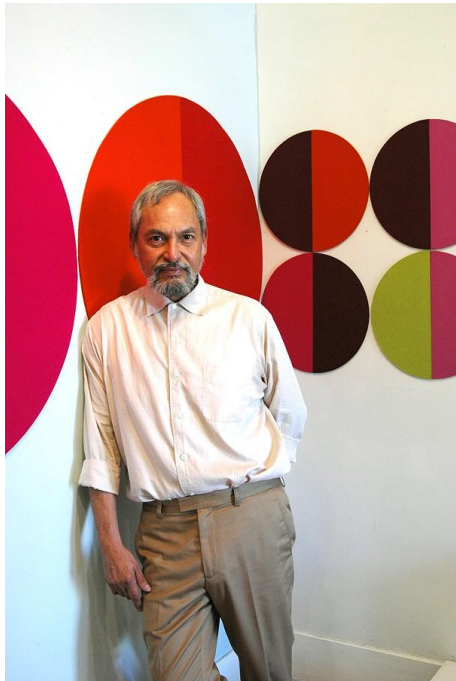


San Antonio Current

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Jesse Amado Presents Art As Placebo In '30 Day Rx'

By [Dan R. Goddard](#)



Jesse Amado considers his "30 Day Rx" a placebo, a placating response to a friend's struggle to decide whether or not to take antidepressants. Cut out of felt and hung on the wall or placed on the floor like a rug, Amado's newest work, on view through June 6 at Ruiz-Healy Art, is in bright pop colors — baby blue, candy pink, lime green, tangy orange and goofy grape — and almost guaranteed to lift your mood.

Typically for one of San Antonio's best-known artists nationally, Amado's painterly/sculptural cutout minimalist hybrids are about much more than what meets the eye.

"My modest proposal is that looking at this work might possibly make you feel better," Amado says.

"The candy colors are similar to the ones used by the pharmaceutical industry. Circles are generally pretty calming, evoking the earth, sun and moon. Felt is an ancient material, soft and sensual to the touch. I don't have all the answers, but I think this placebo works pretty well. It definitely made me feel a lot better while I was working on it."

One of the first artists to be selected for a residency at Artpace, Amado earned his MFA from the University of Texas at San Antonio. His sculptural piece, *Me, We*, acquired by the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, is featured in the national traveling exhibit "Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art," currently on view through June 28 at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City.



Enigmatic and a little mysterious, Amado usually works on several levels simultaneously. With eye-pleasing colors and simple, geometric forms, his felt pieces in "30 Day Rx" can be seen as purely decorative. But considering the 63-year-old artist has survived a five-year bout with cancer, a lot more must be going on than simply coming up with combinations of colors and forms that look nice.

"Cancer has given me a new attitude about making art," Amado said. "I used to go through a lengthy thought process about the art I wanted to make, but now I'm trying not to think about it too much. I'm relying more on my instincts. After more than a quarter century of making art, I think my instincts are pretty good."

Amado spoke and answered questions at a Saturday afternoon roundtable discussion at Ruiz-Healy led by the exhibit's curator, Patty Ortiz, who resigned last fall after serving for five years as director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Currently working as a freelance curator, Ortiz included Amado in "Flatlander," a show she curated for the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art in Colorado running through September 3.

After a little research, Amado learned that a national study discovered the fish in Boulder Creek contain traces of antidepressants.

"Antidepressants are prevalent everywhere in our world," Amado said. "Pharmaceutical companies are powerful and their influence is a little dark. Pills can do wonders, but they can also do damage."

Amado said he has never taken antidepressants. He told a story about a friend of his who battled depression, a U.S. Army officer training for the Special Forces. But his friend decided instead to drop out of the Army and join the French Foreign Legion.

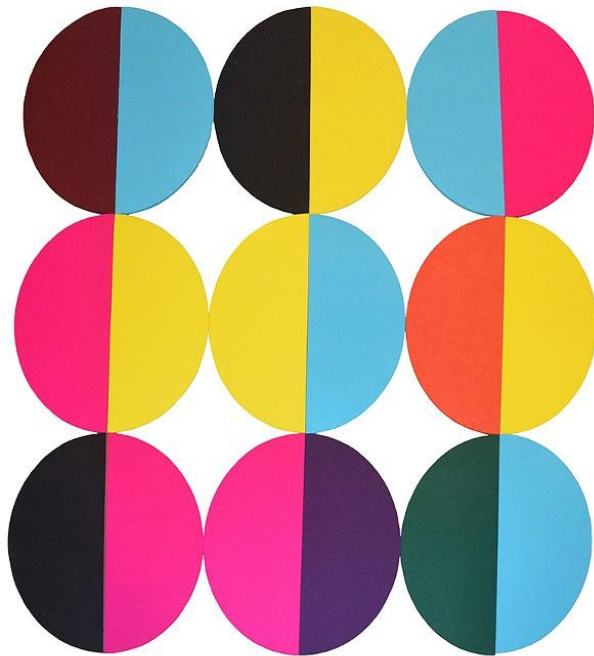
"The legion has a reputation for fighting in some of the harshest conditions in the world," Amado said. "But my friend said after two years, he was cured of depression. There are alternatives to taking antidepressants. I prefer the French Foreign Legion solution."

Five years ago when he was first diagnosed with cancer, Amado said his priorities changed dramatically and he gave up making art.

"I didn't have the strength to make art," Amado said. "I just wasn't in the mood — to tell the truth. After 25 years of working in a studio every day, I decided it was time to focus on my health and getting well. I had always been diligent about working every day, but I gave up the studio and moved everything to my home."

However, one day at a flooring store where he bought paint, Amado noticed the new, tougher brand of felt, designed to be used like carpet.

"When I started feeling better, I picked up where I left off working with felt," Amado said. "Now I can get felt in a variety of colors and that's given me a new palette for my work, about 30 colors. I've always liked the transformative qualities of art and the contrast of hard and soft materials in sculpture. I kept changing things around until they look good. In this way, dissonance becomes resonance."



Working with circles divided in half by a vertical line between contrasting colors, Amado's series of *Tablets* are intended to resemble pills, though they can be read in various ways, as perhaps maps of moods or differences in right brain/left brain thinking depending on the type of pill you take. Amado also arranges the *Tablets* into minimalist grids and patterns.

In her catalog essay, Ortiz notes: "The rigorously controlled presentation without compositional hierarchy evokes Donald Judd and echoes the assembly line of pharmaceutical mass production."

Amado compared his new work to the cutouts of the French artist Henri Matisse, who was diagnosed in 1941 with abdominal cancer and underwent a grueling operation that left him bed-bound. Unable to paint or sculpt, Matisse rediscovered the childhood joys of working with paper and scissors, cutting out swirling shapes inspired by ballet dancers as well as birds, flowers and abstract forms. Similar to Matisse, Amado began cutting forms out of felt and combining them in ways that are not quite painting and not quite sculpture.

"There is a lot of playfulness in the work," Amado said. "Because I was in my home, I felt very close to the work all the time. It was almost like a relationship; there was a primal intensity to the work. And there were happy accidents, things that can occur when you are just playing around. As I cut out the pieces, I started putting aside my scraps, just letting them pile up."

The scrap piles led to related works, *Consequences #1* and *Untitled*, dealing with the side effects and other, more troubling aspects of taking antidepressants. Amado is also intrigued by the effect of gravity on his work; the droopy felt pieces suggest melted figures.

"Remnants of waste felt, dangling from a nail, convey the strung out emptiness and anxiety that can accompany too much medicine," Ortiz wrote. "The way Amado uses scraps and trash as an aesthetic 'magic carpet ride' speaks directly to the bad trip, a drug high gone wrong and the sad but inevitable failure of prolonged pharmaceutical usage."

Felt is often associated with German artist Joseph Beuys, who claimed Tatar tribesmen wrapped him in felt and animal fat to nurse him back to health after his Luftwaffe plane was shot down during World War II. The tale may be apocryphal, but Beuys, who suffered from depression, thought felt had shamanistic qualities. For Amado, the transformative qualities of art may offer an alternative to prescription pills, a soothing balm for the searching soul.

JESSE AMADO: 30 DAY RX

Free, 11am-4pm Tue-Sat, Ruiz-Healy Art, 201-A E. Olmos Dr., (210) 804-2219, ruizhealyart.com

Through June 6

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