

“Michael Anthony García: Continental Divide” at St. Edward’s

Layered photographs and images of empty garments across Austin allude to spaces of equality and disruption

REVIEWED BY MELANY JEAN, FRI., JUNE 8, 2018

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On more than one occasion, I have spotted a stray shirt in the Austin landscape. Such sightings always spark a trail of questions: What's the story there? Was it lost or discarded? Was someone left vulnerable, exposed? In Michael Anthony García's "Continental Divide," articles of clothing are tucked into greenbelt spaces and photographed. The resulting images, like *This Land*, show a natural landscape layered with sediments of flannel and plaid.

These pieces are smaller punctuations in a show mostly populated with works from a series of portrait projects, though both use clothing as a stand-in for their wearers. A dozen or so portraits line the walls of the space, each one a compilation of projections completed in sessions with people of color throughout Austin. García first photographed an item, or several items, of clothing. He then projected this photo onto the face of the subject. He then projected that photo, the subject with their clothing projected onto their face, onto their bedding. This final shot is what appears on the wall. The photos themselves are merely documentation of these performative installations that occurred in the privacy of each individual's bedroom.



Courtesy of Michael Anthony García

Teruko faces the camera straight on, lips slightly parted, face mostly visible through the projection of what seems to be some kind of lace or laser-cut garment. Directly to her right, David avoids direct gaze, bowing his head slightly, his dark skin rendered a glowing checkered magenta through the various projections. Their faces undulate over indiscernible surfaces. The everyday textiles offer various forms of protection in life, shielding the body from the elements and providing the security and warmth of a place to rest. In contrast, the empty garments scattered among the landscape create discomfort in their absence of humanity, an absence that seems to suggest a threat to this security.

García sees the green spaces in Austin as locations of equalization, spaces where, in a city rife with disparity, everyone can seek enjoyment. Even so, he gestures to the many ways this equality is disrupted. Fault lines serve as evidence of displacement, geologic and demographic.

Down the center of the room is an aisle of crushed granite, flanked with strips of lace and dotted with stones. Meant to serve as a symbol for the intentionally segregating boundary of I-35, in his performance of *In the Wake*, García was hoisted over the dividing line, mouth and pockets bursting with pebbles that he dropped as he was hauled above. The rocks sit there now, mouth-deposits in a dirt stream. At the front of the aisle is a quilt, where García knelt to stuff his mouth with stones.

A quilt also hangs on the wall, with little placards of the portraits tucked into pockets. On the back of each is a poem he's written. García allows for viewers to take the cards from the sleeves, shuffle through them, and take them home, symbolic of the erasure of people of color from Austin and, perhaps, audience complicity.