

# PRESENT STANDARD

## Purposeful Pluralism Pluralismo Deliberado

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IN POPULAR IMAGINATION, the boundaries of “Latin America” and the definition of “Latino” are often generic and stereotypical to the point of being cringe worthy. Latin America is popularly perceived as a place “south of the border” and its people possess the same traits and speak one language. These perceptions could be further from the truth. Latin America has been a contact zone for a plurality of ethnicities, belief systems, languages, and lifestyles for centuries. Contemporary Latin American art is no different. It also falls prey to institutional attitudes that artists, who are Latin American or of Latin American descent, will make art with certain visual attributes.

The purpose of the exhibition Present Standard is to sidestep expected clichés and archetypes of Latinx art. By using the term “Latinx” here forward, I am resisting the myth that being “Latin” is a monolith. Instead, “Latinx” thoughtfully encompasses the fluidity of cultural, gender, and racial expressions of a dynamic people. Curated by artist Edra Soto and Josue Pellot, Present Standard aims to challenge so-called norms by providing an alternative view with works by 25 Latinx artists living and working in the United States today. For this curatorial project, Soto and Pellot invited me to write about five exhibiting artists: Paola Cabal, Mariano Chavez, Dianna Frid, Jorge Lucero, and Harold Mendez, who, whether born in the United States or immigrated to this country, all straddle complex worlds of Latinx sensibilities and American values. Their experiences give rise to related but heterogeneous objects and subjectivities.

## Present Standard

Curated by Edra Soto & Josue Pellot

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Chicago Cultural Center

The title of the exhibition Present Standard is intended as a way to reclaim the word “standard.” In English, “standard” implies an accepted norm, making something conventional or usual -- to standardize -- a process to which artists often feel allergic. By contrast, in Old French, “standard” or *estendre* means to extend or go beyond, which is a key goal of this exhibition: to use the exhibition format as a springboard to propel our critical thinking of contemporary Latinx art.

In the same vein, Jorge Lucero’s quick drawing of a “flag” explores the concept of the word and object beyond its concrete or formal definition. Lucero’s minimal drawing strips the flag of political, historical or national marker, making it a floating signifier that forgoes allegiance to a group and instead calls on an imagined global citizenry that is unsympathetic to any one ideology. Dianna Frid employs text, textiles, and graphite in her semiotic organization and repetition of the letter “A” (or pronounced as AH in Spanish) to connote a visual poem. The vertical lines, yellow color blocks, and letters build up a lyrical composition written in the artist’s code. Frid’s use of yellow denotes an activist subject, one who struggles against and cannot accept the conventional.

Harold Mendez’s floor-based sculpture is a burnt cardboard box with a distorted reproduction of a copper Pre-Columbian death mask inside. It is an anachronistic time capsule laid open to reveal the specter of an elided culture. The artist’s handiwork plays with the languages of image and object to reflect on violence and suppression inflicted long ago, but also to set out the prospect of redemption from subjugation.



Dianna Frid, *Enjambment*,  
2012-2013, Paper, paint, canvas,  
embroidery floss, graphite. Photo:  
Tom Van Eynde