

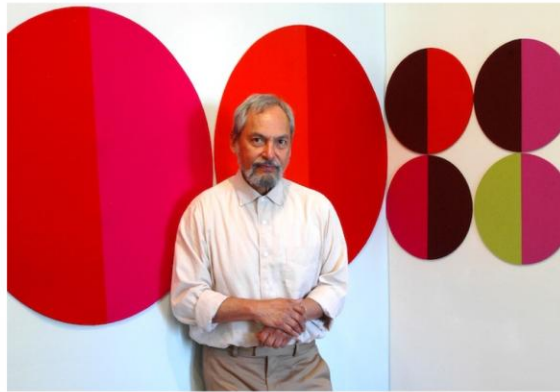
# RIVARD REPORT

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## Prescription Drugs Drive Jesse Amado's New Work

MARCO AQUINO on 1 May, 2015 at 10:27



Jesse Amado, one of San Antonio's most accomplished artists, opened a new exhibition of recent works, "30 Day Rx," at [Ruiz-Healy Art](#) on Thursday. Amado (pictured above) will attend an "artist talk" at the gallery at 201 E. Olmos Dr. with independent curator Patty Ortiz on May 9 at 1 p.m.

The work in "30 Day Rx" draws from the gamut of consequences and effects on the body that come from the use of prescription drugs.

Amado's medium is wool felt, which has become one of his favorite materials to use. "Materiality is my thing," Amado said during a recent visit to his home. Felt is soft, sensuous, and colorful. It's a material that lends itself well to the experimentation and "play activity" that have become central to Amado's work.

In the "Tablet" series, Amado arranges a variety of geometric forms together which resemble pills. The series is a nod to the works of [Ross Bleckner](#) and [Damien Hirst](#).

Amado is familiar with both the benefits and the havoc that prescriptions drugs may wreak on the body, having recently faced his own bout with illness. He says he has also seen others who have battled depression and addiction.

In another series titled "Consequences," Amado explores the negative spaces found in the felt templates he uses. Here, Amado drapes, stacks, and brings together mounds of material. The work evokes the range of emotions one may experience from the use of drugs – from the emotional highs to the inevitable crash. Some creations speak of excess. Others seem more orderly.

He calls these works his "placebos." He admits some of the work may come from a process of self-healing, yet is careful not to devalue the process of art making. For Amado, art is work that requires sacrifice and discipline.

Several years ago when he was diagnosed with cancer, he shut down his studio. Today, he makes art at his home. Amado shared with me some of his most recent creations. He lives with his art on the walls and floors of his living room, his bedroom, and in his closet.

During our conversation, he points to a recent work consisting of two store-bought canvases. They were only partially unwrapped and partially painted. "I wasn't exhausted, but I couldn't afford to do it," he said of the work. "I could be dead by tomorrow. I got as far as pulling off the plastic. There is urgency because we are mortal. Instead of being morbid about it, I just work faster. Life can be snatched away at any time. I saw it when I used to work for the fire department."

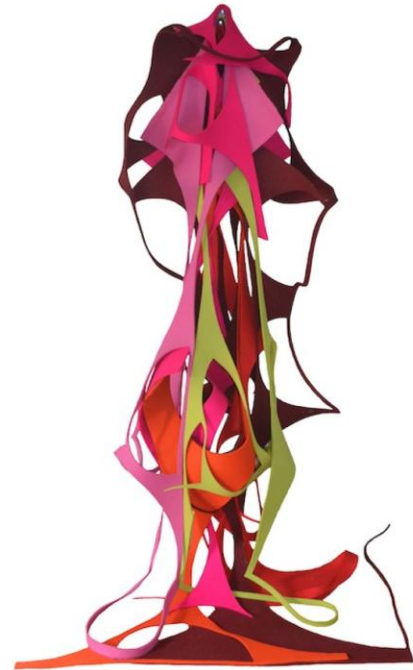
Amado says his message has always been clear even before his illness. "I want to speak about universal truths," he said. He is always investigating. Always looking for something new.

"Market demands don't want you to do that," Amado said. "It is easier for galleries to sell work (that is less experimental).

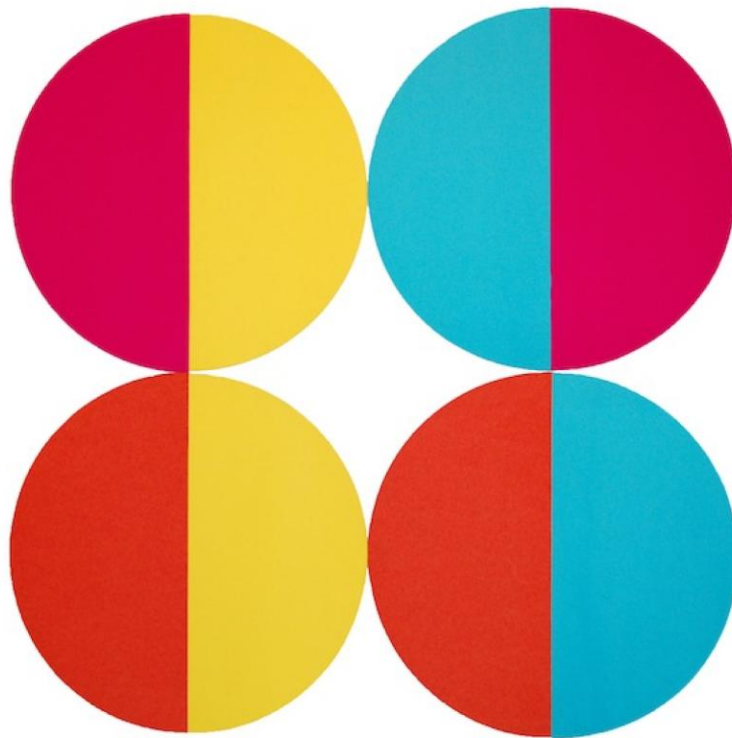
"I've gotten into arguments with gallerists about it. ... Over time, people got used to the idea of something different from me every time. There is always going to be change happening."

He recalled when he was called out in public for not producing the more stereotypical work expected from Mexican-American artists. "I was talking about concepts and not pictures," Amado said, making a clear distinction between his work and other artists who often incorporate iconographic images into their work.

Amado's art is influenced by many cultures. "The world is round, and we know that," he says citing his Iberian, Mexican American, and Texan background.



*"Consequences #1" by Jesse Amado. Courtesy photo.*



*"Four Tablets" by Jesse Amado.*

But he revealed his respect and admiration for one artist associated with the Chicano Art Movement—the late **Mel Casas**. He was one of the few artists whose “approval” Amado sought. During Casas’s time as head of the art department at **San Antonio College**, he bought several of Amado’s drawings.

Amado sees one local institution as being instrumental in the careers of several artists, and which facilitates new ideas and experimentation in their work: **Artpace**.

In 1995 Amado, **Felix Gonzalez-Torres**, and **Annette Messenger** were the first artists to participate in the inaugural **International-Artist-in-Residence** program at Artpace. His own interactions with Gonzalez-Torres and Messenger were limited, but he credits the program as having a major impact on the local art community by bringing international artists to San Antonio. He recalls later participating artists such as the filmmaker **Tracey Moffatt** who were able to interact and build relationships with local artists such as **Alejandro Diaz**, **Chuck Ramirez**, and himself.

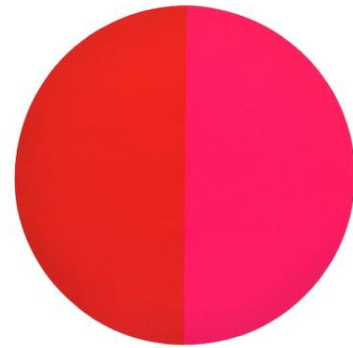
He sees a “lineage of some of the world’s most important conceptual artists” that begins with Gonzalez-Torres and includes artist Gabriel Orozco, and now **Oscar Murillo**—a spring 2015 Artist-in-Residence at Artpace. Murillo’s work is currently on view at Artpace until May 17. Amado takes pride in the fact that these “conceptual” artists also happen to be Latino. “I like that idea,” Amado said.

This summer, Amado is teaching drawing classes at the **Southwest School of Art**. He often tells his students to “make art, not pictures.”

“They want to make art. They may not fully understand what that means, but I try to tap into that,” he said.

Amado considers a work of art “unfinished” until it is presented to the public. Presentation is as important as its creation. “It’s like theatre,” he said. “My strength is in activating and beautifying a space.”

The opening at Ruiz-Healy has completed this process.



*"Tablet #1" by Jesse Amado.*

*\*Featured/top image: Jesse Amado and his "30 Day Rx" exhibit at Ruiz-Healy Art. Courtesy photo.*



#### MARCO AQUINO

Marco Aquino writes about the local arts and culture scene.

[FACEBOOK](#)