

Statesman

Entertainment

Cultura en Austin: 3 must-see December events

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It was inventive, fearless and radical — exactly what was needed at the time to turn heads and help boost Latino art to the national stage.

In the early 1970s, the East Los Angeles printmaking studio Self Help Graphics & Art launched. It became more than just a work space as a cultural hub attracting change-makers and masters in their craft.

Now, you can see more than 70 prints produced at the popular studio between 1978 and 1997 in the Arte Sin Fronteras exhibit at the Blanton Museum of Art, now open and running through Jan. 12. The prints made their way to the museum as a gift from former Austin gallery owner and Latino art trailblazer Gilberto Cárdenas.

Arte Sin Fronteras prints were produced “at a pivotal moment in the national recognition of Latinx art in the U.S.,” says Florencia Bazzano, the Blanton’s assistant curator of Latin American art and co-curator of the exhibition. “Pioneering figures like Dr. Cárdenas, who encourage collecting Latinx art by providing gallery representation for artists, and institutions like Self Help Graphics, which champion artists and the value of Latinx art, paved the way for the inclusion of Latinx art in the American canon.”

The exhibit’s artwork ranges from conveying the legacy of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s to exploring the intersections between cultural identity and sexual orientation.

The visibility of the Latino art revolution happening in East Los Angeles at the time was elevated by game-changers like Cárdenas, who in 1986 launched Galería Sin Fronteras in East Austin.

For 14 years, Galería Sin Fronteras — which inspired the exhibit's name — promoted the work of Chicano and Latin American artists and worked closely with Self Help Graphics & Art, among other community arts organizations and museums across the country. Cárdenas, who taught sociology at the University of Texas for more than 20 years, opened his gallery with an exhibit featuring the work of many Self Help Graphics artists. He's since become a prominent collector of Latino art in the U.S.

From immigration policies to Day of the Dead imagery, Arte Sin Fronteras provides a peek into the types of issues, themes and ideas that sparked the imagination of East Los Angeles artists who would later pave the way for a new generation of Latino artists across the country.

On Thursdays, museum admission is free. Visit blantonmuseum.org for more information.

Aarón Sánchez shakes up Austin

The first time I saw chef Aarón Sánchez featured as a celebrity judge on the television cooking competition show “Chopped,” I instantly felt full of pride. I didn't know him, but here was someone on national television who looked like he could be one of my cousins. His warmth and familiarity came across the screen, and I felt connected. As a Latino chef on television, he was doing more than just talk about food. He was representing Latinos across America.

I met Sánchez, who now appears on Fox's “MasterChef,” during the Texas Book Festival last month, when I moderated a conversation with him about his memoir “Where I Come From.” And once again I felt proud when I saw the first row at the event filled with aspiring little chefs, all mostly Latino students.

Now, Sánchez returns to Austin on Dec. 9 to host a food party to celebrate his memoir at Empire Control Room & Garage (606 E. Seventh St.).

The El Paso-born chef joins another Texan for the celebration: musician Shakey Graves, aka Alejandro Rose-Garcia. Sánchez and Rose-Garcia plan to share stories onstage, followed by a special acoustic performance. Tickets, which range from \$65-\$135, include a signed copy of the book and food by Sánchez and La Condesa chef Rick Lopez. For more information, visit chefaaronsanchez.com/tour.

Las Lavanderas

During the mid-19th century, Puerto Rico's capital of San Juan experienced a time of change that widened the gap between the haves and have nots. As the city modernized, slums were removed and working class families displaced.

But a group of brave laundresses, who were key to the city's economy at the time, fought for their rights as they were being forced to leave their homes behind.

On Dec. 14 and 15, the Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance group pays tribute to these unsung heroes of the island's history through bilingual theatrical performance "Las Lavanderas" at the Boyd Vance Theater in the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center.

The production, written by Puerto Rican Cultural Center founder Ana MarÍA Tekina-eirú Maynard, draws inspiration from oral histories and academic research. "Las Lavanderas" is part of the center's annual Sembrando Herencia performances, which for the past 17 years have made Puerto Rican history relevant and accessible to all Austinites.

Advance tickets cost \$15 for adults and \$5 for children. Doors open at 6 p.m. for the Saturday show and at 2:30 p.m. for the Sunday show. Visit casita.prfdance.org/product/tickets-sembrando2019 for more details.