

STUDIO DANIEL RIOS RODRIGUEZ OPEN THIS WALL



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DANIEL RIOS RODRIGUEZ OPEN THIS WALL



Daniel Rios Rodriguez creates visually rich, symbolic images that blend abstraction and representation. *Open This Wall* encompasses paintings, drawings, prints, and sculpture from 2013—when he left New York City for San Antonio—to 2025, when he became an assistant professor at a university in Dallas. In San Antonio, he was inspired by the landscape and by having the opportunity to explore different artistic methods and mediums. This was a formative period for the artist. Prior to Rodriguez's move, his works were small-scale paintings and drawings of figural abstractions depicting himself and family members. His canvases were loosely painted within a relatively empty picture plane, and the line work in his drawings was more hesitant and rigid. His works progressed to tightly controlled paintings filled with imagery, and they began to incorporate objects while his drawings became more fluid and evocative. Rodriguez is guided by a need to challenge himself and to experiment, qualities

he was able to fully embrace in San Antonio, where his practice transcended the boundaries of painting and drawing.

Rodriguez's works from this time mark specific moments, dreams, and individuals while remaining open to interpretation. He seeks to depict often ordinary, passing moments in life he experienced as profound because they not only were revelatory, but they also grounded him in that precise point in time. Dreams as well as several symbolic motifs—serpents, spirals, flames, the sun, and the moon—that appear therein also inspired paintings and drawings from this period. These moments reflect the artist's interest in portraying the universal subjects of love and the fleeting nature of time. His children are frequently indicated initially by two, and as time progresses, by three repeated forms following the birth of his third child. References to his Mexican-American heritage are expressed throughout his works in many of the motifs he uses, which connect to pre-Columbian glyphs and iconography, to his depiction of Mexican-handcrafted goods, and to the Spanish language titles he uses. All of these subjects and references naturally overlap and intermingle in Rodriguez's practice and add complexity to the resulting works.

The installation's design plays off the exhibition's title, which references a painting inspired by a dream the artist experienced. A freestanding wall, installed at an angle as though an open door, offers a welcoming entry. The title, like the dream upon which it's based, refers to the artist's ability to see obstacles or artistic challenges as not only surmountable but also as a means of advancing artistically. The untitled site-specific wall drawing, which incorporates images of wild grass stalks, mountains, spirals, and serpents, is in muted tones of the painted walls and complements the individual works, transforming the exhibition into a work of art itself. This large-scale wall drawing is his first, and it further exemplifies his desire to tackle new challenges and his goal to create spaces that invite viewers to interpret and engage with the works.

Cover page: *Nerodia*, 2017
Oil, acrylic, rope, wire, wood, nails on panel
11 1/2 x 8 in.

Installation view:
Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Open This Wall
Ruby City, 2025

Move to San Antonio

In New York City, Rodriguez, busy with family life, childcare, and working, had little time for making art. In 2013, a cramped apartment and the high cost of living there prompted Rodriguez and his young family to return to San Antonio, where he had lived for a short time previously. Soon thereafter, two life-altering events occurred: his first marriage ended in divorce, resulting in shared custody of their children, and he received a prestigious Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award of unrestricted funds.

With time and studio space to focus solely on his practice for the first time, Rodriguez experienced both the joy of being a full-time artist and the grief at the loss of his family unit, including the time spent with his children. He filled his hours with self-reflection and bike rides, walks, and runs along the San Antonio River, a linear parkway situated in the city's urban core. This period of solitude and introspection led him to explore new subjects and methods of working. His aim then, and now, is to capture the "energy" and the "feeling or experience of the moment." He also developed and continues to be guided by his vision of an ideal artistic practice based on "the durability of your mind and your ability to be agile and constantly evolve and change," as he said in an interview with me on January 28, 2025.



The San Antonio River & Drawing

Rodriguez encountered nature at every turn along the San Antonio River, which was near his home. His easy access to the river and his exploration of this fertile environment prompted him to observe and study the nearby plants, trees, and wildlife. Feeling adrift and without a clear idea of what to paint, he drew the landscape and its creatures, for the first time working outdoors in all seasons.

He executed hundreds of drawings in graphite and pen and ink, focusing on the vitality of the subjects, seen in works such as *Horsemint* (2014) and *Little Wings* (2014). The latter is a lively visual collection of airborne and landbound critters and plants in action: various birds captured in flight or ambling by, bugs creeping along, flower petals and seeds blown by the wind. The few paintings he executed depict grass, insects, and trash, which he encountered along the river, as seen in *Cardinalis Cardinalis* (2014), the scientific or Latin name for the cardinal bird that is only indicated by the red palette.



At the time, he saw the river environment "as an extension of my studio and where I do most of my critical and open thinking," as he mentioned in his 2022 interview in the online journal *Glasstire*. He continues to make drawings reflective of this influential place and his knowledge of

this environment, always displaying his own creative interpretation, as seen in *Rios SA* (2022) and *Untitled* (2025). Drawing proved invaluable for Rodriguez both then and now as a means to work through imagery that he later translates into paintings, as with *Untitled* (2023), which relates to the large-scale *Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning* (2022–23). This practice encourages solitary contemplation and helps him process societal and personal events, such as the early days of the pandemic as evidenced by the skull in *Hot Head* (2020) and the mask with "no more" written in Spanish in *No Más* (2020). At that time, many people were dying and yet some were vehemently against masks although they helped prevent the spread of illness.

Facing page:

Horsemint, 2014

Graphite on paper
11 x 8 5/8 in.

Rios SA, 2022

Ink on paper
10 15/16 x 15 in.



Materiality

While investigating the river environment, Rodriguez collected a range of objects such as flowers and petals, seed pods, twigs, discarded beads, and pieces of rope, wood, and plastic. These materials, along with shaped wood surfaces he found or crafted, sparked his desire to experiment with form and texture as a means to complicate the flat, pristine surface of his paintings. Rodriguez's mixed media paintings reflect his memories of specific times and the sights, feelings, thoughts, and ideas that caught his attention. Although the works are abstract, the incorporation of material evidence—sometimes gathered at the actual moment the artist depicts—grounds these personal experiences in a tangible reality. The materials can be understood literally and help identify what they visualize.

Lion Feathers, 2017
Oil, Flashe, wood, rope,
found objects on panel
16 x 16 in.

Facing page:
Sophora Secundiflora Moon, 2018
Oil, rope, wood, copper, limestone, Texas
mountain laurel seeds on wood panel
15 x 17 in.

Working with these items also allowed him to conceive of his works more experimentally, arranging objects intuitively until subjects and images revealed themselves, much like early twentieth-century collage artists executed their works. *Lion Feathers* (2017), executed five years after his move, is indicative of this approach. It is painted on a circular piece of wood and is an abstract view of egrets. A rope, nail, branches, and wood pieces suggest the beaks and sinuous forms of resting birds glimpsed by moon or lamplight through trees.



By integrating objects and materials in his works, Rodriguez found immediate solutions to overcoming, as he said in his 2022 *Glasstire* interview, “my inabilities as a painter [and] it was also a way of getting to the point. Why paint snakeskin if I can incorporate one? Why paint stones and feathers if they are the very things I pick up along my excursions?”

Incorporating a bird’s eye view, *Sophora Secundiflora Moon* (2018) records a bike ride near Echo Bridge on Roosevelt Boulevard. The painting shows the streets he traversed as the sun sets—indicated by a smooth and flat round stone with stylized light rays—and as the moon rises. Similarly represented, the moon in the upper right corner casts its light down on the scene. The title is derived from the Latin name for Texas mountain laurel, a ubiquitous native tree found in San Antonio, that is represented by two of its red seeds. For Rodriguez, the seeds additionally reference his children, who always directly and indirectly factor into his works.

A representation of the river landscape Rodriguez encountered on his runs, *Culebra* (2018), includes actual limestone pieces to represent a similar steppingstone pathway crossing the river.

This panel painting is a collage of references indicated by the multiple perspectives represented in the work. In one, the viewer is standing on the riverbank looking across at the silhouette of mountains created by the shape of the panel, with a setting sun and rapidly disappearing blue sky. Simultaneously, another view is from above showing the San Antonio River's rushing waters, suggested by the yellow paint strokes which capture the glare of sunlight on water. The work draws upon his reflections of the river but also the mountains near Marfa, where Rodriguez had a residency, as well as the long and winding street in San Antonio that took its name from the Spanish word for snake, culebra, an animal form he adopted in his dreams.



Culebra, 2018
Oil, copper wire, rope,
nails, acrylic, foil,
limestone on wood
11 x 9 in.

Facing page:
Heat Bloom, 2022
Mixed media
30 x 25 in.

Facing page:
Norma, 2019
Oil, copper, rope, limestone
with wood frame
18 1/4 x 20 3/8 in.



Framing

Rodriguez further transformed his paintings by crafting frames from found materials and objects or wood, allowing him to extend his ideas and imagery beyond the canvas. *Heat Bloom's* (2022) frame, composed of vivid orange and yellow painted wood, emphasizes the potency of the summer sun in Texas. By adding these elements Rodriguez also transforms his paintings into three-dimensional objects—part representation and part relic—carrying seeming traces of the actual moments and places they depict, much like a votive. *The Future* (2022–23) is one of the more elaborate examples. This large-scale painting portrays Rodriguez symbolically as a ceramic sun with a repeating form, the virgula, a pre-Columbian symbol used in codices to indicate spoken language. This form, which he also likens to a spiral, represents the well-rounded knowledge, and life experiences the artist wants to continue to give to his children, indicated by the three stars or moons. The virgula even makes up the frame, serving as the design running around the border and as the “feet” upon which the painting sits.



Portraiture

Portraits, symbolically conceived, have always formed part of Rodriguez's practice. He often draws upon celestial imagery with a goal of representing himself or others. In *Norma* (2019), a moonlit sky and constellation, indicated by the flat, round, white stone with a trio of stars connected by thread,

reflect the artist's love for his mother and the affectionate, gravitational pull her children continue to feel towards her. *Sweet Fire* (2024), in contrast, portrays a passionate romantic relationship. The artist's eye is combined with that of his partner to represent a moment of intimacy and love when their eyes meet.



Self-portraits are found throughout the exhibition often employing timeless, universal iconography including snakes, suns, and eagles. In *the painter (self portrait)* (2022), Rodriguez fashions a paintbrush, gripped between his lips, into a snake. Similar to *The Future*, this work depicts the life-giving sun, an entity he feels an affinity with as an artist/creator. The terracotta suns appeal to Rodriguez given their association with preconquest Latin American symbology, their contemporary production in Mexico, and their omnipresence in the Southwest.

Ceramics

Ceramics have always held great appeal for Rodriguez. His first memory of seeing an artist at work was as a young teenager, watching a ceramicist slowly form a vessel from a lump of clay on a potter's wheel. It was a pivotal experience so much so that he took up the art form in San Antonio and he continues to investigate ceramics, advancing his skills with new techniques. The newly completed work, *Que Linda* (2025), is a ceramic sun installed on the outside wall of the STUDIO space. It honors Linda Pace, who used this building as her personal studio, and acts as a welcoming beacon to all. Translated from Spanish, the title reads "how pretty," an ironic statement given the cracks in the surface of the work. Like all his creative output, *Que Linda* reveals its handcrafted nature and symbolizes the beauty and wonder of the (imperfect) human experience.

the painter (self-portrait), 2022
Oil on terracotta, rope
13 in. (diam.)

Facing page:
Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning, 2022-23
Oil, acrylic, rope, wood, foil on canvas
86 x 114 x 3 1/2 in.

Dreams

Dreams have increasingly become central to Rodriguez's work. He avoids established interpretations, preferring to shape his own understanding of his dreams. The resulting paintings are his impressions, not literal depictions, of them. These works use the illogical appearance of dreamscapes, but he renders them in his own inexpert hand, as he describes it, to create the visual dissonance or eeriness of his dreams.

The large-scale works installed in the gallery, *Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning*, *The Future*, and *Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Noon (Low Flyin' Bird)* are all from 2022–23 and incorporate visions taken from a series of dreams he had that indicated a period of transition for him. Their titles, like many of his works in general, are taken from the titles of music he listened to during their execution and which are connected to his subject. These works incorporate signs of stasis and preparation or action. They picture Rodriguez as an eagle as indicated by the silver-toned locket around its neck that is similar to one the artist wears.





In *Morning*, the eagle pictured in this painting is pensive and perched above, surveying the landscape, waiting to take flight in the cool morning as reflected by the pastel palette. Rodriguez makes his association with the bird explicit by spelling his name along the bottom of the canvas, and he included two words on the beak, which are similar to his tattoos. "Rios" is his mother's maiden name and his middle name, and its translated meaning of "river" also resonates with his artistic trajectory. The other word is eros in ancient Greek, which alludes to an otherworldly creative force propelling one towards visions of beauty and love, equally powerful motivators for the artist. *Noon*, however, shows the eagle in the bright light and heat of the day as it glides above a rushing waterway full of fish. Rodriguez fills the image with color and energy. These works are the culmination of ten years of experimentation and development surrounding materiality, framing, color, drawing, observation, and self-reflection.

Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Noon (Low Flyin' Bird), 2022-23
Oil, rope, wood, San Antonio River flotsam on canvas
82 x 108 x 3 in.

Two years later he developed a series, the most recent examples on view, composed of dreamscapes, many of which reworked older canvases into new paintings. *Open This Wall* (2024), *begin, again, begin* (2011–25), *dueño del sueño* (2025), and *Love Heart Cheat Code* (2012–25) include stairs, passageways, simplified icons of mountains, spiral forms, pathways, mazes, and apertures or open doorways. This symbology speaks to ideas of expectation, growth, perseverance, and the courage to create opportunities and meet new or different goals. Notably, this series was in process when Rodriguez began to contemplate and then execute, for the first time, his search for a professorship.

Open This Wall

Open This Wall captures a transformative twelve years in Daniel Rios Rodriguez's artistic journey, one marked by personal upheaval, creative renewal, and profound artistic growth. The exhibition reveals an artist who transforms personal moments into universal expressions that convey love, human frailty, tenderness, passion, self-examination, and the pleasures of nature. Through his devoted observation of the San Antonio River, his innovative use of found materials, and his fearless exploration of dreams and memory, Rodriguez has developed a distinctive visual language that honors both the extraordinary and mundane moments in life. His works invite us to look closely at all the instances that shape our lives, to find the sacred in the everyday, and to remain open to the transformative possibilities that await when we dare to open a wall.

Elyse A. Gonzales
Director, Ruby City

Daniel Rios Rodriguez (b. 1978, Killeen, TX; lives Dallas, TX) has exhibited his work in solo and group presentations at White Columns, New York City; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York City; Artpace, San Antonio; Camden Art Centre, London; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Seven Sisters, Houston; and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, among others. He was a 2018 Artist in Residence at the Chinati Foundation and received the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award in 2013. Following studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he earned his MFA from the Yale School of Art at Yale University. His work is held in the collections of the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover. Rodriguez was recently appointed assistant professor of painting at the Meadows School of Art, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

begin, again, begin,
2011–25
Oil on linen, canvas,
wood, nails
11 x 16 5/8 x 11 1/4 in.
Courtesy of the artist
and Seven Sisters
Gallery, Houston, TX

B.Y.O.B., 2014
Oil, acrylic, canvas
on canvas
9 x 11 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Cardinalis Cardinalis,
2014
Oil on canvas
8 x 10 in.
Courtesy of
Allegra LaViola

Casi un Hechizo,
2018
Oil, wood, nails, rope,
Texas mountain laurel
bean on wood panel
44 1/2 x 44 1/2 in.
Private Collection

Chinati Snakes, 2018
Graphite on paper
14 1/2 x 11 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Culebra, 2018
Oil, copper wire, rope,
nails, acrylic, foil,
limestone on wood
11 x 9 in.
Courtesy of the artist
and Nicelle Beauchene
Gallery, New York, NY

dueño del sueño, 2025
Oil, wood, jute, paper,
linen on linen with
wooden frame and
collected glass insert
11 x 22 in.

Courtesy of Bob and
Nora Ackerley

Heat Bloom, 2022
Mixed media
30 x 25 in.
Courtesy of the artist
and Cooper Cole Gallery,
Toronto, Ontario, CA

Honey Thoughts, 2017
Oil, Flashe, rope,
wood, nails on panel
21 1/2 x 21 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist
and Seven Sisters
Gallery, Houston, TX

Horsemint, 2014
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 5/8 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Hot Head, 2020
Ink on paper
10 15/16 x 15 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Lion Feathers, 2017
Oil, Flashe, wood, rope,
found objects on panel
16 x 16 in.
Courtesy of the artist
and Seven Sisters
Gallery, Houston, TX

Little Wings, 2014
Graphite on paper
8 1/2 x 11 in.
Courtesy of the artist

*Love Heart Cheat
Code*, 2012–15
Oil, jute, gold leaf
on linen in artist-
made frame
31 1/2 x 26 x 13 3/4 in.
Courtesy of
Leah Bennett

<i>Nerodia</i> , 2017 Oil, acrylic, rope, wire, wood, nails on panel 11 1/2 x 8 in. Courtesy of Simon Cole	<i>Rios SA</i> , 2022 Ink on paper 10 15/16 x 15 in. Courtesy of the artist	<i>Untitled</i> , 2025 Ink on paper 10 5/8 x 11 7/8 in. Courtesy of the artist
<i>No Más</i> , 2020 Ink on paper 11 x 13 15/16 in. Courtesy of the artist	<i>Self-Portrait I'm on Fire</i> , 2017 Oil, nails, rope, found objects on panel with artist-made frame 15 x 10 in. Courtesy of Holly Fogle	<i>Well Done Season, 2024</i> Ink on paper 11 x 17 in. Courtesy of the artist
<i>Norma</i> , 2019 Oil, copper, rope, limestone with wood frame 18 1/4 x 20 3/8 in. Courtesy of Yung Chang and Richard Price	<i>Sophora Secundiflora Moon</i> , 2018 Oil, rope, wood, copper, limestone, Texas mountain laurel seeds on wood panel 15 x 17 in. Private Collection	
<i>Open This Wall</i> , 2024 Oil, acrylic, canvas on canvas with painted and burnt wood frame 74 x 86 in. Courtesy of the artist and Seven Sisters Gallery, Houston, TX	<i>Sweet Fire</i> , 2024 Oil, acrylic, canvas with artist-made frame 58 x 43 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Seven Sisters Gallery, Houston, TX	
<i>PNT</i> , 2017 Aquatint etching with sugar lift, A/P 11 1/4 x 14 7/8 in. Courtesy of the artist	<i>The Future</i> , 2022–23 Oil, acrylic, wood, foil, rope, terracotta, cement, wire on canvas 94 x 73 x 3 3/4 in. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY	
<i>PTD</i> , 2024 Crayon on paper 14 x 11 in. Courtesy of the artist	<i>the painter (self- portrait)</i> , 2022 Oil on terracotta, rope 13 in. (diam.) Courtesy of Aaron Kirsch	
<i>Que Linda</i> , 2025 Glazed slipcast stoneware 12 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 2 in. Courtesy of the artist	<i>Untitled</i> , 2019 Oil, copper, rope, limestone with wood frame 22 1/4 x 20 3/4 in. Courtesy of A. Kate Sheerin	
<i>Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning</i> , 2022–23 Oil, acrylic, rope, wood, foil on canvas 86 x 114 x 3 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY	<i>Untitled</i> , 2023 Graphite on paper 18 x 24 in. Courtesy of Megan Wood	
<i>Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Noon (Low Flyin' Bird)</i> , 2022–23 Oil, rope, wood, San Antonio River flotsam on canvas 82 x 108 x 3 in. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY	<i>Untitled</i> , 2025 Graphite, ink on paper 17 1/2 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist	

RUBY CITY CAMPUS

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

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