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Exhibition honors the life and career of iconic San Antonio artist Chuck Ramirez



Chuck Ramirez, 1964-2010. Whatacup, 2002. Digital print. Collection of the Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas. © Estate of Chuck Ramirez, Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas.

SAN ANTONIO, TX.- Chuck Ramirez's large-scale photographs of everyday objects offer a humorous yet poignant perspective on our culture of consumption and waste, and the reality of fleeting life and mortality. Ramirez was inspired by opposing themes—life/death and humor/despair—and by his work as a graphic designer at Texas supermarket giant H-E-B. Chuck Ramirez: All This and Heaven Too opened at [the McNay](#) on September 14 and runs through January 14, 2018.

Ramirez's art explores a personal narrative including his San Antonio upbringing, Mexican-American heritage, and HIV+ status, making the project relevant to Texas and the broader arena of contemporary art and photography. Ramirez's photographs were created as several themed series explored over the course of his career. For example, Santos presents images of the bottoms of religious sculptures most often used for

private devotion. This dichotomy of celebration and irreverence appears throughout the work. Other series, such as Trash Bag, Quarantine, and Seven Days, make the perishable permanent, whether in objects, moments, or memories. In others, Ramirez replaces an object for a person, where photography of a purse or piñata becomes a portrait. Through his work, the deeply personal becomes clinically sterile, and vice versa, yet all of the works explore the human experience.

“Sometimes, if you’re lucky, an artist can help you make sense of the world,” says McNay director Richard Aste. “If you’re really lucky, that artist also helps you find your special place within it. Chuck Ramirez was that kind of artist.”

The exhibition—the first major survey of Ramirez’s work—is co-organized by René Paul Barilleaux, the McNay’s Head of Curatorial Affairs, and Hilary Schroeder, 2016-17 Semmes Foundation Intern in Museum Studies. The presentation includes photographs from approximately 20 of Ramirez’s series; Bean & Cheese, a recreation of one of the artist’s early exhibitions at Artpace San Antonio; examples of video and installation work; nine decorated Christmas trees the artist made for friend and patron Linda Pace; and other unique artworks.

The exhibition checklist is selected from museum collections, private collections, and the estate of Chuck Ramirez.

“Regardless of subject, Ramirez’s images are devoid of human inhabitants yet filled with a deep and palpable humanity,” Barilleaux notes. “And despite the fact that his career spanned only 15 years, Chuck Ramirez succeeded in establishing for himself a significant place among the canon of Texas artists whose work is known and revered far beyond state lines.”

The accompanying 82-page publication places Ramirez’s art within the broader context of contemporary photography through two essays. Curator and San Antonio native Edward Hayes surveys Ramirez’s art as it is filtered through his biography and personal narrative. Writer and curator Elizabeth Ferrer discusses Ramirez in the context of Latino art. Curator Barilleaux enhances the publication with additional insights.