



ARTIST

Laura Aguilar

TITLE

12 Lauras

DATE

1993

DIMENSIONS

14 in H x 13.375 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1993.006

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-5B

LAURA AGUILAR

BORN

1959

DIED

2018

BIRTHPLACE

San Gabriel, CA

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mexican-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1992

Kathleen O. Ellis Gallery, 2018

Be Strong and Do Not Betray Your Soul Kathleen O. Ellis Gallery, 2021

Queer Moments: Selections from the Light Work Collection

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

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A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection

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BIOGRAPHY

Laura Aguilar (born 1959) spent most of her prolific career examining her identity as a Chicana lesbian artist. Aguilar was born in San Gabriel, California in 1959 and grew up in the San Gabriel valley. Aguilar's family is *native Californio*, Mexican and Irish. Her father Paul Aguilar was second generation Mexican American while Aguilar's mother, Juanita was half Irish and at least fifth generation documented *Mexican Californio* native.

After studying photography at East Los Angeles College, her photographic production was characterized by portraits of diverse communities in the Los Angeles area and self-portraits, which are a representations of herself as a complex individual, Chicana, lesbian and struggling with poverty, learning disabilities and depression. Later in her career Aguilar would incorporate nude self-portraits and nude portraits of other women into her work, challenging contemporary depictions of beauty and highlighting the intimacy between the female form and nature. Ahead of her time, Aguilar's photographs first expose the visibility of these underrepresented and marginalized women, then celebrate them. Among her most recognized series involving nude self-portraits in nature are *Nature Self-Portrait* (1996) *Stillness* (1999) *Motion* (1999) *Center* (2000-2001) and *Grounded* (2006-2007).

Aguilar died in 2018 at age fifty-eight, when recognition of her work was gaining momentum. Her retrospective, *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* at the Vincent Price Art Museum in Monterey Park, CA was the breakout exhibition of *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA: Latin American and Latino Art in LA 2017-2018* and was Aguilar's last exhibition during her lifetime. Since her passing, she has joined the ranks of other iconic female photographers.

ESSAYS

Webster defines voice as "a medium or agency of expression" and 'the right and opportunity to express a choice or opinion.' While we all might have the right to express a choice or opinion, it is very much in question if we all have equal opportunity to do so. Laura Aguilar's recent photographic work speaks directly about the barriers she has encountered trying to express her individual rights in the process of finding opportunities and outlets for her art work. In this series of photographs to right Aguilar presents herself, alone and naked in front of the camera. She has framed each picture in size and height to look like they might have been taken from behind a bathroom mirror. The framing reinforces the private tone of the pictures as if Aguilar is trying to understand how to look at herself while being trapped in the grasp of an outsiders gaze. The pictures are private and nonchalant and Aguilar maintains an expression of neutrality throughout the series - waiting with uncertainty and anticipation for us to acknowledge the openness of her presence. Aguilar continues the private tone in the next series of four images titled 'Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt.' There are no subtleties in this series - straight forward text illustrates stark photographs of herself placing a pistol in her mouth. The text explodes with anger, drawn from her experience of finding doors closed to artists of color. Her anger is pointed in an oblique direction identifying her oppressors generally as 'they' and art as the source of her pain. While the text in this piece expresses anger, it is expressed in a way that suggests that anger is not the voice Aguilar is looking to put forth, but rather the one that she has found. Before she can build the bridges she talks about in the text, she feels she must first try to identify and then break through the barriers of prejudice and exclusions found between and among cultures. Jeffrey Hoone (c)1992 Laura Aguilar lives in Los Angeles, California and participated in our Artist-in-Residence program in May, 1992A Just Image As it plays out in the headlines, justice means equality, fairness, and the rule of law. Yet beyond the events broadcast on television and the news alerts flashed instantly to laptops and PDAs, there is a large realm of justice that eludes reporters. Throughout daily life - at home, in school, doing errands, tending children, making dinner, playing sports - perceptions of justice often float just below the radar. The Light Work Collection offered plentiful proof that photographers frequently make images of routine daily life and its relationship to a sense of justice. However, as members of the Fine Arts 395 "Art and Identity" class noticed, scholars seldom extend the concept of justice into aspects of living that are legal, but sometimes ethically questionable. Counselors, social workers, and therapists seem to take over where the justice system stops. Nevertheless, the line between the legal system's purview and personal life is not fixed. Class members were careful to insist that the law is often less subtle in its grasp of situations and unaware of complexities than are the images included in this show. Nowhere in the law is it written that by embracing a stereotype one can sometimes achieve influence skin to contesting the mold. Thoughts and feelings such as these coalesced as the subject of this exhibition. Work and family emerged as sites where what is fair is not always what is equal. , and what is equal is not always fair. However fair or unfair, the triumphs and annoyances one experiences at work mostly fall below the threshold of the law. It is conventional wisdom, not the IRS, which suggests that wealth carries no guarantee of happiness. Creating this nuanced exhibition about justice in everyday life led the class into hearty and un-nuanced discussions about the slights, snubs, and rebuffs of an ordinary day. The students chose the title *A Just Image* for this exhibition before they read about the expression in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. With the phrase, he and they recognize that art coaxes the world of appearances to create symbols signifying ideas for which there are no words. Just an image becomes *A Just Image*. Mary Warner Marien *A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection* is the result of a collaborative effort by thirty-one Syracuse University students enrolled in Professor Mary Warner Marien's "Art and Identity" course. The exhibition examines the Fall 2007 Syracuse

Symposium theme of justice. The students chose images from the Light Work Collection, considering the personal and societal meanings of justice. They have created an interactive exhibition, where, as the students write in the exhibition catalogue, "ironically... the viewer is still judging." A Just Image invites viewers to explore the photographs and rethink their definition of justice. As the students of the "Art and Identity" course discovered, though justice is a universal concept, it does not necessarily carry the same meaning for everyone. This can be seen in the different perceptions of stereotypes, families, occupations, and leisure activities, which are some of the topics examined by the class. According to the students, "The Pictures we have chosen require more than just superficial judgment; they require the viewer to acknowledge their own stereotyped projections." Roslyn Esperon

CLOTHED/UNCLOTHED In 1990, Laura Aguilar began work on her largest series, Clothed/Un clothed. In this series, thirty-five portraits of individuals, couples and/or threesomes, all close friends of the artist, were portrayed side-by-side, clothed and nude. Unlike Helmut Newton's *Sie Kommen (Naked and Dressed)* Paris, 1981, Laura captured subjects who were diverse in their body types, sexual orientation, and relationship to one another. The series begins with the artist herself in *Clothed/Un clothed #1*. As the series progressed, Aguilar created a study of nude self-portraits and began to gain confidence in being nude in front of the camera. Twelve of these self-portraits were then compiled into the large wall mural, *12 Lauras* (1993), a collection of these self-portrait studies used for the evolving the series. The diptych and triptych portraits in *Clothed/Un clothed* are significant works as they pave the way for Aguilar's celebrated self-portrait in nature series and her international renown. The artist's goals in producing this series were to create visual images that compassionately reflect the diversity of the human experience by focusing on individuals in the lesbian and gay communities and people of color. According to Aguilar, *Clothed/Un clothed* "represents a collaborated effort between the subjects and myself. I intended to uncover the society assumptions that mask our identities. These images invite the viewer to experience racial, ethnic and sexual identity in the most vulnerable form. The subjects' express through the camera lens a personal view of reality; that is, a positive sense of physical and cultural being. Challenging societal stereotypes of physical beauty, these images convey deep self-acceptance in spite of how others may view us." *from the estate of Laura Aguilar circa 2021