

Cande Aguilar

STORY BY CATHIE PARSSINEN & PHOTOS BY CANDE AGUILAR AND JAMES HORD

CANDELARIO (CANDE) AGUILAR speaks calmly and reflectively of past histories and future dreams. But his quiet exterior masks an inner creative life that is turbulent...roiling...molten, a life imprinted in multi-media abstracts that coagulate on canvas in forms as dense as bone; as transparent as blood; as fluid as cartilage; as layered as tissue; and as mysterious and interconnected in its workings as the human body itself.

Cande is a native of Brownsville. His father, Candelario Sr., is a musician who has played electric bass and guitar (the bajo sexto) for over thirty years with the conjunto band, *Gilberto Perez y Sus Compadres*. Cande grew up surrounded by music and musicians. He tagged along with the band as they played at countless ballroom dances across south Texas. His grandfather, Anastacio Aguilar, gave him an accordion when he was six. “I didn’t start to take it seriously until I was about ten,” Cande confides. As a child, he often performed with the *Gilberto Perez* band. His love for the accordion was perhaps a precursor for his future work as an abstract artist. “With the button accordion, the notes are spread all around...they are spread apart. It’s not at all like playing the piano where notes are logically ordered. It was a real challenge.”



Mixta Nueva 2004 mixed media on panel, 61”x 96”



In 1992, Cande and three friends formed their own band, *Elida y Avante*. The band toured across Texas and the southwest, garnering platinum and gold awards in the Tejano music market until the band split in 2001. The decision of their lead singer and her husband to begin a family was, as Cande reflects, “a great ending to an awesome journey we shared together.” Oddly, about 8 months before the dissolution of the band, Cande began to sketch again. He had done nothing with his art since high school, when he won Best of Show for a figurative work entered in an exhibit featuring artists from Brownsville’s three high schools. Cande reflects, “I don’t know why I turned back to the art...it was almost as if I anticipated a change.” Still, the band’s collapse took Cande by surprise. He was starting over. He schooled himself on the fundamentals with hundreds of figurative sketches, setting a platform for the abstract work that would soon consume him artistically.

The birth of their first daughter two and a half years ago transformed Cande’s work. He began to visualize the world through the eyes of this infant child. His visions were imaginings of a preverbal, primitive experience, a bombardment of millions of images, colors, sizes, lines and shapes that characterize this early phase of development and only later, through the miracle of intelligence, become an ordered translation of the universe. His work during this period was as layered and as elastic as memory itself and as seemingly random and mysteriously interconnected as the subconscious. Cande notes, “Among my past works, *Mixta Nueva*, with the number 9, was one of the first paintings that contains within it something clearly recognizable. And this is something I realize...that I have started introducing more figurative images in my work as I have watched my daughter transform her world into something that is less abstract.”

Cande’s band gave him a forum for his creative talents. The band was a living entity for him, and its collapse engendered a sense of loss, even of grief. “I feel the artistic chemistry is still there, unchanged; only the

medium and the environment have changed. In some sense, art is something I don’t fully understand, but it is something that lives inside me.” His work “Chemistry” reflects the chaotic transition from one art form to another.

Keenly aware of the synergies between creating art and marketing it, Cande comments wryly, “No matter how good it is, the band that never gets out of the garage has forgotten the importance of accessibility...of being present to the public.” He researches galleries on the internet, and a year ago he traveled to Austin, hoping to present his work to a gallery on 6th Street that he thought might be a fit for his art. He was rejected, and he strolled along 6th, wandering in and out of galleries. He walked into Austin Galleries and spent a considerable amount of time there, studying the art. He was immediately impressed but noted that the works represented were primarily traditional and figurative...nothing purely abstract, and he was disappointed because, although he loved the quality of the gallery, he saw

no place for his art here. He started to walk out the door, when owner, George Attal, asked him if he were an artist. Surprised, Cande confirmed that he was. George asked him if he had any representations of his art, and Cande pulled out a brochure. George took the brochure and immediately went to the light to study it. After what seemed like an interminable silence, George said, “People have been asking for this sort of thing,” and that was the beginning of Cande’s relationship with Austin Galleries. He offered to bring some pieces to the Gallery for George to review. “I still don’t know how George suspected I was an artist. Maybe he had a hunch. I still can’t believe that after I was rejected by the gallery that I had hoped would represent me, I stumbled into a relationship with a gallery that is one hundred times better. I feel very, very fortunate.”

At the end of our talk, Cande tells me frankly, “Although I love what I do, it isn’t easy. Even when you find something you love to do, it’s still a struggle. I would like it to come easy, but struggle still defines much of

Chemistry 2004 mixed media on canvas, 90”x 90”



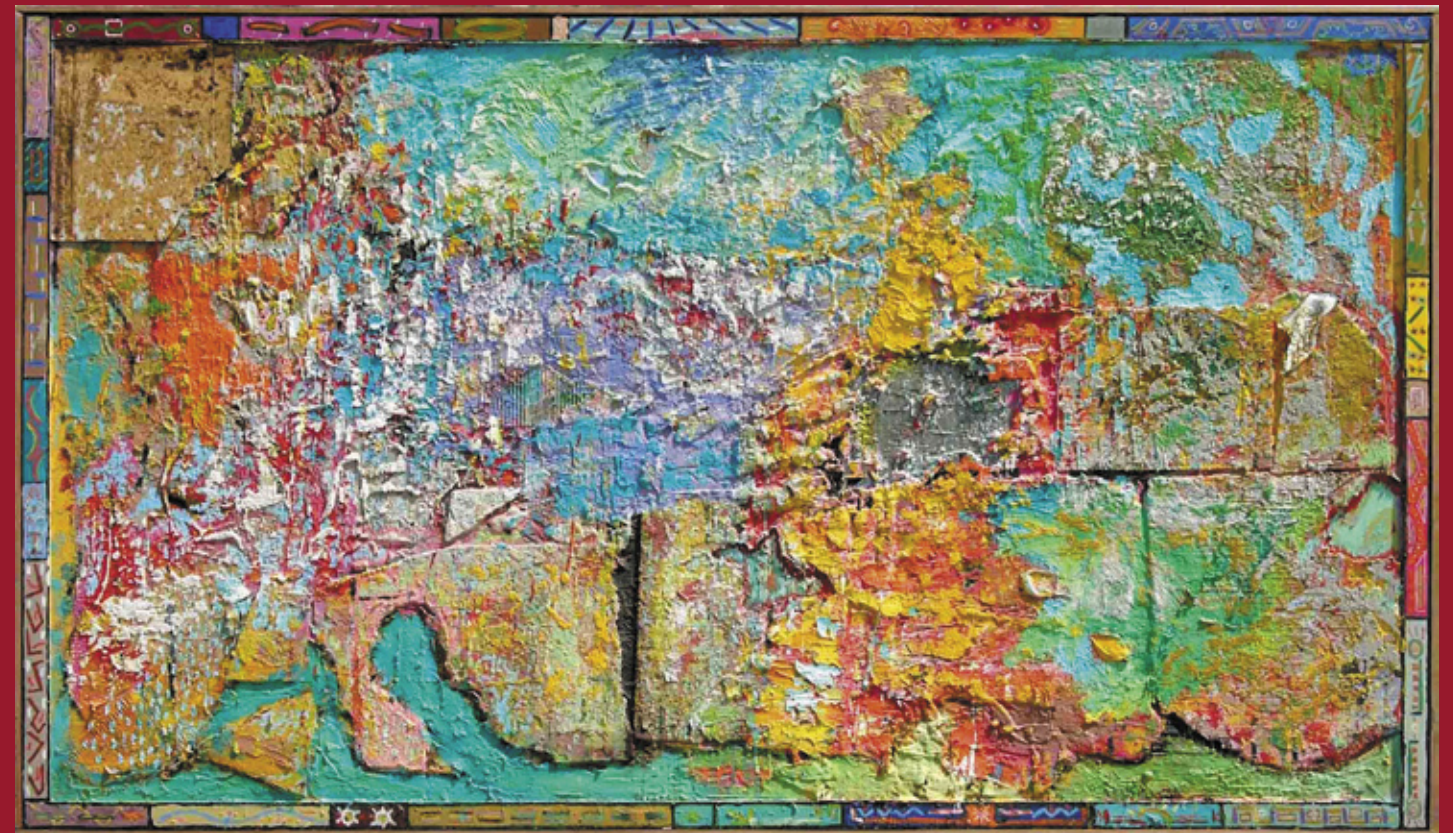
Adolescent Human Race 2003 mixed media on canvas, 83”x 99”



125 Phone Calls per Hour 2003 mixed media, 61”x 55”



visualize the world through the eyes of an infant child



El Nino y la Mariposa 2003 mixed media on canvas, 51”x 85”