

For Immediate Release

Lisa Solomon

But where are you from from?

5 November – 23 December 2022

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 5th, 3:00 – 7:00pm

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition, *But where are you from from?* by Lisa Solomon marking her fifth solo show with our gallery. The new body of work features self-portraits of Solomon dressed in traditional headdress and clothing from the countries that she has been misidentified as her cultural heritage juxtaposed with five portraits of herself dressed in traditional garb from the countries that represent her true ethnicity. The portraits are depicted in watercolor on paper with colorful cutout paper garments and geometric shapes pinned to the surface.

Solomon was born in Tucson and raised in Los Angeles through middle school and then moved with her parents to Santa Barbara for high school. She currently lives in Oakland where she has lived for nearly 30 years with her family. Solomon is also bi-racial with a Jewish American father and Japanese mother. Throughout her life she has been confronted with a curiosity of people asking her the question “Where are you from?” often within the first few moments of introduction. The question has sparked a deeper exploration of the benefits and consequences that can arise from her revealing her ethnic identity. In her younger years she often wondered does one’s knowledge of her ethnic breakdown really matter but as she grew older her defenses hardened and shifted. The question became so common that she would drag things out with a simple reply like “California, born in Tucson but raised in LA and Santa Barbara”. This would often lead to the question “But where are you from from?” to which Solomon would naively ask “oh, you mean my ethnic heritage?”. This question has become a reminder of the cultural pride she has for being Jewish and Japanese as well as American and the constant sense of overwhelm she has had over the years when having to choose one box as her ethnicity although she notes that in recent years a box that identifies with more than one race is more commonly available.

The current discussions surrounding immigration and cultural appropriation has amplified Solomon’s response and draws a closer attention to her perception of herself. The issues of racial identity have become explosive heightened by the Trump years in office with racist laws restricting certain ethnic groups from activities and resources. Solomon also has lived in California for most of her life and has regularly been mistaken as a Latina often being spoken to in Spanish. She admits the only place that she has ethnically felt at home is in Hawaii with so many other Hapas and mixed raced people.

For this body of work, Solomon compiled a list of 20 countries and Indigenous people tribes that represent the different cultures from which she has been misidentified. They include México, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Hawaiian, Hopi, Navajo, Inuit, Zuni, Tibet, Mongolia, Hmong, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Spain, Portugal, Italy and France. Referencing traditional female portraiture by European and American painters like Ingres, Vermeer, Whistler, Manet and Sargent, Solomon photographed herself in similar poses using the images to create her portraits in watercolor with gray tones. She has developed a signature style of using layered paper that is pinned or fastened to the underlying surface in a dimensional format and continues within this format using layers of cut papers for the native dress of each mistaken country. Solomon researched documentary photographs that mimicked her unique stance and position for each portrait. She specifically chose clothing that was easily recognizable from that region. In contrast, a group of five larger self-portraits hangs on the opposite side of the gallery representing the five countries that make up her ethnic heritage including Japan, Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Romania. For these works Solomon created her portraits life-size and in poses ranging from straight on, three-quarters and side views using colors for her skin and hair to show a truer depiction.

Reflecting on childhood notions of making paper chains, Solomon also presents an installation of colorful crocheted links that drape from the ceiling and down the walls in an adjacent gallery. Chains are a pattern that Solomon has used in her work and allude to a great human connection in contrast to creating borders and focusing on cultural differences.

Solomon received her BA in Art Practice at UC Berkeley and her MFA from Mills College. She is currently an adjunct professor at San Francisco State University. She has shown widely in the US including the current group exhibition *Then As Now: Woodland Pattern 1980-2022* at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and the traveling exhibition, *A Beautiful Mess: Weavers and Knotters of the Vanguard* which recently closed at the Huntsville Museum of Art in Alabama and will resume next February at the Sarasota Art Museum at the Ringling College of Art and Design. Solomon has participated in several residencies and recently completed a major commission for Meta in the Silicon Valley. In 2020 she completed a large commission at the headquarters of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Her work is included in several private collections across the US.