

Body of Work



*'The Untouchables' by Eric Ravelo
(2013 - 2015)*

Introduction

Erik Ravelo is a Cuban sculptor and painter turned multimedia artist whose work represents his commitment to exposing abuses often hidden from public view. Over the course of his career, he has established himself as a provocative creator, working both independently and as a creative director at Fabrica, the Benetton Group's renowned communications agency in Italy. His broader body of work includes campaigns for organizations such as the UNHATE Foundation, where he helped produce projects like *Unhate*, a globally discussed series that depicted world leaders in controversial poses designed to spark dialogue about conflict, prejudice, and reconciliation.

Combining commercial aesthetics with graphic, provocative images, Ravelo's portfolio always pushes viewers to confront uncomfortable realities. His portfolio challenges human rights abuses, censorship, and calls for social justice. Works such as *With Love* focused on 'war waste' by telling the stories of innocent civilians and journalists who defend truth while living under repression or suffering violence. Throughout his career Ravelo has used visual art and photography to spark public debate and reflection.

Perhaps his most widely known – and certainly controversial – project is *Los Intocables* (*The Untouchables*), created in 2013 under the UNHATE Foundation. The series is made of striking photographs in which children are posed in a crucifix shape on the backs of adults or institutions that harm them in different ways. Each image visualises a different threat to childhood, such as paedophilia within religious institutions, sexual tourism, gun violence, obesity, and pollution. The tagline of the campaign was: *The right to childhood should be UNTOUCHABLE*. Ravelo conceived the project to indict global forces that rob children of innocence and safety.

Exhibited at OpenArt, Scandinavia's largest art biennial in Sweden in 2015, the series gained much of its international reputation through being spread online. It was widely shared on Facebook before being censored for its disturbing imagery – a controversy that ironically fueled further media attention and public reaction as its removal was debated. Cultural publications (such as LUXUO) highlighted the story, helping establish a virtual presence that far extended the project's reach beyond traditional gallery settings. A popular YouTube video showcases the complete series, ensuring that the images and issues they represent could be viewed by a global audience. Ravelo has stated that he hoped users would distribute images, as if they had personal responsibility for the issues in the campaign.

How to Study 'The Untouchables' campaign

In this Body of Work you'll find all seven images from Eric Ravelo's The Untouchables campaign. The work addresses abuses against children and comments on threats such as war, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, gun violence, and environmental contamination. Each image symbolises a specific injustice and Ravelo constructs the argument that these compromise a child's right to safety and robs them of innocence.

The central idea of the campaign is how adults 'turn their backs' on victims, a visual metaphor for societal indifference or even complicity. Viewers of the images are being challenged to ask: Who is responsible? What systems are being critiqued by the images? The crucifixion pose is a provocative metaphor for sacrifice and suffering imposed on children by adults or institutions. Not only does this amplify the emotional impact through targeting a cultural taboo, it also suggests a certain moral hypocrisy on the part of people who may profess religious (Christian) beliefs and values. The fact that these works were censored is worth considering: what does this say about society's willingness to confront difficult truths?

Stylistically, Ravelo uses disturbing images to provoke emotional responses. His intention is to use provocation and shock tactics to force viewers to confront issues they might prefer to ignore. The posing of children in rigid, arms-outstretched positions links all the images in the campaign, as does the back-back-facing of adults and children. The adults all wear clothes which develop the symbolism of each poster: for example, Ravelo's critique of fast-food obesity is symbolised by an adult wearing the costume of Ronald MacDonald, a well-known fast-food mascot. Objects (such as guns and masks) are used as props.

The children have their faces blurred out which not only suggests issues of consent and protection of identity, but further symbolises the erasure of identities that should be protected and safe. The backdrops to the images are often plain and simple, forming a contrast with the brightly coloured people in the center of each photograph. Spend some time browsing and annotating the images in this Body of Work and prepare answers to the following key questions:

- How does Ravelo symbolically critique the ways adults or institutions cause harm to children?
- How is Ravelo's intention expressed through visual methods, such as posing, staging, costume, contrast, and digital manipulation?
- How does Ravelo's use of shocking and provocative imagery reveal society's relationship with difficult subjects or uncomfortable truths?

UNTOUCHABLES



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Physician

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Priest



Syria

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Nuke

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Weapons



Thailand



Fast Food