

Chapter 6



Heirs Come to Pass, 3,
1991

Martina Lopez, (American,
born 1962)

Silver-dye bleach print made
from a digitally assisted
montage

Promised gift of David C.
and Sarajean Ruttenberg,
courtesy of the Ruttenberg
Arts Foundation

Heirs Come to Pass, 3 and Revolutions in Time, 1

Martina Lopez

Overview

One of eight children, Martina Lopez was born in Seattle, Washington. As a second generation Mexican American, she was raised with both American customs and traditional Hispanic family values. “I have a strong connection to family. I also see people as surprisingly similar. I believe that we as individuals share similar dreams, fears, and experiences.”

In 1986, while studying photography at the University of Washington, Lopez began making computer images. She moved to Chicago in 1987 to attend The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. The artist uses old photographs she finds in thrift stores and pictures from family albums as a visual diary. “I began to use the computer to create images from beyond my personal album as a way to create a collective history, one that would allow people to bring their own memories to my work.”

Lopez has an idea of what she wants to achieve before working at the computer. On the computer screen she creates images from photographs she has taken of clouds and landscapes. She then adds figures from old snapshots, often changing their color and size. After finishing her composition, Lopez has a four-by-five transparency made from the computer disk. A photo lab then produces a large-scale photographic print in color from the transparency.



What's the Story?

Martina Lopez makes photographs that suggest many stories. Because she collects old photographs from thrift stores, all the people in her works are unknown to her. After Lopez puts these people together in new combinations and adds photographs of landscapes that she has taken, she makes up a title that encourages viewers to create their own stories. These narratives are as individual as her audience and their memories.

People, Land, and Time

Lopez began making digitized photographs in 1986, the year her father died. She spent many hours looking through snapshots of her childhood and of her family. She had already spent years listening to stories about and looking at photographs of her oldest brother, who was killed in Vietnam when she was four. Lopez realized that her memories and the pictures in her mind did not always agree with the family

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ALTERNATING FOR
CONSERVATION REASONS
WITH

Revolutions in Time, 1,
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photographs. She wondered if she could figure out who her father and brother had been by using pictures to help her recreate her memories of the past. Lopez came to realize that with a computer she could cut and paste images to tell her version of her family history.

After her first early explorations with family photographs and the computer, Lopez became interested in creating images featuring people she did not know. She began hunting for late-nineteenth-century photographs, frequently rummaging through thrift stores in search of them. Although the artist will never know these people, she often creates stories about them, or links their lives to hers, through the titles she gives her photographs. The broad hips of the woman to the left in *Heirs Come to Pass, 3*, for example, remind Lopez of her mother, who had three of her eight children by the age of twenty-nine. Lopez was twenty-nine when she made *Heirs Come to Pass, 3*, and was an unmarried artist leading a life very different from that of her mother. The little girl looking around at the world through the lens of a hand-held camera also reminds Lopez of herself.

Landscape plays a crucial role in the creation of Lopez's photographs. The first works that she created after her father's death were images of a family car trip. In them, she used landscape as a metaphor for her father's life journey, based on the idea that as people travel through a landscape, they leave a mark or a trace. Lopez now continually uses landscape as a metaphor for a person's life. Wherever she goes, she takes photographs of clouds and landscapes to build a supply of images. She will also go out to take a photograph that she envisions for a particular work.

Landscape enters her work at different points in the process of creation. Lopez began with the vibrant landscape that evokes her love of the mountains and water surrounding her childhood home of Seattle, Washington. In *Revolutions in Time, 1*, Lopez started with the husband and wife, then placed an industrial landscape in the background. Finally, she added smaller-sized figures, who she feels suggest the many individu-

als a person will come to know over the course of a lifetime.

The sense of time, or timelessness, evoked by Lopez's photographs inspire viewers to create stories about the works. The dress and postures of the people in the late-nineteenth-century photographs remind viewers of the time that has passed between when the people were photographed and today. These older photographs also contrast with the contemporary photographs of skies and land that Lopez herself takes. Further, the artist eliminates shadows from her finished photographs to represent all time. The viewer can then create a story based on that timeless, fabricated moment.

Lopez titles each work after it is completed. The title marks the point where creation of the image ends and creation of the story begins, since, with their puns and other forms of word play, the words in the title suggest multiple interpretations for each photograph. The word "heirs," for example, can refer to different types of inheritance, ranging from a cultural legacy to accumulated wealth/possessions passed on from ancestors. Heirs can also inherit the mistakes or errors (a homonym for "heirs") of a family's history. Just as parents do their best to correct the errors of the past when raising their children, the parents' own errors (or "heirrors") will be corrected over time. In Lopez's photograph, heirs come to pass before those looking at the photograph. What, the viewer may ask, will happen in the future to those heirs in the photograph?

Through the mix of old photographs and new backgrounds, Lopez hopes that her works will encourage viewers to make up their own stories about the people in them. Both *Heirs Come to Pass, 3* and *Revolutions in Time, 1* are taken from series that explore relationships among the individuals in the photographs and between these individuals and the viewers of the photograph. Because her work inspires both her own and others' personal responses, Lopez often refers to her photographs as "visual diaries."

Martina Lopez (born 1962)

Martina Lopez was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. She is a second generation Mexican American. Although she does not speak Spanish, Lopez believes that her large family (she is the seventh of eight children) has the characteristics of a traditional Mexican family. Lopez studied photography at the University of Washington and received her MFA from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently on the faculty of art at the University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, Indiana.

How Are the Photographs Made?

Lopez begins by composing the collage photograph in her mind. Once she has envisioned the image, Lopez scans the old photographs she has found of people and the new photographs she has taken of landscapes. With the computer, she digitizes her selected images. Lopez makes changes in dimension, hue, and color during the entire process. In 1986, the photographs she produced had large pixels which made the image appear coarse. Due to technological advances, she can now produce sharper images. Hence, her finished photographs appear exactly as she sees them on the computer screen.

Once Lopez completes the final composition on the computer, she sends the disk to a photography lab which makes a a four-by-five inch transparency made from the computer disk. Using this transparency, a lab produces large-scale photographic prints in color.

After the photographic work is printed, Lopez chooses the title and the process of creating stories is begun.

Glossary

Collage: A two-dimensional work of art incorporating materials and/or objects that have been collected and then attached together.

Digitize: A process in which a paper image is converted into pixels. The computer “takes a photograph” of the image by scanning it with a video or digital camera.

Homonym: One of two or more words that have the same sound and often the same spelling but that differ in meaning.

Pixels: The dots on the computer screen that make up an image. When combined, the pixels form different shapes and colors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Heirs Come to Pass, 3 by Martina Lopez

Who do you think these people are?

Choose one person. What is he or she doing?

Describe the landscape.

Ask these questions of the class:

- Where did your family come from?
- How many people do you live with?
- Who is the most important person in your life?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

To make her pictures, Martina Lopez scans photographs that she has taken or found into the computer. She then arranges these elements in a final composition that suggests different stories.

ART ACTIVITY: *Collage*

Create your own version of a Martina Lopez photograph.

- ❖ Choose the background provided by the artist or draw your own.
- ❖ Collect pictures of people and furniture. Use magazines, newspapers, or photographs as source material.
- ❖ Cut out and arrange the pictures in the landscape.
- ❖ Glue the pictures down and make up a title for your collage.

WRITING ACTIVITY: *A Family's History*

Write a story about the characters in *Heirs Come to Pass, 3* or *Revolutions in Time, 1*.

- ❖ Choose the main characters in the picture. Give them each a name.
- ❖ Describe the action taking place among the characters.
- ❖ Include dialogue between characters.

Write a fictional biography about one character in *Heirs Come to Pass, 3* or *Revolutions in Time, 1*.

- ❖ Choose a name for the character.
- ❖ Include details about the character's life such as childhood events, schooling, type of work, and characteristics of family members and friends.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY: *Family Albums*

Create a classroom family album.

- ❖ Bring in a photograph from your family album.
- ❖ Write a story about the person or people in the photograph from stories you were told by family members.
- ❖ Display the photographs, accompanied by the stories, in the classroom.

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