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With Layered Photographs, Michael Anthony García Builds Community

A photography exhibition, and accompanying magazine, seek to close Austin's community of people of color



By **Mary K. Cantrell** - September 23, 2019

Claudia, Yareth, Tammie, Ploy and Lucero — the names of a handful of women photographed with clothing from their personal closets by artist [Michael Anthony García](#).

The show, "Mujeriego," or "womanizer," a tongue-and-cheek reference to the artists' visits to women's bedrooms, seeks to highlight women of color in Austin. The exhibition is on view at the [Elisabet Ney Museum until Dec. 1](#).

García, who says he's always been able to establish closer bonds with women rather than with men, started the project two years ago to pay homage to his female friendships and to form more intimate bonds with fellow people of color (POCs) in Austin.

García describes the times he'd run into fellow POCs artists in Austin, yet crave a more nuanced understanding of who they are.

"I've just never been to their homes and we see each other in social settings but I've never taken that next step," García says. "Just being POCs in Austin it's like, no way, we need to have a deeper community, I think we need to connect a little more."



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The 11 images hang in a tiny sun-lit side room at the museum, the color-drenched photographs a stark contrast to the alabaster hues in Ney's classical, figurative sculpture. García's pictures are not straight-forward portrait photographs, but textural, layered works that act as flags — each woman her own nation.

García's process involves three separate photographs. He starts by taking a simple photograph of the most stand-out clothing item from a woman's closet. Then, he projects that photograph onto the woman and takes another photograph. Lastly, the photograph of the woman obscured by their clothing is

projected a final time onto the surface of her bed, which is decorated with even more clothing items. A click of the shutter and the final image is made.



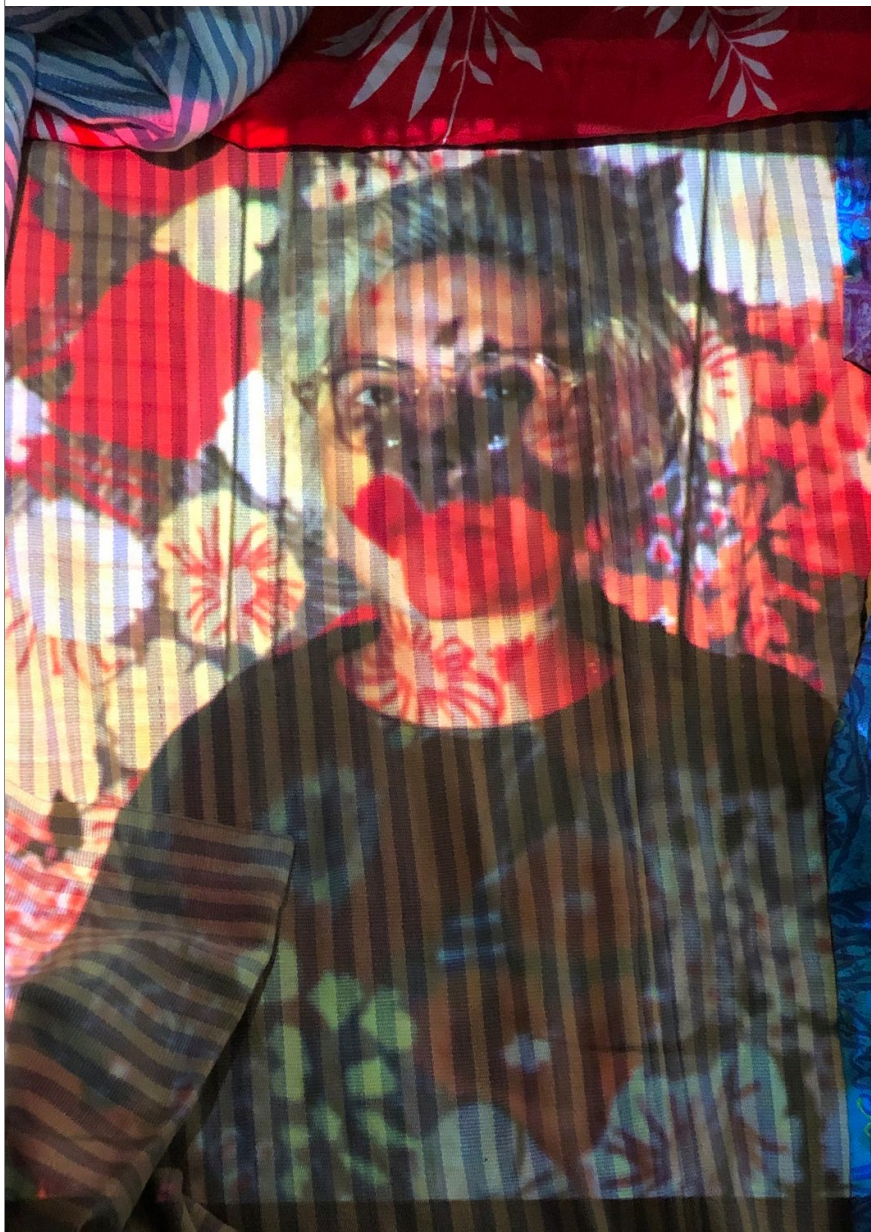
Michael Anthony García, "Betelhelm," 2019, digital photo documentation of temporary installations. 30"x40." Photo courtesy the artist.

"The projected image is a little bit fuzzier compared to the crispness of the actual items that were in the final image," says García, whose artistic practice has long made use of clothing. "It's different for each image, just because each home I went into there were different lighting conditions or space between myself and the subject for projection and photographing. I feel like they all have this very different feel to them."

García describes the process of shooting local artist and [2019 Tito's Prize recipient Betelhem Makonnen](#) as a means for her to tell different stories with her clothing.

“She’s an immigrant and so all the different clothing featured (in her portrait) speak to different places that she’s lived. She has an Ethiopian wedding cloak that she wore for her wedding, (and) a dress that she wore to a certain party in Brazil when she lived there that brings back a lot of memories,” García says.

A serendipitous byproduct of the projections are zigzags which appear across Betelhem’s neck from another dress she chose to be photographed with. When reviewing the images with García she noted that in Ethiopian culture women often get neck tattoos of similar patterns.



Michael Anthony García, "Aparicio," 2019, digital photo documentation of temporary installations. 30"X40." Photo courtesy the artist.

Shooting women in their homes — a domestic sphere often relegated to the feminine — creates an interesting context for the images, most of which depict the women looking pensive, a result of their intimate conversations with García, about loved ones, familial ties, and personal histories. One particular photograph of a woman named Claudia Aparicio Gamundi, her face bathed in a cool, floral pattern from a shirt that belonged to her grandfather, resonated with García because of its cultural significance.

"The rest of these items that were on the bed are all contemporary kimonos that she's picked up through travels and in Mexico particularly. A lot of this is very much rooted in her history, because she was born in Monterrey, Mexico," he says.

Unlike a traditional documentary photo story, one built from individual shots that take on a larger meaning as they amass, García's concentrated images tell a fully developed story in a singular image. The layers of shots symbolize the growing rapport of a friendship, built over time, García says.

"It just fits with the conceptual nature of my work, this idea of going through steps and processes, it's connected to the relationships," García says.

"Sometimes you meet someone and you instantly click and you're best friends, but a lot of times you have these steps."

García continues to embrace clothing and fabric, stereotypically feminized materials, as a vehicle for storytelling in his artwork.

"I feel like [clothing items] are fossils of our own forms," says García. "You take the article, you know what the shape of the body is, you know what size the person is, or if they're tall or short."

Other subjects photographed for the project include St. Edward's University professor and sculptor [Tammie Rubin](#); Diana, a woman who helped Garcia get his dual citizenship at the Mexican consulate; Monica, a Chicano writer and poet, and Chandra, an actress, singer and dancer. Each woman responded to the project differently, but Chandra was one of the most comfortable in front of the camera, García says.

“All of the clothing are costumes she’s worn in different productions. It’s very glittery, but that’s what I really love that kind of captures her energy as a performer,” García says. “You also have these lines radiating from her head like thoughts or some kind of inner radiance coming out.”



The inaugural issue of POCa Madre Magazine, “Haciéndolo Por Sí Mismas”/“Doing It For Themselves.” Cover image by Michael Anthony García; design is by Curious Flux.

Under the banner of POCa Madre Media — a collaborative group which García co-founded that produces a podcast, El Puente, and supports creative efforts of POCs — García published the first [POCa Madre Magazine](#), which includes interviews with artists Deborah Roberts, Laura Gutiérrez, Dawn Okoro and Makonnen, as well as independent curator Claudia Zapata. With its theme “Doing It For Themselves” or “Haciéndolo Por Sí Mismas,” the inaugural issue is a nod to the interconnectedness García hopes the magazine will spark in the creative community.

“In the magazine we have five women that are covered by only four writers. And I wanted this to be a bit incestuous. So some of the artists covered I also had write about other artists for future issues, or the people who wrote for this issue will be written about in future issues.”

An independent curator who has [organized award-winning exhibitions](#), García plans to continue the “Mujeriego” portraits to further his relationships with artists and grow his local network.

“It’s a very rewarding process and what I do through the podcast, and the magazine too, it’s all about building community, especially with other POCs,” says García. “I feel like I have to keep doing this.”

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