

ArtSlut

Rising Local Artist Fernando Andrade Draws Dark Inspiration from Border Violence

by [Marco Aquino](#) October 25, 2016 at 3:53 PM



Fernando Andrade, Cabeza #2

On October 27, Ruiz-Healy Art will present “Perennial Boundaries,” an exhibition featuring four Texas artists whose work examines life along the U.S.-Mexico border: Margarita Cabrera, César Martínez, Michael Menchaca and Fernando Andrade. In anticipation of the group show, we spoke with Andrade, who opened up about his experiences on both sides of the border and revealed some of the driving factors behind his work. A 2008 graduate from the graphic design program at San Antonio College, Andrade has been making waves in the local art community with his stunning, lifelike drawings addressing socio-political themes.

You and I are actually from the same border town of Acuña. Can you talk about your experiences growing up in Mexico?

I remember playing outside with my neighbors and my cousins because we all lived close to each other. I remember we would all go to school together and play after school as well. I didn't grow up inside the house a lot. There were a lot of games we would make up.

Why did your family decide to move to the United States?

I feel like they saw a limit in the sense of what they could provide for their family. For example, there were just a lot of maquiladoras, which was kind of the main job there. My grandparents had been to San Antonio a lot and they really liked it here — this was back in the late '80s and early '90s. My mom and my dad would also come visit. My grandparents — they really saw a nice place for their children and grandchildren to grow. That was kind of the idea behind that — just moving forward in an economic sense. Also, they were telling me that when we first moved over here, there was a hotel [in Acuña] and the people there had been killed and mutilated. That was back in '93 or '94, before we came to San Antonio, so they had just started noticing some of those changes.

Was it a traumatic experience coming to the United States?

Yeah, definitely. I think the language was the biggest thing. Also, leaving friends behind was a big thing. Luckily, I had family here and some cousins who were the same age. I had them and we went to the same school here. Even though it's not far away, it's definitely a different culture. That's when I started picking up English, in the third and fourth grade, so I struggled a lot. I don't think I was very good at school. I'd go to school then I'd go outside and play games again.

Were you able to interact with the other kids or were you kind of an outsider?

It was a bilingual elementary school, Stephen F. Austin. I do remember being bullied because I didn't speak English. There's always those kids that are like "go back to Mexico." I remember getting that a lot. I got called wetback. There were a lot of terms that would make me get mad at them. There were always a few of those kids — especially in third grade — there was a lot of that. And then, there were the other friends that were nice, and would help you out and translate and stuff like that.

I know life along the border has changed quite a bit since you moved here. Were you and your family ever personally affected by the violence and drug cartels in the area?

Luckily, none of my family has been affected, but definitely a lot of the neighbors and kids I grew up with in Mexico who stayed there have ... I mean, it's all around you, it's really hard to get away. It's not a big, big place — everyone kind of knows each other, especially the families that have been there a long time. I think the way it affected me directly was just when a friend of mine disappeared in Piedras Negras in 2008. I had met him here in San Antonio and we were close friends. I definitely still think about the people who are growing up during this time near the border but also all over Mexico.



Fernando Andrade, Mano #2

What do you make of Donald Trump’s comments about Mexico “not sending their best” but “bringing drugs [and] bringing crime” to the U.S.?

That’s pretty hard. I didn’t take it personally, but I feel that it’s my job to prove that it’s not true. I mean we do send a lot of great hard-working people not only from Mexico but from other countries as well. I had an older friend who told me — he was probably in his 70s — he told me he and his wife know how to shoot guns because the Mexicans come over here to rape the women. He was my friend and he told me that, and he knew I was Mexican — that’s probably the conversation he was having in his own mind. I know Trump said it last year but I had also heard it before from a friend. I guess for me, the way I’m speaking up is by my actions. I feel like I’m doing okay staying out of trouble. I feel I’m doing something positive for the community. So I think that’s worth more than words or comments.

I know you’re a 2008 graduate from the graphic design program at San Antonio College. Who would you say are some of your mentors or teachers back in the community?

Definitely back in school, someone who had a huge influence on me to become a more professional artist was Mark...

Mark Pritchett?

Yeah! I know a lot of students hated him, or were scared of him, but for me, he really challenged me in a big way back in my college years. Even though I was a graphic design student, I took drawing classes with him at SAC.

He was one of my instructors too. He was probably one of the toughest people there but he got his message across. What do you think was the biggest lesson learned from him?

One of the things I remember — he would notice the students who did their homework right before class and he would tear those students apart in class. He would say, “Why are we supposed to take time critiquing your work when you don’t even take the time to produce it?” So definitely that’s one of the things that changed me. When I’m going to present something, or when I’m going to hang something up on the wall, I respect the piece. I invest my time and there are no excuses. That’s something that I definitely learned in that class — to be professional and to be respectful to the work. Then, the viewers will respect it. That was huge for me — to respect the work that I’m producing and give it time.

You’ve become known for your figure drawings. When did this interest first develop?

It kind of comes from my mom’s side of the family. I remember when I was young my uncles would draw a lot from magazines. They would draw portraits and figures. So when I started picking up drawing in 2000, when I was a freshman in high school, I would draw a lot from magazines. That’s how I would practice on my own. When I went to SAC I had been practicing for many years. In 2012, when I started drawing my first series dealing with socio-political events, I think I already had plenty of practice. But that’s how I began, just copying ads from magazines.



Fernando Andrade, Pies #2

Tell me about your latest body of work and some of the ideas behind that.

Everything that I've been working on is still socio-political stuff related to violence and the drug cartels, and how the U.S. plays an influence on that. So, the latest body of work is in white pencil on black paper. It has to do with the specific way people are killed in Mexico. They cut them up into little pieces. I guess I was thinking, how can someone do that to another human? Where do you have to be mentally to be able to do that? How can you cut someone up while they are alive? What were you doing before you started cutting people? I think that's the question that I'm trying to figure out. The work that I'm going to have at Ruiz-Healy — it's one figure that's divided into five pieces: the head, the hands, the feet, the back, and the torso. That was my way of breaking up the figure. I don't like showing blood or being too graphic.

I know you were in Houston recently. What did you think of Vincent Valdez's exhibition "The Beginning Is Near (Part I)"?

Aw, man. Yeah, definitely very powerful. You could just stay there forever. It's a critique of the times we're in now, or have been in. I think it's motivating for me. At the same time, I wanted to be staring at the piece because of its power and message. I wanted to go back to my studio and really work. If I want to be at that level someday, I've got to put in my hours.

Perennial Boundaries

Free, opening reception: 6-8pm Thu, Oct. 27; artist talk: 1pm Sat, Oct. 29; on view 11am-4pm Tue-Sat through Jan. 21, 2017, Ruiz-Healy Art, 201 E. Olmos Drive, (210) 804-2219, ruizhealyart.com.