Review: “Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Open this Wall” at Ruby City, San Antonio

JONATHAN RINCK | MAY 27, 2026

Open this Wall at Ruby City’s Studio annex presents an ensemble of paintings by Texas artist Daniel Rios Rodriguez. It’s an autobiographical body of work largely informed by the artist’s time living in San Antonio from 2013 to 2025. While the specific inspiration behind these works are largely personal, and at times veiled in dream-inspired symbolism, what invariably comes across is a life-affirming optimism and a heartfelt affection for San Antonio and its river.

Born in Killeen, Texas, and a graduate of the University of Illinois and Yale, Rodriguez currently calls Dallas home, where he teaches at Southern Methodist University. But he took some of his first art classes at San Antonio College, so the show is something of an artistic homecoming of sorts. Rodriguez cites Texas “outsider” artist Forrest Bess as an influence, and the similarities are striking. His paintings possess what the *New York Times* describes as “a distinct folk-art feel.” Rodriguez’s paintings are situated in rough-hewn rustic, sculptural frames. And embedded in his paintings are a host of found materials: nails, rope, Texas mountain laurel, foil, copper, limestone, cement, wood, marbles, pebbles, and the list goes on.

An installation view of "Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Open this Wall" at Ruby City

Entering the Studio, viewers will encounter the gallery's central wall now positioned at an oblique angle, subtly referencing an open door. Here, we find an ensemble of drawings in graphite and pen and ink. After his move to San Antonio, Rodriguez produced much *en plein air* work documenting the city's riverwalk. His *Rios SA* is a wispy, playful, and reductive pen and ink drawing that plays tribute to this urban oasis, which he walked and biked regularly, and which informs many of the works in the show. Some of the other drawings in this opening salvo are more disquieting; for example, images of skulls and face masks, produced in 2020, recall the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

His paintings are visceral and sculptural. The highly abstract *Lion Feathers* is as much sculpture as painting, a vortex of wood, rope, and found objects forcefully projecting outward into the viewer's space. Works like this are often sprinkled with found objects sourced from Rodriguez's bike rides on San Antonio's riverwalk, paying homage to the river in very tactile ways.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, "Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning," 2022-23, oil, acrylic, rope, wood, and foil on canvas, 86 x 114 x 3 1/2 inches. On view in "Open this Wall" at Ruby City

An ensemble of several large paintings in thick impasto visually anchor the exhibition, each displayed on a separate wall. They reference the artist's dreams, though not always directly or literally (one can't help but reflect that much of this museum campus was itself directly inspired by Linda Pace's dreams). Two large-scale paintings of eagles, positioned on opposite walls, represent the artist himself. *Reincarnation of a Lovebird: Morning, the Future* is a close-up of a determined eagle, brows furrowed, set against a blazing sun peering over the distant horizon. Though the painting is a dizzying amalgamation of mosaiclike patches of color, the painting's tranquil green (rhyming with the teal of the gallery space) lends the work an overall sense of serenity. But the painting, situating a determined eagle over a sunrise, also conveys restless anticipation. On the wall opposite, *Reincarnation of a Lovebird Noon: (Low Flyn' Bird)* is an absolute riot of color and exuberance, the form of the eagle nearly getting completely lost in the riverscape below.

An installation view of "Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Open this Wall" at Ruby City

A third large-scale painting, *Open This Wall*, is a teal painted labyrinthine network of meandering lines, reminiscent of a maze. References to ladders and portals throughout this and other works speak to an optimism and seem indicative of progress forward and ascent, however abstractly portrayed.

The allusive meanings of some of these paintings, and the dreams or events that inspired them, will understandably be lost on many viewers (though works like *Heat Bloom* will absolutely resonate with anyone familiar with a scorching Texas summer, and naturalistic drawings like *Horsemint* and *Little Wings* document the understated wildlife along the San Antonio River). Furthermore, there's no didactic text on the wall explaining the hidden stories behind these works; the exhibition daringly invites viewers to engage with the art on its own terms, though a helpful exhibition booklet reveals some of the secrets and backstories of these works.

In terms of cubic footage, the Studio annex in Chris Park is dwarfed by the imposing Ruby City museum across the street. Despite that comparison it's not small, so it's certainly not easy for a single artist to fill the space. But *Open this Wall* is a visually satisfying show that fills the space comfortably. Furthermore, the exhibition presents Rodriguez's first large-scale work. Not wanting these paintings to be presented in the traditional "white cube" space, Rodriguez painted the walls teal, and added subtle decorative swirling floral and organic accents as a way to, in effect, bring the San Antonio riverwalk into the space. *Open This Wall* is a delightful exhibition, and in his practice of incorporating humble found objects into so many of these works, Rodriguez's art manages, if I may steal a phrase from author John Updike, to "give the mundane its beautiful due."

Open this Wall *is on view through October 4, 2026, at Ruby City in San Antonio.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

JONATHAN RINCK

Jonathan Rinck is an art history instructor and writer. After many years teaching at a small liberal arts university in Michigan, he recently moved to Texas where he teaches art history and art appreciation at San Antonio College. He has written for a variety of publications, including "Publisher's Weekly," "The Detroit Art Review," "Hyperallergic," and "Sculpture" magazine.

ALL POSTS

ARTFORUM

Daniel Rios Rodriguez

by Natalie Harren | October 2025

There was much to reward scrupulous viewers of Daniel Rios Rodriguez's fussed-over paintings, with their hand-built frames, graceful orchestrations of unruly color, and judiciously applied bits of canvas, semiprecious stones, gold leaf, and sculpted wire. In Midnight Electrician, 2025, a tiny pebble of turquoise seemed to regard itself in some nearby shards of mirror, which have been carefully set into the work's frame. With our gaze scaled to the mineral's point of view, the composition's laborious details gradually come into riveting focus. A faceless figure climbs a floating staircase past a canvas-scrap lightning bolt and involuted-wire sun toward a mountaintop home ringed in an aureole of gold. From there, a magenta river wends downward to a green form resembling a snail shell, a shape partially derived from Mesoamerican virgulas—tonguelike spirals that signify speech.

Each of Rodriguez's works is its own contained world. With talismanic charm, his abstracted landscapes depict anonymous figures and creatures who climb, fly, and float through trickily discernible portals, labyrinths, and mountains. Across multiple

canvases, we saw black cats playing sentry in seated profile, emoji-like balls of fire erupting, blackbirds swooping, and a salmon-pink zigzag of mountain peaks, suggesting dimensionality and place while flattening the scene in one decisive gesture. The paintings contained all manner of material and symbolic detritus—ciphers, graphemes—gathered as much from art history as from Rodriguez's wanderings along the San Antonio River near his home. One could have dutifully catalogued the sourced items present in these works, but most of the artist's iconographic details do not readily yield their meaning. However, even as his symbolism is highly personal, it doesn't come across as calculated or imperious. There is a generous sense of humor and wonder at all that a painting can contain while still remaining mysterious—perhaps even to its maker.

Rodriguez's paintings contain frames within frames that multiply the edges of the support. In Casa Llena (Full House), 2012–25, and two of cups, 2025, gold leaf was secreted along the works' sides and back edges, spatially activating areas we could barely see—indeed, we may rightly wonder what Easter eggs are hidden behind the artist's canvases. With their complexly integrated layers, Rodriguez's imagistic works forward a logic of symbolic and material accretion that gives even the smallest paintings a large presence. At just over fourteen by ten inches, A Tender Victory, 2012–25, depicted a green door—apparently a nod to Cézanne—that is ajar, through which escapes a flaming yellow light. Counteracting that gap is the work's actual pillowy convexity. Overstuffed and bulging on its left side, the canvas itself seems to be a door about to open into the viewer's space,a magic portal to who knows where. Punctuating this standoff between 2D and 3D space, the sharp end of a bright-red nail juts out near the door's center and casts a true shadow, as if in riposte to the old Cubist trompe l'oeil joke in which the artist winkingly flattens his multidimensional forms with, say, a rendering of a single nail and its shadow (see, for instance, Braque's Still-Life with Violin and Pitcher, 1909–10). Extending Cubism's play with the grammar of illusionism, Rodriguez exploits the conjoined powers of visual representation and material instantiation to destabilize our perception of reality.

The largest works in the show, Sweet Fire and Open this wall, both 2024, were testaments to Rodriguez's wide-ranging and scholarly syncretism. The paintings' rough-hewn, graphic qualities treat 1980s neo-expressionism as something just as "ancient" and historically valuable as Mesoamerican architecture, synthetic Cubism, and Surrealism's hallucinatory figuration. Among the works' strongest qualities are their maximalist colors and horror vacui. These elements hearken back to the riotous work of the 1970s Los Angeles Chicano artist collective Los Four, especially the bold, illustrational work of group members Carlos Almaraz and Frank Romero. Rodriguez decolonizes art history not through overt critique but by diluting the singular force of European masters, crowding the ancestral scene with equally—if not more so—powerful and relevant sources.

Glasstire
{Texas visual art}

An Interview with Daniel Rios Rodriguez

by Colette Copeland | March 8, 2022

I met with Daniel Rios Rodriguez in early January at his studio in south San Antonio. We discussed his connection and commitment to the land, his family, and painting. His work is well known internationally and nationally, but has not received as much attention in his home state of Texas. Over the last three years, he has had solo exhibitions in Dublin, Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto. He received his BFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago (2005) and his MFA from the Yale School of Art (2007).

Colette Copeland (CC): Daniel, I really enjoyed visiting your studio and hearing about how you transformed the property from a condemned building with years of neglect and discarded debris into the magical working space you have today. Please share your journey of how you acquired the property and the renovations you've made, as well as how it has impacted not only your artistic practice, but the surrounding community.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez (DRR): Sometime in 2017, I came across a run-down property on the southside of San Antonio with a tattered and weed covered “For Sale“ sign. The property itself was being sold by someone who inherited it and owed years’ worth of back taxes, so they were eager to work with me on the price in exchange for the labor involved to get it off The City of San Antonio’s condemned list. The entire property was overgrown and filled with garbage and buried carpets. I‘ve spent the last four years cleaning up, rebuilding and planting trees. I demolished one of the illegal structures and gutted the 900 square-foot house to turn it into an open floor plan studio. It’s a complete work in progress, but the transformation has in many ways paralleled and facilitated the growth of my work and myself. At this point the studio is just as much a work of art as any painting or sculpture.

CC: We discussed the Theaster Gates model of social practice — making change through purchasing properties and dedicating the spaces to art/artists. How does your commitment to the community inform your painting practice?

DRR: Theaster has a far more ambitious agenda for his work as it relates to a social practice. For me, being a decent neighbor is important enough, and taking the time to talk to people in the neighborhood is a part of a small-scale social practice. My neighbors all know I‘m an artist and that I‘m there working daily.

CC: We spoke about your love for the river and how walking either alone or with your children influences your painting, be it collecting objects from your excursions or how the time spent in meditative reflection sparks your creativity. What is it about the river that continues to inspire you?

DRR: I‘ve always thought of the San Antonio River as being modest in the same way the city itself is modest when compared to other large cities in Texas. The river is a place that holds a lot of fascination, memories, and life for me. In the last eight years it’s become a place where I‘ve returned to for solitude or activity with my children. Over time, I have developed an affection for certain bends and paths. I’ve watched the trees and riverbanks grow and change alongside the changes in my own life. It‘s also become an extension of my studio and where I do most of my critical and open thinking. In terms of its material nature, I‘ve spent a lot of time drawing and collecting bits of rubbish that I’d incorporate into my paintings. Unidentifiable bits of plastic and metal became the color and texture of my work, the wildlife and wildflowers became the imagery from which I drew upon, and the symbolic content was/is that of my love for my children and of love more broadly. I would paint regardless of the river, but the river inevitably washes up in my mind as I work.

CC: You spoke about how, after living in Brooklyn, NY for three years, your move back to Texas radically shifted your work. How has the return to Texas affected the themes in your work, such as connection to land, physical space, and relationship to family?

DRR: Life is just organized differently in larger cities like New York. I felt I was always shuffling from one structure to another in order to survive, and the hustle to pay rent, raise kids, and paint was more than a full-time job. When my ex-wife, Veronica, and our kids, Paloma and Theo, and myself moved back to San Antonio, we essentially started over. It was at that point that I had massive amounts of time alone. I began to spend most of my time outside, because I found a studio apartment in the Lavaca neighborhood and was so close to the river. I also spent a lot more time reading, painting, and thinking about my kids who I was no longer living with. I missed what I had deeply, but was forging a new relationship with myself, with painting, and with San Antonio. The year I returned, I was also awarded the Louis Tiffany Comfort Foundation grant and that really did a lot for me in terms of giving me the time to work. In New York, I never felt I had enough time to work, and in San Antonio I had more time than ever. This changed everything.

CC: In reading the *New York Times* review of your 2020 exhibition, writer Martha Schwendener writes that your folk-art style is a conscious decision to dismiss the rules of Western Art History and formal painting. That comment does a

disservice to your work. We spoke a bit about how Yale does not teach a specific type of painting and that you did not learn to paint a certain way from your time there. Rather, you were encouraged to experiment with finding your own voice, ideas, and tools for creation. In some ways, your work deconstructs the history of painting, but it also embraces your unique style. You bring in found objects and create your frames from salvaged materials. Your earlier work is not large-scale, like so many painters working today.

DRR: My education at both UIC and Yale was hugely important, but it was anything but formal in training. You did not attend either of these schools to become a certain "kind" of painter, but perhaps rather to confirm whether you were or weren't one. This is my own opinion of course, but on the whole my education was undogmatic. (I am resistant to dogma on the whole, which is also why my stint in the Air Force was short-lived.) That being said, I really had no idea what to do with paint, so it was inevitable that material exploration became a matter of course. What anyone does when they don't know how to do something is to try and fail and try again. The incorporation of objects and materials into my work was not only a way to overcome my inabilities as a painter, it was also a way of getting to the point. Why paint snake skin if I can incorporate one? Why paint stones and feathers if they are the very things I pick up along my excursions? At this point I am not sure why any of this is seen outside the bounds of a painter's language, but it is understandable considering that most painting of the last 200 years has been a battle of paint on canvas. If we dig a little deeper and look beyond Western art, we see painting/sculpture/architecture and the natural world all sharing the stage and sometimes a surface. My desire to do just that but on a much smaller scale was a natural move for me and not a calculated one. It was a way to embrace my inclinations as a builder and my desire to paint. That in itself, to be a painter, is still very much a mystery to me.

CC: At one point in our conversation, you spoke about your philosophy of painting as a living space. That resonated with me on a deep level. Please explain what you mean by that.

DRR: Now Since I have a studio and basically a permanent work/live space, I am free of a kind of anxiety that so many artists and non-artists alike live with — that of displacement or at worst, homelessness. Artists need both the space and the time in order to articulate our energies and ideas. This is why residencies are so valuable. This particular kind of ownership of my own creative space has really allowed me to craft a daily ritual of entering into a painting space on my own terms and without fear. I come and go as I please, and the rhythm I've established in relation to the neighborhood, my dogs, my plants, and finally to my studio all serve to keep me painting.

ArtReview

‘Talismans of Optimism’: Meet the Artists of June

June Art Fair x Hauser and Wirth x ArtReview 31 July 2020

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, Till Megerle and Margaret Lee on their work, the future and the shift online

This year has not been an easy one for anyone, including artists and their galleries. In recognition of that, and of the obstacles to come, *ArtReview* is supporting the 2020 edition of June, a boutique art fair inaugurated last year in Basel by a select host of galleries. This year the fair is hosted online by Hauser & Wirth from 20–31 August and in weeks leading up we will be speaking to some of the artists involved.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, *Riparian Delights*, 2016, oil and objects on plywood with artist-made wood frame, 29 x 34 cm. Courtesy the artist and Lulu, Mexico City

Daniel Rios Rodriguez is showing with Lulu, Mexico City

ArtReview: Can you tell us about the works that will be on show in June Art Fair?

Daniel Rios Rodriguez: When news of the pandemic hit in March, I feel like many other artists felt a sense of urgency to respond. The unknowns of how we would all fare were looming and when I looked around my studio I decided immediately to spend my

time working on unfinished paintings. The six I will be showing at June are from a collection of around 25 works started over the last five years but which never previously made it out of the studio. My ambition at the time was to leave nothing unfinished. To my mind they are symbolic of the small groups of people we had to isolate with as we watched the grim news and mishandlings of the pandemic here in the US. I also believe them to be talismans of optimism for the future.

AR: This year June has moved to be an online fair – how has the fact that audiences' engagement with art has become increasingly digital (even before the pandemic) influenced your practice or the way you view art?

DRR: My work is very tactile and resists digital flattening. However, I think the scrolling effect has also offered a kind of training of the eyes to pause on novel surfaces and images. I gladly accept the challenge to be equally as engaging in both the digital and real world.

AR: How do you think the artworld might change in the wake of this year's events?

DRR: I don't know about the artworld but society in general has undergone a rude awakening that has forced us to speak a little louder but also be more engaged listeners. Suddenly there are more voices being heard and it seems inevitable that the artworld will have to show that it is listening.

AR: What else do you have coming up?

DRR: I have four paintings included in an exhibition at the Camden Art Centre, London, titled *The Botanical Mind* which opens in September. I also have my second solo presentation of paintings opening at Kerlin Gallery, Dublin in 2021.

OBSERVER

Lower East Side's Best Art Exhibitions Bring Us Brave New Subgenres of Abstraction

By Paddy Johnson • 02/27/2020

Abstraction has arrived in the Lower East Side. A visit to the neighborhood's galleries this month reveals a near survey of contemporary approaches using this technique. But while terms for more established subsets of abstraction abound—geometric, biomorphic, non-objective—few exist for the newer approaches populating contemporary galleries. Observer has a fix for that. I've taken the liberty of coming up with a few terms myself to help gallery goers out. Read and memorize these terms. Share them with your friends. They're all new movements—and you read about them first here.

Let's begin with what I like to call, "All Over Abstraction"—abstraction that extends beyond the canvas, onto the walls, and into the frames. Daniel Rios Rodriguez's intimate paintings currently on view at Nicelle Beauchene fit this bill. Rodriguez uses shaped frames to extend his abstractions outside of the canvas, at times applying paint on them, as if subsuming the structure. The work pairs a beach cottage vibe with a mystical new age aesthetic, recalling the work of Zach Harris. Harris similarly uses hand carved frames and patterning in his work but offers none of the Southwestern touchstones of Rodriguez.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, *Early Life*, 2020. Oil and mixed media on wood panel. Daniel Rios Rodriguez and Nicelle Beauchene

OBSERVER

All Over Abstraction leads to “Combinator Abstraction,” a term inspired by Robert Rauchenberg’s combine paintings and start up culture, though it has nothing to do with either. It refers to artists who assemble canvases together to create new work, like in Klaus Von Nichtssagend’s Pamela Jorden exhibition. In her latest show, shaped canvases fill the gallery’s spaces with vibrant colored washes that resemble Helen Frankenthaler’s soak stained paintings. Muscular in approach, Jorden uses her full arm span to apply the paint, later combining the canvases to create monumental shapes built on their relationship to each other.

The approach melds All Over Abstraction with exhibition design, and Jorden isn’t the only one in the Lower East Side using the technique. Juanita McNeely presents a running series of canvases that wrap around the walls of James Feuntes creating a single continuous surface. In these works abstraction distorts the figure, often creating nightmare-like scenes. The early paintings from 1969 respond to an abortion McNeely needed when the procedure was illegal, the later works respond to life-altering accident in which the artist’s spinal cord was damaged.

Another hot genre in the LES: “Broken Carnival Set Abstraction.” You’ll know it when you see it. It looks something like the fiber art of Julia Bland and Michelle Segre at Derek Eller, which fill the gallery with dreamcatcher-shaped sculptures and cave-palette tapestries. In sum, the exhibition creates a brightly colored yet mildly dangerous-seeming playground. Anyone attempting to do actual circus acts here would definitely get hurt.

Perhaps a safer approach comes in the form of “Logistics Abstraction,” an aesthetic largely informed by the materials used to transport and safeguard art. Jane South at Spencer Brownstone offers a whiff of this in her show “Switch Back,” in which she assembles wall mounted hangings from art handler blankets, rubber mats, drop cloths and other ephemera. The shaped hangings take on a vague resemblance to trucks and wheels, but like much of the art on view in the Lower East Side, they also retain a sense of spirituality. The circular assemblage pieces suggest a life cycle or wheel of life while serving as an homage to modern industry.

As a subgenre, Logistics Abstraction emerges from an established progenitor—the art handling industry—and might represent the most durable of all the movements named above. (Certainly, it holds more promise than Broken Carnival Set Abstraction, which might be best described as a micro-genre.) But the fact is the abstraction I’ve described above represents a small sampling of what’s out there waiting to be named. Just head out to the Lower East Side and see for yourself.

The New York Times

What to See Right Now in New York Art Galleries

Daniel Rios Rodriguez's spiral assemblages; Hannah Levy's perspective-altering sculptures; Anne Minich's enigmatic paintings; Pieter Hugo's portraits from the edge.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez

Through March 1. Nicelle Beauchene, 327 Broome Street, Manhattan; 212-375-8043, nicellebeauchene.com.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez's "Early Life" (2020) in the exhibition "Semper Virens." Daniel Rios Rodriguez and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

Spirals are everywhere in Daniel Rios Rodriguez's paintings in "Semper Virens" at Nicelle Beauchene. They're a motif that reflects the exhibition's Latin title — "evergreen" or "always flourishing" — but also feels in keeping with the moment as spirals are overtaking modernist grids in popularity.

"Angelitos Negros" (2019-20) has a spiral laid out with a rope at its center, while "Agua" (2019-20) has small stone rectangles shaped into a snakelike spiral and "Early Life" (2020) suggests a nautilus structure. Other works here include abstracted suns or moons and relate to life cycles and natural and cosmic regeneration.

Mr. Rodriguez's paintings, which are more like chunky constructions with idiosyncratic homemade frames, include many found objects he collected while walking in the river valley near his home in San Antonio, Texas. There is a distinct folk-art feel to the show. Some works even conjure the vapid, cheery paintings you'd find in hotel rooms or at a local cafe. The precision and structure of these works — as well as nods to artists like Marsden Hartley — are a giveaway, however: Mr. Rodriguez has an M.F.A. in painting from Yale. In other words, this is folk art threaded through the needle of studied composition and artistry rather than curios fashioned by a self-taught savant. What we're seeing is Mr. Rodriguez discarding the rules of Western art history, pushing "high" painting toward craft and coaxing us to follow.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

February 12, 2020

Glasstire
{Texas visual art}

Glasstire's Best of 2019

Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Bruisers at Artpace, San Antonio

Daniel Rios Rodriguez was overdue for a hometown show. With the exception of a small presentation at the McNay in 2015 and only a handful of group shows otherwise, his rough-hewn, beautifully modernist paintings were somehow absent on San Antonio gallery and museum walls. Artpace changed this with *Bruisers*, Rios Rodriguez's deserved first solo show in the region. Featuring drawings, sculptures, paintings, and works that were a combination of all three, the show was perfectly sited in the organization's Hudson Showroom, which features windows that bathe the space in natural light.

Rios Rodriguez's paintings, many of which are intimate in scale, are funny and serious, figurative and abstract. Some of his paintings reveal themselves immediately, while others take a slower burn, but the most important part is that they all truly work on some level; it doesn't matter if he's painting on a terracotta sun face or on a discarded scrap of wood. The cherry on top of Rios Rodriguez's assemblages is his artist-made framing: Wood, rope, painted nails, and other elements combine to make his pieces unique through and through.

— **Brandon Zech**

SIGHT LINES Arts, Culture, News & Ideas

Between elusive and familiar: Daniel Rios Rodriguez's "Bruisers"

In Rodriguez's first major show in San Antonio, his new work toes the line between the organic and the geometric, the handmade and the conceptual

By Lauren Moya Ford | June 10, 2019

Courtesy of Artpace San Antonio. Photo Credit Seale Photography Studios.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez's new solo exhibition, "Bruisers," at San Antonio's Artpace, starts in the hallway, where a small drawing of a jumble of eyes hangs across from a spiky black sun covered in pyramidal chunks of wood. The two pieces recall the essentials of looking — sight and light. But they also represent the curious license that the artist takes with nature. In Rodriguez's world, eyes resemble spiders or even hills, and his tire-colored sun evokes night more than day.

The hallway serves as an introductory jolt, reminding us that Rodriguez's images are never pinned down too tightly.

Rodriguez is invested in the possibilities that unconventional materials bring to his painting. Stones, marbles, ropes, glass, nails, dried plants, and even Mardi Gras beads animate the agitated surfaces of his recent work. In “Bruisers,” many paintings still feature the artist’s signature rope and stones, but the works are quieter, less cluttered.

Here Rodriguez alternates between geometric designs on round clay dishes and looser forms inside of zigzagged cement frames or glossy white wood. The terracotta trays and smiling ceramic sun are surprising substrates, though still based in nature — clay is made of earth, after all. And they recall Texas patios and Mexican restaurants, where they are so common that we almost forget their artisanal and ethnic connotations. With them, Rodriguez quietly injects an undercurrent of identity, nostalgia, and craftsmanship into his show.

The ceramics signal a new direction for the artist, as do the wires, ropes, and hose that Rodriguez has twisted into free-standing, dusty-looking serpent sculptures. Studded with rusty fixtures, hunks of concrete, rocks, and crystals, the “Snake Sketches” conjure associations with the Aztecs’ Coatlicue, the snake of Eden, as well as the plain old Texas garden snake. Clustered together on a table in the center of the room, the snakes also reminded me simultaneously of Alexander Calder’s circus figures and a Pentecostal snake pit. And though the pieces exist outside of Rodriguez’s painted surfaces, the sculpture’s title reminds us that they are ‘sketches’ — provisional drawings in three dimensions.

After studying at the Art Institute of Chicago and at Yale, Rodriguez returned to his hometown of San Antonio, where he still lives. His work has been shown widely, with recent solo exhibitions at Lulu (Mexico City, 2016), Nicelle Beauchene Gallery (New York City, 2017), and Kerlin Gallery (Dublin, 2018). But “Bruisiers” is Rodriguez’s first major show in San Antonio.

In a 2015 artist talk at the McNay Museum, Rodriguez named Phillip Guston, Elizabeth Murray, and Carroll Dunham as key influences. I also see traces of Latin American artists like Rufino Tamayo, Xul Solar, and Tarsila do Amaral in the artist’s paint application, spacial quirkiness, and jewel tones.

Closer to home, the late eccentric painter Forrest Bess also built his own frames, had a history in San Antonio, and made paintings guided by semi-abstract, semi-figurative visions. Like Bess, energy seems to radiate from Rodriguez’s talisman-like paintings. Yet Rodriguez’s sacred hearts, chalices, snakes, and nails reference Spanish American art and Mexican American Catholicism. The artist’s process sounds like a rite itself — he burns, throws, and repaints the pieces, putting them through transformation, and ultimately, transfiguration. If Rodriguez is anything like Bess, he wants painting to do something more, even if it’s just for himself.

But perhaps Rodriguez’s main influence is Texas itself — its landscape is embodied by the wood, stones, ropes, and wire that the artist embeds into his works. When I left the exhibition I couldn’t stop thinking that the work looked like it came from the West Texas desert and also from someone’s garage, and that’s why I liked it. That mixture of mystical nature with the hand and the home is core to Rodriguez’s work, and it’s what continues to draw viewers in.

“Bruisers” is on view through August 18, 2019, at Artpace in San Antonio.

OBSERVER

Snakes and Ladders

In San Antonio, two artists explore hidden geometries of the city.

Michael Agresta | May 31, 2019

Terco, 2019. Oil on terra cotta. Daniel Dios Rodriguez, Image courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin Ireland

Living in a city can deaden our instinct for noticing environment. Caught up in our day-to-day lives, we walk — or, especially in Texas, drive — through our cities without giving much consideration to either the superstructures of urban design that define our paths or the secret world of living things that thrive in the recesses of our man-made spaces. One of the many things that visual art can do is help us notice again, to think more deeply about what our eyes normally race past.

Raul Gonzalez and Daniel Rios Rodriguez, whose art is on display at San Antonio's Artpace through August 18, both invite this sort of shift in the viewer. They begin from abstraction or a stripped-down image and follow their instincts toward compositions that steer clear of any obvious meaning or politics. At the same time, both have developed evocative visual languages that guide our eyes and thoughts toward a certain set of reflections about our physical surroundings.

"Front to Back, and Side to Side" is a different kind of vision — faster, cheaper, more out-of-control, more a part of the city's streets than the soil breathing underneath.

Taken together, these two San Antonio artists unintentionally summon a dialogue reminiscent of the ancient board game "Snakes and Ladders." From below, on Artpace's ground floor, Gonzalez's angular, latticed designs in duct tape thrust the viewer's imagination upward, evoking buildings, grids, pipework and power lines. Meanwhile, on the second floor, Rodriguez's serpentine sculptures and dream-symbol canvases draw us back down into the grass, mud and murky waters of the River City's collective unconscious.

Rodriguez was born in Killeen and grew up all over the world as an Army brat, though with strong family ties to San Antonio. He says his Artpace show, "Bruisers," comes out of an obsession he developed with snakes on a stretch of the San Antonio River near his house. Since settling there five years ago, Rodriguez has made work revolving around found items and wildlife he encounters on daily walks by the river. He

also has a longstanding interest in what he calls “essential forms” — the spiral, for instance, in one body of work, and the snake in this one. “Bruisers” combines his twin interests in the local and the universal, exploring the snake as an archetype while also making reference to the very literal snakes that he knows often surround him, hidden, on his river walks.

Rodriguez’s exhibition space at Artpace is dominated by a table teeming with coiled snake sculptures, featuring materials ranging from rope and wire to metal ducts and electrical conduits. The show title, “Bruisers,” refers to a slang term the artist and his friend use for people with a strong physical presence, who struggle to exist in the world but emerge victorious and tough. He hopes his works can have the same kind of existence — coming into the world on their own terms, thriving regardless of his intentions for them. He speaks of his show as an experiment in seeing if these creatures could survive an excursion outside his house. They do.

Rodriguez makes snake paintings, too. These feel more Jungian, rooted in anthropology and dream symbolism, though he says he’s not interested in psychological theory. (He does frequently dream of snakes, however.) In contrast to the industrial materials which make his sculptures feel like a repurposing of city trash, the paintings are cleaner, based around simple shapes, patterns and color fields, simultaneously more symbolic and less mysterious, more scaled and less poisonous than the sculptures. Each painting, Rodriguez says, is inspired by an individual relationship in his life. Though the meanings are illegible, there’s a sense of a pictorial, nearly hieroglyphic language, inspired by the art of traditional and indigenous societies.

Downstairs, Raul Gonzalez’s duct-tape mural “Front to Back, and Side to Side” is a different kind of vision — faster, cheaper, more out-of-control, more a part of the city’s streets than the soil breathing underneath. Gonzalez, whose first love is drawing, grew up in Houston and has named his mural after a song by hometown rap heroes UGK; he says he dances to hip-hop as part of his composition method when creating large-scale duct-tape works. His mural captures a certain colorful, bustling rhythm, all parallel lines interrupted by curves and swoops, that is easy to associate with hip-hop.

Gonzalez’s past work features realistic portraits of laborers and depictions of his life as a stay-at-home father. He says he likes to build large-scale duct tape murals as a change of pace, because they offer him the chance to move around. The Artpace mural is his first attempt to make a duct-tape project speak to its immediate environment. For the side of the mural facing Main Avenue in downtown San Antonio, Gonzalez has tried to mimic lines of shadow and glare cast by nearby buildings on the glass of Artpace’s façade.

Here and there in “Front to Back, and Side to Side,” observant viewers will notice small gestures that link Gonzalez’s work to Rodriguez’s upstairs. These are the little clumps of extra tape that he has placed (or allowed his daughters to place) at intervals all around the massive mural. Gonzalez says he sees these mixed-confetti hues, interruptions in the otherwise streamlined geometries of solid color, as references to the tiny plants and animals that would quickly take over if humans abandoned their cities — hidden snakes, if you will, among the ladders of San Antonio’s steady growth.

THE IRISH TIMES

A sense of the sacred in the Texan sun

Visual Art: Daniel Rios Rodriguez responds to heat of San Antonio; Carol Hodder's heavy weather

by Aidan Dunne
Tue, Sep 11, 2018, 05:00

Hotwells, by Daniel Rios Rodriguez, at the Kerlin Gallery in Dublin

Daniel Rios Rodriguez: Bite the Tongue
Kerlin Gallery, Dublin 2, until September 29th, kerlin.ie

We had, by Irish standards, a long, hot summer, but not quite up to the level of the summer that informs the work of San Antonio-based Daniel Rios Rodriguez in *Bite The Tongue*. Rios Rodriguez lives in the San Antonio river valley in south Texas. The river flows southeast and drains into the Gulf of Mexico via the Guadalupe river. Rios Rodriguez habitually walks along its path, this summer under a scorching sun. He gathers things as he goes, scraps deposited by the current, pebbles smoothed by its flow.

He incorporates some of these objects into the works he makes, which are more assemblages than paintings, though oil paint is a dominant ingredient, applied in thick, clotted masses of usually flat colour. In the past he has made quite elaborate constructions, but all the work in *Bite The Tongue* adheres to a circular or star-like format. The sun and the moon (with two pieces devoted to each respectively suggest), reign over all of the work, emphasising the daily cycle of time. In a precise though rough-hewn way he uses coarse rope and nails to frame the compositions, and to define forms and areas within the compositions, producing an effect like cloisonné enamel writ large.

Early on, while still a student, Irish artist Michael Cullen, travelling with artist Michael Mulcahy, went to Spain and on to North Africa. The work he exhibited on his return was like nothing else in Irish art at the time and had much in common with the tenor and intensity of Rios Rodriguez's paintings. They are stark, diagrammatic, with a quasi ritualistic quality, as though rehearsing a symbolic iconography. Not that he is making pastiches of such artefacts with their sacred meanings. He is drawing on that visual language, and there is a sense of the sacred in his assemblages, doubtless informed by his experience of being in the landscape. He also draws on other, perhaps more readily familiar aspect of visual culture, including still-life painting.

He has noted the relevance of the eccentric Texan painter Forrest Bess. Something of a reclusive outsider, by choice, Bess made his living as a fisherman. He did have a profile in the art world, though it's fair to say that his reputation has really grown fairly recently (he died in 1977). Inspired by, and perhaps fixated on, inner visions, he was intent on achieving an hermaphroditic state – which he did – convinced that it would lead to immortality, which it didn't. He is one of those figures who produce remarkable work outside the conventional theoretical framework, and there is an element of that to Rios Rodriguez's own approach.

The New York Times

Compact Creations, Radiant and Alive

Daniel Rios Rodriguez: 'Controlled Burn' at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

MAY 12, 2017

BY ROBERTA SMITH

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery
327 Broome Street
Lower East Side
Through May 21

"Jumbo," an assemblage of oil, nails, rope, foil, shingles and plastic foam by Daniel Rios Rodriguez.
Credit courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

This San Antonio-based artist's toothsome little panel paintings, on view through May 21, are like present-day icons devoted to nature and abstraction that also take tips from the early modernists who merged them. Rotating among plant forms, glimpses of outer space and schematic self-portraits, they are indebted to Marsden Hartley's robust brushwork and rich palette, Forrest Bess's visionary quirkiness and Arthur Dove's collage-assemblages. Built as much as painted, they are supplemented with marbles; dried weeds; ribbon; small stones; and scraps of wood, shingle and jewelry — all of which enhance the votive quality. There's also rope, sometimes burned and sometimes used for framing, echoing Picasso's famous 1912 "Still Life With Chair Caning." Occasionally the edges break out in jagged zigzags. In the radiant "Jumbo," they might be sunbeams, or signs of the discovery of the Higgs boson.

FRIEZE.COM

Review - 01 Sep 2017

Tau Lewis, Curtis Santiago and Daniel Rios Rodriguez

Cooper Cole, Toronto, Canada

By Charles Reeve

The stolid figure of Tau Lewis's sculpture *You Lose Shreds of Your Truth Every Time I Remember You* (all works 2017) took me aback as I glimpsed it through the gallery's window. Life-sized, clad in rolled-up cut-offs and casual shoes, holding a wire monkey by a leash, he leans forward in his chair, physically and emotionally shattered, but controlling the space. He doesn't care that he shouldn't go shirtless in a gallery. He's not belligerent, but he's self-assured and wants relief from the hot day.

I did a double take when I observed how alive the figure seems, despite being fashioned somewhat roughly from both conventional and more unusual materials: plaster, stones, acrylic paint and stuff listed, intriguingly, as 'secret objects'. Similarly, in *Untitled (Play Dumb to Catch Wise)*, a smaller figure (perhaps Lewis as a child) sits in a rocking chair but lacks the energy to rock. The exhausted but aware visage enacts the Jamaican proverb in the subtitle, feigning cluelessness so as to be clued in.

Deliberately or not, this subtitle recalls both William Shakespeare (his fellow 'wise enough to play the fool' in *Twelfth Night*) and Italian reggae personality Alborosie's 'Play Fool (To Catch Wise)' (2013) – a range suiting the expansiveness of this two-person exhibition that Lewis shares with Curtis Santiago. The show encompasses work that, while distinct, overlaps thematically and aesthetically. 'I don't want to talk about diaspora anymore,' says Santiago, quoted in the improbably poetic exhibition statement. 'I want to create spaces to think about it. Mobility is necessary and luxurious and peculiar given our past.' Mobility can be physical (as when Lewis's father arrived in Canada from Jamaica, or Santiago's family from Trinidad), but also intellectual or emotional. Thus Lewis's self-representation seems to ponder her out-of-placeness – or perhaps, if we follow in the vein of Homi Bhabha's thinking, 'between-placeness'. The face in Santiago's painting *Higher Self-Portrait* floats toward us from its spray-painted background; its indistinct edges feel ethereal while invoking the visual codes of graffiti and urban grit, and its oversizedin glasses turn the tables by transforming the viewer into the viewed.

Tau Lewis, Curtis Santiago and Daniel Rios Rodriguez, 'Through the people we are looking at ourselves', 2017, installation view, Cooper Cole. Courtesy: Cooper Cole, Toronto

Meanwhile, in Cooper Cole's downstairs space, Daniel Rios Rodriguez's solo exhibition similarly employs a rough-edged aesthetic to thematize issues of identities that refuse to be limited by the synthetic boundaries of nation-states. For example, the upright snake in the colourful, impatiently hewn *Nerodia* suggests a do-it-yourself caduceus or rod of Asclepius (alluding to, respectively, commerce and healing) while its name references a water snake common to Rodriguez's home state of Texas yet found throughout North America. The Nerodia is a curious figure for resistant, mobile identity: widespread, tough, adaptable, but dully coloured and non-venomous. Nonetheless, without capturing much attention, it has infiltrated a huge geographical range, which it seems destined to occupy for centuries to come.

Still, for me, Rodriguez's most compelling piece is his mid-sized, untitled graphite drawing on a paper oval, completed in 2017. Bounded by a drawing of a cord (is the similarity to Pablo Picasso's 1912 *Still Life with Chair Caning deliberate*?), it bursts with images of plants, sunsets (or sunrises?), landscapes and water, rendered in a vaguely cartoonish way that imparts a remarkable energy. This vigour seems like the flipside of the emotional exhaustion that characterizes many of the works in these two shows: maybe an emblem of a time and place beyond the historical conditions that perpetuate diaspora, where enforced travel and the fatigue it generates come to an end.

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Milano Chow, Ann Greene Kelly, Daniel Rios Rodriguez

MICHAEL BENEVENTO
3712 Beverly Boulevard
July 15–August 31

Slumped over a table, a mysterious figure hidden behind a wide architectural facade peers out from an arched window. Milano Chow's painstakingly rendered graphite drawings are meticulous studies of friezes, cornices, balustrades, and striated slats. The perspective the artist offers in *Horizontal Exterior II* (all works cited, 2017) is reminiscent of a voyeuristic glimpse into a neighbor's apartment as one straightens the shades. When a character is suspended in an ornate frame—as with *Mirror (Checkerboard)*, where a woman with a checkered umbrella descends a magically hovering staircase and appears to stride right off the bounds of the composition—Chow's drawings become striking not simply for their trompe l'oeil effects but for their wink at the realm of the surreal.

Milano Chow, *Mirror (Checkerboard)*, 2017, graphite, ink, vinyl paint, and photo transfer on paper, 20 x 15".

The other works in this group show are more overt in their comedic bent. Ann Greene Kelly creates a domain of sculptures that, like furniture, would seem to be sympathetic to the shape of the body, even as they subtly betray it. Her *Untitled (small circular bench)* resembles a miniature Stonehenge as it plays ring-around-the-rosy with a kitsch mosaic garden bench. Kelly deconstructs the familiar, presenting conventional structures in oddly melted or lopsided forms. *Untitled (hollow body shirt)*, for instance, is a cyborgian mannequin with looping tentacles composed of contorted window bars. You cannot help but laugh at the artist's punch lines, even if one isn't entirely sure one has understood the joke.

In another room, Daniel Rios Rodriguez's painted sculptures flirt between two- and three-dimensionality. His bright and joyous wall hangings, made with wood, rope, and nails, are at once abstract altarpieces and dartboards with curves and angles gone haywire. Despite this trio's disparate techniques and separate presentations, there is a quiet and intriguing overlap between each artist's perception of the world.

— *Simone Krug*

Contemporary Art Review .la

Milano Chow, Ann Greene Kelly and Daniel Rios Rodriguez at Michael Benevento

August 2, 2017
Text by Aaron Horst

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, *Juniper Moon* (2017). Oil, Flashe, nails, rope, wood and metal on panel, 10.5 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Michael Benevento. Photo: Jeff Mclane.

In a city, and an art world, without seasons, the summer group show becomes as reliable as the changing of the leaves—if not as captivating. At Michael Benevento, instead of a mish-mash of cognitive dissonance from the gallery's storage room, we are treated to three artists, divided over four rooms, each cordoned off in their own viewing spaces, each represented with a spare catalogue of 3-4 works.

Daniel Rios Rodriguez's work is our introduction—small-scale, semi-vernacular assemblages that call to mind the mythic and often obscure imagery of folktales or religious visionaries. A sort of visual equivalent to the oral tradition, Rodriguez's *Bright Dark* (2017) in particular resembles a florid retelling of an airplane crash. *Egretta*'s (2017) patterned perspective drives our view toward a pearl-like object at its center—explicit meaning taking a back seat to pure reverence. In a subsequent room, three sculptures by Ann

Greene Kelly refer to structure (brick) and design (chairs) fed through a warping subconscious. The emerging result is both deformed and tempered: “wheels” constructed of rings of chairs, and covered completely in an organic, moss-like pattern of brick.

Milano Chow’s works emphasize the rationalization of the human hand through draftsmanship, in contrast to Rodriguez’s tight, hand-hewn assemblages and Kelly’s imperfect, odd objects. Two of Chow’s three pieces here render a formidable, semi-classical architectural facade through which we catch occasional glimpses of tiny, tony inhabitants and spare interiors. The works are impeccable, but stiff (and more so in Chow’s proximity to Rodriguez and Kelly’s odd, organic objects).

When I was a teenager, I used to play a daily radio contest after school called “My Three Songs” in which you had to guess the common thread between three songs. I even won a few times (just saying!). It would be remiss to argue in service of a common thread between these three artists where there isn’t one—association, and grouping are, nevertheless, stubborn features of the human mind. The flat lack of affect in the Benevento galleries—natural lighting, minimal staging, an overall air of the unadorned—works to narrow our focus upon each encounter with the artworks on display. Quiet contemplation is favored over the vaporous curatorial conceits that often, nominally, hold the summer group show together.

Milano Chow, Ann Greene Kelly, and Daniel Rios Rodriguez runs July 15–August 31, 2017 at Michael Benevento (3712 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90004).

Art in America

REVIEWS APR. 11, 2016

Daniel Rios Rodriguez

CHICAGO,

at Western Exhibitions

by Kyle MacMillan

Daniel Rios Rodriguez:*South St. Marys*, 2015-16, oil, nails, wood, cement, metal and paper on panel with altered found frame, 14 by 17½ inches; at Western Exhibitions

Daniel Rios Rodriguez's quirky, unassuming paintings don't fall into any easily recognizable niche or category, as was seen in the up-and-coming San Antonio artist's first solo show at Western Exhibitions. With their homemade and found wood frames, their collaged elements (shells, river rocks, feathers), and their deliberately unrefined paint-handling, these works have a rustic, do-it-yourself feel.

Rodriguez holds degrees from the Yale School of Art and the University of Illinois at Chicago but seems intent on subverting any overt artistic sophistication his education might have gained him. He draws on folk influences, especially the work of Forrest Bess, a self-taught Bay City, Tex., artist whose recognition has continued to rise since his death, in 1977. Largely moving away from Rodriguez's earlier, Picasso-tinged figuration and vanitas symbolism, the eight modest-size paintings in this show, which comprised work made in the past two years, draw on nature and generally exude a brighter, more upbeat feel. Though not as obviously autobiographical, the new paintings are suffused with what a gallery statement aptly describes as his "deeply personal cosmology."

Among the standouts was *Old and New Dreams*, in which a twisted snakeskin (filled out with bits of canvas and fabric and featuring a tiny leather strip protruding from one end like a tongue) is attached to the whitish-painted canvas along with an easy-to-miss seedpod-shaped piece of leather higher up. The snake overlays what looks to be a rendering of a sliced pomegranate, a

seeming reference to the Garden of Eden. The composition also includes a painted branch with cobalt-blue and green leaves, as well as a painted border of school-bus yellow, purple and black—a good example of Rodriguez's weird, alluring palette. Surrounding it all is one of the artist's suitably ramshackle wood frames.

The snake was a recurring motif in the exhibition. A painted incarnation was seen in *High Moods*, a semiabstract landscape with a frayed rope and a rock notched into its frame. In *Sound and Vision*, which is as much an assemblage as a painting, a length of snakeskin is embedded in wax along with matches, elongated seedpods, dried flora and other materials.

A small hunk of concrete and a bit of red-painted wood, collaged at the center of *South St. Marys*, evoke a small house sitting on a horizon line. The form appears within an eye-shaped enclosure with rays emanating from it that conjures one of the all-seeing eyes of God common in medieval art. Jutting from the canvas is a semicircle of metal nails, which are all but invisible beyond a few feet away.

Rounding out the compact show were 30 graphite drawings hung salon-style—quickly executed renderings of everything from flowers and faces to airplanes and even dashes of erotica. While the drawings no doubt helped Rodriguez work through ideas, they have less of a presence than the expressive paintings. There is nothing grand or groundbreaking about those paintings, but they satisfy in their elusive and offbeat way.

This piece could just as well be called “Against Allegory.” Or even “Against Representation.” Or maybe even better yet “Against Language.” Never mind “Against Interpretation” (which is obviously a precedent). I would even almost be inclined to call it “Against Everything,” if that were not already taken and most deftly accounted for, not to mention true. But it is not.

THEORY OF THE MINOR

Allison Katz, *Giant Cock*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: FXP Photography

Allison Katz, *2 Cocks*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Giò Marconi, Milan. Photo: Filippo Armellin

BY CHRIS SHARP

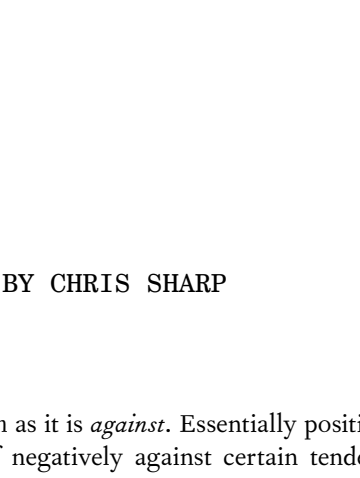
This text is *for* as much as it is *against*. Essentially positive, it nevertheless defines itself negatively against certain tendencies, assumptions, and givens in contemporary art. It should be stated that this text, and the thoughts and position that actively inform it, have been largely sponsored by living and working in the context of Mexico City, and more generally Latin America, for the past four years. Consistently exposed there to a series of doxas regarding the production and dissemination of contemporary art, which are characterized by an implicit protocol to confuse art with journalism, pedagogy, and compulsory assertions of collectivity, all of which are thoroughly embedded in language, I have found myself forced to articulate an increasingly antagonistic position, which militates, perhaps anachronistically, for art itself. Or to be more precise a specific kind of art, which I will antagonistically call *minor*.

By minor, I of course do not mean in the classical sense of the term, as in lesser or secondary to the major (e.g., Guido Reni to Caravaggio), but rather as a mode of making that is characterized by resistance not as a political position, but as a natural consequence of the practice itself (it goes without saying that this consequence is always already political, insofar as it introduces conflict as opposed to consensus). In order to start to sketch out the minor, it is necessary to first take a stab at defining the major, which is more of a verb than a noun. The major, like allegory, instrumentalizes. The major reduces and recuperates, streamlines, flattens out, absorbs, and eliminates difference. Art is never an end in itself, but a means, a vehicle. Seeking the lowest common denominator, which is often found in either spectacle, topicality, or use value, it continually asks what art can *do*, as opposed to what it *is* or *can be*, which it almost always takes for granted.

This is why most major contemporary art formally avails itself of the academicism of conceptualism, all but dismissing form or formal concerns as secondary or tertiary to the impetus of the work—which is to communicate or transmit a specific ideology *unequivocally*. The major is to art what pornography is to the (erotic) imagination (which it, unlike the minor, paralyzes). In other words, like the news, it takes much more than it gives (while the minor gives more than any one individual or era, for that matter, can take). The exhibition format par excellence of the major is the biennial. Servilely obeying the socially and politically expedient injunction to embody and communicate its moment as comprehensively as possible (for how else could it, as an exhibition format, be justified?), to be "contemporary," the biennial generally structures itself around a few key concepts or "urgent political issues" which the art is meant to embody or illustrate, as if it were so much three-dimensional visual aid (of the news or concepts related thereto).

This is not to say that all art in biennials is major, or that all biennials are always themselves major. Salient exceptions exist—Massimiliano Gioni's 2013 Venice Biennale represented a dubious attempt to deal with the minor on major terms, while Jay Sanders and Elisabeth Sussman's 2012 Whitney Biennial was refreshingly minor—but unfortunately they are few and far between. One of the final and most crucial characteristics of the major is that it always seeks to *speak for* (the disenfranchised and oppressed, art being apparently the most effective way and place to do such a thing) as if it were a duty, a civic responsibility to essentially ventriloquize. It aims for the multitude. Abiding by the twenty-first-century logic of the zombie, it always thinks mathematically, in terms of numbers and statistics (like the museum, in fact, or better yet a biennial,) which is how it measures "success."

The major's greatest antagonist is idiosyncrasy, which is a fundamental component, nay the very bedrock, of minor art.



Above, top - Nina Canell, *Treetops, Hillsides and Ditches* (detail), 2011. Courtesy: the artist; Daniel Marzona, Berlin; Mother's Tankstation, Dublin; Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin. Photo: Robin Watkins

Above, bottom - Nina Canell, *Treetops, Hillsides and Ditches*, 2011, *The Promise of Moving Things* installation view at le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, 2014. Courtesy: the artist; Daniel Marzona, Berlin; Mother's Tankstation, Dublin; Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin. Photo: André Morin / le Crédac

ektor garcia, *kriziz* installation views at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Abigail Enzaldo

In case anyone has forgotten the meaning of this word, its etymology might help. Circa 1600, from French *idiosyncrasie*, from a Latinized form of the Greek *idiosynkrasia*, "a peculiar temperament," from *idios*, "one's own" + *synkrasis*, "temperament, mixture of personal characteristics," from *syn*, "together" + *krasis*, "mixture," from PIE root **kere-* "to mix, confuse; cook." Therefore, a mixture of that which is absolutely one's own, peculiar to an individual, unique, perhaps even nontransferable. I think the *krasis*, to mix, is also interesting insofar as it suggests the appropriation, mutation, and integration of preexisting elements into something that is unmistakably one's own. **Irreducible and irrecuperable, it is intrinsically resistant to being co-opted or put into the service of allegory, nor can it be made to speak for, be deployed, or even assigned a function (the major positively loves to assign functions, socially, politically, and art historically).**

If anything, it interrupts and disrupts the process of assimilation to which the major continually and inexorably seeks to exercise on the world around it, like science. Incidentally, if my language here is evocative of Georges Bataille, it is because my thinking is directly informed by him, notably via Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture*, and in particular Bataille's notion, if it can be called that, of the heteorological, which is much more of a precedent of the minor for me than Gilles Deleuze's definition of it. Indeed, in sharp contrast to Deleuze, I would say that the three characteristics of minor art are: not the deterritorialization of language, but the development of one's own personal, highly idiosyncratic language; not so much the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, but the acknowledgement that form, which is art's primary duty, is always already political; and definitely not the collective assemblage of enunciation, but the impossibility of art to speak for anyone else if it does not first and foremost speak for itself. This is one of the reasons why the minor generally does not harmonize with ideologies of collectivity, or science for that matter ("knowledge production"). For in the spirit of scientific method, the collective generally cannot brook manifestations of idiosyncrasy due to the simple fact that they cannot account for anything but themselves, and therefore must be suppressed in favor of the logical accountability of collective decision making (one of the fundamental features of the heteorological is, it just so happens, unaccountability).

The minor is of course queer, but not due to its non-existent capacity to represent (the minor does not represent; it actually precludes representation, which is the domain of the major), but due to its non-classifiability, not to mention its inherent eschewal of the logic of the project, or better yet projects, which have identifiable beginnings and endings, or limits, as it were. I am thinking in particular of the markedly queer sculptural practice of the Mexican American artist ektor garcia, whose sprawling hybrid sculptures-cum-installations are continuous parts of an organic, ever-evolving, and unbounded whole. Devoid of partition, whatever he makes is a manifestation not of projects, but *the* project. Perhaps more importantly than this is how he and others like him elaborate their own personal formal language, and the extent to which it is indivisible from the materials and techniques they use. Drawing upon the iconography and material composition of everything from Mesoamerican religious imagery to southern Mexican ceramic-making techniques to gay leather subculture as well as, say, the likes of Paul Thek and Bruce Conner (both of whom could be considered minor artists), garcia absorbs it into the *krasis* (see above) of his crucible from which he fashions what is unmistakably his own way of making and non-linguistically signifying.

The Colombian artist José Antonio Suárez Londoño and the Mexican artist Rodrigo Hernandez have markedly similar ways of proceeding. Personal to a magnificently gnomic fault, Suárez Londoño's minutely labored, small-scale drawings and etchings are the result of a highly developed idiosyncratic formal language (in which written language itself never has more than an idiosyncratic, non-narrative, and non-conceptual function), which is inspired by indigenous, pre-Colombian iconography as much as it is by European modernism. Hernandez, whose ongoing highly plastic

Olga Balema, *Cannibals* installation views at Croy Nielsen, Berlin, 2015. Courtesy: Croy Nielsen, Vienna. Photo: Joachim Schulz

Olga Balema, *Threat to Civilization* 3 (detail), 2015, *Cannibals* installation view at Croy Nielsen, Berlin, 2015. Courtesy: Croy Nielsen, Vienna. Photo: Joachim Schulz

practice interrogates the divisions between drawing, sculpture, and painting, likewise draws on a heterogeneous variety of sources to construct his own formal idiom. It is perhaps not a coincidence that all of these artists, and those that follow, incidentally, are makers who work primarily with their hands—for what method of producing more directly registers and transmits the idiosyncratic?

Unlike the major, which ratifies, reaffirms, and relies upon specific, already thoroughly codified linear, if dialectical, art historical traditions (for instance Wade Guyton is the quintessential major painter, and it is perhaps no mere coincidence that his latest body of work was actually the news), the minor creates or unearths new or unexpected, if tangential, trajectories. To this end, examples of contemporary minor painting range in age and geography from the Canadian, London-based Allison Katz, to the Belgian *éminence grise* Walter Swennen, to the Texan Daniel Rios Rodriguez, whose practices variously engage and depend upon minor practitioners from Francis Picabia to René Daniëls to Forrest Bess (all of whom have recently been subject to revivals—meaning we could very well be in the age of the minor). Abandoning a linear approach toward the horizon of painting, they could be said to move along it in lateral shifts and jumps, while developing radically idiosyncratic pictorial methods and idioms.

Meanwhile the issue of allegory is a tricky one, because many minor artists and even writers would *seem* to traffic in allegory, but upon close inspection, it becomes clear that they do not (if you disagree, ask yourself why we still read Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka, while we barely read Jean-Paul Sartre or, say, Alberto Moravia, the latter of whom were egregious allegorists; a similar dichotomy could be established between the likes of Philip Guston and Bernard Buffet). The work of the Detroit native Michael E. Smith could be and has been read as an allegory of Detroit, and, by extension America, but that is obviously a simplistic interpretation of a practice whose formal, spatial, and affective complexity has few parallels in contemporary art. When it comes down to it, what he

ektor garcia, *kriziz* installation view at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Abigail Enzaldo

does is just too strange and, yes, idiosyncratic to logically signify (which is the business of the major—logically, nay serviceably signifying). It always already exceeds whatever function might be assigned to it, and is as such excessively dysfunctional. The sculpture of Olga Balema, by virtue of its relationship to the body, undergoes a similar procedure, a kind of feint, if you will, but always errs on the side of excess, and as such ungrudgingly refuses to submit to manageable systems of signification, such as allegory.

By the same token, a similarly quasi if pseudo allegorical attitude can found in the work of the likes of the Swedish artist Nina Canell or the German photographer Jochen Lempert. However, in their cases this elusive dalliance with allegory touches on the

From top left, clockwise - Daniel Rios Rodriguez, *South St. Marys*, 2015-2016; *Pecs*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York; Michael E. Smith, *Untitled*, 2014. Courtesy: the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; *Untitled*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Michael Benevento, Los Angeles. Photo: the artist; *Untitled*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and KOW, Berlin. Photo: Ladislav Zajac; Daniel Rios Rodriguez, *Morning Breath*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

From top left, clockwise - Rodrigo Hernández, *Kippfigur (Figure De Basculement)*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and P420, Bologna. Photo: Tim Bowditch; *I Am Nothing (Dinosaur)*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Galeria Madragoa, Lisbon. Photo: Marc Doradzillo; Jean-Luc Moulène, *Membres à queue (Paris, 2014)*, 2014. © Jean-Luc Moulène by SIAE, Rome, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn; *Ca Propre (Anse) [That Clean (Handle)], (Paris, 2016)*, 2016. © Jean-Luc Moulène by SIAE, Rome, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; *Fairy Fantasy*, 2016. © Jean-Luc Moulène by SIAE, Rome, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London; Rodrigo Hernández, *Head (Pedro)*, *Pedro* installation detail at o.T. Raum für aktuelle Kunst, Lucerne, 2012. Courtesy: the artist

Jochen Lempert, *Untitled (Flora)*, 2016. © Jochen Lempert by SIAE, Rome, 2017. Courtesy: BQ, Berlin and ProjecteSD, Barcelona. Photo: Roman März, Berlin

domain of science, whose sincere and profound engagement is always ultimately exceeded by the minor quiddity of the work. Whereas Canell deploys and harnesses imperceptible currents, conductors, and energies to singularly sculptural (non-illustrational), effect, Lempert's black-and-white photographs of flora and fauna always go beyond the formal zoological and taxonomical origins of his photography, not to mention his training as a biologist. Any attempt to oblige their respective practices to signify in any systematic, scientific way is always already foiled not only by a healthy quotient of affect, but more importantly by a complete and total commitment to the plastic and formal (non-linguistic) qualities of their work.

In an age of increasingly hypertrophic expansion (galleries and museums as well as the grand gestures that must fill them), the minor can also refer to a diminishment of scale and valorization of intimacy as a mode of engagement (the American sculptor Vincent Fecteau, for example, is a master of the minor). But this of course is not always the case. Notable exceptions to the question of scale include the German sculptor Manfred Pernice and the French artist Jean-Luc Moulène. Whatever scale they are working at, the material and formal properties of their inimitable practices always exceed and collapse any linguistic framework within which their work might be placed—never mind the radical heterogeneity at the heart of what they both do.

José Antonio Suárez Londoño, *Planas: del 1de enero al 31 de diciembre del año 2005*, 2005. Courtesy: Casas Riegner, Bogotá. Photo: Miguel Suárez Londoño

José Antonio Suárez Londoño, *Planas: del 1de enero al 31 de diciembre del año 2005*, 2005. Courtesy: Casas Riegner, Bogotá. Photo: Miguel Suárez Londoño

When all is said and done, however, any attempt to describe and codify the minor is potentially, and even ideally, an exercise in theoretical vanity. It almost doesn't need to be said that the minor, in keeping with its essential irreducibility, can be neither a formula nor a strategy. But if anything unites, binds together, and courses through the work of every artist I have just mentioned, it is the creation of their own thoroughly plastic languages, which naturally, non-serviceably refuse to submit to (written or spoken) language. To this end, at least where the viewer is concerned, the minor assumes an almost narrative property, not in the sense of recounting a story (or an allegory), but rather in the sense of positing and generating (new) possibility. For what gives, vitalizes, and renews in the spirit of discovery more than the sense of pure possibility (of being, experiencing, apprehending, and understanding)? Indeed, the irruption of each truly minor artist necessarily entails the introduction of a corresponding quotient of possibility into the world.

Chris Sharp is a writer and independent curator based in Mexico City. Together with the artist Martin Soto Climent, he runs the independent space Lulu. A contributing editor of *Art Review* and *Art-Agenda*, his writing has appeared in many magazines, on-line publications and catalogues. He is currently preparing exhibitions at kurimanzutto, Mexico City; Pivô, São Paulo, and Le Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, among others.

José Antonio Suárez Londoño, *Dibujo*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. Photo: Miguel Londoño

José Antonio Suárez Londoño, *Cuadernos de año – Paul Klee*, 1988. Courtesy: the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. Photo: Ela Bialkowska, OKNOstudio

visual art source

Daniel Rios Rodriguez

Western Exhibitions, Chicago, Illinois
Recommendation by Robin Dluzen

Daniel Rios Rodriguez, "Rios Rodriguez," 2015-16, oil, river rocks, pecan shell, feathers, rope on canvas with artist-made wood frame, 11 x 14"

Continuing through March 12, 2016

Daniel Rios Rodriguez is known for his modestly-sized paintings and drawings featuring bold line work and collaged material. The Yale alum's aesthetic is Modernist-meets-Outsider, with knowing, painterly conventions commingled with rather straightforward imagery and narratives direct from his everyday life. Rodriguez's prior works are populated with images of symbolic skulls and literal paintbrushes. For the current show the natural landscape surrounding the artist's home in San Antonio, Texas provides his subject matter.

Obviously, drawing inspiration from the landscape is a practice that's as old as image-making itself. But Rodriguez doesn't merely depict or reflect the environment in his works, he physically merges the outside world with what he creates in the studio. In works like "Old and New Dreams," a real snakeskin patch-worked with bits of fabric is affixed to the canvas amongst stylistically rendered leaves. "Rios Rodriguez" features a thickly painted river of sharp, winding turns sporting an actual pecan shell stuck with feathers like a little elfin sailboat. Around the edges of his canvases the artist fastens handmade frames of rope or battered wood. The interplay between flatness and dimensionality, painterly illusion and affixed objects, is the component that makes these works compelling. With imagery made up of both representations of things and the things themselves, the paintings become objects that are as lively as that which they depict.