

STUDIO
CELIA
ÁLVAREZ
MUÑOZ
LOS
BRILLANTES

3.28.2024 —
1.19.2025

CELIA ÁLVAREZ MUÑOZ LOS BRILLANTES

Celia Álvarez Muñoz's installation titled *Los Brillantes* (*The Brilliant Ones*) presents three bodies of work that oscillate between the specificity of San Antonio—including a selection of artists based here—and the vast cosmos. With this exhibition, she celebrates the legacy and ongoing strength of the Latinx artistic community of San Antonio and the potent symbolic value it represents to anyone pursuing their interest in the arts. Her resulting installation relies on her firsthand knowledge of this city as well as her keen interest in shifts in scale and in utilizing new and different approaches to her subject matter. As a conceptual artist, Muñoz articulates her ideas using whichever method she deems most fitting for the specific project, as evident in this installation.

Muñoz (b. 1937, El Paso, TX; lives Arlington, TX) has been making works in many mediums throughout her forty-four-year-long career. Having grown up on the Texas–Mexico

border, Muñoz produces work that often reflects her bicultural background, the influence of her family members, and the stories that filled her youth. She is also known for collaborating with discrete communities, highlighting their experiences, vitality, and evolution over time as a reflection of changing circumstances. And sprinkled throughout her projects are a keen sense of humor and a hint of (word)play.

Her focus on a select group of San Antonio Latinx artists in *Los Brillantes* is in keeping with her propensity to zoom in and look closely to understand a community or subject and then to pull back to see it as part of a larger system, in this case, the city and ultimately the infinite universe. Muñoz's installation expresses her experience and what she witnesses in terms of the lasting impact that an individual and group can make not only on one another but also on a place, an arts community, and beyond.

The distinct Latinx artistic community that Muñoz encounters in San Antonio has held great importance for her since the 1990s, when she regularly traveled to the city to see exhibitions, meet with artists, and execute three public art projects.¹ She was struck by the continued vibrancy and vigor of the Latinx art scene here, commenting, "I love San Antonio. I know there's so many Latino artists. There's a community. There's different facets to that community. It's full of tension—all these groups, you know, but it's good energy, it's stimulating energy, it's dialogue, it's active, and it's vital, so let me document these artists."²

1 Muñoz's San Antonio public art projects are *The Accordion Bridge*, 1995–99, at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center Expansion; *El Río Habla* (*The River Speaks*), 2000–01, at the Historic Civic Center River Link Project and Plaza de las Islas; *Stories of Main Plaza Pavers*, 2002–03, at Main Plaza.

2 Celia Álvarez Muñoz, Oral History Interview, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian, interview by Cary Cordova, February 7–28, 2004, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-celia-alvarez-muoz-12446>.

Muñoz had the opportunity to document San Antonio artists in 2002 when she developed the series *Semejantes Personajes/Significant Personages* as part of her solo exhibition, *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*, at Blue Star Art Space (now the Contemporary at Blue Star) in the city. It was the perfect occasion to “capture the moment, which impressed [her] as a rich and thriving time in the arts with so many active artists across several generations.”³ The grand title of the series is a reference to the majority of portraiture in art history being of the nobility or well-established patrons. While there’s reverence conveyed with this title, it’s also meant to be playful since Muñoz doesn’t think anyone should take themselves too seriously.

Ultimately, Muñoz took forty-one portraits of Latinx artists in San Antonio she identified through conversations with colleagues. Eighteen of these portraits were recently purchased by the Linda Pace Foundation, Ruby City, and serve as an anchor of this exhibition. They portray artists with significant regional and national reputations, including ten individuals who have work in this collection. Additionally, each artist is active today or remained so throughout their lifetimes.

To achieve her unique portraits, Muñoz employed a Holga, an inexpensive camera first made in 1982 and well known for the unintended distortions it produces, such as light leaks and blur. Rather than take a straightforward portrait, Muñoz encouraged her subjects to do whatever they wished while she photographed them. The manual nature of the camera meant she could advance the film

as she pleased, and many of the resulting prints include multiple superimposed images of the artists in an active state, in the act of creation. Developments in the then-new digital photography field intrigued Muñoz and enabled her to alter the photographs further and with greater control. For each portrait she selected several images of the artist to scan and then altered them to look like a section of a film strip. This manipulation enhanced their dynamic quality, with the subjects represented seemingly in motion. She even added the Kodak film logo to each of the prints, as well as the name of the subject and her own, to give the final product a look of authenticity, as though they haven’t been carefully crafted. In depicting the artists in action and devoid of any real indicators of time, the pictured artists might have been captured just yesterday. Muñoz considers this project “open,” capable of being added to with more artists, underscoring how Latinx art and artists remain enduring forces in San Antonio and beyond.



3 Celia Álvarez Muñoz, press release, “Celia Álvarez Muñoz’s Major Photographic Series *Semejantes Personajes/Significant Personages* Acquired by Ruby City,” September 15, 2023.



San Antonio House, 1988, *Postales* series. Courtesy of the artist.

In this exhibition, Muñoz also takes a step back, figuratively speaking, to represent the place these artists are based. As she did with the artists, Muñoz produced a portrait of San Antonio because she wants to make it very clear that this community of artists is rooted here.

To represent the city, Muñoz juxtaposes an example from a 1987–88 body of work, *Postales (Postcards)*, with the portraits. She taught herself an airbrush technique to make oversized reproductions of the homes pictured in the postcard-sized photographs she initially produced for this series.

This installation includes a San Antonio home that, at first glance, appears generic, given it is a typical American bungalow. However, it stands out for incorporating *trabajo rústico* (rustic work or alternatively faux bois), a term used for cement sculpted and stained to appear as though it is wood. In so doing, Muñoz creates a unique and identifiable marker of San Antonio itself. Examples of this specialized craft can be found throughout the city in fanciful bridges, sculptures, grottoes, and outdoor furniture. The largest concentration of the art form is purported to be in San Antonio because of a studio workshop established in the early twentieth century by Mexican artisan Dionicio Rodríguez, and the tradition continued.

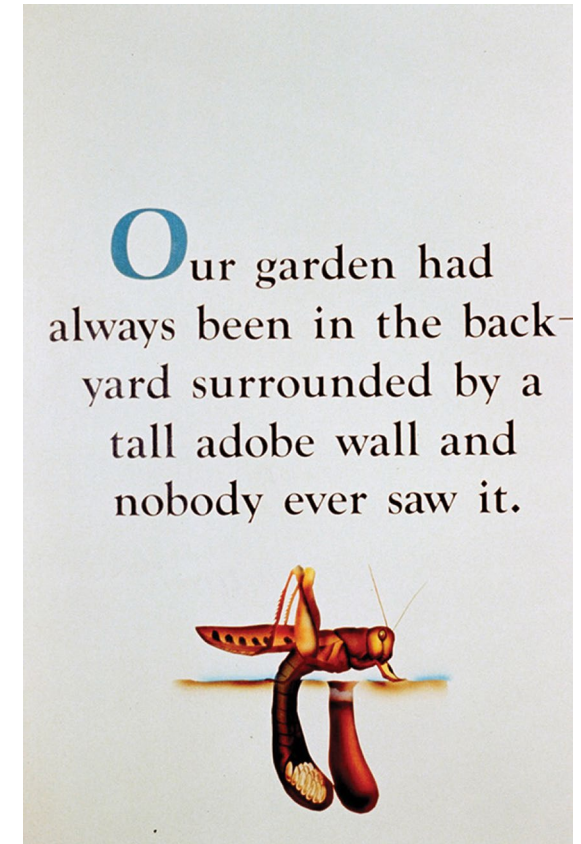


Muñoz airbrushing a painting in the *Postales* series, 1988. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Tracy Hicks.



Installation view *Postales*, Tyler Museum of Art, 1988.
Courtesy of the artist.


Suspended above visitors are street signs mimicking those found in neighborhood intersections. One set of signs features the San Antonio street names Culebra and Broadway. The others have phonetic spellings of how predominantly Spanish- or English-speaking persons typically pronounce those names. Their phonetic spellings appear alternatively strange, funny, maybe even problematic, and just plain wrong. In combination, the street signs and images represent a visual manifestation of the city's distinct character that is an amalgamation of Anglo and Mexican cultures. Even the insect on the scroll that complements the painting of the home and street signs speaks to this idea of blended cultures. Muñoz's insect is a combination of a cricket and a grasshopper and she describes it as a "hybrid," much like, according to the artist, all of us living in contemporary cities. The scroll is inscribed with the phrase, "Our garden had always



Scroll (#3), 1987-88, *Postales* series.
Courtesy of the artist.

been in the backyard surrounded by a tall adobe wall and nobody ever saw it." She specifically selected this scroll to accompany this home, to hint at the secrets or overlooked treasures, or in this instance, the extraordinary artists found behind the façades of San Antonio homes.

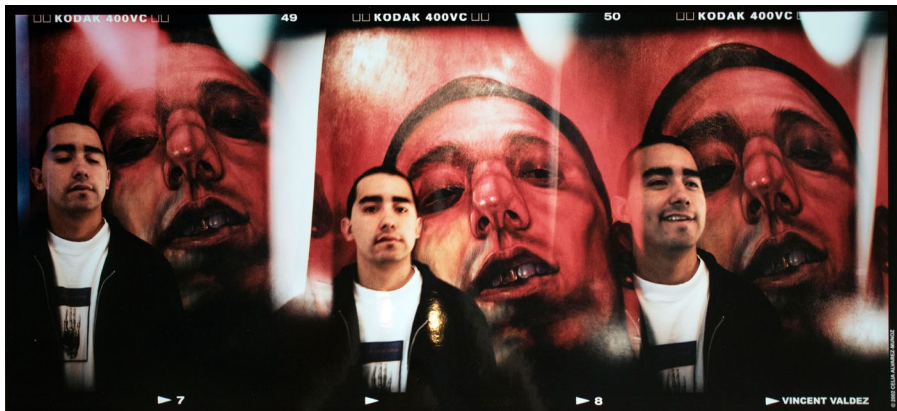
Just as Muñoz wants to ground these artists in San Antonio, she is equally passionate about affixing their place in the firmament. Complementing her installation is a poem written by the artist printed atop a large-scale image of the universe, or more specifically, the Tarantula Nebula star-forming region captured by NASA's James Webb Space Telescope's Near-Infrared Camera in 2022.



*SOMOS UN COSMOS DE DIFERENTES BRILLOS;
ESCANDALOSOS POETAS
QUERENDONES MITOTEROS.
GRITAMOS Y SECRETEAMOS LA ANGUSTIA Y ALEGRIA
DE SER HERMANOS UNIDOS POR
EL COLOR CAMELO -
SOMOS TU ECO, TU ESTRELLA - MIRATE!*

*WE ARE ONE COSMOS OF DIFFERENT BRILLIANCE;
SCANDALOUS POETS,
LOVABLE AGITATORS.
WE SCREAM AND WHISPER THE JOY AND ANGUISH
OF BEING HUMAN BROTHERS UNITED BY
THE COLOR OF CARAMEL -
WE ARE YOUR ECHO, YOUR STAR - SEE YOURSELF!*

While preparing for this exhibition, Muñoz mentioned her fascination with the recent slew of images NASA released as a consequence of a new, specially designed camera that captivates her and that is able to capture better pictures of space. Muñoz's poem was written for the initial installation of *Semejantes Personajes/Significant Personages*; however, it has been updated here with language linking the artists to the stars and the cosmos. It also encourages other potential artists to see themselves in these "significant personages," as models to whom they can aspire. In conjunction with the portraits and *Postales*, this poem and image visually present the artists as perpetually youthful and dynamic, as a vital part of this city and worthy of recognition, now and in the future.

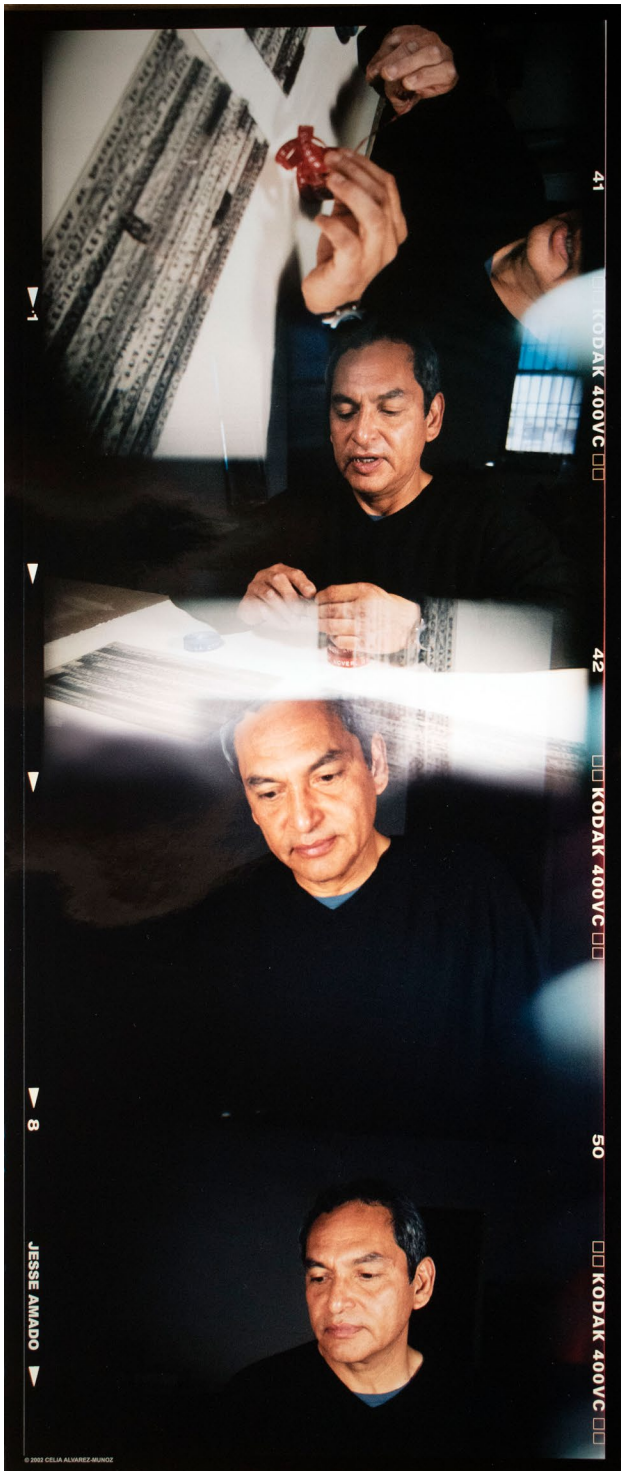


Vincent Valdez, 2002

Previous page photo credit:
Los Brillantes, 2024
 Tarantula Nebula star-forming region: 3NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI, Webb ERO Production Team
 [https://science.nasa.gov/image-detail/stsci-01ga76rm0c11w977jrhgj5j26x-2/]



Cruz Ortiz, 2002



Jesse Amado, 2002

Although selected for its compelling quality, this depiction of the Tarantula Nebula is particularly fitting for Muñoz’s installation. This area is known for being a star-forming region, and NASA’s images have revealed thousands of newly discovered young stars that were previously hidden, much like those as yet-to-be-discovered artists and particularly those Muñoz selected for her project. She deeply reveres these artists (and this place) because she continually finds them symbiotically supportive and inspiring. “These artists are a strong, informed, and politicized community,”⁴ as Muñoz often remarks. “They are important stars in our arts universe, los brillantes.”⁵



Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz, 2002

4 Muñoz, press release, “Celia Álvarez Muñoz’s Major Photographic Series Acquired.”

5 Celia Álvarez Muñoz, email message to the author, February 12, 2024.



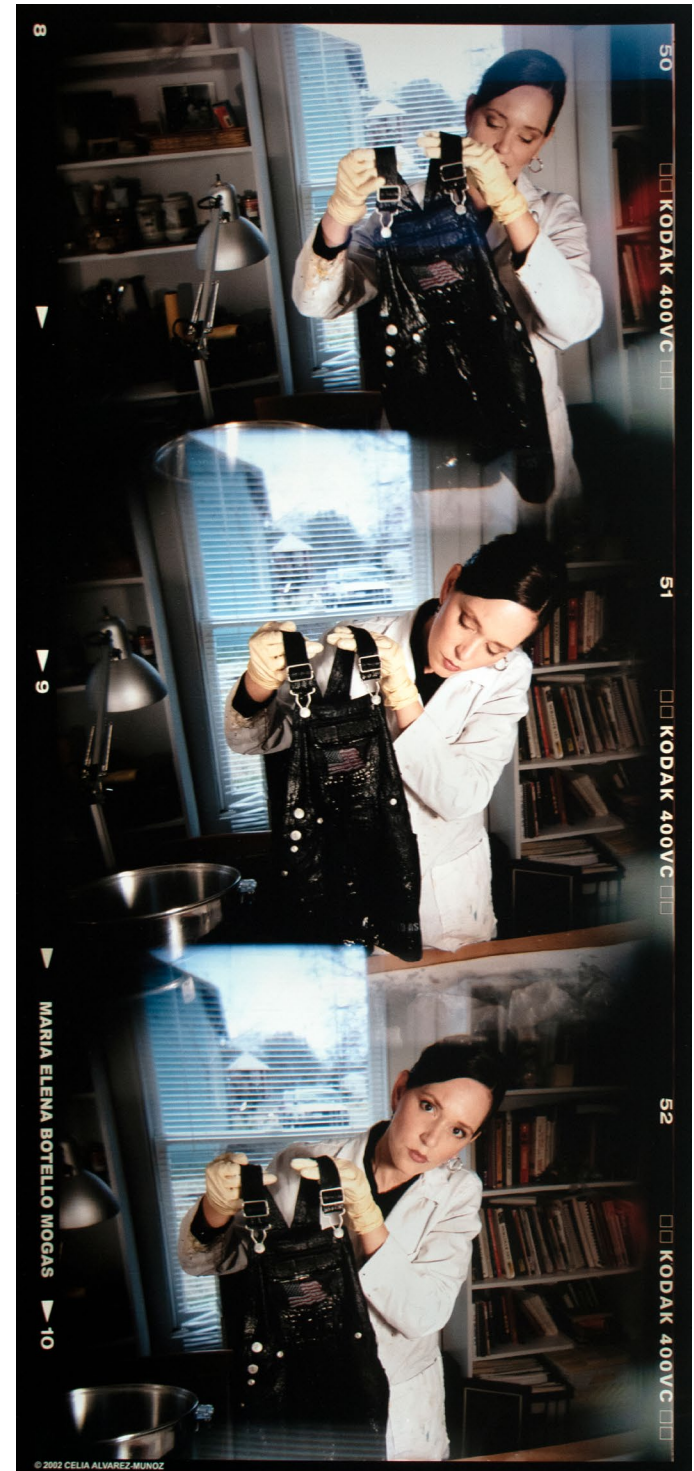
Ana de Portela, 2002



Mel Casas, 2002



Ethel Shipton, 2002



Maria Elena Botello Mogas, 2002

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unless noted otherwise, all works are from the Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City, San Antonio, Texas.

Los Brillantes, 2024
Vinyl graphic with poem by the artist
Tarantula Nebula from the Large Magellanic Cloud Galaxy
Image courtesy of NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI, Webb ERO Production Team

San Antonio House, 1988
Postales series
Acrylic airbrush on canvas
72 x 108 in.
Collection of the artist

Scroll (#3), 1987–88
Postales series
Acrylic airbrush on canvas
58 x 48 in.
Collection of the artist

S CULEBRA ST / N KLAYBRA ST, 1988
Postales series
Painted metal
8 x 30 in.; each
Collection of the artist

N BROADWAY BLVD / S BROSSGUEY BLVD, 1988
Postales series
Painted metal
8 x 30 in.; each
Collection of the artist

Adán Hernández, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 29 7/8 in.
2023.3.1

Ana de Portela, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 30 in.
2023.3.2

José Guadalupe Guadiana, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
30 x 13 1/8 in.
2023.3.3

Maria Elena Botello Mogas, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
30 x 14 in.
2023.3.4

Chuck Ramirez, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 29 7/8 in.
2023.3.5

Ethel Shipton, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 29 7/8 in.
2023.3.6

Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 30 in.
2023.3.7

Vincent Valdez, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 29 7/8 in.
2023.3.8

Terry Ybanez, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 29 7/8 in.
2023.3.9

Cruz Ortiz, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
30 7/8 x 14 in.
2023.3.10

Alex de León, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 31 1/8 in.
2023.3.11

Rolando Briseño, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 31 1/8 in.
2023.3.12

Jesse Amado, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
32 7/8 x 14 in.
2023.3.13

César Augusto Martínez, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 34 in.
2023.3.14

Mel Casas, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 35 in.
2023.3.15

Franco Mondini-Ruiz, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
14 x 36 7/8 in.
2023.3.16

David Zamora Casas, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
37 x 13 3/4 in.
2023.3.17

Jimmy Mendiola, 2002
Semejantes Personajes/ Significant Personages series
Digital Holga print, edition 1 of 5
32 7/8 x 14 in.
2023.3.18

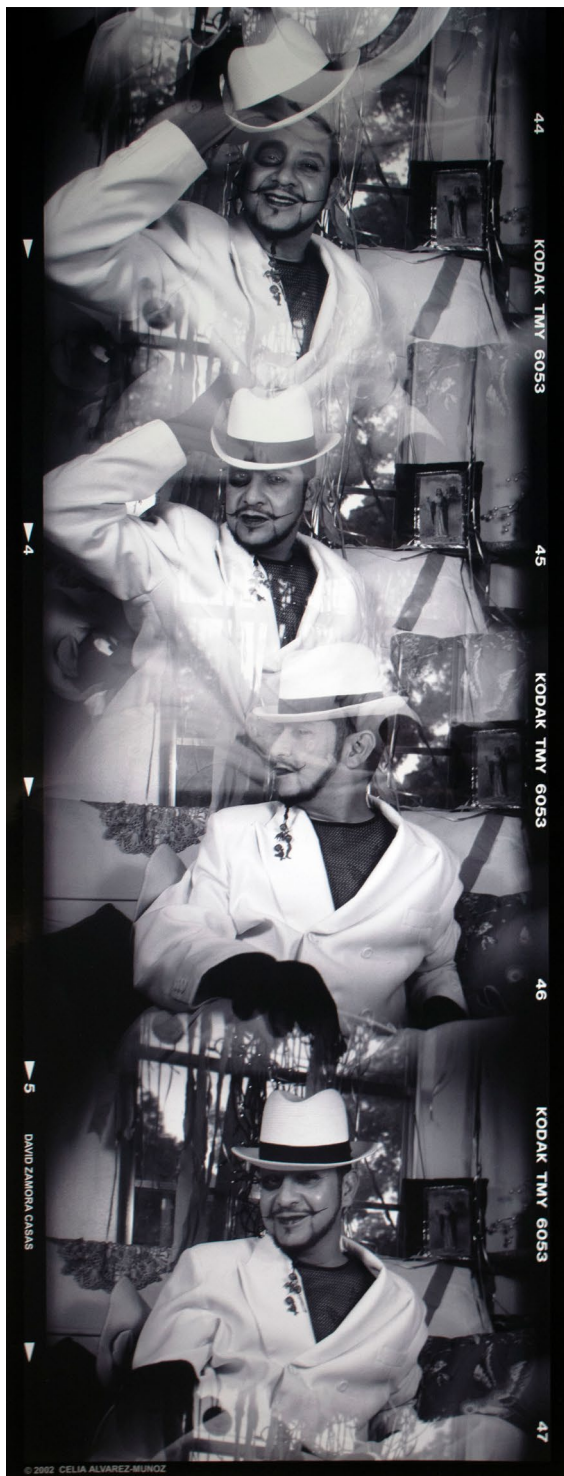
RUBY CITY CAMPUS

- 1 *Celia Álvarez Muñoz: Los Brillantes* (Studio)
- 2 Parking lot
- 3 Marina Abramović, *Chair for Man and His Spirit*
- 4 Nancy Rubins, *5,000 lbs. of Sonny's Airplane Parts*, Linda's Place, *550 lbs. of Tie-Wire*
- 5 Linda Pace, *Jewels in the Concrete* (throughout park)
- 6 Teresita Fernández, *Starfield*
- 7 Teresita Fernández, *Wednesday's Child*
- 8 Teresita Fernández, *Tumble Hill*
- 9 Teresita Fernández, *Journal Benches*
- 10 Daniel Joseph Martinez sculpture
- 11 Daniel Joseph Martinez text piece

RUBY CITY
THUR TO SUN 10AM—6PM
150 CAMP STREET
FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



All images from *Semejantes Personajes/Significant Personages* series courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art, New York, San Antonio. All pictured works are © Celia Álvarez Muñoz.



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David Zamora Casas, 2002