

RED DOT ARTIST INTERVIEW – ASHLEY PEREZ

INTERVIEWED BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA ON JUNE 30, 2020



Ashley Perez
***Southcross*, 2019**
Oil on wood
38" x 47" x 2"
Courtesy of the artist.

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

AP: It's entitled *Southcross*. [It] is an oil painting on wood. I made that last year.

[*Southcross*] has a lot of meaning and has been a catalyst for the work that I'm doing right now. It's part of what I'm referring to these days as the "Forgiveness Project"

AG: Do you maintain relationships with your collectors?

AP: Sometimes. It really depends, but it's great to run into them in the art community, especially when you're out at galleries. Some people who have collected my work follow

me and see how I'm growing. [They] typically like things that were similar to the work that they had purchased originally and so they're always interested to see how I'm growing.

AG: What was an experience with art that changed your life?

AP: Starting from a young age, I joined a youth after school art's organization called [SAY Sí](#). It was there that I realized the importance of art and it really made it real for me. The community and the people that I have met there continue to be a part of my life, and now I'm the visual arts director over there at SAY Sí. It's one of the biggest parts of my life and definitely a pivotal series of moments that led me in the right direction. That's how I know Blue Star Contemporary because [SAY Sí and BSC are] neighbors and I got to regularly see all the exhibits that were there and . . . a lot of work that I probably would not have seen if I hadn't been so close to there. So, I'm really excited to be a part of the Red Dot to help in any way that I can.

AG: You say that participating in Say Sí helped you realize the importance of art, what is that importance to you?

AP: I think that there's an alternative way to see success and I think that that might not always be apparent when you're in high school. So, thinking about success as an opportunity to express yourself in a way that's most appropriate for you and knowing that your voice is heard. That other people have interest in what you're saying and how you're expressing it and how that actually is a huge part of our community. I think when you're young you're just going through and making things and not realizing the bigger picture. I don't think it was until later that I realized the impact of those experiences in

my relation to art, but it was definitely at the back of my mind. It felt like an invisible driver for me.

AG: How do you feel those experiences in your youth shaped the art you make now?

AP: I think I have a special relationship with what I'm doing. I think that most of it is just doing the work and getting into the studio. SAY Sí has definitely driven home the need to create a motivation within yourself to do it and to figure out what is going to inspire you and what is going to move you to make this work, because once the assignments are done, it's just you and your own will to move forward. I think another part of it is just becoming comfortable with showing my artwork from an early age. I think I needed that. I was a very shy, awkward person, I still am, but I think I'm better at it having been forced into those situations in a way. Being at galleries, understanding what it means to be a professional artist, to answer emails, to say yes when opportunities arrive, to ask for help, and to stay true to the kind of work that's important to you. That helps me maintain my practice.

AG: Would you say you associate yourself with a specific style?

AP: I do have a language that I use. I use a lot of metaphor and simile and mostly it is having to do with the natural world. I feel really comfortable with personifying different aspects of nature and using those ideas to suit me and my current process. For example, in the work that I've submitted for Red Dot, I have the fishing hook that is disguised to trick a fish, but it's made from bird feathers to look like an insect. That layered approach to what is essentially a lie really spoke to me when I was talking about the idea of trust. Those are the kinds of symbols that I [have used] throughout my years.

My senior show [in high school] was elephants and it had to do with grief and memory and my continuous obsession with texture. I love texture.

AG: I can see the texture in all the feathers in the duck. When I first saw [Southcross] I thought it was a collage, that's how realistic I thought the feathers on the ducks looked.

AP: That's actually the look I was going for because it was a fishing lure painting. Six months later, I added the beheaded ducks on top and I taped them off really specifically so that the lines were really sharp to look like a piece of cut paper. So actually, I made collages, [and] was going back and forth using Photoshop and printing and cutting things out to see how the painting might look. I really enjoy that flatness, I feel like it's another trick, right? So [it's] also [related] talking about what's real and what you can trust. That's another reasoning behind that style.

AG: Has living in San Antonio shaped your art in any way? How?

AP: I really love this town. I feel bad for people who don't get to live here. The art community in San Antonio is really tight and supportive. I've always felt like it's very attainable to maneuver through this world. The opportunity for mentorship with other artists is right there. I feel like everybody just wants to help each other. I know that the art world changes and shifts with gentrification and everything that surrounds that, but I've always felt that there's good intentions here in this community. There could be more access, but there is a lot of opportunity for access [than] in other places [where] artists might feel a little more isolated. Anytime I [meet] a favorite local artist, it's always a good feeling. They're always really down to earth, have a lot to share, and they're really open.

AG: Do you think [*Southcross*] responds to questions about the future or questions about the past?

AP: Well that one in particular is a family portrait, so it is about the past because it has my mom in it and she passed away a few years ago. When a family member dies, sometimes what happens is that you learn things, things come up that you hadn't realized. It really makes you feel uncertain, so some of these works are in part a response to that. That's why there's no heads. It doesn't seem like any of the birds are acknowledging each other or are aware of what's missing. They're kind of flailing and without something. The purple heart plant that's there is a plant that you will probably look outside and see because it's everywhere. It's a purple, leafy type plant that doesn't require any help to grow. They use it a lot in landscaping. It's the kind of thing I grew up seeing a lot, and so I actually don't like this plant, I think it's very ugly. But [I included it] not because it's ugly, [but] because of the memories tied to the location of that time and space where I was seeing that plant a lot. I'm trying to take that memory and make it not that anymore. I want it to be medicinal in some ways, like [a] face-your-fear approach to the plant as a symbol.

AG: Sort of like a self-reflection?

AP: Exactly, exactly right. I think what I'm doing in my current work is talking to other people and conducting interviews about forgiveness and how other people process these emotions. What is their current stance on forgiveness and were these behaviors learned? If we're talking about memory and the past, it definitely shapes how you interact with your interpersonal relationships. What I'm doing now that's exciting is I started with [*Southcross*], which really focuses on me trying to understand [forgiveness], and now I'm moving toward the broader community and how we understand this.

AG: Where is the best place to follow you for updates?

AP: I'll be updating my [website](#) with my newest work. Instagram [@ashleypaints](#) is another place. I do a lot of paintings in my sketch books these days that are reminiscent of my larger work. I think with those two powers combined you'll get a good sense of my artistic way of being. Any questions or inquiries that anyone has, I'm very open to sharing.

ABOUT ASHLEY PEREZ

Ashley Perez is a San Antonio, Texas based artist who works in a variety of mediums whose practice centers around painting and drawing. She is an alumna of SAY Sí, a national-award-winning creative youth development program. This unique opportunity as a young artist led her to earn her BFA in painting at The University of Texas San Antonio. She now runs the visual arts middle school and high school programs at SAY Sí, where she uses her practice to mentor the next generation of creative leaders. More at www.ashleyperezart.weebly.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.