

Olga Viso

June 2021

In 1992, Coco Fusco presciently observed how the failure to appreciate the different constructions of race in Anglo America and Latin America often got in the way of productive intellectual discourse regarding race in America. It was a phenomenon she noted should be recognized “despite the shared legacies of slavery, sexual exploitation of Black and indigenous women by white men, and segregationist legislation.”

In “Pan-American Postnationalism: Another World Order,” Fusco described the distinctions as follows:

In the North, a combination of prolonged legal and social segregation and a deep embedded ideology of essentialist separatism, supported by the pragmatist stronghold of American philosophy, has continuously deferred recognition and affirmation of this country’s and its people’s racial and cultural hybridity. In the South, at least two centuries of ideological celebration of hybridity (the many discourses on *mestizaje*) often brings Latin American intellectuals to reject binary understand-

Comprehending the respective colonialisms would, in Fusco’s view, decidedly enhance intellectual arguments, especially if recast as a “pan-American dialogue, taking into account the complementary discourses on race and nation in Latin America that began 500 years ago and have informed revolutionary political movements in cultural syncretism in the region’s multiracial societies.”

There is no question that the nuanced level of understanding Fusco called for 30 years ago remains a necessity, especially in the US, where Latinx, multiracial, and detribalized identities continue to be rendered invisible and construed in monolithic, essentializing terms—and not just in cultural circles, but political ones, too. Perhaps the essential recognition Fusco postulates is finally feasible now.

1. Fusco, Coco. *English is Broken Here: Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. (The New Press, 1995)

Contributor

Olga Viso

Olga Viso is a curator, writer, and contemporary art historian based at Arizona State University’s Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. She was previously the director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC. She is a scholar of contemporary and Latin American Art, with a focus on the contemporary art of Cuba.