**Exploring race and identity**

by Margo Ashmore

Barlow’s next project will be about her grandmothers, “not only because I find them fascinating people, but I want to tell the story of race relations through their eyes. How we in America create our identities, how narratives placed upon us affect those identities, and how what we think we know can shift depending on who we meet or where we move.”

Her work, which is due at a show in Winona in March 2019, is funded by a Minnesota State Arts Board grant, and is in its research phase. As the eldest of her parents’ children, she was the first mixed race grandchild, and hers is the only mixed-race family for both sides. “Some people have their built-in prejudices, then once it becomes personal, I shouldn’t think that way but there are residues,” Barlow said. “There’s no one story (of growing up mixed race). There are lots of complexities. There are not a lot of books that tell you what to do. It is getting better because now the folks trying to change the narrative.”

Much of her earliest work, circa 2011, was about identity and part of that race. Even in the “Loving” series exhibited in 2017, Barlow would leave areas of a painting unfinished as a way of indicating identity as fluid, evolving, and intersectional; a story with parts left to be written.

Barlow paints life-size, and found that while she loves painting on large panels, those are difficult to pack and expensive to ship to galleries for shows. Especially since she has started to incorporate textiles sewn onto her canvases, she has found ways to display them anchored with grommets and pins, and to be able to roll them up for transport. She was delighted to find out that one of her idols, Kerry James Marshall, uses grommets to hang his work.

Was he a mentor? No, she laughed, “I hope to meet him someday! But I’ve had lots of mentors,” professors at Minneapolis College of Art and Design. “And now I’m local, and I’ve had interns.”

In a career with her peers, there was positive feedback on the incorporation of, and the choice of, the textiles. “It’s less confusing. I felt I am on the cusp of something discarding what I’ve built-in prejudices, then once it becomes personal, I shouldn’t think that way but there are residues,” Barlow said. “There’s no one story (of growing up mixed race). There are lots of complexities. There are not a lot of books that tell you what to do. It is getting better because now the folks trying to change the narrative.”

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