

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **Blanton Museum Fall Shows Will Forefront Latin American and Chicano Art**

### **Luis Jiménez and critical Pop Art exhibitions showcase the museum's diverse collection**

Austin, TX — August 18, 2021— The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is pleased to present two major fall exhibitions that highlight the museum's rich collections of Latin American, Latinx, and Chicanx art. *Pop Crítico/Political Pop: Expressive Figuration in the Americas, 1960s–1980s* and *Border Vision: Luis Jiménez's Southwest* both open on October 31, 2021 and will remain on view through January 16, 2022.

“These simultaneous exhibitions attest to the Blanton's enduring legacy of collecting and exhibiting Latin American and American art, including a growing collection of Chicanx and Latinx art,” said Blanton director Simone Wicha. “Our diverse holdings allow us to present original exhibitions like these, which draw parallels between modern and contemporary art and life throughout the Americas. *Pop Crítico/Political Pop* puts Latin American art on center stage, highlighting the interplay of artistic themes and techniques, while *Border Vision* showcases the pioneering work of Luis Jiménez, a UT Distinguished Alumnus, in an exploration of topics that are indelible to life in Texas. We hope the stories told through these exhibitions will resonate with our local communities and inspire visitors from all over.”



### ***Pop Crítico/Political Pop: Expressive Figuration in the Americas, 1960s–1980s***

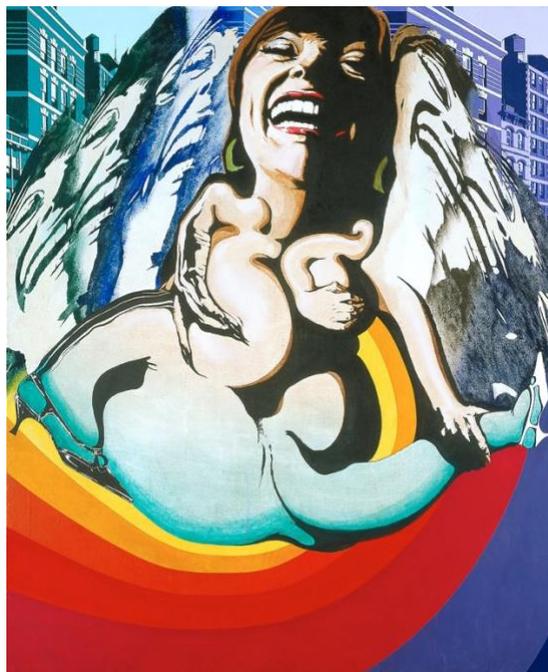
*Pop Crítico/Political Pop: Expressive Figuration in the Americas, 1960s–1980s* juxtaposes diverse works by American and Latin American artists who employed the visual language of Pop Art to voice a political

conscience. The show explores its titular “*Pop crítico*,” or “critical Pop,” a term first coined by Chilean curator Soledad García, within the framework of Pop Art’s global impact.

Featured artists include Antonio Berni, Audrey Flack, Beatriz González, Antônio Henrique Amaral, Barbara Jones-Hogu, Fernando Botero, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Rupert Garcia, Jorge de la Vega, Peter Saul, Antonio Seguí, Marisol Escobar, and May Stevens, among many others. Such artists took Pop Art’s practice of image appropriation, comic-book-style visuals, formal elements inspired by printmaking processes, and bright, eye-catching colors to unexpected political ends, and shielded themselves from accusations of subversion through irony and wit.

“Many of these works, including two new acquisitions by Barbara Jones-Hogu, will be on display for the first time,” said Carter E. Foster, Blanton deputy director for curatorial affairs. “It’s exciting to look closely at the Blanton’s rich collection of modern and contemporary American and Latin American art and draw connections and distinctions between potent works from the 60s, 70s, and 80s. While artists working in Brazil or Colombia, for example, rooted their works in wildly different sociopolitical realities than artists in, say, New York, they were working within the same eras and tapping into Pop sensibilities to their own ends. As a result, one of the remarkable things about this exhibition is that you can find visual congruencies even among the contrasts.”

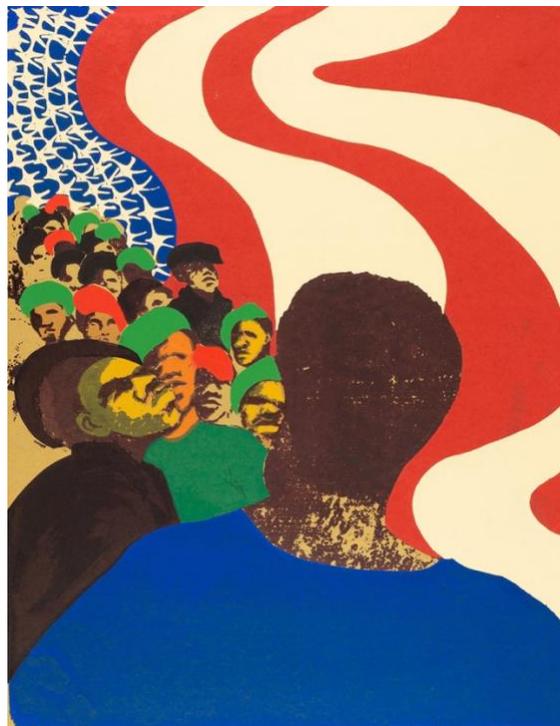
A common thread among all the works featured in *Pop Crítico/Political Pop* is their use of the body as a vehicle for critical content. Following a period dominated by abstraction, artists in both North and South America embraced a return to figurative art that depicted the human form in varied ways. This New Figuration, or *Nueva Figuración* as it was known in Latin America, figures prominently in the exhibition, which extends chronologically beyond Pop proper to explore the expressive figuration that arose in its wake. It was adopted for critical means by artists like Argentine Jorge de la Vega in *Go Go Go* (1967), in which he transforms a woman’s head and body into a grotesque monstrosity inspired by his reaction to images in the mass media.



The exhibition likewise highlights the pragmatic role that Pop Art played for Latin American artists who would deploy satire and irony within Pop's visual vocabulary to veil their critiques from government censors. Both Argentine Antonio Seguí's *Un amor casi imposible* [*An Almost Impossible Love*] (1964) and Brazilian Claudio Tozzi's *O Retrato* [*The Portrait*] (1971) manipulate wartime imagery into collage or comic-book-like prints.

The force of Pop is even evident in works by expatriate artists such as Brazilian Antônio Henrique Amaral, who painted *Sozinho em verde* [*Alone in Green*] (1973) while living in New York. Its overripe, bound, and bruised banana serves as a metaphor for political violence and torture. Amaral coded his denunciation of Brazil's violent military dictatorship by subverting stereotypes that dominate international perceptions of Brazil as a "Banana Republic." His deadpan realistic style reflects the influence of contemporary American Pop, yet his political double-meanings and emphasis on the banana's vulnerability suggest a world far removed from fascination with consumer culture.

In the United States, critical Pop would come to influence AfriCOBRA founding member Barbara Jones-Hogu's defining prints of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras, and even Jacob Lawrence, whose work marking the country's bicentennial offers a more colorful remembrance of the past, with clear intent. A similar impulse drives Peter Saul's celebration of Angela Davis, whose skin he renders in day-glo yellow.



"The exhibition shows how artists skillfully transformed Pop visual language into their own genre of critical Pop to respond to a variety of socio-political issues," noted Vanessa Davidson, Blanton curator of Latin American art. "Works created by artists in North and South America embody very different struggles, depending on country and situation, but their shared visual strategies transcend geography. The exhibition emphasizes this convergence of ideas, but also explores the fascinating issue of false positives: works that resemble one another but reflect tremendously different mindsets and intentions,

not to mention cultural and political contexts. Teasing out these differences while also highlighting points of congruence is at the heart of this exhibition.”

A number of the pairings present striking visual congruencies despite divergent themes and contexts. Peter Dean’s *Dallas Chaos II* (1982), inspired by a famous historic photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald being shot by Jack Ruby, shares a similar palette and gestural painting style with another work addressing a vastly different subject matter: Luis Cruz Azaceta’s *Homo-Fragile* (1983), which reflects the artist’s graphic response to self-imposed exile from Cuba and the horrific experience of radical violence in both Havana and New York. This is but one example of how artists embraced critical Pop and expressive figuration to address potent themes that visitors are invited to discover, often hidden just beneath the surface.

*Pop Crítico/Political Pop: Expressive Figuration in the Americas, 1960s–1980s* is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

### ***Border Vision: Luis Jimenez’s Southwest***

*Border Vision: Luis Jiménez’s Southwest* offers insightful and critical perspectives on the American Southwest, where the artist lived for most of his life (b. 1940 in El Paso, Texas, d. 2006 in Hondo, New Mexico), and which shaped his artistic legacy and unique *rasquache* — or “underdog” — flair. Grounded in Jiménez’s personal experiences and vision of the Southwest, the exhibition explores the history of western expansion and its lasting impact on Indigenous populations, the beauty and diversity of the local wildlife, and the contributions that immigrants and Mexican Americans have made to this region of the U.S. This is the first museum exhibition dedicated to Jiménez’s work since 2014.

“Luis Jiménez is a prominent American artist, whose work is well-known and loved here in Texas,” said exhibition curator Florencia Bazzano, Blanton assistant curator of Latin American art. “This exhibition takes a closer look at his monumental polychrome fiberglass sculptures and remarkable works on paper in order to better understand Jiménez’s life-long commitment to the Southwestern borderlands. His critical perspective on immigration and his celebration of the Mexican American community played a pioneer role in the Chicano art movement, and continues to have great relevance today.”

The show’s first half, titled “**Western Expansion**,” focuses on rural life in the borderlands, built through the colonization and deterritorialization of Indigenous populations. Presented together, the lithograph print series *Progress Suite* (1976) reveals how Jiménez conceived this project as a vast historical narrative, ranging from the Indigenous hunters who lived in this region to scenes of life in the Old West, to the arrival of modern means of transportation. Only two works in the series developed into sculptural form, including the fiberglass sculpture *Progress II* (1976/1999). This dynamic work shows a vaquero lassoing a longhorn. Between them, at the base, a representation of local plants and wildlife grow around the remains of an Indigenous warrior that signal the high price of colonization. Those familiar with Jiménez’s work will recognize the sculpture’s red-lit eyes—a nod to his father’s neon sign shop in El Paso—and its blue hues and ambitious, gravity-defiant scale, a style the artist also employed in his final piece *Blue Mustang* (2008), the 32-foot-tall sculpture commissioned for the Denver Airport.

The “progress” intimated in these titles, an ironic euphemism for colonization and empire, is also a reference to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals by Tom Lea that Jiménez would see as a

child around El Paso, which often starred horses, longhorns, cowboys, and other cornerstones of the Southwest's Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo history.

One of the show's major works, *Cruzando el Río Bravo [Border Crossing]* (1989), is central to the second section, "**Southwestern Traditions,**" which expands into more recent history, including Jiménez's experience growing up in an immigrant family. Featuring a larger-than-life figure of a Mexican man carrying a woman and infant on his back across the Rio Grande River, this fiercely relevant sculpture was conceived as a tribute to the artist's father and grandmother, both of whom crossed the border from Mexico to Texas in 1924.

Opposite *Cruzando el Río Bravo [Border Crossing]*, the 13-foot-tall painting *Fiesta Dancers (Jarabe)* (1989) portrays a middle-aged couple dancing the *jarabe tapatío*, commonly known as the Mexican hat dance. Jiménez created five sculptural versions of *Fiesta Dancers*, the first of which was commissioned for the Otay Mesa border crossing.

Jiménez's works in this section likewise champion the *rasquache* working-class aesthetic associated with Chicano art. A compelling example of Jiménez's brand of *rasquachismo* is *Cholo Van with Popo and Ixta* (1997), which depicts the Mexican legend of star-crossed Aztec lovers Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl as an ornate decoration on the side of a van driven by a working-class *cholo*—a term reclaimed by Chicanos who use it as a symbol of pride. Another example, *Untitled (Low Rider)* (1994) pays direct homage to lowrider subculture, with which Jiménez was deeply familiar. He taught himself to use fiberglass by restoring old classic cars as a teenager, which led to his innovative use of the same material in his large-scale sculptures.

A reoccurring theme in *Border Vision*, the depiction of wildlife native to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, remained a fascination for Jiménez throughout his life. Although not indigenous to the region, the alligators in *Lagartos* (1995) represent the family of reptiles that long inhabited the pond in El Paso's central plaza from 1889 to 1965, once a bustling meeting place in the city. The lithograph with its entangled group of downtown alligators served as a draft for his later sculpture *Los Lagartos*, which honors the original reptiles that have become a cultural memory synonymous with Jiménez's hometown.

Rudolfo Anaya, professor emeritus of history at the University of New Mexico, once predicted, "In the coming years there will be a school of Luis Jiménez art." Today, the artist's legacy remains as influential as ever.

*Border Vision: Luis Jiménez's Southwest* is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

Support for this exhibition is provided in part by Ellen and David Berman.

### **About the Blanton Museum of Art**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with around 19,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

**Image Captions:**

Beatriz González, *Apuntes para la historia extensa, continuación* [*Notes for an Extensive History, Continuation*], 1968, oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 47 1/4 in., Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Judy and Charles W. Tate, 2016, © Beatriz González

Jorge de la Vega, *Go Go Go*, 1967, acrylic and collage on canvas, 77 x 64 3/16 in., Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Gunther Oppenheim, © Estate of Jorge de la Vega

Barbara Jones-Hogu, *Nation Time*, 1970, screenprint on gold-colored paper, 30 7/8 x 24 7/8 in., Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Leslie Shaunty and Robert Topp, 2019, © Estate of Barbara Jones-Hogu