

NEWS / TEXAS

Michael Anthony García: “Grounded in a Utopian Projection of Positivity”

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Michael Anthony García, an Austin-based artist and curator, creates installation, video, and sculptural work that explores personal questions of identity and cultivates community.



Michael Anthony García, *safe (in) space*, 2023, curtains, textile, marker, text, 8 x 9 ft. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.

AUSTIN, TX—Visitors interacting with Michael Anthony García’s current exhibition *entangled portmanteau* at Austin’s Ivester Contemporary—which closes this weekend with a reception Friday, February 24, 7-9 pm—first walk through the piece *Safe (in) Space*, a collage of t-shirt cuttings on a sheer white curtain. The words “weird,” “happy,” and “fresh Mex” stand out. In contrast, smaller text was taken from a memorial t-shirt and reads “y deho luz” and “eternidad,” reminding viewers of their mortality. The title points to the friction of finding safe spaces, ones that might only exist in space or fantasy. Collaged towers are dispersed through the

García’s installations and video pieces often aggregate daily images, found text, objects, and clothing he sources from the community. Clothes have been a long-standing medium in the work of the Austin-based [artist](#), whose practice spans photography and video, sculpture and installation, performance, curation, and poetry.

“It’s always been a way for me to be abstractly figurative in my work, to bring the body into it but without being too literal,” says García. “Clothing, for me, is like fossils of the human form. It’s a way to bring that corporeal aspect to the work. It’s always been a way for people to connect. We all wear clothes, we all have certain patterns or colors that click with us, and we bring our connotations to it. It’s an entryway for people.”

García meets me on Zoom from his home studio in Austin. His on-screen comfort comes from his work as an educator throughout the pandemic and his frequent work in performance and video.



Michael Anthony García of Austin, Texas. Courtesy the artist.

“I’ve had to find a special way of working because working full time as a teacher, it’s so demanding and so draining,” describes García, who has curated exhibitions in Austin at Mexic-Arte Museum, the gallery at the Austin Central Public Library, Fusebox Festival, and at Texas State University Galleries in San Marcos. “So I have had to adapt this split life to where I’ll find a pocket of time when I’m going to cram the actual physical making of the work. But prior to that, the ideas live in my head or sketches on paper. And then they evolve as I ruminate over what it will eventually become.”

Our asynchronous coupling of a virtual meeting about work later viewed in person echoes a duality to García’s multifaceted practice, which includes collaborations with the curatorial collective Los Outsiders with Salvador Castillo, Hector Hernandez, and Roberto Jackson Harrington; hosting the podcast *El Puente* with Dave Bellesen and Kimberly Pollini; and as publisher of *POCa Madre Magazine*. Another duality that influences his current work is the isolation of the pandemic while completing his MFA program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Yet another is García’s 2017 acquisition of Mexican citizenship.

Michael Anthony García of Austin, Texas. Courtesy the artist.

“It affected me in a profound way that I wasn’t expecting, emotionally. Having that paper, that passport that says Mexican, was a confirmation, if you will. But along with it came this guilt. I do have the privileges of having been born and raised [in the United States].”

García, who navigates racial and cultural judgment on both sides of the border, turns to futurism to joke about the concept of extraterrestrial aliens as a counterbalance to his everyday experiences. In a 2020 interview, García describes how his work “is grounded in a utopian projection of positivity.”



Michael Anthony García, *plotted points (can also make constellations)*, 2023, video, artist's clothing, text, variable dimensions. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.

In his show at Ivester Contemporary, García brings images of the graffiti tag “buscar” into the video work *plotted points (can also make constellations)*. Found all over Austin, García says the anonymous tag acts as “a message to me, reminding me to keep looking, keep seeking, which I think is a huge part of growth.”

The *plotted points* video includes a sound bite and clip from a FaceTime conversation with García’s mother, who has become a collaborator in García’s practice.

“Once my parents were resigned to the fact that I was an artist, they really took an earnest interest in it,” García says. “We have collaborated in the past. It’s special to me that my mom has helped me in that way. There are tools that I’ve gotten from my father. My parents are part of my practice.”

Michael Anthony García of Austin, Texas. Courtesy the artist.



Michael Anthony García, *payload (bottom drawer / top shelf)*, 2022, drawers, clothing, glassware, found objects, text, 84 x 16 x 12 in. Photo: Vidur Marwaha. Courtesy the artist.

In his ongoing series *Mil Disculpas*, García travels to Mexico City and purchases items from markets which he uses to create futuristic armor. Dressed in his attire, he takes the Mexico City Metro with the goal of taking a selfie at every Metro train station. Drawing stares from people going about their daily tasks, García uses the performance as a meditation, growing familiar with his life's enduring feeling of otherness.

As García sews together text and imagery either physically or digitally, he searches for the answer to the fundamental question of who he is. Echoes from his life, parents, history, and cultures come together to form bright guiding stars. In the presence of García's artwork or the artist himself, in that space between a question and reply, one knows that together, a response can be formed despite the lack of an easy answer.

"We all have those moments when we need to pull away, and then those times when we need to feel we're part of something larger," García says. "I like bringing people together. Maybe it's me trying to fill in that alienness gap that I have. If I can help someone else not feel that way. Conversation and that idea of entanglement. Relationships are that way, too."



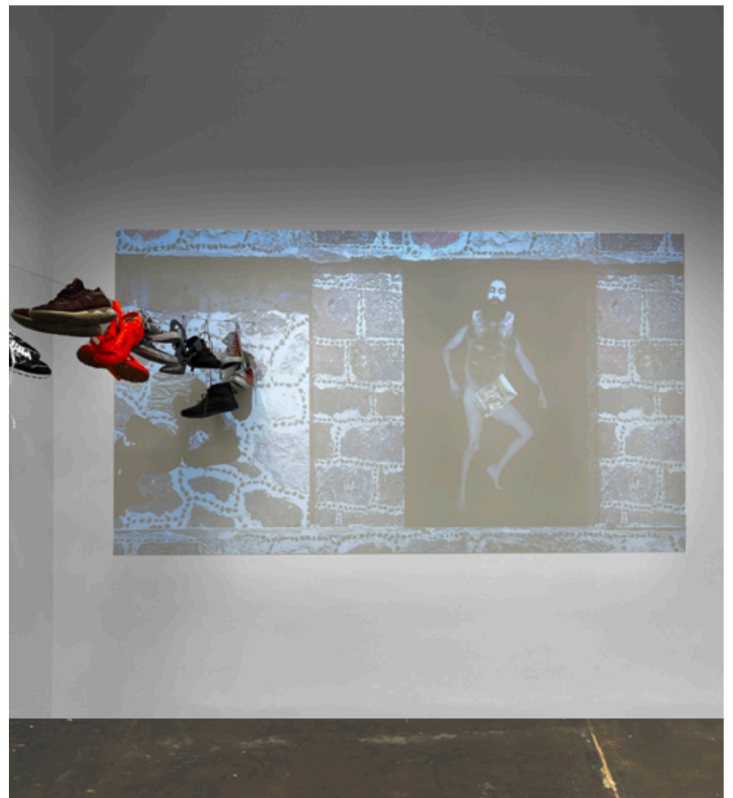
"We all have those moments where we need to pull away, and then those times when we need to feel we're part of something larger," says Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.



Michael Anthony García, *gatekeeper's launch*, 2022, sourced t-shirts, foam, hardware, text, 72 x 14 x 14 in. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.



Michael Anthony García, *safe (in) space*, detail, 2023, curtains, textile, marker, text, 8 x 9 ft. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.



Michael Anthony García, *reconquista (le piso le mato)*, 2023, cable shoes sourced from Latine individuals in Austin, text, stickers, 16 x 120 in. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.

smaller text was taken from a memorial t-shirt and reads "y dejo la z" and "eternidad," reminding viewers of their mortality. The title
of the work is the fiction of finding safe spaces, ones that
gallery and act as watchful sentinels.



Michael Anthony García, *reconquista (te piso te mata)*, 2023, cable shoes sourced from Latine individuals in Austin, text, stickers, 16 x 120 in. Photo: Jaime Salvador Castillo. Courtesy the artist.



Michael Anthony García, *weapons of mass production*, 2022, collage on canvas, fabric, graphite, altered book, text, 20 x 16 in. Photo: Michael Anthony García. Courtesy the artist.

Thao Votang (she/her) has previously published in *Salon*, *Hyperallergic*, *Sightlines*, and others. Votang co-edited *Conflict of Interest* and co-founded the Tiny Park arts space.