



**NARSISO MARTINEZ**  
MISSION-PRECIOUS CARGO

# NARSISO MARTINEZ

## BIO

Narsiso Martinez's drawings and mixed media installations include multi-figure compositions set amidst agricultural landscapes. Drawn from his own experience as a farmworker, Martinez's work focuses on the people performing the labors necessary to fill produce sections and restaurant kitchens around the country. Martinez's portraits of farmworkers are painted, drawn, and expressed in sculpture on discarded produce boxes collected from grocery stores. In a style informed by 1930s-era Social Realism and heightened through use of found materials, Martinez makes visible the difficult labor and onerous conditions of the "American farmworker," itself a compromised piece of language owing to the industry's conspicuous use of undocumented workers.

Narsiso Martinez (b. 1977, Oaxaca, Mexico) came to the United States when he was 20 years old. He attended Evans Community Adult School and completed high school in 2006 at the age of 29. He earned an Associate of Arts degree in 2009 from Los Angeles City College. In the fall of 2012 Narsiso earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from California State University Long Beach. In the spring of 2018 he received a Master of Fine Arts degree in drawing and painting from California State University Long Beach, and was awarded the prestigious Dedalus Foundation MFA Fellowship in Painting and Sculpture. His work has been exhibited both locally and internationally. His work is in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, MOLAA, University of Arizona Museum of Art, Long Beach Museum of Art, Crocker Art Museum, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Martinez was awarded the Frieze Impact Award in 2023. Martinez lives and works in Long Beach, CA.

Artist Instagram: @narsisomartinez





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Source Image

Narsiso Martinez  
*Mission-Precious Cargo*  
Acrylic, ink, charcoal, collage, and matte gel on produce cardboard boxes  
87 x 174 Inches  
2023

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### Artist Note:

*Mission-Precious Cargo* is acrylic, ink, charcoal, and collage painting executed on 33 discrete pieces of discarded produce cardboard boxes. The piece measures 87 x 174 inches total. This piece is inspired by the Oceanside Pole tomato brand illustration label. Using the image of a Mission as a take-off point, the painting engages themes of colonialism, indigenous farm labor, and wine tasting and cultivation.

*Mission-Precious Cargo's* 33 parts are meant to be put together like a puzzle. During installation, an image should be used as reference, and "L" shape pin/nails should hold each part through existing holes and apertures on the sides. No new holes should be created. Each part is signed and dated on the bottom right side of the back, and this can be used as a direction reference as well. Finally, I'd suggest start installation from the center outwards.



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### Artist Note:

The Oceanside Pole tomato brand label depicts a mission / catholic church structure in the middle ground and a tomato field in the foreground. Whenever I work with an existing label image from a certain produce brand, I want to engage in dialogue with the label and its design and thematic elements. The image of the mission or church took me back to my upbringing as a Zapotec indigenous kid. My parents would frequently encourage me to partake in catholic religious rituals. As an adult, I learned about the imposition of religion ideas and rituals on indigenous communities by European colonizers. As an artist, I appreciate other artists who speak up about the struggles of indigenous people under colonization.



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David Alfaro Siqueiros, América Tropical Oprimida y Destrozada por Los Imperialismos  
II Tropical America: Oppressed and Destroyed by Imperialism

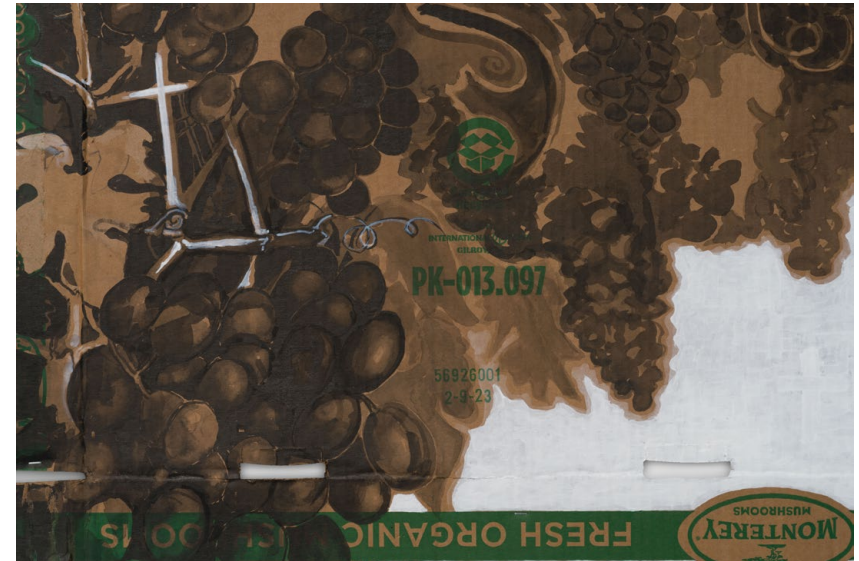
### Artist Note:

I very much identify with the work of artist David Alfaro Siqueiros and his mural Tropical America: Oppressed and Destroyed by Imperialism, which he painted on Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles in 1932. The mural depicts a crucified indigenous person at its center, showing how indigenous people of the Americas have been sacrificed under imperialism. By quoting the central image of the mural Tropical America in the center part of Mission-Precious Cargo, I extend the dialogue established by Siqueiros on the struggles of indigenous communities. Nowadays indigenous communities continue to be oppressed not only by religious institutions but also by agribusiness and the US political system, which enforces a system of unequal opportunities for many, certainly farm workers.



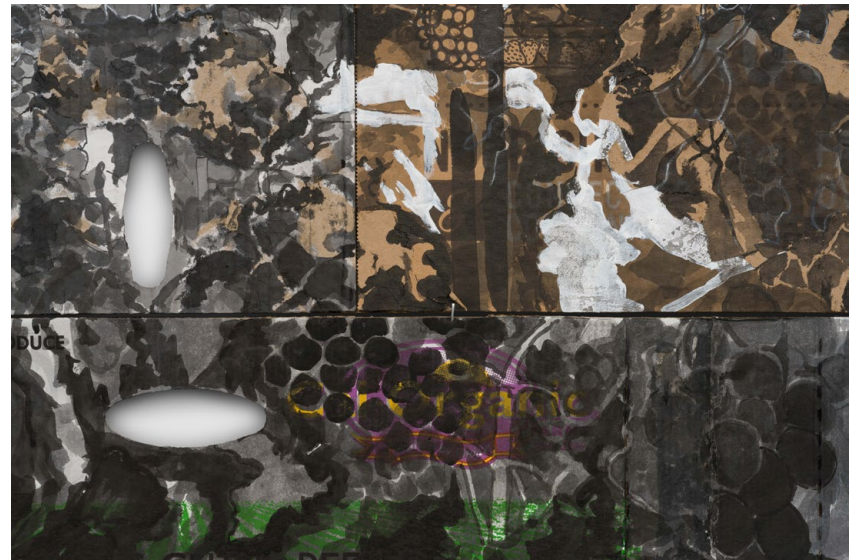
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### Artist Note:

I am a former farm worker myself, but I don't have any experience in the tomato fields. However, I do remember working and interacting with grapevine workers. Therefore, it was more comfortable for me to transform the tomato fields into a grape plantation. Plus, there appears to be a ritual connection between the missions and their religious teachings and wine making. As a result, in the foreground, instead of having a tomato plantation, Mission-Precious Cargo shows the viewer a vineyard instead. Recently, I noticed a trend in wine tasting events and I wanted to touch on this subject as well. While many of us indulge in the pleasures of wine tasting, we sometimes forget to acknowledge the sacrifices farmworkers make day by day in the process of wine production.





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### Artist Note:

On the bottom right-hand side of the piece, I have incorporated another illustration adopted from the King Cole citrus brand, which presents an image of a king holding a tray with oranges, but I swapped the oranges for grapes and wine, suggesting that a wine tasting is imminent.





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### Artist Note:

On the bottom left-hand side of the piece, I wanted to acknowledge the contribution of farmworkers by adding a portrait of a female worker looking over her left shoulder at the viewer. This is one of my first paintings to operate exclusively using the symbolic language of muralism. I decided to forego the depiction of workers in the fields in this piece and allow the loaded symbolic language of the mission to preside over one female farm worker, and one entitled King-like figure.





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