ReadingGroupGuides
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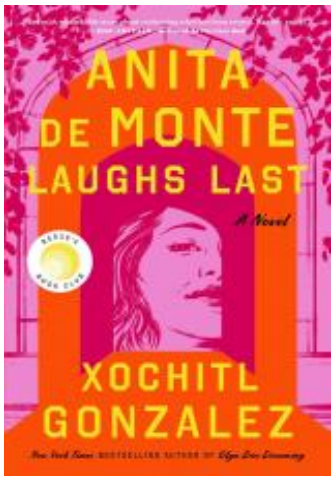
Anita de Monte Laughs Last

by Xochitl Gonzalez



About the Book

New York Times **bestselling author Xochitl Gonzalez delivers a mesmerizing novel about a first-generation Ivy League student who uncovers the genius work of a female artist decades after her suspicious death.**

1985. Anita de Monte, a rising star in the art world, is found dead in New York City; her tragic death is the talk of the town. Until it isn?t. By 1998, Anita?s name has been all but forgotten --- certainly by the time Raquel, a third-year art history student is preparing her final thesis. On College Hill, surrounded by privileged students whose futures are already paved out for them, Raquel feels like an outsider. Students of color, like her, are the minority there, and the pressure to work twice as hard for the same opportunities is no secret.

But when Raquel becomes romantically involved with a well-connected older art student, she finds herself unexpectedly rising up the social ranks. As she attempts to straddle both worlds, she stumbles upon Anita?s story, raising questions about the dynamics of her own relationship, which eerily mirrors that of the forgotten artist.

Moving back and forth through time and told from the perspectives of both women, ANITA DE MONTE LAUGHS LAST is a propulsive, witty examination of power, love and art, daring to ask who gets to be remembered and who is left behind in the rarefied world of the elite.

Discussion Guide

Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel --- as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading ANITA DE MONTE LAUGHS LAST, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The first time we meet Anita in the opening chapter, we see her in the presence of others at one of Tilly?s infamous parties. In the following chapter, we also witness Raquel in a similar setting in college at Nick?s art show. How do the power dynamics in these social gatherings continue to parallel both storylines throughout the novel? How do they serve to heighten the tension around both women?s sense of belonging?

2. ANITA DE MONTE LAUGHS LAST alternates primarily between Anita?s first-person POV, Raquel?s third-person POV, and Jack Martin?s first-person POV. Consider the role that structure plays in this novel. What does it mean for a reader to engage with these characters through these different means?

3. Hip hop and art history are both huge influences in Raquel?s life. How are these two mediums a catalyst in her storyline and in her relationship with those around her?

4. This novel not only takes us through different perspectives, it also takes us through a nonlinear timeline. Why do you think the author made the decision to break away from a more conventional, chronological retelling of Anita?s life? How are the glimpses into her past significant to the story?

5. At the core of this novel, readers will find two Latinas in precarious romantic relationships. How is Anita?s relationship with Jack similar to Raquel?s relationship with Nick? How are they different?

6. What do the Art History Girls represent? How do their seemingly shared lifestyle goals and values contradict Raquel?s when we first meet them? To what extent does this impact Raquel?s confidence and sense of companionship?

7. Anita?s death is one that looms over several characters throughout this novel. From Tilly to Belinda Kim to Mrs. Fitzsimmons, everyone seems to have their own perspective about what happened on that night in 1985. How do their reactions create a fully rounded view of Anita?s sudden demise within the art world? What does this reveal about the erasure and the legacy of women artists in America?

8. Discuss the role of family in this novel, specifically Raquel and Nick?s disparate upbringings. How do their families --- both their parents and younger sisters --- inform their decisions, actions and behaviors?

9. Both John Temple and Belinda Kim serve as advisors to Raquel, especially as her interest in Jack Martin piques. How do they each approach Raquel?s curiosities? Is there a right or wrong way to either of their actions? What do you notice about the way each of them creates space for Raquel to expand her horizons as a student of art?

10. In the chapter titled ?The Ceiba Tree,? readers get a glimpse of Anita?s first transition into a bat. ?Bats can keep their form. Their physicality beyond the ceiba. They can travel back and forth. Be visible. Then invisible. Fly both here and there? (216). How does this chapter become a climactic moment in Anita?s storyline? What does her descent into the lives of others give her permission to do, and how does she wield this power towards the end of the book?

11. Anita?s career as an artist becomes overshadowed in Jack?s presence, but by the end of a novel, there?s a community of people adamant to make sure Anita gets the flowers she deserves. Which of these moments of reclamation resonated the most with you, and why?

12. This novel explores so many themes --- from feminism, to power, to artistry. Pick a theme and discuss its relation to

the title of the book.

Author Bio

Xochitl Gonzalez is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the award-winning novel OLGA DIES DREAMING, the Reese?s Book Club pick ANITA DE MONTE LAUGHS LAST, and LAST NIGHT IN BROOKLYN. She is a contributor to *The Atlantic*, where she was recognized as a 2023 Pulitzer Prize finalist in Commentary. A native Brooklynite and proud public school graduate, Gonzalez holds a BA from Brown University and an MFA from the Iowa Writers? Workshop.

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