

## Cande Aguilar: barrioPOP at Beyond Arts Gallery

Text by Noe Hinojosa, photos by James Hord & Cande Aguilar

What is barrioPOP by Cande Aguilar? In the United States, when you place the word "barrio" in front of anything, it acts as a filter. It filters whatever words follow through a Mexican American context down to a common denominator: the neighborhood. If I say I can play barrio tennis, it means I may not have the fancy equipment or clothes, and my strokes may not be refined, but I do know the rules, and I can play. I might have to jump a fence to get to some tennis courts, but that just reinforces the point that "barrio" anything is being of, or pertaining to, the common folk of the barrio where people are accustomed to less access of all kinds for basic socio-economic reasons.

barrioPop therefore can be understood as pop art through a particular south Texas, Mexican American lens that takes us on a ride that might not be posh, but it will get us there, and in this case, with its own unique style. Cande's work is rooted in a Rio Grande Valley, "pull yourself up from your bootstraps and make do with what you have", kind of feel the translates well through his use of found objects in this series of mixed media art installations. Traditional art, after all, has been done and it all looks the same no matter where in the world it originates. What people want is something new and different. What people need from art are statements that move them either emotionally, or intellectually, and preferably both within some relevant context. This is what Aguilar achieves in his art with regional flavor and genuine authenticity. After all, if there is one thing the "barrio" (and Mexican culture in general) is known for, it is: sabor (flavor).



barrioPOP installation view, Beyond Arts Gallery Harlingen TX

In barrioPOP, we see Cande's abstract expressionist's painterly experience with bright color fields and forms extruded through the Play-dough press of his 1970s and 80s popular culture upbringing. barrioPOP is an interconnected series of mixed media art installations, which represent various border town settings associated with a certain era and place, and it's filled with opportunity for nostalgia. Any shared history or appreciation for the unique cultural amalgamation of post 1960s Americana will find much to enjoy in this particularly modern pop art view cast from the southern tip of Texas.

Cande Aguilar was raised American and proud of it just like all the other Valley kids in the public schools in the 70s and 80s, but they were also fully immersed in their Mexican heritage. Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley and speaking Spanish colored all aspects of life including the flavor of the general cultural ideas being dolled out across America on television and in movies. Cande's unique perspective helped form the building blocks of his barrioPOP art. His hybridization of ideas is the catalyst and the contextual components for his creations in this show.

As a part of the first installation, "Pedaso de Ayer", is one of several paintings hung on the wall of a humble home. The entire installation, however, is a contradiction because fine art didn't usually hang on the walls of simple homes. At best there might be folk art, but the scenes were always country or provincial and certainly not modern pop art like, "Pedaso de Ayer". This particular painting stands out for its bold use of spring colors and cartoon style drawings. Bright aqua, pastel purple, baby blue and vivid yellow all grab our attention, while bold red accent letters spell

out "TOSTADITAS". Other words continue telling the story across a pink and yellow-green wall, peppered with colorful balloons. It's a sidewalk scene in which a woman appears to have fallen down but not without escaping the gaze of some telescoping eyes.



Pedaso de Ayer, 2017, multimedia painting with image transfer on panel, 48x72 inches (122x183cm)

As we proceed from the paintings on the wall of the first indoor setting, a rooster greets us from atop a pink coffee table that's hinged into a globe stand. Naturally, every barrio will inevitably have chickens running around with at least one rooster. The Mexican cultural references involving roosters would fill a book by themselves. Suffice it to say that Aguilar uses this cultural touchstone and others to great effect. His use of words in his artworks also offers plenty of additional context and subtext that visually and verbally intertwine and overlap. His profoundly colorful use of local grocery store sale signs in, "Las Varatas", is another example.



Rooster that sleeps Late



Las Varatas (Daily Special) laminated grocery signs, 2008

Proceeding to the next three large paintings, which represent landscapes, possibly backyards or much of the farmland that covers the Rio Grande Valley, we see irreverence mixed with whimsy. These paintings are covered in confetti. Upon closer inspection, the confetti is punched out of recycled paper, so there are words and word fragments captured in the individual confetti flakes.



barrioPOP Rainy Yard, 2017, multimedia with confetti on canvas, 108x96in(274x244cm)

Across the rest of the installations, Cande maintains his liberal use of popular culture iconography and imagery blended into his own individual flourish of south Texas colors and general brightness. There's no doom or gloom in this exhibit. The colors and ideas flow and call out in reoccurring themes of nostalgia mixed with bright color palettes that form harmonies throughout the show. Each work strikes a series of visual notes and word chords that resonate between the two disparate realities of traditional Mexican culture and modern American pop culture. These two competing worlds could not be more different, yet they have coexisted and even merged, not only along the south Texas border, but also in the heart and mind of this artist who grow up straddling both worlds. The piece, "Pulga Table with Half Off Stuff", is a collection of items: a laptop, a skateboard, a cell phone, and some dishes, all of which can be purchased at one of the local flea markets, but these items have all been cut in half with a water jet. These selected consumer goods apparently straddled a line and bear a mark as well. The artist strikes another harmonious yet humorous note here without missing the beat of the show as a whole.



barrioPOP Pulga Table with Half off Stuff, 2017, assemblage

Cande's attention and focus on a pop art aesthetic may seem as unlikely as seeing Warhol drinking a Modelo in Brownsville, Texas, back in the day, but the garish colors and bigger than life personalities of Mexican culture would've appealed to Warhol, and there are plenty of places in Brownsville where he would've fit in. The Mexican flavor in Cande's work may be colloquial, but America has grown to recognize and embrace a lot of Mexican culture. Since the whole point of pop culture is its universality and wide appeal, the references in the Aguilar's work are hardly limited and far more inclusive than not. Still, the authentic flavor of a simple life lived along the border stands out just as much in barrioPOP as do the cartoon characters and Star Wars references.



Burning Dreams, 2017, multimedia painting with found object on panel, 72x96in(122x244)

Cande Aguilar, "barrioPOP"

where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 N. A. Street Harlingen TX 78550

when: November 11 – January 5, 2018

Time: open during business hours

Contact: 956.230.2859

