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From Domestic to Divine: The Radical Materiality of Threading Glass

Ruiz-Healy's *Threading Glass* brings together powerhouse names of Contemporary Latinx art, Consuelo Jimenez Underwood and Einar and Jamez de la Torre, placing their historically marginalized materials into a space of fine art reverence. Underwood's rich, intricately patterned textiles span one side of the gallery in desaturated, earthy tones and the de la Torre brothers' vibrant, glass-based multimedia sculptures on the other, weaving together to provide a compelling meditation on identity, spirituality, and cultural hybridity.

Despite the domesticity of the materials, the "craft" label does not linger in the mind. Both artists have long moved beyond categorization, but here, the elevation of the materials speaks volumes. It's only in hindsight that I remember: these are textiles and glass, mediums traditionally regulated to the realm of the domestic or decorative. In *Threading Glass*, these materials move the viewer through deep inquiry — contemplations at once playful and biting in the hands of the de la Torre brothers, and reverent and provocative through Underwood's weavings and layered icons.

While separated by artist, the works conversed with each other, forcing me to bounce back and forth. Specifically, I ping-ponged between de la Torres' *Eau de David* (2014) and Underwood's *Father, Son, and Holy Rebozo* (2017) as the layers of complexity in each revealed itself. The obvious connection is the references to Christianity, though it challenges the relationship between divinity and masculinity.



Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *Eau de David*, 2014, Silver print and mixed media, 27.5 x 26.75 x 6.25 cm. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art, New York | San Antonio

Eau de David centers around a bust of the biblical king, David, in front of their version of Hans Memling's *The Last Judgement* (1567-1471) triptych (though the label identifies it as Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*). The bust recalls Michelangelo's depiction of an idealized, mature David with beautiful curling hair and a strong furrowed expression before he takes on Goliath. Triptychs have been the standard for altar paintings since the Renaissance, and the de la Torre brothers continue this tradition with the items placed before the painting and around the bust. From left to right there is: a vintage Avon "Indian Teepee" cologne bottle, Avon "Clock" perfume bottle, Old Spice "Ship's Wheel" decanter, Old Spice "Sea Captain" bottle, an Avon "Golf Bag" cologne bottle, the resin bust of David (center), Avon "Bucking Bronco" decanter, a branded "Kingpin" bowling pin, Avon Classic Lion "Wild Country Aftershave" bottle, and an Avon "Thermometer" aftershave bottle. Incorporating these found objects around the bust is not only visual, but an aromatic experience of traditional masculinity sustained by religion and consumerism – thus the French title *Eua de David*, or perfume of David.

The de la Torre brothers' contextualize this within a Latinx experience, specifically through their alterations of Memling's triptych. The faces have been replaced and modernized, with the addition of culturally-identifying costumes. On the left, mariachi singer Vicente Fernández ascends to heaven, a microphone in his right hand as his left covers his genitals, adorned only with a white mariachi hat decorated in gold thread on his head. There are more men with sombreros, and also famous faces - such as Shakira, with her iconic gold, curls overlaid on a woman's body who clasps her hands piously. The left is for the Christian colonized and colonizers, where Hell on the far right is for the indigenous. The fiery landscape changes to the burning of Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor, the bodies falling and being flayed resembles Mesoamerican masks with broad faces, large eyes, and gaping noses. The most notable change is in the center panel. St. Michael is now the conquistador Hernán Cortés, his judgement of souls based on his ideological and political motives. The saints at the top are historical figures, influencing what should be Christ in the middle. Instead, the figure wears the mask of Quetzalcoatl, the Mesomarian feathered-serpent deity. This is a condemnation of history, religion, and consumerism focusing specifically on issues of masculinity.



Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, *Father, Son and Holy Rebozo*, 2017, Signed, titled and, dated on a label affixed to the reverse, Woven wire, linen, metallic and cotton thread, 40 x 19 in, 101.6 x 48.3 cm. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art, New York | San Antonio

Meanwhile, less obvious a connection but still a clear current to Christianity, Underwood's *Father, Son, and Holy Rebozo* establishes a connection to religion through the title, where I can hear the end of a prayer: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen." Though the litany has transformed the "Spirit" into the type of textile she has created, a "Rebozo." A rebozo is a long, straight piece of cloth that women in Mexico wear similar to a shawl. Underwood feminizes and fabricates the Holy Spirit by both renaming and creating a rebozo, visually represented in the lower register with loose, transparent weavings as she strikes at the heart of Mexican culture and identity. The Holy Spirit itself takes up space at the bottom register, keeping the traditional hierarchy of the Father (a threaded white outline of a cowboy hat) at the top and the Son (baseball cap), choosing traditional male hats to represent them. Cutting through both hats, raised barbed weavings parallel across the textile to represent the geographical lines of the U.S.-Mexico border. The Father's border line is in a silver hue, where the Son's is in a copper color.

The depiction of the border is a continued visual exploration of Underwood's work, emphasizing the unique cultural aspects of growing-up or living border region - a frequent challenge of never being American or Mexican enough on either side. Underwood has placed this question of cultural identity within the framework of gender and religious identity. By choosing to present her message in fabric, given that the production of textiles falls traditionally under the domestic labor of women, Underwood calls to attention the unspoken support women provide in clothing (priest's robes, day laborer's hat sporting uniform). She underscores this silent and forgotten work, relegated to collective consciousness as a craft rather than art, by choosing to represent the divine through the attire of a woman rather than fashioning a man's outfit.

Threading Glass is less about reconciling two disparate practices and more about recognizing the profound resonance when material, culture, and critique converge. Though Underwood and the de la Torre brothers approach their work from distinct visual languages, their shared commitment to interrogating identity, spirituality, and power results in an exhibition that feels both deeply rooted and boldly reimaged.

By framing craft not as an outlet but as a foundational medium for contemporary expression, Ruiz-Healy Art has curated a show that doesn't just elevate these materials - it asks why they were even considered lesser to begin with. *Threading Glass* isn't just a celebration of artistic ingenuity; it's a timely affirmation that the so-called decorative can be profoundly political, that the tactile can be transcendent. And in a city like San Antonio — defined by its layers, its crossing its histories — the exhibition feels right at home.