

Alejandro Díaz, A Latino Texan-New Yorker Exhibits at Ruiz-Healy-Art Gallery.



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Texas native Alejandro Díaz developed an artistic practice over thirty-five years grounded in the bicultural and visual mix of South Texas and Mexico, with formative ties to Mexico City in the early 1990s. He is known for multi-media work: cardboard signs, neon, sculpture, furniture, tapestries, ceramics, paintings, and installations. Early in his career, he was best known for witty, text-based cardboard signs and the subsequent neon versions, which use humor to address class, race, border politics, tourism, and the art market.



Alejandro Díaz, “Burrito”. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

Díaz grew up in the deep Westside of San Antonio, residing in various neighborhoods that were nearly 100 percent Mexican American. As a boy, he attended Guadalupe Catholic School on El Paso Street, only blocks away from several popular Mexican *panaderías* [bakeries], *molinos* that made fresh tortillas daily, and corner stores that sold *barbacoa* on the weekends. The Westside was largely an immigrant community born out of the 1910 Mexican Revolution diaspora. San Antonio was the largest urban center in South Texas, and the city’s link to the Rio Grande border two hours away by car, impacted the daily lives of its bilingual residents.

Díaz's art career began in earnest after he graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1987 with a BFA degree. He returned to his hometown of San Antonio and was included in a show at the San Antonio Southwest Craft Center the following year. His social commentary through art was well received. Díaz's popular "Make Tacos Not War" neon sign was featured at the *Xicanx: Dreamers + Changemakers | Soñadores + creadores del cambio*, a sweeping exhibition at the Contemporary at Blue Star in San Antonio in 2024.



Alejandro Díaz, "Make Tacos Not War," 2007, neon on clear plexiglass. Photo: Contemporary at Blue Star.

Patricia Ruiz Healy, who has known Díaz for more than two decades, wrote that Díaz developed his distinctive work while growing up in San Antonio, Texas, and living in México City from 1990 to 1994. She added: "This background deeply informed his art, which reflects the complex and visually rich cultural environment of South Texas and Mexico." While residing in México City, Díaz was part of an inner circle of artists who lived and worked around the Calle Licenciado Verdad. A 1990s-focused publication

titled *Licenciado Verdad, Vol. 1: Groups and Spaces in Mexico Contemporary Art of the 90s*, explicitly names this tenement and street as a key locus for Mexico City's contemporary art networks, underscoring its role as an address that included studios, living spaces, and informal exhibiting/meeting sites. In 1994, his first solo show opened in Omaha, Nebraska.

Díaz returned to San Antonio in 1994 and created art while working at the famed Liberty Bar off Broadway and Grayson. One of Díaz's most transformative art moments came about at the Liberty Bar. The restaurant sent Díaz to Linda Pace's home to cater for a small dinner party. He and Linda met in the kitchen. He vividly recalled the meeting: "I told her I was an artist, and we got carried away in a length and engrossing conversation about Texas art and artists. She wanted to know everything." All of this occurred before the creation of Artpace and the Linda Pace Foundation. In 1996, Díaz was selected as one of the first Texas Residents of ArtPace.



Alejandro Díaz at the Ruiz-Healy Art forum. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Díaz moved to New York City in the late 1990s and received an MFA from the Cent for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Hudson, NY, in 1999. Although Díaz had moved to New York City, Alix Ohlin of the *Texas Observer* included Díaz in his 2001 story titled “San Antonio Art: Down Home and World Famous.” Ohlin noted that Díaz was the founder of Sala Díaz, a San Antonio Southtown art gallery situated in a “dilapidated white house that sits slouched on a shady street about a mile south of sprawling downtown.” Gregory Sandoval, ArtPace’s program coordinator at the time, visited the gallery often, noting that many artists were resisting going to New York, Los Angeles and staying close to home; “they’re putting their money into doing their own galleries, finding their own alternative spaces, getting their work seen there.”



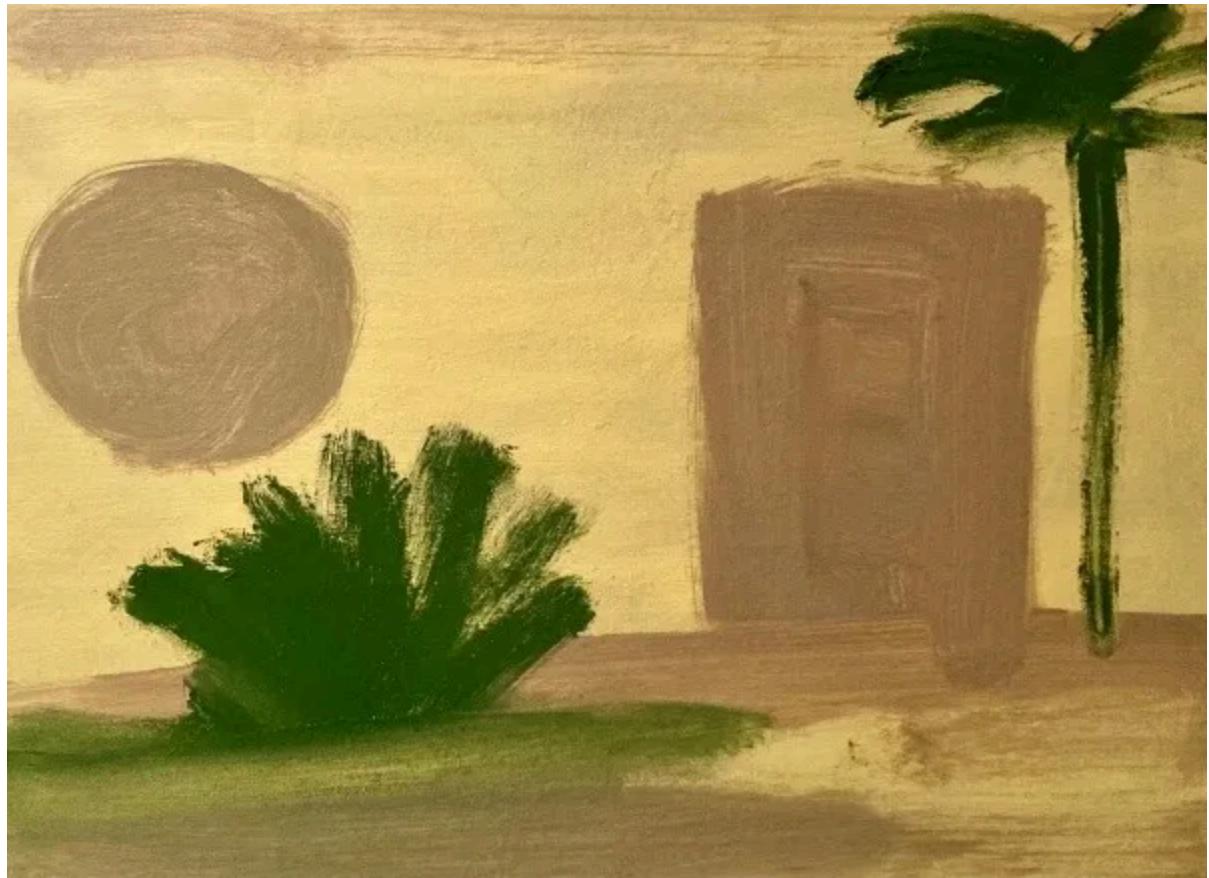
Alejandro Díaz, "Robed Figure". Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

In 2003, shortly after completing his graduate studies, Díaz was asked to create a large-scale artwork for the Havana Biennial, which resulted in the creation of "I (Heart) Cuba" [I Love Cuba], an installation of free souvenir items emblazoned with artist's twist on the familiar "I Love New York" slogan. The Cuba Heart art project gave Díaz the recognition he needed as a New York artist, and a few years later, he was commissioned by New York City's Public Art Fund to create four large-scale sculptures along the historic Grand Concourse in the Bronx.



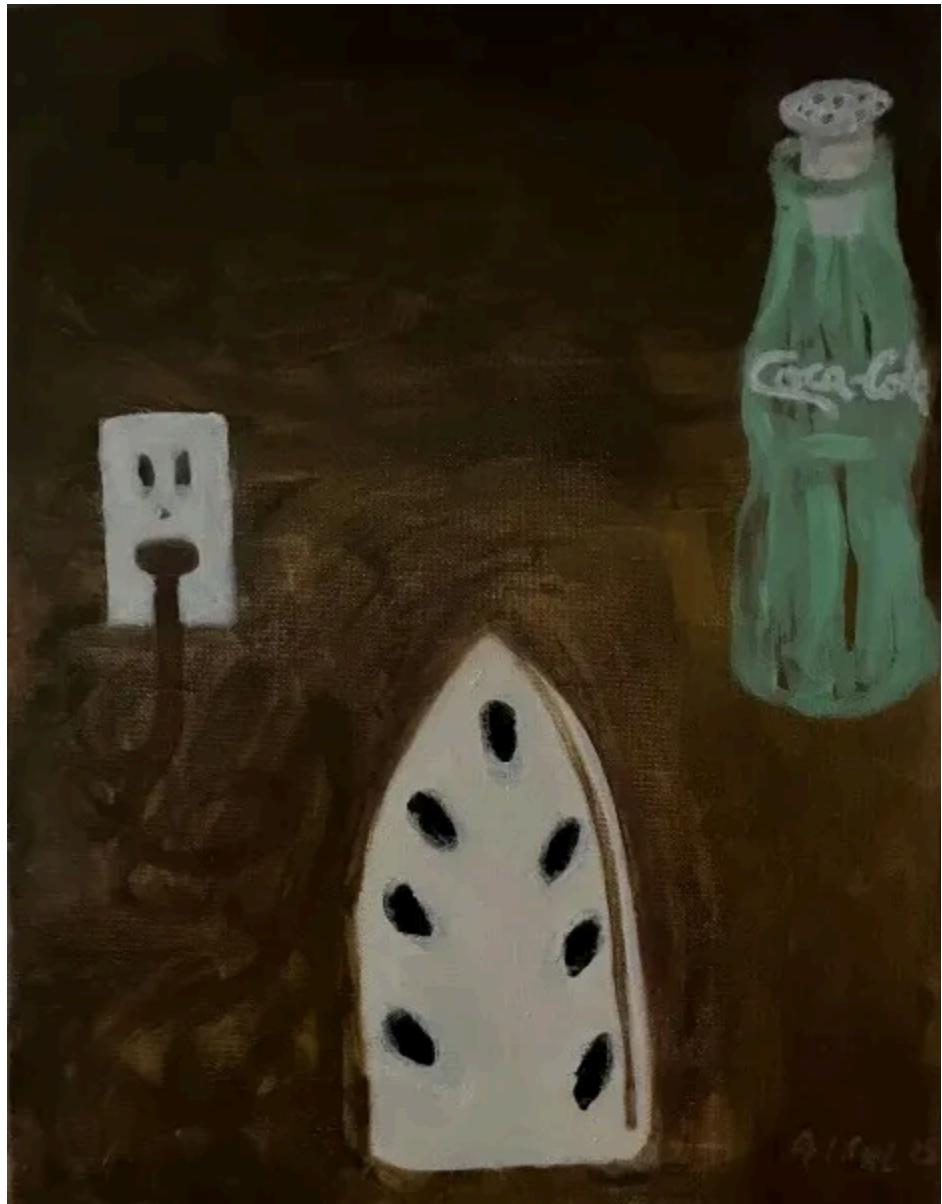
Alejandro Díaz, Untitled. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

Ruiz Healy Art produced a beautiful catalogue of Díaz's work for an exhibit of his paintings at her San Antonio gallery on January 24, 2026. The gallery hosted an artist talk that Harriett and I attended. We were curious about Díaz's artistic approach to most recent paintings. I was instantly drawn to a series of painted shapes subtitled Texas, Spain, and Mexico. Le Flore, a San Antonio poet and artist, observed a painting of soccer goals and explained: "The soccer goals seen in Spain and Mexico express those countries' joy of sport, competition, athleticism, and pride." LeFlore found that the oil rig that Díaz had painted to represent Texas also served as "the goal," adding, "it is a solo machine that works tirelessly but nonetheless, behaves like a sport to its investors, landowners, and its betters."



Alejandro Díaz, “Egyptian Morning”. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

Díaz and LeFlore teamed up to lead the discussion of Díaz’s gallery exhibit. LeFlore stated that in Díaz’s paintings, there is “an art that emerges as inspiration, creation and existence-becoming inseparable.” Díaz’s painting of a boat on a dark lake with moon shining on the water says something different to each viewer. LeFlore saw the presence of a boat in a vast space with pink clouds overhead and a full pink moon to indicate movement. He added. “We’re all coming from somewhere in order to go somewhere else. The movement is what counts, especially its serenity.” I also found a sense of motion in Díaz’s painting of a horse bridled to a manned cart loaded with harvest. I was also moved by Díaz’s use of color. A tall mountain, reminding me of rural Mexico, was painted in blue.



Alejandro Díaz, Untitled. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

The gallery discussion turned to Díaz's artistic approach and what inspires him to paint. After acknowledging that Díaz is always reading and learning about great artists, LeFlore added that "Alejandro paints what makes his heart beat as he explores all the rhythms and mysteries of his life experiences. He paints paintings that wonder and wander." With regard to a question about a painting of a room that included a bed, a chair, and portraits hanging on the wall, Díaz acknowledged the influence of painters like Vincent van Gogh, who had done a similar painting called "The Bedroom" (the Yellow Room). LeFlore concluded that Díaz "paints images that are

beautiful and psychologically powerful; the tonality, the iconography, the contrasts, the stillness—all united in service to Alejandro's artistic intentions."



Alejandro Díaz. "Color Fields". Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

Díaz is internationally known and his artwork has been collected by the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland; the Fundación Colección Jumex, Mexico City, Mexico; the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, AZ; El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; the RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI; the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL; and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA.



Alejandro Díaz, Untitled. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.

Díaz closed his remarks explaining that in these new works, he has found meaningful creations that bring him peaceful calmness. The carefully chosen colors and simple images are reflections of his Mexican and Chicano memories. Ruiz Healy proposed that *Rooms and Places* encourages self-reflection and philosophical inquiries about one's place in the world. The exhibition will be on view at the San Antonio gallery from January 21, 2026 to February 28, 2026.



Alejandro Díaz, Untitled, Texas, México, and Spain series. Courtesy Ruiz- Healy Ar



Alejandro Díaz at the Ruiz-Healy Art exhibit opening. Photo by Ricardo Romo.