

CONTEMPORARY PROJECT

Vincent Valdez: The City



BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART



Vincent Valdez's *The City*: Stripping Away the Disguise of White Supremacy

Andrea Lepage, Associate Professor of Art History, Washington and Lee University

IN SEPTEMBER 2016, artist Vincent Valdez completed his monumental oil paintings *The City I* (fig. 1) and *The City II* (fig. 5), which depict a Ku Klux Klan gathering in a desolate dumping ground on the outskirts of a city just barely visible in the distance. The monochromatic scene is at first reminiscent of a historical photograph of the Klan taken during its 1920s heyday, but the inclusion of contemporary artifacts such as an iPhone, a cell phone tower, a Pikachu toy, baby Nikes, and a customized Chevrolet truck locate the paintings in the present. *The City I* avoids explicit reference to Klan violence and instead captures a candid moment in which men and women in KKK garb engage in mundane tasks like sending text messages, gossiping, and drinking beer. The composition becomes a site to contemplate a number of societal threats that include, but also transcend, overt white supremacism.

Valdez raises unsettling questions about the identity of the individuals depicted, who appear in the work as average citizens. He notes that, “under their disguises, they become *anyone*. It is possible that they are city politicians, police chiefs, parents,

neighbors, community leaders, academics, church members, business owners.”¹ By juxtaposing the hooded group against an expansive metropolis in the background, Valdez transports the subject beyond the rural American south, saying, “There is a false sense that these threats are (or ever were) contained at the peripheries of society and in small rural communities.”² Valdez’s composition stitches together historical and contemporary references to establish a clear continuity between the past and the present.

Contemporary details included in *The City I* hint at the very American-ness of systems of racial discrimination. A hooded baby points outward, evoking Uncle Sam’s “I Want You” gesture, which features prominently in Klan recruitment fliers. Building upon the Klan’s self-proclaimed role as protectors of American values, Valdez also layers in overt and covert references to American patriotism that extend his metaphor—an American flag patch on a shoulder, the American eagle on a hood, a reference to Chevrolet’s 1980s slogan “The Heartbeat of America,” and a special-edition Budweiser beer can.³ Budweiser issued this special-edition can as part of the company’s



“America Is in Your Hands” ad campaign during the 2016 presidential election cycle, tying it specifically to the civic right to vote.⁴ This message is especially disconcerting when the viewer notices that the can is held in the hand of a Klansman who raises his opposite hand in a Klan salute.⁵

The City I attracted national attention during the 2016 presidential campaign when writer Lawrence Downes featured the in-progress painting in his *New York Times* article “An All-American Family Portrait, in White.”⁶ Downes’s title reflects Valdez’s interest in the ways that popular advertising culture—soda and beer commercials (fig. 2), for example—promote a quaint picture of American culture. In Valdez’s words, such imagery personifies a specific type of American positivity indicating that “Life is good. The gang’s all here. Drink up. Don’t worry, be happy.” The artist transfers these attitudes to the Klansmen to underscore that this carefree lifestyle is not accessible to all Americans. Accordingly, in various media interviews, Valdez emphatically rejected any direct link between his work and the specific political landscape of the polarizing 2016 presidential campaign. Instead, he hopes that the paintings will highlight the persistent structures of white supremacy and systematic disenfranchisement of individuals and communities of color.

Figure 1. Vincent Valdez, *The City I*, 2015–16 (detail). Oil on canvas, 74 x 360 in. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Guillermo C. Nicolas and James C. Foster in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Jeanne and Michael Klein and Ellen Susman in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2017. © Vincent Valdez. Photo by Peter Molick.



Figure 2. Reproduction of Coca-Cola advertisement as published in an issue of *Life* magazine, October 4, 1937. Photo by Andrea Lepage.

With his creation of *The City*, Valdez enters into the continuum of American artists who address the persistence of racially motivated oppression in the United States. Contemporaneous with the Klan's revival in the 1920s, artists began to produce work to counter nativist Klan propaganda that shrouded the organization's activities in patriotism, fraternity, and chivalry. The work of Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), and Philip Guston (1913–1980) exemplifies art that exposes the Klan's history of violence and terror against African Americans, Jewish people, Catholics, Latinas/os, and immigrants. More recently, contemporary artists including Fred Wilson (*Mining the Museum: An Installation*, 1992), Paul Rucker (*Birth of a Nation*, 2015), and Billie Grace Lynn (*American Mask*, 2017) reference the Klan in their art to signal the perseverance of white supremacy. Like Valdez, these artists align Klan imagery with American identity, even at a time when official Klan membership has dwindled to about three thousand.⁷

The City I bears a dedicatory inscription in the lower right corner, “For GSH and PG,” that links the painting directly to this larger art historical tradition and specifically to the work of musician Gilbert “Gil” Scott-Heron (1949–2011) and painter Philip Guston (1913–1980). Scott-Heron's 1980 cover of the A. & D. Grey song “The Klan,” which confronts the KKK's history of lynching, provided a starting point for Valdez as he conceptualized *The City I* and *II*. Valdez borrowed his title from one of Guston's Klan paintings, *City Limits* (fig. 4), which he first saw in 2015 as part of the exhibition *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* at the Blanton Museum of Art.⁸ Using the figurative style characteristic of his late 1960s work, Guston depicted three Klansmen squeezed into a vehicle patrolling the city. Guston's roving Klansmen are stripped of power through their cartoonish rendering, appearing comical in their fight against integration. This notion must have appealed to Valdez, who has discussed his idea for *The City I* in the following terms: “I [was] not interested in portraying another sinister portrait of the Klansmen.

Instead, my aim was to figure out how to strip them of their disguises, without literally doing so.” Underneath the threatening hoods and robes, their behaviors are both mundane and disconcertingly relatable.

The City I and *II* constitute Valdez's most recent investigation of U.S. histories characterized by discrimination and racially motivated violence. In his 2005 *El Chavez Ravine* collaboration with musician Ry Cooder (fig. 3), for example, Valdez explored the oppression of Mexican and Mexican American communities in the Chavez Ravine neighborhood of Los Angeles. In the early 1950s, city officials seized Chavez Ravine properties through exercise of eminent domain, with guarantees of improved housing, education, and health facilities. *El Chavez Ravine* features an urban confrontation between the rapidly modernizing city and Los Angeles's historic neighborhoods. Chavez Ravine homes were eventually demolished to make way for Dodger Stadium, leaving promises of urban renewal unfulfilled. A reminder of the loss of a community and a way of life, the pictorial narrative unfolds around a 1953 Chevy ice cream truck that might have circulated in the Chavez Ravine neighborhood.



Figure 3. Ry Cooder / Vincent Valdez, *El Chavez Ravine*, 2005–7. Oil on 1953 Chevy ice cream truck. Collection of Ry Cooder.



Figure 4. Philip Guston, *City Limits*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 77 x 103 1/4 in. The Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Musa Guston. © The Estate of Philip Guston and The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

The Strangest Fruit, a series of nine paintings produced by Valdez in 2013 (figs. 6, 7), is a study of lynching imagery in the United States that exemplifies Valdez's interest in employing art as a vehicle to acknowledge untold stories and bring to light invisible histories.⁹ Valdez draws visual connections between the use of lynching to terrorize African Americans and the lesser-known history of its use against people of Mexican origin and descent.¹⁰ *The Strangest Fruit* depicts ten male figures rendered naturalistically against expansive white backgrounds: All of them hang from invisible nooses.¹¹ Dressed in contemporary clothes and bound by an invisible rope, Valdez's ten Mexican and Mexican American figures evoke the positions of men put to death by mobs. The inclusion of contemporary details in *The Strangest*

Fruit—a Spurs shirt, a Rockets jersey, a pair of Nikes—anticipates the artistic device that Valdez also employs in *The City I*. Such contemporary details root historically based subject matter in our own time. Thus, Valdez metaphorically aligns these historical acts of violence with present-day practices that disproportionately affect people of color, including mass incarceration, the war on drugs, and deportation.¹²

The two Klansmen who bookend the gathering play a crucial role in diverting attention from the looming and larger-than-life-size grouping in the foreground. Standing on opposite ends of the gathering, the two Klansmen gaze toward the gleaming metropolis in the distance. Emphasizing the importance of the painting's title in understanding its central theme, Valdez related:

The design of many American cities today still reflects segregation. The plotting and location of train tracks, city dumps, land claimed through eminent domain, junkyard locations, city jails and police stations, storage and industry sectors, underfunded schools and housing, even down to the placement of parks and trees. These elements . . . of the American landscape [have] for over two centuries [kept] populations divided through borders and boundaries that are determined by economic class and skin color.

In selecting historically based themes that resonate with contemporary conditions, Valdez notes that he utilizes “memory of the past as a catalyst for understanding” the present. In its juxtaposition of the Ku Klux Klan with the urban cityscape, *The City I* visually compares two forms of racism: individual and structural. The Klan in the foreground personifies an overt category of racism in which individuals or groups use tactics of violence, intimidation, and terror to deny people of color their civil rights. At the same time, the city exemplifies a structural racism that is the legacy of centuries of discriminatory policy and practice.



Figure 5. Vincent Valdez, *The City II*, 2016. Oil on canvas, 74 x 90 in. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Guillermo C. Nicolas and James C. Foster in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Jeanne and Michael Klein and Ellen Susman in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2017. © Vincent Valdez. Photo by Peter Molick.



Figure 6. Vincent Valdez, *Untitled*, from the series *The Strangest Fruit*, 2013, oil on canvas, 92 x 55 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Promised gift of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2016. © Vincent Valdez.

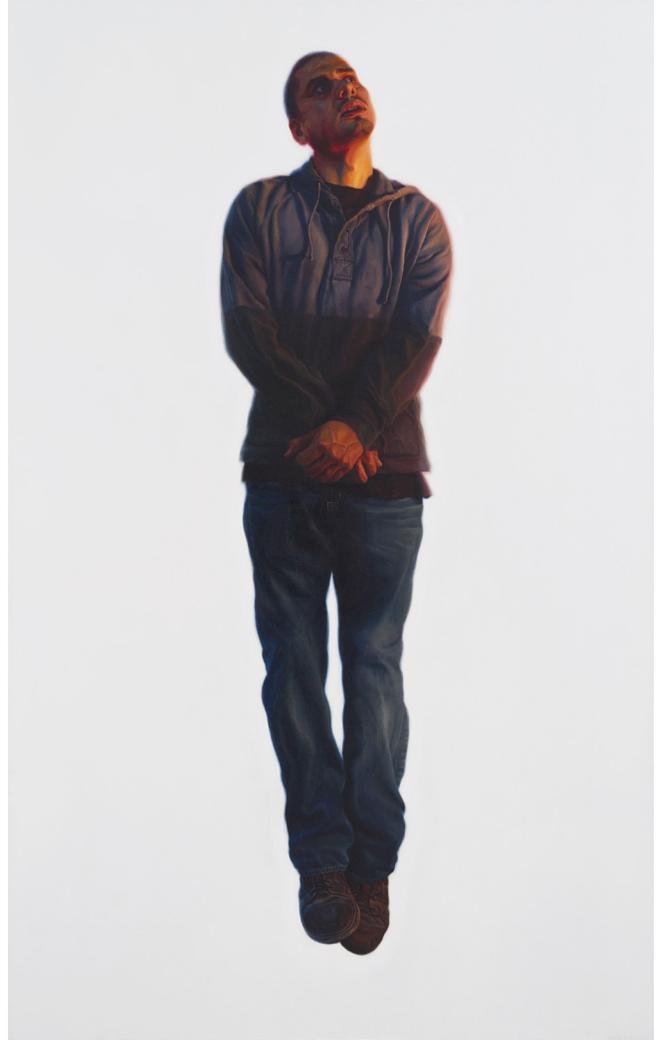


Figure 7. Vincent Valdez, *Untitled*, from the series *The Strangest Fruit*, 2013, oil on canvas, 92 x 55 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Promised gift of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2016. © Vincent Valdez.

Endnotes

¹ On February 29, 2016, Vincent Valdez and I initiated a collaborative project to document *The City* while it was in progress. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this essay are drawn from that five-month-long exchange. Sections of this essay build upon ideas first presented in Andrea Lepage, “Devils and Men: The Ku Klux Klan in American Art,” in *The Beginning is Near I* (Houston, TX: David Shelton Gallery, September 9–October 8, 2016).

² Valdez recounted the evolution of the idea, noting, “For several years I had this vision and idea floating around in my mind but never felt quite ready to pursue it. I sat down and took four minutes to scribble it out. There it was. But it was no good. Didn’t feel right. Too vintage. Too Southern, only. Too removed from my own environment and perception. This is not a subject [relegated to] the swamp lands of Alabama. It has infected all of America.”

³ Between May 23 and Election Day 2016, Budweiser released a special edition can that switched the company’s name with “America” on the front of the can. The Anheuser-Busch “AB” logo was replaced with “US,” proffering this Belgian-owned beer as truly American. Only part of the word “America” is visible in the Valdez painting.

⁴ The can bears key patriotic phrases from the Pledge of Allegiance, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “America the Beautiful.” Drawing from the national anthem, the can boasts of the “land of the free” and the “home of the brave.” A number of key phrases emphasize unity and equality in the nation, “*E Pluribus Unum*” (“Out of Many, One”), “this land was made for you and me,” and most significantly “Indivisible Since 1776.”

⁵ Similar to a Nazi salute, but performed with the left arm.

⁶ Lawrence Downes, “An All-American Family Portrait, in White,” *New York Times*, Sunday Review, March 6, 2016.

⁷ Anti-Defamation League, “Tattered Robes: The State of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States” (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2016), 1.

⁸ *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* was organized by Teresa A. Carbone, the Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and Kellie Jones of Columbia University. The exhibition was on view at the Blanton Museum of Art from February 15 to May 10, 2015.

⁹ See Andrea Lepage, “This is Your America: Racially Motivated Violence and Vincent Valdez’s *The Strangest Fruit*,” 108–126, in *Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture: Making and Being Made*, Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies Series, edited by Corey Dzenko and Theresa Avila (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

¹⁰ See William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850–1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹¹ James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000).

¹² Vincent Valdez, “Artist’s Statement,” in Vincent Valdez’s *The Strangest Fruit* (Waynesboro, VA: McClung Companies, 2015), 4.



Vincent Valdez, *The City I*, 2015–16 (detail). Oil on canvas, 74 x 360 in. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Guillermo C. Nicolas and James C. Foster in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Jeanne and Michael Klein and Ellen Susman in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2017. © Vincent Valdez. Photo by Peter Molick.

Faculty Perspectives

In the fall of 2017, The Blanton hosted roundtable conversations about The City with faculty from diverse disciplines to seek their guidance, input, and expertise on how to make the most of the teaching opportunities around this work. In addition to making significant exhibition design and programmatic suggestions, several faculty members offered written reflections on the paintings. Additional responses can be found on the Blanton's website. Additional responses can be found at blantonmuseum.org/valdezthecity.

Vincent Valdez's *The City* is a monumental work that eerily articulates many of our insecurities about the state of our society and our country in the closing years of the second decade of the twenty-first century. As viewers, we are perhaps struck by the deft ways in which Valdez has used a monochromatic palette, in which black and white, and the shades in between, are deployed to create a work that is remarkable in its reach, its scope, and its depth.

At first viewing, we seem to be presented with an assortment of hooded Klanspeople (the non-gendered plural noun is important, as the painting depicts Klanswomen and a Klan child, alongside the perhaps more historically familiar Klansmen). Valdez ensures that these hooded menaces are every bit as unsettling and disturbing to us as any of the more historical depictions of these personifications of American terror. Lest we be inclined to view the group portrait as something from previous, supposedly less enlightened times, Valdez ensures that we read the group as very much part of the here and now, by including, towards the center of the painting, a hooded menace tapping away at his smartphone, the light from the device reflecting in a ghostly, otherworldly way. We will each read the poses and activities of this motley assortment in different ways, but we will likely be struck by the symbolism of the smartphone, evoking as it does the use of social media in the contemporary age to further disseminate racist bile, oftentimes behind a cloak of anonymity.

– **Eddie Chambers**, Professor of Art & Art History, UT

My first response to an invitation to participate in a Faculty Roundtable discussion of *The City*, Vincent Valdez's painting of the Ku Klux Klan, was shock and even repulsion at the thought of spending time contemplating such an abhorrent subject. Moving past my gut reaction, however, I recognized the potential value in looking at the dark and often-buried underside of our history and collectively analyzing both the image and the feelings it arouses in us.

Confronting the monumental canvas in a room with my colleagues, I experienced a sense of solidarity and emotional engagement as we each struggled to express our thoughts about this difficult, but ultimately powerful image. Unable to ignore these life-size representations of our fellow human beings—at once like us, clutching their cell phones, notepads, and children, and yet so deeply Other—we were forced to articulate the fear, anger, puzzlement, and alienation that we felt for them, ironically mirroring the Klansmen and -women's feelings toward the immigrants and people of color they implicitly and explicitly threaten. Facing this specter of prejudice and violence that continues to haunt society was deeply uncomfortable and painful, but at the same time, I believe, there is something healthy, even therapeutic, in examining what troubles us most. Indeed, it is only by acknowledging the horrifying presence, and banality, of hatred in American society, that we can begin the path toward change.

– **Alexandra Wettlaufer**, Director, Plan II Honors Program; Hayden W. Head Regents Chair, Professor of French and Comparative Literature, UT

I am immediately struck by the hands of the older woman in the far left panel: the plump fingers, hand, and wrist; soft skin; loose ring. They are so much like the hands of my grandmother. She was from Alabama; her closest sister and brother-in-law (my great-aunt and uncle) lived in Mississippi. I remember the time my great-uncle mentioned finding his junior Klan robe in the attic: my grandmother angrily shushed him, hoping I hadn't heard. *The City* connects us with and challenges us to confront our own histories of racism: the ugliness, the shame, the silence.

– **Stephen Thomas Russell**, Professor; Department Chair, Human Development & Family Sciences, UT

Vincent Valdez's *The City* raises many questions about the role and meaning of hate groups in American society today. The sinister, mysterious figures (which include women and children) are members of the Ku Klux Klan, an anti-black domestic terrorist group. The Klan, which emerged after the Civil War, has gone through several iterations since then. (In the 1920s the group targeted not only African Americans but also Jews, Catholics, and foreign immigrants.) The hooded figures dominate the painting, but the small details scattered throughout the immense canvas are equally fascinating, disturbing—and elusive. Rather than approach the painting as a lecture, through which the artist is trying to make a central point, viewers might want to see the picture as a forum for discussion, with the artist raising provocative, open-ended questions calling for speculation rather than specific answers. Why might this group be gathering at night, with the city sprawled out below? Can we tell whether the group as a whole presents a defiant, startled, or menacing front? Are they reacting to a person who has joined them willingly, or intruded into their gathering in an unwelcome, threatening way? Is the artist making statements about forces related to class and gender? In what ways do the individual hooded figures distinguish themselves from each other? This intricate painting challenges the viewer to contemplate the on-going role of hate groups in a modern industrial society. How has the United States changed since the Civil War? How has it remained the same?

– **Jacqueline Jones**, Chair of the History Department and Walter Prescott Webb Chair in History and Ideas/Mastin Gentry White Professor of Southern History, UT

For anyone who thought that the Ku Klux Klan had been relegated to the pages of history, events over the past year have provided a sad corrective. Marches in Charlottesville, Virginia and other college towns have shown that the Klan is not only still active but appears to be thriving. In *The City I* and *II*, Vincent Valdez gives us a subtle but powerful artistic representation of these troubling developments. Here, we see Klan members in an unmistakably modern setting. Checking their phones they strike poses we are familiar with, they wear class rings that perhaps adorn our own fingers, and they drive the same cars we see on the streets every day. Moreover, their meeting place is not some far-flung cornfield but rather the close outskirts of a major metropolis. One of Valdez's accomplishments is therefore to humanize the Klan, not by making it appear more sympathetic, but rather by reminding us that white supremacists are in a sense unremarkably human. Have we met a participant in one of these gatherings, perhaps at a supermarket, a dog park, or dinner table? Valdez gently reminds us that we probably have.

– **Derek Epp**, Assistant Professor, Department of Government, UT

Vincent Valdez's *The City* forces us to stop, to bear witness, to consider, and finally to participate in the banality of American racism and the commonplace of our violence. It is at once beautiful in its mastery and arresting in its content, and therein lies its power—we cannot escape its demands, nor should we want to. Here, at once, is our history and our contemporary, rendered in an undeniably stunning light. The painting calls us to gaze into the faces of evil and in so doing to gaze at ourselves—our capacity for hate and for violence, our collective history, and our fraught contemporary. Here is our American sublime: beautiful and terrible. We want to frantically turn away, but we cannot.

– **Mónica A. Jiménez**, Assistant Professor, Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, UT

Additional Readings and Resources

Prepared by Allison Myers, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow, Modern and Contemporary Art

This list includes resources on themes surrounding Vincent Valdez's The City, many of which the artist studied while creating the paintings. These resources are meant to continue the important conversations sparked by these works.

Let's Talk: Race in the United States

James Allen, ed. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Press, 2000.

A collection of historical photographs and postcards of lynchings from 1876-1950. Though painful, it serves as a visual record of the deep history of racial violence in the United States.

Eduardo Bonillo-Silva. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

A sociological analysis of the ways racism imbues contemporary society beyond the visible violence of hate groups.

Jeff Chang. *Who We Be: A Cultural History of Race in Post-Civil Rights America*. New York: Picador, 2016.

A cultural history of race relations and multiculturalism in the United States as told through visual culture.

Chicano! A History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. Dir. Hector Galan. PBS Productions, 1996.

A powerful documentary on the Chicano movement from 1965-1975, which later appeared as a book by Francisco Rosales.

Klanwatch Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. *Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism*. 6th ed. Montgomery, AL: The Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011.

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a central resource for information on hate groups as well as social justice.

Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells. Ed. By Alfreda M. Duster. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

The autobiography of the African American journalist who led the anti-lynching movement in the U.S. in the 1890s.

Artists and Writers Respond

A Tribe Called Quest. "We the People." *We Got It from Here... Thank You 4 Your Service*. New York: Epic Records, 2016.

Politically-charged and produced in the wake of the recent presidential election, a hip-hop track that denounces intolerance.

James Baldwin. *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955.

A collection of auto-biographical essays that reflect on the experience of being black in America, written during the dawn of the civil rights movement.

Junot Díaz. *Drown*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Short stories that reflect on the American Dream and the experiences of Dominican immigrants in the United States.

Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco. *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*. New York: Nation Books, 2012.

A graphic novel that investigates the connections between poverty and race across different segments of American society.

Los Hermanos Bañuelos. "El Deportado." *Corridos & Tragedias de la Frontera*. El Cerrito, CA: Arhoolie Records, 1994.

A Mexican-American corrido that tells of the sacrifices and injustices faced by Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Claudia Rankine. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014.

Merging poetry, prose, and visual images, an investigation into the many ways racism and microaggressions pervade daily life and affect our sense of who belongs.

Public Programs

Facing Racism: Art & Action

Thursday, September 27, 2018

Inspired by the commitment of Vincent Valdez to creating socially engaged art, this day-long symposium will feature artists, curators, and scholars sharing experiences and ideas about the role of the arts in addressing racism. Thematic panel presentations will be complemented by gallery discussions, a poetry reading, and a film screening. The day will culminate in a keynote address by Dr. Kellie Jones at 6:30 pm in the Blanton auditorium.

Dr. Kellie Jones is Associate Professor in Art History and Archaeology and the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University. She has curated numerous important museum exhibitions, including *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*, which was exhibited at the Blanton in 2015 and included work that helped inspire Vincent Valdez to make *The City*. In 2016, Dr. Jones was named a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Fellow. Her research interests include African American and African Diaspora artists, Latinx and Latin American Artists, and issues in contemporary art and museum theory.

Support for *Facing Racism: Art & Action* is provided by David and Ellen Berman and the Carolyn Harris Hynson Centennial Endowment.

Community Connections

Community Conversations

Ongoing from July 17 – October 27, 2018

Co-facilitators with expertise in interpreting art and addressing challenging social issues will invite close looking and thoughtful conversation with a small group of visitors interested in dialogue. *Community Conversations* will be offered on select Thursdays at 12:30 pm and Saturdays at 3:00 pm. Programs will take place in the Contemporary Project gallery; space will be limited to 25 participants. Please check the website for more information.

Austin History

To learn more about Austin’s history, visit the recently installed memorial marker outside Wesley United Methodist Church in East Austin. Erected by the NAACP’s Austin chapter and other civic leaders in collaboration with the Equal Justice Initiative’s national project to memorialize lynching in America, the marker tells the story of two black men and a black woman lynched by a white mob in 1894.

To learn more about the history of violence against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Texas, please make an appointment to consult the Robert Runyon Photographic Collection, the Russell Lee Photographic Collection, and other archives at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at UT.

For additional information, please visit blantonmuseum.org/valdezthecity.

This installation is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

The City was acquired for the Blanton’s permanent collection with support from Guillermo C. Nicolas and James C. Foster in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Jeanne and Michael Klein and Ellen Susman in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein.

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Cover image: Vincent Valdez in his studio, 2016. © Michael Stravato