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Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez: The Casta Paintings

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Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez: The Casta Paintings

Jonathan Orozco

May 2020
For the descendants

"'Look what they’ve done to us,’ she said softly. ‘I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you.’ She fell asleep."

Tsitsi Dangarembga
Nervous Conditions

I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.

Derek Walcott
The Schooner “Flight”

And one often hears them say that, if only they knew where to find their Spanish blood, they would rip it out of their bodies.

18th century New Spanish observer
Descripción del Estado político de la Nueva España

This is me
I am a child of conquest...
But I will not begrudge my mother and father
For giving me the blood that flows through these veins

Joaquin Zihuatanejo
Child of Conquest

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white.
I will have my serpent’s tongue – my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

Gloria Anzaldúa
How to Tame a Wild Tongue

The future is mestizo.

Virgilio Elizondo
The Future Is Mestizo

I think in Latin America the ideas around castas are intricately connected to notions of class because it’s really a mestizo continent. From Central America all the way to Patagonia: it’s mestizo nations. And I would say Latin Americans would consider themselves mestizos.

All of Latin America is mestizo.

Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez
Acknowledgments:

I am indebted to the art historians and writers whose scholarship is reflected in this essay. My sincere thanks to Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez for inviting me into your house many times and talking to me about your art. The Art History department at the University of Nebraska Omaha too deserves my thanks, especially Professor Nicholas Newman my mentor and advisor for this paper. I express my eternal gratitude to my parents, Juan Antonio Orozco and Antonia Esparza-Orozco, for sacrificing so much in their lives, so that my brother, Misael Orozco, my sister Alejandra Orozco, and I, could have a better life than they did. *La vida es una lucha, pero los dos lo hicieros más fácil para nosotros.*
A list of the Castas according to a 1774 set by Andrés de Islas

1. From Spaniard and Indian, a Mestizo is Born
2. From Spaniard and Mestiza, a Castizo is Born
3. From Castizo and Spaniard, a Spaniard is Born
4. From Spaniard and Black, a Mulatta is Born
5. From Spaniard and Mulatta, a Morisco is Born
6. From Spaniard and Morisco, an Albino is Born
7. From Spaniard and Albino, a Return-Backwards is Born
8. From Indian and Black, a Wolf is Born
9. From Indian and Mestiza, a Coyote is Born
10. From Wolf and Black, a Chino is Born
11. From Chino and Indian, a Cambujo is Born
12. From Cambujo and Indian, a Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air is Born
13. From Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air and Mulatta, an Albarazado is Born
14. From Albarazado and Indian, a Barcino is Born
15. From Barcino and Cambuja, a Calpamualto is Born
16. Barbarian Meco Indians

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1 Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 114, 116-8. Please note that the naming system is not uniform throughout the entire history of the casta genre. Among one of the castes not listed is *no te entiendo*, or I don’t-understand-you, as discussed by Katzew on page 44. The absurdity of these names becomes satirized in a manuscript titled *Ordenanzas del Baratillo de México* by Pedro Anselmo Chreslos Jache. One of his castes is *quesos de todas leches*, or cheeses of every milk, 56-60.
Part I: Introduction

Colombian-born Lincoln-based artist Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez has grounded her recent art production within a wide art historical and Pan-American discourse. This interdisciplinary and interethnic practice is particularly exemplified in Chapter 6: Casta Paintings, a series of work within her “visual novel” (fig. 1-15), started after a significant move from New York City to Lincoln. This paper intends to describe and analyze her casta painting works in detail, from their intellectual inception to the minutiae of the work’s creation, providing a context in which a reader can understand the historical and artistic significance of her works within two methodological approaches; critical-race theory and postcolonialism. The choice to focus on race and colonialism is primarily due to scholarship on casta paintings, which places it within its colonial context, while a feminist and social anthropological approach are only touched upon in this analysis.

Part II: Casta Painting and the Sistema de Castas

Before a proper descriptive analysis of Friedemann-Sánchez’s works can be developed, it is necessary to understand what the artist invokes by describing her work as “casta paintings.” There is a historical genre of painting called casta paintings that emerged during the 18th century in colonial New Spain that describes the multitude of racial types and their amalgamations among the populations under Spain’s dominion. These works vary greatly from the first generation of casta painters, which focus on individuals, to later castas, which integrate the political realities and racial beliefs propagated by creoles and peninsular Spaniards. Since the artist cites the seminal book Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico by

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Ilona Katzew as a major influence in the development of her work, I will rely on Katzew’s analysis to properly contextualize Friedemann-Sánchez’s work within the 18th century casta genre.

The casta genre and the sistema de castas, or the New Spanish caste system based on race did not appear out of nowhere; this system and genre is based on European’s fascination with other people and cultures which occurred over millennia. In fact, foundational European intellectuals from the ancient world, particularly those from antiquity like Herodotus, Pliny the Elder, and Caius Julius Solinus, originated the idea that “the furthest confines of the world were thought to be inhabited by monstrous races – giants, pygmies, two-headed men, amazons, and hermaphrodites.” These ideas were carried on through medieval times, perpetuated through Christian encyclopedias and travel books, and “soon after the first Europeans landed in the New World at the end of the fifteenth century, many believed that they had encountered members of the monstrous races.”

At the beginning of the 16th century, propelled by an interest in foreign cultures, an increasing number of texts devoted to the customs of humans were published. It is in Cesare Vecellio’s book Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo, published in Venice in 1598, that a proto-system of the casta genre emerges. While his book focuses on the varied dress styles found on the four then-known continents of the world, the various illustrations in the multivolume work emphasize the phenotypes of the various populations depicted (fig. 16-21). His compendium is divided into several books, each book devoted to a different region, which he has arranged in a progressive manner. Being Italian, Vecellio describes Italian costume first, following with those

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3 Ibid., 63.
4 Ibid., 63-4.
of other European countries, then Africa, Asia, and lastly, the Americas. This order was further enhanced by arranging the costumes in a succession based on class and occupation. And while all figures portrayed were generally rendered with a classicizing European fashion, there is an attempt at differentiating the figures between the races, as in the case with the depictions of Africans with exaggerated features (fig. 18). The depictions of “savages” are rendered carrying a bow and arrows, no matter their place of origin, as seen the depiction of an Indo-African, in the background of a depiction of a Mexican, and a warrior from the Americas (fig. 19-21). The “savagery” of these figures is further emphasized by portraying them in various levels of nudity; the Indo-African with a bare chest, and the other indigenous warriors from the Americas almost completely naked, with nothing but a loincloth covering their genitals.

This type of description has been particularly emphasized in a book by Amédée François Frezier titled *Relation du voyage de la mer du sud*, published in 1716. Hired by the French king Louis XIV to travel to the coast of Chile and Peru in 1712, his books describe the populations of these two countries, which consisted of natives, Iberians, creoles, blacks, and the castas, focusing on their physical characteristics, customs and dress. Descriptions in the book have a sensationalist overtone, some being totally fictitious. For example, “[Frezier] acknowledge[d] the claims of others to have seen a race of Patagons or giants.” The publication also features illustrations of the flora and fauna of Peru and Chile, and images of ancient Inca rulers and the then-current people of South America (fig. 22-24).

The transition from illustration to painting genre likely occurred due to a Mexican painter in the late 17th or early 18th century coming upon one of these travelogues. The particular work

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5 Ibid., 65-6.
6 Ibid., 66.
7 Ibid.
that most likely prompted this transition is *China Monumentis* from 1667 by German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher which provides engravings and costumes of the inhabitants of China, not unlike those in the casta genre. These engravings were based on the work of three different explorers. Some depictions include groups of three (fig. 25), some in a suggested familial arrangement with two adults and a child (fig. 26), and others place different figures in a single composition divided into compartments (fig. 27). Considering that Kircher was internationally famous and well-known among the creole intellectual elite in Mexico City and Puebla, Katzew credibly argues that it is likely that artist Manuel Arellano or Juan Rodríguez Juárez were introduced to Kircher’s *China Monumentis* and derived the idea to create the casta genre. “Only this time, instead of simply depicting the different attire of the inhabitants of the viceroyalty, these artists gave visual shape to the concern with racial genealogy that had long obsessed Spaniards and creoles.”

It is the subjects depicted in the casta genre that concerns Friedemann-Sánchez. The figures depicted in the castas are the inhabitants of the New World, systematically categorized by their race. Unlike the Anglosphere colonies in the New World where strict separation based on supposed phenotypes was the norm in order to ensure ethnic Anglo-Saxons maintained their white purity, the American colonies ruled by the Iberian peninsula had a more racially amorphous population, freely mixing across supposed racial boundaries. Race mixing occurred out of necessity since there was a near absence of Spanish women accompanying the conquistadores, which led to casual unions between Spanish men and indigenous women in the early sixteenth century. The resulting offspring of this union were called mestizos/as. As the

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8 Ibid., 81-93.
9 Ibid., 40.
New World became populated with more Iberians, and later by Africans, unions across racial boundaries continued, creating a cosmopolitan mixed-raced population and complicating racial discourse during this period. The subjects of the castas are the racial hybrids of the New World, which have become the subjects depicted in Friedemann-Sánchez’s casta chapter.

Proto-casta painting in New Spain acknowledges this multiracial society. A work titled *View of the Plaza Mayor*, painted by Cristóbal de Villalpando in 1695 (fig 28), shows the varied population of Mexico City. Another work produced by a member of the Arellano family, titled *Procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe*, completed in 1709 (fig. 29), portrays New Spain’s social groups in sumptuous clothing congregating to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe during a procession in a pilgrimage site in Mexico City.¹⁰

The earliest known set of casta paintings were made by a member of the Arellano family, possibly Miguel Arellano. The four identified paintings of this set almost exclusively portray individual racial types, which are considered the prototype for the familial group with a father, mother, and child¹¹ (fig. 30). These individualized representations are characteristic of Friedemann-Sánchez’s casta paintings because she portrays individuals, which will be discussed later in the paper. Later casta paintings display familial groups, the earliest examples being from Juan Rodríguez Juárez¹² (fig. 31). One other significant component in many casta sets is the superiority of the male, particularly the Spanish male. In a series produced by Andrés de Islas, the Spanish male is always represented at the beginning of the set and portrayed as a possessor of Spanish culture. In *De español y mestiza nace castizo* from 1774 (fig. 32), “[t]he Spanish male is featured as the controller of women’s sexuality in particular and the Spanish body politic in

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¹⁰ Ibid., 69.
¹¹ Ibid., 10-15.
¹² Ibid., 70-1.
general.”¹³ In another painting by an unknown artist, *De albina y español, produce negro torna atrás*, ca. 1770-80 (fig.33), the Spanish male is portrayed in a position of mastery over the female and child, which stresses the subordination of the child to woman, and the woman to man.¹⁴ In Fridemann-Sánchez’s work, the subversion of these ideas is at the forefront. As will be discussed later in the paper, instead of portraying familial groups, she only represents individuals, while also removing any literal gender hierarchy by removing the male from her compositions.

**Part III: The Development of Friedemann-Sánchez’s Castas**

After this consideration of the historical casta genre, a discussion of Friedemann-Sánchez’s castas can occur. The development of her Chapter occurred in stages, the first being her discovery of the casta genre. During her time in New York City, Friedemann-Sánchez became aware of this painting tradition while visiting Christie’s auction house.¹⁵ But her own understanding of the genre was kept at the surface level, nothing particularly in depth.

Prior to the development of her casta chapter, Friedemann-Sánchez moved to Lincoln in 2011 for pragmatic reasons, primarily to escape the expenses associated with living in New York City. She characterizes this move as economic migration.¹⁶ The University of Nebraska Lincoln provided the impetus for the development of her “visual novel.” The artist took a course on Chicana and Latina literature, which inspired her to “write” her own novel, but being an artist, she opted to create a novel with art.¹⁷ This novel is highly varied in discipline, emphasizing a

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¹³ Ibid., 114.
¹⁴ Ibid., 180.
strong sense of cultural syncretism. Friedemann-Sánchez particularly focuses on creating a hybrid art form based on minimalism and art made by women during the latter half of the 20th century, and the mixing of Spanish, Indigenous, and African cultural practices in Latin America.

In fact, *Chapter 6: Casta Paintings* is the most recent chapter in her novel. In it, she builds on her techniques developed in earlier chapters, like working on black surfaces, appropriation of Spanish and indigenous floral imagery, using found objects, especially objects associated with womanhood, and the emphasis on the glorification and redemption of women’s work by presenting it as high art (fig. 34-37).

In 2015, the artist was awarded a residency at Aquatopia Foundation and International Artist Residency in Puebla, Mexico, which marks the next stage in the development of *Chapter 6: Casta Painting*. The original intention of her residency had very little to do with casta painting. Friedemann-Sánchez set out to learn how carved wooden depictions of saints were polychromed during the colonial period. During a visit to a bookstore, Friedemann-Sánchez discovered Ilona Katzew’s seminal book on the casta genre called *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*, which provided context and material to work with during the development of her own interpretation of the casta genre.

The next major stage of *Chapter 6: Casta Painting* occurred after experimentation with two found objects in the artist’s studio: combining a mask and a Spanish comb together, a facet that all of her castas share. These first masks and combs she owned were inherited, a concept that is important to analyzing her casta paintings. The combination of these objects is simple, the

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18 Ibid.
artist placed a Spanish comb onto an indigenous mask.\textsuperscript{19} The basis for Friedemann-Sánchezs’s casta works was thus established: a woman wearing a Spanish comb.

Once the artist ran out of inherited masks, she began to purchase them. These masks, with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean,\textsuperscript{20} are surprisingly not found in sales by major auction houses or by reputable dealers: these artist instead sources the masks from eBay.\textsuperscript{21} Much like Friedemann-Sánchez’s desire to work with and glorify women’s work, the artist is saving these works which should live inside a museum. By incorporating them into her work, these objects are redeemed and are able to be exhibited in museums while they are on display.\textsuperscript{22}

The Spanish combs are a bit more politicized in what they represent. The peineta and mantilla are ornamental headpieces from Spain worn by women, which eventually found their way to Latin America. Friedemann-Sánchez has spoken about how these objects have been worn to emphasizes one’s Spanish heritage, particularly during the mid to late twentieth century.\textsuperscript{23} The combs in this context then speak to Spain’s dominion over the female body politic of the New World, particularly those on lands ruled by Spain. These masks also function as permanent crowns of memory and violence, as they emphasize the historical legacy these women have had to, and still endure, unable to escape the impact of Spanish colonialism. This colonial legacy is not just exemplified with the crown, but within the composite bodies of the women.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Nancy Friedmann-Sánchez, interview with author, January 26, 2020.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
The body of this adorned woman was the next logical stage in the series’ development. At this point, the disembodied head had not been racialized, it merely stood as a stand holding a decorative object. Here, Friedemann-Sánchez employed her understanding of the casta genre to develop *Chapter 6: Casta Paintings*.

The bodies were developed in a collaborative manner since the artist asked various Latina women local to Lincoln and Omaha to pose for her works. The approach was simple, Friedemann-Sánchez asked the female subject to pose as if she was being scanned by a TSA machine at the airport, “with legs spread and arms raised above their heads.” This stance fits within the context of human migration around the world and who is allowed to travel, but it also strongly fits within a history of racial violence in North America. Karen Levitov invoked this in an interview with the artist, referencing the Black Lives Matter movement and the shooting of unarmed teenager Michael Brown in 2014. While grounded in social concerns, this stance also places the series within art history, referencing Ana Mendieta’s artmaking practice. This stance is one of powerlessness and subjugation, but it can also be one of power, a posture that increases one size, allowing the figures to protect themselves.

These tracings are all placed on top of a common motif in Friedemann-Sánchez’s work: a black background. Works in earlier chapters are all mounted onto slick, reflective black surfaces, encapsulating two major art historical events the artist wants to reference. Friedemann-Sánchez emerged from her schooling towards the end of the minimalist and the feminist art movement.

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24 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
While these movements are almost diametrically opposed in formal and conceptual content, Friedemann-Sánchez creates works that are hybrids of these movements with the intention of subverting minimalism and what it stood for as a practice that the predominantly male-dominated art world was preoccupied with.\(^{29}\)

If Friedemann-Sánchez were a minimalist purist, she would complete an artwork after applying black paint on her surfaces, with no additional found objects or added imagery. But since the artist wants to both recognize and subvert the movement,\(^{30}\) she freely paints on imagery and mounts found objects on her black surfaces. These additions are an attempt to recognize and glorify the “minor” or “sister arts,” placed within the dominating and patriarchal sphere of minimalist art.\(^{31}\) Further, if the artist wanted to maintain a practice strictly grounded in minimalism, she would create works that are meant to be solid and inflexible, but she again subverts this by creating work with Tyvek. This material allows for more flexibility with artmaking and allows for a more complex reading of her work. In her castas, the works are folded with the intention of creating a quiltlike structure, emphasizing artmaking associated with women,\(^{32}\) and undermining minimalism. The artist emphasizes the ease of movement with the works, allowing for easy transportation,\(^{33}\) which can be read as connected to the migration of humans across the world, especially in relation to the castas stance, a stance one takes while passing through an airport, a location that allows global migration for some, but not for others.

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\(^{29}\) Ibid.


\(^{31}\) Ibid.


After tracing the women onto her Tyvek surface, Friedmann-Sánchez then filled in the outlines with ink with the intention to create an undefined map. The body of her figures are implicated in what the 18th century casta painting genre portrayed: the *sistema de castas*, where one’s race became one’s class. A quick visual inspection of this series shows that the “skin” of the figures are all various shades, from pale and rosy pinks as seen in *Castiza* (fig. 2) to dusty earth browns like those in *Morisca* (fig. 5). The result is that the figure is comprised of various translucent skin tones, each representing an ancestor of the figure being depicted, and at the torso, where all the layers converge, these ancestral layers create one being. The positioning of the figures then speaks to the quantification of the human being. If we assume the figure is passing through a body scan machine, then that machine is creating imagery to chart and analyze the various layers that the person is comprised of. In this case, it is for racial analysis.

This ambiguity of skin color has led to the interpretation of the figures being racially undefined and gendered androgynously. But the majority of the components in the series all point to the figures being female; such as the models being women, the floral crown and Spanish comb, and craft traditions associated with women, like quilting.

The final major component to the work is the cascade of flowers that falls from the figures’ heads. This is not the first time the artist uses flowers as a motif in her work. In earlier chapters, the artist included them on her painting surfaces, but the approach that most resembles that used in her casta paintings is seen in *Chapter 4: Cornucopia*. The artist called her technique “mopa mopa,” which is an indigenous South American decorative appliqué technique that was exploited during the colonial period. The approach is similar, but not identical, primarily because

35 Ibid.
the artist is not using the mopa mopa resin – she uses painted flowers on Tyvek sheets and appliques them onto her surfaces. In *Cornucopia* (2016) (fig. 37), Friedemann-Sánchez toys with hybridity through these floral arrangements, borrowing from Spanish colonial paintings, particularly the *monjas coronadas* (crowned nuns) painting tradition, and native paintings from the Amazon, indicating a syncretism of both Spanish and indigenous cultural heritage. This approach directly transfers over to her casta paintings, which thematically fits the purpose of the castas, the hybridization of populations. But while they reference the same concept, the floral arrangement in *Cornucopia* imply a type of colonial and military violence according to Susan Silas’s interpretation of the work. The composition of these flowers can be seen as a “jubilant burst of energy,” but surrounded by armed men and drones, these flowers can be interpreted as an explosion.

This interpretation of violence and disruption does not transfer over to the castas, there is no floral explosion; they are arranged as more of a cascade, decorative like the paintings of *monjas coronadas*, but still communicate hybridization.

All of Friedemann-Sanchez’s castas share these same components, bodies in a state of powerlessness and lack of definition, an indigenous mask donning a Spanish comb, and flowers. This ongoing chapter is near completion, with 15 out of 16 of the castas completed. All the artist has to do is create the final 16th to complete her casta set.

**Part IV: An Analysis of Mestiza, Castiza, Española, and Morisca**

Speaking about all of the racial castes in detail is beyond the scope of this paper but it is productive to focus on four different castas because of their racial, gendered, and cultural

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38 Ibid.
These works are *Mestiza, Castiza, Española*, and *Morisca* (fig. 1-3, 5). The first three are significant because they indicate the syncretic basis found in Latin America. Mestizo, the child of an indigenous and Spanish parent, has historically been the basis for defining who is Latin American. As previously mentioned, this particular admixture occurred primarily out of necessity, as there were few Spanish women accompanying the Spanish conquistadors, which led to casual unions among Spanish men and Indian women in the early sixteenth century.\(^ {40}\) It has become a truism that the majority of the population in Latin America has been produced from this admixture. Castizo is one step above Mestizo in the racial caste system. It is produced by a Mestizo parent and a Spanish parent, whose child is \(\frac{1}{4}\) indigenous and \(\frac{3}{4}\) white.

Above all other castas are the Españoles, the pinnacle of the casta system. The Español in this regard is hardly any different from the Nazi romance with the Aryan race. One could theoretically become Español through “blood mending,” or racial hypergamy, by marrying up on the casta system, but this was a complicated process taking generations to accomplish, and this was quite conditional. For example, The Spanish Jesuit missionary José Gumilla (1687-1750) spoke about how indigenous and black individuals could ensure their children can become white in *El orinoco ilustrado, y defendido, historia natural, civil, y geographica de este gran rio y de sus caudalosas vertientes*, edited three times from 1741-1791.\(^ {41}\) In it, he creates an equation for whiteness, ensuring that in the fourth generation, any indigenous or black person can establish a white existence for their children.\(^ {42}\) That being said, in other tracts describing how the *sistema de castas* functioned in Mexico do not offer the possibility of blood-mending for blacks.\(^ {43}\)

\(^{40}\) Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 47-49.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 48-9.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 49.
effectively, the one-drop rule. Casta sets are divided into three main clusters, the first cluster focuses on Indigenous-Spanish unions, then Spanish-black unions, then Black-Indian combinations. The Indigenous-Spanish unions ensure Spanish children are created in the third generation, but unlike the equation proposed by Gumilla, Spanish-Black unions do not produce more Spaniards.44

Indeed Spaniards were seen as the top of the casta pole, only begotten through two Spanish parents, or through following a complex equation to ensure the inheritance of Spanish phenotypes. Friedemann-Sanchez subverts the idea of white purity and toys around with it in her Española painting, invoking the varied population that lived and were expelled from Spain in 1492.

Finally, Morisca has been selected because of its cultural significance. A Morisco is produced through a Spanish and Mulatto union, so that the child is ¼ African and ¾ Spanish. Morisca exemplifies the intellectual work Friedemann-Sánchez performs in the creation of a casta painting. This discussion will lead into an analysis of the creative labor she carried out to develop the castas from an early stage, to a fully fleshed out body of work.

Mestiza and Castiza were the first pairs of work created in the series (fig. 1-2). On the surface, Mestiza is comprised of two “skin” layers, one that is brown and another that is white, a direct reflection of what a Mestiza is: ½ indigenous and ½ white. Castiza is comprised of three layers, one brown and two white, again reflecting the castiza formula of being ¾ white and ¼ indigenous. The brown layer representing the indigenous ancestry of the figure is much lighter than the Mestiza. In Mestiza, the mopa mopa flowers are all concentrated around the head of the

44 Ibid., 49.
figure, while Castiza has flowers that emanate from her head and cascade to the floor. Castiza’s mask contains a naturalism that Mestiza does not: It appears to be a direct representation of a human, with lucid eyes, eyelashes, thick eyebrows, ears, and blushing cheeks. Mestiza, on the other hand, is animal-like, with stylized eyes and fur or feathers covering the face’s surface. Choosing the mask for Castiza had overtly racial overtones for the artist, as she claims that the mask is a representation of a white person made by a person of color, describing it as “monstrous.”

Castiza would be one step above Mestiza within the sistema de castas, but this approach has been subverted in three ways. The first is about racial purity. Even though Castiza is theoretically one step above Mestiza they both maintain indigenous ancestry: they are not pure Spaniards and both are equally impure under the sistema de castas. This leads to the second aspect, their posture. With their stance, both are subjugated under racial violence in the arms raised position.

Thirdly, the sistema de castas is subverted by ignoring its highly systematized classification through its layering of ancestral bodies and numerical positioning within the system. Mestiza and Mulatta (fig. 4) generally adhere to the sistema de castas by only portraying the parents of the figure with two layers, but this approach begins to fall apart within subsequent generations. For example, Castiza is composed of three layers, not the four needed to produce a castizo. If the artist were a purist with the casta system, she would have intentionally created Castiza with three white layers and one brown layer. But overall, Castiza’s stance on the system is recognized with its third brown layer, enough to recognize that the figure is whiter than Mestiza, but also not white enough to be an Española. The numerical classification is totally

ignored with Friedemann-Sánchez’s castas. Many 18th century casta sets, like those by José de Páez, Buenaventura José Guiol, Francisco Clapera, Miguel Cabrera, Andrés de Islas, and others use numbers to place a racial mix within the *sistema de castas*. The formula is seen in Andrés de Islas’s set from 1774. For example, Mestizo is Number 1, Castizo is number 2, Español is number 3, and so on.46 This formulaic approach is ignored in Friedemann-Sánchez’s set, which breaks the hierarchical nature of the casta system. Friedemann-Sánchez’s intentional disorganization of the *sistema de castas* within her works signifies her acknowledgement of it, while also suggesting that it is a dated system that should have no bearing on contemporary populations.

*Española* (fig. 3) will be discussed alongside *Mestiza* and *Castiza* for context. As previously mentioned, one of the purposes of the *sistema de castas* was to provide a formula to achieve racial purity through racial hypergamy, allowing *Española* to be compromised of various identities. For example, the *Española* could be a peninsular, a woman born on the Iberian peninsula. She could also be a creole, a Spanish woman born in the Americas. While she is an exact copy of the peninsular Española, her American birth lowers her status.47 She could also be a daughter of hypergamy, being 1/8 indigenous and 7/8 European, by being classified as a pure Spaniard within the *sistema de castas*: her *Mestiza* grandmother and *Castiza* mother married well on the racial caste system, ensuring her the privileges of a peninsular Spanish woman. Regardless, she is a daughter of conquest.

We don’t know the geographic origins or ancestry of *Española*; we just know she’s a pure Spanish woman. However, strong evidence suggests that she is a peninsular, as the artist has

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47 Ibid., 43.
spoken about Spain’s racial and ethnic history while discussing *Española*.\(^48\) 1492 was a particularly violent year in global history for both Americans and Europeans. Americans would soon be disposed of their lands and virtually exterminated or integrated into a European colonizer’s culture. In *Española*, Friedemann-Sánchez speaks about Spain’s expulsion of its own minority subjects, while further destabilizing the purpose of the *sistema de castas*.

Like *Mestiza* and *Castiza*, *Española* is composed of the layers which enlighten the viewer about the ancestry of the figure. Unlike *Mestiza* or *Castiza*, the layers that compromise this figure are generally the same skin tone. The *casta* painting genre would emphasize the whiteness of the Spanish subject over the skin color of the other figures. If one were to take the *sistema de castas* as grounded in reality, *Española* should be much lighter than *Castiza*, as the *Española* would be totally European, while *Castiza* would be slightly more indigenous than the *Española*. However, that’s not the case at all, *Castiza* is much whiter than *Española*, with her darkest body layer being as dark as *Española*’s uniform skin colors. The artist intentionally did this because the Iberian peninsula was highly cosmopolitan with diverse populations.\(^49\) Notably, these populations consisted of Sephardi Jews/Judíos sefardíes and Moors/Moriscos, ethnic groups that have over a millennium of history in Europe. Their expulsion in 1492 from Spain reverberates the subsequent violence during the colonization of the Americas. The layers then represent these groups, along with ethnic Spaniards, which amalgamate to the *Española*.

Like *Castiza*, *Española* has a face that looks more recognizably human, but she is also part animal, with the top of her head bearing the face of an animal-like creature. Whereas *Castiza* is a human, *Española* looks like a supranatural being partly composed of animal body parts. Like


\(^{49}\) Ibid.
the other castas, she bears the mopa mopa flowers, undefined skin map, and Spanish comb that all establish the identity of the woman.

Lastly, Morisca (fig 5) is the final casta that will be discussed in this paper. Morisca is the equivalent of Castiza within the sistema de castas, the only difference is that the former has African ancestry, while the latter has indigenous American ancestry. Morisca would have had a Spanish parent and a Mulatto/a parent (who would have been ½ black and ½ white), therefore, Morisca is ¼ black and ¾ white. But Friedemann-Sánchez’s Morisca is not as light as Castiza, in fact, Morisca is one of the darkest castas. This may be honoring the sistema de castas, since the descendants of Africans would not be able to purify their racial caste through racial hypergamy like those with indigenous ancestry, as previously mentioned.50 Morisca’s mask is much more animal-like, somewhere in-between a wolf and jackal and fox, highly distinct from Castiza, who is totally human (albeit, a monstrous version of one). Regardless, Morisca still has her flowers and her Spanish comb that symbolizes her dominion under Spain.

**Part V: Intellectual Labor**

Morisca emphasizes the intellectual work Friedemann-Sánchez performed during the creation of her castas because it has undergone aesthetic corrections (fig. 38). Initially, Morisca had red flowers appliqued instead of the current blue petals, and had a different skin tone than its current one. This is mostly because during the original creation process of Morisca, the Tyvek surface received irreparable damage through creases that could not be straightened out. This drove the artist to retrace the outline of original silhouette onto another Tyvek sheet, providing the artist an opportunity to rework the painting. While the skin tone of the figure has changed,

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50 Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 49.
this choice was not a commentary, it was an aesthetic choice. The new flowers were also chosen with an aesthetic purpose in mind.\textsuperscript{51}

In fact, \textit{Castiza} also underwent a similar transformation (fig. 39). During the development process of the works, the artist did not intend to produce a series of works at all, so many of her castas have been excluded from the chapter, existing as independent developmental studies or remade into complete works in the series. These early castas include the aforementioned \textit{Castiza}, \textit{Chola} (fig. 40), and three variations of \textit{Mestiza} (fig 41-43). These women are in much different positions than the TSA posture the other women are asked to assume. Instead, the art forms informing the early castas are police chalk outlines and silhouette drawing.\textsuperscript{52} While these two artforms have inspired the later castas, the artist did not consider submission early on. The chalk outlines are just as politicized as the TSA positioning, invoking violence and death. Women in the early castas are not in a state of submission and oppression. They pose as if they were laying instead of standing.

The silhouette drawing forms directly link with the chalk outlines, only the origins are much more playful. The artist had experience as a teacher working with school age children, and one of the techniques she was exposed to was the drawing of silhouettes. Again, these works are far removed from the violence and subjugation the later castas are surrounded by, but the women are still racialized, and the early works focus on the investigation of the aesthetics of control and the visual interpretation of race\textsuperscript{53} just as much as the later works created specifically for the casta chapter.

\textsuperscript{51} Nancy Friedmann-Sánchez, interview with author, March 10, 2020.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
In the early *Castiza*, much has been changed, from the positioning of the figure, to the skin tones, the flowers, and even the mask. The early *Castiza* is comprised of two layers, one darker, and one lighter, much closer to the later *Mestiza* than the later *Castiza*, which is comprised of three layers. Her positioning is clearly not in a standing posture, since her entire weight would need to balance on her toes. Her arms are down besides her body. The artist’s later *Castiza* wears a clearly human mask, while the early *Castiza* wears a highly stylized abstracted face. It is neither human- nor animal-like. She does, however, still wear the Spanish comb of dominion and is painted on a Tyvek surface that has been folded to invoke quilt making.

Early variations of *Mestiza* all maintain similar postures. The mask from *Mestiza III*, a standing figure with arms on the side, has been recycled and placed onto *Saltatrás*, a work that lives within the chapter (fig. 7).

**Part VI: Conclusion**

*The colonists annotated intermixing of race and place in society. There were sixteen categorizations: Mestiza, Castiza, Parda, Coyote, China Cambuja, etc. “Otherness” is our contemporary caste system.*

Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez\(^{54}\)

The end result is a thoroughly aesthetic and intellectually considered series of works that focus on the history and conditions of women living in the western hemisphere. Borrowing from, while also breaking from, the historical casta genre gives the artist the material to meditate on the legacy of colonialism, and how it affects us today. In fact, she sees connections from the genre to today, connecting names like *Coyote* (3/4 indigenous and ¼ white) (fig. 31) and *Lobo* (1/2 black and ½ indigenous) (fig. 8) to the same terms used in a derogatory manner today. *Coyote* with its

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\(^{54}\) Levitov, *Double Portrait*, n.p.
association with transnational migration, and *Lobo*, denoting somebody without class, are likely derived from the castas, according to the artist.\(^55\)

I’d like to end this paper with a reflection on the hybrids that populate the western hemisphere, and that all the people of this world are hybrids either racially, ethnically or culturally. Purity has never existed:

One could say that androgyny and racial “impurity” are the driving metaphors meant to suggest the importance, as well as the prevalence, of hybridity in contemporary societies. In fact, at a moment when right-wing reaction has come to dominate politics even in European countries considered to be the most liberal and democratic, a celebratory reminder that purity is a fantasy and that the hybrid is not only a reality but a beautiful and complex one with historical specificity, is not only welcome but also necessary.\(^56\)

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