Latina Artists Explore Themes of Migration, Borders, and Cultural Persistence

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Latina artists are becoming especially active in painting and sculpture in Southwestern communities with large Latino populations, including Los Angeles, Houston, and San Antonio. In this essay, I highlight two Latina artists who held successful art shows in San Antonio, Texas, over the past year. I begin with the renowned textile weaver Consuelo Jimenez Underwood.



Uri Whitehead, “Worth Reaching For.” Courtesy of Dock Space Gallery. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Ruiz-Healy Art Gallery in San Antonio opened a two-person exhibit, “In Our Hands,” on September 16, 2026, which remains on view through November 7, 2026. The exhibit features Consuelo Jimenez Underwood. Over the years, I have followed Jimenez Underwood’s artistic journey.

Jimenez Underwood is a California Latina artist best known for large-scale woven textiles, mixed-media fiber works, and installations. Ruiz-Healey noted that Jimenez Underwood’s work frequently addresses borders, migration, Indigenous and Mexican cultural histories, and environmental concerns.

Born in Sacramento, California in 1949, Jimenez Underwood worked alongside her family in California agricultural fields for much of her youth. ThroughoutJimenez Underwood’s childhood, her family lived in the Calexico, California, and Mexicali, Mexico borderlands, spending winter months picking onions and garlic. She recently

told a National Endowment for the Arts audience, “The worst part of the migrant agricultural world was late enrollment and early withdrawal from school. She spoke of picking tomatoes early in the morning before her school bus arrived.



Consuel Jimenez Underwood. Courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art Gallery, San Antonio, Texas. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Jimenez Underwood uses looms, sewing machines, embroidery, and found materials for her artwork. Two works in the Ruiz-Healy exhibit are new visual interpretations of the “C Jane Run” series that shows a mother crossing a highway with her children in tow. Above the image of the highway sign are the words “Caution.” The blue textile weave-painting also includes an image of a Mesoamerican wheel. Additionally, the work includes a pink cloth construction with three “C Jane Run” caution signs in addition to three images of the Virgin de Guadalupe. Images of an Indigenous figure are placed between the caution signs. Two dark skeleton figures also appear in the middle and upper right section of the cloth painting.

Jimenez Underwood is one of the few weavers constructing art with barbed wire and safety pins in her material art pieces. Dr. Patricia Ruiz-Healy also gave Jimenez Underwood a solo show in New York several years ago, noting that her new San Antonio exhibit presents unconventional materials to address Indigenous displacement and ecological damage. Jimenez Underwood noted on her website, “My work reflects personal border experiences: the interconnectedness of societies, insisting on beauty in the struggle, and celebrating the notion of seeing this world through my tri-cultural lens.”



Consuel Jimenez Underwood. Courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art Gallery, San Antonio, Texas. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Jimenez Underwood's artwork tells commanding stories centering on migration and identity from her ancestral American, Mexican, and Indigenous perspectives. A 2022 Smithsonian American Art Museum page featured "Artist Conversation with Consuelo Jimenez Underwood" and the dialogue explained that, "by combining traditional fiber art techniques with untraditional materials such as barbed wire and safety pins, Jimenez Underwood's large-scale installations and weavings explore border crossings—from the physical crossing of the US-Mexico border to social, spiritual, and artistic borders as well."



Consuel Jimenez Underwood, Ruiz-Healy Art Gallery, San Antonio, Texas. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Jimenez Underwood began her higher education at community colleges in Escondido and San Marcos, California, and received an undergraduate degree in art and a Master of Arts at San Diego State University. She later earned a Master of Fine Arts from San Jose State University. Professors at San Jose State recognized her immense talent and offered her a post teaching in the art department. Over a twenty-year tenure at San Jose State, she has taught and mentored hundreds of students.



Consuel Jimenez Underwood. Courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art Gallery, San Antonio, Texas. Photo by Ricardo Romo.

Jimenez Underwood is living proof of the proverbial concept–which I have adapted– "You can take the artist out of the border, but you cannot take the border out of the artist." She left the border area to study at San Jose State University as a young college student and retired several decades later in a small community north of San Francisco. Nonetheless, her work across diverse media makes it clear that the border and her borderland experience have remained a powerful thematic force in her art. Robert Milnes, her colleague at San Jose State, explained: "The border between Mexico and the United States has always been a dominating factor and theme in Jimenez Underwood's artwork and life."



Uri Whitehead, "Save Some Water for Yourself." Courtesy of Dock Space Gallery. Photo by Ricardo Romo

At the Dock Space Gallery in San Antonio's Southtown, I learned more about the artwork of Uri Whitehead, another artist living and working in San Antonio. Uri Whitehead [born Uri Alvear] grew up near the Little Flower Basilica Church community in the city's Westside. She attended Horace Mann Middle School [full disclosure, my school as well]. Whitehead grew up inspired by her mother's home art and the Chicano murals surrounding her neighborhood. She loved to draw and paint, and her mother encouraged her by providing art supplies and making a special wall in their home available for her to add a drawing or two.

Whitehead took the long route to becoming an artist, first as a tattoo artist for 15 years and later as a bank employee. In 2020, she enrolled as an art major at San Antonio College. After earning her associate degree, she transferred to UT San Antonio, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts with minors in Business Administration and Art History. Whitehead paints and also works in printmaking.



Uri Whitehead, "Mijo." Courtesy of Dock Space Gallery. Photo by Ricardo Romo

Harriett and I first met Whitehead last year when she was doing an internship with Luis "Chispas" Guerrero, an established metal sculptor. When we arrived at her studio, she stopped her welding, removed the metal face mask that protected her from sparks, and explained how much she enjoyed building large metal figures. Whitehead enjoys welding metal sculptures, working with reclaimed steel and found materials from local metal salvage yards.



Uri Whitehead, “The Unsaid and Unsent.” Courtesy of Dock Space Gallery. Photo by Ricardo Romo

At the Dock Space Art Gallery, Whitehead exhibited several paintings that incorporated metal figures attached to the top of the frame. She told us that her artistic approach is to incorporate symbolism in the imagery to create a narrative. The small metal figures appear to be inspecting her painting. One Dock Space Gallery painting of a young boy, “Mijo,” is partly biographical and partly a San Antonio Westside family story. As the child [Mijo] paints the upper sections of an urban sky, one can recognize several familiar Westside buildings such as the Malt House and El Paraiso Paletas.