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About The Cover Artist: Alejandro Diaz

By Dr. Ricardo Romo

Alejandro Diaz's work is widely collected and exhibited, held by institutions including the Smithsonian American Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; El Museo del Barrio, New York; Fundación Colección Jumex, Mexico City; RISD Museum of Art; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin; and McNay Art Museum, San Antonio. Grounded in wit and cultural observation, Diaz's multi-media work—spanning cardboard signs, neon, sculpture, furniture, ceramics, tapestries, paintings, and installations—uses humor and vernacular aesthetics to probe issues of class, race, border politics, tourism, and the art market.

Growing up in San Antonio's working-class Westside, Diaz was immersed in a Mexican American community shaped by the diaspora of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. His early sensory world included neighborhood bakeries, molinos making fresh tortillas, and weekend barbacoa stands—everyday experiences that later surfaced in his art's engagement with language and

place. He earned a BFA from the University of Texas at Austin in 1987 and soon after returned to exhibit at the San Antonio Southwest Craft Center.

From 1990 to 1994, Diaz lived in Mexico City, where he joined a circle of emerging artists connected to Calle Licenciado Verdad, a vital hub of 1990s contemporary art. This period profoundly influenced his sensibility, merging the conceptual and the handmade in ways that mirrored life between borders. As curator Patricia Ruiz Healy has written, Diaz's art reflects "the complex and visually rich cultural environment of South Texas and Mexico." His first solo exhibition followed in 1994 in Omaha, Nebraska.

Returning to San Antonio that same year, Diaz became intertwined with the city's burgeoning contemporary art scene. While working at the Liberty Bar, he met philanthropist and collector Linda Pace, a fortuitous encounter that led to his selection as one of the inaugural Texas Artists-in-Residence at Artpace in 1996. Around this time, Diaz founded Sala Diaz, a nonprofit art venue housed in a modest Southtown residence—

soon recognized, as noted in Texas Observer, as a cornerstone of San Antonio's artist-run spaces. The project embodied Diaz's belief in accessible, community-rooted art-making.

In the late 1990s, Diaz relocated to New York, earning an MFA from Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies in 1999. His practice expanded internationally, with major commissions including *I (Heart) Cuba* for the 2003 Havana Biennial and public sculptures for New York City's Grand Concourse commissioned by the Public Art Fund. Throughout, he maintained ties to Texas and Mexico.

Diaz's return to painting in recent years—explored in exhibitions such as *Rooms and Places*—marks both a renewal and homecoming. Employing the technique of pentimento, he reveals layers of change and imperfection as metaphors for memory and transformation. His canvases draw inspiration from artists such as Goya, Picasso, and Munch, yet ultimately find their rhythm in intuitive, solitary reflection.



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

By Ricardo Romo, Ph.D

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 their subsequent neon versions, which use humor to address class, race, border politics, tourism, and the art market.

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.

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 lengthy 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.

Díaz moved to New York City in the late 1990s and received an MFA from the



*Alejandro Díaz, "Burrito".
Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art.*

Center 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 the 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 or 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."

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 the 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.

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's talk that Harriett and I attended. We were curious about Díaz's artistic approach to his 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."

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 a 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 mean 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 wth harvest. I was also moved by Díaz's use of color. A tall mountain, reminding me of rural Mexico, was painted in blue.

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, CA; 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 Musem of Art, Providence, RI; the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL; and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA.

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



Alejandro Díaz, Untitled. Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art. Photo by Ricardo Romo.



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