White Identity, Racial Nostalgia, and the Perpetuation of Racial Extremism,” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 25, no. 3 (2022): 81–103.

<sup>10</sup> Janelle L. Wilson, “REMEMBER WHEN...’: A Consideration of the Concept of Nostalgia,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56, no. 3 (1999): 296–304.



the artists. I begin by sketching a lineage of self-portrait photography as it depicts the racialized, gendered, and sexualized subject, bringing in scholarly analyses of the work of Cindy Sherman and Nikki S. Lee. I continue by contextualizing the conversation around whiteness as it relates to Gaignard and Gutierrez' practices, including perspectives on the concept of nostalgia. This section ends with an overview of the performative and constructed nature of self-portrait photography, relating back to the constructed nature of racial identity. I then analyze select photos by Gaignard made between 2017 and 2022, tracing how she employs the aesthetics of midcentury "suburbia" and the antebellum South, ultimately focusing on how the *Off With Their Heads* series represents how tropes of white womanhood upheld the system of American slavery. Gutierrez' photos follow, with close readings of work made between 2014 and 2020, focusing on the relationship between her Old Hollywood "blonde bombshell" styling and whiteness. The artists' own perspectives on how and why they deploy racial signifiers in their work are woven throughout. I conclude by broadening the conversation to the significance of racial performance today, and by outlining the sociopolitical urgency of understanding racial nostalgia. More than any other self-portrait photographers working today, Gaignard and Gutierrez visualize the "weird nostalgia" of whiteness in relation to their particular bodies, identities, and histories.

## Part I

The strategy of staged self-portrait photography is not new—as artist Jennifer Dalton noted, younger artists working in the medium exist “in the long shadow cast by Cindy Sherman.”<sup>11</sup> A pioneer of postmodern appropriation and deconstruction in the 1970s and 80s, Sherman examines the nature of identity and representation, taking inspiration from pop culture, television, advertising, and art history.<sup>12</sup> Like Gaignard and Gutierrez, she uses makeup, costuming, and staging to present herself as a variety of characters.<sup>13</sup> Her breakout series *Untitled Film Stills*, made between 1977 and 1980, comprises sixty-nine black and white photographs inspired by film noir, European art-house films, and Hollywood B movies from the 1950s and 60s.<sup>14</sup> Sherman appears in each shot deliberately costumed, styled, and posed as if promoting a film that does not exist. For example, in *Untitled Film Still #8*, 1978, Sherman becomes an anonymous blonde figure in a rustic beach setting [fig. 2].<sup>15</sup> *Untitled Film Still #11*, 1978, finds Sherman lying diagonally on a bed in a formal dress and pearl necklace [fig. 3]. She holds a crumpled tissue in her left hand and gazes forlornly at the ceiling, representing the cinematic trope of the “lonely housewife.”<sup>16</sup> The series sparks “desire and nostalgia” in the viewer by adopting clichés familiar to American audiences.<sup>17</sup> In feminist writer Judith Williamson’s oft-quoted 1983 essay “Images of ‘Woman,’” she explains how Sherman anticipates viewers’ assumptions based on existing images:

---

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Dalton, “Look at Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22, no. 3 (2000): 47.

<sup>12</sup> “Cindy Sherman,” *MoMA*, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1154>.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Meagher, *Woman’s Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008): 62–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358171>.

<sup>14</sup> Amanda Cruz, Amelia Jones, Elizabeth A.T. Smith, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> “Cindy Sherman, “*Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978,” publication excerpt from The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999), p. 295.

<sup>16</sup> “Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #27*, 1979,” *MoMA*, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56659>.

<sup>17</sup> Cruz, Jones, and Smith, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*, 4.

... Far from deconstructing the elision of image and identity, [Sherman] very smartly leads the viewer to *construct* it... by presenting a whole lexicon of feminine identities, all of them played by “her,” she undermines your little constructions as fast as you can build them up.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Laura Mulvey argues in her 1991 book *A Phantasmagoria of The Female Body* that Sherman, in part, shifted the feminist art agenda in the late 1970s and 1980s towards “a politics of *representation* of the [female] body,” more specifically “a re-representation, a making strange.”<sup>19</sup> Rather than attempt to depict themselves ‘authentically,’ artists like Sherman instead manipulated existing patriarchal images. Indeed, many theorists argue that the concept of femininity (that is, qualities or attributes *assumed* to convey womanhood) is inextricable from the mass-production of “illusion, of falseness.”<sup>20</sup> *Untitled Film Stills* cleverly expose the process by which femininity is constructed through popular media.<sup>21</sup>

The majority of scholarly attention has been paid to Sherman’s interrogation of gender; relatively little has been said about how her practice might deconstruct racial identity.<sup>22</sup> Since her breakthrough in the 1980s (and the early literature about her), younger artists have pushed the tradition of feminist appropriation forward through the lens of race.<sup>23</sup> Artist Nikki S. Lee takes the mutability of racial and cultural identity as her primary theme. Best known for her *Projects*

---

<sup>18</sup> Judith Williamson, “Images of ‘Woman,’” *Screen* 24, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1983), 102–116.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Mulvey, “A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 188 (1991): 137–150.

<sup>20</sup> Stephanie Brown, “On Kitsch, Nostalgia, and Nineties Femininity,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 22, no. 3 (2000): 44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414521>. Of course, as Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, all gender identities are constructed to a certain extent, based on existing social scripts.

<sup>21</sup> Gagnard and Gutierrez both engage critically with the film industry, perhaps nodding to Sherman, or more likely because of the unique intersection of fiction, propaganda, and racialized and sexualized subjects movies communicate. The photographs I analyze in this project expand into pop cultural realms like film, television, advertising, and social media content. I am interested in how both artists tie broader cultural references into their work to highlight how symbols of racial nostalgia continue to be disseminated in the public realm.

<sup>22</sup> With the exception of Maurice Berger in *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art* and a few recent articles about Sherman’s appropriative and reductive use of blackface in the early series *Bus Riders*, I have not found significant academic analysis of how integral whiteness is to Sherman’s constructed personas.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, if artists of the so-called *Pictures Generation* were affected by the sudden influx of images and advertising in the 1960s, the ubiquity of images today has grown exponentially.

series made between 1997 and 2001, Lee adopted the dress, mannerisms, and lifestyles of American types—named in her series as punks, exotic dancers, hip-hop fans, Hispanics, yuppies, and seniors—and arranged casual snapshots of herself embedded in each group. The resulting photographs required Lee, like Sherman, to transform herself chameleon-like with heavy makeup and styling, but this time included a cast of other participants.<sup>24</sup> Lee’s performances are far more provocative in nature, donning brownface and cornrows for her controversial *Hip Hop Project* series and heavy makeup and hoops for her *Hispanic Project* series. The white communities she infiltrates—although not racialized as often in America as other groups depicted—include the downtown New York punk scene, Wall Street finance offices, and Midwestern trailer parks.

In *The Ohio Project (7)*, 1999, Lee stares directly into the camera [fig. 4]. She lounges on the arm of a chair, leaning into the white man holding a hunting rifle next to her. A large Confederate flag is stretched across the window blinds to her right, overlaid with the words: I AIN’T COMING DOWN. Around the two figures, the living room setting is modest, with old-fashioned wallpaper, crocheted blankets, ashtrays, empty soda cans and an open bag of chips. Lee is strikingly blonde here—her yellow hair swoops back into a striped headband that matches her striped white and pink tube top. Her pink miniskirt bares her midriff and legs. The barrel of the man’s rifle rests lightly on Lee’s thigh, making a soft indent. The image overall is shocking and uneasy. The Confederate flag—a potent symbol of Jim Crow-era segregation decades after the Civil War, used in Ku Klux Klan rituals, and recently revived by white nationalist movements—sets the stage for white power and separatism.<sup>25</sup> Is Lee a willing participant or

---

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Dalton, “Look at Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22, no. 3 (2000), 49.

<sup>25</sup> Cameron D. Lippard, “Heritage or Hate?: A Pedagogical Guide to the Confederate Flag in Post-Race America,” *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2017): 56–78.

hostage? Despite spending weeks in this trailer park, bleaching her hair, and dressing to fit in, her visible “Asian-ness” puts her in danger in such an overtly white, masculine space.<sup>26</sup>

Art historian Maurice Berger argues that Lee’s work exploits stereotype to make visible a “racial category that has, for the most part, remained invisible in U.S. culture: whiteness.”<sup>27</sup> As America was built on ideals of white supremacy, whiteness usually skates by as the unmarked, hegemonic norm set in opposition to racialized “others.” The discipline of critical whiteness studies, which rose to prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s, attempted to deconstruct this normativity. Informed by critical race theory, which posits that race is socially constructed rather than biologically real, whiteness scholars generally agree that white racial identity has unstable boundaries, contains a diverse range of experiences, and is constantly in flux. This slipperiness, however, does not negate the real-world consequences of white privilege. Cheryl Harris’ seminal 1993 paper “Whiteness As Property” outlines the links between racial identity and economic benefits in the United States, arguing that whiteness is not just a skin color but a valorized status within a racial hierarchy.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, as critical whiteness scholar David Roediger argues in his 2005 book *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White*, ethnic groups new to the United States often perform(ed) whiteness to access the material and social access that comes with it.<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, whiteness today describes and encompasses a particular position of power. I locate whiteness through Berger’s definition as an “imprecise racial category” that can

---

<sup>26</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Nikki S. Lee: Parts* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2006); Maurice Berger, Wendy Ewald, David R. Roediger, and Patricia J. Williams, *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art (Issues in Cultural Theory)* (Baltimore: University of Maryland, 2004), 70.

<sup>27</sup> Berger, Ewald, Roediger, and Williams, *White*, 59. Specific to *The Ohio Project*, the working white poor, often but not exclusively in the American South, were stereotyped in popular media as “white trash” threatening the white race overall. See Matt Wray’s *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) for an in-depth analysis of this intersection between class and white racialization.

<sup>28</sup> Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993).

<sup>29</sup> David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

carry “multiple meanings, multiple ethnicities, and multiple skin colors.”<sup>30</sup> Tropes of whiteness go beyond physical markers like pale skin and into broader representations associated with “absence, normativity, supremacy, privilege, beauty, purity, terror, and death,” in the words of dramaturg and theater studies scholar Faedra Chatard Carpenter, who details how black performers inhabit whiteness as a method of critique in her 2014 book *Coloring Whiteness*.<sup>31</sup> Carpenter’s perspective is especially applicable to Gagnard and Gutierrez, who negotiate tropes and symbols of whiteness without themselves identifying as white.<sup>32</sup>

Like “whiteness,” postmodern definitions of “the self” in self-portraiture are elusive beyond its constructed and performative nature. Self-portraiture through photography, a medium already used for mass communication, is thus perfectly positioned to question notions of selfhood. Both Sherman and Lee reject simplistic definitions of the unified subject and expand the discourse of subjectivity. Sherman explains: “I feel I’m anonymous in my work. When I look at the pictures, I never see myself; they aren’t self-portraits. Sometimes I disappear.”<sup>33</sup> Lee emphasizes the difference she sees between American individualism and group identity formation in Asia: “Western culture is very much about the individual, while Eastern culture is more about identity in the context of society. You simply cannot think of yourself out of context.”<sup>34</sup> While Sherman’s photos allude to broader cultural influences on her appearance and selfhood, it is fitting that Lee’s actually feature other people, as she specifically explores how group membership shapes identity formation.

---

<sup>30</sup> Berger, Ewald, Roediger, and Williams, *White*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Faedra Chatard Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>32</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, I chose to focus narrowly on Gagnard and Gutierrez for the particular intersection of nostalgia and whiteness in both their practices. In an expanded version of this project, many other contemporary artists could be added for diverse perspectives on representing whiteness (and navigating its impacts) today.

<sup>33</sup> “*Untitled*, Cindy Sherman, 1982,” *ICA Boston*, [www.icaboston.org/art/cindy-sherman/untitled](http://www.icaboston.org/art/cindy-sherman/untitled).

<sup>34</sup> Goldberg, *Nikki S. Lee: Parts*. Interestingly, however, she never performs as a member of Korean or Korean-American communities—the identities she assumes are always “other.” Some critics have called out Lee’s comparison between Western and Eastern thought as merely an excuse.

The question of how accurate the *self* is in “self-portraiture” remains just as relevant for Genevieve Gagnard and Martine Gutierrez. In *Auto Focus: The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography*, curator and scholar Susan Bright outlines the extensive number of contemporary photographers working in opposition to the modernist concept of a unitary self. Bright’s definition of a self-portrait photograph, which I apply in this essay, is one that “must show the artist, it must explore the concept of identity—either the artist’s own or something more broad or universal—and it must offer the viewer a tendentious point of view or contemplation about the self.”<sup>35</sup> Besides Sherman and Lee, many artists I have researched seek to complicate identity by employing “theatricality, impersonation, and masquerade” in their photographs.<sup>36</sup> One clear example is Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951, Osaka, Japan), who impersonates celebrity figures and famous paintings through complicated disguises and digital manipulation. His work, which almost transcends artistic mediums, examines the complicated relationship between Japan and the Western art historical canon and challenges the “authority” of racial, cultural, and gendered identities.<sup>37</sup> In a different and arguably more profound way, visual activist Zanele Muholi (b. 1972, Durban, South Africa) shoots self-portraits as representations of Black women in her series *Somnyama Ngonyama – Hail the Dark Lioness*. She describes these dramatic black-and-white images as “political statements,” using props to embody various real, imaginary, and historical Black women in tension with the ways they are popularly (mis)represented.<sup>38</sup> Multidisciplinary artist Christian Thompson (b. 1978, Gawler, Australia) uses self-portraiture as a form of “spiritual repatriation,” bringing costumes, natural materials, and archival imagery in

---

<sup>35</sup> Bright, *Auto-Focus*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Bright, *Auto-Focus: The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>37</sup> “Yasumasa Morimura,” *Luhring Augustine*, [www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/yasumasa-morimura](http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/yasumasa-morimura).

<sup>38</sup> Sophie Bernard, “Zanele Muholi’s Self-Portraits as Visual Weapons,” *Blind Magazine*, May 6, 2021, [www.blind-magazine.com/news/zanele-muholis-self-portraits-as-visual-weapons/](http://www.blind-magazine.com/news/zanele-muholis-self-portraits-as-visual-weapons/).

conversation with his multiple identities.<sup>39</sup> Thompson's photographic personas embody his Bidjara and European ancestors, queer heroes, and historical colonial figures, including some where he appears in cakey white face paint and ashy blonde wigs (exaggerating the literal whiteness of his disguise, as Gaignard and Gutierrez often do).<sup>40</sup>

Within the broad field of self-portraiture, my interest in Gaignard and Gutierrez lies in their dissection of a distinctly American whiteness, replete with all the codes and symbols that uphold its construction.<sup>41</sup> While their overall practices differ in many ways, the specific works I analyze here operate at the shared intersection of whiteness and nostalgia. References to twentieth-century American cinema (recalling Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* again) are key ways Gaignard and Gutierrez employ nostalgia in their self-portrait photography. More a cultural phenomenon than individual feeling, nostalgia draws on "powerful symbols of the past" upon which we can construct our identities.<sup>42</sup> Nostalgia crafts a desirable narrative, like film, only to sell it back to us as memory. Though Gaignard did not live in the antebellum South, nor Gutierrez in the Old Hollywood era, they direct our attention to how both periods have been "prepackaged" and disseminated in the collective zeitgeist.<sup>43</sup> Like the "strange" re-representations of feminist appropriation art, Gaignard and Gutierrez expose the "weird"-ness of these constructed pasts. Their photographs include layers of fact, fiction, interpretation, and distortion, troubling nostalgic visions of whiteness and femininity.

---

<sup>39</sup> "Christian Thompson: We Bury Our Own," Pitt Rivers Museum, [www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/christian-thompson-we-bury-our-own](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/christian-thompson-we-bury-our-own).

<sup>40</sup> See Christian Thompson's *Polari* series, 2014, in particular the triptych *Trinity I, II, and III*. Burke, Kelly, "Christian Thompson, the Australian artist taking over London's streets: 'I can be my own worst critic'," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2022, [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/jun/14/christian-thompson-the-australian-artist-taking-over-londons-street-s-i-can-be-my-own-worst-critic](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/jun/14/christian-thompson-the-australian-artist-taking-over-londons-street-s-i-can-be-my-own-worst-critic).

<sup>41</sup> I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention Arthur Jafa's *The White Album*, 2018, as a video collage that explores many of the same representations of contemporary American whiteness. In this work, Jafa turns his lens onto a racialized whiteness, splicing scenes ranging from white people's polite discomfort to cultural appropriation to violent hate crimes.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, "REMEMBER WHEN..." 296.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, "On Kitsch, Nostalgia, and Nineties Femininity," 40.



## Part II

Genevieve Gagnard identifies as a biracial artist, critiquing whiteness from within *and* outside of it.<sup>44</sup> The daughter of a white mother and Black father, Gagnard explores her own family dynamics and privilege as someone who could “pass” for white through the lens of American history and culture. Her practice spans self-portrait photography, collage, sculpture, and installation, most often addressing racism, the nuances of cultural and racial identity, and the concept of passing. While her sculptural work also connects personal questions to broader systems of power, her photographs in particular balance provocative racial tropes with more sensitive, nuanced explorations of selfhood. The characters she embodies blend contemporary pop culture references with historical symbols. I will analyze select works made between 2017 and 2022 to trace how they critique American whiteness through the lens of nostalgia.

In *Neighborhood Watch*, 2017, Gagnard stares out through a window with one hand on the glass, the other gripping its frame [fig. 5]. Her expression is concerned about something happening outside, beyond the lens. Gagnard’s styling and décor locate the setting in the 1950s.<sup>45</sup> She wears a short, coiffed blonde wig, silver cat-eye glasses, brown blouse, and tan pleated skirt. Her baby blue fingernails are nearly filed into almond tips. We see a glimpse of the home’s hallway behind her with four wood-framed photographs: one an illustration of a blonde

---

<sup>44</sup> Genevieve Gagnard, “About,” [genevievegagnard.com/about](http://genevievegagnard.com/about); Genevieve Gagnard, “Unpacking My Identity,” *In the Foreground* podcast, February 16, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023. While Gagnard does intend to capture a midcentury aesthetic, she also references class differences. “I wasn’t raised in a family where we updated our homes,” she explained—keeping up with home decor trends and renovations is only something people with money can achieve. Like the constant reinventions of the fast fashion industry, the idea of “trend” has inherent class implications. In this case, Gagnard symbolically traverses space and time, with an acute awareness of how “vintage” becomes appropriated into the contemporary mainstream.

angel glowing white; the other three are photographs of what appear to be family members in various poses.<sup>46</sup> The home's exterior and interior is painted a drab cream, with matching scalloped window shades.

The title *Neighborhood Watch* completes the narrative as something instantly recognizable to many American viewers. This is one of the many planned communities that expanded after World War II, a heteronormative, middle-class space which expects and directs predictable behavior. Gaignard, intentionally “channeling” a middle-aged suburban white woman, watches closely out her window for the intrusion of outsiders.<sup>47</sup> In her book *Strange Encounters*, scholar Sara Ahmed analyzes the behavior of recognizing strangers. She describes the sociopolitical dynamics of neighborhood-building, particularly suburban communities with a vested interest in protecting property and the fantasy of racial purity.<sup>48</sup> Ahmed points to the suburban neighborhood as particularly threatened by difference inside its own borders, the fear of a “neighbour who is also a stranger—who only *passes* as a neighbour” (emphasis mine).<sup>49</sup> The neighborhood, then, is “a site of crisis” wherein those who belong must police each other's belonging.<sup>50</sup>

Gaignard's concerned expression and tense body language in *Neighborhood Watch* communicate not only questions of belonging, but a potentially violent encounter. George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch coordinator of his affluent gated community in Florida, infamously claimed self-defense at trial after murdering Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black

---

<sup>46</sup> In a personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023, Gaignard revealed to me that this particular house belonged to her friend's late grandparents. She was intrigued by the family photos and religious iconography throughout, and only lightly staged the background.

<sup>47</sup> Personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Recognising Strangers,” *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ahmed, “Recognising Strangers,” 26. Gaignard notably interrogates the concept of racial “passing,” as seen in another 2017 photograph titled *Colorblinds*. In this work, Gaignard appears as a more modern persona standing hesitantly at the window, with a poster for the 1960 film *I Passed for White* behind her.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmed, “Recognising strangers,” 26.

teenager walking to visit relatives.<sup>51</sup> White women have also violently policed public space. Carolyn Bryant falsely accused a Black child, Emmett Till, of “whistling” at her at the family’s Mississippi grocery store in 1955. Her husband and brother-in-law kidnapped and brutally murdered the child in retaliation, exemplifying the weaponization of white womanhood.<sup>52</sup> More recently, Amy Cooper lied to police that Black birdwatcher Christian Cooper was “threatening [her] life” in Central Park after he asked her to leash her dog; Jennifer Schulte called the Oakland police because a Black family dared to barbeque outside at Lake Merritt; Alison Ettl called the police on an eight-year-old Black girl selling water outside her own house in San Francisco; among countless other examples.<sup>53</sup> Thus the watchful gaze of Gaignard’s persona—surrounded by nostalgic symbols of American suburbia—is anything but neutral.

Gaignard wears the same costume in *Get Out*, 2017, this time staring suspiciously over her shoulder into the camera [fig. 6]. She is now in the yard of the one-story California postwar home, watering flowers with a long green hose. Her white kitten heels sit empty in the center of the composition, leaving her barefoot on the sidewalk. Evoking the suburban suspicion Ahmed examines, Gaignard’s backwards gaze feels like the viewer has intruded upon a private domestic moment. Her ritual of yard upkeep reflects the orderly perfection of the photo—the plain stucco exterior; the cropped green grass; the hard, horizontal right angles of the home and sidewalk; her pressed, pleated skirt and stiff curls. *Get Out*’s cinematic staging mirrors a Larry Sultan-style vision of affluent West Coast suburbia, dominated by warm cream and green tones.<sup>54</sup> Her lighting choices underscore an unease behind such suburban perfection. The harsh sun casts contrasting

---

<sup>51</sup> Campbell Robertson and John Schwartz, “Shooting Focuses Attention on a Program That Seeks to Avoid Guns,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Megan Armstrong, “From Lynching to Central Park Karen: How White Women Weaponize White Womanhood,” *32 Hastings Women’s L.J.* 27, 28.

<sup>53</sup> “White Woman Who Called Police on a Black Man at Central Park Apologizes, Says ‘I’m Not a Racist,’” *Time*, May 26, 2020; “‘BBQ Becky,’ White Woman Who Called Cops on Black BBQ,” *Newsweek*, September 4, 2018; “Permit Patty: Woman ‘calls police’ on eight-year-old for selling water,” *BBC News*, June 25, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> See Sultan’s *Pictures from Home*, 1992.

shadows in the photo, obscuring Gaignard's eyes and hiding any view inside the window. An intense shadow descends from the roof and another from the left hand side of the composition, the darkness reaching out towards her white shoes. This sharp contrast between light and dark, black shadows set against off-white highlights, might be read as a metaphor for the racial divisions America was built on.<sup>55</sup> In *The Pleasantville Effect*, scholar Greg Dickinson traces how “nostalgically tinged” visions of 1950s suburbs are crafted and reinforced through film.<sup>56</sup> Movies like *Pleasantville*, 1998, *The Truman Show*, 1998, *American Beauty*, 2000, *Far From Heaven*, 2002, and others present bland, white environments as representations of “safe,” moral, nostalgic environments under threat of racialized or sexualized danger.<sup>57</sup> Gaignard constructs her setting in this tradition, inserting subtle moments of strangeness into a backdrop of oppressive normalcy.

Titled *Get Out*, Gaignard's image was made after the release of Jordan Peele's 2017 blockbuster thriller of the same name. In the movie, Black protagonist Chris visits his white girlfriend's family for the first time at their estate in upstate New York. Its disturbing plot isolates Chris in an oppressively white environment, highlighting the politics of belonging and concluding with the reality that he is not just an outsider, but a commodity for white consumption.<sup>58</sup> The older white guests at the home yearn for something they've lost—their able bodies, eyesight, sexual prowess—and driven by this nostalgia, implant their brains into Black bodies. By referencing the movie, Gaignard connects her work to its particular intersection of race, place, and exclusion.

---

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Richard Dyer analyzes in *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997) how photography and movie lighting privilege(d) whiteness. Even in the abstract, light and shadow were racialized and assigned moral values.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Dickinson, “The Pleasantville Effect: Nostalgia and the Visual Framing of (White) Suburbia,” *Western Journal of Communication* 70, no. 3 (2006), 212-233.

<sup>57</sup> Dickinson, “The Pleasantville Effect,” 219.

<sup>58</sup> *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures, 2017).

White women play an outsized role in Peele's *Get Out*, most notably Chris' girlfriend Rose, who begins as a trusted ally and ends as the architect of his potential destruction, and Rose's mother, who feigns friendliness before hypnotizing and incapacitating him. In much of Gaignard's work, she directs viewers towards the particular role white women have in upholding white supremacy, deconstructing what bell hooks describes as the "false image of themselves as powerless, passive victims" which deflects attention from "their aggressiveness, their power (however limited in a white supremacist, male-dominated state), their willingness to dominate and control others."<sup>59</sup> In *Get Out*, Gaignard foregrounds the role of the white woman as keeper of the home, protecting the illusion of midcentury domestic innocence.

In her most recent self-portraiture series titled *Off With Their Heads, 2022*, Gaignard incorporates more historical symbolism. She intentionally sought out a location that "felt like" a romanticized version of the antebellum South, though it was actually a friend's property in Los Angeles.<sup>60</sup> The building in her photographs shares the same white marble columns, stone steps, white siding, and multi-paneled glass entrance as the twelve-bedroom Georgia plantation in the 1939 film *Gone With The Wind*.<sup>61</sup> Gaignard's green floral chiffon gown is noticeably similar to one the protagonist, Scarlett O'Hara, wears in a barbecue scene [fig. 7 and fig. 8].<sup>62</sup> O'Hara also wears a choker necklace, though hers is black while Gaignard's is baby pink. Gaignard foregrounds her outfit in *Off With Their Heads: The Gallant South*, extending the dress out by its corners as if to showcase its full elegance [fig. 7]. Upon closer inspection, however, the dress looks wrinkled and dirty in spots. This effect matches the dilapidation of the building behind her.

---

<sup>59</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, South End Press, 1984, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Regina Cole, "Iconic Plantation House From 'Gone With the Wind' Is On the Auction Block," *Forbes*, July 10, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> In *Gone With The Wind*, a prolonged scene shows O'Hara trying on and discarding gowns until she finds the one that would "best set off her charms." Such intentional styling—and construction of self—mirrors Gaignard's curated persona.

The porch's Ionic columns are stained and chipped, and the concrete slabs leading up to the stairs show signs of paint spillage and graffiti. Tellingly, its outer façade is not marble but brick painted a chalky white, subtly reflecting Gaignard's own costuming.

Fallen on the ground to Gaignard's right is a single white rose, symbolizing to an American audience innocence and (racial) purity. The flower may in fact be what's known colloquially as a "Confederate rose," the species *hibiscus mutabilis*, named for the flowers soaked by blood spilled on Civil War battlefields.<sup>63</sup> In *Off With Their Heads: And Just Like That*, which opened this essay, Gaignard has picked up the rose. She stares at it with an expression difficult to define—at once wistful, desiring, and disdainful. In a 2022 interview, Gaignard explains the symbolic connections between her persona and the rose: "I was willing to put myself in the position of this character that was written into history as this precious flower."<sup>64</sup> Every careful detail in Gaignard's composition adds up to a fictionalized ideal of the Southern belle, glossing over the racial terror that upheld her privilege. In *Reconstructing Dixie*, scholar Tara McPherson describes the South as both the "site of the trauma of slavery and also the mythic location of a vast nostalgia industry."<sup>65</sup> She continues by critiquing how American popular culture continues to reproduce "icons of whiteness" inspired by that mythic location, exemplified by Scarlett O'Hara.<sup>66</sup> The romance, innocence, and purity media attributes to Southern femininity serves to distract and dissociate from the real brutalities of the antebellum era, as well as the racial inequities left in its wake.<sup>67</sup> As a biracial woman, Gaignard's body in this character's "position" would have been contested, if not impossible. Her appropriation, then,

---

<sup>63</sup> Steve Bender, "All About the Confederate Rose," *Southern Living*, accessed November 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Colony Little, "Interview with Genevieve Gaignard," *Contemporary Art Review LA*, September 7, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>66</sup> McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 3.

troubles the very racial boundaries and assumptions that the Southern belle relies on. Together with the abandoned, decaying backdrop, it's clear—something's off.

In this vein, Gagnard's persona in *The Gallant South* is less a historical costume and more an urgent reminder of how pervasive Southern nostalgia is today. Plantation tourism is shockingly popular, as are plantation weddings—marketed as “classic” and “picture-perfect” venues recalling the “glory of the Old South.”<sup>68</sup> So-called antebellum parties and plantation-themed balls still occur at colleges and universities, most notably through the Kappa Alpha fraternity, a group that embraces Confederate general Robert E. Lee as their “spiritual leader.”<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon that Gagnard directs us towards reveals the urgency of any real reckoning with American history. The privilege of selective memory has serious impacts in the present and future.

---

<sup>68</sup> “Tell the Wedding Industry: There’s Nothing Romantic About Slavery,” Color of Change petition, <https://act.colorofchange.org/sign/plantation-weddings/>; Michael Luongo, “Despite Everything, People Still Have Weddings at ‘Plantation’ Sites,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> Followers of reality television will remember Rachael Kirkconnell, a contestant on *The Bachelor* in 2021, come under fire for participating in an “antebellum plantation-themed ball” while at Georgia College & State University in 2018. She wore a frilly white and pink gown.

### Part III

Martine Gutierrez is an artist, performer, and musician who identifies as a “woman, as a transwoman, as a latinx woman, as a woman of indigenous descent, [and] as a femme artist and maker.”<sup>70</sup> In her practice, particularly her 2018 self-published magazine *Indigenous Woman*, Gutierrez deconstructs the concept of authenticity as it relates to racialized and gendered identities.<sup>71</sup> Working within what she calls the “gray area” between binaries, her self-portrait photographs convey a range of fluid characters and scenes.<sup>72</sup> Gutierrez deploys appropriation and re-representation in her self-portraits as a stereotypical Latina housekeeper, a “demonic” Indigenous god, an “authentic” Guatemalan maiden, a high fashion model, an American pop star, and more. Because her work breaks apart existing archetypes, Gutierrez appropriates the lexicons through which they are most often communicated: advertising, photography, and film. The works I analyze in depth later epitomize this practice, and specifically visualize the suffocating ideals of American whiteness.

While the artist avoids essentializing or reductive understandings of her transness in interviews, she often talks about the pressure of hegemonic expectations of womanhood on her own gender identity, asking: “What does being a woman mean?... It’s probably something I’ll never stop asking myself.”<sup>73</sup> Gutierrez’ identity construction and artistic practice weave in and out of each other, overlapping and diverging, as she formulates her own gender within and against existing paradigms. About archetypes of feminine beauty like the “Supermodel” and “blonde bombshell” that influenced her childhood and adolescence, Gutierrez explains:

---

<sup>70</sup> Martine Gutierrez, “Letter from the Editor,” *Indigenous Woman*, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Gutierrez, “Letter from the Editor.”

<sup>72</sup> Kathy Battista, *New York New Wave: The Legacy of Feminist Art in Emerging Practice* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).

<sup>73</sup> Hilarie M. Sheets, “A Shape-Shifting Woman Plays All the Parts,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2021.



It's all so ingrained within cis culture that anyone who is Trans or non-gender binary is forced to maneuver through the Supermodel propaganda as well.<sup>74</sup>

In place of the traditional archetype of the blonde, blue-eyed, cis white woman, I insert myself—my narrative, my body, and my control over how both are used to talk about the lack of visibility for individuals like me.<sup>75</sup>

The images of hegemonic femininity are always cis, white, thin, and often blonde, blue-eyed, and unnervingly artificial in some way. Gutierrez often includes mannequins as “co-stars” in her self-portraits to further trouble distinctions between what is “real” and what is not, particularly relating to assumptions about trans bodies.<sup>76</sup> She mirrors the carefully constructed representations in popular media through elaborate self-portraits that she conceives, styles, directs, and shoots entirely on her own.

Her black-and-white photograph *Body En Thrall, Blonde Shoe*, 2020 [fig. 9] was included in her solo exhibition titled *China Doll*.<sup>77</sup> Gutierrez occupies the center of the composition, sitting with legs apart in a flowing white dress. Her hair is white-blonde and styled in loose barrel curls. She gazes in anguish up at a faceless mannequin—we see its left leg and arm, dangling one of her white kitten heels in its hand, but the rest of the body extends out of frame. Barefoot in crisp white linen clothes, the mannequin and its intentions remain mysterious, seemingly coded male by Gutierrez.<sup>78</sup> Is he gallantly returning her shoe, like in Cinderella, or is he wrenching it from her, like some kind of aggressor? Gutierrez extends her left hand to tighten around his arm, as if pulling it back towards her, imploring. Her body position, open mouth, and

---

<sup>74</sup> Audra Wist, “The Girl in the Picture: an Interview of Performance Artist Martine Gutierrez,” *Autre*, October 26, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Diana Tourjée, “Martine Gutierrez’s Self-Portraits Make the Old New Again,” *Garage*, February 14, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Blake Abbie, “The Artist Martine Gutierrez Goes Blonde,” *Interview Magazine*, February 2, 2021. More on the conversation about the “real” in trans experience in Christian Williams’ interview with Judith Butler, “Judith Butler on gender and the trans experience: ‘One should be free to determine the course of one’s gendered life,’” *Verso*, May 26, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan Lee Gallery, “Martine Gutierrez VR Exhibition: China Doll, Rated R,” February 1 - April 30, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> By obscuring the mannequin’s features in this image and *Blonde Bed* mentioned next, Gutierrez subtly toys with viewer’s assumptions of its potential gender.

slipping dress strap over her right breast convey a state of distress. The styling and makeup feel distinctly vintage, mirrored by her choice to shoot in black and white—capturing, like Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*, “desire and nostalgia.”<sup>79</sup> Though not the exact same design, Gutierrez’ long draped white dress and matching heels recall Marilyn Monroe’s scandalous outfit in the 1955 film *The Seven Year Itch* [fig. 9 and fig. 10]. Marilyn Monroe the *persona* continues to be a beloved icon, but Norma Jeane Mortensen the *person* was (and still is) catastrophically exploited, abused, and commodified in Hollywood. Gutierrez wades through the long lineage of representing Monroe, using her immediate nostalgic appeal to draw viewers into an unsettling image.

Toying with the film industry’s ‘damsel in distress’ trope, Gutierrez hints at a potentially violent moment in *Body En Thrall*, *Blonde Shoe* with the mannequin looming above a crouching, exposed, sexualized woman. In a video accompanying the photos in the *China Doll* exhibition, the artist narrates: “To be a woman is to be famous... Is it ever her body? Or an archetype of it?... She’s still the Madonna or the Marilyn, the Venus or the whore, the wife or the mistress.”<sup>80</sup> As Lois Banner argues in her article *The Creature from the Black Lagoon: Marilyn Monroe and Whiteness*, the bleached platinum hair that Gutierrez sports in her self-portrait has a fraught history in American cinema, representing “perverse sexuality” in the 1920s before its rebranding towards “innocence” in the mid-1950s.<sup>81</sup> Old Hollywood “dumb blondes” like Monroe, Mae West, Jean Harlow, and Betty Grable were often trapped in their own constructed personas, at the mercy of a sexually and emotionally abusive film industry. Gutierrez describes these figures as “marked by tragedy,” held up as a narrow ideal that is just “another beautiful obituary to aspire

---

<sup>79</sup> Cruz, Jones, and Smith, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Martine Gutierrez, *China Doll*, 2020, video, Ryan Lee Gallery.

<sup>81</sup> Lois W. Banner, “The Creature from the Black Lagoon: Marilyn Monroe and Whiteness,” *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 4 (2008): 11-13.

to.”<sup>82</sup> Her mix of distress and desire, pain and pleasure in *Body En Thrall, Blonde Shoe* suggests the harmful reality of Old Hollywood while appropriating its glamour.<sup>83</sup>

*Body En Thrall, Blonde Bed, 2020*, progresses the narrative of the previous work [fig. 11]. With the same blonde wig, smudged black eyeliner, and parted lips, Gutierrez now stares directly into the camera. Her expression is dazed, eyelids heavy and bleached brows slightly furrowed. She lounges nude on a white mattress, with the naked mannequin face down next to her, its head hidden behind hers. Gutierrez covers her right breast with the corner of a stark white bedsheet as the rest drapes over her knees and legs. Contrasting with her cinematic hair and makeup, the backdrop is stripped down, just a bare mattress on the floor of an emptied swimming pool.<sup>84</sup> The artist reaches out with one finger to scratch at the peeling white paint of the wall in front of her. Such a setting suggests the fragile superficiality of whiteness and calls the supposed glamour of her persona into question. In *White*, Richard Dyer describes the extent to which (virtuous, upper-class, heterosexual) white women were associated with light in popular American media. He analyzes the specific strategy of representing white bodies—actresses, models, even fictional subjects of paintings—as backlit or bathed in light, “glowing” to convey their moral superiority against darker elements in the composition.<sup>85</sup> Aware of this gendered and racialized history, Gutierrez bisects *Body En Thrall, Blonde Bed* with shadow. She reverses expected lighting of her blonde persona, shading her face in the dark half of the image, as if

---

<sup>82</sup> Ryan Lee Gallery, “Press Release: Martine Gutierrez VR EXHIBITION: CHINA DOLL, Rated R,” 2020.

<sup>83</sup> In an interview with *W Magazine*, Gutierrez describes the influence of movies on her: “I’m transfixed by glamour. Since I was little, it has been my escape. I consumed it through movies.” Siddhartha Mitter, “The Originals: Martine Gutierrez,” *W Magazine*, November, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Though this setting is not as apparent in the photographs, Gutierrez’ 2021 video work *CHINA DOLL, Rated R* shows a wider view of the abandoned pool location, and includes behind-the-scenes footage of how she staged the photographs analyzed here.

<sup>85</sup> Dyer, *White*, 76. Gutierrez’ mannequin companion here has a darker complexion than here, underscoring another one of Dyer’s arguments about how white heterosexual couples are often represented in film: the man is dark and desiring, the woman light and chaste.

somehow corrupted or “fall[en] from grace,” to borrow Dyer’s phrasing.<sup>86</sup> Tellingly, *Body En Thrall, Blonde Bed* recalls Bert Stern’s haunting photograph of nude Marilyn Monroe titled *Reclining Bed*, from the last portrait series taken before her untimely death in 1962 [fig. 15-16].<sup>87</sup>

Both self-portrait photographs mentioned so far offer a disturbing version of nostalgic glamour. Drawing us into the work with a recognizable cinematic aesthetic, Gutierrez lays bare the “cultural trap” of beauty.<sup>88</sup> In *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*, Carol Dyhouse traces the word’s rising popularity in the early twentieth century, explaining that glamour became most strongly associated with the female stars of 1930-1950s Hollywood.<sup>89</sup> Often connoting “artifice” and “performance,” it was inherently gendered and sexualized.<sup>90</sup> In industrializing European and American cities, “female glamour” developed alongside consumerism and in many ways defined modernity.<sup>91</sup> Art critic John Berger takes this historical analysis further by linking it to popular media: “publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour.... Publicity is, in essence, nostalgic. It has to sell the past to the future.”<sup>92</sup> Gutierrez illustrates this phenomenon by appropriating one language of publicity, that is, glossy editorial photographs in the style of commercial advertising. Gutierrez reveals the mechanisms by which a romanticized past is sold to the masses as a promise. She notes dryly in a statement about the series that “blonde is the cheapest privilege you can buy,” and that cheapness is certainly captured in *Body En Thrall, Blonde Bed*.<sup>93</sup> Her insight into “buying” privilege reflects Dyhouse’s research on how we cannot view beauty outside the lenses of class and consumerism.

---

<sup>86</sup> Dyer, *White*, 77.

<sup>87</sup> Sarah Nechamkin, “The Last Photos of Marilyn Monroe,” *The Cut*, June 8, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Ryan Lee Gallery, “Press Release: Martine Gutierrez VR EXHIBITION: CHINA DOLL, Rated R,” 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Carol Dyhouse, “Introduction,” *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Brown, “On Kitsch, Nostalgia, and Nineties Femininity,” 43.

<sup>91</sup> Dyhouse, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>92</sup> John Berger, “Chapter 7,” *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

<sup>93</sup> Martine Gutierrez, “Press Release: Martine Gutierrez VR EXHIBITION: CHINA DOLL, Rated R,” *Ryan Lee Gallery*, 2020.

Gutierrez' *Plastics* series breaks the illusion of glamour by exaggerating its manufactured nature. In *Plastics, Brigitte, 2020*, her face strains against a sheet of plastic wrap, stretched taut to press her features flat [fig. 12]. She stares at us through the glossy layer, at once lifeless and animated. Her lips, carefully made up in scarlet lipstick, snarl in a plump, open pout. Her auburn eyebrows furrow slightly. The plastic wrap binds her nose downward and to the left. Her skin, light tan with peach undertones, is sprinkled with faint freckles and a dark beauty mark—or “Monroe mole”—to the left of her curled lips. Unnaturally yellow curls splay across her forehead and fall past her ears, pushed slightly off-kilter to reveal soft dark brown wisps at the hairline. Most unsettling are her eyes, with their lashes pressed backwards into the corneas and powder-blue contacts hiding dark brown irises underneath. The right contact has migrated off course and floats halfway into the white of her eye. Though the composition crops tightly on Gutierrez' face and neck, we can see by the abrupt angle of her left shoulder that her own arm may be the culprit, gripping and pulling the plastic wrap just outside the photographic frame.

In the 2022 film *Don't Worry Darling*, released two years after Gutierrez' *Plastics* series, protagonist Alice lives in an idyllic town modeled after 1950s suburbia.<sup>94</sup> Wealthy heterosexual married couples live in company homes, the women all housewives, the men all employees of a secret government agency. Alice (played by Florence Pugh) experiences a number of surreal hallucinations, until the plot progresses to expose the “town” as a simulation for misogynist incels in the 21st century. Driven by intense nostalgia for the (imagined) picture-perfect, patriarchal lifestyle of postwar American suburban life, a handful of men programmed a system wherein they could live out their fantasy with real, kidnapped women. One of the more disturbing scenes when Alice breaks with utopian expectations shows her trying to suffocate herself with Saran wrap. Alone in the kitchen, she suddenly wraps the plastic around her head,

---

<sup>94</sup> *Don't Worry Darling*, directed by Olivia Wilde (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2022).

smoothing it down until it's airtight [fig. 13]. We see her take one breath in, one breath out, and then struggle to continue. She eventually claws at it with her nails and rips herself free. Breath throughout the movie correlates with freedom—in the final scene, after Alice escapes the simulation, the screen cuts black while we hear her take a sharp gasp of air. The character's desire to kill herself via suffocation earlier may have been, equally, a drive to escape. In a similar scene, Alice hallucinates the house walls pressing in on her, evoking intense claustrophobia. These physical experiences illustrate the movie's stance that the town is stifling and oppressive towards women.

Like the character Alice, Gutierrez appears to be the agent of her own suffocation in *Plastics, Brigitte*. The visual metaphor of asphyxiation reflects how the artist sees American beauty standards: “this is the image that we're *trapped* by—little waist, peroxide hair, colored contacts” (emphasis mine).<sup>95</sup> Gutierrez' plastic wrap conveys that sense of being trapped, bound, suffocated. Upon further inspection, however, her persona is not quite in the physical distress one would expect. She gazes confrontationally into the camera (albeit with sliding contact lenses), tilting her head down and parting her lips in a recognizably high-fashion pose. The plastic wrap hangs open at the bottom edge—unlike Alice's tight closure—letting air in and clinging mostly to her lips, nose, brow, and hair. This choice associates the plastic more with a film or filter than with a weapon. Recalling Williamson and Mulvey's analyses of Cindy Sherman's appropriation art, *Plastics, Brigitte* critiques the prepackaged images of “women” disseminated in American culture. With a little imagination, Gutierrez' disguise here could be a mass-produced Halloween costume, a mask fresh out of the bag, even a viral TikTok makeup tutorial.<sup>96</sup> *Plastics, Brigitte* represents a distinctly *whitened* image of woman: blue contacts supersede brown eyes, and

---

<sup>95</sup> Hilarie M. Sheets, “A Shape-Shifting Woman Plays All the Parts,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Renee Rodriguez, “I Tried TikTok's Plastic-Wrap Makeup Hack, and I Have Thoughts,” *Popsugar*, March 9, 2022.

yellow-blond hair conceals dark roots. It makes the artificiality of white femininity hyper-visible, alluding to the beauty and plastic surgery industries that sell such an image. But the relative agency Gutierrez has in this work points to a negotiation with the image, rather than a flatout rejection. Indeed, associate curator at the Whitney Marcela Guerrero claims Gutierrez' practice always has an element of "self-critique...on her own terms."<sup>97</sup> Even within the suffocating ideal, the artist succeeds at performing a kind of strange glamour.

## Conclusion

Gaignard and Gutierrez' provocative self-portrait photographs blur the boundaries between past and present, self and other, fact and fiction. The select artworks I have analyzed tackle representations of a specific, white, American femininity, revealing its constructed nature through tools of transformation. Their photographs derive their potency from preexisting imagery that many viewers recognize. By revealing the inherent whiteness of these clichés, the artists remind us of how urgent the question of nostalgia is in today's political climate. Adopting *Gone With The Wind*-style symbolism, Gaignard exposes the enduring romanticization of Southern slavery and its reinforcement of white supremacy now. Her representations of suburbia highlight the dangers of policing space and belonging. Gutierrez, evoking desirable yet tragic Hollywood stars, deconstructs idealized representations of womanhood. Her disturbingly artificial series *Plastics* questions how industries—of beauty, of surgery, of nostalgia—package and sell femininity. While existing writing on Gaignard and Gutierrez dives into the intersection of race and gender in their practices, not much attention has been paid to nostalgia as a primary theme.

---

<sup>97</sup> Sheets, "A Shape-Shifting Woman Plays All the Parts."

The medium of self-portrait photography foregrounds the particularity of the artists' bodies, identities, and autobiographies. Notably, both artists acknowledge the privilege their appearances afford them. Gagnard, someone with pale skin who could “pass” for white, explains that she takes ownership of “being part of the problem” by photographing her body as one “of privilege”.<sup>98</sup> Gutierrez advocates for trans visibility while navigating the world as someone who doesn't always get “clocked” as trans, recognizing her “privilege to be critical.”<sup>99</sup> Rather than perpetuating binaristic thinking, they both express realistic negotiations within and against systems of power. Both artists present critiques that are nuanced, often hidden underneath layers of beauty, seduction, or artifice. The wide range of references and symbols they incorporate invite multiple readings of each image. It is precisely this ambiguity that they intend to capture—mirroring the fluidity of identity itself.

The thin line between critiquing and *becoming* the archetype is evident in how Gutierrez describes her practice. In one interview, the artist compares her self-portraiture to a scene in *The Matrix*, 1999, where protagonist Neo jumps inside the body of his nemesis Agent Smith to explode and destroy him. Gutierrez' self-portrait photos represent “quite literally, ‘becoming the mold to break her.’”<sup>100</sup> Since her blonde persona is “the white woman other white women aspired to be,” she asks, “how do I tear her down? I have to kiss her.”<sup>101</sup> Gutierrez frames her transformation as a necessary step towards deconstructing, then destroying, hegemonic representations. Both verbs here—*aspire* and *kiss*—connote desire, one a social envy and the

---

<sup>98</sup> Jessica Herndon, “Genevieve Gagnard's 'Strange Fruit' Sparks Tough Conversations on Race,” *W Magazine*, April 1, 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Abbie, “The Artist Martine Gutierrez Goes Blonde”; Osman Can Yerebakan, “How Martine Gutierrez Turned Herself Into Cleopatra, Mulan, and Other Historical Heroines for a Public Art Project in Bus Shelters Across the U.S.,” *Artnet*, September 7, 2021. Indeed, Gutierrez compares the freedom of being perceived as cisgender to the privilege of becoming blonde.

<sup>100</sup> Pearl Fontaine, “From INDIGENOUS WOMAN to CHINA DOLL, Martine Gutierrez Remains the Boss,” *Whitewall*, June 23, 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Abbie, “The Artist Martine Gutierrez Goes Blonde.”



other a sexual urge. The ways Gutierrez characterizes her self-portraits are thus more complex than simple condemnations. Instead, they illustrate how we are all conditioned to desire idealized womanhood, and adopt the strategies of the popular media *doing* that conditioning.

In contemporary culture, selfies are a ubiquitous tool of communicating identity. Every representation of someone's body and "lifestyle" is inherently curated. Photographic self-portraiture online can often be a technology of racial performance. A number of white women influencers around the world have been called out for "blackfishing," a term referring to the use of makeup, surgery, or digital editing to appear Black on the internet.<sup>102</sup> The Kardashian/Jenner family is infamous for appropriating Black women's aesthetics in heavily manipulated social media content. Social media users have also swiftly pointed out, however, some influencers' recent "return" to signifiers of whiteness.<sup>103</sup> Instagram creator The Darkest Hue asks in a viral post: "are your problematic faves ditching 'Black' aesthetics in pursuit of more mature and respected public personas?"<sup>104</sup> She continues by analyzing how Kim Kardashian, Ariana Grande, and Miley Cyrus have adopted their naturally paler skin, allegedly removing fillers, dyed their hair platinum blonde, and romantically aligned themselves with white men (Kardashian also wore Marilyn Monroe's vintage gown to the 2022 Met Gala).<sup>105</sup> More useful than passing judgment might be asking what such aesthetic choices are meant to communicate. While adopting characteristics aligned with Blackness allowed many influencers to earn "cool" factor and monetize new markets, performances of "classic white femininity" could indicate their desire to access a different level of social and political power.<sup>106</sup> Those with

---

<sup>102</sup> Faith Karimi, "What 'Blackfishing' means and why people do it," *CNN Entertainment*, July 8, 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Stacy Lee Kong, "For Her Next Trick, Kim Kardashian Will Be Cosplaying as a White Woman," *Friday Things*, July 15, 2022.

<sup>104</sup> The Darkest Hue (@darkest.hue), "As non-Black celebrities experiment with and profit from Black aesthetics, it is interesting to watch the choices they make as they get older and mature," Instagram, November 26, 2021.

<sup>105</sup> As Whitney Associate Curator Marcela Guerrero points out in her essay "Unspooled," 2022, Martine Gutierrez directly refers to Kim Kardashian in her work, as she epitomizes the ability to monetize her own racial "ambiguity."

<sup>106</sup> @darkest.hue, Instagram, November 26, 2021.

skin privilege, in Gagnard's words,<sup>107</sup> have the potential to shift in and out of racialized identities to align with perceived power.

Both artists expand beyond fine art discourse to engage deeply with pop culture, contemporary film and television, and social media content. These references are particularly relevant to racial nostalgia which, as argued earlier, often trafficks in symbols and images of an imagined past.<sup>108</sup> Gagnard wants to capture the “resurgence of symbols” to ask, in her words, “what’s happening now that’s based off of what’s happened in the past?”<sup>109</sup> Social media is where she turns to trace the cyclical nature of trends. In Gagnard’s *Off With Their Heads* series, for example, all her dresses are from contemporary brand Selkie, whose puffy pastel designs went viral on TikTok and Instagram throughout the pandemic, affording women the “pleasures of nostalgia, dress-up, and play.”<sup>110</sup> Fashion critic Mina Le describes these historically-influenced, hyper-feminine dresses as “romantic” forms of “escapism.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, content marked #retro and #vintage consistently trends on TikTok.<sup>112</sup> Such collective obsession with aesthetics of the past turns sinister when those aesthetics are used to advertise oppressive values. One example is the “TradWife” phenomenon (short for Traditional Wife), wherein white female TikTok users post clips of themselves cooking, cleaning, and caring for their husbands while styled in distinctly 1950s-era clothing.<sup>113</sup> One such influencer cheerily describes “submitting” to her

---

<sup>107</sup> Hannah Ongley, “Artist Genevieve Gagnard shatters biracial stereotypes,” *i-D*, January 18, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Wilson, “REMEMBER WHEN...”

<sup>109</sup> Personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023. Her interest in “resurgences” and cyclical patterns connects to contemporary analyses of white backlash in American politics, as documented by Katanga Johnson and Jim Urquhart, “White nationalism upsurge in U.S. echoes historical pattern, say scholars,” *Reuters*, September 4, 2020.

<sup>110</sup> Jenny Singer, “The Enduring Appeal of Those Viral Selkie Dresses,” *Glamour*, August 19, 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Singer, “The Enduring Appeal of Those Viral Selkie Dresses.” The Selkie brand is notably one of the most size-inclusive labels today, which many customers have lauded them for, in addition to their ethical production lines. My analysis of their nostalgic aesthetics is not an overall critique of the brand, but more an interest in how Gagnard visually represents the collapsing of past and present through their designs.

<sup>112</sup> Kate Dwyer, “How Vintage Went Viral,” *Elle*, January 31, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Colette Grimes, “Why are conservative women romanticizing 1950’s housewives on TikTok?” *Hypebae*, October 4, 2022.

husband in all aspects of life. This elision of aesthetics and very real politics is a concerning trend at the intersection of performance, gender, class, and race. Romanticized videos of “traditional” life ignore the fact that only upper-middle-class white women could afford the relative luxury of housewife status in the 1950’s, and could not have performed their duties without relying on the underpaid labor of women of color.<sup>114</sup> The fact that such content is gaining traction in the U.S. now—when women’s bodily autonomy is widely threatened, trans people are being legally and personally targeted, and white nationalism is on a strong upsurge—is concerning.<sup>115</sup> With this context in mind, Gaignard’s “channeling” of tropes of midcentury white womanhood takes on a new urgency.<sup>116</sup>

As Gaignard and Gutierrez make plain, transforming oneself through symbols of a romantic past, of purity, even of glamour, has deep cultural implications. The “false image” of white women’s relative innocence in American racism, which bell hooks discusses in her book *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, begins to erode in their self-portrait photography.<sup>117</sup> Given the weaponization of white femininity for historical and contemporary white supremacy, expanding Gaignard and Gutierrez’ lines of inquiry to other racial performances could provide new insight into the intersections of race, gender, and collective memory. From a curatorial perspective, their practices demand more direct readings into the inherent whiteness of the systems they critique. Interpreting their work means making the symbols of whiteness they exploit specific and not universal—marking whiteness in wall texts or catalogs in the same way we are apt to do with indigeneity and Blackness, for example. Baldwin’s “weird” nostalgia and Mulvey’s “strange” representations denote non-normativity, just as Gaignard and Gutierrez

---

<sup>114</sup> Grimes, “Why are conservative women romanticizing 1950’s housewives on TikTok?” 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Johnson and Urquhart, “White nationalism upsurge in U.S.”

<sup>116</sup> Personal conversation with the artist, March 14, 2023.

<sup>117</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 14.

visualize the artifice and even surreality of white femininity.<sup>118</sup> Their subtle self-portrait photographs highlight the urgency of visual literacy today, especially when confronted with nostalgic propaganda promising white consumers the beauty, comfort, and power of an imagined past.

---

<sup>118</sup> Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*; Mulvey, “A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman.”



Fig. 1. Genevieve Gagnard, *Off With Their Heads: And Just Like That*, 2022, chromogenic print, 36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 54 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo credit: Brica Wilcox.



Fig. 2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #8*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 7 9/16 x 9 1/2 inches. © 2023 Cindy Sherman. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.



Fig. 3. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #11*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 7 1/16 x 9 7/16 inches. © 2023 Cindy Sherman. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.



Fig. 4. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (7)*, 1999, chromogenic print, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the International Center of Photography.





Fig. 5. Genevieve Gagnard, *Neighborhood Watch*, 2017, chromogenic print, 20 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 6. Genevieve Gagnard, *Get Out*, 2017, chromogenic print, 36 x 54 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 7. Genevieve Gagnard, *Off With Their Heads: The Gallant South*, 2022, chromogenic print, 48  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 72  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo credit: Brica Wilcox.



Fig. 8. Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1939.



Fig. 9. Martine Gutierrez, *Body En Thrall, Blonde Shoe*, 2020, chromogenic print, 48 x 32 inches. Courtesy of Ryan Lee Gallery.



Fig. 10. Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*, 20th Century Fox, 1955.



Fig. 11. Martine Gutierrez, *Body En Thrall, Blonde Bed*, 2020, chromogenic print, 40 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Ryan Lee Gallery.



Fig. 12. Martine Gutierrez, *Plastics, Brigitte*, 2020, chromogenic print, 24 x 17 inches.





Fig. 13. Florence Pugh as Alice in *Don't Worry Darling*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2022.



Fig. 15-16. Bert Stern, *The Last Sitting* series, 1962.

## Bibliography

- Abbie, Blake. "The Artist Martine Gutierrez Goes Blonde." *Interview Magazine*, February 2, 2021.
- Ahmed, Sara. "Recognising Strangers." *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Aguilera, Jasmine. "White Woman Who Called Police on a Black Man at Central Park Apologizes, says 'I'm Not a Racist.'" *Time*, May 26, 2020.
- Armstrong, Megan. "From Lynching to Central Park Karen: How White Women Weaponize White Womanhood." *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 27-50.
- Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961.
- Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985.
- Banner, Lois W. "The Creature from the Black Lagoon: Marilyn Monroe and Whiteness," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 4 (2008): 11-13.
- Battista, Kathy. *New York New Wave: The Legacy of Feminist Art in Emerging Practice*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2019.
- BBC News. "Permit Patty: Woman 'calls police' on eight-year-old for selling water." *BBC News*, June 25, 2018.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.
- Berger, Maurice, Wendy Ewald, David R. Roediger, and Patricia J. Williams. *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art (Issues in Cultural Theory)*. Baltimore: University of Maryland, 2004.
- Bright, Susan. *Auto-Focus: The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2010.
- Brown, Stephanie. "On Kitsch, Nostalgia, and Nineties Femininity," *Studies in Popular Culture* 22, no. 3 (2000): 44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414521>.
- Butler, Judith. "Judith Butler on gender and the trans experience: 'One should be free to determine the course of one's gendered life.'" *Verso* blog, May 26, 2015.
- Carpenter, Faedra Chatard. *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014.

- Cole, Regina. "Iconic Plantation House From 'Gone With the Wind' Is On the Auction Block." *Forbes*, July 10, 2019.
- Color of Change. "Tell the Wedding Industry: There's Nothing Romantic About Slavery." Color of Change petition. <https://act.colorofchange.org/sign/plantation-weddings/>.
- Cruz, Amanda, Amelia Jones, Elizabeth A.T. Smith. *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997.
- Dalton, Jennifer. "Look at Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22, no. 3 (2000): 47-56.
- Dickinson, Greg. "The Pleasantville Effect: Nostalgia and the Visual Framing of (White) Suburbia," *Western Journal of Communication* 70, no. 3 (2006): 212-233.
- DuBois, W.E.B. "The Souls of White Folk." In *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1920.
- Dwyer, Kate. "How Vintage Went Viral." *Elle*, January 31, 2022.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Dyhouse, Carol. *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*. London: Zed Books, 2010.
- Fontaine, Pearl. "From INDIGENOUS WOMAN to CHINA DOLL, Martine Gutierrez Remains the Boss." *Whitewall*, June 23, 2021.
- Fraenkel Gallery. "Martine Gutierrez." [fraenkelgallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez](http://fraenkelgallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez).
- Gaignard, Genevieve. "About." [genevievegaignard.com](http://genevievegaignard.com).
- Gaignard, Genevieve. "Interview with Genevieve Gaignard." Interview by Colony Little. *Contemporary Art Review LA*, September 7, 2022.
- Gaignard, Genevieve. Personal conversation with Genevieve Gaignard, March 14, 2023.
- Gaignard, Genevieve. "Unpacking my Identity." *In the Foreground* podcast, February 16, 2021.
- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Nikki S. Lee: Parts*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2006.
- Grimes, Colette. "Why Are Conservative Women Romanticizing 1950's Housewives on TikTok?" *Hypebae*, October 4, 2022.
- Gutierrez, Martine. *China Doll*. 2020, video. Ryan Lee Gallery.
- Gutierrez, Martine. "Letter from the Editor," *Indigenous Woman*, self-published, 2018.

- Gutierrez, Martine. *Martine Gutierrez VR Exhibition: China Doll, Rated R*. February 1 - April 30, 2021. Ryan Lee Gallery.
- Harris, Cheryl I. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787>.
- Herndon, Jessica. "Genevieve Gaignard's 'Strange Fruit' Sparks Tough Conversations on Race." *W Magazine*, April 1, 2022.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* and *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Johnson, Katanga and Jim Urquhart. "White nationalism upsurge in U.S. echoes historical pattern, say scholars." *Reuters*, September 4, 2020.
- Karimi, Faith. "What 'Blackfishing' means and why people do it." *CNN Entertainment*, July 8, 2021.
- Lee Kong, Stacy. "For Her Next Trick, Kim Kardashian Will Be Cosplaying as a White Woman." *Friday Things*, July 15, 2022.
- Lippard, Cameron D. "Heritage or Hate?: A Pedagogical Guide to the Confederate Flag in Post-Race America," *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2017): 56–78.
- Luongo, Michael. "Despite Everything, People Still Have Weddings at 'Plantation' Sites." *New York Times*, October 2020.
- Michelle Meagher, *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008): 62–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358171>.
- McPherson, Tara. *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Mitter, Siddhartha. "The Originals: Martine Gutierrez." *W Magazine*, November, 2019.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Mulvey, Laura. "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman." *New Left review*, 1, no. 188 (1991): 137–150.

- Ongley, Hannah. "Artist Genevieve Gaignard shatters biracial stereotypes." *i-D*, January 18, 2017.
- Reyna, Christine, Kara Harris, Andrea Bellovary, Angel Armenta, and Michael Zarate. "The good ol' days: White identity, racial nostalgia, and the perpetuation of racial extremism." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 25, no. 3 (2022).
- Robertson, Campbell and John Schwartz. "Shooting Focuses Attention on a Program That Seeks to Avoid Guns." *New York Times*, March 22, 2012.
- Rodriguez, Renee. "I Tried TikTok's Plastic-Wrap Makeup Hack, and I Have Thoughts." *Popsugar*, March 9, 2022.
- Roediger, David R. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.
- Ryan Lee Gallery. "Martine Gutierrez Biography." [ryanleegallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez](http://ryanleegallery.com/artists/martine-gutierrez).
- Ryan Lee Gallery, "Press Release: Martine Gutierrez VR EXHIBITION: CHINA DOLL, Rated R," 2020.
- Sheets, Hilarie M. "A Shape-Shifting Woman Plays All the Parts." *New York Times*, September 7, 2021.
- Sherman, Cindy. *Cindy Sherman*. MoMA exhibition. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1154>.
- Sherman, Cindy. *Untitled*, 1982. ICA Boston. [www.icaboston.org/art/cindy-sherman/untitled](http://www.icaboston.org/art/cindy-sherman/untitled).
- Sherman, Cindy. *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978. publication excerpt from *The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999, p. 295.
- Sherman, Cindy. *Untitled Film Still #27*, 1979. MoMA. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56659>.
- Singer, Jenny. "The Enduring Appeal of Those Viral Selkie Dresses." *Glamour*, August 19, 2021.
- Tourjée, Diana. "Martine Gutierrez's Self-Portraits Make the Old New Again." *Garage*, February 14, 2019.
- Williamson, Judith. "Images of 'Woman.'" *Screen* 24, No. 6 (Nov-Dec 1983): 102–116.
- Wilson, Janelle L. "'REMEMBER WHEN...': A Consideration of the Concept of Nostalgia," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56, no. 3 (1999): 296–304.

Wist, Audra. "The Girl in the Picture: an Interview of Performance Artist Martine Gutierrez." *Autre*, October 26, 2016.

Yerebakan, Osman Can. "How Martine Gutierrez Turned Herself Into Cleopatra, Mulan, and Other Historical Heroines for a Public Art Project in Bus Shelters Across the U.S." *Artnet*, September 7, 2021.

Zhao, Christina. "'BBQ Becky,' White Woman Who Called Cops on Black BBQ." *Newsweek* September 4, 2018.