

WHY IS THE SKY BLUE?

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CURATED BY OCTAVIO AVENDAÑO TRUJILLO

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RUIZ-HEALY ART
SAN ANTONIO, TX

Why is the sky blue?
by Octavio Avendaño Trujillo

The blue of the sky was so deep, but it seemed as if the storm would fall at any time.

George Bataille, *The blue of the sky*

1. Heavenly globalization versus earthly globalization.

Why is the sky blue? Kandinsky answered that from its synesthesia the blue of the sky is the color from the sounds of wind instruments, like the flute, the cello or the organ. For Heidegger the blue of the sky is a timeless element that surrounds Earth; the planet where the search for the truth and sense of being emerged. However, since many years ago we have stopped asking ourselves: Why is the sky blue?

The reason for this might be because the sky belongs to the ancient and the Earth to the modern man, as Peter Sloterdijk says in his book: *In the World Interior of Capital*, which I quote:

" The cosmology of Western antiquity, that of Plato and the later Hellenistic scholars, had devoted itself to the idea of representating the totality of what exists in the stimulating image of an all-encompassing sphere [...] since ancient academic times, the great round body of the existent world has been known as cosmos - a name that calls to mind the ornamental and beautiful character of the universe. The same object was simultaneously addressed as uranos, the sky. The titanic name expressed the notion that the world reached its limits in a final ethereal vault - a view one could equally have called hope. The ancients wanted to conceive of the sky as a wide vase that held the fixed stars and calmed the human fear of falling. To Aristotle, the sky was the outermost shell of the orb that contains everything, but is contained by nothing. Measuring the sky in thought meant carrying out the first globalization. In the process, the good news of philosophy emerged: that humans, as much as the disorder they experience might depress them, cannot fall out of space." p.25 (Anaximander)

The real beginning of globalization is found in the rationalization of the structure of the world created by ancient cosmologists, who by means of the sphere presented us with the configuration of order. However, as Sloterdijk observed: The ancient cosmic globalization was replaced by earth globalization, similarly to the establishment of the colonialism of the national states of old Europe: navigation and cartography established the era of the expansion from 1492 to 1945. (Orbis Terrarum).

In *One Final Vision of Paradise*, Eduardo Subirats points out that from such a moment, the globe became a world segmented by ranks of ethnicity, theology, technology and military. A flat world fragmented by hierarchy (p.138). In other words, we stopped looking at the sky and asking ourselves why is it blue, in order to transcend from the sphere to the plane, from nature to capitalism, from the system of thought to the necropolitics system, from philosophers to economists, and from geometers to specialists in terrorism.

II. The modern man

The modern man is fundamentally a man that tries to demonstrate his sovereignty by fighting to the death. In the same way Hegel, the story of domination and emancipation, is clearly related to a story about truth and death, and no longer about the truth and the condition of being of Heidegger. In regards to this, the African philosopher, Achille Mbembe states:

"To live under late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of 'being in pain': fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes [...] terror is a defining feature of both slave and late-modern colonial regimes (p.72) [...] the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead." (p.75)

Once we stop looking at the sky, that is, when we replace old cosmic globalization with

earth globalization, the wars of such globalization do not have among its objectives the conquest, acquisition and seizure of territories. Its purpose would be, ideally, that of a lightning attack, says Zygmunt Bauman.

II. Modernity without sky

According to the great Mexican philosopher with Ecuadorian origins, Bolivar Echeverria, the modernity that established with capitalism (the discovery of America) is characterized by "The scale of the instrumental operability of human labor has taken a significant leap; such growth has transferred the human activity to a higher rank and, thus, to a horizon of possibilities of unknown ways of giving and receiving throughout years of history. From being harassed and confined to the outside universe which is known as nature- to the world conquered by the productive forces which have become, if not more powerful than the universe itself, more powerful when it comes to their specific purposes. By this, Men seem to be positioned in the promised hierarchy by its founding myth of "Lord and Master of Earth." Quote:

"As early as the 'invention of America', when the Earth finally rounded its figure for Man and conveyed to him a means by which to measure his finiteness in the infinite Universe, an incident of far-reaching and irreversible effect was set in motion in the deep history of slow times and long duration. A mutation in the very structure of the 'natural form' -- the elementary civilizational substratum-- of the social reproduction process gradually began to undermine the bases on which all traditional societies --without exception-- throughout history had founded their original code of life." (Bolivar Echeverria: p. 145).

I.e., in modern life, man attributes himself the spherical element of the ancient times and the power of the sky, and because of this, its destruction: The constituent violence.

Walter Benjamin defines constituent violence as a violence that constitutes a new state of things into law, that is, a force used to create and impose a new political regime with a whole scopic regime that supports it. Such violence originates itself from the modern

Western political movement, which has sanctified both, nationalist self-determination and sovereignty since the revolutions of the eighteenth century; the same that we currently endure, not only in the case of Palestine and Israel, but worldwide.

As the Israeli theoretician Ariela Azoulay mentions in her book *History Potential*, which I quote:

"The civilian population can by no means be classified and identified as one of the fighting sides in a war, and the violent policies seeking to transform the politico-demographic reality (p. 49) [...] each of us -says Azoulay- can still claim what I suggest is a universal right --- the right not to be a perpetrator. This is the right to intervene in the constituent violence (in the military, hegemonic, official and media story) [...] so as to enable me, us, to regain our full unimpaired citizenship [...] to free myself of the clamp of sovereignty (state of emergency) and the perspective of the national conflict and to extract from the past its unrealized possibilities as a necessary condition for imagining a different future." (p. 70)

V. The global language

"It is time to be the lords", wrote Apollinaire on his cubist manifesto published in 1913. The transition from the sphere to the flat, from heaven to capital, caused a heteronormative consolidation; Aphrodite and the rest of the ancient goddesses were diminished to means of pleasure or service. However, in the mestizo countries such as the ones located in Latin America, the "time to be the lords" was blocked, not completely, but it did not succeed as it did in other western countries.

Much of this is due to the dignity of Latin women, but in regards to art the world, the self-consumption of the historic European avant-garde in the region allowed the inclusion of very prominent female artists. However, there is not one Latin American country in which the art works created by women are considered important to the artistic production: Maria Martorell in Argentina, Tarsila do Amaral in Brazil, in Mexico Maria Izquierdo, Leonora Carrington, Nahum Olin, Frida Kahlo, Lilia Carrillo, Remedios Varo, Olga Costa, Marysole

Wörner Baz, Helen Escobedo; among many others. Finally, without any doubt Georgia O'Keeffe in the United States.

The artistic works of women reveal that the abstraction engraved in art is a language that subverts the machine, industry and phallogocentrism of modern art. Abstractionism emerges in modernity as a spiritual demand linked to a loss of confidence in the values of the industrial civilization, which contradicts the judgment of Apollinaire.

Even though, the first abstract machine was created with the discovery of America, that is, with the establishment of capitalism, as explained by Terry Eagleton: "the merchandise erased from itself every particle of matter; as an alluring auratic object, it walks its unique sensual being to a kind of spurious show of materiality", which was the operation that exploited and built the continent.

"Marxism always analyzed capitalism as a process -as liberating and as violent and destructive- that draws the feudal ties of people and property, and replaces them with the abstract tie of an exchange."

The interests of man, or rather the connection to himself and the environment that sustains it, has been historically adjusting the abstract machine. If we refer to the so-called historical vanguards, the concept of modernity is centered, as noted by Eduardo Subirats, in the techno-industrial and financial development, defining artistic abstraction as a new global language.

This means that there is a difference between the abstract machinery of terrestrial globalization, constitutive violence, colonialism, capitalism, and the abstraction of the feminine spirit, I would say, even when produced by heterosexual men. Yes, abstraction is a global language. However the difference lies in what we want to say and if we say it after asking ourselves why is the sky blue or by judging from the perspective of the modern man without sky.

The works of Jesse Amado, Laura Anderson Barbata, Cecilia Biagini, Nate Cassie, Anibal Delgado, Hersúa, Cisco Jimenez, Magali Lara, Chuck Ramirez, Guillermo Santamarina, Hills Snyder and Pilar Villela, all raise questions from the various possibilities of global language abstraction. Why is the sky blue? Why is the storm going to fall all of a sudden? Why have 43 students in Mexico disappeared? Where is spirituality? Where is beauty? The exhibition at Ruiz-Healy Art does not pretend to decree as the earthly globalization has done since 1492, but to make us raise questions, to enable contemplatives encounters, and make us critics of the contemporary society.

I would like to finish with a quote from a "Town from heaven", from the French writer Le Clézio:

"The time when silence is so big that anything can happen. Pequeña Cruz recalls that question she's asked for so many years, the question she would very much like to know, about the sky and its color. But now she does not say out loud: What is blue? Because nobody knows the right answer.

She stands still, sitting at the edge of the cliff, facing the sky. She knows that things, at some point, come. So she waits every day, in that place, sitting on the hard ground, by herself. Her almost black face is now burnt by the sun and wind, somehow raised so that there is no shadow on her skin. She is calm, not afraid. She knows that the answer will come one day, without her knowing how. The silence of the empty valley and the silence of the town behind her are there so she can hear better the answer to her question. Only she can hear it. Even the dogs are asleep, without realizing what is happening." (P.212)



Gradually the modern tradition of abstraction was transformed by the peripheries in a corpus where various problems can be overwritten. Aesthetic production registered in this context opened up another room where the abstract signs are translatable and challenge the viewer from the poetic to the political. From this argument stems the inclusion in this exhibition of twelve artists from the United States, Mexico and Argentina, whose production encompasses works which date back to 1971 (Hersúa, Mexico) and extend to the present with Jesse Amado.

- Octavio Avendaño Trujillo



Hersúa

Untitled

enamel on wood

8.3 x 15.7 x 23.6"

1971



Aníbal Delgado

Las medidas del sastre

oil, wax crayon, metal, and wood on cotton

37 x 33"

1983



Laura Anderson Barbata

Familia Victoriano

c-print on photo paper

26 x 25.5"

2011



Cisco Jimenez

Maiz transgenico

enamel on metal and framed watercolor

23.6 x 23.6"

2004



Nate Cassie

Untitled (Prop)

acrylic polymer, wood, epoxy, metal leaf

5.25 x 11 x 5.25"

2015



Chuck Ramirez

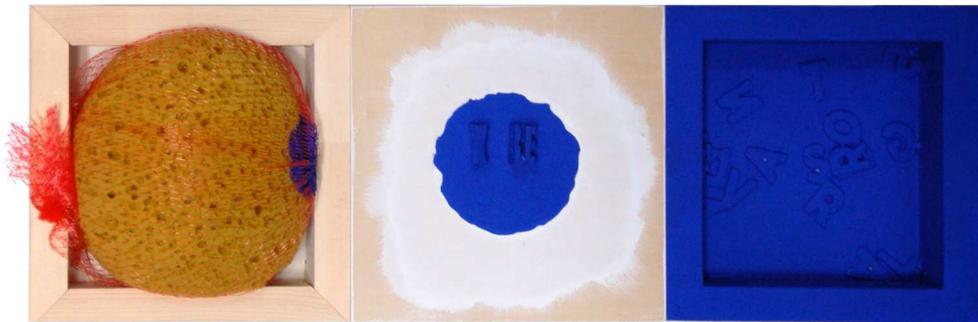
Coconut series

photograph digital print

edition of 10

16 x 16"

1997



Jesse Amado

Yves Blue (Siv Ernav Tiag Bolsra)

Y3 Blau acrylic paint on wood, sponge

6 x 18 x 3.25"

2015



Hills Snyder

Sótano de las Golondrinas

pencil on paper

49 x 61 x 2"

2015



Magali Lara

Ignoro como llegue a esta amplia habitación

oil on canvas

57 x 69"

2008



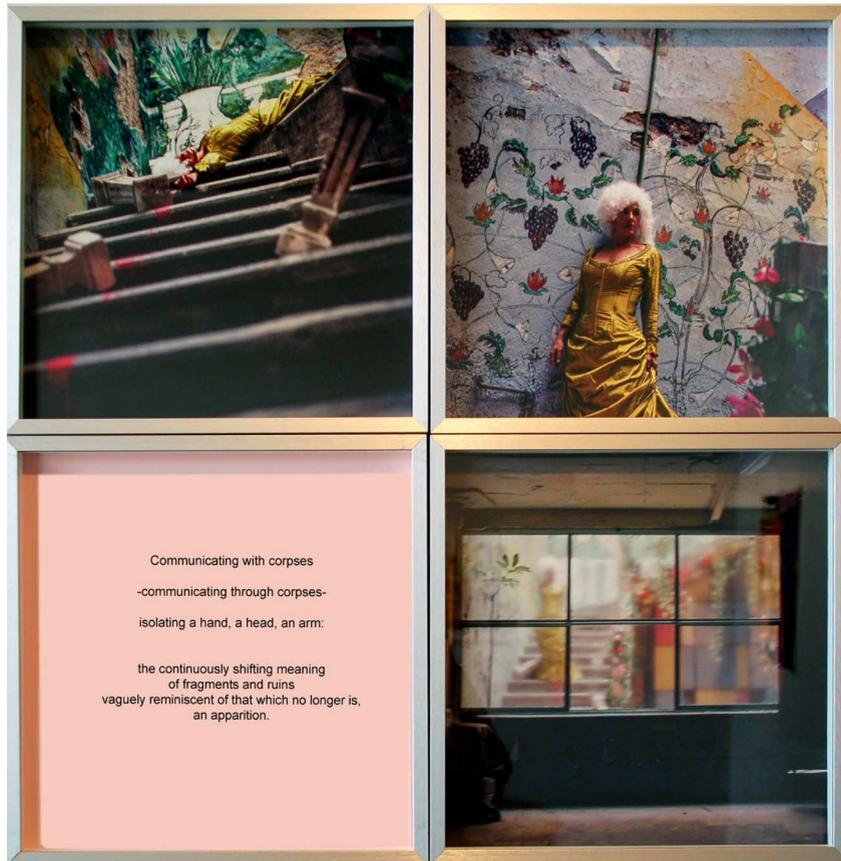
Magali Lara

Melancolia series

watercolor

8.1 x 11.6"

2012



Communicating with corpses
-communicating through corpses-
isolating a hand, a head, an arm:

the continuously shifting meaning
of fragments and ruins
vaguely reminiscent of that which no longer is,
an apparition.

Pilar Villela

Communicating with Corpses

4 digital prints on cotton paper

edition of 5

24.6 x 24.6"

2010



Pilar Villela

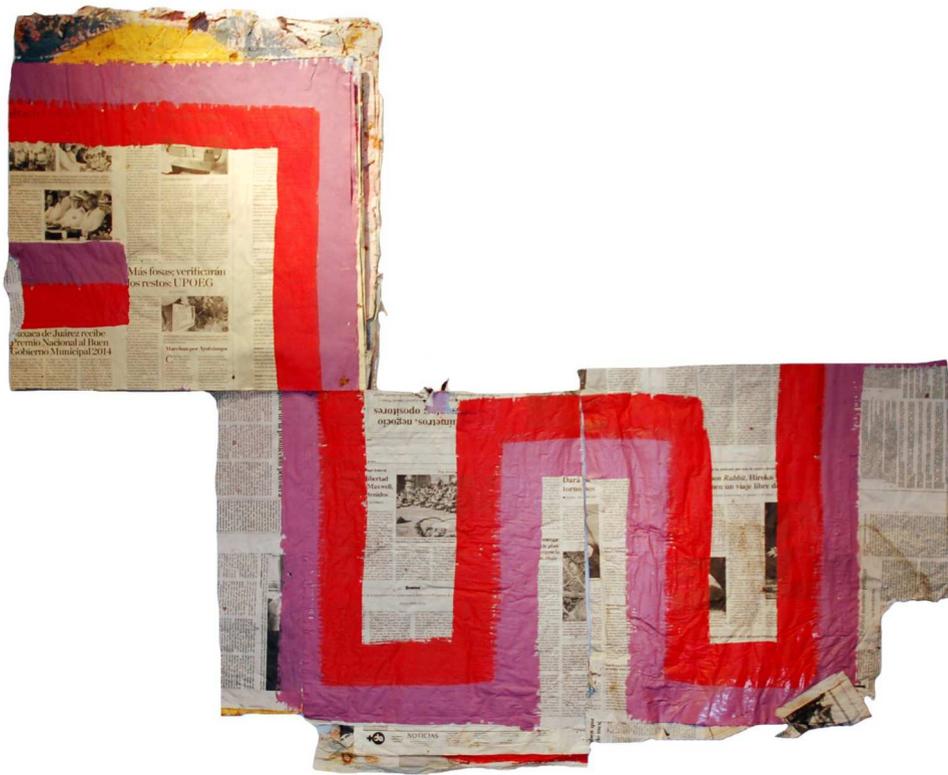
Minimalism was the new Baroque

3 digital prints on cotton paper

edition of 5

12.4 x 37.25"

2010



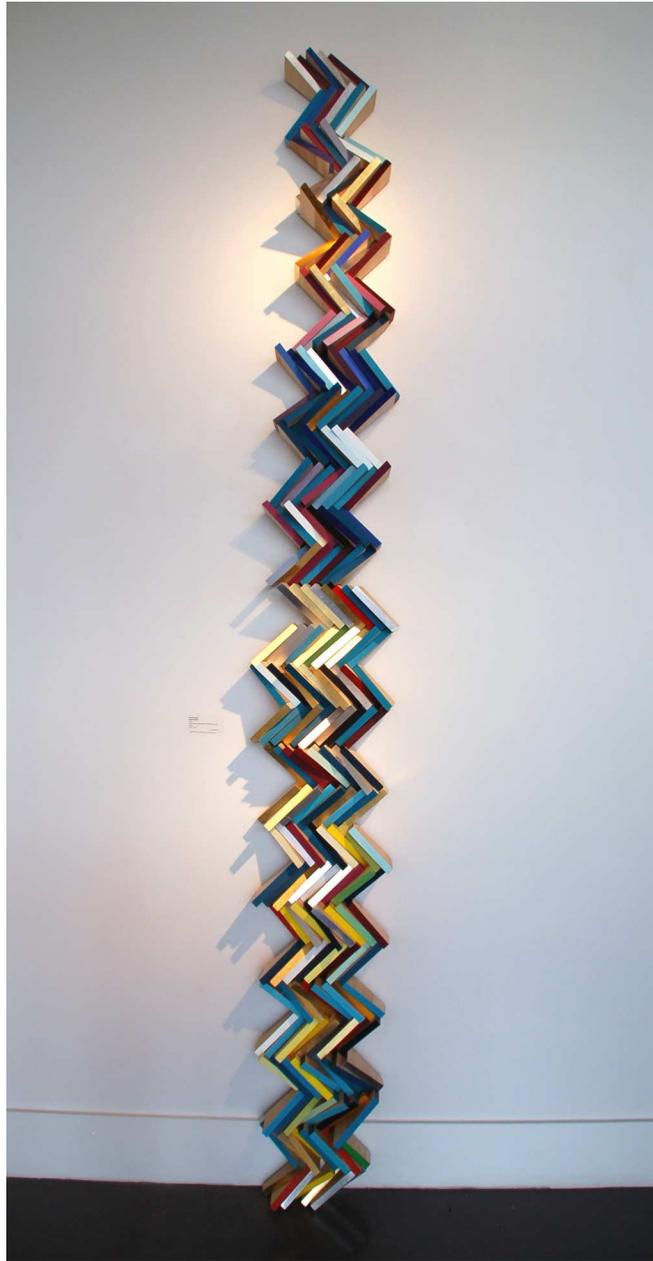
Guillermo Santamarina

Maqueta para un monumento para los poetas infrarrealistas

newspaper and acrylic

40.25 x 50.5"

2014



Cecilia Biagini

Plural Equality

acrylic paint, composition and aluminum leaf, wood

110 x 15 x 8"

2014

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Octavio Avendaño Trujillo (Mexico City, Mexico, 1985) was director co-founder of the *Ibero-American Colloquium of Art Criticism* in 2014. He was associate curator of the *Museum of Modern Art* in Mexico City in 2010 and from 2013 to 2015. He was a member of the seminar *Zonas de Disturbio* taught by Ph.D. Mariana Botey and Ph.D. Cuauhtemoc Medina. In 2014 he published *Mitos Oficiales (Periferia / RM)* a book that includes the most important voices of artists and cultural agents from the 1990s to present in Mexico. He currently works as an independent curator and art critic. His most recent project was this past August during the 56th Venice Biennale. With the auspices of the Benetton foundation he co-curated *Mexico // The Future is Unwritten* at the Palazzo Cini, Venice, Italy.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jesse Amado (San Antonio, Texas, 1951) received his Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Texas at Austin and his Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He is known for art that is conceptually based and highly formal. Amado's practice occupies the liminal space that hovers between life and art. Jesse Amado's art can be found in various private and public collections throughout Texas, the United States and internationally, including the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.; El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Blanton Museum, Austin, TX; San Antonio Museum of Art, TX; Linda Pace Foundation, San Antonio, TX; and Central Public Library, San Antonio, TX.

Laura Anderson Barbata (Mexico City, Mexico, 1958) describes herself as a transdisciplinary artist. She's produced works that combine social justice, video, photography, installation art, performance, along with many other genres. She has lived and worked in New York for many years. She has held professorships at the La Esmeralda National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving at the National Institute of Fine Arts, Mexico, and she has work in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY.

Cecilia Biagini (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1967) studied painting with Guillermo Kuitca in Buenos Aires and attended university for sociology. Biagini has been the recipient of the Photography Critics Award from the Art and Communication Center in Buenos Aires, and the Kuitca Scholarship. In 1998 she moved to New York, where she cofounded the exhibition space, The Hogar Collection, in Brooklyn. Her artwork has been exhibited at notable museums including MoMA PS 1, New York City, NY, and the Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Nate Cassie (Somerville, New Jersey, 1970) grew up on the East Coast and the Midwest. Cassie obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Hope College in Holland, MI, and his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Cassie's work includes drawing, painting, sculpture, video and digital media. His thematic practice centers on what he terms "spaces in between," the gaps that distance surface from volume, skin and structure, formal and intuitive systems. Cassie's work has been exhibited in the U.S. and abroad, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C; the City Museum, Queretaro, Mexico; and the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX. He is a past fellow in the Artpace International Artist-in-Residence Program in San Antonio.

Anibal Delgado (Guadalajara, Mexico, 1949) was born in Guadalajara and studied engineering at the University of Guadalajara. His work has been shown internationally in several notable cultural spaces and galleries including the Lescale Gallery, Brussels; the Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City; the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City; the Institute of Mexican Culture, Washington, D.C. and the Eco Museum, Mexico City. In 2007 he received a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

Hersúa (Ciudad Obregon, Mexico, 1940) was born in Sonora and was educated at the National School of Fine Arts of the UNAM in Mexico City. Though he began as a painter, winning self portrait competitions, he has since become known for his experiments in outdoor manipulations of space using sculpture. His work was shown in several exhibitions throughout Mexico, and in 1970 his work was shown at the VI Biennial for Young Artists in Paris, France. At one point in 1971 he had three simultaneous exhibitions

in Mexico City. He has exhibited in galleries and museums such as the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City and Centre Pompidou in Paris, where he was awarded a scholarship.

Cisco Jimenez (Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1969) has work that encompasses drawing, painting, ceramic, collage and installations. Conceptually, he uses vibrant color and bold line, often in abstract forms. He was educated in Mexico and New York, and is now a member of the National System of Art Creators. He was one of the first Artpace International Artist-in-Residence in 1995 in San Antonio, TX. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Isabel and Agustin Coppel Collection, Mexico and the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), Long Beach, CA to name a few.

Magali Lara (Mexico City, Mexico, 1956) lives and works in Cuernavaca, Mexico. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the National School of Applied Arts in Mexico City in 1977 and was immediately recognized as a new female voice in the arts. She has been a part of collaborative projects in drawing, digital graphics, ceramics, and animation and is interested in the ways in which contemporary graphic thinking appears in various media. She has exhibited at museums such as the National Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City and the National Museum in Havana, Cuba. More recently she had an exhibition at the Center for Latin American Visual Studies at University of Texas at Austin. Lara's works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Cultural Center and Contemporary Art Museum, Mexico City.

Chuck Ramirez (San Antonio, Texas, 1962-2010) was a major force in the San Antonio art community. A 2002 Artpace International-Artist-In-Residence, Ramirez' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. As an artist and graphic designer, Ramirez employed the visual and conceptual techniques found in contemporary advertising and package design, isolating and re-contextualizing familiar objects to explore cultural identity, mortality, and consumerism through his photographs and installations. His work can be found in numerous collections such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. and El Museo del Barrio, New York.

Guillermo Santamarina (Mexico City, Mexico, 1957) studied architecture and

anthropology as a student. He is an important curator, art critic and visual artist in Mexico City. He founded the Advisor Art Fair of Guadalajara and the International Forum on Art Theory. His work is theoretical and aims to explore topics relevant to the world today. He has also participated in the Istanbul Biennial and the Sao Paulo Biennial.

Hills Snyder (San Antonio, Texas, 1950) is a writer, artist, musician and curator. He has received grants and fellowship from Art Matters, the NEA Mid-America, The Dallas Museum of Art and the Artist Foundation of San Antonio and currently teaches at the University of Texas San Antonio. He has work in the collections of the San Antonio Museum of Art, The Linda Pace Foundation, San Antonio, TX and the Austin Museum of Art, TX.

Pilar Villela (Mexico City, Mexico, 1972) Pilar Villela, artist, curator, and art critic, has her Bachelor of Visual Arts from UNAM and her Masters in Aesthetics and Art Theory from the Center for Research in Modern European Philosophy. Drawing on her background in art theory, Villela plays with how the viewer conceives her work, so that they can draw on the ambiguities for new interpretations.

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Contemporary Art from Latin America & Texas