

RED DOT INTERVIEW – ANGELICA RAQUEL MARTINEZ,

CON MI ALMA, SIN MI CUERPO

INTERVIEWED BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA ON JULY 9, 2020



Angelica Raquel Martinez,
Con Mi Alma/ Sin Mi Cuerpo, 2019
Fibers, monks cloth
52 x 36"
Courtesy of the artist.

AG: Can you tell me a little more about the artwork that you submitted for Red Dot this year?

AM: It's a rug hooked piece that I made for my thesis show. I recently graduated from UTSA and my thesis show consisted of several types of materials including textiles, felting, painting, and drawing. That piece [*Sin Mi Cuerpo, Con mi Alma*] was part of an

installation for a larger sculpture about the soul leaving the body of the animal. *Sin Mi Cuerpo, Con mi Alma* is the representation of the soul and the physical sculpture was the life and death of the creature. That show hasn't happened yet because it was scheduled in April; unfortunately, we had to postpone it because it was right when the pandemic started happening. I felt like *Sin Mi Cuerpo, Con mi Alma* on its own was something new and unique to my process of working. I've started to work using [the] technique of rug hooking with other images and storytelling which is what my work is about: folklore, storytelling, magic and myth, and the idea of the soul and death.

AG: How would you describe a typical day of working on pieces like *Sin Mi Cuerpo, Con mi Alma*? Or the preparation for it?

AM: My work is based on folklore, growing up in Laredo, and my family's spirituality and connection to nature. We always had this ritual of storytelling. A lot of [them] were really scary stories, things that are very violent, and that are about love, violence, hate, monsters, demons, and good and evil. That's what I grew up with, so I take some of those stories from a shared past from this culture that I grew up in; I didn't realize that [that culture of storytelling] was so unique [to] living on the border. I couple that with questions of what I see in culture, society, and human-animal interactions. I have all these ideas in my head and I start sketching it out on Post-it notes. Once I find a very quick, loose gesture of a composition that I'm really interested in, I work on a larger piece of paper. [Since] I need to know exactly what format and composition I need to use on the rug hookings, I have to have that concrete [image] on paper. By just looking at that piece of paper and transcribing it onto something larger, it changes and shifts eventually. It's several steps and layers to get to that point of even starting to work on the monk's cloth, which is the material that you punch the yarn through. From there [is]

when I start figuring out color choices, so it happens really organically and [loosely] as I go through it, which is really different from how I work through paintings and drawings which are much more planned and much more representational in my work. These [rug hookings] are very abstract compared to what I usually work with.

AG: You were talking a lot about how your art is based off of stories from your family and growing up on the border. How do you feel that those childhood experiences shaped the art that you make today?

AM: I've been really interested in making art from childhood. There was a point in time where I was really interested in studying zoology and biology, so that's what I started with in undergrad. My fascination for animals and wildlife, and my interest in the spiritual and the unknown has always been there, but for a long time I was really shy about opening up about the spiritual part. Once I had moved from Laredo, I realized how unique the magic and the lore that I grew up with was. I guess not everyone knew the stories or understood exactly the importance of that culture, so I was really shy about it. Once I got into graduate school, I started trying to question why I am so interested in these topics and the study of animals in general.

Recently my grandfather passed away. He was the one who really kept his family interested in the ritual of storytelling, spirituality, camping, and [the idea] of connecting with and giving to nature as much as you take from it. That loss really impacted me and has completely shaped where my art begins. I feel the most genuine I've ever felt in terms of my process of making and creating. It's like honoring [the] part of my life that I've shunned for some time, so it's extremely important. It's the catalyst of my work in general and [the work] that's in Red Dot.

AG: Do you think that your work follows a specific style or method?

AM: I used to follow a bit of a formula. I think once I started translating my work from the two-dimensional to a sculpture or fabric fibers, it started changing slightly. As an exercise, I've tried to force myself to work in new ways, but it's difficult. This is just how I work. Depending on what the subject matter is determines more or less how the imagery takes shape. When I use a lot of references for my paintings and drawings, the work tends to look more realistic; But when I work from stories that I write for myself or stories that I get from my family, it's a lot looser, so that definitely plays a role in how they appear. As for the compositions, I'm more interested in symbolism. I like things to be more inside this body of whatever medium is on the surface. For my work, I feel that environments are more potent when it's in an installation.

AG: What is the story that *Con Mi Alma Sin Mi Cuerpo* is based off of?

AM: That one is part of a piece that is a 7-foot tall sculpture of a deer. Part of the importance of that piece is the experience of it: walking into the gallery, seeing the sculpture, and experiencing it all around. There's different imagery as you walk around this sculpture. That rug-hooked piece is the soul leaving the animal. When you enter the gallery, you'd see the sculpture has two heads: one side is life and the other side is death. When you walk around the "life" side, you would see the soul leaving and would understand it fully when you see the "dead" side across the gallery. [*Con Mi Alma Sin Mi Cuerpo* is] like leaving the sorrow and sadness of death, but [is also] this freedom that comes from that release of the soul. All that came from my first real familial death of my grandfather, who was really important to my family. His loss really impacted all of us, so that piece is like a memorial to who he was and his connection to the natural world. I was questioning at the time how that would translate into my life going forward and

really feeling the continued importance of that relationship. Even though he has died, he still really impacts me and my family heavily, daily. It's very personal. Most of the imagery in the show has to do with either experiences of myself growing up, stories that my family told, the general experience of his death, understanding [the] type of impact [a person has] in somebody's life, or the questions that people have after [experiencing loss].

AG: Do you think your work responds to questions about the future or questions about the past?

AM: I think it's both. I feel that it's important to preserve and look toward a shared past in order to have that richness come into the future. It's really important to not lose those roots and experiences, to not completely shut them away. I've been thinking about the idea of the adult fairy tale because a lot of what I heard was never censored, it was one type of tale for us all to imagine together around a fire. It was incredible—scary, but incredible.

AG: You're saying that like stories are being told to everyone in your family together. How do you think people create their own images?

AM: It's each their own. It's through however you visualize; everyone is so unique. I feel like the imagery that I've come up with is very different from what my family members thought. Some [may be] more impacted by the visceral quality of the stories or the intensity and violence, whereas my work tends to be very soft. For me, it's important to have that softness, lushness, attractiveness and almost childlike quality that a child could look at and be fascinated by. That [fascinated child] was me with how scared, but in love with it I still am. My family still gets together and tells these stories even though my grandfather has passed.

AG: Where is the best place that people can follow you for updates?

AM: I'd say it's Instagram @angelicaraquel24, that's where I have all my stories. I do have a website <https://www.angelicaraquelart.com/> [where] I post all the professional imagery of my work, but my Instagram is the best because I post in-progress shots all the time.

AG: I really want to see your show now, just hearing you talk about it, I need to know where the location is. It sounds really cool.

AM: It'll be at FL!GHT gallery in October. Whether everything is still quarantined by then I don't know, we've been postponing it constantly. I really wanted to share it with my family—they were all gonna drive up—but with everything, unfortunately, I decided to postpone it. I need to have this show though. I've been working [on] it since my grandfather was sick and dying, and I kind of need this as a [form] of closure because a lot of it is extremely personal.

ABOUT ANGELICA RAQUEL MARTINEZ

Angelica Raquel Martinez is an artist living and working in San Antonio, Texas. She recently completed a Masters in Fine Arts at The University of Texas at San Antonio.

Angelica originally is from border city Laredo. She relocated to San Marcos, to earn her Bachelors in Fine Arts at Texas State University prior to living in San Antonio. Her work has been exhibited recently at Field Projects Gallery, New York NY; Rockport Center for the Arts; Amarillo Museum of Art; and the University of Arlington, amongst other venues. More at www.angelicaraquelart.com

ABOUT ÁNGELA GARCÍA

Ángela García is Blue Star Contemporary's Arts, Letters, and Enterprise summer intern from McAllen, TX. She is pursuing a BA in Art History at Trinity University, and plans to study architecture after receiving her undergraduate degree. García has also worked as a studio intern for Artpace San Antonio, a radio host for KRTU 91.7FM, and has done volunteer work at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX. She works in digital and film photography and analog collage.