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## Embracing Ambiguity: Faces of the Future

It is estimated that there are 4.8 million multi-racial individuals living in America. It was not until the year 2000 that Americans were allowed to choose more than one ethnic category on the United States census. **Embracing Ambiguity: Faces of the Future** features painting, sculpture, video and mixed-media works by ten multicultural artists living and working in the U.S. In a world where labels are often forced upon us, these artists are searching for new, more layered ways to respond to the question: "What are you?"

For centuries, the majority group in power has felt the need to label what they deemed to be the "exotic other" or any person that was foreign to them. During the 16th century, in the Spanish colonies, artists used **casta** paintings to depict the results of the Spanish conquerors intermixing with the native people. **Casta paintings** were formulaic studies that illustrated couples of different races with their mixed offspring. Reflecting the trend of the Enlightenment to scientifically categorize the world, these paintings contained inscriptions like **mulatto**, **wolf**, and **coyote**. The paintings reinforced the superiority of the pureblooded Spaniards and attempted to quantify the percent of pure (Spanish) blood in the mixed-race individuals.

Going forward in American history, the **One Drop Rule** stated that any individual with a trace of African ancestry was considered black. In the 1960s, Jim Crow laws kept races segregated in public places. Anti-miscegenation laws forbidding interracial marriage were also still in effect. On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court case, *Loving v. Virginia*, set a precedent. Mildred Loving, an African and Native American woman, and Richard Perry, a white man, were sentenced to a year in prison because the state of Virginia would not recognize their marriage; the couple would not have to serve a prison term if they left Virginia. The couple left, but took their case to the Supreme Court, who ruled that Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute was unconstitutional. Ironically, Barack Obama our 44th president and a child of mixed race parents, was born in 1961 before the ruling took place.

This exhibition opens a year after the election of Obama, our first multiracial president. It was his image on a Time magazine cover that sparked our curiosity about the American identity. The photo of Obama was similar to that of a computer-generated face that appeared on a cover thirteen years earlier. Dubbed "The New Face of America," the image was a composite of many different races. It visually reinforced the idea that Americans were not so easily defined. The artists in this exhibition have an advantage in the search for answers as they represent with images what words may not be fully able to express. Their artistic expressions allow these artists to question the past, and look forward to the future with new visions and voices. We hope this will be a future without boxes, where no one will be limited to "check only one."

-Lynn Stromick and Jillian Nakarathap, January 2010

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