

# MONICA MARTINEZ-DIAZ

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## *A TRAJECTORY OF GRIEF*



## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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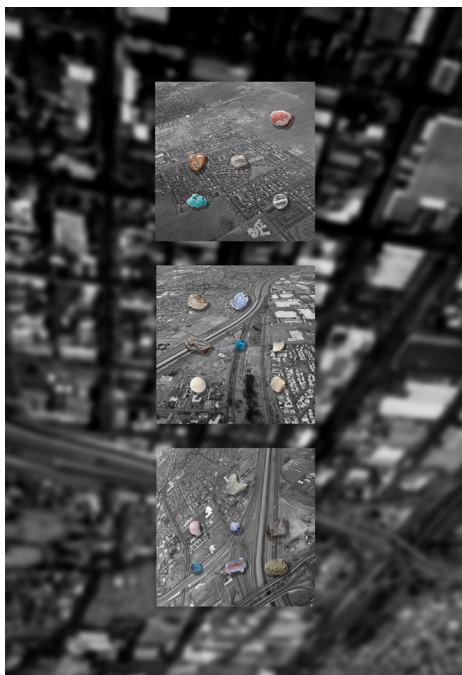
MAY 18 - JULY 3, 2024

AUSTIN, TEXAS

## A TRAJECTORY OF GRIEF

Monica Martinez-Diaz reflects on the development of memory, the resilience of familial ties, and the beauty in the quotidian in her recent exhibition, *A Trajectory of Grief*. Using photography, she forms installations, portraits, and digital collages to carve a path of her own emotional processing and homage to her family and the experiences of impermanence. The exhibition space acts as a commemorative altar and dedication to the passing of her grandfather, one that presents itself in ethereal spaces of nature, abstracted portraits, and a curation of heirlooms.

Martinez-Diaz's experience living on the U.S./Mexico border is a definable characteristic that influences her visual path. As a border resident, the duality of both nations results in a bifurcated reality, linguistically and mentally. This paradoxical notion is what Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa defines as a "forked tongue." The traversing between countries and the tribulation of the diasporic experience is prevalent in works like *Time to*



*Time to return there, 2024*

Inkjet print on premium luster paper, 37 x 25"

*Return There*. In this digital photographic collage, the artist placed gifted rocks atop aerial views of the El Paso/Juárez border. The rocks were intimate presents from her grandfather. As a man of minimal emotional intimacy, one of his ways of showing affection was to gift the artist these unique offerings. By positioning the rocks through the political landscape, the artist makes these tokens larger than life, an effort to call them to gargantuan proportions, like a monumental "Godzilla," according to Martinez-Diaz. The artist wants her endeared objects to be comparable to colossal and unyielding natural phenomena. In doing so, her fantastical additional elements challenge the rigid national borders, with her rocks confronting the space in an unregulated behavior. The frustration of this space is evident, as the borders' bureaucracy prevented her from moving freely between countries during COVID. As her grandfather was sick and the artist traveled across countries to be by her family's side, the national borders posed a preventative measure, inhibiting her movements.

Family, the legacies of their lives, and their home of Juárez, Mexico are central themes for Martinez-Diaz. The passing down and the shared recollection of memory is as important to the artist as any heirloom or precious object. Reclaiming the narrative of the border and the connotative violence of Juárez is significant to the artist's pictorial settings. Her subjects and compositions do not resonate with the fear that the mainstream media paints the border. Instead, she encapsulates each work to reflect the security and nostalgia of her family's homes.

Martinez-Diaz zooms into these private, familial spaces guiding us through the rhizomatic nature of reflection and grief. The artist captured the intimate conversations between her and her grandmother after her grandfather's passing. Works like *To remember our pictures*, with their cinematic aura, evoke visual queries. With glimpses of the artist's grandmother, as a result of anonymity



*For the first time, somewhere in Juarez, I felt the light slipping away from me, 2024*

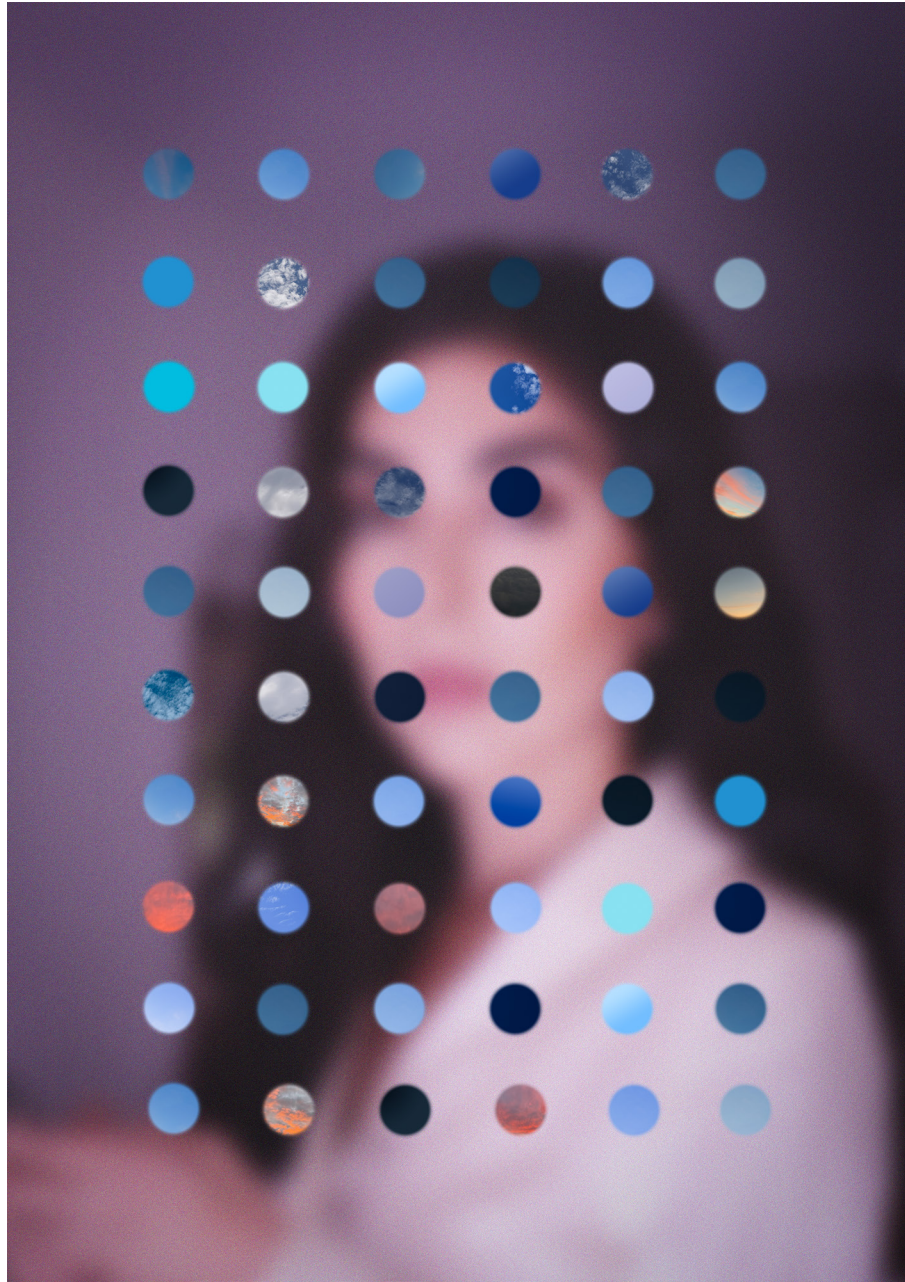
Inkjet print on premium luster paper, 21 x 25"

requested by her family member, each portrait both distances and incentivizes a curiosity about what she is guiding us to decipher. As one peers across the shoulder of this elder, as in *To remember our entrance*, the settings are cryptic, and the environment's timbre strikes a melancholia that lingers throughout the series. This interweaving between sadness and the surreal nature of memory, where, despite death, someone can be eternally present, paints each of the artist's works as memento mori and homage.

Martinez-Diaz relies on her family's curation of objects to translate her emotional process. Through digital collage, she fuses her perception of her patrimony: heirlooms, memories, and love. The artist's inherited collection of mantelitos [doilies] and other fabrics are domestic gifts that she uplifts to precious objects in her digital captures, as in the work *Roads on the hand*. Rivaling the intricate nature of the mantelitos' detailed craftsmanship, the artist adjoins family photos with these curios to create a photographic frame digitally. The effect of this precise digital collage is a trompe l'oeil, or a fooling of the eye. Are these fabric objects framed and containing her family's photographs? This visual playfulness and oscillation between perception and reality is a consistent undertone of Martinez-Diaz's work.

As in *I hear your voice in every piece*, the





*After all, we are all under the same sky, 2023*  
Inkjet print on premium luster paper, 37 x 25"

Cover Panel: *A Trajectory of Grief, 2024*, Installation view

embroidered object is the seemingly perfect container of this photograph. In this image, the artist photographed her grandparents' collection of Lladró, a Spanish brand of porcelain figurines. Each piece was purchased after a major milestone in her family's life, from births, business deals, and marriages, making the shelves a biography of accomplishments and joy that the family achieved. With this memory, the artist transports one through a chronology of happiness that rivals the insurmountable components of grief and also shows her inherited desire to remember visually.

The abstract and the incomprehensible nature of sorrow articulate works like *I want to love things again*. The work is an example of the emotional process and the unnerving logic of this evolution. Taken on a rare day in fog-covered Juárez, the photo is from the artist's old high school. With a longing to live in the past, free of death and sadness, she went back to her hallowed grounds to challenge her current headspace. The absence of figures and the loneliness of mourning lingers in Martinez-Diaz's landscapes.

Natural phenomena carry a premonitory weight, as in her photo, *I knew one of my grandparents was going to die when the plants and trees at their house started to cry*. I knew something was wrong when the branches of one of the three trees at the forefront started to dry. I knew one of the grandparents was gonna die, I just didn't know



December 6, 2024

Inkjet print on premium luster paper, 21.5 x 21.5"



*I knew one of my grandparents was going to die when the plants and trees at their house started to cry. I knew something was wrong when the branches of one of the three trees at the forefront started to dry. I knew one of the grandparents was gonna die, I just didn't know which one, 2023*

Vinyl, 70 x 105"

*which one*. The black and white photo summons a reflective tone, comparable to a cinematic trope suggesting a flashback. To the artist, this duo of trees on her grandparents' land was a harbinger of her family's fate. With half of the family's garden dying and one tree starting to rot, she knew one of her grandparents was going to die. The image is a testament to the artist's foresight. It may also act as the inherited natural connections and non-Western perceptions of spiritual relationships with the land.

Martinez-Diaz's works interweave these realities and recurring callbacks to land and sky. Nature and the universality of the earth's experience are both unsettling and yet comforting constants, a collective moment she aims to preserve. In *After all, we are all under the same sky*, the central photo is evidence of a collaboration with her friends and family. As a result of the pandemic, the artist was alone in the U.S. and away from her family in Mexico. To cross the border was complicated in these uncertain times. Therefore, in an effort to connect, she asked people to send her a picture of their sky at a specific time. The ability to

connect across borders is a challenge for those who live transnationally. And despite each political action to inhibit human connections, there is a resilient effort by the affected communities to circumvent the preventative measures. The contestation and protest may exist in the traditional spaces and forms of didactic prints, calling out and overtly identifying aspects of oppression. Yet, in these conceptual forms that Martinez-Diaz develops, there is a comparable objection to unjust separation, equally as formidable and rousing.

In a post-2020 era, death and commemoration are central tenets of our present realities. Martinez-Diaz's photographs act as visually eloquent testimonials of mortality and the finite nature of the corporeal. *A Trajectory of Grief* takes on an epitaphic form, inscribed photographically with snapshots, portraits, and found objects. Her works are a eulogy for both her family and her past self: when she was unfamiliar with her ability to exist in such pain and yet survive.

Claudia Zapata, Ph.D is the Associate Curator of Latino Art at the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas.



# Monica Martinez-Diaz CV

## EDUCATION

- 2018 MFA, Art, Photography, and Video, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
2015 BA, Art and Photography, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *The Place where the Clouds are Formed*, Museo de Arte de Nogales, Nogales, Sonora, MX  
2018 *The Distance Was Very Frightening*, Cruces Creatives, Las Cruces, NM

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *The Place where the Clouds are Formed*, Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ  
*The Place where the Clouds are Formed*, UA Poetry Center, Tucson, AZ  
2018 *Circa Circuit: Contemporary Fabrication*, Cruces Creatives, Las Cruces, NM  
*Emergent*, Bank of the West, Las Cruces, NM  
*Juried Student Show*, University Art Gallery, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
*Not Only, But Also*, University Art Gallery, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
2017 *AiR Exhibit*, Green Olives Arts, Tetouan, Morocco  
*Juried Student Show*, University Art Gallery, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
*New Acquisitions / Nuevas Adquisiciones*, University Art Gallery, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
*Wild Cuts*, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL  
2016 *Interjecting Manuscripts*, Downtown Las Cruces, Las Cruces, NM  
*Juried Student Show*, University Art Gallery, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
*Maximum Weight Capacity*, Williams Hall, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM

- 2015 *Making Sense*, Art Obscura, Las Cruces, NM  
*Speculative Future*, Williams Hall, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
2013 *Fronteras sin Muros*, Las Misiones, Juárez, México  
*Iman*, Universidad Autónoma de Durango, Juárez, México

## RESIDENCIES

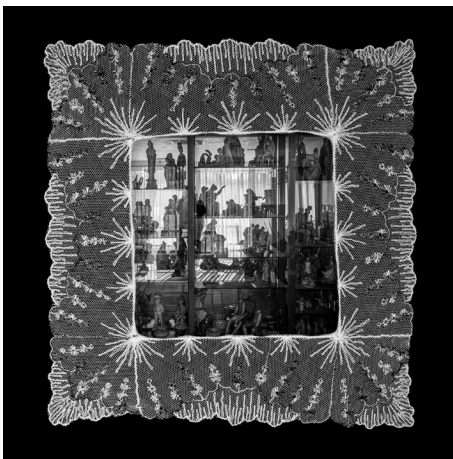
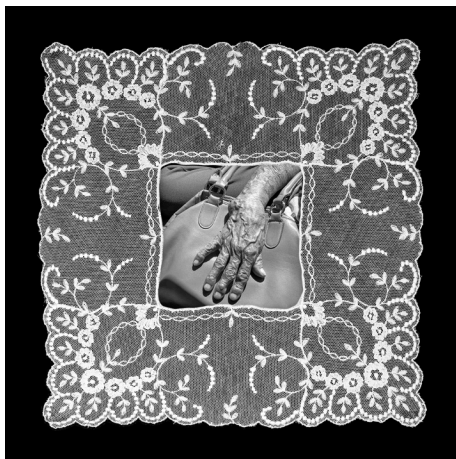
- 2017 Green Olives Arts, Tetouan, Morocco

## COLLECTIONS

- 2018 Devasthali's Private Art Collection, Las Cruces, NM  
2017 University Art Gallery Permanent Collection, Las Cruces, NM

## PRESS

- 2024 McCarrey, Cat. "A Trajectory of Grief Traverses Tragedy". *The Austin Chronicle*, May 31, 2024.  
Zastudil, Nancy. "Gallery Row: A Seasonal Spotlight on Six Texas Galleries". *Arts and Culture Texas*, April 29, 2024.  
Center for Creative Photography. "The Place Where Clouds Are Formed". *Southwest Contemporary*, April 6, 2024.  
2021 Stowe, Isadora. "Life in the Time". *BorderSenses*, 2018.  
2020 Stowe, Isadora. "Review: The Distance Is Very Frightening". *Southwest Contemporary*, January 28, 2020.  
2018 Baumann, Minerva. "NMSU student, award winner, looks forward to career overseas". *Las Cruces Sun News*, January 13, 2018.  
"10th Anniversary Issue". *Fraction Magazine*, May 2018.  
"NMSU's art department open house puts students' artistic talents on display". *KRWG Public Media*, April 17, 2018.



Left to right: *Roads on the hand*, *I hear your voice in every piece*, *I loved to hear the tale of how you both met*, 2024  
Inkjet print on premium luster paper, 21.5 x 21.5" each



*A Trajectory of Grief, 2024, Installation view*

## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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*Photographs by Essentials Creative & Monica Martinez-Diaz*

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Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inform audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 2,000 women artists, presenting 341 visual art exhibitions, 166 music, dance and theater events, 30 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 867 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that diverse women artists are equitably represented in all forms of art. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in the United States that dedicates itself to the

work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the 42-year archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.



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The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

