

RUIZ-HEALY ART

Latinx, Latin America, & Texas Contemporary Art

Ruiz-Healy Art is pleased to present *César A. Martínez: Smoke & Mirrors*, on view at our San Antonio gallery from October 24th to November 30th, 2024. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, October 24th, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. A fully illustrated catalogue will be published alongside an essay written by Santos G. Martínez Jr., curator of the landmark 1977 Houston Contemporary Arts Museum exhibition *Dále Gas: Chicano Art of Texas*. *Smoke & Mirrors* marks the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery.

César A. Martínez: Smoke & Mirrors encompasses several of the artist's most acclaimed series, *Bato/Pachuco*, *Serape*, and *Collage*, and will highlight the varied range of mediums, experimentation, and innovation used by Martínez throughout his over fifty-year career. Historical and newer created works will be presented; Acrylic paintings, linoleum relief prints, watercolor paintings, and drawings will be exhibited. Santos G. Martinez Jr. stated, "Since those early years, the artist has remained true to his cultural roots. He is best known for his artistic exploration of various culturally inspired themes, which inform his art-making in a range of media; among them, south Texas landscapes, *mestizaje*, folklore, *toros*, collages, serapes, and, of course, his signature, iconic *Bato/Pachuco* Series. Heritage, identity, and his vast historical knowledge form the connective tissue that is the basis of his body of work produced throughout the course of these past five decades."

Martínez employs abstraction and color as essential tools across his opus. These principles allowed him to break away from the older Chicano art canon, largely about representation, by deconstructing and reclaiming Chicano motifs, such as the serape and step pyramid. This can be seen in his 1980s work, *Papalote*, where the artist refracts a serape through a kaleidoscope, amplifying the simplicity of the bold colors and blunt lines. "In 1977, the artist began experimenting to find a suitable format for what eventually would become his signature *Bato/Pachuco* Series. What started out strictly as a focus on the street fashion or zoot suit of the 1940s' *pachuco* generation, rapidly evolved to include the contemporary street scene and popular culture of the *batos* and *rucas* from the barrio. This remarkable, creative endeavor with broad resonance, consisting of paintings, drawings, and prints, has been ongoing. Through the years, it has become iconic and carries immense cultural significance," explains Santos G. Martinez Jr.

Martínez's *Collage series* draws inspiration from Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's South Texas journey. The artist crafts a narrative that resonates with stories of human survival and endurance told in ancient steles by incorporating elements of Native American rock art and Mesoamerican visual traditions in his collage work. Echoes of Martínez's passion for bullfighting are also seen throughout *Smoke & Mirrors*. His first introduction to *matador* culture was around age five when the young artist was taken to Nuevo Laredo's Plaza de Toros, equally horrified and amazed by the grand spectacle. He spent his teenage years training with bullfighters in Nuevo Laredo but never pursued the profession.

About the Artist

Martínez was born in Laredo, Texas, and graduated from Texas A&I University, Kingsville in 1968. He now lives and works in San Antonio, Texas. A major figure in the early 1970s and 1980s Chicano Art Movement, Martínez's portraits are Mexican American art history icons. Deeply rooted in his native South Texas and its Mexican American culture, Martínez's work reflects a broad knowledge of the Western art canon and finds inspiration from color-field paintings, Mexican architecture, and photography. Martínez's work has been included in landmark exhibits like *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters & Sculptors*; *La Frontera/The Border: Art About the Mexican/U.S. Border Experience*; and *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation 1965-1985*. In 2009, the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX, gave Martínez's work a solo exhibition with an accompanying publication book. The artist's work is broadly collected at the McNay Museum as well. His work is part of the permanent collection of institutions like The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Art Museum, Brooklyn, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX, and the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago, IL., among others.