ARTIST STATEMENT

Luna Enriquez is an Indigenous multimedia artist from Northern California, living and working in Portland, Oregon. Her work is influenced by the Dada movement, Indigenous Futurism, DIY punk art, advertising, and propaganda. Fascinated with image appropriation and recontextualization, her work blurs the line between the familiar and the bizarre. She pulls inspiration from the used or discarded, often mining secondhand stores and free bins for vintage books and magazines which are then deconstructed and given new life in service of a different narrative.

Luna Enriquez
Thesis Crit Seminar
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Throughout my artistic practice, images of American consumerism have fascinated me, specifically as they relate to the white nuclear family. As someone who did not experience that lifestyle growing up, I have created a mental version of it that is likely far from reality; less as something aspirational and more as an alternate universe that I am prohibited from entering. My research into this culture has led me to a focused interest in suburbia, particularly what I consider to be the archetypal suburban lifestyle of the Midwest. As an outside observer, things that are everyday occurrences to someone raised in the suburbs appear to me to be unfamiliar rituals stemming from a system of beliefs that I'm not sure I can ever truly understand. I intend to approach my research through what I view as a sort of inverted anthropological lens, trying to understand the "norm" from the point of view of someone who has not experienced a typical American life.

The aim of this project is to thoroughly dissect white suburban culture, perhaps out of the misguided idea that if I successfully take it apart, I might find where I fit into the picture. What is that element at the core of the white suburban vision of the American dream that I find so intangible? Can it be isolated, reproduced, or taught to others on the outside who dream of one day blending in? And, most relevant to my particular situation, do those of us who *don't* dream of blending in have any role to play in the suburban narrative created by middle and upper middle-class white people besides being a potential outside danger encroaching on their well-regulated lives?

My partner of over six years grew up in the suburbs outside of Chicago. From his family's perspective, my childhood as a low-income Native person living on and off the

reservation in a rural area likely seems as strange to them as suburbia seems to me. However, one of these experiences is considered normal (theirs) while the other is often treated as if it's some sort of primitive society with esoteric social rules, and is researched as such by white sociologists, anthropologists and the like. As an Indigenous woman, I have been subjected to the constant fetishization of my culture and have witnessed an overwhelming amount of non-Native people picking apart Indigenous traditions in a way that seems to only serve their personal image of what Native people can be, often resulting in the perpetuation of harmful tropes such as the "Ecological Indian" or the "Noble Savage".[1]

Stereotypes of this sort persist because they can plausibly be written off as novel, positive traits by non-Native people, therefore minimizing their problematic nature.[2] However, when the roles are reversed and white people start having their culture viewed as foreign or exotic, they react defensively despite being the ones historically in control of the narrative. I hope that my work on this topic can shed light on the lack of true objectivity in research and reflect my experience as a subject of white anthropological studies back onto non-Native people. My aim is not to intentionally display a biased view of what suburban life is. Instead, I want to allow those who are unfamiliar with the feeling of having their culture put under a microscope to experience what many Native people feel on a daily basis, taking inspiration from artists like Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and James Luna.

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[1] McNaughton, Brooke. "The Noble Savage and Ecological Indian: Cultural Dissonance and Representations of Native Americans in Literature." Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects, December 1, 2010. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors/70.
[2] Dina Gilio-Whitaker, "The Problem With The Ecological Indian Stereotype," KCET, February 7, 2017, https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild/the-problem-with-the-ecological-indian-stereotype.

With this project, I intend to maintain my core value of using accessible materials to create works that do not alienate those without the financial ability to create something similar. My parameters for accessibility are that the materials must be low-cost and reasonably convenient for those without access to an art studio outside of their home. I will be using the risograph machine, an outdated printing system that uses transparent soy-based ink and runs similarly to a traditional copier, as well as a Xerox machine. My creative process for this project will begin with building an image library of found material relating to suburbia and stereotypes of the typical middle class white lifestyle as I understand it, the content (and limitations) of which will dictate the way my work takes shape visually. The act of sourcing these images involves going to thrift stores and estate sales and looking at books published between the 1950s to the 2000s. Typically, I focus on books instructional or informational nature that happen to contain photos rather than selecting books *about* art or photography, as I prefer to piece together many independent images to form a piece rather than starting from something that was composed with aesthetics or art in mind. I have also chosen to limit myself to physical media, allowing the element of chance to play a role in the curation of my visual language.

I intend to create a series of 8-10 risograph prints ranging in size from 8"x10" to 10"x12". The subject matter will be pulled from my image library, then scanned, overlapped in different colors and recontextualized to create new meaning, with each print containing multiple layers of flat color. The prints will be displayed like posters and will be surrounded by some of the typical furnishings of a suburban home circa the 1960s-80s. They will be accompanied by a single color eight-page zine made on a Xerox machine that dives deeper into my research, providing further food for thought in relation to the pieces themselves as well as expanding on traditional anthropological strategies and their ramifications. My background as an artist has

been deeply influenced by the punk ethos of DIY, with the integration of art, activism and accessibility being a primary goal of my practice. Art made with low-cost materials like a copy machine and office supplies is gritty, imperfect and non-archival, qualities that push back against the values of the world of gallery art. By combining these analog processes with my research topic, I intend to marry my aesthetic with my subject matter, fully embracing the role of the outsider.

The intention of this project is for me to put myself in someone else's position as both an artist and a researcher while simultaneously calling attention to the ways in which being the subject of social study can be dehumanizing. Those in the social sciences don't set out to do research with bad intentions, yet Native people are still studied intensely in a fetishizing and exotifying manner while other cultures are left unquestioned simply because they've always been considered the default. I don't intend to mirror what I perceive as an ethical blind spot, I simply want to provide an outsider's perspective on a way of life that many people may not have personally spent much time interrogating. I hope to use my own visual language in combination with a more research-based zine to engage the audience and ideally make them question systems that may often seem ubiquitous.

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ABSTRACT

In the installation *Uncontacted,* primitivist anthropological approaches are analyzed and applied to the white suburban lifestyle of the mid-20th century as a method of decolonization. This project turns the white gaze upon itself, recontextualizing found imagery from the post-WWII era through layering and digital manipulation to create a series of risograph prints containing elements that reference the effects of white supremacist anthropological practices. The prints and the accompanying zine, *An Indigenous Explorer Discovers Suburbia*, are intended to speak to multiple audiences simultaneously. In this work, I act as both an agitator and a translator, strategically using the code switching I learned growing up with one white parent and one Native parent in combination with the visual language of suburbia to try to provide non-Native people with a unromanticized glimpse into the reality of contemporary Indigenous life.

THESIS PAPER WILL BE INSERTED HERE ON 5/13

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