

# STUDIO SYNTHESIS & SUBVERSION REDUX

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# SYNTHESIS & SUBVERSION REDUX

This exhibition includes works by five artists based in, or deeply connected to, San Antonio: Juan Carlos Escobedo, Jenelle Esparza, Bárbara Miñarro, Angeles Salinas, and José Villalobos. These artists explore their Latinx cultural identities by utilizing, incorporating, or depicting everyday objects and materials. Each creator works with mediums that reflect their personal experiences and familial histories.

The title and thesis of the exhibition is based on the 1996 exhibition *Synthesis and Subversion: A Latino Direction in San Antonio Art* curated by Frances Colpitt (1952–2022), a renowned art history professor teaching at that time at the University of Texas at San Antonio. In the accompanying brochure, Colpitt stated in an essay that the exhibition demonstrated a “particular sensibility informed by autobiography, abstraction and the everyday.” The title of the exhibition alluded to the fact that these artists were adept at articulating their personal experiences and identity through visual gestures that both challenged (or “subverted”) and incorporated (or “synthesized”) the prevailing practices in contemporary art at the time. She characterized the selected works not only as conceptual in nature, but also as those that eschewed the imagery typically associated with the more widely represented artists who identified as Chicano in San Antonio.

The initial presentation—which included artists Jesse Amado, David Padilla Cabrera, Alejandro Diaz, Franco Mondini-Ruiz, Ana de

Portela, and Chuck Ramirez—sparked intense debate among those in the Chicano art community who saw Colpitt’s organization of the exhibition as yet another example of underrepresentation at UTSA and an opportunity to advocate for change. There was, remarkably, only one professor, Dr. Jacinto Quirarte, who identified as Latino and who taught in the Department of Art and Art History at UTSA in a city with a majority Latino population. This fact, along with a desire to have greater representation in such important positions, was reiterated in an undated letter to UTSA president at the time, Dr. Sam Kirkpatrick; it was signed by a group of “Concerned Latino Artists.” In the letter, they also expressed serious concerns with the then-forthcoming exhibition of *Synthesis and Subversion* and what they felt was a “decontextualized manner” in which the work would be presented.

*Synthesis & Subversion Redux* revisits the ideas behind the original exhibition on the occasion of a gift of works from Colpitt’s estate to the Linda Pace Foundation, Ruby City, as well as a series of shows mounted to highlight the art historian’s legacy. However, this exhibition highlights a younger generation of artists demonstrating the enduring vibrancy of the San Antonio art community as well as significant changes within contemporary art.

Escobedo, Esparza, Miñarro, Salinas, and Villalobos have adopted conceptual practices that incorporate or make references to the body and/or craft, a mode of working that has more recently taken place in contemporary art. Marginalized communities, including Latinx artists, have embraced figuration and bodily references as well as the use of textiles, ceramics, paper, and other traditional materials and methods of production to make contemporary statements.

Furthermore, by exploring artistic practices typically understood as representational, functional, or tied to folk art, these artists both represent and invoke their rich cultural heritage and the complicated questions found in identity politics. Whereas earlier Conceptual artists prioritized meaning as superior to the act of making and the final aesthetic form, a new generation of artists suggests that the corporeal and the act of making itself can be a conceptual gesture.



Jenelle Esparza. *The Family Room*, 2024  
 Found objects, cotton rope, handwoven tapestries.  
 Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Jeffrey Janko

**Esparza's** works frequently consist of woven textiles made of cotton and incorporate found objects including implements her family once used to harvest cotton on a farm near Corpus Christi. As in *The Family Room* (2024) these materials are then arranged to create formal, abstracted images or associations that she likens to paragraphs or lyrical writings, collectively representing people, her memories, and her family's histories and events. Farm



tools, both benign and menacing, speak to the back-breaking labor and danger inherent to her ancestors' lives, from the nature of their labors to the racial violence they faced. Esparza uses organic cotton throughout and weaves compositions that recall the South Texas landscape with earth tones and textured color fields. Some textiles evoke a bodily presence, alluding to flesh and scars. Rooted in Esparza's memories and family legacy, this work also highlights the enduring fortitude of people of color in Texas.





José Villalobos, *En la reflexión del machismo I* [In the Reflection of Machismo I], 2024  
Mirror aluminum composite panels. 48 x 23 in., each  
Courtesy of Liliana Bloch Gallery, Dallas, Texas. Photo: José Villalobos

Ranching and agro-industrial histories are topics that similarly can be found in **Villalobos's** selection of works. They suggest both the literal and figurative toxicity imposed upon and expressed within his El Paso and Norteño families and the communities in which he was raised. *El polvo se humedecía y se deslizaba sobre sus rostros como velo de novia* [The Dust Moistened and Slid Over Their Faces Like a Bridal Veil] (2023) is a video loop of the artist as a cowboy whose face and head is covered by a billowing veil, symbolizing the longtime practice of spraying toxic chemicals directly upon Mexicans—who were considered unclean and a potential threat to health and safety—entering the United States. Like many with Mexican heritage, Villalobos's family members were part of the U.S. government Bracero Program (1942–64), which recruited agricultural and railroad workers from Mexico to alleviate labor shortages. Mexicans were fumigated with contaminants, some now banned and were exposed to them in their agricultural labors. Villalobos's photograph of a cowboy hat in flames, *El ardor era como el que sufrió Carmelita Torres al cruzar la frontera de Ciudad Juárez y El Paso* [The Burn was Like the One Carmelita Torres Suffered When Crossing the Border of Ciudad Juarez and El Paso] (2023) represents the very real danger posed by these chemical agents and the title highlights a young woman who led a 1917 protest against the inhumane practice of fumigating Mexicans.

*En la reflexión del machismo I* [In the Reflection of Machismo I] (2024) taps into the machismo that characterized Villalobos's childhood, highlighting the ironic hypermasculinity of men who actively condemn LGBTQ+ individuals, yet wear clothes featuring flamboyant decorative elements. Another irony not lost on the artist is how some of these embellishments on cowboy boots are hidden by pants, nodding to the closeted lives many LGBTQ+ people must live in order to remain part of these communities.

Clothing as signifier is also at the heart of **Escobedo's** works, and he explores this through the material of cardboard, which is a strong, yet malleable material used and then disposed of without regard. Seeing a connection between it and capitalist society's seeming perception of Latinx people, Escobedo fashions fantastical clothing articles that reflect the landscape and built environment of El Paso, his birthplace. His works and the faux price tags attached to them (complete with his brand name J.ESC) relay the connections between consumption and the built environment in which segregation, gentrification, and stratification continue to restrict upward mobility, especially for people of color.

His new works, all from 2025, include *Brownscape Jeans x J.ESC*, a pair of pants with a landscape, *Desert Sky Jacket x J.ESC*, a blue shirt representative of the sky, and *Eclipse Mask* depicting the sun. They allude to the cosmic realm, spirituality and his experiences with Catholicism and *curanderismo*, traditional Mexican folk healing. The new body of work is not explicitly shamanic, religious, or occult, but it deftly alludes to the possibility of the supernatural or the divine evoked by receptivity to the unknown and the wonders of nature and its phenomena.



Juan Carlos Escobedo,  
*Deconstruction/Construction Boots x J.ESC*, 2021  
Cardboard, paper, plastic. 3 x 4 ½ x 12 in.  
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Shannon Bright





Juan Carlos Escobedo, *Brownscape View-Neck x J.ESC*, 2022  
Brown paper, cardboard. 27 x 36 x 5 in.  
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Shannon Bright



Bárbara Miñarro, *We Are Staying Put*, 2017  
Rope, wood, grandmother's sheets, childhood  
dresses, repurposed women's garments. 240 x 36 in.  
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Bárbara Miñarro



Bárbara Miñarro, *Entre tú y yo*  
[Between You and I], 2018-19  
Reclaimed clothing, fabric scraps,  
poly-fil, rope  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photo: Bárbara Miñarro

For **Miñarro**, the clothing and bedclothes of the artist's friends and family serve as source material for her soft, colorful sculptures. Their disarming appeal belies the fraught nature of her subject matter: the complexities of the immigrant experience. An immigrant herself with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status, she is directly impacted by the challenging and ever-changing nature of the federal government program that grants deportation protection and the ability to legally work to undocumented individuals who came to the United States as young children. *Entre Tu y Yo* [Between You and I] (2018–19) has the same dimensions as a section of the wall being built along the border and initiated by President Trump during his first term. Miñarro's wall is floppy and plush, incapable of acting as a barrier, yet representative of the physical and political barriers that continue to separate family and friends. Made of 100 "bricks" crafted from textiles sourced from individuals on both sides of the border, Miñarro symbolically embeds the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican immigrants within the wall itself. *We Are Staying Put* (2017) is comprised of colors and shapes that mimic limbs and flesh. The sculpture is malleable to the architecture in which it is shown, representing immigrants' resiliency and adaptability. The title is a declaration and concerted hope that she, along with thousands of others, will maintain her home and career in the United States.



**Salinas** also sources clothing for material in her elaborate sculptural works and installations that draw upon traditional handicrafts she learned as a child such as sewing, embroidery, and tin medal making. *Anatomical Dissection* (2023) consists of a series of hanging embellished and embroidered textiles that lay bare, as though in a biological examination her character and life story that includes Mexico, where she was born, and the U.S., where she lives. Symbols throughout it, such as a spider with a sac of eggs, refers to motherhood while others indicate the care and financial responsibilities she needed to manage upon her divorce. Complimenting this work is the interactive and meditative installation *The Space Between* (2024), created by sewing together remnants of salvaged clothes. Visitors are invited to lay upon the bench, or clouds, and gaze up at a landscape that forms the border between Texas and Mexico, including a stitched version of the Rio Grande. When flying between the two, Salinas enjoys a meditative calm—which she also hopes to instill in viewers—free of the cares and concerns waiting for her in either locale. This liminal state also symbolically represents her bicultural identity that is fully rooted in both countries.



Angeles Salinas, *The Space Between*, 2024  
Repurposed clothing, fabric, acrylic paint, yarn. 10 x 12 x 8 ft  
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Christopher Karr



Angeles Salinas, *Anatomical Dissection*, 2023  
Dollar bills, Twenty Pesos bills, thread, aluminum foil. 96 x 48 x 96 in.  
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Christopher Karr



In the 1996 *Synthesis and Subversion* exhibition brochure, Francis Colpitt referenced two significant art historical precedents: the groundbreaking 1990 exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA) and the Brazilian concept of cultural cannibalism. Invoking a landmark moment in the establishment of Chicano art history and the era of multiculturalism, she emphasized the exhibition's subtitle. For many artists, CARA represented the first time they saw a representation of themselves authored by individuals like them in the "mainstream" art world. Colpitt also referred to cultural cannibalism, or *anthropophagia*, as an additional example of how marginalized groups navigate the world and tactically consume and regurgitate the dominant culture.

Through these comparisons, Colpitt suggested that the *Synthesis and Subversion* artists were employing their own individual and collective strategies for survival. Nearly thirty years later, this title remains relevant for the group of artists in this exhibition because it speaks to methodologies evident in all of their work—code-switching, translation, deconstruction, and reinvention. *Synthesis & Subversion Redux* demonstrates that the issues and concepts central to the original group of artists have not faded away; rather, they have evolved and adapted in response to the challenges of the 21st century. Colpitt underscored the 1996 exhibition as demonstrating "a fruitful direction towards optimism and inclusiveness." Although optimism and inclusiveness remain worthwhile endeavors, the artists in this exhibition are manifesting new strategies not just for survival, but for innovation, defiance, and metamorphosis.

Elyse A. Gonzales, Director, Ruby City

Mia Lopez, Curator of Latinx Art, McNay Art Museum

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Juan Carlos Escobedo** (b. 1985 El Paso, TX; lives San Antonio, TX) received his BFA from New Mexico State University and MFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited in San Antonio at the Contemporary at Blue Star, Centro de Artes, and the Southwest School of Art; in Boston at MassArt X SoWa; and in Darmstadt, Germany, at Darmstädter Sezession for the World Heritage Festival. He has received a Collective Futures Fund Grant from Tufts University Art Galleries; Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts as a consultant; an Actos de Confianza Grant from the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures; residencies at Casa Lü, Mexico City, Mexico, at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, and at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, facilitated by the Contemporary at Blue Star.

**Jenelle Esparza** (b. 1985 Corpus Christi, TX; lives San Antonio, TX) received her BFA in photography from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her work has been exhibited nationally at institutions including the DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; and the Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi. She is the recipient of numerous honors including a National Association of Latino Arts and Culture Artist Grant and the Artpace International Artist Residency. Her work is also included in the permanent collection of the San Antonio Museum of Art.

**Bárbara Miñarro** (b. 1994, Monterrey, Mexico; lives Austin, TX) received her BFA from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her work has been exhibited in San Antonio at the Contemporary at Blue Star, the Southwest School of Art, and Artpace. Additionally, her work has been in exhibitions at Sweet Briar College in Virginia and South Texas College in McAllen. She participated in a residency at the Textile Center in New York and is a recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program Fellowship.

**Angeles Salinas** (b. 1972, Mexico City, Mexico; lives San Antonio, TX) received a BDes from Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and a BFA and MFA from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She has exhibited at Flight Gallery, San Antonio; Artpace 111, Fort Worth; Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin; and Galeria UNAM, San Antonio.

**José Villalobos** (b. 1988, El Paso, TX; lives San Antonio, TX) received a BFA from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He was awarded the Artist Lab Fellowship Grant at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Villalobos is a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant Award and Residency and the Tanne Foundation Award. He has participated in residency programs at Artpace, Fountainhead, and the CALA Alliance. His work has been exhibited at the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; NARS Foundation, New York; the Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin; El Paso Museum of Art; El Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Phoenix Art Museum; Denver Art Museum; and Museo de Arte Queretaro, Mexico.

## RUBY CITY CAMPUS

- 1 Sculpture Garden  
2 Nancy Rubins, *5,000 lbs. of Sonny's Airplane Parts*,  
3 *Linda's Place*, *550 lbs. of Tie-Wire*  
4 Marina Abramović, *Chair for Man and His Spirit*  
5 Ken Little, *Boss*  
6 Stephen Kaltenbach, ART WORKS  
7 (in sidewalk by building entrance)  
8 Teresita Fernández, *Starfield*  
9 Teresita Fernández, *Wednesday's Child*  
10 Teresita Fernández, *Tumble Hill*  
11 Daniel Joseph Martinez sculpture  
12 Daniel Joseph Martinez wall painting  
13 Linda Pace, *Jewels in the Concrete* (throughout park)  
14 Teresita Fernández, *Journal Benches*  
15 Parking (also available on Camp Street)

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