

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Katie Bruton, [katie.bruton@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:katie.bruton@blantonmuseum.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## Blanton Museum Announces First Curator of Latino Art



AUSTIN, TX—April 10, 2023—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin announces the appointment of Dr. Claudia Zapata as the museum’s first Associate Curator of Latino Art. This key curatorial position was established as part of an institution-wide initiative to expand the Blanton’s focus on Latino art.

Zapata is currently the Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellow in the Departments of Art History and Chicana/o and Central American Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles. Most recently, they served as curatorial assistant for Latinx art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in support of the current exhibition *Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now*, which has redefined the history of U.S. printmaking. They will join the Blanton’s curatorial team in July.

“This is a tremendous moment for the Blanton,” said Director Simone Wicha. “Thanks to investment from the *Advancing Latinx Art in Museums* initiative, we’ve been able to institute a new curatorial position that will ensure that the Gilberto Cárdenas and Dolores Garcia Collection, and Latino art in general, here receive the research and focus they deserve. Claudia brings diverse knowledge of Latino and Chicano art to this position, bolstered by their studies of modern and contemporary Latin American art and ancient Mesoamerican art, fields that the Blanton and UT have respectively pioneered. As a scholar, museum professional, artist, and Texan, Claudia has long advocated for the recognition of Chicano and Latino art in Texas and U.S. art, and I am confident that they will advance the Blanton’s steadfast commitment to representing and amplifying this important area of American art.”

“The histories of Chicano and Latino art have deep roots in works on paper, which Claudia has extensively studied and researched—not only examining artists and collaboratives working in the medium, but also coming to know the printers themselves,” added Vanessa Davidson, curator of Latin American art. “This is enhanced by their vast knowledge of the larger field and expansive studies of the strategies by which these artworks have historically been presented in museum and gallery contexts, as well as in artist-run spaces. Their outstanding scholarship, combined with their passion for advancing this field through research and curatorial work, will be instrumental at the Blanton.”

In their new position at the Blanton, Zapata will direct the project to inventory, research, catalogue, and digitize the artworks recently gifted and purchased from the Gilberto Cárdenas and Dolores Garcia Collection, in addition to producing a publication on this landmark gift, which includes more than 5,000 works. They will oversee collection rotations in the Blanton’s recently opened galleries dedicated to Latino art. While Zapata will work closely with Davidson within the Blanton’s Latin American art department, they will also collaborate with all curatorial areas of the museum as well as with university faculty, helping to advance Latino studies across the campus and beyond.

"Undoubtedly, the Gilberto Cárdenas and Dolores Garcia Collection gift to the Blanton is one of the most historic events in Latino art," said Zapata. "I am honored to join the Blanton curatorial team to guide the advancement of Latino art’s study and presentation using this expansive and comprehensive collection. The Blanton is leading the charge for museums with their new permanent Latino art galleries, demanding space for this significant contribution to American art. We aim to make this institution the preeminent site for Latino art study and appreciation, serving local to international communities."

Prior to their role at the Smithsonian, Zapata served as the first curator of exhibitions and programs at Austin's Mexic-Arte Museum from 2010 to 2014, where they curated solo exhibitions on seminal Mexican and Mexican-American artists Sam Coronado, Arturo García Bustos, and José Guadalupe Posada. They have published widely in the field, including the forthcoming essay "The Future is Feminist: How the Maestras Atelier Transformed Self Help Graphics" in the anthology *Self Help Graphics & Art at Fifty*. They co-founded the Puro Chingón Collective, an experimental art group that develops zines, prints, apparel, designs, and art toys. The collective's zines are part of the collections at the Thomas J. Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Library and Archives, the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston, the Mexic-Arte Museum, and the London College of Communication Library, among many others. Zapata holds a doctorate in Art History from Southern Methodist University and a master's in Art History from The University of Texas at Austin.

The associate curator of Latino art position is funded by *Advancing Latinx Art in Museums*, a new initiative to nurture and prioritize U.S. Latino art supported by the Ford Foundation, the Getty Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. UT Austin has further invested in the Blanton's Latino art initiative by providing funding for collections staff and storage needs to process and study the Gilberto Cárdenas and Dolores Garcia Collection. *Advancing Latinx Art in Museums* will fund the curatorial role for five years, as the Blanton works toward endowing the position into the future.

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

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 21,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary U.S. 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: Claudia Zapata (photo: courtesy of Luis M. Garza)