
DIGITAL ALLEGORY

Martina Lopez

Martina Lopez was introduced to computer imaging over twelve years ago by the artist Paul Berger at the University of Washington. Lopez immediately recognized the potential of this new imaging tool which allowed her to create new photographic works by assembling and manipulating existing images. One of the artist's earliest series of computer-assisted works began shortly after the death of her father in 1986. Lopez began working with her family's photographs as a way of reconstructing memories and exploring feelings of loss and change. From this series she created works dedicated to her father, mother, and her eldest brother who was killed in Vietnam when she was four years old. The artist remarked that many of the memories of her oldest brother were in part constructed from his presence in family photographs. Working with snapshots from family vacations Lopez began to stitch together new images of her family that would exist in an artificial space of her own creation outside of a specific moment in time. Of this Lopez writes, "By extracting people from their original context and then placing them into fabricated landscapes, I hope to retell a story of their being, one which allows the images to acquire a life of their own. While the pieces from photographs verify an actual lived experience, the landscape stands as my metaphor for life, demarcating its quality, where the horizon suggests an endless time."

In later images Lopez began to incorporate found photographs and images taken from family albums other than her own. In doing so the artist created works which reflected her own thoughts and experiences, but also allowed the viewer to bring their own interpretations and memories into the work. The turn-of-the-century photographic studio portraits which figure prominently throughout Lopez's work evoke a resonance to our own individual memories of family and past experiences. The rigid and contrived poses and settings which were common in photographers' studios of that period often mirror our own personal photographic archives of familiar faces and distant relations who, although disconnected by the passage of time, are linked by memory or through stories which have been passed down over generations. These photographs then become a mnemonic for a specific memory where an image of a birthday party, a wedding, or an individual duplicating a gesture, or wearing a familiar outfit, or standing in a recognized place provokes a synchronous recollection in our own lives.

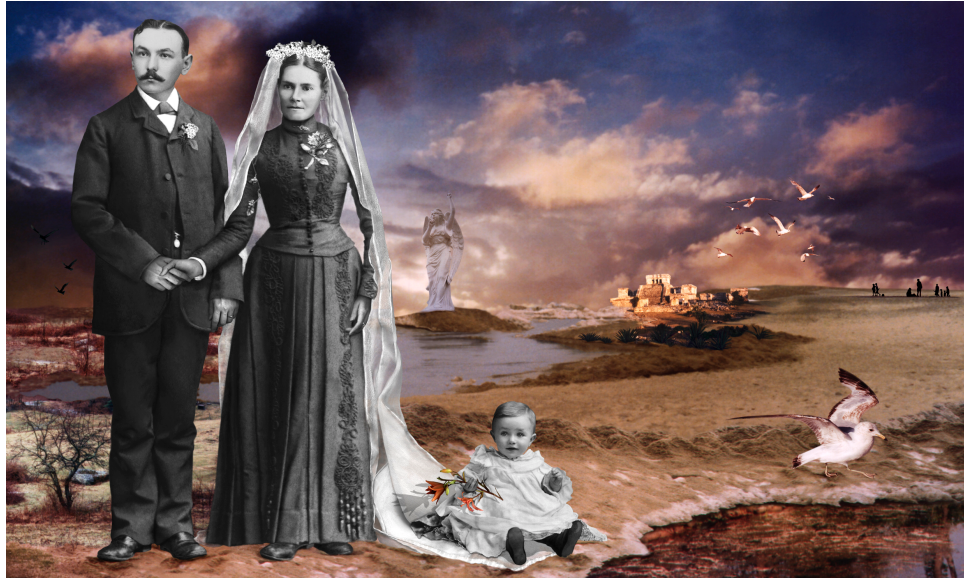


Revolutions in Time, I

30" x 50" Silver Dye-Bleach Print

Martina Lopez©1994

The figures in Lopez's images vary in scale and placement within each scene and are rendered in monochromatic tones so they seem to have no direct connection to the fabricated landscapes they occupy. The surreal landscapes, composed of disjointed topographies that are appropriated from other sources and from photographs made specifically for the piece, become a stage setting in which the placement of each character is carefully choreographed. The large scale of Lopez's work, often up to 40 x 60 inches, is a key element in their interpretation. At a distance we consider the relationship between the primary characters in each image, as we move closer we become aware of the secondary characters in the scene and ponder their role in the landscape. When these large panels are placed together they begin to be read as individual segments of a much larger story similar to other allegorical works of art throughout history from ancient pictographs, to Medieval tapestries, to Renaissance frescos, to contemporary murals which visually compress accounts of great epics and significant events onto a single two dimensional plane.



Questioning Nature's Way, I

30" x 50" Silver Dye-Bleach Print

Martina Lopez©1998

In the most recent works presented in this exhibition the artist looks back to a very emotional year which saw the death of one of her brothers and the birth of her first child. She writes, "This blatant exchange of life and death made me question many things, the intangible human spirit, the miracle of birth, the passage of death, nature's role of the mother, and my own inner conflict of independence and the dependent child." For Lopez the foundation of each series is autobiographical, but also states that "the specific stories are not necessary to understanding the work, but they are what drive their creation. My images have become a visual diary, a place where I come to terms with life." In her computer-assisted images Lopez presents us with an intricate mosaic fashioned from millions of individual pixels that create an allegory of life, death, and nostalgia, and like the memories and the photographs they reference, her images exist in their own temporal state.

*Gary Hesse,
Associate Director, Light Work*

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