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## Austin's Blanton Museum Hires First Curator of Latino Art

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The **Blanton Museum** of Art in Austin has named Claudia Zapata as its first associate curator of Latino Art. They will start at the institution, which is part of the University of Texas at Austin, in July.

Zapata is a rising curator in the field of Latinx art, having served most recently as a curatorial assistant on the landmark exhibition “Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now,” which was curated by E. Carmen Ramos at Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C. Zapata is also currently a chancellor’s postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles, with a joint affiliation with the school’s departments of art history and Chicana/o and Central American studies.

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<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/claudia-zapata-first-latino-art-curator-blanton-museum-1234663816/amp/?fbclid=IwAR3-KgffijSfCvvc1xDt4slZlIzch8Mj7NbMMKUzmMMJ-WZ2IVkY0kOnkfc>

From 2010 to 2014, they were the first curator of exhibitions and programs at the Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin, where they mounted exhibitions on Sam Coronado, Arturo García Bustos, and José Guadalupe Posada. Zapata is also a zine artist and co-founder of the Puro Chingón Collective.

Zapata will be one of the few curators in the country whose title and role is specifically focused on Latinx art. Since the mid-'90s, the Smithsonian's Latino Center has added several positions across the institution, including Taína Caragol, who is curator of painting and sculpture and Latino art and history at the National Portrait Gallery. (Earlier this year, the Whitney Museum **promoted Marcela Guerrero**, who had been hired to focus on Latinx art though the specialty was not named in her title, to a full curator.)

"Being the first associate curator of Latino art has a weight to it that I don't take lightly," Zapata told *ARTnews*. "This is the beginnings of this blueprint for the future. This doesn't end with me—it begins with me, but there's going to be the next generation after."

They added, "The mainstream trending of Latinx art may not last, that money may run out, but we're still going to be doing this work."

Zapata's appointment at the Blanton is part of the **Advancing Latinx Art in Museums initiative** that was announced in February by a consortium for four leading foundations—Mellon, Ford, Getty, and Terra—to pool together \$5 million to grant \$500,000 (over five years) for the creation of 10 Latinx art-focused curatorial positions. The Blanton will aim to endow Zapata's newly created position after the five years.

Other institutions that are part of the initiative include the National Gallery of Art, El Museo del Barrio, and Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Zapata said that this funding has created "a cohort that is going to be leading in charge. It's not one of us; it's all of us that's going to demand a change for the future."

At the Blanton, Zapata will initially focus on inventorying, researching, and cataloguing the Gilberto Cárdenas and Dolores Garcia Collection, a **gift of more than 5,000 works** that was donated to the Blanton in February. Zapata will also produce a catalogue on the gift. "With Latinx collectors like Gil and Dolores," they said, "it's not a diversification of a financial portfolio where it's a very removed market experience. It's very personal, and you can see that in the collecting practice."

Simone Wicha, the Blanton's director said the Cárdenas-Garcia donation "propelled the initiative of building a Latino program and collection forward in a very significant way for us. It was very clear to me in acquiring that collection that I wanted to bring a curator on board to help us go through that collection in depth. It was clear that this was a big responsibility, and I wanted somebody specialized in this area who would know that collection and able to add new research to the field at large."

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Additionally, Zapata, who will report to the Blanton's curator of Latin American art, Vanessa Davidson, will collaborate across all curatorial departments. They will also manage the Blanton's recently opened galleries dedicated to showcasing the Latinx art in the museum's permanent collection, which they called a "game-changer," adding "The idea of getting people from, for example, the Rio Grande Valley, to come up is amazing. That would be a huge win, for people to understand there's something for them here."

The Blanton's creation of a Latino art curator stems from its long-term commitment to supporting a related but distinct field, Latin American art; it was the first museum in the country to create a curatorial position for Latin American art, when it hired **Mari Carmen Ramírez** in 1998. The new position is also significant given that Austin is around 32 percent Hispanic/Latino and grew 35 percent between 2010 and 2020, **according to the Austin Chamber**.

Over the years, works by Latinx artists, including Celia Alvarez Muñoz, Enrique Chagoya, Luis Jiménez, and Ana Mendieta, had entered the collection, and more recently works by Alejandro Diaz, Vincent Valdez, Jay Lynn Gomez, and Laura Aguilar have also been acquired. The Blanton's strong foundation in Latin American art, Wicha said, "gives us another layer to be able to speak to and reference, so we can do something very unique in a way because that has been a strength."

She added, "Latinx art is a huge field that deserves even greater attention. My hope is that we are not just meeting the moment but also helping to kind of encourage other [museums] to acquire, showcase, and feature Latinx artists, their perspectives, their views, their lives, their experiences because it is part of the American experience."

Zapata said that in taking on this role they want to "open up the understanding of what Latinx art can look like—and *does* look like—is the key, showing the diversity. You need to think about Latinx art in its diversity and that includes thinking about queerness, Afro-Latinidad, and Indigeneity."